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## The Underrepresentation of Hispanic Female Educational Leaders and Their Perceived Barriers

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The Underrepresentation of Hispanic Female Educational Leaders and Their Perceived Barriers

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The Underrepresentation of Hispanic Female Educational Leaders  
and their Perceived Barriers

Angela Jane Schmitz

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of  
Doctor of Education

National Louis University

2020

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceived barriers faced by 15 Hispanic women who were current or aspiring educational leaders or employed in K-12 public education. This research highlights the underrepresentation of Hispanic female leaders in American K-12 schools compared to that of Hispanic students, the fastest growing minority population in the United States. The study incorporates the literature supporting the importance of diversity among women leaders in education. The pertinent literature identifies historical barriers to diverse representation among educational leaders and emphasizes the value of mentoring for Hispanic female leaders in terms of strengthening representation at the higher tiers of educational leadership positions. This study inquired into the lived experiences of female Hispanic educational leaders with a focus on how culture, language, and gender affected their ascent into educational leadership and teaching positions. The findings of this study suggest that perceived barriers were directly and indirectly attributed to being Hispanic, while institutional, gender, and cultural factors hindered as well as enhanced career aspirations.

## PREFACE

My educational background extends 18 years in the profession. I started my career as a teacher of students in the Exceptional Student Education program at a high school. Following this position, I was Dean of Discipline for 11 years. Following my years as a Dean, I held positions as a Behavior Technician and Behavior Interventionist. I began working as a Transition Specialist and Social Worker and held that position for five years at the district's Evaluation Center. During this time, I worked with the Hispanic population and began to learn about their culture and the barriers these families and students faced getting into school and staying in school. Since then, I became a Coordinator for the district's Graduation Enhancement Technicians who work in heavily Hispanic populated schools helping to reduce chronic absenteeism. Working in this position, I observed the need for more Hispanic female leaders in education and especially in schools enrolling high percentages of Hispanic students many of which schools were Title 1 designated school sites.

When I first started working in Title 1 schools enrolling a majority Hispanic population, I started to notice very quickly that I did not observe any Hispanic principals or assistant principals leading these schools. In fact, there were only a few Hispanic males and only one Hispanic female principal in my entire school district. I thought, how could this possibly be and why? Rectifying this lack of diversity, especially in the representation of Hispanic women in leadership roles, became my motivation and passion. This study is an outgrowth of my desire to investigate not only the gender gap but to further ascertain why Hispanic leadership was lacking in these predominantly Hispanic student-populated schools. I experienced in my youth this lack of role models

who looked like me and whom I could emulate. I know how that can impact a young child's life.

Having worked with Title 1 schools and predominantly Hispanic student populations, I saw students struggle each day who were already labeled as at risk for dropping out of school, often living a life of crime, or working in the fields to support their families. Often they had no one in administrative leadership roles with whom they could identify and who could truly understand their culture and inspire them to be successful and productive citizens. To begin to value themselves, value learning, and connect to the school culture, these students required education leaders who experienced similar barriers and challenges and spoke their native language.

Exploring the cause and effect regarding the underrepresentation of Hispanic female educational leaders, through my study I investigated the barriers they experienced and the need for support systems required. Such support systems serve several functions: first, to inform school district leaders who oversee aspiring leaders programs; secondly, to provide research based information to Hispanic females aspiring to leadership positions or advancement in educational leadership; to explore the cause and effect of the underrepresentation of Hispanic female leaders in order to inform the professional educational community at large about the challenges faced by this population of aspiring leaders; and to provide a framework for future research to expand inquiries of comparable issues.

The study I undertook resulted in the powerful stories of 15 women whom I interviewed and I felt a kindred connection because of my own struggles growing up. Although I am not Hispanic, I was perceived and I perceived myself as not belonging to

a particular group and as not destined for leadership roles in many of the same ways as my research participants. The leadership lessons that I learned from this study were incredibly beneficial to reshaping my own career aspirations, as I was able to redefine my membership and belonging in a higher education setting and educational leadership administrative role. I aspire to transition to a postsecondary institution position where I can continue my research work, teach, and speak on my topic.

I learned the value of research design. I experienced how research is able to provide an avenue in which the voices of Hispanic female educators may be heard and affirmed. During the process of research, there was communicated, through the collaboration of voice and the sharing of experiences, a greater awareness of cultural differences, existing barriers, the lack of and need for Hispanic role models in leadership positions, and the overwhelming need for support and mentoring.

The greater understanding that I gleaned from the experience of undertaking this study made me a better equipped scholar and more insightful educator. Due in part to my rough start as a child as I just tried to fit in and make a difference, I have been a transformational leader during my entire professional education career. Entering my dissertation journey as a transformational leader, the experience and the greatest lesson I learned was a reaffirmation of my belief in perseverance. I believe that as an educator, I must stay the course toward accomplishing my goals and upon embracing my professional goals, reach back to pull someone else up...*each one teach one*.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge a number of people for their support and guidance throughout my doctoral journey. First, I must thank my two daughters, Alecia and Ashley, for their love, enduring support, encouragement and firm belief that I can reach my professional goals. I love you both to the moon and back. I want to say a special thanks to my best friend, Lauren, and my father, August, for being there for me throughout the entire doctoral program. You all have been my best cheerleaders.

I express my great appreciation to my dissertation chair, Dr. Carla Sparks, and my dissertation committee member, Dr. Marguerite Chabau, for their wisdom and guidance in helping me complete a dissertation that is useful and of which I am very proud. They exemplify the leadership practices to which I aspire. I want to acknowledge Dr. Carla Sparks' countless hours of reflecting, reading, and encouraging me, as well as her incredible patience throughout the entire process. The leadership lessons that I have learned from you are immeasurable.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. James Lawson, my cohort members, and my colleagues for their support. They contributed more than they know to my successful completion of this goal. I am privileged to know such fine people.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the 15 Hispanic women who participated in my research study. Without their support, none of this work would have been possible. My great hope is that this work will continue to benefit Hispanic female educators as they aspire to become educational leaders.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The demographic makeup of the United States is rapidly changing. As of 2010, the United States Census Bureau reported that there are 50.5 million individuals who identify themselves as Hispanics in the United States, comprising 16% of the total population (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). The term Hispanic has been defined by the United States Census Bureau as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (2020, para 1). This population in the United States reached nearly 58 million in 2016 and has been the principal driver of U. S. demographic growth, accounting for half of the national population growth since 2000. The Hispanic population itself has evolved during this time, with changes in immigration, education and other characteristics (Pew Research Center, 2017). With this paradigm shift in the U. S. population, a critical need was created for more Hispanic women to pursue careers in PK-12 public schools, particularly as applied to teaching and the attainment of educational leadership roles. Through this study, I examined the potential barriers for such career aspirations perceived by Hispanic female educators in an attempt to facilitate institutional remedies that more accurately reflected a changing U. S. population.

To understand the gap between White educational leaders and ethnic minority leaders, I needed to compare the trends in overall population to the number from each group represented within public education. While the student population in U. S. public schools continues to become more diverse, the population of school leadership remains comparatively homogenous. According to the 2017-18 National Center for Education

Statistics (NCES), about 79% of public school teachers were White, 9% were Hispanic, 7% were Black, 2% were Asian, 2% were of two or more races, and 1% were American Indian/Alaska Native (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The Department of Education projected that by the year 2020 the United States would see 14.0 million Hispanic students enrolled in public education (2020). Of the 89,810 principals at K-12 schools in the United States in 2011, 6.8% (6,107) were Hispanic (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013). The discrepancies between the population of Hispanics in general, the number of Hispanic principals, and the increasing diversity of the student population in K-12 public school districts point to both a racial and gender gap that was increasing over time. About 76% of public school teachers were female with only 9% Hispanic female, and in 2017-18, about 78% of public school principals were White, 11 % were Black, and 9 % were Hispanic (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

I intended to implement this study as a means to gain a deeper understanding of Hispanic women and explore the lived experiences of current and aspiring female educators within two public school districts in the United States. Through this study, I explored, examined, and compared the participants' experiences and perceptions through semi-structured interviews in order to uncover the perceived challenges they faced while securing their career aspirations.

### **Problem Background**

A 2018 report from the Department of Education in the state of the districts under study indicated an underrepresentation of Hispanic women in educational leadership positions where this study was conducted. According to the report, Hispanics accounted

for 0.09% of full-time officials, administrators and managers (citation withheld to protect confidentiality). Yet, projections by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U. S. Department of Labor (2019) indicated Hispanics will make up nearly 20% of the country's labor force by the year 2024. Additional data from the NCES – the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing school data – demonstrated the percentage of Hispanic public school principals had barely budged over the last 25 years. Despite the increasing diversity in school populations, the demographics of school principals had remained the same.

In the 2007–08 school year, only 17.6 % of principals of all U. S. schools were from minority backgrounds according to the report by the U. S. Department of Education, *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce* (U. S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016). As evidenced by this data and the population trends previously detailed, more Hispanic women serving as teachers and leaders in elementary and secondary education were clearly needed. This shortage of female education administrators was compelling. The need for qualified competent educational leaders in all segments of the education field was critical for improving the educational opportunity for all students.

In addition to the changing face of society, the demographic makeup of students enrolled in U. S. public schools has likewise changed. Enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools increased from 48.8 million to 50.3 million between Fall 2004 and Fall 2014, and is projected to continue increasing to 51.7 million by the Fall 2026 (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Common Core of Data*, 2020). Diversity in school leadership creates opportunities for minority students to

make relevant connections with educational leaders of their own ethnicity and gender. Gonzales (2007), supported that view, stating that having Hispanic females lead our schools may be beneficial to students, by serving as role models for Hispanic children. The researcher Gonzales attributed that benefit to Hispanics having a deep understanding of the nature of the families they served and, as a result, being able to positively influence student success and academic performance. Arne Duncan, former Secretary of Education, as quoted by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, stated that “with the increase in Hispanic population, it is important to have a teaching workforce that reflects the student population in order to meet the demands of our nation’s young people” (White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, 2020, p.1). In a 2018 study, researchers surveyed more than 80,000 public school students and found that when students had teachers of the same race as the students, they reported feeling more cared for, more interested in their schoolwork, and more confident in their teachers' abilities to communicate with them. The researchers also stated that those students reported putting forth more effort in school and having higher college aspirations when they had teachers with the same ethnicity as them (Egalite & Kisida, 2018).

In addition, members of The Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS) said they believed that there should be a more comparable representation of Latino superintendents with the Latino student population and were committed to identifying, recruiting, developing, and advancing Latino school administrators. ALAS stated that approach would serve to potentially improve the educational accomplishments of Latino youth (Garcia, 2011). Lindsay et al. (2017)

presented an analysis of the disparities between the racial composition of students and the racial composition of the American teaching force. Using data from the American Community Survey, they revealed that, in 2015, just over half of American children aged 5 to 17 were White, but nearly 80% of teachers were White. Hispanic students comprised around 24% of all school-aged children, yet Hispanic teachers represented only around 9% of all young teachers (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017).

Despite the fact gender awareness is a vital factor to be considered societally, leadership roles continue to be dominated by men. A study by Xiang et al. (2017) presented statistics on educational leadership which showed that 71% of the U. S. population agreed that gender equality in leadership was still emerging. In nearly the same timeframe as the research by Xiang et al., the Center for American Progress indicated that 28% of participants stated that change had been met and women were no longer excluded in leadership roles. Although women held almost 52% of all management- and professional-level jobs, American women still lagged substantially behind men in terms of their representation in leadership positions (Warner et al., 2018). However, according to Haile et al. (2016), a review and analysis of the barriers and challenges that women faced indicated that, while female leadership positions were evident, women had been in short supply in leadership roles while their male counterparts were given the top posts.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the barriers faced by Hispanic women who were current or aspiring educational administrators in two K-12 public school districts in the United States. The topic was guided by specific central

research questions and overarching and specific objectives that led to the realization of expected outcomes. Through the answers to those proposed questions, I will develop a plan that has the potential to be used by public school districts to increase the number of females in administrative roles at the local and state levels. In this study, I explored the personal and professional experiences of 15 Hispanic women in educational leadership and teaching roles through a semi-structured interview process and qualitative analysis of their responses. My intent for the interview process was to capture the experiences of the participants in their own words and identify the barriers they perceived to their career aspirations, as well as possible strategies that organizations can use to mitigate these barriers.

Discovering and giving voices to their experiences were important for two reasons. First, sharing the stories of Hispanic women who obtained top administrative positions in educational leadership may offer encouragement to new and emerging Hispanic women leaders in that field. Secondly, new aspiring female leaders could model the experiences described by the participants in my study and apply successful strategies that are appropriate to their situations for their career advancement path. The in-depth descriptions of the participants' personal experiences offered an opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of the types of barriers associated with access to top tiered leadership positions. I intended to deliver valuable information for other Hispanic women aspiring to become future leaders in higher education.

