THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF LATINA LEADERS
NEGOTIATING CULTURES

by

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(Under the Direction of Laura Bierema)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences of Latina leaders who work in community development in the Southeastern United States. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How did Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills?
2. What factors influenced the leadership practices of Latina leaders in communities?

Interpretivism and feminism were the guiding theoretical frameworks for this study. Nine Latina leaders were purposefully selected to participate in this study. Primary methods of data collection included in-depth interviews, field notes, and document analysis. Data was analyzed inductively using the constant comparative method. Analysis of the data revealed four main themes about the learning experiences of Latinas in their leadership practices between cultures. For research question one, the main theme is Using Latina Specific Strategies to learn to navigate their leadership practices among different cultures. For research question two, three themes were identified to understand the factors
that influence the leadership practices of Latina leaders. The themes are: 1) *Navigating the Intersecting Dynamics of Gender and Ethnicity*, 2) *Lifting up the Community through Quests for Learning*, and 3) *Developing Leadership Practices around the Prismatic Reflections of Family*.

Five major conclusions were derived from the findings of this study. The conclusions that can be drawn about the learning experiences of Latina leaders are: 1) Latinas’ specific strategies to negotiate leadership practices between cultures are unique to their lived experiences in the Southeastern United States; 2) Latina leaders’ intersecting dynamics of gender and ethnicity challenge their leadership practices; 3) Latinas’ leadership practices spring directly from their cultural roots and values; 4) Spirituality and connectedness shape Latina leaders’ learning experiences, and 5) Latina leaders’ learning experiences and leadership traits create a model for emancipatory leadership.

**INDEX WORDS:** Adult Education, Feminism, Intersectionality, Latinas, Latina Leaders, Emancipatory Learning, Women’s Learning, Leadership, Emancipatory Leadership, Women’s Leadership, Southeastern U.S., Cultures, Qualitative Research.
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

La Virgen del Valle ~ Gracias Virgencita por todos los favores recibidos.

St. Achilles ~ Agradecida de haber defendido mi tesis en tu día.

My Parents (María B. Núñez & Omar Lopez) ~ My biggest fans and cheerleaders.

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Me ~ Perseverance gave me the greatest gift to become Dr. Darbisi.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Over a decade ago, a young adult woman, thriving in all of her endeavors, was confident that she was a natural born leader and that her abilities could only improve as she took advantage of more learning and leadership opportunities. Little did she know that moving to a different country would change everything and shake her confidence and experiences. Her education, socio-economic status, social capital, and family heritage were a winning combination that provided her with a perceived privileged position in Venezuela. However, all of that changed when she immigrated to the United States—life in the land of opportunity, the home of the brave—was not utterly what she envisioned it would be.

That woman is me, Carolina Darbisi, the author of this story. Though that once winning combination is still part of who I am, I am no longer that emergent leader. Instead, my positionality has shifted as I negotiate and navigate the new values, stereotypes and biases that my gender and ethnicity carry in American culture, especially in the American South. In this environment, I constantly question and reframe my knowledge, capabilities, and skills; I am always reminded both in overt and subtle ways that “I am not from around here” and that I am a woman, an immigrant, a Latina, and, more than anything else, a minority. It indeed does not matter how many graduate degrees, credentials or professional experience I accumulate or how well I perform at work, instead what has come to matter is my resiliency and ability to learn to navigate
and negotiate the intersections of my multiple identities and my other statuses—as Latina residing in the United States.

There are certain considerations unique to women residing in the U.S. regarding their learning and leadership experiences. In several respects, women have distinctive ways of learning, ways of knowing, ways of working, ways of caring, and ways of leading; undoubtedly, women have different ways of being. These ways of being are not merely attributed to unique women’s ways or feminine styles but are exclusively pertinent to women’s unique life experiences, and encompass more than gender.

Examining women’s ways of knowing began in the late 1980’s when Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) published their research on one hundred and thirty-five American women from diverse backgrounds, both rural and urban. In this research, women were asked questions regarding their background, gender, relationships, and "ways of knowing." This study metaphorically uses the word voice to describe stages of intellectual development in women. In this metaphor, the least empowered women are described as voiceless and/or silent whereas the stages were described as listening to the voices of others (received knowing), to the inner voice (subjective knowing), to the voice of reason (procedural knowledge), and the integration of voices (constructed knowing). Subsequently, in the 1990s, women’s ways of leading gained notoriety when Helgesen (1990) examined successful women leaders. Helgesen discovered that workplaces managed by her participants tended to foster environments described as webs of inclusion. Helgesen explains that women leaders in her study organized culture more as a web rather than a hierarchical (top-down) model, and that the sharing of information was instrumental to their effectiveness in a leadership role. Since then, additional research
has been conducted to understand gender differences and styles that would make women effective leaders, but little has been done in the contextual perspectives where women find themselves exercising leadership roles (Madden, 2005; Stead & Elliott, 2009). Although all the work previously done is instrumental in understanding women’s leadership, we need additional research to understand different women’s experiences when learning to be leaders in their communities. In an effort to contribute to this body of knowledge, I am specifically interested in Latinas—immigrants and non-immigrants—and the practices of their leadership in our communities.

A fair amount of scholarship already exists on how women learn (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Hayes, 2001; Flannery & Hayes, 2000; Tisdell, 2000a); however, as in other disciplinary areas, the field of adult education has been remiss in efforts to focus their attention on Latinas when it comes to their learning strategies and experiences. Additionally, the scholarship in leadership focuses mainly on corporate women’s leaders, neglecting those women who occupy leadership roles in their communities. This study aims to elicit answers to supplement the women’s ways of learning and women’s leadership scholarship.

In many ways, members of society conform and perpetuate traditional gender roles and stereotypes; furthermore, it is known that “Hispanic girls and women face the constraining sex-role expectations ingrained in Hispanic culture” (Bonilla-Santiago, 1992, p. 4). Thus, to bring about meaningful change and step outside of these traditional gender roles, Latinas ought to learn to practice and negotiate their leadership skills to foster social action and enable social change within their communities and academia. The benefit of exploring Latinas’ learning and their leadership experiences is crucial to create
a more balanced representation of women in our scholarship, and more inclusive environments for work. Women are not a homogeneous group of people, and this encourages scholars to take up the task of understanding the myriad of experiences that women have in different social contexts and from different heritages and/or backgrounds.

**Background of the Problem**

During 1990s the southern states became a major new destination for Latinos. In 1995, 3.7 million Latinos resided in the U.S. South, while in 2003, that number grew to 6.1 million. Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority in the United States, accounting for 16.3% of the population, an estimated one-third of whom are immigrants. It is projected that by 2050, Latinos will represent 24% of the U.S. population (Bergman, 2004). Between 1990 and 2006 the Latino population in six southern states (Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee) grew by 514%, while the national average grew by 98%. Additionally, the majority of these new immigrants in the Southeastern United States were people from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Peru, and Brazil, and most tended to be immigrant workers from Mexico and Central America who came to fill jobs in the construction, manufacturing, poultry processing, landscaping, service, and agricultural industries.

The state of Georgia is a prime example of the changes in demographics and the new racial dynamics in the Southeastern U.S.; Georgia provided the context for this study due to the unprecedented and dramatic change in Latino demographics in the last 20 years as well as the political environment towards immigrants that is reflected in the passing of bills such as HB87 and SB458 to halt illegal immigration. The 2010 Census reported that 853,689 or 9% of the population in Georgia are Latinos, of those 61% of the
population are of Mexican origin. Currently, the state of Georgia has the highest number of Latinos—new Latino immigrants—among the Southeastern states populations. This situation challenges and alters the Black and White historical norms. Moreover, Latinos in Georgia encounter both subtle and overt racism and discrimination due to existing racial and cultural relations in conjunction with severe immigration law practices and enforcements.

Recent data from the census also estimates that Georgia has approximately 393,239 Latinas, accounting for 46% of the Latino population in Georgia. Latinos as a group tend to be younger than their counterparts; the median age for all Latinos is younger than non-Latinos at 27, compared to 31 for Blacks and 41 for Whites (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Nationally, only 13% of the Latino population has completed college, compared to 20% of Blacks and 33% of Whites (Edwards, 2009).

As noted earlier, Latinas in leadership roles is a relatively foreign concept within the literature. First, Latinas in general tend to be less educated than non-Latinas in the United States; 36% has less than a high school education, compared with 10% of non-Latinas (Gonzales, 2008). In addition, native Latinas and foreign-born Latinas differ in their educational attainment in that almost half of foreign-born Latinas have not completed high school. According to the U.S. Census (2010a), 46% of Latinas in Georgia do not have a high school diploma, which is higher than the national rate, and only 10% of the Latinas in Georgia have a Bachelor’s degree diploma.

Furthermore, the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reports that Latinas hold 5.17% of the bachelor’s degrees, 4.04% of the master’s degrees, and 2.80% of the doctoral degrees that were conferred in the year 2009-2010. In addition to
disparities in educational attainment, the most common occupations held by Hispanic women are in office and administrative support (Gonzales, 2008). Gonzales also explains that Hispanic women are “much likely than non-Hispanic women to be employed in blue collar occupations” (p. 14), while only 6% of the Latinas hold a management occupation. In 2002, Latinas accounted for only 0.24% of corporate officers at the Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2003), and in 2006, Latinas held 1.0% of Fortune 100 board seats (Catalyst, 2011).

However, education and work are not the only obstacles Latina leaders face, as Adler (1999) states, leadership is not culture and value free and consequently, there is an array of factors that influences each Latina’s path to learning and leadership. The country of origin or heritage largely contributes to the differences that are often identified as well as the stage of migration or acculturation given the stress associated with living between two different cultures or the constant exchange of values, attitudes, behaviors and norms (Zuniga, 2008). Additionally, Bonilla-Santiago (1992) describes one of the foremost obstacles for Latinas leaders, asserting that “Hispanic women leaders share a history of discrimination and oppression based primarily on color, class, and cultural differences from the mainstream population” (p. 21).

Traditionally, women have been portrayed as lacking the traits and behaviors that would make them effective leaders; however, it has been found that “instead of lacking the requisite skills for leadership, women are more likely to lack opportunities for exercising leadership” (Klenke, 1996, p. 8). Gender stereotypes, perceptions and expectations, the effects of the glass ceiling, the dynamics of tokenism, and the lack of
mentoring are some of the barriers or obstacles that women leaders encounter when trying to participate and access leadership opportunities.

Likewise, Vazquez and Comas-Diaz (2007) have identified several challenges and obstacles in leadership for Latinas, explaining that “although Latinas experience similar experiences to other women” it is the intersection of gender and ethnicity what makes challenges or obstacles unique. In their research, Vasquez and Comas-Diaz assert that Latinas in leadership roles experience devaluation of their work, aversive racism, societal expectations/role restrictions, stereotype threat, and disidentification; that is, “the process whereby members of stereotyped groups, having experienced stereotype threat in their education, learn to protect themselves by avoiding and devaluing the associated academic activity” (p. 272). Despite of all the challenges and inequalities that Latinas may face due to their race, gender, education, social economic status and positionality in general, there is evidence that Latinas are making progress in their educational attainment as well as they have become progressively active within leadership roles in the United States (Gomez et al., 2001; Lopez-Mulnix, Wolverton & Saki, 2011; Santiago-Bonilla, 1992; Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007).

Leadership is contextual (Adler, 1999; Madden, 2005, Stead & Elliot, 2009); and its “definitions change from one context to the next” (Klenke, 1996, p. 10). Klenke asserts that it is crucial to understand the importance of context in leadership studies and in “each context - political, intellectual, artistic, religious, scientific, social, cultural, and international- leadership manifests itself differently” (p. 25). Therefore, by understanding the context in which Latina leaders learn and develop their leadership is influential in the
creation of a climate more favorable to the acceptance of them as learners, leaders, agents of change, and visible role models.

Statement of the Problem

Current literature in the field of adult education and leadership show that there is still opportunity for more knowledge to be created related to Latinas’ learning and their leadership practices. Traditional models, research, and theories of adult learning and leadership tend to exclude women’s experiences, and even when including them, they fail to recognize the cultural, ethnical, and social background or context in which women interact. Specifically, Latinas are a group of underrepresented women that have been overlooked by researchers, educators, service providers, and policymakers despite the fact that it is estimated that there are over 14.4 million Latinas in the U.S. (Gonzales, 2008).

Latinas’ learning and leadership experiences are inherently related to their own social context as well as to the complexity of their Latino experience based on gender, national origin, immigrant status, generation in the United States, level of acculturation, and regional differences related to where they live in the U.S. Latinas are not well reflected in the adult education scholarship and are fairly invisible from scholarly work in leadership. Similarly, feminist scholarship “has neglected to include the relationship of Hispanic women’s leadership to women leaders in the United States” (Bonilla-Santiago, 1992, p. 2) and there is a “gap in understandings of women leaders in relation to the social context of their leadership, and a need to develop and broaden the research base of women’s leadership” (Stead & Elliot, 2009).
**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences of Latina leaders who work in community development in the Southeastern United States. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How did Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills?
2. What factors influenced the leadership practices of Latina leaders in communities?

Latina leaders in this study worked in more than one culture and negotiated their practices not only across cultures—e.g., Southern culture, mainstream culture, dominant culture, organizational culture—but within the different Latino sub-cultures they encountered due to the diverse and rich heritages of Latinos in the U.S. In an attempt to include all the different cultures in which Latinas in this study interact and to understand the dynamics associated with different cultures, Latina leaders have identified and named the different cultures they find themselves practice their leadership roles in communities.

This study was informed by the work of scholars who have initiated a research agenda on women and leadership. These scholars recognize that leadership is a process where the intersection of gender and ethnicity play a principal role in the development and practices of women’s leadership (Bonilla-Santiago, 1992; Smooth, 2010; Stead & Elliot; 2009) and “due to the intersection of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and culture, Latinas have suffered varying degrees of domination and social inequality” (Mancillas, 2010, p. 211). Furthermore, Barvosa and Baca (2010) assert that Latinas “had already experienced the double workday, gendered labor exploitation, and race-and-gender-based
labor market segmentation. Moreover, they knew their experiences of patriarchy to be strongly shaped by racism” (p. 604). Feminist principles in leadership and qualitative research also provided a framework for this study. Feminist leadership embraces the diversity of women and “in accordance with feminist principles of attending to the lived experience of women,” feminist leadership seeks women’s experiences as the foundation to understand the meaning of leadership (Suyemoto & Ballou, 2007). In addition, a feminist approach to qualitative inquiry allowed capturing the lived experience of Latina leaders as they learn to practice their leadership skills and negotiate leadership roles between cultures.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is important because Latinas are a minority group growing at a rapid pace and are changing the demographic profile of society in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Latinas are challenging the traditional definitions of leadership and women’s learning conceived and shaped predominantly by the scholarly work of White men and to a lesser degree, White women. The increasing number of Latinas will shift all kinds of cultural expectations and their presence in the workplace, inclusive of colleges and universities, will be noticeable. This work contributes to the body of knowledge permitting Latinas more opportunities to learn to practice their leadership and to demonstrate their professional contributions through leadership roles. Additionally, the findings from this study counter abound and harmful stereotypes and misunderstandings about Latinas and their leadership competencies.

The findings from this study advance our knowledge in Latinas’ learning and leadership, helping to fill the dearth of knowledge base of Latinas in Adult education and
leadership. This knowledge is needed to be responsive adult educators and to understand the intrinsic dynamics of the social context, gender, and ethnicity associated to Latinas as learners. Adult educators benefit from the findings; they would have more knowledge to be better equipped to design classes and programs for Latinas; there is more knowledge available to better design leadership development strategies for Latina leaders. In addition, implications from the findings elicit more research to keep complementing the scholarly work on Latinas.

The contributions of this study also adds to the human resource and organization development field; findings and implications would assist practitioners in designing more inclusive strategies for recruitment, hiring, retention, and professional development for the advancement of Latinas in the workplace. In addition, the findings and implications from this study inform the articulation of inclusive strategies to foster the development of organizational cultures that welcome and support Latinas leaders.

**Definitions**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will be used:

**Community Development**: is a process for “empowerment and transformation of individuals and communities” (Reid & van Dreunen, 1996, p. 49).

**Culture**: “learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols and traditions that are common to a group of people” (Northouse, 2013, p. 384).

**Hispanic or Latino**: refers to a person of Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. This
definition was used in the 2010 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). These terms are used interchangeably in the literature review.


**Latina Leader**: is a Latina who is either the executive director, CEO, President, or state director of a community-based organization, or is an appointed or elected board member of a non-profit organization.

**Leadership**: “is a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task” (Chemers, 1997, p. 1).

**Leadership Development**: a series of learning opportunities and events that trigger and/or enhance leadership skills, behaviors or traits within an individual.

**Southeastern United States**: is the region of the United States that includes the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia (The Association of American Geographers, 2012).
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences of Latina leaders who work in community development in the Southeastern United States. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How did Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills?

2. What factors influenced the leadership practices of Latina leaders in communities?

The literature review which serves as the foundation for this study includes four major areas: a) Latinas in the United States, b) Emancipatory adult learning, c) Feminist theories, and d) Leadership and women.

Latinas in the United States

This portion of the literature presents a general profile on Latinas with information on demographics and education, followed by the characteristics or cultural values and traits of Latinas in the United States, and the experiences of Latinos living in the Southeastern U.S. Latinas for this study refers to a woman of Latin-American or Spanish speaking descent, especially living in the United States, and who self-identifies herself as Latina. In addition, Hispanic or Latino refers to a person of Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin.
regardless of race. This definition was used in the 2010 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). This term is used interchangeably in the literature review.

**Profile of Latinas**

The only thing Latinas have in common is the great diversity that exists among them; Latinas in the United States are a heterogeneous group made up of diverse socio-economic statuses, levels of educational attainment, national origins and political histories, generations, acculturation stages, and languages spoken. According to recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates, there are 50.5 million Latinos in the United States and 14.4 million of them, or 48%, are women (U.S. Census, 2010b). As of 2007, approximately half (48%) of all Latinas were born in the United States or born abroad to a parent who is a U.S. citizen; the other half (52%) were born in countries other than the U.S. (Gonzales, 2008). Among immigrant Latinas, 57% have been in the United States since 1990, and six in ten Latina immigrants were born in Mexico. The majority of the literature on Latinos focuses on the experience of Mexican origin Latinos due to their large presence and history in the United States.

However, the presence of Latinos in Georgia is relatively a new concept that is changing the Southeastern United States, bringing collateral changes in the social, economic, and cultural aspect of this region that is characterized by its distinct norms, customs, politics, history, religion and cultural traditions. Specifically in Georgia, a history of slavery, secession, the outcomes of the Civil War and the decline of cotton crops and farms form a distinct background that shapes current norms. Currently, nine percent of the population in Georgia is Latino (U.S. Census, 2010a), and this includes Latinos who are U.S. born citizens, legal permanent residents, temporary migrant
workers, and undocumented immigrants. This range of statuses brings yet another layer to the diversity among Latinos and their experiences living in the South. In summary, Latinos in the South represent a wide range of education, profession and economic levels, making them socially and economically diverse.

According to Census data (2010b), the Latino population accounts for over half the growth of the total population in the United States between 2000 and 2010. Furthermore, the analysis of ethnic group distributions nationally shows that the Mexican population is still numerically and proportionally the largest Latino group in the United States, representing 63% of the total Latino population in the United States. The second largest group of Latinos is Puerto Rican, which comprises 9% of the population, followed by the Cuban population that represents approximately 4% of Latinos in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2010b). The state of Georgia mirrors the national percentage of Latinos by country of origins: approximately 61% of the Latinos are Mexican, 8.4% are Puerto Ricans, and approximately three percent are Cubans (U.S. Census, 2010a). In addition, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorians account for 10.5% of Latinos in Georgia.

The majority of the Latino population in Georgia has jobs in construction, poultry processing, manufacturing, restaurants, landscaping, the hospitality industry and agriculture. The 2010 Census data shows that people of Latino origin in Georgia are much more likely to be living in poverty than people in the general population, especially when they have children less than 18 years of age living in the home. Across Georgia, 16.6% of families of all races and ethnicities live in poverty, while 27% of Latino families with children under age 18 live in poverty. In 2009, the annual personal earnings
of Latinos in Georgia was $18,000 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009), averaging an income of $1,500 per month.

Regarding educational attainment for the population aged 25 and older, less than 49% of all Latinos in Georgia have at least a high school diploma or equivalency, compared with 83% of non-Latino whites and 73% of African-Americans (Census, 2010a). There are several factors contributing to the unusually high rate of high school non-completion, including language problems, low levels of previous education, work conflicts, belief that college is unattainable and lack of parental involvement (Atiles & Bohon, 2002). Bohon, Macpherson, and Atiles (2005) have identified six primary barriers to Latino educational attainment; they include: (a) lack of understanding of the U.S. school system, (b) low parental involvement in the schools, (c) lack of residential stability among the Latino population, (d) little school support for the needs of Latino students, (e) few incentives for the continuation of Latino education, and (f) barred immigrant access to higher education.

**Cultural Values among Latinas**

It is important to begin this section by explaining that being Latina or of the Latino origin is an ethnicity rather than a race, and therefore Latinas may be of any race. Latinas’ origins can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of their birth or their parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. There is a considerable amount of literature published on Latino cultural values (Bermúdez, Kirkpatrick, Hecker & Torres-Robles, 2010; Lopez-Baez, 1999; Marín & Triandis, 1985; Morales, 1996; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002), the following values influence Latinas’ behaviors, development and learning:
**Familismo.** This is the preference that Latinos have for maintaining a close connection to the family, immediate and extended. Latinos, in general, are socialized to value close relationships, cohesiveness, and cooperativeness with other family members. These close relationships are typically developed across immediate and extended family members, as well as close friends of the family (Marín & Triandis, 1985). Latinos come to value the interdependence associated with these relationships above individual independence. Also, with this value comes the idea that Latinas will put the needs of the family above the needs of the individual (Garcia-Preto, 2005a; Ho, Rasheed, & Rasheed, 2004). This is typically the most common descriptive value associated with Latinos (Bermúdez et al., 2010).

**Marianismo.** This is a gender-specific value that applies to Latinas; Marianismo encourages Latinas to use the Virgin Mary as a role model of the ideal woman. Thus, Latinas are encouraged to be spiritually strong, morally superior, nurturing, and self-sacrificing (Lopez-Baez, 1999).

**Machismo.** This is a gender-specific value that applies to Latinos, Machismo refers to a man’s responsibility to provide for, protect, and defend his family (Morales, 1996). It also brings negative connotations that include sexual aggressiveness, male domination, and arrogance.

**Personalism.** This is the valuing and building of interpersonal relationships. Personalism encourages the development of warm and friendly relationships, as opposed to impersonal or overly formal relationships (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Personalism is “a form of individualism that values those inner qualities in people that make them unique and give them a sense of worth” (Garcia-Preto, 2005a, p. 162). Furthermore,
“dignity of the individual and respect for authority are closely linked to personalism” (p. 162).

**Respeto.** This implies deference to authority or a more hierarchical relationship orientation. Respeto emphasizes the importance of setting clear boundaries and knowing one’s place of respect in hierarchical relationship (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). This consciousness of one’s place in relationships then in turn dictates behaviors towards others based on age, gender and authority status (Comas-Diaz, 1995). This value is very typically applied in the attitudes children are expected to have towards adults (Falicov, 2005).

**Simpatía** ("kindness"). “Is smooth, pleasant relationships that avoid conflict (Falicov, 2005, p. 235). This emphasizes the importance of being polite and pleasant, even in the face of stress and adversity. Avoidance of hostile confrontation is an important component of simpatía. Because of simpatía, some Latinos/Hispanics may not feel comfortable openly expressing disagreement.

**Religion and Spirituality.** This refers to the critical role that faith plays in the everyday life of most Latinos. Most Latinos are Christian, with the majority belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, which can shape a Latinos’ life transitions as Catholic Sacraments such as baptism and confirmation are considered normal parts of life. However, different groups may have a different faith affiliation. As it does for many people, religion offers Latinos a sense of direction in their lives and guidance in the education and raising of their children. This sense of spiritualism, furthermore, often gives Latinos the sense that they can have rich spiritual lives and attain spiritual goals
even if they do not meet material goals, which means that many come to value spiritual qualities such as loyalty over physical goods (Garcia-Preto, 2005a; Garcia-Preto, 2005b).

The extent to which Latinas endorse these values is highly influenced by their acculturation level and generational status. For example, Latinas who are more acculturated into the mainstream culture of the United States may not identify as strongly with these values as compared to their less acculturated counter-parts. Similarly, older generations of Latinos (first or second-generation) may identify with these Latino values more strongly than younger generations. Given the dynamic process of acculturation and family members belonging to different generations, it is not uncommon for Latino/Hispanic families to have inter-generational value differences with family members differing in their endorsement of Latino values (Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008).

**Experiences of Latinos Living in the South**

Lacy (2009) explains that Latinos in the South tend to live a transnational life. In her study of over 200 migrants in South Carolina, she found that some Latinos had been living there for over a decade and had become integrated into South Carolinian life, yet they still remain closely tied to their places of origin “through frequent communication, remittances, or travel back and forth across the border” (Lacy, 2009, p. 12). Transnational life is characterized by the extensive and frequent contact and relationships that immigrants have with their places of origins; this makes Latinos to retain the vitality of their language and cultural practices, creating a situation that is less likely to lead to complete assimilation (Gurin, Hurtado & Peng, 1994).
Lacy (2009) found that 40 percent of the immigrants in her study had experienced discrimination. Discrimination is manifested in the form of “denial or reluctant provision of services in shops, restaurants and other public facilities; in employment, including being passed over for the most selected tasks, being denied pay or other benefit they had been promised, or harassment from others in the workplace” (p. 6). In addition, being subjected to verbal abuse from strangers due to the inability to speak English well is another manifestation of discrimination; similarly in Georgia, “much of the hostility toward immigrants has to do with language” (Wainer, 2004, p. 32). Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Diltmann and Lagunes (2010) assert that speaking English with an accent has significant “consequences associated with lower sense of belonging, greater feeling of being an outsider, and greater perceived discrimination” (p. 73). Additionally, the more English Latinos speak, the more likely they “will interpret any intercultural interactions as discriminatory and understand it when someone discriminates against them” (Perez, Fortuna, & Alegria, 2008, p. 430).

Based on a survey conducted on 500 low-income Latinos across the South (from New Orleans to Charlotte), Bauer (2009) found that low-income Latino immigrants face increasing hostility in the Southern United States. About 75 percent of the respondents interviewed said that they have faced discrimination, while 68 percent reported they suffer racism in their daily lives. This study concluded that regardless of immigration status, “discrimination is a humiliating part of everyday life for many Hispanics in the South.” “Life for Hispanics …. is an experience where the most mundane chore becomes a burden” and then, “there's the hostility aimed at anyone who appears Hispanic—hostility ranging from disapproving looks to physical attacks” (Bauer, 2009, p. 32).
In a study conducted by Torres, Popke, and Hapke (2006) to better understand the dynamics of Latino migration to eastern North Carolina, they found that participants alluded to “problems getting along with people—racism” (p. 52). In addition, 20 percent of the Latino families included in the study reported that people “have been mean or unkind to them”, with several respondents “reported feeling discriminated against, particularly when dealing with government employees, school teachers and other service providers”; and in some other instances, “it is not direct discrimination but feeling alienated as an outsider” (p. 62).

Wainer (2004) in his study of the new Latino South and the challenge to public education found that discrimination was present in all of the three study sites to varying degrees, the study sites were in North Carolina, Arkansas and Georgia. In addition, Wainer (2004) explains that discrimination was most marked in Georgia and Arkansas; he goes on to explain that “Latino and [W]hite respondents said that hostility toward immigrants is typically subtle, representing more a lack of understanding and a fear of change, rather than a deep seated hatred of any particular ethnic or racial group” (p. 32). Wainer (2004) explains that many respondents inside the school system claimed, “there was a systemic, although not overt, form of discrimination occurring against Latino students” (p. 33). In Georgia, racism is manifested in schools by “unfair placement, placing kids in remedial classes because they [teachers and administrators] don't understand their educational needs, unfair discipline and grading policies that teachers and principals engage in” (p. 32).

Perez, Fortuna, and Alegria (2008) claim that as “Latinos achieve higher social status and become more assimilated, they have a greater sensitivity to discrimination
compared to their less-acclimated counterparts” (p. 427). Accordingly, Frazier and Reisinger (2006) assert that “racial discrimination will hunt many Latinos and prohibit fair access to employment, housing, and services” (p. 280). As many opportunities lie ahead for Latinas and their leadership practices, it is important to be aware of the forces contributing to the prejudice and discrimination that Latinas experience as well as the systemic oppression towards them, so that their learning is relevant to their lives and of an emancipatory nature.

**Emancipatory Adult Learning**

When delving into adult learning theories that would explain the learning experiences of Latina leaders and the learning principles that could have contributed to the advancement of Latinas in their leadership practices, it is suitable to present emancipatory learning as the main adult education theory for this study. Emancipatory learning allows learners to access their knowledge while acknowledging and understanding the existing challenges and inequalities within social structures across society. The outcome of this learning aims at generating actions, which allows learners to become social agents, agents for social change.

The emancipatory approach to adult education (Cranton, 1998; Mezirow, 1991) fosters a learning that would allow Latinas leaders participate in their own education, bringing self-awareness and self-understanding of their positionality and/or situation, and how the intersection of their gender, race, social economic status, educational level, immigration, and culture advances or hinders their development as learners and leaders. Emancipatory learning provides a unique opportunity for Latinas and their empowerment to create knowledge that would assist them in addressing their problems or situations as
they reflect on their practices and applications; current constraints become options for Latinas when they understand and treat their situation “as an historical reality susceptible of transformation” (Freire, 1982, p. 73).

While there are an extensive number of different adult learning theories, the outcome of the learning can be classified as only two categories: a learning that “either reinforces the status quo or changes some aspects of it” (Jarvis, Holford, & Griffin, 2003, p. 72). The learning that reinforces the status quo occurs when the learners use the learning process to be able to recall or repeat accurately what has been taught; for example, acquiring a new skill or learning how to read and write. In this category, scholars are only concerned with the situation in which learning occurs. On the contrary, learning that allows change (cognitive or physical) occurs when the external reality is not only grasped but understood by the learners.

Several adult education scholars have recognized the potential for change and have used a different terminology that reflects what they describe when change occurs as a result of the learning process. Table 1 presents a summary (Jarvis et al., 2003) on the typology of learning, along with the terminology that adult education scholars have used to describe an approach to learning that either underpins the status quo or allows for change.

All of the adult education scholars mentioned in Table 1 have recognized and accepted that as a result of the learning process “changed learners might become change agents” and those learners “may be emancipated from being entrapped in their situations” (Jarvis et al., 2003, p. 74).
Table 1

*Learning and the Status Quo – Learning and Change*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Learning and the Status Quo</th>
<th>Learning and Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argyris and Schön</td>
<td>Single-loop learning</td>
<td>Double-loop learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botkin <em>et al</em></td>
<td>Maintenance learning</td>
<td>Innovative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brookfield</td>
<td>Not discussed-implicitly non-critical learning</td>
<td>Critical learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freire</td>
<td>Banking education</td>
<td>Problem-posing education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarvis</td>
<td>Non-reflective learning</td>
<td>Reflective learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowles</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Andragogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mezirow</td>
<td>Formative learning</td>
<td>Transformative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental learning</td>
<td>Emancipatory learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marton and Säljö</td>
<td>Surface learning</td>
<td>Deep learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table adapted from Jarvis et al., 2003)

In addition to understanding the typology of learning that allows learners to change, it is important to consider the different domains of knowledge underlying adult education theories. Habermas (1972) has proposed three domains of knowledge: technical, practical, and emancipatory; this makes it possible to classify learning theories using an additional category (Cranton, 1994). Technical knowledge “includes information about cause and effect relationships in the environment” (p. 9); practical knowledge “is concerned with understanding of what others mean” and “making ourselves understood” (p. 9); and emancipatory knowledge “is gained through critical-self-reflection” (p. 9). Technical knowledge falls under the positivist paradigm while both
practical and emancipatory knowledge can be seen as a component of the constructive paradigm. For this study, we will only consider the practical and emancipatory knowledge.

