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**THE JOURNEY TOWARD ASCENSION: UNDERSTANDING THE  
NARRATIVES OF LATINX WOMEN IN K-12 SCHOOL  
PRINCIPALSHIP**

Manuela Jimenez  
*Rowan University*

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**THE JOURNEY TOWARD ASCENSION:  
UNDERSTANDING THE NARRATIVES OF LATINX WOMEN IN K-12  
SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP**

by

Manuela Jimenez

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Research Department  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of  
Doctor of Education

at

Rowan University

February 28, 2024

Dissertation Chairs: James Coaxum III, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Research & MaryBeth Walpole, Ph.D, Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Research

Committee Member:

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## **Dedication**

To my mother, Clara I. Estevez for believing in me, inspiring me, and teaching me that with faith in God, persistence, and integrity everything is possible. Thank you for sacrificing so much of yourself to flourish my dreams. You are my number one supporter and I hope that you are as proud of me as I am of you!

## **Dedicación**

Para mi madre Clara I. Estevez por creer en mí, inspirarme y enseñarme que con fe en Dios, perseverancia e integridad todo es posible. Gracias por sacrificar tanto de ti misma para hacer florecer mis sueños. ¡Eres mi mayor inspiración y espero que estés tan orgullosa de mí como yo lo estoy de ti!

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The pursuit of knowledge is a challenging and self-sacrificing task. I spent extensive hours delving into my dissertation phenomena and it would not have been possible without the unwavering faith in God and the support of the individuals who sustained me throughout this journey. My family, ancestors, dissertation team, and the Latinx women in my study kept me on my feet until I reached the finish line. I am grateful to my dissertation committee, Dr. James Coaxum, Dr. Hajime Mitani, and Dr. MaryBeth Walpole, for being selfless mentors who rendered much of their time to enable and inspire me to complete this study. I especially thank Dr. Walpole for her patience, thoroughness, motivation, and exemplary leadership. My aunts Jocelyn, Hipatia, Bienvenida, Mayra, Amalia, and my uncle Francisco provided examples of leadership, while my grandmother Elsa and grandfather Moises & Santiago taught me family values, integrity, and a work ethic that fomented much of this research & guided my daily professional practices. I also thank my siblings, Chico & Tina, my father, Jose, and my in-laws, Wilson and Yude, for providing me with great examples of dedication. America stands for a symbol of freedom, as embedded in our Statue of Liberty's torch. I am grateful to all those who passed me the torch and hope to continue passing it on to others so they can achieve their dreams! My success is your success! To my readers: the words you have just read are a testament to the power of dedication, hard work, and unwavering support. The pursuit of knowledge is a challenging and self-sacrificing task, but it is also one of the most rewarding experiences that life has to offer. Success is never achieved alone; it is the result of a collective effort, and the contributions of those around us make our triumphs possible. As you navigate your journey through life, I urge you to remain steadfast in your pursuit of knowledge and cherish the relationships that sustain you along the way. With hard work, perseverance, and unwavering support, there is no limit to what you can achieve. So go forth with courage and determination, and know you can achieve greatness. The future is bright, and with your passion and commitment, there is no doubt that you will leave an indelible mark on the world!

## **Expresiones de gratitud**

La búsqueda del conocimiento es una tarea desafiante y abnegada. Pase muchas horas profundizando en los fenómenos de mi tesis y no hubiera sido posible sin la fe inquebrantable en Dios y el apoyo de las personas que me sostuvieron a lo largo de este viaje: Mi familia, mis antepasados, el equipo de tesis y las mujeres latinas en mi estudio me mantuvieron en pie hasta que llegué a la meta. Agradezco a mi comité de tesis, el Dr. James Coaxum, el Dr. Hajime Mitani y la Dra. MaryBeth Walpole, por ser mentores desinteresados que dedicaron gran parte de su tiempo para permitirme e inspirarme a completar este estudio. Especialmente a la Dra. Walpole por su paciencia, motivación y liderazgo ejemplar. Mis tias Jocelyn, Hipatia, Bienvenida, Mayra, Amalia y mi tío Francisco brindaron ejemplos de liderazgo, mientras que mi abuela Elsa y mis abuelos Moises y Santiago me enseñaron valores familiares, integridad de trabajo que fomenta gran parte de esta investigación y impactan mi practicas profesionales diarias. También agradezco a mis hermanos Chico y Tina, mi padre Jose y mis cuñados Wilson y Yude por brindarme su apoyo. Estados Unidos representa un símbolo de libertad, tal como está; incrustado en la antorcha de nuestra Estatua de la Libertad. ¡Agradezco a todos aquellos que me pasaron la antorcha y espero seguir pasándola a otros para que puedan alcanzar sus sueños; Mi éxito es tu éxito! Para mis lectores: las palabras que acaban de leer son un testimonio del poder de la dedicación, el trabajo con dedicación y el apoyo inquebrantable. La búsqueda del conocimiento es una tarea desafiante y abnegada, pero también es una de las experiencias más gratificantes que la vida tiene para ofrecer. El éxito nunca se logra solo; es el resultado de un esfuerzo colectivo, y las contribuciones de quienes nos rodean hacen posibles nuestros triunfos. Mientras recorre su viaje por la vida, le insto a permanecer firme en su búsqueda del conocimiento y valorar las relaciones que lo sostienen a lo largo del camino. Con trabajo duro, perseverancia y apoyo inquebrantable, no hay límites para lo que puedes lograr. A sí que avanza con valentía y determinación. Recuerda que puedes alcanzar la grandeza. El futuro es brillante y con tu passion y dedicación, no hay duda de que dejaras huellas imborrables en el mundo!

## Abstract

Manuela Jimenez

### THE JOURNEY TO ASCENSION: UNDERSTANDING THE NARRATIVES OF LATINX WOMEN IN K-12 SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

2023-2024

James Coaxum, III, Ph.D &

MaryBeth Walpole, Ph.D

Doctor of Education

This study centered on exploring the unique leadership journeys of Latinx women who currently hold principal positions in K-12 schools across New Jersey. The research findings revealed that these women's career paths were significantly influenced by their social identity characteristics, specifically as female Latinx individuals. The study serves as a crucial reminder to challenge and eliminate any negative perceptions and biases towards Latina school principals and their leadership growth and methodologies. The focus of the study was on the leadership journeys of Latinx women holding principal positions in K-12 schools in New Jersey. The findings also showed that their career paths were aided by their social identity characteristics as female Latinx individuals. This research serves as a wake-up call to eradicate negative perceptions around the leadership of Latina school principals. This study challenges the negative portrayal of Latinx women in leadership positions. It explores how cultural values and social identities shape their experiences. The study's findings reveal that Latinx women principals' success is facilitated by their bilingualism, family values, and the desire to inspire others. This research aims to eliminate the deficit mindset about Latina school principals and promote inclusive leadership practices. The research question for this study are: (1) How do Latinx women describe their experiences ascending into school leadership positions? (2) How do cultural values influence these Latina school principals' leadership? (3) How do their intersecting identities shape Latinx women's leadership experiences?

*Keywords: Latinx women school principals, Women in leadership, Latina School Principals, Community Cultural Wealth, Leadership Ascension*

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

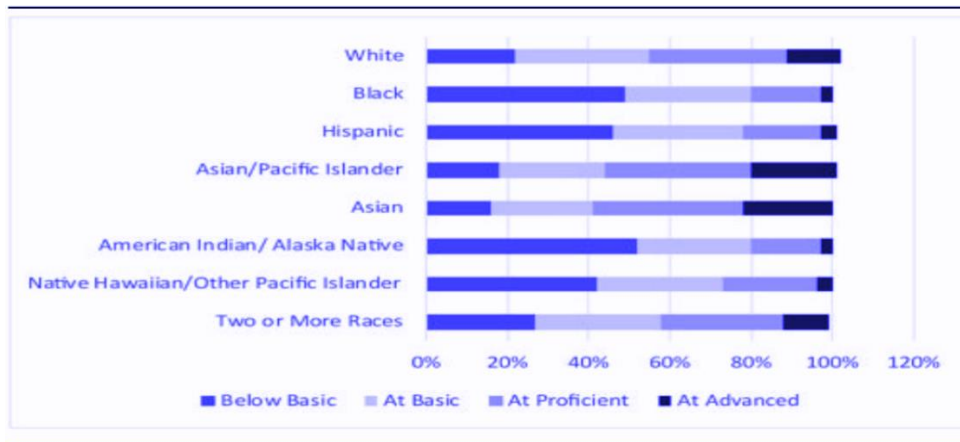
The Latinx Community is approximately sixty million people in a nation of 320 million, representing almost 19% of the U.S population (Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021; US Census Bureau, 2018). Demographers estimate that Latinx individuals are the most rapidly growing ethnic segment of the national population, and, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), the Latinx population will rise to 111 million in the United States by 2060, or 29% of the population (Pew Research Center, 2008). The rapidly increasing Latinx demographics are also reflected in schools. According to The US Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2021) approximately 30% of the nation's students enrolled in public schools will be of Latinx descent by the year 2030. This means that approximately 14 million Hispanic or Latinx students will be enrolled in the education system by the year 2030 (US Department of Education, NCEs, 2021). Twenty four percent of the students currently enrolled in K-12 schools are Latinx. However, more than 50% of the Latinx population are high school dropouts with less than a 10th-grade education, compared to 29% of Whites and 24% of African Americans (Tayloe, 2016; The League of United Latin-American Citizens, 2003). Without a formal education, their ability to achieve upward mobility and overcome poverty becomes more difficult. These outcomes may, in part, be due to a lack of role models in schools (Alcocer & Martinez, 2017; Knouse & Moody, 2013). As Latinx student enrollment continues to increase in public schools across the nation, there is an urgent need for school leaders with knowledge of Latinx cultural practices, norms, and lifestyles (Denderian-Aghanian, 2010; Thompson, Lemmon, & Walter, 2015) because educational leaders with backgrounds

similar to their students have a positive impact on student academic achievement and assist with closing various achievement gaps (Banks, 1994, Hernandez et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Martinez et al., 2021; Meier et al., 1999; Murakami et al., 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2009). However, few leaders identify as Latinx, and even fewer identify as Latinx women (Institute of Education Sciences, 2013), which may be stifling the ability to close academic achievement gaps among this ethnic group.

### National Academic Achievement Trends

**Figure 1**

*Percentage Distribution of 4th-grade of 4th grade students across NAEP Reading Achievement Levels by Race/Ethnicity*



*Note.* Data adapted from Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017).

Over the past 40 years, the academic achievement gap has become one of the most difficult challenges in school reform (Howard, 2010; 2019). The academic achievement gap refers to the unequal academic outcomes among African American, Native American, and Latinx students and their White and Asian peers (Howard, 2010; 2019). This gap prevents minoritized students from being placed in advanced placement classes and often determines whether they obtain their high school diplomas. These gaps are reflected prominently in grades, standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, placement in special education, and suspension and expulsion rates (Darling-Hammond & Branford, 2007; Howard, 2010). The primary assessment used to examine current achievement outcomes across multiple categories of student performance in U.S. public schools is The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), also referred to as the nation's report card (McFarland et al., 2019). These assessments are conducted yearly in mathematics, reading, science, writing, art, geography, economics, and U.S. history. According to NAEP data, persistent gaps have existed in the educational outcomes of Latinx students when compared to their White and Asian counterparts across multiple important achievement indicators for more than 30 years (Howard, 2010). For example, the 2017 NAEP reading assessment data shows that Latinx students' academic achievement was far below their Asian and White peers in grades 4, 8, and 12. Figure 1 provides a revealing illustration that shows that among 4th-grade students, 46% of Latinx students are reading below basic level as measured by the national English Language Arts assessment, when compared to merely 22% of White and 16% of Asian American students. Additionally, the NAEP (2017) data also reveals that merely 23% of Latinx students are at proficient or advanced proficient levels. In comparison, over 47% of White and 57% of Asian

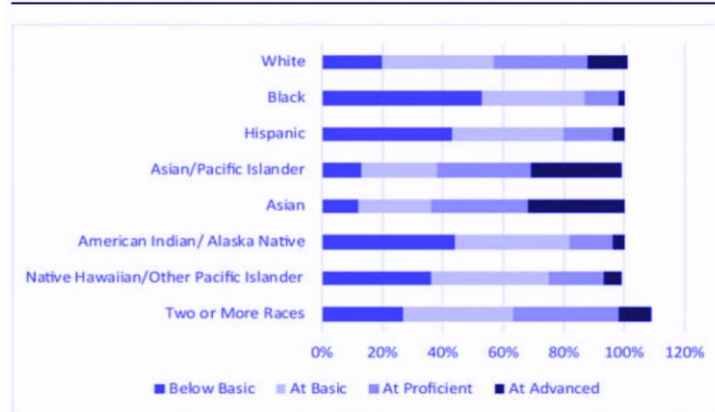


students were proficient or advanced proficient. The academic achievement of Latinos has remained stagnant during the past three decades when compared to the academic achievement of their White and Asian counterparts (McFarland et al., 2019). For example, from 1975 to 2008, there was no significant narrowing of the achievement gap between White and Latinx 17-year-olds based on national academic assessment data generated by the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP).

Moreover, mathematics is a gatekeeping subject that impels postsecondary educational access (Attewell & Douglas, 2017). Unfortunately, this is another area where an achievement gap continues to exist for Latinx students. Figure 2 illustrates the discrepancies in mathematics performance that deem Latinx students and other minoritized student groups as academically disadvantaged. According to the U.S Department of Education (2017) data, almost 50% of Latinx students are performing below their academic grade level in mathematics proficiency compared to 20% of White and 8% of Asian American students. Reading and mathematics are foundational subjects for other academic areas. Therefore, academic achievement gaps in these subjects signify that students may have gaps in other subject areas that may stifle their academic improvement and overall school performance (Howard, 2010).

**Figure 2**

*Percentage Distribution of 8th-Grade Students Across NAEP Mathematics Achievement Levels by Race/Ethnicity*



*Note.* Data adapted from Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017).

Additionally, the ongoing poor academic achievement of Latino students is a complex problem that must be addressed as the Latino student population grows (Bagula, 2016; Madrid, 2011). Standardized assessments determining the academic achievement gap of Latinx students do not merely measure their academic progress. They are valid indicators of a student’s ability to think, learn, and communicate effectively (Federal Interagency on Child and Family Statistics, 2009). Since the ability to think, learn, and communicate effectively are all foundational leadership skills, the persistent academic achievement gap in K 12 schools among Latinx students is a barrier to their leadership development (Federal Interagency on Child and Family Statistics, 2009).

Demographic research asserts that Latinx students are unlikely to interact with or be influenced by Latino teachers (9%), principals (8%), and superintendents (less than

6%) (Snyder et al., 2019). The Latinx academic achievement gap may be ameliorated by increasing the representation of Latinx teachers, school principals, and superintendents to serve as their mentors and role models (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2015).

Furthermore, New Jersey's current academic achievement racial gaps are larger than the national averages (Wall, 2022), evidence that Latinx students continue to be educationally disadvantaged. One possible reason for these gaps may be the lack of minority teachers and leaders (Shorey, 2002; Sólorzano, 2005), which may demotivate minority students to persist academically when they face educational challenges. The most recent aggregated data reported by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE, 2019) shows that 43% of Latinx students were not proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and 50% were not proficient in mathematics, while 30% of Asian and White students were not proficient. The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) further exacerbated the academic achievement gap among Latinx students and their counterparts of Black and White backgrounds. Compared to students in other states with similar standards, based on common core, Latinx students in NJ performed 50% below the national average (NJDOE, 2019), indicating Latinx students experienced significant educational barriers in the state (NJDOE, 2019). Despite the sizable enrollment of Latinx students in schools across New Jersey, these scholars remain educationally disadvantaged, as their test data projects that they are far below academic proficiency. Educational outcomes for Latinx students have not made drastic improvements in the last 30 years (AFT, 2004; Hill & Torres, 2010), as Latinos continue to have low academic achievement and one of the highest dropout rates

in the nation, as well as low college preparatory course enrollment and postsecondary attainment nationally (AFT, 2004; Hill & Torres, 2010).

With such Latinx student achievement issues, there is a need to examine and increase the number of Latinx educators and school administrators serving this population (Martinez et al., 2020). Latinx teachers and administrators play a vital role in advancing the Latinx community and increasing students' educational achievement at all academic levels (Gandara and the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, 2015; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Latinx leaders and educators serve as role models and mentors for students, families, and professional colleagues. Increasing Latinx teachers' and students' interactions increase students' likelihood of college attendance (Gandara & Mordechay, 2017). However, less than 8% of public school teachers nationwide are Latinx (Morderchay, 2017) and 9% of school administrators are of Latinx descent (NCES, 2018). Additionally, only 54% of school principals, and 26.9% of school superintendents are women. Specifically, Latinx women represent less than 8% of the national population of school principals and 1% of school superintendents (Ellerson et al., 2015; Goldring & Taie, 2017; Hill et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). However, the Latinx community represents the largest and most rapidly growing community of color in the United States of America (Murakami et al., 2018; Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021; Solorzano & Yosso, 2006).

Moreover, increasing the number of Latinx school teachers and administrators may help address the prevalent academic achievement gap of Latinx minority students, as these individuals serve as role models for minoritized scholars (Egalite et al., 2015; Howard, 2019; Jones, 2022; Sanchez-Villa, 2021). Latinx teachers and principals can inspire

their students to hone their leadership trajectories because the students may be empowered by their ethnic/cultural commonalities. Additionally, the impact may be more significant in school districts that serve a predominantly Latinx student demographic (Bagula, 2016; Martinez et al., 2021). Therefore, raising awareness about successful Latinx women in leadership may positively impact the recruitment and retention of highly qualified Latinx women in school leadership positions. They may also inspire the minoritized youth in the school districts they serve to emulate their success. Furthermore, they can provide professional development to teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders not of Latinx descent in their institutions, enabling them to implement the best educational practices for Latinx student achievement.

### **National Latinx Women Disproportionality**

One of five women in the United States is Latina, and Latinas represent 48.9% of the overall Latinx population in the United States (Gandara, 2015; Maes, 2010). However, in 2004, only 6.4% of teachers were Latinx women, and in 2014, the percentage of Latina teachers remained at a low 8.7% (Gandara, 2015). These statistics denote that Latinx women are underrepresented in the teaching profession, in school leadership, and in research (Bagula, 2016; Hernandez et al., 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2000). Since the Latinx student population is rapidly increasing in United States schools, there is a dire need to increase the number of Latinx teachers and school leaders to mirror the student population (Hernandez et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2016).

## **Educational Leadership in New Jersey**

It is crucial to note that there is an ethnic disproportionality in K-12 schools in the state of New Jersey, as 56% of the student population in the state are minoritized scholars (Kiefer, 2022). On the other hand, merely 16% of the state's teaching workforce are people of color. In New Jersey, the percentage of Black teachers currently stands at 6%, Latino teachers at 8%, and Asian teachers at 2% (Kiefer, 2022). Although Latino teachers are currently the fastest-growing population entering the workforce, they relinquish their positions at higher rates than teachers of other ethnic backgrounds (Irizarry, 2015). These Latinx educators report being discouraged from sharing their culture with their students despite their students being of the same ethnic backgrounds (Aponte, 2018). This is important because Latinx women aspiring to school principal positions are often promoted from teaching positions. This means few Latinx educators are currently to be considered for future school principal positions. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) reports that for the 2020-2021 school year, there were 686 operating school districts and 87 charter schools open to the 1.28 million students enrolled in K-12 schools. Recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2021) and the NJDOE (2021) show that the student population is majority-minority—see Figure 3 for a comparison of statewide and K-12 school population demographics. Whereas the racial/ethnic makeup of the student population is comparable to the statewide population, the same is not valid for the school's certified personnel composition. Figure 4 shows the population of teachers and administrators, and these do not reflect the racial/ethnic makeup of the student body in New Jersey schools. A similar disparity exists in the gender breakdown of certified school personnel. Overall, women dominate the education field as teachers, yet merely 4.1% are women of Latinx

descent. Males represent almost half of the administrative positions regardless of their race. Figure 5 provides a breakdown of the New Jersey teachers and administrators by race and gender, according to the latest survey conducted in New Jersey to determine the percentages of public school employees by position, race, and gender.

**Figure 3**

*New Jersey State Census Population Estimates and Public School Student Population by Ethnicity (in Percentages)*

| <i>Ethnicity</i> | <i>NJ Population</i> | <i>NJ Public School Student Population</i> |
|------------------|----------------------|--|
| White            | 61.6                 | 45   |
| Latinx           | 20                   | 30   |
| African American | 12.4                 | 15   |
| Asian            | 6                    | 10   |

*Note.* Adapted from the NJDOE (2021) and Census Bureau (2021)

**Figure 4**

*New Jersey Students and Public School Employees by Ethnicity*

| <i>Race/Ethnicity</i>   | <i>Students</i> | <i>Teachers</i> | <i>Administrators</i> |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| <i>White</i>            | 45              | 83              | 78.2                  |
| <i>Latinx</i>           | 30              | 8               | 5.6                   |
| <i>African American</i> | 15              | 6               | 15.3                  |
| <i>Asian</i>            | 10              | 2               | 2.4                   |

*Note.* Data presents percentages adapted from New Jersey Department of Education (2021) and Census Bureau (2021)

**Figure 5**

*New Jersey Public School Employees by Position, Race, and Gender*

| <i>Race</i>             | <i>Teachers</i> |             | <i>Administrators</i> |             |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------|
|                         | <i>Female</i>   | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i>         | <i>Male</i> |
| <i>White</i>            | 64.2            | 19.7        | 40.0                  | 37.4        |
| <i>Latinx</i>           | 5.4             | 1.4         | 4.1                   | 2.6         |
| <i>African American</i> | 5.1             | 1.7         | 9.1                   | 5.2         |
| <i>Asian</i>            | 1.5             | 0.3         | 0.7                   | 0.4         |



*Note.* Data represents percentages. Adapted from the New Jersey Department of Education's most recent data gathered for N.J. public school employees by position, race, and gender (2017).

Despite barriers and stereotypes, Latinx women have overcome challenges, establishing their paths as entertainers, artists, scientists, activists, athletes, writers, and educators. They pursue their passions and create controversy by standing up for their beliefs (Mendoza, 2004). So, it is evident that these women possess the cultural assets that enable them to lead and transform the school districts where they work as school principals. Moreover, sharing their success stories can mobilize aspiring Latinx women to pursue leadership positions. Additionally, increasing Latinx women in leadership may also provide Latinx role models to inspire minoritized students, which, in turn, can help promote academic success in predominantly minority-serving K-12 school districts (Murakami et al., 2018). This is because scholarly literature on the topic has asserted that the lack of Latinx role models in school districts hinders schools' ability to address the prevalent educational achievement and the attainment gap between Latinx students and their counterparts, predominantly White and Asian students (Burciaga et al., 2010; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Murakami et al., 2018).

Gender also has implications for Latinx women who deem them as having one of the lowest educational attainments in the United States, as merely 1 in 5 women with a college degree are of Latinx descent (Anthony Jr. et al., 2021). Therefore, Latinx women remain among the most educationally disadvantaged demographic groups compared to

women of other ethnic backgrounds. However, Latinx women possess sufficient cultural assets to represent a vibrant, diverse, and strong culture that continues to contribute immensely to American society (Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021). It is crucial to note that Latinx women in school leadership positions possess multiple intersecting social identities, including gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation, which are factors that potential employers often stereotype (Aguilar et al., 2003; Ayón et al., 2018; Bagula et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2021). Due to these social attributes, their ability to be promoted to a school leadership position has been deemed more difficult for them than aspiring leaders of other gender and ethnic backgrounds (Bagula, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2015). Thus, despite the upward mobility that Latinx women in school leadership have achieved, other aspects of their social identities may continue to challenge their leadership trajectories in modern-day society. Despite their administrative credentials and educational efforts, Latinx women's ability to be promoted to school leadership positions may be hindered by stereotypes about their multiple intersecting social identities (Martinez et al., 2020; Mendez-Morse, 2015). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to delve into the successful leadership ascension trajectories experienced by Latinx women currently serving as school leaders to help raise awareness about the positive attributes that may increase Latinx women's representation in educational leadership positions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Latinx women lag in attaining managerial positions in PK-12 schools. Furthermore, some underrepresentation may be due to stereotypes about their intersecting social identities. These stereotypes may limit their attainment of leadership roles and their ability to serve as role models needed for Latinx students' academic success.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Latinx people are a growing population in the United States, with one of the lowest educational attainment rates (Gándara, 2015). There is a need to increase the number of Latinx educators in school leadership roles in U.S public schools (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2015; Quiñones et al., 2021) so they may serve as role models to influence the academic achievement of Latinx students positively (Mendez-Morse, et al., 2015). Therefore, this study explores the experiences of Latinx women in school principal positions to understand their ascension into leadership positions and how their intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation shaped their experiences. Examining their experiences using community cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) as a theoretical frame and delving into the impact that their cultural wealth had on their leadership development and leadership practices serve aspiring Latinx women leaders hone their leadership attributes. Their leadership trajectories are captured through semi-structured qualitative interviews.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are:

- (1) How do Latinx women describe their experiences ascending into school leadership positions?
- (2) How do cultural values influence these Latina school principals' leadership?
- (3) How do their intersecting identities shape Latinx women's leadership experiences?

These questions are used to explore the experiences of the identified participants. The interviews were conducted through individual, electronic interviews via Zoom. I asked about their career trajectories to understand how their community's cultural wealth (CCW) shaped their leadership development and daily leadership practices. In my interviews, I delved into how these women manage their intersecting identities after attaining ascension into a K-12 leadership position as a school principal and how their intersecting identities impact their leadership.

There continues to be limited research about Latinx women in school leadership and how their multiple social identities may impact their leadership development and or leadership practices (Breslin et al., 2017; Chin et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2020; Méndez-Morse et al., 2021; Murakami et al., 2016; Sanchez-Hucles, 2010). This study seeks to address these gaps in the literature by examining the leadership development and practices of Latinx women in school principal positions. At the same time, the study demonstrates how their intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation impact their leadership development and how they effectively manage their intersecting identities in their day-to-day leadership practices. More research is required to cultivate Latinx women's leadership development (Murakami et al., 2015; 2016).

The research participants in this interpretative phenomenological qualitative study are working professionals who have attained graduate degrees and school leadership certifications to serve as school principals in the districts and communities they serve. This research adds to the limited research available about the experiences of Latinx women in leadership positions and how they may use their cultural assets in their leadership (Davis, Sanchez-Hucles, 2010; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse, et. al, 2015).

This study explored the leadership experiences of Latinx women employed as school principals through the use of community cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) as a theoretical framework. Understanding how this cultural wealth may help aspiring Latina school principals or vice principals learn to manage stereotypes associated with their multiple intersecting social identities amid their leadership as they possess social intersecting identity commonalities to this study's research participants. Thus, CCW allowed me to delve into the cultural assets to provide a counter perspective that is often overlooked in traditional research (Bagula, 2005; Mendez-Morse & Martinez, 2021; Yosso, 2005).

Therefore, examining the experiences of Latinx women in school leadership positions from an asset based perspective may help increase the numbers of K-12 leaders who possess similar intersecting social identities, which may, in turn, reduce the academic achievement gap. Instead of sustaining a historically hindering deficit approach, examining the experiences of Latinx women employed as school principals from an asset-based framework of CCW allowed me to explore the unique experiences of Latinx women in school leadership and uncover the essence of their experiences to reveal how their experiences contribute to effective leadership practices and the management of the stereotypes pertaining to their historically marginalized intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation.

## **Significance**

The significance of this study is that it adds to the limited body of literature about Latinx women's leadership in the context of K-12 education, especially in showcasing Latinx women in school principal positions' cultural assets, a perspective which is often limited in minority leadership studies (Niño et al., 2017). Employing a cultural asset perspective is vital to understanding Latinx women's leadership development and practices for managing their historically oppressed intersecting social identities. Mendez-Morse et al. (2015) recommended further studies examining how gender and race may benefit Latina educational leaders' daily leadership practices in their professions. The notion that Latinx women's leadership is beneficial is showcased in modern research, denoting that Latinx women in school leadership can positively influence the development of students in the communities they serve, therefore increasing students' career aspirations, academic engagement, and increased intrinsic motivation (Fernandez et al., 2015; Sanchez et al., 2008). By being able to relate to students ethnically, Latina school leaders are an essential asset to communities serving Latinx students as they can serve as adult role models with whom scholars can identify; these leaders' leadership practices may propel the scholars to improve their academic performance and educational demeanor. Several studies about Latinx women's leadership have examined how their intersecting social identities of race and gender impact their leadership practices and development. For example, Tayloe (2016) found that the Latina school principals in her study shared experiences of deficit thinking, microaggressions, institutional racism, and marginalization. However, many studies about minority women's leadership focus on a deficit mindset that may stifle

Latinx women's leadership improvement that can be attained through a cultural asset perspective that may derive from exploring their leadership experiences using CCW; as Latinx women possess multiple forms of cultural assets that enable their effective leadership development and therefore counter deficit experiences narrated in many studies about Latinx women's leadership trajectories.

Furthermore, because of their intersecting identities of gender and race, Latinx women have been stereotyped and marginalized in education and career contexts (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Elenes et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2012). Therefore, Latinx women have been historically marginalized since the inception of their educational trajectories. As they have been one of the last individuals permitted to legally obtain a college education because of their gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Rodriguez, 2021). Throughout history, women, regardless of their race/ethnicity have been subjected to upward mobility hindrances, prohibiting them from obtaining employment and a formal education, while men have been the dominant gender historically. This patriarchal perspective has disadvantaged aspiring Latinx women principals and stifled their upward mobility; because in addition to their gender, Latinx women are also considered an ethnic minority. In addition, for Latinx women who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ), their sexual orientation and gender identity may also pose an additional hindrance to their ability to ascend into a leadership role because of potential employers biases pertaining to individuals who do not identify as heterosexual; they may be denied a promotion by their employer as historically, non-heterosexual sexual orientations have been marginalized and subjected to hate crimes and dis-

crimination. Women of color have multiple, intersectional identities that create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989). These intersectional identities include gender, racial identity, sexuality, disability, and nationality, that may pose disadvantages for women of color. These disadvantages may be due to racism, sexism, and heterosexism causing discrimination that may hinder their ability to attain ascension into managerial positions in educational organizations. Crenshaw (1989) explains how minoritized women's intersectional identities may impact their leadership development, leadership styles, and practices in educational organizations. Discrimination based on those identities may make it more difficult for women of color to ascend into school leadership positions.