I grounded my research study in the Liberal Feminist Theory which helped to provide context and the structure of the theoretical framework. Liberal Feminist Theory is based on the belief that social disparities form the basis of women's oppression and

that both males and females are similar in their leadership styles (Fernández & Valdés, 2016). The theory further argues that men and women have a similar ability to reason, and therefore, they ought to be treated equally, rather than differently. However, critics of this theory argue that equal opportunities should be judged with regard to qualifications (Arneson, 2015). Regardless of criticisms or support for Liberal Feminist Theory, it is an essential lens for understanding the leadership capabilities of women and for supporting this research study. Although the participants in this study in no way proclaimed themselves as feminists, throughout this study, I drew on the Feminist Theory to explore the lived educational leadership experiences of Hispanic females and the perceived barriers they faced in rising to top tier leadership positions. Critical Feminists contend that social injustices are often associated with the oppressive forces of patriarchy and gender discrimination (Mikkola, 2019). According to Mikkola, nine Critical Feminists argued that those structures, which privilege male dominance and result in the subordination and oppression of women, are determined by gender and are, therefore, central to the Critical Feminist perspective.

In my review of the literature, I found limited information on the lived experiences of Hispanic women in current or aspiring educational leadership roles. Many authors who investigated women's experiences indicated there appears to be a significant gap in the literature specifically regarding Hispanic women and the challenges they face when rising to leadership roles. Existing studies that discussed minority themes were limited to the experiences of African American females in higher education. My study investigated elementary and secondary female Hispanic educators' lived experiences. As such, this phenomenon calls for intervention to empower Hispanic women in the field of

education. My intended outcomes of this study were to enable the development and creation of a framework to illuminate Hispanic women's perspectives and empower them to attain top leadership jobs.

### **Research Questions**

A purpose of this study was to determine the perceived barriers Hispanic female educational leaders faced while achieving their career aspirations. Additionally, my intention was to gain insight in the lived experiences of these successful women. Through this study, I examined the following research questions.

My overarching research question was: What are the perceived and actual barriers female Hispanic educators face in obtaining higher tiered educational leadership roles?

1. RQ1: *What taxonomy of barriers do female Hispanic educators perceive while seeking or advancing to administrative leadership roles within two K-12 Public School Districts in the United States?*
2. RQ2: *How do factors associated with culture, gender, and language impact the rise into educational leadership roles for current and aspiring Hispanic educational leaders?*

### **Definition of Terms**

There are several important terms that are used with specific meanings throughout this study which I defined here for clarification.

**Administrator:** A person who has authority to supervise and direct within a school district. In this study, administrator included the superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, assistant principals and district coordinators (Dictionary.com, July, 2020).

Barriers: something material that blocks or is intended to block passage; something immaterial that impedes or separates (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, February, 2020).

Hispanic: A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. All students [whose data were included in my study] who indicated they were Hispanic or Latino were included only in the Hispanic counts; they were not included in the other racial categories they selected (citation withheld to protect confidentiality).

Superintendent: an administrator or manager in charge of a number of public schools or a school district, a local government body overseeing public schools (Dictionary.com, October 2018).

Principal: an individual with the highest authority or most important position in an organization, institution, or group (Dictionary.com, July 2020).

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages; instruction in English/Language Arts, regardless of delivery model approach (citation withheld to protect confidentiality).

### **Significance of the Study**

The topic of women in educational leadership brings invaluable insight into a potential gap in the literature, specifically regarding Hispanic women and the barriers they faced ascending toward top tier leadership positions across the local, state and national levels. There has been very little literature written addressing the myriad of barriers that Hispanic females had to overcome in obtaining top tier leadership roles. As the public school population continues to grow more diverse, the need for leadership that represents Hispanic students' cultural and ethnic backgrounds is essential in the

education profession, yet there is a disproportionate lack of women in leadership roles compared to their male counterparts.

The underrepresentation of women in academic administration suggests that masculine practices and leadership norms function to exclude women. In terms of senior administrative positions, in the U. S. only 26% of all four-year university professors are women, and of that 26%, only 1.3% are Hispanic. Additionally, as of 2018, only nine of the 50 highest paid leaders in the U. S. were women (Almanac, 2018).

At the time of this study, credentialed and competent Hispanic females were becoming a desired factor in many schools, owing to that Hispanic children were steadily increasing in the school districts under study. In one of the school districts under study there was a solid increase in the number of Hispanic students enrolled up from 30.7% in 2014/2015 to 33.9% in 2018/2019 school year (citation withheld to protect confidentiality). The significance of this topic and examining what actual and perceived barriers Hispanic women experienced could potentially lead to increased diversity and cultural expansion in the profession of education by having more female Hispanic leaders at the administrative level. I intended to use the results of this study to provide both recommendations to the educational profession and a deeper understanding of the challenges that Hispanic women face. I also based my intentions for this study on Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jiménez, and Hernandez's (2015) research on the topic. They discussed the importance of enhancing the understanding of ethnicity and gender equality and possibly reassessing the need for added supports in the advancement of Hispanic women in educational leadership careers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

The review of the literature served as the foundation for this study. The body of literature specifically addressing the underrepresentation of elementary and secondary Hispanic female educational leaders was limited. Therefore, I reviewed the historical barriers to women's success. In the first section, I focused on gender equity and stereotyping. In the second section, I identified the experiences of Hispanic females in educational leadership including superintendency and principalship positions and the barriers they faced. In the final section, I discussed the value of mentoring and diversity among Hispanic female leaders in attaining top tier educational positions.

The gender leadership gap has been a critical issue in the United States, especially in the educational leadership sphere (Bitterman et al., 2013) Unlike their male counterparts, women have been less likely to ascend to leadership positions, whether in business, unions, courts, religious institutions, or educational institutions.

Leadership opportunities have been even more elusive to women of color. Hispanic, Black, and Asian women comprise 17% of standard workers, but only about 4% of managers and executive officials are women (Whitford, 2020). The statistics indicated that fewer and fewer female leaders are moving up the professional ladder into leadership roles. The significant gap is not due to a lack of qualified women to fill leadership roles. In the United States, women attain the majority of university degrees at all levels, apart from only professional degrees. The high number of women in the general workforce suggests that there are other pertinent, inherent factors within the systems that work against women, deterring them from ascending to senior leadership

positions. One such barrier is blatant sex discrimination, with the U. S. Equal Opportunity Commission documenting approximately 30,000 sex discrimination cases between 2007 and 2012. The decisions for most of those cases favored the party that filed the charge (U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021). However, discrimination is only one of the barriers, since women also have to overcome persistent negative stereotypes, biases, and hostile work environments that often result in their inability to attain high level leadership positions.

Significant strides in the fight for women's rights have been realized, such as the increased percentage of women in leadership positions over the past half-century (Kaltz, 2013). Kaltz indicated most women who are in leadership positions still struggle with being negatively stereotyped, undermining women's reputation for competence and capability in leadership roles. Through anti-discrimination laws and other gender equity measures, society is emerging from a period of imbalanced treatment of women. Kaltz (2013) stated that nationwide a residual amount of institutionalized discrimination still exists, along with instances of suppressed advancement opportunities and blatant chauvinism. Organizations continue to overtly or surreptitiously favor males over females for advancement under the presumption that men will demonstrate greater assertiveness, competence, and leadership ability than their female peers.

### **Gender Equity and Stereotyping**

Hispanic women have been unable to assume educational leadership roles despite the current emphasis on gender equity. According to Chin (2011), women have made significant steps in attaining equality with their male counterparts. High levels of gender equity are clearly visible at home and in the workplace, owing to the shift in the

classifications of gender roles and lifestyles. Men no longer view household chores and child rearing as tasks that are exclusively reserved for women. Chin stated that, owing to the immense flexibility in gender roles and social articulation of etiquette, women are gaining equality, particularly in relation to marital status. Additionally, in modern families, men are no longer the sole breadwinners, since women are contributing more to the financial aspect of family life. Coaxum-Young's (2017) findings indicated that, indeed, gender bias is a relevant issue in women obtaining leadership roles. That phenomenon created the need for institutions to formulate programs that empower women in leadership capacities and abilities.

Educational leadership, however, is depicting a whole new trend as emphasized by Adkinson (1981) and reinforced by Chin (2011). Chin asserted that "women are still underrepresented in leadership roles in corporations, institutions of higher education, and the political sector especially in light of the changing population demographics" (p. 1). That underrepresentation is often hard to define or attribute to gender-specific elements because there is little or no difference in the leadership styles of men and women.

Nevertheless, women are still on course to attain parity with men in educational leadership roles owing to the lack of limiting factors and the robust support from society (Chin, 2011; Adkinson, 1981). However, the ability to realize higher numbers achieving that outcome depends on whether the system will act on supporting this issue, which is continually gaining attention, such as stated by Adkinson:

Underrepresentation of women in leadership spheres has been under discussion for decades as scholars attempted to determine the causes and formulate practical solutions. The low number of women in the teaching profession can be attributed

to their inherent characteristics that, in turn, have implications on their career selection and ambition. (1981, p. 314)

According to Adkinson, the problem of underrepresentation was even more pronounced for minority groups such as Hispanics and African Americans. The same research also stated that understanding those demographics is aggravated by the fact that researchers have yet to narrow their research to determine the reasons for underrepresentation due to stereotyping. Nevertheless, interest in this area of research has led to critical information that has influenced current trends and proved that women could break barriers and rise to the top.

Aschenbrenner (2006) stated that the problem of underrepresentation is even more pronounced for minority groups such as Hispanics. This researcher uncovered the fact that despite the emphasis on gender equity, Hispanic women in particular had been unable to secure educational leadership roles. The incidence of inequity of opportunity in educational leadership may be seen in the percentage of Hispanic female principals and Hispanic female superintendents. An understanding of demographic group incidents of female inequity in educational leadership is prohibited by a lack of research into gender equality among racial subgroups (Aushenbrenner, 2006).

Nevertheless, according to the Pew Research Center (2017), interest in equity research has led to critical information coming forth. That research has influenced trends in education by establishing data concerning the advent of women who are breaking barriers and taking leadership positions. In a 2018 article on Latinx leaders (Dishman, 2018), Sandra Lopez is presented as one of those Latino women breaking barriers. She is the Vice President of Intel Sports and stated:

One of the biggest challenges that Latinos have is ensuring that our voices are heard and represented. We represent approximately 17% of the U. S. population, yet less than 2% of CEOs are Hispanic and approximately 3.5% of Fortune 500 board seats are held by Latinos. (para. 4)

Lopez is deeply committed to nurturing and fostering the up and coming generation of leaders across the industry to ensure women are included and feel they belong.

In a survey conducted by Pew Research Center (2017), 91% percent of the United States population think it is important for women in the United States to have the same rights as men. Two years after Hilary Clinton became the first woman to win the presidential nomination of a major United States political party, and with a record number of women running for Congress in 2018, there were a majority of Americans who stated that they would like to see more women in top leadership positions Pew Center Research, 2018).

### **Current Trends and Perceived Obstacles**

Kaltz (2013) revealed that women continue to face several employment challenges, despite emerging from a history of gender discrimination which favored masculinity. There have been significant strides realized in the fight for women's rights, such as the increased percentage of women in leadership positions over the past half-century. Kaltz (2013) indicated that most women who are in leadership positions still have to deal with stereotypes regarding women's competencies and capabilities. Society in the United States is just emerging from a period of heightened discrimination against women. Suppression and chauvinism still persist in some segments of organizational hierarchy. Many in those organizations still have tilted perceptions about assertiveness, competence,

and leadership skills being masculine characteristics (Kaltz, 2013). Other stereotypes of women in leadership include expectations of being nurturing, modest in character, quiet and selfless. Hence, women have to work extra hard to prove themselves as capable and competent beyond such stereotypes. In most cases, no matter how hard they try, quickly correcting such perceptions is difficult (Kaltz, 2013).

Many women still continue to experience gender wage gap challenges. Across the world, women in leadership positions continue to experience discrimination with regard to their remuneration, as compared to men. The International Labour Organization (2017) reported that in the United States women earned 81% of what their male counterparts earned with the same responsibilities and in the same positions. Across Europe the same challenges are faced by women in leadership with Estonia having the highest wage gap of 25%; Belgium and Italy also have gaps of 6.1% and 5.3%, respectively. In Canada, women earned approximately 83% of what their male counterparts did, with similar positions and responsibilities (Haile et al., 2016). Those trends indicate that women in leadership have to deal with the kind of demotivation associated with the reality of lower remuneration for women than men.

Studies have shown positive trends as far as women in leadership are concerned, underling the fact that the female gender can overcome barriers and ascend to the top. Many years ago, McCreight (2001) recognized that, indeed, progress has been made even though the educational system had yet to attain the desirable levels of equity of males and females in leadership roles. Educational leadership positions have been traditionally held by men who have served in senior positions in the teaching profession as principals, supervisory administrators, and superintendents (McCreight, 2001). In the social

paradigm of that time, wherever women were allowed to teach, they were designated to primary institutions where they taught basic life skills to young children. Since women would leave teaching after getting married, they were categorized as transients, while the male counterparts became permanent employees.

Fast forward to the 21st Century when teaching and administration were separated, with women and men considered suited to the former and the latter, respectively (Robinson, 2016). The numbers of women in school leadership began to rise when the Center for Educational Statistics started to gather information on gender representations in learning institutions. However, that increase was realized in the principalship's occupancy, but remained low in the superintendency (Brey et al., 2018). In the past, McCreight (2001) stated that those low rates of ascension were alarming, since women were statistically more educated than men, yet they were unable to transition from teaching into administration. More recently, the 2018 report by McKinsey & Company attributed that difficulty in assuming administrative positions to several factors. These factors are listed below and discussed in more detail.