Habermas’ work on the three processes of learning or inquiry (technical, practical and emancipatory) as well as his work on communicative action has strongly influenced Mezirow’s work in the development of adult learning theory (Jarvi et al., 2003). Mezirow’s contributions (1991) have made a clear distinction between types of learning: instrumental, communicative and emancipatory. Instrumental learning “involves determining cause-effect relationships and learning through task-orientated problem solving” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 73); communicative learning is the process of “learning to understand what others mean and to make ourselves understood” (p. 75); and emancipatory learning involves “identifying and challenging distorted meaning perspectives” (p. 87) and this is achievable through a process of critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1990).

Mezirow (1991) states that the “formative learning of childhood becomes transformative learning in adulthood” (p. 3). In addition, Mezirow goes on to explain that children accept their learning from authority sources and that their early learning is socialization, while adults “discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control over their lives” (p. 3). The work of the Brazilian educator Freire on popular education (1970), the work of the German philosopher Habermas on domain of knowledge (1972), Mezirow’s work on transformational learning, principles of feminist theory, and critical
theory thoughts have influenced the development of emancipatory adult education (Imel, 1999).

Building on the classifications of the typologies of learning presented by Habermas and Mezirow has allowed Cranton (1994) to organize adult learning in three new categories that contribute to the emerging concept of emancipatory learning. Table 2 presents Cranton’s summary of these three new categories of adult learning (subject-oriented, consumer-oriented, and emancipatory) explaining what the main goal of the learning and the role that both educators and learners play.

Table 2

*Adult Learning Categories by Patricia Cranton (1994)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Learning</th>
<th>Main Goal</th>
<th>Educator Role and Learner Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject-oriented</td>
<td>The main goal is to acquire content</td>
<td>The role of the educator is to cover the material and the learners see themselves as gaining knowledge or skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer-Oriented</td>
<td>The main goal is to fulfill expressed needs of learners</td>
<td>The role of the educator is to act as a facilitator or resource person and the learners’ role is to express their needs and set their own learning objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emancipatory</td>
<td>The main goal is to free learners from the forces that limit their options</td>
<td>The role of the educator is to foster critical reflection and the learners’ role is to questioning assumptions and to engage in critical self-reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fundamental goal of emancipatory learning is to free learners from those forces that limit their options and control their lives, forces that they have taken for
Emancipatory learning occurs when an individual transforms or changes her or his frames of reference, which are those deep-seated underlying values and belief systems that guide, shape, and dictate everyday attitudes and behaviors. Transforming frames of reference is usually a long and emotional experience (Mezirow, 2000).

Mezirow (1981) views the opportunity for emancipatory learning as “synonymous with perspective transformation” (p. 6), thus the lack of emancipatory learning opportunities in different settings undermines the potential for transformational learning at both an individual and community level. Transformational learning as described by Mezirow (1981) is “the process by which adults come to recognize culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and take action to overcome them” (p. 6). Transformative learning leads to emancipatory knowledge (Cranton, 1998).

Major transformative learning includes three phases: “critical reflection on one’s assumptions, discourse to validate the critically reflective insight, and action” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 321); and the process of transformative learning is triggered by a disorienting dilemma; that is, encountering something that is discrepant with how we understand the world or ourselves (Cranton, 1998) or a particular life-changing event such as an illness, a loved one’s death, marriage, or divorce (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). To conclude, Merriam and Caffarella sustain that transformational learning theory, as has been explained by Mezirow, “focuses on both the individual and social construction of meaning” (p. 263); in addition, according to Mezirow (1991), perspective transformation is a cognitive process in which people’s meaning schemes and meaning perspectives experience radical change.
Furthermore, Cranton (1998) explains that reflection is a key concept in transformational learning and she distinguishes three types of reflection: content, process, and premise reflection. Content reflection; asking ourselves “What has happened here?” or “What is going on here?” by examining the content of the “problem,” process reflection; asking ourselves how we came to hold a particular belief or assumption, “How did I come to believe this?” by examining the process, and premise reflection; asking ourselves why it is important to consider this issue (assumption, belief, perspective) in the first place, “Why does this matter?” by examining the premise. Premise reflection is most likely to lead to transformative learning.

Cranton (1998) explains that transformative learning consists of the revision of previously unquestioned perspectives and assumptions based on critical reflection; when people question assumptions, values, and perspectives that they come across in the world, and based on critical self-reflection; when people question their own meaning schemes and meaning perspectives by examining the sources of the assumptions they hold and the consequences of continuing to hold them; leading this to more open, permeable, and better-justified perspectives.

**Emancipatory Adult Learning Issues and Critique**

As adult educators, Merriam and Brockett (1997) emphasize that “there are a number of good reasons for reflection on what we do” (p. 29), there are five primary philosophical approaches that guide our practice: liberalism, progressivism, behaviorism, humanism, and radical adult education. The critique is that only radical adult education fosters learning (emancipatory) for social change. The radical philosophy of adult education assists people to seek ways to understand society and the power structure. The
significant contribution to society is that the goal of radical adult education is to improve people’s conditions and change their lives to release them from oppressive situations (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Furthermore, Imel (1999) asserts that “although emancipatory learning is commonly associated with adulthood, not all adult education fosters it because adult education practitioners “hold a number of varying philosophical beliefs about the goals and purposes of education, and not all adult educators align themselves with perspectives that lead to emancipatory learning” (¶ 3).

Another critique regarding emancipatory learning in adult education is the lack of inclusion of the emancipatory learning goal in the self-directed learning process models. The goals of self-directed learning can be classified into three major aims: “to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning, to foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning, and to promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 290). Merriam and Caffarella (1998) explain that there are several different models that aim to explain or describe the self-directed learning process but there is only one model proposed by Hammond and Collins (1991) that “explicitly addresses the goal of promoting emancipatory learning and social action as a central tenet of self-directed learning” (p. 304).

Critical pedagogy, popular education, and participatory research have been the ground for Hammond’s and Collins’ model. They have purposively included the critical perspective by examining the social, political, and environmental contexts that affect adult learning, and they have stressed developing both personal and social learning goals (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Merriam and Caffarella explain that Hammond and
Collins have proposed a framework with seven components to assisting learners to engage in the critical practice of adult education in formal settings. In Hammond’s and Collins’ model, learners take the initiative by

1) building a cooperative learning climate, 2) analyzing and critically reflecting on themselves and the social, economic, and political contexts in which they are situated, 3) generating competency profiles for themselves, 4) diagnosing their learning needs within the framework of both the personal and social context, 5) formulating socially and personally relevant learning goals that result in learning agreements, 6) implementing and managing their learning, 7) reflecting on and evaluating their learning (p. 305).

Although greater control of the learning process is what Hammond and Collins (1991) see as the immediate goal for learners using their model of critical self-directed learning, they explain that the final goal is to “empower learners to use their learning to improve the conditions under which they and those around them live and work” (p. 14). In addition, Merriam and Caffarella (1998) go on to explain that they did not find a single study in which the authors had included the use of Hammond and Collins’ model as their conceptual framework.

Collins (1996) explains that not until the definition of self-directed learning is broadened to include these seven components, the self-directed learning is merely a technique to condition the individual into the acceptance of what is offered. On the other hand, scholars supporting the goal of promoting emancipatory learning and social action want to include not only the learners’ examination of the sociopolitical assumptions under which they learn and function, but the incorporation of collective action as an
outcome. Distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation is a main pitfall in adult education, Inglis (1997) explains that empowerment is “centered on creating self-confidence, self-expression, and an interest in learning”, while emancipation is “a collective educational activity which has as its goal social and political transformation” (p. 5).

Similarly, Heaney (2000) states that the practice of adult education “is always embedded in a social and political context from which derives its purpose and value” (p. 564). Adult educators must be aware and acknowledge that adult education practices comprise social practices, and how educators approach those social practices could strength as well as diminish, or weaken as well as empower, reproduce injustice and inequities as well as build democracy (Heaney, 2000).

Emancipatory Learning and Critical Theory

A number of adult education intellectuals have brought critical theory into practice and research, in particular, Habermas’ version to adult education (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 351). The role of the critical theory is to move theory and practice. According to Fay (1987), critical theory seeks to explain a social order in such a way that it becomes itself the catalyst which leads to the transformation of this social order. A critical, emancipatory perspective of education as a critical social science, would suggest explanation or emergent theory that enables significant change to major aspects of both society and the field. It can be inferred that such radical discontinuities and transformations are substantial and progressive. The notion of emancipation is important here; not only would the actual products of research and theory influence society, but the very act of participation and reflection on ideas and themes would encourage researchers
and practitioners to challenge their own values and beliefs to become different, more enlightened people. By using critical theory, adult education practitioners can develop pedagogical practices that would foster emancipatory learning.

Considering the development of pedagogical practices to sustain emancipatory learning, Tisdell (2001) explains that in order to facilitate emancipatory learning, it is necessary to activate more than just new cognitive understanding. Clearly, the development of cognitive thinking skills is a task that cannot be sacrificed in the process; emancipatory learning involves the cognitive, the affective/relational, and the behavioral, and their integration. One way to move from readings (cognitive mode), to story (affective/relational), to behavior (action mode), to synthesis (reflection and integration of these modes) is to create experiential learning activities.

Through creating the suitable conditions for experiential learning, it promotes an environment that would compel learners to discover and identify issues about positionality and to be able to incorporate and create new knowledge among them. It is not enough for the learner to simply tell a story or to identify positionality issues, those stories and/or experiences need to be reflected on, unpacked, and all of the positionality’s aspects need to be addressed and made visible. It is important to do these around various categories of identity, so that all participants, not just members of a particular group, have to do the work of unpacking their own positionality (Tisdell, 2001). Mezirow’s (1990) transformational theory supports these ideas in that the learners’ understanding of new material is dependent on previous learning experiences, contents and processes, and that the learners must assimilate old with new learning in order to progress. Mezirow defines learning as a “meaning making activity” that can be understood as “the process of using a
prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162).

Another pedagogical approach to foster emancipatory learning is the use of consciousness-raising (Hart, 1985, 1990). It brings up experience of oppressed people to understand their feelings, experiences and struggles. Hart (1990) explains that the very purpose of consciousness-raising is “to give voice to those experiences that have been suppressed or silenced precisely because of existing structures of inequalities” (p.61). In addition, consciousness-raising is a process of reclaiming social membership and it fosters a practical orientation towards emancipatory action. In a study of twenty four White middle class women who had experienced a transformation of consciousness related to women’s issues, Loughlin (1994) found that “facilitating explorations into the interconnections between individuals’ experiences and societal norms and structures can provide a context for developing informed opinions about public policy and decision-making” (p. 9).

The consciousness-raising technique is a powerful tool when women are provided with a supportive space where they would be comfortable enough to put this concept into practice. It is important for them to acknowledge their feelings and experiences to discuss issues that have contributed to the oppression of women. However, this is not an easy concept to practice since people tend to avoid sharing painful feelings and/or revealing a great deal about themselves. Yet, exploring “the diverse ways of knowing which individuals use to make meaning of their life experiences” leads to “an empathetic understanding of differences between individual, as well as the similarities that unite them” (Loughlin, 1994, p. 9).
However, in a consciousness raising process; the group has to be homogeneous to be effective; “only a learning group that is relatively homogeneous with respect to major social differences like gender, race, or class would share a vital interest in liberation” (Hart, 1990, p. 89). Unfortunately, when planning educational and leadership programs for underrepresented populations, not all of the educators and practitioners are members or represent the “oppressed” groups, this is why is important to call for critical approaches to reflect upon the social, political and power relations in Latinas’ own contextual realities.

**Emancipatory Learning and Latinas**

Emancipatory learning aims to change the frame of reference of the learner to encourage growth and development by unsettling the paradigm within which the learner operates. The implications of this study for participants are significant, as any emancipatory change affect their professional life, family relationships, and their community. Changing the frame of reference is necessary to better foster learning and leadership development of Latinas. Without change, the potential of the individual learners is inhibited, when there is freedom to learn, learners have more freedom to develop their own potential, but since learning is potentially a change process, “this can sometimes be problematic for social groups that might wish to retain the status quo either socially or culturally” (Jarvis et al., 2003, p. 75).

In addition, Palmer (1993) writes about the need to educate in ways that might heal rather than wounding our world and us. Latinas in the United States, as a group, have been historically oppressed and discriminated across many settings, including leadership. Effective emancipatory adult educators create new spaces that allow for the construction
of learning communities that acknowledge differences, fostering a learning that is transformational and conducive to social change. A vital element of transformative learning is emancipatory learning which frees learners from influences that bind and restrict them, and Cranton (1994) sees its fostering as the central goal of adult education. Emancipatory learning can thus be a mean by which Latina leaders can begin to find opportunities to broaden their understanding of how societal structures and power affect their leadership development so that they can make meaningful and informed choices when learning to develop and execute their leadership practices.

Sheared, Sissel, and Cunningham (2001) explain that the focus of relationships of the individual to social structures, and issues of power relations between dominant and oppressed groups is still primarily on class, and the serious consideration of power relations based on gender as a social structure is generally missing, but it has changed with the inclusion of feminist practices in adult education. Therefore, feminist theory principles complement the framework that will assist to understand the learning experience in leadership practices of Latinas, feminism is “committed to the emancipation of women” (Stabile, 2006, p. 25).

**Feminist Theories**

One of the goals of a feminist approach to research is to “capture women’s lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women’s voices as sources of knowledge” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 783). There is a wide spectrum of feminist theories that fits the ideological or philosophical thinking of feminists who adopt them; feminist theory is interested on agency, power relations, shifting positionalities, voice,
individual experience, and socially constructed knowledge (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983; Collins, 2000; Fraser, 1989; Hooks, 2000). Although feminist theories are oriented toward understanding the dynamics of gender relations, they often address issues of marginalization associated with race, class, sexual orientation, language, and the practices and politics of educational systems (Lather, 1991). The purpose of feminism is “to raise women’s consciousness of their oppression as women and promote social change through collectively organizing women as a distinct revolutionary class” (Stabile, 2006, p. 24).

Women have several and distinct ways of knowing; they are not a homogeneous group. A woman's worldview is influenced by her history and differences such as socio-economic status, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, education, and political factors will affect her values, beliefs and experience. These inherent differences between women, which influence their experiences, their knowledge, and their thinking are addressed or embedded in “feminist epistemology” in constructing knowledge or reality. Crotty (1998) asserts that feminists emphasize that “women’s knowing is, in important respects, different from that of men” and “women and men have different ways of perceiving the world and relating to it” (p. 174).

The term “feminism” does not have a unified or universal definition; there are multiple forms of feminism, and they are similar “in that they focus on the experiences of women’s lives and the oppression of women in this culture” however; they are all different in “how they conceptualize the marginalization” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 775). Stabile (2006) explains that “the project for feminism has been both intellectual and political: to raise women's consciousness of their oppression as women and to
promote social change around gender issues, through collectively organizing women as a distinct revolutionary class” (p. 24).

There are several feminist theories that perceive or make meaning of the world, feminists bring to their research numerous and different assumptions and perspectives, so they have different ways of constructing reality. However, any feminist theoretical framework shares the premises that women are oppressed by a patriarchal system and has a common interest in opposing it (Stabile, 2006). Feminist theories provide a theoretical framework of way of viewing Latinas using the context of their own experiences. It is women's experience and vision, women's knowledge and ways of knowing that shaped feminist theories, and this same knowledge is used to form theories that influence the way of constructing meaning.

Feminist theory is also an influence on the adult education radical philosophy and emancipatory adult education. This type of radical theory stresses an understanding of how people are perceived in terms of SES, race, and gender, that is, how the power is distributed. Some educators focus on marginalized women and how to improve their positions in society, while “others emphasize the individual woman and how women come to be empowered” (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 45). Like the typical radical approach, the feminists seek to improve women’s conditions and change their lives to release them from oppressive situations (Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

In a summary for the types of feminism, Donovan (1994) describes feminists as liberal; radical, ecofeminism, and cultural. Similarly, Tong (1998) classifies forms of feminism as liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, or postmodernist. Additionally, Campbell & Wasco (2000) state that in academic discourse
it has been articulated four main types of feminism: liberal, radical, socialist, and womanism.

Fundamentally, Donovan (1994) explains that liberal feminists focus their attention on the inequalities in society and have proposed remedies to that inequality. Liberal feminism takes into account how social and cultural preconceptions of femininity affect women’s access to equal rights and equal opportunities, and the overall goal of liberal feminism is to create "a just and compassionate society in which freedom flourishes" (Wendell, 1987, p. 90).

**Radical - Cultural Feminism**

Donovan (1994) presents that radical feminists blame patriarchy as the cause of all societal problems and seek to replace it with women’s ways of thinking and acting. Radical feminist theory derives its principles from a woman-centered worldview by challenging patriarchal systems. The oppression of women is believed to take place in all cultural institutions, and cannot be remedied by changing those institutions. For oppression to overcome gender discrimination, gender roles have to be eliminated across all the social and cultural institutions (Crotty, 1998, p.165).

Tong (1998) explains that the “radical feminist community has divided into two camps: radical-libertarian feminists and radical-cultural feminists” (p. 47). Tong (1998) posits that in order to qualify as a radical feminist, “a feminist must insist the sex/gender system is the fundamental cause of women's oppression” (p.46). Tong (1998) explains that the aforementioned statement is based on the interpretation of Alison Jaggar’s and Paula Rothenberg’s on what constitutes the basis for radical feminism, as follows:
• That women were, historically, the first oppressed group.
• That women's oppression is the most widespread, existing in virtually every known society.
• That women's oppression is the deepest in that it is the hardest form of oppression to eradicate and cannot be removed by other social changes such as the abolition of class society.
• That women's oppression causes the most suffering to its victims, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, although the suffering may often go unrecognized because of the sexist prejudices of both the oppressors and the victims.
• That women's oppression provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression (Tong, 1998, p.46).

In Western society, principles of independence, hierarchy, competition and domination are associated with males, whereas ideas such as interdependence, cooperation, relationships, community, sharing, joy, trust and peace are thought to be female values. Cultural feminists believe that there are fundamental, biological differences between men and women, and that women should celebrate these differences, women are inherently more kind and gentle. Cultural feminists believe that because of these differences, if women ruled the world there would be no more war and it would be a better place. Essentially, a women's way is the right and better way for everyone. Cultural feminists are usually non-political; instead, they are focusing on individual change and influencing or transforming society through this individual change. They usually advocate separate female counter-cultures as a way to change society but not completely disconnect.
Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminists believe that there is a direct link between class structure and the oppression of women. Socialist feminists believe that “women's oppression is not the result of individuals' intentional actions but is the product of the political, social, and economic structures within which individuals live” (Tong, 1998, p. 94). Socialist feminism is largely the result of Marxist feminists' dissatisfaction with the essentially “gender-blind character of Marxist thought, with the tendency of Marxists to regard women's oppression as far less important than worker's oppression” (p. 119). Tong (1998) explains that although socialist feminists agree with Marxist feminists that women's liberation depends on the overthrow of capitalism, they claim that capitalism cannot be destroyed unless patriarchy is also destroyed and that people's material, or economic, relations cannot change unless their ideologies are also changed. Tong posits “women must then fight two wars, not one, in order to be liberated from the forces of oppression” (p. 120).

The challenge for socialist feminists, therefore, is to draw on the experiences of all women, never falling prey to the temptation to valorize the experiences of women, avoiding the idea of “the most oppressed group of women—as somehow the paradigm for what it means to be a woman” (Tong, 1998, p. 120). Western society rewards men because they produce tangible, tradable goods. On the other hand, women's work in the domestic sphere is not valued by western society because it is not a tangible, tradable good. This gives men power and control over women. Socialist feminists reject the idea that biology predetermines one’s gender. Social roles are not inherent and women's status must change in both the public and private spheres.
Socialist feminists like to challenge the ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy. Like the views of radical feminists, socialist feminists believe that although SES, race, ethnicity and religion divide women, they all experience the same oppression simply for being a woman. Socialist feminists believe that the way to end this oppression is to put an end to SES and gender, and women must work side-by-side with men in the political sphere. In order to get things accomplished, women must work with men, as opposed to ostracizing them. There must be a coalition between the two and they must see each other as equals in all spheres of life. In contrast to ideals of liberal feminism, which tend to focus on the individual woman, the socialist feminist theory focuses on the broader context of social relations in the community and includes aspects of race, ethnicity and other differences.

**Womanism**

Campbell and Wasco (2000) explain that womanism shares the same principles of radical and socialist feminism, “but call more attention to the differing experiences among women of various classes and racial/ethnic groups” (p. 777). Due to marginalization and as a race critique for feminism, black feminists “created womanism to examine the intersections of race, gender, and class oppression” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 777; Collins, 2000), black feminism claims that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together. Collins (2000) places black feminist epistemology in the personal experiences of racism and sexism of black women as well as the cognitive styles associated with black women. Collins (2000) also uses black feminist epistemology to provide black women with self-representations that would enable them to resist the demeaning racist and sexist images of black women in the
broader world, and to take pride in their identities. Additionally, womanist scholars have “the freedom to explore the particularities of black women's history and culture without being guided by what [W]hite feminists have already identified as women's issues” (Williams, 1989, pp. 181-182).

In an effort to include what ethnicity and culture bring to Black women’s experiences, Hudson-Weems (1993) claims that womanism needed to be redefined as *Africana Womanism*. Hudson-Weems in her theory asserts the need to reclaim the term womanism and reconceptualize its application to all Black women of African descent such as Blacks in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and North America; hence, to be able to expand the analysis beyond African-American women. Hudson-Weems explains that Africana womanism connects the ethnicity and cultural identity to the women’s experiences; “it is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women” (p. 24). Similar to womanism, racism, classism, and sexism are central to the Africana womanist perspective but “the primary goal of Africana women, then, is to create their own criteria for assessing their realities, both in thought and in action” (p. 50).

**Chicana/Latina Feminism**

Latinas share similar experiences as those claimed by black feminism in that the earlier feminist work was based on a Eurocentric framework that ignored or neglected to recognized “the differences among women in terms of class background, religious traditions, sexual preferences, races, ages, cultural experiences and regional variations” (Perez, 2008, p. 490). Feminist work on Latinas in the U.S. started with the Chicana feminist movement that began as a paralleled to the civil rights Chicano movement in the
1960’s, with the premises that Chicanas ought to be recognized as a valuable asset in their communities when they started to be aware of their conditions or realities, such as not being encouraged to seek professional careers and education, not receiving equal pay for equal work, and feeling there was discrimination towards them (Garcia, 1997). Chicana is a self-identified political stance identified with a Mexican-American woman.

There are multiple definitions that convey the meaning of Chicana feminism, in addition to the women’s inequalities exposed in the previous feminist approaches presented, Chicana feminism takes into consideration the cultural and linguistic backgrounds in Chicanas’ realities. Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Najera-Ramirez and Zavella (2003) assert that Chicana feminism establishes “a political stance that confronts and undermines patriarchy as it cross-cuts forms of disempowerment and silence such as racism, homophobia, class inequality, and nationalism” (p. 2). When exploring the intersection of race, SES, and gender among Chicanas, Blea (1992) explains that "Chicana liberation has meant freedom, emancipation from racism and sexism, plus cultural sovereignty: that the cultural integrity and dignity of a people be recognized and respected as equal to any other" (p. 146); consequently, Roth (2004) points out that “Chicana feminists analyzed their situation as women as the result not just of gender but of racial/ethnic, national, linguistic, and class dynamics” (p.12). Chicana feminists have been mostly working out of the U.S. West and Southwest as these geographically have a large concentration of Mexican-American women; however, their work and their impact “serve as the local point for Latina feminisms” (Perez, 2008, p. 491). Perez (2008) explains that the seminal work of Chicana feminist has been extended to join the work of Latin American women working against exploitation and social injustice.
The Latina feminist framework is based on the earlier experiences of Chicana feminists as well as other experiences from Latinas doing feminist work in other regions of the United States, such as Cubans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and South American feminists residing in the Northern or Southeastern states. This framework comprises the experiences of the diverse individual nationalities that exist among Latinas in the U.S.; Perez (2008) explains that “Latina feminism attempts to incorporate all Latinas, including women of varied socio-economic backgrounds, English-dominant Latinas, and those whose families have been living in the United States for several generations in addition to Latinas who are recent immigrants” (p. 492).

While the combination of the main premises of the aforementioned feminist theories influences my perspectives on how to understand and capture the learning experiences of Latina leaders, the inclusion of the intersectionality lens complements the framework to understand the heterogeneous group of Latinas leaders’ experiences in this study. Intersectionality refers to the connection between gender and other identity markers such as age, ethnicity, race, sexuality, SES, etc. Crenshaw (1991) has “used the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences” (p. 1244).

Additionally, Crenshaw (1991) explains that “race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (p. 1242). Crenshaw’s focus on the intersections gender and class highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed (p. 1245). Furthermore,
intersectionality, provides a framework to understand “the effects of race, class, and
gender on women’s identities and experiences, and struggles for empowerment” and
“how race class and gender interact in the social and material realities of women’s lives
to produce and transform relations of power” (Davis, 2008, p. 71).

McCall (2005) has identified three approaches in terms of their stance toward
categories to explore the complexity of intersectionality; anti-categorical approach, intra-
categorical approach, and inter-categorical approach. Anti-categorical approach rejects
categories, “it is based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories. Social
life is considered too irreducibly complex—overflowing with multiple and fluid
determinations of both subjects and structures—to make fixed categories” (p. 1773).
Intra-categorical approach “interrogates the boundary-making and boundary-defining
process itself…. it acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social
categories represent at any given point in time” (pp. 1773-1774). Finally, the inter-
categorical approach “adopt[s] existing analytical categories to document relationships of
inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple
and conflicting dimensions” (p. 1773). To conclude, McCall asserts that “not all research
on intersectionality can be classified into one of the three approaches” (p. 1774).

**Leadership and Women**

This section of the review of the literature focuses on the leadership literature
associated with personality and behavior traits and gender differences, and it
encompasses two sections. The first section examines both traditional and contemporary
leadership styles: traditional leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, and
laissez-faire focus on the leaders as individuals, while contemporary leadership styles
such as distributed, shared and collaborative focus on the collective social process. The second section introduces the women’s leadership literature that explains gender differences and women’s ways of leading.

Leadership has as many definitions as well as many contexts in which it is applied and observed; there is not a single definition of “leadership” that every expert agrees upon. Leadership is an extremely controversial and dynamic term, making it difficult to understand; yet it is one of the most studied concepts in literature. Bennis (1983) states that “to start with, there are more than 350 definitions with more coined by the dozens each month” (p. 44); leadership can be defined within a specific context and leaders’ attributes will depend among other things on the nature of their gender and the social context in which leadership is exercised. A definition of leadership pertinent to this study involves “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2013, p. 5). Northouse synthesizes the ways leadership has been conceptualized and identifies four components central to the leadership phenomenon: 1) process, 2) influence, 3) group context, and 4) common goal attainment (p. 5). Another applicable definition suitable for this study is that leadership “is a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task” (Chemers, 1997, p. 1). Furthermore, Bass & Bass (2008) define leadership “as the interaction among members of a group that initiates and maintains improved expectations and the competence of the group to solve problems or attain goals” (p. 26)

From this definition, the leadership’s core points are: it is a group activity; it is based on social influence and it revolves around a common task.
Traditional Leadership Styles

The vast majority of past and current research on leadership focuses on identifying personality traits and behaviors associated with effective leadership and on understanding the impact of situational factors on the leadership process (Chemers & Ayman, 1993; Northouse, 2013). However, a different trend of leadership research emerged in the 1990s in which researchers began to focus their attention mainly on two styles; transformational and transactional leadership; Burns (1978) was the first to introduce the idea of transformational leadership and began to further develop the concept in 1985. Burns (1978) based his theory of transactional and transformational leadership on Kohlberg's (1971) stages of moral development and Weber's (1947) theory of leadership and authority.

Transactional leadership. Transactional leaders are given the power to evaluate, correct, and train subordinates when productivity does not match the desired level as well as the power to reward effectiveness when expected outcome is reached (Burns, 1978); this type of leadership involves clarifying subordinates’ responsibilities, rewarding subordinates for meeting objectives, and correcting or punishing subordinates for failing to meet objectives (Carli & Eagly, 2007). Transactional leaders are given the opportunity to lead the group and the group agrees to follow his or her lead to accomplish a predetermined goal or task; this type of leaders “appeal to subordinates’ self-interest by establishing exchange relationships with them” (Carli & Eagly, 2007, p. 136) for rewards and/or incentives. Bertocci (2009) states that the main assumptions of this style are:

- people are motivated by reward and punishment, social systems work best with a clear chain of command, when people have agreed to do a job, a part of the deal is
that they cede all authority to their leader and the most important purpose of a subordinate is to do what their leader tells them to do. Transactional leadership is another managing style that focuses on short-term tasks (p. 58).

This leadership style has serious implications for learning, knowledge creation and/or creative work, yet it remains as a common leadership style among many organizations.

**Transformational leadership.** Burns (1978) defines a transformational leader as one who "recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower...looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" (p. 4). Burns (1978) established four transformational categories of leadership: intellectual, reform, revolutionary, and heroic (charismatic).

An intellectual leader is devoted to seeing ideas and values that go beyond immediate practical needs and at the same time can change and transform her or his social surroundings; "the concept of intellectual leadership brings in the role of conscious purpose drawn from values" (Burns, 1978, p. 142). The intellectual leader is a person with a vision that can transform society by raising social consciousness. A reform leader transforms parts of society to realize moral principles; reform leadership by definition implies moral leadership, which means “an attention to matching the means to the ends” (Burns, 1978, p. 170). A revolutionary leader has a strong sense of vision, mission, and end-values, which is the transcendent purpose; Burns (1978) explains that "revolutionary leadership demands commitment, persistence, courage, perhaps selflessness and even self-abnegation" (p. 169). A transcendent purpose and strong will is needed to motivate masses of people. A reform leader operates on the parts, a revolutionary leader operates
on the whole; “in its broadest meaning revolution is a complete and pervasive transformation of an entire social system” (p. 202). A heroic (charismatic) leader is what is today most referenced as transformational leader; for Burns, Moses is the epitome of charismatic heroic leadership.

Transformational leaders tend to develop positive relationships in order to strengthen employee and organizational performance; leaders who display transformational leadership behaviors encourage employees to look beyond their own needs and focus instead on the overall interests of the group. According to Bass (1990) transformational leaders behave in one or more of the following ways:

- **Charisma**: Provides vision and sense of mission, instills pride, gains respect and trust.
- **Inspiration**: Communicates high expectations, uses symbols to focus efforts, and expresses important purposes in simple ways.
- **Intellectual Stimulation**: Promotes intelligence, rationality, and careful problem solving.
- **Individualized Consideration**: Gives personal attention, treats each employee individually, coaches, and advises (p. 22).

According to Bass (1990), transformational leadership occurs when a leader transforms, or changes, his or her followers in ways that together result in followers trusting the leader, performing behaviors that contribute to the achievement of organizational goals, and being motivated to perform at a high level. Transformational leaders: a) increase subordinates’ awareness of the importance of their tasks and the importance of performing well, b) make subordinates aware of their needs for personal
growth, development, and accomplishment, and c) motivate their subordinates to work for the good of the organization rather than exclusively for their own personal gain or benefit.

Building on Bass’s contributions, Tichy and Devanna (1986) have identified the characteristics of transformational leaders as follows:

- Qualities of the agents of change: transformational leaders identify themselves as change agents; they create adaptive, entrepreneurial, innovative and flexible organizations. Their personal and professional image makes it possible for them to successfully lead people.
- Courage: transformational leaders are courageous individuals; they are ready and able to assume an appropriate attitude, to take a risk and face the status quo in the organization.
- Openness and faith in the followers: transformational leaders believe in people, in the relationship with the others (followers), transformational leaders are open and sincere and ready to give confidence, they possess great power. Transformational leaders are sensitive as regards their followers and they do their best to empower them whenever it is possible.
- Led by values: transformational leaders are value-driven; they formulate a set of essential values, which are to be achieved, and show behaviors in accordance with their values.
- Lifelong learning: transformational leaders are lifelong learners.

