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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership


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Abilene Christian University
School of Educational Leadership

Narratives of Latina Leadership in Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Deborah Ina Gonzalez

November 2024

Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this work to God, whose grace and guidance have been my constant source of strength throughout this journey. Without His presence, none of this would have been possible. Through moments of doubt and challenge, His light illuminated my path, reminding me that all things are possible through faith.

To my late mother, Maria Antonia Ramos Sanchez, your encouragement has been the foundation upon which I've built my dreams. It is with a heavy heart that I have arrived at this moment without the one who set me on this path. Your strength, wisdom, and sacrifices have shaped the person I am today. You have always been my motivation and inspiration, and although you are no longer with me in this life, I feel your presence every step of the way. I love you, Mom, and this achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

To my loving husband, Michael Gonzalez, and our incredible children, Mariah, Michael Jr., and Melena, your patience, understanding, and support have meant everything to me. You have all made countless sacrifices so I could pursue this dream, and for that, I am forever grateful. You are my pillars of strength, my greatest cheerleaders, and the reason I continue to push forward. Without your love, encouragement, and faith in me, I would not have been able to succeed. Every late night, every moment away, was made bearable by the knowledge that I had your unwavering support. Thank you for believing in me even when I struggled to believe in myself.

This journey has been a shared one, and I dedicate this success to all of you. Together, we have achieved what I once only dreamed was possible.

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I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Janet Tarello and Dr. Frank Rojas, whose expertise and mentorship have been instrumental in shaping this dissertation. Dr. Tarello's encouragement and thoughtful perspective have enriched my research, inspiring me to explore new angles and develop a more comprehensive understanding of my field. Dr. Rojas's constructive feedback, sharp insights, and commitment to academic rigor have strengthened my work and challenged me to deepen my analysis. Their support and belief in my potential have helped me grow not only academically but also as a researcher and professional.

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the experiences of Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles during middle adulthood and their perceptions of the factors, if any, that may influence their leadership development in Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas. As the increased Latina student populations increase in Hispanic serving institutions it is crucial for students to see themselves in the leaders that influence them. Using the narrative life stories and LatCrit as the theoretical lens this study provided themes regarding the factors that influence leadership development during middle adulthood of the participants. Through the life stories, the study's findings described and illustrated elements that influenced the leadership development of the participants. Through thematic analysis, three themes emerged as the most influential factors in the leadership development of Latinas: (1) educational and career advancement, with subthemes (1a) personal relationships, (1b) professional relationships (1c) mentor relationships; (2) cultural awareness, with subthemes (2a) community service, and (2b) equity and inclusion, and (3) practice, with subtheme (3a) advocacy, (3b) voice. Furthermore, this study contributes to the scholarly literature on Latinas in higher education leadership roles in Hispanic-serving institutions in Texas.

Keywords: Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs), Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs), Texas, leadership development, middle adulthood, women leadership, narrative life stories

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Latinas make up 18.9% of the female population in the United States (Scott et al., 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). However, the representation of women and historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups is not reflected in academia, particularly in leadership roles (Sánchez et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022). The limited presence of Latina populations in academia highlights the ongoing issue of historically marginalized groups being underrepresented in influential and prestigious roles (Perez et al., 2024). While significant progress has been made in diversifying leadership across various fields, such as human resources, medical, and health services, the glass ceiling remains stubbornly intact for women (Scott et al., 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). For this study, the term *Hispanic or Latina* was defined using the Census guidelines as "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture regardless of race" (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

While women have increased their presence in higher education over the past few decades, the representation of Latinas in higher education leadership lags far behind (Eiden-Dillow & Best, 2022; Sánchez et al., 2021). For example, according to the 2022 Labor Force Statistics survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau (2022), only 9.8% of Hispanic women are employed in education as administrators across the United States. Likewise, Eiden-Dillow and Best (2022) reported that a mere 5% of college presidents are women, and only 1% of that population are Latinas. Thus, these recent statistics indicate there is a visible gap in the student body and leadership representation of women and Latinas in higher education (Velarde Pierce, 2023).

The underrepresentation of Latina leaders in higher education, particularly within Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), is a stark reminder of the existing disparities in leadership

roles (Sánchez et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022). HSIs are colleges and universities in the United States with at least 25% of the institution's full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate students' enrollment of Hispanic or Latino students; they are eligible for federal Title V funding and are accredited by a recognized accrediting agency or association (Garcia, Ramirez et al., 2019). The lack of representation of Latina leaders in HSIs hinders their empowerment and recognition and limits the perspectives and experiences brought to the table in decision-making processes within those institutions (Velarde Pierce, 2023). Macias and Stephens (2019) argued that the lack of educational guidance and support not only minimizes future Latino educators, but this barrier also limits Latino educational leaders, who subsequently will not be in a position to make decisions that affect Latino students.

In fact, according to Velarde Pierce (2023), the equitable representation of women and Latina educational leaders needs to be improved in higher education. In a similar vein, Venegas (2021) suggested that there is an inadequate number of Latinas in leadership roles across all industries, especially HSIs, and in 2016, only 2.9% of all university presidents were Latina (ACE, 2023; REHE, 2023) which does not reflect the fast-growing Latina population. The 2016 American Council on Education describes demographics of college presidents by race and gender, indicating that a mere 4% are Hispanic and Latina (Ace, 2023). More recently, according to the 2019 U.S. Census Bureau data, 71.8% of Hispanics, compared to 94.6% of non-Hispanic Whites, had a high school diploma or higher, and 18.8% of Hispanics, compared to 40.1% of non-Hispanic Whites, had a bachelor's degree or higher. Nearly 5.7% of Hispanics held a graduate or advanced professional degree, compared to 15.1% of the non-Hispanic White population. This figure underscores a substantial disparity in leadership opportunities for women

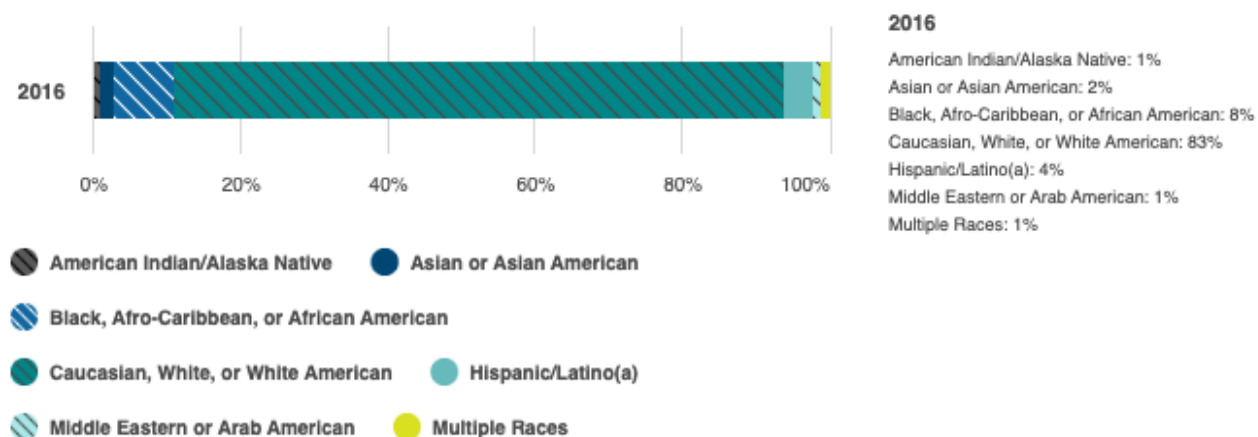
and Latinas in academia despite the growing number of HSIs across the United States (ACE, 2023; REHE, 2023).

Within the landscape of higher education, the striking underrepresentation of Latina leaders is a concern that demands our attention (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). HSIs are designed to cater to the needs of a diverse and predominantly Hispanic student population. They ought to reflect the richness of their student body within their leadership ranks (Velarde Pierce, 2023). Figure 1 illustrates the demographics of college presidents by race and gender.

Figure 1

Demographics: College Presidents, by Race/Ethnicity (only 4% are Hispanic)

Demographics: College Presidents, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: www.acenet.edu/acps2017

Note. From American College President Study: Minority Presidents, by American Council on Education, 2017, (<https://www.aceacps.org/minority-presidents/>) © 2017 by American Council on Education. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix A).

Besides inadequate representation, Latinas are more likely to face barriers to leadership roles that are raced, gendered, or race-gendered (Brown & Montoya, 2020; Eiden-Dillow & Best, 2022; Liu et al., 2021; Velarde Pierce, 2023). Macias and Stephens (2019) stated that Latinas face interwoven race-gender barriers that limit attaining leadership roles. Therefore, addressing the underrepresentation of Latinas in higher education requires a comprehensive approach (Ching, 2022; Ledesma, 2017) that involves several stakeholders (Flores & Park, 2015) and collaboration among the leadership of educational institutions (Cuellar, 2019), policymakers (Ledesma, 2017; Noopila & Pichon, 2022), community organizations (Komives & Sowcik, 2020), and families (Velarde Pierce, 2023) to support future generations (Venegas, 2021).

In summary, Latinas make up a significant portion of the female population in the United States, yet they are notably underrepresented in academia, particularly in leadership roles (Scott et al., 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Despite the growing number of Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), Latina leaders still lag in representation, comprising only 2.9% of leadership positions in these institutions (ACE, 2023; REHE, 2023). This underrepresentation not only hinders the empowerment and recognition of Latina leaders but also limits diversity in decision-making processes (REHE, 2023).

Capper (2015) agreed that educational leaders are responsible for enacting change to eliminate school racism. Without equitable representation, change cannot occur. The need for increased Latina representation in leadership, as pointed out by Velarde Pierce (2023) and Venegas (2021), is evident. Latinas face barriers to leadership roles shaped by race, gender, or a combination of both (Sánchez et al., 2021). Addressing this underrepresentation of Latinas requires a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders, including educational institutions, policymakers, community organizations, and families, to support future generations

and promote diversity and inclusion in higher education (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2019; Flores & Park, 2015; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Ledesma, 2017; Noopila & Pichon, 2022).

Background and Context

Hispanic Serving Institutions

The history of HSIs traces back to the civil rights movement, where increased advocacy for educational access led to the need to establish institutions to serve the growing Hispanic population (Calderón et al., 2012; Garcia, Ramirez et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2022). In the early 1980s, the federal government recognized the need to support institutions serving significant Hispanic populations (Aguilar-Smith & Doran, 2023; Fay et al., 2021). This support was started to increase the degree attainment of the Hispanic student population (Venegas, 2021). HSIs are public and private not-for-profit degree-granting institutions that are designated as HSIs because they have a significant Hispanic student population, enrolling at least 25% Latina/o students and maintaining at least 25% Pell Grant eligibility (Cuellar, 2019; Flores & Park, 2015; Noopila & Pichon, 2022; Venegas, 2021). Title V Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program has financially supported HSIs in Texas to enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for Hispanic students (Flores & Park, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas

In Texas, the state government and educational leaders recognized the importance of serving the growing Latino population and promoting higher educational success (Calderón et al., 2012). As a result, institutions in Texas started to identify as HSIs, including community colleges and 4-year universities (Flores & Park, 2015). HSIs in Texas, like in other states, strive to address the unique needs and challenges faced by Latina students and provide resources to promote their academic success (Venegas, 2021).

According to ¡Excelencia in Education! (2023), the evolution of HSIs has increased over the past 28 years, and of the 571 HSIs in the United States, Texas is home to 101. Therefore, the growth of HSIs in Texas reflects the state's demographic changes and the increasing enrollment of Hispanic students in higher education (Flores & Park, 2015; Venegas, 2021). According to Flores and Park (2015), HSIs play a crucial role in higher education, particularly in states with significant Latino populations, such as Texas.

Hispanic Serving Institutions and Latinas

The creation of HSIs was to serve the rising Hispanic population (Flores & Park, 2015; Venegas, 2021) and have emerged as vital contributors to higher education (Flores & Park, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). The financial support these higher education institutes receive provides services, including academic and social support, to the Hispanic population and supports Latinas in reaching their educational potential (Calderón et al., 2012). HSIs often prioritize creating a culturally responsive and inclusive campus environment by celebrating Hispanic culture, traditions, and heritage, making Latinas feel welcomed and represented (Calderón et al., 2012).

Furthermore, HSIs are not just educational institutions; they are engines of empowerment for Latina students, contributing to the advancement of Latino communities (Bacon et al., 2023). By fostering an inclusive campus environment that celebrates Hispanic culture, traditions, and heritage, HSIs create a sense of belonging for Latinas, making them feel valued and represented (Calderón et al., 2012). An inclusive environment is essential to the organizational identity of a Hispanic-serving institution (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2023). Ultimately, the establishment and support of HSIs serve as a testament to the commitment to educational equity and access, aiming

to support women Latinas and the broader Hispanic community in achieving their educational potential and making positive contributions to society (Calderón et al., 2012).

Theoretical Lens

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that emerged in legal studies and later expanded to other disciplines, including history (Macias & Stephens, 2019). CRT originated in the United States during the late 1970s and 1980s as a response to the limitations of traditional civil rights strategies in addressing persistent racial inequalities and systemic racism (Macias & Stephens, 2019). CRT has evolved and adapted to address new challenges and contexts and continues to be a significant framework for understanding the complex relationship between race, power, law, and other social institutions and practices (Macias & Stephens, 2019). CRT's evolution and expansion address the challenges faced by different racial and ethnic groups, such as Latinos (Stefancic, 1998).

Latino Critical Race Theory

Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) originates in the immigration reform acts 1986 (Stefancic, 1998).

LatCrit offers a unique lens to understand Latinas' challenges in educational leadership roles. This theory calls attention to how conventional, and even critical, approaches to race and civil rights ignore the problems and special situations of Latino people-including bilingualism, immigration reform, the binary black/white structure of existing race remedies law, and much more. (Stefancic, 1998, p. 424)

Therefore, utilizing the LatCrit theory in this research is appropriate, as this perspective encompasses the diverse experiences and issues Latinas face (Espino, 2012).

Latinas and LatCrit

As Stefancic (1998) noted, LatCrit emphasized the power of storytelling and counter-narratives, challenging dominant historical narratives that often marginalize or erase the experiences of Latinas (Espino, 2012). LatCrit seeks to reclaim and amplify the voices of marginalized communities (Espino, 2012). Scholars acknowledge that the Latina community faced distinct racialization, discrimination, and oppression, often rooted in complex histories of colonization, immigration, and citizenship (Fay et al., 2021; Macias & Stephens, 2019). The LatCrit framework explores the complexities of Latina identity formation and the challenges of navigating multiple cultural influences and expectations. Furthermore, it helps to highlight the specific issues and concerns that Latinas may face within HSIs, such as cultural barriers, gender bias, and intersectional experiences of discrimination (Fay et al., 2021; Macias & Stephens, 2019). Overall, LatCrit is a powerful tool for understanding and addressing Latinas' challenges in HSIs and educational leadership roles (Fay et al., 2021; Macias & Stephens, 2019).

Leadership

A leader can inspire, motivate, and empower others, guiding them in a particular direction to achieve desired outcomes (Day, 2000). Leadership influences and guides individuals or groups toward achieving common goals or objectives (APA, 2012; Day, 2000). Additionally, leadership involves providing a clear vision, setting strategic priorities, making decisions, and effectively communicating to rally people around a shared purpose (ACE, 2023; APA, 2012). Therefore, effective leadership development goes beyond merely giving orders; it involves fostering collaboration, empathy, and the development of team members (Ledesma, 2017).

Leader Development

This study used the women's leader development (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014) model as a lens. Leader development refers to a deliberate and systematic process of enhancing the skills, qualities, and competencies of individuals to become influential leaders involving activities and programs that aim to identify and nurture leadership potential, develop leadership skills, and cultivate the necessary attributes to lead others successfully (Day, 2000).

Rather than viewing leadership as a fixed set of traits or behaviors, developmental leadership emphasizes the dynamic nature of leadership and the potential for continuous growth and improvement (Day, 2000; Eiden-Dillow & Best, 2022). A developmental approach to leadership may provide individuals with opportunities to become leaders who can effectively navigate complex and ever-changing organizational environments (Fox, 2018).

This theory is rooted in qualitative research on women's leadership in higher education (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Critical drivers for women to pursue leadership roles include (a) a sense of responsibility towards relationships, (b) a realization of their calling and leadership abilities, and (c) the presence of a mentoring relationship or a role model (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). These emerging leaders commonly encountered validation and resistance, significantly shaping their leadership journeys (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

The dimensions of the women's leadership development model start by looking at the circumstances that arise, the opportunities to learn, grow, and reflect on effective strategies, and what changes can be made (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Then, the model illustrates how emerging leaders encounter affirmation and, or opposition that influences and impacts their leadership paths (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The women's leader development approach

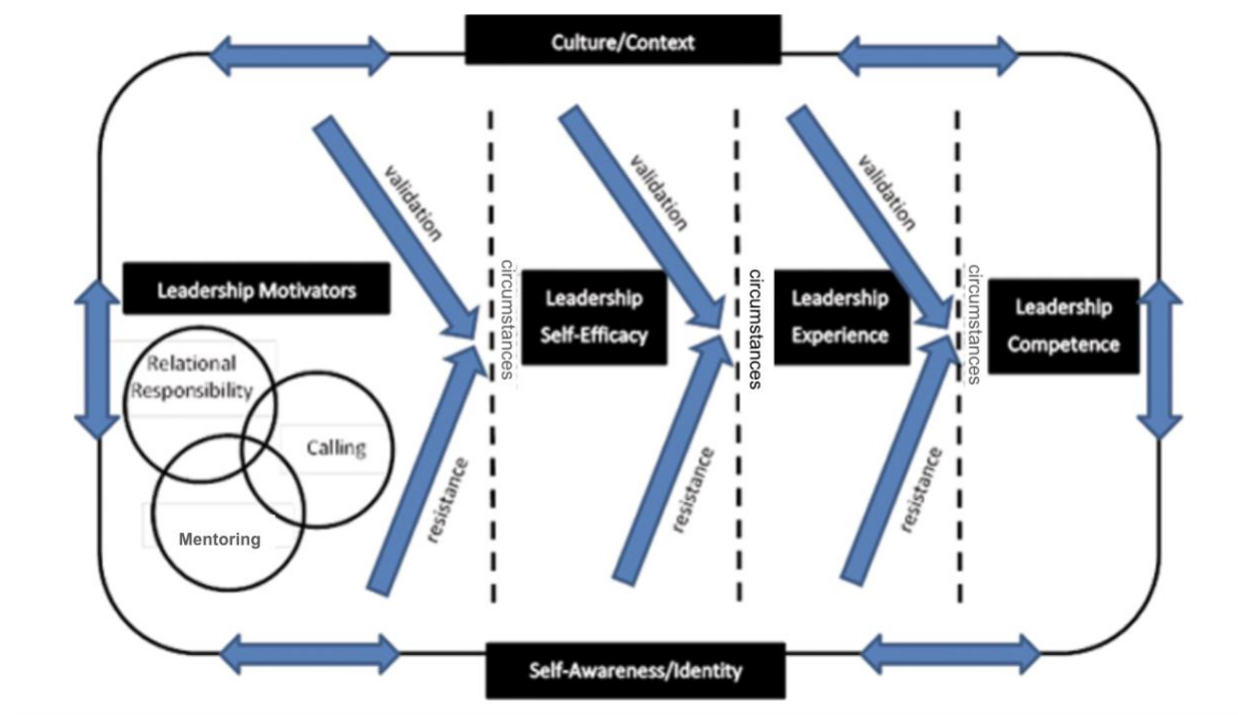
highlights six areas: motivators, self-efficacy, competency, culture, self-awareness, and experiences (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

According to Dahlvig and Longman (2014), a woman has stages of development in her leadership journey. Initially, she identifies the motivators that drive her to seek leadership opportunities. The development of leadership self-efficacy faces resistance and validation depending on the circumstances, and these circumstances equip her with valuable leadership experience. Her leadership competence eventually grows as she gains more experience. This is encompassed and influenced by her self-awareness, identity, and cultural background. This model illustrates how a developing leader's response to circumstances, whether resistance or validation, determines her progression to leadership (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Validating the experiences across her lifespan as a Latina leader strengthens her ability to lead effectively (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Fox, 2018; Liu et al., 2021). Dahlvig and Longman (2014) posited that in higher education, role models and mentors, including women and persons of color, are crucial for both male and female students.

This model has been used in studying women in Christian higher education as a nonmajority population of leaders within a majority culture (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Therefore, this model is suitable to use as a model for women and Latina leaders in higher education. Figure 2 illustrates the dimensions of the women's leadership development model. The model starts by looking at the circumstances that arise, the opportunities to learn, grow, and reflect on effective strategies, and what changes can be made (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

Figure 2

Contributors to Women's Leadership Development



Note. From “Contributors to Women’s Leadership Development in Christian Higher Education: A Model and Emerging Theory,” by J. Dahlvig and K. A. Longman, 2014, *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 23(1), 5–28 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/10656219.2014.862196>). Copyright 2014 by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. Reprinted by permission of Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group, www.tandfonline.com (see Appendix B).

In summary, this model provides a fluid representation of the challenges and opportunities women, and historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups may face on their journey through leadership (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The concept of leader development involves a systematic process for enhancing leadership skills and qualities, emphasizing continuous growth and adaptability rather than fixed traits (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Dahlvig

and Longman's (2014) model, rooted in qualitative research, identifies key drivers and challenges faced by emerging women leaders in higher education, focusing on motivators, self-efficacy, competence, culture, self-awareness, and experiences, and has been applied in studying nonmajority populations of leaders within majority cultures (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014), making it a valuable framework for women and Latina leaders in higher education (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

Life Course Perspective on Leader Development

McAdams (2014) suggested that midlife adults can provide deeper reasoning and insights into how their life journey led them to be who they are. The life course perspective is a multifaceted framework that delves into the intricate interplay between an individual's life experiences, the timing of events, and their influence on various life stages (Bierema, 2002). It recognizes that early life encounters, such as family dynamics and education, are the cornerstone of an individual's leadership development, shaping their future potential as leaders (Bierema, 2002). Its long-term outlook on leader development sets this perspective apart, perceiving leadership as a dynamic, ever-evolving process rather than a static state (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). This perspective acknowledges that leadership capabilities are not set in stone but are malleable and have the potential to grow and evolve throughout an individual's entire lifespan (Bierema, 2002). It emphasizes that a person's leadership journey is an ongoing narrative influenced by continuous experiences and opportunities.

Using the life course perspective to leader development approach as a lens for this study may provide a profound and comprehensive understanding of how individuals ascend to leadership roles (Liu et al., 2021). It considers the rich tapestry of their life experiences, the opportunities they encounter, and the challenges they face (Liu et al., 2021). This approach

paints a vivid picture of individuals' intricate pathways as they progress toward leadership roles, acknowledging that their histories and circumstances uniquely shape their journeys (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, it may be critical to select a timeline of date and age to be influential in the development of the framework (Liu et al., 2021).

Lifespan and Stage

Leadership development is not an isolated occurrence; therefore, it is essential to note that it develops over time (Liu et al., 2021). Liu et al. (2021) defined leadership development in conditional stages. These stages span across the lifetime from nascent (0-6 years) to legacy-making (past 60 years). For the purpose of this study, the research will focus on middle adulthood (Liu et al., 2021).

During middle adulthood (30-60), an individual is most likely purpose driven. In this stage of life, an individual experiences significant life challenges, along with developmental challenges at work, and seeks out opportunities for leadership development (Liu et al., 2021). The narrative of each participant is subjective to each individual's perspective on their experiences.

Mentorship and Leadership Development

Macias and Stephens (2019) underscored the crucial role of mentorship programs in Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) to support and empower Latinas. Mentorship is the value-added experience of a mentor and the impact of mentoring on leadership development (Coers et al., 2021). This relationship is a powerful vehicle for leadership development, intentionally enhancing individuals' skills, competencies, and qualities to become influential leaders (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Mentorship increases leader efficacy through a mentoring relationship (Coers et al., 2021). By offering mentorship programs, HSIs can effectively nurture leadership

skills among Latina students, providing them with the guidance, wisdom, and support needed to navigate the complex path to leadership roles (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Macias & Stephens, 2019).

In conclusion, when integrated into HSIs, mentorship programs may not only aid Latinas' personal and professional development (Cuellar, 2014), but also contribute to the diversification and enrichment of educational leadership within these institutions (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Macias & Stephens, 2019). Ledesma (2017) argued that leadership diversity in higher education is “imperative in addressing and alleviating historically racist campus cultures” (p. 136). Addressing the underrepresentation of Latinas in leadership positions calls for a comprehensive approach (Cuellar, 2014) that recognizes the value of diverse perspectives (Cuellar, 2014; Velarde Pierce, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

By 2022, Latinos comprised 42.5% of the student population enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in Hispanic-serving institutions in Texas (Cuellar, 2014; HACU, 2023). The Latino population continues to increase across the United States; currently at 40% of the population, yet the presence of Latinas in HSIs' leadership roles is minimal (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022; Velarde Pierce, 2023). According to the American Council on Education, in 2022, women held 38.3% of college and university presidencies; however, only 7.9% of college presidents were Hispanic, historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups, and women (ACE, 2023). This demographic reality underscores the importance of understanding the educational experiences of Latinas within the context of HSIs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). There needs to be more connection between the representation of the student population and leadership (Cuellar, 2014; HACU, 2023) to ensure cultural relevancy and equity in education. The number of Latina

administrators and leaders must reflect those they serve to continue to ensure the success of our future Latina leaders (Velarde Pierce, 2023).

Furthermore, research has consistently highlighted the disparities in educational attainment and leadership representation among Latinas in Texas. Latinas face significant challenges in HSIs, including systemic barriers, cultural norms, gender biases, and limited representation in leadership positions (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Macias & Stephens, 2019). The underrepresentation of Latina educational leaders in higher educational institutes underscores the pressing need for increased Latina representation in leadership roles (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Macias & Stephens, 2019) that ensure cultural relevancy and equity in education. Building upon the intricate details of the research findings, it becomes apparent that mentorship may provide networking opportunities to help Latinas develop as a leader and succeed in leadership roles (Bierema, 2002; Macias & Stephens, 2019).

The literature on Latina education underscores the importance of addressing Latina life's social and cultural aspects in educational programs. Hastings and Sunderman (2020) and Ledesma (2017) have noted that the unique educational need to ensure cultural relevancy and equity in education for Latinas in HSIs necessitates tailored support systems. Likewise, Castellanos and Gloria (2007) emphasized that Latinas benefit significantly from programs considering their unique social and cultural backgrounds. Locke and Gonzalez (2019) emphasized the urgency of addressing the educational needs of Latinas due to the increase in Latina college enrollment. They argue that the present moment is the most relevant and necessary time to focus on this imperative (Locke & Gonzalez, 2019). With the growing Latina population in educational institutions, it is vital to provide tailored support and resources to

ensure that Latinas have equitable educational opportunities and can thrive academically (Macias & Stephens, 2019). However, to do so effectively, institutions must base their strategies on a thorough understanding of the experiences and needs of Latina students.

Kivlighan et al. (2018) highlighted the significance of hope and belongingness for Latinas in higher education. Kivlighan et al. (2018) argued that programs designed to address the needs of Latinas are most effective when Latinas feel a sense of hope for their future and a strong sense of belonging within their educational environment. One way to fulfill these vital elements is through mentorship programs, as Eiden-Dilloo and Best (2022) suggested. Moreover, research by Castellanos and Gloria (2007) emphasized that mentorship programs and leadership development initiatives are essential for promoting academic success and leadership skills among Latinas, thereby ensuring cultural relevancy and equity in education.

The existing body of research powerfully underscores the need to delve into the experiences of Latinas with mentorship programs and leader development within HSIs in Texas (Scott et al., 2022; Solórzano, 1997). The call to investigate the experiences of Latinas within mentorship programs and leader development initiatives in Texas HSIs is rooted in the state's demographic landscape, the persistent educational disparities faced by Latinas, and the recognized potential of HSIs to address these disparities (Scott et al., 2022; Stefancic, 1998; TxCan, 2022). Hastings and Sunderman (2020), Ledesma (2017), Locke and Gonzalez (2019), and Castellanos and Gloria (2007) all concur that understanding and improving the support systems for Latinas in HSIs is essential. This research is academically relevant and holds practical implications for policymakers, educators, and institutions aiming to promote equity, inclusivity, and the academic success of Latinas in Texas (Velarde Pierce, 2023; Venegas, 2021; Yosso, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative life story narrative study was to understand the experiences of Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) during middle adulthood and their perceptions of the factors, if any, that may influence their leadership development in HSIs in Texas. For this study, the interchangeable terms "Hispanic or Latina" is, as defined by the guidelines set forth by The Office of Management and Budget standards, a female person of ethnicity from Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture regardless of race (CDC, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Therefore, in this study, the term "Latina" will primarily represent the population of interest in this research and LHSILR is a female who identifies as "Latina" in the presidential role of an HSI in Texas. The leadership roles for this study include president, vice president/chancellor, dean, associate dean, or director.

In the current phase of our study, Leader development is the progression through multiple stages of the lifespan, adapting to various contexts and enhancing one's capacity to exert influence in progressively intricate and diverse leadership scenarios (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). This study's focus was on the stage of middle adulthood. This stage refers to the stage of life when an individual experiences developmental challenges at work and is exposed to leader development program opportunities, namely 30-60 years of age (Liu et al., 2021).

Research Questions

Three broad questions provided the lenses to guide this study.

RQ1: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their personal experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ2: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their professional experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ3: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) describe their mentorship experiences, if applicable, within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences contribute to their leadership development?

For the purposes of this study, leader development refers to progression through multiple stages of the lifespan, adapting to various contexts and enhancing one's capacity to exert influence in progressively intricate and diverse leadership scenarios (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014), and of middle adulthood, which refers to the stage of life when an individual experiences developmental challenges at work and is exposed to leader development program opportunities, namely 30-60 years of age (Liu et al., 2021).

Positionality Statement

Qualitative researchers acknowledge and reflect upon their subjectivity and positionality throughout the research process. They recognize that their interpretations and analyses of narratives are influenced by their perspectives and biases, and they often incorporate this reflexivity into their research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Through personal reflection, I must disclose my implicit bias. I am a Latina, first-generation college student pursuing a higher educational leadership role. I have experienced intersectionality situations that have led me to biased support toward Latina seeking leadership opportunities. In addition, as an educator, I have observed that in historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups, female administrators begin their leadership journeys with tremendous excitement and motivation but minimal support for success.

When I began my professional career, I reflected on my journey to determine my goals and direction. I am the daughter of an immigrant migrant field worker. I recall the days of my youth working alongside my mother, picking strawberries in the fields of California. I hold dear the few words of wisdom she imparted to me when I started high school and as she struggled to fight her battle with cancer, “Go to school.” I was one of seven children with her dedicated support in education. Unfortunately, she passed away before I graduated. Her words rang in my heart and mind for many years until I returned to college and earned my bachelor's degree. My family was ecstatic and proud of me for having achieved this milestone. Yes, this was just one milestone, as they encouraged me to pursue more education. I enthusiastically continued my educational quest and soon realized the tremendous hurdles and barriers before me as a Latina. I needed guidance and support; no one could relate to my circumstances. The void in guidance and support is the catalyst that guides this research.

Although bias cannot be eliminated in qualitative research, it can be acknowledged and disclosed (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). This study was written through my lens. Bias can arise from various sources and affect different stages of the research process. Buys et al. (2022) cautioned researchers to remain mindful of their identities and experiences to avoid harmful and optimistic bias. Identifying and mitigating potential biases is crucial in maintaining the validity and credibility of your qualitative research. Researcher bias occurs when the researcher's personal beliefs, values, or preconceptions influence data collection, analysis, or interpretation (Buys et al., 2022). In order to mitigate research bias, I have previously discussed my positionality and biases and will address ethical considerations in Chapter 3.

Definition of Key Terms

Hispanic. The term “Hispanic or Latino” is, as defined by the guidelines set forth by The Office of Management and Budget standards, “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture regardless of race” (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas. HSIIs are colleges and universities in the United States with at least 25% of the institution's full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate students' enrollment of Hispanic or Latino students eligible for federal Title V funding and are accredited by a recognized accrediting agency or association (Garcia, Ramirez et al., 2019).