### **Mentoring**

Aschenbrenner (2006) confirmed that mentorship is vital in increasing the number of Hispanic women in educational leadership roles. Aschenbrenner defined mentoring as a "long-term, professionally centered relationship between an individual and another person in which the more experienced person provides career guidance to the person of lesser experience" (p. 23). Based on the sample population of the study, lack of mentoring increased negative perceptions, as it related to pursuing leadership careers. Some other contributors included networking, family roles, and career paths.

Recommendations of Heisdorf (2019) disregarded the critical role mentorship can play with a Hispanic female aspiring to become a leader in the education sector.

Historically, mentoring has been crucial in promoting the professional and personal growth and development of students and staff in the educational arena. Mentorship can be a fundamental influence in broader leadership development, whether during the transition into leadership, or in the actual leadership role. Heisdorf (2019) stated there is no limit to how long an individual needs to be mentored because even senior leaders have individuals to whom they look for inspiration.

Women leaders require mentoring more than men in order to acquire guidance and advice to assist them in overcoming gender-related obstacles such as discrimination. This understanding calls for mentoring programs in schools and higher institutions as underlined by Genao (2016). Heisdorf (2019) stated the role of mentorship shows Hispanic women are more likely to be motivated if they learn from those who have succeeded on similar paths.

According to Genao (2016), culturally responsive strategies are vital in promoting success for a diverse population within the education context. Those strategies integrate philosophies and policies that seek to create inclusive environments for people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Minority students are often hindered by the lack of confidence in their capacity to succeed in an environment that is not designed to align with their cultural capabilities. In other words, some minorities perceive the system as having been designed to ensure that they are unsuccessful. As Genao reiterated, if the system was designed differently to accommodate these groups, then higher numbers of minority women would less likely succumb to the obstacles. Through mentorships,

students learn the strategies that other individuals have used to overcome challenges. They also come to understand that modifying the system into one that fits into the model of a culturally-congruent pedagogy is a long term process. Genao also stated that one means of mentoring prospective educational leaders is by narrating the experiences of women who have risen to leadership positions.

According to a study by Emrich et al. (2017), Hispanic women and other minorities have difficulties identifying the process of career advancement. By providing them access to a mentor-protégé relationship, women minorities who are underrepresented in top tier leadership positions have a greater opportunity to advance in their careers (2017).

### **Cultural Effects**

According to research by Menchaca et al. (2017), Latinas have ongoing difficulties ascending to educational leadership roles due to their cultural inclinations, which are likely to continue denting efforts to increase the number of women in educational leadership roles throughout their careers. In 2001, McCreight acknowledged that their cultural practices were hard to eliminate and were referred to as prohibiting the potential change that could otherwise be realized in a bid to minimize underrepresentation.

An additional issue with making professional advancements is that up until the 1960s Latinos had virtually no opportunity to pursue college (Menchaca et al., 2017). Although opportunities were available, that demographic group continued to experience difficulties pursuing education due to financial constraints, compelling many to prioritize family responsibilities in place of their advanced education. Menchaca et al. stated that

those obstacles have continued to be impediments to progress over many years.

### **Stereotyping and Breaking Barriers**

One major hindrance in minorities' efforts to pursue educational leadership roles was stereotyping. Discrimination in promotion and hiring became an irregularity when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted. Further legislation in the form of the 1972 Higher Education Amendment emphasized the need for equity in education. To further promote equity, the federal government instituted the Equal Pay Act in 1963 that made pay difference based on gender for a man and a woman working under the same job description unlawful (U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2020).

Then, in the 1990s, the federal government embarked yet again on the effort to address the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Nonetheless, women still hold disadvantaged positions despite recent efforts to implement programs and initiatives that seek to improve female participation in leadership (U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2020). That underrepresentation is partly due to the element of stereotyping. Krause (2017) sought to uncover why there is a diminishing number of women leaders in higher education institutions that translate into leaders in high-level organizations. Krause found that aspiring female leaders are discouraged in the long run due to the stereotyping message that leadership is traditionally meant for men.

According to Méndez-Morse (2000), "Stereotyping of Latinas has been widespread in three major areas, namely limitations in the scope of work, relations with men, and emphasis on the role of women domestically" (p. 585). Méndez-Morse et al. (2015) stated that, as per the Latina culture, women are portrayed to be under the control of men, which is why they are expected to be submissive to male siblings, husbands, and

fathers. Those females are expected first to fulfill the role and societal expectations of a wife, and maintain their homes and families through childbearing and caring. Their research determined that constraint meant women have neither time, resources nor support to pursue higher education and leadership employments.

Numerous researchers have explored the experiences of women who succeeded in their endeavors to become educational leaders. Aschenbrenner (2006) sought to assess the lived experiences of women leaders as a way of understanding why women of minority groups were underrepresented in educational leadership positions. That research revealed that Hispanic women were unable to ascend to leadership due to their inability to pursue advanced degrees, which translates to a lack of qualification that can prevent promotions. Based on enrollment statistics, Hispanic women and students were at a disadvantage as far as future success was concerned. On a different note, an assessment of Hispanic women in educational leadership showed that they were not limited by the Latina stereotype (Heisdorf, 2019). Certain segments of Latina women have been able to break those cocoons and contribute to educational administration. Heisdorf (2019) found those individuals disregarded the fact that their leadership capacities were undermined and, instead, sought to fulfill their potential as leaders.

Breaking barriers is a lifelong process that Hispanic women have dealt with throughout their entire process of pursuing leadership roles. Heisdorf (2019) confirmed that female Hispanic students faced numerous obstacles that derailed their pursuit of education. At school, Hispanics received lower marks due, in part, to the complex environment that was created by stereotyping. They dealt with barriers such as lack of adequate knowledge of the functionality of the educational system as a whole, political

instability, lack of supports from their significant others, and low academic capacity in schools that they attended. Based on study findings, Heisdorf (2019) proposed several solutions to reduce that gap, such as enhancing opportunities for transition, including parents in the process, and dedicating more state and federal resources towards the education of the minority groups.

### **Family Work-life Conflicts**

Family work-life conflicts are another major challenge faced by women in leadership positions. Rincón et al. (2017) stated many women who hold leadership positions in the workplace also have families for whom to care. The way society is organized, even in contemporary times, a lot of roles in family care are placed on women. Rincón et al. stated women are the primary caretakers, and their energy and efforts are split between nurturing children in their families and their work responsibilities. Many women in leadership positions face a challenge of balancing both family and work roles, which can lead to the postponement of having children. Many women have left their careers to focus on family or forgo having children in favor of their careers. Those researchers additionally stated that either way, women are faced with the challenge of striking a balance between the heavy responsibilities of leadership in both their career and family lives. Chioda (2016) found that some successful Hispanic women were resolved to succeed and also relied on support from their families to be able to balance family and work life.

### **Experiences of Women Educational Leaders**

Hispanic women have experienced barriers that contributed to their low numbers in leadership capacities. Aschenbrenner (2006) proposed that Hispanics were one of the

fastest-growing minorities in the U. S., comprising an eighth of the country's population and projecting that over the next decade the number would rise to approximately two-thirds of the entire school-age population, meaning that Hispanics would become the most extensive minority group in the U. S. Despite the increasing number of Hispanics, their position in the workplace has been underwhelming as far as equality is concerned. The majority of this demographic group has been isolated due to the prevalence of racism. In other words, acceptance, recognition, and advancement have been rare for Hispanics in leadership and the general workplace Aschenbrenner (2006).

At the time of Aschenbrenner's (2006) study, Hispanics constituted only 2.9% and 3.2% of faculty members and administrators, respectively. The gap in enrollment statistics and the percentage of Hispanic faculty members and administrators indicated that more Hispanic women leaders were clearly needed, which was only attainable if the sector could minimize barriers to entry. Unlike men, women faced numerous obstacles that propelled Aschenbrenner (2006) to analyze how those individuals took control of their careers and the various supportive elements that came into play.

A lack of funding, too, has played a critical role in influencing the financial capacity of Hispanic females as they pursued leadership. In England, a response to this need has been integrated into the government plan for education and provision of grants for leadership equity and diversity to boost the diversity of senior leadership. That plan included "removing the barriers that stop individuals - such as women and those from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds - reaching senior leadership roles" (Department for Education, National College for Teaching and Leadership, para. 2). In the United States, the U. S. Department of Education (USDOE) has prioritized grant

funded responsiveness to the growing body of diversity research yet not in the area of diversity of education leaders. The USDOE website statements reflect their priority:

Racial and socioeconomic diversity benefits communities, schools, and children from all backgrounds. Today's students need to be prepared to succeed with a more diverse and more global workforce than ever before. Research has shown that more diverse organizations make better decisions with better results. The effects of socioeconomic diversity can be especially powerful for students from low-income families, who, historically, often have not had equal access to the resources they need to succeed. Additionally, Congress recently highlighted the importance of this priority in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020, para. 1)

The U. S. Department of Education (2016) published a supplemental priority for discretionary grant programs that supported socioeconomic diversity strategies. Socioeconomic diversity was a focus area for many grant funding programs such as Magnet Schools Assistance Program, Expanding Opportunities Program, and Promise neighborhoods. However, programs to expand entry of a diverse population into the ranks of educational leadership have not been a focus of equity and diversity priorities.

### **Complexities Involved in Gender and Leadership**

Crosby-Hillier (2012) found that gender influences educational leadership, especially in four key areas: gender politics, work relationships, the intersection of work and family, and resources accessibility. That researcher stated there is a an underlying need to dedicate bounteous efforts to eliminate gendered and racialized educational environments.

Baptiste's (2018) comprehensive analysis of leadership styles stated that there are five major personality traits which are: neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and extraversion. The five personality factors represent a range between two extremes. For example, research conducted via a cross-cultural standpoint indicated that there were general differences in behavior and attitude with regard to gender. Women generally registered higher agreeableness and neuroticism, while men generally reported as having a higher level of conscientiousness and extraversion (Mueller, 2017).

Extraversion represents a continuum between extreme extraversion and extreme introversion. With regards to gender application, most people lie somewhere between the two polar ends of each dimension (Cherry, 2016). The differences in personality traits based on gender differences may, at times, be a source of challenge for women in leadership or in any employment position.

In 2017, the International Labour Organization stated that unconscious gender bias refers to automatic and unintentional mental associations stemming from one's culture, experiences, socialization, traditions, and norms. Those mental associations are another complexity involving gender that creates an approach to individual work assessments based on gender stereotypes. This approach to assessments automatically results in biases in promotions and remuneration in the workplace, a situation that negatively impacts the evaluation of the worth of women in leadership positions.

Organizational structures and practices may be the source of gender bias in areas such as performance evaluation.

As presented in their journal article, "The Effects of the Glass Ceiling On Women In the Workforce: Where are They and Where are They Going?", Carnes and Radojevich-

Kelley (2011) found that processes that stereotypically favor masculine approaches and solutions may have a negative impact on women. For instance, the researchers stated an organization may use unfailing availability and mobility of the employee in various geographical locations as criteria to qualify for promotion. In that scenario, unlike women, there may be bias especially inclined towards men's reduced domestic obligations. The cultural norms make the men more suitable for the new position since they can easily move to different locations without much pressure from family.

### **Experiences Women Encounter on their Journey to Leadership Positions**

The glass ceiling has been often cited as one of the challenges that women face as they proceed professionally. Glass ceiling effects are regarded as unofficial barriers that are experienced by a class of workers, usually women, from progressing upwards in their employment (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011). One of the enablers of the glass ceiling is the choice of educational programs for women and their eventual careers. The number of women pursuing science related courses at higher institutions of learning and those with the doctoral level in tactical fields such as in engineering and math is usually very low. Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley also stated there are certain courses that women believe they are unable to successfully complete which keeps them from qualifying for leadership positions in industries that require such disciplines.

Martinez's (2016) research on the glass ceiling for Latinos in K-12 educational leadership sought to determine how the culture and ethnicity of Latinos affect their ability to pursue leadership roles in education. That study's results indicated that culture and ethnicity can hinder or facilitate efforts of aspiring leaders. The findings of this research also revealed that what is important is for minority leaders to understand the oppressive

systems in society to successfully navigate and overcome such barriers as they rise into educational leadership.

### **The Need for Diversity**

Diversity simply means the sum of how people are both different and alike (National Education Association, 2020). That organization stated that various dimensions are used as indicators of diversity, including ethnicity, race, culture, language, immigration status, and sexual orientation, among others. The interaction between individuals in the education sector is influenced by the attitudes, beliefs, values, and other related elements of each person. In the educational context, diversity is a concept with both challenges and promises. Educators have an opportunity to learn from various languages, experiences, and cultures through interactions, which enriches both students and educators in a variety of ways. However, the National Education Association also stated that the element of diversity has, too, brought numerous challenges related to gaps in academic achievements for students of different backgrounds, gender inequalities, racial segregations, harassment, sexuality, religion, income disparities, and other factors. Nevertheless, supporting diversity is critical to enhancing the ability of women from minority groups to pursue leadership roles.