Moreover, the lack of research on minoritized women's leadership development (e.g.: Latinx and Black) poses a threat to redressing the achievement gap that students of minoritized backgrounds still experience in P-20 institutions (Bagula, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2015; Tayloe, 2016). Since this is not a specific framework available for the examination of the assets that minority women possess, I utilized the CCW (Yosso, 2005) framework to examine the experiences of Latinx women in educational leadership. CCW postulates that individuals of color benefit from multiple forms of cultural assets that enable their leadership with adequate knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used by communities of color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005). In relation, Latinx women, as part of communities of color, possess these aforementioned forms of capital that may enable their effective leadership development and practices.



Research also asserts the importance of Latinx scholars being able to find inspiration in role models of their same ethnic/cultural background (Bagula, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2015). There is much talk about closing the achievement gap, improving educational opportunities through equity, equality, and increasing graduation rates, especially for Latinx girls. We are educating them, yet, the limited representation of Latinx women in educational leadership shows that they are not being hired upon graduating from higher education institutions. Therefore, delving into Latinx women in educational administrations' journeys provided further insight into the recruitment and retention of Latinx women in academic leadership positions and the difficulties they encountered in the process.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In my research, I emphasized how stereotypical beliefs about Latinx women's multiple intersecting social identities may be countered by using the CCW model (Yosso, 2005). The CCW model is used to analyze how the cultural assets that Latinx women in school principal positions possess enable their effective leadership development and practices despite their multiple intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation. This means that Latinx women benefit from their former lived experiences within their cultural communities. These experiences may include speaking a different language, networking with others, establishing goals for themselves despite experiencing barriers, advocating for equality amid cultural oppression, and learning about their own culture. Thus, empowering them to attain upward mobility when applying their cultural experiences is used within the context of academia to improve their leadership development. Moreover, in the context of my study, I examined how CCW impacts Latinx

women employed as school principals' leadership. Yosso's (2005) community of cultural wealth model enables an exploration of Latinx women employed as school principals from an asset-based point of view, as they can serve as role models for students in the school district where they are employed. Utilizing an asset-based framework by examining this phenomenon in the context of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model also ensures that the positive aspects in a Latinx woman's life and career are showcased to enable their success as leaders. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) postulates that networking connections including mentors, professors, former employers, and other professional networks can help Latinx women foster within themselves enough self-efficacy to enable themselves to overcome self-doubting beliefs that hinder them from viewing their intersecting identities as valuable assets to their leadership development, style, and leadership practices. Bagula (2016) found that Latinx women in school leadership roles identified barriers relevant to the progress of women of color that affected their development positively. This acknowledgment is crucial because a deficit mindset prohibits self-improvement and the ability to inspire others. This, in turn, prohibits the ability of school leaders and teachers to close the achievement gap in K-12 schools. Viewing Latinx women school principals' intersecting identities in light of Yosso's (2005) community of cultural wealth (CCW) framework enables school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders to work effectively as a diverse team serving the needs of diverse students and, therefore, ensuring the upward mobility of students of color.

As a Latinx woman who possesses multiple intersecting social identities, I hope that my research empowers other women struggling to overcome the effective manage-

ment of their intersecting identities to harness their leadership styles and practices to improve educational equity and access for marginalized students in P-20 institutions. My research explored how Latinx women employed as school principals experience multiple cultural assets that enabled them develop into the leaders they are today; and how these various forms of cultural assets may continue to help them manage the stereotypes pertaining intersecting identities in the context of the workplace.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) theoretical model explores how cultural assets may have impacted the participants' leadership experiences in this study. This qualitative study provides an Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) designed to allow the researcher to explore how the participants comprehend their personal and social worlds, giving meaning to their experiences (Smith et al., 2009; 2021; Moustakas, 1994). A qualitative design is appropriate for this study due to the nature of the research questions, which examine the meaning and lived experiences of Latinx women employed as school principals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The research participants' sample size entails five New Jersey Latinx women school leaders; interviewed using semi-structured qualitative interviews that took an average of 60 minutes each. Using IPA to examine the cultural assets in my participants' experiences will facilitate the thematic analysis to best capture the participants' leadership trajectories.

## **Limitations**

This study was designed within particular parameters. The geographical location for this study is limited to the State of New Jersey. Five Latina administrators were interviewed for this interpretative phenomenological qualitative study. Thus, the sample size cannot be taken to generalize these findings to a larger population.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terminology and theories are discussed in my research. These terms and theories are defined in this section to provide a coherent comprehension of their use in this research:

### ***Critical Race Theory (CRT)***

Critical race theory is a research methodology that promotes social justice by "challenging traditional notions of how to conduct, practice, or rhetorically engage in education politics and leadership" (Aleman, 2009, p. 295); allowing for the analysis of Latina's school principals intersecting identities management in the context of their leadership permitting an "understanding of how race and racism affect education and the lives of the racially disenfranchised" (Aleman, 2009, pp. 295-296). Solorzano and Yosso (2001) assert that the Critical Race theory in education is grounded in the following five tenets of education;

The centrality of race and racism and other forms of subordination;

A challenge to the dominant ideology;

A focus on the experience of persons of color;

A commitment to social justice to promote the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty, as well as the empowerment of underrepresented minority groups;

A trans-disciplinary perspective improves understanding of racism, sexism, or classism in education (pp. 472-473).

***Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)***

Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) examines the experiences unique to the Latina/o community, such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. This theory helps address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001).

***Latina***

A Latinx woman that encompasses many ethnic cultures, including Cubans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and South or Central Americans (Mendez-Morse, 2000).

***Latinx***

Latinx refers to a person of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina).

***Latinidad***

An identity term used by Latinas that includes gender and ethnicity, simultaneously or in tandem (Mendez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, & Hernandez, 2015).

### ***Language***

Language is a vital aspect of human behavior; it is the primary communication method among individuals that conveys thoughts, feelings, intentions (Hutton, 2009). Situational, social, transmitted and cultural meanings enrich Language in the context of this study cultural meanings are expressed symbolically and in ways individuals make sense of words to express themselves in Spanish as it is the Language pertinent to the research participant's Latinx (ethnic) demographic.

### ***Culture***

Hofstede (1991) defines culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

### ***Counter-Storytelling***

Counter-storytelling is a tenet of CRT used by minority communities allowing them to reflect on their experiences and knowledge (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). These narratives help challenge historical marginalization and deficit modes of thinking. It aligns well with the CCW model as counter-story telling is used to share the experiences of minority groups from an asset based point of view.

### ***Community Cultural Wealth Model (CCW)***

The Community Cultural Wealth Model examines six forms of cultural assets that offer a cultural asset perspective about how students of color experience college from an appreciative standpoint (Yosso, 2005). In the context of this study, the Community Cultural Wealth Model focuses on the multiple forms of cultural assets that Latina school principals experienced in their leadership trajectories. For example, how they may benefit

from their culture in their leadership development, and how they continue to employ the use of cultural assets in the context of their daily leadership practices.

### ***Ethnicity***

Ethnicity is defined as membership in a group with shared socially defined cultural characteristics such as a common language, genealogy, ancestry, heritage, and religious practices and beliefs (Fenton, 2010). For this study, the word ethnicity refers specifically to Latina because it is identified as a selection criterion for all study participants.

### ***Intersectionality or Intersecting Social Identities***

Intersectionality or Intersecting Social Identities pertain to understanding how a woman of color's multiple social and political identities combine to create different systems of oppression that may make it more difficult for them to be promoted into school leadership positions. In the context of this study, intersecting social identities entail a Latinx woman employed as a school principal's gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation that may have challenged or helped their leadership development or practices.

### ***Microaggressions***

Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). This term is used in this study to refer to negative experiences that Latina leaders described that pertain to their gender, racial, and/or ethnic identity.

## **Summary**

This chapter introduced my study and explained the purpose, significance, and proposed research methodology for examining my research phenomena. In chapter 2, the next chapter, a review of literature about Latinx leadership and the history of their educational challenges are presented to support the importance of this research as well as the framework. In chapter 3, I review my methodology and strategy of inquiry to explain the research design best aligned with the research on Latina leadership for this study. In chapter 4, I provided the results/findings that derive from this study, and finally, chapter 5 provide the conclusion of my study with suggestions for future research.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Overview**

This chapter provides a literature review to provide context for this study, specifically Latinx women in educational leadership. One in five women in the United States is Latinx, and one in four female students enrolled in a public school nationwide is a Latina (Gandara, 2015). By 2060 Latinas will represent almost one-third of American women (Gandara, 2015). However, they continue to be underrepresented in school leadership (Avalos & Salgado, 2016). In relation, the college graduation rates of Latinx women are one of the lowest nationally (Pumar, 2021). A college degree is a catalyst for their promotion into a leadership position. Hence, Latinx women's ascension into educational leadership positions is progressing extremely slowly (Crisp et al., 2014; Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021). This qualitative study explored the leadership trajectories of Latinx women employed as school principals to provide aspiring Latina principals with guidance in addressing the barriers that may derive from a lack of understanding about their intersecting social identities. This is significant because Latinx women aspiring to ascend into school leadership roles may not have adequate mentors available to empower their leadership.

Therefore, it is helpful for minority women with similar intersecting identities (e.g., ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation) to learn about the experiences of successful Latinx women in school leadership. The literature in this section also delves into the history of marginalization of Latinx women in educational organizations and their intersect-

ing identities (e.g., gender, race/culture, and sexual orientation). Latinx educational leaders' perspectives and discussions about how women of color's intersecting identities impact their leadership development and career ascension are included.

Due to the lack of research available on the development of Latinx women's leadership, I conducted an analysis of studies on the intersectionality of African American women, which encompassed their gender, ethnicity, race and other social identities. This allowed me to effectively examine the role of intersecting identities on the Latinx women principals or vice principals in this study as their experiences; as minority women are similar (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). By examining how African American women's social intersectionality affected them (Crenshaw, 1989), I gained insight into how the historical perspective of cultural deficit shaped the leadership paths of women of color. I also review the theory of community cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005). CCW builds on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina Critical Race Theory (LatCrit). Therefore, empowering women of color to shift their mindset from a cultural deficit to a developmental or asset-based mindset may enable their leadership development and positively inform their daily leadership practices. There are many dissertations on Latina women in leadership that focus on their struggles and not on their cultural strengths; Lopez (2000) delved into several conflicting factors that hinder the upward mobility of Latinas and the issues that negatively stifle Latina women's leadership. These issues include but are not limited to a fear of the risk of failure and a high value on career security, as well as a review of obstacles created by the intersectionality of gender and ethnic discrimination and low educational attainment. It is vital to examine the success stories of Latinx women's leadership development through the lens of a cultural asset leadership framework that promotes

cultural pride as a counterstory to the longstanding, historically marginalizing factors of Latinx history (Yosso, 2005).

## **Background**

Merely 9% of school principals in the United States are Latinx (NCES, 2018). This number mirrors the segregation that individuals of color experienced historically because of their race and ethnicity (Sanchez et al., 2008). Despite the rapidly growing Latino population, their representation in leadership is not growing at a similar rate. In fact, according to a School & Staffing Survey conducted in the academic year of 2017-2018 by the National Center for Statistics on Education (2018), 46% of public-school principals are male, while 54% are female (NCES, 2018). However, 78% of public-school principals were of non-Hispanic -White descent, 11% were of non-Hispanic Black, and merely 9% were of Latinx descent (NCES, 2018). Among the private school sector, 87% of school principals are of non-Hispanic -White heritage, and merely 7% are of non-Hispanic -Black descent. Approximately 50% of public and 53% of private school principals are female (Battle & Gruber, 2009). Therefore, the statistics above demonstrate that despite the Latinx population increasing, Latinas are underrepresented in educational and managerial roles (Mendez-Morse, 2004). The US Census reported that in 2021, there were approximately 11.1 million Latinas in the labor force. This number represents one in seven women in the workplace. It is crucial to acknowledge Latina women's rapidly shifting demographics and diverse leadership trajectories to support them in their education and leadership positions.

However, effective school principals play a vital role in the recruitment and retention of effective educators who ensure the achievement of students of color through culturally responsive pedagogy (Khalifa et al., 2016). Latinx school principals have the power to encourage collaboration among all stakeholders and equip them better to educate students of color (Bordas, 2013). Despite their ability to effectively lead schools and districts, Latinx leaders, especially women, continue to face barriers in their leadership trajectories that stifle their ascension into leadership positions (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami et al., 2015). Women and minorities are often hindered in their career trajectories in school administration due to the following barriers: family and home responsibilities, gender role stereotyping, overt discrimination, administrative programs that lack curriculum and materials for both women and students of color, gender discrimination in hiring decisions, unequal salaries due to their gender/ethnicity, and hostile work environments (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). For Latinas, confronting these biases often results in losing their cultural identity and assimilating into American culture (Bordas, 2013; Mendez-Morse, 2004). Latinx women aspiring to become school principals are often overlooked because of stereotypes attributed to their intersecting social identities. They are three times minoritized due to their triple minority status, for being a woman, members of a minority ethnic group, and often from a low socioeconomic background (Almager et al., 2018; Gandara, 2015). Additionally, Latinx women in educational leadership feel pressured to tone down their ethnicity or perceive their culture as an asset to their leadership (Sánchez, Salazar, & Guerra, 2021). Despite Latina women being certified to hold educational leadership positions, in the last quarter of the century, Latinx

women are still underrepresented in academic and managerial positions (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT) & Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)**

Latinx women in school leadership roles have been historically underrepresented in literature and history (Martinez & Méndez-Morse, 2021; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami et al., 2016). Critical Race Theory is a framework used to analyze the experiences of minoritized individuals to examine systemic racism and oppression in US school systems for people of color (Huber, 2010; Kohli, 2009). Latinx women are considered minorities; hence, CRT is appropriate for analyzing their leadership experiences. The CRT framework was developed in 1970 to reveal and ameliorate race, racism, and its intersections with other forms of oppression (Kholi, 2009, p. 237). CRT raises awareness about the racist practices prevalent in American society and the power structures that disadvantage people of color. Counter storytelling is one of the tenets of CRT; it is an attempt to give voice to underrepresented perspectives, such as those of Latinx women in leadership (Martinez et al., 2012; Méndez-Morse, 2015; Murakami, 2016).

CRT guides this study to explore the trajectories of Latinx women as they ascend into school leadership positions, specifically serving as school principals. CRT guides this study as CRT empowers researchers to advocate for eliminating racism by comprehending how individuals of color are often subordinated due to their social intersections of gender, ethnicity, and other forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Perez-Huber, 2001). This study aims to give Latinx women in leadership a voice by allowing them to

share their experiences about their ascension into school principal positions. Their experiences were examined using Interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA). In this study, I examined the counter stories about the successful leadership trajectories of Latinx women (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) is a theoretical branch deriving from CRT that considers Latinx community members' unique experiences, such as their ethnicity, culture, and language (Perez-Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The Latcrit framework entails five themes: (1) the focus on race and racism and the intersectionality with other forms of subordination based on Latinx individuals' multiple social identities, (2) the challenge of the dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of practical knowledge, and (5) multidisciplinary viewpoints. Researchers employ LatCrit to analyze the experiences unique to Latinx individuals and promote equity and social justice for Latinx community members (Perez-Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Thus, LatCrit encourages the analysis of the lived experiences of Latinas from an asset-based perspective that contradicts the prominent literature about Latinas' struggles (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami, 2016).

### **Cultural Deficit in Latinx Leadership**

Reflecting on the origins of the cultural deficit is a catalyst that enables positive change for minority individuals. A cultural deficit is a set of negative assumptions that individuals may possess about certain groups of people. Therefore, automatically deeming minorities inferior or less capable of upward mobility than others, "deficit beliefs be-

come a filter that blocks educators' abilities to examine their assumptions and to look beyond traditional solutions for real and meaningful change" (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 151). Deficit thinking is also defined through six characteristics and practices expressed by dominant ideology: (1) victim blaming that associated educational challenges with social and/or cultural identity, such as blaming a child of color for not being proficient in reading due to their culture as opposed to assessing educational inequities in their early childhood education experiences, (2) Oppression and power disadvantages between the elite and the oppressed, (3) The prevalence of prevalent biases in research that promote retention of students in impoverished communities, (4) Temporal changes defined by ideological and research that fails to assess how failure takes place without taking into account differences among students of color and their White counterparts, (5) Educability and the nature of science and practices, such as reading retention policies that use testing to explain student success and attribute it to a child's socioeconomic status (6) Lastly, heterodyne that prevails in academia and other institutional spaces that continue to be applied in explaining academic achievement gaps based on cultural predictors and social factors rather than systems of inequity in education (Valencia, 2010). Due to the focus on deficit beliefs, most studies about leadership focus on the negative experiences that aspiring Latinx women in school leadership and other aspiring minorities encounter (Hernandez & Marshall, 2017). The significant focus on cultural deficit perspectives to examine the role of Latinx women in leadership demonstrates that systemic and institutional structures of racism may still be prevalent in P-20 educational institutions. Throughout the leadership trajectory of Latinx women leadership, these perspectives are hindering the ascension of Latinx leaders into a principal role as deficit beliefs based on the notion that

Latinx students are underachievers. This belief sustains inequity and injustice in policy and practice (Valencia, 2010).

### **Ascending into a Principal Role**

Attaining a principalship position poses unique challenges for Latinx women. In general, women and people of color struggle more than their majority peers to secure a principalship after obtaining their principal school certification (Whitaker & Vogel, 2005). Additionally, females were less likely to pursue leadership positions after not being offered employment the first or second time they engaged in the application process (Whitaker & Vogel, 2005). Employment biases about their intersecting identity factors of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation may contribute to the belief that they lack leadership persistence (Peterson & Vergara, 2016). Employment applications for school leadership positions include optional questions that reveal their intersecting social identity factors to potential employers. Due to their intersecting social identities, Latinas have been perceived as less qualified based on their ethnic status, an example of "deficit thinking" (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Deficit thinking results in ineffective recruitment practices for school educational administrators. Board members and superintendents are more likely to offer administrative or school principal ascension to White men who mirror themselves (Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

### **Historical Challenges Confronted by Women & Minority Leaders**

Women of color and other minority leaders positively influence the communities they serve. However, despite these positive influences, they continue to encounter barriers in pursuing the principal school role (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami, 2016).



Polczynski (1990) defines barriers as social and societal constraints that prevent access to specific individuals from membership in an existing group. Women and minorities have historically confronted the following obstacles in their career trajectories to school administration: family and home responsibilities, gender role stereotyping, conspicuous discrimination, limited educational opportunities that are curricular engaging for women of color and students of color, gender discrimination in employment decisions making, unequal salaries, and hostile work environments (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Moreover, the triple oppression of race, gender, and social class discourages Latinas who want to pursue careers and encourages them to be submissive women instead, continuing to contend with historical notions about their intersecting identities as inspired by their culture (Ayón et al., 2018; Bagula, 2016; Ballenger, 2010; Melville, 1980; Miranda & Enriquez, 1981; Pineda, 2016). These perspectives are based on a cultural deficit framework, focusing on an array of stereotypes and marginalization that continue to impact Latinas in leadership roles (Canul, 2003), stifling their ability to attain professional ascension or respect despite their educational attainment and efforts. The stereotypes contend with the notion that Latinas are mere "baby-making machines," and despite their degrees, certifications, and academic accolades, they are still "uneducated" (Canul, 2003, p. 174). Latina school principals are perceived in the workplace from a deficit perspective, as women's intersecting social identities pose challenges (Ferdman, 1999). As women in leadership, Latinas even face worse scrutiny for making the same mistakes as other leaders who work in the same educational institutions merely because of their ethnic background and gender.

Consequently, their positional authority is often received from a negative or deficit-based perspective (Aguilar et al., 2003; Rodriguez, 2014). No matter the professional

situation, they are often confused for being merely a teaching assistant or a parent of a student in the school's community because of the expectation that a White man is in the role of leader (Aguilar et al., 2003; Rodriguez, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to delve into the effective management of Latina school principals' multiple intersecting social identities because it may ensure that negative experiences do not negatively impact their self-esteem in their work contexts. Self-confidence and intricate motivation stifle aspiring Latina leaders when they witness or experience microaggressions and stereotypes in the workplace (Murakami et al., 2015; Olivas-Lujan, 2008; Shorey et al., 2002). Moreover, Latina school leaders continue to experience marginalization that discourages them from remaining in the profession when they obtain positions, including having their authority challenged, being dismissed from meetings, having their ideas dismissed, and other forms of microaggressions (Gabriel, 2021).

### **Women's Gender Contribution to Effective Leadership**

Women employed as school principals manage daily operations in educational institutions. However, a manager is not necessarily a leader, and a leader is not necessarily a manager (Burchard, 2009). Merely having a formal position in school leadership does not mean they are effective leaders; it only suggests positional power. True power comes from knowledge, skills, character, abilities, personality, and sustaining relationships with others that deem leaders credible and transformational (Burchard, 2009). Contrary to popular belief, women employed as school leaders are not considered only managers who are respected and followed because of their formal titles; they are deemed transformational leaders (Bagula, 2016; Burchard, 2009). There is a limited amount of research available that sustains evidence on the relationship between a school principal's gender

and students' academic achievement; on the other hand, female teachers and administrators have been able to impel student learning for English Language Learners (ELL) positively (Chudgar & Sankar, 2008). Female school principals have been evaluated higher than their male colleagues on formal school principal yearly evaluations that measure their ability to improve student achievement growth and teacher's ratings of these women's school leadership abilities (Grissom et al., 2018); this demonstrates that women are stronger instructional leaders than their male colleagues (Krüger et al., 2007).

Therefore, despite being valued less than men, women's leadership styles are considered more transformational than men's (Northouse, 2016). They are considered more effective in leadership roles in government, social service, and educational organizations (Northouse, 2016). Women have developed their style of leadership by breaking challenging conventional leadership styles that emphasize traditional management styles and instead focus on implementing effective organizational change rather than implementing control (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Rosener, 1990). Women's leadership styles are more transformational than men's because women engage their followers in the leadership process by establishing rapport with them, encouraging participation, sharing power and information, and inspiring work excitement to ensure collaborative leadership ensures the achievement of organizational goals (Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt, 2013).

### **Leadership Development**

Leadership development among educational leaders has been a vital research focus often because of the responsibilities of school principals in the accountability-driven

contexts they work (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Vogel et al., 2021). The literature emphasizes the impact of leadership on the overall effectiveness of schools (Vogel et al., 2021). Scholars also advance a theory of identity development that integrates leadership as part of an individual's overall identity, in which an individual develops from novice to intermediate to an expert leader who makes cognitive changes in their conceptualization of leadership (Vogel et al., 2021). The most common practical approaches for effective leadership development include executive coaching, mentoring, networking job assignments, 360-degree feedback, and action learning (Vogel et al., 2021). Given the demands of 21st-century work environments, individuals must navigate and support each other's leadership as leadership is shared among institutions (Eva et al., 2021). This idea has given rise to collective leadership, which involves the participation of multiple entities in the leadership process (Eva et al., 2021). Leadership is viewed as a property of individuals and their interactions with followers; however, recent literature emphasizes leadership as a collective phenomenon distributed or shared among different people (McCauley & Palus, 2021). All leaders in an organization may positively impact each other's leadership development, as they will work more efficiently. As leadership development adopts an integrated approach that focuses on the dynamic interplay between leaders and followers, the role of leadership development is ongoing (Martin et al., 2020) to achieve common organizational goals. Therefore, it often requires collaborative leadership development to take place; in the context of this study, collective leadership development may be crucial as educational leaders must be able to effectively work collaboratively alongside other leaders in order to eradicate educational achievement gaps to ensure the achievement of

student success outcomes in educational contexts. Collective leadership ensures more robust overall leadership development and practices (Eva et al., 2021). Overall, it is crucial to note that leader identity and developing a prominent leadership style among leaders is a crucial topic in leadership development (Vogel et al., 2021). However, there is a disconnect between women's leadership in the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, and *The Leadership Quarterly*, indicating that, on average, only about 7% of published leadership articles mention the impact of women's gender on their leadership development and overall leadership styles (Lyness & Grotto, 2018; Vogel, 2021).

### **Latinx Women's Leadership Style**

Scholars have established in previous studies that Latina women do not merely associate with one leadership style but that their managerial attributes demonstrate they are transformational leaders (Bagula, 2016; Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). In her Latina leadership in the United States study, Bonilla-Rodriguez, (2011) discovered that transformational leadership is the most common leadership style among Latina leaders because they effectively motivate their followers to become leaders. Transformational leadership style is defined using four elements: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Burns, 1978).

As transformational leaders, Latinx women employed as school administrators strive to be strong role models, help their followers succeed within their administrative team, and personally develop (Rivera, 2014) therefore, preparing them to serve Latinx

students best and improve student learning outcomes by addressing academic achievement gaps. Therefore, Latina leaders can empower and enable other people to learn by teaching them and providing them with growth opportunities (Rivera, 2014).

The intersectionality of their ethnic background benefits these women's leadership as ethnic minority leaders lead in meaningful, nurturing, and engaging ways; therefore, their leadership approach is congruent with the transformational leadership model (Ardichvili et al., 2009). Collectivist values are also vital to minority leaders' leadership styles; therefore, their cultural backgrounds are integrated into their leadership (Hetty Van Emmerik et al., 2008). In a study examining Latinx women in higher education managerial positions Segura (2003) found that one of the reasons that inspired her participants to become educational leaders was to challenge the stereotypical cultural beliefs about their leadership abilities; and instead demonstrate that Latinx women in leadership possess cultural assets that define their leadership as transformational (Mazzula, 2011).

### **Latinx Women's Intersecting Social Identities**

In the context of education, the individual aspects of the multiple, intersectional identities encompassed in Latinx women and minority leaders have historically provided overlapping systems of oppression that oppress and disadvantage them (Crenshaw, 1989; Bagula, 2016; Gabriel, 2021; Perez-Huber, 2010; Méndez-Morse, 2015). The following section provides a brief history of Latinx women's intersecting social identity factors and how these factors have inequitably posed educational and professional disadvantages. The foundations for analyzing Black women's intersecting identities in history were de-

veloped by Kimberle Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality which found that different aspects of their identities shaped Black women's experiences. She believed that a woman's gender, race, class, and sexual orientation combined in ways that could not be easily separated, shaping their experiences. When she first coined the term, it explained the interconnection among identities that cannot be separated when exploring their experiences or perspectives. In educational leadership, a woman's intersecting social identities may result in employers' misconceptions about Latinx women's ability to employ effective leadership as school principals. Many researchers using CRT support the notion that Latinx women's intersecting identities are related, shaped, and developed through the historical constructions of stereotypes about culture, gender, and race (Gonzales, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

### ***Latinx Women's Gender***

Without considering other aspects of their intersecting identities (e.g., ethnicity or sexual orientation), Latinx women's gender entails expectations that traditionally hinder their leadership development. In general, gender encompasses an integral part of American society (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Societal expectations have traditionally dictated women's and men's roles. These expectations deem women as nurturers; and men as leaders—positioning women as homemakers, nurses, or teachers (Gil & Vasquez, 1996; Nogales, 2003). These expectations make it more challenging for women to develop leadership abilities. "Although Latinas are beginning to assume positions of power throughout the world, Latino culture continues to be ambivalent about the essential value of women" (Nogales, 2003, p. 16). In general, women are disadvantaged in their careers be-

cause of stereotypes about their gender. Since women have more domestic responsibilities than men, potential employers often prefer to hire men for leadership roles (Carli & Eagly, 2011; Parker, 2015). All women, especially women of color, are thought to lack executive presence and, compared to males, underestimate their leadership abilities, while men overestimate theirs (Rhode, 2017).

Gender has posed a historical disadvantage for Latinx women in K-12 leadership roles. The idea of leadership for Latinx women pertained to the notion that they should possess *marianismo* and have a sacred duty to sacrifice their careers to take care of domestic duties (Gil & Vazquez, 1996). These gender-based stereotypes limit leadership in career ascension as Latinx women's family members often do not support them in pursuing a career or advancement in leadership positions. Latinx women's leadership effectiveness may also be negatively affected because of gender stereotypes. Therefore, hindering women's leadership ability to ascend into leadership positions because they are often given lower performance ratings than their male colleagues because of stereotypes about their race and gender (Rhode, 2017). Gender acceptance is a struggle for Latinx women mainly because, in Latinx homes, women are the primary caregivers for their husbands and children (Chavarria-Prado, 1994). Latinx culture expects women to give up their career aspirations to prioritize domestic duties (Chavarria-Prado, 1994). Therefore, balancing their home life with their professional demands often hinders Latinx women's ability to ascend into leadership positions.

Gender issues may persist today as males in leadership positions continue to outnumber women in educational contexts (Coleman, 2003; Johnson, 2017). Latinx women's



female gender is merely one of the intersecting social identities that Latina school principals possess. Therefore, Latinx women's gender may challenge them to ascend in educational leadership; employers may associate their gender with the social expectations associated with it. Deeming women to be domestically responsible in their households; is a challenge that male school principal candidates do not face (Coleman, 2012). Research has noted differing viewpoints about how a Latinx women's gender may impact their ability to obtain a leadership position. Some scholars believe that gender does not negatively impact Latinx women's leadership abilities, while others disagree. Byrd's (1999) study on Latina school leaders asserts that the assumption that gender hinders Latinx women's ability to employ effective leadership is false because they can multitask effectively.

On the other hand, Mendez-Morse et al. 's (2015) study about Latinx women in leadership asserts that domestic responsibilities negatively impact Latinas who work as educational school leaders. The study's findings suggest that Latinas struggle to sustain a healthy work-life balance that may stifle their ascension into school leadership positions. Recent research about Latinx women reveals that their leadership ability and authority are often undermined, resented, questioned, or ignored in the workplace merely because of their gender (Murakami, 2015; Rhode, 2017).

Despite the noted struggles for Latinas to ascend into educational leadership roles, cultural asset approaches may help them effectively prepare to lead school districts (Myung et al., 2011). Multiple hiring systems are in place to enable leadership ascension for Latinx women. These management systems allow districts to identify potential principals and develop their leadership to succeed in a career as a school principal.

However, many school districts need to use effective hiring systems that enable equity for Latinx women's career ascension. Instead, districts often rely on traditional forms of recruitment and retention of school administrators. Traditional hiring processes are tapping (Myung et al., 2011). Tapping is a form of informal hiring that encourages school administrator candidates to apply (Myung et al., 2011). However, this may not benefit Latina principals as non-Whites and women, in general, because women who aspire to lead often require extracurricular activities management experience, such as sports management, to obtain an administrative promotion from their employer (Myung et al., 2011).