Transformational leaders try to draw a lesson from their own experience for
some future situations. In that sense when necessary, transformational leaders perform radical changes in their own attitudes, approaches, behaviors, etc.

- Ability to face the complex, ambiguous and uncertain situations:
  transformational leaders have the ability to deal with complexity. Considering the complexity level and the level of uncertainty of contemporary conditions and untypical situations in which contemporary organizations are almost daily, the ability of successful ingenuity in such conditions is of extreme importance.

- Visionary abilities: transformational leaders are good visionaries; they have the ability to create and articulate a future vision and have the ability to successfully communicate this vision to the followers, with a lot enthusiasm.

Unlike trait or behavior theories, transformational leadership is concerned with the behavior of the leaders as well as with the development and performance of the follower; Bass (1997) states that transformational leadership is universally applicable and he proposes, that regardless of culture, transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization, followers become motivated to expend greater effort for the collective goal. Transformational leadership is “a process that changes and transforms people” (Northouse, 2013, p. 185); this much reflects the process of adult learning in which individuals may change or transform themselves as a result of the learning that has taken place.

**Laissez-faire leadership.** A third style of leadership associated with behaviors and personality traits is the Laissez-faire style; this style entails avoidance or absence of leadership. Laissez-faire leaders take a more passive approach to leadership; failing to
assume responsibility for leading. This type of leader is often absent when key decisions need to be made (Northouse, 2013).

The following table, Table 3, summarizes the main characteristics of transactional, transformational and Laissez-Faire traditional leadership styles,

Table 3

*Traditional Leadership Styles Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
<th>Description of the style</th>
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| Transformational | • Demonstrates qualities that motivate respect and pride from association with him or her  
|                  | • Communicates values, purpose, and importance of organization’s mission  
|                  | • Exhibits optimism and excitement about goals and future states  
|                  | • Examines new perspectives for solving problems and completing tasks  
|                  | • Focuses on development and mentoring of followers and attends to their individual needs |
| Transactional    | • Manages workflow to accomplish organizational goals  
|                  | • Provides rewards for satisfactory performance by followers  
|                  | • Attends to followers’ mistakes and failures to meet standards  
|                  | • Waits until problems become severe before attending to them and intervening |
| Laissez- Faire   | • Exhibits frequent absence and lack of involvement during critical junctures |
Contemporary Leadership Styles

Traditionally, leadership has been viewed from a heroic perspective, meaning that traditionally, leadership revolved around the attitudes, behaviors and actions of an individual leader. However leadership theories have moved away from this concept into a post-heroic representation of leadership (Badaracco, 2001), changing leadership to focus on a more systematic perspective. Leadership is viewed more as a collective social process involving many actors in the process for decision making and outcomes. Leadership is viewed as a set of individuals contributing to one decision and the relationships and learning involved in this process. There are several different ways of considering this new concept of leadership: distributed leadership, shared leadership, collaborative leadership.

**Distributed leadership.** Distributed leadership is not “something ‘done’ by an individual ‘to’ others, or a set of individual actions through which people contribute to a group or organization . . . [it] is a group activity that works through and within relationships, rather than individual action” (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003, p. 3). Additionally, Bennett et al. (2003) have identified three premises about distributed leadership: 1) leadership is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals, 2) there is openness to the boundaries of leadership, and 3) varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few (p.7)

**Shared leadership.** Shared Leadership was defined by Pearce and Conger (2003) as:

A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational
goals or both. This influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence. (p. 1)

Additionally, Pearce and Conger (2003) explain that it is yet to be understood the role and distribution of cultural values, task interdependence, task competence, task complexity, and the team life cycle. Carson, Tesluk, and Marrone (2007) state that a shared purpose, social support, and voice are factors that support shared leadership practices in organizations. Shared purpose “exists when team members have similar understandings of their team’s primary objectives and take steps to ensure a focus on collective goals” (p. 1222). Social support is “team member’s efforts to provide emotional and psychological strength to one another. This helps to create an environment where team members feel their input is valued and appreciated” (p. 1222). Voice is “the degree to which a team’s members have input into how the team carries out its purpose” (p. 1222).

**Collaborative leadership.** Collaborative leadership emphasizes the importance of individual leaders engaging partners, both internal and external, in their leadership practices. This form of leadership emphasizes the leader as a learner as well as a decision maker. A leader can create a richer organizational culture by actively collaborating with others because it ensures that leaders can better respond to the needs of the organization. Yet, to be a collaborative leader, individual leaders must engage not only other individuals, but the entire organizational system the work with and tie everything together. This system creates a more fluid dynamic that departs from the traditional rigid organizational structures (Rubin & Futrell, 2009).
Additionally, Chrislip and Larson’s study on collaborative leadership found that collaborative leaders usually have no formal power or authority and tend to exercise leadership when all parties involved are peers (Chrislip and Larson, 1994). They go on to state “collaborative leaders have a different focus …. promoting and safeguarding the collaborative process” (p. 130). Furthermore, collaborative process leadership activities include “keeping stakeholders at the table through periods of frustration and skepticism, acknowledging small successes along the way, helping stakeholders negotiate difficult points, and enforcing group norms and ground rules” (p. 130).

**Leadership Styles of Women and Men**

This section explores the literature on gender differences in leadership styles from 1980’s to the most recent studies. According to Fine (2007), the literature on women and leadership consists of two threads; one thread that relates to the gender nature of the organizations in which male dominant bias leadership practices diminish women’s ways of leading; while the second thread examines and aims to identify differences in how women and men lead. This second body of the literature proposes that women possess unique leadership style.

Traditional leadership models, theories and studies have been under the domain of men and did not account for gender and ethnic cultural differences in leadership styles. Bass (1981) had assumed that good leaders should be active and task-oriented and he attributes these qualities to men rather than to women. In addition, the characteristics stereotypically attributed to women such as being emotional, considerate, warm, non-aggressive were used to further disqualify women for leadership. Furthermore, the aforementioned stereotypical beliefs suggested that not only women possess qualities that
would disqualify them as promising leaders but also they lack those core qualities that are needed for leadership. As recently as 30 years ago, women were seen as poor prospects for leadership positions due to lacking career orientation; lacking of leadership potential; being undependable; and being emotionally less stable (Bass, 1981).

Chemers (1997) explains that issues related to gender and leadership were ignored by academic researchers until the 1970’s; perhaps, assumptions of gender equality in leadership and the predominance of male researchers contributed to women being overlooked in this area. It was not until the end of 1980s that scholars noticed women in management and leadership positions; yet, studies from the early 1990’s concluded that there were not differences in leadership styles among women and men (Bass 1981; Powell 1990). Powell (1990) explains that “there is not much difference between the needs, values, and leadership styles of male and female managers” (p. 71), then he goes on to explain that a few of the sex differences have been found in laboratory studies more than in field studies, therefore “they tend to cancel each other out” (p. 71). Along with Powell, many other researchers argue that gender has no relationship to leadership styles and effectiveness (Dobbins & Platz, 1986; Powell, 1990; Van Engen, Van der Leeden & Willemsen, 2001).

In contrast to those scholars who denied that gender is a factor in leadership styles and effectiveness, there are other studies and views that provide evidence that there are gender differences in leadership styles – this can be seen in today’s contemporary research and that indeed, women’s ways of leadership tend to be more effective (Grant, 1988; Helsegen, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Book, 2000). Fine (2007) explains that the narratives of women leaders she collected suggest that women informally constructed
leadership through a moral discourse of leadership that emphasized (1) leading in order to make a positive contribution in the world, (2) collaboration (3) open communication, and (4) honesty in relationships.

Grant (1988) states that women have unique qualities that make them well-suited to be managers; she suggests that organizations should recognize the unique qualities women possess instead of forcing them to fit the male led model of leadership and managerial success. Grant (1988) proposes the following six important areas to consider: “communication and cooperation, affiliation and attachment, power, physicality, emotionality, vulnerability and lack of self-confidence, and intimacy and nurturance” (p. 59).

In the area of communication and cooperation, Grant (1988) explains that women have a lot of practice in communication, conciliation, mediation, and caring for others since early age; women tend to have a more cooperative behavior and that “should lead to higher morale and greater commitment from people in an organization” (p. 59). In the affiliation and attachment arena, women have a “strong sense of ties to and concern for others” (p. 60); Grant explains that this can be a real advantage since often in organizations there are feelings of alienation and lack of community. In addition, the importance of attachments and connectedness for women has often been seen as a deficit; when instead, “women's greater ease with the relational world could help make organizations places in which affiliation, friendship, connection, and personhood could also be valued in a more integrated manner” (p. 60).

When talking about power, Grant (1988) explains that women’s use and view of power differs from men’s; “women also tend to equate power with giving and caring or
with nurturance and strength, whereas men tend to equate it with aggression and assertion” (p. 60). Physicality, according to Grant, refers to the experience of female biology such as pregnancy, lactation, and nurturance of growth; Grant states that this “can lead to an earthiness and concreteness in life that is immensely helpful to organizations” (p. 61). In regards of emotionality, vulnerability, and lack of self-confidence, Grant explains that women seem to be more comfortable or at ease at expressing their fears, weaknesses, difficulties, vulnerability, lack of self-confidence and their emotions, Grant goes on to explain that this is important because it “allows for a more accurate assessment of self and of one's strengths and weaknesses;” therefore, “women are in a strong position to work productively with their feelings of weakness and to eventually build new strengths” (p. 62). Grant explains intimacy and nurturance as the greater potential or capacity that women have for empathy with others and “with the experience of themselves as less separated from others and as more connected to the world,” Grant explains that this sense of continuity with others leads women to “value closeness and to nurture intimacy in others” (p. 63).

Rosener (1990) points out that adopting the command and control leadership style of men is not the only way to become effective leaders. According to her study conducted for the International Women's Forum, Rosener concluded that when men and women, in similar managerial jobs, describe their leadership styles, huge differences arise. Men are much more likely than women to view leadership as a series of transactions with subordinates, and to use their position and control of resources to motivate their followers, “exchanging rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance” (p. 120). Whereas women are far more likely than men to describe
themselves in ways that illustrate the characteristics of transformational leaders such as “getting subordinates to transform their own self-interest into the interest of the group through concern for a broader goal” (p. 120); other attributes are charisma, work record, and interpersonal skills to motivate others.

According to Rosener (1990), women in her study described themselves as transformational; female respondents explained that they make every interaction with coworkers positive for all involved by encouraging participation, sharing power and information, enhancing other people’s self-worth, getting others excited about their work, and energizing them. In general, women leaders tend to be supportive and cooperative, and unlike men “women leaders don’t covet formal authority; they have learned to lead without it” (p. 123).

Helgesen (1990) reinforces the notion that women leaders have a tendency to share more information; on her work on women’s ways of leading discovered that the workplaces led by the women in her study tend to be "webs of inclusion." Helgesen explains that their communities are modeled more like a web rather than having a hierarchical structure and that sharing information was a key element to their effectiveness.

Another set of unique female abilities in leadership is presented by Book (2000), in her study of 14 successful women leaders, she found seven uniquely characteristics or abilities that these women embodied: they can sell their visions; they are not afraid to reinvent the rules; they are closely focused on achievement; they show courage under fire; they turn challenges into opportunities; they are aware of customer preferences; and they maximize what Book calls "high touch" in an era of high tech.
In reviewing the literature of gender differences in leadership styles, Burke and Collins (2001) conclude that evidences of gender differences found in earlier leadership styles studies are yet inconclusive. Burke and Collins explain that the most recent studies in which gender difference leadership styles have surfaced need to be replicated with different samples and methodologies; this will contribute to overcoming the vast body of research that concludes that gender differences in leadership styles do not exist. Burke and Collins surveyed 711 females and 320 males to assess self-reported leadership styles of accountants; the results of this analysis show that the style emphasized by female accountants differ somewhat from the style emphasized by male accountants; they go on to explain that female managers are “more likely than male managers to report practicing transformational behaviors” (p. 250). According to Burke and Collins’ findings, females are more likely than males to report doing the following:

- serving as positive role models for subordinates who aspire to be like them (attributed charisma);
- inspiring employees to believe in and strive for a common purpose (inspirational motivation);
- encouraging followers to be creative in problems solving and to question assumptions (intellectual stimulation);
- spending time developing, teaching, and coaching subordinates (individual consideration) (p. 250).

Burke and Collins (2001) ascertain that their findings provide supplementary evidence in opposition to the early beliefs of no gender differences in leadership styles; in addition, Burke and Collins conclude that the results from their study, in conjunction with the findings of Rosener (1990) and Bass, Avolio, and Atwater (1996), “provide support for the conclusion that gender differences in leadership styles exist and that females are more
transformational than males” (p. 253). In a meta-analysis of forty five studies comparing women and men leadership styles, Eagly, Johannensen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003) have also found that women tend to be more transformational in her leadership styles than men as well as women tend to engage in more contingent reward behaviors than men, and those two traits predict leadership effectiveness. In addition, some scholars assert that gender differences exist in leadership roles; for example, Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995), in a meta-analysis comparing the effectiveness of leaders, found that men and women were more effective in leadership roles that were congruent with their gender; women tend to be more effective in education, government and social service organizations settings and women are more likely to be effective in settings where communal interpersonal skills are high valued (Eagly et al., 1995).

This shows that there is empirical research that provides enough support to affirm that womens’ experiences in leadership roles are different than men’s; however, the vast majority of the research focus on middle-to-upper class white women navigating the corporate world. Those studies examining women leaders fail to account or bring attention to women from other classes, background, race, and/or ethnic. In addition, studies on women of color, especially Latinas exercising leadership in community settings are very limited.

Latinas have started to show presence in leadership roles and they have unique qualities and strengths when it comes to leadership (Gomez et al., 2001; Lopez-Mulnix et al., 2011; Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007). Latinas belong to the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States; Latinos are already the largest minority group in the United States and this percentage is expected to nearly double by the middle of this century (Pew
Research Center, 2008). As the number of the Latina population grows, so does the importance of how they learn and practice their leadership skills. Not all the Latinas in the United States share the same beliefs or experiences; despite of Latino women being a very heterogeneous group, there is a set of cultural values that is common among them: centrality of family, messages received about gender roles, and a collective identity that emphasizes social responsibility (Gomez et al., 2001).

**Chapter Summary**

The literature reviewed the main four areas of the foundation for this study: Latinas in the United States, emancipatory adult learning, feminist theories and leadership and women. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences of Latina leaders who work in community development in the Southeastern United States. Latinas are a growing group in the United States; currently there are 14.4 million of them. Latina leaders are also growing in presence and due to the intersectionality of their gender, ethnicity, SES, immigration status and geographic location they face many obstacles and stereotypes that hinder the practices of their leadership roles. Emancipatory learning provides the tools to foster critical reflection and to address oppressive forces, while feminist theories common goal is the empowerment of women. Literature in leadership does not account for Latina leaders’ experiences and contributions. Additionally, research about Latina leaders’ learning is limited; hence, there is a need for research that addresses the learning of Latina leaders and their strategies to effectively practice their leadership roles between different cultures.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences of Latina leaders who work in community development in the Southeastern United States. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How did Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills?
2. What factors influenced the leadership practices of Latina leaders in communities?

This chapter discusses the design of the study, the epistemology and theoretical framework, selection of participants, data collection and data analysis methods. Additionally, this chapter presents a number of strategies to ensure trustworthiness for the study and concludes with my subjectivity statement and study’s limitations.

Qualitative Research Design

An interpretive qualitative research design was used to understand the learning experiences of Latinas practicing leadership roles between cultures in the Southeastern United States. Qualitative research commonly refers to the collection and the analysis of material that seeks to uncover meaning and understanding of experiences; “qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things” (Berg, 1995, p. 3). Additionally, qualitative research is done with the purpose to “understand social processes in context” (Esterberg, 2002, p.
2); qualitative research explores the richness, depth, and complexity of phenomena (Merriam, 1998, 2009).

Esterberg (2002) explains that interpretation is the main attribute of qualitative research and its essence is to investigate and describe how social reality is constructed and the overall goal is to capture and accurately convey reality, which is the reality of an event or experience or the truth of a particular individual or group. Having an in-depth understanding into a person’s experiences allows us to place the meaning in people’s lived experiences and to provide vivid descriptions embedded in a real context (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Merriam (2009) emphasizes four characteristics that have been identified as the most important elements to understand the premises for a qualitative research: focus is on process, understanding and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument for both data collection and data analysis; the process is inductive; and the final product is rich in its descriptions. These four characteristics serve to explain why a qualitative research or interpretive research (Merriam, 2009) is the best fit for my study.

**Focus on Meaning and Understanding**

The focus of this study aimed to understand and describe the learning experiences of Latinas as they practice their leadership skills between different cultures. Merriam (2009) explains that the “overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather that the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (p. 14). By exploring the meaning and process of the lives of Latinas from their own perspective (emic), I was able to gain more in depth understanding of how
Latinas learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills. In doing so, I was also able to bring their voices and feelings to the field of adult education.

**Researcher as Primary Instrument**

According to Merriam (2009), “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 15), which requires acknowledging one’s own role in the process; additionally, Creswell (1994) suggests that, "data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines" (p. 145). Consequently, I acknowledged that it is essential to understand that I could have possibly influenced the participants’ answers during the interview process when data collection and that this might have affected the validity of the research findings when analyzing the data (Maxwell, 1996).

**An Inductive Process**

Merriam (2009) explains that “when there is lack of theory or an existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon,” researchers carry out qualitative studies and the process is rather inductive than deductive. The literature review for my study showed that knowledge on Latinas’ ways of learning and ways of leading is limited; hence, from my findings I was able to build on what we already knew about women’s learning and leadership practices instead of trying to prove or test a theory. In addition, this inductive process allowed me to look for “underlying order in the phenomenon and suggest hypotheses that encompass and explain the phenomenon” (Merriam & Simpson, 2002, p. 27). Using an inductive approach to analyze the data reveal themes, categories, typologies, concepts, ideas, hypothesis, and/or theory (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981; Merriam, 2009). This required that as a researcher, I needed to have the skill to “think
inductively, moving from specific raw data to abstract categories and concepts” (Merriam 2009, p. 17).

**Rich Description**

The product of what I learned about Latinas’ learning and leadership practices between different cultures was highly and richly descriptive (Merriam, 2009). The rich description of how Latinas learn to negotiate to practice their leadership skills and pursue leadership roles in the community “form[ed] the basis for an emerging story to be told” (Creswell, 1994, p. 154). Denzin (1989) defines rich or thick description as “deep, dense, detailed accounts of problematic experiences.... it presents detail, context, emotion and the webs of social relationship that join persons to one another” (p.83). Furthermore, in the collected data I sought for “unusual or useful quotes that can be incorporated into the qualitative story” (Creswell, 1994, p. 155).

In summary, interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2009) was suitable for this study that attempted to explore, describe, and understand the lives of Latinas leaders and their learning experiences while negotiating their leadership skills between cultures. Qualitative data comprised some essential “richness and holism, with strong potential for revealing complexity” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10).

**My Epistemology**

How do I come to know what I know? This is a question I ought to answer before attempting at creating knowledge from my study. The answer to this question is drawn from the epistemology or theory of knowledge that informs my views on how knowledge is constructed.
An “epistemology” is a framework or theory for specifying the constitution and generation of knowledge about the social world; that is, it concerns how to understand the nature of “reality.” A given epistemological framework specifies not only what “knowledge” is and how to recognise it, but who are the “knowers” and by what means someone becomes one, and also the means by which competing knowledge-claims are adjudicated and some rejected in favor of another/others. (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 188)

I identify with the constructionist stance (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Preissle & Grant, 2004). I believe that knowledge or reality is the product of the interaction between the “knower and the known” (Preissle & Grant, 2004, p. 173). Constructivism is the epistemological approach that infers that knowledge is not there to be discovered but instead, construction of knowledge is through interaction by individuals or groups and the world around them (Crotty, 1998).

Under the premises of constructivism, meaning is made by the interaction between the “subject” and the “object.” For knowledge to exist, some entity “a mind” has to observe, reflect, and relate to the perception of an “object” to what that mind already knows and expects, then establishes an understanding of what this “object” means to the mind. Making meaning in line with the constructionist view requires a human consciousness and an object to be comprehended, thus meaning is arrived through a back-and-forth process between a human being (mind) and an object (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) provides the following assumptions about constructivism: 1) meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting, 2) humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social
perspectives, and 3) the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community.

This epistemological perspective offered a foundation for a research that aimed to ask questions that were complex, such as leadership practices among Latinas residing in the Southeastern U.S., when answers were not apparent, and could only be answered by constructing meaning through interaction between the researcher and the participant(s). Since different cultures make different meanings, this epistemological approach allowed for the creation of knowledge that was not intended to be generalized to an entire population, Crotty (1998) asserts that humans are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon them by their own culture and reality is constructed and shaped by the human mind (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). My epistemology is embedded within the theoretical framework that informs the beliefs, assumptions and principles for all aspects of the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

**Theoretical Framework**

Interpretivism and feminism were the theoretical frameworks guiding my ideas, procedures, and strategies in this qualitative study, from participant selection and data collection to data analysis.

**Interpretivism**

Interpretivism was the main theoretical framework guiding this research. Interpretivism framework posits that knowledge is socially constructed and ephemeral; in other words, knowledge is influenced by history, gender, culture, power differences, and politics in society. Interpretivists believe that reality is not objectively determined, but it
is socially constructed (Husserl, 1965); furthermore, Merriam and Simpson (2000) assert that all qualitative research is based on the philosophical assumption “that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds” (p. 97). Interpretivism is a way to gain insights through discovering meanings that result in the production of thick and rich description (Merriam, 1998); additionally, the study of phenomena in their natural environment is the main premise in the philosophy of interpretivism, admitting that there may be multiple interpretations of reality but these interpretations are unique to the individuals and their social world. Interpretivism “attempts to explain human and social reality.” Interpretivism also “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 66-67). Interpretivism was well suited to this study because the center of the research was to understand the reality of a group of Latina leaders as they learn to negotiate their leadership skills between different cultures in the U.S. South.

**Feminism**

This research was also informed by some of the principles or approaches that guide feminist research. This study was on women, done by a woman, and for women and their learning experiences in leadership. Methodologically, this feminist research differed from most traditional research in that it actively sought to remove the power imbalance between research and subject; it was politically motivated and with the intent to have a major role in changing social inequality; and it began with the standpoints and experiences of women. Harding (1987) makes similar claims to the defining features of feminist research when she argues that studying women from their perspective, recognizing the researcher as part of the research subject and acknowledging that the
beliefs of the researcher shape the research is what makes feminist research feminist; she states that “they can be thought of as methodological features because they show us how to apply the general structure of scientific theory to research on women and gender” (Harding, 1987, p. 9).

The design of this study was informed by the five basic epistemological principles that Cook and Fonow (1986) have identified on feminist methodology: (1) the necessity of continuously and reflexively attending to the significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life, including the conduct of research; (2) the centrality of consciousness-raising as a specific methodological tool and as a general orientation or "way of seeing"; (3) the need to challenge the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated from one another and that personal and/or grounded experiences are unscientific; (4) concern for the ethical implications of feminist research and recognition of the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge; and (5) emphasis on the empowerment of women and transformation of patriarchal social institutions through research.

Furthermore, this study was enlightened by some other tenets of feminist methodology outlined by Morris, Woodward, and Peters (1998) that include: a “commitment to feminist principles” in the purpose, conduct, and reporting of the research; a commitment “to doing feminist research for women, and not just on them”; and a “commitment to reflexivity, based on notions of openness and intellectual honesty” (pp. 220–222).

One of my main goals in this feminist research was to eliminate the power relationship between me, the researcher, and the women. That is, “to establish
collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study to avoid objectification and to conduct research that is transformational” (Olesen, 2005; Stewart, 1994). With this study, I aimed at providing a supportive space for my participants to establish a rapport or connection in which they could freely talk about their learning and leadership experiences. It was my intent that by voicing these experiences aloud and seeing their stories in the research findings, Latinas leaders might have found an opportunity to reflect and have a transformative experience as a result of this.

A second intent for this feminist research approach was “to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position” (Lather, 1991, p. 71). Latinas are invisible in the adult education literature and when they are portrayed, they are seen from a deficit perspective (Jeria, 1999, p.49); consequently, this study provided an opportunity for Latina leaders to be visible in the field of adult education.

A third principle of feminist research that enlightened this study was the use of in-depth interviews as a main method for data collection. Some feminist scholars assert that in-depth interviews are very suitable to study women (DeVault 1999, Reinharz, 1992). Historically, women’s voices have been missing from research and this allowed my participants to tell their own stories on leadership.

**Participants Selection**

This research focused on Latinas leaders living and working in one of the states of the Southeastern United States. Latinas for this study included those who were U.S. born citizens—but self-identify as being Latinas due to their upbringings or tight connections
to their parents’ countries of origins—as well as Latinas who were immigrants. The inclusion criteria to participate in the study were:

1. Latinas who either were the executive director, CEO, president, or state director of a community based organizations, or Latinas who were appointed or elected board members of non-profit organizations.

2. Latinas age 25 and older.

3. Latinas who had at least five years of experience in leadership roles.

4. Women of any Latino background. This criterion acknowledged that Latinas in the United States comprise heritages from 19 different countries.

5. Latinas with either formal schooling credentials or not. This criterion was needed to recognize that learning and leadership practices can happen as the result of both formal and informal learning.

**Selection Method**

Purposeful sampling was the main method to identify research participants for this study. Patton (2002) presents that there are several strategies for purposefully selecting participants for information rich cases. In applying the logic in what would be the best approach for this study, snowball or chain sampling fitted very well with the task of identifying participants who would provide answers with rich information. Patton (2002) states that snowball or chain sampling involves utilizing well informed people to identify critical cases or informants who have a great deal of information about a phenomenon. I followed this chain of contacts in order to identify and invite Latina leaders to participate in the study.
I identified three key informants in different cities, and shared the purpose of this study. These preliminary conversations yielded a list of 14 potential participants to invite. When the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study, I sent a letter of invitation (See Appendix A) to each of the potential participants, explaining the purpose of the research and inviting them to be part of the study. The invitation letter provided yes/no questions to ensure inclusion criteria. Participants emailed me back to let me know their willingness to be part of the study.

**Sampling Size**

Merriam (2009) explains that there is not an answer to the question of how many people do I need to interview?, she explains that it will depend on the questions to be asked, the data that is being generated along with the ongoing data analysis, as well as the resources allocated for the research. In addition, Patton (2002) posits that "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative research" (p. 244), it is the data gathered in the study what determines how many participants need to be included in the study. I interviewed nine Latina leaders who met the selection criteria.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the number of interviews needs to continue "until the point of redundancy" (p. 202) and they go on to explain that “in purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is concluded when no new information is forthcoming from new sample units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion” (p. 202). I stopped collecting data when I felt confident that I have reached data saturation; that is, I started hearing repeatedly the same answers among my participants.
Data Collection

For this interpretive qualitative research study, I used in-depth interviews as the primary source to collect data, along with field notes and document analysis. In-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed me to learn more about my participants’ learning experiences and leadership practices. This type of interview is less rigid and the goal “is to explore a topic more openly and to allow the interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 87). There is also the concept of a semistructured life world interview that is “an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life–world of the participant with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1996, p. 6). Kvale explains that the qualitative research interview is based on daily life conversations, and conversation is “a basic mode of human interaction” (p. 5) and a focus on eliciting stories (Seidman, 2006). This type of interview focuses on themes and includes suggested questions. The interview protocol or guide for this study was divided in five themes (I) Participant’s background and learning, (II) Participant’s current leadership role or position, (III) Participant’s barriers and challenges, and (IV) Reflecting and summary. (See Appendix B).

Merriam (2009), as she explains that less structure interviews allow participants to “define the world in unique ways” (p. 90), presents the following characteristics that are inherent to semi structure interviews: “Interview guide includes a mix of more and less structured interview questions, all questions used flexibly, usually specific data required from all respondents, largest part of interview guided by list of questions or issues to be explored, no predetermined wording or order” (p. 89).
Before each interview was conducted, I provided participants with the consent form (See Appendix C) asking them to sign it. I formally informed the participants the purpose of the study, the benefits and the risks pertinent to the study, and the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview or during the study. After the consent form was signed, participants filled out a questionnaire to gathered demographic data (See Appendix D). Interviews lasted from 65 minutes to 150 minutes, with an average of approximately 90 minutes. All of the interviews were digitally recorded. Interview files were stored in both my computer’s hard drive and on an external hard drive. The files on the computer were protected by using a password and the external drive was kept in a safe locked place. Interviews were transcribed verbatim within two to three weeks after each interview took place. Additionally, data analysis started the moment the first interview was conducted; Merriam (2009), Ezzy (2002), and Patton (2002) encourage the researcher to conduct data analysis simultaneously with data collection.

Document analysis refers to the use of existing documents. I reviewed and analyzed participants’ curriculum vitae (CV’s), participants’ workplaces websites as well as any newspaper or magazine articles featuring their work in their communities. Additionally, I reviewed and analyzed the data collected through my field notes. These documents helped me to “uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Merriam, 2009, p. 163).

**Interviewing within a Feminist Framework**

Oakley (1981) believes that the interviewer should invest her own personal identity in the research relationship by answering respondents’ questions, sharing
knowledge and experience, and giving support when asked. Nonhierarchical relationships between feminist researchers and their female informants are best achieved by appealing to their common experience as women. Oakley argues, “a feminist interviewing women is by definition both inside the culture and participating in that which she is observing” (p. 57). By being a woman, the researcher can identify with the women she interviews and at the same time, the women identify with her, so that “personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives” (p. 58). In studying a group to which one belongs, one can use one’s knowledge of that group to gain deeper insights into their opinions and experiences. Moreover, the researcher and the participants are on a relatively equal footing, reducing the likelihood of exploitative power relationships (Oakley, 1981). The interview ideally becomes a mutually reinforcing process; or at least, the researcher and the participant establish common understandings.

Women as researchers bring their own experiences and history into the role of researcher and the research process. The feminist researcher may be both insider and/or outsider to the environment and topic they are exploring. As insider, they have a stronger understanding of the dynamics and play of social relationships that inform the situation under investigation. The issue of inequality may be overcome through the affiliation of the researcher with the context, where participants may feel more comfortable in sharing information with someone who is within the situation (Matsumoto, 1996). Questions about the motivations for the researcher to study women of other races, cultures, ages, abilities and classes need to be addressed as part of the research process.
Acker (2001) explains that accumulated experiences of feminist researchers trying to work with the insider/outsider issue make it increasingly clear that strict prescriptions about method based on a rigid distinction between “insider” and “outsider” are not all that helpful in developing research strategies on the ground; on the other hand some other feminists argue for the importance of empathy with research participants, and are often concerned that “outsiders” may be more inclined to take on or appropriate the voices of the research (Acker, 2001).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis refers to the process of creating meaning out of the participants’ words or as Merriam (1998) explains it is “the process of making sense out of the data” (p. 178). Furthermore, data analysis is a process of organizing and interpreting the data (Creswell, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Qualitative analysis for in-depth interviews requires a high level of organizing or managing the data before analyzing it (Seidman, 2006); therefore, before analyzing the data, I created a filing system to match each interview transcript with each participant’s digital voice file to be able “to trace interview data to the original source on the interview tape at all stages of the research” (Seidman, 2006, p. 112).

To analyze the data, I used the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). I constructed categories and codes from the transcripts using analytic induction (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) explains that an inductive analysis means that patterns, themes, and categories "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (p. 390). The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Maykut &
Morehouse, 1994) provided the framework to scan for categories and relationships, to compare among categories, and to generate meaning to be able to understand the learning experience and leadership practices between cultures of Latina leaders. Goetz and LeComte (1981) assert that constant comparative “combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed” (p. 58) Coding was the first and most pivotal step towards data analysis in the constant comparative method; it allowed me to start interpreting and refining the data, allowing for the discovery of relationships; “as events are constantly compared with previous events, new typological dimensions, as well as new relationship, may be discovered” (p. 58).