The importance of diversity in relation to women leaders in education has been explored in detail by Johnston and Young (2018). According to those researchers, diversity plays a crucial role in preparing school heads, who normally receive little to no mentorship and training once they embark on their work. A high-quality leadership preparation program focuses on equipping leaders with the ability to satisfactorily handle the varied aspects of the workplace. Field experience and interactions with students of

diverse backgrounds further enhance the ability of a school leader to offer service to learners.

Johnston and Young (2018) stated that those elements are critical, as they revolutionize the learning environment to such extent that minority learners have the opportunity to gain confidence in the system and feel more supported to pursue their leadership dreams. This research concluded, however, the effect of diversity competency varied for the different races, with less effect on Whites, while being more impactful for non-Whites. The lack of further research on the variance represents a research gap.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review supported the argument that different forms of affirmative actions have been key to improving the position of women as far as educational leadership is concerned. Despite the reality that equity has been slow and challenging to realize, the past few decades have been characterized by considerable milestones in supporting inclusion and equality for women. Mentoring programs have been geared towards improving the expertise of women, and they have been successful (Bazrafkan et al., 2019). Despite the existing leadership programs, the number of men in leadership positions still outweighs the number of women significantly, and the research described in this chapter has demonstrated that while progress occurs, gains are made slowly. Mentoring has been of the essence, but the number of minority mentors remains significantly low.

The research reviewed in this chapter identified barriers that occur while seeking top leadership positions and revealed how the problem has led to developing and implementing programs to overcome those barriers. However, there is little literature

available that actually focuses specifically on Hispanic female leaders and their underrepresentation in elementary and secondary schools.

Additional barriers include ethnic differences, cultural barriers, and lack of opportunities. The barriers emphasized the need to conduct further research to understand the specific factors that hinder Hispanic women from securing top tier leadership roles. This review comprises a robust foundation that shapes the direction of the current research which seeks to determine the woman's ability to move upwards in terms of pursuing a career in educational leadership. My research is intended to add to the existing knowledge of the interventions that can be implemented to support current and aspiring Hispanic female educational leaders. Chapter Three begins with a discussion of the design of my study including sampling techniques, data-collection, organization, and analysis process.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

As stated in Chapter One, the percentage of Hispanic public school principals barely budged over the last 25 years. As evidenced by this data and the population trends previously detailed, more Hispanic women serving as teachers and leaders in elementary and secondary education are clearly needed. This shortage of Hispanic female education administrators is compelling, and qualified competent educational leaders in all segments of the education field are needed to improve the educational opportunity for all students. Diversity among school leaders creates opportunities for minority students to make meaningful connections with educational leaders of their own ethnicity and gender.

### Research Design

This phenomenological study explored, examined, and compared the barriers faced by 15 Hispanic women who were current or aspiring educational leaders or teachers. All participants in the study were currently employed by two K-12 public school districts in the United States. I chose these two districts because both had a large population of Hispanic students but had a disproportionate percentage of Hispanic female teachers and educational leaders. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived barriers faced by Hispanic female educators as they pursued their career aspirations. The foundation of this study was exploratory and understanding oriented, making the qualitative research methodology appropriate (Creswell, 2013). I choose phenomenology as the approach to this study because it focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I conducted

interviews with a group of individuals who had first-hand knowledge of an event, situation or experience (Creswell, 2013). Through this research design I was able to construct meaning of their lived experiences and arrived at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

A definition for a qualitative study is:

Qualitative research gives voice to the participants in the study. Qualitative study enhances the involvement of everyone related to the study. The researcher works on the social parameters in addition to the quantitative measures in the study. The subjects also have an empowering experience in the study. (Gibson et al., 2004, pp. 422–426)

Qualitative data, in general, is text-based with the focus being to capture motivations, opinions, attitudes, and ideas about a specific topic. Qualitative data collection is a deep, scientific inquiry intended to acquire explanations in the form of notes to capture the motivations and ideas usually presented by the research sample from open-ended questions (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview process allowed the preservation of the participants' voices and personal stories to benefit current and aspiring Hispanic female leaders.

Researchers utilizing a quantitative approach are guided by fundamental assumptions of processes in their studies, which start with setting a goal, reviewing the literature, making the hypothesis, testing and analyzing. The researchers utilizing qualitative methodologies are guided by philosophical assumptions, such as axiological (reporting the researcher's biases and values), and ontological and epistemological principles (Creswell, 2014). They try to get as close as possible to the respondents and

obtain subjective evidence from them. Another major assumption for a qualitative approach is that people have varying attitudes and aims; hence, the participants' inputs should be captured in their raw form, and then major themes are formulated from the data. Extracting the essence of the lived experience involves moving towards a deep level of philosophical understanding. Qualitative research is a science of understanding human beings at a deeper level, providing a wide meaning to the lived experiences from the participants under this proposed study (Qutoshi, 2018).

To effectively undertake this research, I enlisted a total of 15 Hispanic female participants, consisting of five administrators, five aspiring administrators, and five Hispanic females who aspired to be teachers, but who were serving in other educational roles. Creswell (2014) stated that qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain enough data to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest and address the research questions. For phenomenological studies, Creswell recommended 5-25 participants (2014).

With regard to epistemological assumptions, the reality, in this study, stood to be socially construed. The general purpose of this study entailed understanding, as well as interpreting, the lived experiences of current and aspiring leaders or teachers in public school systems. I asked the participants during the over-the-phone interviews to provide their demographic information while taking part in the process. Qualitative research involves asking participants about their lived experiences regarding things that happened in their lives. Researchers can learn about their experiences and find similarities and gain a deep understanding (Austin & Sutton, 2014). The choice for the limited sample size in this study was intentional, in order to cultivate a deep and intensive engagement with the

participants (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Adequate and appropriate data analysis processing first requires the use of collection techniques that include in-depth interviewing, which demands a qualitative approach (Bryman, 2016).

### *Participants*

I used an in-depth interview technique utilizing a standard set of open-ended questions and a common interview protocol. According to Crouch and McKenzie (2006), in-depth interviews are considered worthy when comprehensive information regarding the opinions and views of the individuals are required or there is a need to investigate issues in detail. The participants for this study were chosen on the following criteria:

- Female
- Hispanic
- Ages 21-66 years old
- Working in a K-12 public school system
- Aspiring educational administrators
- Current educational administrators
- Aspiring teachers

For this phenomenological study, I recruited 15 Hispanic female educators from two K-12 public school districts in the United States. I received permission from district leaders to conduct research in both those school districts, and through the cooperation of the respective research data department of one of the school districts, a list of over 4,300 Hispanic female district staff were initially identified. The list contained the position title for each employee, as well as their name and contact information. That information first allowed me to pare the list of over 4,300 eligible participants to 75, using the criteria of

school or district administrative positions, instructional personnel, and teacher assistants or aides.

I then sent an email to each of the 75 prospective participants explaining the nature and purpose of the study and extending an invitation to volunteer to participate. Once a prospective participant expressed interest, I sent a follow-up email which stated the demands of time expected, the questions I would ask, and that I would limit the study to 15 participants. Within two weeks of the initial email, over 25 educators responded with an interest in participating, allowing me to select a balanced representation from each of the three criteria groups. The final list of research participants included five Hispanic females with educational leadership endorsements (practicing and non-practicing), five practicing teachers holding a Department of Education certification who aspired to move into leadership positions, and five Hispanic females working in the school districts and aspiring to become teachers.

### ***Data Collection***

I considered how I would have the means for recording the information, and how I would store the data (Creswell, 2013). I sent an email letter of invitation to each of the chosen participants. I then sent a DocuSign file to each one that included the informed consent form to be signed and returned to me. Once the participants completed and signed the consent forms, I offered them an opportunity to set up a date and time that was convenient for them to conduct the interview. I also sent them the interview questions for their review (Appendix A). I communicated with the participants via telephone to set up the interview appointments. I determined an agreeable day and time on which to conduct the one hour telephone interview with each participant. The interviews occurred over a

span of two months.

The participants' anonymity was preserved through the use of transcribing their responses by hand and utilizing pseudonyms for each participant. I reminded each participant that at any time during the interview they could withdraw or not answer a question without penalty. The identified ethical principles on which I based this study included presumption and preservation of confidentiality and anonymity and the participants' right to check and modify the interview transcript. Anonymity of the school districts and individual participants throughout the study was maintained by removing all names and any identifying information. There was no risk to participants in this study beyond that of everyday life. To thoroughly address the research questions for this study, I collected data through a set of semi-structured interview questions. The interviews were all conducted via telephone and at a day and time that was convenient for the participants. Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes, with an average length of 47 minutes. Thirteen of the 15 participants chose not to have their interview video or audio recorded, in order to maintain the highest level of confidentiality. To provide consistency in the method of collection and analysis, I did not record the remaining two participant interviews.

According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), credibility establishes whether the researcher finds representative information drawn from the participants' original data and is then interpreted correctly. My expectation was for the participants to answer honestly. Because they had attachments to the school districts in which they were employed, 13 participants asked not to be recorded, so no recordings of any of the interviews were recorded, to remain consistent across all participants and allow participants to be

transparent in their responses. I took extreme care while collecting, analyzing and making sense of the data, so that the participants' accounts remained in context. I stored all transcripts in a locked file cabinet in my home office whenever they were not in use.

Creswell (2014) stated that qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain enough data to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest and address the research questions. Discovering and giving voices to participants' experiences was important for two reasons. First, sharing the stories of Hispanic women who had obtained top administrative positions in educational leadership may offer encouragement to new and emerging Hispanic women leaders in the field of education. Secondly, aspiring female leaders could model the experiences described by the participants in my study and apply successful strategies that were appropriate to their situations for their career advancement path. The in-depth descriptions of the participants' personal experiences offered an opportunity to gain a clear understanding of the types of barriers associated with access to top tiered leadership positions. I intended to deliver valuable information for other Hispanic women aspiring to become leaders in higher education.

I developed an interview protocol that included an explanation of the research study, the steps taken to ensure confidentiality, and a set of nine questions designed to fully explore the two research questions. I read the same introduction to each participant, and I asked them all the identical set of questions in the same order. I also asked follow-up or probing questions of each participant that were more nuanced and specific to the individual responses provided. I recorded by hand all participant responses using a word processing document and keyboard. Although this process was labor-intensive, it helped me to facilitate a trusting atmosphere, allowed an opportunity for the immediate member-

checking of responses, and yielded an accurate transcript of each interview.

### ***Data Analysis***

As suggested by Korstjens and Moser (2018), developing the codes, the concepts and the core category helped me to examine the characteristics of the data. I read and reread the data as I studied and analyzed the concepts. Over four weeks, I printed each transcript and completed a first reading in order to become familiar with the participant responses and to identify potential codes and possible emergent themes. I manually wrote analytic notes in the margins of each page and used them to identify relevant participant comments and how they might relate to the emergent codes or themes. I also used my analytic notes to gain a better understanding of the meaning behind each potential code, to ensure there were no duplications or failures to capture critical data points later in the process.

Following the initial read-through and analytic note-taking, I used a process of first cycle structural coding to develop a more concrete set of codes throughout each participant's transcript. In order to honor all 15 participants' voices, I included a process of NVivo coding in the first round, as a means to better reflect the words and experiences of the experts themselves. I assigned codes to each of the 15 individual transcripts with the same meaning to provide a common analytical process between documents. However, each transcript also produced additional unique codes that I used to identify critical data in only a few, or in some cases, only a single interview.

I then uploaded each transcript to a web-based research application. The transcripts then underwent a second cycle of pattern coding to help refine the codes and organize them into larger categories. I then took the larger categories, grouped similarly

coded data, and identified common and unique barriers faced by Hispanic female educators. At each level of analysis, I did a constant comparison across all interview transcripts as a means to further assist in identifying common themes. This process helped me to remain consistent in emphasizing key points during each cycle of coding.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter included my research design, participants, data collection, methods of analysis and ethical considerations. The qualitative research for this study centered on the interviews of five current female Hispanic leaders, five aspiring female Hispanic leaders and five aspiring female Hispanic teachers. All participants in this study were employed at two K-12 public school districts in the United States. I obtained permission from leaders of each school district to use email as a means to invite potential participants from various school sites and district offices. Upon their willingness to participate, I established a date and time for the interview that was convenient for each participant. The data I collected using the interview questions helped me to effectively answer my research questions. The data collected from my study assisted in uncovering valuable insight and patterns from participants' responses to fully address the research questions. The data provided information beneficial to Hispanic female educators and stakeholders that seek to assist Hispanic females in overcoming their perceived barriers. The data I collected assisted in providing support for Hispanic female educators in fulfilling their career aspirations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

This chapter begins with the presentation of the demographics and backgrounds of each of the participants. That information is followed by data analysis and the presentation of themes that emerged in the interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning across a data set. Finally, this will chapter will conclude with the results and summary of the findings.

#### **Restatement of the Purpose**

Through this phenomenological study, I explored, examined, and compared the barriers faced by 15 Hispanic women who were current or aspiring educational leaders or teachers. All participants in the study were currently employed by one of two K-12 public school districts in one state in the United States. Both districts had a large population of Hispanic students but with a disproportionate number of Hispanic female teachers and educational leaders. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived barriers Hispanic female educational leaders faced while achieving their career aspirations. To assist in uncovering the multitude of those barriers faced by the participants, I used the following research questions to guide my study.