Latina. A Latina is a female person who identifies with the ethnic heritages defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, regardless of race (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions leadership roles (LHSILR). For this study, LHSILR is a female who identifies as “Latina” in the presidential role of an HSI in Texas.

Latinos. The term “Hispanic or Latino” is, as defined by the guidelines set forth by The Office of Management and Budget standards, “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture regardless of race” (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Leader development. Leader development is the progression through multiple stages of the lifespan, adapting to various contexts, and enhancing one's capacity to exert influence in progressively intricate and diverse leadership scenarios, including (a) a sense of responsibility towards relationships, (b) a realization of their calling and leadership abilities, and (c) the presence of a mentoring relationship or a role model (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

Life course perspective on leadership development. The life course perspective on leadership development views learning and career development as a lifelong process (Bierema, 2002).

Life story narrative. A life story narrative is an internalized, continuous, and self-constructed story of a person's life experiences (McAdams, 2014).

Mentorship. Mentorship is the process of increasing leader efficacy through a mentoring relationship (Coers et al., 2021).

Mentorship experiences. Mentorship experiences refer to the interactions between a mentor and mentee and the impact of mentoring on leadership development (Coers et al., 2021)

Middle adulthood. Middle adulthood, spanning ages 30 to 60, is the stage of life when an individual encounters developmental challenges at work and is often exposed to leadership development program opportunities (Liu et al., 2021).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 of this study introduced the research focus on Latinas in leadership roles within HSIs in Texas (Velarde Pierce, 2023). It highlights the underrepresentation of Latinas in academia, particularly in leadership positions, despite their significant presence in the overall population (Cuellar, 2014; HACU, 2023). This underrepresentation is particularly pronounced in HSIs despite the substantial Latina student population in these institutions, where only a small percentage hold leadership roles (Cuellar, 2014; HACU, 2023). The research highlights the urgency of addressing this issue and notes the unique challenges Latinas face in higher education (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Macias & Stephens, 2019). The chapter also addressed the term "Hispanic or Latina" according to the Census guidelines. It discussed the growing need for Latina representation in higher education leadership, especially within HSIs, which are designed to cater to a diverse Hispanic student population.

Furthermore, the chapter addressed the intersectional challenges Latinas face; the race-gender barriers in their pursuit of leadership roles. The chapter introduced the theoretical lens of

critical race theory (CRT) and Latino critical race theory (LatCrit), emphasizing their relevance in understanding the challenges and experiences of Latinas in educational leadership roles (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Macias & Stephens, 2019). Moreover, the chapter addressed leadership and leader development, emphasizing the dynamic nature of leader development and the importance of mentorship in nurturing leadership skills among Latinas.

The life course perspective on leader development was introduced, highlighting how an individual's life experiences, timing of events, and opportunities influence their leadership development. It underscores the role of HSIs in supporting Latinas' educational journeys and leadership development. Lastly, the chapter set the stage for the research by stating the problem of the underrepresentation of Latinas in leadership roles within HSIs and the need to address this issue. The outline of the purpose of the study, research questions, and my positionality as a Latina with a personal connection to the topic were also included. Chapter 2 will further review relevant literature describing the background and context of HSIs and Latina in HSIs' leadership roles. Chapter 2 also expands on the theoretical framework of the life course perspective on leader development theory.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative life story narrative study was to understand the experiences of Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) during middle adulthood and their perceptions of the factors, if any, that may influence their leadership development in HSIs in Texas.

Three broad questions provided the lenses to guide this study.

RQ1: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their personal experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ2: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their professional experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ3: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) describe their mentorship experiences, if applicable, within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences contribute to their leadership development?

This literature review begins with an overview of the underrepresentation of Latina students in higher education institutions, followed by the underrepresentation of Latinas in educational leadership roles in HSIs. This overview includes an analysis of research on the role of HSIs. To provide context for this underrepresentation, I examined the role of mentorship and leadership development and its effect on leadership roles and attainment. The review next explains why stories of Latinas in senior-level positions matter. The final section of the literature review looks into how Latinas are affected by cultural perceptions of race and discusses critical

race theory and LatCrit as the theoretical framework, followed by a summary that identifies gaps in the literature.

Literature Search Methods

In this comprehensive literature search, a diverse range of research sources, such as journals, books, and other media spanning multiple disciplines and methodologies, were thoroughly explored to lay the foundation for the study. To initiate this endeavor, a strategic selection of search terms was employed, including but not limited to *Latina leaders in higher education, mentorship, Latina leaders, Hispanic serving institutions, higher education, intersectionality, leadership development, life stories, narrative methodology, Latina/critical race theory, and cultural identity*. These carefully chosen terms formed the basis for thoroughly exploring scholarly literature spanning multiple disciplines and perspectives.

The sourcing of relevant literature encompassed an exhaustive search across various academic databases and platforms, each chosen for its unique strengths in housing scholarly work. These platforms included the Brown Library database, an invaluable resource available through Abilene Christian University's online library, and renowned databases such as EBSCO, ERIC, JSTOR, ProQuest, Digital Commons @ ACU, and Google Scholar. Utilizing these platforms ensured that a broad spectrum of sources and perspectives were considered, enhancing the comprehensiveness of the review.

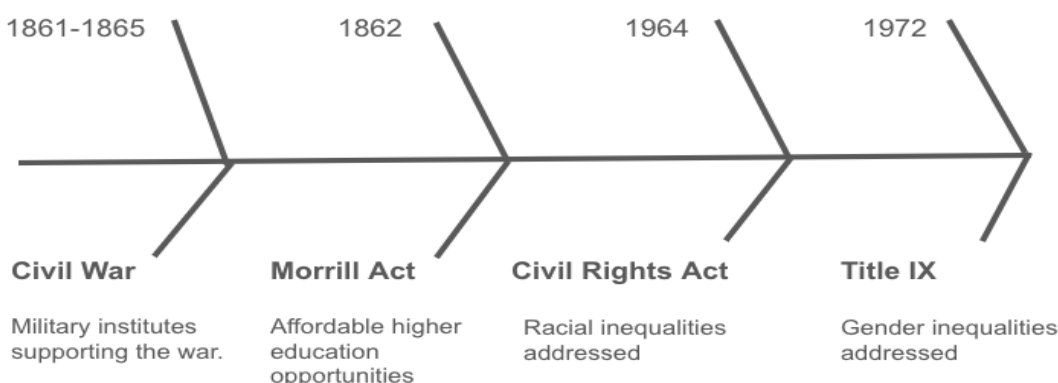
Additionally, the search criteria encompassed recent publications, an essential component to remain updated with the latest developments in the field. This focus on current literature allowed for collecting pertinent research findings and facilitated the systematic categorization of content, ensuring the literature review was thorough and up to date.

Background and Context

A Brief History of Higher Education

The roots of higher education in the United States have deep historical foundations and understanding its evolution from the Civil War era to the present day involves considering various social, economic, and cultural factors (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020), (see Figure 3). During the Civil War era, higher education in the United States was primarily reserved for the elite (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). The few existing institutions were often private, religiously affiliated, and focused on classical education (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). The Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862, signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln, was a significant development during this period (LOC, 2023; Morrill, 1876). It provided federal land to states to establish institutions that focused on agriculture and mechanical arts, broadening access to education beyond the traditional elite (LOC, 2023; Morrill, 1876). The Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s prompted increased efforts to address racial and gender inequalities in higher education (USDOJ, 2008).

Affirmative action policies were introduced to promote diversity, and there was a growing emphasis on inclusive education (USDOJ, 2008). Title IX is a federal law in the United States that prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities (USDOJ, 2015). It was enacted as part of the Education Amendments of 1972 and is codified at 20 USC §§ 1681-1688 (USDOJ, 2015). The primary objective of Title IX is to ensure that individuals are not excluded or discriminated against based on sex in educational programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance (USDOJ, 2015).

Figure 3*Historical Timeline of Higher Education*

Note. Information regarding the Civil War and Morrill Act from Edmonson and Hynes (2020) and Morrill (1876). Information regarding the Civil Rights Act and Title IX from LOC (2023) and USDOJ (2008, 2015).

Higher Education

Higher education, a pivotal phase in the educational journey, extends beyond secondary (high school) education and plays a fundamental role in shaping the lives and careers of individuals (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). This sector encompasses diverse educational institutions, programs, and degrees that are purposefully designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary for career development, advanced studies, and professional growth (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; Ford, 2017).

The faculty and staff in higher education institutions form a crucial system component (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; Ford, 2017). They are the stewards of knowledge, guiding students on their educational journeys and imparting wisdom acquired through years of experience (Ford,

2017). Faculty members are responsible for disseminating knowledge and fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a deep understanding of the subject matter (Ford, 2017).

Networking research and innovation are integral to the higher education landscape (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). These institutions are hubs of intellectual exploration and progress, often housing cutting-edge laboratories and research centers (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; Ford, 2017). These facilities provide fertile ground for faculty and students to engage in groundbreaking research, contributing to advancing knowledge in various fields. Moreover, they promote innovation, nurturing a culture of creativity that drives technological and societal progress (Ford, 2017).

Moving forward, accreditation is a cornerstone of quality assurance in higher education, with bodies evaluating educational institutions to ensure they meet established standards of excellence (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; Ford, 2017). This rigorous process guarantees that the education provided is of a high quality and is recognized by employers and other academic institutions (Ford, 2017).

Furthermore, universities and colleges, as higher education institutions, serve as hubs for exploring cultural and social diversity (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; Ford, 2017). They foster an environment where students from various backgrounds come together, interact, and learn from one another (Ford, 2017). This exposure to diversity promotes cultural understanding and helps individuals develop into more open-minded and empathetic citizens (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; Ford, 2017). Furthermore, higher education institutions often engage with local communities, forging valuable partnerships that address societal issues and contribute to the betterment of the broader community (Ford, 2017).

In essence, the higher education system empowers individuals with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities necessary to make meaningful contributions to their communities, nation, and the world (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; Ford, 2017). It is a bridge to fulfilling careers and a gateway to intellectual and economic development, fostering a culture of innovation and progress (Ford, 2017).

Higher Education in Texas

Higher education in Texas boasts a diverse landscape of institutions catering to the educational needs of a broad spectrum of students (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). This educational ecosystem encompasses public universities, community colleges, private colleges, and technical schools, offering various academic and vocational opportunities (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). The Lone Star State is home to many institutions, with 38 independent or private universities and 37 public universities, many organized into comprehensive university systems, reflecting a robust commitment to higher education (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020).

Among Texas's major public university systems, the University of Texas System, Texas A&M University System, and the Texas State University System stand out as pillars of the state's higher education landscape (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). These systems provide a comprehensive range of educational programs, research opportunities, and resources, contributing significantly to the state's academic, economic, and cultural vitality (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020).

The state of Texas's dedication to higher education is further exemplified by initiatives like the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, which plays a pivotal role in shaping the state's educational landscape (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). This board strives to enhance access to higher education, make it more affordable, and promote educational attainment among Texas

residents (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). These efforts are integral to ensuring that higher education remains accessible and beneficial to a wide array of individuals throughout the state (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020).

The foundational support for higher education in Texas traces back to the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862, also known as the Land-Grant College Act (LOC, 2023). This landmark federal legislation had a profound and lasting impact on higher education in Texas since it laid the groundwork for establishing educational institutions, including the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas in 1871, which eventually evolved into the renowned Texas A&M University (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; LOC, 2023). The Morrill Act's primary objective was democratizing higher education, making it more accessible to a broader population segment. This mission is closely aligned to promote education within diverse communities in Texas (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; Library of Congress, 2023; Morrill, 1876).

Furthermore, the implications of the Morrill Act extended beyond establishing institutions and accessibility. It also played a role in shaping leadership roles in higher education, including those for LHSIs (Library of Congress, 2023; Morrill, 1876). The commitment to diversity and inclusion in Texas higher education has created opportunities for underrepresented groups to play significant roles in leadership and educational development (Library of Congress, 2023; Morrill, 1876). As land-grant universities were established under the Morrill Act, leadership roles within these institutions became a critical aspect of their development by diversifying academic disciplines and expanding educational programs (Lee, 1963; Morrill, 1876). This diversity was reflected in the leadership roles within these institutions, with leaders representing various fields of expertise such as mechanical arts, agriculture, and military tactics (Lee, 1963). Leaders of land-grant universities were expected to embody a commitment to public

service (Morrill, 1876). They were often involved in initiatives that applied the knowledge and expertise of the institution to benefit society (Lee, 1963; Morrill, 1876).

While the Morrill Act did not prescribe specific leadership structures or roles, it laid the foundation for the growth and diversification of higher education institutions (Library of Congress, 2023; Morrill, 1876). Leadership in higher education, influenced by the principles of the Morrill Act, became essential in steering these institutions toward fulfilling their educational, research, and public service missions (Lee, 1963; Library of Congress, 2023; Morrill, 1876). The evolution of leadership roles in higher education continued as institutions adapted to changing educational needs and societal demands (Lee, 1963).

The state of Texas boasts a rich tapestry of cultural and demographic diversity, reflecting the dynamic blend of people and traditions that make up its population (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). This rich diversity extends to the student body in Texas higher education institutions, where a substantial Hispanic and Latino presence forms a significant portion of the overall enrollment (TxCan, 2022). The state of Texas has the second largest Latino population (40%) in the United States according to a recent analysis completed by ¡Excelencia in Education! (2023). This demographic diversity is not just a statistic but a source of strength and testament to the state's commitment to inclusivity and equal access to education (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020).

In conclusion, higher education in Texas is a multifaceted and dynamic sector characterized by various institutions, comprehensive university systems, and a commitment to accessibility and diversity (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; LOC, 2023; Morrill, 1876). Federal legislation like the Morrill Act of 1862 has been pivotal in shaping the educational landscape, ensuring that higher education remains accessible and inclusive (Library of Congress, 2023). On the whole, Texas's higher education system stands as a testament to the state's dedication to

nurturing the intellectual and economic development of its citizens and promoting education within diverse communities (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020).

Hispanic Serving Institutions

HSIs in the United States, defined as higher education institutions with a student population consisting of at least 25% Hispanic or Latino students (Cuellar, 2019), play a crucial role in addressing the educational needs of Hispanic and Latino communities (Santiago, 2006). HSIs are committed to promoting access, retention, and success for Hispanic or Latino groups (Cuellar, 2014, 2019). The historical and legislative context surrounding the emergence of HSIs reveals a deep-seated commitment to addressing disparities in education and fostering opportunities for historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups (Cuellar, 2014, 2019; Santiago, 2006).

The 1960s and 1970s marked the height of the Civil Rights Movement (USDOJ, 2008), drawing attention to stark educational inequalities, including those in higher education. Advocates for civil rights called for increased access to higher education for historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups, and this movement set the stage for legislative changes (USDOJ, 2008, 2015). The Higher Education Act of 1965, a landmark piece of federal legislation, recognized the importance of serving underserved populations, including Hispanics, in higher education (Cuellar, 2014, 2019; LBJ, 2023). This act laid the groundwork for developing HSIs, reflecting the federal government's commitment to addressing educational disparities (LBJ, 2023).

Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas

In Texas, between 1980 and 1990, the Latino population experienced a 53% growth, which in turn, prompted universities to create specific programs within their institutions to

support the influx (Ching, 2022; Crisp et al., 2015). These higher education institutes received federal funding and grants to improve educational opportunities for Hispanic students (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014; LBJ, 2023; Santiago, 2006). This regional response to demographic shifts underscored the state's dedication to promoting educational equity (Santiago, 2006).

In Texas alone, according to the National Center for Education Statistics report of 1990, less than eight percent (7.3%) of Hispanics enrolled in colleges and universities had completed a degree compared to the 22.6% of White students (NCES, 2024). Recognizing the urgent need to bridge the accessibility gap in higher education, the U.S. Department of Education established the Hispanic-Serving Institutions program in the 1990s (Cuellar, 2019). This program aimed to provide federal funding and support to institutions with substantial Hispanic enrollments, facilitating their mission to serve historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups (Cuellar, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). The program played a pivotal role in supporting the growth and development of HSIs, enabling them to serve their students and communities better.

The rapid growth of the Hispanic population in Texas and other states contributed significantly to the formation and expansion of HSIs (Cuellar, 2014, 2019; Garcia & Natividad, 2018). The nearly three million Hispanics legally immigrated around 1990 fed the rapid population growth and seven out of 10 Hispanics were younger than 35 years old (USDCEA, 1993). Hispanic females held jobs as operators, laborers, services, and administrative support, very few held a managerial or professional roles (USDCEA, 1993). The average family income was lower than the average for all American households, and twice as many lived in poverty (USDCEA, 1993). Advocacy and research by scholars and activists, such as the work of Cuellar (2019, 2014) and Garcia and Natividad (2018), played a pivotal role in shedding light on the challenges faced by historically marginalized groups in leadership positions which stem from

systemic biases and inequalities prevalent in society. Some of the challenges include lack of representation, implicit bias and stereotyping, limited access to networks and opportunities, lack of mentorship and support (Ching, 2022; Garcia & Natividad, 2018).

This demographic shift thereby necessitated a new classification of higher education institutions in Texas, making them eligible for Title V funding, which supports programs that promote Latino students throughout their educational journey (Venegas, 2021). These efforts raised awareness about the need for change and informed the development of policies and programs (Fay et al., 2021; Garcia & Natividad, 2018).

The development of HSIs and the initiatives, (see Table 1), supporting them underscore the commitment of Texas and the United States to addressing historical and educational disparities, fostering diversity, and creating opportunities for Latinos and Hispanics (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014; Santiago, 2006; Venegas, 2021). These efforts not only promote access to higher education but also diversify leadership roles, empowering Latinas, and other historically marginalized racial-ethnic individuals to contribute to the transformation and advancement of the educational landscape (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014; Santiago, 2006; Venegas, 2021).

Table 1

Outline of Key Milestones in the Development of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Related Initiatives in Texas and the United States

Year	Milestone / initiative
1965	Higher Education Act (HEA): Enacted as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs, the HEA provided federal funding to institutions of higher education and marked the beginning of federal efforts to address educational disparities (Cuellar, 2014, 2019).
1980	Emergence of HSIs: The term "Hispanic Serving Institution" gained recognition, referring to institutions where Hispanic enrollment comprised at least 25% of the total student population (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014; Santiago, 2006).
1992	HSI Definition Formalized: The Higher Education Amendments of 1992 formally defined HSIs in federal legislation, establishing criteria based on enrollment percentages and certifying institutions as eligible for federal grants aimed at strengthening Hispanic educational opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2023; Venegas, 2021).
1995	HACU Founded: The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) was established to advocate for the interests of Hispanic higher education institutions and their students (HACU, 2023).
2000	Excelencia in Education: The organization ¡Excelencia in Education! was founded, focusing on accelerating Latino student success in higher education (Santiago, 2006).
2006	Title V HSI Program: Title V of the Higher Education Act was reauthorized to include the Strengthening Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) Program, providing federal funding for academic and administrative support to enhance educational opportunities for Hispanic students (Quan et al., 2022; Venegas, 2021).
Present	Ongoing Advocacy: Organizations like HACU, ¡Excelencia in Education! and federal agencies continue to advocate for policies and funding to support HSIs, recognizing their role in addressing historical disparities and fostering diversity (HACU, 2023; Santiago 2006; TxCan, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas

Texas's demographic shifts of the nearly three million Hispanics legally immigrated (USDCEA, 1993), in the latter part of the 20th century, particularly the substantial increase in the Latinos population, have gradually transformed the leadership dynamics within the state's educational institutions (Fay et al., 2021). As the Latin population grew, a heightened emphasis on diversity and inclusion in leadership roles emerged, particularly within HSIs (Garcia & Natividad, 2018). To address historical disparities, various initiatives were developed to create pathways, (see Table 2), for Latinas and other historically marginalized racial-ethnic individuals to assume leadership positions within these institutions (Fay et al., 2021; Garcia & Natividad, 2018).

While initiatives like the Morrill Act of 1862 did not explicitly address leadership roles in higher education, its impact on higher education had indirect implications for leadership roles within the institutions that were established under the act and played a vital role in expanding leadership opportunities in higher education in Texas, including administrative roles in land-grant institutions (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014; Santiago, 2006; Venegas, 2021). Expanding leadership opportunities for historically marginalized groups, such as Latinas and other underrepresented communities, in higher education is critical to addressing historical disparities and fostering diversity within the academic landscape (Santiago, 2006; Venegas, 2021). Recognizing the need for greater diversity in leadership roles, both at the federal and state levels, initiatives were launched to address historical disparities and create pathways for Latinas and other historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups to assume leadership roles in higher education in Texas (Cuellar, 2014, 2019; Garcia & Natividad, 2018). Despite these efforts, there

is a lack of research on executive leaders, including senior leadership teams and very little published work on leadership within the HSI context (Ortega et al., 2024).

Table 2

Initiatives Commonly Implemented to Create Pathways for Latinas and Other Historically Marginalized Racial-Ethnic Individuals to Assume Leadership Positions Within Institutions

Initiatives	Description
Diversity and inclusion programs	Programs aimed at fostering an inclusive environment by actively addressing disparities in leadership (Montas-Hunter, 2012).
Leadership development programs	Programs providing training, mentorship, and networking opportunities for individuals from underrepresented groups (Noopila & Pichon, 2022).
Mentorship and sponsorship programs	Pairing emerging leaders with experienced mentors or sponsors for guidance and advocacy (Ching, 2022; Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019).
Policy advocacy and institutional change	Advocacy for policies promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, and addressing historical disparities (ACE, 2023).
Data collection and reporting	Strategies for collecting and analyzing data on leadership demographics to identify areas for improvement (ACE, 2023; Montas-Hunter, 2012).
Cultural competency training	Programs promoting awareness of unique challenges faced by individuals from historically marginalized groups (Garcia & Natividad, 2018; Yosso, 2005).

Therefore, despite the significant strides made by HSIs in promoting access and educational attainment for Hispanic and Latino students, challenges still need to be addressed in promoting Latinas into leadership roles within these institutions (Garcia & Natividad, 2018). The disparities in graduation rates between Latina students and non-Hispanic students in HSIs are a cause for concern, with Latina students experiencing a graduation rate that is 14% lower than their non-Hispanic counterparts (TxCan, 2022). This disparity in graduation rates has broader

implications for the availability of leadership roles and opportunities for Latinas within these institutions (ACE, 2017, 2023).

The challenges Latinas face include the high cost of tuition, textbooks, and living expenses, which often pose significant hurdles for higher educational attainment (Flores & Park, 2015). Furthermore, access to support services such as academic advising, tutoring, and mentoring can significantly impact academic success (Ching, 2022; Flores & Park, 2015). Hispanic females lack representation and visibility in leadership positions across academia, thus making it challenging to access networks and resources (Crisp et al., 2015, Flores & Park, 2015). Many Latina students need to work long hours while attending school, which can adversely affect their academic performance and their ability to persist to graduation (Crisp et al., 2015; Flores & Park, 2015).

Efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, along with initiatives to break down barriers, are crucial for fostering representation and empowerment for Latinas and other historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups within higher education (ACE, 2023). The disparities in graduation rates and the challenges Latina students face can have a ripple effect on the pipeline for Latina leaders in higher education (Garcia, 2020). The organizational culture and climate play a significant role in supporting or hindering the advancement of Hispanic female leaders (Crisp et al., 2015; Flores & Park, 2015). Environments that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion are more likely to support the leadership development and advancement of Hispanic female leaders (ACE, 2023). According to Ortega et al. (2024), as HSIs grow, it is imperative to actively promote Latinx representation in leadership and develop career pathways for these leaders, as they can enhance equity and justice by fostering learning environments that honor Latinx students' cultural backgrounds and support the community they serve.

One crucial strategy for improving Latinas' representation and leadership prospects within HSIs has been to recruit and promote Latina faculty, administrators, and staff who reflect the diversity of the student body (Garcia, 2020). Diverse faculty members, including Latino faculty, often mentor Latina students and infuse courses with culturally relevant perspectives and content (ACE, 2023; Banda et al., 2023; Garcia, 2020). When Latina students can relate to and engage with faculty who share their cultural background, it positively impacts their academic experience and sense of belonging (Garcia, 2020). Latina staff representation in the classroom also increases discourse, and students respond positively to faculty who connect their culture to the learning process (Banda et al., 2023; Garcia, 2020). These mentors provide guidance, support, and career advice, helping students navigate academic challenges and explore leadership opportunities (Hastings & Sunderman, 2020). Interactions with mentors and exposure to role models significantly influence leadership development. Mentors provide guidance, support, and learning opportunities that accelerate a leader's growth by sharing their wisdom and experience (Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). Role models inspire and serve as examples for aspiring leaders to emulate their successes and values, ultimately influencing their leadership journey (Banda et al., 2023; Menchaca et al., 2016).

While there has been progress in increasing the number of faculty members of Latin origin within HSIs to support and foster academic success (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014), there is still work to improve Latinas' success in leadership roles. Latina students who witness Latino faculty members in leadership positions may feel empowered to pursue leadership roles within the academic setting and in their communities (Banda et al., 2023; Hastings & Sunderman, 2020). This empowerment positively impacts the academic success and leadership development of Latina students, helping them realize their potential and contribute to the diversity and vitality

of their institutions and the broader higher education landscape (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Hastings & Sunderman, 2020).

In conclusion, efforts to address the disparities in leadership roles and graduation rates for Latinas within HSIs in Texas are essential to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education (Banda et al., 2023; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Hastings & Sunderman, 2020).

Initiatives to increase Latina representation in leadership positions and provide support services can help Latinas overcome challenges and succeed academically, ultimately contributing to their development as leaders within their institutions and communities (Crisp et al., 2015). The need for more Latina role models in leadership positions can create a self-perpetuating cycle where Latinas may not see themselves reflected in leadership and may not consider these roles as viable career options (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014; Hastings & Sunderman, 2020).

The Underrepresentation of Latina Leaders

The underrepresentation of Latina leaders, particularly in leadership positions within institutions, is a complex issue rooted in historical and systemic factors (ACE, 2023; Crisp et al., 2015). As previously stated, according to the 2022 Labor Force Statistics survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, only 9.8% of Hispanic women are employed in education as administrators across the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). In the same vein, Eiden-Dillo and Best (2022) reported that a mere 5% of college presidents are women, and only 1% of that population are Latinas. Achieving greater representation involves addressing barriers disproportionately affecting Latina individuals in various sectors, including education, business, government, and nonprofit organizations (Flores & Park, 2015).

Latina leaders in HSIs are crucial in advocating for equity and inclusion (Garcia, 2020). They can work to ensure that policies and practices within their institutions are sensitive to the

needs of Hispanic students, addressing the unique challenges previously stated (Liou et al., 2021). By creating an inclusive campus climate that values diversity and fosters a sense of belonging for all students, including Latinas, these leaders contribute to a more supportive and empowering educational environment (Banda et al., 2023; Garcia, 2020).

Addressing the underrepresentation of Latinas in leadership roles requires a comprehensive approach (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). Embracing the principles of LatCrit, such as intersectionality, social justice and equity, voice, and representation as change, can provide a valuable framework for understanding and addressing systemic inequalities (Liou et al., 2021). Creating supportive and inclusive environments in HSIs is crucial for nurturing Latina talent and promoting their advancement into leadership positions (Banda et al., 2023). Providing mentorship and leadership development opportunities is equally important, as these initiatives help prepare Latinas for leadership roles and offer guidance and support as they navigate their careers (Banda et al., 2023; Liou et al., 2021).

Leadership in Higher Education

The underrepresentation of women, particularly Latinas, in leadership roles within higher education institutions in the United States has deep historical roots that can be traced back to the nation's early history (ACE, 2023; Macias & Stephens, 2019). Historically, White men have predominantly occupied higher education leadership positions, establishing an enduring precedent (ACE, 2023; Macias & Stephens, 2019). Latinas are often underrepresented in academic leadership positions, including roles such as department chairs, deans, and university presidents (ACE, 2023). Latinas may experience both gender bias and racial/ethnic bias, which can make it particularly challenging to break into leadership roles (Banda et al., 2023; Macias & Stephens, 2019).

In the early colonial period, many higher education institutions in the United States were established by religious denominations, and leadership positions were often held by clergy, primarily white men (Scott et al., 2022). Higher education in the United States initially had limited access and was primarily reserved for White men from privileged backgrounds (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). Racial discrimination and segregation were prevalent during this period (Fay et al., 2021). This early historical context further reinforced the dominance of white men in leadership roles in academia (Garcia & Natividad, 2018). Discrimination, limited access to education, and systemic racism restricted opportunities for individuals from minority groups to enter leadership roles in higher education (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020; Fay et al., 2021). It was not until the mid-20th century that significant efforts were made to address racial and gender disparities in leadership positions (Fay et al., 2021).

Women Leadership in Higher Education

Traditional gender roles and cultural expectations have significantly shaped societal perceptions of women's leadership abilities (Liou et al., 2021). These norms have created formidable challenges for Latinas who aspire to break through the glass ceiling and access leadership opportunities (Liou et al., 2021). The intersection of gender and racial biases has created unique hurdles for Latina leaders, compounding the obstacles they face in reaching leadership positions (Menchaca et al., 2016; Montas-Hunter, 2012).

Once established, traditional leadership structures tend to perpetuate themselves (Montas-Hunter, 2012). Higher education institutions have historically been resistant to change, which has made it challenging for women and historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups to break into leadership roles (Macias & Stephens, 2019; Montas-Hunter, 2012). It is only in recent times that concerted efforts have been made to diversify leadership in higher education (Scott et al., 2022).

Many institutions have recognized the importance of prioritizing diversity and inclusion in leadership recruitment and development to better represent the diverse student bodies they serve (Scott et al., 2022). Increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in leadership positions benefits the institutions and the communities they serve, as it brings a broader range of perspectives and experiences to the decision-making process and better reflects the student population (ACE, 2023; Ledesma, 2017).

However, progress toward diversifying leadership in higher education has been slow, with incremental changes occurring over time (Sánchez et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022). Latina leaders face significant challenges in gaining representation in leadership roles within academia (Noopila & Pichon, 2022; Ochoa, 2022). The compounding effects of discrimination, both gender-based and racial, have contributed to their underrepresentation (Sánchez et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022). Encouraging HSIs to adopt more inclusive hiring and promotion practices and supporting diversity initiatives at the state and federal levels can help address the disparities faced by Latinas (Ledesma, 2017).

Systemic bias and discrimination against women, especially Latinas, have persisted in higher education and society at large (Montas-Hunter, 2012; Ochoa, 2022). Discriminatory hiring practices and gender-based stereotypes have played a role in reinforcing the underrepresentation of women, particularly Latinas, in leadership roles within higher education (Sánchez et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022).

Efforts to diversify leadership in higher education are essential for promoting equitable access to leadership opportunities, challenging historical norms, and creating a more inclusive and representative educational environment (Ochoa, 2022; Quan et al., 2022). These efforts must address the multifaceted challenges that Latinas face due to the intersection of gender and racial

biases, with the ultimate goal of fostering a diverse and empowered leadership landscape in academia (Macias & Stephens, 2019).

It is important to note that progress has been made over the years to address these disparities, but significant challenges remain (Macias & Stephens, 2019). Efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education leadership continue to this day, and there is a growing awareness of the need for representation from diverse backgrounds at all levels of academic administration (ACE, 2023; Ledesma, 2017). Nevertheless, the historical legacy of white male dominance in higher education leadership roles has had a lasting impact on the composition of these positions (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

Latina Leaders in Higher Education

The underrepresentation of Latinas and other historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups in higher education leadership positions in the United States is a persistent challenge that is underscored by recent research findings (ACE, 2017, 2023; HACU, 2023). An American Council on Education (ACE) study found that in 2017, minority presidents, including Latino individuals and other historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups, collectively accounted for only 18% of college and university presidencies (ACE, 2017). This data suggests that while there is some representation, it still needs to reflect the diversity of the U.S. population (ACE, 2017; Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). The need for greater diversity, particularly in leadership positions, remains a pressing issue (Ledesma, 2017). A subsequent study by ACE conducted in 2022 found that Latinas held a mere 3% of college and university presidencies in the United States, revealing a significant lack of representation (ACE, 2023). This statistic reflects the stark underrepresentation of Latinas in top leadership roles within higher education institutions (ACE, 2017, 2023).