In addition, it is more common for male candidates to possess extracurricular managerial experience because women are often unable to attain extracurricular activities management experience, making their ascension into a leadership position more complex (Myung et al., 2011). Latinas also have to work twice as hard in leadership positions to prove themselves and sustain their leadership positions (Santamaria & Gaetane, 2014). Latina school principals may still be experiencing gender and cultural discrimination that a cultural-based approach can help dismantle in which they effectively manage their intersecting social identities in the context of their leadership development or practices.

In general, the role of women in leadership positions demands that women ascending into managerial and leadership positions have to abide by archaic rules created by men that deem women as less effective leaders, labeling them as transactional as opposed to transformational by their coworkers and supervisors (Rosener, 1990). However, because of their gender, women are considered more charismatic and, thus, possess better

interpersonal abilities than their male counterparts (Rosener, 1990). Therefore, women have the skills that enable them to manage others effectively.

### ***Latinx Women's Culture/Ethnicity***

Without considering other aspects of their intersecting identities (e.g., gender and sexual orientation), Latinx women in K-12 leadership roles have been historically oppressed because of their culture/ethnicity. Latinx are considered a minority in the United States and suffered from segregation, while African Americans were subject to it in schools (Estrada, 2015). Women of color are predominantly marginalized in their culture (Rhode, 2017). A recent survey about cultural stereotypes reveals that 37% of Latinas, 56% of African Americans, and 46% of Asians believed that racial or ethnic stereotypes existed in their organization (Rhode, 2017). This element of their intersecting identity historically hindered the professional and educational ascension among Latinx women because they attended segregated schools while African Americans were segregated (Valencia, 2005). Therefore, the intersectionality of culture/ethnicity identity disadvantages for Latinx women persisted throughout the 1900s, preventing their ability to attain equity and equality in education. Modern-day researchers who have delved into Latina leadership believe that Latina administrators may still experience ethnic oppression (Brooks et al., 2013; Byrd, 1999; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). When applying for school principal positions, Latinx women candidates might still suffer more scrutiny and, thus, be deemed less qualified (Tayloe, 2016).

### *Latinx Women's Sexual Orientation*

Latinx women in K-12 leadership roles who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) have been historically oppressed in education because of biases and discriminatory policies or practices employed by school officials (Sears, Malory, 2011; Webster et al., 2018). This oppression begins in school, where LGBTQ youth face hostile climates and damaging school policies and practices because of their sexual orientation. Individuals of minority descent experience a greater risk than others that identify as LGBTQ (GLSEN, 2016). African American, Latinx, and Multiracial students who are part of the LGBTQ community experienced higher school discipline rates (GLSEN, 2016). These students were likely to believe they might not obtain a high school diploma (GLSEN, 2016, p. xiv). Therefore, making it more difficult for them to obtain a leadership position in the future or develop their own leadership. LGBTQ professionals believe that they lack the safety to self-identify as an LGBTQ member in the workplace because they fear being fired and bullied in the workplace, which may cause socio-emotional stress that reduces their work performance (Chung, 2011). In turn, this fear stifles them from ascending to school leadership roles by being offered a promotion. Hence, the sexual orientation intersectional identity of Latinx women in K-12 leadership roles who identify as part of the LGBTQ community is often disadvantaged because of this aspect of their intersecting social identities. Therefore, publicly identifying as a member of the LGBTQ community may stifle their educational progress, impacting their ability to attain a higher education degree and, respectively, an educational administration position.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) educators and administrators often experience complex school environments as employees that challenge their safety (Wright & Smith, 2015). LGBTQ educators and administrators are often exposed to workplace harassment and bias. Disrespectful comments and homophobic beliefs about their LGBTQ affiliation have also made them feel uncomfortable in the workplace and have caused negative socio-emotional implications for them (Spitko, 2015). Bias and discriminatory practices against LGBTQ educators and administrators have unfairly resulted in denying employment and employment dismissal since the 1970s (Spitko, 2015). In the past, teachers were fired for their sexual orientation as there were no laws prohibiting LGBTQ employment discrimination (Graves, 2015). Sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination against school teachers and administrators may also result in students of the LGBTQ community not having empowering role models in the school community. Although there are now laws that prohibit the employment discrimination of LGBTQ community members, this intersectionality may still pose employment ascension challenges for Latinx women aspiring to become school principals.

### ***Latinx Leadership Literature***

Much literature about Latinx women's leadership emphasizes their development barriers, such as a lack of mentors and experiencing isolation (Bagula, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2004). However, scholars also explore how cultural assets positively impact Latinx women's leadership (Bordas, 2013; Holvino, 2010; Nogales, 2003; 2007, Zaki, 2007). Multiple aspects of Latinx women's intersecting identities should be considered when examining their leadership styles—for instance, their gender, culture/race, and sexual orientation. Bordas (2013) and Holvino (2010) emphasize the culture of Latinx

women's intersecting identity in their research and employ a positive or cultural wealth approach to examining different aspects of Latinx women's leadership. According to Bordas (2013), ten principles enable Latinx leadership, which also apply to Latinx women's leadership, as they are a sub-sector of the Latinx community. They are as follows: Principle One: Personalismo: The character of the leader, entails the belief that all individuals possess inherent values and should be treated with respect. This principle ensures that leaders develop and establish personal, genuine, and caring relationships. Principle Two: Consciencia: Knowing Oneself and Personal Awareness; which entails being able to reflect and respond to the two critical questions Bordas (2013) posed "who are you?" and "what kind of person are you? It enables a leader to establish a sense of consistency and self-reliance while tapping into one's core values and using them in our leadership. Principle Three: Destino, Personal and collective purpose, it entails being aware of our destiny, as Latinx individuals believe that destiny is predetermined. Principle Four: La cultura: Culturally based leadership; entails unifying common history, heritage, language, traditions, spirituality, and the culture overall. As well as integral values of respect, service, generosity, honesty, and other adages that our families have taught us. Principle Five: De colores, Latino inclusiveness and diversity, it entails welcoming individuals of other cultures to join our leadership efforts by establishing a sense of community that bridges the gap between diverse members while unifying our efforts and contributions into a shared identity. Principle Six: Juntos, Collective Community Stewardship, it entails action-oriented principles establishing democratic shared leadership and facilitating contributions, resource sharing, and equal opportunities to lead in the community. Principle Seven: Adelante's Global Vision and Immigrant Spirit, it entails the realization

that Latinx individuals encompass 22 countries, with ties in Brazil, Portugal, Italy, and the Philippines. Being inclusive enables addressing institutional barriers of injustice.

Principal Eight: Si se Puede, Coalition and activist leadership, it entails the establishment of social activism and a concern for addressing social inequities by ensuring equal rights for everyone despite their ethnic background. Principal Nine: Gozar la Vida: Leadership that celebrates life, it entails engaging in activities celebrating culture, family life, and community; these allow individuals to enjoy life and restore themselves after a difficult day or situation. Principal Ten: Fe y Esperanza, Faith and Hope, it entails a belief in God; faith is the foundation of Latinx leadership.

Similar to Bordas' cultural principles of leadership, Holvino (2010) also encouraged Latina women to focus on their cultural capital. Thus, steering away from a deficit mindset may reduce their self-esteem and cause barriers to their leadership. She asserted that Latina's identity and intersectionality of gender and race could not be viewed simultaneously. In support of Latina school leaders using their cultural wellness as a leadership enabling tool, Holvino proposed eight common mobilizing and empowering cultural scripts that Latina women possess; 1. Familismo (close family), 2. Machismo-patriarismo (gender-roles). 3. Personalismo (personal relationships), 4. Suno Atua (positive relations), 5. Colectivismo (community), 6. El Presente (the present time), 7. Respect (respect for older people, authority figures, or those in power), 8. Spiritualism (belief in a higher power). These differ from stereotypes because these are not extrinsic beliefs like stereotypes or over-generalizations (p. 2). Holvino suggested that Latinas focus on their scripts to be aware of their cultural strengths and use them to their advantage in their leadership

practices. In addition, she encouraged those who supervise Latinx women in the workplace to learn about Latinx women's cultural assets, so they are more aware of the Latina leaders' strengths, to encourage Latinas to be better leaders, and to encourage others in their community to view them as such. Employing these cultural scripts helps improve cultural tolerance and ensures a better leadership collective in a school community. Latina's strengths are used to empower others, lead others and mobilize students of color from a cultural asset perspective instead of a deficit perspective.

Nogales (2003; 2007) contends that Latinas innately possess seven asset-based traits that enable their leadership. These traits include 1. Their creative spirit, 2. Their *aguantadora* or passionate determination 3. Their *comadre* networking abilities 4. Their *deplicatica's* discretion 5. Their *atrevida* courage 6. Their *malabarista* balance is 7. Their *Reina* (e.g., queen spirit) confidence and strength. Nogales (2003; 2007) believed that ensuring Latina's awareness of these strengths would enable them to harness them and hone their leadership skills through development and practices. In the context of this study, raising awareness of Latina leaders' cultural wellness would ensure that more Latina leaders are developed.

The career ascension of Latinx women in school leadership is rarely researched from a cultural asset framework (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami, 2016). Therefore, this research offers new insights that may inform current Latina school principals and thus enable them to improve their practice, inspire aspiring Latinx school leaders, and inform diverse school leaders about Latino leadership practices to ensure that they can effectively teach and lead in K 12 organizations that predominantly educate Latinx students. Zaki's (2007) perspectives entail that Latinas have potent voices that empower



aspiring minority leaders. She believed that Latinas should be enabled to possess nine tenets of effective leadership through a cultural asset mindset. These tenets entail: Becoming passionate about their organization, becoming reflective, becoming competent, becoming great communicators, becoming understanding of the role that culture has on their leadership practices and development, becoming physically and emotionally energetic and resilient to persevere consistently, becoming focused and forward in their thinking, becoming respectful of others and their individuality, and becoming credible and reputable to others.

### **Latinx Women's Cultural Assets Synthesis**

Despite deficit-based thinking about Latina leadership, Latinas possess cultural strengths that assist them in developing their leadership and implementing effective leadership practices (Bordas, 2013; Holvino, 2010; Nogales, 2003; 2007, Zaki, 2007).

### **Community of Cultural Wealth Conceptual Framework**

Yosso's (2005) Community of Cultural Wealth (CCW) Model synthesizes the cultural assets described by many scholars (Bordas, 2013; Holvino, 2010; Nogales, 2003; 2007, Zaki, 2007). Yosso's 2005 CCW model supports the idea that the aspects mentioned above of Latinx women's intersecting identities have the power to enable Latinx women's leadership development and practices. CCW enables Latinx women in leadership to consider their lived experiences through a cultural asset-based framework rather than a deficit-based perspective. In essence, Yosso's (2005) Community of Cultural Wealth model supports the notion that Latinx women possess adequate cultural wealth to

attain upward mobility. The Community of Cultural Wealth model entails a list of asset-based forms of capital that enable their leadership.

The first form of capital is aspirational capital, which details Latinx women's ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite facing real or perceived barriers (Yosso, 2005). The second form of capital is linguistic capital, defined as the intellectual and social skills Latinx women have learned through communication experiences in more than one language. Navigational capital is the third form of capital, and it consists of having acquired the skills required to maneuver through social institutions or educational organizations. The fourth form of capital entails social capital and is a part of a network of people that serve as a community of resources or support systems. Familial capital includes acquiring knowledge nurtured by a family with a sense of history in the community and cultural institution. At the same time, resistant capital allows Latinx women to resist the oppression they encounter in their communities and refers to their skills cultivated through behavioral or inequality challenges. Therefore, this study examines the leadership ascension experiences of Latinx women in school principal roles in analyzing how they navigate their intersecting identities and how their intersecting identities impact their leadership.

Yosso's (2005) Community of Cultural Wealth framework may enable Latinx women school principals to serve as role models to Latinx students and other students of color in their districts. Thus, steering away from a deficit framework that focuses on how being a woman of color is historically marginalized for their multiple intersecting identities. Examining this phenomenon in the context of Yosso's (2005) community of cultural

wealth model may enable aspiring Latinx school leaders to become aware of their cultural assets in the context of their career success, leadership development, and leadership practices. These include employing their cultural capital, which means they can attain ascension in the profession, hiring/promotion by using their symbolic skills, mannerisms, credentials, and the like. Moreover, Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework postulates that networking connections, mentors, professors, former employers, and other professional networks enable Latinx women to develop adequate self-efficacy. Adequate self-efficacy empowers them to overcome the historically established deficit mindset about the different aspects of their intersecting identities. With self-efficacy, they can perceive strengths among the attributes that history framed as worthy of oppression. For instance, their gender or sex may be considered the subservient gender or sex; race/culture, which defines them as minorities; class, which undermines their financial abundance to merely the lowest socioeconomic status. Examining the trajectories of Latinx women in K-12 principal positions in schools in New Jersey through the lens of Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth unveils the negative stereotypes and prejudices inspired by Latinx women's intersecting identities. Thus, providing a more objective overview ensures an accurate analysis of their ascension journeys. They are steering away from a cultural deficit thinking model that perceives them as unable to ascend from K-12 institutions to higher education universities, to attain a prosperous career. It is crucial to note that when Latinx women ascend into leadership roles within educational institutions, their complex identities are at the forefront. Inevitably, examining Latinx women's leadership trajectories from a cultural perspective is essential because the educational institutions

where these women are employed are culturally diverse. Therefore, Latinx women's leadership also impacts the leadership of other stakeholders in the institution (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Richardson & Loubier, 2008). Latinx women in leadership experience stereotypes associated with gender, race, and ethnicity (or culture); this is called "triple jeopardy," caused by their intersecting identities (Arredondo & Perez, 2006; Sanchez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007; Crenshaw, 1989).

As a form of qualitative research that enables giving a voice to the voiceless, this phenomenological study was written in the form of a testimony, which is a tool that helps others understand the educational experiences of communities of color, particularly the Latinx community. It also helps to legitimize and decipher the injustices by using "talk back" to injustices (Hooks, 1989, p.5) as a way to challenge and transform educational practice and research (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Moreover, Yosso's (2005) CCW framework may enable school leadership aspiring Latinx women and active practitioners to succeed as educational leaders despite their multiple intersecting social identities (Duran & DelCampo, 2010). Additionally, Latinx women can use the community of cultural wealth (CCW) model to experience fulfillment from their hard work at home and work and to counter negative, stifling beliefs that may hinder their effective leadership development and practices.

## **Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature about Latinx women's leadership, the history of challenges about the Latinx demographic, Latinx leadership cultural assets, researcher perspectives, and other supporting literature on Latina school principals. As the Latinx

population in the United States continues to increase, the percentage of Latino students enrolled in schools is increasing. However, predominantly White male principals lead in these schools. Therefore, this study seeks to motivate and increase Latinx women's presence in school leadership by sharing the experiences of successful professional Latinx women employed as K-12 school principals in the State of New Jersey.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Overview**

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research methodology used in this study. The following sections are the study's purpose, research questions, researcher positionality, participants, data collection procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness/credibility, and ethical considerations.

#### **Purpose Statement**

This qualitative interpretative phenomenological study explored the leadership and career ascension of Latinx women employed as school principals in K-12 schools in New Jersey. It examines how their intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation shaped their leadership. Analyzing their experiences using Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) as a framework provides information that may help aspiring Latinx women leaders hone their leadership attributes. Qualitative interviews captured the essence of my participants' leadership trajectories. For this study, I employed an interpretative phenomenological (IPA) approach because this method is ideal as it allows me to use a meaning-making perspective to explore further how participants made meaning of their leadership ascension experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Since I examined the cultural assets across the collective participants' leadership experiences within the context of educational leadership, IPA also ensures a thorough understanding of how participants perceive and make sense of the events that they experienced in diverse contexts while working to ascend from a teaching position to managerial roles

(Smith et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2022), therefore using an IPA approach facilitated the research process.

Moreover, researchers using IPA find emerging themes in the lived experiences of their participants and relate that information to existing literature (Smith et al., 2009). Relating participants' stories to scholarly literature provides validation of the experiences and applicability of those experiences in broader contexts to better understand and contextualize the cultural assets in their experiences. Ultimately, this study aims to use the findings to strengthen a career ascension pathway that supports Latinx women from K-12 education through college and to increase their ability to ascend into formal leadership positions in educational institutions.

There continues to be limited research on Latinx women in school leadership and how their multiple social identities may impact their leadership practices (Breslin et al., 2017; Chin et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2020; Méndez-Morse et al., 2021; Murakami et al., 2016; Sanchez-Hucles, 2010). This study seeks to address these gaps in the literature by examining the leadership development and practices of Latinx women in school principal positions. At the same time, I consider how their intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation impact their leadership development or how they effectively manage their intersecting identities in their day-to-day leadership practices. More research is required to cultivate Latinx women's leadership development (Murakami et al., 2015; 2016). This study explores how community cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) shapes Latinx women employed as school principals' leadership. CCW entails an asset-based perspective that is not common in traditional research. Therefore, examining the experiences of Latinx women in school leadership positions from an asset-

based perspective may mobilize K-12 scholars with similar intersecting social identities, reducing the academic achievement gap in the state and nation. Instead of sustaining a historically hindering deficit approach, examining the experiences of Latinx women employed as school principals from an asset-based framework of CCW (Yosso, 2005) will highlight the unique experiences of Latinx women in school leadership and how their experiences contribute to effective leadership practices as well as the management of the stereotypes about their intersecting identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

Women in educational leadership are affected by their intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (Bagula, 2016; Martinez et al., 2016; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). Moreover, this study examines and comprehends how Latinx women school principals' multiple intersecting identities impact their leadership. Yosso's Community of Cultural Wealth (2005) counters the research conducted about Latinx school principals that merely focuses on a cultural deficit perspective (e.g., merely examining the hindrances that the multiple social identities that Latinx school principals possess may pose) (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004; Perez-Huber et al., 2006; Solorzano et al., 2005; Swail et al., 2004; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). Existing research often provides a deficit mindset perspective that perpetuates the educational attainment gap between Latinx scholars and their counterparts (Luna & Martinez, 2013; Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005).

This study is critical because it raises awareness about how the multiple aspects of their identity (e.g., gender, race/culture, and sexual orientation) positively impact the leadership of Latina school principals, an asset perspective that counters deficit frameworks about the social intersecting identities of women leaders (Crenshaw, 1989). Since



Latinx administrators and educators have a vital role in addressing the prevalent educational achievement gap of Latinx scholars, it is crucial to examine how they managed their intersecting identities to achieve academic leadership positions (Mendez-Morse et al. 2015, Gandara & The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, 2015).

More research is still needed on the leadership abilities of Latinx school leaders and how their multiple social identities may positively impact their leadership development or leadership practices. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps in the literature in a variety of ways by examining the leadership development of Latina school principals through their daily practices while considering how their intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation impact their leadership development or how they are effectively managing their intersecting identities in their day to day leadership practices. More research is required to cultivate effective Latina leadership development (Murakami et al., 2016; Murakami et al., 2015).

However, this study explored the experiences of Latinx women in NJ school principal and vice principal positions to understand their ascension into leadership positions and how their multiple intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation shape their leadership experiences. These intersecting social identities have historically created barriers to career ascension for women of color due to stereotypical notions about their abilities and their intersectional social identities (e.g., ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation) (Bagula, 2016; Martinez et al., 2022; Murakami et al., 2018). Educational leadership research is often limited to documenting the experiences of male school leaders because of stereotypical patriarchal notions about ideal school leader attributes

that question the effectiveness of aspiring women leaders and pose challenges to their career ascension (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Mulawarman et al., 2022).

Moreover, research about Latinx women in school leadership and how their multiple social identities may impact their leadership development and leadership practices continues to be limited (Breslin et al., 2017; Chin et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2020; Méndez-Morse et al., 2021; Murakami et al., 2016; Sanchez-Hucles, 2010). Examining the experiences of Latinx women currently serving as school principals using community cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) as a theoretical frame may inform perceptions of their leadership. Raising awareness about their cultural assets is critical to impel aspiring Latinx women leaders to hone their leadership attributes.

This study addresses these gaps in the literature by examining the leadership development and practices of Latinx women in school principal and vice principal positions. At the same time, considering how their intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation impact their leadership development or how they effectively manage their intersecting identities in their day-to-day leadership practices may help aspiring minority leaders hone their leadership. More research is required to cultivate Latinx women's leadership development (Murakami et al., 2015; 2016). The research participants in this phenomenological study are working professionals with graduate degrees and school leadership certifications who serve as school principals in urban school districts with a predominant minoritized or economically disadvantaged student population the districts and communities they serve and identify as Latinx women. This research adds to the limited research on how Latinx women in leadership positions experience

their journey and any connection between their leadership and cultural assets (Davis, Sanchez-Hucles, 2010; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015).

Examining the experiences of Latinx women in school leadership positions from an asset-based perspective may enlist other educators and administrators to collectively work towards the common goal of intrinsically motivating K-12 scholars who possess similar intersecting social identities as the women in this study to utilize their cultural assets as a catalyst for sustained educational achievement. Since the women in this study serve as examples of the leadership success aspiring Latinx women may obtain, this research may impel them to pursue their leadership development through formal education, which, in turn, may positively impact the national efforts to reduce the prevalent academic achievement gap between Latinx students and their White counterparts (Howard, 2010; 2019). The academic achievement gap refers to the unequal educational learning outcomes between Latinx students and White and Asian peers (Howard, 2010; 2019). Instead of sustaining a historically hindering deficit approach, examining the experiences of Latinx women employed as school principals from an asset-based framework of CCW explored the unique experiences of Latinx women in school leadership and how their experiences may contribute to effective leadership practices and the ability to manage stereotypes about their historically marginalized intersecting identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (Hernandez et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022).

Their career trajectories are examined from an asset perspective, with their community's cultural wealth (Yosso, 2015) at the forefront to delve into how their culture positively impacted their leadership. Exploring their ascension into leadership positions and how their intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation

shaped their experiences will uncover overarching leadership attributes among my research participants by examining their experiences using community cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) as a theoretical frame delving into their cultural wealth's impact on their leadership. This study may inspire aspiring Latinx women leaders to hone their leadership attributes and use their cultural assets to self-advocate their leadership trajectories (Delgado-Bernal, 2016; Martinez et al., 2021). Therefore, using their cultural assets helps them overcome challenges that may arise along the way (Delgado-Bernal, 2016; Martinez et al., 2021). Cultural assets refer to the unique viewpoints Latinx women offer to the research process, developed from personal experiences in their cultural communities (Delgado-Bernal, 2016). Their cultural assets positively impact the documented experiences of Latinx women employed as school principals (Delgado-Bernal, 2016; Martinez et al., 2016). They align with the different forms of cultural assets described in the Community of Cultural Wealth Model (CCW) (Yosso, 2005), the theoretical framework in this study.

The leadership trajectories of Latinx women currently employed as K-8 school principals or vice principals in New Jersey are captured through qualitative interviews using an interpretative phenomenological (IPA) methodological approach. The participants were selected after replying to my initial invitation and information about this study email, emailed to them via the NJPSA Leadership connection platform. I selected the first 5 interested people who replied and whose social intersecting identities aligned with this study. This research adds to the limited research available about how Latina leaders' leadership differs as educational leaders when compared to other women (Méndez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

## **Research Questions**

This study addresses the following questions:

- (1) How do Latinx women describe their experiences ascending into school leadership positions?
- (2) How do cultural values influence these Latina school principals' leadership?
- (3) How do their intersecting identities shape Latinx women's leadership experiences?

## **Rationale for Methodological Selection**

### ***Qualitative Methodology***

These research questions are best addressed through qualitative research because qualitative research will help understand their lived experiences. Qualitative research may be defined as a process of investigation to understand a societal problem (Creswell, 1994; 2013; Smith and Osborn, 2008). This process provides a complex, holistic picture formulated by the research participants' words; their reflections about their lived experiences (Creswell, 1994; 2013). Qualitative research methodology entails gathering perceptions about the phenomena by examining the lived experiences of the identified participants in the study. Using qualitative methodology in this study helps illuminate the lived experiences of Latinx women in K-12 leadership roles employed as school principals in educational institutions. In addition, my research helps clarify how they overcome the barriers to leadership along the way and attain ascension into their leadership positions

and explore how their intersecting identities impact their leadership practices in the context of their profession. Engaging in the interview process allowed me to respond to this study's research questions using qualitative methodology.

### ***Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA)***

The conceptual approach used in this study entails interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). An IPA research design utilizes phenomenological inquiry concerned with the participant's subjective reports of events rather than their objective accounts (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). IPA is a suitable approach when a researcher tries to discover how individuals perceive the specific situations they face and how they make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The philosophical underpinnings supporting phenomenology are based on the work of four significant philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). Each contributed to IPA's evolution by refining three core elements; phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022).

### ***Phenomenology***

IPA research designs employ phenomenological inquiry concerned with the individual's experiences. This inquiry process is divided into two areas; descriptive (Husserl) and interpretive (Heidegger) (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). However, there is an overlap between both inquiries (Fade, 2004; Shosha, 2012), synthesizing these two foci on comprehending the participants' experiences with a thorough analysis. This method is appropriate for this research because it will allow me to obtain insights into the lived expe-

riences of Latina K-12 principals through interactions with them. Merriam (2002) postulates that the interpretation of an individual's everyday experiences and their perspectives about these experiences best defines the process of phenomenology. I utilize the process of bracketing (ignoring personal beliefs), analyzing, and comparing findings to identify the phenomenon's essence, in this case, the experiences of Latinx women in school leadership positions (Chan et al., 2013).

### *Hermeneutics*

The second major underpinning of IPA research design derives from hermeneutics or the theory of interpretation. It was introduced by Heidegger to phenomenological philosophy and considered an explicitly interpretative activity (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022; Wilcke, 2002). The hermeneutic process reveals textual meaning (Moustakas, 1994) as the interviews are transcribed and analyzed. Therefore, the interpreter's analysis can discover hidden phenomena. Hermeneutics is applied to IPA research to develop theories for the meanings that groups of individuals (research participants) attach to their lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2007; 2008; Wilcke, 2002). It involves a reflective interpretive process that describes the experience as it appears in consciousness and an astute interpretive analysis of underlying historical and aesthetic conditions that account for it; this means that the interpretation of the research participant's experiences were described as close as possible to their points of views as they recall from their feelings and memories (Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). This process is more concerned with enabling the research participants to share details about their lived experiences by bracketing the researcher participants' lived experiences apart from the re-

researcher's personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The hermeneutic analysis process requires protocol focused on (a) fixation of the meaning, (b) mental dissociation of the author, (c) entire interpretation of the text, and (d) allowance for multiple interpretations (Moustakas, 1994). Since this study seeks to thoroughly examine Latinx women in school leadership positions experiences using in-depth descriptions to analyze their experiences, the complexity of the hermeneutic process in IPA provides the best research methodology for this study.

### ***Idiography***

The third major underpinning of IPA research design is idiography, which is concerned with the particular and contrasts with the universal principles applied in traditional empirical research (Breakwell, 2012). Its primary concern is capturing the individual experiences of each participant in the study (Moustakas, 1994). In the IPA methodology, the researcher does not make predesigned claims about human behavior (Smith et al., 2009). At the primary level, the sense of detail requires the researcher to conduct an intensive, in-depth study of each participant's leadership experience. In contrast, at the subsequent level, the researcher analyzes how the respondents perceive events, processes, and relationships on their leadership ascension journeys. As the researcher, the idiographic process requires me to use a small, purposeful sample. There is no suggested sample size in IPA research; however, a small sample size helped me organize themes to capture the essence of the research participants' experiences, which becomes more feasible when the sample size is small (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Interpretative analysis ensures that the essence of participant testimonies is captured; this is important because it unveils a thorough understanding of the individual experiences of each research participant as



much as possible (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Moreover, analyzing the emergent themes that align from one participant to the other is essential (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the sampling of five participants for this study may benefit the idiographic process by allowing a thorough exploration of the similarities and differences noted in each participant's leadership ascension journey allowing me to learn something about the generic themes in the analysis and the experiences of the participants who tell their stories (Breakwell et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022).

Overall, an IPA approach allows these elements to become tools for researchers to understand the meaning people assign to their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). Since this study aims to examine how Latinx women employed as K-12 school principals make sense of their experiences, IPA is appropriate for this study. Notably, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) combined with Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) helped me thoroughly unveil the resilience and persistence that the Latinx women employed throughout their leadership trajectories because CCW helps to recognize the cultural assets that Latinx women in school leadership possess, and utilizing IPA to delve into their experiences will best enable me to provide a detailed examination of these experiences. Moreover, this qualitative research methodology aims to provide a thorough analytical account of the personal experiences of each of this study's research participants (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). Using this method in IPA, I am concerned with examining subjective experiences. However, there is always deeply constructed meaning in my research participants' personal experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is committed to the research participants' linguistic, cognitive, affective, and physical well-

being, unifying their thinking and emotional state during the data-gathering process or interview process to uncover the essence of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009; 2011;2022).

### ***Bracketing***

Bracketing is an intricate concept in phenomenology, requiring a succinct methodological decision (Gearing, 2004). There are six bracketing types used in qualitative research: ideal (philosophic), descriptive (eidetic), existential, analytical, reflexive (cultural), and pragmatic bracketing (Gearing, 2004). The type of bracketing is contingent upon the research design for each study. Since this is an interpretative phenomenological study, I utilized descriptive (eidetic) bracketing because it effectively aligns with my theoretical framework due to its guiding influences of descriptive phenomenology elements (Gearing, 2004). Descriptive bracketing's foundational focus entails a two-step process of setting aside my assumptions and being able to express the phenomenon (Kohak, 1978; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Tuohy et al., 2013), requiring me to examine my assumptions about the phenomena and remain more impartial through the research process (Gearing, 2004; Tuohy et al., 2013). I did this by keeping a journal where I reflected and documented my emotions as a form of emotional detachment after each interview. This type of bracketing allowed me to set aside personal assumptions connected to my research phenomena while also recognizing that eliminating some of the more prominent cultural and social aspects might not be possible (Gearing, 2004). With this in mind, descriptive bracketing allowed me to set aside prior knowledge about my phenomena, assumptions, and opinions and ensure new understanding is developed. Finally, in the final phase, I

made sense of newly achieved data by clarifying or following up with my research participants when needed (Gearing, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, I ensured impartiality through self-reflection, journaling, and following up with my research participants via email or phone if required.

### ***Researcher Positionality***

The idea for this study began with my research in the summer of 2021. I engaged in reading about Latina school principals and noticed how there was a limited amount of research on the phenomena. Therefore, I started thinking more critically about the topic and delved into the historical underpinnings of women in higher education institutions. After a thorough analysis of the Latinx women leadership literature available, I realized that these women's leadership trajectories can serve as role models who enable the abilities of other women leaders (Olsen, 2016).