RQ1: What taxonomy of barriers do female Hispanic educators perceive while seeking or advancing to administrative leadership roles within two K-12 Public School Districts in the U. S.?

RQ2: How do factors associated with culture, gender, and language impact the rise into educational leadership roles for current and aspiring Hispanic

educational leaders?

In order to fully address the two research questions and gain insight into the lived experiences of these successful women, I used a process of semi-structured interviews and reflective journaling to gather data. I interviewed each participant in the study separately, in order to protect their privacy, increase their comfort level, and provide an atmosphere conducive to exploring deeply such a personal topic.

### **Method of Analysis**

I used constant comparison across all interview transcripts as a means to identify common themes at each level of analysis. Coding and re-coding the interviews aided in the constant comparative analysis techniques that are critical to grounded theory methodology. This process helped me remain consistent in emphasizing key points during each cycle of coding. The three cycles of coding ultimately resulted in 121 distinct codes, as shown in Appendix B. Although individual codes clustered around specific questions, I found most codes throughout the transcript, as participants revisited or repeated topics across questions. Using data from the use of proliferation of individual codes and an inferential analysis of participant responses, I fully developed four themes and presented them in Table 1 that follows.

### **Four Themes**

#### ***Theme One – Participants’ Perceived Personal Barriers were Directly and Indirectly Attributed to Being Hispanic or Female***

The first theme that arose from participant responses was most associated with questions organized under the category of Direct or Indirect. I coded data in this category 80 times throughout the entire transcript and included frequently mentioned codes such as

Cultural Expectation, Communication, Bilingual, Family Valued Education, Connecting with Hispanic Population, Feeling inadequate, Family Struggles, and Personal Strategies. In the first prompt posed to the participants, I said: Tell me how being Hispanic has enhanced, inhibited or slowed your attaining your career aspirations.” The second prompt I posed was: “What were the barriers, if any, that you faced in your career advancement”? I worded my prompts to elicit from participants their experiences regarding their perceived barriers-- a key element of the first research question guiding this study.

### ***Theme Two – Participants’ Perceived Barriers Within Their Educational Intuitions***

The second theme that arose from participant responses was most associated with questions organized under the category Institutions. I coded data in this category 28 times throughout the entire transcript and included the codes Cultural Diversity, Support System and General Improvements. In the prompt I posed to the participants, I said: “Tell me how your school district has prepared you to become a teacher or an administrator” through which I attempted to highlight their opportunities. Although the prompt was intended to highlight the opportunities their district offered, the responses presented the institutions as barriers and the participants attempted to address perceived barriers — a key element of the first research question guiding this study.

### ***Theme Three – Distinct Presence of Female Mentors***

The third theme that arose from participant responses was most associated with prompts organized under the category Gender Factors. I coded data under this category 13 times through the entire transcripts and included the code Females. The prompt I posed to the participants was: “Tell me about any female mentors that played a

significant role in your decision to become a teacher or administrator and how they encouraged you.” Through that prompt, I attempted to address participant experiences regarding gender influences – a key element of the second research question guiding this study.

***Theme Four –Participants Realized Education was Their Calling at a Young Age***

The fourth theme that arose from participant responses was most associated with prompts organized under the category Cultural Factors. I coded data under this category 8 times throughout the entire transcripts and included the codes Looks Like Us, Lost in the System and Family Voice. The prompt I posed to the participants was: “What are some significant life experiences you have had that contributed your decision to become an educator?” I used this question to elicit responses that addressed participant experiences regarding language and culture — a key element of the second research question guiding this study. See Table 1 below for details about the themes, categories, codes, and frequencies.

Table 1.

*Themes and Category with Codes and Frequencies*

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
Participants' perceived personal barriers were Directly and Indirectly attributed to being Hispanic or Female	Direct	Cultural Expectations	7
		Communication	12
		Bilingual	6
		Family Valued Education	7
		Connecting with Hispanic Population	4
	Indirect	Feeling Inadequate	15
		Family Struggles	18
		Personal Strategies	11
Participants' Perceived Barriers within their Educational Intuitions	Institutions	Cultural Diversity	9
		Support System	8
		General Improvements	10
The was a Distinct Presence of Female Mentors	Gender Factors	Female	13
Participants Realized Education was their Calling at a young age	Cultural Factors	Look like us	4
		Lost in System	2
		Family Voice	1
		Early Literacy	1

**Participants' Demographics and Background**

For this phenomenological study, I recruited 15 Hispanic female educators from two K-12 public school districts in the United States. I was granted permission to conduct research in both districts and, through the cooperation of the respective research data department, a list of over 4,300 Hispanic female district staff were initially identified. The list contained the position title for each employee, as well as their name and contact information. This information first included over 4,300 eligible participants to be pared to 75 using the criteria of school or district administrative positions, instructional personnel, and teacher assistants or aides.

I sent an email to each of the 75 prospective participants, explaining the nature and purpose of the study and extending an invitation to volunteer. Using an email invitation, I stated the demands of time expected from each participant, the questions I

would ask, and that the study would be limited to 15 participants. Within a two week period, over 25 respondents expressed an interest in participating, allowing me to select a balanced representation from each of the three criteria groups.

The final list of research participants included five Hispanic females with educational leadership endorsements (practicing and non-practicing), five teachers holding a state Department of Education certification, and five Hispanic females aspiring to become teachers. The positions held by these participants included one principal, four assistant principals, four classroom teachers, three program specialists and three teacher assistants. Nine of the 15 participants held Master's degrees, two participants held Doctorate degrees and four participants held Bachelor's degrees. The participants ranged in age from 25 years to 61 years. Some participants were born in the United States and some participants were born in other countries such as Peru and Columbia. Table 2 lists each participant, to include their age, highest degree, position, country of origin and number of years in current position.

Table 2.

*Participants' Demographics*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Highest Degree	Born	Current Position
Participant 1	Female	56	Doctorate	United States	Principal
Participant 2	Female	33	Master	United States	Program Specialist
Participant 3	Female	58	Master	Chili	ESOL Specialist
Participant 4	Female	28	Bachelor	Mexico	Teacher Assistant
Participant 5	Female	26	Bachelor	Costa Rica	Teacher Assistant
Participant 6	Female	25	Bachelor	United States	Teacher
Participant 7	Female	42	Master	Mexico	Teacher Assistant
Participant 8	Female	56	Doctorate	United States	Assistant Principal
Participant 9	Female	27	Master	United States	Teacher
Participant 10	Female	61	Bachelor	Mexico	Teacher
Participant 11	Female	45	Master	Puerto Rico	Program Specialist
Participant 12	Female	39	Master	United States	Assistant Principal
Participant 13	Female	27	Master	United States	Teacher
Participant 14	Female	34	Master	Puerto Rico	Assistant Principal
Participant 15	Female	39	Master	United States	Assistant Principal

The analysis of the coded transcripts from each of the 15 participants revealed data that thoroughly addressed both of the research questions. I developed nine semi-structured interview questions to elicit that information (Appendix A). As part of comprehending the perceived barriers of Hispanic female leaders as they rise to educational leadership roles, the first step was to understand how factors associated with ethnicity, culture, gender, and language impacted their career aspirations.

**Findings***Calling at a Young Age*

Nearly all the participants conveyed factors or moments in their lives to which they could point that served as catalysts for their career aspirations. Several codes emerged for understanding those significant moments when the participants knew education was their calling. Several participants had similar experiences categorized as

cultural factors.

*Looks Like Us*

Participants discussed the importance of students having role models in educational institutions who looked like them. This code appeared six times throughout the transcripts.

Participant 6 said:

All kids need love and a sense of belonging in their school. I want other Hispanic students to be proud of their culture and see others in positions of teachers and administrators so they do not fall into the stereotype that Hispanics can't be teachers.

Participant 4 talked about leadership in schools: "If we become leaders in our schools, Hispanic students are going to see someone that looks just like them, and this is the most powerful and rewarding thing."

For some participants, the difficulties they experienced by lacking a Hispanic role model impacted them early on in deciding to become an educator. Participant 5 remembered: "I faced a lot of difficulties along the way, and if I could help just one of my Hispanic students succeed in achieving their hopes and dreams, my job is done."

Participant 11 vividly recalled seeing no Hispanic leaders in the schools while growing up:

In my schooling I had one Hispanic teacher but never any Hispanic administrators. The more I wanted to read about my culture and find Hispanic leaders, I learned we didn't have that kind of literature in our schools. I really became disheartened that we had no role models. I never saw anyone that looked like me.

Participant 13 recalled seeing no Hispanic educators in schools as a driving force to:

make an impact in my community and to let young people know that we are very capable at succeeding and to give hope and inspiration that Hispanics are capable of doing so much more than what people think we can do.

### ***Early Literacy***

Reading in the home as young child growing up revealed a path for many of the participants to follow in the process of becoming a teacher. Participant 12 was an only child, and she was quite lonely. Her mother would frequently read “all kinds of books she read to me. It made me realize that the key to help young people [is to] read in early literacy.”

### ***Family Voice***

Several participants talked about growing up in a household with parents who spoke no English. Therefore, the participants were the voice of the family. Participant 7 recalled: “I was their voice at very young age. I had to translate everything, and when I say everything I mean from parent conferences, to going to pay bills, to all the doctors’ appointments.” What participants endured as young children in the home became the driving factor to teach. Participant 4 had a similar experience as a child. She was responsible for taking care of her younger siblings. She said: “I had to be the voice of my mom at teacher parent conference nights for all my siblings; anything to do with school, I was responsible for organizing.”

### ***Lost in the System***

Participant 6 talked about not wanting other children to experience what she did in school. “I truly believe in fostering the love [of] learning. I had some miserable teachers growing up, and just because I got good grades and was a good kid they

assumed I knew what was going on, but in reality I was very lost. I felt like they gave up on me in the day, and I was determined to not let that happen to other kids.” Participant 15 experienced a similar situation and said:

I was told that most Hispanic females never make it to administrative roles because we are not qualified. I found that unacceptable. I worked that much harder and had to prove many people wrong to get to where I am today.

### ***Distinct Presence of Female Mentors in Becoming a Teacher or Administrator***

Many of the participants indicated that, at one point in time, a female mentor played a significant role in their decision to become a teacher or administrator. That concept was captured in codes and categories 13 times. In the very early stages of beginning their journey to become an educator, there was one or more females that impacted them in such a way that encouraged them to pursue education during the most challenging times of their lives.

### ***Gender Factors***

Participants used terms such as *mom*, *grandmother* and *teacher* to describe the females who made an impact in their decision to take the education career path. The importance of female influencers certainly revealed that what the participants in this study experienced in their relationship with these females attracted them to education and made them realize education was their calling.

The word *mom* appeared in the transcripts as an important role model for several of the participants. That code appeared five times throughout the transcripts which indicated that their mothers played a significant role in their decisions to become a teacher or administrator. When asked about any female mentors who played a significant

role in their decision to become a teacher or administrator and how they became encouraged by that support, Participant 7 stated:

I remember when I was nine years old I was helping my mom fill out paperwork for school, and we were at the library. I overheard a lady say to her friend how bad she felt for me that my mom couldn't even speak English and that it was horrible that a mother can't read or write and relies on her kid to help her. I was so young then I didn't have the means to really understand, but I do remember feeling embarrassed and sad for my mom.

Participant 4 shared a similar experience: "My mom played a huge role in my decision to become a teacher because she believed in my abilities as an aspiring teacher and supported me by being there every step of the way." Participant 10 recalled that: "My mom was instrumental in my seeing education as a positive thing."

Participant 1 knew that she wanted to become an educator to help people like her mom who struggled with the English language. She had a similar experience and even paused in her response as what she was about to say something that held great meaning dear to her heart: "Definitely my mom; she was discriminated against and she would cry and cry because she could not read or write." Participant 1 went on to reflect on her mom at a time when she was seven or eight years old:

We had just got our reports cards and I was excited because I had gotten good grades. My friend and I were standing in front of my mom, and she took my report card and said, "I am so proud of you," and my friend said, "She's holding your report card upside down. Is your mom stupid? She can't read?"

That experience was a profound moment and Participant 1 remembered her mom looking

at her in such an endearing way that: “The seed was planted at that very moment that I was going to be a teacher.”

Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruct non-English speaking individuals on the fundamentals of the English language so that they can communicate with others. Another common source of career inspiration for participants were the female teachers who helped them, particularly in learning English as a second language. Three of the 15 participants mentioned female mentors such as their ESOL teacher, classroom teacher, and guidance counselor. Participant 4 spoke about how she had a teacher who took a special interest in her: “She told me things about college that I didn’t even know existed. Without her guidance and support, I would have never gotten into college or got the financial assistance I needed.”

To see other females in their schools who understood their culture also encouraged these women to pursue their educational journey. Participant 2 had such a mentor: “My ESOL teacher was inspirational and encouraged me to not give up. She was a strong woman and was so committed to teaching me English.” Participant 7 remembered telling her ESOL teacher what had happened with other adults making fun of her mother for not knowing how to read or write: “She told me that she had been in my shoes before and that is one of the reasons she decided to become a teacher.” For this participant, that encounter with that particular teacher was a turning point: “It was at that very moment that I remember telling myself that I, too, wanted to be a teacher one day to help my mom learn to speak English, and she would be happy and not cry.”