Following Maykut & Morehouse (1994) recommendations, I identified “the chunks of units of meaning in the data” (p. 118). After reading the first transcript, I identified and developed five color coded units of meaning: blue represented the challenges about being a Latina leader; yellow represented the experiences about different cultures; gray represented the learning experiences, green represented the leadership practices values; and pink represented support systems and motivation to practice leadership roles. I contrasted and compared these five units of meaning in each of the nine interview transcripts.

Then, as Maykut & Morehouse explain “as each new unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other unit of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorized and coded) with similar units of meaning” (p. 134). Therefore, I created an excel file with five tabs (one per color) where I copied and pasted all of the data chunks by similar codes. Then, I compared and contrasted the data chunks, making notes for similarities and dissimilarities. Hence, patterns and categories emerged as connections
were being made. I developed comprehensive themes with its supporting subthemes while identifying and sorting supporting data into each one of those themes. Furthermore, Charmaz (2000) provides the process I followed to compare the data:

(a) Comparing different [women] (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences); (b) comparing data from the same [women] with themselves at different points in time; (c) comparing incident with incident; (d) comparing data with category, and € comparing a category with other categories. (p. 515)

Moreover, I followed Merriam’s (2009) guidelines or criteria to develop relevant categories when using the constant comparative method of data analysis. These suggestions included: 1) categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research, they are the answer to the research questions; 2) categories should be exhaustive, all important data is placed in a category or subcategory; 3) categories should be mutually exclusive, do not fit the same data in multiple categories; 4) categories should be sensitizing, the naming of the category needs to reflect the exact meaning of the data; and 5) categories should be conceptually congruent, apply the same level of abstraction or the same conceptual level to all the categories (p. 186).

**Trustworthiness**

I employed multiple strategies to accurately capture the social reality of this research. In qualitative research, validity and reliability are displayed in different ways that demonstrate the quality of the findings and its trustworthiness. Validity is concerned with credibility and accurate representation of reality, while reliability is concerned with generating results consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). With regard to
validity, I assumed an adequate engagement in data collection as strategy to ensure the credibility of the study. I collected data until I reached the saturation point and could no longer find new information. Merriam (2009) explains that “data and emerging findings must feel saturated” and “no new information surfaces” (p. 219). Members check was another strategy I used to promote validity, I provided my participants with their interviews’ transcripts along with findings and its interpretations to assure that it reflected their experience. Merriam (2009) encourages the use of member checks to enhance trustworthiness, “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229).

In addition, I practiced reflexivity during the process. Reflexivity is the ongoing questioning of one’s place and power relations within the research process” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.38). Reflexivity allowed me to explore the ways in which my involvement in this study influenced, acted upon and informed the research (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Another strategy I incorporated was peer review. During the process, my dissertation committee members read and provided comments on the design and findings of the study. In addition, I convened three colleagues and one fellow graduate student to discuss every step of the research process. These “discussions with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229) will make the study stronger and credible.

Regarding reliability, I used triangulation and audit trail as strategies to enhance the reliability of the study. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of data collection and it is defined to be a “procedure where researchers search for convergence
among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). This study included in-depth interviews, document analysis and field notes as methods of data collection. Patton (2002) promotes the use of triangulation by asserting that “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods; this can mean using several kinds of methods or data” (p. 247).

Audit trail is “a detail account of the methods, procedures, and decisions points in carrying out the study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). The purpose of the audit trail was to enable others to understand and if chosen to reconstruct or replicate the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Additionally, I had a colleague who would walk me “through [my] audit trail periodically, raising questions when necessary” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 147).

From the design to the presentation of the findings, I have provided a clear account of my choices and my role as the researcher as well as guiding conceptual and theoretical frameworks for the study, a thorough description of participants’ selection and criteria, the context and how data was collected and analyzed, describing how the data was coded and synthesized into themes or categories.

Subjectivity Statement

I am a Latina immigrant from Venezuela who came to the United States in 2000. I was in my late twenties and had a professional career in industrial engineering at that time. Since moving to Georgia, I have professionally developed a new career where I focus on the research and education of the Latino population in different issues in communities across Georgia —from higher education access and retention to teen pregnancy prevention, to youth and adult leadership development. Currently, I am a
public service faculty member at the University of Georgia, the state's flagship institution of higher education in the state of Georgia.

I brought to the study my sensitivity and knowledge about the language, culture, common values and customs of Latinas, and I was aware and respectful of the differences and diversity that exist among them. In addition, I brought to the study the biases and perspectives embedded in my own experiences; I have lived the experiences that I studied. Since I have experienced countless racial microaggressions in my personal and professional interactions with people from different Georgia communities, the main bias I brought to the study was the assumption that Latina leaders face daily microaggressions in their practices. Pierce (1995) asserts that,

> Probably the most grievous of offensive mechanisms spewed at victims of racism and sexism are microaggressions. These are subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal and/or kinetic. In and of itself a microaggression may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence. (p. 281)

I openly disclose that from the selection of this research topic to the decisions on the research design, data collection and analysis, and how I presented the findings were choices shaped and motivated by my own positionality and lived experiences. With this research, I set to bring to the forefront the lives of Latina leaders. The lives of Latinas who are invisible from the adult education scholarship—the lives of Latinas who are transforming communities.
I have practiced reflexivity throughout the research process. I was able to be aware of my own contributions and biases, I accounted for my personal feelings, questions, thoughts, and my methodological decisions and the reasons for them.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are some limitations of this study. First, Latina leaders interviewed were identified using the purposeful sampling method and they were from only one of the nine Southeastern states; therefore, the study and findings are confined to one state and cannot be generalizable to all Latina leaders working and living in the Southeastern region at large. Another limitation related to sampling is that women interviewed represented both U.S born and foreign born Latinas. However, the experiences described by the Latinas in this study provide the baseline for the dynamics and awareness of negotiating leadership practices between cultures.

Another limitation is that I did not ask participants how they identify themselves in terms of ethnicity, preventing validation of their ethnic identities. I asked the participants how they identified themselves in term of race but I assumed their ethnicity and only asked if participants identified themselves as Latinas with a yes or no question.

One more limitation was not considering the religion of the participants. Religion was not the focus of this study, but it would have informed how the religious identity was a factor in negotiating leadership practices between cultures in a region that is predominately protestant.

In terms of data collection, the study was limited to participants’ stories and documents. Adding observations as another method for data collection would have
allowed me to observe the Latinas leaders’ interactions between cultures, offering multiple perspectives of their experiences.

Finally, my education and public service faculty status at the state’s flagship university created an outsider status; thus, it might have affected what Latina leaders shared with me, for example they might have withheld information that could have enriched their leadership stories and findings.
CHAPTER FOUR

NINE LATINA LEADERS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences of Latina leaders who work in community development in the Southeastern United States. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How did Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills?

2. What factors influenced the leadership practices of Latina leaders in communities?

This chapter presents the story of the nine Latinas who participated in this study. Each Latina is introduced by a profile that is structured in three parts: 1) a description in terms of demographics and background in leadership; 2) the interview process and setting; and 3) a summarized narrative within the context of practicing leadership skills between cultures, highlighting the barriers and support mechanisms each Latina has encountered. Each summarized narrative closes with the key learning or advice leaders in this study would transfer to emerging Latina leaders. This chapter concludes with a summary of the narratives’ common themes.

The demographic data, description of the Latinas, and summarized narrative information were collected using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, a demographic questionnaire, field notes, and documents. These use of multiple methods of data collection or triangulation strengthened this study. The demographic questionnaire was...
given to the participants to complete right before the interview. The field notes were

taken before, during, and after the interviews were conducted. Additionally, the
documents analyzed consisted of resumes or CV’s and magazine or newspaper articles
and/or previous interviews provided by the participants.

All participants, with the exception of two, filled out the questionnaire while I
was setting up the digital recorder for the interview, and the other two participants
completed the questionnaire at an initial meeting prior to scheduling the interview date.
Seven interviews were conducted at the participants’ offices and two interviews were
conducted at coffee shops. The shortest driving distance to an interview location was
approximately 65 miles, while the longest was about 165 miles; I drove over 2,000 miles
across the state during data collection. The state in where these interviews were
conducted is one of the Southeastern states of the U.S. The interviews lasted from 65
minutes to 150 minutes, with an average of 90 minutes. Interviews were transcribed
verbatim within two to three weeks after they were conducted, and transcripts were
emailed to participants to seek feedback and to give them an opportunity to expand on
their answers; furthermore, this was done as a strategy to promote validity in the study
since participants’ member checks enhance trustworthiness. After completion of the
dissertation, participants were e-mailed the findings chapter.

Furthermore, Latinas are introduced by their pseudonyms; and while each woman
had the opportunity to choose a pseudonym, I have decided to change four of them to
protect their identities, eliminate bias, and connotations from their own choices. This
chapter opens up with a summary table (see Table 4) of the participants’ demographics,
followed by the nine Latina leaders’ individual profiles. Profiles of the nine Latina
leaders are presented in the same order in which the interviews were conducted during data collection.

Table 4

Demographic Profile of Latinas in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Latino Heritage</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Race(*)</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th># of years Leadership Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Mexico City, Mexico</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>Lima, Peru</td>
<td>Peruvian</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andie</td>
<td>Texas, USA</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latina</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristina</td>
<td>Kansas, USA</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorie</td>
<td>Mexico City, Mexico</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Latino/White</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lina</td>
<td>Panama City, Panama</td>
<td>Panamanian</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Afro-Latina</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margara</td>
<td>Barranquilla, Colombia</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lili</td>
<td>San Juan, Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>White (Latina)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>New York, USA</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*) Participants have self-identified their race.
Ana

Ana is a Latina in her mid-fifties. She has self-identified her race as Brown. Ana was born in Mexico City, Mexico and came to the United States when she was 24 years old. Ana is divorced and has one daughter. Ana lives in the north part of the state since the year 2002. She holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology and she is the founder and the executive director of a non-profit organization dedicated to address the needs of the low income Latino community in a county that is situated in the northern part of the state. Ana has over 21 years of experience in community leadership roles.

I met Ana for the first time in 2008 when I was facilitating a train-the-trainer session for a community leadership curriculum. During that interaction, I realized she had a distinctive, serene way of communicating. It was not until summer of 2011 that I had the opportunity to see her again and at that time I was a witness to how calm she conducted herself in the midst of a very intimidating situation for the group of Latinos she leads in her community.

I contacted Ana after New Year’s Eve of 2011, and she gladly accepted my offer to be a participant for this study, and so we scheduled the interview for January 11, 2012 at 10:00 am at her organization’s office which is located approximately 150 miles from my town. I left home at 5:30 on a rainy, windy morning to conduct the first interview for the study. On my driving there, all I could think was, “I hope she does not notice how excited and scared I am to interview her.” This interview lasted about 105 minutes and had to be stopped for about 15 minutes due to hail. I gave Ana the choice of having the interview in Spanish but she decided that it was okay to speak in English and that she could use Spanish when it was easier to explain or did not know the right word to use in English.
Ana made us a fresh pot of coffee while discussing the purpose of the study and explaining the consent form. Her offices are located in a space that has the feeling of a warehouse, with an open area that can hold approximately up to 300 people standing. The space lacks of heating and air conditioning systems. Since all the interviews are recorded digitally, I was worried about the quality of the audio file because I could hear the loud sound of the rain on the roof. It was not until the interview had started, when I learned that she was recovering from pneumonia and I could have not been more appreciative of her time in sharing with me her experiences in leadership.

**Ana’s Summarized Narrative**

Ana believes that the key to negotiating between cultures is to learn to work from inside the culture, if a leader can understand the culture they are working with, it is easier to relate to your target audience and work with other people. Another aspect of negotiating between cultures is working to understand and overcome stereotypes. For Ana, it is important to learn how others perceive her and her culture, then to work from there to overcome it by acting polite and respectful while providing information to give others the correct cultural perceptions. In this way, it is best to try to act as a broker between cultures: first, one should understand the other culture; second, understand how they see your culture; and third, teach them about your culture so they can learn to relate to you. An important part of negotiation is to always remain calm, polite and respectful, in this way one can be more successful when working with various cultures and can create more meaningful dialogues. If a leader gets angry and defensive, particularly when it comes to misunderstandings and stereotypes, one is not very effective as this shuts other parties down and makes them less willing to talk and negotiate.
For Ana, the biggest barriers to her community and to her as a leader are racism issues and fear. There is prejudice and discrimination towards her and towards the people she leads. Many people in her community do not fully understand other cultures, and so this makes it more difficult to function as a leader within the community. Furthermore, some other leaders are less willing to listen to your ideas if they perceive you as “too female” or “too Latino.” As part of this, Ana has found that it is sometimes a barrier to her if she asks for resources or help from the community, to have racist and fearful attitudes as people take more hostile attitudes towards any requests. However, the best way to overcome these barriers is to always remain civil and respectful and not to get upset or angry; if one gets upset or angry, it usually does not help the situation.

Though she does not have any specific mentor or structured support group, Ana finds support from her family, especially her daughter, and from a few selected members of her board. Her family can support her in a more personal function and can give her the strength to continue in her work, while a Board member can serve her in a more professional capacity and offer her advice when she needs it. However, a structured peer support and mentoring system would be very nice and Ana believes that there should be one in place.

Ana’s advice to emerging Latina leaders is first learn to work within a culture since this will make you more effective as a leader; then, learn to listen to what the community wants and do not make plans based on funding or what you feel is what the community needs, but to really listen to the community. Also, it may be difficult, but learn to ask for help when you need it; do not always try to shoulder the burden yourself. You should always learn from your experiences, positive or negative, analyze your
actions and motives and take away lessons from them. It is very important that you find your passion; this will make you a better leader.

Lucia

Lucia is a woman in her late 40s and she identified her race as Latina. Lucia was born in Lima, Peru and moved to the United States when she was 21 years old after she married an American citizen. Lucia is divorced and has one son. In her home country, Lucia was pursuing a law degree but being unable to transfer credits and considering the amount of time that would have taken her to complete a law degree in the United States, she decided to pursue a bachelor’s degree in political science instead. Additionally, Lucia holds a master’s degree in social work. She is the president of a community-based organization that provides mental health and substance abuse counseling to low-income Latinos. Currently, her organization has six different locations in the metro area and neighboring counties. In addition, Lucia serves as a board member on different organizations in the metro area. Lucia has 20 years of experience in community leadership roles.

I had always known that Lucia was a prominent leader within the Latino community, but had never met her prior to the interview. I emailed Lucia with the invitation to participate in the study before New Year’s Eve 2011 and she answered my invitation accepting to be a participant three weeks later. We scheduled the interview for January 18, 2012 at 11:00 am at her offices, 80 miles away from my house. While I was waiting for her to arrive to the interview, I had the opportunity to observe how proud she is of her accomplishments; in her main waiting room, the walls were plastered with more
than 30 certificates of appreciation, participation, completion, membership, accomplishments, recognition and CEU’s.

She arrived to the offices around 11:20 am, and a few minutes later her assistant came to bringing me to Lucia’s office, at this point I was getting a little anxious but as I entered her office, I felt more relaxed by the music ambience and her exquisite furniture choice. Her office displayed her university diplomas and some other certificates as well. Lucia was dressed in business attire and received me with a smile. She greeted me in Spanish and we talked in Spanish for a few minutes while she was reading and signing the consent form; however, the interview was conducted in English. The interview lasted approximately 90 minutes.

**Lucia’s Summarized Narrative**

For Lucia, the most important lesson for navigating between cultures is to learn everything you can about a culture. If you learn about the history, geography, languages and dynamics of a culture, it becomes much easier to establish credit with people of a different culture and it becomes easier to talk and to relate to different people. Therefore, to navigate successfully between cultures one has to be willing to continually learn everything one can. Lucia learned this attitude through her experiences of coming to the United States and getting an advanced education, and found that she was more successful as she completely immersed herself in the new culture. This experience was not always easy, but it brought about greater rewards and successes. It is much easier to navigate between cultures when one is culturally competent in a culture and is able to relate to others on a different level.
Lucia believes that this learning attitude furthermore goes beyond just learning specifics cultures. Lucia is always striving to improve herself through reading and through taking advantage of educational seminars whenever possible. Through these, she has learned that a leader can be more successful if she or he strenuously avoids being narrow-minded. If leaders can avoid the mentality that they know everything and they can fix everything and simply learn to listen to others, they will have a more positive leadership experience among diverse people. This attitude can create and sustain fuller dialogue between people. Thus, learning and listening are the keys to being a better leader and being able to navigate among various cultures.

The foundation for this attitude was instilled in Lucia from an early age as her mother taught her the value of hard work and her father taught her the value of a good education. These factors combined turned Lucia into a lifelong scholar who was not afraid to learn what she needed to be able to improve herself. Finally, just taking time to receive a good education and throwing herself into work really helped Lucia learn how to navigate different cultures. Additionally, rather than considering negative experiences as barriers, Lucia considers them to be challenges. If she fails in some way, Lucia reflects on what she could have done better and how she could have changed the outcome. She then takes these lessons learned and applies them to future leadership experiences.

However, it is sometimes difficult learning to reconcile little differences between cultures that may not always mesh. For example, just being a woman, sometimes a female leader can be considered provocative, even if she is not meaning to. This goes beyond just the book learning about a culture; it is learning to work with the little
physical cues that are involved in everyday business transactions that dictate what is acceptable to one person and not to another.

A big difficulty Lucia runs across, as a leader, is the assumptions people make about different service sectors. For example, people may assume that those working in the for-profit sector are just in it for the money and may not care, while people may assume others in the non-profit sector are just inefficient organizations that leech off tax dollars. To overcome these barriers, it is important to see how the different sectors can support each other. The non-profit sector may be able to deliver more services so that more people can work and make money in the for-profit sector, and in turn the for-profit businesses can donate money that supports the non-profit organizations. Finally, as a leader, Lucia has had difficulty with changing cultural climates, both nationally and locally. While she continues to abide by her rule of learning and adapting, it is sometimes harder to help her serving population when there is more racial discrimination and misunderstandings in the local dynamics at the time.

As with many other Latina leaders, Lucia finds a great source of support and comfort from her immediate family. She believes that this is a very important aspect of Latino culture that family is very important and you take care of your own, even if you do not always get along. Lucia has also found a great source of professional support for her as a leader among an established group of Latina leaders. These women meet on a professional basis and discuss professional matters. Not only they are able to learn from each other how to avoid common leadership pitfalls, but they also become better leaders as they share ideas on how to be more effective and assertive leaders. Then to support this professional support group, Lucia has found that a close-knit group of personal
friends also greatly serves her in her leadership skills. However, in this capacity, Lucia stresses that it is very important to have a reciprocal relationship with friends; one friend should not always take all of the time, but each friend should take and give to the other. In this way, the friendship becomes more of a support system, as each friend is able to give and receive, rather than the friendship becoming a burden to one party. Finally, Lucia finds a great source of support in her staff, and she finds that the culture and atmosphere in her organization is very positive and supportive, which greatly helps her in her function as a leader.

In terms of what advice Lucia would offer, she says that the first thing to do is to find your passion: whatever it is and whatever you want to do, as long as it is your passion and you can fully devote yourself to it, then that is where you should go. If you have a passion for your work, it is much easier to serve your community in that capacity. If you have a passion for serving individuals but do not care as much for the community, then it is much harder to function as a community leader, the passion must be there. The second thing to do would be to immerse yourself in whatever culture you find yourself in: learn the language, learn the customs, and devote yourself to learning everything about the culture. It is important to go all the way with this advice; if one only goes halfway with only learning the language, then one will not be as successful.

Andie

Andie is a Latina born in Texas, United States. Andie is of a Mexican descent and identifies her race as Hispanic/Latina. She is 46 years old, married and has two children, a daughter and a son. Andie grew up in a large migrant family; she is one out of ten siblings, five girls and five boys. Growing up, Andie would travel with her family to
harvest crops back and forth from Florida to Texas, and/or from Florida to North Carolina. Andie did not finish high school but passed the General Education Development (GED) exam. She has taken a few college courses but has not completed a higher education degree; however, Andie has participated in many trainings and certification classes as they had become available in her community. Andie has lived in the southern part of the state since 1984 working as a community organizer and advocate. Since 1995, Andie has been the co-founder and Executive Director of a non-profit organization whose efforts are dedicated to advocate and empower low income families so that they can participate in decision making processes and actively contribute to the communities in which they live and work. Andie has over 22 years of experience in community leadership roles.

I did not know about Andie until one of my key informants told me who she was and her important work and accomplishments within the migrant community. My key informant introduced us via email and I followed up with her after that. After two weeks without having heard from Andie about my invitation to participate in the study, on January 12, 2012, I decided to drive four hours to her town to pay her a visit and introduce the study and myself. I arrived to her offices around 2:00 pm without announcing my visit, and to my surprise Andie gave me her time and explained the operations of her organization, then I briefed her about the study and two weeks later, I came back to conduct the interview.

I interviewed Andie on January 25, 2012. I arrived to her office at 9:30 in the morning and her interview lasted over 150 minutes. Andie’s interview was emotionally charged; she is a passionate woman who would laugh, cry, and/or raise her voice as she
was telling me her story. I felt both privileged and proud of my rapport with Andie throughout the interview; she did not treat me as a stranger and shared stories she said she had not told anyone else with regard to her challenges as a Latina leader in a southern state.

**Andie’s Summarized Narrative**

As part of the migrant community, Andie was exposed to many different locations and communities growing up. Moving around in this way helped Andie build a flexible attitude that served as a foundation that allowed her to take on challenges working with diverse communities as they arise. Through these same experiences, Andie learned not only how to adapt to different communities, but also how to be a leader. Among the communities she was in when she was young, she soon became a leader to the children as she instilled in them a sense of value for the education system and taught young children the importance of learning, even as she lacked a traditional higher education herself.

Beyond her environment, Andie credits her mother with instilling a sense of hard working ethics which has allowed her to take on whatever tasks she needs to do and to stand up and be a leader when the situation calls for one. It is this attitude that serves as a starting point for her leadership experiences; this attitude has taught her not to be afraid of new experiences and to face them with determination. Through this, she has been able to serve the community by adopting the attitude of even if she does not know how to work with another community herself, and she will take on the challenge and do what is necessary to do outreach and to start the discussions between different communities. It is largely this attitude that has allowed her to get as far as she has gotten in her leadership
practices; using this attitude, she is able to utilize available resources and bring meaningful change to her community.

Further, when navigating between cultures, Andie has found that simply using available resources is very useful for creating meaningful and sustained dialogue. Rather than setting out on a new path, Andie has found that it is more useful to approach a new community and discuss all available resources and ways to pool them together, which have made her more effective as a leader among different communities.

The biggest barrier Andie perceives to her leadership skills is a lack of communication among different and diverse groups, even as groups within a community that are working towards the same goals, they do not collaborate with each other and end up duplicating efforts. This can be difficult as a leader who is trying to deliver services to the community. Andie has found that through simple communication and collaboration, leadership and community efforts are much successful when organizations and communities pool their resources together.

Another barrier to practicing leadership skills for Andie is sometimes the distrust among individuals in a community. When trying to deliver services to a specific community, it is sometimes difficult to break in to do some good because the individual community members may not trust you to deliver services. This may end up being a barrier to a leader as she works to deliver services.

Though Andie did not start her leadership path with a traditional higher education, she found a great source of support for developing her leadership skills in different training venues. Throughout her career, she was sure to take advantage of whatever trainings she was able to, and thus she was able to learn about many different topics and
earn various certifications. These training experiences really supported her leadership skills and helped bring education to practicing as a leader.

Andie also finds a great source of support in her family, who allow her to remain grounded even as she gives her time and energies to an organization that may require some odd hours. Furthermore, Andie finds support for her leadership skills in the staff at her organization; she remains open and honest with them, and in turn she knows that she can rely on them to get the job done. By placing an emphasis on transparency, Andie is able to create a richer leadership experience for herself as she works as a unit with her staff. Another piece of this support group is volunteers, whom she considers to be a blessing and she draws a lot of energy and support from her groups of volunteers.

Andie believes that a key learning that she can share is to focus on building trust in the community, and she explained that first you ought to build trust with the people to whom you are going to serve or provide services, and then you focus on the relationship with the community at large. Another advice that she can offer to an emerging Latina leader is to always treat others as you want to be treated, do not forget your position as a leader in the community and that you are a role model at all times. A different advice was to reflect and understand what is the limit to what it can be done for the community; and do not push or leave family on the side for work, balancing family and work is something that Andie still regrets not having been able to do when her children were younger.

Cristina

Cristina is a 33-year-old woman who was born in Kansas, U.S. to an American father and a Colombian mother, she identifies as Latina. Cristina moved to her current city when she was three years old. She is married and has one child; an eight-month old
baby boy. Cristina holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in social work. She is the executive director of a non-profit dedicated to provide domestic violence services and programs to Latino families. Cristina is the youngest of my participants and she has over six year of experience in leadership roles.

With the help of one of my key informants, I got in contact with Cristina at the beginning of 2012 and I interviewed her on January 26, 2012 at 4:00 pm at Cristina’s offices. It was a rainy afternoon and I was worried about being late due to traffic; this situation gave me some anxiety but as I arrived and Cristina greeted and welcomed me, I felt at ease immediately. Cristina made me feel that she already knew me and told me how honored and happy she was to be able to contribute to my study.

Before starting with the interview, Cristina showed me around and explained her organization’s programs and services and introduced me to the staff that was at the office at that time. There was no question as to the preferred language for the interview since Cristina’s native language is English and she says that she has the worst Spanish accent out of her whole family. The interview with Cristina lasted about 75 minutes.

**Cristina’s Summarized Narrative**

Cristina believes that her family instilled a sense of service and community responsibility as she volunteered for different community service projects as a young girl. These projects enabled her to start down her path as a leader and gain the necessary experience to be an effective leader in the nonprofit field. For Cristina, simple time, experience and exposure helped her to grow as a leader and gave her the necessary skills to negotiate between the different cultures involved in community service.
Cristina credits her mother with much of her early leadership development, and beyond the sense of community stewardship, Cristina’s mother also strongly believed in the value of a good education. Therefore, Cristina attended good schools and learned to adopt an attitude of lifelong learning. This attitude first helped her through her formal education, both for a bachelor’s and a master’s degree, which established her academic credit as an organizational leader as she created a sound theoretical base for her leadership skills. This learning attitude carried into her formal career as she found she was willing to take advantage of other leadership development opportunities, which always has helped her to grow more as a leader. Yet, this willingness to learn attitude did more for her than just establish theory: this attitude became a lifelong perspective of humility and the desire to learn, which has proven invaluable to Cristina in her leadership skills. Through this, Cristina has learned that a secret to good leadership is to know when to educate others with what you know and when to readily admit that you are not sure what this means and that you need help.

Through her mother’s examples and education, Cristina has found that she is a more effective leader by simply asking others for advice and help when she is unsure of the way. Beyond just her own experiences as an individual leader, this approach has given Cristina the skills she needs to negotiate between cultures. Beyond asking for help, Cristina believes that a deeper dialogue between cultures can be established if one approaches a different culture or one that she does not understand with a respectful, learning attitude.

Particularly relating to cultures, Cristina grew up in mainstream culture as a Latina born in the United States making her particularly comfortable with this culture.
However, her family also ensured that she was comfortable with more than one culture through family experiences and in the community service environment she was raised. Through this upbringing, Cristina found a higher level of comfort with both cultures and found that she was able to more easily move between them.

As a Latina born in the United States, one of the biggest barriers perceived by Cristina as a leader has been establishing her credibility as a Latina. She has perceived that people both in mainstream culture as well as in the Latino community make assumptions about her based on how she looks and her accent. For those in mainstream culture, she is seen as a Latino, and sometimes valued less for this, while those within the Latino community see her as a White woman, which in turn makes it difficult for Cristina to get individuals within the community to relate to her. For Cristina, a barrier to being an effective leader has been this tension between the two cultures and finding a place where she fits. However, this same barrier can be turned into a positive experience as she has learned what to say to establish her Latino identity with others, while she can find experiences to relate with the Latino community. At the same time, those within the mainstream culture may take her more seriously due to her lack of an accent, though this may be a barrier for many others with the assumptions and attitudes people take before establishing a relationship.

Another perceived barrier for Cristina when practicing her leadership skills is the tendency of others to undervalue her as a leader due to her age; many may assume that because she is young she is not as valuable of a leader. Some may not even realize that Cristina is a leader until she introduces herself; thus, she found that she often has to work harder and has more to prove because she is young. However, Cristina has found that by
finding the right things to say and considering her audience when speaking, she is able to make others take her seriously as a leader, despite her youth.

For Cristina, the biggest support system for her as a leader is her team at her organization. She has perceived that by being open with your team and collaborating with them, as opposed to just supervising them, she is not only more effective as an individual leader, but this system makes also the organization more efficient and effective as a whole. By establishing an open and welcoming environment, Cristina believes that her team not only does effective work, but they also guide her through good and bad decisions, making her leadership experience richer and deeper for the organization. At home, Cristina also finds a great source of support in her family, and she uses both her immediate and her extended family as a sounding board for decisions. Cristina perceives that the diverse viewpoints her family brings to the table enable her to make better decisions and grow as a better leader.

Finally, Cristina finds support in a few close mentors, particularly from her board, who serve as guides to her through particularly difficult decisions. Furthermore, these mentor perspectives are invaluable to her as a leader because they bring yet another viewpoint to her decision making process, which helps her in her leadership skills.

With respect to Cristina’s advice to emerging Latina leaders, she says that always remember to embrace who you are and realize that who you are and what you can do is a unique gift. Through your environment and background, you bring a special set of skills, which can be used to enrich your community. Also, find what you are passionate about; if you are passionate about something, it will greatly enrich your experience.
Finally, always be willing to learn from others and any experiences you may come across. If you approach your career and your community with a willingness to learn, you can become a more effective leader. Part of this attitude is also being eager to bring other people to the table. It is important to always have a set of diverse viewpoints to help the community; furthermore, if you continually bring more people to the table, you ensure that the efforts are sustainable and can continue even if you are good; it is not always a good thing to be indispensable.

**Lorie**

Lorie is a 45-year-old Latina. Lorie was born in Mexico City, Mexico and came to the United States at the age of eight when her parents moved to Minnesota to work in a chicken factory and a meat packing plant. Lorie has self-identified as Latino/White. Lorie is married and has two sons, and has lived in a southern state since 1997. Lorie has a bachelor’s degree in political sciences and a master’s degree in public policy with emphases in international economic development. Currently, she is self-employed and has over 15 years of experience in community leadership roles. Lorie serves as a board member for many community organizations and committees. She has also been the president of a National Latino organization for businesswomen.

I had met Lorie in 2010 through my work facilitating community leadership workshops. At that point, Lorie was doing volunteer work as a site facilitator for a non-profit organization’s leadership institute. I sent the invitation to participate in the study before the end of 2011, and was finally able to interview Lorie on February 2, 2012. I met Lorie in a coffee shop at her convenience. This was the first interview I conducted in a public space and was worried about the noise level and the quality of the recording. Also,
conducting the interview at the coffee house prevented me from gathering more data about Lorie’s life in terms of things I could have observed if I could have been able to meet Lorie at her house and/or office. This interview lasted approximately 65 minutes and was conducted in English.

**Lorie’s Summarized Narrative**

As part of a migrant family, Lorie learned leadership skills early in her life: migrant children were generally expected to do more “adult” tasks to help their parents. Thus she was ingrained with a strong sense of responsibility at a young age, which helped her develop necessary leadership skills. Furthermore, Lorie was raised in a largely diverse environment growing up, and was therefore very comfortable with mainstream culture early on, so much that sometimes she had trouble adapting or relating to her own Latino roots when she encountered them. Finally, Lorie topped her life experiences with a formal education of both undergraduate and graduate work, which gave her a theoretical basis for negotiating between cultures, which she could then combine with her environment and put into better leadership practices.