I utilized descriptive (eidetic) bracketing in the research process to examine my personal bias with my positionality, dispositions, beliefs, and assumptions and to minimize my involvement with the subject material (Patton, 2014). My professional and personal experience influences my positionality in this research. As a certified school principal and K-12 supervisor of Latinx descent, my upbringing positions me closely to my research topic. I am also a woman, similar to the demographics of my research participants. However, I was able to document an impartial perspective about my research phenomena because I have not yet ascended to being employed as a New Jersey School Principal. My experiences are different from my research participants as I merely have the formal experiences of the New Jersey Department of education's mandated 350-hour leadership

practicum internship and the state-mandated 150-hour school superintendent internship; as well as one year of departmental leadership experiences, serving the role of the electives department chair (e.g., Art, Music, Physical Education). Therefore, examining my dispositions, beliefs, and assumptions helped me remain transparent about my positionality and develop research strategies that maintained an unbiased focus.

While I have commonalities with the research participants, I remain open to hearing and empowering their voices as they share their unique leadership insights. Therefore, I emphasize the importance of bracketing the beliefs and assumptions that stem from my own experiences throughout the inquiry process to remain open-minded and sustain an adaptive point of view that is willing to change positions when reason leads to doing so (Chan et al., 2013; Gearing, 2004). Moreover, as a researcher, my positionality allowed me to make sense of the study participant's experiences through a double positional role (Smith, 2004). The dual role of the researcher is both like and unlike the participant; in one sense, the researcher is like a participant, drawing on everyday human resources to make sense of the world (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022).

Concerning the research phenomena of leadership development in this study, I also have experience developing my leadership as a certified Latinx school leader and examining my leadership practices in educational organizations where I am employed. On the other hand, I am different from the participants, and I only have access to the participants' reported experiences and see this through my experiential sense (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022).

## *Participants*

The focal population for this study is Latinx women employed as school leaders in New Jersey, working as school principals. Almost 9% of principals identify as Latinx, while 54.2% entail women serving as principals in K-12 schools (NCES, 2019). Of the 54.2% of women school principals, 67% manage primary schools, 40% middle schools, and 33% high schools (Taie & Gold-ring, 2019). Approximately 3.5% of Latinx principals are Latinx women (School Staffing Survey, 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics has not reported separating gender within races and ethnicities in school surveys after 2012. Therefore, this is the only report/survey data that details the national number of Latinx school principals in the United States. With this in mind, the sample size for this study is small because the amount of Latinx women currently serving in New Jersey school leadership positions is small (NJDOE, 2019). Therefore, the targeted participants for this study are five Latina school principals employed in K-12 New Jersey schools of all administrative experience levels. IPA emphasizes providing a detailed account of the research participants' lived experiences. Therefore, large sample size is unnecessary (Smith et al., 2009). Instead, a small sample size is recommended as it is beneficial due to the concentrated focus on analyzing the data gathered, yielding better quality research (Smith et al., 2009). IPA developers suggest a sample size of 3-6 participants (Smith et al., 2009). Other scholars also suggest a small sample size to highlight similarities in the experiences of phenomenological research participants; researchers should interview 5 to 10 participants who have experienced similar events (Polkinghorne, 1989; Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). Since interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is

conducted on small sample sizes (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022), and this study is a phenomenological interpretative study (IPA), the sample size of five participants is appropriate. This sample size is also appropriate for this study because 2-10 participants or research subjects are sufficient to reach data saturation (Boyd, 2011). Creswell (1998) recommends extended interviews with up to 10 participants to reach data saturation. Patton (2002) agrees that a minimum sample size of 3 participants is sufficient to reach data saturation in a phenomenological study.

### ***Sampling***

Purposive sampling enabled the examination of my research phenomena. Purposive sampling is appropriate for this study because it permitted me to select a group of non-probabilistic sampling members with the required characteristics of identifying as a woman currently employed as a school leader of any managerial experience level in a New Jersey K-12 school (Creswell, 2012). The emphasis on qualitative research (IPA) conceptualization demands the purposeful selection of participants that ensure I comprehend the research problem and respond to the research question (Creswell, 2003; Smith et al., 2009).

The research participants in this phenomenological study are working professionals with graduate degrees and school leadership certifications to serve as school principals in their districts and communities. Therefore, it demonstrates that it is possible to positively manage their intersecting social identities amid their leadership practices and development trajectories. Thus, they have overcome systemic barriers and may continue encountering them in their leadership practices (Mendez-Morse, 2004). To identify my

research participants, I worked closely with the New Jersey School Principal and Supervisor Association to purposefully select my research sample. Moreover, this study uses convenience sampling to ensure the allocation of the correct sample size for this study. Convenience sampling entails the easiest method for the researcher to allocate research participants for this study; this may depend on geographical proximity, availability at a given time, and willingness to participate (Robinson, 2014). I selected the first five respondents to my initial invitation to participate in my study email, which provided information about my study and explained the required participant demographic criteria. Thus, the participants in this study all self-identified and verified that they identified as Latina women currently working as certified school principals or vice principals.

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, an invitation for the study was emailed to the Latina school principals, stating my position, explaining my research, and inviting them to the study. After selecting participants, a 1-hour interview was scheduled and took place virtually. All participants' names have been changed to self-selected pseudonyms, as well as the data about their current employing school districts, to protect the identity of my research participants. This research will add to the limited research on how Latinx women in leadership positions developed their skills and any connection between their leadership and cultural assets (Davis, Sanchez-Hucles, 2010; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Five Latinx women educational leaders who are currently employed as K-12 school principals or vice principals in New Jersey are interviewed in this study to obtain

and report data that captures the leadership experiences of K-12 Latina school principals and how CCW shaped their leadership ascension experiences in this phenomenological interpretive (IPA) qualitative study. The participants selected are self-identified Latina women of all experience levels who serve as school leaders or have moved to other educational leadership positions in K-12 public schools. Their experiences were examined through in-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions utilized to examine the lived experiences of each participant in this study (Appendix A) (Robers, 2020). The purpose of in-depth interviews is to understand a person's lived experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (Seidman, 2019).

Additionally, open-ended questioning elicits in-depth responses, which lead to a thorough understanding of how the leadership experiences unfolded in the lives of the Latinx women in school leadership positions and what it meant for these participants (Seidman, 2019). The interviews took place virtually via zoom, were approximately 60 minutes each, were recorded for accuracy, and transcribed. Moreover, I kept field notes to reflect upon the participants' responses (Garcia, 2018) and to determine when to ask follow-up questions for accuracy and clarification.

### ***Interview Protocol***

The study utilized qualitative research questions to examine the experiences of participants through individual interviews, electronic communication, or face-to-face discussions. The participants were asked about their career advancement trajectories and how their cultural assets, as defined by Yosso (2005), impacted their leadership. By doing



so, the study aimed to identify the assets that allow Latinx and other school leaders working with minoritized students to use their cultural strengths to promote academic success. This research could contribute to the improvement of leadership abilities of school leaders working with this demographic, ultimately reducing the academic achievement gap between Latinx students and their Asian and White peers (Shorey, 2002; Solorzano, 2005; Wall, 2022).

This interpretative phenomenological qualitative study is grounded on Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). The research questions in this study focus on exploring the leadership ascension of Latina school principals. Thus, it provides an asset-based framework that focuses on the community cultural wealth that Latina school principals possess. Different forms of community cultural assets impelled Latina school principals to develop their leadership and attain principal school certifications. Therefore, their experiences may help other aspiring school principals achieve their leadership development goals and improve their leadership practices.

During the study, I asked the participants a series of questions about their leadership journeys. These questions helped them reflect on the role that their cultural background played in enabling their leadership. The interviews were conducted either through electronic means via Zoom. By asking about their career paths, I was able to understand how their cultural background influenced their leadership development and daily leadership practices. I also asked questions that revealed how they overcame stereotypes associated with their intersecting social identities, particularly in their journey to becoming K-12 school principals. Despite any misconceptions about their social identities, these participants' diverse backgrounds positively impacted their ability to obtain promotions and

develop their leadership skills. The objective of the study was to explore the experiences of Latinx women currently employed as school principals in K-12 schools in NJ. In this study's interviews, I asked the research participants questions that allowed them to reflect on their leadership trajectories, which revealed the role their cultural assets played in enabling their leadership (Yosso, 2005) and overcoming the stereotypes associated with misconceptions about their intersecting identities. The interviews were conducted through individual, electronic, or face-to-face interviews. Asking the participants in this study about their career trajectories facilitated an understanding of how their cultural assets shaped their leadership development and daily leadership practices (Yosso, 2005). In my interviews, I also asked my participants questions that unveil how overcoming stereotypical notions about their multiple intersecting social identities in their leadership trajectories as they ascended into a formal K-12 school principal position was essential to their tenacity development and how contrary to deficit perspectives, their intersecting social identities positively impacted their ability to obtain school principal promotions and to comprehend their leadership practices further. This study's interview questions aimed to explore the experiences of the identified participants, Latinx women currently employed as school principals or vice principals in K-12 schools in NJ.

### ***Data Analysis***

In order to best analyze the data, I audiotaped and transcribed the interviews verbatim. The transcriptions offer a verbatim account of the questions and answers gathered from the interviews. I listened to the audiotapes and compared them to the transcript to ensure the accuracy of the data. After evaluating the transcriptions, I engaged in a thorough data analysis process commencing with the re-reading of the transcribed transcripts

of all five participant interviews. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) requires a six-step analytical and systematic procedure that identifies vital features, experiences, and perceptions (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). The six steps entail 1) Reading and Re-Reading, 2) Initial Noting, 3) Developing Emergent Themes, 4) Searching for connections across emergent themes, 5) Moving to the following cases, and 6) Looking for patterns across issues (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). I examined the content and language of my interview transcripts to interpret the text thoroughly, with an open mind, to capture the essence of my participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2009). I used Google Docs to code the transcripts by reoccurring themes that indicate commonalities among the research participants, which is noted, coded, and re-coded for accuracy using MAXQDA software; a coding program was used to facilitate this process. The data examines how Latinx women employed as K-12 school principals or vice principals in the state of New Jersey describe their experiences ascending from teaching positions to school principal or vice principal roles) Furthermore, the essence of their experiences of community cultural wealth (CCW) elements may have facilitated their ascension trajectories and provided an inter perspective about the impact of historically stereotyped attributes on their multiple intersecting social identities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation). Themes are examined for the commonalities in the professional ascension trajectories and the leadership development and practices of the Latina school principals in the study. I reached data saturation in my study after I had gathered sufficient information or themes that document my participants' similarities; since my sample size is positive, data saturation is achievable with a small sample size (Guest, 2006). I also utilized researcher memos and my journal to ensure that I was suspending predispositions during the data

analysis while comprehending all participants' perceptions unbiasedly (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007; Fade, 2004).

### ***Trustworthiness/Credibility***

Being open to change, comparing themes (Kornbluh, 2015), and examining data saturation (Patton, 2015). In order to understand the population, I have informed myself about the needs and cultural attributes of Latinx individuals. I also have the same ethnic background, which helps me do this. In order to convey the data analysis process and reconstruct data while being open to change, I utilized field notes and a researcher's journal where I reflected on my interviews. The role of field notes kept in a journal ensured that I thoroughly considered the contextual information of my research participants: how my participants were dressed, how they reacted to my interview questions, and the tone they used to respond to each question (Phillippi et al., 2017). In my field notes journal, I engaged in data reflections and drafted reflective narratives about my observations and personal opinions to ensure that I remained aware of how my participants' perceptions vary from my own and, therefore, truly capture the essence of their experiences in a credible manner that does not include my personal biases in the data. Thus, ensuring that the essence of their experiences ascending into school principal and vice principal positions was captured. My field notes, and personal observations journal also ensured that I delved into the data analytically to code the data thematically while engaging in bracketing, as I coded the themes in my study to ensure that my personal feelings were not part of my research study's findings. Therefore, I remained impartial and genuinely captured the essence of my research participants' experiences.

Moreover, I also engaged in data saturation analysis in the research process when a researcher has collected sufficient data to draw the necessary conclusions (Guest et al., 2006). Data saturation was reached when I gathered and examined enough information to replicate the study as determined by the thematic relevance among my participants' experiences (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Patton, 2015). Since the sampling strategy in my study is purposive and entails a small sample size, it relies on data saturation or the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data (Guest et al., 2006).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

I sought approval from Rowan University's IRB and complied with IRB's requirements to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of each human participant; this helped address ethical concerns and ensure the research participants' confidentiality. I ensure participant confidentiality by allowing them to create pseudonyms for all participants in the study and keeping the data collected secured on my personal computer, which is password protected; therefore, the data was not shared with anyone. Since participants acquired a copy of the interview transcripts, they were able to add more information that they found to be missing and wanted me to showcase it in the findings section. Data about their districts [in their responses] was also modified to exclude attributes that may allow their identities to be jeopardized or revealed. Furthermore, I allowed my participants to refrain from responding to questions they may feel uncomfortable answering, however, all participants responded to all of the research questions they were asked and did not feel uncomfortable while doing so. After all of the data was verified and revised by my participants, I destroyed the audiotapes and written transcripts of the interviews in

order to ensure the protection of all of the school principals and vice principals in my study.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodologies, a re-iteration of the study's purpose, explained the study's theoretical frameworks, provided descriptions of the participants and the data collection, and the data analysis processes. The study may benefit women, and other minoritized aspiring leaders, Latinx scholars in their academic fields, educators and administrators serving Latinx students at the P-20 pipeline, and other researchers interested in Latina leadership development.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

#### **Overview**

In this chapter, I present the qualitative data I collected to understand the career trajectories of Latina school principals in New Jersey. The aim was to study their journey as they moved from teaching to formal leadership roles as school administrators. The chapter begins with brief introductions of all five participants, including their overall years of experience working in public schools, years working as a public school administrator, current position, and current school district's characteristics. Their biographies capture the inspiring attributes that led them to become school leaders, accompanied by a short background statement.

Selecting participants for a research study is a crucial step that requires careful attention to detail. In the present study, the New Jersey School Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA) Leadership Connection Platform was used to identify potential participants who met the eligibility criteria. The study aimed to explore the career trajectories of Latina school principals and vice principals in New Jersey and involved both practice interviews and formal semi-structured interviews. A total of 11 self-identifying Latina school leaders expressed their interest in participating in the study. However, I selected the first five respondents for this study that met the eligibility criteria. The selection process was based on carefully considering their experiences and ability to provide valuable insights into the research topic. The participants selected for the study entail five Latina supervisors; four school principals and one vice-principal were also interviewed,

providing diverse perspectives on the research topic. The five research participants were selected based on their experiences, which captured the essence of the career trajectories of Latinx women serving as school principals and vice principals in New Jersey. Their stories revealed how they leveraged their cultural assets, challenged stereotypes, and transitioned effectively from teaching to supervisory positions.

The insights provided by the participants in this study are valuable for aspiring Latina school leaders, as they offer information on the career ascension trajectories of Latina school principals and vice principals in New Jersey. The study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities that exist for Latinx women in educational leadership positions, and highlights the importance of cultural assets in their success (Bagula, 2016; Martinez & Rivera, 2020; Méndez-Morse & Martinez, 2021; Pimienta, 2014; Tayloe, 2016; Yosso, 2005).

Throughout the process, I incorporated member checking as a research method, allowing participants to review their biographies and transcripts to correct any inaccuracies. While no changes were made to the transcripts, corrections were made to their biographies. This process helped to ensure member checking or the accuracy and validity of the research findings (Birt et al., 2016; Saldana, 2016).

After my five participants approved their transcripts, I coded each document individually. For the first coding cycle, I used Google Documents to analyze the transcript and determine the experiences of Latinx women employed as school principals. I coded the transcript manually and highlighted similar themes, similar word choices, significant ideas, opinions, and thoughts using different highlighter functions (Saldana, 2016; Smith



et al., 2021; 2022; 2023). After this step, I conducted a second cycle of pattern coding utilizing MAXQDA, verifying the themes' consistencies throughout each transcript, and then created a codebook to reference during the coding process (Saldana, 2016). Moreover, the second cycle of pattern coding, using MAXQDA, allowed me to categorize my data, code my data, and use text segments systematically to fine-tune the data and create a codebook to reference during the coding process to ensure emerging themes were emphasized (Saldana, 2016). The pattern coding process helped me develop sub-themes and better organize the data (Saldana, 2016). The themes and sub-themes provided a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied: Latinx women employed as school principals' career ascension trajectories. This process helped me organize my data well, and throughout the process, I re-read the data. I drafted reflective memos about the data to ensure I captured the essence of my participants' experiences. These steps helped me ensure a better understanding of my research phenomenon.

The findings are based on an analysis of semi-structured individual interviews. These findings were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which enabled me to capture the essence of my participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2009; 2011; 2022). I maintained a research journal to ensure that the participants' data remained the focus of the results (Gearing, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Consequently, this study illuminates the commonalities in my participants' experiences as they ascended into their school principal positions. Therefore, I included each participant's personal narratives and direct quotations throughout this chapter. The participants shared their Latin origin of which two identify as Puerto Rican, one as Peruvian mixed with Puerto Rican,

one as Dominican, and one as Cuban. Audiotaped face to face interviews were conducted. Participant recruitment began within the New Jersey School Principal and Supervisor Association (NJPSA) and subsequently continued through purposive sampling. Each interview allotted 30 minutes to 60 minutes for completion. However, most interviews lasted an average of 1 hour. Prior to commencing the interviews, participants were read the study's disclosure statement where they verified my permission to audiotape the interviews. While conducting the interviews, I wrote detailed observations of the participants, their demeanor, observed body language, and their attire in my field notes. In order to maintain the participants' confidentiality, all journal entries consisted of the interview date and the participants' self-selected pseudonyms. Following my analysis, the data revealed four themes. The first theme was collaborative leadership. The second theme was intersecting social identities. The third theme was family values and language. The fourth and final theme was mentors.

The participants were all excited to be part of this project. However, they were occupied with their work demands and they all were mothers. Therefore, I followed up several times with them after they initially expressed interest in participating in my study. We emailed back and forth several times to ensure we selected a convenient time for them to meet with me to interview them. I reminded them about the study's interviews by emailing them one day prior to the interview. However, one of my participants almost forgot to meet with me and showed up 20 minutes after I sent her a second reminder email. An observation I made while conducting interviews was how all participants wore professional attire to the interview, long sleeves, and all except one of the participants

wore their hair in an up-do hairstyle (tied). All of the participants also wore glasses except one of them. They also asked me why I pursued this topic for my doctoral studies. All of them valued the importance of this topic. They noted the minimal number of Latina school principals in New Jersey, which is disproportionate to the number of Latinx students enrolled in K-12 New Jersey public schools.

### **Participants' Stories**

Five Latinas from New Jersey agreed to participate in this study. They all serve as K-12 school principals in schools that serve a prominently Caribbean Latinx demographic. All of them are bilingual; they speak English and Spanish. All participants described their experiences ascending into school leadership positions as a smooth experience and focused on the positive impact of collaboration on their leadership practices. All participants have at least three years of serving as school principals or vice principals, and they are now serving as school principals and vice principals. Each participant selected her pseudonym. The participant information is listed below in Table 1 in alphabetical order based on their pseudonyms. After Table 1, data is explained and each participant's background story is presented.

**Table 1***Study Participants*

| Name<br>(Pseudo-<br>nym) | Years in<br>Education | Years as<br>Admin-<br>istrator | Current<br>Role     | School Edu-<br>cation Level         | School<br>Classifica-<br>tion | Student<br>De-<br>mographic<br>s                |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Erminda<br>Henandez      | 20                    | 9                              | Principal           | Elementary/<br>Intermediate<br>PK-8 | Urban                         | 71%<br>Latinx;<br>26%<br>Black; 3%<br>Other     |
| Irene<br>Torres          | 18                    | 8                              | Vice Prin-<br>cipal | Intermediate<br>7-8                 | Urban                         | 42%<br>White;<br>19%<br>Latinx;<br>4% Black     |
| Marly Al-<br>varado      | 7                     | 2                              | Principal           | Elementary<br>(PK-4)                | Urban                         | 97%<br>Latinx;<br>3% Other                      |
| Milagros<br>Trujillo     | 20                    | 13                             | Principal           | Elementary/<br>Intermediate<br>PK-8 | Urban                         | 76%<br>Latinx;<br>23%<br>Black; 1%<br>Other     |
| Nana Ro-<br>driguez      | 17                    | 9                              | Principal           | Elementary/<br>Intermediate<br>PK-8 | Urban                         | 59%<br>Black;<br>30%<br>Latinx;<br>11%<br>Other |

The table was created to provide a clear profile of the study participants and detail their background and experiences ascending into a school principal position. Table 1 highlights the participants' names in the form of pseudonyms, their overall years working

in K-12 public educational institutions, their overall years working in a school administration position, and their current administrative position. All this information helps consider how their experiences may be similar or different. This information was developed after I conducted all the interviews. The narratives below were also shared with my participants, and they revised them and emailed them back to me after confirming that these biographies capture the essence of their experiences. Their experiences are presented accurately below:

***Erminda Hernandez***

Erminda is a first-year school principal of Puerto Rican Latinx ethnicity. She holds a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and a Bachelor's degree in Communication and Media Studies. She recently received a promotion for the academic year 2023-2024 and now serves as the school principal in the district where she had worked as a vice principal for five years. Prior to her administrative role, she worked as a teacher in the same district. Erminda is proud of her achievements and is committed to making a positive impact on the school and the community, she said:

I will say that, for me, my family and my roots have always motivated me...I think about my family...so, much of what I do in the field [as a principal], making sure that my daughters have opportunities that I did not have...So, my commitment to my family and my passion for my city (sic) coupled together have given me a lot of drive and ambition, which is one of the reasons why I've been in this district as long as I've been here. I firmly believe in the work that it is that we do. I take a lot of pride in knowing that.

Erminda has worked in K-12 public schools in the same city for over 20 years. Her school principal leadership ascension trajectory began in 2005 as an elementary school teacher at an urban school in New Jersey. Erminda ascended into her first school leadership role as a teacher coach in 2014. For Erminda, her commitment and passion for her city and her family roots enabled her to ensure that the teachers she mentored served minoritized children to the best of their abilities in the district where she is a school principal with their best interest at heart. "I do not want anyone in my school who does not care about our babies and our community," she said. Ermina also believes that being a Latina has instilled a passion for the students in the community she serves. She told me, "you have to have the heart and the passion for it [for teaching Latinx students] because I was one of those kids." Moreover, Erminda believes that her Spanish-speaking fluency allows her to meet the needs of those who speak Spanish. She told me, "being able to communicate with children and families who do not speak English has been a major cultural asset." Therefore, being fluent in Spanish continues to be a linguistic-cultural asset that has allowed her to advocate for the students and families in the school communities she has served. As a school principal, she believes that collaborative leadership is best suited to her work. "As a leader, one of the things that I know are essential is having strong trusting relationships, and when you are a school leader there are so many constituents that are somehow tied to the work," she said. Erminda believes that her intersecting social identities of being a woman, a mother, and a school leader have inspired her to be a better leader, as she always aspires to be a positive role model for her daughters and grandchildren. She explained:

I am at this point where I can say I am a single mother; I am a homeowner; I am a school leader; I am highly educated; I have a level of success that I know is breaking generational cycles, and I also know that that is part of what drives the work that I do with the kids in my school.

Erminda believes that aspiring Latinx women leaders should perceive their ethnicity as an asset that enables them to comprehend the needs of Latinx students, "not everyone understands the needs of Latinx children and the culture nor has their best interest at heart."

Therefore, as a Latinx school principal, she advises aspiring school principals to pursue their dreams because:

there is (sic) not very many of us in educational leadership positions... and so I take that as an inspiration with me in the work that I do because I know that I am representing other women who are trying to get there who were (sic) not able to get there who are aiming for other things.

### ***Irene Torres***

Irene Torres is a sixth-year school vice principal of Dominican Latinx ethnicity. She possesses two master's degrees, one in general education and one in educational administration, and a bachelor's degree in History. Her leadership ascension journey started 18 years ago as a high school history teacher. "Before I got the permanent position, I was an interim. I think at the high school for 3 or 4 months," she recalls. Irene also served as a college history department dean for two years before becoming a vice principal, and has worked in four school districts. Irene described collaborating with others and adapting as essential aspects of school principalship; she said:

I don't see myself as someone who just tells people what to do and that's it. I like the collaborative piece...I like to collaborate with people with an understanding that at the end of the day the decision is mine...I think that any administrator that's not adaptive is not effective. That's just impossible. I just don't see how it's possible to be like a building administrator and not be adaptive.

Irene also says that her fluency in Spanish enabled her to advocate for herself and obtain a higher salary. She said upon being hired for her current position, she told them the following:

“I know that your population of Latinx students is growing, and I see that you do not have an administrator to speak Spanish, and I know I am an asset to you and I think I should get paid for that,” and they gave me more money for it.

In addition, she said that being a Latina administrator enables her to serve her community best as,

It [being a Latina] helps me understand the needs of the community and therefore I like to put myself out there to help them... as I see a Latino parent come into my building, and I see that they do not speak English, I give them my card and I am like, “here is my card- I may not be your kid's administrator, but call me or email me if you need me,” little things like that because I understand their needs,

Then, Irene further elaborated on her experiences serving as a Latina school vice principal; she said:

I empathize with the kids, empathize with the parents; so even today, like, you know, I was leading a PD and we are talking professional development, you



know, there were things that I could relate to my family and my kids, but the empathy thing I think changed, a lot, especially because I have a 12 and 8-year-old two girls...12 and 8 year old and especially as the one is middle school age... I just understand more, therefore being more willing to help.

As advice for aspiring Latina school principals, Irene said:

Use your bilingual skills because it is beneficial and an asset; it is not a negative thing. It is very positive, and do not be afraid to advocate not just for yourself in that aspect but for others who are considered minorities. Go out there and do it because we need more women leaders.

### ***Marly Alvarado***

Marly Alvarado is a first-year school principal of Puerto Rican and Ecuadorian Latinx ethnicity. She possesses a Master's degree in Educational leadership and a baccalaureate degree in English Language Arts. Her leadership ascension trajectory as a school principal started seven years ago as an elementary school teacher. She was recently promoted during this academic year 2023-2024 as a school principal in the same district where she taught as an elementary school teacher for seven years and served as an instructional leader for one year for the English Language Arts (ELA) and bilingual English as a second language (ESL) departments, helping educators hone their skills to serve minoritized students of Latinx descent better. "I knew I wanted to work for a Spanish population," Marly stated as she reflected upon her leadership trajectory. "I struggled a lot in high school with my Spanish, as I did not speak it because my mother is Americanized, but my father taught me more about Latino values and the culture, and I have learned more Spanish while serving the community where I lead," she said. Marly also

believes that collaboration is a vital aspect required to ensure effectiveness in all careers, explaining “I don't think any job in any field you can do alone,” she said proceeded to describe her leadership style by stating:

I definitely feel like my leadership style is 1000% collaborative...I think there can always be an expert, but I am someone who's big on support, and someone who's big on, regardless of where you are, whether I'm an administrator versus my custodians, I think that those relationships are very important. So I treat everyone the same...I like to be collaborative. I'm very flexible and adaptable. I do well under high volume situations...I'm very good with coming up with another solution... I am a problem solver, and I'm definitely not a servant type administrator. I think that that's just not who I am personality wise. I'm collaborative, but also very strong, and so I am very confident in my abilities, and I'm very confident in the knowledge that I have learned and gained.

Marly further explained how she supervises others by saying:

I treat everyone the same, whether you are another leader in the district, a custodian, teacher, or teacher's aide, everyone is an asset to the team...I like holding people accountable because I like that same type of if I am messing up or I am not doing my best, I want someone to hold me accountable because I am always trying to be the best version of myself, and so I feel like I expect that a lot from other people.

She recalls her times in college as a confusing time in her career and acknowledges the diversity she encounters as a catalyst for her development as a leader, "In my sorority, there were only two Latinas, myself and another girl...most of my friends were White

girls, and I love them, we still support each other to this day," she says. Acknowledging that community members in her school district are astounded when she can speak Spanish and help those who are not fluent in English, she explained, "I am big on advocacy and enjoy speaking Spanish," she said, as much of the work that she does is inspired by her Latinx roots. As advice for aspiring Latina school leaders, Marly said, "Go for your goals; we need more Latina administrators! Si se puede!"

### ***Milagros Trujillo***

Milagros Trujillo is a fifth-year school principal of Cuban Latinx ethnicity who possesses two master's degrees, one in Business and Marketing and the other in Educational Administration. She has been a school administrator for over 13 years in the same district, and she started her career as a substitute teacher, then taught pre-K and self-contained students; she spent eight years in the classroom before becoming a school administrator. Her first school administrator position was serving in the capacity of an English Language Arts (ELA) coach for teachers, training for several years before she was promoted to a position as the director of mathematics in the same district, where Milagros served for four years prior to being promoted as a school vice principal. She then served in that capacity for five years before obtaining her current position and has worked in K-12 public schools for over 20 years. Her work history is consistent, dedicated, and stable, as she has only worked in two districts. Milagros describes each day as a school principal as an opportunity for her to collaborate with others, she says,

There are days that ...we have what's called a team meeting so I meet my leadership team, which consists of my vice principals, Instructional coaches, we meet for about an hour and a half every Monday, discuss the reason [for the meeting].

We have an agenda set every week. Everybody has [access to] the agenda. So, we set our goals for the week. What our training would be like and so forth and the events that are happening [every week]. That's what we plan together.

Milagros believes that in addition to being collaborative, her role as a school principal also demands being flexible; she states:

You know, you set your day [as a school principal], you have an agenda...today, I will walk through [conduct observations] and say an emergency happens with a student...that can happen; you have to be very flexible, so every day is different.

Milagros' skills as a school principal also entail being bilingual as she is fluent in Spanish. She believes that being fluent in Spanish is an asset that impacts her relationships positively as her district predominantly serves the Latinx community, in relation, she said:

Individuals get a sense of relief when they realize I speak Spanish and do not need a translator...Being able to open the door to a parent, obtain a sense of relief, and their guard goes down. I had issues with a local business shop near the school, and when I started speaking Spanish, they let their guard down.

Moreover, Milagros believes that when supporting the teachers she supervises she is, "Able to be diligent, flexible, and organized [which] is crucial as well as being able to delegate and trust the team [because] some teachers require more management than others." So, she provides extensive training and mentoring for them "with baby steps." In contrast, other teachers are more independent, so she allows them to do their job without providing expensive guidance. In addition, Milagros said,

My family values taught me to relate to families better; although my parents struggled, they inspired me to develop the determination to do better than them, so all of the struggles my family went through inspired me to do better than those that came before me so it became important for me to set an example for others.