### ***Perceived Barriers Directly and Indirectly Attributed to Being Hispanic or Female***

In order to fully address the first research question, I included in the interview

protocol specific questions related to the various barriers, or other inhibiting factors, that directly or indirectly related to being Hispanic or female. Participants responded with a range of various issues they experienced that could be grouped under the category of barriers. They discussed cultural barriers that played a role in their educational journeys. I categorized the codes with regard to how being Hispanic directly, or indirectly, was related to being Hispanic and female.

The participants shared similar experiences on how being Hispanic directly related to the barriers they experienced in attaining their career aspirations. Communication, cultural or family expectation, and racial factors were codes revealed across all the interview data. There were times when these women experienced feelings of being unable to act in a relaxed and natural way because of the self-consciousness or mental restraint that they experienced by being a Hispanic female.

### ***Importance of Communication***

Communication appeared 12 times throughout the data. Participants' said that having an accent inhibited them in some way along their educational journey. Participant 13 stated: "I'm very self-conscience of my accent, and even though I like having an accent because it sets me apart, I want to speak proper English." Similar feelings were experienced by Participant 2 when she talked to other professionals: "I was always worried people did not understand me when I would talk in front of groups, and it was very challenging." One participant went as far as taking additional classes to try to perfect her English to advance in her educational career. Participant 4 stated that she: "took a lot of English classes to perfect the language, but having a strong accent always seemed to put me in the category as a dumb Mexican." She expressed that: "My accent is

part of who I am, so I never truly understood why it played such a huge factor in how other professionals view me.”

Participant 5 also struggled with having an accent as a child, which continued to adulthood. “I have always had, and to this day have, a very strong accent. I am not always understood, so indeed communicating clearly is my biggest barrier.” Participant 3 stated: “People always tend to want to correct me. I had an experience with a supervisor in my past job where she made a comment that she and I were not communicating well, and that maybe it was because of the language barrier.” Participant 4 remembered: “A professor publicly ridiculed me with something I wrote, so that has made me very insecure.” She expanded on that topic by saying: “I think that whole experience has stopped me from wanting to pursue higher positions.” That experience was also shared by Participant 4, who remembered:

People did not understand me very well, and it was very frustrating because many of my colleagues were White and did not speak Spanish, so I couldn't even try to explain myself in Spanish so they would understand what I was trying to communicate in English.

The same lack of understanding was experienced by Participant 5: “Communicating was my biggest barrier, as I spent a lot of time explaining myself to people who did not understand me.”

Participant 7 remembered that as a child she was behind in reading comprehension: “My family only spoke Spanish, and I really did not have the opportunity to perfect my English outside of the ESOL classes I was put in.” Participant 2 said : “I learned my profession in English, but since my first language is Spanish I needed to

understand my career in Spanish.” Participant 2 shared similar experiences with English being her second language: “There are a lot of rules on grammar that I do not understand. I had to go through a lot of grief on papers, and I did not feel comfortable and needed people to proofread because I was afraid to make mistakes.” Participant 13 stated : “I was so embarrassed because of my accent and lack of writing skills.”

### ***Cultural or Family Expectations***

Cultural or family expectations appeared seven times across the interview transcripts. Participants personally experienced what they considered barriers that were directly related to being Hispanic and also experiencing the cultural expectations that other people placed upon them. Some of those included being put on the migrant track when they aspired to go to college. Participant 1 said: “I came from a migrant family, and I was put on a different track; it was expected that I would be a farm worker like my family.” Even when she entered college, “Because I only took general education classes in high school, I was placed in basic reading, writing and math as the assumption was, that is where I should be.” Participant 7 shared a similar experience. She described believing that she was putting her cultural values second. “I could have helped my family financially by going to work in the fields, but instead I went to school. She continued:

A lot of my friends dropped out of school to help their families, so I felt I was looked upon as the outsider within my own family. That was really hard for me, and I remember feeling a sense of disconnect from my own culture.

Two participants shared that they both hid the fact they were taking college classes. Participant 7 stated: “I did not like that I had to be sneaky about wanting to go to college, but I didn’t want to upset my family.” Participant 1 remembered thinking: “What

if I don't make it; what if I get caught? What if I'm not smart enough to take classes?"

Participant 10 experienced a cultural barrier with her family: "My parents didn't feel education is important for the female. My father said that we are to get married and raise a family."

Participant 6 felt the cultural expectations with people in general: "I'm also not your typical Hispanic if you were to look at me. I don't speak Spanish fluently, so people do not think I am who I say I am." Participant 12 recalled a different experience in her early childhood and being Hispanic. She stated: "I was bullied a lot in my younger years as the stereotypical Hispanic which really messed me up."

Participant 15 remembered that she wanted her recognitions as an aspiring leader to be for her abilities; however, "Often times I received such recognitions solely because I was Hispanic." She also stated: "I felt like I was used inappropriately sometimes to meet the minority checked box." Participant 1 shared a similar experience: "After my fifth year of teaching I received teacher of the year, but my bubble was instantly burst as I was told I was the token Hispanic, and of course I received that award because it was me."

### ***Feeling Inadequate***

Ten of the participants shared the feeling of inadequacy. I found this code 15 times throughout the interview data. Participant 11 stated: "I've always been clumped together as a minority. The [school] district hires minorities, but they tend to be African American and the Hispanic people tend to get left out of that minority classification." This statement emphasized that a school district can hire an African American and consider that act as being culturally diverse. Participant 8 added to that thought:

I am here to make a difference, but I feel Hispanic females are the forgotten ones in terms of race. Hispanic females are breaking the ceiling all the time, but we are still underrepresented, and I think we tend to be the forgotten ones and have to work twice as hard to get a plate at the table.

Participant 1 said that: “Even after I received my PhD, the University had asked twice for my race, and I refuse to check it. Instead I used my ethnicity.” Participant 4 stated:

The Hispanic population is growing, and for me personally, I tend to hide how I truly am because I feel like if I speak out too loud or often people do not take what I have to say seriously and say I’m playing the race card. It seems as if, although many White females have the same exact credentials as I and the same highly effective status as I, I am the forgotten one.

Some of the participants said they were often afraid to be themselves, whether in a room full of fellow educators or because they felt uncomfortable that they did not look aesthetically like a typical Hispanic. These cultural barriers, at some point, inhibited them as they pursued their journey to become a teacher or administrator. Participant 13 recalled: “They placed me in ESOL classes where I didn’t belong, and that made me feel dumb and segregated.” A few of the participants touched on the fear of being exposed as Hispanic, a fear that those women carried with them. They wanted to be recognized for their abilities as educators. Participant 1 recalled that, in college, she wondered: “What if I’m not smart enough taking classes?” Even during her early years as a teacher, that participant recalled:

I was in a White American dominant world, and I was stepping into this world. I kept thinking, “What if they find out what I am?” I remember being at a meeting

or conference and I had to literally write down my name and what grade I taught because I was so scared thinking I am playing a role that I wasn't sure I was deserving. I was fearful of being exposed as not smart enough, lots of self-doubt of being just a Mexican.

Participant 1 perceived that being Mexican meant not ever being smart enough to go to college or be anything more than a farmworker.

Four of the participants believed being Hispanic slowed their careers. Participant 14 stated:

It has slowed my career aspirations in that I have always had to prove my abilities as a leader and prove to others that I should be taken seriously. I am not sure if it's because I'm short, Hispanic, female, and have a strong accent, or if women, in general, have to work that much harder to secure leadership positions.

Participant 13 believed that it might be because she looked too young to be a teacher and district trainer for other teachers: "I'm constantly questioned by parents and colleagues in my abilities as a young female Hispanic educator. I sometimes feel like I get push back and that people underestimate me." Participant Five shared her thoughts: "I feel like I always have to prove myself and work 10 times harder than others in my field just to show that I have the abilities and skills to be an effective leader." Participant 1 recalled always having to prove her abilities and stated, "During college I had to prove myself and learn to be true to myself; it was a constant worry." Participant 2 remembered applying for her Master degree program: "I had a lot of self-doubt if I would really get in. Maybe I wasn't meant to be in higher education." She continued to say: "There were a lot of mental obstacles, and I had no one to look to as an example. I was outside of my comfort

zone.” Participant 1 stated that during her education journey, “I was not sure I was able to do this, but felt that I can’t be the one who didn’t make it. I was fearful of being exposed as not smart enough.”

Participant 11 said: “I tend to speak my mind and advocate for myself and my people. Speaking out has also gotten me blackballed. If you’re a minority and you speak out, then you end up having to tread lightly or face being the loud Hispanic.” She also remembered the significance of being bilingual:

When I was growing up, I was told knowing two languages would be beneficial in my career advancement, but let me tell you how that was used. I was hired for a Dean position, which is the final step in becoming an Assistant Principal. Instead of being groomed for that transition, all translation issues any student or parent had were all directed to me. I helped my own people, but that was all I was used for the majority of time. I have other skills, such as working well with my community, but it seemed as though the school used me to their benefit, and I was brought there to help the school to just translate.

### ***Family Struggles***

The topic of family struggles came up five times. Five of the participants shared their family struggles that attributed to slowing their aspirations. Participant 12 stated: “I think being Hispanic slowed my career because my mom did not have a green card and was illegal.” Having a parent that was in this country illegally manifested itself in several ways. For instance, Participant 12 recalled having to take care of all transportation-related issues within the family because her parents were unable to obtain a driver’s license. She stated: “I could only go to school part-time because I was responsible for driving around

my siblings and my mom.” That experience had ramifications beyond being able to simply perform the task at hand and revealed an underlying fear that was present with many immigrants who are not legal citizens. That participant continued: “Her immigration status hindered me because she was always afraid she would be deported. Not knowing what would happen to us was very scary for our family.” Participant 12 also talked about her father, who came from Guatemala.

He was 17 years old, and even to this day he is unsure of his English. I knew I wanted to help people like that. He also motivated me to learn Spanish, so that I could communicate with my people.

Participant 13 shared a very similar struggle with her family. “My mom did not have a green card and was illegal. Not knowing what would happen to us was very scary.” Taking care of family was often the responsibility of these women, which slowed progress in their careers. Participant 13 revealed: “My younger brother was diagnosed with cancer at age two, so I helped my family with his health care and appointments.” Other participants left their countries and families to pursue their educational dreams. Participant 2 recalled: “Learning a new language and culture was intimidating to me. I was afraid to venture out and try new things.” Participants 3 and 4 said that although their families allowed them to come to America to further their education in America and become educators, doing so was still a struggle to be without that family presence and support. Participant 7 said that she came from a migrant family and that: “My parents did not have money to send me to college, so I had to go to work for a few years before going on to college.” Participant 9 revealed: “I remember always seeing my parents stressed with their jobs and the struggles.”

Six of the 15 participants discussed and shared similar experiences. While growing up in their perspective households, their parents had little or no formal education. Participant 5, who at the time was still living in her country of origin, recalled her parents' level of education affected her in a profound way: "They couldn't help me with my schooling because they both had dropped out of school in their early years." She recalled a time when she was very young and could not read books herself: "I received a collection of books from an American family that was visiting, and I was so excited to receive such a gift, but unfortunately neither my mom or dad could read." Participant 1 stated: "My parents were never formally educated, and I had to finish school, so when I graduated high school my parents were so proud." Participant 7 recalled that both her parents were unable to support their children's education, because they had "worked very hard out in the fields, and they both dropped out of school in the sixth grade. They did not read or write English and could not help my siblings and I." Participant Four recalled that: "My parents never received any formal schooling, so they just did not understand the value in it or what having an education could possibly do that my family couldn't do."

### ***Personal Struggles***

Many of the participants encountered barriers on the way to achieving their successes. The topic came up 11 times throughout the interview transcripts. There were lost friendships, physical and mental risks from the job, and returning to college in their 40s. Many of them had to take personal risks along the way.

Many of the participants had financial barriers in order to pursue their careers, and six of the participants stated that trying to obtain loans was one of the biggest barriers.

Participant 12 recalled: “I worked since I was 14 to help my family. I remember I used money I got from a car I wrecked to pay my tuition bill.” Participant 10 stated that the lack of money “was a huge barrier. I have had to borrow a lot of money to get where I am today, and it’s been tough financially.” Participant 7 talked about her second job that impacted her ability to be fully involved in her job as a teacher. Participant 7 said:

Time and money were factors that prevented me from opportunities at my school to advance. I was a single mother providing for myself and my children. In order to begin the administrator track, I needed to be involved at my school. I had my second job to go to help pay for school.

Participant 13 said for her: “There was always the financial barrier, but we just prayed and hoped everything would turn out.” Participant 12 said that her mother “put my college tuition on her credit card and would sacrifice her own medicine that she needed for her type I diabetes to help me.”

Participant 11 said that when growing up she wanted to get away from all the stigma. She said: “All Hispanics were classified as Mexicans, which I find to be very interesting, but in my own culture I felt like my own people wanted to keep me down.”

Participant 4 said that her family “was very reluctant to let me leave and they did not understand why I wanted to pursue education. My family was a constant barrier that I had to try and get through.” Participant 5 talked about the biggest barrier being her family and going against her family culture:

What I mean by that is that my parents wanted me to get married and have a family. They did not understand that I wanted a different life that was not predetermined for me. I had to travel my journey alone for quite some time, and

it's hard to overcome cultural barriers when you don't have the support.