For Lorie, the biggest barrier to her as a leader was a rigid cultural structure within some of the Latino organizations in which she was involved. In these organizations, one had to have the right background to be more effective, and when she was felt to not have this, her opinion was valued less. Furthermore, within these established organizations there was already and established hierarchy that many involved with the projects did not want to change, thus when Lorie suggested new tactics and changes, she was met with negativity as this went against tradition.
Another barrier she experienced to being truly effective as a leader were cultural differences in different parts of the country, particularly as they relate to the way meetings and businesses are conducted. While some areas of the country welcome pleasantries at the commencement of business, others would rather just get straight to business, and it is rather difficult to jump between these. Lastly, a perceived barrier to Lorie being a better leader was her own perception of what was expected of her. As a woman in a male-dominated field, she always felt driven to prove herself and work harder than everyone else to prove her worth as a female leader. However, she has since perceived that this may be a specific barrier in certain fields.

Lorie’s biggest perceived supports were a few chosen mentors with whom she had long-term relationships, and she believes these mentors provided her with the most valuable lessons she needed to grow as a leader. Along with older mentors that guided her, Lorie found that she also received many lessons and support from younger leaders, which was useful to her as she found that the mentoring relationship is a very reciprocal one. Finally, she has also found a great source of strength in her family, particularly her husband and children.

Lorie’s advice to emerging Latina leaders is to remember to value what you bring to the table, do not let people look down on you because you are young, you have a special set of skills you bring to the position, thus for a true leader it should not matter how old you are. Also try not to limit yourself geographically, go to where the best program is rather than just a specific local area, branch out and practice your skills.
Lina

Lina is a Latina in her mid-forties. She has self-identified her race as Afro-Latina. Lina was born in Panama City, Panama and came to the United States when she was 11 years old. Lina is divorced and has no children. Lina moved to the South in 1990. She holds a bachelor’s degree in child and adolescent psychology and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in organizational management and leadership development. Lina is the project director for a national non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the number of Latino students who are achieving academic success. Lina has over 10 years of experience in community leadership roles and has been a board member in eight different non-profit organizations as well as she has been a member of the Governor’s Hispanic Committee.

I contacted Lina after one of my key informants introduced us through email. Many emails went back and forth until I was able to schedule the interview due to Lina’s busy traveling schedule. I interviewed Lina on February 7, 2012; we agreed to meet at a coffee shop near Lina’s place. Lina is a woman with great presence and energy. The moment I met her, it dissipated all the worries I had about meeting her in a coffee shop. I felt that this time, the setting would not interfere with me learning more about her; Lina’s initial contact and our pre-interview conversation dismissed the apprehensions I carried from my previous interview conducted at a public setting. Lina’s research interview lasted about 110 minutes but we met longer than that; we spent about three and a half hours together. It seemed as I had known Lina all my life, we shared and laughed at so many stories.
Lina’s Summarized Narrative

Through a childhood spent in Panama with her grandmother, while Lina’s mother was settling her life in New York, she learned a sense of responsibility and caring from her family. She learned the importance of sharing what you have and establishing an environment of caring and openness, which has helped her through her experiences in leadership and in different cultures. Then, after she moved to the United States, Lina immersed herself in another culture and thus was able to gain exposure to more than one environment, which made her more flexible as she moves between cultures.

Furthermore, Lina discovered the importance of going to the middle of the road as it relates to negotiating between cultures. She discovered through early experiences that a defensive and confrontational attitude does not create good opportunities for leadership or dialogue. Instead, Lina discovered that if you take time to listen and understand the other people and then take time to calmly educate them about your own culture, you are more likely to develop positive experiences. Along these same lines, she has found that it is better to try to meet people halfway when starting a dialogue and it is better to come a bit out of your own culture and find something to relate to with them rather than expecting the other person to come to you completely.

These experiences have combined to give her the confidence to negotiate her way through many different cultures as she has established her skills to be able to discuss a variety of issues with whatever cultural group she comes into contact. Besides, all of Lina’s experiences have been bolstered by a good education, which not only laid the foundation for better relating to other people, but also established an attitude of lifelong
learning and realizing that there are many things one can learn from diverse groups with different backgrounds.

Throughout her life, Lina has experienced a lot of adversity brought on by her racial and ethnic identities, therefore, many of the barriers she has experienced have been due to distinctly racial overtones. Due to either her background or the color of her skin, she has found that people tend to make certain assumptions about her professional style before they know her; for example, because of the dark color of her skin, people may assume that she is more aggressive, but when they learn that she is Latino, they assume that she is more passive. She has found this to be very difficult throughout her career, but she has found different tactics to try and overcome it. At first, she was very confrontational over the issue (mainly due to the negative experiences she had earlier in life), but she found this was not very effective for overcoming the barrier. Later, she found that adopting a calmer, more positive attitude was a much more effective way of dealing with this barrier. Using this attitude, she endeavors to educate others about their assumptions, which are largely made from ignorance, and through this she has found that she can better navigate through relationships with other people and create more positive dialogue.

However, beyond the racial discrimination, Lina has experienced a barrier created by the own Latino community in terms of openness and willingness to work with all groups or sectors in the community. Through her experiences, she has perceived that an important segment of the Latino community in her state is more likely to continue in unproductive competition and protecting what they consider to be their territory rather than sitting down and having a meaningful discussion on ways to work together.
However, she feels that this barrier can be overcome through a willingness to engage in dialogue.

In her career, Lina found that a series of older Latina women who served as mentors to her were the best system of support in her leadership development. Though most mentors did not know they were educating her, she found that many women who simply shared their stories and communicated their experiences influenced her own development as a Latina leader.

However, beyond just Latinas, Lina also found a system of support among several men as well; each of whom were able to teach her something different and valuable about being a leader, such as remaining calm in the face of crisis. For Lina, it was better to have a number of different mentors who were each able to teach her valuable lessons rather than to rely on one specific leader or role model. Finally, Lina found that her family was a great system of support to her, particularly in her younger life. Her family played a pivotal role in her education and she felt that this has influenced her greatly as a leader.

Lina’s advice to emerging Latina leaders is to always keep an attitude of humility, one is much more likely to be effective through this attitude and people are more likely to listen to you. Furthermore, it is important to remember to listen to others: establish good listening skills and you will be much more effective as a leader. Be confident in who you are as a Latino and as a woman and to remember that no one is intrinsically better than you are because of what they have or what they look like. Finally, be prepared, educate yourself, and always strive for more knowledge, but go beyond just the formal education and be opening to new experiences and the lessons people have to offer.
Margara

Margara is a 37-year-old Latina born and raised in Barranquilla, Colombia. Margara identified her race as Hispanic. Margara came to the United States in her late 20’s and has been in the state for almost 10 years. Margara is married and has three children, with her youngest being a 12-month-old baby. Margara holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in professional counseling and she is a national certified counselor. She is the executive director of a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting health and social change in Hispanic/Latino communities. Margara has over nine years of experience in community leadership roles.

After doing a search in an online professional network, I found Margara’s contact information and emailed her with the invitation to participate in the study on March 12, 2012. She replied to my email in less than 24 hours, scheduling her interview for the next day. I interviewed Margara on March 14, 2012 at 1:00 pm at her offices. Margara decided to do the interview in English and this interview lasted 76 minutes. An interesting anecdote about my interview with Margara is that about 10 minutes into the interview, she said, “have we met before?” and I said “I have the feeling that I know you but…” Asking each other questions about what we did prior to our current jobs, we realized that we indeed knew each other and had tried to work together in a community event when I was working in the teen pregnancy prevention field in 2005.

Margara’s Summarized Narrative

Margara was instilled with a sense of caring and service early on in life through her family in Colombia; this led her to want to serve others in her community. This sense of deep caring has helped her negotiate her way through various cultures and
interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, through Margara’s family life, she was taught the value of education and learning; therefore, she became a serious scholar, which helped her develop her skills as a leader. A central question to her early learning was “Can people change? Do people change?” These questions have driven her in many of her leadership efforts as she navigates cultures and tries to help people.

The biggest barrier perceived by Margara was a sense of discomfort in organizational cultures when she has been the only Latina in the organization. Such cultures did not foster a sense of openness and invite all people to participate in organizational dialogue. In these cultures, Margara did not feel welcomed and often ended up cutting herself off in the processes because she was having trouble with the environment. Other people would sense her discomfort, but due to the rigid nature of these organizations, she found that there was no way to correct this discomfort. However, Margara found that with groups of people from different backgrounds, by pushing herself and creating a sense of openness, there can be useful dialogue created. For Margara, the biggest perceived barrier to her leadership was often herself, and she found that she could not speak and participate as much as she wanted to when she felt uncomfortable, so she ended up taking away from herself and cutting herself off from the group or team.

As with other Latina leaders, Margara’s family is her best source of support. Her mother helps to keep Margara grounded by always discussing her feelings and beliefs, ensuring that Margara continues to examine all that she does and strive to be the best she can be. Furthermore, her husband and children have a great relationship with her and so she finds them to be a great source of strength. Beyond her family, Margara finds one
individual mentor in the form of an older Latina woman is very beneficial. Each leader should have a woman that she looks up to, yet it is important with some relationships to find a balance between friendship and respect, particularly when the mentor is in a position of authority.

When giving advice to emerging Latina leaders, Margara said that it is very important to have a goal in life and to work hard to get to that goal. If you have something to work towards and to guide you, it can help you in your efforts. It is also more important than ever that young Latinas step up as leaders because there is so much to do right now. Though the task may seem daunting, and it is a challenge, there are many opportunities for leadership roles available for Latinas right now.

**Lili**

Lili is a 45-year-old Latina. Lili is Puerto Rican and has self-identified her race as White-Latina. Lili came to the United States 13 years ago. Lili is married and has five children. Lili holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration with a concentration in marketing. Lili is the co-founder and the executive director of a non-profit organization that provides educational workshops and support groups to strengthen Latino families. Lili has over 16 years of experience in community leadership roles.

I had seen Lili once when we met at a local non-profit organization resource fair in 2009. At that time, Lili and I spoke for about 20 minutes about her organization and my role assisting with building capacity within community-based organizations as part of my public service faculty responsibilities. In early March 2012, I emailed Lili reminding her who I was and inviting her to participate in the study. She accepted and I interviewed her on March 20, 2012 at her offices. The interview was conducted in the middle of
afternoon and she was the only one at her office, we sat in the common area and she explained more about her staff, programs and services, then she brewed a fresh pot of coffee and we started the interview. Lili’s interview lasted 80 minutes and was conducted in English.

**Lili’s Summarized Narrative**

As an only child in Puerto Rico, Lili discovered early in life that she gravitated towards organizing projects and doing community work through the church. With this background and the support of her parents who valued a quality education, Lili developed a desire to always learn new things and to approach new subjects with humility. This outlook has served her well as she negotiates between various cultures; Lili believes that if one approaches other cultures with an attitude of humility and a desire to learn, then respect is quickly established as other people realize that you genuinely want to learn from them. It is very important to maintain an attitude of humility and realize that you do not know everything there is to know and people are generally more open to you if you come to them willing to learn rather than to dictate. Lili’s leadership experiences have been greatly enriched through this attitude as she finds more people can relate to her and she can learn more, particularly how to better serve people, in this way.

The biggest barrier that Lili has experienced is her own comfort zone. While working with Latinos as part of a Latino organization, it was always easier to find a common ground to work with. However, to be a truly successful organization, one needs to branch out to other organizations that are outside of this normal comfort zone. Through her experiences, at first Lili was afraid to do this for fear of rejection, but once she and her organization branched out, they found a greater level of success. On another
level, Lili has experienced a barrier due to preconceptions about her Spanish accent, particularly in the South. However, she has discovered that by maintaining a positive attitude this can be overcome.

For Lili, the biggest source of support is always her family. When she was younger, her parents encouraged her to get a good education and after she was married her husband and children became her biggest source of support. Not only is her immediate family of great comfort to her, but also her extended family helps to keep her grounded. She also feels that her religion is a major source of support for her due to the way she was raised.

Lili’s advice is that it is important to learn to delegate tasks, to realize that you cannot do everything yourself. It makes you a better leader if people realize that you have confidence in them to do tasks rather than just telling them what to do. Also, learn to relax and not to get “uptight” about everything. Finally, at the beginning of a project, make sure you have a strong support structure in place such as a strong Board and grant writing, these will ensure success later on in the project.

Mia

Mia is a 40-year-old woman. Mia was born and raised in New York, NY and both of her parents are Puerto Rican. In terms of race, Mia identified herself of mixed race. Mia is married and has two children. Mia and her family moved to the South six years ago. She holds a bachelor’s degree in communications. Mia is the executive director for a local branch of a national organization committed to developing youth and healthy living. Mia has over 27 years of community leadership roles and in her leadership experience, Mia accounts for all of her community involvement years since being a teenager.
Mia was introduced to me via email by one of the participants (Cristina). Mia responded positively to my invitation and we arranged for her interview with the two of us excited that this connection had happened. I met Mia in person for the first time on March 14, 2012. At that time, she signed the consent form and filled out the demographic questionnaire, and then I came back to her offices for the second time to conduct the interview on March 26, 2012. Her interview lasted about 70 minutes. Mia was the last of my participants for the study.

**Mia’s Summarized Narrative**

From early childhood, Mia was always a natural leader, growing up in New Jersey she always stepped forward to volunteer for community projects and cared about other people. Her mother encouraged her in these leadership tendencies and was always supportive, telling Mia she would be good working with people and that she should go into public relations. In this way, through her early experiences she was able to develop her leadership skills along with a direction in her life. Furthermore, through this encouragement and support, Mia was able to develop the confidence she needed to navigate her way among cultures.

Throughout her childhood, Mia attended a variety of private and parochial schools; through this experience she was able to learn how to adapt to many different environments, since each school she attended was different. In some of these schools, she was a minority, but in others she was among the cultural majority. However, she discovered that a person could experience discrimination even in environments where most of the people are the same culturally. Even in environments where most students were Latinos, there was discrimination among students based on how dark or fair skinned
they were. Through this, she was able to learn that there will almost always be some form of discrimination, but you cannot let it stop you or get you down.

As another leadership tool, Mia’s mother taught her family the importance of a quality education and lifelong learning. Her parents may not have had much and her father was not highly educated, but they believed in the value of learning and seeking knowledge. This helped Mia through life as she devoted herself to learning. Her mother also taught her children to always be proud of who they are and not to let the hurtful things people may say get in their way and bring them down. Her mother instilled in her a great sense of pride and value in herself that has served her well in her role as a leader.

Through these combined experiences, Mia learned how to be a good listener and learned that the key to negotiating between cultures is to come with an air of mutual respect. When interacting with different people, it is good to come forward with understanding and an intention to establish respect; thus, even if one stumbles and makes mistakes, there is still the respect there that is established, and this aids Latinas in their leadership endeavors. Furthermore, through this approach, Mia has discovered that people have more in common than might be assumed, thus it is good to respect everyone.

One of the biggest difficulties Mia has experienced in her work, particularly in the non-profit field, is “political correctness.” In society, one has to find a balance between serving people and risk management practices. In Mia’s experience, there is usually some racial discrimination that serves as a barrier to her leadership practice, but with the right attitude, this can be overcome. It is better to keep a positive attitude if people react differently to a person because of their culture or race. Moreover, the biggest barrier to Mia as a leader is when male colleagues value her opinion less than others simply
because she is female. In one experience, she believed that a program would not work and tried to talk to her supervisor about it, but he would not listen to her, but instead listened to another male colleague that said Mia did not know what she was talking about. The program turned out badly as Mia said it would, but Mia never received any form of apology or acknowledgement that her opinion was valued less because she is female.

Another difficulty Mia has experienced is the fact that as a leader it is very important to continue to show belief and confidence in what you do, because, as a leader, if you do not show confidence in your program, other people are quick to lose confidence.

The biggest support for Mia throughout her experiences as a leader is her family. When she was younger, her mother was always her biggest cheerleader and encouraged her to develop her talents and to get the best education possible. Then, when Mia was older, her husband and children have been a great source of support for her. With the environment she was raised in, she was taught that family is very important, thus the support of family is vital. Another great source of support for Mia has been friends and colleagues; for Mia, it is very important to have a diverse group of friends and colleagues. One can benefit from many different viewpoints. Mia has had many different mentors throughout her career from various backgrounds, and she always felt she benefited in some way from each of these different people.

Mia’s advice to emerging Latina leaders is to realize that to truly be bilingual, you need to have a mastery of both languages (English and Spanish). To be successful in higher-ranking positions, you have to be able to do more than speaking both languages, you have to learn and prepare yourself. Mia advises that beyond who you are and where you come from in the professional setting, let your track record speak for itself, behaving
professionally and handling work well will eventually cast aside any misconceptions or preconceived notions about who you are because they will not matter anymore. This will also create a very positive opinion and a positive image about our culture as Latinos and what we are capable of as individuals so that people will see that being Latino is a wonderful thing, not a negative thing.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the nine Latina leaders who participated in this study. In their narratives, six key common themes were identified: having family support, valuing lifelong learning, practicing listening skills, showing respect, minimizing effects of discrimination, and finding your passion.

Having Family Support

The one most common theme across of all Latina leaders’ narratives was the emphasis on the importance of family and family support in being a leader. Regardless of the Latino country and/or heritage background of the Latina leaders, they always felt that their families were a vital source of support for them as leader. Family was always necessary to give them the strength to keep leading in the face of challenges. Furthermore, beyond the family support given to them as current leaders, in most cases the Latina leaders felt that it was their family examples and experiences in their childhood that set them on the path to leadership and gave them the values they need to be successful as Latina Leaders.
Valuing Lifelong Learning

The majority of Latinas interviewed placed an emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning. Though formal education is not absolutely necessary to be a successful Latina leader, it is important to be open to learning in all forms and to be ready to take advantage of any educational opportunities as they arise. Latina leaders believed if they take time to learn from their experiences and people, they become more effective as a leader. Also, Latina leaders are willing to put themselves in other people’s situations to learn from them [people Latina leaders serve] rather than coming into situations s with set ideas and solutions. Furthermore, many of the Latinas believed that it was important to value lifelong learning from an early age because this creates good habits and values early in life, which makes the path to being a successful leader easier.

Practicing Listening Skills

The majority of the Latina leaders emphasized the importance of listening to all people, including mentors, staff, other leaders, clients, and community members. To be an effective leader and particularly to overcome the challenge of discrimination, Latina leaders believe it is important to listen to both new ideas and criticism to make the organizations they lead successful and also to further develop their skills as leaders. They believed if a leader is a good listener, then she or he can be ready to learn and grow.

Showing Respect

Tied closely to listening skills is to always have a sense of respect for everyone. This skill is vital for Latina leaders as it helps not only with their staff to make an organization successful, but also works to overcome or counter stereotypes and
discrimination. Most of the Latinas agreed on the strategy of remaining calm, polite and respectful. Showing a sense of respect helps Latina leaders develop their skills to navigate and to overcome challenges associated with their practices between different cultures.

**Minimizing effects of discrimination**

Though several of the Latina leaders interviewed react differently to discrimination, most of them agreed that to be successful as a leader and to develop their leadership skills, it is important to develop a positive attitude and to not let discrimination get in the way of their path forward. It is important to not get angry over discrimination and react negatively—this tends to stop people from listening. To create meaningful dialogues among communities and cultures, it is better to remain positive and respectful and to try to work a little bit at a time to work with other cultures and hope that through communication, discrimination will become less of a problem as Latina leaders educate people in their communities.

**Finding your Passion**

The advice most Latina leaders offered to future Latina leaders was to find their passion. Latina leaders shared that to be a great leader, one must have passion for one’s cause and one’s organization; thus, it is important to find a cause and/or organization that you can be passionate. It makes you more likely to be a successful as a leader if you are doing what you enjoy doing. Latinas acknowledged that to be a successful leader it requires long and sometimes irregular hours, which means that not only will passion make a leader more successful, but it should also make the work enjoyable.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences of Latina leaders who work in community development in the Southeastern United States. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How did Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills?
2. What factors influenced the leadership practices of Latina leaders in communities?

This chapter reports the findings of the research design that was guided by the theoretical frameworks of interpretivism and feminism. Nine Latina leaders living and working in one of the states of the Southeastern United States were interviewed during the months of January, February, and March of 2012. The inclusion criteria to participate in the study were:

1. Latinas who either were the executive director, CEO, president, or state director of a community based organizations, or Latinas who were appointed or elected board members of non-profit organizations.
2. Latinas age 25 and older.
3. Latinas who had at least five years of experience in leadership roles.
4. Women of any Latino background. This criterion acknowledges that Latinas in the United States comprise heritages from 19 different countries.
Methods of data collection for the study included in-depth interviews, field notes and document analysis. The reputational-case selection strategy was used to invite Latina leaders to participate in the study: Latinas were identified on recommendations of experts, key informants, from the field of leadership and human services in the Latino communities. In-depth interviews lasted an average of 90 minutes, were digital recorded, and were transcribed verbatim. Data from the interviews, field notes and documents (CV’s, articles and website pages) were analyzed inductively using the constant comparative method to derive the study’s findings.

This chapter is divided in four parts by the major themes that answer the research questions that guided the study. Each theme was developed in detail using the own words of the nine Latina leaders, honoring their voices, and representing the commonalities that convey their learning experiences in leadership roles. Table 5 presents four themes and their associated subthemes that emerged during the constant comparative analysis of the data.

These themes address how Latina leaders learned to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills and what factors influenced their leadership practices. The themes identified were (1) Using Latina specific strategies, (2) Navigating the intersecting dynamics of gender and ethnicity, (3) Lifting up the community through quests for learning, and (4) Developing leadership practices around the prismatic reflections of family.
Table 5

Summary of Findings

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Major Theme and Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills?</td>
<td>1. USING LATINA SPECIFIC STRATEGIES</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Having an awareness of how others position them</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Negotiating outsider-insider Latina status, values, and knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Managing power alliances of their multicultural world</td>
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<td>What factors influenced the leadership practices of Latina leaders in communities?</td>
<td>2. NAVIGATING THE INTERSECTING DYNAMICS OF GENDER AND ETHNICITY</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Balancing community work and personal life</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Living and working in a racially divided culture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Addressing Latino’s stereotypes and stigmas</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. LIFTING UP THE COMMUNITY THROUGH QUESTS FOR LEARNING</td>
<td>• Having a spiritual purpose</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Engaging in a variety of adult learning experiences</td>
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<td>• Using their learning to foster emancipatory education</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AROUND THE PRISMATIC REFLECTIONS OF FAMILY</td>
<td>• Being a community leader is determined early by family examples and experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Having family cultural values engrained in their leadership practices</td>
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<td>• Using family as their primary support mechanism</td>
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Using Latina Specific Strategies

The first major theme identified is related to how Latina leaders navigate their leadership practices among different cultures. I found that Latinas have a clear awareness of how they are perceived by both the Latinos and non-Latinos, and Latinas negotiate their insider-outsider values and knowledge to practice their leadership skills. These are Latina specific strategies because the women in this study: 1) are aware of how they are perceived or positioned by others as Latinas, and yet they actively counter the stereotypes and expectations with their actions in their leadership practices; 2) have learned how to negotiate their perceived positionality to fluidly balance their outsider-insider status; and 3) recognize opportunities to manage power alliances.

Having an Awareness of How Others Position Them

Latina leaders in this study are aware of how they are perceived and what assumptions others make about them and their performance as leaders. This is based on how they look racially/ethnically or the accent they have when they speak whether in English or Spanish. Being aware of how they are perceived or positioned by others is challenging and exhausting. The women mentioned how they always have to be double prepared to get past those perceptions. They have developed a repertoire of strategies to counteract people’s perceptions. Latina leaders have been accused of being too Latina or not being Latina enough. Perceived identities vary among Latina leaders due to the intersectionality of their race, ethnicity, national origin, immigrant status, generation in the United States, and level of acculturation. In general Latina leaders provided several examples of discrimination, prejudice, racism, and stereotypes. Lili stated “it wouldn’t be truthful to say that I have never seen discrimination. Yes. I am sad to say that yes I
have.” The women in this study are altogether aware that as Latinas they are perceived “to be the ones that are less educated,” “passive,” “not really competent” and “don’t have the skill sets” to effectively perform leadership roles. In addition, Margara who is an executive director for a non-profit organization and a mother of three children said, “people have the perception of, you’re women. How can you be a leader? You are raising children.”

Ana explained that practicing her leadership role outside of the Latino community challenges her. “There are many stereotypes that are difficult to deal with,” she explained. Sometimes she just remains calm because she does not want to “look defensive or condescending.” Ana has “been accused of being too Latina.” Additionally, Ana explained that the non-Latino community at large perceived her as a racist; she said that in her town, “people feel that we [Latinos] are isolating ourselves or that we are kind of racist from the Latino side.” Additionally, Ana explained that she has to counter misconceptions about her and her non-profit. In her many interactions in meetings with non-Latinos community members she is perceived as a troublemaker when raising Latino community issues. She provided an example that illustrates how others [non-Latinos] reacted to her in a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce Leadership class when discussing public safety in her town:

I was in the Leadership Program with the Chamber of Commerce about 6 or 7 years ago. One person that was assigned to this area [Latino neighborhood] said, “No, I couldn’t go that close because even the police don’t go there because it’s very dangerous and they had a lot of illegals.” When he said that even the police were
afraid to come to visit this street, I went, “Ah! I have to say something!” I was so upset. But I knew that I couldn’t show that I was angry or anything. I needed to quickly think of something. So I said, “Well, I drive every day around there because of my job and I have seen the police in there and there are non-profit agencies there that are non-Latino.” It would be good if the person assigned to that area, if we could go together for you to know that it’s not that way. I think it’s an opportunity to meet with people living there and see if it is what we think it is. They just looked at me. But I wasn’t fighting. I wasn’t offending them. But I was questioning.

Ana explained that when attending meetings with other community leaders and listening to people stereotyping Latinos, she tends “to be very cautious or not to express any opinion. I don’t fight or argue. I just try to give a little bit of information, not to act bad or to make them [White people] uncomfortable.” In general, Ana said, “I try to learn how they [White people] perceive our culture, and also to provide information.” This behavior might be perceived as being passive. Additionally, Ana said “I am always trying to understand both sides and trying to learn to sense the moment when I can give more information or when I can do something else.” However, every time when she tried to do something for the community, “people from the White community—not all—they were like, ‘How do you dare to ask for something? How do you question things? You need to be grateful that you are here.” Ana explained, “We [Latinos] don’t have any representation anywhere.”
While Ana has been accused of being too Latina by non-Latinos, Lorie has been accused of not being Mexican by a Mexican group of women in her city. Lorie is a Mexican immigrant raised in Minnesota and English is her preferred language. From a recent interaction with a group of women from Mexico, Lorie remembered them telling her, “Well, you’re not really Mexican.” Lori said, “So that’s another cultural issue” and goes on to say, “Well, yeah, they did come from a different world. They were from the upper class and I never had that experience. I’ve been here [United States] for most of my life; my Spanish is okay but it’s not perfect.” This example shows how much Lorie differs from other women from her same country of origin.

Andie’s leadership work is related to migrant farmers and her organization is located in a rural area. Andie’s perceived identity is that “we are the folks on the bottom of the totem pole.” Even though she was born in Texas, is a fifth generation Mexican, and speaks English without a Spanish accent, she is perceived as an undocumented immigrant. Andie faces racism frequently, she said “I would come and find letters on my door saying, go back to Mexico.”

Cristina has a different experience when it comes to how she is perceived; she explained that in her family “I’m considered probably the most whitest.” Cristina is Latina on her mother’s side with a Colombian heritage. Cristina always has to explain that she is Latina to the Latino community to whom she provides services, “Because English is my native language. That’s kind of my Achilles heel, speaking Spanish, sometimes. That’s one thing that I’ve struggled with, especially as I came into this leadership position.” She continued,
For me, my personal challenge is not being considered Latina sometimes because of the fact that, especially during wintertime, I’m pale. And then because I was raised here in the U. S., and especially in the South, and because my name says [Mary Smith] no [Maria Núñez] or anything like that, they [Latinos] are kind of like, “Hmm, is she really Latina?” Because I was raised in a different kind of upbringing versus a lot of other Latinos and the youth that I work with, it’s a very different thing.

In Cristina’s experience, we can see how her positionality shifts depending on the situation. Cristina is aware that in the non-Latino world “because I don’t have a Spanish accent, people will take me more seriously.” She realizes that her Latino staff have problems due to how they are perceived by non-Latinos; Cristina said, “our woman’s advocate who has been doing this for over 20 years—and she knows women inside and out—because she has a Spanish accent, she isn’t taken as seriously.”

Lucia’s awareness of her positionality reflects three areas: 1) being Latina limits her options geographically in the state for leadership roles, 2) deciding how to present herself must take into account media perception about Latinas, and 3) she has to act differently in interactions with White and Black males. The following narrative illustrates her experience as a Latina in different parts of the state:

Being a Latina female, it continues to be a challenge. I see it here in [Red] County. If I was an African-American female, things would be better for me here. I see it. If I was a white female, things would be better for me in [Pink] County or [Teal] County.
With the things that I do with government work. So you have to be one race in certain parts of the state, and you have to be of another race in certain parts of the state. And we Latinas still don’t count anywhere in the state.

Second, Lucia makes conscious decisions about how she presents herself to avoid what she considers as stereotypical Latina images in the media.

I think Spanish TV channels sexualize women so much that we are seen as walking sex instead of a person that can contribute to the community, can be intelligent. No, we are just walking sex for everyone. Not only that, they add to it. So you look like a cartoon kind of. It’s sad, because that’s not the image we want to have. And that bothers me a lot. I dress very conservative most of the time. I never wear anything dangling. I never wear a lot of perfume.

Finally, Lucia works hard at making sure that her interactions with others, especially men, cannot be interpreted as sexually suggestive.

It’s a question of misunderstanding how we Latinos hug and kiss, and are very touchy-feely and smiling and warm people. And they misunderstand in different ways. The white people feel threatened, like, “Oh, my God. She’s coming on to me.” And the black people say, “Oh, my gosh. She wants me.” So you have to also be very careful because there can be confusion with certain
populations—on both ends—with the white population and the African-American population, as to what your friendliness means.

In terms of Latinas’ skin color, Mia shared that it is not only the perception of her being Latina that makes her different from other people but also the color of her skin, she realized that is the combination of her culture and skin color. Mia explained that this realization happened to her at a very early age, Mia said,

I have to tell you this is very interesting because I am Latino; I am a Latino of dark skin and I will tell you that from a very early age, I had an experience that helped me understand the difference between how you identify culturally and how you identify ethnically. I was in 3rd or 4th grade, I was very young and we had switched school of course because my brother had gotten himself into some trouble. So here I was; I went from a predominantly White German, Italian, Irish immigrant Catholic school to now a Catholic school that was predominantly Latino, lots of Cubans and South American children. So I was no longer from a cultural respect a minority anymore. So I thought, “Oh how wonderful. No one’s going to make fun of me and this is great and I’m going to be with kids who speak the same language at home.” And for the most part, it was wonderful and then I can remember an experience with a child—I will never forget his name—he was a fair-skinned Argentinean boy and this is a first time I can remember having a crush at school. And I don’t know but I think I
sent him a valentine and he didn’t respond so I asked him at school, “Why don’t you like me?” And this young man turned to me and said, “Because I don’t like chocolate people.” And for the first time, I realized that it wasn’t necessarily just my culture that differentiated me from other people but it was also the color of my skin because I was a dark-skinned Latino. I can remember being saddened but I don’t remember feeling angry at the fact that I was dark, feeling like I wanted to change who I was or to change how I looked. I don’t remember any of those things. I just remember thinking, “Gosh, even with people who speak the same language that I do at home, I’m different.” So that was a very profound, poignant moment for me and I will never forget it for the rest of my life.