For Milagros, her intersecting social identities of being a woman, leader, and a parent provided insights into her students and their families, "Being a mother helps me understand the needs of other mothers and families, like if we have an event, like Thanksgiving in my district, my kids come, it keeps me young and in the know," she said. In addition, Milagros believes that her intersecting social identities provide her with more assets than deficits, she states:

Being a leader, a woman, and a parent at the same time, I think, helps a great deal in the field that I am in...it can also be a little bit difficult, but I am always able to reconnect with my children as I can spend the summers with them.

As she reflects on the benefits of having summers off, Milagros said,

I grew up bilingual and want my kids to be trilingual. One of my sons is fluent in Japanese and is also learning Spanish...being a parent allows me to be more flexible and understanding, which is crucial for a leader.

As advice for aspiring Latina school principals, Milagros said:

Always hold respect for other women before us and be able to be a positive role model to show the young girls that they can achieve things... to embrace their Latinidad and always believe in themselves because we need more Latina school leaders to pave the way for those that will come after.

*Nana Rodriguez*

Nana Rodriguez is a fourth-year school principal of Puerto Rican Latinx ethnicity. She is a doctoral candidate pursuing her Ed.D. in Educational Administration and possesses two master's degrees, one in Educational Administration and another in Paralegal studies. Nana's school principal leadership trajectory was inspired by her mother, who is a retired school principal. Nana never envisioned becoming a school principal, as she transitioned into the education field in 2007 after many years working as a paralegal. Nana then worked as an elementary school teacher. She has taught second and fourth grade and was in the classroom for seven years before becoming an elementary school assistant principal. She has only worked in one school district so far. Her day as a school principal always starts with an agenda and brings new challenges that require her to be collaborative, she explained:

each day, [I work in] dealing with resources and ensuring effective collaboration takes place...[and] try to have a plan, it feels like the day never ends because you're always dealing with little lives and you're dealing with big lives and everybody all those lives bring the team together, to tackle the challenges of the school.

Nana describes her leadership journey, by telling me:

I do not know how different or how my leadership [journey] is compared to other people... [however] they pulled me out of my school to cover my previous school during COVID; I covered elementary school, a pre-K to 4; I was in the school where I had to try to help fix it with no staff there until they came back.

As a school principal, Nana cares about honoring the cultural groups in the school, explaining, "We celebrate Hispanic heritage, we raise awareness about Indigenous Day, formerly Columbus Day," she said. Nana believes that her culture is an asset to her leadership because it allows her to comprehend and better serve her community. While she is not entirely fluent, she explains, "Spanish is an asset. It is just not pretty, but I will translate, and the more I do it, the easier it gets. It is just that I am not always the first point of contact," she said. In support of aspiring Latina school principals, Nana believes that relying on diverse mentors is essential to her success; she said:

Find your group; I have a big group, I get along with everyone; I chatted with Italian American men and one of our big principals. I am in a very supportive group, But I have. I have my group of people like he is, he is an assistant principal; he is from Honduras, and other assistant principals, Puerto Rican, another principal, she is Dominican like we have our group of people that you know that you can rely on.

### **Summary of the Participants**

There were several similarities as well as differences that were identified through the process of each participant retelling their career ascension trajectories. Despite their differences, there were more similarities identified than differences in these anecdotes. All participants are Latinx women currently employed as school principals or vice principals. All participants have a career repertoire of at least seven years in the classroom as teachers. The participants all had one or more years of experience as a school administrator before serving as the principal in staff support administrative roles. They all had taught in schools that serve a predominantly Latinx student demographic for over five

years before becoming administrators, and all ascended into their roles as school principals or vice principals soon after obtaining their school principal certification. All of the women have two master's degrees except one. Likewise, most participants faced challenges based on the social intersectionality of their race and gender, which will be discussed later in Chapter 5. However, they did not allow that to deter their passion for pursuing a career in educational leadership. On the contrary, all of the women in this study perceived their gender as the foundation for their strong leadership; the women explained that they grew up in households of strong women who supported their leadership and encouraged them to pursue their career objectives (this is explained in chapter 5 in the findings section). One of the participants stated that her father inspired her leadership from an early age. In contrast, all other participants provided leadership ascension accounts that counter the narrative of passivity as Latinx women persevered, attended college, and applied for leadership positions rapidly. In addition, all except one of the participants attributed their ability to speak Spanish fluently to their rapid and easy transition from their teaching positions to administrative roles.

All participants stated that a patriarchal work environment influenced the gender bias that they encountered after ascending into their leadership roles (this is discussed in Chapter 5's findings section). However, the hostility inspired them to work harder, manage their time between domestic and career duties more efficiently, and employ a collaborative leadership style that benefits them in their day-to-day life at work. Their professional leadership practices are deeply rooted in Latinx culture, and their leadership is inspired by a deep sense of helping minoritized children and being a role model for them.



## Interview Themes

During the interviews, participants shared narratives about the requirements needed to become a school leader despite the intersectionality of social identities about their gender, ethnicity, and leadership. Despite expressing unique challenges, they focused more on the assets that enabled them to overcome difficulties along their leadership ascension trajectories. The interview questions focused on learning more about the phenomenon specific to Latinx women’s leadership trajectories and the impact that the intersectionality of their social identities, gender, and ethnicity had on their leadership. Some of the assets Latinx women employed as school leaders experienced were coded, and themes were developed from them. Table 2 provides a visual of the themes created after interviewing the five participants and the second coding cycle had finished.

**Table 2**

*Thematic Map*

|                                |
|--------------------------------|
| Main Themes                    |
| Collaborative Leadership       |
| Intersecting Social Identities |
| Family Values and Language     |
| Mentors                        |

Table 2 provides a visual illustration of the significant themes discovered throughout the coding process of the study. Each theme was presented multiple times and captured the essence of the participants' experiences. These themes will help better comprehend their unique leadership experiences as they harnessed their Leadership to obtain formal employment as school leaders. Collaborative and transformational leadership is the first theme presented, which defines the formal leadership styles of the women in this study. At the same time, each theme symbolizes a unique aspect of these women's leadership trajectories, specifically in how the themes formally enabled them to obtain a position in school leadership.

***Theme 1: Collaborative Leadership***

All five participants mentioned how collaborative leadership shaped their school principal ascension trajectories. Notably, the Latinx women principals in this study define their leadership styles as collaborative. While discussing her leadership, Marly said:

My leadership style is 1000% collaborative. I cannot think of any job in any field you can do alone...regardless, as a leader, I know that I have to manage our school, and I can only do that with all the pieces and all the players doing their job. Thus, I like to be collaborative. I am very flexible and adaptable... I am collaborative but also very strong...I am confident in my abilities, and I am confident in my knowledge.

Another participant, Milagros Trujillo, shared the impacts of collaborative leadership on her leadership practices, stating:

I am very easygoing as a leader; I am very hands-off... [I trust] they know what they need to do and [they] get it done... I trust them and know that by collaborating, we [as a team] can achieve more.

Irene Torres also discussed her collaborative leadership, stating, "I am a collaborative leader; I like to collaborate with people with an understanding that the decision is mine."

Erminda Hernandez believes that collaborative leadership forges strong partnerships that are crucial for ensuring successful educational and effective leadership; she said:

As a leader ...I like to collaborate so that it can be with my parents and the business owner from the barbershop across the street. It can be the crossing guard. It can be an eighth-grade student the same way it can be a preschool student. It can be, you know, a teacher who is going through something personal. It can be another school administrator with whom we might be collaborating. Some projects or initiatives together. Thus, it is a variety of types of leadership for me. Having collaborative, solid relationships is critical to ensuring the school's success. It is not necessarily about my success.

Nana Rodriguez also believes in the power of collaborative leadership; she said:

To be an excellent leader, you have to have a team, so although, you know, I might be the queen of my queen-dum, I do not ever walk around with the crown on because I do not have to. I have a strong team.

All the school principals in this study described using collaborative leadership styles to positively impact stakeholders in the institutions they serve. Other studies have also demonstrated a positive correlation between school principals' collaborative leadership

styles and teachers' self-efficacy (Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2016). As collaborative leaders, the women in this study seek to empower teachers they supervise to meet student learning outcomes and to ensure the students' academic success in the school districts they serve.

### ***Theme 2: Intersecting Social Identities***

Concerning the impact of the intersectionality of their social identities (gender, ethnicity, and leadership role) on their Leadership, the participants shared experiences of being stereotyped and experiencing bias because of their gender in their leadership roles (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). Sexism, or the notion that men are more suitable leaders than women, is not a new phenomenon, and educational leadership is patriarchal, prioritizing men being promoted to school administrative roles over women (Ballenger, 2010; Coleman, 2005; Dlamini et al., 2014). Patriarchy impacts women as it hinders or prolongs their leadership ascension trajectory, taking them longer to obtain a school leadership position despite being highly qualified, thus making it more difficult for women to obtain upward mobility and receive the career promotions they deserve (Dlamini et al., 2014). Many of the participants in this study discussed how stereotypes based on their ethnic intersecting social identity stereotypes impacted Leadership. Irene shared her experiences, stating that:

Just because we are Latina does not mean that we cannot do it, and that is the thing, you know, we were always taught that, since we are women and men are always favored in positions of Leadership...Men are prioritized in leadership positions, but I do not get that because if women want to do it, they should do it. If that is something that you dream of accomplishing, something that's been instilled

in us though is the belief to persist, and another principal in the district brought up the point, she is like, "not everyone is willing to make those moves like you made; to work hard to overcome gender stereotypes" and I am like 'you know what, you are right,' but...I cannot wrap my head around that because, as Latina women, we have never been in a position where things are given to us; we have to work hard and believe in ourselves.

Similarly, Erminda Hernandez explained that as a woman employed as a school principal, her leadership was challenged because of her gender, but that the negative experience served a positive purpose as it empowered her to prove others wrong, stating:

We have many women of color in leadership positions in our district, and I still had to prove my worth; I can tell you I remember my first year as vice principal. We were moving our school from one building to another... The office that I was in had an enormous desk...I wanted the desk to be moved to my new office, and the gentleman responsible for coordinating the furniture move said to me, you do not need that big of a desk...So one of the last things in the school building was my desk...and I asked him, he said, "Well, they cannot take it apart, and it is too big for them to load it on the truck." So, I went home, got my power tools, and returned to disassemble the desk so they could move it because I needed him to know and understand that I would not allow him to get away with that. I am going to prove you wrong, and it will happen anyway, and for me, it was symbolic because it was not about the desk... I know that it was really about him thinking he would minimize my value as a Latina and a woman in a leadership position and thinking that he was going to get away with something like that just because there

is this lovely lady, she, you know, like, I, it was, it was more so I am going to prove to you that you are not going to stop me from whatever it is that I want to have to happen, I will make it happen, and in this case, it was a desk. However, again, it was symbolic because I needed him to know and understand that whether you think I am so lovely, I am so pretty, at the end of the day, I am a leader in this district, and you are going to respect that and you are going to know that if something needs to be done, I am going to make sure that it gets done.

When discussing the impact of the intersecting social identities of gender and being a mother, the women in this study found that these intersecting social identities positively impacted their leadership. They believe that contrary to popular belief, their gender did not negatively hinder their leadership ascension; instead, it positively impacted their Leadership by enabling them to best understand the parents, families, and other community members in the institutions they serve. Milagros Trujillo discussed the benefits that her intersecting social identities have on her Leadership, stating:

I think that because the field I am in is being a woman in Leadership and being a parent is empowering; being a leader and a woman and a parent at the same time is because if there is an event [at the school], for example, we had this vast Thanksgiving event and my kids got to participate, they will come, and they will be serving the food; my husband also helps with serving the food. Besides being an educator, I run a nonprofit and my kids are entirely part of that. Like if we have another event, like the Thanksgiving one, my kids come, which keeps me young and in the know.

Nana Rodriguez also discussed the benefits that her intersecting social identities of gender and motherhood have on her leadership, stating:

I do not think about my intersecting social identities, but when I do think about it, I realize I am a mom, a woman, and a leader, and I will have conversations with my teachers and think about my daughters as a parent. I am more aware that when things are not right in my district, “this does not sit well with me,” right? Because as a parent, I expect better, and also as an administrator, I will bring my experiences to my teachers to say, “If you get a parent like me, to avoid a difficult situation, it is important to have a conversation; a difficult conversation, make sure your stuff is on point,” Right? So, as a parent who is a woman and a leader, I benefit because I am always thinking about my parents, and I know you have to make sure you always communicate with the parents.

Erminda Hernandez also discussed how the intersecting social identities of gender and motherhood have an effect on her as a leader, stating:

When I think about my family as a mother and a leader, I was a single mother. I am also a grandmother, and so a lot of what I do in the field is making sure that my daughters have opportunities that I did not have that I can set a stage for them different from the one that was set for me, so being a woman and a leader is empowering.

In her anecdote, Erminda elaborates on how what she does in her role as a school principal establishes an example for her daughters to follow. Despite experiencing gender-based stereotypes in their leadership ascension trajectories, all participants found that the

intersecting social identities of their gender as a leader positively impacted their Leadership. When discussing the topic, Irene Torres discussed her experiences perceiving the positive impacts of the intersecting social identities of gender, Leadership, and motherhood in others, stating:

There are a lot of strong women in my family; I am sure you see that, too, and that has helped to mold me. The approach I have found a lot of women administrators I have worked with has been that women lead the way strong with love. However, firm, you know, we do not take people's crap but love how we approach others. That is how I was raised like I was raised with nurturing people around me. However, they also did not take my crap...also being a woman and a leader empowers me to do my job better because you can empathize with your community, the kids, and the parents. So even today, like, I was leading a PD (professional development), and we are talking about professional development, there were things I could relate to my family and kids.

The participants acknowledged that the intersecting social identities of being a leader, mother, and woman gave them intrinsic motivation to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities. Concerning the matter, Marly Alvarado said:

Knowing that I am a leader and a woman, and knowing that there are always eyes on me wondering, "how is she going to react?" I feel like it [gender] gives me confidence; I have much pride as a leader, and so, yeah, I think being a Latina woman has shaped that because the scenario or the narrative is, "Oh, Latina women are strong, and they are this, and they are that, and outgoing, and loud,"



and I embrace all of the qualities that they [people] try to make negative. They are all great qualities; we are just as good to sit at any table as anyone else.

### ***Theme 3: Family Values and Language***

Latinx Family values and language entail being part of a close-knit group (Clutter & Nieto, 2009). The term "family," which is Spanish for familia, extends beyond the immediate family (Bordas, 2013; Clutter & Nieto, 2009). The Latinx family unit includes parents, children, and extended family (Clutter & Nieto, 2009). For the participants in this study, their extended family includes the students, parents, families, and staff members of the school communities they serve. This idea is one of the ingrained Latinx family values. The family values among the Latinx communities include respect, religion, the pursuit of formal education to obtain upward mobility, traditional gender roles, and Spanish as a common language (Bordas, 2013; Holvino, 2010). All participants in this study discussed that the authentic Latinx family and cultural values defined above played a role throughout their leadership ascension trajectories and continue to impact their daily leadership practices for the inculcation of an instilled appreciation for formal education attainment and the ability to speak Spanish among their family fluently. Language is a vital aspect of human behavior; it is the primary communication method among individuals that conveys thoughts, feelings, intentions (Hutton, 2009). For the participants in this study, language has a cultural meaning as Spanish is the most common language among Latinx individuals and it permits them to relate to each symbolically (Hutton, 2009), which demonstrates ethnic pride. Additionally, the family values possessed by the Latina school leaders in this study were inculcated in all of the participants in this study by their parents and other family members since they were merely elementary school students,

and since then, these values have been a catalyst for these women K-12 school principals' leadership; they impacted their motivation to seek formal education, become teachers, and effectively obtain a position as a school principal; and continue to impact the way that they lead in a more inclusive, family oriented manner. Latinx culture embeds cultural assets that positively impacted all participants' leadership ascension trajectories. However, many stereotypes about the Latinx culture and their ingrained values perceive all of their cultural assets as deficits. For example, the Latinx culture needs to be more active, and their lack of English and Spanish fluency hinders their leadership development. While discussing these misconception-based stereotypes, Marly believes that several of the stakeholders who are not of Latinx descent fail to understand that these are mere stereotypes that may hinder teachers and administrators in her community from best serving the needs of her student body. Marly stated:

People with stereotypes about the Latino culture say, “Oh, well, they do not even have books at home. They will never learn to read,” or, “that mom never comes back to school nights,” or, “this kid sleeps alone.” I know from speaking with families that some moms work three jobs, so yes, the child is home with their older sibling. Some kids cannot afford the books, that is correct, but they tell stories differently, and so that has allowed me to understand our students better and also has allowed me to advocate for our students in a leadership role, right? Being a Latina allows me to find ways to figure out how to break that idea [stereotypes] of, “Oh, well, they are immigrants, so they are less than,” or, “Oh, their parents are never involved, so they must not care about their child's education,” when I

know how immigrant families or just Latino families are and of course, they want the best for their families; we have done so much to get to where we are.

Moreover, she provides professional development for her team. She ensures that they become aware that historically known stereotypes about Latinx culture are not cultural deficits that stifle the Latinx student body from achieving educational outcomes and that they are, instead, cultural assets that they can use in order to ensure the best student learning outcomes are achieved in her school district, as well as enable the leadership of the student body and expand the culturally relevant pedagogy currently being implemented in her district to raise awareness about the assets that the Latinx culture; their culture and family values possess. Irene Torres believes that the cultural value Latinx families place on religion is an asset that positively impacts her daily leadership practices. Like Marly, she can overcome challenges in her daily leadership practices as a school principal. For Irene, her cultural and family values taught her to find the strength to overcome challenges. Irene states:

I think many people I know give up easily when things get rough and feel like, “Well, this did not work, so like, oh, I do not like the job,” for me, it is just like giving up is just not an option. Like, I was taught that you have to work hard.

Moreover, for Irene, being hardworking is a family value, as well as her work ethic. These family values guide her daily leadership practices and allow her to be an adaptive school leader and remain calm amid difficult situations in the school community she serves. Therefore, her devoted, hard working ethic allows her to overcome setbacks she may encounter daily as a vice principal after experiencing difficult situations.

The Latinx individuals value family bonds, close relationships, and strong partnerships that unite their cultural values. One way they sustain this belief is by honoring the contributions of their ancestors on their leadership that allowed them to succeed the way their ancestors [the family that came before them] motivated them to do their lessons on being hard working and keeping their memory alive by formally becoming leaders and defeating historical stereotypical notions about how the Latinx culture is not capable of obtaining upward mobility. The participants in this study utilized stories of ancestral deficit to give rise to cultural assets, thus defeating historically hindering notions of the family values that empower Latinx community members to become leaders. Concerning the matter, Erminda Hernandez stated:

For me, looking back at my ancestors and everything that they have had to do to try to survive, just to try to make things happen, and knowing that I am at this point in my life where I can say I am a single mother, I am a homeowner, I am a school leader. I am highly educated, I have a level of success that I know is breaking generational cycles, and that is part of what drives the work that I do with the kids in my school.

Nana Rodriguez's experiences are similar to Erminda Hernandez's; for Nana, her family's humble beginnings also enabled her to find strengths in her family's humble historical narratives because her mother was a first-generation college student. Her family values influenced her to pave the way for Nana to follow in her footsteps as a second-generation college student. Nana Rodriguez said,

My family is Puerto Rican and came over here (the United States) in the fifties.

My mother's first generation, born and raised in New Jersey; she was the first person in the family to graduate college; she went through the system; she is the youngest of 7, and we talked a lot about family values in my family that were all pressed upon me, like “you gotta go to school, you gotta go to school” before EEOF (equal employment opportunity commission).

She was one of the first people in the program, and they (the program's team) were helping Black and Latino students back then. It was the majority Puerto Rican at that time to get through college, so she went to college, was able to navigate, and went into teaching.

In the context of this study, language proves to be a valuable unifying force among families, allowing for the development of leadership skills among participants. Of particular note is the fluency in Spanish, which is a linguistic ability inspired by participants' families. As such, all participants in the study are fluent in Spanish and one is capable of conversing in the language. Moreover, the participants all identified bilingualism as a cultural value that provided them with a linguistic asset that benefits their leadership ascension. For Milagros, being the daughter of immigrant parents who struggled with the language empowered her to learn the language and, thus, become bilingual in English and Spanish, a skill that benefitted her leadership ascension trajectory as it was a requirement to be bilingual in the district where she obtained her school principal position. In relation, Milagros said:

My family values help me to relate to families in the school community that I serve because we are fortunate [my family and I]; they [ancestors] struggled to come here without knowing the language, so I had no choice but to succeed; so I

was determined to do better than them, all of the struggles my family went through inspired me to be better and do better, everyone that came before me. It was vital for me to set an example.

Milagros' experiences demonstrate how the lack of English speaking in her parents was not indeed a cultural deficit but rather a strength. Linguistic and cultural assets in English and Spanish bilingualism also impact the leadership trajectory of Irene Torres. In regards to the matter, she said:

I had used my ability to speak Spanish as leverage to get a higher salary when I got this job because they, you know, when I was offered a job, I said, "You know, I know that your population of Latino students is growing, and I see that you do not have an administrator to speak Spanish, and I know I am an asset to you, and I think I should get paid more for that," and they gave me more money for it.

Being fluent in English and Spanish, bilingual also plays a role in the daily leadership practices of Milagros Trujillo, as she believes that it allows her to establish community members' buy-in and help the stakeholders in her community who serve in a predominantly non-English Speaking Latinx community to overcome communication barriers; Milagros said:

The district I work in is mostly Latinx, and when you have a leader who does not speak the language, you will rely on a translator, which is different, right? It feels like it comes from another person, not you, so language is an asset because I can connect. You know, you open the door to a parent, and when they right away see your face and know that you could speak to them in their native tongue, they get that sense of relief, and the communication barrier goes down; I had some issues

with some businesses around my, school; to say politically correct, many issues are coming down from one, specific, like, barbershop, you know, police activity, so when I started to introduce myself. I spoke English, and they just stared at me, “like, who are you?” Then the moment that I started speaking to them in Spanish, like, you know, that was it, then their guard came down, so for me, being bilingual is always a benefit.

For Milagros, her linguistic assets enabled her to solve a problem that was occurring beyond the walls of the school building where she works as a school principal; her bilingualism ensured that she communicated with a local barbershop owner whose facility resides near the school where she is the school principal to put an end to loud noises that were causing educational disruptions as well as ameliorate criminal activity to ensure a safe and effective learning environment of the stakeholders and students Milagros is responsible for supervising as a school principal. Resolving the issue was only possible because she possessed the linguistic bilingual cultural assets that her family instilled in her. Similarly, Erminda Hernandez recalls the unifying power of her bilingualism and its impact on her leadership practices. She states:

Spanish was my first language. I was literate in Spanish before I was literate in English. So that breaks down some of those communication barriers that anyone who does not speak the language might encounter. In the city where I work, there is a considerable population of Puerto Rico and a massive population of Dominicans, and so what that does for me is it allows me to connect with families and students in a way that someone who is not a Latina might not be able to; when I interviewed someone the other day and he is Dominican, and we were chatting,

and I said something in Spanish she goes “oh you speak Spanish?” she says “are you Dominican?” I said, “No, in Puerto Rican, we are cousins,” right because we understand that those are things from one Latino community to another, those little connections that are nuanced but specific to, like, you know.

Erminda Hernandez's experience demonstrates that her linguistic abilities enable her to establish rapport with the teachers and stakeholders she supervises. The participants in this study believe that language is a critical leadership attribute as it allows them to establish better staff buy-in, creating a more positive school culture and climate that thrives on harmony and effectively works together to serve the Latinx student body they serve.

Language proved to be an asset for the participants in this study, including those whose first language was not Spanish; two of the five participants whose first language was English were Nana Rodriguez and Marly Alvarado; the only two participants were second-generation college graduates facilitating their career ascension from a teaching positions to a supervisor role . As school principals employed in predominantly Latinx communities, Nana Rodriguez and Marly Alvarado perceive language as an attribute that facilitated their leadership ascension and continues to impact their daily leadership practices. As she recounts her experiences with the Spanish language, Nana Rodriguez states: "My first language is English, but my bilingualism includes Spanish; I think in English, but I can communicate with families that do not speak English conversationally; the Spanish language helps me connect well with others whom I serve in the community." However, reflecting on the fact that Spanish is her second language, Nana adds, "but when I have formal meetings to discuss individualized education plans, I always have



someone who speaks Spanish more formally join in the meeting to ensure the correct terms are utilized when the meeting involves parents who only Speak Spanish."

For Nana, harnessing her linguistic skills and bilingualism is crucial to her leadership. She aspires to continue ameliorating the communication barriers faced by other administrators and educators in her district who always need a translator. In regards to the matter, Nana believes that the linguistic assets of her Spanish-speaking students, who are not fluent in English, positively impact her stated: "I know that being bilingual is an asset, and I have improved my Spanish speaking abilities more by working in a predominantly Latino community," Therefore, Nana attributes her continued Spanish speaking improvement to the Latinx student body that she serves on a day to day basis in a dual leadership exchange where her students' sense of language is a leadership attribute she benefits from. In contrast, she serves as a role model for them in a school principal capacity. Similarly, Marly Alvarado reflects on the impact the Spanish language had on her growing up and the impact that it continues to have on her as a leader. She states:

I knew all the cultures, traditions, and the foods of Puerto Rico. We went to Puerto Rican Day parades. We liked the Yankees, stereotypically very New York Rican. Moreover, I knew my dad was a Latino. He spoke Spanish on the weekends to us. That was a big part of my relationship with my dad trying to navigate; even though I knew I was Latina with my mom, we spoke English. We were very American, so my dad was very foreign to me, and I did not understand it as a little child. I did not speak Spanish as a child. It was not my second language. I could understand it eventually when my grandma would come to visit us from Puerto Rico every summer because she would babysit us. Thus, when I went to middle

school, I knew I wanted to take Spanish classes, so I did to learn. When I walk into a room, I want people to know I am a Latina; I love speaking Spanish.

In addition, all participants in this study stated that one of their vital family values entailed a fostered belief that formal education was essential for them to pursue. Formal education is an essential component of the participants' leadership ascension trajectory. Formal education is training in an educational institution and follows a specific subject matter curriculum. They had to obtain graduate degrees by pursuing formal education beyond a baccalaureate degree to transition from a teaching position into a school administrative role. Despite most of their family members not having a formal education, the women in this study said that obtaining a formal education is a family value instilled in them. The participants in this study believe that formal education is a cultural value that catalyzed their leadership ascensions. These women all identified that their family values emphasized the importance of formal education, as their families instilled in them the belief that formal education was the key to a better life. Although her parents had no formal education, Erminda Hernandez could turn her family's historical and cultural deficit into a leadership mobilizing asset. Erminda Hernandez said,

I will say that, for me, my family and my roots have always motivated me as a Latina; I was born here in this country, but my parents were not, so my father has a third-grade education, and my mother has an eighth-grade education, but they instilled the value of obtaining a formal education in us very, very early on. They knew and understood that if we had an education, we would have better opportunities than they did; that was something that I embraced, and I ran with it, even

from my earlier years in school, so I take much pride in knowing that, when I applied for college, I was the first person in my family to get a bachelor's degree to go to college and get a bachelor's degree I am one of, I think, maybe three now because there are these other generations that have a master's degree that was able to complete graduate school. My grandmother could not read at all.

Due to Latinx families' importance on formal education, similar to Erminda, Milagros Trujillo also found a way to navigate uncharted territory as a first-generation college student effectively. Amid her leadership ascension trajectory, when she was a student, Milagros said:

It was challenging to navigate college for me as a first-generation college student, so I have been able to work hard to give my children the college opportunity. My parents did not have a formal education, but they instilled in me the value of it.

For Milagros Trujillo, the lessons her family instilled in her inspired her to continue to teach her children the value of formal education. To enable them to eventually become leaders, leaders who value formal education and, therefore, through the power of formal education, ensure they will have more leadership opportunities than she did. While discussing the topic of formal education, Milagros said:

When I was in college, I also worked, but I wanted my children to focus on their education. I want them to be a student and travel abroad. I want them to have all the opportunities that I did not have, and I instill in them the value of formal education.

Although Nana Rodriguez was not a first-generation formal education graduate, she also benefited from the high value that her Latinx family placed on the power of formal education for obtaining upward mobility. As she utilizes that knowledge to empower the students in the school community where she also leads to pursue formal education, it empowered her to pursue a second master's degree to strengthen her leadership skills and keep the tradition in the family by empowering her daughter to hone her leadership through formal education as a third-generation college student. While discussing her second-generation formal education attainment experiences, Nana said:

My mom was the first to obtain a formal education, and now my oldest daughter is in college. I have two master's degrees; a formal education paves the way for a better future, and I communicate with my children and work to advocate for it in my community as a school principal.

For Irene Torres, the value of formal education also empowered her to obtain two master's degrees and empower her children to do the same. Recalling the didactic lessons in formal education attainment her family instilled in her, Irene Torres said:

I was taught that you must go to college to move up. You know, there were things I had to do, like work. I had to tell myself, "You are going to college," my dad has been working since he was nine years old; my mom came to this country at 16 without knowing a drop of English, and she learned English on her own and went to secretarial school and moved up in the business world, She went, and she went (to college) and got her BA (Bachelors of Arts) when we were kids, and she double majored it took her seven years but she did it, so I think all that shapes like

why I have two masters; You know, it is not like, you know, it is like there is always you know, you have to do better and be better, which is a minority thing. Right? Like, and you know, it is just a minority thing; Where we are like, no, and I, you know, I instill it in my kids too, I am like, “no, you are going to do better” because that is what we have to do.

The emphasis on formal education ingrained in her cultural and family values was passed down to her from her father, as he was a first-generation immigrant. She became a second-generation college graduate which served as one of Marly Alvarado's most significant leadership ascension-enabling attributes, providing that if one works hard, one can achieve their dreams despite any challenges. One of the challenges that formal education helped Marly overcome was the dual nature of her cultural identity. As she recalled these experiences, Marly Alvarado said,

My mom was very Americanized, so many of my Latina experiences were from my dad, and my dad is an immigrant, first generation from Ecuador. Thus, his first language is Spanish, and I remember all through my life, from a very young age, my dad made our education extremely important and demonstrated that. So my dad, being an immigrant, came. He got his degrees. I remember he worked in New York City for a big company, and we always visited him. So, even as an immigrant, he had to overcome many barriers and learn the English language. He then joined the Navy. So he has done a lot for our country in general, but education was also super big.