Participant 14 said: "I basically left my cultural values and family to better myself, and I'm still paying to this day for wanting to overcome those barriers."

Participant 6 left home at 17 years old:

I had two full time jobs while going to college, and not too many people were there for me. I lost a lot of friendships and had to cut ties with a lot people because they did not value or support my priorities in obtaining a college degree.

Participant 4 recalled that, when she left her country: "I desperately wanted to get out of Mexico, but I was afraid to lose my family. It was hard to keep my dreams alive. I knew when I left that I would not see them for a long time."

### ***Participants Perceived Educational System Barriers***

In addition to the barriers participants perceived as being directly or indirectly related to being Hispanic or female, they each perceived barriers within their own educational institutions. This data was elicited through a question in the interview protocol asking participants how their organization could have better prepared them for their career aspirations. Although I intended the question to highlight the opportunities, the participants' responses presented the institutions as barriers.

Responses from all 15 participants included data that could be coded under several thematic categories. These codes included: Cultural Awareness, Support System and General Improvements. In the following discussion, I explored these three overarching codes with participant responses.

### ***Cultural Awareness***

Cultural Awareness appeared eight times throughout the participants' interview

transcripts. Some participants believed that there was a need for more cultural awareness within their institutions and believed that by having a better understanding of the Hispanic culture that their institutions could bridge the culture gap, as well as have more diverse teams at the leadership level. Participant 15 recalled that often times she was the only Hispanic female in the administrative pool and: “I often felt looked upon as the outsider; as though I didn’t deserve to be there for my leadership abilities but only because I was a Hispanic.” Participant 7 described her thoughts about becoming a certified teacher: “ I feel cultural awareness trainings would benefit the district and current administrators in understanding the Hispanic culture and that not everyone develops as a teacher or administrator the same.” Participant 10 also shared a similar thought regarding a time when she was going through the new teacher mentor program: “It would have been helpful to have a coach or mentor who spoke Spanish because in our culture we like to talk in our first language and sometimes understanding English words’ meanings is difficult.” Participant 5 recalled the importance of cultural awareness in the educational institution and how it helped her:

When I was in college, they assigned me a mentor to help me acclimate to my new culture here in the United States. It was beneficial to converse in my first language, and I felt as though I had a friend who wanted me to be successful. I think seeing a school district implement something similar for new teachers or aspiring administrators would be valued.

Participant 4 stated: “I spent a lot of my free time and countless hours trying to figure things out in my district. There is a vast amount of information for teachers to stay on top of from professional development to certification steps.” Participant 8 mentioned that for

her: “The district trained us in a certain way, but having diverse practices we start to see outside of that realm and what that looks like or what would the best practices be.”

### ***Support System***

Many of the participants talked about the importance of having a support system both personally and culturally. Often, many of the women had to work twice as hard to get where they were in their careers and some had support systems, while others did not. This topic came up eight times throughout the participants’ interview transcripts. Participant 4 said: “Having a group of the people that understand and support our struggles and barriers.” Participant 10 stated: “Without the help of my support team, I would have not continued my career. I learned so many things to be able to wear many different hats in the schools. Find people who support you and want you to succeed.” Participant 7 said, “I had close friends that understood my struggles that helped me stay focused. It’s important to have that support from both a career standpoint and also a cultural standpoint.” Participant 1 said, “Stay the course; having a support system and confidant that understands our struggles is important. We need Hispanic females in our classrooms, and we are throwing away so many gifted individuals because of cultural barriers.”

### ***General Improvements***

Some of the participants had general improvements they felt would benefit others wishing to become teachers or advance to leadership roles. This topic came up five times in the interview data. General improvements such as minority recruitment programs, onboard trainings, retention of Hispanic females, and financial assistance were mentioned. Participant 14 said she knew one Hispanic female who left her district for a

better opportunity to become a principal in another district. Participant 6 said that “some have left because of the pay.” Some participants stated that improvements were general as they related to onboard training and the new teacher mentoring programs. Participant 6 said: “Mentoring programs need to have mentors that have classroom experience to meet the needs of new teachers and who have had classroom experience and can be more rigorous.” Participant Five had a similar thought: “we feel more comfortable being in a supportive environment with others who not only speak Spanish but also share our Hispanic culture”.

### ***Barriers to Achieve their Successes***

Despite all the barriers these women faced in their career advancement, some of the participants discussed how they overcame them. They provided encouraging words or advice to share with other Hispanic women wishing to become educational leaders of tomorrow. Some of the participants described how there was a lot of “self-talk” throughout their educational journey. Participant 4 stated:

What I did the most was to always keep trying and not giving up on myself. I had many talks with my grandmother who understood my struggles and helped me be strong when I felt alone. She taught me how to remind myself, with daily affirmations, that I will succeed.

Participant 1 stated: “During my Master’s and PhD education, I was stubborn and had that constant drive, so I kept saying to myself that I am going to prove everyone wrong.”

Participant 5 said: “Don’t let anyone tell you that being Hispanic will keep you from making it. I had a small community of my people, and no matter the odds, we always came together to assist each other in any way.”

Participants discussed how they overcame the various barriers by bringing a modern approach to their culture. Participant 4 recalled:

My grandmother taught me that I will face many barriers and that I could embrace my culture, but to also start a new way of thinking in that I did not have to be the girl that gets married and starts a family.

She said that way of thinking helped her when she wanted to quit, or things became difficult. Participant 1 reflected on the past when, at one point, she was the submissive female. When she was raising her own children, she said to them: “I want you to know the mom figure to aspire to be more. I moved my family into a new modern way of Hispanic culture. That shift that women make can be powerful.”

***Potential Barriers Indirectly Attributed to Assisting Hispanic or Female Participants***

**Bilingual.** Being a Hispanic female did not simply present a lengthy list of barriers and impediments. A majority of participants touched on several factors they believed actually assisted them with their career aspirations. Seven of the participants said that being bilingual and bicultural played a part in securing educational positions within their respective school districts, rather than being a detriment or a limitation. Participant 3 stated: “I am bi-cultural, and I have found that seems to be an asset. For me, people in my professional career have hired me partly for that reason.” Participant 4 stated: “Because I can speak Spanish, I am often called upon to all sorts of meetings, and that has allowed me to see the whole child.” The term whole child in education comes from The Whole Child Approach to education which ensures each child, in each school, in each community is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged (ASCD, 2020). In education, Participant 7 said: “My district has a high population of Hispanic students

and the need for Spanish speaking educators is very much in demand.”

**Family Value of Education.** Although several participants discussed the lack of education among their parents and siblings as being a barrier or inhibiting factor, several other participants discussed the value their families placed on education as enabling them to have career aspirations. This topic appeared seven times throughout the interview transcripts. Participants whose culture or families valued education also played a part in helping them rise to the top in educational leadership roles. Participant 6 stated:

For my family, your school always came first, and my culture left a big impression on me in terms of what education meant, and if you were not doing good in school then everything else took a back seat until you did what was needed to get back on track.

Participant 3 said that her family instilled the importance of education. She stated: “It was a natural thing for me to be teacher because I had a broad perspective and was independent. The community I grew up in supported me to learn English, regardless of race or culture.” Participant 7’s parents made sure she understood how important doing well in school was. She said: “My parents were adamant that I did not work with them in the field and to concentrate on my school work. My family wanted me to have a better life.” That participant was the oldest of four children in her family and she recalled: “My mom wanted me to set example for my younger siblings, so she was very hard on me to do my best in school.” Participant 11 also had parents who valued education. She said, “I needed role models, and my parents were always about getting an education and pushed me, so that helped me.” Participant 1 remembered her parents were “very adamant that all the children finish high school.” Her family would need to migrate every spring to

another farm for work and to make money for the family, but “My parents valued education so much that they made sure we migrated to upstate after school was out.”

**Connecting to Hispanic Population.** Several of the participants shared that their ethnicity allowed them to better connect with students in schools serving a high number of Hispanic families. This topic came up four times throughout the interview data.

Participant 8 stated that her cultural ethnicity “has played a very prominent role in forging through and overcoming all obstacles and challenges I have had to face. Because of my cultural upbringing, I am able to give back and relate to the Hispanic population.”

Participant 5 stated:

I have connected with my students on a personal and cultural level. My students and parents trust me because they know I am a lot like them and understand the culture and home life which many of our school staff simply do not fully understand.

Several of the participants also believed that because their culture was not only determined, it was also a very helping culture which allowed them to connect with Hispanic families. Participant 2 stated: “My culture is very welcoming and giving; like, how I can make you happy?” Participant 5 stated:

I consider myself a servant leader, and I get that from being brought up in a culture where we serve our people, whether it be our own families or other families. We are a giving culture and are quick to help whichever of our schools need that relationship in the Hispanic communities.

### **Summary of Results**

In Chapter Four, I discussed the findings of this phenomenological study in which

I examined the lived experiences of 15 Hispanic female educators who were current or aspiring educational leaders or teachers. This chapter also included the interview findings, data analysis, and emerging themes with thematic descriptions and examples of participants' responses to these themes. The themes that emerged revealed aspects of these women's lives that allow the reader to develop an understanding of these women and the barriers and personal experiences they lived. I hope the knowledge and information will engender change.

I designed the interview questions to help in understanding the perceived barriers and to examine the challenges the women who participated in this study faced. Themes that emerged from the analysis included: perceived personal barriers were directly and indirectly attributed to being Hispanic or female; participants perceived the education system to have its own set of barriers; the distinct presence of female mentors; and realizing education was their calling at a young age. In Chapter Five, I will offer an analysis of the findings in further detail, as well as implications of this study and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

This chapter begins with stating my purpose for this study and the statement of the problem, the overarching research methodology, and the research questions. Next is a further discussion of the four main themes and categories building upon my discussion in Chapter Four. In the conclusion section, I discussed the findings, overall conclusion, implication for professional practice, and recommendations for further research. Finally, this chapter closes with a brief summary.

#### **Purpose and Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the career and personal experiences of 15 Hispanic female educators. Specifically, I sought to identify perceived barriers faced by those educators, as well as other factors related to culture, language, and gender that impacted their career aspirations. Credentialed and competent Hispanic females are becoming a desired asset in many public school systems, particularly as the number of enrolled Hispanic students is increasing steadily. During the 2014-2015 academic year, 30.7% of students in public schools in the state where my study took place identified as Hispanic. By the 2018-2019 academic year, that number had grown to 33.9%, or over one third of all enrolled students (citation withheld).

While the student population in U. S. public schools continues to become more diverse, the population of school leadership remains comparatively homogenous.

According to a report from the National Center for Educational Statistics, in the 2017–2018 school year, approximately 79% of public school teachers were White, 9% were Hispanic, 7% were Black, 2% were Asian, 2% were multiracial, and 1% were American

Indian/Alaska Native (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). For the 2020-21 school year there were 14 million Hispanic students enrolled in public education (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Given the increase of Hispanics in the overall U. S. population, the increasing diversity of the student population in K-12 public school districts, and the dearth of Hispanic teachers and educational leaders, there is a clear racial and gender gap that is increasing over time.

Also stated in the NCES (2020) report is that roughly 76% of public school teachers were female, with only 9% of them Hispanic. In 2017–18, about 78% of public school principals were White, 11% were Black, and 9% were Hispanic. The significance of this topic and examining what actual and perceived barriers these women experienced could potentially lead to increased diversity and cultural expansion in the profession of education by having more female Hispanic leaders at the administrative level.

The purpose behind this phenomenological study helped me shape the formation of two separate research questions through which I sought to examine possible contributing factors for the gender and racial gap. More specifically, the research questions centered on the factors that were related to gender, race, and culture and the perceived barriers the participants in my study experienced on their journey toward their career aspirations. Those factors were derived from the lived experiences of the 15 volunteer participants in this study, who met the criteria of being Hispanic, female, and an educator as a participant in a one-on-one interview with the researcher.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

The research questions helped me to frame both the interview protocol and the

questions that I asked of each participant. Conceptualizing, developing, writing, and re-writing research questions were part of the reflective qualitative inquiry process. I formulated the research questions to help me clarify purpose, make connections, and reflect on and interrogate the impact of the research trajectory on participants. I formulated the research questions based upon pertinent educational research literature. The research literature indicated that minority women, including Hispanic women, experienced barriers that were perceived to be directly or indirectly attributed to being Hispanic and female. The two research questions guiding this study were:

1. What taxonomy of barriers do female Hispanic educators perceive while seeking or advancing to administrative leadership roles within two K-12 Public School Districts in the U. S.?
2. How do factors associated with culture, gender, and language impact the rise into educational leadership roles for current and aspiring Hispanic educational leaders?

Through the first research question, I sought to identify the specific barriers perceived by current or aspiring educational leaders. The question concerned how the participants viewed the obstacles they faced that were directly or indirectly attributed to being female or Hispanic. Through the second research question I explored how the conditions of being female and Hispanic may have shaped the participants' career aspirations or influenced their successes and failures.

I collected interview data and analyzed the interview transcripts to fully address both research questions. The process of analytical coding revealed four distinct themes in the data presented in Chapter Four. Those themes served as the foundation for the

findings of this study.