Additionally, Mia shared that “I have this ethnically-ambiguous look and people can’t figure out what I am, which I think is an advantage.” Then, she said:

Because I’m not stereotypically what people perceive a Latino is going to be. So when they meet me, it’s like okay but they still haven’t figured it out now because [her name] it’s Emma Kroc but they see me and I’m dark. So one of the very first questions I always get when I meet someone new is—it’s either—“What are you?” which I always find an interesting choice of words or “Where are you from?” I have this ethnically ambiguous look and people can’t figure out what I am, which I think is an advantage.
And of course I always know what people are getting at but I’ve come to get very used to that.

While Mia has a very ethnically ambiguous look, Lina without mistake is perceived as a Black woman. Lina identify herself as Afro-Latina and has a much darker skin color than Mia. Lina explained how she always has to say, “Well, I’m African Latino and my background is more one of Latin American background.” Lina shared that she has realized that this piece of information always changes the way people deal with her:

So the way they [White American] would treat an African American and the way they [White American] would treat me once they find out is different. White American would say, “They’re [Latinas] not as aggressive and you’re more understanding.” And I’ve even had people say, “Oh, you’re different than that.” And I have asked this question, “What do you mean that I’m different from them? What does that mean?”

Lina shared her sentiment about how others position her in the following narrative:

Let me tell you how I’m perceived. I’m perceived here in America as an African American woman. When people look at me, they don’t look at me as an Afro-Latino at all, and it’s funny because I laugh at how many times I was called all kinds of things and people [speaking in Spanish] say crazy, silly things around me. So from the African American standpoint of leadership being involved with another black leader, it is challenging because they want me at times to behave in certain kinds of ways and to relate to the
African American culture and they’ll say, “well, this is not how we
do it and this is not this…”

When Lina talks about her positionality and how she is treated when working among
different groups in her state, she said “and on top of that, not only was there a difference
based on my color, my ethnicity, my gender but also it was where I came from. I was a
“Damn Yankee” when I got down here [Southeastern United States] on top of all of that.”

To conclude this section, Lorie provided a narrative that reflects the common
experience of the nine Latina leaders in this study. This narrative shows their general
awareness on how others perceive and position them:

I was very aware that I was Mexican, that I was a Latino woman.
So it’s the whole ‘I got to work harder’ I was always afraid of
getting fired. I was always afraid of people thinking I wasn’t
committed; I was always afraid that people would think I was
slacking off. So I answered my Blackberry anytime of the day,
weekends, whatever; I always went the extra mile to show that I’m
committed, I’m working hard. And my temper of being a hot
Latino, you know? I mean being into that, having a chip on my
shoulder. I think that people may unjustly come after me, if you
will, because I’m a woman or I’m Latino. So I was very aware of
that. I think sometimes I probably fought too hard and I probably
should have just chilled out. So I think that’s what I should’ve
done instead of…
To be able to negotiate the practice of their leadership skills between different groups in communities, Latina leaders not only are aware of how others position them, but they also have developed other strategies to effectively navigate their multicultural worlds. Another example of those strategies is to be able to recognize when they need to negotiate their insider-outsider cultural values, positionality (gender, skin color, Spanish accent, SES) and knowledge to fulfill their missions.

Negotiating Outsider-Insider Latina Values, Positionality, and Knowledge

Latinas in this study constantly negotiate their insider-outsider values, positionality, and knowledge. This negotiation occurs at multiple levels: within Latinos and non-Latinos, and within Latinos and their multiple subcultures. This also includes the number of how many generations their family has been in the U.S. Negotiating outsider-insider Latina values, positionality, and knowledge is a complex process that also occurs among Latinas and Latinos who are from the same country of origin. Ana’s example helps to understand this complexity. Ana was born and raised in Mexico, and she said “and even with people from Mexico, I grew up in Mexico City, and I have met many people from rural areas in Mexico, and we have very different points: this is beautiful or this is awful.” Also, Ana provided insight on how she has to negotiate her insider-outsider positionality, values and knowledge with Latinos who are more established in terms of their acculturation level in the U.S. Ana said that “even though I’ve had many years here, there are Latinos that are more acculturated than I am.” Ana explained that “we [Latinas] need to be very strategic and thinking about the purpose” and “then we need to think what we are going to say and how.” This type of negotiation for Ana’s work in the community happens all the time and “it’s very stressful sometimes” in her words.
Here is one example of Ana’s negotiations of her outsider-insider knowledge within the Latino community she serves:

We had the meeting with the mayor about roadblocks, many people [Latinos] in the community wanted us [her organization] to be very aggressive and tell him to do this and that, and, “Why do you need that?” I said, “No, because we are trying to negotiate. We cannot do that because we wouldn’t get anything.” So some people in the community understood and some stayed upset. But we were able to talk to the mayor and the police. They listened to us. Otherwise, we wouldn’t.

Ana shared that for her to effectively be able to negotiate her outsider-insider status values and knowledge with non-Latino leaders in her community, she has to remain calm and not become defensive; otherwise it “closes more doors than just staying quiet.” Another of her strategies is “to speak when it is necessary or you feel that you have a specific purpose to speak.” She said, “I have been quiet in meetings that they [non-Latinos] say a lot of things about Latinos in [her town], and I haven’t said anything. Not because I agree with it, but because it’s not the time and it’s not the place.”

Another example of negotiating outsider-insider status within Latinos is when Lili explained, “When I’m working with other Spanish speakers, I tend to neutralize my Puerto Rican accent a little bit because I know it’s very strong and also try to use words that are more understandable to other cultures [Latino subcultures].” She understands that to be able to better relate to the Mexican community who are the ones that most often
seek her non-profit services and programs, she needs to minimize her outsider status within that group.

All of the Latina leaders in this study have strategies to negotiate their outsider-insider positionality, values, and knowledge among the different cultures they encounter in their daily work. Lucia, who is Peruvian, said:

To me, I am more Mexican than most Mexicans are. I know everything about Mexico. I know even almost the name of every elementary school, primary school, and secondary school that is in Mexico. I know their history and everything there is to know about Mexico. I know the premier languages before the Spaniards and just everything. As I said, I'm not kidding, I know more about Mexico than a lot of Mexicans, because I actually studied the Mexican. That, to me, is how I have been able to be really successful with the Mexican population.

Working successfully between different cultures is an ongoing process of learning and negotiating Latina outsider-insider status. Lucia noted, “You have to learn more and identify more.” She explained that it is “like if it was your own culture with the primary culture where you are.” When it comes to negotiating her outsider-insider values and knowledge with non-Latinos, Lucia explained that she does it “by just observing the cultures, then you also adapt to their styles. There is a style. For instance, if you were in an old, white-American, Caucasian-American business meeting, you see what is happening and you adopt that style. You see how people talk, how people refer to things, and you adopt those styles.”
Cristina is perceived to be an outsider within the community she works. She is conscious of this negotiation of values, positionality and knowledge, Cristina shared: “I think that’s where I sometimes have to be very clear about it, where I don’t start with, ‘My name is [Cristina]. My mom is Colombian.’ But, at the same time, having to make sure that they [Latinos] are aware that this is my community. I’m just basically a first generation here, if you go by it from my mom. If you go by it from my dad, well, he’s from here. So it’s a very different thing.”

Similar to Lucia’s experience, Cristina knows that her negotiating outsider-insider status is a continues learning process;

I think that with the Latino culture, it’s been much more kind of a work in progress, but also that whole idea about there isn’t just one idea about who a Latina is, and this is my version, and this is me being a Latina growing up in the U. S. and growing up in the South. But if you ask me about my ideas or customs or something like that, then they are [Latino]. But, I’ve also never pretended to experience being followed in a store.

As an adult, Cristina’s values identify more with the Latino culture versus the Anglo culture in which she was raised as well; however, she has to negotiate these values among other Latinos. Her challenges are about:

Feeling like I am accepted in the Latino culture. Feeling like I can’t fit in. And being okay with the fact that my Spanish isn’t as great as somebody else. I think that’s kind of the part I’ve
struggled with is, okay, I know our culture, I share the values, I
just look a little bit paler, and my accent.

Along with looking a little bit paler and speaking Spanish with an English accent,
Cristina provided an example when she has to negotiate her outsider-insider positionality
and knowledge due to her age and her youngish look when working with Latino mothers.
She said:

When it comes time to do a parenting class, I let the older women
[staff] who have teenagers, who are native-Spanish speakers, who
are Latinas. They are the ones who will go [teach]. Because I
know that if I go up there and I’m working with the parents who
may be older than me, they’ll be looking at me like, “Okay.”

Due to her looks and skin color, Lina, who is Afro-Latina, encounters many
instances when it is necessary to negotiate her outsider-insider cultural values and
knowledge. She shared:

I find myself sometimes having to come outside of who I am as a
Latino in order to meet them [other Latinos and non-Latinos]
halfway to get something done in that particular culture, which I
think is fair to some degree. Some people would say, “It’s my way
or the highway and if you don’t get it, that’s your problem.” So
having that flexibility is good. Having that ability to do that is
important because some people don’t [have it].
When Lina was exclusively working with a particular Mexican population she had daily experiences where she had to prove herself to them. Lina said that they would be:

Looking at you and you don’t look like me; you look like African American so please tell me what your references are. So then I would go through all that, and then I would have to throw in all the things that I found out about Mexico and all the things I would eat, and then they would open up. So that’s how I worked.

To summarize her outsider-insider negotiation experiences, Lina said “I have learned to have to fit in the groups as I come in. So I usually come into a group and I kind of observe the dynamics first before I start to make any kind of input.”

Related to having to fit, Lorie who grew up in a mainstream environment (White community in Minnesota) talked about an early experience with other Latinos in a Fellowship minority recruitment program, she said:

I had never been around so many minorities and they ate me alive. I didn’t know the right words to use; I was saying “Hispanic” and they were jumping down my throat because that wasn’t the right word. I didn’t know our history; I wasn’t in the club. I didn’t know all that. I grew up white basically with whites, eating beans and tortilla every night but everybody else around me. I didn’t know all the songs and music, the culture, except for maybe what my mom and dad had. So that was tough for me to be in that environment. So that was an interesting experience and then in my
career, I really wasn’t around Latino because there weren’t that many Latinos that I worked with.

Lorie went on and explained that she:

Grew up in Minnesota: so outside of the migrant work, I was in an Anglo-Saxon world. I didn’t’ have any friends who were Mexican. I grew up very White; so I’m very comfortable in that environment. It took me some time to get comfortable in the Latino environment.

One of Lorie’s strategies to negotiate her outsider-insider status revolves around “how to remain true to our community and true to ourselves, and not sell ourselves out, but still recognize the fact that we are in the U. S.” She said that she has learned:

Being open to, being a part of still my migrant community that I’m not better than them, making sure that I still identify with that community and being aware that I’m not in any way doing anything that would make anyone feel like, “Oh, I’m not like you. I’m a different type of Mexican.” I mean that kind of thing, just being aware of that.

As Latina leaders negotiate their outsider-insider status, positionality, cultural values and knowledge, they encounter opportunities to create and manage power alliances or agreements to achieve goals. These opportunities arise for different purposes and from the different cultures they incessantly navigate.
Managing Power Alliances of Their Multicultural World

Latina leaders in this study have encountered several opportunities to create cross-cultural power alliances that benefit them to achieve greater goals. Strategies to manage these power alliances include: the knowledge of being the Latino token and the identification of a common need among different cultural or ethnical groups in the community.

Latina leaders in this study are aware of tokenism and they have found a way to reverse the harmful connotations and take advantage of the situations to their benefit since this knowledge allows them to access and reach out to some other cultural groups to establish partnership or collaborations or to improve the image of Latinos. The following examples from Lorie, Lucia, and Lina illustrate how these power alliances lead to the benefit of both their personal growth as leaders and the strengthen of their involvements in the communities.

Lorie was selected to be the Chair of Racial and Ethnic Concerns at her congregation and she said they chose me “because I’m Mexican,” and “they wanted a person of color to run that. We don’t have that many people of color in our congregation and they really wanted somebody of color to be a part of that.” Contrary, Lorie is also aware that tokenism practices not always benefit organizations when the “token person” does not have the skill set required to perform the role. Lori explained:

Sometimes you see that people [the token ones in the group] have a well-meaning; they have the right intentions but they just don’t have the skill set and sometimes it feels like it’s a lost cause, sometimes to work in certain communities on certain groups. The
leaders of that community and board, because it’s not where it [the token person] needs to be.

When Lorie gets access to certain groups due to her race, gender, ethnicity, and/or education she constantly analyses the role she would be play and the benefits of her involvement, she said:

So I’ve had discussions with myself to go, “okay, do I really want to stay here? Because this is going nowhere. Am I just wasting my time? Or do I step up and lead?” But with one of those, I just walked away because I felt it was going nowhere and I couldn’t help it.

Due to her education and professional status, Lucia gets appointed to serve as a board member for several organizations in her city. Even though she knows that she will be the token Latina in the board, she explains that she joins these groups because of the experiences and uses them as a tool to benefit the community. Lucia said:

What I do like is actually the differences that you can make and how you can help the organization help people. To be more efficient, to when they are deviating from the mission of the organization to refocus, regroup, and say, “Is this really our mission?” Those kind of things where you can actually bring something.

At the same time, Lucia recognizes the harm that can result when people get asked to join community groups or be part of boards solely based on tokenism, “I’ll tell
you what I don’t like about being Board member [by tokenism] is that sometimes there are politics involved. People come with their own agendas as to what they are going to do with the organization and stuff like that.” In this example she refers as how many times token people are invited to be part of groups just to meet the quota or have a representation from minority groups when they are not invested in the mission of the organization to the betterment of the community, and “I think that happens in every organization. Some people don’t come there with the best interests of the organization.”

Lina, as the rest of the women, knows how exposed she is to be selected to participate in initiatives or be part in different community groups; she said “you know you have somebody here who fits all those qualities [to be the token one]. I’m black, female, a Latino and if you break my leg, I could be handicapped.” On Lina’s experience, she has allowed her to recognize when she is invited to be the “token one” or to make use of her skills and knowledge. She said “not on all of the boards but some of the boards I would know that I’m the token Latino there.” And “not only that, the other thing that was sad was I knew the token Latino and it was acceptable for me to be on that board because I was black.” She said,

I have people who call me and ask me to do this or that. But I always ask the question, “What are they trying to accomplish? Who is at the helm and what are they really going to do and give me a little background of what they’ve done?” And then, that determines. I would go by just give me an opportunity to be in there and say something, it’s like I’m not going to waste my time.
If I’m not going to affect change, I’m not going to be there; just not going to be there.

This learning on how to approach tokenism came from reflecting on early experiences and what Lina thinks she could have done better. Lina explained:

I think I would change some of the decisions that I’ve made having to do with the community in that sitting on the Governor’s Hispanic Committee for a New [name of the State], I knew that being on that committee after a couple of meetings that I shouldn’t have gotten off or I should have forced certain issues for the community and I think I would have changed being on that. I would have changed being on a lot of these boards or community committees just to be a Latino on there.

When it comes to what is best for the community and the organization, Andie explained that she benefited from having a power alliance with a White male in a southern small rural community. He did not want the community to know that he was supporting the work she did in the migrant community. Andie shared that she was the face of the organization and she did the work but he financially supported the inception of the organization until she was able to secure funding for operations and services. Andie shared,

He came to me and he told me that he wanted to sponsor me and he wanted to support the organization. He came to me and he said, “You look for a place that you think is a good location and then we
can come and look at it and we’ll see how we can pay for the rent
and start a local office.” I did that.

After establishing the nonprofit and being able to position herself as a leader in
the role of executive director, Andie obtained the perceived recognition and the means to
seek out other alliances with non-Latino community stakeholders. Andie said “I brought
together a group of people in the community, a group of stakeholders that were interested
in the topic of serving this population [migrant farmer workers].”

This example of a power alliance was the enabler or springboard Andie needed to
address the multiple community needs that the migrant farmer community she leads was
facing at that moment. Andie provided another example of power alliance between
different groups, in this case, with the African-American community in her town. Andie
applied for a grant that would benefit her organization but part of it was also to include
the African-American voice. This was a challenging situation for Andie since there had
been tensions in the community between Latinos and African-Americans. However,
Andie decided to pursue the opportunity and committed to conduct an assessment for the
African American community needs, Andie described,

I was asked to try whatever it took to get into the African-
American community; I didn’t take it upon myself to do the task. I
hired temporarily 10 African-American women in [Purple] County
to conduct a study, a needs assessment in that area. Because I
knew that I wasn’t going to be able to take it on. I had money to
do it, and that was one of my tasks. The task was not to hire the
African-American. The task was to conduct the study. If I had to
hire interviewers, I could. I did. I used the resources. 150 of those
surveys were conducted among African-Americans. Those were
conducted by African-American teachers. They were all teachers
from the middle school who lived in that neighborhood. I did the
training. I brought in trainers. Dr. [Dillard] from [Milton] came
in. His assistant came in. We did training. We did whatever
needed to be done to capacitate them to do this. They went out and
they did it for me.

Furthermore, Andie explained that this community project, which had started as a
funding source for her non-profit, gave her the experience to create a power alliance that
she did not have before, with the African American leaders of her county. She took this
opportunity to “bring together the African-American community and the Latino
community to talk out our differences. To talk about why we were unable to come
together as a community and work towards change for both groups.”

As Latinas have learned to use specific strategies (having an awareness of how
others position them, negotiating outsider-insider Latina status, values and knowledge
and managing power alliances) to navigate the different cultures of the communities, they
also have factors that have a great influence or contribute to the overall outcome of their
leadership roles.

**Navigating the Intersecting Dynamics of Gender and Ethnicity**

A second major theme identified is related to the challenges Latina leaders
continuously face when navigating the intersecting dynamics of gender and ethnicity in
the Southeastern United States. Latina leaders live complex and dynamic lives that are
embedded in the historical context of the South. Main challenges among Latina leaders in this study are: 1) balancing community work and personal life, 2) living and working in a racially divided culture, and 3) addressing Latino’s stereotypes and stigmas. Nevertheless, overcoming these challenges promotes resilience and adaptability among this group of women.

**Balancing Community Work and Personal Life**

All of the Latinas in this study have a challenging time separating their work and personal lives. Being a community leader has an impact in the career, wellbeing, and family responsibilities of the Latinas in this study. The shortcomings of not being able to balance work and family responsibilities or nurture their wellbeing can be attributed to the intersection of their gender, ethnicity, and positionality and their involvement and particular commitment to their community work.

Latina leaders believe their community work does not end when they go home in the evenings, weekends, or even during holidays. Few of the women in this study have learned to or are trying to find a balance; however, it continues to be a challenge for all of them. On balancing work and family life, Andie reflected on her experience when she was starting the organization, the first non-profit to address migrant worker’s conditions in a Southeastern small rural town, and how being the founder of the non-profit impacted her family. She explained that the involvement in creating and establishing her non-profit:

[It] took me away from the attention that I needed to give my children. They were there. I knew they were taken care of. They always attended private daycare. They were a support along the
way. I didn’t realize the suffering they were going through because I was not there long enough to see it. My goal was to help the people in need. I worried about the community. I worried about the folks that had less. I didn’t have a lot, but I knew that my children were not going to go hungry.

Andie continued and explained that her daughter who was 10 at that time:

went through a lot of battles with me in my time of change and just growing and working in this organization that I was trying to pick up, that I was trying to lift, because it needed to be successful. It needed to be a successful organization.

Then, emotional and with tears in her eyes, Andie said “I gave my life to this organization. I took time away from my children. My children were secondary.” Andie who is now an established and well-known leader in her community feels guilty for not had been able to balance work and family life when her children were little. She said “you don’t learn that until later on in life, like now.” Yet, Andie continues to struggle in establishing a balance between work and family life and her wellbeing. The following narrative illustrates how difficult it is for her to step back from her leadership responsibilities and enjoy family trips or gatherings:

Stepping back to me is going out to my farm and enjoying the afternoon with him [her husband] out there in the back with the horses or just getting away from everything else. I would leave my cell phone behind. I would leave everything behind. The only thing about when I do that, I find myself, myself every time
I pull away from my phone, “I don’t know what I’m come find when I get to it.” All of that just takes away the wonderful opportunity that I just lived, the wonderful opportunity of being by myself, taking time for myself, not worrying about anything. They’re going to call that phone because that’s the agency phone. I’m the Director.

Andie is a wife, a mother, a grandmother, and a sister but she is also a director. This executive director identity cannot be isolated from her family roles. Andie said:

It’s 24/7. I’m the person that will be at the emergency room at 2:00 in the morning. I’m the person that well be at a domestic violence call from the police over here at the trailer parks. I’m the person that’s going to interpret for the little guy that they’re trying to shoo away. Shoo, shoo, get away from the grocery store bench because he has nowhere to go. These are just some of the scenarios that I’ve lived. It is very difficult. I’m the person that’s going to get the call from the teenager that wants to commit suicide because they know who I am. Or, that’s going to answer an email or a text for someone that’s depressed. I’m the Counselor. I’m whatever you want to call me, emergency person until I’m able to get to an expert.

It’s difficult to deal with these issues. It’s almost like you ask what you do to take care of yourself ... It’s very difficult. Some of my best friends tell me, “You can’t solve everybody’s problem.” I
know that. But if you saw that one individual’s problem or you help to facilitate a positive outcome, then you’ve done your duty. I’m not out there to save everybody’s life or save everybody from their problems or whatever, but I’m out here to be there if you need me.

People say, “How can you keep a straight face when you’re dealing with something like this and still keep going?” Nobody knows how many times you go home, you’re in your bedroom at night in the dark, you’re waiting for your husband to come home, you’re by yourself and you’re crying, because you had a traumatic situation that day. It’s traumatic. It’s traumatic to feel.

Andie’s narrative captured the common sentiment of the majority of the Latina leaders in this study when it comes to distinguishing the boundaries between their duties as community leaders and their family duties or responsibilities.

Margara who has three young children ages 7, 5 and 12 months offers another perspective when trying to balance work and family, she said:

It is a challenge because I’m in a position that they expect me to be everywhere at every time, it doesn’t matter the schedule, it doesn’t matter if it’s a weekend, it doesn’t matter. So the challenge is I really would like to be everywhere. I would really like to be on every, single event. I would really like to be on every, single health walk. I can’t. I can’t. I have a home, kids, and a husband.
Margara believes that she is in disadvantage when it comes to her leadership role and her family, she explained: “I’m in the lower end of the leaders that I know because I’m younger and have little kids. Most of the Latinas that I know that are in leadership roles, their kids are older.”

Margara has made changes to help balance her life; she moved closer to her offices. She explained:

I’m very happy that I get to drop my kids off at school every day and that I can pick them up every day. They are literally two minutes away from here. They are right here, across the street at the [World] Academy. So two or three times a week, I can pick them up and take them home, and be very close, and then come back here.

Additionally, Mia’s narrative shows her learning with regards to balancing work and family, she explained:

I would say it’s wonderful to have a passion for what you do; however, it can also be a detriment. I go back to my comment about being able to establish healthy boundaries, know that there is only so much that can be done in one day so planning becomes critical; making sure that you’re spending your time on the things that are the most important every day will allow you to maintain that balance. With respect to family, there are hours every day that you have to keep sacred for your family.
However, I also learned the hard way. When you have young children you know you have to pick them up from daycare at a certain time; you have to make sure you sit with them and do homework. You cannot compromise your familial success and maintaining a strong family at home and compromise that for your professional success you know that there needs to be room to do both of those things well.

But the lesson is learning the appropriate balance, that there are things and times that are sacred for your family and there are times when you have to be focused on your work.

Another aspect that averts the balance between community work and personal life is related to the efforts Latinas engage in order to be effective leaders in a highly demanding setting with community expectations. Latinas in this study assert that working in the community “is a huge commitment” and “very demanding of your time.” Additionally, Latinas always feel they have to “go the extra mile” and believe that the work can always be done better. Also, Latina leaders do not have an outlet to express their doubts and struggles since they have to be a role model for others. For example, Lili spoke about how hard she is on her role, she said:

The pressure that I put on myself many times; I am very hard on myself and I always think that if it works good, it’s everybody’s success but if it doesn’t work good, I always blame myself. What did I do or didn’t do? And I keep banging my head on the wall, and there are sometimes when you just have to let it go; but I’m
also very anxious. Whenever I’m starting something, I can get very anxious and very nervous just making sure that it works well. So it’s the pressure that I bring on myself.

Similarly, Lorie talked about all of her commitments and said “[it] stresses me out more than anything else; that’s one of the things I try to really do – doing what I said I was going to do. Then, she explained:

I’ve gotten to the point where I have been burned out. Like I used to be part of the [Girls local group] engagement and I was like, ‘No, too much; can’t do that’. So I’ve had to say ‘no’ but you don’t know the threshold on it until you get burned out. So it is knowing when to pull back. To me, that’s what stresses me out; is doing it well.

Additionally, Mia’s narrative complements the sentiment of the other women when it comes to the connection of their leadership role and expectations:

It’s hard for you to be tired; it’s hard for you to have a bad day or an off day when you’re maybe losing faith in what it is that you’re trying to accomplish. As a leader, you have to be strong for other people when they’re not strong when they’re not strong. You have to help re-focus when people have lost focus and that takes an incredible amount of energy—to be able to put on a happy face and to project optimism at times when maybe you’re not feeling very optimistic. That is very draining and difficult at times. But it’s essential to leadership because even if you’re having doubts, you
can’t let your team know that you’re having doubts because you have to continue to right the ship, continue to right the ship and to have faith. And of course in the background, you’re constantly re-evaluating right when I’m having a bad day or I’m starting to question things and I’m starting to lose faith. You know you go through this process of re-evaluating “Is this the right thing? Is this the right thing?” But you have to keep that boat on course because the minute you start to show that you lack faith or that you’re not motivated or that you don’t think that it’s the right thing to do, then everything falls apart around you.

To conclude this section, Lucia stated “I am always on the job 24/7” and “as a leader, you never leave that leadership role”…. “you are always a role model anywhere you go.” Additionally, “you are always being observed and always on the job.” “As a leader, you have a public image and you have to maintain that role because it is a role that’s not just for you but also for other people.” Balancing community work and personal life is factor derived of the connection between gender, ethnicity, positionality and commitment to serve the Latino community. As Margara said:

You have a lot of eyes on you. Being in a position as the Executive Director, we have a Board and have organizations looking at what we do, and in my job. It’s a lot of responsibility. It’s always a struggle, but you always have to work hard.
Living and Working in a Racially Divided Culture

Additionally, Latina leaders in this study have the experience of practicing their leadership roles in an environment that is permeated with the history of the Black and White context of the South. Therefore, by living and working in a racially segregated Black and White culture combined with the nature of their work, Latina leaders find themselves in challenging situations. This challenging situations cross across work boundaries since they also impact their families. Latinas in this study have not escaped from experiencing prejudice, discrimination and racism since diversity and inclusion are new concepts to yet be embraced in the South.

The only Latina in the study who grew up in the Southern culture was Cristina; the rest of the women moved to the Southeastern state as adults and were not aware of the implications of living in an environment permeated with the history of the Black and White context of the South. Lili said “you don’t realize, for me it was not so obvious until I got here of that division between Whites and Blacks and Latinos and Asians. For me that is sad.” Ana echoes the Latina leaders’ shared experiences when she said “It challenges me because sometimes there are many stereotypes that are difficult to deal with” and “the many obstacles that the Latino community has in rural areas like this.” And “I think the main one [obstacle] is racism and the views here. And fear.”

Lili provided an eloquently narrative that portrays the challenges of being a Latina in the South:

Another obstacle over here is and it is sad to say but still in the South, there’s a lot of racial division. People may not admit it but in the beginning, coming from Puerto Rico and in Puerto Rico
nobody is a pure breed. We were a Spanish colony for 100 years and a U.S. colony for another 100. We don’t have native Indians, we’ve not had native Indians for more than 450 years so everybody is a little bit white and a little bit black and everything in-between and within the same family you can have 20 shades. There is discrimination obviously; it’s not a perfect world but I guess that at least in my family and in my environment we were more open to the idea. I have a cousin and we were raised as brothers and I remember introducing and still to this day I introduce him to everybody as my brother. He is black; he is a black man. I remember my daughter when she got here [US South], said “I didn’t realize that [he] was black”.

Another of Lili’s experience was when one of her sons, who is a teenager now, needed to fill out a form at school. Lili said:

My son who is 17 now once called me from school; he was probably 2nd or 3rd grade and he called to me, “Mom, am I black or white”? And I was like, “What do you mean you are black or white?” “I’m filling out a form in school and they asked me if I was black or white. And to this day, no one had asked Kevin, “Are you black or white?” He was telling me that he told his teacher that he was Puerto Rican but she told him that is not an option. So I asked him, “What do you want to be?” And he said, “I guess
“Okay, honey, then you’re White”. And to this day as a joke, we call him our White child.

Mia shared a similar experience about how her family skin colors do not fit the historical Black and White context of the South:

My husband and I are a bi-racial couple. So his ancestry is English, Russian and Polish so he is very fair-skinned and we have always exposed them [her children] to both cultures so I’ve always taught them [her children] about Puerto Rican culture but it’s funny because it recently came up. Our daughter is 14 and our son is 12. It came up about 3 years ago and my daughter came home from school and she said, “Mom, you know something came up at school today and I was just wondering. Are we Black or are we White?” So I looked at her and said, “What do you mean ‘we’? Do you mean our family?” She said, “No, no our family. Are we Black or are we White”. So I asked her what had happened so I guess they had a discussion about ethnic groups in America in school so they were learning about the differences between ethnic identification and racial and cultural identification. I guess they were having a discussion about Jews. It’s not a race; it’s ethnicity or a culture because it’s religiously-based. So she [her daughter] said, “I started to think about it and I was kind of confused and I didn’t really know if we were Black or White.” And I said, “Okay, honey. What do you think you are?” So she thought about it a
while and couldn’t give me an answer. And I said, “When you walk down the street, what do you think people say?” And she’s like, “Most of the time the kids think I’m Italian” so I started laughing. And I said, “Okay. What does that mean? How does that help you self-identify in terms of color?” And she said, “Well, you know we’re kind of fair skinned but in the summer we tan really easily and we look like you.” So I said, “What do you think you are?” And she said, “I think we’re mixed; I think we’re a little bit of black and a little bit of White.” And I said, “Okay. Well, if that’s what you think, then that’s what you are.” And it was like okay, end of discussion.

When it comes to the Latinas’ confidence, Lili explained that “honestly, I am sometimes a little more nervous about doing [working with Whites] that than dealing with other minority populations or diverse populations because sometimes you think that they are not going to accept you or treat you with the same respect.” Similarly, Margara feels that it challenges her confidence, and she added:

It’s not the best situation for me, personally. And I can work at any level. I can work at any level. I don’t really mind. But when it comes to culture [Black and White]. So I am very aware that for me it’s a challenge in many ways. Forget about language. It’s a challenge about, I don’t know. It’s different perceptions.
Feeling a lack of confidence and doubting capabilities because of speaking English with a Spanish accent is common among Latinas in this study whose English is their second language. As Lili explained:

One of the things that I have felt the most is that Latinos, it’s very hard for you to get rid or your accent. That is always going to be there; we have an accent and by now I have learned to feel comfortable with my accent and make mistakes when I speak English because English is not my native language. So I speak Spanish most of the time because my clients speak Spanish; the person at the office speaks Spanish so it is an everyday thing. Many times I have encountered people making fun of your accent or treating you as if you were ignorant because you have an accent and that is sad; that is really sad. There’s nothing that you can do but be true to yourself and know that you know what you know and nobody can take that away from you.

Challenges are also present if the visible traits match the Black and White faces of the South but the heritage and core values do not because they are Latino. Lili, Lina and Mia provided the best narratives that expressed this experience. Lili who is a Latina with fair skin color recounted:

When I moved to [this state], I started working for the County School System right away. So first day that I went, the person who interviewed me for the job was not my immediate supervisor but yes I look very American because my biological parents are from
Mississippi. I was adopted by a Puerto Rican couple but I don’t have Puerto Rican genes. So even in Puerto Rico, there are many, many fair-skinned people like everywhere in Latin America. We have people from every shade under the rainbow, which is kind of cool. Anyway, I remember when I got to work that first day, I got there and I was nervous and excited. You know the southern accent was very hard for me in the beginning for me to grasp. And even though I knew English, I felt I knew nothing because it was hard for me to get used to the accent. I remember going to my boss and greeting her and she said, “Oh, I thought you were an American until you opened your mouth”. And I was like, ‘I’m sorry. What can I do? Yes I’m an American-Puerto Rican. I was born in America and am an American citizen by birth. I guess that qualifies me as an American.’ And she had just said it straight to my face and I was like embarrassed and confused.

