

I AM LATINA:
SINGLE-GENDER CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF LATINAS

by

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ABSTRACT

For this study, I researched the literature focused on Latinas and leadership development. It detailed discussed the obstacles Latinas encounter and the cultural factors that reinforce negative stereotypes, such as the role and influence of the patriarchal church, as a male dominated culture, on the Catholic school system. The study explored the experiences and perceptions of five Latinas who attended a single gender Catholic school, Felton Catholic High School, and their journey into leadership roles. Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theory was used to understand how the women navigated through *nepantla*, the in-between space, found their voices, and established inner peace, which ultimately led them to experiencing a type of liberation/empowerment, which in turn gave birth to the new *mestiza*, a new identity. *Las nepantleras* (Anzaldúa, 2015) are boundary crossers who initiate others from a listening, receptive, spiritual stance. They rise from their own visions and shift into acting them out; thus, introducing change. This takes place through Anzaldúa "path of conocimiento...inner work" (Anzaldúa, 2015).

A foundational belief that the participants echoed was that of spirituality (inner peace). Anzaldúa's definition of spirituality aims at becoming aware of interconnections between all things by attaining a grand perspective (Anzaldúa, 2015). This served as a coping mechanism for the women immersed in a male dominated work culture.

The findings also suggested that strong family support and a positive ethnic identity were contributing factors in cultivating their leadership abilities. The participants created new narratives, new stories in essence "putting Coyolxauhqui together"

(Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 138). They were able to re-write their personal stories with their family's support.

The participants unlearned “colonized behavior” that may have been taught in a patriarchal school. They were able to overcome limitations that may have been imposed on them as students. In this case, the participants used their leadership skills learned in a collectivist environment for the betterment of community to counter the dominant culture of individualism. Each participant appeared to follow the *conocimiento* stage of “the crossing” by defining herself in terms of who she is becoming, not who she has been (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 136). It is a call to break free from coping strategies and undergo conversion. Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theory is an instrument that empowers the voiceless through the path of *conocimiento*, knowledge (Anzaldúa, 2015).

Keywords: Latina leaders, single-gender schools, Catholic schools, Borderlands theory, and *conocimiento*.

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

To never again feel embarrassed or shameful for being a Latina, to never have to apologize for the person that I was created to be, was the motivation of this project. I am Latina, so why is this not enough? I am woman, so why do I hesitate? I am intelligent, so why do I doubt? This writer was seeking to take her place in the world by looking at and assessing herself, no longer falling back on old, embedded recordings of deficit thinking that set her up for failure nor blaming anyone else (Valencia, 2010). Never again, for I am Latina. There were no apologies necessary. I wanted to know what educators before me did not share about their experience or, better said, what misguided me to a false notion of self. I wanted to know what is unknown. What have successful Latina leaders learned in their life that have set them apart? Were they misguided? If so, did they delete the recordings of deficit thinking? If so, how?

My hope was that this project would help erase those recordings of deficit thinking that dragged me down and incapacitated my leadership skills. I aimed to replace those recordings with new ones of success and pride. How do I do this? With discipline, persistence, and conviction—yes, but is this enough? Ultimately, my emptiness and incompleteness, my *unfinishedness*, brought me back to searching for that new version of myself that would replace those old feelings of inadequacy and self-fulfilling prophecies of failure. Insecurities had not been silenced, even with the remarkable accomplishments of earning multiple degrees—Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Master of Education—or completing all doctoral course work. This constant, recurring, aching pain had been my companion throughout my doctoral program. Self-doubt almost kept me from continuing this project. Fortunately, I aligned myself with professors who were like-minded about

empowering women, so I continued. The hope of smothering negative memories that stifled me and creating new and positive ones, not only for myself but for others who have been exposed to similar experiences, was the resolve of this project. Unlearning those oppressed beliefs and values would dispel the embedded recordings, finally giving way to re-writing a transformational story that would re-invent me as a change agent. My research would contribute to organizations and programs that build Latina women's self-esteem, character, and leadership skills.

Before and during my research study, I wrestled with the terminology and how it identified me. Am I *Chicana*, *Hispanic*, *Mexican-American*, *Latina*, or *American*? Chicano is a term through which I came to realize the significance of the movement and its legacy. The 1960s era was a time of great social upheaval, political fervor, and cultural rebirth. This movement trained a new generation of leaders and brought forth issues important to the Mexican American community (Martinez, 2000). Because of educational programs, Chicanos and Chicanas streamed onto campuses in unprecedented numbers. I had to remind myself that Chicanos were fighting for our rights and, yes, they were upsetting the status quo. Never again will people of color sit silently watching the discrimination take place. Chicanos were the voice for those of us who did not know how to identify and define our oppressed condition, let alone get out of it. For it was the Chicano effort that brought forth social change.

Hispanic is a safe term, but it is too general to distinguish me. Mexican-American is the term that my school teachers assigned me when they called me "Alisha." I could never call myself an American because it felt like I had left something behind. I identified myself as a Latina because, as a Latina, I accepted the complexity of this

identity as a privilege by claiming all aspects of my identity, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, native language, and place of origin without leaving it behind (Anzaldúa, 1987). For the purpose of this study, I used the word Latina because it captures the Latino/a population of people who trace their ancestry to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Central, and South America. Latino/a is a category that includes not just many nationalities but races as well (Gracia & De Greiff, 2000).

Martinez's (2000) studies in Chicana scholarship have stimulated cultural pride that has become an important motivator in fighting against those stories of racism and sexism that have been embedded in my mind. In my case, this meant challenging the passive female ideals edified by a patriarchal church that condoned and glorified the woman's role within the family (Learner, 1986; O'Connor & Drury, 1999). This research was an attempt to disrupt the pattern of thinking that believed one would betray her culture for the security of her well-being (Trujillo-Ball, 2003). I was determined to know what was unknown, what had been discovered by those brave and courageous women who had liberated themselves from patriarchal sexism and deficit-thinking ideologies. The avenue that lead to breaking these ideological bonds is found in education:

Education is freedom. Education will make you be counted amongst other women. And education is the foundation to whatever you want to do. It gives you this power to choose, the power to have a voice, the power even to challenge unfair traditional practices. Because you read, you understand. You make information be transformed into knowledge (Makoni & Risley, 2010).

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and experiences associated with the leadership development of Latinas who were educated in

a single-gender religious school. I chose attendance in a religious school as a requirement for selection because these institutions provided an academic program within a faith-filled environment. Religious education was an essential component of education, contributing to the curriculum by developing students' knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs, practices, and traditions. This study focused on the Roman Catholic religion. "Catholic schools develop and implement academic, co-curricular, faith formation, and service/ministry programs to educate the whole child in all these dimensions" (National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools, 2012, p. 2).

The genesis of this study occurred when I was marketing the single-gender Catholic school that I am employed. I stated that it was a school in which young girls would walk into the hallways as quiet shy girls and walk out into the world as confident young women. I caught myself stating how successful and self-assured these women were as leaders when they moved into fields such as business, medicine, and education. My point was this school prepared young girls to be strong, poised leaders, but I began to question what data I had to support my claim? I also asked myself, "Has this world changed so much?" I had seen many Latinas graduate with such confidence. It was a world apart from my own experiences of deficit thinking. What difference in their education set them free and gave them the skills to maneuver confidently in this world?

Statement of the Problem

Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich (2000) state that although women are successfully advancing in leadership roles, men are more likely to advance to the top leadership position. In addition to male advancement, it has been documented that women do not

aspire to leadership roles as often as men (Skrla et al., 2000). Wojtalik, Breckenridge, Hancox, and Sobehart (2007) suggest that problems still exist concerning how men and women are socialized, and this socialization creates internal, gender-biased values that inhibit females from seeking leadership status.

Organizational, interpersonal, and personal obstacles are additional barriers for women advancing in their careers (Northhouse, 2001). These barriers have functioned to keep the number of women in leadership positions disproportionately low; thus, there is a need to develop competence and create associations within and beyond their organizations. For the leadership development of Latinas specifically, “Creating a gender-fair environment in schools and communicating messages of female strength and heartiness” is necessary and critical (Wojtalik et al., 2007, p. 62).

While there are Latina women who have reached significant leadership positions within the United States, Latina women still suffer more unfair disadvantages and are more likely to live in poverty compared to any other ethnic or gender group (Gaston, 1994). Latina women remain uneducated, underpaid, and underrepresented in leadership positions (Caiazza, Shaw, & Werschkul, 2004). The issue of underrepresentation of Latina leaders is critical because Latinas will comprise 25% of the U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Different methods may need implementation to break this statistic, “In order to change how girls perceive themselves and their capabilities, we need to provide new social scripts that illuminate the strengths and talents of the female gender” (Wojtalik, Breckenridge, Hancox, & Sobehart, 2007, p. 62). By breaking negative stereotypes, cultivating personal capabilities, adding positive contributions, and building self-confidence, Latinas prepare for leadership and become role models for

others (Sanchez de Valencia, 2008). Single gender Catholic schools may be instrumental in contributing to Latina leadership development. As DeBare (2004) contends, single-gender religious schools are effective in educating young women for success through the development of scholarship and leadership, giving them the confidence to remove barriers that keep them from succeeding. While Catholic education can be a powerful counter-culture formative agent in the lives of students, Catholic education is also a part of a larger and dangerous discourse about gender and masculinity, (Burke, 2010; Chernin, 1994; hooks, 2000) which limits leadership opportunities for women. Catholic schools are under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church that traditionally established policies that undervalue women (O'Connor & Drury 1999). The Catholic church has continuously prioritized men at the expense of women. The church has a history of manipulating the Bible to reinforce patriarchy, in which men are seen as spiritual leaders and women are to submit to their authority (Mattson, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of leadership development among Latina leaders who were educated in a single-gender Catholic school. The study illuminated strategies that may be effective tools of empowerment for young women. Latinas owe each other the conversations that move them from silence to a space where they can recognize the internalized oppression and psychological damage that has caused Latinas' pain and suffering (Flores & Garcia, 2009). We are called by the feminist poet and teacher Adrienne Rich to "listen to the silences, the soft voices of young women" (1978, p. 243). She encourages educators to be advocates for these young women who try to speak up but are often seen as "strident

and unfeminine because of their tones of confidence and assertiveness” (p. 243). This study was significant in that it provided insight into how Catholic single-gender schools had influenced the leadership development of young Latinas. It also aided higher educational institutions in understanding the effects that culture, race, and gender had on Latina leadership.

Research Questions

Using the phenomenological approach, the researcher utilized in-depth interview methods to answer the proposed research questions. The overarching research question of this study was: What are the perceptions and experiences associated with leadership development of Latina leaders who were educated in a single-gender Catholic school?

The following subquestions were included:

1. What values and foundational beliefs were instilled when Latinas were students that developed their current leadership?
2. What instrumental strategies, instruction, and methods were used to develop their leadership abilities as students?
3. What was the family’s role in contributing to leadership development?
4. What role did culture play in contributing to leadership development?

Theoretical Framework

The lives of the women participants were explored through the lens of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* theoretical framework. Borderlands theory is a process that attempts to rewrite history by inserting new meaning in the myths and narratives that have been passed on to colonized people (Anzaldúa, 1987). The colonized person is a product of “the colonial order established since the sixteenth-century and contemporary relations of

control” (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008, p. 6-7). Europeans exercised control of the colonized on the basis of racist values which led to the creation of opposing categories such as *us* and *them*. Fanon (1963) introduces the colonial world as one that is divided into the colonist and the colonized, created by the colonist in order to assert his own superiority. Fanon’s study of psychology and sociology led him to conclude colonized people perpetuate their condition by striving to emulate the culture and ideas of their oppressors. The true revolution is eventually led by the masses who have discovered they can liberate their souls by fighting colonial oppression. Freire (1970) supported Fanon’s conclusion that, “in their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them” (p. 14). Freire believed, “the oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption” (p. 8). Unlike Fanon but similar to Anzaldúa, Freire contended that oppressors also could change their thinking from being colonized. He believed “those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly” (p.12). Anzaldúa (2015) urged one to confront these destructive aspects of the world through *conocimiento* (knowledge). “Conocimiento pushes us into engaging the spirit in confronting our social sickness ...resulting in transformation, healing of our wounds” (p. 19).

The framework focused on those who had been historically marginalized by the dominant groups and the process of transforming their identity for healing and for the sake of challenging those structures that oppressed them (Anzaldúa, 2015, 1987). Using this framework, the study examined how culture, race, language, and spirituality were intertwined in the experiences of five Latina leaders, and it explored the impact that these

factors had in their lives (Alarcon, 1998). It placed the women leaders at the center of the research and presented new ways of understanding the world of a Latina.

Anzaldúa (1987) contends that the borderlands is a “place of contradictions, colored people, poor people, weird people, deviant people, engaging in daily battles for survival. Hatred, anger, and exploitation are prominent features of this landscape” (preface). As Anzaldúa and Keating (2000) put forth, “Borderlands is a metaphor for processes of many things, psychological, physical, and mental,” (p. 176). Anzaldúa’s (2015) post-Borderlands writings presents a healing journey, “the seven stages of *conocimiento*” and offers a holistic design to effect change (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. xxvii). This theory sets up a path to break free from traditional models of class, race, gender, and sexuality and for transformation to take place. Anzaldúa’s (2015) premise puts the pieces together to overcome the fear and insecurity that is felt from the separation and segregation that has been imposed on minorities.

Importance of the Study

This qualitative study drew from literature of traditional gender roles and the perceptions of professional successful Latina leaders, including how they understood their experiences as students and how these experiences contributed to or impacted their leadership development. It included discussions of Catholic education and research on single-gender schools. This study sought to understand if culture, religion, and single-gender education played a significant role in Latinas’ leadership skills.

The reflections of the study’s participants served as an influential model for young girls and women as they take a step into a world in which Latina leaders are underrepresented. The goal was to address both the invisibility and distortion of female

experiences so that it contributed to ending women's unequal social position (Lather, 1991).

The importance of this study is couched in the understanding that, we are ethically bound to pay attention to how we word the world. We must pay attention to humanism's desire for unity, coherence, totality, and equilibrium as well as to the language that enacts that desire, a language that produces real, material structures – categories, binaries, hierarchies, grids of intelligibility based on essence – that reward identity and punish difference. (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 484).

Studying the experiences of these Latina leaders added to the limited body of knowledge about Latina leadership. It informed the field about patterns and characteristics that inspire the transformation of current and future Latina leaders. These elements could assist religious colleges and universities as they support Latina students. The values and foundational beliefs identified in this study could be incorporated early in school to continue empowering young Latinas. The results of this study center the voices of women who have been oppressed and traditionally marginalized by recognizing common experiences, maintaining connection to their roots, removing obstacles, and transforming young Latina lives. Education has the potential to inspire Latina students to become leaders within the community and institute changes for those who will follow them.

Scope of the Study

“Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a worldview” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 148). The study took individuals in a particular context and explored their personal experiences and

interpreted these experiences. A phenomenological approach was used to address the research questions of the study, as it aimed to focus on understanding the essence of Latinas' experiences developing leadership (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Merriam, 2002). I studied the lives of women who had attended an all girl's Catholic high school in grades 9-12 and examined if the school, family, and culture had an influence in their leadership development. The reflections of the Latina leaders were "bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essence" of their experience (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). This approach was best suited for the study because it sought to understand the lived experiences of the women.

Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory helped me to understand the stories of the Latina leaders who had been influenced by single-gender Catholic education. To get to the essence of the meaning of the Latina leaders' experience, a phenomenological interview was designed to gather their personal stories. The research focused on understanding the meaning of their personal experiences. Were there strategies and methods the religious sisters staffed at the school used to educate this group of women that may have made a difference in their leadership development?

The participants reflected on what types of leadership roles they were involved in, and I asked them to expand on how the educators in these schools influenced them. Did religion and values instilled at this school make a difference in their development as future leaders? Latinas were also asked if their family had a role in their development as leaders. The data gathered from the interviews was analyzed and written as narrative accounts and were examined for the common interpretations and the meanings of their personal experiences. Documents such as participants' journals, letters, scrapbooks, and

yearbooks were also used to supplement and support data provided in the interviews. The participants were asked to evaluate whether the researcher's interpretation of the interview data resonated with their experiences. This was done to assure the analysis of their lived experience was portrayed as accurately as possible. Finally, archival documents such as reflections and data records served to confirm and triangulate the data. This analysis was used to ascertain if the school had an influence in their role as leaders or helped them grow into leadership positions.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

All proposed research studies have limitations. The leaders' in-depth reflections were studied, but their responses were limited because they relied on their memory of the experiences that took place decades prior. The study also took into consideration that there were other factors that had influenced the participants' lives such as their family and neighborhood experiences as well as their work experiences. Based on my perceptions of their responses, I had my own doubts about myself. I did not have the lived experience of being a student in a single-gender school nor had I been a Catholic school student. I am looking at their experiences through the lens of a public school student which may affect interpretation of the study's findings. Latinas are also very diverse from socio-economic status and cultural background, to their experiences, which may also limit the findings of the study.

Delimitations

While I acknowledge delimitations, it is important to stress that the specific purpose of this qualitative study was to understand this phenomenon from the

participants' perspectives. This research attempted to explore if single-gender Catholic school had an influence on Latina leaders. A small, purposeful sample was used and included only Latina women educated in an all-girls' Catholic school. This study was bounded and situated in a specific context. The number of participants was small and focused on a specific population. The findings of this qualitative study may still be transferable (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) to other similar groups in similar contexts.

Definition of Terms

Canon Law – any church's or religion's laws, rules, and regulations; more commonly, the written policies that guide the administration and religious ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church. (Catholic Encyclopedia.org).

Chicana – the name of “resistance that enables cultural and political points of thinking through multiple migrations and dislocations of women of ‘Mexican’ descent” (Alcarcon, 1998, p. 374).

Latina – a woman who traces her ancestry to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Central and South America (Gracia & De Greiff, 2000).

Patriarchal System – a social system in which men are regarded as the authority. It is inherent in faith-based cultures that dictate the path to leadership for women (Rogers, 2002). In a patriarchal system, men make all decisions in both society and in their family unit, hold all positions of power and authority, and are considered superior.

Religious sister or nun – a woman who belongs to a religious order, or community. After a period of preparation (called formation) sisters and nuns take lifelong vows. Usually they take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; that is, they promise

to live simply, celibately, and to follow the will of God through their community (Catholic Encyclopedia.org).

Single-sex education – also known as single-gender education, it is the practice of conducting education where male and female students attend separate classes or are placed in separate buildings or schools (Debare, 2004).

Vatican II – the popular name for the Second Vatican Council which was held from 1962 – 1965. It was an assembly of all the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church who were summoned by Pope John XXIII as a means of spiritual renewal for the church (Encyclopedia Britannica). The bishops ordered a large-scale liberation and modernization of practices in the church. This directive was felt in nearly every area of church life and set in motion many changes (dictionary.com).

Summary

My aim in participating in this doctoral program of educational leadership and school improvement was to open doors for those who had obstacles in their midst. Little did I believe I was ill equipped to handle such a challenge. I had to embrace my own insecurities and overcome my own feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy. As an educational leader, I had to face my own demons of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010) not only by acknowledging them, but by overcoming them. In order for me to contribute to the greater good of the Latino community, I had to re-connect with both my past and present experiences by exploring how I had arrived at these inadequate feelings. The goal was to bridge the past by recognizing commonalities of other Latinas' stories that can grow in our consciousness in hopes of removing oppressive obstacles and ultimately change lives. Studying the lives of Latina leaders who had been educated in a Catholic

single-gender school possibly diminished the impasse and promoted understanding which can transform young Latina lives.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“This was the last astronaut job that was not (yet) done by a woman. Now with this milestone we can focus on the fact that what is important to succeed in life, it does not matter whether you are a man or a woman” (NASA Astronaut Ellen Ochoa on Milestones - First Latina female astronaut). With this accomplishment, Ochoa is one Latina who has broken ground and paved a path for other women to follow. According to Lopez-Mulnix, Wolvertin and Zakai, (2011), Latinas represent a small percentage of women in leadership in the United States. The motivation for this research came from the need to better understand the experiences women who had been able to jump the hurdles and tear down the walls that keep most Latinas from leadership opportunities. What had the small percentage of these women experienced that had set them apart?

An overarching question guided this qualitative study is: What were the perceptions and experiences associated with leadership development of Latina leaders who were educated in a single gender Catholic school? This study focused on the knowledge of women who had been historically marginalized to uncover stories where “multiple truths are discovered and voice where there had once been silence” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 348).

This chapter provides a review of literature related to Latina leadership, the patriarchal system of the Catholic Church, the role of female leadership within the church, spirituality and leaders, Catholic education shaping leadership, and leadership within single-gender schools. Anzaldúa’s (1987) Borderlands theory addresses cultural factors and experiences of Latina women who have often been marginalized. Her theory also takes into account the means used to resist oppression and transform traditional

gender roles to dispel misperceptions. Finally, this chapter includes literature on Catholic education and studies that demonstrated benefits of single-gender schools.

Leadership

Leadership is defined by Northouse (2001) as a process where one person influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. This leader may inspire the support of others to accomplish a task. Billing and Alvesson (2000) assert that successful leadership has been associated with masculine behaviors and traits. Men are generally stereotyped as competitive, aggressive, and rational. Women are often viewed as emotional, accommodating, and intuitive (Haslett, Geis, & Carter, 1992). These gender stereotypes are culturally shared and, because they are based in beliefs that men and women show different behavioral characteristics, they create power differences in the workplace.

Female leaders are evaluated against masculine-established norms, leaving women at a disadvantage. Categorizing such a masculine identity sets up a standard that denotes feminine traits as subordinate and out of the realm of the successful leader stereotype (Forbes, 2002). Billings and Alvesson (2000) found that women often implement masculine traits to maintain successful leadership positions and preserve their status in the workplace. They learned that women in upper-level management positions rarely identify with feminine qualities.

Understanding the beliefs that White-male leaders hold about leadership and gender reveals strong assumptions about how women are perceived in the workplace (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Women have to put more effort into their work than their male peers in order to earn recognition and praise. Women who are bosses may be

perceived as pushy, while a male boss is aggressive. A female boss is picky; a male boss is attentive to details. Men who follow through may be seen as positive trait, but women who do the same are labeled negatively as someone who does not know how to quit. These perceptions constitute a “glass ceiling” that prevents women from rising above in leadership positions (Williams, 2005). When women recognize these assumptions, they are armed to confront the effects of gender stereotyping.

Latinas and Leadership Development

Latinas constitute one of the fastest growing segments of our population, but there are few visible Latinas in leadership. As described previously, the word Latino/a captures a combination of common language, ancestry, and cultural factors (Gracia & De Greiff, 2000) and will be consistently used in this study to unify the different terms for this population. In this literature review, the terms Hispanic and Chicana will be used only when citing others’ work. Anzaldúa (1987) uses Latina as a term that identifies a person who claims all aspects of her identity such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, native language, place of origin without leaving anything behind and accept this complex identity as privilege.

Latina leaders represent a relatively small percentage of women in leadership in the United States, according to Lopez-Mulnix and colleagues (2011). They note that “Latinas hold less than 1% of corporate office and board of director positions in Fortune 500 companies and similarly miniscule percentages in professions like medicine, higher education, and K-12 administration” (p. 6). The Lopez-Mulnix et al. (2011) study explored the stories of eight exceptional women who had found success in male-dominated areas such as higher education, public schools, business, and science and

found several factors that put Latinas at a disadvantage. To begin, they started life one level below everyone else. According to the women participants, there were several barriers that obstructed a Latinas' success. They believed racism prevented them from arriving to the decision-making circle fast enough, and they were denied the same opportunities as white people. They reported that Latinas had to work twice as hard to achieve rapport and to be included in the conversation. They were also at a disadvantage due to gender-based stereotypes and machismo (aggressive masculine) practices. They also struggled with family obligations taking precedence over their leadership aspirations. Lack of mentor support and representation also served as obstacles because it gave rise to an unclear social identity as well as self-imposed limitations, which added to the culture of inferiority. Often Latinas adopted a "survival mode" and adapted their Latina heritage to fit the majority. According to Gaston (1994), this may be due to the assumption that advancement within work requires assimilation to the dominant culture.

The study also found that a Latina who wanted to be successful had to be incredibly competent and be able to see the "big picture" while staying focused on the task at hand. Women in the study reported surrendering their own personal rights to a family, giving that decision to the institution. Latinas adapted masculine traits such as competitiveness, aggressiveness, independence, and exclusiveness to be able to place themselves on an even playing field, often compromising traits of collaboration, receptiveness, interdependence, and inclusivity, as well as their integrity, for a leadership position.