A report from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) in 2020 shed light on the underrepresentation of Latinas and other historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups in senior leadership positions within higher education, such as provosts and deans (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). This report highlighted the continued disparities in leadership roles and the need for more equitable representation (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

Diversified leadership ensures that the leadership of universities reflects the diversity of the student body, faculty, and staff (Crisp et al., 2015). The underrepresentation of minority groups, including Latinas, in the governance and decision-making structures of colleges and universities is a matter of significant concern, and it has been highlighted by various reports and studies, including one published by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) in 2020 (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). This issue extends beyond the surface-level statistics and carries significant implications in the governance and decision-making structures of colleges and universities and the communities they serve, including Latinas and other historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups, who have a limited presence (HACU, 2023; Ledesma, 2017). Diversified leadership fosters a more inclusive and equitable environment (Flores & Park, 2015). It sends a message that all individuals, regardless of their background, have opportunities for advancement, and it can help reduce bias and discrimination within the institution (Flores & Park, 2015; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

Despite some progress in increasing diversity in higher education leadership roles such as presidents, vice presidents and deans, these statistics reveal the ongoing disparities and underrepresentation of Latinas (HACU, 2023). The data underscore the necessity for continued and more robust efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the leadership ranks of

higher education institutions, with a specific focus on addressing gender and racial disparities (HACU, 2023; Ledesma, 2017). Universities prioritizing diversity in leadership can have a competitive advantage in attracting students, faculty, and staff (Fay et al., 2021; Flores & Park, 2015). A diverse leadership team can also enhance an institution's reputation and standing in the academic world (Flores & Park, 2015).

In summary, the underrepresentation of Latinas and other underrepresented groups on governing boards of higher education institutions is a multifaceted issue that carries significant implications for the future of higher education (Fay et al., 2021; Flores & Park, 2015; Garcia & Natividad, 2018; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Ledesma, 2017). Efforts to address this disparity are not only about promoting diversity for its own sake but also about ensuring that colleges and universities are better equipped to address the evolving needs of their diverse student populations and communities, fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Ledesma, 2017). Recognizing the importance of diverse voices in leadership positions is a vital step toward creating more equitable and inclusive educational institutions (Fay et al., 2021; Flores & Park, 2015; Garcia & Natividad, 2018; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Ledesma, 2017).

Barriers Latina Leaders Face in Leadership Roles

Latina leaders face various barriers and challenges when pursuing leadership roles (Fay et al., 2021; Garcia & Natividad, 2018). Latinas in leadership roles in higher education often face intersectional challenges that arise from their gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Ledesma, 2017). Access to quality education and professional development opportunities can be limited for Latinas due to socioeconomic factors, language barriers, and unequal access to educational resources (González-Figueroa & Young, 2005). These challenges may have

compounding effects on their experiences as leaders (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Ledesma, 2017). These barriers are rooted in systemic inequalities, social biases, and cultural factors (Fay et al., 2021; Garcia, 2020).

Low Graduation Rates

Graduation rates among Latina students, particularly within HSIs, are low and can result in a smaller pool of potential Latina leaders (Locke & Gonzalez, 2019). This reduced pool can limit the availability of qualified candidates for leadership roles (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Liou et al., 2021). The limited presence of Latina leaders in prominent positions can create a lack of representation and role models for aspiring Latinas, making it more challenging for them to envision themselves in leadership roles and pursue such paths (Fay et al., 2021).

Stereotypes

Regarding gender, Latina women, especially those in higher education, are disproportionately underrepresented in peer-reviewed literature related to their roles and acquisition of leadership positions (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Macias & Stephens, 2019). According to a recent ACE survey, only 7.9% of university presidents identified themselves as Hispanic and female, whereas White and female self-reported as an overwhelming 69.1% in presidential roles (ACE, 2023). Latinas often face a double bind due to gender and racial biases (Garcia, 2020; Liou et al., 2021). They can encounter stereotypes and biases about their gender and ethnicity, making it more difficult to be perceived as influential leaders (Crenshaw, 2013; Fay et al., 2021). This underrepresentation is even more pronounced among Latina female leaders who work at HSIs, where they are represented sparingly in leadership roles (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Macias & Stephens, 2019).

Scarcity of Role Models

The underrepresentation of Latinas in educational leadership roles within HSIs is a significant issue that has implications for both representation and diversity within the higher education system (Cuellar, 2014). While the presence of Latina faculty members can positively impact the leadership development of Latina students, it is essential to recognize that ethnic biases may still exist within institutions, which can present additional challenges (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). The increased leadership participation of women in academia is necessary to encourage meaningful contributions to the challenges faced by society (Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024). The scarcity of Latina leaders in prominent leadership roles, as previously discussed, can discourage aspiring Latinas, and contribute to a lack of role models (Banda et al., 2023). It can also reinforce the idea that leadership positions are not accessible to them, limiting their aspirations (Garcia, 2020).

Socioeconomic Challenges

Latinas have and continue to face socioeconomic challenges as first-generation college students, which can further complicate their educational journeys (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Macias & Stephens, 2019). As first-generation college students, Latinas may need more family knowledge and resources to navigate the educational system effectively (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Barriers burden them more as they strive to achieve their educational and leadership aspirations (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gonzáles-Figueroa & Young, 2005).

Language Barriers

English proficiency can be a significant barrier for Latina leaders, mainly if they are not native English speakers (Banda et al., 2023). Communication skills are crucial in leadership, and language barriers may hinder their ability to effectively convey their ideas (Gonzáles-Figueroa &

Young, 2005). Cultural expectations and traditional gender roles can sometimes discourage Latinas from pursuing leadership roles (González-Figueroa & Young, 2005). These expectations may emphasize family and caregiving responsibilities, making it challenging to balance career and personal life (Banda et al., 2023). Balancing family responsibilities with the demands of leadership positions can be particularly challenging for Latinas (Banda et al., 2023; Ching, 2022). The lack of family-friendly policies and support can make it challenging to pursue leadership roles without compromising family life (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

Implicit Biases

Implicit biases can lead to unconscious judgments and prejudices that affect hiring and promotion decisions (Ledesma, 2017). These biases can disadvantage Latinas, even when they possess the qualifications and skills required for leadership roles (Ching, 2022). Latinas may encounter challenges in organizations that need more cultural competency and awareness of Latina leaders' specific needs and experiences (Liou et al., 2021; Locke & Gonzalez, 2019). This can hinder their ability to thrive and be effective in leadership roles (Crisp et al., 2015).

In light of these challenges, it is crucial for higher education institutions to actively work towards creating more inclusive and equitable environments (Crisp et al., 2015). This includes addressing the intersectional challenges that Latinas face and taking deliberate steps to foster representation and support for aspiring Latina leaders (Ching, 2022; Crisp et al., 2015). Latinas' diverse experiences and perspectives are valuable contributions to the educational landscape and ensuring their equitable access to leadership roles benefits both the individuals involved and the institutions they serve (Locke & Gonzalez, 2019).

Latina Leaders in Hispanic Serving Institutions

The underrepresentation of Latinas in higher education leadership roles is a critical issue with profound implications for promoting diversity and ensuring equitable opportunities for all students to reach their full academic potential (Crisp et al., 2015). It affects Latinas and deprives institutions of diverse perspectives, experiences, and voices that can enhance decision-making and better support Latino students and faculty (Banda et al., 2023; Montas-Hunter, 2012).

Numerous studies and reports have consistently highlighted the underrepresentation of women, including Latinas, in leadership positions within higher education (Banda et al., 2023; Crisp et al., 2015; Montas-Hunter, 2012). As of 2019, the ACE reported that women made up only 30% of college and university presidents in the United States, with even lower representation of women of color, including Latinas (ACE, 2023). This underscores the disparity in representation of Latina leaders in HSIs, which can significantly impact the ability of aspiring Latinas to identify with role models who have successfully overcome similar challenges (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Locke & Gonzalez, 2019).

Latina leadership in HSIs is vital for increasing representation and fostering diversity among university administrators (Locke & Gonzalez, 2019). Latina leaders in these institutions serve as role models for Hispanic students, offering tangible examples of attaining high-level academic positions (Banda et al., 2023). They are uniquely positioned to understand and address the specific needs of Hispanic students, drawing upon their cultural knowledge and experiences to inform policies and practices to improve student success, retention, and graduation rates (Banda et al., 2023).

The Underrepresentation of Latina Leaders in Hispanic Serving Institutions

The underrepresentation of Latina leaders in HSIs' leadership roles has multifaceted implications (Ochoa, 2022). It perpetuates gender disparities in decision-making, resource allocation, and policy development within higher education institutions (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). Furthermore, it limits the diversity of perspectives at the leadership level, which can hinder innovative and inclusive approaches to addressing the complex challenges facing higher education today (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Ochoa, 2022). Therefore, efforts to promote diversity and equity in leadership roles should encompass a range of initiatives, including policy changes, mentorship programs, and professional development opportunities (Ochoa, 2022). These measures are essential for creating a more inclusive higher education landscape where Latinas have equal opportunities to contribute to leadership roles, thus enriching the educational experience for all. (Ledesma, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework that emerged in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1970s and 1980s, which aimed to eliminate racial segregation and discrimination (Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). While the Civil Rights Movement achieved significant legal victories, it became evident that these legal changes did not automatically translate into racial equality in practice (Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002).

CRT recognizes that race does not operate in isolation but intersects with other social categories such as gender, class, and sexuality (Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002; Yosso, 2005). CRT emphasizes considering how multiple identities intersect and

influence a person's experiences and opportunities (Banda et al., 2023; Yosso, 2005). This intersectionality shapes the experiences of individuals and groups, leading to unique and compound challenges. Latinas in leadership, for instance, may face specific forms of discrimination and biases that further limit their opportunities for advancement (Banda et al., 2023).

CRT posits that racism is not merely an issue of individual bias but is deeply ingrained in the structures and systems of society, including law, education, and institutions (Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). It delves into how these structures perpetuate racial hierarchies and disparities. CRT also questions the idea of legal and institutional neutrality, arguing that what is often seen as neutral or objective reflects the interests and perspectives of the dominant racial group (Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002; Yosso, 2005). CRT challenges dominant narratives and power structures, prioritizing the viewpoints of those who have been historically oppressed (Solórzano, 1997, 1998).

Applying CRT can help with the exposure and analysis of racial inequities and how deeply embedded they are in laws, policies, and institutions (Yosso, 2005). CRT analysis goes beyond examining individual acts of discrimination to scrutinize the systemic nature of racial injustices and disparities (Sánchez et al., 2021). The ultimate goal of applying CRT as a lens is to advance social justice and equity by identifying and addressing these systemic racial injustices and disparities (Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002; Yosso, 2005). In the context of Latinas in leadership positions within higher education, CRT may serve as a valuable framework for understanding the structural and systemic challenges they face (Sánchez et al., 2021).

Latina and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

LatCrit, short for "Latina and Latino Critical Race Theory," is a legal and theoretical framework that emerged in the late 20th century to address race, ethnicity, and social justice issues within the United States legal system (Stefancic, 1998). Latino Critical Race Theory (Latino CRT or LatCrit) offers a powerful lens through which to understand the unique challenges that Latinas face in HSIs and encourages advocacy for equitable representation (Fay et al., 2021; Macias & Stephens, 2019). LatCrit emerged as a response to the limitations of CRT in fully addressing the experiences of Latinos in the United States and has evolved to incorporate contributions from various disciplines and scholars (Solórzano, 1997, 1998).

LatCrit, as a strand of CRT, explicitly addresses the experiences and issues of Latina/o communities (Garcia & Natividad, 2018). It builds upon CRT's core tenets and objectives but applies them to the unique racial, ethnic, and social dynamics faced by Latina/o individuals and communities (Fay et al., 2021). Its core tenets focus on recognizing structural racism, intersectionality, challenging neutrality, and centering narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Legal scholars within the LatCrit framework have produced extensive writings, articles, and books, contributing to a growing body of work that addresses the concerns of Latina and Latino communities within the legal system (Garcia & Natividad, 2018; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Stefancic, 1998). By doing so, LatCrit helps identify and address systemic barriers that contribute to the underrepresentation of Latinas in leadership roles within HSIs (Scott et al., 2022).

LatCrit serves as a critical framework for understanding and addressing the challenges faced by Latinas within HSIs and advocating for their rights, opportunities, and inclusion within higher education institutions and beyond (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This framework allows for

the exploration of the experiences of Latinas in leadership roles, acknowledging their distinct cultural identities and the challenges they face due to their racial and ethnic backgrounds (Sánchez et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022). It also encourages examining how Latinas navigate multiple cultural spaces and identities (Sánchez et al., 2021).

One significant aspect of LatCrit is its recognition of the diversity within the Latina/o community. Latinas come from various Latin American countries, each with distinct cultures and histories (Quan et al., 2022; Sánchez et al., 2021). LatCrit examines how ethnicity and cultural background intersect with race to shape the experiences of Latina leaders, highlighting the importance of recognizing these complexities (Quan et al., 2022; Sánchez et al., 2021). By amplifying the voices and experiences of Latinas in academia and leadership, LatCrit empowers Latinas and encourages them to advocate for their rights and the rights of their communities, fostering community empowerment and activism (Quan et al., 2022; Sánchez et al., 2021).

In summary, LatCrit is a critical legal theory that focuses on the intersection of race, ethnicity, and social justice within the legal system, particularly in the context of Latina and Latino communities (Garcia & Natividad, 2018; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Stefancic, 1998). LatCrit provides scholars, activists, and advocates a platform to address systemic inequalities, challenge oppressive legal structures, and work toward more significant equity and justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). LatCrit provides a crucial framework for understanding and addressing the unique experiences and challenges Latinas face in leadership roles (Scott et al., 2022).

Leadership Studies

Overview of Leadership

Leadership is a complex and multifaceted concept crucial in various aspects of life, from personal development to organizational success (Riggio, 2008). Leadership is influencing, guiding, or directing others toward achieving a common goal or vision. Leadership involves directing people and inspiring and empowering them to work collaboratively toward a shared vision (Noopila & Pichon, 2022; Ochoa, 2022). Effective leadership encompasses many skills and qualities essential for guiding and managing others effectively (Noopila & Pichon, 2022; Riggio, 2008).

Leadership Development

Leadership development initiatives increase the visibility and representation of Latinas in leadership positions across academia (Quan et al., 2022). Leadership is a multifaceted concept crucial in various aspects of human life and organizations influencing, motivating, and guiding individuals or groups toward achieving a common goal or objective (Noopila & Pichon, 2022).

One of the fundamental aspects of effective leadership is strong communication. Influential leaders are adept at conveying their thoughts, ideas, and expectations clearly and concisely (Hastings & Sunderman, 2020). They listen actively to others, provide feedback, and foster open and transparent dialogue (Noopila & Pichon, 2022). Effective communication ensures that everyone understands the group or organization's vision, goals, and strategies (Hastings & Sunderman, 2020; Noopila & Pichon, 2022).

Leadership often involves critical decisions, and influential leaders are skilled decision-makers (Noopila & Pichon, 2022; Quan et al., 2022). Leaders gather information, analyze situations, consider alternatives, and make well-informed choices (Noopila & Pichon, 2022).

Moreover, leaders can make tough decisions, when necessary, even in the face of uncertainty (Garcia & Natividad, 2018; Noopila & Pichon, 2022).

Influential leaders are resourceful problem-solvers (Garcia & Natividad, 2018). They can identify challenges, obstacles, and issues and then develop strategies to address them (Garcia & Natividad, 2018; Noopila & Pichon, 2022). Problem-solving skills enable leaders to navigate complex situations, find innovative solutions, and maintain progress toward their objectives (Noopila & Pichon, 2022).

Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Influential leaders are adaptable and can adjust their approaches and strategies to fit different situations and contexts (Noopila & Pichon, 2022). Leaders remain flexible and open to change and can lead their teams through transitions and challenges (Noopila & Pichon, 2022).

In summary, leadership is a dynamic and complex skill set encompassing many competencies. Influential leaders are proficient in guiding and motivating others and excel in communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and adaptability. These qualities are essential for driving progress and achieving shared objectives in various personal, professional, and organizational settings.

Leader Development Model

A leader development model provides a structured framework to understand and analyze an individual's growth and development as a leader (Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). Such models typically outline various stages, processes, and factors contributing to the individual's evolution as a leader (Fox, 2018; Garcia & Natividad, 2018). The following is an expanded explanation of how these factors play a crucial role in leadership development by

outlining the fundamental principles, processes, and stages involved in developing influential leaders within an organization or society (Day, 2000; Fox, 2018).

A fundamental aspect of leadership development is cultivating one's identity as a leader (Day, 2000). Self-awareness, understanding one's values and beliefs, is recognizing how these elements influence one's leadership style and decisions (Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). A strong self-identity is the cornerstone for building leadership capabilities, providing a clear sense of purpose and direction in leadership roles (Locke & Gonzalez, 2019).

Leaders acquire specific knowledge and skills relevant to their roles (Fox, 2018). This includes honing abilities in communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution (Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). A set of leadership competencies, traits, and skills that are considered essential for effective leadership within the specific context are essential for guiding and motivating others effectively (Day, 2000; Liu et al., 2021).

Leader development often involves gaining practical experience through new responsibilities and exposure to different situations and challenges (Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). Leaders can take on new responsibilities and roles as they accumulate valuable experiences, further refining their leadership capabilities. Individuals are encouraged to take on leadership roles or responsibilities, allowing them to apply what they have learned and gain hands-on experience (Fox, 2018). This experiential learning is critical to the development process (Fox, 2018; Komives & Sowcik, 2020). Influential leaders engage in continuous self-reflection and evaluation to understand their strengths and areas for improvement (Komives & Sowcik, 2020). This ongoing assessment allows them to refine their leadership approach and adapt to changing circumstances (Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia,

2019). This might involve self-assessment, peer assessment, or expert evaluation to identify strengths and areas for improvement (Komives & Sowcik, 2020). Self-reflection is a powerful tool for personal growth and refinement in leadership.

Leader development models have been widely used in various research contexts to understand, assess, and enhance leadership capabilities (Garcia & Natividad, 2018). Researchers and practitioners employ these models to study leadership effectiveness, design training programs, and inform organizational practices (Fox, 2018). Leader development models help researchers identify and define specific competencies or attributes contributing to effective leadership (Fox, 2018). This may involve examining factors such as emotional intelligence, communication skills, adaptability, and strategic thinking (Garcia & Natividad, 2018). This helps identify commonalities and differences in leadership requirements. Leader development models are applied in various sectors, including business, education, healthcare, and the military (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). Researchers adapt models to align with specific industries' unique challenges and requirements (Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019).

A leader development model is valuable for understanding leadership development (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). Leader development models provide a framework for understanding how leadership behaviors impact the workforce, such as job satisfaction, engagement, and retention. By using leader development models in these ways, researchers contribute valuable insights to the understanding of effective leadership, guide evidence-based practices, and inform the design of leadership development initiatives across various contexts (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019).

Women's Leadership Development Model

The woman's leadership development model proposed by Dahlvig and Longman (2014) provided a fluid representation of the challenges as previously described and the possible opportunities women and historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups may face on their journey through leadership. The model of leader development outlays a systematic process for detailing the importance of building leadership skills and possessing qualities that offer continuous growth and demand adaptability rather than merely possessing fixed traits (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Garcia & Natividad, 2018).

Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) model, (see Figure 2), rooted in qualitative research, identifies key drivers and challenges faced by emerging women leaders in higher education with a concerted focus on intrinsic motivators, self-efficacy, competence, culture, self-awareness, and experiences, and has been applied in studying nonmajority populations of leaders within majority cultures (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014), making it a valuable framework for women and Latina leaders in higher education (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019).

Latina Leader Development Model

The leader development model also facilitates the identification of key influences and factors contributing to the leadership development of Latina leaders (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). These influences may encompass cultural factors, educational experiences, mentorship, and personal growth, which are particularly relevant in the context of Latina leadership (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). Moreover, the model aids in assessing the acquisition of leadership skills over time, which is essential for understanding the progression of leadership capabilities among

Latina leaders (Fox, 2018; Garcia & Natividad, 2018). The emphasis on identity formation, mentorship, and role models in the model aligns well with Latina leaders' unique challenges and opportunities (Crisp et al., 2015).

Incorporating a leader development model into the study of LHSILR serves several valuable purposes. The model helps contextualize the life stories of Latina leaders by identifying where they are in their leadership development journey (Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019).

When applied to the study of LHSILR, it provides insights into their unique journeys, the factors shaping their leadership development, and the cumulative impact of life experiences on their leadership capabilities (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). This approach may offer a deeper understanding of leadership in the specific context of HSIs and Latina leaders' challenges and opportunities.

Life Course Perspective on Leader Development

The life course perspective on leader development has been a framework that emphasized the importance of understanding leadership development as a lifelong process that is shaped by individual experiences, transitions, and trajectories across various life stages (Bierema, 2002). This perspective recognizes that leadership development is not confined to a specific phase of life or a finite set of experiences but rather an ongoing and evolving journey (Riggio, 2008). An inclusive institutional culture that supports and celebrates Latina leaders may catalyze change and progress (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). This perspective allows researchers to delve into the long-term influences and personal growth that contribute to the development of Latina leaders in HSIs offering a holistic view of their leadership journeys (Sánchez et al., 2021; Singer et al., 2013).

The life course perspective highlights that leadership development is a continuous and lifelong journey (Bierema, 2002). These stages can include childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, midlife, and later life. Each stage can offer distinct opportunities for leadership development (Liu et al., 2021). These experiences can come from education, work, personal life, and other contexts. These cumulative experiences develop and refine leadership skills and qualities (Bierema, 2002).

Major life transitions, such as entering the workforce, marriage, parenthood, career changes, and retirement, can significantly impact leadership development (Liu et al., 2021). These transitions can serve as turning points that shape one's leadership journey. Leaders draw from their personal experiences, values, and beliefs as they navigate their leadership roles in various contexts (Liu et al., 2021). This benefits Latinas individually and enriches the educational landscape by ensuring that a broad range of perspectives and experiences are represented and valued (Ledesma, 2017). Leadership development is viewed as a process of adapting to changing circumstances and demonstrating resilience in the face of adversity (Bierema, 2002; Brown & Montoya, 2020). Leaders assess their values, goals, strengths, and weaknesses and use this self-awareness to make informed decisions and lead effectively (Liu et al., 2021).

It is crucial for institutions to actively work toward creating more representative leadership teams that mirror the diverse student populations they serve (HACU, 2023; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). The life course perspective recognizes that leadership development is influenced by the social and cultural context in which individuals live (Montas-Hunter, 2012; Ochoa, 2022). Cultural norms, societal expectations, and historical events can shape a person's leadership development journey as well (Liu et al., 2021). Moreover, mentoring and guidance

from more experienced leaders are seen as essential factors in leader development. Individuals at different life stages benefit from the insights and wisdom of mentors and role models (Ochoa, 2022). By recognizing the significance of diverse leadership and actively nurturing Latina talent, organizations and communities can promote equity, access, and success for Latinas in higher education and beyond (Banda et al., 2023).

In summary, the life course perspective on leader development encourages organizations and individuals to adopt a holistic and long-term approach to leader development, recognizing that leadership skills and qualities are continuously evolving (Noopila & Pichon, 2022). It emphasizes the value of experiences at different life stages and the importance of embracing change and adaptation as essential elements of effective leadership development (Ochoa, 2022). In doing so, institutions can help combat the sense of absence and degradation that results when Latina leaders are not visible or recognized (Martusewicz et al., 2015).

Mentoring and Empowerment

According to Perez et al. (2024), underrepresentation of Latinas is due to a lack of professional mentoring. Mentorship and empowerment are pivotal aspects of the leader development model, particularly for Latina leaders in higher education, especially those in leadership roles at HSIs (Crisp et al., 2015). This prioritization is because Latina leaders in HSIs often prioritize collaboration and community engagement as fundamental aspects of their leadership approach (Quan et al., 2022). They actively seek partnerships with local communities, organizations, and other educational institutions to create opportunities for Hispanic students and promote the advancement of the Hispanic community (Liou et al., 2021). This commitment to community and collaboration aligns with mentorship's inclusive and supportive nature (Liou et al., 2021; Quan et al., 2022).

Mentorship is a supportive and developmental relationship between an experienced mentor and a less-experienced mentee (Fox, 2018). In this relationship, the mentor offers knowledge transfer, support, encouragement, and guidance, all of which contribute to the mentee's personal growth and career development (Fox, 2018). Mentoring and guidance from more experienced leaders are seen as important factors in leader development (Hastings & Sunderman, 2020).

Mentorship is an empowering force that provides Latinas in leadership roles with guidance, access to a broader network, and exposure to new opportunities (Fox, 2018). It empowers them to confidently navigate their leadership roles, knowing that they have the support and expertise of a mentor (Graham, 2019). Empowered Latina leaders are better equipped to make a positive impact within their institutions and communities (Hastings & Sunderman, 2020).

Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILR)

LHSILR serve as vital mentors and empower other Latina faculty, staff, and students (Ledesma, 2017). They provide guidance, support, and mentorship to individuals aspiring to leadership roles in academia, fostering a pipeline of future Latina leaders (Banda et al., 2023). These mentoring relationships can be transformative, shaping aspiring Latinas' career trajectories and leadership skills (Ledesma, 2017). Mentorship and empowerment, when provided by experienced Latina leaders, have a transformational impact (Liou et al., 2021). They help aspiring Latina leaders build confidence in their abilities to lead, influence change, and make a positive impact within their institutions (Ledesma, 2017).

Chapter Summary

In the mid-1980s, the need to address disparities in access to higher education in Texas became increasingly apparent (Cuellar, 2014, 2019; Garcia & Natividad, 2018). This need was driven by several significant factors, including demographic shifts, educational inequalities, and a growing recognition of these issues in educational policy (Solórzano, 1998). As the demographic landscape of Texas evolved, it became clear that equitable access to higher education was crucial for the state's Latino population (Cuellar, 2014, 2019; Garcia & Natividad, 2018).

The response to these challenges led to the emergence of the HSIs, a designation that recognized educational institutions with substantial Latin student populations (Cuellar, 2014, 2019; Garcia & Natividad, 2018). These Texas institutions were eligible for federal funding to improve educational opportunities (Garcia, Ramirez et al., 2019). HSIs have played a pivotal role in expanding access to higher education for Latinas and promoting their leader development within the higher education landscape (Garcia, Núñez et al., 2019). This recognition and support have been essential in breaking down barriers to educational access and nurturing leadership potential among Latinas (Cuellar, 2014, 2019; Garcia & Natividad, 2018).

The literature review conducted in this research study highlighted the critical importance of addressing the underrepresentation of LHSILR (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014; Santiago, 2006; Venegas, 2021). It underscored the significance of this issue and its broader implications for the educational landscape in the state (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014; Santiago, 2006; Venegas, 2021). Additionally, the review provided valuable context on the historical development of HSIs and the influential role of LatCrit in understanding and addressing educational disparities (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2014; Santiago, 2006; Venegas, 2021).

Moving forward, Chapter 3 of the study will delve into the research design and methodology. It will comprehensively explain the population under study, the study sample, the materials, and instruments used for data collection, as well as the analysis procedures. This chapter will also address ethical considerations, assumptions, and the limitations and delimitations of the research.

Chapter 3 Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative life story narrative study was to understand the experiences of LHSILRs during middle adulthood and their perceptions of the factors, if any, that may influence their leadership development in HSIs in Texas.

Three broad questions provided the lenses to guide this study.

RQ1: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their personal experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ2: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their professional experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ3: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) describe their mentorship experiences, if applicable, within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences contribute to their leadership development?

This chapter introduces the qualitative research design, the narrative life story research tradition, and the processes for collecting and analyzing the stories provided by the participants for this study. It also discusses ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations.

Qualitative Research Design and Method

Qualitative research in narrative studies allows a researcher to explore and understand the experiences, perspectives, and meanings of events, stories, and personal accounts of research participants (McAlpine, 2016). Narrative studies commonly employ qualitative research methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, qualitative methods are used to obtain a depth of understanding in research (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach offers a platform for participants

to express their experiences within the framework of their cultural identities (Benuto et al., 2018). Yilmaz (2013) defined qualitative research as an "emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world" (p. 312). Qualitative research allows researchers to approach the study with cultural sensitivity and flexibility (Polkinghorne, 2005). The appropriateness of a qualitative research design and methods depends on the specific research questions, objectives, and context. In the study of the lived experiences of LHSILRs, the qualitative approach is the most appropriate choice because the research questions require in-depth exploration, understanding of context, and capturing participant perspectives.

Research Paradigm

A paradigm encapsulates our perceptions and interpretations of reality and shapes how we interact with and understand the complexities of our surroundings (Davies & Fisher, 2018). Furthermore, within research methodologies, an interpretive or constructivist paradigm offers a distinctive lens through which to examine phenomena, particularly evident in life story narrative studies. Rooted in a relativist ontology, the interpretive paradigm acknowledges the subjective nature of reality, emphasizing the importance of context and multiple perspectives (Davies & Fisher, 2018), and is crucial to making meaning and understanding of the data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Unlike positivist approaches that seek universal truths, the interpretive paradigm recognizes the diversity of human experiences and employs inductive reasoning to generate nuanced insights that resonate within specific contexts (Davies & Fisher, 2018). Through its commitment to understanding the intricate interplay between individuals and their environments,

the interpretive paradigm fosters rich, multifaceted understandings of phenomena, contributing to advancing knowledge and exploring human narratives (Davies & Fisher, 2018). The researcher, a participant observer, makes meaning of the data and constructs an interpretation of the world around them through their thinking after interacting with participants, accepting that context is vital to knowing and understanding the individual rather than universal laws (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Narratives

Narratives play a significant role in research studies, mainly qualitative research; they provide valuable insights into individuals' experiences, perceptions, and meanings attributed to specific phenomena or events (Clandinin, 2006). A narrative methodology is a research approach that collects and analyzes personal stories and experiences to gain insight into the lived experiences of individuals or groups and offers points to reference, to improvise, to adapt, and to overcome (McAlpine, 2016; Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020). Researchers can adjust their approach based on the narratives as they unfold, ensuring that essential aspects of the stories are not overlooked (Clandinin, 2006). Narrative research seeks to understand individuals meaning-making processes to interpret and make sense of their experiences (Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020). By recognizing that individuals interpret and construct their realities differently, the research will explore multiple viewpoints to understand the same phenomenon (Clandinin, 2006; McAlpine, 2016). There are several forms of narratives (Clandinin, 2006). This study will use the narrative life story as a research tradition. Narrative life story research acknowledges the diversity within any group (Prosek & Gibson, 2021).

Research Tradition Narrative Life Story

The development of the narrative life story tradition can be traced back to various disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, and sociology (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). This tradition emerged as a response to the need for a deeper understanding of individuals' experiences and perspectives, emphasizing qualitative data collection methods (Polkinghorne, 2005; Prosek & Gibson, 2021). McAdams (2014) noted the significance of considering the historical context in data collection and how this tradition has evolved into a narrative on the internalized, continuous, and constructed life story of a person's life experiences.

Rooted in the work of psychologists such as Jerome Bruner and Dan McAdams, narrative life story emphasizes the significance of narratives in shaping individual identity and understanding human experience (McAdams, 2001). Narrative research gradually found its way into educational research, where scholars began to use it to understand the experiences of students, educators, and leaders within academic institutions (Clandinin & Caine, 2008).

Narrative life stories as a qualitative research method are vital to understanding the human experience by providing researchers with practical means to inform practice and policymaking (Suri, 2011), thereby making narrative life stories a valuable qualitative data source that provides rich insights into individuals' experiences, perceptions, and personal journeys (Singer et al., 2013). Narrative life story inquiry allows researchers to investigate subjective experiences, cultural perspectives, and social phenomena through the analysis of narratives (Clandinin, 2006). In addition, the narrative life story research process offers numerous benefits by providing insights into personal experiences, promoting self-understanding, fostering connections, and contributing to research validity and reliability (Clandinin, 2006; McAlpine, 2016).