In Chapter Four, I presented narratives that illustrated the key perceived barriers that 15 Hispanic female educators faced while advancing in their educational careers and Hispanic female educators who were aspiring to be educational leaders and wanting to be teachers. The methodology I used to gather that information was a phenomenological approach through which I sought to uncover a phenomenon or phenomena occurring in the lived experiences of a group or an individual person. This was accomplished by in-depth interviewing and was conveyed through the participants' narratives (Creswell, 2017). According to Shenton (2004), this phenomenological method yields an abundance of rich, descriptive narratives that are organized into themes and categories. That approach shed insight into the phenomena of the barriers faced by 15 Hispanic female educator participants in this study.

## **Discussion**

The findings from this study also aligned with my purpose and the expectation that the findings would contribute to the limited research literature that exists exploring Hispanic female educational leaders and the barriers they faced while achieving their career aspirations. Through this study, I intended to also employ qualitative research methods to safeguard the integrity of the data I gathered and analyzed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The extent of the findings in this study provided information to serve as an outline in conducting similar studies to expand the body of knowledge in the field of educational leadership.

The 15 participants in this research study all seemed willing to be transparent in sharing their lived experiences. Each one of them added her unique voice to the story in

hopes to inspire other Hispanic females to never give up on becoming leaders in education and fulfilling their career aspirations despite the barriers. Their stories revealed four distinct common themes. The first theme that emerged from the data was the perceived barriers the participants experienced, which were either directly or indirectly attributed to being Hispanic or female. The second theme was the perception of barriers within the participants' own educational institutions. The third was the presence of female mentors in their younger years. Lastly, the fourth theme was the realization that education was their calling at a young age.

***Finding One: Perceived Personal Barriers Were Directly and Indirectly Attributed to Being Hispanic or Female***

According to the narratives, the participants faced various inhibiting factors that were directly or indirectly attributed to being Hispanic or female. Those barriers addressed the first research question related to various perceived barriers the participants experienced while achieving their career aspirations. They shared experiences that affected them directly, such as the cultural expectations people and family placed upon them. Many of the participants were expected to work in the fields to help their families financially. In some cases, the expectation for some of these women was to get married and have children. Many of the participants discussed their communication barriers in having an accent inhibited them in some way. The participants were often corrected in their misuse of the English language. They were cited for not advancing in their careers because they were not communicating well with others.

In examining the narratives, I noticed the participants faced indirect barriers, such as feeling inadequate and dealing with family struggles and personal tragedies. Although

those barriers were indirectly related to being Hispanic or female, participants shared that they often were afraid to be themselves or feared being exposed as Hispanic. The direct and indirect barriers left the participants feeling unable to act in a natural way because of their mental limitation of being a Hispanic female.

***Finding Two: Participants Perceived Barriers Within Their Educational Intuitions***

According to the narratives, the participants encountered barriers within their own institutions which were revealed through their responses to the interview questions. The participants faced cultural diversity barriers and experienced a lack of support systems. The data that produced this finding was elicited through a question in the interview protocol asking participants how their organization could have better prepared them for their career aspirations. Many of the responses presented institutions as a barrier. Some participants stated that their institution did hire minorities, but they hired an African American and considered that act as being culturally diverse. Several of the participants indicated that they were “clumped together as a minority ... and Hispanic people tend to get left out of that minority classification” (Participant 11). Many of the participants, according to their narratives, expressed that Hispanic females were the forgotten ones in terms of race. That situation was articulated by Participant 4:

The Hispanic population is growing, and for me personally, I tend to hide how I truly am because I feel like if I speak out too loud or often people do not take what I have to say seriously and say I’m playing the race card. It seems as if, although many White females have the same exact credentials as I and the same highly effective status, I am the forgotten race.

***Finding Three: There was a Distinct Presence of Female Mentors***

Many of the participants revealed how gender factors played a role. Many of the participants indicated that at one point in their early years, a female mentor played a significant role in their decision to become a teacher or administrator. This finding addressed the second research question. Participants used terms such as *mom*, *grandmother* and *teacher* to describe the females who had the greatest impact on their decision to take the education path. The importance of those female influencers was most strongly articulated by Participant 1's comment:

Definitely my mom, she was discriminated against and she would cry and cry because she could not read or write. We had just got our reports and I was excited because I had gotten good grade. My friend and I were standing in front of my mom, and she took my report card and said, "I'm so proud of you" and my friend said, "she's holding your report card upside down. Is your mom stupid? She can't read?"

Participant 1 indicated that was a profound moment for her. She remembered her mom looking at her in an endearing way. She said, "The seed was planted at that very moment that I was going to be a teacher." According to the narratives of many of the participants in this study, what the women experienced in their relationships with some other significant females impacted them in a way that encouraged them to pursue education during the most challenging times.

***Finding Four: Realized Education was Their Calling at a Young Age***

In understanding the significant moments that the participants knew education was their calling, the narratives revealed that many of the participants communicated

moments in their lives that served as inspirations for their career aspirations. Several of the participants had similar experiences, which I categorized as cultural factors in this study, and concluded that the second research question was addressed. The participants expressed the importance of students having role models in educational settings that looked like them. That belief was demonstrated by several participants when they described that all children need love and a sense of belonging in their school. Many of the participants had wanted other Hispanic students to be proud of their culture and to see other Hispanics in positions of teacher and administrator, so those other students would not fall into the stereotype that Hispanics must follow the migrant track.

For some participants, the difficulties they experienced because of the lack of a Hispanic role model impacted them early in their quest to becoming an educator. The participants indicated the need for making an impact in the community and letting young people know that Hispanics are capable at succeeding and doing much more than what some people think Hispanics can do. Participants shared experiences of being lost in the educational system, of having adult responsibilities, and wanting to ensure no other children experienced what they had experienced in school. Participant 7 commented, regarding her non-English speaking parents: “I was their voice at very young age. I had to translate everything, and, when I say everything, I mean from parent conferences, to going to pay bills, to all the doctors’ appointments.” Other participants revealed that they simply lacked good teachers growing up, along with the fact they may have been perceived as good students when in reality they were very lost.

### **Implications for Practice**

Exploring the cause and effect regarding the underrepresentation of Hispanic

female educational leaders, the barriers they experienced, and the lack of and need for support systems will serve three functions. First, the information will inform the distribution of information to school district leaders who oversee preparing aspiring leaders programs. Secondly, it will provide research-based information to other Hispanic females aspiring to become educational leaders and teachers regarding mentoring and support systems. Lastly, exploring the cause and effect regarding the underrepresentation of Hispanic female leaders will inform those aspiring Hispanic females of the challenges they may face along their educational journey. Exploring that cause and effect will provide a framework for future research to expand inquires of comparable issues.

Additionally, an environment must be created to provide the means for Hispanic leaders to support one another, network, and advocate for increasing the number of Hispanic female leaders (Glass, 2019). The need for more competent Hispanic female educators across the U. S. suggests there is a substantial opportunity for growth, in terms of providing leadership roles to the members of this ethnic minority group (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2008). The study results indicated there is no time like the present to increase Hispanic female leaders in our public schools.

As the influx of Hispanic students further populate our schools in the coming years, creating and maintaining culturally responsive school districts for Hispanic female leaders is imperative. As Furman et al. (2009) suggested, advocacy for social justice and change on behalf of those Hispanic students needs to be present and viable. Hispanic female leaders, given their ethic of care and their personal attributes complementing the Hispanic culture and community, can make and support those changes.

The findings from this study revealed that Hispanic female leaders are and can be

successful and that more of them need to be in educational leadership roles. They are exemplary role models on how they achieved their career aspirations despite the barriers they had to overcome. The findings also demonstrated the need for more support and opportunities for Hispanic female leaders to obtain leadership roles. Policies are needed to help create preparation programs to assist Hispanic females with securing the credentials needed to secure top-tier positions. Policies should be implemented by school districts for recruitment and retention of Hispanic females in top leadership positions.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study and its findings revealed several opportunities for future research. It is the revealing of the obstacles that would allow for change in programs and practices. The revelation of barriers and factors that impact Hispanic females professionally has the potential to be used by educational organizations and agencies to develop programs and practices that assist in overcoming the obstacles the participants experienced throughout their professional lives, and particularly, in their desire to achieve leadership positions. Research on policies and procedures can be conducted, and then the findings could lead to the development and implementation of new policies and procedures to ensure a more representative instructional and leadership cadre of Hispanic females in our K-12 public schools.

For this study, I recruited 15 Hispanic females out of a total of 75. They were employed by two school districts in one state. Further researchers may consider larger numbers of participants from various school districts across the U. S. for the purpose of capturing a robust sample size. In addition, future researchers could center on the differing perceptions between Hispanic ethnicities, as in the research of Savala (2014).

That study evolved around the impact of ethnicity on decision-making. Further research needs to be conducted to examine if Hispanic females' leadership styles, age, and number of years in the leadership pool help or hinder them in reaching their career aspirations (Reyes, 2015). Other factors that should be considered could include those such as immigrant status, time in the country, and parents' levels of education.

### **Conclusion**

I began this research because there was a need. I became concerned by the underrepresentation of Hispanic female leaders in my school district and the limited amount of research regarding barriers Hispanic women faced along their career paths. I also was concerned by the lack of institutional support for current and aspiring Hispanic female leaders, and this certainly ignited the inspiration and motivation to conduct this research. Having lived experiences in which I struggled to find my own identity as a young child through my adult life, and the sacrifices and barriers that I, too, encountered along my life's work and practice, I embarked on a research study which examined and explored the perceived barriers that Hispanic female educators experienced while ascending in their career journeys. As an educator, I recognized that for me, my own barriers related to my own lived experiences, but also my future leadership identity would emerge from a result of those barriers and experiences.

I became a ward of the state when I was born and later bounced around in foster care until I was almost four years old. I was then adopted into a White family. The way my parents raised me, and their belief that they had to support my differences, had a tremendously positive impact on me. Over the years, I struggled to identify with someone who looked like me whether they be friends, teachers, or employers. I never had the

opportunity during those years to look at a female of my skin color and be empowered and inspired. I did not have a role model to look at and know that one day, I too, could be somebody despite the challenges I faced being of mixed race living with a White family.

My leadership style is that of a Transformational Leader. I'm passionate about creating an open, communicative and diverse culture, allowing my followers to be able to share ideas, and empowering them on an individual level. I'm very passionate about mentoring and being a role model to others, and each day I strive to lead by example and align my values and beliefs to those of my institution. I gained my leadership style from my lived experiences and have found extreme comfort leading in the way that I know is the most effective way.

I spent a lot of my time understanding how to make meaningful connections with my students. Through relationship building, collaboration and mentoring, I began to understand that I overcame many of my barriers, and only with the encouragement of others and the will to never give up my hopes and dreams. I found myself working in Title 1 schools with populations of 75% or more Hispanic students, and at the time there was not one Hispanic female leading any of these schools. I knew there were credentialed Hispanic females in the district and sought to find out where they were. This ultimately led me to my research questions and conducting this study.

As I interviewed the current and aspiring female Hispanic leaders and teachers for this research study, I felt a kindred connection, although I am not Hispanic – a surprise to many individuals who have inquired about my research study. My birth mother was White and my birth father was Black; therefore, I consider my ethnicity as biracial. Yet, I felt that kindred connection because being perceived as belonging or not belonging to a

particular group impacted me in many of the same ways as the participants of the study. I also shared the same passion and determination that many of the participants did to be a role model for future students who look like me. Like myself, many of the participants also wanted to be leaders and help create environments in which Hispanic students could see one of their own as a teacher or a principal. I felt connected to the participants as I listened to their stories unfold throughout our interviews. Their collective experiences served as both a source of empathy and inspiration that I knew would drive the focus of my research.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Research/Interview Questions

Appendix B: Codes and Frequencies

## APPENDIX A

## Research/Interview Questions

What is your Age?

What positions have you held?

What is your current position?

How long have you been in your current position?

Where were you born?

What languages do you speak?

What language do you read and write?

1. Tell me how being Hispanic has enhanced, inhibited or slowed your attaining your career aspirations.
2. Please tell me how your culture has played a role in your educational journey.
3. What risks, if any, have you taken to achieve the success that you have?
4. What are some significant life experiences you have had that contributed your decision to become an educator?
5. What were the barriers, if any, that you faced in your career advancement? How did you resolve them?
6. Tell me about any female mentors that played a significant role in your decision to become a teacher or administrator and how they encouraged you.

7. Tell me how your school district has prepared you to become a teacher or an administrator.
8. What words of advice or encouragement would you share with other Hispanic women wishing to become educational leaders of tomorrow?
9. Do you know any Hispanic female educational leaders who left your district? If so, why?
10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this topic?

## APPENDIX B

## Codes and Frequencies

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
Participants Perceived Personal Barriers were Directly and Indirectly attributed to being Hispanic or Female	Direct	Cultural Expectations	11
		Communication	12
		Bilingual	6
		Family Valued Education	7
	Indirect	Connecting with Hispanic Population	4
		Feeling Inadequate	15
		Family Struggles	18
Participants Perceived Barriers within their Educational Intuitions	Institutions	Personal Strategies	11
		Cultural Diversity	9
		Support System	8
The was a Distinct Presence of Female Mentors	Gender Factors	General Improvements	10
		Female	13
Participants Realized Education was their Calling at a young age	Cultural Factors	Look like us	4
		Lost in System	2
		Family Voice	1
		Early Literacy	1