Lopez-Mulnix et al. (2011) assert that women tend to be natural collaborators. This counters the stereotypical assumption that women cannot lead complex

organizations because they are not tough enough to make hard decisions for success, even though collaboration and inclusiveness are being valued more and more in business.

Women have to work twice as hard to achieve a level of trust because their decisions are often second-guessed or scrutinized more closely (Lopez-Mulnix et al., 2011).

The Latina leaders in Lopez-Mulnix et al.'s (2011) study faced these challenges head-on. These Latinas recognized that gender and ethnic biases exist, but they took the extra step to overcome the obstacles of biases and discrimination. They maneuvered the inequalities of their workplace by bringing meaning and balance to work, and they used barriers as opportunities, giving credit to their success because they tried. They flourished because of their diligence, hard work, and commitment, persevering amidst the tensions of holding multiple roles in their professional and personal lives. They learned to navigate two cultures. They focused on the rich tradition and values provided by their connection to family, and they claimed these experiences made them strong and independent. A successful Latina has to be strong-willed enough to get the job done, especially if she is in a field that is dominated by men.

Lopez-Mulnix et al.'s (2011) findings related to Latina leadership further emphasized the meaning of success. For these Latina leaders, success was "having accumulated enough material wealth to have the freedom to choose where and how to invest time and energy" (Lopez-Mulnix, et al., 2011, p. 2). Success for these women was being happy with themselves and their careers. Success also meant balancing a lifestyle with family and work. Although these women created their own success in their own unique ways, their journeys were rooted in commonalities. There was a strong sense of family and traditions, along with strong ties to cultural heritage and influential religious

customs (Lopez-Mulnix, et al., 2011). Finally, the study found the common factor among all Latina leaders to be education. The women in the study achieved a certain level of confidence because they did not face the barriers that resulted from a lack of skills. Education empowered Latina leaders to know how to obtain information and knowledge and to know what to do with it once it was acquired to succeed in life.

Roybal's (2012) auto-ethnography echoed the findings of Lopez-Mulnix et al. (2011). In it, she presented her perspective of a Hispanic woman in an educational leadership position. Her experiences was one in which "many male administrators [did] not look favorably on women administrators" (p. 7), and they expressed superiority when in discussions. For these reasons, leadership positions often posed a challenge for women. Roybal (2012) encountered a macho, male, political mentality that women should stay at home. She stated that male administrators earned a bigger salary, even though she had more experience and education. She contended that tradition (culture, religion, language, and family), economics, opportunities for education, and lack of role models often posed challenges for Hispanic women seeking leadership positions.

Roybal's auto-ethnography also revealed that family and economics played a major role in attaining necessary degrees for leadership positions. Because educational leadership, specifically superintendency, is traditionally dominated by men, few Hispanic women are part of conversation of reform, leaving them in a profession of isolation. Roybal concluded that "a Hispanic female, must work harder and be more educated and have more experience than her male counterparts in order to be considered for the top positions" (p. 7). Despite these inequities, Roybal considered herself as a successful

leader and believed it was her obligation to give back to the community in hopes of advancing its success.

Breaking Negative Stereotypes

Even after achieving success, Latina women still continue to struggle with psychosocial and cultural realities that impact their achievement, goals, and future success (Thorne, 1995). As Sanchez de Valencia (2008) proposed, “Latina leaders go through stages of preparation, transformation, and influence. Latinas prepare for leadership by breaking negative stereotypes, improving personal capabilities, adopting positive contributions from their Latino culture, and by building self-confidence” (p. 157). Latinas can break negative stereotypes by accessing higher levels of education, becoming self-sufficient, and providing for others. Latinas can surround themselves with a positive support system, one that will help them in building emotional resilience that break down barriers. Aligning with role models and mentors can provide guidance and support. By adopting positive stereotypes and by taking pride in their cultural heritage and by identifying as Latinas, they will ultimately serve as role models for others.

Higher Education

Education is a powerful tool that can break negative stereotypes. Yet, even though this is the case, Latinas who have managed to achieve higher education and professional positions and who have adapted to new environments often find themselves tokenized or stereotyped (Arredondo et al., 2003). Trujillo-Ball’s (2003) research on Mexican-American female principals found that the women learned to adopt a “chameleon” identity. The participants selected were four successful Mexican American females in principalship positions in central Texas. Success was defined as having

recognized school ratings, according to Texas Education Agency's (TEA) guidelines. The study found that the women changed according to expectations of society. In order for them to be successful, each woman felt she had to adapt to an identity that was closely related to a White male identity. The women learned to juggle two distinct identities and, in some cases, denied their Mexican American female identity in order to be part of the White middle class institution. This is the opposite, as Trujillo-Ball states, of what Chicana feminism espouses. All men and women should accept and be proud of their own identity.

Similarly, the participants in Quilantan's study (2002) acquired the necessary educational credentials and the professional skills to reach educational leadership positions. The researcher recruited the participants from the TEA database, which recorded that, in the 2000-2001 school year, only 159 of the 1,175 superintendents were female. Of these, only 13 were Hispanic women. Quilantan selected ten Mexican American female superintendents who were employed in the public-school system in Texas. The study found that although these women were qualified, they had to utilize coping skills to maintain those positions. The participants blocked issues that they could not change, such as dealing with prejudice from the predominantly White population.

Themes of solitude and isolation surfaced among the leaders in Quilantan's (2002) study. The Mexican women felt alone in the patriarchal and hierarchal structure of the educational organization. They had to withstand academic pressures from the organization as well as social and personal pressures from their traditional Mexican American homes. Even when these participants were able to overcome these societal demands and personal obstacles, they were not perceived as positive traits in a Mexican

American woman. Further, these educational leaders used collaboration as a strategy to include members from the school and local community. They created their own expectations and accommodated their personal lives in order to have inner harmony. Their educational credentials got these women in through the door to success, but their coping mechanism of redefining their identity and collaborating with others were also necessary for their success.

Family Support System

Sanchez de Valencia (2008) suggests that Latina leaders align themselves with a support system. This recommendation comes from their study of 11 successful business women that provided data on their perceptions and experiences associated with leadership development. According to this study, there were many positive and negative influences and stereotypes related to race, gender, and leadership that affected their success. The findings show that experiencing a strong committed family or community can be an advantage when collaborating with others. On the other hand, expectations of staying at home and rearing children and the perception of passiveness can seem to be a weakness. Sanchez de Valencia's (2008) participants encouraged women to break stereotypes and restore self-confidence. Thorne (1995) encouraged professionals to be cognizant of the importance of family.

These support systems are critical in the success of Latina leaders (Sanchez de Valencia, 2008; Thorne 1995). Roybal's auto-ethnography (2012) has been consistent with Sanchez de Valencia's findings in which she enjoyed a large family along with a successful career. She avoided subscribing to the belief, if you are an administrator you

must devote your life to the job and put family second. Roybal, on the other hand, successfully committed to marriage and children first, then her work.

Mentoring Latina Students

Young Latina students who have mentor relationships can provide a positive support system as well as break negative stereotypes. Trujillo-Ball (2003) proposed that her research had implications for graduate students studying for school leadership positions. She recommended that honest discussions take place regarding cultural adaptation and identity change. She promoted giving students the opportunity to recognize their own prejudices and understand taboos associated with cultures, race, and gender. These studies can also give students an awareness of why Mexican American women feel they need to adapt their identities to succeed. Guzman's (2012) doctoral narrative provided insight into a Latina's experience of fear and isolation in a large urban college campus. It took her several years to feel a sense of belonging, wondering to herself if she should quit school and get a job. It was only after she encountered professors who mentored and encouraged her that she was able complete her education. Guzman (2012) concluded that mentoring in education is an important factor that contributes to the success of the student.

Additionally, Méndez-Morse (2003) recommended that preparation programs include in the curriculum contributions of minorities, females or males, in conjunction with educational leadership theories. She encouraged more investigation into the experiences of minority women and men, and deeper understanding of what it takes to become an educational leader.

Cultural Factors and Latina Leaders

Understanding culture sheds light on how and why people interact in particular ways, and the factors that give rise to assumptions and stereotypes. Cultures are the means by which people adapt to the conditions of life. Samovar and Porter (1991) remarked,

Culture becomes a part of who a person is. Culture serves the basic need of laying out a predictable world that enables one to make sense of one's surroundings ... Patterns of behaviour and ways of thinking become internalized and habitual (p. 34).

In order to change these patterns, they must be unlearned. Unlearning what was acquired during childhood and learning something different as an adult is difficult to achieve (Hofstede, 1997). This initial adjustment to an unfamiliar culture can lead to culture shock, or simply stated, a state of frustration (Hofstede, Pedersen, & Hofstede, 2002).

Because we begin learning culture from the moment a person is born, it becomes routine and is taken for granted. Actions become automatic, often without questioning or knowing why such an action takes place. "Every person carries within herself patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting which were learned throughout their lifetime" (Hofstede, 1997, p. 4). Culture is passed on through many avenues. It is learned through common expressions, stories, art, mass media, and technology. Family, school, and church are also means of learning culture. Family is the first teacher that introduces a child to what is and is not acceptable in society. The child learns this by observing and imitating family (Samovar & Porter, 1991). As soon as these patterns have established within a person's mind, they become a part of her life; they become a part of her culture

“that which distinguishes one group from another” (Hofstede et al., 2002, p. 34). These guidelines serve as a measuring stick for social behavior and help us determine expectations about how individuals behave and what they should believe. Culture influences how one perceives and operates within social circles. One communicates and makes choices based on cultural influences. “What is important about values is that they get translated into action” (Samovar & Porter, 1991, p. 49).

One of the dominant cultural paradigms in the United States is individualism. In order to succeed in school and ultimately in society, one must adopt an individualistic approach (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). This belief focuses on the individual’s identity. The center is the self rather than the community. The individual’s goals take precedence over the group’s purpose. Individualism rewards independence and individual achievement makes competition, instead of cooperation, the objective. Individualistic culture emphasizes fulfillment and choice rather than social responsibility (Trumbull, et al., 2001).

The dominant United States’ culture is individualistic. According to Trumbull, et al. (2001), many immigrant cultures are strongly collectivistic. Hofstede (1997) classifies Hispanics as collective. While individualism stresses that the person is the most important element in society, collectivism concentrates on community. In a collectivistic society, organizations, extended families, and groups take priority over the individual. Family has greater value than the needs of the individual. People perceive their own personal goals with those of the group (Trumbull, et al., 2001). In a collectivistic community, harmony and cooperation are preferred over competition. People are responsible for contributing to the common good of the group. Collectivists place

emphasis on sharing personal items in contrast to individualists who value private property. Another aspect of a collectivistic culture is that children pay deference to older people (Trumbull et al., 2001).

Another dominant cultural pattern found in the United States is the “doing orientation” versus the “being orientation” (Samovar & Porter, 1991, p. 74). As part of a doing orientation, activity and action are emphasized in American culture.

Accomplishments become the standard in this culture. In a doing oriented culture, “The individualistic society encourages children to become independent thinkers and doers who focus on their own intellectual achievement” (Trumbull, et al., 2001, p. 12). On the other hand, most Latin cultures are being-oriented. “The act of being is one of the main goals and joys of life. People take great delight in the simple act of conversation with family and friends” (Samovar & Porter, 1991, p. 74). The child who comes from a collectivistic culture is socialized to be connected to the community and be responsible to other members of the society.

Taylor (2004) also contends that Latino families are more collectivistic with a being frame of mind. The family expects one to achieve so that she can bring economic and emotional benefits to the family. Latinas show respect for others and demonstrate concern for the community’s success. It is very common for the eldest Latina in the family to be responsible for aging parents. She is expected to be their caretaker. Taylor (2004) reports that Latina women often choose not to move far from their family to keep that close connection. When Latinas begin to acculturate and enter the work force, particularly leadership positions, they often struggle with the uncertainties of the individualistic work cultures which value assertiveness, independence, and achievement.

They do not entirely separate from their cultural beliefs. Even while trying to live in the dominant culture, they hold on to “connectedness” (Taylor, 2004, p. 2) by either residing with their families or taking on family expectations.

Latinas have learned a way of life from their home environment. Education and work often defy traditional cultural expectations and beliefs. A single-gender education may have the potential to enlighten women by giving them an understanding and appreciation of culture as well as how to live within the dominant culture – never again marginalized, never again silent, but empowered to be a change agent.

Latinas may be given the tools to break the machismo practice that centers the obligation of family over self. Due to this belief, some women tend to retain the traditional roles and prioritize the family. Latinas acculturate to the role of women as caregivers who are silent, obedient, and devoted to family and husband (Del Campo, 2005), finding their work to be supplemental. These women position themselves outside of the leadership role due to fear of it interfering with family responsibilities. Latina leaders who have transcended beyond these cultural expectations have found a balance between work and family (Del Campo, 2005). The spouse is a source of support and not domination.

Culture Conflicts

University and college experiences often challenge Latina’s belief systems. Maatita’s (2005) study investigates the relationship between feminist and Chicana identities. Her research studied 12 women of Mexican descent. The participants in her study were students aged 19-25 from California universities who belonged to Chicana student organizations. Maatita (2005) identified conflicts that arose when women were

reared in traditional Latino homes. She found there was often a separation of the public and private domains. There were expected duties within the private domain that defined women in the Mexican culture. Staying home was “what a good woman does” (p. 32). Women are taught to stay in and take care of the home while men go out to take care of family. Maatita’s respondents believed that relinquishing control and power to men was part of the defined tradition. They believed they had no power to use their voices. While they did not like what was expected of them, they complied with those expectations out of respect for their fathers. Defying their father would risk losing their title as a “good daughter” (p. 32). Their role was to be obedient and respect tradition.

The respondents in Maatita’s (2005) study found that college experiences provided different viewpoints that challenged how they saw themselves relative to traditional roles. They found going home caused conflicts as they attempted to balance traditional expectations with their newly formed identities. Maatita’s study concluded that resocialization was evidenced by the women participants’ stories. The women in her research found a voice that they were not allowed to use at home. According to Maatita (2005) identifying as a Chicana feminist brought a “sense of empowerment needed to confront racism and sexism simultaneously” (p. 33).

Galante’s (2010) research sought to examine the influence of Mexican cultural factors on Mexican American women’s access to and performance in leadership roles. The study focused on the population of women of Mexican ancestry who lived and worked in El Paso, Texas. The quantitative phase of the research used surveys to collect data on 40 of the 127 women solicited. Ten of those women also participated in the qualitative phase. While the study findings showed that cultural factors exist and affect

participants' work behavior, the perception of cultural factors exists on the part of the organization and not the individual. Galante's (2010) participants agreed that cultural factors challenged them in leadership positions. These cultural factors were not necessarily associated with their ancestral background but were social behaviors learned from the community. Participants did acknowledge that gender-related beliefs, traits, and behaviors that men assumed from the dominant culture were challenges to women in leadership roles (Williams 2005).

Cultural conflicts created challenges, but intersections of cultural identities could open up empowering positions for Latinas. Some Latinas were bicultural and bilingual. According to Lopez-Mulnix et al. (2011), these qualities overwhelmingly shaped these women. Traditions, language, and belief systems were intertwined with being an American. The intersections of these cultures defined what Latinas value and who they are. They were able "to move in and out of multiple and constantly changing cultures, to gain perspective beyond the dominant frames" (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012, p. 543). This, in turn, could negatively or positively affect society. The women in the Lopez-Mulnix et al. (2011) study had a strong sense of family that was influenced by religious traditions. They also had formidable ties to their cultural heritage and saw it as a distinct advantage. They turned negative realities into positive opportunities; for instance, seeing their fathers experience racial prejudice motivated them to be proficient in English. Hearing comments that Mexicans were expected not to succeed inspired them to defy expectations. Instead of waiting for their partner to succeed as is dictated by the "machismo" attitude, the women started investing in themselves (Lopez-Mulnix et al.,

2011, p. 5). Their cultural heritage gave them a distinct advantage, a unique perspective in dealing with people.

Leadership and Spirituality

The spiritual belief system is another way Latinas are redefining themselves, for they are returning to an “indigena-inspired spirituality” (Medina, 1998, p. 189). They are feeding their souls by integrating their creative inner resources. Such perspective on spirituality have been traditionally prohibited by patriarchal religions. Medina (1998) contended that these rituals were not only about spirituality; these rituals forged women’s identities and became tools for daily survival within a society that had often silenced women. Spirituality became a power of energy; it was no longer a non-rational aspect of life (Medina, 1998). The lack of such rituals in patriarchal societies often resulted in women having to struggle to gain the confidence to take positions of leadership. Spirituality can be used as a “tool or strategy of resistance to help Latinas persist and thrive” (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012, p. 543). Claiming spiritual rituals has given women the ability to nourish and express their deepest values, thus preparing them to assume positions of authority that come naturally to them (Medina, 1998).

Gallegos (2006) asserted that spirituality was an important part of leadership, a source for women in developing integrity and finding meaning in their work. Gallegos studied 11 successful professional Latinas, aged 43 – 63, who lived and worked in the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States. These women were born and raised in the United States and each one was a first-generation college graduate who had achieved an advanced degree. They held middle- to upper-level management positions in the public and private sectors. Latinas in Gallegos’ (2006) study embraced a sense of spirituality

that is not associated with traditional religious beliefs or practices, but instead is associated or connected to a supernatural source. Gallegos sought to explore factors that influenced the success of Latinas in positions of leadership. The findings suggested that strong family support and a positive ethnic identity were contributing factors to the success of these women. Ethnic identity for the women in the study brought forth a strong sense of family, community, and spirituality. The spirituality described by the women was reflected in the respect and value of earth, community, family, self, and God. Gallegos found the women's connection to the earth, the heavens, and to one another gave them a belief that there was something larger than what was experienced. This spirituality surrounded their lives and gave them the strength to resist, persevere, and become generative.

Gonzalez-DeJesus' (2012) study explored the factors that influenced the career development of Latinas. The study reported findings on 20 women of Hispanic-Latina descent who were employed as mid-level administrators in community colleges. Spirituality became an essential component in the career of these participants. According to Gonzalez-DeJesus (2012), the women managed to overcome challenges to their career development by believing in and relying on a higher spiritual being. Participants' sense of calling and service led them to decisions that impacted their career development. Having a spiritual connection was necessary for participants to feel complete. They believed they needed this spiritual strength, which gave them an overwhelming feeling that everything would be fine, a feeling to carry on. Gonzalez-DeJesus (2012) stated this spiritual connectedness had an impact on her participants' lives, as it was seen as strength coming from within or coming from an invisible realm. The study also found that the dimension

of spirituality was ingrained and evident in the mindset of these women. When exploring factors that influenced career development of Latinas, the findings showed that that “spirituality led to balance in their lives which helped them find personal happiness, positive thinking and drive, and belief in self” (p. 142). Thus, spirituality was a factor that influenced Latinas in their careers. The dimension of the spirit is very important and essential to Latina’s resistance and growth; it is important to acknowledge and feed the spirit (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2014).

Patriarchal Systems and the Role of Female Leadership

Although Latinas are redefining themselves and integrating spirituality into their lives, (Medina, 1998), this empowered stance on spirituality has traditionally been prohibited by patriarchal religions. According to Lerner (1986), patriarchy is the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children. This implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society, and women are deprived access to such power.

Patriarchy is a social system which regards men as authority figures, and in patriarchal faith-based cultures, men dictate the path to leadership for women (Rogers, 2002). Patriarchal institutional structures suggest men lead while women attend first to family, then to organizations. This institutional leadership structure is founded on male definitions of power, authority, and leadership (Curry, 2000). In a patriarchal society, the oppression of women is emphasized. The term oppression means to push down or restrict. Women are not allowed to rise up to leadership levels or make decisions. Women are also not allowed to demonstrate independence or suggest changes to any social order.

In essence, women have a role in a patriarchal society, but only to the extent to which it is submissive and subservient to men.

Hunt (2010) argues it is important to understand that only men can be ordained within the Catholic church. Canon law prohibits women from being ordained. Only the ordained are given the responsibilities of making important decisions, such as those regarding sacraments, real estate, and church discipline. The implication is that this practice excludes women, even nuns, from leadership roles and decision making (Hunt, 2010). Latinas educated within this structure often embrace the patriarchal ideas of leadership within this system.

Wood (2004) studied the effects of patriarchy on three women in leadership positions in Catholic schools. This case study found that within Catholicism there exists the added constraint of religious doctrine that reinforces patriarchal concepts (Wood, 2004). Females who were educated and/or work within the structure of Catholicism faced the task of evaluating their leadership strengths within the tradition of the church (Rogers, 2002). Patriarchal ideologies created barriers for women who wished to construct themselves as leaders within the Catholic school system (Rogers, 2002). These obstacles set up women as inferior or as having a secondary status, thus women were dependent on and subordinate to men in decision-making roles (Sultana, 2011). The women in Wood's (2004) study discussed how they had to personally dismantle patriarchal images of women in leadership. This research suggested women who were committed to move beyond the stereotypical expectations for women in Catholic education (Wood, 2004).

Emerson's (2006) study discussed how women were able to overcome a patriarchal environment. The participants were selected from a high school league

directory that listed 40 women athletic administrators, 12 of which responded to participating in the study. Through their stories, participants demonstrated the strategies they used to achieve leadership roles in the *patriarchal game*. The women “challenged ideology, contested hegemony, unmasked power, overcame alienation, and learned liberation” (Emerson, 2006, p.113). Emerson’s (2006) research showed that when women spoke of proving themselves as leaders it often meant conforming to patriarchal ideology. The women recognized the existence of the good old boys’ club that reinforced the power center. They experienced overt sexism and gender inequities. The participants confronted the male-dominated discourse “by adapting to the external environment in which they worked and by holding on to the internal values, morals, and ethics that shaped their leadership” (Emerson, 2006, p. 115). The women working in this patriarchal institution experienced an alienating professional environment. They developed relationships with key supporters such as administrators and family members in order to liberate themselves (Emerson, 2006).

Guzman (2012) reflected on how this patriarchal ideology was very much ingrained in women as she expressed her mother’s deep-rooted, patriarchal, learned beliefs regarding the value of womanhood. She recalled her mother’s advice “to find a career that is short so that you can finish quickly and get married” (Guzman, 2012, p. 69). While her mother encouraged her to attend college, the ultimate goal was matrimony and family, not necessarily a profession. This anecdote gave insight to women’s belief systems and their roles within society due to patriarchal thought.

The face of the church reveals the pain that many women experience. At times this pain results from flawed behaviour of human beings – clergy and lay – when

we attempt to dominate each other. Women also experience pain because of persisted sexism. (US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994)

Women still struggle to have a voice equal to that of their male counterparts in the church. Even the church, who traditionally advocates for the underprivileged, has set up women to be at a disadvantage due to the gender inequities in the church structure. This social organization has created obligatory sets of rules that keep women from advancing in society. This system of belief is precisely why this study was so critical. This background perspective on Catholicism helps clarify the assumptions men hold and why women who are educated within the church continue practices that marginalize them.

Catholic Education Shaping Leadership

Since this study focused on participants in a Catholic school environment, it was important that the reader understand the influences the patriarchal church had on Catholic schools. Understanding male dominance within the church and the effect Catholic schools had on young people is critical to the cultivation of culture. Catholic schools are not only locations where academic knowledge is learned. They are places where socialization occurs and spirituality is instilled. Schools have a great deal of power to shape student identity. Lesko (1998) contends that schools have a great deal of influence and power to construct norms and values for adolescents. This will have a substantial effect on the student's future and who the student becomes as a person and citizen of the world.

Catholic education is also a part of a larger and dangerous discourse about gender and masculinity (Burke, 2010; Chernin, 1994; hooks, 2000). Catholicism perpetuates the status of men while defining what is possible in the process of being a man as well

(Ghail, 1994). O'Connor and Drury (1999) agree that patriarchy is oppressive to women in the church. Catholic schools overtly and subtly teach that women are always handmaidens, passing revelation off to men who will carry the message to the crowds. Women in this culture are limited to two overarching roles: that of a virgin or the woman responsible for the fall of man (Burke, 2010; Daly, 1973). In modern society, women are often still limited to the role of the mother and/or wife.

The lessons of Catholic schools are life-long. Rogers (2002) surmised that they begin and end with tight homosocial bonds that are protected institutionally; women have ancillary roles while men have central roles. In Catholic school systems, girls' self-images were often shaped by standards that envisioned them as helpers and caregivers rather than leaders (Rogers, 2002). An example of this standard is the fact that only men can aspire to be priests, the religious leaders of the faith.