Rapport

In support of narrative qualitative interviews, rapport is essential for both myself and the participant (McGrath et al., 2019). Mao and Feldman (2019) asserted that qualitative interviews are most productive when the exchange is collaborative, and the relationship is encouraging. Having obtained the participants' informed consent, building a trusting relationship is the next priority in the interview process (McGrath et al., 2019). Building rapport in qualitative interviews is essential for three primary reasons: trust, quality of data, and neutrality (Mao & Feldman, 2019; McGrath et al., 2019). First, it helps create a comfortable and trusting environment and encourages participants to open up and share their experiences more candidly; second, it enhances the overall quality of data collected, lastly, it preserves neutrality and minimizes bias (Mao & Feldman, 2019). Building rapport may be challenging during the interview process (Buys et al., 2022). McGrath et al. (2019) recommended that one way to mitigate the challenge is by sending a draft of the interview questions and their importance to the research ahead of the interview to enable the participant an opportunity to become familiar with the topics of discussion.

Rapport Phases

Building rapport is a dynamic process that involves different phases and strategies to facilitate each phase (Buys et al., 2022). The rapport process has three main phases: initial contact, connection, and ending (McGrath et al., 2019). The initial contact phase begins with a friendly and respectful introduction, conveying the interest in their participation and the research's significance (Buys et al., 2022). It is essential to clearly explain the study's purpose, goals, and potential benefits to the participants, ensuring they understand why their input is valuable (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

During the connection phase, I demonstrated active listening by nodding, paraphrasing, and showing empathy (Buys et al., 2022; McGrath et al., 2019). I encouraged participants to elaborate on their responses by asking open-ended questions that invite storytelling and reflection (Buys et al., 2022). It is also essential to be mindful of verbal communication, including body language and facial expressions, while maintaining eye contact and exhibiting a relaxed, nonthreatening demeanor (Buys et al., 2022). At the end of the interview, I expressed my gratitude for their time and contribution, emphasizing the importance of their insights, reiterating the commitment to confidentiality, and informing them about any follow-up steps in the research process (Buys et al., 2022; McGrath et al., 2019).

Narrative Interviews

Everyone has a different story; with a narrative life story, researchers can understand lives in general (McAdams, 2001). Stories and narratives of experiences are helpful in "conveying the coherence and meaning of lives" (McAdams, 2001, p. 100) and should be valued in research practices (Perez et al., 2024). The life story connected to a significant part of one's life is considered self-definitional (Singer et al., 2013). These narrative life stories are autobiographical memories in nature and reflect the life lived and the perspective toward the experience (McAdams, 2013; Singer et al., 2013). Interviews are a commonly used method to collect narrative life stories (Caine et al., 2017; Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Structured or semistructured interviews allow researchers to gather detailed information about an individual's life experiences, beliefs, and values (Polkinghorne, 2005; Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Researchers in this field explore how people construct their life stories and the impact of these narratives on their well-being and psychological development (Caine et al., 2017; McAdams, 2001).

Therefore, for this study, I used a semistructured interview protocol (Appendix C) and open-ended questions to facilitate the emergence of personal narratives.

Participants, and Sample Size

For this study, I selected three female participants who identify as Hispanic and Latina. Second, they had at least 2 years in a current or past university leadership position as either a president, vice president/chancellor, dean, associate dean, or director. Finally, the position is or was held within a higher educational institute that identifies as a HSI in Texas. I identified three female participants for this study through purposeful sampling. A call to participate was sent, and even though I was expecting three participants, four individuals that met the criteria were accepted to participate in this study.

Palinkas et al. (2015) defined purposeful sampling as the strategic selection of participants or narratives based on predefined criteria that align with research objectives, ensuring the acquisition of rich and relevant data. This method enables researchers to target individuals with firsthand knowledge or lived experiences about the phenomenon of interest, thus facilitating a comprehensive understanding of its complexities and nuances (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Researchers often use a small number of participants in their qualitative research studies for efficiency and practicality, allowing researchers to identify central tendencies (Palinkas et al., 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005). Homogeneous sampling, the selection of participants based on predefined group characteristics, allows researchers to triangulate and bring the core meaning and deepen the understanding of the lived experience (Kalu, 2019; Lopez & Whitehead, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005). Palinkas et al. (2015) posited that researchers purposefully select participants or narratives based on specific criteria relevant to the research

objectives. This approach allows for the intentional selection of individuals who have experienced or can provide in-depth information about the phenomenon under study (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). By deliberately choosing participants with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, researchers can capture a spectrum of narratives that reflect the multifaceted dimensions of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Palinkas et al., 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005). The goal is to choose participants who can provide rich and in-depth information about the research topic through their lived experiences (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Recruitment

Once institutional review board (IRB) approval (Appendix D) was secured from Abilene Christian University, four female participants were specifically identified and selected by their position, a minimum of 2 years of experience within an HSI in Texas, and who identify as Hispanic and or Latina. For several reasons, participants with at least 2 years of experience are suitable for this research. Firstly, experienced candidates are generally more familiar with the academic industry, its practices, and potential challenges. Additionally, having some experience indicates that a participant has already developed some of the necessary skills and can contribute to the credibility of the research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Furthermore, a track record of success and experience can give me a better understanding of the challenges the participant has overcome in achieving their leadership role. I used purposeful sampling to select participants who can provide rich and varied information. Before conducting interviews or collecting narrative life stories, I obtained informed consent from participants (Appendix E). Interview requests were sent to potential participants via email and phone (Appendix E), utilizing social media and academic networks Academia.edu, LinkedIn, and ResearchGate. The email explained

the study purpose, the eligibility criteria, the benefits of participation, and obtained their consent (Appendix E). I coordinated with participants to schedule data collection sessions involving interviews (Appendix F).

Materials/Instruments

Life story data collection refers to gathering information and narratives about individuals' lives, experiences, and personal histories (Nasheeda et al., 2019). Interviews and conversations are the most efficient and effective methods used in narrative research (Nasheeda et al., 2019). Listening to narrative life stories during interviews is essential to gather rich information to understand the participants' accounts of events (Palinkas et al., 2015). I developed a set of open-ended questions (Appendix C) that guided the conversation and allowed the participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and insights. Each participant was asked the three RQs along with five probing questions for each RQ and a final closing question. This data collection method aimed to capture and document individuals' unique stories, perspectives, and memories, providing insights into their lived experiences and the contexts in which they exist (Nasheeda et al., 2019). I also reviewed transcripts, researched literature, and publicly available artifacts, and sent a follow-up question to clarify the context and time period to build the contextualization of the individual portraits and overall introductory context.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This section overviews typical approaches to analyzing qualitative data from interviews and narrative life stories. Data analysis is crucial in uncovering meaningful insights from interviews and narrative life stories (Polkinghorne, 2005). Data analysis in research refers to transforming raw data into meaningful and interpretable insights, allowing researchers to address research questions, draw conclusions, and make evidence-based claims (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Qualitative data analysis involves analyzing nonnumerical data, such as text, images, or videos (Suri, 2011), to identify and interpret qualitative data's patterns, themes, and meanings (Suri, 2011). The qualitative analysis provides a deeper understanding of subjective experiences, attitudes, and perceptions (Yilmaz, 2013). Thematic analysis is a widely used approach for analyzing qualitative data, including interviews and narrative life stories (Palinkas et al., 2015). It involves identifying and organizing patterns or themes within the data, which capture the essence of participants' experiences and perspectives (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Researchers typically use a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to develop themes that represent the underlying meaning within the narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this study, I first read the entire description. Next, I identified meaningful units that develop from the described experiences, and finally, I transformed the meaningful units into themes by making the implicit explicit (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

Site, Interview Location, and Mode

Ensuring optimal interview conditions fosters open communication and facilitates meaningful participant engagement (McGrath et al., 2019). I sought to create a supportive and inclusive interview experience that prioritized their comfort and convenience. Therefore, the interview time and location selection were thoughtfully determined, considering the availability and comfort levels of the participants involved (McGrath et al., 2019). Flexibility was a fundamental principle guiding the scheduling process, as I aimed to accommodate the diverse schedules and preferences of the participants.

This study used virtual methods to collect data, such as Zoom or Google Meets. Virtual interviews provide convenience and accessibility, eliminating the need for travel and offering a familiar setting for participants to express themselves comfortably (Suri, 2011). The interview

date and time was selected based on the availability and comfort of the participants (McGrath et al., 2019). The following procedures were used in the study in the following order: transcription, thematic coding, chronological ordering, member checking, coding (first and second cycles), and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Transcription

After conducting the interviews, the next essential step involved uploading the interview recordings to TranscribeMe, an online transcription service renowned for its accuracy and reliability. It is imperative to ensure that all data handling processes adhere to stringent privacy standards, mainly when dealing with sensitive information. TranscribeMe is a trusted platform that prioritizes data security and confidentiality, aligning with the strict privacy protections mandated by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA Privacy Rule, 2023). I transcribed the spoken words from the interview recordings into written text using TranscribeMe. Text data allowed me to work with the data more easily during analysis. I coded the transcripts to identify themes, concepts, and patterns within the interview responses.

Thematic Coding

Researchers identify and code themes within narratives to uncover recurring ideas, concepts, or experiences; thematic analysis helps explore the broader patterns and meanings that emerge from individual stories (Palinkas et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers analyze narratives by examining the structure, content, and themes present within the stories; this analysis helps identify common patterns, key plotlines, and underlying meanings embedded in the narratives (Nasheeda et al., 2019). By analyzing multiple narratives, researchers can identify common patterns, themes, and trends across participants' stories (Stage, 2007). This coding process, often

called narrative or thematic analysis, helps researchers uncover shared experiences, recurring motifs, or key ideas that emerge from the narratives (Polkinghorne, 2005; Stage, 2007).

Chronological Ordering

This study's comprehensive data collection was pivotal, as it aimed to capture the intricate life stories of four Latina female leaders spanning from their early adulthood to the present moment. The collected data were organized chronologically to ensure clarity and coherence, delineating key events and transitions within distinct lifespan categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; McGrath et al., 2019). Once the stories had been chronologically depicted, participants played a vital role in verifying the accuracy and authenticity of their narratives. The participants were provided with opportunities and encouraged to review their life stories. This strategy ensured that their experiences and perspectives are accurately portrayed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; McGrath et al., 2019).

Coding Process

Through the iterative interplay of first and second-cycle coding, researchers can navigate the complexities of qualitative data analysis, illuminating the multifaceted dimensions of participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thorough coding of the data ensures that readers of the research can relate the findings to their context (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This methodological rigor underscores the commitment to capturing the richness and complexity of qualitative data, thereby advancing the understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; McGrath et al., 2019).

First-Cycle Coding

In the first coding cycle, researchers embark on a journey of immersion within the data to familiarize themselves with the content and nuances encapsulated within the transcripts

(McGrath et al., 2019). Adopting an exploratory approach, researchers diligently read and reread the transcripts, actively identifying initial ideas and impressions that surface during this process (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). I systematically analyzed the data line by line to identify and label concepts, themes, and categories using descriptive or in-vivo codes that capture the essence of the content (McGrath et al., 2019). Tomaszewski et al. (2020) advocated for creating comprehensive summaries that encapsulate the salient elements extracted from the transcripts, laying the groundwork for subsequent coding endeavors. As the coding process unfolded, codes underwent refinement, modification, or expansion to accommodate emerging patterns and insights gleaned from the data (McGrath et al., 2019). This iterative approach underscores the dynamic nature of qualitative analysis, wherein codes evolve in tandem with the evolving understanding of the dataset. By remaining responsive to the nuances and complexities inherent within the data, researchers can refine their coding schema to capture the depth and richness of participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Second-Cycle Coding

In the second coding cycle, researchers delve deeper into the data to distill meaning units that encapsulate the essence of participants' narratives and further refine and deepen the analysis (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Building upon the foundational codes identified in the first cycle, researchers strive to uncover underlying themes and patterns that transcend individual data points (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This process involves synthesizing disparate meaning units into cohesive themes, elucidating the implicit connections and insights embedded within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I revisited the data with a specific focus on the central themes to extract additional insights, allowing for a more detailed exploration of the topic (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). By making the implicit explicit, researchers illuminate the underlying structures and

narratives that underscore participants' experiences, thereby enriching the interpretive depth of the analysis (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis was the next step after the data analysis has been coded into meaning units (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Themes are recurring ideas, concepts, or topics that emerge from the data, while patterns are systematic relationships or similarities across different data sources (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Each theme was defined and described in detail, and a clear, concise name was given to the themes that reflect their content and meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Thematic analysis offers flexibility and adaptability, making it suitable for various research questions and contexts, exploring complex phenomena, uncovering rich insights, and generating new knowledge grounded in the data (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

This study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps for the thematic analysis process: 1) familiarize yourself with the data, 2) generalize initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) review themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. Braun and Clarke (2006) posited that thematic analysis offers a rich and detailed account of the data, identifying patterns or themes across and within data. Data collection methods for narrative life stories offer unique opportunities to understand individuals' experiences, perspectives, and journeys (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2005). Interviews, oral histories, and diaries are just a few methods to collect and analyze these stories (Polkinghorne, 2005; Prosek & Gibson, 2021). By employing these techniques, researchers can uncover valuable insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of human experiences and inform various fields of study by presenting the findings coherently (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 3 illustrates the thematic analysis process.

Table 3*Thematic Analysis Process*

Phase	Description of steps taken
1. Familiarizing yourself with the data	This includes transcribing verbal data, reading and rereading transcripts, noting initial ideas, and organizing stories into chronological order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data.
2. Generating initial codes	Involves first-cycle coding, where interesting features of the data are systematically coded across the entire dataset. Relevant data are collated under each code.
3. Searching for themes	Second-cycle coding involves focused coding to collate codes into potential themes. All data relevant to each potential theme is gathered, and relationships between codes and possible themes are examined.
4. Reviewing themes	Themes are connected in relation to codes extracted in the first and second cycles. A thematic map of the analysis is started to visualize the connections.
5. Defining and naming themes	The analysis continues to refine each theme, compiling an overall story from the data. Clear definitions and names for each theme are generated, and the thematic map is refined further.
6. Producing the report	Select compelling excerpts from the data, provide evidence of themes and write a scholarly report detailing the findings of the thematic analysis.

Note. Adapted from “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” by V. Braun and V. Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

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Member Checking

Member checking validates an interview transcript with the participant for agreement (McGrath et al., 2019; Tomaszewski et al., 2020; see Appendix F). An email communication (Appendix G) was initiated with each participant, inviting them to engage in the review process and provide feedback on the depiction of their transcripts and life narratives. This collaborative approach empowers participants to assert ownership over their stories and enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of the research findings (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). By soliciting participants' input and validation, researchers uphold principles of transparency and participant-centeredness, honoring the unique voices and lived experiences of each individual involved in the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through this iterative process of data validation and participant engagement, researchers can cultivate a sense of mutual respect and reciprocity, fostering meaningful connections with the participants and enriching the depth and authenticity of the research outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; McGrath et al., 2019).

Trustworthiness

Issues of respect for participants are always paramount (Polkinghorne, 2005). Qualitative research must provide a strategy for trustworthiness and credibility to ensure validity, such as member checking (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Member checking is a crucial validation technique in qualitative research that involves returning to participants to verify the accuracy and credibility of the research findings, interpretations, or themes derived from their data. It helps ensure that my interpretations align with the participants' perspectives and experiences (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Member checking is a valuable method for enhancing the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research by involving participants in the interpretation process and ensuring that their voices are accurately represented in the findings (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). I

maintained detailed research process documentation, including data collection, analysis, and decision-making. Maintaining accuracy allows others to trace the my steps and assess the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Ethical Considerations

When collecting life story data, it is crucial to consider ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and the potential impact of the research on participants (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Polkinghorne, 2005). Ethical dilemmas may arise when handling sensitive or traumatic experiences, and researchers should be prepared to provide appropriate support or referrals when needed (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Researchers should also be mindful of the power dynamics inherent in the data collection and strive to ensure that participants' voices and experiences are respected and represented authentically (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Polkinghorne, 2005).

This study followed the IRB protocol: informed consent process, participant recruitment, data collection and management, safety monitoring, reporting requirements, communication with the IRB, continuing review, and closure of the study and ensure that all research activities adhere to the protocol approved by the IRB (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). This includes following Abilene Christian University IRB-approved research methods, procedures, data collection instruments, and any specific guidelines or restrictions outlined in the approval. I provided potential participants with clear and understandable information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality measures, and their rights as participants (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Polkinghorne, 2005). I also obtained written informed consent from participants before their involvement in the study and ensured that recruitment materials accurately represented the study and did not unduly influence potential participants to participate.

I protected the confidentiality and privacy of participants' data throughout the research process, including data collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Polkinghorne, 2005). The participants were given pseudonyms and no identifiable information, such as age or institution location was included in the final research text. With the consent of participants, I recorded interviews using an audio or video recording device, such as an iPhone camera or laptop computer. During the interview, I also took notes using a notepad or iPad to help capture critical points. The recordings were uploaded and stored on an encrypted, password-protected laptop and transcribed verbatim to facilitate analysis; any printed notes were then stored in a safe locker. It is essential to adhere to ethical principles when handling data from interviews.

I clearly explained the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and any potential risks or benefits. The participants were ensured they understood their rights and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. According to IRB guidelines, the data will be digitally shredded using a secure file shredder after 3 years. Securely File Shredder is a free file shredder software that offers several shredding methods to permanently erase files from a computer (Securely File Shredder, 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Participants were assumed to respond openly and honestly to the interview questions. Assumption of participant authenticity means the researcher assumes participants provide truthful and accurate accounts of their life stories. It is essential to recognize that participants may have memory biases, selectively share certain aspects of their stories, or present themselves in a socially desirable manner (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Palinkas et al., 2015). A significant limitation of this study is that purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings

(Palinkas et al., 2015). The findings may not represent the larger population since participants are selected based on specific criteria. However, the focus of qualitative research, including narrative research, is often on exploring in-depth understandings rather than generalizability (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Delimiting the data collection methods, such as interviews or written narratives, and the 2-year employment requirement impact the depth and type of data collected (Palinkas et al., 2015). The research study is also confined to HSIs in Texas, and the results may not be applicable in other geographical areas. Recognizing and addressing these assumptions, limitations, and delimitations in qualitative narrative life story study is essential for maintaining research integrity and ensuring that findings are appropriately interpreted and applied.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, the narrative research tradition is the best qualitative approach to answer the research questions fully and successfully and, therefore, meet this study's purpose. The purpose of this qualitative life story narrative study was to understand the experiences of LHSILRs during middle adulthood and their perceptions of the factors, if any, that may influence their leadership development in HSIs in Texas. This chapter has detailed descriptions of how a qualitative life story narrative (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) study allowed the understanding of the phenomena of lived experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). The narrative approach and open-ended semistructured interviews from four LHSILRs provided rich data. Using an inductive approach with transcription, thematic coding, chronological ordering, member checking, coding (first and second cycles), and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) provided a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences. This chapter also described the ethical principles and limitations of the study. I followed all the Abilene Christian

University's IRB guidelines. The findings of this research are presented in Chapter 4, along with any identified themes, as connections between codes identified after coding the data collected during the participant interviews. A call to participate was sent, and even though I was expecting three participants, four individuals that met the criteria were accepted to participate in this study.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the qualitative life story narrative of four LHSILRs. The purpose of this qualitative life story narrative study was to understand the experiences of LHSILRs during middle adulthood and their perceptions of the factors, if any, that may influence their leadership development in HSIs in Texas. I sought to understand the leadership development perspective of Latina leaders in HSIs in Texas. Three broad questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their personal experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ2: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their professional experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ3: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) describe their mentorship experiences, if applicable, within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences contribute to their leadership development?

First, this chapter begins with the description of the current context of HSIs in Texas. Following the context is a review of the methodology, and next, the participants' narratives are presented as third-person portraits. The portrait of each participant will include a synopsis of their background and their current leadership roles. Lastly, Chapter 4 concludes with the emergent themes and subthemes discovered through analyzing the participants' life stories during middle adulthood.

Study Context

COVID-19 Pandemic Effects

Before presenting the participant's story, it is important to examine the cultural context during the development of this study. The change in dynamics due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic are still felt in the world of academia. The context of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be separated from this study. The effects of the pandemic impacted me, the participants, their institutions, families and their communities.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with social turmoil has exposed an undeniable leadership crisis in higher education across the United States (Ortega et al., 2024). In 2020, little did we expect the world as we know it would come to a standstill (Aristovnik et al., 2020). The Wuhan virus would slowly make its way across the globe and bring with it widespread death, grief, fear, and anxiety (De, 2020). This virus spread with vigor across the United States. By mid-March of 2020, schools across the United States began closing their doors. This closure affected millions of students (Aristovnik et al., 2020; De, 2020). This led to a shift in educational platforms. Schools transitioned from in-person learning to online/remote learning (De, 2020). After the summer, schools began preparing to reopen. This meant challenges for health and safety protocols, such as mask mandates, social distancing, and regular disinfecting of surfaces. Some schools experienced outbreaks leading to closures and further disruptions (Chakraborty & Kar, 2021).

By 2021 the World Health Organization (WHO) released vaccines to high-risk populations and then educators (Jebril, 2020). With the vaccine rates increasing, pressure was placed on schools to reopen (De, 2020). In the summer of 2021, the academic setbacks became

apparent. The need for summer programs, tutoring and interventions was part of the back-to-school plan for schools (Chakraborty & Kar, 2021).

The COVID-19 fear was beginning to tone down, but in 2022 the Omicron Variant surged, leading to similar restrictions seen in 2020 (Lenharo, 2023). The focus was not only on school learning loss and physical health, but mental health as well (Chakraborty & Kar, 2021). The shift from hustle and bustle in-person interactions to isolation and online nonphysical interactions created an unhealthy mindset for many (De, 2020).

Today, in 2024, the COVID-19 virus and its Omicron Variant solidified a new learning for the world (Aristovnik et al., 2020; De, 2020; Lenharo, 2023). The learning loss gap is slowly ending as students have returned to classrooms and there have not been any recent outbreaks that warrant school closures (De, 2020). Nonetheless, we are more likely to meet with people that we do not closely interact with, via online platforms rather than in person. This is true for me as well. The participants agreed to meet via online platforms for convenience and safety.

Creating Hispanic-Serving Institutions

HSIs were established as a result of a long political battle aimed at addressing the educational needs of the growing Latino population in Texas (Garcia, Núñez et al., 2019). The creation of HSIs was driven by the recognition among Texas educational leaders of the urgent need to close the educational attainment gaps faced by Latinos, who had historically been underserved by traditional higher education systems (Venegas, 2021). Today, Texas is home to 101 designated HSIs, a testament to the state's ongoing commitment to enhancing educational opportunities for Latino students (¡Excelencia in Education!, 2023).

The majority of these HSIs enroll a significantly higher percentage of Latino students than the 25% required for the HSI designation (Venegas, 2021). According to a recent study

conducted by ¡Excelencia in Education! (2021), 48% of the enrolled students are of Latin or Hispanic descent. Moreover, many of these students come from low-income backgrounds, making the role of HSIs even more critical in providing access to higher education (Flores & Park, 2015; Venegas, 2021). The financial support that these institutions receive is pivotal in offering a range of services designed to support the academic and social needs of Hispanic students (Flores & Park, 2015). This includes targeted initiatives to help Latinas reach their full educational potential, which is crucial given the additional barriers they often face in their academic journeys (Calderón et al., 2012).

At the core of HSIs is an organizational culture that positions faculty and institutional leaders as agents of change, actively working to ensure equitable outcomes and experiences for all students (Garcia, 2019). These institutions are not only advancing the educational achievements of Latino communities but are also fostering an inclusive environment that is essential for promoting educational equity and access (Flores & Park, 2015). Texas HSIs have received over \$331 million in unique federal grants over the last 25 years to support student success (¡Excelencia in Education!, 2021). By providing comprehensive support to Latinos, including women Latinas, HSIs are playing a vital role in empowering the broader Hispanic community. The work of HSIs ultimately contributes to making a positive societal impact, ensuring that more Latino students can achieve their educational goals and contribute meaningfully to society (Calderón et al., 2012).

Texas Law Changes

It was in the 1980s when the federal government began recognizing HSIs, providing them with eligibility for specific grants and funding (Ching, 2022; Ledesma, 2017). This recognition pushed Texas institutions with significant Latino populations to adapt their leadership strategies

to better serve these students and meet the criteria for HSI designation (Ching, 2022; Cuellar, 2019; Flores & Park, 2015; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Ledesma, 2017; Noopila & Pichon, 2022).

In 2001, the Texas House passed the Texas Dream Act, House Bill 1403 to allow undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition at Texas public colleges and universities (Locke & Gonzalez, 2019). In 2015, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board launched the 60x30TX plan, aiming for 60% of Texans aged 25-34 to hold a degree or certification by 2030 (Edmonson & Hynes, 2020). This led to a push on higher education leaders to focus on increasing educational attainment across the state, particularly among historically underrepresented groups.

In 2021, the Texas House Bill 3979 and Senate Bill 3 (CRT Bills) restricted how race and history could be taught in public schools and higher education (Fay et al., 2021; Sánchez et al., 2021). Most recently in 2023, the Supreme Court ruling on Affirmative Action and DEI initiatives were called into a reevaluation of the diversity strategies and support services provided to students (Hernández, 2023). These events have forever reshaped the leadership landscape of Texas' higher education.

Senate Bill 17

Senate Bill 17, signed by Governor Greg Abbott on June 14, 2023, prohibits state funded universities from organizing and maintaining an office focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. This also includes hiring an employee to carry out the duties of a DEI office. Institutions are barred from requesting DEI statements from job applicants or favoring candidates based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin (McGee, 2023). Additionally, any compulsory diversity training centered on race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual

orientation is prohibited. This bill requires Texas universities to be complying by January 1, 2024, with routine audits conducted every 2 years. According to an NBC news report in May of 2024, the University of Texas system has eliminated a combined 681 contracts, programs, and trainings related to DEI initiatives among the nine academic and five health campuses, along with 311 full and part time employees effectively since January 1, 2024 (Arkin, 2024). Salazar Montoya (2024) posited that colleges and universities are responsible for preparing the next generation of school leaders, and restricting the use of DEI initiatives in higher education directly impacts the future leadership in Pre-K–16 schools.

DEI helped individuals achieve their aspirations and played a vital role in shaping the culture of educational institutions. DEI created environments that were more inclusive, culturally aware, and responsive to the diverse needs of students, ultimately enhancing the educational landscape (Salazar Montoya, 2024). The impact of racial discrimination is felt in underresourced communities, unequal public schools and unaccumulated generational wealth (Landry-Thomas, 2024). Antonio Ingram, assistant counsel at the national Legal Defense Fund, reminded us that when considering the purpose of DEI initiatives, it is important to recall the historical patterns, laws and policies that were enacted that led to inequalities in higher education, and view DEI as not an unfair advantage, but as restoration (The Daily Texan, 2023).

Role of the Narrative Researcher

Similarly, it is important to review Chapter 3's examination of my role as a researcher in the collection of stories and process of analysis. Researchers can adjust their approach based on the narratives as they unfold, ensuring that essential aspects of the stories are not overlooked (Clandinin, 2006). Narrative research seeks to understand individuals' meaning-making processes to interpret and make sense of their experiences (Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020).

By recognizing that individuals interpret and construct their realities differently, the research will explore multiple viewpoints to understand the same phenomenon (Clandinin, 2006; McAlpine, 2016).

Methodological Organization of the Findings

Before presenting the participants' narratives and the emerging themes, it is essential to revisit the methodology described in Chapter 3. I conducted open-ended, semistructured interviews to capture the life stories of four LHSILRs in Texas, (see Appendix J). To ensure transcription accuracy, I reviewed each transcript alongside the audio recordings and organized them chronologically. Using an inductive approach with two-cycle coding and qualitative data analysis software, I identified categories and themes to understand the participants' lived experiences. This process revealed three main themes, and seven subthemes. Subsequently, I selected interview excerpts to illustrate each theme and subtheme. Appendix H includes a sample of the codes and interview excerpts.

Participants

A call to participate was sent, and even though I was expecting three participants, four individuals that met the criteria were accepted to participate in this study. All four participants serve in a leadership role in a Hispanic-serving institution in Texas. Each participant's specific role varied within institutions; however, one participant was an associate vice president, the second an associate dean, the third a director and the fourth also a director. Table 4 aligns the participants' pseudonyms, years of experience in their role, and years of experience in higher education. Pseudonyms were provided for anonymity of the participants.

Table 4*Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Years in leadership role within an HSI in Texas	Years in higher education
Anita	4 years (associate vice president/executive director)	15+
Esther	4 years (associate dean)	14+
Cynthia	3 years (director)	8+
Victoria	2 years (director)	2.5+

Portraits

For this study, each participant was introduced with a detailed third-person portrait that provided a comprehensive overview of their background, including their personal journey, educational achievements, and the experiences that have shaped their leadership style. These portraits also highlight their current leadership roles at Texas HSIs, emphasizing their contributions and the unique challenges they face within these institutions. Following each portrait, the participants' narratives offer deeper insights into their perspectives, strategies, and the impact they aim to make in fostering inclusive and equitable environments in higher education.

The portraits align with life story research (Etherington, 2009; McAdams, 2001), in-depth case study research (Flyvbjerg, 2006), narrative profiles (Seidman, 2006), structural narrative analysis (Labov & Waletzky, 1997) and, by doing so, the method captures rich material that often escapes the scope of other forms of analysis. (Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020, p. 613)

By presenting these narratives, the study not only sheds light on the individual experiences of these leaders but also underscores the broader implications for leadership in diverse educational settings.

Portrait of Anita

Anita shares her experiences in middle adulthood as the fuel that propelled her ascent into leadership in HSIs through the tough times as a single parent. She recounts the influence of her family and the dynamics she possessed to succeed, despite her circumstances, in earning her doctoral degree. Anita has more than 15 years in higher education all within HSIs in Texas. She previously served as deputy to the chancellor for 11 years and was an executive director for an educational partnership program for 4 years. Anita is currently the associate vice president/executive director at a 4-year university in central Texas.

Anita advocates equally for her team as well as those she encounters throughout her day. She draws on her past experiences to support Latinas in various ways, from offering daily advice to assisting with career negotiations. Her expertise in educational partnerships and leadership roles gives her the influence to drive meaningful change and create opportunities for diverse students and communities.

Anita's Story

Episode 1: Middle Adulthood College Experience

I went to school a little bit later in life. And when I was an undergrad, again, back then, it wasn't anywhere as diverse as it is now. I had a daughter. I was a single parent. And I was working on my master's at the time, again, much later in life. So probably, I'd say 5 or 6 years after I earned my master's and I was working on my doctorates when I moved to this city. I went through different leadership classes and things like that. But it was

disappointing because-- so that would be the one word I would use to describe it because I was really-- because nobody in my family went to college-- I was first-gen. So, it wasn't like I had someone I could look to be a mentor or nobody from high school, like teachers or anything like that. And then I started with my doctoral internship at a community college.

I remember hearing one time-- there was a question posed to a group, and they said, "When was the first time you had a teacher that looked like you?" And I was thinking, "Hmm." I had a teacher in high school. She was Latina. But other than that, it was at the university. And I never had a Latina teacher. And so that wasn't until I was at the university, which was really unfortunate because I think about my high school, it was predominantly-- well, yeah, I guess it was-- I don't know what the makeup was probably 60% [Hispanic].

A lot of people in my doctorate program, they wanted to be presidents, college presidents, university presidents, because my doctorate's is in higher ed administration. And it's like I thought, "Well, yeah, that might be kind of cool to do that." I mean, some of them were like determined. They were going to say, "By the time I'm 40, I'm going to do this," and on and on. And I really wasn't ever that driven.

Relationships and Cultural Roles. I got married right out of high school, yeah, 18. I had my daughter. Got divorced by the time I was 20. And so I was divorced for 20 years. I was divorced a long time. And I met my now husband, and I told my mom "Oh, yeah. He's a nice man." And she said, "Does he know you're in school?" And I said, "Yeah." I said, "Yeah." She said, "He knows you're working on your master's?" And I said, "Yeah." She said, "And he's okay with it?" She said, "Is he Latino?" I said, "Yeah." And she said,

"Okay, Mija, is he okay with it?" And I said, "Yeah, I think he kind of likes it." I mean, he's very supportive, and she said, "Okay." And I thought, "What an interesting question. But in her own way, she's saying, "Don't stop because of a man-- because of him and maybe Latino stereotypes or whatever. Because dad would say, "Get in the kitchen and go help your mom. You can't make arroz How are you going to ever find a husband?" My dad always said, "If I couldn't make arroz, I was never going to find a husband."