Although Marly's father was not fluent in English, what seemed to be a cultural deficit in the form of a language barrier proved to become a cultural and linguistic asset for Marly,

whose first language is English but whose employing district demanded her to be bilingual; fluent in English and Spanish in order to ascend into the school principal position that she is currently employed in, Marly said, "I feel like that part of my dad being an immigrant has shaped my identity as a leader because, especially for our students, I feel like I connect with our immigrant families, and we have many of them." In addition, Marly added that while she was in the pursuit of her first college degree, a bachelor's degree, enrolled in a formal education institution, she struggled with different aspects of her identity language development as English was her first language and her Latina identity, however, the formal education Marly received empowered her to achieve more than she had anticipated; Marly Alvarado added:

I always knew I wanted to major in education and knew I was never only going to be a teacher. Hopefully, I would always become a principal, so I got my master's in educational leadership; that was my next career goal. I worked for one year as an instructional leader last year in [my district], and now I am a vice-principal.

Her family's high value on formal education since her elementary school years facilitated Marly's transition from a teaching position to a school administrator position rapidly, as she obtained her formal school principal position at 34. As the youngest school principal in this study, Marly fulfilled her dreams by being promoted to principal in the same district where she began her leadership trajectory as a teacher. A district that serves a predominantly Latinx demographic, and after merely seven years working in the classroom, Marly's value on formal education paid off, enabling her to ascend into a school principal position, therefore empowering the students of the same ethnic background to value for-

mal education as she represents a vision of what the future may hold for them if they pursue formal education. Since obtaining a formal leadership career requires administrative certification and graduate college education beyond a baccalaureate degree, formal education was the catalyst that enabled Marly to achieve her dreams at merely 34 years old; she is a vision for her students of what they can achieve through the power of formal education.

#### ***Theme 4: Mentors***

A mentor is someone who actively helps, supports, or teaches someone else how to do a job so that she will succeed (Méndez-Morse, 2004). Mentors also come as role models, defined as someone whose characteristics or traits another person would want to emulate (Mendez-Morse, 2004). Formal mentors are a state mandate for standard school principal certification in New Jersey. While enrolled in their certification program, all school principal candidates must obtain a formal mentor who has been employed as a school principal or superintendent for at least five academic years; this mentor will supervise the state-mandated 300-hour internship in educational leadership aligned to the professional standards for school leaders in N.J.A.C. 6A:9-3.4 by the roles and responsibilities as a principal, independent of other course requirements. After obtaining employment, another formal mentor is assigned to the novice school principal. New Jersey Leaders 2 Leaders (NJL2L) is the formal mentoring and induction program for all new school leaders in New Jersey. During the mandatory two years of the program, the new administrators, who are residents, are paired with an experienced mentor. In their first year of principalship, Novice school principals must complete two years of residency (formal

mentorship) before receiving their standard principal certification from the New Jersey Department of Education.

All five participants in this study possessed their New Jersey standard school principal certification and mentioned the importance of mentors (formal and informal) in their leadership ascension trajectory; mentors helped them develop their Leadership through influence, motivation, and contribution toward effectiveness and success (Bergman, 2021). The participants elaborated on the impact of others' leadership on their own; in relation, while discussing the role of mentors in her leadership trajectory, Nana said:

Our superintendent is Latina; she was my mentor. She is Cuban. She is the one who put me to act as the principal from the other school I was at and then moved me here...I love her. She is amazing. So, she sees us. That is what I could say. She sees us. Not many Latina mentors are available, but I also had other mentors who taught me.

Similarly, Irene also discussed the importance of mentors in her leadership trajectory by stating:

My mom was my role model growing up and a mentor for me...there are a lot of strong women in my family.... I have [also] found [mentors in] administrators that I have worked with ... two in particular that I am very close with...they lead the way strong with love, but firm.

Her anecdotes reveal that conventional (formal mentors) and unconventional mentors (informal mentors or role models) shaped Irene's leadership ascension trajectory. For Marly, the influence of others' leadership, while enrolled in higher education academia, fostered unconventional mentors that supported her leadership ascension trajectory; she shared:



I joined a sorority predominantly made up of White American girls I love, and they are my best friends to this day. Only two were Latinx, and one was Black, but we worked collectively to hone our leadership... I knew I would be a strong, intelligent Latina woman and wanted to drive that home. I was going to learn from the leadership of others to develop my leadership.

During the study, female participants shared their personal stories about their journey as school principals and the factors that shaped their leadership trajectories. One of the most prominent factors that emerged was the influence of family values and language on their experiences. Participants explained how their upbringing and cultural heritage impacted their leadership practices and played a crucial role in their success as school principals. These insights provide valuable understanding of the complex interplay between personal experiences, cultural values, and career progression.

## **Summary**

Chapter 4 explored the leadership journeys of five remarkable Latinx women who worked as principals in K-12 schools in New Jersey. Their compelling stories shed light on the numerous positive influences that shaped their leadership paths and the effective strategies they implemented to overcome challenges. This chapter provides a fascinating glimpse into the experiences of these trailblazing women and offers valuable lessons for aspiring Latina leaders. It also highlights the common threads that run through their stories, emphasizing the pivotal role of resilience, determination, and a growth mindset in attaining success in leadership roles. In addition, this chapter discusses the themes that emerged at the end of the second coding cycle, capturing the essence of Latina school principals' experiences. These themes enable readers to understand

their experiences more clearly. The analytical explanations for each theme provide a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In the previous chapter, the first and second coding cycles allowed me to collect direct quotations from the participants, indicating that they are the experts whose experiences are accurately captured in this study's data.

Moreover, throughout chapter four, I included direct passages from participant interviews to ensure my readers comprehend that the data in this chapter provided the study's participants' interpretation of the phenomenon are reflected in the findings. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the participants' recollections of their leadership journeys as they transitioned from a teaching position to a school principal role. While each participant's experiences are unique, they faced similar moments and situations. These similar experiences encompass the recurring ideas I coded as themes in this chapter. The findings from this chapter allowed me to relate the participants' experiences to current research and create recommendations for future research related to this topic, which are included in chapter five. I also discussed suggestions for practitioners and policies and responded to the research questions.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

#### Summary of Study

This study was inspired by the need for educational research that analyzes the leadership ascension trajectories of Latinx women obtaining K-12 school principal positions in New Jersey. This analysis is crucial because women (especially ethnic minorities) continue to be regarded as an anomaly in formal leadership roles in the United States (Dean et al., 2009). This study may serve as guidance to aspiring Latina leaders as there is a need to increase the number of Latinx educators in school leadership roles in U.S. public schools (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2015; Quiñones et al., 2021) so they may serve as role models to influence the academic achievement of Latinx students positively (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Therefore, this study explores the experiences of Latinx women in school principal positions to understand their ascension into leadership positions and how their intersecting social identities of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation shaped their experiences. Examining the experiences of five Latinx women employed as school principals using community cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) as a theoretical frame and delving into the impact that their cultural assets had on their leadership development and leadership practices will help aspiring Latinx women leaders hone their leadership attributes.

This phenomenological study aimed to understand and examine the leadership trajectory and ascension experiences of Latina school principals currently serving as vice principals or school principals in NJ K-12 public schools as they moved up the career ladder from a school teacher position to a school administrative position. I interviewed five Latinx women school principals currently employed in NJ K-12 public schools who

met the criteria of my study by self-identifying as Latina women whose intersecting social identities encompass their gender as women and their roles as parents (four of them), their Latinx ethnicity as a school administrator. Each participant went through a semi-structured interview process, which I analyzed to find recurring themes, which I discuss in detail in the fourth chapter. For the purpose of data collection, I opted for a virtual mode of communication and conducted a series of five individual semi-structured interviews with participants through Zoom. Each interview session lasted for approximately 60 minutes and involved virtual interactions with the participants, adhering to the established standards of academic research. To guide the interview process, a set of eight research protocol questions (as outlined in Appendix A) was utilized, ensuring consistency and objectivity in the data collection process. Purposeful sampling was used to select the five Latinx women employed as school principals who participated in this study, which allowed me to ensure that the participants met the identifying criteria to participate in this study (Creswell, 2013). Participants shared their experiences being promoted to a school principal or vice position, discussed their experiences obtaining the state-mandated administrative certifications and required graduate degrees in school principalship to qualify for school administrative positions, and explained the impact of their family values and language, mentors, their intersecting social identities, and mentors on their leadership; in the process of ascending into school principal positions and how these factors continue to influence their leadership practices. After the interview and data analysis process, four main themes were discovered. The first theme was 1) Collaborative Leadership, followed by 2) Intersecting Social Identities, 3) Family Values and Language, and the final theme was 4) Mentors. These themes represented the study's findings of commonalities among

the participants' principalship career ascension experiences. They allowed me to explore how this information may be helpful to aspiring school principals and other stakeholders who may be able to impact the leadership development among Latina school leaders, e.g., school boards, human resource managers, or mentors.

My findings revealed that cultural values are an interwoven aspect of who they are and shape their leadership, which distinguished the essence of this study. While the participants shared insights about the negative experiences encountered throughout their trajectories that emotionally impacted and challenged their leadership, their positive experiences were more prominent. Their positive experiences fomented the catalyst of these Latinx women employed as school principals' principalship ascension trajectories as they placed their family values and language at the forefront. Their cultural values include their hard-working ethic, the inculcation of a vital appreciation for pursuing formal education, and an appreciation for being fluent in Spanish, their family language, which facilitated their ability to obtain a promotion in the same district where they started their careers as teachers. Another positive experience entails their support systems or mentors. Their cultural values include their hard-working ethic, the inculcation of a vital appreciation for pursuing formal education, and a linguistic appreciation for being able to speak Spanish fluently or conversationally; their family language, which facilitated their ability to obtain a promotion in the same district where they started their careers as teachers. Another positive experience entails their support systems or mentors. Therefore, the leadership of others positively influenced the participant's leadership trajectories by serving as examples of leadership they sought to emulate. They perceived role models (e.g., professors, mentors, and colleagues) whose intersecting social identities may have differed

from theirs shaped their leadership ascension trajectories. Participants indicated during the study that they were guided by their family values and language and their mentors; the relationships they established with others also enabled them to serve in the communities where they attended K-12 schools as students, then after the completion of higher education degrees became teachers, to later ascending into school principals or vice principal positions after obtaining an in-district promotion. The findings in this study also mirror the data found by other scholars about this demographic, which indicates the lack of mentors who are also Latinx women (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Delgado & Allen, 2021; Méndez-Morse, 2004). However, all the participants in this study had mentors, which contrasts with the literature on mentoring in general for women and minoritized individuals, but such mentors are required in the State of New Jersey. (Bagula, 2016; Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021).

Historically, educational leadership has been patriarchal, as those in charge of managing educational institutions are primarily male (Yanez, 2022). However, mentors can guide Latinas to break the glass ceiling and provide network opportunities that facilitate their leadership ascension pursuits (Yanez, 2022). Studies have shown that sponsorship and mentors are scarce for minority women educational leaders (Bagula, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami et al., 2016). However, mentors are concurrently deemed necessary for success (Bagula, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami et al., 2016). In New Jersey, this requirement is built into the certification process. The New Jersey Department of Education mandates all master's degree candidates enrolled in a graduate program that leads to school principal certification to take a supervised 350-hour

internship as part of the curriculum to obtain their degrees and obtain a certificate of eligibility as a school principal to be employed as a school principal (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). In New Jersey, the NJDOE mandates that aspiring school principals who recently graduated continue receiving formal mentoring for two years after securing a position as a school principal or vice principal and enroll in the state-wide school principal two-year program that leads to standard principal certification, which is known as New Jersey Leaders 2 Leaders (NJL2L) program. Therefore, the role of mentors shaped the ascension experiences of this study's participants in different ways, which are further explained in the findings section of this chapter.

Moreover, all of the participants in this study were formally mentored. Participants indicated that despite the lack of formal mentors whose ethnicity or gender mirrored their own, in these instances, the participants relied on examples of the strong women in their families as role models who motivated them to pursue leadership roles and shaped their leadership practices in the educational settings where they serve as school leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). These interactions also enabled the Latinx women principals to hone a collaborative leadership style as school leaders in their daily leadership practices (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Lac & Diaz, 2023). Another positive experience shared by the participants in this study was their commonality for deeply rooted family values that enabled them to establish strong partnerships in the school districts they serve by communicating with all stakeholders with their family values at the forefront (Bagula, 2016; Bordas, 2013). In this chapter, I provide answers to the three research questions examined in this study, reflect on the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and leadership, examine the impact of the

community cultural wealth conceptual framework on the participants' experiences, and provide implications for educational leadership, policy, and practice. Additionally, I provide several recommendations for other stakeholders who may enable the leadership of Latina school principals. Lastly, I discuss suggestions for future research.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Obtaining a school principal position is only possible by first garnering the required administrative certifications allocated after obtaining a formal education in higher educational institutions (Vogel & Weiler, 2014). Historically, Latinx women's ability to acquire the aforementioned educational requirements mandates was deemed impossible or rare as previous studies demonstrate that Latinx women, as a sub-group of the Latinx community, have the lowest college-going aspirations and expectations when compared to other ethnic groups (Anthony et al., 2021; Hurtado et al., 1997), and with low college-going aspirations and expectations, obtaining the mandatory formal education and qualifying for a principal role becomes more difficult. Because of this, current research exists that delves into the formal education trajectories of Latina women as an underrepresented group (Bagula et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2016), but there is limited information available regarding Latina women's ability to hone their leadership beyond college, obtain administrative positions or ascend into managerial roles. Findings in my study show that despite historically stereotypical deficit perspectives documented by other scholars about Latina women's ability to obtain the required formal education and acquire administrative roles (Gándara, 2015), the Latina school principals in this study benefited from assets that historically are often perceived as hindrances in their pursuit of formal education and leadership ascension as school principals and vice principals. These assets include but are



not limited to being a member of a minoritized ethnic group, being of a minoritized gender, being a member of a lower socioeconomic group, and being bilingual (Murakami et al., 2016). Often, Latina school principals' ability to speak Spanish and their gender as a woman are historically undervalued attributes that facilitate the participant's ability to be promoted from a teaching position to a school administrative role.

The Latinx women in this study have been employed as school principals for at least one year and ascended to administrative positions after merely five years in the classroom. Therefore, the results of this study add to the limited body of literature that focuses on Latinx women school principals' assets (Bagula, 2016; Niño et al., 2017) and identify how the participants ascended into their formal leadership positions. This study also confirms previous research on these women's challenges in their roles due to gender-based stereotypes (Martinez et al., 2019; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Furthermore, this study emphasizes the voices of Latinx women school principals who are usually not included in existing literature (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami et al., 2016). Similar to other studies, the Latina school principals in my study also experienced challenges through their leadership trajectories (Bagula, 2016; Murakami et al., 2016; Tayloe, 2016). The challenges they experienced were based on historical stereotypical notions about different aspects of their intersecting social identities (Murakami et al., 2016).

However, having faced hardships amid their leadership ascension trajectories, most of the experiences encountered by the Latina school principals in this study were predominantly more pleasant than their challenging experiences; as these leaders found

leadership-enabling factors amid their challenges and experiences, facilitating their leadership ascension trajectories. Initially, in the process of honing their leadership through the pursuit of formal education, Latina women principals in this study stated that they experienced a culture clash and gender-based stereotypes after being promoted to a school administrative position; similar to other studies, for Latinas, the confrontation of biases often result in the loss of their own identity (Bordas, 2013; Mendez-Morse, 2004). Research exists on the stereotypes based on the intersecting social identities of Latina leaders; discussing the "triple oppression" of race, gender, and class discourages Latinas who want to pursue careers and encourages them to be submissive women instead, and they continue to contend with historical notions about their intersecting identities as inspired by their culture (Melville, 1980; Miranda & Enriquez, 1981). However, all of the participants in this study stated that archaic gender norms were not part of their upbringing and that, instead, their families inspired them to pursue formal education to obtain a career. Therefore, the essence of Latina school principals' experiences in this study shows that misconceptions about their intersecting social identities and the values their family instilled in them are based on a cultural deficit framework, focusing on an array of stereotypes and marginalization that may continue to impact Latinas after they ascend into leadership roles (Canul, 2003).

Additionally, the participants in this study noted that while pursuing formal education, enrolled in graduate programs, and pursuing master's degrees in educational leadership, the women in this study had limited interactions with others who possessed the same intersecting social identities as themselves as they realized that most of their peers

and teachers in higher education academia were European, Black, or males. Current research shows that only some Latinas in leadership roles can mentor these individuals (Avalos et al., 2016; Bagula et al., 2016). A mentor is someone whose characteristics or traits another person would want to emulate; someone who actively helps, supports, or teaches someone else how to do a job so that she will succeed (Mendez-Morse, 2004). Research suggests that for Latina school principals, obtaining mentorship from someone they can relate to in terms of gender or ethnicity is highly significant (Martinez et al., 2020; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Ruiz, 2021). However, the field of educational administration is patriarchal, and thus, finding mentors whose gender or ethnicity is a commonality was extremely difficult for the participants in this study (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Chavez, 2022; Villenas et al., 2012). Most of the data about their mentors reflected the findings noted by scholars on mentoring phenomena that indicate White males are predominantly mentoring women in leadership positions because of the lack of women serving in educational leadership positions (Ballenger, 2010; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021). A contributing factor to this may be patriarchal societal norms, which are based on the idea that men make better leaders than women because of their ability to be less emotional and have fewer expectations for taking care of domestic tasks (Avalos, 2016). Therefore, patriarchy is a concept that prevailed in leadership throughout history and may still impact aspiring Latina school principals' leadership ascension trajectories (Avalos, 2016; Chávez, 2009).

For this reason, most of the study's participants explained that they struggled with their identity before they could comprehend their leadership assets, similar to previous empirical research findings on the phenomena (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami et

al., 2016). For Latinas, confronting biases about their gender, social identity, and ethnicity resulted in an internal struggle that challenged their leadership and often challenged them to assimilate into American culture by implementing patriarchal leadership norms (Bordas, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). However, the participants in this study explained that while enrolled in higher education academia, interactions with other individuals, professors, peers, and other students while pursuing formal education allowed them to establish supportive mentoring relationships that enabled them to overcome challenges and hone their leadership skills. In addition, the participants in this study all noted that the collaborative leadership styles their mentors employed motivated them to emulate collaborative leadership styles themselves (Mendez-Morse, 2004). Therefore, their mentors, strong women in their families, district supervisors, peers, and professors, inspired them to challenge stereotypes and biases amid their leadership ascension trajectories instead of assimilating to patriarchal leadership norms.

In relation, the findings in my study show that in the absence of similar role models or mentors, Latina school principals benefitted from relying on members in their social groups to forge strong mentoring partnerships. Therefore, their ability to construct primary mentors from nonprofessional areas of their lives, mitigating in the absence of a formal, traditional mentoring relationship, facilitated their leadership ascension trajectories (Mendez-Morse, 2004); this is a finding mirrored in other contemporary studies (Mendez-Morse, 2004). Therefore, social relationships with others were used to mitigate the absence of formal, traditional mentoring relationships required to enable Latina school principals' leadership (Bordas, 2013; Mendez-Morse, 2004). In addition, the experiences of these school leaders demonstrated that these Latinas assembled or constructed

a mentor from varied sources that collectively met their specific needs and priorities (Mendez-Morse, 2004). For the participants in this study, these sources were found among their family members, peers, or professors. Supporting literature discusses that Latinas often seek guidance from their families and formal mentors for important decisions. In these instances, the participants in this study stated that while their family was able to provide guidance (informal mentorship), their contributions prominently influenced the deeply ingrained family values and Language acquisition that inspired them to seek administrative positions that would provide them with the opportunity to serve in their communities (Gloria et al., 2005). Their formal mentors, including district supervisors, professors, and role models, consisting of strong women in their families, inspired them to pursue their intrinsic leadership passions; this was evident in my research as all participants attributed their intrinsic desire for serving in the communities where they attended K-12 academia to the contributions of their family members and mentors. The participants stated that this desire derived from their ability to understand the educational needs of the same demographic, which inspired them to pursue school teaching and administrative positions to enable the best leadership in the Latinx community where they reside. After obtaining a promotion as a school administrator, the study participants experienced further challenges concerning their leadership because they were often questioned and scrutinized due to patriarchal notions of leadership that benefit aspiring male school administrators (Avalos, 2016; Chavez, 2009), which empowered them to work harder than their male counterparts.

Women and minoritized individuals' career ascension trajectories have been stifled throughout history due to stereotypes based on misconceptions about their gender,

domestic duties, overt discrimination, and lack of educational programming; curriculum and materials that perpetuate unequal hiring decisions due to their gender or ethnicity and hostile work environments (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). All of the participants in my study discussed how they felt as if there was much pressure for them to prove themselves more than other leaders in the district, particularly men. This created hostility in the workplace as the women were often denied help from their male counterparts as a way for their counterparts to ensure that these women leaders would be able to perform their supervisor duties (Mendez-Morse & Martinez, 2021). For example, Erminda spoke about how when she first obtained her promotion as a school principal, she was tasked with moving furniture, and upon asking her male colleagues for their help, they dismissed her requests. In relation, Nana Rodriguez was also tasked with proving her worth after she obtained her promotion as a school principal during the time of COVID-19; as she ascended into this position, many of her male counterparts would randomly question her about her leadership experiences and school administrative certifications as well as expect her to be able to ameliorate all of the district broad issues that prevailed more rapidly than humanly possible. For Nana and many other participants in this study, stereotypes about their other intersecting social identities also challenged their leadership. Thus, they are three times minoritized due to their triple minority status as a woman, a member of a minoritized ethnic group, and often from a low socioeconomic background (Almager et al., 2018, Gandara, 2015). Latinx women aspiring to become school principals are often overlooked for positions despite being highly qualified because of stereotypes attributed to their intersecting social identities (Bagula, 2016). Current research exists on the experi-

ences of Latina school principals that mainly discusses the biases, emphasizing their deficits or stifling factors that complicate their ability to obtain school principal positions (Bagula et al., 2016; Murakami et al., 2016).

Despite this, the findings in my study also demonstrate that Latinx women employed as school principals are still often discriminated against due to stereotypes based on their intersecting social identities, which historically have been erroneously perceived as hindrances to their leadership (Bagula, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2021). These same attributes facilitated the participants in this study; as they believe that their gender as women, their Latinx ethnicity, and often their domestic duties as parents were the catalyst for their success as school principals. The participants in my study all discussed that the attributes like their culture, values, and bilingual linguistic abilities for which they have been historically oppressed also facilitated their leadership ascension trajectories enabled them to develop their leadership (Bagula, 2016; Holvino, 2010; Mendez-Morse, 2021; Yosso, 2005). These attributes continue to impact their daily practices in school principal positions. As the Latinx women principals in my study discussed their leadership ascension trajectories, they all noted the positive impacts of the challenges they encountered after being promoted into school principal positions and how these experiences based on stereotypical viewpoints about their abilities motivated them to work harder as school principals. They also discussed how challenging experiences inspired them to seek school principal positions in their home districts. Similar to other studies' findings, Latinas were primarily employed in urban districts, leading elementary campuses with high minority or low-income student populations (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Moreover, they also served as teachers or other non-administrative capacities before becoming school leaders; their

varied professional experiences, as well as their cultural background and identity, enhanced their leadership practices (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). Moreover, the findings in this study are similar to other research about Latinx women's leadership (Bordas, 2013; Holvino, 2010). All of the participants in this study discussed how their culture remains at the forefront of their leadership as it enabled them to establish a sense of consistency and self-reliance while tapping into their core values and using these values in their leadership; the participants further defined these values as cultural attributes that their families instilled in them since early on in their lives; such as collaboration, hard work, dedication, honesty, and paying it forward.

### **Regional Women's' Educational Leadership Forum**

On November 29, 2023, I attended the annual *Regional Women's Educational Leadership Forum*, hosted by the New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA) and Educational Research. *The Regional Women's Educational Leadership Forum* taught me about the leadership ascension trajectories of women serving as school superintendents in New Jersey. They discussed their experiences in leadership, ascending from teaching positions to school administrative roles. Like the participants in this study, the guest speakers explained that their intersecting social identities, leadership, and gender; being a woman and a school administrator and their role as a parent often placed them in situations where their leadership attributes were scrutinized. The New Jersey women superintendents explained that microaggressions deriving from male counterparts and other members of the employing districts they served would often question their ability to excel in a district-level managerial role (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Hernandez et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2023; Rivas-Garza, 2022). These microaggressions arrived in



the form of questions about their prior leadership experiences, their preparation (certifications), and others pretending not to comprehend the expectations delegated to them by these women superintendents. In my study, the women school principals recounted a similar phenomenon; all women were scrutinized, and their abilities and qualifications to supervise were often questioned and undermined. For example, Erminda and Nana narrated anecdotes about how, upon acquiring promotions into school administrative roles, microaggressions from men whom they were in charge of supervising occurred in the form of the challenging of their authority, pretentious notions of instances when others failed to abide by their supervision. For Nana, during the beginning of COVID-19, her district superintendent promoted her to serve as a school principal and tasked her with culture and climate improvements. She said that stakeholders under her supervision were difficult as they were not used to having a female school principal; her abilities were questioned, and her mandates were often ignored. Erminda noted how the same day she transitioned into a school principal position, men in charge of arranging the furniture in her new office engaged in micro-aggressions that challenged her leadership by alleging that she did not need the large desk her district provided her. Erminda also explained that she was often told she was too young or physically attractive to be a school principal. She was further questioned about the certifications and qualifications required to serve in a school leadership position. In relation, Irene discussed how before she ascended into an educational administrative position as a college history department dean, she was often told Irene was too physically attractive and that a year later, she faced similar challenges after ascending into a school principal role. Irene said that women would employ microaggressions and ignore her commands due to jealousy about her being young and physically attractive

(Lakoff & Scherr, 2022; Y-Muhs et al., 2012). Similarly, the women superintendents who participated as guest speakers at the NJASA (2023) *Regional Women in Leadership Forum* explained that as women leaders, they felt more challenged by the stakeholders who also serve in their school districts and that they were often considered too young or attractive to be effective in managerial positions. However, despite the challenges and microaggressions, the women in my study and the women superintendents demonstrated resistance to the leadership challenges they encountered; a concept examined in previous studies that denotes resistance assets refers to the newfound knowledge and skills that are fostered through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality (Yosso, 2005). An example of one of these micro-aggressions also includes a concept noted by other scholars and in my findings that entails how women serving in educational leadership positions are often pressured to prove themselves more than other leaders in the district, particularly men (Martinez et al., 2019; Murakami et al., 2016). Thus, having their leadership challenged provided the women serving in leadership capacities at the state and district levels with challenging experiences that equipped them to be more resilient and prepared them to be effective in school administrative roles. For these women leaders, their resistance to biases or micro-aggressions enabled them to become better leaders (Camacho & Lord, 2011; Pimienta, 2014; Yosso, 2005). Other scholars in contemporary literature also concur with the perspective that experiencing micro-aggressions or other leadership challenges is beneficial to women's leadership, as these experiences equip them to become transformational leaders who are often tasked in the districts they serve as school supervisors to be role models for others and gain followers' trust and confidence (Eagly & Carli,

2007). An example of how women serving as educational leaders have been able to benefit from challenging experiences is documented by Martinez et al. (2019) in a contemporary study whose findings demonstrate how challenges about the intersecting identities of women in school administrative roles confronting gender roles stereotypes, expectations of motherhood, the criticality of mentorship, how they confronted and addressed racism and sexism, and were able to harness these challenges including their linguistic bilingualism abilities to empower themselves and other constituents in the school districts that they serve.

Additionally, all women in educational and managerial roles, those in my study, and the district women leaders who narrated their leadership ascension trajectories at the NJASA (2023) Forum attributed their family values as leadership-enabling assets (Bagula, 2016; Holvino, 2010; Yosso, 2005). The women superintendents explained that childhood hardships and lessons from their families fostered values that helped them be more effective as educational leaders. One of the participants mentioned how she was placed in foster care after the age of 9 due to economic strife. Other participants discussed having struggled with their mixed ethnic backgrounds, for which their families would motivate them to perceive their differences positively. In the same manner that the participants in this study discussed, they often struggled with their mixed ethnic backgrounds and how their family values also equipped them to be better leaders. For all of the New Jersey women educational leaders, their struggles and family values enabled them to empathize with children and families in the school districts they serve as school administrators; this is because these women leaders have experienced everyday struggles

and, most importantly, having overcome these struggles by establishing a positive mindset through the ability to perceive challenges as a lesson and opportunity for growth enables them to foster relationships. Therefore, they can effectively employ collaborative and transformational leadership in their districts (Ortiz, 2018; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Zentella, 2005). Their unique understanding of the communities they serve fostered partnerships and experiences that gave them valuable insights into the lives of the families and children they now fervently advocate for (Murakami et al., 2013; Zentella, 2005).

Moreover, for the women superintendents, collaborative leadership has allowed them to establish longstanding leadership trajectories and facilitated their ability to ascend from a teaching position to their respective district managerial roles (Catalano, 2022; Colvard, 2023; NJASA, 2023). They discussed the crucial aspect of being able to allocate mentors (formal and informal) as role models within their families and in their employing school districts (NJASA, 2023). Like the women in my study, my participants all mentioned having found mentors in the strong women in their families and the school districts where they first served in a teacher capacity and were later promoted to school administrator roles. For all these women in New Jersey school and district leadership roles, collaborative partnership and mentoring relationships were catalysts for a rapid career ascension. One of the guest speakers at the NJASA (2023) *Regional Women in Educational Leadership Forum* explained how her mentors advocated for her to obtain a promotion in the district she now serves as a school superintendent. The other participants also mentioned their mentors' vital role in their ability to ascend into leadership despite gender, age, or ethnic biases.

Similarly, the women in my study explained how their mentors facilitated their ascension from a teaching position to their current roles as school principals. For Nana and Erminda, these promotions occurred without their anticipation. In contrast, the promotions were more notable for Marly, Milagros, and Irene, as their mentors advised them to apply for school administrator positions. Overall, it is evident that the role of mentors is essential for aspiring women leaders in their quest to ascend professionally at the regional or district level.

### **Answering the Research Questions**

There were three questions that this study focused on to learn more about the leadership trajectories of Latinx women employed as K-12 school principals or vice principals in NJ. By responding to these questions, my study provided a better and more in-depth understanding of the positive factors that impelled Latina women to pursue formal school leadership positions, the opposing challenges they encountered, and how these experiences shaped their principalship ascension trajectories. The information and themes collected from the participants in this study provided me with insight into the phenomenon examined. They provided me with the information to respond to the research questions. The answers to the research questions for this study are intertwined and can be difficult to separate. The following sections reviewed each question while responding to them based on participant responses and relevant research.