Catholic School Academics

The culture of male dominance continues to be edified through single-gender religious schools. Pioneering religious sisters founded and administered several all-girl Catholic academies. These single-gender Catholic schools have seen enormous changes since the 1960s, due to the effects of the Vietnam-era counterculture, the 1970s women's movement, and the Second Vatican Council (Debare, 2004). Historically, Catholic girls' schools have had much in common, the biggest common denominator being education from religious sisters. The sisters typically emphasized the arts and provided training in piano or harp along with courses in needlework and painting. Over time, the emphasis shifted to vocational education, with classes in home economics and business skills, such as typing and stenography. But, options for Catholic girls remained limited during the

pre-Vatican II era. Young women were educated for the purpose of marrying and raising children in the future or becoming nuns. It was not until single-gender schools went through their own social transformation that they changed the lives of women and their leadership development.

Culture of Caring

A characteristic of this transformation was the contribution to the education of minority students. Litton, Martin, Higareda, and Mendoza (2010) studied the lives of students and their parents from one of the most ethnically and economically diverse Catholic school systems in the United States. Tuition assistance was provided to students who would otherwise not have been able to attend Catholic schools due to financial limitations. The results of Litton et al.'s (2010) study indicated that Catholic schools were making major contributions to the lives of ethnic minority and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Catholic schools were retaining students in school longer and graduating them from secondary schools at a higher rate than their peers who were enrolled in public schools. This gave minority students more opportunities to succeed in the future.

A unique characteristic of Catholic schools is built upon the ideas of acculturation. Catholic schools emphasize the importance of honoring and respecting culture. This is the basis for successfully educating students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds (Litton, et al., 2010).

Another key element to Catholic education is openness to educational change and new pedagogical styles. Catholic schools are able to respond to challenges of changing student demographics “due to their flexibility, local control, ability to function as a

community, and their tradition of educating the poor and immigrant children” (Litton, et al., 2010, p. 352).

Litton et al.’s (2010) research found that the ability of the Catholic school to form a sense of community also made the difference for disadvantaged students. Catholic schools create a culture of caring where students from low-income families are able to thrive. Students experience this deep concern from the school and, in turn, take personal responsibility for their studies (Litton, et al., 2010). This study found that “Catholic schools kept ‘at risk’ students in a safe, respectful, and trusting environment where they could learn (Litton, et al., 2010, p. 360). These students were more likely to stay in school and develop work habits and study skills that would help them in their education.

Catholic schools have not only made an impact on minority students, they have networked with families. Catholic educators reach out to families and form relationships with them. Through this partnership, parents of minority students see the Catholic school as a safe haven for their children. Parents also believe that the Catholic school better prepares their children for a better life (Litton, et al., 2010).

While Catholic schools have been instrumental in promoting social justice issues, single-sex (female) Catholic schools walk a tightrope on a range of women’s issues. According to Debare (2004), Catholic girls’ schools that were founded by religious nuns often felt freer to discuss topics such as contraception, abortion, or premarital sex that are frowned upon by the institutional church leaders. Religious nuns make decisions whether to work within a patriarchal system or move outside the system, simultaneously understanding that the hierarchical Church leaders take a much closer look at their schools. These female educators stay within the church and work to change its approach

to women. Focusing on educating disadvantaged students as well as empowering women is the mission of some single-gender schools.

Catholicism and Social Justice

Vatican II (1962–1965) launched Catholicism on a new path. It held Catholics responsible for the poor and the oppressed. It offered a “wide range of new ways for laypeople to assume spiritual leadership” (Debare, 2004, p. 233). Vatican II also empowered women's movements and bolstered in women a desire to challenge their status as second-class citizens in their own church. Religious sisters were at the center of this endeavor (Hunt, 2010). These women became activist nuns and, under their leadership, girls in Catholic schools were “encouraged to look within themselves for answers to spiritual questions and to think critically about the world around them” (Debare, 2004, p. 235). Many sisters introduced social justice into the curricula.

Catholic schools continue teaching social justice, human rights, and dignity within the curricula. Graduates are called to change the world by building relationships instead of fences. Heft (2011) contends that for a generation of students who tend to be individualistic and preoccupied with personal choices, Catholic education can be a powerful counter-culture formative agent in their lives. “Education in the forms of Christian leadership will help create a sense of responsibility for the larger community” (Heft, 2011, p. 20).

Catholic schools are called to “embody an identity and charism that make a unique and meaningful contribution to church and society” (Cook & Simonds, 2011, p. 319). Catholic schools prepare students to become citizens of the world through service opportunities, the integration of current events in the curriculum, and opportunities to

learn about world cultures and religions (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998). Catholic educators are instrumental in helping students build relationships within a faith-filled environment and learn how to evaluate culture critically using faith-based principles (Cook & Simonds, 2011). Graduates from Catholic schools are prepared to continue building relationships in the world. They are called to reach out to others and make a difference in the world.

Catholic schools want their students to participate in service as an altruistic endeavor that they take with them through life (Bickett, 2008). Service in a Catholic school is part of a mission-driven philosophy that links social justice to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Bickett (2008) selected a single-sex (female) Catholic (private) high school as her case study to analyze the impact that Catholic schools have on students, with specific regard to their disposition to leadership and service to the community. Bickett's (2008) interviews, observations, and document analysis found that service was a significant part of the Catholic school culture. Students' participation was high and for the most part positively reported. Bickett (2008) also found that service and leadership were closely linked. Many students believed that to lead was to serve. Students considered service opportunities as leadership opportunities.

Catholic Schools and Gay and Lesbian Students

While Catholic schools are seen as the place where faith, knowledge, experience, community, and family are integrated and inclusiveness of all students of diverse backgrounds is professed, Maher (2007) argues that Catholic schools have failed in achieving this goal of integration. Disintegration is the term Maher's (2007) research uses to describe the areas of difficulty and disconnection students experience in Catholic

schools. Maher's qualitative study explored gay and lesbian alumni of Catholic schools who shared that their lives did not fit those of their peers in areas such as spirituality, identity, family, and school. This is a contradiction to the purpose of Catholic schools' mission of inclusion. Gay and lesbian youth spent a great deal of time and energy hiding their sexuality (Maher, 2007). These students coped with the stigma in a number of unhealthy ways. According to Maher (2007), they withdrew from school, experienced self-hatred, family alienation, substance abuse, and even had suicidal tendencies. Internalized homophobia in Catholic schools can damage students' self-esteem (Maher, 2007). Students were forced to adapt to a school climate that reinforces heterosexuality and silences homosexuality. Maher (2007) found that schools' *silence* on this topic in curricula and library holdings left a void for gay and lesbian students who yearned for role models. These students found that faculty were judgmental and did not protect them from peer harassment. These anecdotes are indicative of socialization in which women and homosexuals do not fit in the leadership paradigm. Catholic schools' mission is to promote the dignity of all people. Single-gender schools address this contradictory statement with their promotion of respect for women and the disadvantaged.

Single-Sex Schools and Leadership

“All girls' schools are genuinely countercultural in their opposition to society's expectations for teenage girls” (Debare, 2004, p. 324). While the world has opened up to girls and women in many ways over the past 35 years, girls still encounter several societal demands to shape themselves in harmful ways. They face numerous levels of pressure “to define themselves in terms of their looks and sexuality” (p. 324). Girls are confronted with cultural images that tell them that beautiful, shapely, sensual bodies are

most essential. Single-sex schools are training grounds for girls to be future leaders. These are places where “girls have room to grow, to develop their talent, and then emerge to shape a better world (Debare, 2004, p. 326).

According to Shmurak (1998), there is much anecdotal support that shows that alumnae who attended single-sex schools have developed confidence because of the single-sex school experience. This confidence has been instrumental in overcoming the challenges of adulthood. Findings have been mildly supportive and are by no means conclusive on the question of whether single-sex schools are more successful than co-ed schools in educating women.

While it may be difficult to provide evidence that validates attending single-sex schools has an impact on academic achievement and future careers, Salomone’s (2003) study described women’s experiences that showed single-sex education could be an effective tool of empowerment and self-realization for some girls. Her findings came from published peer-reviewed journals and scholarly papers presented at professional conferences since 1980 which reflected contemporary views on sex roles. Salomone (2003) explored recurring themes that focused on attitudes and achievements. She found that all-girls’ settings seem to provide girls a certain comfort level that helped them develop self-confidence. Providing an “emotional and developmental ‘safe haven’ apart from the other sex for at least a portion of their education” had become an increasingly effective way to reach some students (p. 243). Salomone’s (2003) study also pointed to the academic and social benefits that disadvantaged minority students derived from single-sex schools. These students were empowered by tying academic achievement to their self-esteem. According to Salomone (2003), a growing number of anecdotal reports

have become increasingly persuasive that single-sex schools have an impact on students. Such stories portray students overcoming hardships when given sufficient knowledge and skills, and support in developing positive attitudes. Students felt comfortable and were better able to take risks due to the emotional security that was provided in an environment free of gender boundaries.

Streitmatter's (1999) participants provided a picture of "how girls in a girls-only setting feel, what they believe, and what they want, rather than simply what their test scores are" (p. 107). Multiple sites were explored in the study, including a private girls' school in Connecticut, an all-girls seventh and eighth grade program in a public school in Arizona, and a girls-only math class and a girls-only science class in an Arizona public high school. Streitmatter observed classes and interviewed administrators, teachers, parents, and students over a span of four years. According to this researcher, single-sex schools created a space for girls to be more focused as learners and supported to take more risks. This space created a small bit of alternative reality, or a counterculture environment where girls felt valued for who they were and what they could be (Debare, 2004). "Girls schools create a small culture-within-the culture where things that matter are brains, talents, and hearts – where girls can be themselves, for themselves, rather than constantly looking over their shoulder to see how they appear to boys" (p. 324). Girls' schools teach an alternative to the dominant culture that treats young women as sex objects. This practice affirms that women are at the center by giving girls the opportunity to excel (Debare, 2004).

When Debare (2004) contemplated about the benefits of a girls' school, she drew upon stories and images from the daily life of students in single-sex schools rather than

statistical data. In this study, the research recorded stories from more than two hundred alumnae. The themes and ideas they expressed were shaped from these women's school memories. Girls carried the lessons learned at school into adulthood in ways that were not easily measured through surveys or test scores. Debare (2004) examined why women who attended all girls' schools left more confident and more willing to speak their mind. These women were prepared to become leaders within their community. The study focused on the intellectual and social challenges that face girls and discovered that girls were able to succeed in an environment that was warm and engaging.

Debare's (2004) study found that girls' schools typically viewed their mission as extending beyond academics. These single-sex schools addressed the social and emotional challenges facing girls. The curriculum was infused with issues of self-esteem, body image, and sexuality. It included female role models and female voices (Debare, 2004). Focused on a single-sex mission resulted in a sense of physical connection and relaxed warmth in which "girls are more willing to abandon the common adolescent mask of cool sophistication and simply have fun" (Debare, 2004, p. 306). The study described how the girls were less self-conscious about their bodies and worried less about their appearance, leaving their focus open to more important things like academics (Debare, 2004). Further, the findings highlighted how the confidence and self-knowledge acquired at the all girls' school helped the women build successful lives and careers as adults. The alumnae participants also conveyed that when they found life challenging, they looked to their own girls' school experiences to inspire them to persevere. Debare (2004) found that these single-sex schools are committed to helping girls become leaders in a world that still does not always welcome female leaders.

While considerable research shows that single-sex schools were viable options for education, Jackson (2009) on the other hand, contended that most of the studies were based on unfounded assumptions that humans come in categories of being either male or female. Most research that advocates for single-sex schools focused on knowledge around the sex/gender binary (Jackson, 2009; Intersex Society, 2006; Thurer, 2005). The Intersex Society of North America (2006) asserted that nature does not decide where the category of male ends and the category of female begins. Humans within society make those distinctions. The Intersex Society contended that what counts as a standard for male or female is subjective. The acceptable concept of gender performance is defined within cultural boundaries (Robinson, 2005). This performance of masculinity or femininity is characterized and policed by the sociocultural context of the particular time (Jackson, 2009; Robinson, 2005). Proponents of single-sex education embrace an essentialist assumption of innate male and female differences. Due to these beliefs, misconceptions regarding the number of humans who do not conform to society's sexed expectations were often seen as the exception to the rule. To their detriment, some were not seen at all (Connell, 2002; Jackson, 2009). The opposition with single-sex education was that of essence, archaic patriarchal beliefs, and binary male/female concerns.

Single-sex schools gender children, according to Robinson (2005). Heterosexual narratives in schools become powerful lessons in which children learn what is acceptable and what is not in terms of gender performance (Robinson, 2005). There was an underlying message of normative heterosexuality. Presumptions that male behavior and female response is natural and accepted gives in to the belief that adolescent boys and girls have a negative impact on each others' school performance (Heather, 2002). The

solution was to separate the girls from the boys. Heather (2002) used the term *gender-proofing* to describe this phenomenon. Parents were led to believe that learning differences between boys and girls as well as distractions of either male/female behaviors will diminish students' overall education. These obstacles could be eliminated by changing the environment and setting up single-gender formats of learning. Based on these notions, single-sex school advocates make dangerous presumptions about how people learn and interact (Jackson, 2009).

Farrell (2007) asserted that prescribing to the differences of male and female interests ignores prejudice and social pressures. The impact of physical, social, cultural, and familial environments that steer males toward hard sciences and females toward nurturing professions is not taken into consideration (Farrell, 2007; Jackson, 2009). The belief that one gender prefers certain activities excludes students from exploring all of their interests and misrepresents students with more stereotypical views of gender (Farrell, 2007).

Proponents of single-sex education believe males and females learn differently, that each has competencies in different areas and develops at different rates. Jackson (2009) contended that this assumption failed to take into account environmental factors and how they impacted brain development. The question of innate differences was impossible to determine scientifically because boys and girls grow up in a society that treated them differently (Jackson, 2009; Meehan, 2007). Failing to recognize the complexities of biological sex and of gender left intersex, transgender, and gender-bending students invisible. The existence of gay and lesbian students was also disregarded (Salamone, 2003). Single-sexed schools institutionalized this blindness.

Success of single-sex schools may have more to do with changing traditional school structures that impede learning, according to Jackson (2009). However, they ratify the false binaries of sex and gender and negate the existence of multiple sexes, gender, and sexual orientation. While philosophies may differ regarding the success of single-gender schools, Debare (2004) contends they create a space for empowerment of women and the disadvantaged, and they ultimately provide a place for leadership development.

Anzaldúa's Borderlands Theory

“Gender difference feminist thought has been challenged by the difference-between-women critiques of women of color” (Ferguson, 1994, p. 205), highlighting race and class generalizations. Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory brings forth a feminine model of strength and openness and allows the possibility for one to redefine herself not only in her eyes, but in the eyes of society (Henriquez-Betancor, 2012). This theory is attributed to Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) work that examines the concept of borders as instruments that are socially produced. Borderlands theory emerged from her experiences as a Mexican American woman from the physical southern border region. She grew up between two cultures, the Mexican culture with a heavy Indian influence and the Anglo culture as a member of a colonized people. Anzaldúa straddled the *Tejas*-Mexican border all of her life (Anzaldúa, 1987). She was born to sharecropper/field-worker parents in 1942 in South Texas Rio Grande Valley, and she was the oldest of four children. After relocating at age 11 to the city of Hargill, Texas on the border of the United States and Mexico, she entered the fields to work. Growing up her family moved to various ranches working as migrant farmers. With her parents and siblings, Anzaldúa worked as a migrant worker for a year in Arkansas. Realizing this lifestyle would not benefit his

children's education, Anzaldúa's father decided to keep his family in Hargill, where he died when Anzaldúa was 14. His death meant that Anzaldúa was obligated financially to continue working the family fields throughout high school and college, while also making time for her reading, writing, and drawing. Her work examines the borders for women in Chicano and Latino culture, lesbians in the straight world, and Chicanos in White American society. "Through intense self-reflection, Anzaldúa creates an autohistoria-teoria articulating her complex theory and practice of the artist-activist's creative process" (p. xxix). She used her life to inspire, empower, and inform her radical social justice vision. Anzaldúa's faith shaped her work. "Despite the various forms of discrimination, oppression, and rejection she experienced throughout her life, she maintained her belief in people's ability to change" (Keating, 2006, p. 13). Anzaldúa challenged feminists of all colors to rectify racism, homophobia, and classism. "She exposed the hypocrisies and limitations without rejecting the people or the organizations themselves" (Keating, 2006, p. 13). Anzaldúa's writing include elements of spirituality, and adds a mystical nature to the very process of writing (Voices from the Gaps, 2009).

For Anzaldúa, Borderlands theory is not only a geographical line, but a mental, spiritual, and emotional facet as well. She contends that Mexican Americans/Chicanos straddle the borderlands with competing cultures and racial identities without necessarily identifying with one or the other. "We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 63) living in an intersection of cultures, people and power. Her critique is against colonialism and the dominant culture that has used culture and myths to create negative stereotypes of the "other" as an inferior

person. This dominant culture has created a version of reality aiming to privilege certain groups by overriding the rights of others (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000).

Borderlands are socially constructed hierarchies that create binary categories of *us* and *them*. The *us* being privileged over *them*. According to Anzaldúa (1987), these social hierarchies promote the world as composed by definite categories of superiority and inferiority. The superiority is commonly associated with people who are white, male, Christian, and middle/upper class. Inferiority is anyone outside of these categories being considered different and rejected due to their color, sexual preference, class and/or gender.

Colonized Person

Anzaldúa's work is a process aimed at the inner self of a colonized person in her struggle and resistance to achieve liberation. The colonized person is a product of "the colonial order established since the sixteenth-century and contemporary relations of control" (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008, p. 6-7). Europeans exercised control on the basis of racist's values which led to the creation of opposing categories such as *us* and *them*. The colonized person, that is the Mexican American/Chicano is treated as inferior, conquered, not only within White culture but dominant Mexican culture as well. Anzaldúa (1987) argues that discrimination of racial/ethnic minorities is a direct product of both historical and contemporary practices. One is disempowered when she cannot identify as either Mexican or American due to a division of her essence (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000), making it possible for dominant groups to take control of the person/community.

Anzaldúa's goal is to reverse the colonization that has been passed on through cultural practices and the construction of myths. She maintains, "the dominant culture

has created its version of reality and my work counters that version with another version—the version of coming from this place of in-betweenness, neplantla” (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000, p. 229).

Autohistoria

Anzaldúa proposes that there is another way of looking at reality. She used her writing skills to create the Borderlands theory by using her *autohistoria*, which is a mix of personal narrative, *testimonio* (testimony), factual accounts, *cuento* (story), and poetry as her method of re-writing the myths, or the other ways of knowing. Through *autohistoria*, Anzaldúa develops a method for understanding self-knowledge, self-ignorance, and practices of knowing others (Lockhart, 2007). She further asserts that one must be critical about the content of stories and histories told by the dominant group. An example of such a myth is that women are naturally inferior to men. “*Tu no sirves pa’ nada- You’re good for nothing. Eres pura vieja*” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 83). Women are worthless. The dominant culture (male) has placed women as dependent who cannot accomplish anything without men’s support. Anzaldúa specifically challenges women to confront the tradition of patriarchal silence. She also introduces a way to counter this tradition through alternative language usage by re-writing the myths and reconstructing the story (Lockhart, 2007).

Anzaldúa (1987) declares that the myth of women’s inferiority can be changed and women can liberate themselves by resisting domination and entering into the process of borderlands. This theory is one in which self-awareness and understanding is achieved by interrogating and challenging authority regarding structures of power that marginalize. Orozco-Mendoza (2008) stresses that one must reshape herself, or re-write one’s identity,

before one can change the world. One does this by “uprooting dualistic thinking and healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80).

Nepantla

Borderlands theory involves accepting one’s differences as well and learning to live with them. Anzaldúa draws on concepts from her Mexican American’s ancestors in the formulation of Borderlands theory. She explains that people who are in the process of crossing from one class or identity to another go through the first process of Borderlands theory: *nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 1987). A Nahuatl (Aztec) term, *nepantla* is the space in-between, or as Anzaldúa described it, the transitional period in identity formation (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000). This process is central to Borderlands theory for this is the state where the self is going through challenges, confrontations, and reaffirmation. This process is necessary in order to confront the fact that there are many other ways of knowing, being, and expressing that are outside the rigid categories constructing people’s identity. *Nepantla* constitutes the channel where the journey towards self-awareness and self-proclamation begins. One needs to be aware of the diversity of knowledge and either embrace, reject, or select what is best. The key element of *nepantla* is that it allows transcending rigid identities and begins the process of de-colonization by providing multiple views. *Nepantla* is a transition channel that exposes one to other perspectives by seeing through mindful awareness (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000). By going through this state, one learns to re-invent social, political, and cultural spaces, helping one to survive and counterattack the oppressor by focusing on cultural differences as a place of power (chicanoart.org/nepantla).

Coatlicue

Coatlicue is a major goddess in the Aztec pantheon and regarded as the earth-mother goddess. She symbolized earth worship, was the patron of childbirth, and was associated with warfare, governance, and agriculture (Ancient History Encyclopedia, 2013). Anzaldúa (1987) gave the female goddesses a central role in her work. This goddess is viewed as an image of transformative strength (Herniquez-Betancor, 2012). The purpose for this was to return to women the power that the patriarchal culture took from them.

Coatlicue is the state in which one stops to reflect on all the knowledge gained in nepantla, thus beginning to confront past identities. This is the state in which one transitions through different worlds, meanings, and categories to gain *concocimientos* (knowledge of self). At this stage one has to kill the colonized identity and everything one has learned that has brought about negative stereotypes and inferiority. This is a painful stage for it requires purging of self in order to reverse domination. Avoiding self-awareness only leads to conformity and alienation. It is only through the feeling of discomfort that one can risk to seek change and arrive at transformation.

Coyolxauhqui

Reconciliation and self-validation are a function of *Coyolxauhqui*. This goddess is the daughter of *Coatlicue*. When you come out of the *Coatlicue* state, you give birth to yourself (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000). *Coyolxauhqui*, the moon goddess, is a warrior woman that was dismembered by her brother, the Aztec war god (Ancient History Encyclopedia, 2016). *Coyolxauhqui* experiences reconciliation amidst the struggles of denial, recognition, and change leading to self-acceptance (Anzaldúa, 1999). This is the

process in which one picks up the pieces and puts herself together, not only for self. One reconciles with the external world that is oppressive, and exercises the power to change it and accommodate it to her needs. Anzaldúa (1987) expresses that it is acceptable to be different, putting the pieces together only means that one is a work in progress. There is always a possibility for change. In this state, we recognize that there are many forces that are trying to influence us, but we choose to decide what to ignore, what to incorporate and what to discard (Anzaldúa, 1987).

New *Mestiza*

Anzaldúa (1987) names the last state in Borderlands theory *la conciencia de la mestiza* or borderlands consciousness. One has traveled from the challenges experienced in *nepantla* to the pain endured in *Coatlicue*, and through the putting self together in *Coyolxauhqui*. This process has birthed the new *mestiza* (blending of races), a space of hybridity which empowers the self to engage and abandon previous feelings of being a victim and replaces those feelings with actions against domination. The new *mestiza* no longer lives as one who is devalued. She uses her new identity, her voice, to define herself, speak for herself and ultimately open new spaces for self. The feelings of fear and shame are healed with “a new value system” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3), thus reversing the negative stereotypes imposed on her by those in power. Anzaldúa (1987) asserts that the role of the new *mestiza* is one of building communities, teaching resistance, and transforming institutions.

Transformative Social Change

The new *mestiza* embraces all the different parts of which she is made and transitions towards a new way of thinking and feeling (Henriquez-Betancor, 2012).

When one arrives at the identity of *la conciencia de la mestiza*, marginalization is transformed into redefining self and resistance. It produces a transformation from negative stereotypes to empowered identities (Henriquez-Betancor, 2012). The new *mestiza* is a survivor, for she has overcome the cultural patriarchal domination. This theory is an instrument that can empower the voiceless in marginalized groups.

Anzaldúa's (2015) position is that marginalized people can take fragmented pieces of identity and begin to piece together by using a hybrid understanding that makes room for multiple ways of knowing and expressing self. The *mestiza* perspective helps her to increase her tolerance to see a bigger picture of the world. "By changing ourselves we then might, as Anzaldúa hopes, change the world" (Lockhart, 2007, p. 8).