Episode 2: Middle Adulthood Higher Educational Opportunities

Navigating on My Own. And so a lot of the opportunities I had to kind of seek out on my own. And I was working full-time and that kind of thing, which was sort of unheard of back then because students were expected to attend full-time. And it was kind of interesting back then. If you weren't going to take a full load, you had to have a document signed by your employer saying why you couldn't work full-time. So every semester, that I worked for a VP at a community college, I had to have him sign saying that I worked full-time and that I couldn't take a full load. So those were some personal decisions I had to make because, again, I was a single parent and going to school full-time and I mean, going to school and then working full-time. It was a challenge.

So, when you think about people who see themselves in their teachers from day one—and so there's, I think, a different level of maybe comfort that comes with that. But for Latinas, it's like yeah, never—I mean, it wasn't until much later that you see somebody. So, it's kind of kind of lonely. I tried to provide what I was never given. I just wanted to be in a role that I found fulfilling and rewarding and where I could help, where I could help Latinos. I wanted to be able to be somewhere where I could help first-gen students, basically, because I didn't have a lot. So, I just wanted to be somewhere where I

could help them and make sure that they have the resources they needed. Then I was executive director of a nonprofit of the educational partnership, which was a college access nonprofit. So, they would help students. Anybody who came through the door, they'd help you figure out how to navigate the college/university process.

Now I'm able to help students every day. My staff meet with students all the time, and we're able to put the resources where we need to, where we can try to help students. We have career services and internships, employer relationship engagements, and workforce development. But one of the things that I think is so important is we teach students how to network.

Networking. But that networking piece, because I look at my kids, they went with two events with us, with my husband and me. If we had extra seats or whatever, we would take them so they would be exposed to that kind of thing. And how you make that chit chat at networking events and things like that. And so they were exposed to that kind of thing. But early on, I mean, I had never attended anything like that until I was in my late 20s, early 30s, and I'm trying to figure out, "Oh, my gosh. Look at all these forks and everything." And having that conversation. How do you have a conversation if you're shy, you're not really confident, but finding that calming ground of things to talk about. And now I have to say it's so easy, but trying to help students do that because if your parents can't pick up the phone and just call a friend that's a lawyer, "Oh, you want to go shadow them? Oh, okay." Or networking events or, "Oh, come to this chamber gala with us." And you can meet all these different people or something, whatever it is. And I want students to feel comfortable.

Our former president, the Latina, she was always really good about inviting students to sit at her table. Whenever we had an event at a chamber gala or different events, she would have half the table of students filled with students. And I loved it. What a great experience for them to be exposed to that. So yeah. So I'm glad that we're able to do that.

Mentoring. There was a mentor program, and you could have a mentor at the college, or you could take somebody outside of college. You could go ask somebody, but I needed to know who your mentor was. I was overseeing the program. And this one student said, "I really want to go and talk to the CEO of a large corporation. It's a big company here. And she said, "I used to work there a long time ago, and I always admired his leadership, and I'd love to have him as a mentor." And I said, "Are you going to ask him?" And she said, "Do you think I should?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "All he can do is say no. He says no. You're in the same place you were." I said, "Yeah." And so she made an appointment with him to go see him, which, of course, was an ordeal in itself. But he said yes. And everybody was shocked. It's like, Oh, my gosh. Great. He's going to be your mentor. She said, 'I introduced myself and I scheduled time with him 30 minutes and explained why I wanted him as a mentor.' And they agreed to meet once a month kind of thing. But I was really proud of that. And I was so proud of her for doing that. You know what? Go up and ask. You never know. You never know. And that's how you make things happen. I feel like that was something, again, that I really lacked, but we were able to help students with that exposure. Because a lot of cases, it is who you know. And when you're looking for a job, and unfortunately, sometimes it is. You got to know people. [laughter] put yourself out there.

Episode 3: Middle Adulthood Professional Development

I think part of it, too, was getting to the point where you are more confident, and you are willing to ask for professional development and understanding the importance and the value of that. I see the opportunities that are provided here. And there are some people who are just like, "No, I am good." But I think, "Wow, these opportunities are being availed to you and you are not taking advantage of them." And for example, I always tell my staff, here, and when I was at community colleges as well, I asked, 'If there is an area you want to learn more about, if you want to shadow, if you want to learn more about budget, if you want to learn more about being a president of one of the colleges or something, let me know. And then I can help you figure out how to do that, whether it job shadowing or whatever it is, or you can take courses.' But let me know where if you want to grow within higher education, let me know which areas because it is hard to make that jump unless you have learned more about it and such. And I can help you. I am glad to help.

And so when I think about leadership development, again, it is a little bit different. But here, there are a lot of different programs. For example, through the Hispanic Chamber, or there is a leadership program for Latinas specifically within the city. And even though some of the programs are not specifically for Latinas, there is always typically strong representation there. I applied for leadership [Texas City A], just because I thought, "I think this will help me grow." And I joined the board of the Hispanic Chamber, their education committee, and things like that. But trying to navigate that and figure out, "Okay, what is going to help me grow professionally and personally so that I will be a better mother and a better employee and be able to do things that I want

to do in my life, in my career." So it was not easy, but yeah, trying to figure out what those avenues are and, again, not having any role models. And so trying to navigate all of that on my own and try to figure out what I needed.

Again, I went through leadership programs and I was one-- it was like a cohort of maybe 18, and there were two of us, I think, that were Latinas in there. So it was so different than it is here. And I think when I went through leadership development programs, it was almost like you are representing Latinas. And so you had to really be strong and be confident and all of that. It kind of felt like that because it's like, "Wow. There is not anybody else here to represent Latinas." Here, it is a little bit different. And because there is less pressure, maybe. But you are still confident, still strong, and all of that. But it is more collegial. I do not know if that makes sense. But here, you are not wearing that badge. It is just who you are.

Now I'm That Person. And then as I got older, more experienced, and I thought, "You know what? I'm going to seek this out. I am going to ask for funds to attend this conference." And even if it was something where I would split the cost with them, or maybe I just needed the time off, I will pay for this opportunity, but I want the time off kind of thing, so trying to negotiate I think that early on in my career, too, I did not realize negotiating anything was an option. And it really is. And especially when it comes to your professional development. I never took risks. I did not go question a professor about a grade or anything like that. I did not take enough risks or ask enough questions or push back on things. I just was always accepting of whatever came my way.

Probably when I was about 40. [laughter] As I got older, and I noticed-- I think maybe that was it because I had my doctorate and I was thinking, personally, I like to run,

and I like long-distance running, and so I have run some marathons. And so I will often think, "Okay. I can do this." Because for me personally, that was a big challenge. So it is like, "Okay. I run marathons. I have my doctorate. I can do this." And it does not have to be that, but I always encourage people think about these things you have accomplished, how you have gotten to this point. And I mean, there is a lot behind that. And then how you go in with that confidence and help build that confidence, 40, in my opinion, was too late. I mean, not too late. But it should have been sooner-- I see folks here in their 20s, and I am thinking, "Wow, this is great. I love that you are pushing back on this." And even though it does not make my life easier, with staff or something, I am thinking, "Good for you. I am glad you are questioning." Or we had a listening session with the president, and I would see young people, Latinas, asking questions. And I am thinking, "That is great. I am really glad." And I try to give those opportunities to other people too.

"When did I become the oldest person in the room?" Because when I was younger, when I was in my 20s or something, and I would be in meetings, and I would think, gosh, how does she do that? She always knows what to say. She always speaks up. And of course, I am a 20-something-year-old and just timid and everything else. And then as I have gotten older, I am thinking, Now, I am that person. I am that person, the oldest in the room. And you learn. It just comes from experience and wisdom and just life, that you learn those things. And so, I am really grateful for that. But it is just funny because you look around at some point in your life, you look around and it is like, wow, I think I am probably the oldest woman in here.

The other thing I learned, and this was part of-- it was one of our Diversity Equity and Inclusion trainings that we went to. It was about microaggressions. And it was

talking about how we all have all of us have some innate, I guess, prejudices or something. But it said, "So think about you walk into a meeting and the makeup of the group." So if I were to walk into a meeting and it is all white males, what mechanisms start or what wheels start turning in my head? If I walk into a room and it's all Latinas my age, what kind of attitude do I have about that? If I walk into a room and it is all really young, diverse young people.

So, you can kind of think about that and think about maybe I do have some prejudices because in one scenario, yeah, I will walk in and feel totally comfortable. It is like, "Hey," I need to start talking and everything. And then others where you might feel a little more intimidated. Some where you are thinking, "Oh, great. This isn't going to go well." And you have these preconceived notions sometimes or whatever. So, I thought that is really interesting to think about. And so, a lot of it is your attitude and your approach to things and how you are going to-- what you are open to experiencing. And again, at this age, not being intimidated by situations or groups or titles or people or anything like that. That is one of the benefits of growing older and just having been in all of those different scenarios and situations and problem-solving.

Keep Talking. One time, I was on the executive leadership team. There was one other Latina there at that time. Anyway, there was this woman. She was a CFO. She was white. And every time I was talking, she would talk over me. She would start. And I would get so mad because I would stop talking. So, I am talking, and then she would interrupt and then just start and then just take it, and then I would just stop talking. So, I was reading some articles about it and listening to some podcasts, and it said, "Don not stop talking when somebody interrupts you or they are talking over you, just keep talking." And I

thought, "That is going to be awkward because we are both going to be talking at the same time." So initially, I would say, "Oh, just a second. Let me finish my thought here or whatever." And then trying to be polite and stuff. And sometimes she would stop. Sometimes she would be very assertive. And so the first time I remember I did that, we are in an executive committee meeting, and I am talking and whatever. And then she just starts talking over me, kind of interrupting. And I just keep talking. And it was so awkward because we are both talking at the exact same time. And I was thinking, I am not going to stop talking. I am going to just keep sharing my thoughts. And it seemed to me like it was a long time. It might not have been that long. But then she just stopped talking. And then when I finished, I said, "Oh, okay. Yeah. So, what were you saying? Or you had your thoughts about it or something." So pushing yourself to do those kinds of things that are totally uncomfortable and awkward. But it's like she didn't interrupt anymore after that. It's like, Okay. So, kind of yeah, you just cannot do that or you should not just do that.

Hunger for Latina Mentorship. But I mean, obviously, there is stress involved in all of that, but trying to put things in perspective. And it is hard. And terminating people is hard. Meeting all the deadlines is-- I mean, all kinds of different situations at work that are really hard. And you just learn how to deal with them. Yeah, just figuring it all out along the way. And that would be really helpful if you have a mentor. And then as I moved into more senior roles, I have counterparts, and I have colleagues who I kind of look to as mentors. Maybe they are a little bit older. Maybe they are a little bit more experienced. Part of its age, but some of it is just experience and trying to seek their mentorship as well. But in terms of me seeking out mentors, I was really disappointed,

again, just because it was not there. But my mentors were often white women. And I was really hungry for Latina mentorship because it is a different experience. And so, I was kind of disappointed. It was when I moved to central Texas, and then I started realizing the importance of mentorship. I was really disappointed because, there was a VP who came in and she was Latina. I thought, "Oh, wow. Great. This is perfect. I want her as a mentor." But she was not very willing to do that. And I tried different ways of trying to connect with her. And for whatever reason, I do not know why, but she was not too keen on that idea. I was disappointed. But I knew there were not a lot of role models around. And so I had to decide for myself, "Okay, I think this is a good path to go on, to go by. But again, I did not have any mentors or anything, any Latina mentors or anything.

I know one of my staff said, "Gosh, how do you--" she said, "I knew you would have an answer to this kind of thing." Because at this stage in your life, you have seen a lot, and you have experienced a lot. And I know you do not get excited about situations because it is like, "All right. Well, we will figure this out. Let us see what is the real issue here. Let us try to do this." And I am not going to get frazzled about it. I am not going to whatever. But because you know, okay, we are going to figure it out, and it is not the end of the world. One of my bosses one time told me, because he said, "You get so stressed about stuff." He said, "It is not like we are generals in the army where if we make a wrong move, our troops, hundreds of lives will be lost." He used to tell me, "Just kind of chill." And I thought, "Okay, he is putting it in perspective." Because this is going to be I mean, depending on what the situation is, but this will be here tomorrow, and I can try not to lose sleep over it or whatever it is.

Episode 4: Middle Adulthood Leading in an HSI in Texas

Why Should You Earn More. And so it's kind of funny, one of my staff often reminds me about how when she interviewed for the job or-- one of my staff. And we were talking about the salary. And she said, "Oh, okay. Great. Yeah." And in not so many words, I encouraged her to negotiate. And she said, "What?" And I said, "Come back to me with the-- come back to me with justification as to why you should earn more than what I'm offering." And she's like, "Oh, okay. I can do that?" I said, "Yes, you can do that." And so she jokes. Yeah, the other day, she said, "Who does that? When they offer somebody a job, who tells them, 'Negotiate. I want to pay you more.' But wanting to teach her-- nobody ever taught me that you can negotiate. I was always the same way. It's like, Oh, wow. This is salary. Okay. Good. I never negotiated. But it's those kinds of things that I think mentors can help you with.

And I've done that a number of times. I said, "Even if -- even if they can't meet a number that you are looking for, they can come back maybe with something different." I said, "But this is the time to do it, and you have to be bold enough. You're worth it and your skills and everything." And nobody ever taught me that. And then as I saw other people do it, it's like, "Oh, wow." A lot of times I have found males, don't have a problem negotiating. And I'll say, quite frankly, white males, don't have any problem negotiating. Whereas Latinas, I have found, they often don't. They've never done that, yeah, unless I asked them to [laughter]. Yeah. So I've tried to bring that, what did I not get.

It's Okay to Speak Up. I had a student one time. I was teaching at the community colleges, and she was super quiet in class. But her papers were beautifully written. She always knocked the assignments out of the park. She was really bright. And one time I

was talking to her, and I said, "It would be great if you would share all these different ideas that you're sharing in your papers, these thoughts and ideas, share them in class too, so other people can hear them. Because I'm reading her paper, really bright. And she was really shy about it at first, but then she started speaking more and more during class. And I loved it because everybody's like, "Wow, that's a great idea," or, "Wow, I hadn't thought about that." It's okay to speak up. It's okay to. I try to instill that especially in younger women as they are emerging leaders to some of those things that I wish I had been taught or that somebody had kind of pulled me aside and told me, I didn't have that. And so that's what I would encourage a lot of these young ladies here. Speak up in class. Share your opinion. Share your thoughts. I was always so quiet, and I never thought my opinion was important or valued. And I want them to see that it is important, and others need to hear your voice as well. And just kind of put yourself out there sometimes out of your comfort zone a little bit. But make sure your voice is heard. A lot of opportunities here with all these young people here." So, I think back when I started having the confidence like, 'Oh, yeah. No. I can do this', or just speaking up on different things, and here's my opinion.

We Can't Have Those Anymore. We had a Latina president, and she just recently left. Actually, the first two presidents were Latinas here at the university. And the former president left maybe a year ago or something, we celebrated Day of the Girl. I mean, there were a lot of women's issues that took the forefront. Now we have a male president. He's great, just kind of a little bit of a different focus. He's Latino, but it's just a little bit of a different focus. The former president provided a lot of support for professional development for women. We had a program called Women at Work here where we

would bring in speakers and things like that, which was really great. Now, because of SB17, we are a little bit more limited, I think, in having those kinds of programs. Because I helped to start a DEI program and things like that but we can't have those anymore.

No Need to Apologize. I'm really proud because-- it's funny, I was in the hallway. 70% of our students are first-gen. It's probably 85% Latino here. And so I see these young Latinas, these students, a lot of them fresh out of high school, so young. Sometimes I think, "All right. Don't be a mother [laughter]." But I was in the coffee line the other day, and this young lady she was sort of-- sort of in my way, she said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry." And I said, "No." I said, "No need to apologize." I said, "You weren't even in the wrong here." And I said, "You don't need to apologize. You're standing here." And because I know that for me, I apologized all the time when I was like, "Oh, sorry." Even if it's not your fault, you just apologize. And until somebody told me one time, "Why are you always apologizing for everything. You don't have to apologize for being [laughter]." And it's like, "Oh." And it really made me realize, "Oh, yeah, I do apologize a lot."

And so that or eye contact or having a conversation or just how you conduct yourself. So again, so many opportunities to do that here with our Latinas in the coffee line, in the bookstore, on campus, whatever you're doing, just trying to be that role model for them as well. And how you conduct yourself personally, how you dress every day, and that's not all it's about, but that makes a difference too how people perceive you. And again, it's not all about how others perceive you. However, if you want to be confident, it's how you want others to see you. So how you're presenting yourself. So, I remember when I was really young, and any time I had to go to the president's office or something when I was at the community college, I was a secretary, and I always wanted to try to

present my best self when I went up there. And if I had a meeting in that area or something like that, I always wanted to, again, present my best self. And then opportunities for improvement and whether it's about-- and I don't mean to be simplistic, but whether it's about attire, how they're dressing, or maybe their attitude, or maybe how they conduct themselves in meetings, or because there are all kinds of things I did that I wish somebody had told me when I was much younger.

Latina Representation. In this city, there's a much larger, a much higher percentage of Latinas. When I was at the community colleges, I was deputy to the chancellor. And I started a leadership program there and a mentorship component with that. And I was always, gosh, we really need to have more Latinas. And a number of people reached out to me, young ladies, young women reached out to me and said, "Oh, I really love you to be my mentor. And say, Great. Yes, I'd be happy to. And I'm still in touch with some of those folks to this day. For example, in our administration-- and then I was also at another institution, I was one of many Latinas in the executive leadership. And here there is strong representation. And there are a lot of smart Latinas here. So, it's kind of a different-- almost a little bit of a different persona that you have here. [talking in comparing two HSIs in Texas] So, it's kind of varied. Because just thinking about the various experiences that I've had throughout my career, here it's very comfortable.

Portrait of Esther

Esther currently serves as an associate dean at a 2-year HSI community college in South Texas for the past 4 years. She previously served as the department chair at the same HSI community college for 12 years. She recognizes the importance of diversity and the impact her

role in leadership plays. With her commitment to fostering inclusive environments, she strives to ensure that all voices are heard and valued.

Esther acknowledges that the leadership roles she obtained in middle adulthood may not have seemed intentionally sought after, but her ability to communicate with people provided her with leadership opportunities, allowing her to embrace her full potential. Esther values the importance of using one's voice as an instrument for change.

Esther's Story

Episode 1: Middle Adulthood Early College Experience

I grew up down in South Texas, the Rio Grande Valley, and the context of my surroundings. I mean, I grew up in a predominantly Hispanic region. Although we were considered minorities back in the days. But the reality at this point is that we're the majority. The cultural influence of growing up in that environment influenced a lot of what I did in my education. As I recount, my mother and I graduated from college together with our undergraduate degrees. So that was a big influence. Knowing that my mother, who was a single mom at the time, raising four kids, had three kids in college plus herself, I don't know how that woman did it. I admire and have so much respect for her and all she accomplished. She did it, against all odds. I mean, it was not ever a question. I was going to college. So, I can appreciate, again, the struggles that a generation can have and then the generational wealth that can happen through education. It's generational wealth through education and my mother was the catapult for us and our family to pursue education, whatever goals we had were inspired by her and what she experienced at that time and who she is now.

Graduate School. Another experience that really shaped who I am as a leader was when I finished undergrad and then went to graduate school to become an occupational therapist, which is my profession. I remember going to grad school, and I was maybe one of two Latinas, and all of my peers were Anglos from around the country. It was [a Texas University]. There was only a couple of us from Texas, and the rest of my peers were all from around the country. So, growing up in a community where I was the in the majority, I went to a space in grad school up in North Texas, mind you, where I was the minority, being around Anglo-Americans and African Americans. Growing up, I was rarely around African-Americans. I can remember, there was only one African American family in my community. So, it was a cultural shock leaving where I grew up, to go to North Texas, and being a minority. When I recount that, it was a very humbling experience. It enriched my understanding of culture and embracing differences.

Episode 2: Middle Adulthood Opportunities Emerged

Recognizing that diversity is important and recognizing that in my role in the healthcare landscape, that was a critical part. So quickly I found myself in leadership roles in healthcare. It wasn't necessarily that I was intentionally making those decisions, but opportunities emerged and my ability to communicate with people started to emerge and started to embrace who I am. When I came into higher education full-time was back in 2010 was when I took the leap of faith into full-time academia. I was an adjunct and taught because I just discovered, "Oh, I actually like teaching." I wasn't ready to leave clinical practice because I loved what I was doing and by that time, I was already working in the [Texas City A] Market, and was, again, in a leadership role in a large hospital system, but started teaching where I teach now. Again, I gravitated into a

leadership role, became a department chair of the program that I was teaching in, and just started to learn about a community college because I didn't know-- anything about a community college.

Embracing the Authenticity of My Culture. How I got here is just knowing that-- you just put your mind forward no matter what the obstacles are, and you can succeed. So then when I went into practice, and I practiced in the [Texas City C] area for 20-plus years, and I got my first job as an occupational therapist in a large rehab hospital in the [Texas City D] area, I was the only Latina out of-- we had 30 or so occupational therapists, 30 or so physical therapists, 20 or so speech therapists. I was the only one Latina and one who was bilingual. I just remember time and time again when I'd walk into a patient's room who was Latina, many would say, "Oh, thank God"—“ Gracias a Dios, hablas Espanol”—and the fact that I could connect to them culturally really influenced how I continued to develop not only as a human being but as a leader. And so just embracing the authenticity of my culture and the value that I felt, during those times as a human being, being able to connect with patients, especially Hispanic or Latinos that were in a vulnerable position, they were grateful to have somebody that spoke their language. My Hispanic background has and will always influence my perspective as a leader in an HSI.

So, when I recount my story, that has informed and shaped who I am as a leader in our amazing, amazing institution. I mean, it really sparks my passion to serve because it wasn't easy for me getting started. My life could have gone so differently had it not been for my mom and her voice and what she did to have sparked generational wealth, change, and growth through education.

Episode 3: Middle Adulthood Experience With Racism

Well, What Are You? I'll never forget one experience. I remember walking into this one patient's room, and the patient had to have been in their 80s. It was an elderly person. And at the time, part of our uniform required wearing a lab coat. So potentially, somebody could think I was a doctor because we all had to wear white lab coats back in those days. I went into the patient room and introduced myself and told them who I was, what I was there for. I can still hear this person's voice. They asked, "Well, what are you?" I said, "Well, I'm Hispanic, Latina." And the person said, "No, you're not. You can't be that." And I thought to myself-- I mean, it shocked me, first of all. I said, "Well, that is who I am" and she didn't believe me.

That encounter has always hung in the back of my head because what are “we” supposed to look like? I mean, why do you think I'm not? Because I'm a professional, and I'm articulate, and I'm wearing a white coat. My takeaway from that experience and it took me reflecting over the years is that it was perhaps a generational thing, right? For her, for this person, in her generation, probably someone of color, could not be in my role or bring value and you surely didn't wear a white coat. But for me, that just taught me humility and the ignorance and the racist attitude people can have. It didn't change who I was as a healthcare provider. I still provided her with care and compassion and I didn't get offended. I did not take it personally. It was just like people are who people are. And for me, it didn't shift who I was whether she believed it or not.

That experience continued to inform my development and who I became as a Latina in leadership roles. That was an interesting experience because it helped me better understand racism and how ignorance informs a person's perception of human beings. A

lot of my growth has been through reflection. It's like we're all human beings here, right? We're all on this planet to do the best we can with the tools we learn or not learn. And for me, it was to serve and to be kind and compassionate with those I served and those I worked with.

Episode 4: Middle Adulthood Leadership Development

I always encourage up-and-coming leaders and students to be comfortable with a mentor and seeking advice and trusting others to guide you. That's how I entered into higher education because I had a mentor. When I graduated from my OT program and started practicing in the [Texas City D] market, one of my former professors at the graduate school I graduated from, she called me. And I tell this story a lot. She called me one day, and she said, "You know what? You need to come and teach with me." I was like, "What? I barely passed your class." That was the only C that I got in grad school. It was the hardest class, but it was one that I learned so much from. She saw something in me that I sure as heck did not see in myself. I was like, "Well, if you think I can teach then I'll do it." To this day I give her credit for bringing me into higher education. I just love her dearly. That's the kind of mentors I've had, the kind of people I've admired and respected in my life to guide my development.

Someone else I saw as a mentor is a Latino-- a colleague. When I was contemplating getting my doctorate degree. And then, I started it and I was like, "Oh, why am I doing this? I really don't need this for my job. I really don't. But this has always been on my bucket list, my personal list. Nobody's asking me to do this, something I've always wanted to do." And I'll never forget, he said-- because I would hit my head and say, "Why am I doing this? I don't need this." He said, "Do not be a statistic. You finish.

Do not be a statistic for Latinos that you started and didn't finish." And I hung on to that little voice. And to this day, he's a dear friend at the college and truly respects him because he, too, had his long story of getting into leadership roles in higher ed. And he's a very accomplished leader now. I see him as a mentor because that little nugget he gave me in a moment where I was like, "Oh, why am I doing this? His words of encouragement stuck in my ear. I was like, "Hell, no, I'm not going to be a statistic [laughter]. I want to be the statistic on the other side. I finished." So, to me, I see him as a mentor. Is it an official mentor? But it was someone I trusted, and he provided me with guidance and just what I needed at the moment. He knew me enough to tell me what I needed to hear, and he knew that it would impact me. To me, that's a mentor. So, to me, a mentor-- well, for me, a mentor has been someone that has seen something in me that I didn't know I was able to do, and you can't put a price on that. It's about creating a trusting relationship with someone who has your best interest at heart, who wants to see you succeed and who believes in you, guides, makes connections, and coaches; to me, that is a mentor.

In a professional work environment, people who have either because they were in a supervisor role or in other leadership roles, again, who saw something in me, and I just trusted. I trusted the person to guide me and to give me feedback. And so, when I look at the HSI institution I serve in now with other Latinas, I trust and respect their guidance. They share their own lived experience as Latinas in higher education and they inspire me to be a better leader and role model for Latinas.

For me, a mentor can be in the form of a coach, someone I trust, someone I admire and someone that I would want to emulate certain things or are the people that I

learn from. So, I haven't had, quote, what I would say, "Oh, this is a formal mentor program," per se. But I know that when I first moved into the leadership role as a department chair, I had a mentor. And that was a little bit more of a formality. But it was just for guidance for the role of the department chair, learning some of the nuances. But to me, a mentor fills personal growth and enriches who you are as a human being. That is the value that I see in a mentor and someone who displays that compassion, kindness, integrity, and listens to what you need and coaches and supports.

Your Voice Matters. I hang on to and believe my voice matters just as much as the Chancellor, the vice presidents, vice-- I mean, it doesn't matter the title. Your voice matters. And that, for me, professionally has removed what I would sometimes say is a perceived barrier(s) because nobody put them there. Just say what you need to say. Be prepared, be informed, and know your audience.

When I walk into a space at the college or within the community representing what I do, my role is to know who I'm speaking to so that my conversations, dialogue, and discussion is informed. Everyone's voice is important. Everyone has a story. And everyone's just trying to get through life the best way they can. I have learned to use my voice as a leader. And because of my own lived experiences, I listen and I tell students, my colleagues, my coworkers, those who I'm serving, "I want to hear your story." When I've had conversations with upcoming leaders who are Latinas, I can think of one right now who's asking, "How did you do it-- how have you done that? "I'm inspired to see you, a woman of color, in the role that-- how did you do that?" And the one thing I told her, I said, "You show up and be prepared to contribute to the conversation. You show up and your voice matters." I strongly believe I have a responsibility to say something

because I've had Latina students tell me, "We've seen you. We watch you. We want to be where you are." "How did you do it?" My response is always, "It's possible. You've got to do the work. You've got to show up. You have to ask for help when you need it. You've got to use your voice. Your voice matters." That's how I would respond to them personally and professionally.

You never know who is shaking in their boots and wish that they could say what you're about to say or what you've said. And that it may encourage someone or it may inspire the next generation who has started or is starting in their trajectory of development as a leader. I think that's an important part for all of us, particularly for Latinas, because there's a gender bias in leadership roles. I think our part is, again, showing up, being ready, and not being quiet. And use your voice. It matters. It counts.

Episode 5: Middle Adulthood Leading in an HSI in Texas

Always Learning. I find myself as a leader being very mindful of that and also being humbled and having cultural humility, as I'm always learning too. I'm always learning, willing, open to learning. And as a Latina woman, just in hearing other Latinas within the college, having their struggles, right? Almost a fight, if you will. I think it is-- I don't know. I've not experienced it like that for myself. I have not personally felt like it was a daily fight. And in part, because at this point in my career, I own what I believe I need to know and if not, I learn it, I know about myself. I personally have not felt discriminated upon or left behind in my work at our HSI. I've always had opportunity to engage across the college, opportunities to engage in the community.

In the world we live in and the space we're in in higher ed, that as a leader, I'm always learning. What's relevant now? What's the relevance of roles? And what are the

attributes and skills that a leader needs today? What do I need as a Latina woman to continue to serve in the very fast-moving pace and the challenges of serving in an HSI and the students we serve.

So, it's this continuous process of learning that I just embrace, this cultural humility that I'm always learning. I'm a lifelong learner. The other thing I've learned is, you never know who and when you're going to impact someone, so I take my role as a leader seriously. I treat others as I would like to be treated. I work to do the right thing or at least do the best I can with the information I have at the time and as I know more, I do better the next time.

If I recount, how does that happen? I show up. I show up. I listen. I listen to get to know people, to understand what is valued in the conversation. So that's how I navigate and-- how I navigate my professional development within my space. And I'm a woman of faith. I'm a woman of faith, and for me, that's a big part of how I do my work. I trust and I believe I'm where I'm supposed to be, and I'm supposed to be serving people. People are counting on me. Because if others are afraid to say something, those may be looking to me to say something. So in my space at an HSI, we're serving Latino students. We have a high percentage. I mean, a very high percentage, over 40% of our student population are Latinos.

Higher Ed Leaders Need to Look Like Their Students. I didn't have the privilege of going to a community college growing up. If we had them in our community, I did not know about them. I had not experienced being a student in a community college. So, when I ended up working at the college I'm at now, and I was like, "Oh my God." And I had taught at a 4-year institution also, my old alma mater. And having that experience

and then coming to teach in a community college, I thought, "Oh, my gosh." It was like a kid in a candy store. The more I learned about the mission of the college, and then the more I learned about what a HSI represents and the alignment to who I am as a human being and my purpose and value of serving. It was easier for me to be a leader because I understood the value of culture, the value of differences. As I continued to develop myself as a leader, as a human being and as a leader in a HSI, I could understand some of the challenges that our students face, particularly our students of color. Not that white students don't have challenges too. Absolutely. But if you look at the data, the disparity, then I could relate to the story of the student who was perhaps in a single-family home, living in poverty, or have parents working multiple jobs-- my grandparents' generation, we've had generational growth and wealth in our family.

For many years, and this is common, not only in our institution, but the argument has been and continues to be that in higher ed leaders need to look like they're students. We have had a gap, and we continue to work to close it. Over the past-- I would say the past 7 to 10 years, there's been a big shift and there are more Latinas in leadership roles, and there are more African Americans in leadership roles. Because particularly as an HSI, it's one thing to have the designation of an HIS, but you've got to do the work. Otherwise, it's just all talk. From my perspective, I am proud to say that the leaders, women of color, Latina and African American leaders that I see at our institution, we're using our voice. It's been also really nice to have other leaders who look like me in leadership roles, either at my level and above, that there's a sense of camaraderie. I recognize that I am serving as a role model for the next generation of Latina leaders in

higher education, specifically a community college, HSI, and for that, I am humbled and grateful.

So, now as a leader in my role now at an institution that is very focused on serving those who are underserved and using data, I've come to embrace the value of data to inform a story or narrative. My dissertation research was informed by qualitative methods. Quantitative data are valuable; however, those are numbers which is only part of the narrative and that data are needed. But I want to know who the person is behind that number. And as a leader, and perhaps because of my story. I've been in a leadership role at the college, since 2010, and in this specific role, since 2020. When I look at Latinas within our institution and leadership roles, that's been a very interesting experience because it has shifted.