The following research questions guided this interpretative phenomenological qualitative study;

(1) How do Latinx women describe their experiences ascending into school leadership positions?

(2) How do cultural values influence these Latina school principals' leadership?

(3) How do their intersecting identities shape Latinx women's leadership experiences?

### *Research Question 1*

**How do Latinx women describe their experiences ascending into school leadership positions?** The most prominently recurring themes discussed by all participants while describing their experiences ascending into school leadership positions entail family values, language, and mentors (Mendez-Morse, 2021). The theme of family values and language correlated with the importance placed on formal education, which entailed a family value that the Latina school principal's families placed on pursuing formal education as a strategy for upward mobility attainment (Bagula, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Each participant positively discussed their educational trajectory and transition from college into the workplace, driven by their family values and language, which empowered them to hone their leadership by pursuing graduate degrees. All of the participants possess a master's degree, which is a requirement for aspiring school principals in the State of New Jersey. Additionally, most of the participants in this study (four out of five) possess two master's degrees, demonstrating their dedication to the profession. Language was another family value, as all participants had at least one family member who encouraged them to value becoming fluent in Spanish to communicate with their families while being raised (Bordas, 2013; Rivera, 2014). The positive impact that language or bilingualism has on Latina school principals' leadership trajectories is a concept that Martinez et al. (2019) describes as beneficial to aspiring principals as it helps empower them to pursue career ascension and facilitate the career ascension in others whom they serve in their roles as school principals. Thus, language was an asset to all participants because it enabled them

to serve as school administrators in districts whose student demographic was predominantly Latinx and whose native language was common among the participants. Thus, family values and language facilitated the participants' ascension trajectories, allowing them to obtain promotion from teaching positions to managerial roles after merely five years in the classroom in the district where they initiated their career trajectories as educators. Moreover, family values and language continue to impact their leadership practices after obtaining a promotion; this is further elaborated in response to the following research question (Mendez-Morse & Martinez, 2021).

While the discussion for research question #2 centers on Latinx women principals' culture, their culture inevitably intersected with their family values (Bordas, 2013) and prevailed as a leadership mobilizing factor for the Latina school principals in this study. This intersecting identity factor was examined in my literature review section, which emphasizes Bordas's (2013) Latino leadership attributes, which emphasize family values and language at the forefront of Latino leadership. Bordas (2013) describes integral family values among Latinx ethnic leaders as Culturally-Based Leadership, which indicates that Latinx leaders feel as if they are bound together by their common history, heritage, spiritual traditions, and Language. They also shared family values such as respect, honor, service, and generosity. For the participants in my study, this was a commonality that inspired them to pursue school administrator positions in the districts where they attended K-12 and to serve a predominantly minoritized community of Latinx and Black students. Additionally, Bordas (2013) defines Destino or Personal and Collective Purpose in her research as another family value among Latinx leaders that motivates

them to perceive their colleagues, students, and their families as their own family, therefore better enabling them to serve them by empathizing with their needs. Among the family values described in Bordas's (2013) Latino leadership attributes is the unifying notion that it is a Latinx leader's life purpose (destiny) to validate the efforts of their ancestors. Similarly, all of the Latina women in this study described their leadership ascension trajectory as a pilgrimage that validated the efforts and struggles of their ancestors. Symbolically, their leadership ascension trajectories represented what Bordas (2013) describes as a destino (or fate) that honors the efforts of their ancestors; in the context of this study, since the Latina school principals' ancestors were denied educational and career opportunities, they perceive their destino (life purpose) as one that enables others of minoritized groups who experienced similar struggles to receive the educational and career opportunities that their ancestors were denied (Bordas, 2012; 2013). This pilgrimage is best defined as travel and movement, from obtaining their formal education to obtaining a career as a teacher to the veneration of their families, immediate and ancestral, and a particular place or places considered to have some profound significance, often associated with sacred figures or founders (Reader, 2015). All of the participants in this study are first-generation college graduates or second-generation who accepted the challenge to pursue and succeed at obtaining formal education as a way to honor the efforts of their ancestors and families to develop the leadership skills required to empower others in their communities also to overcome stereotypes and a history of educational inequity. This was a goal all of the participants set out to meet in order to obtain formal education during the inception of their leadership trajectories.



For the participants in this study, part of their career ascension experience included formal or informal mentors, derived from family members or professional networks, who were catalysts that facilitated their ability to ascend into school principal or vice principal positions. Similarly, other studies on Latina school principals examine the vital impact of formal and informal mentors on their leadership ascension trajectories (Bagula, 2016; Martinez et al., 2019; Tayloe, 2016).

Moreover, all five participants identified the role of their mentors as a facilitating factor of their leadership ascension experiences ascending into school leadership positions as school principals and vice principals (Mendez-Morse & Martinez, 2021). Their mentors advocated for them to be promoted and, therefore, helped them develop an intrinsic passion for what they do. This passion, as instilled in them by their mentors, continues to impact the work that school principals do in the communities they serve as a way to pay it forward by being mentors to others: students, staff, and families as a mentor for them; this is because the participants' mentors also inspired them to commit to broader community advocacy and pursue career objectives that would enable them to serve as role models for other minoritized individuals within their community (Mendez-Morse & Martinez, 2021). All of the participants in this study also stated that because of the contributions of their mentors (both formal and informal), they were able to develop self-confidence that enabled them to develop the tenacity to overcome difficulties, such as gender-based stereotypes that caused micro-aggressions and challenged their leadership.

Moreover, the theme of family values and language is a recurring theme in this study that shaped all participants' educational leadership ascension trajectories (Yosso,

2005). Starting with their awareness of their family's history, which inculcated the family values and language that inspired them to develop their leadership and made them aware of inequalities that stifled leadership development among their ancestors. History started long ago with segregated schools that stifled the leadership development of most of the participants' ancestors and immediate family members; as all participants explained how their families worked farm jobs, they had mothers who were traditional women who took care of household demands. This is because their ancestors lived when formal education was an anomaly in the United States when schools banned speaking Spanish (Ruiz, 1991). All participants learned from their ancestors' narratives the importance of pursuing a career to obtain upward mobility as a way to enable the leadership of others, the children they serve in the school districts they are employed in, and their biological children. All participants noted that they are grateful for their families' efforts and feel that obtaining careers in school leadership is a way to empower other historically minoritized individuals to break down generational iniquities about education and career attainment (Khalifa, 2020). Through the stories of pain and suffering in the history of their ancestors' struggles, my participants found the passion to achieve those long-withstanding dreams for them by pursuing what they were denied to pursue. Then, they became teachers and school administrators, professions predominantly for men in the United States (Williams, 2023).

Moreover, after five years in the classroom, they obtained graduate degrees and sought to maximize the potential of those enrolled as students in the schools they manage. For the participants in this study, their leadership ascension pilgrimage is one where

they find their life purpose, one that allows them to implement all of the values their families instilled in them, marked by a history of oppression that prevented their ancestors from achieving their dreams and honing their leadership to their full potential (Bordas, 2013). This pilgrimage is one for the brave, one for the strong, one that dismantles racism, oppression, and all inequality and seeks to empower the students in the schools they serve as school principals to ensure that the longstanding academic achievement gap among Latinx students and their peers of non-minoritized ethnicities is re-dressed; a national educational issue that other scholars have examined for many centuries, but can be addressed with the help of the Latinx women in school principal positions whose career ascension trajectories serve as an example it can be done (Howard, 2010; 2019). Research question one sought to understand the experiences of Latina school principals as they worked fervently to obtain promotions as school leaders. The participants in this study provided significant insight into how their personal experiences based on their intrinsic aspirations and their stories revealed that Latinx women employed as school principals benefitted from their ancestors' efforts and family values and continue to benefit from cultural assets in their daily leadership practices; as these themes were prevalent throughout the study and will be further elaborated in response to research questions.

### ***Research Question 2***

#### **How do cultural values influence these Latina school principals' leadership?**

Culture is the deeply ingrained beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and traditions common to a group of Northouse (2019). Concerning Latinx culture, Latinx cultural values are the attributes shared among Latinx ethnic members in a close-knit group where family extends beyond the immediate family to include extended family members (Clutter &

Nieto, 2009; Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021) and for Latinos, the Spanish language, the Catholic religion, and shared values stem from their Spanish and indigenous ancestry roots (Bordas, 2013). For the Latinx women school principals in this study, their extended family members include members of the school communities they serve: families, students, parents, and staff members. These women's cultural values defined their leadership approach as culture informs leadership style and some argue that Latina leadership provides and offer additional tools for leaders to lead effectively in increasingly diverse contexts (Bordas, 2013). While discussing the influence of cultural values on their leadership, the themes presented for the Latinx women principals in this study were collaborative leadership and family values and language. The participants in this study's family values and language intersect naturally with their culture (Bordas, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Latina school principals' family values are also integrated into their leadership styles, influencing how they supervise the schools they serve as principals. Latinx cultural values encompass a focus on paternalism. In the context of an educational institution, paternalism refers to the natural tendency for Latinx leaders to establish strong relationships that deem them as parental figures for the stakeholders they supervise (students, families, and staff members) (Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021). Latinx individuals are often brought up in a patriarchal or matriarchal setting because individuals of Latinx ethnic backgrounds follow historical family structures that are hierarchical as a cultural value and are based on Roman Catholic religious precepts promoting the idea that their children have to work hard at school this is because Latinos have not been part of the elite social class, and as such, they have not attained benefits, reaped rewards, or obtained privileges they did not earn; they have been able to improve their economic situation through their efforts (Bordas, 2013). Work

has meaning and dignity as part of a collective culture where collective success is more important than individual success (Bordas, 2013; Holvino, 2010). As such, work is a way for Latino family members to contribute and become a valued part of the group, as everyone in the family is accountable for contributing to the family dynamics (Bordas, 2013). Family values of collaboration catalyze a sense of equality and the idea that no one is better than anyone. Therefore, all individuals deserve respect. This Latino cultural value is perceived in the Latina school leaders in this study because of their family value of collaboration and contribution; they can better value team efforts and support the notion that all institutional stakeholders are vital team members (Bordas, 2013; Holvino, 2010; Yosso, 2005). At the same time, the patron or parental figure takes care of their vital needs. The maternal figure takes care of the domestic duties, ensuring that the family has all of their vital necessities to survive: a clean home, food on the table, and fulfilling all of their emotional needs, often at the sacrifice of her own (Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021).

Similarly, in educational institutions, school principals and leaders follow a hierarchical managerial structure that holds the supervisor accountable for the team's collective success. In the context of an educational institution, the role of the participants in this study in the organizations that they serve is that of a parent tasked with supporting those under their supervision unconditionally, as a parent would in the Latinx culture by providing ongoing encouragement and emotionally connecting to them individually in order to achieve collective results that impel transformation (Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021). In addition, the role of these Latina school principals as parental figures indicates that another one of their core duties is to ensure the sustainability of establishing a harmonious family that gets along well and whose contributions to the family are equally important

and encouraged to ensure a collective (family) identity that empowers all members of the family to work hard in order to achieve their collective goals (Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021). These attributes are all integrated into the definitions of Collaborative leadership style (Northouse, 2019). Collaborative leadership style can be described as considerate, consultative, participative, and employee-centered (Bass, 2008). Collaborative leaders establish mutual trust, respect and commitment with their subordinates by valuing their perspectives (Goleman, 2003). In their work contexts, the Latina school principals in this study were able to mirror these traits. For the participants in this study, Latinx cultural values through collaborative leadership is a management practice that promotes effective, harmonious relationships in the workplace, ensuring that individual members of a leadership team can work together to implement decisions that all members agree with to keep the educational organization thriving (Northouse, 2019). All the participants in the study identified themselves as collaborative leaders. Collaborative leadership empowers team members by treating them as equally valuable change agents, which in turn helps to mobilize and inspire them. This approach is similar to the way Latinx families' cultural values promote the ongoing improvement of their families (Rodriguez & Tapia, 2021). The participants in the study also demonstrated that their cultural values positively impact their leadership skills, both within their immediate and extended families.

Moreover, contemporary literature asserts that Latinx educational leaders at the national level all demonstrate the following cultural values: Bilingualism, Spanish and English fluency; *confianza* or "belief," *respeto* or "respect," and love of family and community (Bordas, 2013; Martinez et al., 2016; Murakami et al., 2016); which enable them to establish high expectations among their families in their personal and work contexts.

Therefore, the essence of the Latina school principals in this study reveals that cultural values are at the forefront of their leadership and had the most profound impact on their leadership ascension trajectories, facilitating their leadership ascensions.

The findings in this study demonstrate the deeply rooted cultural value for family that these women possessed, which motivated them to give back to their communities by implementing leadership practices resembling their cultural values that enabled them to become collaborative leaders (Bordas, 2013; Miranda, 2019; Santamaría, 2014). The findings in this study also show that all participants identified their solid family values, including hard work ethic, religious faith, and valuing the efforts of their ancestors (the family that came before them), motivated them to harness their leadership as school principals. In addition, cultural values catalyzed the leadership ascension of all of this study's participants; as these women school principals all identified that their cultural values emphasized the importance of formal education, as their families instilled in them the belief that formal education was the key to a better life; a value that impelled them to pursue formal education despite being first-generation and second-generation college students (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Méndez-Morse et al, 2015; Villarreal, 2021).

Moreover, previous studies suggest that when a school principal's culture mirrors that of their students, closing the academic achievement gap and obtaining high student academic outcomes is possible; this is because school principals of the same ethnic background as their students are better able to find commonalities that inspire students to view them as role models (Mendez-Morse, 2016; Murakami et al., 2016). This study confirms that Latina school principals' family values and linguistic assets in New Jersey provided

assets that positively shaped their leadership and enabled them to serve in their communities as school leaders. These cultural assets also include, but are not limited to, their bilingualism (fluent or conversational English and Spanish) or language (bilingual abilities) that also facilitated their leadership ascension trajectories. All of the participants in this study stated that being fluent in Spanish helped them obtain a school principal position easier than other applicants who may have had more leadership experiences than themselves, as the employing school districts required someone to be bilingual in English and Spanish in order to be considered for the position. In addition, one participant explained that their first jobs before becoming school administrators were teaching positions that also demanded them to be bilingual in order to serve the students best, while other participants noted that most of the students attending their school districts were of Latinx descent. Overall, this study demonstrated that Latinx women employed as school principals' cultural values positively impacted them, as cultural values enabled their leadership ascension by facilitating their transition from a teaching position to a school administrator.

### ***Research Question 3***

**How do their intersecting identities shape Latinx women's leadership experiences?** Intersecting social identities that minoritized women possess throughout history has subjected them to different forms of oppression due to the biases and stereotypes about these multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1989). These different attributes also complicate women's ability to obtain formal leadership positions (Crenshaw, 1989). In this study, the intersecting social identities of the Latina school principals encompass their gender, Latinx ethnicity, role as a school leader, and often included their role as a parent. As the Latina school principals in this study reflected on how intersecting social identities



shaped their leadership experiences, the themes presented were collaborative leadership and the social intersecting identity factor of gender (Martinez & Marquez, 2020; Murakami et al, 2018). This is because the participants in this study shared that while their gender presented challenges to their leadership, in their initial experiences after ascending from a teaching position to a school administrative role, they were able to employ the use of collaborative leadership and, in turn, develop the resilience to overcome leadership challenges based on stereotypical notions about their intersecting social identities. All participants shared insights about how stakeholders in the school districts that they served as principals would often scrutinize them by keeping a close eye on their daily leadership practices (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Similar studies have shown that behaviors noted by the participants in my study, for example, challenging their authority, dismissing them from meetings, dismissing their ideas, and other forms of microaggressions, may lead Latina school leaders to internalize self-doubt as a leader (Gabriel, 2021). However, according to my participants, instead of internalizing self-doubt because of the microaggressions, the participants felt compelled to work harder and not allow the spectators who had internalized misconceptions about the leadership abilities that the participants possessed as Latina women principal to garner any evidence that they were ineffective in their administrative roles. Misconceptions about their intersecting identities also shaped Latina principals' leadership by needing to constantly prove themselves in the face of their male coworkers, who had internalized patriarchal stereotypes, deeming them to believe that males would make better school principals (Avalos, 2016). This finding is similar to what other scholars have found in their studies, indicating that because of stereotypes based on their intersecting social identities, Latinas have been perceived as less qualified based on

their racial/ethnic status, a phenomenon defined as "deficit thinking" (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, pp. 150-158).

In the face of adversity, the Latina school principals in this study demonstrated their ability to multitask and harness the assets embedded into their historically marginalized intersecting identities. All of the participants in this study are married women or mothers who must multitask effectively to meet the demands of their jobs as well as their domestic duties (Brescoll, 2016; Delgado-Romero et al., 2008; Eagly et al., 2009). They were able to enlist the collaboration of other stakeholders in their communities in order to ensure that daily leadership tasks were effectively managed in the workplace; this rapidly garnered the Latina school principals in this study staff buy-in as well as respect and admiration of their colleagues (Bagula, 2016; Yanez, 2022). Through a collaborative leadership approach, all of the Latina school principals in this study perceived gender-based assets when comprehending the needs of parents, families, and students in their communities. Studies show that women leaders can adapt and serve as leaders better than their male counterparts (Northouse, 2019). Participants shared stories about how their intersections of gender and culture also strengthened their leadership as students in the school districts they served often sought them as mentors and role models who inspired the students to aspire to become Latinx leaders (Bagula, 2016). Latina students in the school districts where the participants in this study served were often surprised when they realized that a minority woman whose gender and ethnicity mirrored their own was the school principal in their school district. All participants also stated that their intersecting social identities were an intrinsically motivational factor when they decided to aspire to

ascend to school principal positions because, despite national K-12 school districts serving over 50% of Latinx demographics, those in principal positions do not mirror the student demographic they serve (Gandara et al., 2015). Being aware of the mismatch in the leadership demographic to the student demographic came with the realization that there is a lack of role models in K-12 schools that Latina students could visualize who would empower them to overcome the long-withstanding academic achievement gap Latina students currently demonstrate (Tayloe, 2016). Moreover, Latina school principals in this study were aware of the stereotypes about their intersecting identities of Latina students enrolled in K-12 schools, a demographic with one of the lowest college attainment rates in the nation (Gandara, 2015).

Moreover, historically, minority women leaders' intersecting identities merely presented a challenge that hindered their leadership. However, the findings in this study suggest that although these intersecting social identities present challenges for women of color in their quest to achieve and perform leadership roles in work settings (Sanchez-Hucles et al., 2010), they also provide strengths that strengthen their leadership abilities.

In relation, contemporary literature explores the role of Latina leaders' intersecting identities, revealing that the intersectionality of race and class impacts Latina school principals' daily leadership practices as school administrators (Murakami et al., 2018). This literature also describes the impact of formal education on their leadership development and professional identities (Murakami et al., 2018). Predominantly, the Latina school principals in this study believe that the intersecting social identities of their gender and ethnicity, as a leader, positively impacted their leadership, as the participants all iden-

tified as female and deemed it a positive intersecting social identity in educational leadership. They believe that it benefits their leadership. Additionally, all participants except one believe that the intersecting social identity of being a mother and a woman is also an asset to their leadership (Martinez et al., 2020; Oliva & Alemán, 2019; Pimienta, 2014; Rivera, 2014). This is because all of the participants except one, in this study are parents. The participants explained that being parents motivated them to be better leaders and enabled their ability to multitask more effectively as a way to be role models for their children. All of the participants were inspired to be role models for the children in the schools they serve as school principals (Martinez et al., 2020; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Pimienta, 2014; Rivera, 2014). Previous studies demonstrated that women leaders and minoritized leaders confront domestic responsibilities, gender-role stereotyping, gender discrimination, and overt discrimination, hindering their ability to ascend into formal leadership positions during the hiring process (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Prior studies also identified race and gender as a hindrance that Latinx women school principals encounter (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). However, this study demonstrates that the intersectionality of the social identity of women, leaders, and their Latinx ethnicity is an asset that enabled Latinx women school principals to develop resistant assets or the ability to advocate for themselves and secure equal rights (Yosso, 2005) as negative experiences of gender-based stereotypes instead inspired these women to harness their leadership; the Latinx school principals in this study expressed that their gender as a woman and intersecting identities of being a mother, school leader, and Latino ethnicity enabled them to be strong, develop empathy to serve better and understand the needs of the stakeholders they

serve in their community. Additionally, gender is a social intersecting attribute that positively impacts their leadership. Therefore, contrary to popular belief, their gender facilitated their ascension trajectories by making them more adaptive and collaborative leaders who comprehend the needs of the parents, guardians, and students that they serve in their educational institutions and communities (Martinez et al., 2020; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Pimienta, 2014; Rivera, 2014). Moreover, Latinx women employed as school principals advise aspiring Latinx women administrators to advocate for themselves and hone the assets their intersecting identities provide instead of allowing misconceptions, stereotypes, and biases about these intersecting identities to demotivate them in their leadership ascension pursuit.

Although none of my participants came out to me as LGBTQ+, they also did not mention being heterosexual, although that is assumed for most of them, as they were or have been married, and all but one is a parent (Fasoli & Hegarty, 2020; Fassinger et al., 2010). Their family lives are structured around heterosexual norms, which helps them relate to the students and school families (Lawton-Sticklor, 2018). Thus, their leadership was informed by their experiences, placing the needs of their children before their own, advocating for their needs, and ensuring that the families they serve know their best interest is at the forefront of the Latina principal's priorities.

### **Reflecting on Conceptual Framework**

This study investigated the experiences of a marginalized and underrepresented school leader demographic. To better conceptualize the experiences of Latinx women school principals and vice principals who transitioned from teaching positions to school

administrative roles in New Jersey, I utilized the community of cultural wealth as my theoretical framework (Yosso, 2005). Community cultural wealth refers to the key strengths of the Latinx community that are frequently overlooked in traditional research and contains an array of knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed and utilized by marginalized communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005; 2006). Community cultural wealth has six assets: familial, linguistic, aspirational, resistant, navigational, and social (Yosso, 2005; 2006). The familial asset is the cultural knowledge nurtured among the family that carries a sense of community history and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005); for the participants in this study, familial asset enables them to treat everyone in the school communities they serve as a family while sustaining and honoring the history of their biological families' struggles. Familial assets engage a commitment to community and expand the concept of family to include a broader understanding of family (Yosso, 2005). Familial assets cultivate linguistic assets; linguistic assets draw on the strengths gained from the ability to communicate in different languages and styles (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015); Yosso, 2005; 2006). For the participants in this study, linguistic assets play a role in their ability to communicate with the families and students they serve daily as school principals. Aspirational assets provide fundamental support for Latinx community members (Mendez-Morse, 2016; Yosso, 2005; 2006) as it refers to the ability to embrace high expectations for the accomplishment of career and educational objectives, which is something all participants in this study have in common for themselves and for the students in the communities that they serve. Social assets are defined as the connections and relationships maintained with others and can be viewed as a way to access power (Yosso, 2005; 2006). The participants in this study demonstrated

benefiting from social assets shown in their ability to obtain support from others by working collaboratively on a day to day basis and establishing support networks as well as while they were enrolled in higher education institutions where they allocated mentors that enabled their leadership skills. Navigational assets are the ability of Latinx community members to effectively navigate their way in formal education institutions as they pursue education (Yosso, 2005), a commonality in the participants in this study as they all pursued their higher education degrees in educational leadership. Resistant assets refer to knowledge and skills that are fostered through oppositional behavior and challenges of inequality (Yosso, 2005), which helped all participants in this study when their leadership abilities were scrutinized after they obtained their first school administrative positions.

Participants in this study demonstrated that all forms of cultural assets impacted their ascension into school leadership positions (Yosso, 2005). For the participants in this study, their cultural assets facilitated their transition from a teaching position to a school administrative position, as the participants in this study were enabled to hone their leadership most due to the assets that their families fomented in them from childhood to their professional lives.

Using a community of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in this study enabled me to comprehend that women leaders with multiple cultural assets did not merely rely on one form of cultural wealth (or asset) over the other amid their leadership transition trajectories. CCW aligns with some of the literature reviewed for this study, which delved into Latinx communities' cultural assets and what Latina women possess as they are a subgroup among the Latinx community (Bordas, 2013; Holvino, 2010). Research on Latinx women leaders is sparse, and the literature available predominantly focuses on providing

deficit-based perspectives about the struggles Latinx community members, students, and leaders face and recounting stories of the struggle to grapple with leadership perpetuated by stereotypes due to their intersecting social identities: gender, socioeconomic background, or sexual orientation. Therefore, I sought to provide an asset-based perspective to give voice to successful Latinas now leading New Jersey schools. More intentionally, this study aimed to investigate these women's experiences and how their cultural assets impacted their leadership ascension trajectories. Findings in my study show that the participants in this study's leadership ascension trajectories were facilitated by their community cultural wealth assets (Yosso, 2005). Participants' leadership ascension trajectory experiences were associated with intersecting aspects of CCW that worked together to impact their ability to ascend from a teaching position to a school administrator position (Yosso, 2005).

Most importantly, the participants expressed the value that multiple forms of assets, specifically navigational and aspirational CCW assets, impacted their leadership experience as they transitioned into their leadership roles (Yosso, 2005; Mendez-Morse & Martinez, 2021). The navigational asset is defined as a student's skills and abilities to navigate social institutions, including educational spaces (Yosso, 2005); this is demonstrated in my participants' experiences as when they were students, they were able to navigate the universities (social institutions) effectively these Latinx women principals attended, where they obtain their formal teaching certifications and then their school administrator certifications. All except one of my participants possess two master's degrees.

Moreover, their aspirational assets, defined as their personal and professional hopes and dreams (Yosso, 2005), enabled their intrinsic passion for aspiring to become



school principals. It later became a deep commitment to the educational institutions where the participants were employed as school leaders. Moreover, all participants in this study emphasized that despite having faced gender stereotypes, the negative experiences or stereotypical beliefs about women in leadership were assets that motivated them to do well in formal leadership roles. Moreover, this study showed that Latinx women employed as school principals' initial leadership experiences demonstrated navigational and aspirational assets that continued impacting their intrinsic motivation as they honed their leadership. All cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) assets were present in their leadership ascension trajectories. However, several forms of cultural assets shaped the leadership ascension trajectories of the Latina school principals or vice principals in this study more than others. For example, in the context of this study, Familial capital was at the forefront of the participants' experiences as familial capital aligns closely with the emergent theme Family values and language (Yosso, 2005; Mendez-Morse & Martinez, 2021). In this regard, familial capital (CCW) established a foundation for the participants to be proud of their ethnic roots, never give up, speak their family language; Spanish, work hard in school, attend formal education, and value and respect the relationships with mentors or role models in their life this is because familial capital encompass the values learned and the impact of strong, caring relationships and mutual commitment (Yosso, 2005). Thus, familial assets (CCW) played a pivotal role in ensuring that they pursued a formal education by going to college.

Moreover, familial assets impelled them to devote themselves to their goals until they obtained a career promotion from a school teacher to a principal position. Linguistic capital (CCW) also benefitted them as all participants started their careers as educators in

districts serving a Spanish-speaking population. One of the participants stated that for her to obtain a promotion from a school teaching position to a school principal position, communicating in more than one language facilitated her ability to secure a promotion and advocate for higher pay because of her bilingual Spanish and English speaking linguistic abilities. Therefore, being able to serve the communities where they work better. Lastly, resistance capital also played a role in the career ascension trajectories of my participants as the source of this form of capital derived from parents, community members, and a historical legacy of experiencing inequality, securing equal rights and collective freedom, and establishing a resistance against deficit perspectives about their abilities (Yosso, 2005). In the context of this study, resistance capital played a role in my participants' leadership ascension trajectories as when they experienced microaggressions and challenges to biases others had about their leaderships, they were resistant to those forms of oppression due to their intersecting social identities and instead found motivation to work harder than their coworkers or critics as a result of the experience.

## **Implications for Educational Leadership, Practice, Policy and Future Research**

### ***Educational Leadership***

The results of this study have important implications for educational leaders who want to increase the number of Latina teachers and motivate Latinas to pursue leadership roles in the education pipeline. Aspiring Latina principals are a specific group that would benefit from support to develop their leadership skills throughout the education pipeline. The study suggests several strategies that educational leaders and other stakeholders can implement to encourage the development of Latinx leadership in K-12 education and beyond, particularly among women leaders. These strategies include improving district

staff's cultural competencies, enhancing the recruitment and retention of Latina leaders, and reviewing existing policies to foster more Latina school leadership. A collaborative approach among educational stakeholders is vital to implement these strategies, which differ from current state policies as they involve in-district initiatives that engage all stakeholders in the leadership process. The aim is to ensure the leadership development of Latinas and provide diverse mentors the opportunity to mentor Latinas effectively through a dynamic experiential approach across the lifespan of Latinas so that their leadership preparation is fostered throughout their formal education trajectories and beyond.

### ***Anti-Racist Leadership***

Practices aimed at dismantling the organizational reproduction of inequality in schools among those in power, and in charge of recruiting and retaining aspiring Latina leaders, involve implementing anti-racist leadership. This begins by addressing the race-neutral colorblind ideologies and assumptions often held by teachers, parents, school board members, and hiring managers (Diem & Welton, 2022; Khalifa, 2020).

Diem and Welton (2021) recognize that educational leaders often avoid discussing race by offering superficial initiatives like multicultural programs, celebrations, or diversity professional development that their staff members never implement. On the other hand, anti-racist leadership acknowledges race/ethnicity as a factor in schools that promote racial or ethnic awareness (Diem & Welton, 2022), which involves incorporating racial content into the curricula (Khalifa, 2020).

Furthermore, I suggest that leaders verify that the racial content is being implemented in PK-12 classrooms as they conduct yearly teacher observations. This will help

them connect with diverse minoritized educators and administrators in the district and prepare them to be part of their districts' recruitment and retention committee.

### ***System-Level Commitment***

Implementing a system-level commitment is crucial to ensure equality and inclusivity in the education system. This requires the involvement of educational teams and stakeholders to eliminate structures that reproduce inequality. Understanding the production and reproduction of inequality is essential to achieving this goal (Amis et al., 2020). System-level commitment refers to changing various system components to create a new managerial system that works collaboratively and functions differently than before (Weiner, 2009). Educational leaders must take steps to dismantle racist ideologies, structures, processes, and unequal employment outcomes for minoritized members to ensure equality and inclusion (Amis et al., 2020; Diem et al., 2022). One way to address educational inequalities is by dismantling school choice practices. This involves regulating charter schools to prevent them from having too much freedom to govern their districts and schools (Diem et al., 2022; Khalifa et al., 2016). It also requires aligning their educational policies with those of traditional public schools, adhering to standardized testing, data use practices, and funding protocols that do not perpetuate racism (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2020). Another way to address educational inequalities is by equipping staff members with the knowledge and skills to implement culturally responsive practices that cater to the needs of Latina students in their communities. This should include both teachers in the classroom and administrators in their leadership practices. Professional development centered on culturally responsive leadership is essential to ensure staff members can make equitable decisions. Scholars have noted that a lack of awareness can lead

to the perpetuation of organizational inequalities, and those in power may be more likely to hire individuals who are similar to themselves. To counter this, it is crucial to provide staff members with professional development on culturally responsive leadership, to equip veteran leaders to mentor aspiring Latina leaders, and to foster their in-district leadership preparation through mentoring, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or other social identity differences. This will enable the Latinx demographic to develop leadership and contribute to a more equitable educational system.