Path of Conocimiento

Borderlands theory gave way to Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* (*knowledge*), and the seven stages. As Keating (2006) notes: Anzaldúa offers her fullest discussion of *conocimiento* to date in her 2002 essay, "now let us shift...the path of *conocimiento*...inner work, public acts," where she describes a synergistic seven-stage theory. The first stage, "el arrebato...rupture, fragmentation...an ending, a beginning." In this stage, something is lacking. There is a great sense of loss, grief, and emptiness. Each rupture is an "awakening that causes you to question who you are, what the world is about (p. 125). The second stage is "nepantla...torn between ways." This in-between space is one living between two cultures and even living in both places simultaneously. This is the site of transformation in which one is exposed to different perspectives which come into conflict. The third stage is "the Coatlicue state...desconocimiento (*lack of knowledge/ignorance*) and the cost of knowing." The path of *desconocimiento* leads into

ignorance, fear and hatred. “In the deep fecund cave of gestation lies not only the source of woundedness, but also the promise of inner knowledge, healing, and spiritual rebirth” (p. 133). The fourth stage is “the call...el compromiso (*commitment*)...the crossing and conversion.” Within this stage, one begins to define herself in terms of who she is becoming, not who she has been. It is a call to action to break free from coping strategies and undergo conversion. The fifth stage is “putting Coyolxauhqui together...new personal and collective ‘stories’”. This is space in which one begins to create a new narrative, to compose a new history, to re-write your story. “You pick and choose views, cultures with transformational potential, not a mestizaje (*mixture*) imposed on you, but one whose process you can control” (p. 141). The sixth stage is “the blow-up...a clash of realities.” This is the space in which one takes her story into the world. “New conocimiento (*knowledge*) threaten your sense of what’s ‘real’ when it’s up against what’s ‘real’ to the other. But it is precisely this threat that triggers transformation” (p. 147). The final stage is “shifting realities...acting out the vision or spiritual activism.” This is the critical turning point of transformation in which “you shift realities; develop a compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and differences within self and others; and find common ground by forming holistic alliances” (p. 123). The work of spiritual activism allows conflict to dissolve through reflective dialogue. This forms an intimate connection that fosters empowerment. “These stations comprise a meditation on the rites of passage, the transition from birth to death, and all the daily births and deaths in between” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 124).

Summary

The chapter addressed the literature focused on Latinas and their leadership development. It discussed the obstacles Latinas encounter and cultural factors that reinforce negative stereotypes, such as the role and influence of the patriarchal church, as a male dominated culture, on the Catholic school system. Education, family, mentors, and spirituality serve as a support for Latinas in redefining themselves. This chapter also introduced the research on single-gender schools and their role in leadership development of women. Finally, Anzaldúa theoretical framework, Borderlands theory, was outlined as a process for those who have been marginalized to challenge themselves, remain open to different forms of knowledge, and propose to work towards transformation, and take the initiative to construct a better world. Conocimiento offers a holistic design to challenge, effect change, and transform unjust social structures.

III. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the method that was used to address the central research question of the study: What were the perceptions and experiences associated with leadership development of Latina leaders who were educated in a single-gender Catholic school? A phenomenological approach was used to understand the experiences of these women and provide a rich description from their perspective. There was an attempt in this study to not only make meaning of participants' experiences but also to identify shared interpretations of the intersections of their gender, spirituality, cultural, and leadership identities. The methodology of this study also addressed the following subquestions:

1. What values and foundational beliefs were instilled when Latinas were students that developed their current leadership?
2. What instrumental strategies, instruction, and methods were used to develop their leadership abilities as students?
3. What was the family's role in contributing to leadership development?
4. What role did culture play in contributing to leadership development?

Methodological Approach

The nature of qualitative research is exploratory and open-ended (Merriam, 2009), designed to generate rich, detailed, and valid data that contributes to an in-depth understanding of the contextual experiences of individuals. Merriam suggested that qualitative study could use richly descriptive words, metaphors symbols, and concepts to portray a phenomenon and help us understand how individuals came to make meaning out of their unique, personal experiences. According to Hesse-Biber (2014), in a

qualitative study, themes or categories are not narrowly defined beforehand by the researcher; instead, these ideas are allowed to emerge from the information contributed by participants. The participants were given the freedom to respond to open-ended questions and elaborate on their experience as they perceived them, not through preconceived notions about what their worlds were like (Hesse-Biber, 2014). With regard to this study, qualitative methods were used to collect, analyze, and interpret data. This included interviewing Latina leaders and exploring what contributed to their leadership development. The study invited perspectives on their family upbringing, culture, school, as well as reflections on how their lives were influenced by these encounters.

Because this qualitative study focused on exploring the experiences and shared meanings that were derived from the participants, it drew on the epistemological perspective of constructionism in which “meaning is constructed not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, seen in relation to the same phenomenon” (Gray, 2014, p. 20). Constructionism views the world as being internally created through constructs. Through interviews, the researcher discovered meaning made by Latina leaders as they made connections based on their experiences.

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach, which is defined as “the study of lived experiences and the way we understand those experiences to develop a worldview” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 148). This approach situated participants in their particular contexts and explored their personal perspectives; it began with a detailed examination of unique experiences before moving to more general claims.

Phenomenology also aims to conduct examinations of human lived experiences in a way that enabled the experience to be expressed in its own terms (Smith, Flowers, & Larking, 2009).

According to Patton (1990), interpretation is essential to understanding experience, and the experience includes the interpretation. This phenomenological study of *how* people describe things and experience them through their senses is an attempt to understand the participants' relationship to the world. According to Patton (1990), we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness. This study was an "interpretative" process of making "meaning" of activities and the things that happened to the participants (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21). Interpretive research assumes that reality is socially constructed and comprised of multiple interpretations of a single event. In other words, researchers do not "find" knowledge, they "construct it" (Merriam, 2009, p. 8).

The phenomenon of interest was the long-term impact produced by a single-gender Catholic educational institution. This holistic approach "assumes that a description and understanding of a person's social environment is essential for overall understanding of what is observed" (Patton, 1990, p. 49).

The phenomenological approach was used to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of the Latina leaders' lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

"Reflections are of major significance to the person, who will then engage in a considerable amount of reflecting, thinking, and feeling as they work through what it means" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 3). Narrative accounts were constructed from the participants' reflections, accounts in which the "researcher's analytic interpretation was

presented in detail and was supported with verbatim extracts from participants” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 4). The participant’s common understandings and the meanings made of their schooling experiences, family, and cultural experiences and how those experiences influenced their roles as leaders, were emphasized (Crotty, 1998). A limitation of this qualitative interviewing was the respondent’s ability to accurately recall detailed accounts of past events (Open Textbooks, 2015); as an individual ages, accuracy decreases even more (Anderson, Cohen, & Taylor 2000).

Theoretical Framework – Borderlands Theory– *New Mestiza*

For the purpose of this study, I am using Anzaldúa’s (1987) Borderlands theory as well as Anzaldúa’s (2015) *conocimiento*. Borderlands theory consists of seven stages: rupture; *nepantla*; the Coatlicue state; the crossing and conversion; putting Coyolxauhqui together; the blow-up; and shifting realities. Four of the stages: *Nepantla*, Coatlicue, Coyolxauhqui, and *New Mestiza* (shifting realities) guided the study by viewing how the participants constructed the borderlands between the influences in their lives and their leadership development. The interviews allowed for a reflective space, or *nepantla*, which is conceptualized as a third space in which the women were able to make meaning of their experiences. This framework centered the voices of women by acknowledging their unique *inside/outside* insights. Prompts invited them to explore whether or not, as Latinas, they felt they were in an in-between space as leaders in positions traditionally held by men, or if they found themselves caught between the two worlds of professional work and family life.

The *Coatlicue* stage guided the participants in recognizing the positive and negative aspects of their multiple identities. The participants were asked how they lived

between multiple worlds and if they successfully navigated the discrepancies found among them. Prompts invited them to describe how they negotiated the cultures of individualism and collectivism in their professional lives, and how they worked through or around patriarchal gender roles and negative stereotypes.

By drawing on the *Coyolxauhqui* process, I saw how the participants attempted to integrate their experiences. The women were asked to explore what elements of home, culture, and school stimulated or hindered their leadership development and reflected on what aspects of their lives were assimilated into the dominant culture, if any.

I explored if the participants had arrived at *la conciencia de la mestiza*. Several questions drove this exploration: Did they have to re-write the myths that dominated Latina women as they advanced into leadership roles? Did this bring forth a new identity? Did they have to redefine themselves as Latina leaders? Did they identify with the new *mestiza*? If so, how did they arrive at this inner harmony? What contributed to their emotional resilience? What resources gave them a voice, or “a new value system” (e.g., spirituality, higher education, role models)?

According to Anzaldúa (2015), this voice/new vision works with *las nepantleras* because they are boundary crossers who initiate others from a listening, receptive, spiritual stance. They rise from their own visions and shift into acting them out promoting change. This takes place through the “path of conocimiento...inner work,” where Anzaldúa describes a seven-stage experience: “el arrebató...rupture, fragmentation...an ending, a beginning;” “nepantla...torn between ways;” the Coatlicue state...desconocimiento and the cost of knowing; “the call...el compromiso...the crossing and conversion;” putting Coyolxauhqui together...new personal and collective

‘stories;’” “the blow-up...a clash of realities;” and “shifting realities...acting out the vision or spiritual activism” (Keating, 2006, p. 153).

While these stages and concepts guided the interview questions, they did not dictate nor presume the experiences of the participants. The researcher did not categorize the participants’ experiences to fit them into preconceived ideas of who they should be. Borderlands theory was used as a guide to understand if the Latinas’ inner selves had gone through a transformation towards liberation.

Participant Selection

Creswell states “it is essential that all participants experience the phenomenon. All individuals meet this criterion” (Creswell & Miller, 1998, p. 118). Creswell’s parameters were critical for quality assurance. The five women selected for this study graduated from an all-girl Catholic school located in South Texas, Felton Catholic High School. This grade 9-12 Catholic high school is sponsored by a group of religious sisters who came from France to give young women an opportunity for an education. Since 1951 and up until the 80s, all faculty had been religious sisters with the exception of the P.E. coach. Subsequently, Vatican II (1962-1965) changed the face of Catholic schools by refocusing sisters’ roles from teaching to pastoral work. This resulted in most teaching positions being filled by lay people (non-religious sisters).

Selecting the individuals who participated in this study was an important step in the research process. The Alumni Director served a critical role in this study. Bringing personal knowledge and access to the alumni data base helped identify the potential participants. The director and I sent an email (See Appendix A) explaining the research

study and requested volunteers. Five participants were selected from the 56 responses to take part in the research.

Sampling refers to the process of selecting individuals for the purpose of obtaining information (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). For this study, participants were identified through purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). The researcher used personal judgment to select a representative sample of participants who fit the precise criteria of Latina leaders who attended a single-gender Catholic high school.

“The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 1990, p. 278). The interviews were especially helpful in discovering strategies and values focused on leadership that these women learned in high school. For this process to be useful, I asked questions about policies and procedures that administrators expected students to follow and asked if these rules were influential in their leadership development.

Patton recommends that “qualitative sampling designs specify minimum samples based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and the stakeholder interests” (Patton, 1990, p. 186). Since the aim of this study was to describe the meaning-making values of a small number of individuals who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998); five participants were selected. As Patton put forth, “the purpose of a small sample is credibility, not representativeness, and “a small, purposeful sample aims to reduce suspicion about why certain cases were selected for study, but such a sample still does not permit statistical generalizations” (1990, p. 180). Thus, the study was not designed to find out what is generally true of the many (Merriam, 2009).

Further criteria for participant selection included having graduated from a single-gender Catholic high school, Felton Catholic High School, between 1955 – 1980. The high school experience was critical in this study because schools have a great deal of influence and power in constructing norms and values (Lesko, 1998). Socialization occurs in schools and has the potential to affect the student’s future as an adult. The selection criteria for Latina leaders also included those who:

- Were successful (i.e., received some recognition for her impact on the local community, whether it is public service, business or education)
- held leadership positions in their place of work that were predominately held by men

This study did not involve broad claims, but invited the reader to make connections between the elements of this research and their own experiences (Cziko, 1992). The reader may be able to apply the results of this work to another similar situation or give insight to religious colleges and universities.

Data Collection

To get to the essence of the meaning of the Latina leaders’ experiences, phenomenological interviews, designed to gather in-depth reflections on personal experiences, were the primary method of data collection. Document analysis of the participant’s memoirs and archival texts, such as yearbooks or scrapbooks, were also used. “Document analysis involves skimming, reading, and interpretation” (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). The researcher examined and interpreted these various sources of data to uncover meaning and gain insight and understanding of the phenomenon. The documents studied contained recorded words and images that provided background

information to the research focus as well as historical insight. Document analysis served to either corroborate or contradict evidence found in the interview process.

Interviewing

According to Patton (1990), qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. The task at hand was to make it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the researcher into the participant's world. "The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (Patton, 1990, p. 279). Semi-structured in-depth interviews (Patton, 1990) were the primary means of data collection for this study. A list of open-ended questions, which required more thought, and more than a simple response, were developed with the literature in mind. It included a mix of more or less structured interview questions and allowed for all questions to be used flexibly. This helped to prepare the interviewer and keep the focus on the areas relevant to the study. Open-ended questions gave participants the opportunity to take different paths and explore various thoughts and feelings, encouraging freedom to express views in their own terms. It became a two-way dialogue, giving the respondent the ease to add new ideas regarding the topic (Merriam, 2009).

The interview guide (Appendix C) provided a framework for developing and sequencing questions, and it aided in decision making concerning what information to pursue in greater depth regarding family and high school experiences. The advantage of the interview guide was to ensure the researcher had carefully decided how to best use the limited time available in the interview situation (Patton, 1990).

Patton (1990) stated that the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. These interviews sought to discover the things we cannot clearly see, such as sentiments, thoughts, and feelings that were not observable. Hesse-Biber's (2014) feminist interview approach attempts to uncover the "subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated" (p. 184). This study's interview approach attempted to understand if Latinas removed barriers of unfair disadvantages caused by a patriarchal society. It searched for an authentic representation of women who strived for social change.

Since phenomenology is the study of people's conscious experience of their life-world, their "everyday life and social action" (Schram, 2003, p. 71), the interview questions focused on the values and beliefs that may have been instilled in their lives. Each Latina leader was given the opportunity to share her story by recalling her experiences particularly associated with Catholic single-gender schooling and the influence it may have had in her leadership development. Specific attention was focused on how the school experience and family may have been key to their transformation into Latina leaders.

In-depth interviewing allows the feminist researcher to access the voices of women who may have been marginalized in a society (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Participants were asked questions that were specific to their Felton Catholic High School experiences in an effort to explore what fundamental beliefs and values may have empowered them to pursue and succeed in leadership roles. Discovering whether inequities and concerns were encountered as they grew in their leadership roles and how their high school experiences may have helped overcome these obstacles was paramount to this study. The

research was particularly concerned with the educational strategies that may have influenced or empowered Latinas to overcome obstacles inherent in a male-dominated society.

Piloting the Interview Guide

The interview guide was piloted to evaluate its effectiveness. The researcher wanted to ensure the participants understood what was being asked in the terminology that is clear and familiar. Merriam (2009) suggested the key to getting good data through interviews is to ask good questions. To do so, she recommended wording questions clearly, using terms familiar to participants, and then piloting the instrument to determine its effectiveness. The pilot interview also gave the respondents an opportunity to suggest questions that would provide more information for the researcher (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

Two alumni participated in the pilot interview. This gave me an opportunity to ask the questions from the interview protocol. I was able to practice interviewing which help set the pace for my interviews. I needed this practice because the first one seemed rushed and hurried. From the transcripts, I was able to gauge if I was asking the right questions to serve my research. The participant's responses focused on family, work ethic and education. Family was a foundational influence in the women's lives and the high school enhanced it by teaching them to care for each other and be responsible. Their responses also focused on work ethic, a "do it yourself" ethic. "Don't let others do things for you." When asked about school, education was a given in their families. Their parents sacrificed to send them to private school and expected them to succeed. The responses from the pilot interview indicated that the questions were in accordance with my research.

The pilot provided valuable feedback that helped me revise and improve my interviewing skills. I found that I was not following my protocol as closely as I needed and did not give the participant enough time to think through the question. I realized that I was re-asking the question when there were awkward pauses. I made it a point to give participants time for reflection and be comfortable with the silent moments. The pilot prepared me to begin interviewing my participants.

Participants' Interviews

Merriam (2009) recommends recording interviews to capture the fullness of responses and to ensure that everything said is preserved for analysis. Taking notes in addition to recording was also critical. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim; immediately after the interviews. Interviews were held in the participant's place of employment or a private space designated by the participant. Each interview was approximately 50 – 60 minutes in duration. The private meeting room facilitated confidentiality during the face-to-face interview and provided the opportunity to notice facial cues. The work environment also provided an insight into the participant's workspace which was described in field notes taken after each interview. The following topics were included: the participant's background, leadership development, mentors, obstacles, high school beliefs and values, single-gender education, Catholic education, and family.

A follow-up interview took place about one month after the original interview. It served to expand and develop ideas from the first interview session. The follow-up interviews were conducted over the phone and consisted of a summary of what was gathered from the initial interview and allowed for any follow up questions that were

needed for clarification or further amplification. The second interview was no more than 15 to 20 minutes. The goal was to gain rich data from the personal perspectives of these women.

Listening and Rapport

This in-depth interview process proceeded more like a conversation between co-participants than a structured question-and-answer session (Hesse-Biber, 2014). “There is a premium paid on listening to the participant instead of one’s own agenda. The interview flowed more like a ‘conversation.’ There was a give-and-take between the interviewer and participant, aiding the ‘cocreation of meaning’” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 191). However, DeVault and Gross (2012) suggested that listening is not as simple as it sounds:

Active listening means more than just physically hearing or reading; rather it is a fully engaged practice that involves not only taking in information via speech, written words, or signs but also actively processing it. It means allowing that information to affect you, baffle you, haunt you, make you uncomfortable, and take you on expected detours (p. 216).

Women’s perspectives have often been silenced or ignored. Because of this, the researcher paid close attention, listened for gaps and absences in the women’s talk, considered what meanings might lie beyond explicit speech (DeVault & Gross, 2012). In order to achieve this goal, the interviewer became an active listener, carefully considering the comments of the participant to discover experiences that were often hidden, and at the same time remained focused on the research question. The interviewer was tuned in to what was being said, especially when participants brought up personal stories of their

educational experience and connected it with how they developed their leadership roles. This ensured that each participants' voice was heard.

The researcher was also careful to establish and maintain rapport with the participants by demonstrating she was listening carefully. Being mindful of any muted language contained within the dialogue was a critical component of the interview process. At the end of each interview, it was important to ask each participant if there was anything else they would like to talk about that had not been touched upon.

Merriam (2009) suggests the best rule of thumb is that the data and emerging findings must reach saturation. Once the researcher began to see or hear the same things repeated, with no new information surfacing, that indicated it was not necessary to collect more data.

Personal Documents and Archival Documents

Another source of collected data were personal documents. Personal documents "refer to any first-person narrative that describes an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 133). These documents were a reliable source of data because they portrayed the person's attitude, beliefs, and view of the world, capturing the essence of her experiences. These personal, private reflections of the participant's perspective were highly subjective, as the writer is the only one who selects what she considers important to record. Nonetheless, personal documents were important primary sources of data because they were instances in which the originator of the document recounted firsthand experience with the phenomenon of interest (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As such, they give the reader a snapshot into what the participant thinks is

important, from her own personal perspective, because they describe the innermost meaning of her historical lived experience.

Participants' journals, letters, scrapbooks and yearbooks were used as personal documents. One participant shared a book while the others brought with them yearbooks, and scrapbooks. One specific document that was used was a book written by one of the alumnae portraying herself as a Latina leader. She captured her personal and political achievements in this manuscript written in an authentic, unique voice. She described how her Mexican parents instilled a love of learning, a desire to excel, and a commitment to community in their children. The book also spoke about how her education in a Catholic single-gender school, together with her family upbringing, empowered her to lead her community and promote social justice.

Other documents that were included in this research study were archival texts written by the religious sisters who founded the school. I visited the Sister's archive room in which I received permission to review their documents. These documents were in the forms of journals, letters, and pictures. They had their archives sectioned by decades. I focused on the 1950s and 1960 because the school was founded in 1951. This data was used to give evidence to the sisters' purpose and goals, as they attest to the values and beliefs they attempted to instill in young women. The purpose of reviewing these archival texts was to identify evidence of leadership development that may verify findings and give more credibility to this study.

Field Notes

Reflective notes were written in order to record insights on the verbal and nonverbal behavior observed and highlight key quotes. These field notes served to

monitor the process of data collection and supplement analysis (Merriam, 2009). I noted the facial expressions and the hand gestures as the women shared their stories. I also noted questions that the participants asked during the interview. In a couple of interviews, when the recorder was turned off, the participant continued recalling her high school years. This was noted as well.

Data Confidentiality

Maintaining the confidentiality of the participants was most essential. Participants were asked to sign a consent form assuring them of confidentiality. This document also informed them of the purpose of the study, how the information would be collected, and how it would be used. All measures to protect the identity of the Latina leaders were taken by assigning pseudonyms to the data as well as the school they graduated from. The researcher ensured that all audio information obtained from the Latina leaders was safeguarded properly in a locked cabinet. All written research work was stored in a password-protected computer. All information will remain protected from disclosure outside of the research setting.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. This involved consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what participants had said and what the researcher had seen and read (Merriam, 2009). It was the process of making meaning. Patton (1990) asserted that the challenge is to make sense of massive amounts of data and to reduce the volume of information in order to identify significant patterns and construct a framework to communicate what the data revealed. Worthen and McNeill (1996)

recommended that each interview be listened to and read several times before analysis begins. This enabled the researcher to obtain a sense of the whole (Maxwell, 2013).

Coding

Coding took place throughout the research process to evaluate similarities and differences in the data. The overall process of data analysis is to identify segments in the data that are responsive to the research question (Merriam, 2009). The designation of the coding focused on the study's central research question: What role did a single gender Catholic education play in developing leadership in Latina graduates?

After two interviews, the transcriptions were read and examined with the theoretical framework in mind for initial open coding. Single words and phrases such as "successful Latina leader," "single-gender education," "Catholic education," "family influences," "values," "beliefs," and "leadership development" were constructed based on key words and concepts that reflect the Borderland theoretical framework. Data that seemed to go together was clustered and subsequently assigned to themes; responses that did not fit the pattern were also noted (Saldaña, 2013). The goal was to identify topics that came up frequently and that were important to the research question. Once this task was complete, the next two interviews and transcriptions were analyzed in a similar fashion until all five interviews had been coded in this manner.

All transcripts and field notes were re-read in their entirety. The researcher was attentive to the essence of the experience of the phenomenon of each individual interviewed. Participants' responses were examined with the intent of understanding expressed and implied meanings. Patton (1990) states that what will emerge is a portrayal of the experiences and representation of the individuals who participated in the

study. “Creative synthesis is the bringing together of the pieces that have emerged into a total experience, showing patterns and relationships” (p. 410).

Data Interpretation

The initial step for data analysis was to keep focused on the purpose of the study. Patterns, themes, and characteristics that were unique to the Latina leadership development were retrieved from the interview transcripts and field notes. Borderlands theory framework was used to examine the participants’ reflections regarding their single gender environment, family, religion and culture. Each story was reviewed against social patterns that may have dictated beliefs and behaviors that marginalize Latinas.

The researcher looked for practices into which the women may have been socialized through organized religion, the Catholic Church. I sought to identify reasons that Latinas may have tolerated patriarchal behavior. I also focused on words, events, and strategies that may have provided a means for Latinas to break barriers that oppressed them.

Verification, Credibility, and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of a qualitative research is achieved through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The goal of credibility is to ensure that the research represents the subject appropriately (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Credibility affirms the qualitative researcher’s confidence in the truth of the research findings. Triangulation and member checks are used to address the credibility of a study, processes that will be described in more detail below.

Transferability is the generalization of the study findings to other situations and contexts. Transferability is how the qualitative researcher demonstrates that the research

findings are applicable and useful to others in similar situations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Participants in this study were identified through purposive sampling. The research was specific and intentional in selecting successful Latinas leaders who had been educated in a single gender Catholic environment, Felton Catholic High School.

Dependability is the extent that the study could be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent and repeatable. The researcher acknowledged that “the qualitative assumption of the social world is always being constructed and the concept of replication is itself problematic” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 253). As explained below, member checking and triangulation ensured the dependability of the study.

Confirmability in the findings are based on the participants’ responses and not the researcher’s personal motivations or potential bias. This helps establish that the research findings accurately portray participants’ responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher engaged in a self-reflective exercise to understand the biases that may be brought into the research and acknowledge when personal perceptions were incorporated into the study, a process further detailed later in this chapter.