Emotional Intelligence. The COVID-19 pandemic not only tested my agility as a leader but also provided an opportunity to significantly improve my emotional intelligence (EI). This growth in EI was crucial in effectively guiding students and faculty through unprecedented challenges. Here's how I enhanced various aspects of my emotional intelligence. My self-awareness, meaning I had to recognize my stress responses and emotional reactions to the crisis so that I could make effective decisions during uncertain times. I also had to acknowledge areas where I needed support or additional expertise before I responded to faculty and students. As a leader during this time, I had to develop and use strategies to manage my stress and maintain composure so that I could serve effectively.

This experience influenced and enhanced my leadership skills and taught me what it is to be resilient in the face of rapidly changing circumstances. The pandemic also

enhanced my effective ability to resolve conflict resolution arising from the pandemic's challenges that students were facing. Given the diverse population at my institution, this overall experience enhanced my ability to understand and respond to culturally specific emotional expressions and needs. Lastly, my growth in EI has made me more adept at navigating the complex human dynamics in higher education, particularly in the context of serving diverse populations at HSIs.

Portrait of Cynthia

Cynthia is currently a director at a 4-year university in central Texas and has held this position for the last 3 years. Cynthia previously served in an assistant director leadership role for 3 years in an HSI in Central Texas. In all she has held several inaugural leadership roles in an HSI 4-year university for the past 10 years. Cynthia humbly leads Latinas in many organizations that promote leadership development. She constantly celebrates the accomplishments of others and embraces her contribution to equity for Latinas.

Cynthia takes her role as an advocate for students very seriously. Her father greatly influenced her leadership style in higher education during middle adulthood. His challenge to her was to find ways to serve the community and his example is the inspiration she uses to make decisions that affect her staff and the students she serves. She continuously seeks innovative solutions to address community needs and enhance the educational experience for everyone involved. She serves on a commission for her city and sits on a board of directors as well as chamber leaderships.

Cynthia's Story

Episode 1: Middle Adulthood Early College Experience

A Fathers Influence. If you look at my desk, I have my father's picture right there, right, because he was my biggest advocate, my biggest cheerleader, but also the one that kept me aligned quite a bit when I'd get a little shaky on things. My father took his girl-dad role very seriously. He enrolled in junior college for a technical degree when I was a junior in high school so we would graduate at the same time. He was just one of those people that he's like, "Mi hija, you always have to uplift the community around you." So he was one that everyone knew they can go to Micah and ask for help. It didn't matter what it was. If someone needed something, they went to him for the most random things, sometimes.

Small Town Roots. I grew up in a very small town, so in a town called [Asada?], Texas. I think, at the time, the population was maybe 200 people. Even going to school, it was 2% of individuals went to school, and then it got even shorter of attainment. So, it was one of those when I went to college even the first time, right, I had a lot of imposter syndrome. I didn't know why I needed to go to college. And it was then that I realized like, "You've got to show up for others." And that was because of him. That he's always saying, "Don't get complacent." I think even his approach, I always saw him get involved, whether it was through volunteering. I even learned later in life that he was commissioner for our county 1 year. I'm like, "You never told me that." Right?

Episode 2: Middle Adulthood Early Career

Community Minded. And when I started talking about this with him, he was like, "I challenge you to say, okay, your job is important to you, but what else are you doing for

others around you?" Right? "How are you being community-minded?" And I'm glad that he instilled that, even though there are some days that are absolutely exhausting. But my heart is full at the end of the day, too. I'm proud of the legacy I'm starting and where it's going. I'm horrible about speaking to my own wins, but I will speak to others' wins all day, every day. It's one of those-- I don't know if it's where it's very collective in terms of our society, our culture. Right? I want to be the biggest cheerleader for everyone else around me, and I forget about me sometimes. And so that's what I'm still working on, to kind of say, 'Okay, well, hey, you need to celebrate because you did have to do a really big lift there. It's okay to acknowledge that.' Right? Not everybody could do that, and that's all right. I'm working on that part. I'm humble to a fault, I think, on some things. Every day I do good, I'm doing good for them. So, it is pretty critical to me.

Servant Leadership. So much so, now I serve on one of the commissions with the city of [Texas City B] . I've made it to be a point on a board of directors earlier in my career, and still now, to this day, I've been in chamber leaderships. And I don't think I would have done that without his push, and really wanting to be excellent for not only myself, again, but for my family.

So, I will say a lot of my career is in career services. So that's why I have a different experience because learning my job most of my life has been talking about the professional background. And so, Student Affairs is you are constantly moving. Even this summer-- people think we have off. Absolutely not, right? The moment a class graduates, guess what? Orientation's right around the corner. So, we're in active onboarding role and then getting ready for the fall semester. So, it's full scope. That's very easy to forget unless we actually document those wins and we have something to reflect on.

I find it really useful because it's one of those that I do challenge them quite a bit at the end of our mentee-mentor meetings. I always give them homework, right, but I actually ask them, "How do you want to get out of your comfort zone?" But I also ask for the feedback for myself because I think it's something that is an opportunity for reverse mentorship. I reckon I'm still kind of learning in the industry in terms of senior-level leadership. I understand entry at a certain point, but also entry has evolved so much that I want to stay abreast on it. So, I really do kind of cone in on them and what they're looking for as well, and how they want to grow in industry, and if there's any opportunity to be created there.

Nonprofit to Higher Education. And it actually took one of my students to tell me about, "Hey, did you know that colleges have this role that you do today in the nonprofit world?" Right? So, my first job in higher ed was actually at a community college. It was one of those I was very much green. Right? And then just being able to advocate for myself was very hard at first. I am now at this point in my career where I am mid-manager. Right? And I've been in higher ed about 14 years. I'm 40. For myself, I will say, when I started here, I'd been here about 10 and a half years, I was a career advisor, and I had just finished my graduate degree and I was really excited. Right? I was like, "Ooh, yay me." And I talked to my supervisor, and she's like, "Well, unfortunately, there's not a career ladder just yet." Because you're talking about, at that time, we were one building. And it made sense. Right? I had to go to the annex campus. I got it. And I was like, "Well, okay."

Speaking Up. And as things started getting busier and I started to oversee more things, I had to speak up for myself. I was like, "I really understand that. But I think this

is opportunity that if there's not a set career ladder, let's start building a plan to make that. I really feel like I've had the value of being an assistant director. This is the direction I want to go into." And then, finally, I got bumped into the assistant director, and then I moved into the associate director during COVID. And then even at that stage, I was like, "Oh, I really want to be a director." Right? So, I started having those conversations. I recognized that the parts that I was missing in director I started scheduling informational interviews to kind of assess where my gaps were. Because I recognized budget management at that time really was my like, "I have no idea how to do this." Right? So, I scheduled time to meet with other directors at other systems schools because we are part of a larger network of campuses. And that helped me a lot because that also allowed me to start saying, "Well, this is what I need here, but then this is how I want to forecast to get us to those larger numbers, right, because in time, we're going to be a bigger school." And then I was really fortunate. After having those conversations within a year, I became a director. And I think it was one that was, at first. I was scared to talk about that. But it's like, "Well, I've earned it. I've done my time. I've done above and beyond. I've set a new standard. I feel like I'm worthy of that. And yes, we haven't done it before, but why don't we start that?"

And I'm really proud of that. Even in my division, I was the second assistant director, the first associate director. And then I'm, actually, the inaugural for this role. So, I've been the inaugural for three or four of my jobs here. So, I'm very grateful. And it wasn't until I actually spoke that I would have done that.

Episode 3: Middle Adulthood Leadership Development

So just some context. I grew up as a migrant student in the Rio Grande Valley. And even to this day, I'm very confident in my ability, but do I still have moments of like, 'How did I get here?' So, I keep an active resume with me. I audit that every semester just to kind of reflect. And it is good for my heart, but also is one that I recognize for me to advance and for my team to advance, we have to be mindful of that. So, every semester, I'm doing an audit. Okay, where did we go? Where did we go for this? And I have a document. It's as ugly as can be, but it helps me remember things. It also is one of those where, if I have a really bad day, I fell on my face a little, I have somewhere to go back. It's like, 'You know what? You thought that other day was hard but look where you got to. You survived that. You're going to survive this, too. It's fine.' It's kind of allowed me to grow and say, 'You evolved so much from-- hey, you started off as just working as a library aide as a work study, to now being on the administrative side of the house, to be in a role that you didn't even know existed.' It's kind of a cool thing, but that's very intentional. And I really do credit my professional background to kind of teach me that skill set. I mean, at the end of the day, I don't want to just be a supervisor on paper. I truly want to be an important part in their development. And I hope in time that, while I love having them a part of the team, I want them to evolve, and kind of move on and grow, and then find their own team, right, later on. So, I think with leadership, fine learning from all parts. But also, kind of do a 360 of yourself, too, because it's needed, especially in this time.

I lean in a lot of Clifton Strengths, as well. So, I am a certified Clifton Strengths coach, and I lean a lot with empathy just because, again, I came from an advising section.

So, at career advising, you meet one-on-one with people all the time. You chat, you get to know their stories, you kind of build a plan of action. So, I do that a lot even as a leader. I'm like, Okay. So how do I get to know you as an individual? How do I make sure I hear you, I see you?" I hear the things that aren't being said. I read body language quite a bit. And I found it really impactful in terms of my career, especially post-COVID. It's been hard to be a leader during COVID.

So, I asked them forthcoming, especially because I have a pretty multi-generational team. I mean, I got student age type, and then I have some that we're really close in age. Right? And I have some that are older. It's like, "Okay. How do we all collaborate together?" And that's been helpful. Again, even one that they're like, "Do you want the honest truth?" I'm like, "Yes, I do." And there was the one that I'm like, "I'm sorry." I'm like, "Let me adjust that for you, and then we'll make a change on that." And it's helped because it's also allowed us to build trust there.

Mentoring Others. So, I do have a mentor that was a former VP, and I meet with her every semester. She's at another institution just because her career took her that direction. She's phenomenal. Again, she asked me those really tough questions on what I want to be when I grow up. Right? And then how did I change, and how did I challenge the status quo? I'm like, 'Ugh.' But then I also recognized I needed mentors outside of industry because it's one of those, in higher ed, I feel like sometimes we can be siloed a little bit. That we don't always know what's best. Right? So, for example, one of my mentors, they oversee a nonprofit in philanthropy side of the house. Well, one of the parts of my job is sponsorship and philanthropy relations to bring in dollars. And that's a new skill set. So, I appreciate all the time I get with him.

So, I actually had a mentor at a community college. I was like, 'Okay, they're in continuing education.' I'm like, 'Can you help me kind of figure out the mechanics behind this?' And it wasn't until, I think, at that point that I realized, Oh, I do have other skill sets I could translate over. Right? I like to think of higher ed that, essentially, we are Swiss Army knives. Right? We have skills that can go everywhere. I'm grateful for that because even though it was scary to have to ask for help at first, I recognized they were a safe space for me to ask for help. And because of that, I was able to be successful with it. Did it hurt a little bit? Yes. Was it a lot of hours? Yes. But at least I got to try it out. I got to develop a new skill that I wouldn't have had a chance to do otherwise.

I am a mentor, not only within a couple of professional associations, I serve on a conference committee, but also I'm a mentor for new professionals in the industry. And I do, typically, get partnered with Latinas, it just so happens right now, which is interesting. And then also, I do participate in a program called NUFP (NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program), which is out of NASPA, which is NASPA is our National Association for Student Affairs, essentially. That one, though, I actually serve as a mentor for upcoming student talent that are interested in pursuing a career in student affairs. Because in student affairs, there's not a major that just goes naturally, right, into it. It's just like we can go whatever direction we want, essentially. So, I actually have two mentees under, and I actually talk to them about the different parts of student affairs, and then kind of connect them to different departments. That one I've been doing for about-- I think, since I've done student affairs for 13 years, I've been serving as a mentor for 5 for that one.

And I am also trying to get a diverse group because, essentially, I wanted to create my own board of directors, and I didn't want the same voice and the same perspective every single time. I have some that grew up in the Rio Grande Valley. I have some that did not, that they went private. I have some that have worked in corporate for years and years. And it's helped to receive that kind of an ongoing basis. Is it hard to hear sometimes? Yes. Because while I think I'm doing something great, they're like, "Well, have you really thought about it this way?" I'm like, "No." And it's one that I appreciate now because they've saved me some grief later on. One of my mentors, when I was first having to do-- one of my other duties as assigned was a really cool project, but it was also very daunting because I had no one to ask for help at the university.

Project Emotion. But even I recognize that I'm very still protective on how I project emotion, or even show any inkling of weakness. So, it was hard. I've had to mourn my father, mourn my mother-in-law while I've been here at a director-level role. And that was very difficult for me to even be a human in those conversations. And that's when I reckon I'm like, "you can let go. It's okay. It's a safe space." But I'm like, "No, I worked so hard to get here. What if they think less than me now?" There's stuff like that that I still kind of battle back and forth on.

Episode 4: Middle Adulthood Leading in an HSI in Texas

One of Two Latinas. And I will admit, so our leadership team at the campus, a few years back, I think in looking at my divisional leadership, I think it was one of two Latinas. And again, I work at a HSI, and you would think, "Wait. What?" It's changed a bit over the years. And I don't know if it's just one that-- even a lot of my job is also external

facing. I deal a lot with corporate because I do external relations for the campus. That I recognize I'm the only one that looks like myself sometimes in the room. Right?

I take my role very seriously when I'm at the table because I recognize that I'm not just speaking for myself, but all those that are going to be around there at some point. So, I'm very, very conscious of that. And so even talking about, 'Hey, so if I'm not here to advocate for you, I need you to know how to advocate for yourself as well.' And so, these are skills that we're developing. I'm one, though, the way that I kind of reflect back on it is that every day I show up, I'm showing up not only for my family, but also those who will come after me.

So, when I moved into this role, I was moving into a different department in my center. And a colleague that I inherited as part of this role-- it was kind of odd, right, because we had been colleagues this whole time. And it's like, "Well, I'm now going to be your supervisor." Right? And the first time I saw his evaluation, I was like, "Hey, this isn't it. Let's talk about this." I'm like, "We're going to have an informal discussion, but then I want you to schedule a formal time with me, and we're going to go truly through this evaluation." Now, before that meeting, though, these are the things I need to see. That's where we start going about, "Okay. Let's talk about this program. What were the learning outcomes? What were the actual assessment plans for it? Where's the numbers? How much money did we spend on it? I need you to think outside of just being a day-to-day programmer, and start thinking about very intentional things of what do you want your area to look like in the time? And when we come back and we write it down, I needed to be a lot stronger because I think there was a disconnect there." I was like, "Well, not only is this evaluation used for trying to create a new role in time, right, trying

to promote, but it's also tied to our actual performance in terms of monies." I'm like, "If I don't see a certain performance on there, how are we going to be able to give you a bump?" And so that's when they've gotten a lot better now through this time, that every year, we have kind of a premeeting check-in at the halfway of the year to say, "Okay, am I on the right point?" "Yes, we are." I appreciate it because it's turned the evaluation more so that, "Oh, I have to do it." Like, "Hey, it's my opportunity to kind of brag a little bit." Right? So, I appreciate that because now when they're doing their planning and we talk about budget, it's much more intentional about like, "Hey, these are the things I want to do."

First Generation Students. So, my overall center is a team of about 14. But directly overseeing, I have a team of one, two, three, four, five, six under me. And that's a mixture between student and pro staff. Now, a lot of them, they are coming from the first-gen population. So, FYI, in this university we work with about 72% first-generation college students. And so, it's also one of those our faculty and staff kind of mirror a lot of that as well.

I'm one of them that we work with an HSI, but we have to still be able to speak to our ability, right, and to be very data-informed when we do our decision-making. Really, just in terms of leadership development, its ongoing. But, then also, I do a check-in again with my team just to see how I'm doing as a leader. I recognize I put a lot of pressure on myself, that I check on them, like, Am I doing that to you? And if I am, I need you to tell me. Right? Because I'm one, again, my dad taught me work ethic. And I learned it from the fields. Let's just be real. You bust your butt, and that's what I was trained to do, right,

all my life. With that I'm like, I don't want to burn you out. What works for me may not work for you.

Lifelong Learning in Leadership. So, I think it's one that leadership-- look for all these different ways to develop. So pretty much lifelong learning absolutely is going to be a thing. Again, I do recognize the importance of higher ed kind of training leadership programs, but I really do appreciate the chamber of commerce's have been really transformational for me. Our Teams chat. I've done programs through the Hispanic chamber, which was phenomenal. It was right before I was about to move into the assistant director role. So, I got to talk to people who were in different industries than myself. Got to learn some project management. Got to learn some more recruiting strategies.

I've done the transformational leadership program, which allowed me just to recognize it's okay to not feel 100% as a wife, mother, daughter type of thing, but also at work. It was hard to balance all things at once, but it's possible just to feel okay at it. You don't have to be everything for everyone all the time. And I think that was a community that it wasn't until I heard them say that, "Yeah, there's some days that I mess up there and I'm okay with it." I'm like, "Wait, you don't have to be stellar all the time right now?" I'm like, "Okay." And I still keep in touch with them quite a bit.

I'm doing Leadership [Texas City B] right now through the Greater Hispanic Chambers, and that has been phenomenal because those are, essentially, director-level leaders that it's just-- some of the things they come up with, it's made me kind of think even more so, kind of stretch. Like, "Oh, what are some innovative-- how can I ideate even more to kind of think outside the box? Who are some other partnerships that maybe

I didn't think of, or what else could I do with this kind of career?" Even because of them, I've been able to explore some more board of director roles that I didn't even know existed.

Portrait of Victoria

Victoria is currently a project director of her department in a 4-year university in Central Texas. She is fairly new to higher education having only served in this role for 2.5 years. She admits that reaching this leadership role was a slow process through middle adulthood, as family is a priority. Nonetheless, family has been her beacon of support that provides the confidence she needs to reach her leadership goals. Victoria knows that regardless of her difficult past experiences she is determined to build a positive culture for her staff and the students she serves. Hardships are the frame of reference to lead her team and foster the environment she wishes she could have had in her leadership development.

Victoria's Story

Episode 1: Middle Adulthood Education

High School. My mom passed away my senior year. And one of her requests for me was 'You keep going to school. Don't give up.' And so, I graduated that year after she passed away, and I've always been driven. Her voice has always been in the back of my head, right?

After I graduated high school. I had children, and I just worked myself up to get my bachelor's degree. I think I graduated my bachelor's in my late 30s, I think, or mid-30s, something like that. And then my master's, I'm about to be 50. I have always been intrinsically motivated to educate myself. I may have taken the long road, but it is

something I have always desired. So, I've definitely done it slower than usual, but it's my story to write, right? And I'm still accomplishing those goals.

First Take at College. I've always been amused by the medical field. My first take of going to school was becoming a nurse, right? But at the end of the day, I was a mom first. A nursing field is very chaotic and requires a lot of your time. And my husband sat me down, and he was like, 'Look, you need to make the choice.' So, within me getting my degree from my BSN, I switched literally a year before. I think I was almost 10 hours away doing clinicals and stuff like that.

Take Two at College. So, I stopped nursing school and graduated with my undergraduate degree in like three semesters. As a mother, we have a very strong impact on our children's lives and when we become mothers we make that choice to be selfless and to put our children first. That doesn't mean to put yourself on the backburner but to ensure they are taking and staying on the right path to become great and awesome human beings. But also, coming from K-12 I respect that college is not for everyone and it doesn't guarantee you success or an amazing career. I believe everyone should do what is best for them that will help them be successful in their life. Whatever success is for them.

Episode 2: Middle Adulthood Leadership Development

Independent. I'm coming from K through 12. I was in the classroom. And I ate by myself. Everything I did by myself. So, my professional career was very, very slow. But professionally, allowing myself to climb the ladder really helps me-- I think it helps me look at the employees that I work with and for, department and college-wise, too, is how can I be my most effective self, right? Just that way and with the team and professionally. I think it helped broaden my view of teamwork ethically, professionally, spiritually even,

and even-- what's that word I'm looking for? Just the cohesiveness within my department.

Building Relationships. Because I've learned also professionally when you don't build relationships, when you don't understand what that other person does, there's a lot of tension. There can build a lot of tension in there. And when you're just bossing people around, there also becomes that resentment too. So, I've learned to not do that with the people that I work with. And professionally, it's just really helped. I'm really proud of what I've been able to do, which is the small staff that I have. The retention. I just came from a conference last week. I was in Baltimore. It's a state conference that we do, a mandatory conference that we do every year. And I met up with another woman that's over a program in another state. And we were talking about our retention rates and how she's had a revolving door for the past 4 years. And I asked her authentically, "Why do you think that is? Why do you think that is?" And she shared with me. And so, I thought in my brain, 'Well, man, I've been able to keep all of mine. I haven't had a second person.' And I was proud of that. The retention. And I am proud of that. I believe we're a powerful staff. And she was like, "Well, how are you doing that?" And I was like, "Well, I'm not a micromanager." I've learned that micromanaging thing is not healthy. I think in some circumstances, maybe. Building personal professional relationships is also very important, because you need to know who you are working with. I'm really proud of what I've been able to do with the small staff that I have.

Hardship Made me who I am Today. I always go back to one of the toughest experiences that I've had in my professional career to the point of the lesson that it taught me during that hard year of that professional career. It was absolutely horrible. I don't

wish it on my worst enemy, but it allowed me to be in the leadership role that I am today, and it was only because of that experience, that I was able to land this role.

So, in the moment of that chaos and insanity and super anxiety-driven day-to-day activities that I was experiencing, I would go home and cry. I would cry in the car before I would go in the building, like that. It was really bad. But you have also a family to support, right? My child was, I believe, a junior. My youngest was junior-senior that year. So, I had to push through. And in that moment, I would always question God like, 'What is the purpose for me experiencing this right now? I don't understand it, and I hope later I will.

The experiences of not just the hardship piece but the professional experience that I received that year. In that, the leadership piece has allowed me to create a culture within my staff, although albeit it's not a huge staff. It has allowed me to lead in a way by example. I'm the boss. I'm the leader. And I don't like my team to call me boss. I can't stand that. I don't like them to introduce me that way we are a team. My name is Victoria, right? That's the way I like to be introduced. But it definitely has opened my eyes to be empathetic and compassionate and build relationships first. And making sure that I understand each role that they represent. If they were to not be there tomorrow, could I step in without a shadow of a doubt? Always knowing what's going on.

Intrinsic Motivation. When I think about mentorship, there are maybe a few administrators that I spoke with about professional goals, and I took some of those things to heart. I've also been slapped in the face by who I thought were my mentors. If anything, I've learned that, although you can look at somebody as a mentor, to never fully trust them. I haven't really had a positive mentor-- I think because of my mom and just

my life story, I have very strong intrinsic motivation to do things on my own. So I struggle with the mentorship program. I think my husband probably would-- I would consider him a mentor because he's always -been in my ear like, "You got this. Don't give up. You've come this far." He has his associates degree, but he's still encouraged me and would say things like, "Don't do it. You've come this far. You're smart." And I think, just my children, too, have been my motivators. They're looking at me, I don't want them to think that giving up on your education is something you should do. I want to be the role model of "if it is hard, it's okay. Just keep pushing forward. Don't give up," kind of thing."

Episode 3: Middle Adulthood Leading in an HSI in Texas

Make it Happen. I've never been a follower, ever. I've always kind of gone against the grain, and I think that's why I've been able to get to where I've gotten to today. Because if society were to look at me from the outside in, they'd be like, "How do you even get here?"

I'm also a pusher. Just this week, one of my teammates came to me, they are over a certain part of the program. And they're like, "Oh, well, this, this, and this is happening. And what should I do?" I said, "What should you do? You're the academic coordinator. What should you do? You know the students?" And they just looked at me like, "Oh, my God." I said, "You'll be fine. I trust the choice that you're going to make. Because you've built relationships with the students, and you know what to do." And they're like, "Okay, okay." I said, "If you want me to help guide you after you make that choice, then fine." But helping them gain that confidence of, "You got this. This is your position. You're

okay." But yeah, I think they do look at me as a mentor in certain areas." Specifically, because before I had a full team I was the only person doing all the roles.

Culture in an HSI. All of the staff in my department are Latinos. I am also proud to be working in an HSI and to serve the community. This university's vision to serve Latinos is incredible. It gives them an option to know that they have the choice and a way to go to school if that is what they want to do.

Empathy and Kindness. When I was teaching in a K-12 setting during COVID. I learned something extremely important about being forced to teach behind black screens and not being able to physically interact with my students. My heart ached for one of my students who took their life right after their 2020 graduation. I am sure there were some underlying issues besides the pandemic, but I am certain that being quarantined more than likely exasperated their situation. It was the situation specifically, that has really helped me through my leadership role at an HSI that I authentically understand the importance of building relationships and getting to know the individual on a personal level. As a leader I make it a point to allow the staff to share freely (when appropriate) about their personal lives. To allow myself to have 1:1 time with each one so that they know I truly care about their mental and physical health. I truly believe this is why (even though it has only been just over 2 years) I have not had any issues with people leaving their roles and having to fill that role every few months. It is a true blessing to get to know each and every one. All of us have a story and being in a leadership role, specifically like mine, requires empathy and kindness. It is an honor.

Key Themes

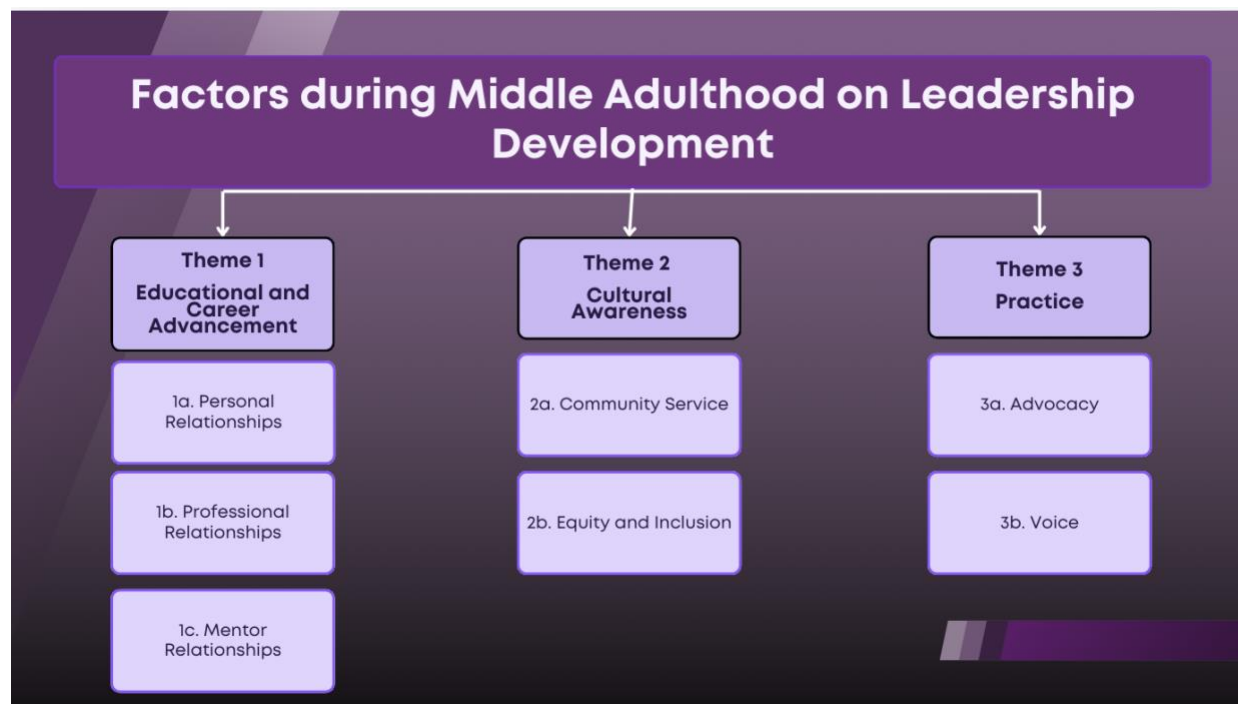
Three key themes emerged from the analysis of the participant's stories. Critical themes centered on impactful factors during middle adulthood that influence their leadership development in Hispanic-serving institutions in Texas. The factors were (1) educational and career advancement, (2) cultural awareness, and (3) practice.

Factors During Middle Adulthood on Leadership Development

Figure 4 illustrates the three themes of (1) educational and career advancement, subthemes (1a) personal relationships, (1b) professional relationships and (1c) mentor relationships; (2) cultural awareness, subthemes (2a) community service, (2b) equity and inclusion; and (3) practice, subtheme (3a) advocacy, (3b) voice.

Figure 4

Impact of Factors During Middle Adulthood on Leadership Development



Theme 1: Educational and Career Advancement

Personal, professional, and mentor relationships provide Latinas with the emotional support, practical guidance, and opportunities needed to advance in their educational and career pursuits. These relationships help them navigate challenges, build confidence, and achieve their goals in a culturally affirming way (Perez et al., 2024).

Relationships refer to the meaningful connections or associations between individuals or groups that are formed based on emotional, social, or professional bonds. These connections can be personal, such as those between family members, friends, or romantic partners, or they can be professional, involving colleagues, mentors, or collaborators.

During the interviews the participants shared the importance of relationships characterized by varying degrees of trust, communication, mutual support, and influence. These relationships play a significant role in shaping the participants' leadership development through middle adulthood. The three subtopics are defined below as 1A: Personal, 1B: Professional and 1C: Mentorships.

1A Personal. For many Latinas, family plays a central role in their lives. Encouragement and support from family members can boost confidence and provide the emotional strength needed to pursue educational and career goals. Strong personal relationships can build resilience, enabling leaders to navigate challenges and setbacks with greater confidence and perseverance (Perez et al., 2024). Participants recalled crucial conversations with personal friends or family members that impacted their leadership development during middle adulthood. Guiding questions centered around the leadership development as a result of those experiences.

Anita was a single parent to a daughter, and she recalls the time when she was questioned, in a loving manner, by her mother regarding her new relationship. The concern of

her mother stirred up stereotypes and gender roles. Nonetheless her mother in her own way was trying to ensure Anita not only complete her master's but go to complete her doctorates in higher education administration as well.

Esther, raised by a single parent, recalled her relationship with her mother and the inspiration she instilled in her family. Witnessing the struggles of a single mom, Esther's path was laid out. Esther was compelled to live up to the legacy her mother began, and this deep connection influenced her leadership style, driving her to approach challenges with the same resilience her mother demonstrated.

Cynthia, reared by her father's support, keeps her focus on her every decision. She knows that the decisions she makes today will impact tomorrow. Her father's unwavering belief in her abilities serves as a constant reminder to lead with confidence and integrity, shaping her approach to leadership as one grounded in the values of support and encouragement.

Victoria recalls her mother's request to complete her education. Although her mother did not witness her crossing the stage, her impact resonates in Victoria's leadership role. Her intrinsic motivation to succeed has been a desire of her heart, and the lessons learned from her mother's perseverance continue to guide her. Victoria's leadership is deeply rooted in the desire to honor her mother's memory, driving her to lead with compassion and determination.

Table 5 includes excerpts that were selected for illustrative purposes of the significance of personal relationships from the participants' narratives.

Table 5*Illustrative Quotes: Personal Relationships*

Participant	Illustrative quote: Personal relationships
Anita	“But in her own way, she's saying, ‘Don't stop because of a man’”
Esther	“My life could have gone so differently had it not been for my mom.”
Cynthia	“If you look at my desk, I have my father's picture right there, right, because he was my biggest advocate, my biggest cheerleader...”
Victoria	“‘You keep going to school. Don't give up.’ And so I graduated that year after she passed away...Her voice has always been in the back of my head.”

1B Professional. Professional relationships expand a leader's network, offering access to diverse perspectives, opportunities, and resources. Effective leadership often depends on the ability to work well with others, build consensus, and inspire teams (Freeman et al., 2019). Strong professional relationships enhance a leader's ability to influence and lead collaboratively. Building a network of professional contacts is essential for career advancement (Craps et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2019). For Latinas, connecting with other professionals who understand their unique challenges and experiences can lead to mentorship opportunities, job referrals, and collaboration.

Esther began working in a community college without knowing the full scope of the HSI's mission. She quickly navigated towards leadership roles and noticed “opportunities emerged” as she learned more and more about the mission of an HSI. Her professional relationships within the institution played a crucial role in her development, as mentors and colleagues guided her understanding and leadership approach. These connections not only broadened her perspective but also solidified her commitment to advancing the HSI mission through her leadership.