### ***Culturally Responsive Leadership (CRL)***

School leaders need to comprehend their students' and communities' contexts and histories to better serve them as oppressive structures and practices and engage the entire school community in these implementations as a form of social justice in schools. Thus, practices that foster equity for aspiring Latinas' leadership preparation will only be in place if the status quo is actively challenged (Amis et al., 2020; Khalifa, 2020). Therefore, educators and leaders must learn to implement the best practices against oppression (Khalifa, 2020). Culturally responsive leaders are unlike the Western school leadership model, in which principals remain in the schools and have identities as individual administrators aligned to schools; this differs from how minoritized leaders implement leadership (Khalifa, 2020).

However, they can be taught to be Culturally responsive leaders and how to establish community-based experiences that relate to the students and parents (Khalifa, 2020). Murakami et al., (2016) found that Latinx school principals connected their leadership to the Latinx community to serve and understand them best. Thus, providing them with ongoing cultural leadership professional development will equip them to excel in

districts that serve Latinx students. Moreover, implementing culturally responsive school leadership that involves the following three premises will ensure the preparation of Latina leaders at the P-20 pipeline: (1) Cultural responsiveness is an essential component of effective school leadership. (2) For cultural responsiveness to take place and be sustainable, it must be promoted concisely by the school leadership team, including the Superintendent, Curriculum supervisors, Principals, Vice Principals, School Board Members, and supporting stakeholders. (3) Culturally responsive school leadership is characterized by a core set of leadership behaviors, including being critically self-reflective; developing and sustaining cultural response teachers and curricula; promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school environments; and engaging students' indigenous or community contexts through collaboration.

## **Implications for Practice**

### ***Improving District Wide Cultural Competencies Among Staff Members***

As members of a minoritized culture, Latinx community members are often subjected to injustice (Sue, 2010). Moreover, due to stereotypes and biases, Latinx individuals have often been deprived of desired career opportunities, education, health care, or living conditions for physical and mental well-being (Sue, 2010). Moreover, contemporary management culture does not critically engage with developing affirmative action-oriented managerial perspectives that prevent biases (Amis et al., 2020; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Thus, this negatively impacts women's ability to progress in aspiring careers (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). In the context of this study, Latina leaders mentioned that after obtaining a promotion and ascending into a school principal or vice principal

position, they experienced microaggressions or marginalization due to the effects of implicit bias, conscious or unconscious, due to stereotypes based on their different social intersecting identities (Sue, 2010). Thus, it is crucial to establish formal professional development programs that are not currently in place in the K-12 pipeline, which may ensure a nurturing of cultural intelligence among the staff members, diminish bias towards Latina leaders or aspiring Latina leaders, and ensure a positive school culture and climate in educational organizations.

### ***Cultural Competency Professional Development Requirement***

The NJDOE has established vague curriculum guidelines for educators of different discipline areas to improve cultural competence among stakeholders in K-12 schools in the classroom [into the curriculum]. However, no mandated professional development training requires cultural competence development among the staff members in the K-12 pipeline. Each new academic year, educators nationwide start the year in the summer. They are being trained on repetitive units that do not provide cultural intelligence development, which may help dismantle biases stifling the Latinx community's leadership development. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is an individual's capacity to function and manage effectively in diverse cultural settings, emphasizing adaptability and success in varied cultural contexts (Ang et al., 2007). At the same time, intercultural competence refers to an individual's proficiency in understanding and adjusting their behavior to account for cultural differences and similarities. With this in mind, providing staff-wide cultural competency training may ensure the development of cultural intelligence and intercultural competence that will impel a better school climate in order to address microaggressions towards aspiring and currently practicing Latina leaders and ensure equal employment

opportunities for these applicants as such training will ensure all stakeholders in schools develop a deeper comprehension of diverse cultural norms and practices (Hammer, 2012).

Since all school districts in NJ implement ongoing in-district professional development training each academic year, this is a feasible practice as it may take place during August (prior to the beginning of a new academic year) or on an ongoing basis, depending upon the particular school or school demographic. For example, if the student demographic aligns closely with the staff member's demographics, offering this type of training for several days during summer institute may be sufficient. However, if the staff demographic is very different from the students being served cultural competence professional development should be ongoing; thus, teachers should be required to partake in it on a bi-weekly basis during the time allotted for in-district professional development, which is usually after school; in charter school districts as educators are mandated to stay on campus for one hour after student dismissal (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2019). In traditional public schools, the modules for professional development are to be completed at the discretion of the staff member; they may elect to complete them during their preparation period (non-instructional period) on their daily schedule (New Jersey Department of Education, 2024).

The learning modules could be developed in alignment with The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986; 1993). Staff members should also be provided a physical copy of the Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication (Bennett, 2013), a book on the framework. There are many different platforms that school boards may elect to utilize to implement the initiative; for example, the International Foundation



for the Advancement of Reflective Learning and Teaching (ARLT) or another virtual platform whose goals entail providing the school teams with the skills to address unjust social structures or sustain a positive school culture and climate at the K-12 pipeline.

It is also beneficial for school leadership teams in NJ to provide yearly structured professional development programs for educators and administrators in the district around cultural competence and stereotypes/gender bias to create positive experiences for Latina students (Kim & Brien, 2018). Latinx students are more likely than students of other ethnic groups to attend K-12 public schools in districts that provide limited college-related information and whose staff lacks a commitment to facilitate their access to college-bound resources (Grodsky & Jones, 2007); this may be due to lack of cultural asset comprehension from their teachers and administrators. Therefore, establishing support programs to advocate on behalf of these students and ensure that the K-12 educators and administrators serving them can establish high expectations among the Latinx student body will enable them to improve lower college-going aspirations due to the low expectations established by the staff in their attending districts when compared to other ethnic groups (Bohon et al., 2006; Hurtado et al., 1997). In turn, establishing more supporting programming may inspire more Latinx students to pursue a college education, which may improve their low college graduation rates, as other empirical studies denote that Latinx students are least likely to apply to college and to engage in an extensive college search and choice process (Desmond & Lopez-Turley, 2009; Hurtado et al., 1997). Moreover, it is adequate to ensure that school faculty and staff know the cultural strengths (Yosso, 2005) that Latinx students possess and receive professional development support to com-

prehend this student demographic better. Therefore, the school leadership team may collaborate to ensure adequate school/district-wide professional development to educate the team about best-serving school communities (Menchaca et al., 2017). Additionally, cultural competence training may enable administrators and teachers to address the academic achievement gap between Latinx students and their White and Asian counterparts (Hernandez & Kose, 2012). Overall, the training may be beneficial in raising awareness about unconscious biases and positive school culture and ensuring a climate of equal treatment that will eliminate or prevent biases or stereotypes for minoritized staff members, particularly Latina leaders.

### *Cultivating Staff Diversity*

Cultivating staff diversity in school districts that serve Latinx and other minority populations is an essential aspect of ensuring students' motivation and the achievement of educational outcomes that may ameliorate the academic achievement gap (Byrd, 1999; Howard, 2019; Villegas & Davis, 2008). In order to cultivate staff diversity, school districts should be committed to social justice (Reynolds & Tabron, 2022). Employing social justice leadership may ensure equity in hiring, promotion, recruitment, and retention, as social justice is based on a fair society, which provides individuals and groups fair treatment and equal opportunities to advance in society (Donker, 2013). However, many scholars note that organizations, such as educational institutions, are often far from being neutral entities and constitute bounded, rationalized, and formalized spaces in which economic opportunities intersect with structures of exclusion and disadvantage. Thus, this generates an organizational reproduction of inequality (Amis et al., 2020). Social reproduction of inequality refers to the idea that inequality is continually socially reproduced

because the entire education system is overlain and created to continue advancing dominant groups (The Social Reproduction of Inequality, 2018). Thus, when it occurs in organizational institutions, it perpetuates systematic progress, hindering practices for minoritized individuals (Amis et al., 2020). In *The Organizational Reproduction of Inequality*, Amis et al. (2020) provide insight into practices that hinder staff diversity; these include hiring practices, role allocation, promotion, compensation, and structuring (Amis et al., 2020). The perpetuation of inequality is a complex issue influenced by various factors within hiring protocols, promotion procedures, job assignments, and compensation systems (Amis et al., 2020). These factors act as barriers, limit advancement opportunities, confine individuals to predetermined social identities, and solidify economic disparities, often in conjunction with established laws, regulations, societal norms, and traditions. Furthermore, rigid structures within organizations further reinforce existing power imbalances, making it difficult for individuals to overcome these obstacles and achieve their full potential. In this study, unequal organizational reproductions usually occur during the hiring phase, which serves as a gatekeeping tool that facilitates opportunities for some while hindering the opportunities for others (Rivera, 2012). Hiring may enable inequality for aspiring Latina principals in three different ways:

1. The widespread use of cultural similarity as an evaluative shortcut
2. The unreflective use of tools and instruments in recruitment processes
3. And the reliance on informal networks in screening and selecting candidates

Crucially, hiring decisions are influenced by managers' positive bias toward people they regard as similar to themselves (Kanter, 1977). In these instances, cultural similarities are

prevalent in hiring for managerial and professional positions, which may explain why often, Latina teachers like the participants in this study are more likely than Whites to be employed and remain consistent in challenging to staff urban schools whose student demographic entail predominantly students from low-income, ethnic/racial minoritized (Achinstein et al., 2010). Thus, during the Latina teacher recruitment phase, it is essential for hiring managers (education board members, chief of schools, and other hiring committee members) to implement impartial practices that will dismantle subconscious biases, implement a formal tool for recruitment to be utilized in the interview phase on all applying candidates, and remove the reliance on informal networks during the screening and selecting phase (Amis et al., 2020). These practices will ensure the cultivation of staff diversity and equal opportunity outcomes for aspiring Latina leaders.

### ***Recruitment & Retention of Latina Educational Leaders***

Effective strategies exist for recruiting and retaining Latinx leaders in academic institutions. These strategies include enhancing the leadership development of Latina teachers in the district so that they can transition to principal positions with the necessary support (Garza, 2019; Martinez & Marquez, 2020). This can be achieved through collaborative leadership opportunities and professional development programs, which have been proven effective in combating isolation and lack of support among aspiring Latina principals (Bagula, 2016; Murakami et al., 2015).

Formal support groups, such as supplementary educational programs, newsletters, and after-school events, can also facilitate career ascension trajectories by providing leadership opportunities for Latina teachers (Toscano, 2023). Providing in-district mentors can benefit aspiring Latina leaders, as enthusiastic and passionate mentors can be positive

role models (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). These mentors do not necessarily need to be of the same culture or gender as the aspiring leaders, as diverse managers can effectively enable leadership (Bell & Goldsmith, 2013). In the absence of Latina principals or vice principals, it may be beneficial to construct mentors for aspiring Latina leaders from veteran school administrators with social justice leadership attributes (Bell & Goldsmith, 2013). The best mentors for aspiring leaders are those who can teach by role modeling, engage in compassion, mutually search for wisdom, and are determined to develop mutually trusting relationships with aspiring leaders (Bell & Goldsmith, 2013).

Aspiring Latina school principals can also benefit from advocating for themselves as leaders, utilizing their cultural assets, such as linguistic abilities, to serve in high-needs communities (Menchaca et al., 2017). To develop the ability to advocate for themselves, they must develop supportive relationships with veteran leaders who can teach them the ropes. Participating in activities related to cultural diversity, networking with seasoned leaders, research, service, and professional development in diverse bilingual/bicultural settings have proven effective techniques for aspiring Latina school principals (Menchaca et al., 2017).

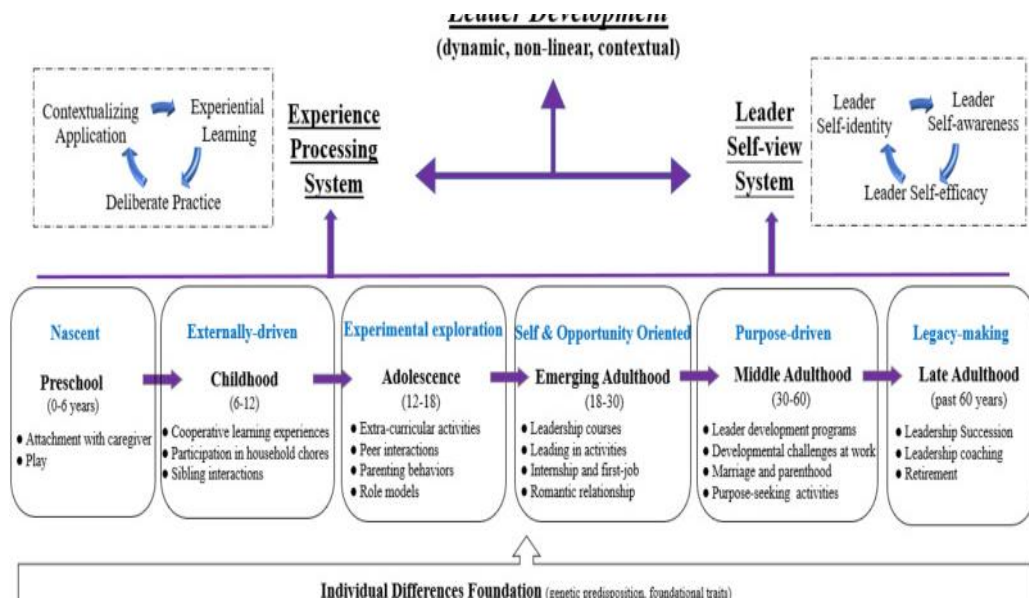
### ***Leader Development Across the Lifespan***

Recruiting and retaining Latina teachers and administrators can be made more accessible by implementing the Leader Development across the lifespan dynamic experiential framework in K-12 education, as suggested by Liu et al. (2021). Developing leadership skills is an ongoing process that should be nurtured in young Latina girls from the early stages of their formal education. Therefore, initiating leadership development from

preschool and continuing it throughout K-12 education is essential. Governor Phil Murphy also supports this idea and has passed a bill that allows K-12 institutions to collaborate with higher education institutions to increase the number of teachers (NJPSA Legislative Conference, 2014). Currently, 25 schools are partnered with Rowan University to ensure students across New Jersey can attain a college education (Marshall, 2024). This program could also increase the number of Latina teachers by allowing them to pursue careers in education while still in high school. Previous studies have emphasized fostering leadership qualities from early childhood to adulthood (Liu et al., 2021). As every stage of life presents unique opportunities for leadership development, it is crucial to prioritize critical developmental experiences. According to Liu et al. (2021), these stages offer moral or ethical leadership implications later in life. This model supports the idea that experimental explorations provided for adolescents in multiple contexts can help develop their collaborative leadership skills later in life. Other scholars whose research focuses on this particular demographic have also recommended that Latina girls in grades K-12 are supported to foster their leadership skills throughout their lives (Huber et al., 2006; Martinez et al., 2020; Zambrana et al., 2013). The Liu et al., (2021) framework emphasizes the importance of leadership development starting in the preschool stage and progressing through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. It should be implemented in NJ school districts to achieve this goal. To empower Latina students, we must provide them with role models and engage them in extracurricular activities during adolescence.

**Figure 6**

*The Leader Development Across the Lifespan Framework*



*Note.* This framework examines how critical experiences shape leadership throughout life. It explores opportunities and mechanisms that foster leadership development to enhance leadership and pedagogical practices (Liu et al., 2021).

Therefore, it will offer opportunities for collaboration and exposure to role models in the school setting, establishing a solid foundation for them to develop aspirations for pursuing formal education and potentially even attaining a managerial role, such as that of a school principal, in the future. To increase teacher buy-in and awareness about the importance of providing their students with hands-on learning opportunities in the K-12 pipeline, this model can be presented in-district during summer months in preparation for the upcoming academic year. Implementing the lifespan Dynamic experiential approach

(Liu et al., 2021) may be particularly significant in districts that serve a predominantly Latinx population to foster the early leadership development of future Latina principals.

### **Experiential Learning**

Moreover, Li et al. (2006) argue that using appropriate pedagogical strategies coupled with a dynamic modeling environment will help students better articulate their thoughts through model building, facilitating the learning mastery process and challenging their outdated learning notions (Li et al., 2006). The experiential learning process is relevant to the leader development dynamic lifespan framework developed by Liu et al. (2021) as it provides students leadership development opportunities through on-the-job experiences that enable leadership. Thus, in a time of dire need in the education field, Latina teachers or administrators may ensure the educational retention of Latino students by providing students experiential leadership development. These opportunities must be specific age-related and age-appropriate experiences impact leader development (Liu et al., 2021). Moreover, Latina educators and administrators must be willing to facilitate the learning process by modeling academic expectations and supporting students' alternative conceptions (Li et al., 2006). Thus, students' explanations were often considered partly right rather than wrong to provide social support and cognitive perturbation to facilitate conceptual change in students who may not be engaged in their learning (Li et al., 2006). Therefore, for conceptual change and to enable students to develop a stronger sense of ownership and autonomy over their inquiry process, the dynamic modeling environment used in the (Law & Liu, 2006) study provided the students with a user-friendly, rich, and exploratory medium to express their ideas and tentative explanations in comparison with other static or graphical representations.



With this in mind, the New Jersey Department of Education may benefit from implementing experiential learning and close mentoring to improve the retention of Latina students currently enrolled in teacher or administrator preparation to increase the recruitment and retention of Latina students enrolled in higher education teacher or administrator programs. Through a curriculum redesign, experiential learning and research mentoring can facilitate this process. It will permit Latinx students to engage in problem-based learning and research experiences that increase their opportunity to engage in unlearning community approaches and cohort-based classes that immerse them in engaging and supportive forms of learning. Jin et al., (2019)'s research found that the implementation of experiential learning and one-on-one mentoring increased Latinx college student enrollment from 66 to 102 over four academic years at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and that the retention rate over the same period nearly doubled from 43% to 80% thus, decreasing the time to graduate by approximately two years and that other institutions may benefit from emulating a learning community and mentored pedagogical approach to ensure the recruitment and retention of Latino students (Jin et al, 2019).

Moreover, experiential learning may also benefit the recruitment and retention of in district aspiring Latina leaders as experiential learning takes place in contexts beyond educational institutions; for example, the Center for Hispanic Policy, Research, and Development Office (2024) has implemented the Governor's Hispanic Fellows Program, that supports aspiring Latinx leaders that utilizes an experiential and mentored pedagogical approach. The program is geared towards high-performance students interested in diversity and inclusion who seek to develop their leadership skills in preparation for a successful career (N.J. Department of State (NJDOS) Center for Hispanic Policy, Research

and Development Governor's Hispanic Fellows Program, 2024). Aspiring Latinx leaders are provided hands-on experience with traditional classroom instruction as part of the program. The program requirements entail being a resident of N.J., of Hispanic descent, enrolled in a two or 4-year college or university, and being a U.S. Citizen or Legal Permanent Resident (NJDOS, 2024).

Many K-12 campuses have Latinx student groups. However, there is a need for more specific groups that focus on the educational experiences of Latina students and their families. The findings in this study suggest that cultural values are an intertwined aspect of the Latina school principals and vice principals in this study that inevitably drives their leadership as educational leaders (Bordas, 2013; Holvino, 2010; Mendez-Morse & Martinez, 2021). With this in mind, policies at the K-12 level should prioritize the understanding of Latinx cultural values as assets for policies. Thus, state leaders are responsible for supporting greater diversity in our nation's teaching force (Wisher, 2023). Since all of the participants in this study were teachers before ascending into principal or vice principal positions, it is of utmost importance for school boards to work fervently to staff bilinguals in educator and school principal roles to serve students in Latinx communities. Little is known about the linguistic diversity of the current teacher workforce, which makes increasing linguistic diversity among educators an urgent area for policy-making (Wisher, 2023). Current state programs such as Grow Your Own at the secondary school pipeline are aimed at increasing teacher diversity and thus providing minoritized teachers opportunities to give back to their communities, aiming to provide students with apprenticeships and internships in the teaching profession (Wisher, 2023).

In contrast, in high school, however, there is a dire need for state leaders to provide more support to qualifying aspiring Latina school principals (Martinez et al, 2016; Méndez-Morse, Sylvia, et al, 2015; Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020). Some programs support aspiring school principals at the national level. The School Superintendents Association (NAESP) offers a yearlong cohort-based academy designed to support aspiring, assistant, and early career principals in attaining the essential skills to develop or improve their leadership. This should be done by advocating and informing qualifying candidates for such positions. There is no current national policy that requires this. However, it would be an excellent initiative for state legislators to support as it would mandate school districts to equip qualified teachers to ascend into principal positions by recommending them as long as they qualify for such initiative. This means that even if they do not intend to promote qualifying educators in-district, they would be mandated to recruit them as part of the Equal Educational Opportunities (EEOA) Act, which mandates schools serving significant Spanish-speaking demographics to provide bilingual education. Including aspiring Latina administrators who qualify in these initiatives will provide advocacy for their leadership development and should be a growth opportunity for Latinx educators who have completed a master's degree, are Bilingual in Spanish, and have passed the state-required school principal assessment.

### **Implications for Policy**

To address the shortage of teachers in hard-to-staff areas, Governor Phil Murphy of New Jersey enacted a bill (S-1553 / P.L. 2023, c. 180) in 2023. This legislation is a positive step towards recruiting and retaining teachers, particularly aspiring Latina leaders who may have difficulty passing the basic skills examination due to language barriers.

The bill streamlines the teacher certification process and removes a potential obstacle for aspiring Latina school principals interested in starting their careers in education as teachers. With this adjustment, it will be easier for aspiring Latina principals who teach math, science, art, and other subjects to obtain state teaching licensure.

### **NJ Executive Order to Address Staff Shortages**

In addition to enacting this bill, Governor Phil Murphy established a task force to help address the State's educational workforce challenges. The Task Force on Public School Staff Shortages in New Jersey, created under Executive Order No. 309, will develop short- and long-term recommendations to increase the number of K-12 school staff in the State, including teachers and support staff (NJDOE, 2024). This task force will also explore best practices and innovative ways to recruit and retain school staff and identify best practices and resources to increase the pipeline of teachers and educational support candidates. These efforts are significant given the significant decrease in the number of teaching certifications issued today compared to a decade ago. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated existing shortages, particularly in high-demand areas such as special education, science, math, and bilingual education. This new order may benefit aspiring Latina leaders who have a certification in a high-demand subject area and are currently unemployed and seeking to start their careers in the field of education as a teacher.

### **NJ Teacher Certification & Reciprocity**

Certified Latina school principals or vice principals from other states nationally can quickly transfer their Out-of-State Certificate Equivalent to a Standard Certificate as the requirements for this entail holding a valid standard certificate issued by another state

and demonstrating at least two effective years of teaching within three consecutive years of the last four calendar years, as documented on the electronic Record of Professional Experience form which will be sent to the employer when an aspiring NJ teacher from another state applies or they must hold a National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certificate in the equivalent subject area/grade level (State of New Jersey, 1996-2024 Department of Education, 2024).

However, according to the NJDOE, there is no reciprocity available for certified teachers who may seek to relocate to the state of NJ; NJ educators must meet all NJ Certificate of Eligibility (CE) requirements. Additionally, an Out-of-State Certificate is Equivalent to a Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing (CEAS or "Traditional Route") (State of New Jersey, 1996-2024 Department of Education, 2024). Educators must complete each of the following requirements: (1) Hold the equivalent of a valid CEAS following the completion of a CEAS educator preparation program which includes clinical practice or "student teaching". (2) Demonstrate passage of a subject-matter test to receive the out-of-state license or pass appropriate New Jersey subject-matter test (State of New Jersey, 1996-2024 Department of Education, 2024).

The lack of teacher reciprocity in NJ diminishes the ability of certified teachers who may want to relocate to the state of NJ to pursue a career in education. This decreases the candidate pool of Latinas, which may be deemed a crucial effective practice to increase the number of Latina school principals or vice principals in the state of New Jersey, as all of the participants in this study started their careers as teachers.

## **NJ Residency Requirement**

Increasing the representation of certified Latina school principals and teachers in NJ schools may be further complicated as the current residency requirements prohibit candidates from local states from working in New Jersey. Moreover, The New Jersey First Act, enforced since September 1, 2011, bars certified teachers from neighboring states from taking up teaching jobs in NJ public schools (Labor & Workforce Development, 2024). As per the act, aspiring NJ teachers must live in New Jersey unless exempted (Labor & Workforce Development, 2024). If aspiring teachers live outside New Jersey, they must relocate to NJ within one year of employment (Labor & Workforce Development, 2024). This residency requirement poses a challenge for certified Latina teachers in neighboring states like Pennsylvania or New York who wish to pursue a teaching career in NJ. Waiving the residency requirement can be a potential solution to address the current teacher shortage and increase the representation of Latina teachers in NJ K-12 schools.

## **Consideration for Future Research**

Further research should be conducted to replicate the findings of this study in various states to identify similar themes and experiences of Latinx female school principals across the country. This can include investigating the impact of Latinx women in principal roles on the academic progress of the schools they lead. A study can also be conducted to analyze the effect of being a Latinx female school principal on graduation rates, state exams, rates of English as a Second Language (ESL) reclassification, and overall academic achievement. Additionally, researching Latinx parents' perspectives on their

daughters attending college can provide valuable insights. Another study can be conducted to explore the perspectives of secondary school Latina students on leadership development, struggles, and stereotypes. It may be fruitful to conduct a study to analyze Latinx parents' perspectives on sending their daughters attending college or a study of secondary school Latina students addressing their perspectives on leadership development, struggles, and stereotypes. Conducting a study of district office administrators and their perspectives about the current support systems for Latina women, Latina K-12 students, and Latinx educators to hone their leadership may also benefit future Latinx leaders.

## **Conclusions**

This study focused on capturing the essence of Latinx women principals and vice principals in NJ as they ascended into principalship from teaching positions. Examining their career trajectory was crucial as they are part of a minoritized demographic that has historically been marginalized. Thus, the experiences of Latinx women in the United States related to stereotypes about their intersecting social identities that were present in this study and challenged the leadership of Latina leaders. Stereotypes based on patriarchal norms about school leadership were a recurring experience that shaped the leadership ascension trajectories of the women in this study (Carroll, 2021; Esparza, 2023). However, their career ascension trajectories were positively shaped by cultural assets often misconstrued as deficits (Yosso, 2005; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002; Zentella, 2005). The essence of the study revealed that Latina school principals' leadership is shaped by their social intersecting identities and that attributes that have been historically marginalized when they are aware are instead the catalyst for their leadership (Bordas, 2013;

2023; Jimenez, 2022; Rodela et al., 2020; Saiz, 2021). Moreover, providing them with intrinsic passion and personal beliefs of self-confidence provided these women with a strong work ethic that supported their ascension into school leadership positions. Their family and cultural values catalyzed these women to prioritize formal education, which is required to attain formal leadership positions as school principals (Bagula, 2016; Murakami et al., 2013; Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020). The essence of their experiences shows that despite the stereotypes of the intersecting social identity of gender as women and leaders, all of the participants in this study attained and thrived in such positions and can draw on community cultural wealth to build successful academic environments for minoritized students in the school districts that they serve as school principals resistant cultural assets play a vital role in the leadership of the Latinx women in this study. Overcoming stereotypes about the intersectionality of gender helped them develop unique perspectives that make their leadership style more relational and, thus, non-hierarchical (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). The Latinx women's ability to overcome gender-based stereotypes is evident as the participants in this study all describe their leadership style as collaborative and adaptive. Professional challenges these five Latinx women faced strengthened their commitment and passion for giving back to their communities of residence. Establishing strong support partnerships was essential for these participants to succeed in this patriarchal leadership environment (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Hernandez et al., 2014). There is a dire need for Latinx women harnessing their leadership at the K-12 level to have mentors who serve as role models and support them as they transition from K-12 into college (Bagula, 2016; Martinez et al., 2020; Saiz, 2021); it is crucial to note that good mentors may for this specific demographic do not



need to be limited to the same ethnicity as the women in this study mentioned that their formal mentors were both women and men of other ethnicities. The study's findings also suggest that policymakers in educational organizations (e.g., educational board members at the state level) can develop policies to empower Latina students, given the experiences of discrimination and stereotypes due to misconceptions about their intersecting social identities (Martinez et al., 2020; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014). Educational leaders can use the findings of this study as a way to create a new policy in their educational institutions and refine dated policies using this contemporary research about the experiences of Latinx women's leadership development. For example, educational leaders at the college level can use this research to implement ongoing curriculum reviews and revisions to higher education programs that conduct yearly curriculum reviews to ensure that future leaders of minoritized and non-minoritized cultures become leaders for equity.

In addition, dismantling oppressive hiring practices is essential, and a way to ensure this is by aligning the certification criteria in all public schools, including school-of-choice options, e.g., charter and magnet schools whose current N.J. policies permit them to hire and promote an aspiring principal whom merely possess a school supervisor certification, which does not require them to enroll in the NJ state-mandated 350 supervised (mentored) internship, nor requires these candidates to pass the 4-hour school principal assessment (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2019). Currently, at least 28 states out of 50 in USA territories do not require their charter school leaders to be certified (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2019). Aligning the requirements for applicants may ensure more equitable opportunities to ascend from a school teaching role

to a school principal position for highly qualified, certified aspiring Latina school principals who possess their school principal certification and not merely the school supervisor credential or make the requirements more lenient for all public school aspiring Latina leaders in alignment with the newly modified NJDOE policies for the recruitment of teachers during a time of national teacher attrition crisis.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your educational background?
2. How long and in how many schools/districts have you been a vice/assistant principal or principal?
3. What does a typical day look like?
4. Tell me a little about how you think about leadership and which leadership approaches are most effective for you?
5. Tell me about the ways in which your identities (and this can be broad and include race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, your Identity as a mom, as a daughter, etc.)...affect your leadership?
6. Can you tell me about any ways that being a Latina has shaped your leadership experiences?
7. Can you tell me about any ways that your cultural values shape your leadership?
8. As a Latinx woman employed as a K-12 school principal, what advice would you share with Latinx women aspiring to attain a leadership position?