Member Checking

A common strategy for ensuring credibility is member checking. Did the participant recognize her own experiences in the analysis and interpretation of the data? This was a procedure that involved asking participants to check the accuracy and enhance the validity of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1981). Maxwell (2013) calls this respondent validation, describing it as “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of

identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). Validity refers to the meaningfulness and correctness of the inferences a researcher makes (Frankel & Wallen, 2009). Drawing correct conclusions based on the data obtained is what validity is all about. Ensuring credibility preserves confidence in the truth of the findings.

For the preliminary analysis of this study, themes and categories initially constructed from the data were emailed to the participants, affording them an opportunity to review them. The themes were focused on the common experiences of each woman as well as differences that emerged among their stories regarding the topics of focus: successful Latina leaders, single-gender education, Catholic education, family influences, values, beliefs, and leadership development.

The participants were asked to evaluate whether the researcher’s interpretation of the interview data and documents resonated with their experiences. If they did not recognize their experience in the interpretation, they were given a chance to give suggestions to better capture their voices. This assured that the analysis of their lived experience was portrayed as accurately as possible.

Triangulation

Triangulation, or using more than one approach to investigate a research question (Denzin, 1970), was used as the principal strategy to ensure validity and reliability (Maxwell 2013; Merriam 2009). Triangulation, accomplished by cross-checking data using multiple sources, reduced the risk that conclusions would reflect only the biases of a specific method and facilitated a deeper understanding of the issues under study. When a study is supported by data collected from a number of different instruments, validity is

enhanced. Further, improved reliability indicates conclusions will retain consistency over time and circumstances. In short, triangulation improved the quality of the data and the accuracy of the study's interpretation (Frankel & Wallen, 2009).

Multiple sources were used to compare and cross check data collected through interviews with the Latina leaders. The women's individual perspectives and their responses in follow-up emails were compared and contrasted. Personal documents were collected and analyzed as additional important sources of information. These documents were used to supplement and support data provided in the interviews. The advantage of using these documents was that they were grounded in the educational setting that is being researched and can help better understand how the participant saw her high school experiences and how she communicated the values learned from this environment.

Along with personal documents and the interviews, archival documents also served to confirm, complete, and triangulate the data. This ensured that the study was comprehensive and well-developed. The fundamental purpose of triangulation was to cross check conclusions against the participants' real intent, thus establishing credibility.

Positionality and Researcher Bias

Patton (1990) states that firsthand experience allows the researcher to access personal knowledge and direct experience to help in understanding and interpreting data. While I was not educated in a single-gender religious school, I have pursued leadership roles within a single-gender Catholic school system and am very cognizant of my biases. Within the last 20 years, I have been exposed to a boys' club mentality, a term for a men-only group or club in which men act like boys, joking around with each other (Urban Dictionary, 2008). Given this experience, I am often not given the benefit of the doubt

when a male–female issue arises; as a result, both sides of a story are seldom explored, and my focus tends to be on the female outcome. I have also been exposed to positive, promotional literature regarding single-gender schools, and have been socialized in a patriarchal church. Acknowledging and understanding this exposure forced me to reflect on a concern before jumping to conclusions, recognizing the influence my innate perceptions and feelings exerted on my decisions. I was mindful of this, particularly as I selected quotes from narratives and analyzed them for themes. I acknowledged whether or not my own perceptions influenced the data analysis.

I purposefully engaged in the process of reflecting critically on myself as researcher, the “human as instrument” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183), to understand the biases I brought to my research. Reflexivity means taking a critical look inward and reflecting on my own lived reality and experiences. This self-reflection was extremely helpful in recognizing, examining, and understanding how my own social background and assumptions could intrude into the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2014). This will allow the reader to better understand how I might have arrived at the interpretation of the data.

Practicing reflexivity empowered both me and the participants, allowing me to negotiate differences and similarities with them. This transparency allowed me to gain access and obtain data that would not have been available to me otherwise. This helped me gain new insights into the perspectives of my participants.

As the researcher, I was sensitive to the fact that I am both an insider and an outsider (Hesse-Biber, 2014). I am a Latina leader who has experienced many obstacles in achieving leadership roles in a Catholic school system due to my ethnicity. Yet, I was

not educated in a single-gender religious school. I am an insider because I share the same ethnicity and leadership plight, but I am an outsider because I differ from my participants' high school education experience.

Ethical Considerations

DeVault and Gross (2012) urge feminist researchers to be cognizant of harms produced by generations of male-centered research that distorted women's realities. A feminist researcher should measure herself against an even higher ethical standard. The feminist researcher needs to be mindful and responsive to issues of authority and power within the interview context and balance the relationship between the researcher and the participant. "In order to hear the voices of the silenced, value is placed on victims of oppression" (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 216). The respect and well-being of the participants in this study were foremost in my mind.

The Institutional review board (IRB) ethics regulations was followed as required of all research involving human subjects. Permission was sought from each participant, and each received a clear, easily understood informed consent document explaining the purpose and the process of the research to the participant (see Appendix B). It assured participants that all measures to protect their identity were taken, including the use of pseudonyms for names, places of employment, high school, and any other trait that could connect the research to the participant. The participant's privacy was respected, and confidentiality was guaranteed and maintained. All transcripts are anonymous and will be kept in a locked file cabinet for three years and then destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to this data. Only participants who were cognizant and could fully consent to the research were engaged; no vulnerable individual was involved (HHS.gov).

Summary

This chapter discussed the phenomenological approach to this study, as well as the qualitative processes and methods that were used to examine the experiences and perspectives of five Latina leaders in developing leadership. Anzaldúa's (2015, 1987) Borderlands theory and path of concimiento provided a theoretical framework which guided the methods proposed by this study. The procedures for data analysis and interpretation described assured the validity and reliability of the study. Finally, the participants in the study were assured respect and equity during the interview process, as well as confidentially in the research process.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents a description of the study site and descriptive profiles of the five participants along with findings related to being educated in a single gender Catholic high school and the role it played in developing their leadership. Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher utilized in-depth interview methods to collect qualitative data, which was then coded and analyzed to identify the commonalities of participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell, this collective experience of participants informs and explains a phenomenon, which in this case was being educated in a single gender Catholic school and the role it played in participants' leadership development.

This study was guided by the following research question and four subquestions: What were the perceptions and experiences associated with the leadership development of Latina leaders who were educated in a single-gender Catholic school?

- What values and foundational beliefs were instilled when Latinas were students that developed their current leadership?
- What instrumental strategies, instruction, and methods were used to develop their leadership abilities as students?
- What was the family's role in contributing to leadership development?
- What role did culture play in contributing to leadership development?

Data analysis was guided by Anzaldúa's (2015, 1987) Borderlands theory framework, which included the stages of *conocimiento*. It analyzed the division/classification of people based on color, economic status, and/or race. These categories created binaries of *us* and *them*. The *us* being privileged over *them*, and

Anzaldúa proposes that these social binaries promote categories of superiority and inferiority. Superiority, the *us*, is associated with people who fall into the white, heterosexual, male, Christian, and middle to upper class categories. Inferiority, the *them*, is associated with anyone outside of the aforementioned categories. The findings of this study focused on how the participants' lived experiences and school experiences that developed their leadership and prepared them to work in male dominated fields. This information was acquired through interviews where all participants were asked to share their childhood/neighborhood experiences, the values they learned growing up within their families, their Catholic high school influences, and the challenges and strengths they encountered throughout their careers. Prior to unpacking the participant interviews, it must be noted that each participant attended the same single gender Catholic high school, and the following section describes the school as detailed by two of the school's Religious Sisters.

The Site: A Single Gender Catholic School Foundation

The five women selected for this study attended and graduated from Felton Catholic High School, an all-girl Catholic school located in South Texas. Opened in 1951, this Catholic high school (9-12 grade) was sponsored by a group of religious Sisters who came from France to give young girls an opportunity for an education. Felton Catholic High School set out to provide a Catholic education in the city to a diverse group of girls. The Sisters' mission focused on diversity among African Americans, Hispanics, and Immigrants, especially recent immigrants (Callahan, 1955). Because of the area of the country (South Texas), the Hispanic Culture was important and made evident in school life.

In an interview, Sister Rose, a former principal of Felton Catholic High School, and Sister Lori, an administrator of the congregation and alumna, shared the purpose and goal of the school's foundation. These Sisters were both white whose family originated from Louisiana. While the purpose was to provide a quality education to young women, "the focus would be on the gifts they brought to their education. According to Sister Rose, the goal was to "challenge young women to discover those gifts and use them for their own growth as well as in service to others" (Sister Rose Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2018).

The values and beliefs instilled in the mission of the school were faith-filled such as God cares and loves everyone. Faith in God, and its continued growth in one's faith life, was important and expected to deepen as students grew. Centered in their mission was the belief of empowering young women. Sister Rose went on to explain that their gifts and talents were too important to the church and society to be left unrecognized, and "a woman's strength and approach can bring changes" (Sister Rose Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2018). For example, women know how to collaborate, to question, to be compassionate, and to stand up for the "poor" in creative and needed ways, so these were among the many lessons taught to the students.

The strategies used to empower students began with hiring the best teachers: those interested in teaching "all girls" and those interested in empowering them to develop in the best ways they could. Students were empowered primarily by the notion that all teachers believed in them. If a teacher really had faith in a student's abilities, there was no end to the ways that student would grow and develop. Students were also empowered to engage in religious, academic, social, physical, civic, and extracurricular activities.

The extracurricular activities, such as clubs, groups, and student council, encouraged the development of leadership. The basis of empowerment was the fact that God cared and loved them and all the girls are “important because of this belief” (Sister Rose Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2018).

Felton Catholic High School held women in high regard and greatly emphasized the woman’s value. To educate female students as leaders was of the utmost importance, and the teachers and administrators believed that students could either be a leader in the home, a leader in business, or a leader as a college student. The school had three different tracks of study. For the woman who intended to raise a family, they had a home economics curriculum/track. There was a business track for those interested in the business world. And there was the college preparatory curriculum for the woman who wanted to continue her education. The school recognized the diversity across the student population as well as the individual differences and encouraged the women to be the best Christian leaders they could be.

Educating a diverse group of girls did not come without its challenges, however. The challenge the Sisters found in providing a single gender Catholic education to Latina girls was their lack of self-esteem and belief in themselves. They also found that teachers did not recognize the special gifts that the Latina students had and did not tap into those gifts. Many students came from poor neighborhoods and poor parishes, and as a result, families did not have the means or the skills to get involved in the private education of their daughters. The Sisters believed that it was not a matter of being “a minority, but a matter of poverty.”

Participant Profiles

To identify participants who had graduated from a single gender Catholic school, I contacted the Alumni Director of Felton High School who was instrumental in assisting with the selection of the five women from the school's database. She sent an email on my behalf to alumnae between 1955 - 1980 explaining the research study and requesting volunteers. I had specifically asked her to send only to the women that graduated during that time. She received 56 responses with some requesting more information and some agreeing to participate in the study. Of the 56 responses, only five were the best fit for the following criteria—Latinas who were leaders in a male dominated field. They were chosen from a variety of professions in which they had successfully worked for at least 25 years. They were leaders who had received some level of recognition for impacting their local community, and leaders who held positions in public service, education, business, research, and social services predominantly held by men.

The participants also attended high school between 1955–1980, the era when Anzaldúa created Borderlands theory. Throughout these years, Anzaldúa incorporated her personal experiences in her writing, confronting injustices that the participants also may have experienced during this era. Similar to Anzaldúa, the participants experienced economic and social hardships in their lives. Finally, they either identified themselves or their family as Hispanic differentiating themselves from the other people in their neighborhoods.

Participants were given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality and privacy. Each participant was interviewed either in their office or a conference room in the school. In the section that follows, each participant is described based on her accomplishments,

credentials, family description, the neighborhood in which she grew up, and the values and beliefs learned from family.

Valentina – Jeweler and Business Owner

Valentina is a retired Master Jeweler of 40 years as well as a retired Jewelry Business Owner. In a male dominated profession, she was show cased in the city newspaper in the late 70s as the first woman jeweler who had a jewelry store that designed and fabricated her own work. She graduated from Felton Catholic High School in 1969. She holds certificates from the Jewelers Association as well as the Gemological Association. She grew up in a family of four girls and two boys. Her childhood neighborhood was predominately Hispanic, and most of the families were lower middle class working in local shops and on the military base. Her father was an automobile mechanic and her mother was a stay at home mom. Valentina’s mother never went to school because her family only educated her brothers. The family believed that the men were the “bread winners”. The women stayed home to take care of the children. Due to her lack of formal education, she spoke very little English and communicated in her native tongue—Spanish. Valentina’s grandparents migrated from Mexico but both of her parents were born in the United States. Valentina’s mom was a single parent raising her five siblings until she married Valentina’s father. Valentina feels fortunate that she was raised by both parents and she admires her mother’s determination and strength, and gives credit to her father for instilling in her a spirit of tenacity and for teaching her to always surround herself with positive people.

Sofia – Research Scientist

Sofia has been a Research Scientist, another male-dominated field, for 35 years. Her work focuses on cardiovascular diseases and trauma-based research that develops therapies for treatment. Her research team has been awarded two significant grants to continue their study in heart diseases. She graduated from Felton Catholic High School in 1976 and earned her bio-medical science doctoral degree in 1985. Upon graduating from the University of Houston, she realized that she was the only woman in her college class. She grew up in a family with one brother and three sisters. Her childhood, low-income neighborhood was interracial with Hispanic and African American families, but she spent most of her time with her grandparents where the neighborhood was even poorer than hers. When Sofia was in high school, her father went back to school and earned a master's degree in business while working two jobs to support his family. Her mother, a stay at home mom, was a silent partner always supporting what he said. Sofia learned from her family that education was the most important value and there were never any excuses for bad grades. Her father solidified her love for the Catholic faith and trusted that God would take care of her. To this day, she respects the church and has never questioned its doctrine.

Carolina – Social Services Administrator

Carolina has held many positions in many different fields, from teaching, television (national children's program), and public relations, to quality assurance. She is now working in the social service sector as a Social Service Administrator, and has maintained this title for the last 30 years. She founded a nationally recognized program that services Veterans, mostly male, who have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

and Military Sexual Trauma. The Veteran's Administration recognized her at a national banquet for writing the curriculum and for running a successful program that grosses over a million dollars. She graduated from Felton Catholic High School in 1956. She grew up in a family of two brothers and three sisters in a Hispanic neighborhood that was lower to middle class. According to Carolina, most of the families were serving in the military or retired from military service. She was raised by her stepfather, who was an auto mechanic, and her mother, who was uneducated and worked at an assembly line in a soda factory. Nearing her final year of undergraduate school, Carolina's mother and stepfather divorced, which rendered her unable to finish her studies, as it was necessary for her to take on the financial responsibility of her family. With her stepfather no longer in the home, she dedicated her life to caring for her mother and little sister. Her mother modeled the importance of faith and respect for everyone, and her stepfather, through his actions, taught her to never expect anything; one is to work for what is needed.

Paula – Politician/Community Service

Paula volunteered at a community organization for 25 years until she decided to run for public office at the age of 39. She was the first Latina to be elected to the City Council of a major city in the United States in the 1980s, and the first Latina mayoral candidate for the same city in the 1990s. She spent 10 years serving as a city council representative, and upon completing her term, she continued her political activism by serving on several local (Women's Empowerment Center), national (National Hispana Leadership Institute) and international committees (Inter-American Commission on Women). Paula was one of six children (three brothers and two sisters) who lived in a poor Hispanic neighborhood in a home that had no plumbing until her father refurbished

it. Eventually, however, the family moved into a “beautiful duplex,” for which her uncle provided the down payment. Her mother was a housewife and could not speak English, as they had moved from Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. When Paula graduated from Felton Catholic High School in 1959, she had made up her mind that she was going to be a secretary to help her father in supporting the family financially and she did just that. She eventually earned her college degree in political science by attending night school. Education was very important in her family, but good character served a better purpose in life. She still remembers her father’s lessons that obedience, cleanliness, and thriftiness were critical values. According to Paula’s father, “What mattered was how you behaved and how you treated other people.”

Elena – District School Administrator

Elena retired as a school district administrator, but she continues working full time mentoring other school administrators. She was one of a few Latina administrators in her district during the early 1990s. When she was a senior in high school, she ventured out on her own, started working, and rented her own apartment. She graduated from Felton Catholic High School in 1975 becoming a “first generation” high school graduate. She went on to the local state university and received her degree in education and began her teaching career earning several “Teacher of the Year” Awards. She grew up in a family with two sisters and a brother and was also one of 56 cousins. Her family migrated to the downtown area of the city, and her uncles and aunts followed suit. She lived in a very segregated, predominately working-class neighborhood where “the Blacks lived with their families, the Spanish lived with theirs, and the Whites lived with theirs.”

Elena shared that her community was a very “violent,” one in which the children were not allowed to play with each other outside. As previously stated, because of the economic challenges and violence, the neighbors were afraid to trust one another, so they stayed within the confines of their own family. The protective environment was provided by the family. Elena described her father as a member of the working class, employed at a local clothing store selling suits, and her mom as a stay at home mom until the youngest child started school. Her father’s core belief was that he would provide a Catholic education for each one of his children. This was his upbringing and wanted to pass it on to his family. She continues supporting her alma mater to provide a Catholic education for others emulating her dad. Although Elena and her mother argued often, she learned to make it on her own. Her grandfather, a curandero (healer) who always protected her, also taught her many lessons; he told her over and over, “You have a gift. You have to find your gift. And you have to give the way I give.”

Themes

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and experiences associated with the leadership development of five Latina leaders educated in a single-gender Catholic school and identify commonalities or themes that were instrumental in their leadership development. Seven themes were identified: 1) Spirituality – Inner Peace; 2) Altruism – Leadership; 3) Little Focus on Leadership Development; 4) Family Mentors; 5) Greater Good; 6) Dual Work/In-Between Space; and 7) Voice. There is an overlap across themes in that happiness, good of community, connection with family are intertwined in the way the participants navigate the two cultures of family and society. Derived from Anzaldúa’s (1987) Borderlands theory framework and *conocimiento*

(2015), these themes center the voices of women by acknowledging neplantla, the *in-between* space. That is the journey towards self-awareness. It exposes one to other perspectives and one learns to survive the oppressor as well as doing good for others. Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory and *conocimiento* sets up a path to break free from traditional oppressive models, experience inner harmony and encounter transformation.

Values and Foundational Beliefs

Spirituality – inner peace. The Latina leaders in this study reported spirituality as a value and foundational belief that aided in their leadership development. A recurring theme found in the participants' common experiences was inner peace by way of spirituality. Each of the women, despite the many employment obstacles they were faced with, found peace in their lives, and they all attributed this inner harmony to spirituality as a foundational belief, or, as Medina (1998) wrote, a power of energy. This aligns with the *Coatlicue* (earth mother goddess) concept (Anzaldúa, 1987) which represents the painful experience of moving forward that enabled the participants to see new perspectives and changes in their identities. This inner peace enabled them to cross this *Coatlicue* or painful stage in their lives. Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* (2015) "pushes us into engaging the spirit in confronting social sickness with new tools" (p. 19) enabling one to defy these painful experiences. This work of spiritual activism "permits an awareness that finds the best instead of the worst in the other" (p. 154). A spiritual connection fosters the empowerment to transform conflict into an opportunity to change negativity into strengths.

Although the women were educated in a Catholic environment, their spirituality is not always associated with the traditional religious beliefs of Catholicism. The

connection to the earth, heavens, and to one another gives the women the belief that there is something larger than what is physically experienced. Gallegos (2006) believed that it is this spirituality that has empowered women to resist and persevere in their struggle. Gonzalez-DeJesus (2012) suggested that spirituality has led to a balanced life and has helped people find personal happiness. She goes on to include that this spiritual connection is a strength that comes from within, and is an invisible being that helps individuals achieve completeness. Anzaldua (2015) describes spiritual activism as a “spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us, yet commonalities as catalysts for transformation” (p.246).

The participants have their unique source of peace, and their fountain of support stems from spirituality. Anzaldua (2015) asserts that one needs a spiritual orientation to life because it gives individuals the ability to sort out anger and frustration, and allows compassion to surface. “Spirituality becomes a port you moor to in all storms” (p. 154).

When Paula encounters obstacles at “city hall”, she has learned to “keep her soul strong and to keep her spirit calm and have the ability to go deep into who she is and operate from that space.” She finds time away from the hurried noisy world to reflect and discern within a political system that she believes “totally negates and ignores, and makes fun of spiritual values.” She meditates using “St. John of the Cross, Thomas Merton, and Henry Nouwen’s” (spiritual mystics and spiritual directors) writings which guide her into the depth of her spirit. “This is the space where everything happens and flows outward into a peaceful existence.” This transformed the obstacles in her life giving her strength to challenge her colleagues.

When Valentina's world is troubled and she is confronted with making meaning of her situation working in a male dominated business or facing the *in-between space* as a woman who is living an alternative lifestyle, she remembers her father's words of wisdom: "The Sky is the Limit." She knows that this discomfort is just for a little while. It is a "moment thing" that can be overcome with prayer, not with a traditional "Hail Mary" or an "Our Father," but with more personal prayers that connect her to the spirit of her father. She stated, "I know God and I ask him to help me remember what my dad inscribed in my heart." Her mantra is: "The sky is the limit." "Don't let these men stop me."

Elena stated that she has broadened her idea of church, and her peace is found within her soccer community. "Sunday is celebrated in the soccer field." She goes on to say that her family is not just her husband and sons. Soccer is her family. Her church life is a very healthy lifestyle-athleticism, playing soccer, and the soccer league, the soccer board, is her spiritual community. She takes care of the members of her soccer team and they take care of her. Elena reiterates that it is within this athletic space that she generates her peace when she is confronted with conflicts. This aligns with Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory (1987) in which she proposes other ways of viewing reality. Elena's non-traditional form of spirituality is countering the Catholic Church tradition that she was educated in. Elena uses this source of "physical energy" to fight off the "naysayers."

Carolina and Sofia on the other hand, have a more traditional way of keeping focused and finding peace. They continue their Catholic beliefs taught when they were students. While spirituality and religion are not the same, both participants see their

practices as acts of spirituality that brings them peace. “I became a Eucharist Minister at my church and have become more cognizant of my Catholic beliefs” (Sofia). Carolina gets to work at 5:45 am and uses “the time to read my bible and to pray for our staff.” They pray, read the bible, read inspirational books and go to mass every week. Within these customary practices is where their peace exists. Whether it is working in the research lab or with a volatile veteran, these women call upon their God to help them make the right decisions.

Anzaldúa (1987) speaks of reconciliation and self-validation as functions of *Coyolxauhqui*. This is the story of a goddess who picks up the pieces of her body after her brother, the war god, dismembered her. Anzaldúa *re-membered* the endurance of this *dis-membered* woman warrior, which gave birth to new creation. In this case, the participants were able to re-member their stories and construct new narratives. There is an inner harmony amidst the struggles of recognition and change, and this harmony leads to self-acceptance as one reconciles with the often times oppressive external world. The participants’ spirituality enabled them to overcome their struggles and obstacles in their professional life and the difficulties faced in a male dominated world. Paula describes her challenges at city hall and utilizing this spirituality to “keep her soul strong and keep her spirit calm” to negotiate her political position.

Valentina also used her spirituality to navigate this in-between space of working in a male-dominated jewelry business by recalling that “the sky is the limit.” Reminding her that if she worked hard enough, she could succeed in her business. The participants through their spirituality formed resiliency during the process of negotiating the in-

between space. This inner harmony, according to Anzaldúa (1999), takes place when one is able to exercise the power to change it; thus arriving at a state of reconciliation.

Altruism - leadership. In defining their understanding of successful leadership, participants overwhelmingly shared similar altruistic responses and referred to altruism as a foundational belief that had been established early on by their families. Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theory seeks to attain liberation for any colonized identity. "By changing ourselves we then might, as Anzaldúa hopes, change the world" (Lockhart, 2007, p. 8).

This altruistic leadership is a result of the construction of the new *mestiza* in which she reinvents herself through self-empowerment and empowering others. In their experiences, leadership was not about material possessions, status, nor professional positions; rather, leadership was about one or a combination of the following: happiness, making someone else proud, helping the community and/or family, and knowing God.

According to Valentina, "Being successful means that I've accomplished what my parents wanted me to [do]. Something that they can be proud of her. I did something good for myself, my sisters and my brothers. I was able to be there for them." Carolina emphasized spirituality/religion when unpacking her understanding of successful leadership: "The successful person, whether you are Mexican or whatever, is someone who is happy and has God in her life." Paula's understanding of successful leadership is as follows:

The answer to what makes a good Latina leader is how well she uses herself, her abilities, and her leadership, to improve, and assist those she leads. The answer is not in what happens to her, but in what happens to the community she leads. Are

they better because she was their leader? The group determines, not the leader, if she is successful.