Cynthia formed partnerships that created opportunities to collaborate with others who share similar goals but may come from different sectors or backgrounds. This collaboration can lead to innovative solutions and a broader network of support, which is essential for effective leadership. She realized she “needed mentors outside of industry” to help her develop a “new skill set that she can now use to further the HSI mission and leadership.

Victoria speaks of the “powerful staff” connections she has made that help her run a “cohesive department.” She credits the “horrible” experiences from the beginning to “land this role” and how this experience “has allowed her to lead in a way by example.” Table 6 includes excerpts that were selected for illustrative purposes of the significance of professional relationships from the participants narratives.

Table 6

Illustrative Quotes: Professional Relationships

Participant	Illustrative quote: Professional relationships
Esther	“I trusted the person to guide me and to give me feedback.”
Cynthia	“I’m grateful for that because even though it was scary to have to ask for help at first, I recognized they were a safe space for me to ask for help.”
Victoria	“But it definitely has opened my eyes to be empathetic and compassionate and build relationships first.”

1C Mentorships. Mentors often provide specific advice and training to develop leadership competencies, such as strategic thinking, communication, and decision-making. Mentorship encourages self-reflection and accountability, pushing leaders to set and achieve goals while staying true to their values and vision. For Latinas, having a mentor who understands their cultural background can be especially valuable in navigating the unique challenges they may face in both education and the workplace. Haber-Curran and Tapia-Fuselier (2020) posited

that interlocking voices may mitigate the challenges marginalized and minority populations may face.

Anita recalls a sense of longing and frustration due to the lack of Latina mentors in her professional journey. While she had mentors who were often white women, she yearned for guidance from someone who could relate to her unique experiences as a Latina. This absence of culturally relevant mentorship left her feeling “disappointed”, as she believed that mentorship from someone with a shared cultural background could have provided a different and perhaps more resonant perspective on her challenges and aspirations.

Esther considers an individual a mentor because of a powerful piece of advice he offered during a moment of doubt. When she was questioning her path, the mentor's encouraging words made a lasting impact, motivating her to push through challenges. The mentor's guidance helped Esther reject the idea of becoming a negative statistic and instead strive to be an example of success. As a result, Esther completed her journey and now views this person as a key mentor in her life.

Cynthia has been serving as a mentor for 5 years, and upon reflecting on this role, she recognizes that her efforts extend far beyond the immediate task of mentoring. Each day, she shows up with a deep sense of purpose, understanding that her presence and actions impact not just her own family but also the broader community and future generations. Cynthia sees herself as part of a larger legacy, where her contributions help to shape a path for those who will come after her. This awareness fuels Cynthia's commitment, knowing that by guiding others today, she is laying the groundwork for success and opportunities for those who will follow in the years to come. Cynthia's mentoring is not just a role, but a responsibility to ensure that her influence endures and benefits many more lives beyond the present.

Victoria reflects on the painful experience of being let down or betrayed by individuals she once considered mentors. This unexpected disappointment has been a harsh reality check, revealing that not all mentors live up to expectations. However, this experience has significantly impacted Victoria's leadership development and style. It has taught her the importance of discernment and has likely strengthened her resilience. By overcoming this setback, Victoria has learned to navigate challenges more effectively and to seek genuine support for growth. This adversity has ultimately shaped her into a more self-aware and determined leader, better equipped to guide others with authenticity and care. Table 7 includes excerpts that were selected for illustrative purposes of the significance of mentorship relationships from the participants narratives.

Table 7

Illustrative Quotes: Mentorship Relationships

Participant	Illustrative quote: Mentorship relationships
Anita	"But my mentors were often white women. And I was really hungry for Latina mentorship because it is a different experience. And so I was kind of disappointed."
Esther	"I see him as a mentor because that little nugget he gave me in a moment where I was like, 'Oh, why am I doing this?' His words of encouragement stuck in my ear. I was like, 'Hell, no, I'm not going to be a statistic [laughter]. I want to be the statistic on the other side.' I finished. So, to me, I see him as a mentor."
Cynthia	"I've been serving as a mentor for 5 for that one. I'm one, though, the way that I kind of reflect back on it is that every day I show up, I'm showing up not only for my family, but also those who will come after me."
Victoria	"I've also been slapped in the face by who I thought were my mentors."

Theme 2: Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is a foundational aspect of effective leadership for Latina leaders, especially in community service and efforts related to equity and inclusion (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). Understanding and valuing cultural differences not only enhances their leadership but also ensures that their work is impactful, relevant, and inclusive. When Latina leaders demonstrate cultural awareness, they build trust within their communities. Trust is essential for effective community service, as people are more likely to engage with leaders who understand and respect their cultural backgrounds. Latina leaders who are culturally aware can better understand the specific needs and challenges faced by their communities. Culturally aware Latina leaders are more likely to recognize and address the systemic barriers that marginalized communities face.

2A Community Service. These experiences have empowered these leaders to step into roles where they can drive change and serve their communities. Whether through moral support, collaboration, or strategic guidance, these connections provide the foundation for their effective leadership development in service.

Anita spent several years working as an executive director for a nonprofit education partnership. Nonprofits are often deeply embedded in the communities they serve. Anita engages in these partnerships to develop a stronger understanding of community needs and how to address them. Anita's engagement in this endeavor is crucial for her to create lasting, positive change. Anita affirms that the nonprofit program helped students, "anybody who walked in the door," "figure out how to navigate the college/university process." Anita wanted to be in a position that was not only "fulfilling and rewarding" but where she could make a difference and "help Latinos," and "first-gen students."

Esther describes how her understanding of the college's mission, particularly as a HSI, deepened over time. As Esther learned more about what an HSI represents, she realized how closely it aligned with her own identity, purpose, and values of service. This alignment between the institution's mission and Esther's personal beliefs has profoundly influenced her leadership development. It has reinforced her commitment to serving others and provided her with a clear sense of purpose in her leadership role. By embracing the mission of the HSI, Esther has become more driven and focused, leading with a strong sense of identity and dedication to the communities she serves.

Cynthia encourages others to look beyond the importance of their own job and to consider the broader impact they have on those around them. Cynthia challenges herself by asking "What else are you doing for others?" and "How are you contributing to your community?" By fostering this community-minded approach, instilled by her father's example, Cynthia has inspired those around her, creating a more inclusive environment, and leading with a sense of purpose that goes beyond personal success. This mindset helped cultivate Cynthia into a leader who is not only effective in her positions but also deeply committed to making a positive difference in the lives of others.

Victoria contributes to the advancement and support of a vibrant and diverse student population and reinforces her personal commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable educational environment. Working, engaging with and understanding the unique needs and aspirations of her students is incredibly rewarding. Initiatives that aim to uplift and empower community members not only aligns with Victoria's professional goals, but also resonates deeply with her personal values of community service and educational equity.

Table 8 includes excerpts that were selected for illustrative purposes of the significance of community service from the participants narratives.

Table 8

Illustrative Quotes: Community Service

Participant	Illustrative quote: Community service
Anita	"I just wanted to be in a role that I found fulfilling and rewarding and where I could help, where I could help Latinos."
Esther	"The more I learned about the mission of the college, and then the more I learned about what a Hispanic serving institution represents and the alignment to who I am as a human being and my purpose and value of serving."
Cynthia	"I challenge you to say, okay, your job is important to you, but what else are you doing for others around you?' Right? 'How are you being community-minded?'"
Victoria	"I am also proud to be working in an HSI and to serve the community."

2B Equity and Inclusion. Intersectional approach, recognizes that individuals' experiences of inequality are shaped by multiple, overlapping social identities such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and ability, such as creating equitable educational practices, inclusive workplace environments, or public health strategies that address disparities (Freeman et al., 2019; Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). Inclusion refers to the practice of creating an environment where all individuals feel welcomed, respected, and valued. This can involve developing inclusive curricula, promoting student organizations that represent diverse identities, and ensuring that campus policies do not inadvertently exclude or disadvantage any group.

Anita shared how growing up in high school and her early years at college that the Latina representation was not present. She described the experience as lonely and knew that she could

make a difference someday. She supports and guides students with networking opportunities and access to participate in events they would not be able to otherwise.

Esther's experience has been positive for her. She spoke about the camaraderie she has with those she works with. She understands that students look up to her in her position of influence and depend on her to be their voice. She is determined to keep learning more and more about how she and the HSI can be of service to all. She is focused and dedicated to advancing the mission of the HSI and equity practices.

Cynthia boasts about the high percentage of Hispanic students' population she serves. She is very aware that in her leadership role she is responsible for choices that will affect the historically marginalized population of students in her community. Cynthia is very intentional and careful to incorporate facts and data.

Victoria is proud to have a full staff of Hispanic, Latino students. She is encouraged by the university's mission to serve the community and all it has and continues to do for their students. She is very supportive of her staff and students and encourages them to thrive in the job they do.

Table 9 includes excerpts that were selected for illustrative purposes of the significance of equity and inclusion from the participants narratives.

Table 9*Illustrative Quotes: Equity and Inclusion*

Participant	Illustrative quote: Equity and inclusion
Anita	“And here there is strong representation. And there are a lot of smart Latinas here.”
Esther	“It's been also really nice to have other leaders who look like me in leadership roles, either at my level and above, that there's a sense of camaraderie.”
Cynthia	“So, FYI, in this university we work with about 72% first-generation college students. And so, it's also one of those our faculty and staff kind of mirror a lot of that as well.”
Victoria	“All of the staff in my department are Latinos. I am also proud to be working in an HSI and to serve the community. This university's vision to serve Latinos is incredible.”

Theme 3: Practice

Latina leaders in higher education exhibit a range of practices and policies that reflect their commitment to equity, inclusion, and support for their communities. The practices and policies are designed or need to be adapted to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities, particularly for underrepresented or historically marginalized communities. These leaders tie their passion into community service by addressing how their institutions and organizations can serve diverse populations more effectively through inclusive practices and policies. They can advocate for inclusive practices and policies that ensure everyone has equal access to opportunities, resources, and support.

3A Advocacy. The combined influence of personal, professional, and mentorship experiences ensured that these leaders are not only empowered to initiate change but are also equipped to sustain their efforts, grow their influence, and continue advocating for their communities over time.

Anita pointed out the implications to our communities, especially within Latino communities, that when discussions about salary and compensation are often surrounded by cultural norms and barriers it discourages open negotiation. Growing up, she wasn't exposed to the idea that negotiating one's salary was a viable option, and this lack of awareness can significantly impact career advancement and financial stability. This realization has driven Anita to advocate for better leadership development and support systems for Latinos, both in educational settings and the workplace.

Esther embraces her personal and professional growth that has shed light on the systemic barriers and cultural hurdles that can impact educational experiences and opportunities. Recognizing these challenges has fueled her commitment to creating more inclusive and supportive environments for all students. By leveraging her leadership role, Esther strives to address these obstacles, advocate for resources and policies that promote equity, and work towards ensuring that every student has the support they need to thrive academically and personally.

Cynthia is adamant about individuals who work within a HSI, and how crucial it is to not only embrace the role but also to clearly communicate our capabilities and achievements. Cynthia is aware that her contribution to the mission of serving a diverse student body requires that the HSI remain “data-informed” in the “decision-making” processes. Cynthia emphasizes the importance of utilizing evidence-based strategies to guide her actions and ensure that HSI initiatives are effectively addressing the needs of our students.

Victoria fosters a unique sense of community and shared understanding in her department as "All of the staff in my department are Latinos." This collective experience not only strengthens her internal collaboration but also enhances her ability to relate to and support her

students. “The university’s vision to serve Latinos is truly incredible”, as it reflects a deep commitment to addressing the specific needs and aspirations of our community. By aligning her departmental efforts with this vision, she is able to contribute meaningfully to the institution’s goals and help create an environment where Latino students can thrive academically and personally. It’s both inspiring and motivating to be part of an organization that is dedicated to making a tangible difference in the lives of their students.

Table 10 includes excerpts that were selected for illustrative purposes of the significance of advocacy from the participants narratives.

Table 10

Illustrative Quotes: Advocacy

Participant	Illustrative quote: Advocacy
Anita	“Negotiate. I want to pay you more. But wanting to teach her-- nobody ever taught me that you can negotiate.”
Esther	“As I continued to develop myself as a leader, as a human being and as a leader in a Hispanic serving institution, I could understand some of the challenges that our students face, particularly our students of color.”
Cynthia	“I’m one of them that we work with an HSI, but we have to still be able to speak to our ability, right, and to be very data-informed when we do our decision-making.”
Victoria	“But helping them gain that confidence of, "You got this. This is your position. You're okay."

3B Voice. Experiences in these domains helped these leaders align their personal values with their professional and community roles, leading to more authentic and purpose-driven leadership. The participants learned to deeply value the perspective of others, and believe every voice is important. It deserves to be heard and acknowledged by others.

Anita shared the importance of actively participating and making your voice heard, as this not only contributes to one's own learning but also enriches the classroom experience for everyone. She encourages students to share their unique perspectives, because it helps create a more dynamic and inclusive academic environment. Anita reminds students that their contributions are valuable and can inspire others to engage more deeply as well. Your thoughts and ideas matter and advocating for yourself is a key part of your educational journey and personal growth.

Esther credits her ascent to leadership by being prepared and owning your thoughts. When she arrived in class or any discussion setting, she was ready to engage and add value to the dialogue. Her presence and preparation signaled her commitment and respect for the subject matter. Additionally, she stressed "that your voice matters." Each person, "particularly Latinas" bring a unique perspective that can shape and enriches the conversation by actively participating and sharing their insights. Esther affirms her role as an important and valued member of the group knowing that her contributions are vital in fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment where everyone's input is valued and considered: "I think our part is, again, showing up, being ready, and not being quiet. And use your voice. It matters. It counts."

Cynthia understands that her contributions represent a broader perspective and her approach to every conversation is heightened with a sense of responsibility and purpose. She is mindful that the choices and outcomes that are discussed have implications for many others, and Cynthia strives to ensure that her input reflects a commitment to inclusivity and fairness. By doing so, Cynthia aims to advocate not only for her own views but also for the interests and needs of those who may not have the opportunity to speak directly. This awareness drives her to

be thoughtful and deliberate in every interaction, knowing that her role at the table carries significant weight in shaping outcomes for the wider community.

Victoria understands the needs and strengths of her students. Victoria's interactions with them have given her valuable insights into their individual circumstances and learning styles. This connection enables her to make informed decisions that are both compassionate and effective. Victoria's deep understanding of their experiences and challenges equips her with the knowledge to choose the best course of action. She encourages her students and instills confidence in their judgment and believes that their choices will be guided by a genuine commitment to their well-being and success. Table 11 includes excerpts that were selected for illustrative purposes of the significance of voice from the participants narratives.

Table 11

Illustrative Quotes: Voice

Participant	Illustrative quote: Voice
Anita	"And so that's what I would encourage a lot of these young ladies here. Speak up in class. Share your opinion. Share your thoughts."
Esther	"You show up and be prepared to contribute to the conversation. You show up and your voice matters."
Cynthia	"I take my role very seriously when I'm at the table because I recognize that I'm not just speaking for myself, but all those that are going to be around there at some point."
Victoria	"I trust the choice that you're going to make. Because you've built relationships with the students, and you know what to do."

Chapter Summary

This chapter represented the narratives accounts, and first-person stories of four Latina and/or Hispanic female participants in leadership roles in Hispanic-serving institutions in Texas. I presented each participant and the key themes that emerged from their recalled experiences

from middle adulthood and the influence those experiences had on their leadership development in HSIs in Texas. A thematic analysis of the stories led to the key themes of (1) educational and career advancement, subthemes (1a) personal relationships, (1b) professional relationships and (1c) mentor relationships; (2) cultural awareness, subthemes (2a) community service, (2b) equity and inclusion; and (3) practice, subtheme (3a) advocacy, (3b) voice. Next, in Chapter 5, I present conclusions based on the emergent themes. I also discuss the findings related to existing literature and the theoretical framework of leader development through the lens of Latino Critical Race Theory. Finally, I propose recommendations for practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The disparity of leadership roles between Latinas and other populations in higher education institutions in Texas is a significant issue (Ortega et al., 2024; Perez et al., 2024). As previously stated in the introduction of this research, only 9.8% of Hispanic women are employed in administrative roles in higher education across the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), and a mere 1% are Latinas (Eiden-Dillow & Best, 2022). Despite the growing Hispanic population in Texas and increasing enrollment of Latina students in higher education, Latina women remain underrepresented in leadership positions within these institutions (Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024). Latinas are significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles such as presidents, provosts, deans, and other executive positions in higher education institutions in Texas (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2023; Ortega et al., 2024). While Hispanic and Latina/o students make up a substantial portion of the student body in Texas colleges and universities, this diversity is not reflected in the leadership ranks (Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024; Ortega et al., 2024).

The purpose of this qualitative life story narrative study was to understand the experiences of LHSILRs during middle adulthood and their perceptions of the factors, if any, that may influence their leadership development in HSIs in Texas. The three research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their personal experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ2: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their professional experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

RQ3: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) describe their mentorship experiences, if applicable, within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences contribute to their leadership development?

First the findings of this research may provide another perspective on the experiences in leadership development of Latinas in HSI in Texas. For instance, initiatives to increase Latina representation in leadership positions and provide support services can help Latinas overcome challenges and succeed academically, ultimately contributing to their development as leaders within their institutions and communities (Crisp et al., 2015).

Second, it may provide practical implications for policymakers, educators and institutions aiming to promote equity, inclusivity and academic success of Latinas. The limited presence of Latina populations in academia highlights the ongoing issue of historically marginalized groups being underrepresented in influential and prestigious roles (Perez et al., 2024). One crucial strategy for improving Latinas' representation and leadership prospects within HSIs has been to recruit and promote Latina faculty, administrators, and staff who reflect the diversity of the student body (Garcia, 2020). According to ¡Excelencia in Education! (2021), an organization for the success of Latinos, their program initiative outcomes is to increase the number of Latino/a leaders in higher education by closing the attainment gap. Diverse faculty members, including Latino faculty, often mentor Latina students and infuse courses with culturally relevant perspectives and content (ACE, 2023; Banda et al., 2023; Garcia, 2020).

Finally, it may provide a better understanding of the challenges and barriers that Latinas face in their leadership journey. Recognizing that resilience is crucial for the development of leaders, as it encompasses the drive for success, the importance of strong relationships, and the value of building on the lived experiences of Latinas in leadership roles (Perez et al., 2024).

Narrative life stories as a qualitative research method are vital to understanding the human experience by providing researchers with practical means to inform practice and policymaking (Suri, 2011).

Summary of Study

In this narrative study, I used an inductive approach with two-cycle coding and qualitative data analysis software to identify categories and themes to understand the participants' lived experiences and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development. Open ended interviews were conducted in the summer of 2024. The guided conversations allowed participants to recall stories and experiences that were impactful to them during their middle adulthood. I also sent a follow-up question to clarify the context during this time in their lives.

According to Suri (2011), narrative life stories as a qualitative research method are vital to understanding the human experience by providing researchers with practical means to inform practice and policymaking. Singer et al. (2013) suggested the use of narrative life stories as a valuable qualitative data source providing rich insights into individuals' experiences, perceptions, and personal journeys. Therefore, this study followed these recommendations as I began the analysis of the stories, using a woman's leadership development model and incorporating the lens of CRT, specifically LatCrit.

Thematic analysis helps researchers uncover shared experiences, recurring motifs, or key ideas that emerge from the narratives (Polkinghorne, 2005; Stage, 2007). This study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps for the thematic analysis process: (1) familiarize yourself with the data, (2) generalize initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) review themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report.

A thorough thematic analysis of the stories led to the following key themes demonstrating the significance of exploring the experiences that impacted the leadership development of LHSILRs: (1) educational and career advancement, with subthemes (1a) personal relationships, (1b) professional relationships (1c) mentor relationships; (2) cultural awareness, with subthemes (2a) community service, (2b) equity and inclusion, and (3) practice, with subtheme (3a) advocacy, (3b) voice. Through the lens of LatCrit the findings addressed the interest of examining the life experiences of Latinas and the impact those experiences have on their leadership development in HSIs.

Next, I present conclusions based on the emergent findings presented in Chapter 4 and the alignment with the literature on leadership development. Finally, I propose recommendations for practice and future research.

Conclusions

The findings presented in Chapter 4 are fundamentally tied together through these themes to present the conclusions. Three conclusions were constructed based on the data findings to answer the research questions: How do Latinas in LHSILRs recount their personal experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development? How do LHSILRs recount their professional experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development? How do LHSILRs describe their mentorship experiences, if applicable, within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences contribute to their leadership development? Conclusion (1) corresponds with the LHSILRs perceived impact of personal, professional and mentorship relationships contributing to their leadership development.

Conclusion (2) and (3) correspond to the experiences of LHSILRs within HSIs in Texas and to what extent these experiences contributed to their leadership development.

- Relationships represent critical factors influencing leadership development.
- Integrating cultural awareness and inclusion represent influences on leadership development.
- Focusing on advocacy and voice represents critical factors impacting leadership practices.

Conclusion 1: Relationships Represent Critical Factors Influencing Leadership Development.

The development of Latina women in leadership roles within HSIs is significantly influenced by the dynamics of relationships and the degree of inclusion they experience. Understanding how an individual develops as a leader through significant relationships highlights the importance of support systems that foster professional growth, emotional resilience, and a sense of belonging (Perez et al., 2024). Undeniably, Hispanic females lack representation and visibility in leadership positions across academia, thus making it challenging to access networks and resources (Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024; Crisp et al., 2015; Flores & Park, 2015). All four participants reflected on their personal, professional and mentor relationships during their middle adulthood in HSIs, and how those relationships these relationships influenced their leadership trajectory.

Anita recalls the guidance her mother gave her in not compromising her education, despite being in a new relationship. The lack of support from professional or mentor leadership role models delayed her progression up the leadership ladder, however she did not let the minimal system of support deter her. Esther recounts how her mother enrolled and graduated college as a single parent with three of her four children in college at the same time. It was not a

question for Esther, she was going to college no matter what. Esther also recalls the professional and mentoring relationship she had with a gentleman, whose words of encouragement sustained her to complete her doctorates, and the dear friend who encouraged her to pursue teaching at the community college level. This opportunity led her to be an effective Latina leader in her department. Without her mothers' guidance Esther recognizes that her life could have gone down a completely different path. Cynthia enthusiastically shared the influence her father bestowed upon her. She keeps his memory, and legacy alive by living up to the expectations in leadership he set for her. Her personal relationship with others provided opportunities for advancement and her professionalism is reflected in her continued progression in leadership roles. Victoria, much like Anita, did not have positive professional or mentor relationships that supported her leadership growth. Her family, mainly her husband and kids, provided her with guidance and helped her make important choices that affect her leadership progression.

Positive and negative relationships have significant influence over the progression of leadership development. The issue remains that Latinas have a scare population of mentors to choose from, may not be able to choose their mentor, and are more likely to have cross-gender or cross-race relationships with mentors who do not have the cultural awareness that Latinas can benefit from (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2023). Moreover, Manongsong and Ghosh (2023) posited that when mentoring is provided it is oftentimes inadequate and inconsistent. The role of mentorship programs not only empower and support Latinas they provide a value-added impact on their development as leaders (Coers et al., 2021; Macias & Stephens, 2019). I recognizes the importance of both as influential and critical to the development of Latina leaders.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research that accounts for the perceptions of the influence of

gender or race-based mentoring that can manage the conflicts associated with mentoring relationships (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2023).

Conclusion 2: Integrating Cultural Awareness and Inclusion Represents Influences on Leadership Development

Integrating cultural awareness into leadership practices is not merely about adapting methods but about embracing a holistic perspective that values and incorporates cultural diversity (Calderón et al., 2012). This commitment to cultural responsiveness can lead to more impactful and meaningful leadership development that is both inclusive and effective in addressing the unique challenges and opportunities within Latina communities (Bacon et al., 2023).

Participants spoke of their cultural awareness as critical to incorporating cultural sensitivity into the realm of their leadership development within HSIs in Texas. Participants all spoke of being more adept at fostering inclusive environments where diverse team members feel valued and respected, allowing the Latina leaders to fully express their identities and lead authentically.

Cultural Awareness. Cultural awareness is vital for Latina women in leadership roles in higher education, especially within HSIs. According to Ammon (2024), when individuals cultural identities are accepted and valued the sense of belonging increases. Cultural values contribute significantly to the resilience of Latinas, as shared expectations and responsibilities build communal spaces, minimize structural barriers, inspire and motivate, thus shaping the trajectory of Latinas in leadership attainment (Liou et al., 2021; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). The participants encompass understanding and value not just of their own cultural background but the diverse cultural contexts of the communities they serve.

Anita recounts lacking the representation of Latinas in educational settings. Not having someone who understands your culture or heritage leaves a void. Cynthia and Esther recount growing up in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and recognize that diversity is an integral part of their work in the HSI. Cynthia understands that the dynamics of the student population in the HSIs in Texas are representative of the increasing first-generation and that university leadership should mirror. Esther speaks of attending graduate school where there were only a few Latinas represented allowed her to recognize the importance of diversity and embracing the culture and the differences that come with it. She also recalls the shock of her identity being questioned. She did not let the prejudice interfere with her professionalism, but it is a reminder of the bias people may still harbor intentionally or unintentionally. Victoria recognizes the HSIs' vision to serve Latinos, and the community provide an incredible opportunity for her to be a leader.

Inclusion. Inclusion includes promoting culturally relevant curricula, supporting diverse hiring practices, and implementing programs that address the specific needs of underrepresented groups. An inclusive environment is essential to the organizational identity of a Hispanic-serving institution (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2023). Latina executive leaders can promote inclusive practices at HSIs by creating learning environments that recognize and embrace the cultural backgrounds of Latinx students (Ortega et al., 2024). Leaders can utilize their skills to serve and empower others (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). Now is the time to put research emphasis on the inclusive leadership of women and the impact it has on leadership development (Akram & Krusemark, 2024). The participants recall the systemic inequities and how they managed to thrive in limited environments.

Anita recalls previous female Latina university presidents providing professional development for Latinas, and how the focus is shifted now that there is a male Latino university

president. Cynthia is adamant to celebrate the successes of her students and staff. Cynthia often partners with Latinas in her mentorship programs and supports them with guidance and networking opportunities. Esther is committed to fostering inclusive environments by wanting to hear other stories to help her understand how to help those she serves. She reminds herself to be attuned to the challenges others face and treat others with humility and respect. Diversity is critical and she is intentional when making decisions in her leadership role. Victoria speaks of the culture of the university and the Latino employees she serves. She considers herself not the leader, but a team member.

Conclusion 3: Focusing on Advocacy and Voice Represents Critical Factors Impacting Leadership Practices

All participants spoke to some degree on the importance of advocacy and voice as they recalled their development in leadership roles. The power to make change is directly linked to leadership capacity (Akram & Krusemark, 2024). Participants shared their leadership practices of emphasizing the importance of using their positions to champion causes and amplify the voices of those they represent.

Advocacy. Advocacy is a core practice for Latina women in leadership positions within HSIs. Advocacy involves actively supporting and promoting the needs, rights, and interests of students, faculty, and the broader community, particularly those who are underrepresented or marginalized. Although there have been progressive practices over the past decades, inequality and deliberate exclusion continues to exist (Merma-Molina et al., 2024). As HSIs continue to emerge and develop in Texas, it is crucial for them to actively support and advocate for increased Latina representation in leadership roles and to create and support the career trajectories for these future leaders (Ortega et al., 2024).

Anita encouraged her students to speak up and share their ideas, to foster diversity and collaboration. She is also disappointed that many more do not pursue the opportunities available. Her goal is to be able to provide services where they are needed and give to others what she did not get during her education and leadership development. Anita encourages students to question and listen to leaders every chance they get. She is excited about the exposure and the increased opportunities provided by the HSIs in Texas. Esther quickly recognized that she was the only Latina, and the only bilingual, of the many who practicing therapists in her hospital. By remaining connected to her patients and students she embraces the responsibility she carries when advocating for them. Cynthia recounts how, although she works in an HSI in Texas, at the start of her career she was only one of two Latinas in her divisional leadership network. She recognizes that she speaks for herself and those who will come after her. Cynthia also encourages her staff and students to learn to advocate for themselves by asking tough questions and gathering evidence to support and justify their responses. Victoria pushes her staff and students to trust themselves and come up with a solution on their own. She will always be there to encourage and guide them if they need additional support.

Voice. Voice is another critical element of practice for Latina women in leadership roles. Voice refers to the ability to express one's views, experiences, and perspectives authentically and assertively in professional settings (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Quinteros and Covarrubias (2023) posited that there is a resistance nature in higher education, and leaders, especially Latinas, face the resistance with opposition. In the context of HSIs, Latina leaders use their voice to bring attention to issues that may otherwise be overlooked, such as the need for culturally sensitive support services (Quinteros & Covarrubias, 2023). Women are agents of change for the future in leadership utilizing knowledge as the tool for making well-informed decisions (Wang et

al., 2024). A leader can inspire, motivate, and empower others, guiding them in a particular direction to achieve desired outcomes (Day, 2000; Graham, 2019; Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020).

All four participants stress the importance of using their leadership roles to make their voices more powerful. Anita values her students' perspectives and ensures them that their voice matters and others need to hear it. Cynthia recognizes that diversity in voice can be an instrument of change. Esther is adamant that being prepared and knowing your audience before speaking. Regardless of your position, your voice is valued and should be heard. Victoria learned to be the most effective by conversing with her staff and building understanding.

Implications for Research

This study provided insights to the experiences that impact LHSILRs leadership development and an understanding of how their leadership practices formed as a result of their lived experiences. Current literature concerning leadership development provided a fluid representation of the challenges women and historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups may face on their journey through leadership during their middle adulthood (Coers et al., 2021; Eiden-Dillow & Best, 2022; Fox, 2018; Ledesma, 2017; Liu et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022; Solórzano, 1997). The narrative data were analyzed using the women's leadership developmental model approach (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014) during middle adulthood. LatCrit theoretical lens has been used in this study as literature supports its use for analyzing personal narratives of underrepresented and historically marginalized groups (Espino, 2012; Fay et al., 2021; Macias & Stephens, 2019; Scott et al., 2022; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Stefancic, 1998).

Therefore, this section explores the connections between this study's findings and existing literature on leadership development through the lens of LatCrit theory. Regarding the LHSILRs

leadership development in HSIs in Texas, three themes emerged (1) educational and career advancement, with subthemes (1a) personal relationships, (1b) professional relationships (1c) mentor relationships; (2) cultural awareness, with subthemes (2a) community service, and (2b) equity and inclusion, and (3) practice, with subtheme (3a) advocacy, (3b) voice. Therefore, the findings, as presented in Appendix I of this study, supported existing literature on leadership development of Latinas but expanded on the awareness of leadership within HSIs in Texas.

The woman's leadership development model proposed by Dahlvig and Longman (2014) provided a fluid representation of the challenges women and historically marginalized racial-ethnic groups may face on their journey through leadership. These influences encompass cultural factors, educational experiences, mentorship, and personal growth, which are particularly relevant in the context of Latina leadership (Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Menchaca et al., 2016; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). The themes of (1) educational and career attainment, (2) cultural awareness, and (3) practice, along with their seven subthemes, are closely aligned with women's leadership development model, particularly those designed for Latina leaders in higher education HSIs. By integrating these themes, leadership development programs can better support Latina women in building the skills, confidence, and networks they need to succeed in leadership roles, while also honoring and leveraging their unique cultural perspectives and experiences.

Additionally, LatCrit theory, or Latina/o CRT, is an extension of CRT served as the lens for this study. LatCrit specifically addresses issues affecting the Latina/o community, including education, law, policy, and social justice (Espino, 2012; Fay et al., 2021; Macias & Stephens, 2019; Scott et al., 2022; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Stefancic, 1998). This study's themes align with the leadership developmental model noted above and with the lens of LatCrit.

Theme 1: Educational and Career Attainment

Educational and career advancement are closely linked, especially in fields that require specialized knowledge or skills. Educational and career attainment for Latina women in leadership roles in higher education HSIs is deeply influenced by personal, professional, and mentor relationships (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2023). Each of these subthemes contributes uniquely to supporting and advancing Latina leaders, helping them overcome barriers, build resilience, and achieve success in their educational and career endeavors (Ortega et al., 2024).