Contrary to being of a light skin color Latina, Lina is a dark skin Afro-Latina and explained that even though she is Black, she has encountered prejudice since she does not share the historical struggles of the Blacks in the South. She narrated:

So you are Black and you consider yourself Latino” and I said, Yeah, I’m Afro-Latino. And she said “Oh, that’s interesting because interesting because if I was to look at you on the street, I would just think you’re African American.” And I said, “Yeah, that’s the African in me but when in essence I’m African Latino”.
She said, “What do you consider Afro-Latino?” What does that mean?” And I said, “Well, my background obviously is African because of my color” and then I went even more descriptive and said, “Well, it must have been that during the slave trade, my family got dropped off probably somewhere in the Caribbean or escaped. I don’t know. And that’s where I come from and they married some Latinos and the Indian natives and so on and it went down and produced me. But my upbringing and core is Latino.

Then she said, “Oh, okay. You know if you sat at a lunch counter here in [the South] back in the 60s, you know that just looking at you, it wouldn’t matter if you were African Latino or not, they still wouldn’t serve you because you’re black.” And I said, “That’s fine. My color is not in anyway in dispute here. Who I am I think is what you’re disputing.” So I would say they would still have been wrong and dumb for doing what they did, refusing me or not, whatever color I am. I said, “You know people make no big deal about an African who speaks French or an African who speaks another language. What’s the big deal about an African who speaks Spanish? Why are you trying to put me in a box or make a differentiation? I can only tell you what my core is. That’s like me telling you that you’re African American from the north when you’re from the south and that you should think like another
northerner. You can’t do that. That’s just my upbringing.” So she was kind of like, “Oh, okay. I never thought about it that way.”

And Mia who is also a dark skin Latina explained that “because I’m not stereotypically what people perceive a Latino is going to be. So when they meet me, it’s like okay but they still haven’t figured it out now because they see me and I’m dark.” She told the story of what happened a few months later when she joined her organization as the new executive director:

I was in my office one day and I had an African-American staff person come into the office and just some idle chatter and finally she said, “Well I’m just going to come out and ask you because everybody’s been talking about it”. And I just looked at her strangely and said, “Oh really? What’s that? What do you want to ask me?” And she was like, “Well, we were all wondering what are you?” And I was like, ‘Here we go again’. And so I just looked at her and said, “Well, what do you think I am?” And she’s was like, “I don’t know; you have that New York accent, so are you Italian or part Italian? Are you mixed?” And I said, “You know what? I like the fact that people can’t figure it out so you know what? I’m not going to tell you for a while so you keep guessing and you come back to me and tell me what people think I am and I’ll tell you if it’s right or wrong.” So of course a couple of weeks went by and their assumption I guess was I was mixed Italian and Black. And I said, ‘Well, that’s a lovely mix; however,
no, I’m Puerto Rican. Both of my parents are from Puerto Rico.

And there was this surprise and I always worry about the surprise
and I said, “Well, why are you surprised? What is it that’s so
surprising about that fact?”

While people cannot figure Mia out, Cristina is questioned in terms of her work in the
Latino community since she is White and speaks English without a Spanish accent; she
said that she always has to justify her leadership role in the Latino community to
mainstream leaders. She explained that they “look at me and they’re like mainstream
culture, “why is this white woman leading a Latino organization?” Then, Cristina said
“I’m just basically a first generation here, if you go by it from my mom. If you go by it
from my dad, well, he’s from here. So it’s a very different thing.”

An example of living in highly divided Black and White town is best explained by
Andie’s experience. Andie lives in a small rural town where the high school junior and
senior proms are segregated; Whites and Black high school students hold their proms
separately, leaving Latino high school students without the opportunity to participate in
proms. Andie explained that this prom situation “It wasn’t up to them [students]. It was a
parent driven situation.” Adults in her community still live in the past. Additionally,
Andie has been warned many times by “The Brotherhood” to go back to Mexico. Andie
is a 5th generation Mexican from Texas who speaks English as her first language. Yet,
she continues to experience prejudices and discriminations after having lived in her town
for over 25 years.

Additionally, Cristina conveyed what it means to live and work in a Black and
White divided society when she feels as to tell others “this is my version, and this is me
being a Latina growing up in the United States and growing up in the South.” In addition, Lina offered “I’ll share my life, culture; you share yours. It’s not a competition; it’s not that mine is better than yours or whatever. It’s just that we have different upbringings and that’s fine.” This is the beginning of Lina’s approach to address stereotypes and stigmas.

**Addressing Latino’s Stereotypes and Stigmas**

To overcome the lack of understanding and prejudice about Latinos in the South, Latina leaders have the challenge of educating the community at large as the opportunities become available when practicing their leadership roles between cultures. Very typical in this group of leader is to have the skills to communicate and create avenues to address Latino stereotypes and stigmas. Latinos in the Southeastern United States carry the perception of being less educated, living in poverty, lacking English language skills, and holding daily labor or low skilled jobs. Due to their positionalities, Latina leaders have the duty or the additional responsibility to dispel stereotypes and tell the real stories of the Latino community, that otherwise would have never had the opportunity to be heard or known. As Lina said “I have the ability to express that on their behalf.”

Cristina spoke of how as the representative of her community, having to dispel stigmas can be tiresome, she said:

It’s a long-term process and it’s very hard. But we’ve found that this is a community that isn’t looking for a handout. They [Latinos] aren’t looking to be coddled or anything like that. They just really want to improve their families and the quality of their
life. So I think that is one of the main things that we deal with in terms of stigmas with the culture. It’s this whole idea about there’s more violence in there.

And women are more submissive. So that’s one of the first stigmas we always have to really say, “No, it isn’t that. It’s the same across the board, regardless of what race, ethnicity, or class you’re talking about. It’s just we have found that it comes in handy addressing this front from a cultural perspective”. Because when people feel like, A, you’re speaking to them in their native language and that you understand their culture and their values, it makes a big difference.

Additionally, Lina provides one of the many examples she encounters on daily basis in terms of people perpetuating Latino stereotypes in her community and her attitude to educate them. She narrated:

So I have been in meetings where people have made all these comments about Latinos coming here, taking jobs, doing this, doing that, low education. I mean just as. And I let them talk because I think it’s important and then I would say, “Well, what if I told you that I was Latino? Now ask me if I fit into one of those boxes or categories that you guys have just decided is standard categorization for all Latinos.” And then I take a minute to educate first because I think that people operate on ignorance and that is what causes the problem. So I always take that opportunity
to educate and once I educate people, I still allow them to make
their comments because that’s, they’re free and I can’t take that
away from them. The only thing I can do is be an example and
educate them so that they can see a different perspective or have a
clearer or better perspective; then they’re not lumping all Latinos
in the same category.

Likewise, Lili explains how she approaches the challenge of educating the
mainstream community about Latinos, she narrated:

When I am speaking to non-Latino people, I also try to put myself
in their shoes and it is different and sometimes even shocking
because all Latino cultures are pretty different from the American
culture and I try to always be educating others without being in
their faces. And at the same time, try not to hurt their feelings or
not to be too strong because normally with a smile and a kind
attitude, you gain much more.

I like a saying that I heard years ago that the “United States is no
longer a melting pot. We are a salad bowl.” We all retain our own
personality but if we learn to work together in the salad bowl, we
make a very darn tasty salad but we don’t need to be tomatoes or
cucumbers; we can be what we are and we’re different. You’re
from Venezuela, I’m from Puerto Rico and that’s cool. So I guess
making everybody the same is not necessary for it to work well.
To conclude this section, Margara’s words summarize how the nine Latina feel about the intersecting dynamics of gender and ethnicity while practicing their leadership roles in the Southeastern United States: “That’s the challenge. We are [women]. That’s just to start with. It’s a challenge to be Latina and to be a woman. Just to start, it’s a challenge in itself.” However, Latinas in this study have a high sense of purpose when it comes to work for the community that helps them to cope and compensate for the challenges inherent to their leadership roles.

**Lifting Up the Community through Quests for Learning**

The third major theme I identify is an additional factor that influences the leadership practices of Latina leaders in communities. This factor is related to their learning nature and knowledge creation. This learning nature is driven by the needs of the community and the connection with whom they work. Latinas in this study engage in learning experiences that are connected or relational to the needs of the community and its members. Furthermore, Latinas in this study believe that working to improve the conditions of people in the community is their call or purpose, and they engage in a variety of adult learning approaches to fulfill their leadership roles. Additionally, Latina leaders use their knowledge to enable or foster emancipatory education among the members of the communities they serve.

**Having a Spiritual Purpose**

All of the nine Latinas in this study believe that their leadership role in communities is due to a higher purpose or a mission they have to fulfill in life, as Lina explained that doing community work, “that was a plan greater than me.” Furthermore, Latina leaders have a spiritual motivation that aims at learning what is needed to better
serve the community and their residents’ needs. This spiritual motivation is manifested in serving the community without expecting anything in return or feeling a greater sense of purpose when they see the results of their work in the people they help. Latinas in this study believe that they were meant to work and learn for the betterment of others, in this case, the Latino community in the Southeastern of the United States. Latinas in this study conveyed that they have always being interested in knowing how they can help others in less privileged positions and how to improve their situations. For example, Ana explained, “I feel all the time I want to do something to ensure that justice is done.” Mia shared that “from an early age, I always drawn to helping others.” And “I’ve always had this sort of inclination to be helpful and to help if there was a need in the community.”

Moreover, all of the women in this study assert that in order to learn and be an effective community leader you have, as Ana stated, “to follow what you think is your mission in life, what goes along with your values and your beliefs. The rest will fall into place.” Additionally, these Latinas are serving others without expecting anything in return. Andie said that she is:

- dedicating myself in heart and soul to this community. Do the work that you’ve given, all your time, all your dedication. You don’t do this kind of work to earn stars. You do this kind of work because your heart calls you to do it. But the ultimate goal is the wellbeing of the people that I considered have the greatest need. The people that need us the most. That’s how I think about it. That’s what I’m saying to myself. That’s, for me, what drives my objectives. Because that is I’d say my calling, my mission in life,
their wellbeing, I’m so concentrated on anything that has to do with it. My work has to be so much around that, sometimes I don’t know. I’m so focused on that.

Furthermore, Lorie said, “I have always been interested in improving the world.” She explained:

I like the sense of being able to make an impact and make a difference. And I love all the people that I meet. But it’s really that sense that I’m doing something worthwhile. I have my job and my career but I can then leverage that to spend time and resources in my community and I love it. And mentoring people, I really do like using my skills in my community, and hopefully mentoring others in our community.

Cristina provided an example of their spiritual purpose when she explained that her organization is in her heart and “I realized that this is where I belong” and “where I am giving back to the community, where I am happy with myself and I enjoy the work. Then, she shared “I think for me I know deep down that this is where my heart is, and that this is where I’m supposed to be. Because I tried the corporate world and lasted a whole four months.”

Additionally, in many instances, the spiritual motivation of Latina leaders is permeated by religious beliefs. While explaining their community commitments, challenges, and leadership practices experiences, Latina leaders have used phrases such as “it’s a blessing,” “God knows,” “God has helped me,” “believe in God,” “thank God,” “pray to God,” “Oh God. I don’t know what I want to do,” and “have faith.” On
reflecting on her purpose to be engage in the community, Cristina mentioned her religion; she said “then also being Catholic, one thing that they always did was instill the idea of community service. Community service was actually high.”

Ana epitomizes how religion infuses her motivations for the work she does, she said that her desire to help others is related to “tengo hambre y sed de justicia,” and she said it is “very engrained in my mind and my heart, because I feel that all the time.” What she feels all the time refers to Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

In addition to having a spiritual need that motivates them to be community leaders, they have a strong connection with the people and their needs. This connection permeates everything they do. People’s needs and their conditions are at the forefront of the Latinas leaders motivation to learn and practice leadership roles. This has helped Latinas assess what kind of education and knowledge they need as well as it has dictated Latinas’ course of action on what programs and services are essential to provide in the community. For example, Lucia illustrates why she changed her choice of graduate school and the work she wanted to pursue after reflecting on what she knew and the needs she would constantly see in the community,

I think when I got my first job is when I realized there was a need for me to do something more. Not to just do my job and investigate this case with [social services agency], write my notes, and file it. I thought that there was a huge need to do something: community education and culture.
This sense of duty to do more than being a caseworker was ignited by her deep connection with the needs of the people she was encountering.

This connection is a common experience among the women and their learning motivation. Ana best explains how she is perceptive of others’ needs; she asserted, “I think I’m very perceptive on the needs and I want to address those needs. I have the urgency to meet those needs, and to create projects from zero.” She continues and said that she always based her leadership practices on what the community needs and wants; she said that she has learned “to listen what the community wants and not to make plans based on funding or what I feel is what we need, but to really listen to the community.”

In validation of Ana’s leadership practices, Lili added that all of her community programs are “programs in Spanish and very highly customized to the needs of Latinos.” She continues and explained that due to her personal quest and connection to the Latino families’ needs, “thousands of people have benefited.”

Furthermore, Lorie illustrates the importance of the connection and being able to feel what is needed. She said, “now that I’ve been in the community longer, I can assess what we really need more help for here. So I’m then gravitating for where I feel my community needs me.” Then, Margara added that in her leadership role and her connection to the community, she proposes “things to them [board of directors]. I’m the one that has the contact out there with the community. I’m the one that knows what is happening.”

To be able to fulfill their missions or calls, Latinas in this study engage in a variety of adult learning experiences depending on the knowledge they need and the context of their connections and relationships with others. Latinas learn best in situations
that promote better understanding and relationships with and for the people they interact while practicing their leadership roles.

**Engaging in a Variety of Adult Learning Experiences**

Latinas in this study have engaged in a combination of learning opportunities that focus on their relationships with other people and their wellbeing, and a learning that is contextually connected with the community. They have described several experiences that reflect how they seek knowledge or learn the skills needed to be able to practice their leadership roles in communities. Their collective learning experience’s stories reflect that they make meaning or create knowledge that is self-directed, experiential, transformative and emancipatory in nature. For this group of Latina leaders, self-directed learning occurred when they controlled what and how they wanted to learn. Experiential learning occurred when Latinas used their own previous and/or current experiences and/or others’ experiences in conjunction with critical reflection to expand their knowledge and understanding. Transformative learning changed the Latinas’ worldview or frames of references when moving to the US Southeastern or getting divorced. Emancipatory learning manifested when Latinas were in control of their lives as they understood what oppressed them or the community they serve. For most of the Latinas in this study, their examples overlap when trying to categorize their type of learning. Therefore, I have selected a few stories that distinctly represent the manifestations that characterize the learning experience in their pursuit of creating knowledge that address the needs of the community and its members.

Formal education is present among all of the Latinas. In the pursuit of higher education degrees, all of the nine Latina leaders in this study have engaged in traditional
higher education: five completed their master’s degrees, three obtained bachelor’s
degrees, and one Latina had only a few college level classes. Mia stated a shared belief
about education and learning among the women: “the value of a good education and how
important it is to learn your entire life.” Consequently, Lili represented the women’s
lifelong learning sentiment “one of the things I do is approach everything with a desire to
learn.”

Engaging in self-directed learning is a lifelong learning attribute that this group of
women possesses and it will vary from each Latina situation and context to another,
depending on the community needs. Accordingly, Latina leaders in this study
continuously engage in self-directed learning activities; all of the Latinas describe
examples of how they control their learning objectives and goals and their autonomy to
learn what is relevant. Some examples are related to acquiring knowledge about different
cultures and their populations, while other example are related to the different functions
of their organizations such as to learning about board governance and members’
responsibilities, and to understanding marketing and the role of social media to promote
their events, programs, and fundraising activities.

Concerning self-directed learning, Ana shared an example from when she “went
to trainings on the popular education” so she could learn how to better advocate for the
community she serves; hence, she could be able to design or tailor programs to teach
them [new immigrants in her community] the United States systems e.g. educational,
legal, and their rights. Ana’s desires to learn popular education comes from working with
a population that is disenfranchised, Ana knows:
How hard it is to learn how the system works here. So we [her non-profit] provide a lot of information about that. If people have rights, we tell them what their rights are, or how to advocate for themselves and the community.

The outcome of Ana’s autonomy and desire to engage in this incident of self-directed learning was to understand how to facilitate popular education. However, the knowledge created has allowed Ana to become an emancipatory education agent in her community.

As very typical of the other women, Lucia’s learning experiences provided several concrete examples that show her engagement in self-directed learning to improve her leadership practices: her experience involves reading books and attending workshops. She said “I have read books. I think the most recent, which it was a long time ago, was *The Solo Manager* or *The Solo Partnership*. *The Solo Partnership* because it’s a corporate way to be a solo partner” then, she shared “you know what I do? I also go to [local university] to some of the workshops. To me, that has helped me a lot, too.

Furthermore, Lucia explained that to be a more effective board member she has attended classes “for board training. I did that a couple of times. That was really good. I took another one also with; I think, I took one of the [local private university] ones. They offer one.” Then, Lucia shared that when she wanted to learn more about organizational mission/vision/goals and objectives, she “did go to the [local] Women’s Foundation.

They have a non-profit course, to be a non-profit” to help the organizations in which she serves as a board member, she said “to be more efficient, to when they are deviating from the mission of the organization to refocus, regroup, and say, “Is this really our mission?” Those kind of things where you can actually bring something.”
Similarly, Cristina provides another example of self-directed learning when she said:

I’m really wanting to learn more about marketing, because I went to school for social work. And so it’s something that I know is important to our organization, but I’m looking for people who are able to help guide me about how I can improve our marketing efforts.

Experiential learning in this group of women can be defined as a learning that comes from experiences, observations, and reflections. All of the Latinas in this study learn based on concrete and contextual experiences that are specifics to the nature of their work and with whom they work in the community. Therefore, their learning and knowing is interconnected with their leadership practices. Additionally, the experiential and self-directed learning manifestation in this group of women can be attributed to incidental learning as it “is defined as a byproduct of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation” (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 12). Latinas in this study have learned from their mistakes and/or through the process of trial and error.

The following narrative of Mia expresses the values she imposes when engaging in a combination of self-directing and experiential learning to be a better leader. She said “I think that educating yourself, you know expanding your education allows you to be better [leader].” Then she included how she benefits as well from other leaders’ experiences, and said “my experience with other people that are in leadership roles, a lot of reading also. I read, not just this for my class, but I like to read about others who are leaders and having arrived and being leaders and from actually doing.”
Moreover, reflection is an important factor in experiential learning. Reflecting is present in each of the Latinas in this study, they actively reflect on their own experiences and/or on others’ experiences i.e. the population they serve through their community non-profit work. Ana’s described an example of experiential learning incident when she held a job as a mental health counselor for new arrived Latina immigrants, and how creating knowledge together based on their unique experience allowed Ana to design a relevant program for this group. Ana recounted:

I realized that the program they were offering was just a translation of things in English. It wasn’t culturally-relevant for the women or anything. I started trying to learn how to create a program or material that was in Spanish, but that would appeal to the women. I saw a lot of needs, not just in terms of language, but access to resources and the fear of being undocumented. So I started working with women, trying to find common issues and to learn how we could work together.

For Lucia’s leadership role, it is important to learn from other people experiences and cultures, in her case, the Mexican community is a priority. To accomplish this, Lucia uses a combination of self-directed and experiential learning as she said:

I talk to the people and learn just the traditional cultures, not the book culture. The things they like and don’t like, and those kinds of things. The things that really bother them here in the United States. I learn from them.
Another example of Lucia’s experiential learning is when she has learned to negotiate her leadership practices between different cultures; she said that she has learned by “you see how people talk, how people refer to things, and you adopt those styles. So, basically, you learn by doing and observing.”

Lorie’s experiential learning in her leadership practices is present when she reflects on her skills and responsibilities she had when working in the corporate world. Lorie said that “everything that I learned at corporate, all of my companies trained me. They trained me how to be a manager; they trained me how to hire and fire. They trained me how to communicate, all of these things. I am then able to use that in my non-profit work.” She approaches the non-profit world by reflecting on her corporate experience as she adapts and makes sense of what is important to her community leadership practices. Lorie continued and said:

I can then translate that [corporate knowledge] and I implement that into my non-profit work that I do. Registering voters? That’s a sales job. How many are you going to close? Let’s have a goal, Saturday. Let’s have a goal. As a team, we want to register 25 people. You get 5, you get 5, you get 5 and then we. So I look at that as a reward. And PR? PR is important for [the organization], so how are we doing that? How can we leverage that? That’s where I come in with the business skills into the non-profit.

To close this section on the variety of learning experiences Latinas leaders in this study have engaged, it is important to mention that transformative is another type of learning found in this group of women. All of the Latinas in this study but Cristina have
encountered a “disorienting dilemma” experience when moving to the United States Southeastern and/or when they have experienced marital problems, including divorce. All of them had to reframe what they knew and had to learn to see the world from a different point of reference. Latina leaders who grew up in their Latino countries of origin did not have disorienting dilemmas attributable to their race or gender in their own culture, they experienced their main disorienting dilemmas after moving to the United States as young women; while those Latina leaders who grew up in the United States and had darker skin did have early formative disorienting dilemmas due to their ethnicity and perceived race.

Margara best expressed the nature of a transformative learning experience among these Latina leaders. Margara’s examples illustrate her transformative learning experience when she had realized she could not practice in the United States as a psychologist:

But everything changed when I came to the States. Because I couldn’t practice. When I came, I said, “Oh, my God. I’m a Psychologist. I can’t practice. I have to be a fulltime provider. I can’t. So I don’t want to go back to school 5 more years. And I really needed to support my mother. She paid for my education.” So, “I cannot just go to school for 5 more years. I’m in my 30s. I’m not going to do it. I’ll go another way.”

So when I started working for community-service organizations, a whole, different spectrum of psychology opened up for me. Because I thought, “Okay, it’s not only individual psychology but the social group, the family, the community.” So I looked into a
bigger picture than I had been, that I really was not interested in before or exposed to before. I was only doing clinical, individual, or couple psychology. So that changed for me. I started researching and doing some, “What is this about community development? How do I apply what I know to work with the family or with a group?”

The nature of their learning and the knowledge constructed between these women and their connection to the community have prepared Latina leaders to become emancipatory education agents and transform communities.

**Using Their Learning To Foster Emancipatory Education**

The stories shared by the women in this study show how their connections and learning fostered emancipatory education within the communities where they work. All of the women used their learning and knowledge to foster emancipatory education. Most of the Latina leaders in this study have experienced emancipatory learning from having the knowledge and understanding of what oppresses them by reason of being women and having a Latino ethnicity in the Southeastern United States. As a result of this oppression, all of them become agents of emancipatory education. Through their connections to members of the community and their relational orientation, which are gendered traits associated with women’s learning, Latina leaders become emancipatory agents because they understand the struggles that underrepresented or disfranchised Latino communities face. Latinas use their leadership role to influence and teach Latinos what their rights are and how they can find their voices to be heard and become visible in society.
For example Ana’s emancipatory education orientation and her learning about oppression and injustices began early in her life, she said:

I think by seeing my parents, but also maybe people like church, or in the community. When I was going out, there were many injustices in Mexico. I saw the student movements in 1968, and how the army was in the streets and all of that. I was questioning many things and I wanted to do something about it. I was very curious about how to help those people. I wanted to learn why people were in detention, why children were detained, and how to help people.

Likewise, Andie’s story shows a combination of how her transformative and emancipatory learning nature prepared her to be an emancipatory education agent:

There came a time in my life when I said I need to do something different with myself. I can’t continue not trying to do better. I was living in labor camps with my family and I would see the injustices. I would see the cruelty to some of the workers – the nonpayment, the beating of workers. A migrant lifestyle is definitely not something that people want to live the rest of their lives. You grow up thinking that it’s a natural thing to move from place to place, like a gypsy. It became like that because you would see us: I would remember riding down the interstate with my parents and my older siblings and with their truck loaded with stuff. All the little kids would be in the back of the truck in a
camper. Always risking a lot … risking our lives because if there was an accident, we were going to be the first ones to be ejected from the vehicle. Those things you don’t think about when you’re little. But now, as an adult, you look back, you think back, and you kind of assimilate those and you say, wow, we risked a lot of things in life to survive.

Then, she said:

I was not educated enough to be able to advocate. I was young. I was learning. But I was a fireball. I was out there. I was getting there. I was doing. I was raising my voice for this community. I was telling them what I thought. Maybe in an inappropriate way. Now I wouldn’t go do it that way because things changed. You age and you get more wise and you learn how to talk. Back then it was like “That’s discrimination. You shouldn’t have that on there.” “We can’t speak Spanish?!” “You should have someone.”

It was like get in there and tell them exactly what you think.

Mia who continuously instill in her community “don’t ever be ashamed of who you are and don’t let what people say to you bring you down” shared that her inclination to foster empowerment comes from the following story: “we were the only minorities in our neighborhood. So I did experience as a child some racial discrimination and some racial harassment.” And “that helped mold and shape the person that I am. That’s why I just have this inclination to be helpful I guess.” She continues and said:
So from a very early age, I can remember being asked to call the natural gas company on her [mother] behalf because she was self-conscious about her accent and she felt that if she called, she would be treated differently or discriminated against or not treated fairly. So I can remember as a child her calling on me to do that. At the time, it kind of felt like a burden you know. I wanted to be helpful but as a result, I think it just conditioned me to sort of take care of things.

While Mia’s sense for emancipatory education started early in life by observing racism and discrimination attributable to her mother language barriers, Cristina’s underpinning for emancipatory education started with her passion to work with young women victims of domestic violence. Cristina’s example of fostering emancipatory education is noticeable in her work with young women as she described:

Because for us [her non-profit], what we’ve always believed is we always say it’s the voice of the woman. At our work, we used to just say it’s the voices of the women. What we started doing, I’ve worked with the teenagers since I was old enough to basically facilitate the adolescent group. One thing, especially with Latino youth, is that they are always considered, especially with the group we work with, they are considered at-risk. “Oh, they are going to end up in a gang. Oh, they are going to end up dropping out of school. They are going to do this and that.” And they were never
given enough credit in terms of what they were experiencing and what they could bring to the table.

So for the past six years, we’ve had this group called [la voz de los jóvenes] – the youth voice. What they started doing was they started conducting their own research. What the research basically focused on was how they deal with the violence. How do they think the community responded? How could the cops better respond? They have done stuff around the issues of gangs. They are doing a research study right now about the issue of immigration.

It’s a very time-consuming process in a way, and it hasn’t been the easiest, but these kids have now had the opportunity to travel all over the United States and present their findings at different conferences. And people have been so amazed about seeing youth, especially Latino youth, present at conferences, and be the keynote and main presenters. One thing that we always did is we didn’t coddle them in terms of being like, “Well, if you just go up there and say, ‘I’m a witness of domestic violence and it was hard’”, but instead having them go through each part, about what is research, and making them do that analysis, and making them do the transcribing and all that kind of stuff. Holding them to a certain standard. And then also talking to them about public speaking. That way, because we knew that they were capable of this, we also
required them to sign contracts saying they would stay in school
and do these different things.

It wasn’t easy. But, at the same time, six years later, I’ve seen kind
of the impact, and I’ve seen how that has helped to make them
realize how they view themselves and their own strengths.

While Cristina fosters empowerment and emancipatory education among youth, Lina
focuses her efforts on empowering the parents as well. Lina said that her efforts with
parents at the end “will help them [youth] go on to finish high school and see the value of
going on and to finish.” Additionally, explained that she strives for “involving the parents
and I would say giving them a voice” And “empowering them to do for themselves.”
Lina said that she tries to teach them:

How to speak up for themselves and how to help their children
succeed, you know. So to me, that was the best because of a lot
Latino parents feel like they’re here but they feel invisible or they
make themselves invisible. And they make themselves invisible
because of fear. And I felt like if we could make them feel that
they have all the rights, like anybody else, to speak up if they don’t
like something to advocate on behalf of their children that that
would empower them to really help the kids be successful. So to
me, that’s been the most enjoyable piece.

Help people to the point at different levels so the first piece would
be you know you teach somebody to fish. At the second level,
now they know how to fish so now you teach them how to sell the
fish. And then now that they know how to sell the fish, then you teach them how to save the money and turn it back into their community.

On Lucia’s experience as to being an emancipatory education agent in the community started in her early professional career when she realized:

That, to me, my first job, was really started this thing off [to empower people], the need to help people [about their rights and the law]. Because I began to see how much of a problem the culture differences were. The fact that we parent our children differently than American people parent their children.

Lucia fosters empowerment in the community by informing and explaining the law and policies to new arrived immigrant with children. She realized that more and more parents in her community were having social services agencies investigating them and placing their children in foster care. This was happening because they would leave the children at home alone or at the care of the older siblings and could not understand why the policy was involved because where they came from it is not a crime. So Lucia made her duty to empower the new Latino community by teaching the law and its consequences.

This section closes with Ana’s summary of her emancipatory education orientation and her accomplishments when people tell her “we didn’t know we could do something about it”. Or, “You motivate us to follow dreams.” Ana narrated:
I know how hard it is to learn how the system works here. So we provide a lot of information about that. If people have rights, we tell them what their rights are, or how to advocate for themselves and the community. Also, the Latino community here is very isolated from the rest of the community, even though the percentage of the population is high. We are trying to bridge gaps. And not to be seen as a problem or that we are waiting for people to give us something, but to be part of the solution, to do things also to contribute.

We started registering people to vote because I saw there were many legislators saying lies about immigrants. But people weren’t ready to vote because they didn’t know why it was important. Some wanted to vote, but they weren’t citizens. I asked them, “Why are you not a citizen yet?” They said, “It’s because I’m afraid of the test”. So we started citizenship classes to empower them to apply, and to practice with them, and to help them to fill out the application, with the purpose of benefiting individually, but also to build power.

To summarize, all of the women in this study reveal in their stories their spiritual connection to their communities’ needs and the sense of urgency they have to be helpful and improve the world. Being able to help and empowering others drive the Latinas learning experiences as they engage in several learning approaches to construct the knowledge that shapes their leadership practices. The outcome is a learning that allows
them to become agents of emancipatory education, empowering and giving voice to underrepresented groups in the community.

**Developing Leadership Practices around the Prismatic Reflections of Family**

The fourth and last of the themes I identified is interconnected to family. This is another factor that influences the leadership practices of Latinas in the Southeastern United States. Each Latina leader has identified family at the forefront of their practices, decisions, values, and their interactions with staff or community members. The subthemes associated with this theme are 1) being a community leader is determined early by family examples, 2) having family cultural values engrained in their leadership practices, and 3) using family as their primary support mechanism.

**Being a Community Leader Is Determined Early By Family Examples**

All of the leadership journeys of the nine Latina leaders who participated in this study have started because of the examples that have been set by parents and grandparents. Specifically, mothers and grandmothers are the primary sources of inspiration for these women to aspire the pursuit of leadership roles in their communities. It is important to notice that only one participant mentioned her dad as her sole influence on why she is a community leader; when asking Lucia what influenced you to do the type of work that you currently do, she responded “My father, I admire him very much. I wanted to be just like my father.”

Early exposure to service and care of community members by parents and grandparents has influenced the leadership journey of each Latina leader in community
development endeavors. While Lucia has only identified her dad, Cristina has given all the credit to her mom. Cristina explained:

For me, a lot of it came from my mom. We were always raised with the belief to always use our skills, our experience, and our knowledge in a way that benefited our community… Since I was the youngest and because she [her mother] was basically a single mom, she would always take me with her. I got to basically volunteer in soup kitchens and convalescent homes, and a variety of different things. So I was introduced very early on.