Elena echoed the other participants when she stated: “A successful Latina is one who is open to learning. She is centered and strives for things that are part of her core values.” Leadership in the participants’ experience is about the well-being of the others and the greater good of humanity. The Latina leaders recognized their interdependence among all people embracing the values consistent with service and a demonstrated ethic of care towards others (Forbes, 2002).

Elena believes that her promotions came as a result of parental involvement within her schools. She always respected her stakeholders and gave them an opportunity to be part of the students’ education. Paula’s neighbors rallied behind her during election campaigns. For they believed her work was for the betterment of their community. Participants’ sense of calling and service led them to decisions that impacted their career development.

Furthermore, a factor contributing to this altruistic mentality may be that graduates from Catholic schools are prepared to reach out to others in need and participate in service (Bickett, 2008; Cook & Simond, 2011). Service in a Catholic school is part of a mission-driven philosophy that links social justice to the faith and action belief of the Catholic Church. This altruistic leadership character is not only attributed to Catholic School. It may also be due to a culture of collectivism shared among many Latinos which is discussed in a later section. Leadership is not about accomplishments or about status and material possessions. Leadership is about helping

the community by improving their lives. At the end of the day, it is about asking yourself, did I do something good for others?

Anzaldúa (1987) suggested that using a hybrid understanding that makes room for multiple ways of knowing, the *mestiza's* perspective, helps to increase her tolerance to see a bigger picture of the world. The *mestiza* abandons feelings of being a victim and replaces them with feelings that bring forth a new identity. Each of the participants fit into Anzaldúa's (2015) *conocimiento* framework of putting Coyolxauhqui together...new personal and collective 'stories;' by countering the successful leadership narrative that is stereotyped as competitive and aggressive (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Carolina often recalled her work as a service to the veteran community. This was her way of giving back to the community. Sofia views her research work as an act of kindness for the betterment of society. The participants used their leadership roles to focus on the common good. Thus, reversing the negative stereotypes of women as subordinates imposed on them by the dominant culture and replacing with women as interdependent and collaborative.

Instruction and Strategies Used to Develop Leadership

Little focus on leadership development. Participants' could not recollect the sisters using explicit strategies for leadership development such as delegating responsibilities, teaching them interpersonal skills, and guiding them in communication skills. However, there did seem to be some practices that may have inadvertently contributed to their development as leaders. In particular, the participants recalled how the sisters fostered their confidence, introduced them to social norms, and provided a safe

space that valued each individual and respectful practices that may have indirectly contributed to their leadership development.

Their recollections of Felton Catholic High School are memories of young, amazing, lady like, well mannered, well spoken, and very loving Sisters. They spoke of being in a safe environment. Sofia shared that a turning point for her life was attending the single gender Catholic school:

I hated public school. I hated the teasing. My father was very strict. He never let us wear pants. He never let us shave our legs. ‘Nope you are only 13 years old. You are too young for makeup.’ In public school, everybody was wearing what was in fashion, bell bottom pants and all. There I was in little rolled down white socks. I hated the teasing that I would get.

As a shy girl, she found a safe haven in this school because everyone wore uniforms, and the Sisters did not allow girls to make fun of each other. She learned to be confident and not afraid of doing something different or being different. She carried this confidence into her college years and career.

The Sisters created a safe space for students, like Sofia, by espousing a mission of empowerment for the women they taught (Sister Rose Smith, personal communication, December 17, 2018). The Sisters taught that all girls were to be treated with dignity. The focus of the school was not what clothing the students wore but the academic accomplishments. Catholic schools were called to empower students by tying academic achievement to their self-esteem (Salomone, 2003). Debare (2004) contends they create a space for the empowerment of women and the disadvantaged and provide a place for leadership development.

In their quest to educate Hispanics, did the Sisters, knowingly or unknowingly, perpetuate the denial of the Mexican American female identity in order to be part of the White middle-class? The culture of male dominance continues to be edified through single-gender religious schools (Debare, 2004). While Vatican II (1962-1965) called for students to be citizens of the world (Cook & Simonds, 2011), and to think critically about the world around them, (Hunt, 2010), the Sisters continued to offer classes such as home economics and business (administrative skills), which limited the women and their aspiration to be leaders. Felton High School changed the curriculum in the late 80s. Valentina's parents not only sent her to Catholic school to learn about God. "My parents wanted me to be graceful and learn etiquette from the Sisters. Good breeding was important to make it in society." In this case, they entrusted the Sisters of the school to teach her how to conform to customs that would help her succeed in life.

While Paula was enrolled at Felton Catholic High School, she was on a mission. She planned to graduate high school and then seek employment to help her father who worked in construction digging holes. She shared there was no other conversation of her attending college and the Sisters never encouraged her to further education. She remembered the beauty of the school and its beautiful walls. The girls "were the smartest and the most beautiful people I had ever seen" (Paula). This was a different world for her. She remembered her music class and the excitement of learning. For Paula, high school was an experience that took her "someplace else that was beautiful." At the end of the day, she would get on the bus and ride home only to share with her brothers and sisters the stories of her beautiful high school. Paula now reflects on the "different world" experiences she had at Felton and wonders if this is why she was so dedicated to

community service and championing equitable changes in her neighborhood and ultimately in city hall.

Anzaldúa (1987) argues that discrimination of minorities is a direct product of both historical and contemporary practices. Therefore, one has to take into consideration the historical time (1955-1975) that these women graduated. All Catholic Schools were, and still are, under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church, a patriarchal institution. One that reinforces negative female stereotypes in a male dominated culture. Options for Catholic girls remained limited, and they were educated for the sole purpose of marrying and raising children or becoming nuns (Debare, 2004). This study's findings align with Debare's (2004), which reports that it was not until single gender schools went through their own social transformation in the late 80s that they changed the lives of women and their leadership development.

Family's Role in Leadership Development

Family mentors. The participants acknowledged that family was instrumental in contributing to their leadership development. A common theme that recurred throughout the participants' interviews was mentorship. Each participant had one person in their lives who taught them a valuable lesson about succeeding in life. The women named a parent or a close "family neighbor" who was instrumental in contributing to their leadership development. They focused on the rich tradition and values provided by their deep connection to family (Lopez-Mulnix 2011).

Sofia identified her dad as a mentor; he was very influential in terms of her education.

There was no excuse for bad grades and it was expected that we were “A” students. That we would succeed and that we would be the best in our class and that we would go on to college. When I was in high school, he went back to school to get his masters in business and I saw him do that and I realized that he was old to me. He was probably in his 30s but for him to go back to school while he was raising a family and had two jobs because he had to support 5 kids. This just spoke to me. If he felt this passionate about education. Then there had to be something to it. I, too, would go to college.

His own tenacity to complete his studies encouraged her to successfully graduate in a field dominated by men. Sofia was one woman among men in the science courses. She was there to complete her studies. Remembering her dad’s passion for school, taught her to persevere even when she was look down for being the only woman in class.

Paula also saw her father as a mentor. He taught her that they were part of a very important culture. “Éramos mejicanos y hablábamos español. (*We were Mexican and spoke Spanish*). They listened to the Spanish novelas on the radio and saw rented movies of Pedro Infante, Libertad Lamarque, Jorge Negrete, and Sarita Montreal (Actors/Singers during the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema). It was “la época de oro del cinema mexicano. en (*Golden Age*) Mexico when all the movies were coming out” (Paula). She credits her father for learning her culture. Her mentor taught her to be secure with that knowledge and never apologize for being Mexican, and she carried these lessons with her throughout her political career. This self-awareness helped her when she was challenged by the political system in place:

You are a woman with all these values and going into this system. Number one, you are not planning to fit in to the system, but to change it. It is very important and it is hard. It is very hard because city hall was not a friendly place to come into at all. The political male, male of any color, did not welcome a woman and I was a first among men. My own Mexican American leaders did not know what to do with me.

Paula believed the greatest gift her father could have ever given her was her identity. “It is like this tree that is so deep, nothing, nothing, nada, nada te va tumbar (*nothing will knock you down*). Porque sabes quién eres (*because you know who you are*) and there won’t be a need to perform or to compete or to be like somebody else because you know who you are”. Her father reinforced a Mejicana (Mexican) identity that she should embrace. “Eres mejicana, not Mexican American, mira el orgullo en ser mejicana. ¡Mi hija puede ser todo!” (*You are Mexican, not Mexican American. You should be proud to be Mexican. My daughter can do everything!*)

Valentina named her big sister as her mentor. “My sister was supportive and protective through thick and thin.” She was instrumental in encouraging Valentina to open her jewelry business. “I would often come home wanting to give up. The jewelry business was hard. I felt I was not respected, all because I was a ‘girl’. My sister never let me give up.” Her sister stayed right by her side especially during ups and downs of maintaining a business in a male dominated field. Valentina felt she was never alone because she had her sister giving her advice when needed, and a shoulder to cry on which helped her to persevere as a leader in the jewelry business.

A German lady down the street was Elena's mentor. The "family neighbor" was Elena's father's best friend and a counselor from a local high school.

She would drive a Cadillac and would tell me, 'you can get that car, nothing is impossible.' She had this vision that I was going to be a teacher. She would say teaching is your thing. 'I am going to make sure you get a job at the school district.' She was always at my side nagging at me. She and my dad were best friends. They cooked for each other. They would get together about guiding me and telling what I was going to do. My dad was on my side wanting me to be a teacher. My mom wanted me to be a lawyer. Mrs. Wanda (the neighbor) tried to calm my mother down. She would say you have to let her find her way. She (Mrs. Wanda) was the powerhouse in my life.

This German lady, her "family neighbor", was always supporting her and empowering her to be the woman that she is today. Her accomplishments came as a result of engaging with the parents of her students. Mrs. Wanda taught her that parents were part of the teaching responsibility. Elena fought against the "nay sayers" who did not believe in partnering with parents. She stood firm in this belief and earned the respect of her school community giving her opportunities for leadership positions.

Carolina also found her neighbor to be very encouraging and supportive. Her mentor lived a couple of doors down from her house, and was a friend of the family. Mrs. Grace was an intelligent woman, graduated from college and was a nurse. She joined the military and became the first Mexican American woman Lieutenant in the state of Texas. Carolina stated, Mrs. Grace was "always lifting up how important education was and that we watch over each other." Her mantra was to always give each other

chances to succeed and be there for each other. She encouraged all the neighborhood girls to get educated and find a career. Mrs. Grace was a great role model. Carolina wanted to emulate this strong positive woman and, because of Mrs. Grace., learned to have the utmost respect for veterans. The memory of Mrs. Grace helped Carolina break through into a position that was mostly held by educated men who served veterans. Thus, breaking the mold for other women to be offered similar positions. These neighbors were considered extended family by these women. In the Latino culture, familia is not limited to the nuclear family but includes both blood relatives and vecinos (*neighbors*), compadres (*daughter/son's godfather/mother*), etc. Members of the Latino community enjoy large extended family networks which embraces those who live in close proximity to them (Lopez, 1999; Vega, 1990).

Whether it was a family member or a neighbor, the participants found someone in their lives to mentor and advocate for them, advise them, help them along the way, and teach them how to carry on in their careers. Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theory is one in which self-awareness and understanding is achieved by interrogating and challenging authority regarding structures of power that marginalize women. One must *re-write* her identity by "uprooting dualistic thinking that originates in our lives" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80). Family, neighbors, and mentors served as supports for the Latinas in this study as they redefined themselves. The women re-invented themselves when challenged by a male dominated political system or workplace by remaining focused on their mentor's words.

Culture's Role in Leadership Development

Greater good. The participants concurred that culture played a role in contributing to their leadership development. The women in this study overwhelmingly focused on the greater good of their family when they described leadership. This counters societal beliefs. For one of the dominant cultural paradigms in the United States is individualism which emphasizes fulfillment and choice rather than social responsibility (Trumbull, et al., 2001). The participants' respect for family traditions and values enacted *Coyolxauhqui* (Anzaldúa, 1987) by integrating their family values and societal values. There is this overlap, shared space where culture and family intertwine and intersected, reflecting a Borderlands theory of in-between space.

La mestiza (Anzaldúa, 1987) takes on a leadership role by using her voice to speak for herself, to define herself, and to open up new spaces for herself. Thus, remaining strong with family ties amidst the dominant beliefs of society. This altruistic leadership character may be attributed to collectivism (Jung & Avolio, 1999). For it concentrates on community where people are responsible for contributing to the common good. Hofstede (1997) classifies Hispanics as collective. The participants came from a collectivistic culture in which they were socialized to be connected to the community and be responsible to other members of the society (Samovar & Porter, 1991). Lopez-Mulnix's (2011) study discussed the women in her study navigating between two cultures—one of professional life and one of family life. They focused on the rich traditions and connections to family. Both Paula and Carolina put their college studies aside to help their family. This attests to the eldest daughter in the family expected to be the caretaker (Taylor, 2004). Sofia pointed out, "Family is still very much a part of my

life. You do not give up family connections”. While Elena spoke of her estranged relationship with her mom when she was young, she is now grateful she can afford to “treat her mom and show her the better things in life.” Valentina has not let go of her family even though they disagree with her lesbian lifestyle. She lives in a self-imposed silent secretive world with her partner out of respect for their values. She believes this is her way of giving back to her family. The participants in this study have learned to navigate the two cultures of family and society and have not forgotten the values learned from family or their obligation to give back to family. This is what they perceive to be the greater good of the two cultures. As leaders within their families and professional lives they became *La Mestiza* by using their voice to speak for themselves and open new spaces (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Dual world/in-between space. Another recurring theme illustrated how participants navigated their cultural experiences. The duality differed for each participant, but navigating these experiences was a common trend amongst them all. The participants were caught between the cultural expectations associated with professional work, family life, personal life, and/or spiritual life. The women shared their challenges and struggles as they navigated the *in-between space* (Anzaldúa, 1987) as leaders in these dual cultures.

For example, Sofia often found that female scientists were caught between choosing family and a career path. Her *in-between space* was balancing family life and career life because both were very important to her.

My career path? - what is happening with PhD scientist, is that schools are training more and more scientist, but the positions for them to work is not

growing. And so people who graduate with a PhD find it hard to land jobs. They have to be very flexible to find a job. You can do all your training in Texas and there are openings in Wyoming and Connecticut. You have to be willing to move. And women in general do not like to move, Hispanic in general do not like to move. Women are more grounded. And that is what happened to me. I needed to come back to San Antonio. I just got lucky in that I was able to get a position. I took in academia which was not the coveted position that everybody is looking for in your field. It was the secondary one, a research tract positions which are little easier to get but much more volatile and you could lose that position at any time.

She considered herself fortunate because she had the luxury of not being the only source of income in her family; she had her husband as the primary income. Thus, giving her an option to stay closer to home. Sophia integrated family and academia. An empowerment occurred when she realized that it was her choice. The construction of the *mestiza* is in itself a journey that women embrace as they re-define themselves as leaders when they make choices.

Throughout Sofia's career, she saw many women assimilate into the work culture and become hyper-focused on their careers. She stated, "If they had children, they never talked about them or their family". She saw many of them become very cold and harsh to get to that high profile leadership position. While she did not like that, Sofia understood they had to be like that in order to "be competitive with the men in the same position".

Paula uses Anzaldúa's (1987) borderland terminology of *inside/outside* insights. Her in-between space was a world of haves and have nots. She claims that her leadership

was enhanced due to these experiences. She learned how to be sensitive towards others. There were a lot of class differences and there were moments she experienced the pain associated with not having and not being able to have. When she was a student at Felton Catholic High School, she dreaded regular dress day which allowed students to wear their own clothing instead of the assigned uniform. To this day, she does not remember what she wore, but she certainly remembered what the other girls wore on regular dress day. “They dressed in their plaid pleated poodle skirts and their beautiful sweaters with a little fur on the collar. This outfit included patent leather shoes or black suede loafers.” Paula learned to deal with these differences with her father’s assistance. “Papa, quiero zapatos de charol.” “No, hija, ustedes van a tener los zapatos de la escuela.” (*Dad, I want patent leather shoes. No, my daughter, you have your uniform shoes from school.*) That is all they could afford. The money they had was used for Catholic school tuition and purchasing uniforms. Through these experiences, she learned she was different because she was poor, but also recounted not feeling like she was less of a person as a result of it. She vowed to change “the way things were and bring equity into the world.”

Valentina’s in-between space was having to reconcile the social-cultural norms of relationships as she recounted:

My family is very traditional. We are a Hispanic family that only knows one way to love and that is between woman and man. To this day, my family is not open-minded. When I told them that I fell in love with a woman, they committed me to a hospital to convert me back to normal. I still love this woman, but it is not discussed in my family. I could never break my family’s heart. I owe them my

life. I am lucky to have my life partner. I believe this has made me stronger as a woman, sacrificing in silence. I can overcome anything I set out to do.

Valentina integrated family and her personal life renegotiating her *mestiza* identity. An empowerment occurs when one realizes that she has made her choice. She has chosen to live this life of silence for the good of her family which she believes has made her a stronger person. Maher (2007) studied the areas of difficulty and disconnection students experience in Catholic schools. His study is based on in-depth interviews with 25 (12 female and 13 male) gay and lesbian alumni who attended Catholic high schools. What emerged was a theme of disintegration. Things simply did not fit together in their lives in the areas of family, peers, school, spirituality, and identity. He states that gay and lesbians spend a great deal of time and energy hiding their sexuality and cope with it in number of unhealthy ways. Valentina, on the other hand, has accepted herself and all aspects of her identity, gender, race, and sexual orientation and has used it as a strength. In her alternative lifestyle as her family names it, Valentina has chosen to link the pieces of her life and follow the path of *conocimiento*. She is re-writing a different way of perceiving, of knowing. She is refiguring her identity and life purpose. “Nepantla is a place where one can accept contradictions and paradox” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 56). All people in nepantla relate to it in different ways. She brings this strength to her work. While on the “path of *conocimiento*...inner work,” sometimes you need to block the other from your mind to respect yourself. “They acknowledge the need for psychological armor to protect their open, vulnerable selves from negative forces while engaging in the world” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 155).

Valentina not only lived in a dual world socially but also professionally. She had a definite challenge in being a woman in a male dominated profession because she was one of the first women in the field of jewelry business. “I worked around many Mexican men. There weren’t that many women.” Her struggles came from traditional male practices. “Diamond brokers did not use written contracts. A handshake was used for a legal agreement. A gentleman’s agreement was all that we needed to exchange diamonds. It took me two to three years to break into that trusted circle while the other men walked into that handshake.” Valentina’s strength helped her persevere becoming well respected among her male colleagues and evening opening doors for women jewelers. For she also chose to teach the trait to women.

Carolina’s *in-between space* was trying to live and work as a Catholic woman in a culturally secular world. She was told to stop praying with her clients. Carolina was conflicted because she needed the job and felt that her clients had been through “mental hospitals, and they had the most expensive medications and psychiatrists” and she found that prayer and spiritual introspection aided them.

Carolina also experienced a dual world in being a Latina, as most people did not know that she was Mexican American because of her light skin color. She “blended” into the community, and was often mistaken for being “white.” This bothered her because she saw the injustices that “morenas” (darker skinned) experienced. She struggled with the privilege she received as a result of her color. She recalls one summer day when her friends were not allowed to swim in a public swimming pool but she was because she looked like her mother-- “white.” Carolina often struggled to reconcile the different treatment due to her complexion. These experiences compelled her to continue being a

person of God, and “be that person that never discriminated at work. All people are God’s children.”

Elena also found her skin tone challenging because she too was lighter complected than her family and friends. Her *in-between space* was that of her skin color and the way society viewed it – light versus dark. She believed that her complexion offered an advantage over her siblings. When Elena received promotions, she often asked herself, “is it that I am fair skinned even though I am one hundred percent Mexican? I am the only one that has light eyes; they are hazel”. People treated her differently and she could see it clearly. That was the one thing that made Elena state, “I don’t like that feeling”. She noticed that she could mingle with the “White community” without any issues due to her skin color. Her biggest struggle was that she often found people making derogatory remarks about her family or Mexicans in general. Elena wondered what her life would have been like if she had not been “fair skinned.” She wonders to this day if her skin tone was the reason for her professional accomplishments. She reminds herself that it was precisely this discriminatory treatment that motivated her to pursue her career. For she wanted to give everyone, “black, white, and brown” a chance in life.

Paula’s greatest challenge was being true to her values and not compromising her integrity. Her *in-between space* was one of navigating her life as a female in a male dominated political world, one that was connected with “deep pockets.” The supporters who focused on the development of the city rather than the well-being of individuals and affordable housing made her critique and fight against the world she inhabited. As a result, however, she always felt her agenda was ridiculed as she explained:

Going into a political system that totally negates and ignores even maligns, makes fun of those values. You are a woman with all these values and going into this system. Number one, you are not planning to fit in to the system, but to change it. It is very important and it is hard. It is very hard because city hall was not a friendly place to come into at all. The political male, male of any color, did not welcome a woman and I was a first among men. My own Mexican American leaders did not know what to do with me. I think they could have dealt with a woman (I am going to use this word. It is a terrible word) who was a “bitch.” Because that is what they call a woman who defends herself *y todo (and all)*. If I came as a toughy, and a know everything, it would have been very easy to shut me down. If I had been somebody who had a questionable reputation, such as we know what you did 10 years ago. She had an affair with so and so. That’s a reason to squash. Anything you can find to squash, you squash. What if you had somebody you don’t know how to squash? What do I do with this woman? She is up there talking about justice, talking about her community, talking about her roots, and she is so proud to be *mejicana*. *¿Qué voy hacer con esta mujer? (Mexican woman. What am I going to do with that woman?)* I know that it was hard for them. I am talking about the good guys, those coming from the same community. What to do with a woman like me and that was harder.

Paula did not believe she had assimilated into the dominant culture. She never compromised her values. She believed that she lost the mayoral race due to being a Hispanic woman, but never made any apologies for it. She recalled her campaign manager setting up focus groups to look into the positive and negative viewpoints of her

as a candidate. She had several negative areas that were brought to her attention such as the issues she espoused against the establishment. She never questioned those concerns, but the one that she quarreled about was the one that said, “Paula is too Hispanic.” Her public relations counselor told her there was a solution to the “Hispanic” problem as she tapped her fingers on her folder indicating a change had to happen. She felt it was very fixable. Paula told her, “I am sorry. I do not want to see what you have in there (folder). I am me. Se acabó (*That’s it*).” Paula believed the greatest gift her father could have ever given her was her identity. “It is like this tree that is so deep, nothing, nothing, nada te va tumbar (*nothing will knock you down*). Porque sabes quién eres (*because you know who you are*) and there won’t be a need to perform or to compete or to be like somebody else because you know who you are”.

Leadership has been associated with masculine behaviors as has been stereotyped to be competitive and aggressive (Haslett & Carter, 1992), and women have often implemented these traits to maintain successful leadership positions (Billings & Alvesson, 2000). Latinas adopt a “survival mode” and adapt to fit the mold (Gaston, 1994). Some women have surrendered their personal rights to a family to be able to place themselves in the same playing field as men.

The participants in this study recognized gender biases (Lopez-Mulnix, 2011) existed and had to take extra steps to overcome the obstacles of discrimination. A successful Latina has to be strong-willed enough to get the job done, especially if she is in a field that is dominated by men who are acculturated in the patriarchal and hierarchal structure Quilantan (2002).

Anzaldúa (1987) maintains, “the dominant culture has created its version of reality and my work counters that version with another version—the version of coming from this place of *in-betweenness, neplantla*.” The findings of this study presented the lived and school experiences of Latinas on their paths to leadership and navigating the two worlds. They described the cultural challenges they encountered along the way between the professional, familial, personal, and spiritual worlds.

Voice. The participants discussed the forces of the dominant culture and the influences it had on their leadership development. The new *mestiza* no longer lives devalued (Anzaldúa, 1987). She uses her identity, her voice to define herself, ultimately opening a new space for self. The theme of finding voice was shared amongst the participants, as it helped them overcome many of the obstacles they faced while pursuing and working within leadership roles. Each found that strength, their voice, either from within, or from their school, family, and cultural experiences to fight obstacles of their daily lives.

The dilemma Carolina found within herself became her greatest strength, and her voice came from God. Her multiple worlds included one of alcohol and partying and then she found herself being confronted with a Born Again Religion. This religion helped her come out of acts of self-destruction, but she was not ready to leave the world behind. She loved socializing with a drink in hand, but being Born Again would mean no drinking. She wrestled with her love of God and being baptized into this new way of life. She eventually turned her selfish life into selfless giving and caring for others. As a result of this struggle between her spiritual life and “party” life, she became a stronger woman, one that takes care of her family and gives back to her community. Caroline

shared that she does all of this “in honor and glory of God”. She found God as her voice, her stronghold which has helped her succeed in her position to this day. Carolina shares she is more focused on her job and the clients that she helps. Because of her relationship with God, serving veterans has become her priority.