Personal relationships play a critical role in the educational and career attainment of Latina women in leadership roles (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2023). For many Latina leaders, personal relationships with family, friends, and community members provide essential emotional support, encouragement, and motivation (Wang et al., 2024). These relationships often serve as a source of resilience, helping them navigate challenges and maintain a sense of identity and belonging (Wang et al., 2024). In the context of Latina culture, family is typically a central pillar, and the support of family members can significantly impact educational persistence and career aspirations. Latina familial beliefs and values play a role in shaping one's assessment of reality and expectancy practices with others (Liou et al., 2021). Additionally, personal relationships often influence values and priorities, such as the importance of giving back to the community, which can shape career trajectories in higher education leadership (Menchaca et al., 2016).

Professional relationships are crucial for career advancement and success in higher education leadership. For Latina women, building networks with colleagues, supervisors, and peers can open doors to opportunities, provide access to resources, and enhance visibility within the institution (Menchaca et al., 2016). These relationships are particularly important in HSIs, where Latina leaders may seek out connections with other professionals who share similar

cultural backgrounds or experiences (Menchaca et al., 2016). Professional relationships also contribute to creating a supportive work environment, fostering collaboration, and enabling Latina leaders to advocate for policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion within the institution (Ammon, 2024). In environments where Latinas may be underrepresented in leadership roles, strong professional networks can help mitigate feelings of isolation and reinforce a sense of belonging (Ammon, 2024; Ortega et al., 2024).

Mentor relationships are often pivotal in the educational and career attainment of Latina women in leadership roles at HSIs (Ortega et al., 2024). Mentorship provides guidance, support, and advocacy, which can be especially valuable in navigating the complexities of higher education institutions (Akram & Krusemark, 2024). For Latina leaders, mentors who understand their unique cultural experiences and challenges can offer tailored advice and encouragement, fostering both personal and professional growth (Menchaca et al., 2016). Mentors can also serve as role models, demonstrating successful pathways to leadership and helping Latina women envision their potential to achieve similar success (Ortega et al., 2024). In addition, mentorship can play a significant role in developing leadership skills, building confidence, and expanding professional networks, all of which are essential for career advancement in higher education (Quinteros & Covarrubias, 2023).

Traditional research on Latina leaders has often been constrained by narrow definitions of success and achievement, typically focused on quantitative measures such as positions attained, tenure, and academic outputs (Quinteros & Covarrubias, 2023). However, a more comprehensive understanding of educational and career attainment for Latina leaders necessitates a shift towards recognizing the critical role of qualitative factors, particularly the impact of personal, professional, and mentor relationships (Ortega et al., 2024; Quinteros & Covarrubias, 2023).

Theme 2: Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is vital for Latina women in leadership roles in higher education, especially within HSIs (Liou et al., 2021). This theme encompasses understanding and valuing one's own cultural background as well as the diverse cultural contexts of the communities served by these institutions (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2023). Cultural awareness connects closely with the subthemes of community service and equity and inclusion (Ammon, 2024). By drawing attention to this discrepancy, the research acknowledges that performative efforts fail to address the real needs of diverse communities within educational institutions (Salazar Montoya, 2024).

Community service is often a natural extension of cultural awareness for Latina women in leadership roles within HSIs (Menchaca et al., 2016). Latina leaders who are culturally aware are more likely to understand the specific needs, values, and challenges of the communities they serve, particularly those of Hispanic and Latino communities (Menchaca et al., 2016). This understanding drives a commitment to community service as a way to give back, support, and uplift these communities (Akram & Kusemark, 2024; Freeman et al., 2019; Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). For Latina leaders, community service is not just about fulfilling a role or obligation; it is about fostering strong ties with the community, advocating for its needs, and creating programs and initiatives that reflect the cultural values and priorities of its members (Liou et al., 2023). This service often stems from a deep-rooted cultural value of the importance of family and community (Ortega et al., 2024; Perez et al., 2024). By engaging in community service, Latina leaders can also serve as role models, demonstrating the importance of cultural pride, civic engagement, and social responsibility (Akram & Kusemark, 2024).

Equity and inclusion are fundamentally tied to cultural awareness, as understanding and valuing cultural differences are essential to promoting fair and inclusive practices within higher

education (Merma-Molina et al., 2024). Latina women in leadership roles at HSIs are often acutely aware of the barriers faced by marginalized groups, including Hispanics and Latinos, in educational settings (Merma-Molina et al., 2024). This awareness informs their commitment to equity and inclusion, driving efforts to create more inclusive environments that recognize and celebrate cultural diversity (Ammon, 2024; Merma-Molina et al., 2024). Culturally aware Latina leaders are likely to advocate for policies and practices that ensure equitable access to resources, opportunities, and support for all students and staff, regardless of their background. They understand that equity involves more than just equal treatment; it requires addressing systemic inequities and creating an environment where everyone can thrive (Menchaca et al., 2016). Additionally, culturally aware leaders are often proactive in fostering a culture of inclusion, where diverse perspectives are valued, and all community members feel seen, heard, and respected (Perez et al., 2024). This includes promoting culturally relevant curricula, supporting diverse hiring practices, and implementing programs that address the specific needs of historically marginalized and underrepresented groups (Ortega et al., 2024).

Theme 3: Practice

Practice for Latina women in leadership roles in higher education HSIs is closely related to advocacy and voice. Through their actions and behaviors, Latina leaders engage in advocacy to promote equity and inclusivity and use their voice to influence policy and practice within their institutions (Akram & Krusemark, 2024). Both subthemes are essential components of their leadership practice, enabling them to effectively serve their communities and drive positive change in higher education.

Practice in the context of Latina women in leadership roles in higher education HSIs refers to the actions, behaviors, and strategies these leaders employ to enact their roles

effectively (Menchaca et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2024). This theme is deeply connected to the subthemes of advocacy and voice as follows:

Advocacy is a core practice for Latina women in leadership positions within HSIs. Advocacy involves actively supporting and promoting the needs, rights, and interests of students, faculty, and the broader community, particularly those who are underrepresented or marginalized (Liou et al., 2021). Latina leaders, drawing on their personal experiences and cultural awareness, often engage in advocacy to address systemic inequities and create more equitable educational environments (Quinteros & Covarrubias, 2023).

In practice, advocacy by Latina leaders may include lobbying for policies that increase access to education for Hispanic and Latino students, securing funding for culturally relevant programs, and challenging institutional barriers that limit opportunities for minority groups (Quinteros & Covarrubias, 2023). Latina leaders in HSIs often advocate for inclusive curricula that reflect diverse histories and perspectives, as well as for the hiring and retention of diverse faculty and staff (Menchaca et al., 2016). Their advocacy efforts are rooted in a deep understanding of the cultural and socioeconomic challenges faced by their communities, driving them to champion change and equity in higher education (Ammon, 2024).

Voice is another critical element of practice for Latina women in leadership roles (Wang et al., 2024). It refers to the ability to express one's views, experiences, and perspectives authentically and assertively in professional settings (Wang et al., 2024). For Latina leaders, using their voice is a powerful tool for influencing change, shaping institutional policies, and representing the interests of their communities.

In the context of HSIs, Latina leaders use their voice to bring attention to issues that may otherwise be overlooked, such as the need for culturally sensitive support services or the

importance of bilingual education (Wang et al., 2024). They often share their own experiences as women of color in leadership, offering unique insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by Latina students and staff (Menchaca et al., 2016). By using their voice, Latina leaders can challenge stereotypes, confront biases, and advocate for a more inclusive and supportive campus environment (Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024). This practice not only empowers them as leaders but also inspires others to find and use their own voices to advocate for change (Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024).

Recommendations for Practice

Based on this study, recommendations for practice among leaders in higher education HSIs in Texas is to take the lived experiences of the four LHSILRs in this study and reflect on the critical factors personal, professional and mentor relationships have on the leadership development of Latinas. Furthermore, inquiry and consideration of cultural awareness, inclusion, advocacy and voice, and how it influences the educational experience and leadership development warrant attention from policy makers and leaders (Akram & Krusemark, 2024; Ammon, 2024; Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024; Liou et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2024; Quinteros & Covarrubias, 2023).

The results of this study demonstrated that the leadership development of LHSILRs is directly impacted by life factors such as relationships, cultural acceptance, and current policies. Therefore, LHSILRs should be aware of how their leadership practices support and develop the underrepresented Latinas in higher education as well as the historically marginalized populations within their communities. Aligning leaders to address these disparities requires intentional efforts to create inclusive environments, promote equity in hiring practices, and support the professional development of Latina leaders in Hispanic-serving institutions in Texas.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative study findings were based on a small purposeful sampling of four participants over a specific time frame of their leadership development during their middle adulthood. With such a specific time frame and small population, it is not feasible to generalize them among other LHSILRs. Further research could include a qualitative approach expanding across the lifespan to identify influential factors impacting leadership development. Researchers should consider broadening their metrics of success to include nontraditional forms of leadership and achievement that reflect the lived experiences of Latina leaders, such as community impact, cultural advocacy, and personal resilience.

Chapter Summary

According to Liu et al. (2021) and Perez et al. (2024), an individual experiences significant life challenges that impact leadership development during the middle adulthood stage of life (i.e., ages 30 to 60). This study examined how the life experiences of four Latina leaders in HSIs understood their relationships whether personal, professional or mentors, significantly impacted their leadership developmental practices. The Latina leaders consider their experiences as contributing factors in their leadership practices; empowering them to be advocates in their leadership journeys as well as support the students they serve. In addition to their life relationships and experiences the geographical locations represent significant components of LatCrit, considering the large Hispanic population serviced by HSIs in Texas. Moreover, the relationship experiences described by the LHSILRs highlight the importance of understanding and valuing the unique experiences of Latina leaders, promoting culturally responsive practices, and advocating for equity and inclusion (Perez et al., 2024). Higher education institutions have a responsibility to meet the needs of their students, including Hispanic or Latinas, and shape them

into the future leaders of our communities (Perez et al., 2024). Collectively, the life stories of the LHSILRs illuminated how the relationship experiences impact educational and career attainment, cultural awareness, and practice during their middle adulthood and how they have shaped the leaders they are and continue to be.

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 Department: General Questions
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Hi Deborah,

Thanks for specifying! This table is actually from the American College President Study microsite that was created to accompany *American College President 2017*. Please note that it is not from *The American College President: 2023 Edition*.

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We wish you all the best with your dissertation!

Regards,
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Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Introduction

I would like to thank you again for agreeing to work with me on this research project. I will first take a moment to reassure you that all personally identifiable information was removed from the transcripts of this recording. All participants were assigned pseudonyms in the transcripts and research documents. This is the opportunity to let me know if you would like to select your pseudonym/alias.

As a recap, this qualitative life story narrative study aims to understand the experiences of Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) during middle adulthood and their perceptions of the factors, if any, that may influence their leadership development in Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas. Three broad questions will guide this study. RQ1: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their personal experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development? RQ2: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their professional experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development? RQ3: How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) describe their mentorship experiences, if applicable, within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences contribute to their leadership development?

At this time, I would like to turn on the recorder. “Do I have your permission to do so?”

This is Deborah Gonzalez, a doctoral student at Abilene Christian University. Today’s date is _____, and I am speaking with participant _____.

The Semistructured Interview:

The following open-ended questions were used to guide the interviewer.

I began the interview by asking: “Do I have your permission to record this interview?”

Leadership Development Questions

These interview questions aim to delve into the personal, professional, and mentorship experiences of Latinas in leadership roles within Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas, as outlined in the research questions.

Regarding Research Question 1:

How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their personal experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

- Can you share some significant personal experiences you've had during your time in leadership roles at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in Texas?
- How do you perceive your personal growth and development during middle adulthood (age 30-60) while serving in leadership positions within HSIs?
- Can you describe any challenges or obstacles you've encountered personally that have influenced your leadership journey within HSIs?
- In what ways do you think your personal experiences have shaped your leadership style and approach within the context of HSIs?
- How do you reflect on the impact of your personal experiences on your overall leadership development within HSIs?

Regarding Research Question 2:

How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) recount their professional experiences during middle adulthood within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences impact their leadership development?

- Could you discuss some of the significant professional experiences you've encountered while serving in leadership roles at Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas?
- How have your professional experiences within HSIs contributed to your growth and development as a leader during middle adulthood?
- What are some of the key challenges or achievements you've faced in your professional journey within HSIs, and how have they influenced your leadership trajectory?
- In what ways do you believe your professional experiences within HSIs have shaped your leadership skills and competencies?
- How do you perceive the impact of your professional experiences on your overall leadership development within the context of HSIs?

Regarding Research Question 3:

How do Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) describe their mentorship experiences, if applicable, within HSIs in Texas, and to what extent do these experiences contribute to their leadership development?

- Can you share any experiences you've had with mentorship within Hispanic serving institutions in Texas?
- How would you describe the role of mentorship in your leadership journey within HSIs?

- Have you encountered any specific challenges or benefits from mentorship experiences within HSIs that have impacted your leadership development?
- In what ways have your mentorship experiences influenced your leadership style and decision-making within HSIs?
- How do you perceive the overall contribution of mentorship experiences to your leadership development within the context of HSIs?

Closing Questions: Reflecting on your responses to your personal, professional, and mentorship experiences you just described, how would you summarize your leadership development and leadership practices in a Hispanic serving institution?

Is there anything else you would like to share that may have impacted your leadership development and leadership practices in Hispanic serving institutions?

Thank you for being so willing to participate and be interviewed today for this research study. I assure you that your responses will remain completely anonymous. Thank you again for your time and generous sharing of your life story.

(Recording will end)

Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Approval

Date: June 19, 2024

PI: Deborah Gonzalez

Department: ONL-Online Student, 17250-EdD Online

Re: Initial - IRB-2024-121

Narratives of Latina Leadership in Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for *Narratives of Latina Leadership in Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas*. The administrative check-in date is --.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 3.(i)(B). Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection.

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Research Notes: Approved for Exempt 3B research protocol

Additional Approvals/Instructions:

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit it to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the IRB. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

- When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
- According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
- It is the investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website <http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...> or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board

Appendix E: Request for Participation

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Deborah Gonzalez, and I am a doctoral student at Abilene Christian University. I humbly request your participation in a doctoral research study titled: Narratives of Latina Leadership in Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas. This qualitative life story narrative study aims to understand the experiences of Latinas in Hispanic Serving Institutions Leadership Roles (LHSILRs) during middle adulthood and their perceptions of the factors, if any, that may influence their leadership development in Hispanic Serving Institutions in Texas.

The study involved virtual interviews with participants who were asked to share stories about their leadership development across their mid-lifespan. Initial interviews will last approximately one hour, with possible follow-up interviews to clarify and expand the narrative from the first interview. Interviews may be conducted through a virtual conference such as Zoom or Google meets. Participants will remain anonymous in the actual publication of the study. Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to participate or stop your participation at any time in the research and for any reason.

If you would like to participate in this study, please email me at xxxxx@acu.edu. I have attached the informed consent form.

I appreciate your consideration.

Respectfully,

Deborah Gonzalez
Doctoral Candidate
Abilene Christian University

Appendix F: Transcript Verification Email

Hello. Thank you again for taking time from your very busy schedule to participate in my study at Abilene Christian University. To ensure the accuracy of your transcript, I have attached it here for your review. Please read, and if you notice any inconsistencies or if there is anything else you remember or would like to add, please note the time stamp, and indicate the additional remarks. I look forward to your response within 1 week.

Appendix G: Narrative Verification Email

Hello. Thank you again for taking time from your very busy schedule to participate in my study at Abilene Christian University. To ensure the accuracy of your narrative, I have attached it here for your review. Please read, and if you notice any inconsistencies or if there is anything else you remember or would like to add, please indicate the additional remarks. I look forward to your response within 1 week.

Appendix H: From Codes to Themes (Sample)

Participant	First cycle: Initial code	Second cycle: Focused codes	Subthemes	Themes
Anita	And so you had to really be strong and be confident and all of that. It kind of felt like that because it's like, "Wow. There isn't anybody else here to represent Latinas." Here, it's a little bit different.	Latina	Advocate Voice	Practice
Esther	When I walk into a space at the college or within the community representing what I do, my role is to know who I'm speaking to so that my conversations, and dialogue, and discussion is informed.	Lead by example	Advocate	Practice
Victoria	Because I've learned also professionally when you don't build relationships, when you don't understand what that other person does, there's a lot of tension.	Relationship building	Professional	Relationships
Esther	I have found I should say, for me, it's been more of me putting, "Oh, I don't want to." No. Just say what you need to say. Be prepared, be informed, and know your audience.	Voice		Practice
Esther	Because if others are afraid to say something, those may be looking to me to say something.	Voice		Practice
Esther	And use your voice. It matters. It counts.	Voice		Practice
Cynthia	And I will admit, so our leadership team at the campus, a few years back, I think in looking at my divisional leadership, I think it was one of two Latinas. And again, I work at a HSI, and you would think, "Wait. What?"	Latinas	Equity and inclusion	Cultural awareness

Participant	First cycle: Initial code	Second cycle: Focused codes	Subthemes	Themes
Esther	I was the only one Latina and who was bilingual.	Latinas	Equity and inclusion	Cultural awareness
Cynthia	“Am I doing that to you? And if I am, I need you to tell me.” Right? Because I'm one, again, my dad taught me work ethic. And I learned it from the fields. Let's just be real. You bust your butt, and that'	Culture	Personal Professional	Relationships

Appendix I: Leadership Development

Source	Theory	Design	Scope of the study	Leadership influences	Context	Participants
This study (2024)	Leadership development	Qualitative	Empirical	(a) Educational and career attainment (b) Cultural Awareness (c) Practice	Texas Hispanic Serving Institutions	Associate vice president, associate dean, directors
Perez et al. (2024)	Critical race theory and LatCrit theory	Qualitative phenomenological	Case study	Lived experience	University	Hispanic female leader without a degree
Wang et al. (2024)	Educational administration	Literature review	Theoretical framework	Women's empowerment	Economic, political, knowledge, and psychological empowerment	Women in both developing and industrialized countries
Liu et al. (2021)	Leadership development	Literature review	Theoretical	(a) Life span experiences (b) Dynamic (c) Contextual	Life span development	Adolescence through middle adulthood
Liou et al. (2021)	Resilient resistance LatCrit	Qualitative literature review	Theoretical	(a) Expectations (b) Resilience (c) Resistance	Latinas in PK-20 education pipeline	Latinas HSIs in Americas Southwest

Source	Theory	Design	Scope of the study	Leadership influences	Context	Participants
Menchaca et al. (2016)	Journey to leadership LatCrit FemCrit Counter-storytelling	Qualitative literature review	Theoretical	(a) Leadership (b) Mentorship (c) Education	Leadership	Two top level Latina administrators of universities
Day (2011)	Leadership development	Literature review	Empirical	(a) Leadership ability (b) Trajectory	Leadership	Childhood through adulthood
Solórzano & Yosso (2002)	Critical race theory LatCrit	Literature review	Framework	Storytelling	Educational research	

Appendix J: Sample Transcripts

Participant 1:

So, it's interesting because I guess I've been here in [Texas City A] 20 years. But before this, I was in [Texas City B] at another HSI in [Texas City B]. And I think the experiences are a little bit different being in [Texas City B] versus in [Texas City A] because here in [Texas City A], there's a much larger, a much higher percentage of Latinas here. For example, in our administration-- and then I was also at another institution here in [Texas City A], and I was one of many Latinas in the executive leadership. And then here at [a Texas University], let me see. There, again, is strong representation.

And so, when I think about leadership development, again, in [Texas City A] it's a little bit different. But here, there are a lot of different programs. For example, through the Hispanic Chamber, or there's a leadership program for Latinas specifically within the city. And even though some of the programs aren't specifically for Latinas, there's always typically strong representation there. Again, when I was in [Texas City A], I went through leadership [Texas City A], and I was one-- it was like a cohort of maybe 18, and there were two of us, I think, that were Latinas in there. So, it was so different than it is here. And I think that in [Texas City A], when I went through leadership development programs, it was almost like you are representing Latinas. [laughter] And so you had to really be strong and be confident and all of that. It kind of felt like that because it's like, "Wow. There isn't anybody else here to represent Latinas." Here, it's a little bit different. And because there's less pressure, maybe. But you're still confident, still strong, and all of that. But it's more collegial, I think, maybe than an [Texas City A]. I don't know if that

makes sense. But here, you aren't wearing that badge. It's just who you are. And there are a lot of smart Latinas here and so it's-- I don't know if that makes sense. So, it's kind of a different-- almost a little bit of a different persona that you have here. So, it's kind of varied. I mean, when you asked the question, I thought, "That's interesting." Because just thinking about the various experiences that I've had throughout my career, here it's very comfortable. We had a Latina president, and she just left. Actually, the first two presidents were Latinas here at the university. And the former president left maybe a year ago or something, but she was very-- we celebrated Day of the Girl. I mean, there were a lot of women's issues that took the forefront. Now we have a male president. He's great, just kind of a little bit of a different focus. He's Latino, but it's just a little bit of a different focus. But she was very-- the former president, she provided a lot of support for professional development for women. We had a program for women at work here where we would bring in speakers and things like that, which was really great. Now, because of SB17, we are a little bit more limited, I think, in having those kinds of programs. Because I helped to start a DEI program and things like that, but we can't have those anymore.

Participant 2

So just some context. I grew up as a migrant student in South Texas. So, it was one of those when I went to college even the first time, right, I had a lot of imposter syndrome. I didn't know why I needed to go to college. My father took his girl dad role very seriously. So, he enrolled in junior college for a technical degree when I was a junior in high school so we would graduate at the same time. Right? So, when I started going to school and I was-- okay, afterwards, I worked in nonprofit, did a job coaching. And it actually took one of my students to tell me about, "Hey, did you know that colleges have

this role that you do today in the nonprofit world?" Right? So, my first job in higher ed was actually at community college in Texas. It was one of those I was very much green. Right? And then just being able to advocate for myself was very hard at first. I am now at this point in my career where I am mid-manager. Right? And I've been in higher ed about 14 years. I'm 40. Thank you for that. I'm like, "Oh, you made my day." And even to this day, I'm very confident in my ability, but do I still have moments of like, "How did I get here"? Absolutely. I'm one, though, the way that I kind of reflect back on it is that every day I show up, I'm showing up not only for my family, but also those who will come after me. I take my role very seriously when I'm at the table because I recognize that I'm not just speaking for myself, but all those that are going to be around there at some point. Right? So, I'm very, very conscious of that.

Even if you look at my desk, I have my father's picture right there, right, because he was my biggest advocate, my biggest cheerleader, but also the one that kept me aligned quite a bit when I'd get a little shaky on things. I'm also one, though, that I'm very much a community-based leader, meaning that-- I've noticed, myself, that I need to get better on this part. I'm horrible about speaking to my own wins, but I will speak to others' wins all day, every day. It's one of those-- I don't know if it's where it's very collective in terms of our society, our culture. Right? I want to be the biggest cheerleader for everyone else around me, and I forget about me sometimes. And so that's what I'm still working on, to kind of say, "Okay, well, hey, you need to celebrate because you did have to do a really big lift there. It's okay to acknowledge that." Right? Not everybody could do that, and that's all right. I'm working on that part. I'm humble to a fault, I think, on some things.

He was just one of those people that he's like, "Mi hija, you always have to uplift the community around you." So, he was one that everyone knew they can go to Micah and ask for help. It didn't matter what it was. If someone needed something, they went to him for the most random things, sometimes. I grew up in a very small town, so in a town called [Asada?], Texas. I think, at the time, the population was maybe 200 people. Even going to school, 2% of individuals went to school, and then it got even shorter of attainment. And it was one that I realized like, "You've got to show up for others." And that was because of him. That it always saying, "Don't get complacent." I think even his approach, I always saw him get involved, whether it was through volunteering. I even learned later in life that he was commissioner for our county one year. I'm like, "You never told me that." Right? And when I started talking about this with him, he was like, "I challenge you to say, okay, your job is important to you, but what else are you doing for others around you?" Right? "How are you being community-minded?" So much so, now I serve on one of the commissions with the city of [Texas City B] . I've made it to be a point on a board of directors earlier in my career, and still now, to this day, I've been in chamber leaderships. And I don't think I would have done that without his push, and really wanting to be excellent for not only myself, again, but for my family. Every day I do good, I'm doing good for them. So, it is pretty critical to me. And I'm glad that he instilled that, even though there are some days that are absolutely exhausting. But my heart is full at the end of the day, too. I'm proud of the legacy I'm starting and where it's going.

So, I will say a lot of my career is in career services. So that's why I have a different experience because learning my job most of my life has been talking about the

professional background. So, I keep an active resume with me. I audit that every semester just to kind of reflect. And it is good for my heart, but also is one that I recognize for me to advance and for my team to advance, we have to be mindful of that. So, every semester, I'm doing an audit. Okay, where did we go? Where did we go for this? And so, I have a document. It's ugly as can be, but it helps me remember things. It also is one of those where, if I have a really bad day, I fell on my face a little, I have somewhere to go back. It's like, "You know what? You thought that other day was hard, but look where you got to. You survived that. You're going to survive this, too. It's fine." It's kind of allowed me to grow and say, "You evolved so much from-- hey, you started off as just working as a library aide as a work study, to now being on the administrative side of the house, to be in a role that you didn't even know existed." It's kind of a cool thing, but that's very intentional. And I really do credit my professional background to kind of teach me that skill set. And I challenge students and even my team to do that. Especially within my own team. I'm one of them that we work with an HSI, but we have to still be able to speak to our ability, right, and to be very data-informed when we do our decision-making. And when we try to get to new opportunities, I need to have written evidence. That's why I'm like, "Hey, have you updated your resume? Where's your log? I need your performance." Because it's easy to forget when you're in the swim of things, especially because I work in student affairs.

And so, student affairs is you are constantly moving. Even this summer-- people think we have off. Absolutely not, right? The moment a class graduates, guess what? Orientation's right around the corner. So, we're in active onboarding role and then getting

ready for the fall semester. So, it's full scope. That's very easy to forget unless we actually document those wins and we have something to reflect on.

Participant 3:

When I recount, it really takes me back to where I grew up down in South Texas, and the context of my surroundings. I mean, I grew up in a predominantly Hispanic region. Although we were considered minorities back in the days. But the reality at this point is that we're the majority. The cultural influence of growing up in that environment influenced a lot of what I did in my education. I'm recounting is my mother and I graduated from college together as undergrad. So that was a big influence. Knowing that my mother, who was a single mom at the time, raising four, had three kids in college plus herself, I don't know how that woman did it. Just admire and respect. But she did it, right?

So recounting kind of how I got here is just knowing that's that-- you just put your mind forward no matter what the obstacles are and you succeed. So, my trajectory in recounting what got me here today is that I was going to college. I mean, it was not even a question. I was going to college. And then another experience that really kind of shaped was when I finished undergrad and then went to graduate school to become an occupational therapist, which is my profession. And I remember going to grad school, and I was maybe one of two Latinas, and all of my peers were Anglos from around the country. So, it was the graduate school, from a Texas university. There was only a couple of us from Texas, and the rest were all from around the country.

So, being from a community of growing up, that I was the majority, I went to a space in grad school up in North Texas, mind you, where I was the minority. And being

around Anglo-Americans and African-Americans, right? I was never around African-Americans. So, it was a cultural shock leaving where I grew up, going to North Texas, and being a minority. When I recount that, it was a very humbling experience. And it enriched my understanding of culture and embracing differences. So then when I went into practice, and I practiced in the [Texas City C] area for 20-plus years, and I got my first job as an occupational therapist in a large rehab hospital in the [Texas City D] area, I was the only Latina out of-- we had 30 or so occupational therapists, 30 or so physical therapists, 20 or so speech therapists. So, a huge team.

I was the only one Latina and who was bilingual. So, I just remember time and time again when I'd walk into a patient's room who was Latina, Latino, and they're like, "Oh, thank God. [Gracias a Dios, hablas Espanol]," right? And so just embracing the authenticity of the culture and the value that I felt, right, for me as a human being, to be able to connect with these patients that were in a vulnerable position, but yet grateful to have somebody that's spoken and can connect to them culturally really influenced who I continue to develop to be, right? Recognizing that diversity is important and recognizing that in my role of healthcare, that was a critical part. And so, it began to kind of catapult my leadership because I very quickly found myself in leadership roles in healthcare. And it wasn't necessarily that I was making those just I guess some skills started to come through and my ability to communicate with people and embrace who I am.

Participant 4:

I always go back to one of the toughest experiences that I've had in my professional career to the point of the lesson that it taught me during that hard year of that professional career. It was absolutely horrible. I don't wish it on my worst enemy, but it

allowed me to be in the leadership role that I am today, right? So, in the moment of that chaos and insanity and super anxiety-driven day-to-day activities that I was experiencing, I would go home and cry. I would cry in the car before I would go in the building, like that. It was really bad. But you have also a family to support, right? My child was, I believe, a junior. My youngest was junior-senior that year. So, I had to push through. And in that moment, I would always question God like, "What is the purpose for me experiencing this right now? I don't understand it, and I hope later I will." And it was only because of that experience, that I was able to land this role. The experiences of not just the hardship piece, but the professional experience that I received that year. In that, the leadership piece has allowed me to create a culture within my staff, although albeit it's not a huge staff. But I believe we're a powerful staff. With me, it makes two, three, four. I'm sorry.

It has allowed me to lead in a way by example. I'm the boss. I'm the leader. And I don't like my team to call me boss. I can't stand that. I don't like them to introduce me that way or a team. I have a name, right? That's the way I like to be introduced. But it definitely has opened my eyes to be empathetic and compassionate and build relationships first. And making sure that I understand each role that they represent. If they were to not be there tomorrow, could I step in without a shadow of a doubt? Always knowing what's going on.

Absolutely. So, my professional career was very, very slow, a lot like what you were sharing with me about your mother, etc. We almost have the exact same circumstance, right? My mom passed away my senior year. And one of her requests for me-- there's a way bigger story to this than just me going to school. But she was like,

"You keep going to school. Don't give up." And so, I graduated that year after she passed away. And I've always been driven. Her voice has always been in the back of my head, right? So, I graduated high school. I've always been amused by medical field. My first take of going to school was becoming a nurse, right? But at the end of the day, I was a mom first. A nursing field is very chaotic, and requires a lot of your time. And my husband sat me down, and he was like, "Look, you need to make the choice." So, within me getting my degree from my BSN, I switched literally a year before. I think I was almost 10 hours away doing clinicals and stuff like that. And I graduated with my undergrad in 12 months, three semesters or something like that. But because of those professionals-- so I started off literally as a clerk, right?

I already had children, and I just worked myself up to get my bachelor's degree. I think I graduated my bachelor's in my late 30s, I think, or mid-30s, something like that. And then my master's, I'm about to be 50. You know what I mean? So, I've definitely done it slower than usual, but it's my story to write, right? And I'm still accomplishing those goals. But professionally, me allowing myself to climb the ladder really helps me-- I think it helps me look at the employees that I work with and for. And department and college-wise, too, is how can I be my most effective self, right? Just that way and with the team and professionally. I think it helped broaden my view of teamwork ethically, professionally, spiritually even, and even-- what's that word I'm looking for? Just the cohesiveness within your department. Because I've learned also professionally when you don't build relationships, when you don't understand what that other person does, there's a lot of tension. There can build a lot of tension in there. And when you're just bossing people around, there also becomes that resentment too. So,

I've learned to not do that with the people that I work with. And professionally, it's just really helped. I'm really proud of what I've been able to do, which is the small staff that I have. The retention. I just came from a conference last week. I was in another state. It's a state conference that we do, a mandatory conference that we do every year. And I met up with another woman that's over a program in another state. And we were talking about our retention rates and how she's had a revolving door for the past 4 years. And I asked her authentically, "Why do you think that is? Why do you think that is?" And she shared with me. And so, I thought in my brain, "Well, man, I've been able to keep all of mine. I haven't had a second person." And I was proud of that. And she was like, "Well, how are you doing that?" And I was like, "Well, I'm not a micromanager." I've learned that micromanaging thing is not healthy. I think in some circumstances, maybe. But for the position specifically in the program that we run, micromanaging is not a good way to run the program. And also, I know when they're not doing their work. You can tell.