Valentina shared that being a Latina is indeed her voice. She found her niche in being a proud Latina during a time when some hid their cultural identity. “I was lucky to be Mexican. The Small Business Administration was helping women like me to open businesses. All I needed was a sound business plan with a little collateral. They gave me the edge to go full throttle into my business.” She was able to establish herself within the business world living as a successful Mexican American woman. Her strength came from identifying herself as a Latina.

Sofia found her voice in her education because her social life was very challenging. Society taught her that as long as you were beautiful, dressed the part, and had a great personality, you would fit into the social scene. That is what made the popular girl popular. Sofia was quite the opposite. She was a very quiet and timid girl. Her father did not allow her to dress in fashion, and because of this, the “Coffee House” social events offered at Felton Catholic High School were a source of anxiety for her. “There were many social events, but I was very shy and reluctant to attend those. That kind of social interaction scared me because I needed to know that I was not going to get teased, called names.” Years later, however, as a quiet, unassuming young Hispanic woman, Sofia remembers being the only woman and the only Hispanic in her graduate science courses. “I did not feel that way at graduate school. I had the grades. I had the SAT grades. I was the only Hispanic in the class. I realized the field that I was

following, there were maybe only 2% Hispanic women of all scientist. I realized that as I progressed through my career that I was a rarity.” She served on many committees that catapulted her research career, but she wondered “was I invited to serve only because I am Hispanic?” While Sofia wondered if that was the only reason she was chosen, she also acknowledged and recognized, “no, my father taught me a great work ethic and I earned all my grades.” She transformed her shyness and homeliness into believing in her own academic potential and found her voice in her studies and later within her science community as she developed her career.

Elena found her voice in her inner “fighting spirit.” She lived in a cultural world where men were alcoholics. “The men in my family drank a lot and smoked a lot (Elena). She described her neighborhood as a “violent environment.” She had seen a lot of bad things happen, yet she still found a protected space with her family and within the Felton Catholic High School environment. She chose not to be a victim and let those experiences fester. She learned to fight her way outside of her protective environment in order to succeed. She used this “fighting spirit” to advocate for her students and parents. Her leadership among her students’ parent earned her respect. She fought to give parents a place in education. “Whether they (parents) were in prison, poor, or uneducated, I felt like they had a say in their children’s schooling.”

This “fighting spirit” came to Elena very early in life. She recounts the story when she was 12 years old. Her cousin accidentally shot his brother. Fortunately, it did not kill him, but it injured him. Elena was instrumental in calling EMS and the police department. The next day the newspaper mistakenly wrote that she had shot her cousin. This embarrassed her and she sought to have it changed and corrected. “It was about my

reputation and my pride. I was the neighborhood babysitter and I bathed dogs.” She recalls nobody fighting for her so she took it upon herself to get her neighbors to sign a petition to get the newspaper to write a retraction. “I wrote to the editor and insisted that the retraction be placed on the front page. I then went to the newspaper office and sat in the lobby refusing to leave until someone saw me. I eventually got my retraction, not on the front page, but a retraction, nonetheless.” Elena is proud of her “fighting spirit,” and she relies on it during challenging moments.

Paula’s voice came from her strength and pride in being Mexican. Her father reinforced a Mejjicana (Mexican) identity that she should embrace. “Eres mejicana, not Mexican American, mira el orgullo en ser mejicana. ¡Mi hija puede ser todo!” (*You are Mexican, not Mexican American. You should be proud to be Mexican. My daughter can do anything!*) Her father would say this to her because she noticed a division in her school among the Mexican American community. There were the girls “las del barrio” (*those of the neighborhood*) (meaning “hood” or “ghetto”) and the ones who were more “American.” Paula was from the “barrio.” Her mother did not come to PTA (Parent Teacher Association) meetings like the other mothers did because she did not know English. She also saw a class difference within the Mexican American Community. The “American” girls seemed to have more money than the girls from “el barrio.”

Paula recalled seeing her classmates years later at her school reunions, and realizing that there were many “girls that I did not know were Mexican American.” These women were now identifying themselves as Latinas. “We never knew. I think my parents did a good job of having me be a very proud Mexican.” She knew she was a brown girl, one that spoke Spanish. She also knew that when you are sure of who you are

no one can take that identity from you. “So, when you go someplace where somebody else has more (possessions), I know who I am. They have nothing on me” (Paula). As a Mexican woman, she was proud of her heritage. She chose to use these lessons to empower her neighborhood, her local community. Her identity gave her voice and confidence.

Anzaldúa (1987) described the new *mestiza* as no longer living as one who is devalued. She used her *voice* to define herself. She stated there are many forces that try to influence us, but we can choose to incorporate or to discard them. The new *mestiza* is a survivor. This perspective helped her to increase her tolerance to see a bigger picture of the world. This theory is an instrument that can empower the voiceless in marginalized groups. By choosing their voice, through God, identity, education, and/or a “fighting spirit,” the participants were empowered and replaced feelings of being victims. Their voices helped them make choices to overcome obstacles which ultimately led to their success.

Conclusion

The chapter’s intent was to explore and analyze the experiences and perceptions of five Latinas as they journeyed from their lived and school experiences into leadership roles. Through interviews, the women shared their lived experiences. Anzaldúa’s (1987) Borderlands theory was used to understand how the women navigated through the in-between spaces, found their voices, and established inner peace, which ultimately led them to experiencing a type of liberation/empowerment.

Anzaldúa (1987) proposes that there is another way of looking at reality by going through the process of *neplanta* which is a transitional channel. The participants in the

study were caught between the cultures of professional work, family life, personal life, and/or spiritual life. The women shared their challenges and struggles as they navigated the in-between space. *Coatlicue* is a state in which one reflects, gains knowledge of self. This female goddess is viewed as an image of transformative strength. In this study, the family was instrumental as mentors who served as support while the participants reflected and redefined themselves. In the state of *Coyolxauhqui*, one experiences reconciliation amidst the struggles that were encountered in their professional lives. Despite patriarchal influences while the participants were in school, they overcame limitations. They spoke of a spirituality that led to inner peace during their time of struggle.

Anzaldúa reminds us that using a hybrid understanding of identities makes room for multiple ways of knowing and seeing a bigger picture of the world. The participants learned to navigate the two cultures of family and society and remained connected with family stating it was the greater good of the two cultures. They referred to altruism when defining their understanding of successful leadership. Going through Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theory, the process gives birth to the new *mestiza*, a new identity. Anzaldúa's (2015) "path of conocimiento...inner work," requires that one apply what was learned to all daily activities and question the limitations of a single culture. Through this path of knowledge, we liberate ourselves. The participants defined their "voice" as a choice that helped them overcome obstacles which ultimately led to their success.

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore perceptions and experiences associated with the leadership development of Latina leaders who were educated in a single-gender Catholic school. I examined the collective experiences of five Latinas who held positions predominately held by men. In this study, I sought to discover the role culture, family, and attending a single-gender Catholic school (i.e., values, beliefs, instruction) played in developing their leadership skills to discover effective tools of empowerment for young Latinas.

This chapter summarizes and discusses the findings of the study within the context of Anzaldúa's Borderlands framework (1987), which is the process of *nepantla*—the “in-between” space or the transitional period in identity formation for the participants. One travels from *nepantla* to the pain endured in *Coatlicue*, and through the putting together in *Coyolxauhqui*. The process has birthed the new *mestiza*, a space of hybridity which empowers the self. Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theory builds on this work, expanding them in to the seven stages of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa 2015) offering a holistic design to effect change.

Borderlands theory and *conocimiento* were used as guides to study how the participants constructed borderlands (the state where the self is going through challenges, confrontations, and reaffirmations) and journeyed on the path of *conocimiento* to make sense of the influences in their lives and schooling, that appeared to contribute to their leadership development. It further helped to unpack the transformation the Latinas went through on their journey during their leadership development. In this chapter, the women's encounters with the *in-between* space as leaders in male dominated fields and

how they navigated their lives between the two worlds within their professional work and family will be discussed. Latinas from a collectivistic cultural background fitting in male oriented field of the White World of individualism maneuvering between the two spaces, which results in their abilities to cross between the two spaces and thus develop a different identity that allows them to succeed.

Insight is also provided into the ways in which these women melted/merged their identities as they lived their dual world experience, which ultimately gave birth to the new *mestiza* (Anzaldúa, 1987) which is a space of hybridity which empowers the self to engage and abandon previous feelings of being a victim and replaces those feelings with actions against domination. Additionally, the chapter details how the participants transformed negative stereotypes into a “voice” that empowered themselves and others. This chapter will close with implications for policy and practice, recommendations for further research, and final thoughts.

Placed at the center of this phenomenological study, I studied the lived experiences of five Latina leaders in an effort to understand their experiences with leadership development (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The five Latinas selected graduated from Felton Catholic High School in South Texas between the years of 1955 – 1980. Through qualitative interviewing, the five women were asked to reflect on their high school education and family and cultural experiences that contributed to their leadership development. The following overarching research question and subquestions guided the study:

What are the perceptions and experiences associated with leadership development of Latina leaders who were educated in a single-gender Catholic school?

- What values and foundational beliefs were instilled when Latinas were students that developed their current leadership?
- What instrumental strategies, instruction, and methods were used to develop their leadership abilities as students?
- What was the family's role in contributing to leadership development?
- What role did culture play in contributing to leadership development?

The findings of the study highlighted the participants' common experiences, how they understood them, how they removed obstacles, and eventually how they transformed their lives through vehicles of education. Ultimately, this study may give voice to women who have been traditionally marginalized.

Summary of Themes, Findings and Discussion

As identified in Chapter 4, seven themes were identified: 1) Spirituality – Inner Peace; 2) Altruism – Leadership; 3) Little Focus on Leadership Development; 4) Family Mentors; 5) Greater Good; 6) Dual Work/In-Between Space; and 7) Voice. Analysis of these seven themes, using Borderlands framework and path of *conocimiento*, resulted in the findings discussed in the section that follows.

Spiritual Activism – Inner Peace

In this study, the findings suggest that spirituality served as a coping mechanism for the women immersed in a male dominated work culture. This inner peace was instrumental to the Latinas' leadership development. A foundational belief that the five participants echoed was that of spirituality. Anzaldúa (2015) advocates for a more functional vision of spirituality which she simply calls spiritual activism. This points in the direction of spiritual-in-action (Tirres, 2019). *Conocimiento* “pushes us into

engaging the spirit in confronting our social sickness with new tools and practices whose goal is to effect a shift” (p. 19). Anzaldúa (2015) definition of spirituality aims at becoming aware of interconnections between all things by attaining a grand perspective. Feelings of alienation disappear when coming to terms with spirit. One finds ways to “spirit through woundings,” discovering new approaches to problems. Through spirituality one seeks harmony with our environment. Spirit represents the “energizing power for life. It is the inner voice, the electrical charge, that says, ‘I’m going to do it. I will do it.’” (p. 39). Anzaldúa did not coin the term spiritual activism, but she used it to describe spirituality for social change, one that recognizes differences yet focuses on commonalities as a means for transformation.

Spirituality in this discussion, is defined as “*the search for the sacred*” (Pargament, 2000). The term “sacred” refers not only to God, but also to other aspects of life that are perceived to be manifestations of the divine or higher power. Beliefs, practices, experiences, relationships, art, nature, or any part of life, positive or negative, can be given sacred status (Pargament, 2000). When discussing the participants’ spirituality, it is not focusing on a specific religion, which is “an institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, 2019). According to Keating (2006), “Organized religions impose authority on individuals through external teachings, texts, standards, and leaders, spiritual activism locates authority within each individual, individuals often scarred by oppressive contacts with those they have encountered” (p.11)

The participants’ perseverance and resolve were founded in the peace they established. For example, Elena generated her inner peace within the soccer field when

confronted with conflicts giving her the opportunity to endure obstacles at work. This inner harmony served as an internal discernment mechanism that allowed them to wrestle with the oppressive work hurdles, yet harness positive energy in order to continue succeeding in their work environment. Paula utilized her spirituality “to keep her spirit calm” while negotiating her political position with her politician colleagues. Valentina recalled her spiritual mantra “the sky is the limit” to give her that motivation she needed to succeed in a male-dominated business. Elena, Paula, and Valentina’s spirituality stirred from within bringing forth vitality. These findings align with Anzaldúa’s (1987) concept of *Coatlicue* which is a painful state in which one stops to reflect on all the knowledge gained in *nepantla*. This is the stage in which one has unlearned the colonized identity and reversed domination in order to acquire knowledge of self. Paula and Valentina, both navigated the in-between space and did not succumb to “doing it their [men’s] way,” but asserted themselves in the male dominated world. Spirituality manifested as inner peace became a significant component of leadership for these five Latinas.

Gallegos (2006) asserts that spirituality is an important part of leadership, as it is a source for women when developing integrity and finding meaning in their work. For example, as in the case of Carolina, spirituality is more of an individual practice, for it has to do with having a sense of peace and purpose. Carolina shared her gift of spirituality with her clients believing that she was giving them an alternative to their “expensive medications.” This practice earned her accolades both from her clients and her bosses. Beliefs are developed around the meaning of life and a connection to something bigger than ourselves is created (Eckersley, 2007). Latinas are redefining

themselves by integrating their creative inner resources into their lives so that they may feed their souls (Medina, 1998).

This inner peace, this spirituality, becomes a power of energy. This energy source shapes a woman's identity as it did for Sofia for it became a tool for her daily survival in the field of science, a society that has often silenced women (Medina, 1998). The spirituality described throughout this study is a belief system that is not always associated with traditional religious beliefs or practices, but instead connected to a supernatural source giving women something larger than what is physically experienced. This spirituality surrounds women's lives and gives them the strength to resist, persevere, and transform obstacles into life giving experiences (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012, p. 543) as is the case in Elena. Her church was "the soccer field." Claiming a spiritual belief system gives women the ability to nourish and express their deepest values which prepares them to assume positions of authority (Medina, 1998). Spirituality becomes a means of coping with the demands and potential overload of any particular job (Altaf & Awan, 2011).

All participants described an inner harmony that surfaced from having a spiritual experience or from religious practice. Either they mentioned God directly, discussed a relationship with a higher power, or described some sort of spiritual connection that came from within. Paula and Valentina's positive energy was a source of support that contributed to their resilience, which led them to the positions they held throughout their careers. According to Gonzalez-DeJesus (2012), women manage to overcome challenges to their career development by believing in and relying on a higher spiritual being. The participants found this source either through spiritual mystics such as in the case of Paula

that helped calm her spirit, Elena's connection with people in the soccer field, Valentina remembering a father's words of wisdom and Carolina and Sophia whose source was the traditional approach of church attendance and prayer. Acknowledging this dimension of the spirit is very important and essential to Latina resistance and growth; it is important to acknowledge and feed the spirit (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2014).

New Personal Stories – Family Mentors

The participants created new narratives—new stories—which directly correlates with the essence of “putting Coyolxauhqui together” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 138). They were able to re-write their personal stories with their family's support. “You pick and choose views with transformation potential, not imposed on you, but one whose process you can control” (p. 141). The findings suggest that strong family support and a positive ethnic identity were contributing factors to the success of the participants. In this case, the participants credited their family in cultivating their leadership abilities. Their families served as mentors and role models who motivated, supported, and advised them. Paula's father was her mentor who taught her how to appreciate her identity (*mira el orgullo en ser mejicana, look at the pride in being Mexican*). Valentina's sister advised her on how to carry on in her jewelry business. “My sister never let me give up.” Elena's neighbor was the “powerhouse” in her life insisting to her that “nothing is impossible.” Mrs. Grace was Carolina's role model teaching her to have respect for military veterans, “always saying that we watch over each other.” They focused on the values provided by their deep connection to family mentioning a parent or sibling as a mentor. Paula and Sofia credited their fathers for learning the Mexican culture and providing guidance and life advice regarding education. Paula mentioned that having a positive Mexican identity

promoted pride in her heritage and encouraged her to become a role model and an advocate on behalf of other Latinos by representing them in city council. The life advice, Sofia received from her dad was about education. His example taught her to persevere and graduate with a doctoral degree.

Gallegos (2006) contends that a strong ethnic identity for the women is brought forth by a strong sense of family and community. Elena and Carolina appreciated their mentors' acute focus on education and willingness to advocate for them. Mrs. Wanda, not only encouraged Elena's education, but also gave her guidance on dealing with her students' parents. Mrs. Grace encourage all the neighborhood girls especially Carolina to get educated and find a career. Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theory is one in which self-awareness is achieved by challenging authority regarding structures that marginalize women and by re-writing their identity. Paula changed the un-written rules of city hall by becoming the first Latina to be elected to the City Council of a major city in the United States. "The political male, male of any color, did not welcome a woman and I was a first among men." Valentina confronted the "gentleman's agreement" approach of doing business. She asserted herself and broke into the "trusted circle" and became a well-respected business woman among her male counterparts. Sofia re-wrote her story without having to make a choice, either/or. She integrated her family and a successful career path. Sofia chose not to become "hyper-focused" on a career and becoming "very cold and harsh to get to that high profile leadership position." Apparently, family served as a support system for the Latinas as they re-defined (Anzaldúa, 1987) themselves and became strong, independent women in male dominated professions.

Nepantla, In-Between Space – Culture

“Nepantla is a place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas inherited from family, education, culture (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 127). Key findings showed the participants managed to work in this in-between space living between two cultures and even living in both places simultaneously. Anzaldúa (1987) maintains that “the dominant culture has created its version of reality.” She counters that notion with another version of *inbetweenness*, or *nepantla*, as a state in which Latinas straddle two worlds. Each participant was caught in a duality of two cultures – the White, male dominated, individualistic one they faced in their professional life and the Hispanic, collectivism experienced in their family and communities (Trumbull, et al., 2001). Cultures are the means by which people adapt to the conditions of life (Hofstede, 1997, Samovar and Porter, 1991). Latinas have a learned way of life from their environment. Latino families are more collectivistic concentrating on extended families and communities (Taylor 2004, Trumbull, et al., 2001, Hofstede, 1997). Families have greater value than the needs of the individual (Trumbull, et al., 2001). Collectivism emphasizes interdependence and social responsibility as well as harmony and cooperation (Hofstede, 1997).

The participants in the study had a collectivistic frame of mind as they entered the work force, particularly when it came to leadership positions. In Valentina’s case, she found her leadership was not about material possessions nor status, rather it was about making her family proud of her. Paula used “her abilities and her leadership, to improve, and assist those she leads.” Elena believes that she was promoted as a result of her parental involvement within her school. Carolina often recalled her work as a “service”

to the veteran community. Sofia also viewed her research work as a service for the betterment of society.

The participants countered the successful leadership narrative that is stereotyped as competitive and aggressive (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). The dominant culture of individualism focuses on the individual's identity; the center is the self rather than the community (Trumbull, et al., 2001). It rewards individual goals, independence and achievement over social responsibility. Paula refused to follow the "deep pockets" that were focused on developing businesses and golf courses. She instead focused on the well-being of her neighbor and affordable housing. Often to the dismay of her political colleagues, "she is up there talking about justice, talking about her community. ¿Qué voy hacer con esta mujer? (*What am I going to do with this woman?*) Sophia integrated her family life with her career life by not taking a prestigious position. She chose not to "be competitive with the men for the same position." Her values were closer to home. Elena never aspired to have an administrator's position nor a district office. She dedicated her work to give parents a place in education. "Whether they were in prison, poor, or uneducated." Elena was their advocate. One must *re-write* her identity by "uprooting dualistic thinking that originates in our lives" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80). Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory is an instrument that can empower the voiceless. In this case, the participants used their leadership skills learned in a collectivist environment for the betterment of community, countering the dominant culture of individualism.

Crossing and Conversion – Single-Gender Catholic Education

Each participant appeared to follow the *conocimiento* stage of "the crossing" by defining herself in terms of who she is becoming, not who she has been (Anzaldúa, 2015,

p. 136). It is a call to break free from coping strategies and undergo conversion. The study's findings suggest that the participants unlearned "colonized behavior" taught to them in a patriarchal school and were able to overcome limitations to their leadership development imposed on them as students.

Debare (2004) contends, single-gender religious schools prepare young women for success through the development of scholarship and leadership, which in turn gives them the confidence to remove barriers that keep them from succeeding. In this study, the participants could not recall poignant moments in which they were educated to be leaders. They did, however share memories of a safe environment. Additionally, they remembered the strict adherence to the dress code and learning etiquette, but they did not recall being encouraged to attend college. This may be attributed to limited memory due to the fact that their school experiences happened 40 to 50 years ago.

The school culture may not have lent itself to the development of Latina leaders. Elena shared of subtle messages of who were the bright girls. "I knew I was not in their league. I was an average student." When it came time for Science experiments, Valentina took a list from the science book. She wanted to do the "egg hatching" experiment. Sister told her "only boys could do that." Carolina remembered fighting with Father Don because she "wanted to be an altar girl" and getting in trouble for it. Paula recollected that "in those days, girls went to Felton to learn and it was really encouraged to get married very soon. I don't remember getting the message that girls had to go to college at all." She loved science class. "When I think about it that was a gift. What if that gift had been developed?" The curriculum was structured to educate women planning careers either as secretaries, mothers/wives, or nuns.

The Sisters admitted that administration, teachers, and curriculum found it challenging to educate Latina girls due to their students' low self-esteem and the teachers not understanding the Hispanic culture.

The findings also suggest that deficit beliefs may unknowingly been at the center of this single gender Catholic education. The Sisters acknowledgement appears to be a testament to failed school efforts due to these beliefs. The views "become a filter that blocks educators' abilities to examine their assumptions and to look beyond traditional solutions for real and meaningful change" (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 151). This deficit thinking blames the student who is actually the "victim". In this case, Paula was not being encouraged to attend college or Valentina not allowed to work on certain science experiment. Valencia (2010) asserts that a school system that uses deficit thinking often absolves itself from Latino's failing. An example of this is the sisters' curriculum that planned secretarial careers or to be mothers/wives, or nuns. In some cases, according Valencia (2010), teachers lowered expectations and fail to motivate the student to succeed such in the messages that Elena received of not being one of the "bright students." Students' failure is placed on the student and family and not school failure.

Critical race educators challenge dominant social and cultural assumptions that oppress culture and intelligence (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Within the field of education, its aim is to heighten awareness about racism and educational inequity. It was developed in the 1970s among legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberley Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado. This movement believes a radical approach is needed with new strategies and theories to deal with subtle, institutional, and color-blind forms of racism. This movement is needed to combat the official power (Delgado

& Stefancic, 2005). Critical race scholars in teacher education acknowledge that schools operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The lack of a cultural lens is also important to this discussion, as it influences educators' assumptions and interpretations about culturally and linguistically diverse students' behaviors and academic performances (Garcia and Guerra, 2004). In this case, the right out admission of the Sisters and teachers not understanding the Hispanic culture.

Along with deficit thinking and lack of cultural understanding, the sisters sponsored a Catholic school influenced by the patriarchal church, a male dominated culture. Patriarchal institutional structures suggest men lead while women attend first to family, then to organizations. This institutional leadership structure is founded on male definitions of power, authority, and leadership (Curry, 2000). In Catholic school systems, girls' self-images are often shaped by standards that envisioned them as helpers and caregivers rather than leaders (Rogers, 2002). The Sisters' curriculum aligns with this belief focusing on marriage and educating the girls in becoming mothers/wives.

Patriarchy is a social system which regards men as authority figures, and in patriarchal faith-based cultures, men dictate the path to leadership for women (Rogers, 2002). The implication is that this practice excludes women, even nuns, from leadership roles and decision making (Hunt, 2010). While the Sisters sponsor the Catholic school, they report directly to the Archbishop and follow his dictates. The Latinas participants were educated within this structure that often embraced the patriarchal ideas of leadership.

The participants, unknowingly, were caught in a dual world in which their parents entrusted their education to the Sisters whose mission was to empower young women. However, it appears the Sisters fell short when developing the participants' leadership abilities as high school students. Rather than developing their leadership skills and empowering them to lead independent and successful lives, the participants were caught in a world in which they were prepared to be subservient to a husband or to the church. This is an example of Anzaldúa's argument of the historical and contemporary notion that women are naturally inferior to men. The colonized person is treated as inferior, conquered people. Anzaldúa challenges women to confront the traditions of patriarchal silence. Her goal is to reverse the colonization that has been passed on through cultural practices, and, in this case, the patriarchal practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Anzaldúa (1987) states that to be empowered women must develop their voice or new identity. To do so, she suggests that Latinas must first unlearn the socially established roles and behaviors that classify women as subordinates, and Latinas can do this by replacing colonization with another way of looking at reality. She proposes *nepantla* (i.e., *the in-between space*) as a transition that channels one to other perspectives through self-awareness and interrogates the structures of power that marginalize. In doing this, Latinas create alternative spaces in which they can live and function as women who are able to negotiate between different cultures and cross over from one to the other (or the "*borders*." The *mestiza* learns to tolerate living with her different cultural and racial elements. She transcends them as she lives with both and accepts her new hybrid identity.

Despite the patriarchal teachings of the nuns, the participants appeared to overcome the limitations that were imposed on them as students. That is, Elena and Valentina, and Paula rejected lessons rooted in the male dominated church, such as traditional church teachings on marriage, worship practices, and ultimately the implied purpose of a woman (to marry a man or marry the church as a nun).

Although well intentioned, through the Sisters own admission, they found educating Latina girls a challenging feat. While Catholic education can be a powerful counter-culture formative agent in the lives of students, Catholic education is also a part of a larger and dangerous discourse about gender and masculinity, (Burke, 2010; Chernin, 1994; hooks, 2000) which limits leadership opportunities for women.

Single-sex Catholic schools have the ability to educate young women with self-esteem, intelligence, and character (Debare, 2004). Debare stresses that all girls' schools can give girls a glimpse of the "inner, guiding vision of what a society would look like that truly respected and valued women" (p. 326). Girls in turn can go on and birth that vision into reality. Farrell (2007) asserts that prescribing to the differences of male and female interests ignores prejudice and social pressures. Based on these notions, single-sex school advocates make dangerous presumptions about how people learn and interact (Jackson, 2009).

We now know that Latinx students learn best in culturally familiar settings and when they have strong positive racial identities (Hughes-Hassell, 2014, Hanley and Noblit 2005). Administrators of single-sex Catholic schools can be advocates for a positive educational experience for their students, and they can effect positive changes in student achievement and begin to understand family engagement within a cultural lens.

Educators are role models who can shape learners' identity development, as well as their future aspirations. Latina administrators can model to students that success for minority females is possible (Méndez-Morse et al., 2003).

Freire (1970) asserts teachers must be sensitive to what they say and do in the classroom when engaging with learners and this also holds true for nuns teaching in single-gender Catholic schools. They must recognize the importance of educating the whole child (and not solely focus on religious teaching), valuing students' cultural identity, and valuing the experiences they bring to the classroom. Education has the potential to inspire Latina students to become leaders within the community and institute changes for those who will follow them (Lopez-Mulnix et al., 2011). Latinas can break negative stereotypes by accessing higher levels of education, becoming self-sufficient, and providing for others.

When looking at the lived experiences of the five Latina leaders who were educated in this single-gender Catholic school, two, Paula and Valentina, had unlearned roles and behaviors. Paula refused to believe that only men could be political activists in the forefront while women served as their background support. She unlearned this "colonized" behavior and became the first female Latina elected council member in a major city by using skills that she had learned from her father. Jewelry making and the jewelry business was a man's job according to those Valentina's encountered. In her experience, women could sell the jewelry, but not own the store. Valentina also pushed herself out of the "colonized" identity and into the jewelry business world disregarding the "gentleman's agreement" attitude. It seemed Valentina not only changed the gender "colonized behavior," she also learned new ways of being with her sexuality. She

learned that gender and sexuality are not a fixed feature of personality and identity. She used nepantla as a time of transformation by disrupting the categories of gender and sexuality. Unlike Anzaldúa who served as a role model for alternative modes of sexual existence by advocating for the Chicano community to loosen the strictures imposed on Chicana sexuality (Anzaldúa, 1987), Valentina writes her path with her silence. Both Paula and Valentina did not succumb to “doing it their [men’s] way,” but asserted themselves in the male dominated world. They both navigated the in-between space, a concept of *Coatlicue*, which is a painful state in which one has unlearned the colonized identity and reversed domination in order to acquire knowledge of self and become council woman and business woman.

Moreover, the participants created alternative spaces in which they lived and functioned as women who were able to negotiate between different cultures (from collectivism and White culture–individualism) and cross over from one to the other. The findings suggest that the participants countered the successful leadership narrative defined by the dominant culture by focusing on the betterment of community and family. Sophia integrated her family life with her career life by not taking a prestigious position. She successfully worked as a research scientist while being fully immersed in her family life. Paula focused on the well-being of her constituents and worked towards affordable housing. She was able to navigate the political system within city council and affect change. Elena never aspired to have an administrator’s position nor a district office instead advocated for parents’ rights. The participants re-wrote the successful leadership narrative by using values and beliefs that they learned in a collectivist environment.

The participants unlearned colonized behavior and as well navigated between two different cultures, thus reversing the stereotypes imposed on them by the dominant culture. Doing this result in the development of *mestiza* identity, which then allowed them to be successful leaders in male-oriented fields. Valentina navigated this in-between space of working in a male-dominated jewelry business by recalling that “the sky is the limit” and working side by side with the traditional male attitude and worked hard enough to succeeded in her business. Sofia found that female scientists were caught between choosing family and a career path. Her in-between space was balancing family life and career life because both were very important to her, remaining strong with family ties amidst the dominant beliefs of society. They became the new *mestizas*, survivors, by overcoming the cultural patriarchal domination. *Conocimiento* gave them another approach to connecting “across differences trying to negotiate contradictions, survive the stress and traumas of daily life.

Felton Catholic High School continues to educate young women in a single gender environment. The school remains under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church. There is a more concerted effort to empower young women to be leaders within society and make a positive difference in the world. The curriculum is college preparatory for all students. Professional development is focused on Advanced Placement courses and college readiness. While the focus is no longer on home economics or administrative skill courses, there has not been a change cultural awareness. There are no professional development requirements for diversity training. There are conversations regarding empowerment, but “colonized” is a foreign term.

There is a major oversight one that espouses that a student is successful if she is accepted into college. She may succeed in the field of business, medicine, education, but is she empowered. The school takes into consideration the student's transcript, but is gravely overlooking if she will succeed as a confident young leader, someone who knows her true identity who has the tools to change the world. Is she leaving as the new *mestizas* who will build communities, teach resistance, and transform institutions? There is no evidence to that response.

Due to the findings of this study, I have arrived at the conclusion that as the leader of Felton Catholic High School, I must be the first to change, both in my beliefs about students and their families and my leadership practices. I must create a culture and school environment that ensures all students an equitable education. As the principal of this school, I have learned that we encourage and expect all students to attend college, but there are still teachers with deficit thinking. While one of my priorities is to have a college readiness curriculum, there are no conversations regarding students' identities and cultural backgrounds. The school is currently a one size fits all model. Beginning with myself, as the principal of the school, I realize I should identify myself as Latina, one that has overcome obstacles to achieve my education. I have to give credit to my family and role models who helped me create the alternative space for my success. I can no longer hide my story for it may serve as a motivation to students who face similar obstacles in their lives. I have to be cognizant of teachers who do not believe in students' abilities to learn and thrive in this educational setting. I will give teachers and myself the opportunity to develop into a growth mind set through professional development,

developing understanding of our identities as well as those of the students and families we serve.

The other area I took notice of is that previous to this study, I believed that the school had a great group of parents supporting it. While we do have parent support, I have reflected on who are the parents who participate. The attitude of the school is that all parents are welcomed, but the leadership does not do much to reach out to those parents who speak a different language and/or are working-class. Although, this group of parents are not involved in traditional ways (e.g., attending PTA or helping with homework), I have learned from this study they are involved (Nelson, & Guerra, 2014). Thus, teachers and myself must work on changing our deficit thinking to see and value the non-traditional involvement practices of working-class parents and other assets they bring to schooling and reach out to them in different ways to bring them into the school.

As the principal of the school, I can have teachers and myself participate in professional development sessions that would include addressing our deficit thinking, identity formation, cultural awareness, culturally responsive instruction and parent engagement, but it is dependent on who I am as their instructional, spiritual, and cultural leader to set the example. My first step is to join them in this ongoing professional development effort. Second, I will implement the learning from professional development into teacher practice across the school and in my leadership and monitor implementation. Third, I will continue to learn how the school can empower young women in today's world and work with teachers to incorporate these practices into the school's curriculum. Finally, as the leader of the school, I will model for both students and teachers, that we are life-long learners.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Findings from this study revealed that education in this single gender Catholic school did not appear to directly contribute to participant's leadership development. However, family, mentors, cultural identity, and spirituality served as a support for participants in redefining themselves, developing their leadership (i.e., self-esteem and advocacy), and becoming Latina leaders. Moreover, attending a single-gender Catholic school was not instrumental in this redefinition process but may have hindered this development. Based on the findings of this study, the following sections provide implications for future practice, educational leadership preparation programs, policy and recommendations for future research.

Implications for Practice

Single-gender Catholic schools have the obligation to uphold their mission of empowering female students of all backgrounds. The school leadership plays a pivotal role in creating a school culture that values diversity. Administrators are called to be not only the instructional leader, but the cultural leader as well. The implementation of professional development, a multicultural curriculum, and role models would serve a single gender Catholic school in creating a culture and school environment that ensures all students are given an equitable education.

Professional development programs for single gender Catholic school leaders could extend beyond academics. The program could be infused with issues of self-esteem, body image, and sexuality as well as female role models and female voices (Debare, 2004). Preparation programs for girls' schools could teach an alternative to the dominant culture that treats young women as sex objects (Debare, 2004). Professional

development could also facilitate conversations to help educational leaders become aware of America's social problems that place central importance on power and economics. They can be given the tools to resist oppression by unmasking color-blindness and erasing barriers of upward mobility of minority population. In essence leveling the playing field for those who have been excluded (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Educational leaders should leave professional development programs with the belief that all students, regardless of learning needs, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status have the right to learn alongside with everyone (McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, Gonzalez, Cambron-McCabe, Scheurich, 2007).

Teacher professional development programs for single gender Catholic schools could address issues such as deficit thinking and building equity (Capper, Theoharis, Sebastian, 2006). Brown (2004) maintains that more alternative approaches focused on "attitude development, such as cultural autobiographies, life histories, prejudice reduction workshops, cross-cultural interviews, educational plunges, diversity panels, reflective analysis journals, and activist assignments" (Brown, 2004, p. 81) are instrumental in bringing forth transformative learning. The program could also prepare teachers to create a warm and welcoming school climate one that reaches out to the community and to marginalized families (Theoharis, 2007). A family support system is critical to the success of Latina leaders. It is within this thought, that teachers should partner with families in the education of their children (Sanchez de Valencia 2008; Roybal 2012; Thorne 1995).

Implementation of cultural awareness in the curriculum such as Anzaldúa's (1987) understanding of the new *mestiza* can help faculty and staff understand the

crossroads that Latinas navigate. Catholic schools emphasize on the importance of respecting cultures and have been known for contributing to the lives of ethnic minority and students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Litton, et al., 2010). Learning the Latina culture, being cognizant of parents' culture and identity, and encouraging the strong identity of women will provide a strong support system for young Latina students. Understanding the home life of young girls and the assets (not deficits) can also add to this support (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

An essential support in becoming a Latina leader is to empower other females through encouragement and strengthening the self-concept of being a female (Kelsey, Allen, Coke & Ballard, 2014; Sanchez de Valencia, 2008). The missing factor in the participants' lives was a support system outside of the family, which could have been provided by the school. Young Latinas need role models and advocates that will encourage and influence them to excel in their adult life. A Latina leader needs a network that can cultivate personal capabilities, add positive contributions, and build self-confidence (Sanchez de Valencia, 2008) and this could start early in the school. Latinas preparing Latinas for leadership can be a critical component in integrating their experience and navigating the *in-between* space by drawing on the *conocimiento* process (Anzaldúa, 2015).

In order for these changes to occur, the school climate must change beginning with the leadership (administration) of the school. The immediate change is to have an administrator who has a mindset that focuses on learning and improving. One that is open and willing to participate in professional development programs that teach empowerment of students of all backgrounds. The next change is just as important as the

first one in that leadership, faculty and staff also have to identify and change their deficit thinking about students and their parents. It is incumbent on teachers to create a safe environment in their classroom for all students to learn free of criticism. Implementation of curriculum that promotes identity and cultural awareness and respect for diversity is the following change that needs to take place. If this curriculum is going to be taught, it requires faculty to believe in it and understand it, which is why it would not be an immediate change. This would take place only after administrators and teachers have received sufficient professional development. Finally, a long-term goal would be to provide a support group of role models for students. Before such a program can be sustained, the administrators and teachers need to take ownership and fuel it to fruition.

Implications for Policy

Within this study, I sought to explore the leadership development experiences of Latinas who were educated in a single gender Catholic environment and discovered the school had little influence in the development of their leadership. This research focused on a Catholic school that was sponsored by religious nuns. Catholic schools are under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church that traditionally established policies that undervalue women (O'Connor & Drury 1999). For example, Pope Francis, the canonical leader of the church, expressed to the church community that the gender pay gap is a "pure scandal" (Calamur, 2015, p. 2). He claimed that women did not receive equal pay because they did not contribute an equal amount of work, but he left out the part about women in the Roman Catholic Church not even getting a shot at equal work. Although one factor, pay is not the primary issue when women are barred from certain positions and underrepresented in others. It is not the primary issue when the symbolism, rituals

and vocabulary of an institution exalt men over women (Calamur, 2015). This is a very important issue to address because Religious Sisters at this study's site continue educating young women within this patriarchal system. Sister Teresa Maya, president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious stated that:

Teaching is a critical part of the sisters' mission of education because we believe, in short, that education can save the world. It empowers people, it broadens horizons, it deepens values, it engages conversation between faith and culture (Salgado, 2017).

Mission statements of all-girls Catholic schools reflect the sisters' challenge of balancing what the church considered the natural role of women with many young women's desires for independence. The sisters' historical movement to educate women has worried the governing bishops since the early 1930s (Ryan, 2010). Sisters also found themselves fighting against the church patriarchy for their own pursuit of higher education (Stringer, 2018). In 2012, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious was denounced by the Vatican and put under the control of three (male) bishops charged with cleansing it of its "radical feminist" inclinations. Instead of using the bible to reinforce patriarchy, the church may attend to the words and actions of Jesus, who treated women as equals, with the respect and love deserved by divine image-bearers of God (Mattson, 2018). This may serve to include the leadership, wisdom, and experience of women within the church.

Girls are growing up in a world where all doors have been open to them, but there is a disconnect when they see the church without female leadership (Mattson, 2018). Challenges to that imbalance are met with the insistence that what once was must always

be (Ryan, 2010). If religious Sisters are administering the all-girls Catholic schools, it seems a contradiction in terms of leadership development within the Catholic Church.

The Sisters plight to empower girls in a Catholic school has a remarkable history, but it have fallen short of putting their mission statements into action. The Congregation hiring and professional development policies could expect educational leaders to participate in leadership program that include opportunities for reflection on adopting social justice discourse, understanding what it means to be a transformative leader, creating inclusive schools, and building relationships with families (Brown, 2004). Their schools could include professional development programs that discuss cultural awareness, diversity training, deficit thinking, and partnering with families.

Recommendation for Future Research

This qualitative study was not able to document many strategies and methods that the Sisters used to develop leadership abilities in students in their single gender Catholic school. In fairness to the sponsors of the school, the responses of the participants may have been limited because they relied on their memory of experiences that took place over 40 years ago. One also has to take into consideration the historical time (1955-1975) that these women graduated. Leadership options for women remained limited. My first recommendation is that research take place with first year college students that have been recently educated in a single gender Catholic school to explore if strategies were employed to develop leadership abilities. The purpose would be to determine how many of the younger graduates are leaders? What role did the school, family, neighbors, and/or culture ultimately play in their leadership development?

The participants in this study were at peace in their current roles, and stated that this was something they found through their spirituality. Maybe spirituality is yet another coping mechanism for women in a male-dominated workplace. My second recommendation is that further research examine Latina leaders and if spirituality, a power of energy that feeds the inner self, is a factor in their success as leaders within a male dominated work culture. My own personal mantra is: “If God is for us who can be against us, if the power of God is on our side” (Romans 8:31, New American Bible). This mantra has given me physical and emotional endurance as I encountered professional and personal hardships in my life. Spirituality is an avenue that can help women overcome if it is used as a “tool or strategy of resistance to help Latinas persist and thrive” (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012, p. 543). While spirituality was discussed in this study, it could be investigated further.

My third recommendation is to study the duality between the two cultures to see if and how it manifests for younger Latina leaders in today’s world of work. It is essential to know that Latina discrimination exists. Once Latinas take on leadership roles, they must be prepared to overcome this discrimination and be role models for other Latinas. Castillo-Montoya and Torres-Guzman (2012) believe it is important to understand how to help Latinas successfully “learn there is more than one way to live, be, and interact in this world” (p. 547). I conclude that such factors are necessary to understand in order to better serve the Latina/o community and foster Latina leadership success. “By changing ourselves we then might, as Anzaldúa hopes, change the world” (Lockhart, 2007, p. 8).

Final Thoughts

It is up to Latina leaders to shape the future and be instrumental in the transition process. “Hispanic women educators need to take the helm and help shape the direction of education” (Roybal, 2012, p. 153), which involves psychological liberation (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012). This liberation of the mind calls for a transformation that sees individual problems as part of the larger picture of the dominant force that marginalizes Latinas.

As each of the participants shared their story of struggles on becoming a leader, I saw a little of myself in each one of them. They each had a family they belonged to, and their dreams were not of becoming leaders, but of making their families proud and helping their communities. “I am one of a growing number, but today Latina leaders are still not visible ... I believe that I have been successful ... but my story is not out there, and there are many more successful stories not out there for Latinas” (Lopez-Mulnix, et al., 2011, p. 108). I, Alicia Garcia, am a *colonized person* struggling to achieve liberation. I did not attend a single-gender Catholic school, but I have experienced the *disempowerment* due to recordings of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010). As the women in my study, I did not aspire to be a leader, but I always wanted to make a positive difference in this world. I also want to make my family proud. Perhaps, with the accomplishment of earning my doctoral degree, I will finally be able to erase the recordings that fill me with self-doubt. I am searching for that place in which I can reconcile all the virtues and values I inherited from my family and church (Anzaldúa, 1999).

Ultimately, I need to reconcile with those who wrote the negative stories in my past, learn from them, forgive myself, and vow to never be the one that is marginalized. I can be the new *mestiza* who no longer lives as one who is devalued, but as one who embraces a new identity. I will use my voice to build communities, teach resistance, encourage parents, educate students, and support cultural programs for the purpose of transforming lives. I am seeking the gift of education for the good of the community and for myself so that I may be instrumental in enabling and empowering those left behind and those disenfranchised from the intellectual bounty of our great country. “Though I know that things can get worse, I also know that I am able to intervene to improve them” (Freire, 1998, p. 53). Never again, invisible. Never again, for I am Latina.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A: Recruitment Email Message

To: individual addresses or own address if BCC
From: Alicia Garcia
BCC:
Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Single Gender Catholic School and Leadership Development of Latinas

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

This doctoral dissertation research study seeks to learn more about the perceptions and experiences associated with the leadership development of Latina leaders who were educated in a single-gender Catholic school. The reflections gathered may serve as a model and be influential for young girls and women as they step into a world in which Latina leaders are underrepresented. You are being asked to participate because you are a Latina leader who has graduated from a single-gender Catholic high school between 1965 – 1980. You are recognized as a successful leader because you have received accolades for your impact on the local community or hold a position at work that is held predominately by men.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in one individual interview and then a follow up interview. Interviews will be held in the participant's place of employment or a private space designated by the participant. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked to share your experience as a Latina student and how educators in a single gender Catholic school influenced your development as a future leader. With your permission, the interview will be (audio-recorded) and the researcher may take notes as well. All participants will be asked to bring artifacts, yearbooks, journals, scrapbooks about their educational and family experience to assist in recounting memories and facilitate conversation.

All interviews and data collected will be confidential and secure. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind. You will not be paid for participation in this study.

To participate in this research or ask questions about this research please contact Alicia Garcia, 210-262-3107, ag1638@txstate.edu.

This project [insert IRB Reference Number or Exemption Number] was approved by the Texas State IRB on [insert IRB approval date or date of Exemption]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser 512-245-3413 – (lasser@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB administrator 512-245-2314 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

Thank you for your time.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Study Title: Single-Gender Catholic School and Leadership Development of Latinas

Principal Investigator: Alicia Garcia **Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:**
Dr. Patricia Guerra
Email: ag1638@txstate.edu **Email: pg16@txstate.edu**
Phone: (210) 262-3017 **Phone: (512) 245-4240**

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about the perceptions and experiences associated with the leadership development of Latina leaders who were educated in a single gender Catholic school. The information gathered will be used to address both the invisibility and distortion of female experiences so that it may contribute to ending women's unequal social position. The reflections may serve as a model and be influential for young girls and women as they step into a world in which Latina leaders are underrepresented. You are being asked to participate because you are a Latina leader who has graduated from a single gender Catholic high school between 1965 – 1980. You are recognized as a successful leader because you have received accolades for your impact on the local community or hold a position at work that is held predominately by men.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in one individual interview and then a follow up interview. Interviews will be held in the participant's place of employment or a private space designated by the participant. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked to share your experience as a Latina student and how educators in a single gender Catholic school influenced your development as future leaders. With your permission, the interview will be (audio-recorded) and the researcher may take notes as well. All participants will be asked to bring artifacts, yearbooks, journals, scrapbooks about their educational and family experiences to assist in recounting memories and facilitate conversation.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

In the event that some of the interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. There are no known psychological or physiological risks associated with taking part in this study.

BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you give may provide insight into how Catholic single-gender schools have a long term impact on young Latinas, as well as how high educational institutions understand the influence culture, race, and gender exert on Latina leadership.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Alicia Garcia at ag1638@txstate.edu.

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on [date]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

Your participation in this research project may be recorded using audio recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording: Yes _____ No _____

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Printed Name of Study Participant

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in my study. My name is Alicia Garcia and I am a doctoral student in the School Improvement program at Texas State University. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and experiences associated with the leadership development of Latina leaders who were educated in a single gender Catholic school. The reflections gathered may serve as a model and be influential for young girls and women as they step into a world in which Latina leaders are underrepresented.

The interview should take less than an hour. With your permission, I will record the session because I do not want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I cannot possibly write fast enough to get it all down. I have asked you to bring artifacts, scrapbooks, journals, yearbooks about your education and family. Please feel free to share them throughout the interview.

All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will not be shared with anyone. I will ensure that any information we include in the study does not identify the participant. You do not have to talk about anything you do not want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Are there any questions about what I have just explained?

Are you willing to participate in the interview?

1. Share about experiences and friends that made a lasting impact in your life and why?
 - a. Neighborhood
 - b. Culture
 - c. Gender
 - d. Childhood dreams
2. What was it like growing up with your family?
 - a. Beliefs, values, words of wisdom/advice, (dichos), messages and lessons learned
 - b. Family influential in leadership development
 - c. Future expectations
 - d. Inspirational stories (consejos) that encouraged success
 - e. Scrapbook, journal
3. Help me understand your single gender Catholic high school experience regarding your leadership development.
 - a. Strategies and interventions
 - b. Lessons from religious sisters
 - c. School events
 - d. Religious beliefs and values
 - e. Scrapbook, journal, yearbook
4. How would you describe a successful Latina leader?
 - a. Education

- b. Material possessions
 - c. Beliefs and values
 - d. Status
 - e. Professional positions
 - f. Family
5. As a Latina leader, what are/were the greatest challenges and strengths you find in your place of employment?
- a. Cultural challenges and strengths
 - b. Gender challenges and strengths
 - c. Mentors
6. Is there anything else you would like to add that you haven't already shared with me?

I am very grateful that you shared your story and experiences. Your answers and story will be very helpful. Thank you.

The next step consists of an email with the themes that emerged from the conversations. This email will be sent in two weeks. I will then call for a second interview with follow-up questions. Are you comfortable and clear about the process?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix D: Follow-up Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to a follow-up interview:

1. Do you recognize your own experience in the analysis and interpretation of the interview and documents?
2. Could you tell me more about your family upbringing and their expectations of you?
3. Could you help me paint a picture of the sister's vision for your future?
4. Share more examples of how your mentor helped you in your leadership development.
5. How did you respond to attitudes/difficulties regarding you being a Latina in the workplace?
6. Do you have anything else you would like to share with me?

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