Ana grew up participating in programs for families living in poverty that both of her parents coordinated, she explained that her parents were teachers and they would take her with them. Ana explained:

I remember that they [parents] would take dentists and physicians to communities… And some communities were infested with rats or roaches, so they [parents] would take people to help the community with that… I saw people that were poorer than me… it was amazing for me to see the needs, and also how people were so satisfied of helping, and those who received the help. I didn’t understand very clearly at that time… I was questioning many things and I wanted to do something about it.

Lili also explained that her parents provided her with opportunities and examples to engage in leadership roles in the community; Lili as an only child was always exposed
to her parents’ church activities. Lili affirmed that having been around her parents and older adults all the time influenced her to pursue community leadership work, Lili said:

My parents and my family were very active at their local churches and they do a lot of leadership and community work through the church. And, as an only child, I was mainly all the time with the adults and could relate to what they were doing and I enjoyed what they did. So I guess that would probably be my earliest influence would be them.

While Lina and Margara grew up in different countries, Colombia and Panama respectively, both had vivid memories of their grandmothers helping the less fortunate in their communities. Lina and Margara shared similar stories. Lina explained that her grandmother “was involved in the church a lot and used to do like missionary work,” and Lina used to ask her grandmother about why she cooked so much and why people always came to eat at her house, Lina explained that her grandmother “would go to all the sick people’s houses, to people she knew had problems with getting food, clothes, whatever and she would just go and bring food, bring clothes, bring everything.”

Lina did not always go along with what her grandmother did; she often questioned her grandmother’s choices.

Then, she [my grandmother] would cook a whole lot of food from our house and I would get mad because I would be like, “Why? It’s only 4 of us.” And my uncles and them would come by “but why do you cook so much?” And she would always say to me,
“You never know who’s going to knock on your door.” Everybody in that community knew my grandmother.

My grandmother’s land was very fruitful and abundant, to this day. And I think it has to do with just who she is and her beliefs. she never judged, she never asked; she would just always welcome somebody to the house. And she always had a sense of community, of giving back, of sharing, of helping those who don’t have. And I remember when I was little I would say things like, “Why do all these people always come to our house and beg and beg?” And I remember getting a beating that time because my grandmother would say to me that, “You have. And you have more than you need. And it’s always good to share with others.”

As a child, Lina had no idea how these incidents would influence her professional career. She reflected, “It didn’t impact me [then] but as I got older, I realized that most of my life was always driven to that. So I would say that is where we or I’ve gotten that sense of community of being able to share and give back to my early life, modeling after my grandmother. So I learned very early on to care for others; to understand what community is.”

Even though Margara was an only child, she grew up in a very large family with a house full of children, uncles and aunts, and household help and their children. Margara was very conscious of her grandmother helping the homeless and treating the help’s children as their own grandchildren, Margara remembered how her grandmother:
always had a stock of plastic cups that she would buy so she could give
coffee and milk to the homeless. Always. She always had that in the
kitchen and the kids of the maids; she was very close to those children as
she was to us.

Margara reported that her grandmother was very involved in community work. “She
never officially volunteered anywhere, but our home, as big and as crowded as it was,
people always knew that they could come in and receive a plate of food. She always used
to say ‘donde comen dos comen tres’ [where there is food for two, there is food for
three]. She would always say that.” Margara grew up extremely aware that she needed
to help others. “We were the only house in the entire block that would receive homeless
people very regularly coming in for meals.”

Another way to explain Latina leaders influencing factors to working for
communities comes from seeing parents’ struggles and work conditions, and injustices
that affect them. Lorie and Andie come from migrant families: Lorie’s parents worked in
the chicken factory and meat packing plant in Minnesota, while Andie’s parents worked
the East Coast, going up to North Carolina and coming back to Dade City, Florida in the
seasons of work. Mostly, Andie’s parents, siblings, and relatives harvested oranges. A
different migrant worker occupation was the ones that Lorie’s parents had, she explained:

My parents worked in the chicken factory and meat packing plants
and I did as well with them. So I think that influenced me a lot, the
experience that I saw my parents go through, influenced me a lot.
Andie talked about living in labor camps with her family, and the injustices she witnessed there.

I would see the cruelty to some of the workers: the nonpayment, the beating of workers. Sometimes you’d come across with a family member or maybe known family would have an accident and they would get killed in the accident. You’d have to deal with those issues with the extended family members who were suffering through the processes and the mourning and the grieving and all that. It became a somewhat stressful lifestyle. There came a time in my life when I said I need to do something different with myself. I can’t continue not trying to do better.

The pursuit of leadership roles and the involvement of Latinas in the communities are determined early by seeing family conditions and experiences in community service. In addition to following family examples, Latina leaders carry their family cultural values deep-rooted in their practices.

**Having Family Cultural Values Engrained in their Leadership Practices**

The findings consistently show that all of the nine Latina leaders hold their own family cultural values as their standards or guiding principles when it comes to their leadership practices. Participants mentioned the value of work, which they explained is different from hard work. The value of work is related to working for what you have. Lucia eloquently conveyed this value:
We work for what we have. We don’t expect things for free. We don’t expect anyone to take care of us. Not our government, not someone else, but we take care of our own. We’re family. We’ll take care of each other. That, to me, is something I brought with me… The value of work is something that I know is more unique in a family. I think it’s very, very common in Latino families… So, to me, we take care of our own, and we work for what we have. We don’t expect anyone else to take care of us.

Ana’s guiding principles at work reflect this value as well; she said that what she is trying to accomplish with her organization is “to bridge gaps. And not to be seen as a problem or that we [Latinos] are waiting for people to give us something, but to be part of the solution.”

For Cristina, her leadership practices come from modeling her mother’s styles and values. Cristina said “I learned a lot from her in terms of leadership style, and that you don’t use it to hold over people or feel like you are in charge of them, but instead, using that specific skill or quality in order to strengthen your community.” Cristina repeated,

I would just say that definitely kind of seeing the way of my mom’s leadership style. Again, even though she has a PhD, she doesn’t flaunt it. She always saw that as a way in which she could help her community. So unless she has to, she never has anybody call her Doctor or anything like that.

For all of the participants, Lili summarized what it means to have a sense of family at work. Lili explained a strong “sense of a family unity—you know, that family
comes first and you do whatever you need to do to for your family.” In addition, Cristina works in an organization that “is a very family friendly environment” and appreciates “the sense of family and the Latino culture overall” and that she received that support system from her team.

Family cultural values identified among all of the participants are serving others without expecting anything in return; treating people with respect, care and love; the importance of being prepared; the value of quality education; the importance of family and the sense of family among members of their organizations; good or strong work ethics; and a sense of responsibility.

**Using Family as their Primary Support Mechanism**

Latina leaders rely on their families as their primary source of support as they practice their leadership roles. Family members such as mothers, daughters, sons, and husbands are the first people that participants mentioned when asking about support and nurture; nevertheless, when participants mentioned their staff and close friends as a support mechanisms, it seems a family affair as well. In many cases, staff or team and friends are considered to be extended family; Margara summarized this common sentiment for the Latinas in this study: “you work in a place that you feel like family.”

For most of the Latina leaders in this study, mothers are the first ones that come to mind when asking for their support system. Cristina said:

I think that my mom is definitely one of my main sounding boards, because she and I are very similar. I’m definitely probably
the most like her out of any of the kids. So with some of the decisions, I’ll run it by her.

Then Cristina mentioned “my husband. And my family also comes into play.” When Cristina said my family, she referred to grandmother and aunts. Cristina has recently become a mother so she said:

definitely in terms of right now my son is with my aunt and my grandmother, and then another aunt. Being able to count on them to really help to take care of my son and raise my child makes a huge difference.

In addition to supporting Cristina while she is at work, her family also supports her organization work. Cristina is appreciative of having her family as support system for both home and work, she said:

I think just having all the different support systems and basically everybody saying, “You can do this”, I think has been a big thing. My family also volunteers for the organization. My grandmother is there on Wednesday evenings, as well as my aunt and everybody else. They believe in what we do. So, it helps to know that the sacrifices I’ve made are worth it. Because they keep on saying, “This is a great organization. We think that you’re doing good.”

Lucia, Andie, Lili, Mia, Cristina, and Margara specifically mentioned their husbands to be their biggest support when it comes to the nurture of their leadership
roles. These husbands have been described as “my rock,” “my friend,” “my cheerleader,” “my everything.” Margara said,

My biggest rock and support is definitely my husband. He’s not only my husband but also my friend, my guide. He’s really, really my everything. We are very close. We have, thank God, a very good relationship. So he’s my biggest supporter. Everything that has to do with my professional life, it’s him.

Margara added,

So I think that between my husband and my mom, those are the biggest two and most important relationships in my life. I talk to her about everything, and she understands. She gives me good guidance, just practical sense. She’s so practical and she is so down to earth. She has such a perfect common sense. And she’s never worked in a corporate environment. She’s never worked at all with professionals. But she has such a common sense that it really shocks me. And she keeps me in line with what I want from my heart. She’ll say, “Is that what you want?” She’s always referring to, “You always have to think about if you are really making the best decision for you and the people that you are working with.”

In addition to having support from their husbands, Lili noted that “also, a great [support] in my life and in my leadership has been my father-in-law.” Furthermore, Lili explained that in addition to her husband and father-in-law, she finds support in “now my adult
children. It’s very nice now that I have 2 adult children that I can go back to them and have their input on things.”

For Ana and Andie, their daughters are their main sources of strength and support: Ana and Andie confide their challenges and worries to their daughters. Andie said that her daughter, since she was a little girl has been very aware of what Andie goes through, Andie explained:

[My daughter] has always been a very good kid. She made me strong many times. She is very pretty. She went through a lot of battles with me in my time of change and just growing and working in this organization that I was trying to pick up, that I was trying to lift, because it needed to be successful. It needed to be a successful organization.

Lili also find support in knowing that her children care and want to participate in advancing the mission of her non-profit organization; her children volunteering is an extension of family functions, Lili shared:

My oldest son is 26 and is a lawyer; our daughter is a nurse and will be 25 and then I have 17, 16 and 14. And they are all involved in the program in one way or another. My daughter-in-law is involved in the program. So it’s already a family affair and I enjoy that a lot.
To conclude this section, I constructed a data poem from the participants’ words to illustrate that Latina leaders’ world develops around the prismatic reflections of family:

My source of strength is my family
My grandmother, my mother, my parents;
My daughter, my sister, my aunt;
My husband, my son.
She, he, they have always been there for me.
Family comes first.
Family supports you.
Family teaches you values.
My parents wouldn’t value money or anything but education.
My family taught me to be active in the community
Who I am comes from those two women.
My strength comes from my family.
My husband - my rock, my friend, my cheerleader,
My everything.
You do what you need to do for your family.
What we do is seeing the impact with the families.
To me it’s so satisfying – it’s so incredibly satisfying
We’re family. We’ll take care of each other.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study. The first part concentrated on how Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures: having an awareness of how others position them, negotiating outsider-insider Latina status, values, and knowledge, and managing power alliances of their multicultural world. The second part presented the challenges factor that influences the Latinas’ leadership practices. This factor is related to
navigating the intersecting dynamics of gender and ethnicity: balancing community work and personal life, living and working in a racially divided culture, and addressing Latino’s stereotypes and stigmas. The third part focused on the learning factors that shape the Latina leaders’ leadership practices: having a spiritual purpose, engaging in a variety of adult learning experiences, and using their learning to foster emancipatory education. And the last part covered the concept of family shaping the Latinas leadership practices: being a community leader is early determined by family examples and experiences, Latinas’ family cultural values are engrained in their leadership practices, and family is the primary support mechanism.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences of Latina leaders who work in community development in the Southeastern United States. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How did Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills?
2. What factors influenced the leadership practices of Latina leaders in communities?

This chapter presents a summary of the study, the major conclusions derived from the findings, the discussion of the conclusions and their relationship to current literature on Latinas’ learning and leadership practices. Finally, this chapter discusses the implications for theory, practice, and future research.

Summary of the Study

Using Interpretivism and feminism as the guiding theoretical frameworks, nine Latina leaders working in community development in the Southeastern United States were purposefully selected to participate in this study. The criteria to participate in the study included: 1) Latinas who either were the executive director, CEO, president, or state director of a community based organizations, or Latinas who were appointed or elected board members of non-profit organizations; 2) Latinas age 25 and older; 3) Latinas who have at least five years of experience in leadership roles; and 4) Women of
any Latino background. Participants’ ages ranged from 33 years to 53 years, and their Latino heritages were Colombian, Mexican, Panamanian, Peruvian, and Puerto Rican. Participants used the following terms to self-identify their race: Brown, Latina, Hispanic/Latina, Latino/White, Afro-Latina, Hispanic, White (Latina) and Mixed. Three participants were born in the United States. The total years in community leadership roles ranged from 6 to 27 years.

Primary methods of data collection included in-depth interviews, field notes and document analysis. In-depth interviews lasted an average of 90 minutes, were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Data from the interviews, field notes and documents (CV’s, articles and website pages) were analyzed inductively using the constant comparative method to derive the study’s findings. Analysis of the data revealed four main themes about the learning experiences of Latinas in their leadership practices. For research question one, the main theme is Using Latina Specific Strategies to learn to navigate their leadership practices among different cultures. For research question two, three themes were identified to understand the factors that influence the leadership practices of Latina leaders. The themes are: 1) Navigating the Intersecting Dynamics of Gender and Ethnicity, 2) Lifting up the Community through Quests for Learning, and 3) Developing Leadership Practices around the Prismatic Reflections of Family.

Conclusions and Discussion

Five major conclusions were derived from the findings of this study. The conclusions that can be drawn about the learning experiences of Latina leaders are: 1) Latinas’ specific strategies to negotiate leadership practices between cultures are unique to their lived experiences in the Southeastern United States; 2) Latina leaders’
intersecting dynamics of gender and ethnicity challenge their leadership practices; 3) Latinas’ leadership practices spring directly from their cultural roots and values; 4) Spirituality and connectedness shape Latina leaders’ learning experiences, and 5) Latina leaders’ learning experiences and leadership traits create a model for emancipatory leadership.

**Conclusion 1: Latinas’ Specific Strategies to Negotiate Leadership Practices between Cultures Are Unique To Their Lived Experiences in the Southeastern United States**

The first conclusion of this study is that Latina leaders have learned to develop Latina specific strategies to negotiate their leadership practices between cultures in the Southeastern United States. These strategies are unique to each Latina leader and are embedded in her own reality. The use of Latina specific strategies such as having an awareness of how others position them, negotiating outsider-insider status and managing power alliances are lessons from their unique lived experiences that can be better explained by the intersectionality of their complex lives and their multiple identities as Latinas. Therefore, Latina leadership practices in this study are shaped by the intersectionality of their gender, ethnicity, immigrant status perception and the geographic location of their practices. The most suitable way to describe this phenomenon is through the lenses of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Phoenix, 2006). It would be deceiving to understand the lived experiences of Latina leaders only in terms of their gender and/or ethnicity.

Intersectionality refers “to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements,
and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis, p. 68). Furthermore, intersectionality “addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgment of difference among women” (p. 70). Latina leaders’ experiences and learning in this study do not necessarily reflect the common experience of Latina women in the U.S. Latinos are a heterogeneous group and though they might hold common “Latino” values and beliefs, each one of them has an experience that has been shaped by their own intersectionality. The strategies Latina leaders in this study have learned to use to negotiate their practices between cultures are unique to their experiences in the Southeastern United States. These experiences have allowed Latina leaders to create meaning or knowledge that is informed by the challenges and the need of negotiating or shifting their multiple identities in each individual interaction. Hurtado (1996) explains that it is the “unique knowledge that can be gleaned from the interstices of multiple and stigmatized social identities” (p. 375). Furthermore, “all identities are socially constructed and therefore the outcome of context-specific relationships” (p. 376).

Latina leaders in this study have made visible their multiple identities or shifting positionalities that constitute their everyday leadership practices in diverse cultures in the racially divided South and the power relations that are essential to them (Phoenix, 2006). There are core principles of intersectionality that provide an understanding of what the findings have shown about the dynamic and complex lives of Latina leaders and their practices. Intersectionality:

(a) Resists additive models that treat categories of social identity as additive, parallel categories and instead theorizes categories as intersecting; (b) adheres to
anti-essentialist politics and the variation within categories of social identity; (c) recognizes that social identity categories and the power systems that given meaning shift across time and geographical location; (d) embraces the coexistence of power and oppression and acknowledges that they are not mutually exclusive; and (e) changes the conditions of society such that the power hierarchies are dismantled in efforts to build a more just world. (Smooth, 2010, p. 33)

In terms of resisting additive models, the Latinas in this study provided experiences and learning that cannot merely be understood in isolation, in paralleled categories, or in aspects of identity such as gender, class, ethnicity, perceived race, but that can be explained by intersecting them. Latina leaders’ different aspects of identities inform each other and when intersecting “produce a way of experiencing the world as sometime oppressed and marginalized and sometime privileged and advantaged depending on the context” (Smooth, 2010, p. 34).

The lived experiences of Latinas in this study have shown that there is a great variation within categories of social identity, making it difficult to essentializing or reducing their experiences to “the Latina leader experience” (Smooth, 2010). Additionally, Latinas have provided examples of how the power in their leadership practices shifts “across contexts of time and location” (p. 34). Furthermore, Latinas in this study have experienced both privilege and marginalization as Smooth explains “women who represent groups that have no traditionally held power are often situated within this paradox of power and oppression as leaders. At once, they can be both marginalized and empowered” (p. 35). Lastly, Latina leaders ultimate goal is to improve the conditions of the people in their community, Latinas achieve this through
emancipatory efforts. Jordan-Zachary (2007) asserts that persons who experience the
effects of life at the intersection exhibit a liberatory agency, it is “the imperative to
change the existing conditions and take action from their location intersection toward
impacting the lives of those both within and between social identity categories” (Smooth,
2010, p. 35).

Conclusion 2: Latina Leaders’ Intersecting Dynamics of Gender and Ethnicity

Challenge their Leadership Practices

Latina leaders’ challenges in this study correspond to the intersecting dynamics of
their gender and ethnicity—many of the challenges cannot be attributed only to their
gender or ethnicity or perceived race. Similar to Black women, Latinas are stereotyped
and subjected to double jeopardy. Thus, the Latina leaders in this study face additional
barriers that are associated with having a double or triple jeopardy status due to holding
multiple minority statuses or identities: women, Latinas, and immigrants. Double
jeopardy is a term coined by Beale (1970) to explain the experiences of Black women in
the American society: “As blacks, they suffer all the burdens of prejudice and
mistreatment that fall on anyone with dark skin. As women they bear the additional
burden of having to cope with white and black men” (King, 1988, p. 46). Latina leaders’
identities are simultaneously shaped by their female gender, their Latino ethnicity, and
their perceived immigrant status; consequently, it can be concluded in this study that the
more minority identities Latina leaders held, the more stereotypes and discriminations
they faced. Latinas in this study concurrently faced more than two forms of stereotypes
and the respective discrimination, prejudices and biases associated with them in their
leadership practices.
Women in this study further expressed an awareness of the negative perceptions and stereotypes related to their perceived race, ethnicity, gender, and the population they serve. Latina leaders expressed that they are discriminated against because they are women; they are Latinas; and they are leaders for the Latino community; this means they are triple minority and they face triple jeopardy at any given time. Therefore specific stereotypes in this study can be categorized in three areas: stereotypes due to gender, stereotypes due to ethnicity, and stereotypes due to the population they serve. Gender stereotypes were related to being passive in their leadership roles or being the hot Latina that the media portrays. Ethnicity stereotypes corresponded to being the Latina token, not being from around here, and to lacking leadership capabilities due to speaking English with Spanish accent. Lastly, the stereotypes associated with the population they serve were related to being uneducated, lacking English language proficiency, being undocumented, living in poverty, and having too many children. These findings build and support the assertion of a previous study on Latinas in professional occupations; (Hite, 2007) found that Latinas tend to struggle with issues of acculturation, belonging, discrimination, and family-work balance (Hite, 2007).

Latina leaders in this study were less apt to articulate gender discrimination, rather than ethnic discrimination examples. In the case of Latina leaders in the Southeastern United States, it is ethnicity and not gender that mainly puts them in a disadvantaged position. Latina leaders in this study did not allow the stereotypes of their intersecting dynamics of gender and ethnicity hamper their motivation from achieving their goals and meeting their expectations as community leaders. By having an awareness of the stereotypes that directly affect them, Latina leaders in this study have been able to
overcome the barriers that stereotypes create in their practices. At the same time, Latinas leaders in this study have contradicted the common stereotypes of what it means to be a Latino woman: dominated by men, uneducated, and conformed to gender role or expectations. Latinas in this study who were married had the support of their husbands; their husbands in many instances were part of their support system and motivated them to continue pursuing their leadership roles. Furthermore, Latina leaders are educated women, they believed in the value of formal education and the importance of being a lifelong learner. Latinas in this study have pursued bachelor’s and master’s degrees as well as certifications and continuing education credits.

Findings did not indicate a conflict in gender roles between being wives and/or mothers and being community leaders. While it was found that being a Latina leader challenges their work and family balance, this challenge cannot be attributed to conflict in gender roles but to the nature of their work, how connected Latinas are with the communities and the people they serve, and the intersecting dynamics of gender and ethnicity.

As the literature reports on women leaders and balancing work and family, Latinas in this study did not escape the struggles and stress associated with balancing their family and leadership responsibilities. However, the Latinas in this study often managed their work and family responsibilities by merging the two. Additionally, community work is a family affair for Latina leaders in this study. Additionally, family played a big role in helping Latina leaders balance their work and family; both immediate and extended family provided support. Thus, it can be concluded that including multigenerational family support (mothers, grandmothers, aunts) and having spouse
support help Latina leaders overcome the challenges associated with their leadership practices.

**Conclusion 3: Latinas’ Leadership Practices Springs Directly from Their Cultural Roots and Values**

The third conclusion of this study is that the leadership practices of Latina leaders are embedded in their cultural roots and family values. Findings in this study show that Latinas have exhibited in their leadership practices their family values and culture. For Latina leaders, family examples set their paths to community leadership, family cultural values are engrained in their leadership practices, and family is their main support. Additionally, Latina leaders’ cultural background facilitated their leadership practices with a collectivistic approach to learning and practice.

Findings show that Latinas’ path to community leadership is early determined by family experiences and examples. Similarly, Lopez-Mulnix et al., (2011) in their study of eight Latina business leaders asserted that their leadership journeys as women “are rooted in similar ground tilled long before they enter the world—a strong sense of family, influential religious traditions, and formidable ties to their cultural heritage” (p. 2). Additionally, their participants “grew up with an extreme determination to get educated that was fostered by parents and grandparents who believed education was the path to success” (p. 3). Latinas in this study revealed that their parents and grandparents have instilled the value of education and learning in them, it was a common sentiment that “education is something that nobody can take away from you.” Similar to Latina leaders in this study, they shared that their parents, grandparents, and other familial mentors communicated the value of education, sense of responsibility and accountability and
passion to them. Additionally, they “experienced a strong sense of family as children and continue to value family—both immediate and extended—as adults” (p. 2)

Furthermore, Latino cultural values learned from family has long been documented in the literature (Gomez, 1994; Gomez et al., 2001; Lopez-Mulnix et al., 2011; Marin and Marin, 1991) and this was a consistent finding in this group of women. This group of Latina leaders did not attribute their values to the “Latino” culture but to their families’ cultural values.

For all of the Latinas in this study, their own family cultural values informed their leadership practices. Family cultural values identified among all of the participants were serving others without expecting anything in return; treating people with respect, care and love; the importance of being prepared; the value of quality education; the importance of family and the sense of family among members of their organizations; good or strong work ethics; and a sense of responsibility.

**Conclusion 4: Spirituality and Connectedness Shape Latina Leaders’ Learning Experiences**

Learning is much more than behavioral changes in individuals. Learning is a constant meaning-making process of the individuals’ experiences, which are embedded in their own reality and their interactions with their social context. Furthermore, individuals’ learning manifestations are unique and their complexity cannot be explained with only one adult learning theory or conceptual framework, nor do individuals have the same orientation to learning across their lifetime. The Latinas in this study have shown that their learning experiences in leadership practices correspond to an overlapping mesh of adult learning conceptual frameworks.
The fourth conclusion of this study is that Latina leaders’ learning experiences are shaped by spirituality and connectedness that predispose them to engage in a variety of adult learning experience. Spirituality has an influence on how Latina leaders in this study construct knowledge and make meaning as Tisdell (2003) has explained, “spirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning” (p. 20). Latinas in this study see their community work and their leadership roles as their purpose or mission in life; they have a strong sense of what their mission or call in life is. This finding shares similarity with Tisdell’s (2000b) study on spirituality and emancipatory adult education in women adult educators for social change: “for [Tisdell’s] participants, spirituality was about experiences of a perceived higher power or a life force” and “about making ultimate meaning out of one’s life purpose” (p. 331). Another similarity to Tisdell’s findings is that Latina leaders in this study have been found to be emancipatory education agents in their communities, working for social justice and change. This finding supports Tisdell’s connection between spirituality and emancipatory education; she asserts “their spirituality informs their work for social justice” and “that having a sense of one’s life’s mission and drawing regularly on what gives one sustenance to do that social change work, which for many is related to the spiritual, is a needed component for emancipatory education efforts” (p. 333)

This study was not designed to explore spirituality in Latina leaders; however, findings revealed the existence of a spiritual aspect of the women and how it has shaped their learning and informed their emancipatory education efforts. Tisdell (2003) presents seven assumptions about spirituality: 1) Spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated; 2) Spirituality is about awareness and honoring of
wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of .... the Life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or Great Spirit; 3) Spirituality is fundamentally about meaning-making; 4) Spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment; 5) Spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self; 6) Spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made more concrete in art forms such as music, art, image, symbol, and ritual which are manifested culturally; and 7) Spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise (p. 28-29). With respect to these assumptions, the nature of spirituality in Latina leaders’ experiences found in the data supported all of them but the last one, “spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise.”

The role of spirituality in learning and creating meaning among Latinas has been previously supported in the Chicana/Latina feminist literature (Godinez, 2006; Gonzalez, 2001; Perez, 1998). As manifested in this group of Latina leaders, Delgado Bernal (2001) found that “women [Chicanas] directly connect their spirituality to their educational journey, their learning, or their desire to help others” (p. 634). Consequently, the importance of spirituality in Latina leaders corresponds to Latinas having “a way of learning and knowing from their homespace, as energy, from mothers’ and elders’ cultural knowledge” that will inform their “practices for negotiating and navigating from day to day” (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 648).

Additionally, “while everyone’s spirituality is uniquely her or his own, the spirituality of most people connects to what they value and how they behave in the world” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 42). Latinas in this study value the connection they have with
their community and they behave as emancipatory education agents to improve the conditions of people in their communities. Latinas leaders in this study “focus on the transformation of the world” (p. 41).

Latina leaders in this study “are strongly influenced by the spiritual and cultural traditions of those with whom” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 116) they interact in their communities, additionally, spirituality allows for “discovering our connectedness with others” (p. 116). Flannery (2000) states that “our knowing is deeply intertwined with our worldviews, with our histories, our families, our social groups, our experiences and so forth” (p. 112); Latina leaders in this study supported this way of knowing. Additionally, Latina leaders “learn through interactions and relationships with others” (p.124). Moreover, Latina leaders in this study are "connected knowers" (Belenky et al., 1997).

Because Latina leaders’ connectedness with communities and people they serve, they learn from their own experiences but they also learn from other people’s experiences. Latina leaders have learned to negotiate their leadership practices between cultures through their own experiences and interactions with members of those different cultures; additionally, they have learned what programs or services are needed in the community from empathy and other people’s lives experiences (Belenky et al., 1997). Connected knowers "develop procedures for gaining access to other people's knowledge. At the heart of these procedures is the capacity for empathy" and they believe that truth is "personal, particular, and grounded in firsthand experience" (p. 113).

In quests for learning and acquiring knowledge to be able to better practice their leadership roles between different cultures, Latina leaders engage in a variety of adult learning experiences. The literature in the adult education field tends to portray Latinas’
learning experiences from the deficit perspective and to focus on Latinas’ needs for basic adult education programs. However, this study’s findings show how Latina leaders engage in self-directed and experiential learning activities, as well in the practice of critical reflection to make meaning of their experiences. Findings revealed that all of the women engage in experiential learning and its importance in understanding how to negotiate leadership practices between cultures; experiential learning as it has been define by Jarvis (1992):

Is the essence of everyday living and of conscious experience: it is the process of transforming that experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and beliefs.
It is about the continuing process of making sense of everyday experience—an experience happens at the intersection of a conscious human life with time, space, society, and relationship (p. 11).

Furthermore, the limited research done on emancipatory learning suggest that adult educators should engage Latinas in emancipatory learning practices so that they can free themselves from what oppresses or limit their options (Cranton, 1999; Mezirow, 1991); however, Latina leaders in this study have shown to become the emancipatory education agents in their communities and the ones that engage the population they serve in emancipatory learning practices.

**Conclusion 5: Latina Leaders’ Learning Experiences and Leadership Traits Create a Model for Emancipatory Leadership**

The final conclusion of this study is that the findings from this study support the creation of an emancipatory leadership model that explains the learning process of Latina leaders and their leadership traits to lift up the communities they serve. Latina leaders in
this study have exhibited characteristics that correspond to transformational and collaborative leadership. Latina leaders’ experiences support Tichy’s and Devanna’s (1986) characteristics of transformational leaders: they are courageous agents of change; they believe in people; they empower their followers; they are value-driven and behave in accordance with their values; they are lifelong learners; they have the ability to face the complex, ambiguous and uncertain situations; and they are good visionaries.

Additionally, Latina’s leadership practices in this study mirror Bordas’ (2007) assumptions on how leaders “grow their communities by engaging people in the following practices: (1) encouraging participation and building consensus, (2) creating a community of leaders, (3) generating a shared vision, (4) using culturally effective communication, and (5) weaving partnerships and connections (p.121).

From the Latina leaders’ experiences presented in their narratives and findings, it can be inferred that they have the qualities of the nine tenets of effective leadership identified by Lopez-Mulnix et al. (2011). Latina leaders in this study: 1) are passionate about their organizations, 2) are reflective, 3) are competent, 4) are great communicators, 5) understand the role that culture plays in shaping the way they lead, 6) possess the physical and emotional stamina, energy, and resilience needed to persevere in the long run, 7) are focused yet forward thinking, 8) respect and value individuality, and 9) possess credibility” (p. 130).

Figure 1 shows the Latina leaders process to lift up the community through emancipatory leadership. This process begins with their spiritual learning nature and their higher calling to serve the community. This learning motivation nurtures Latina leaders’ need to learn and create meaning of their experiences; therefore the process continues
with Latinas being engaged and participating in different learning approaches to acquire the knowledge and skills that transform them in emancipatory education agents. Latina leaders become emancipatory education agents to encourage people to be aware of the conditions or factors that trouble them and to give a voice to underrepresented or oppressed communities. This emancipatory leadership model is embedded in the aforementioned Latina leaders’ effective leadership qualities, and it is affected by the intersecting dynamics of identity such as gender, culture, family values, ethnicity, immigration status, and geographical location of the leadership practices.

Figure 1. Latina Leaders Process to Lift Up the Community through Emancipatory Leadership
Implications for Theory

Findings from this study have added to the knowledge base of the adult education and leadership literature. Research concerning Latinas in adult education is inadequate and the existing research has portrayed Latinas from a deficit perspective (Jeria, 1999). Additionally, the findings and conclusions add to the small body of literature in leadership on Latina leaders in community development. Including the stories from this study will raise awareness of Latina leaders and their contributions to the field.

The importance of the findings for adult education is significant; this study confirmed that Latinas engaged in a variety of learning. Latinas engaged in self-directed, informal, experiential, transformative, and emancipatory learning. Additionally, Latinas in this study confirmed the relationship between spirituality and emancipatory education. The findings have highlighted the necessity to conduct more empirical studies and theoretical work to document Latinas’ experiences in self-directed, informal, incidental, and experiential adult learning. In sum, the adult education field should revisit and update their learning approaches and theoretical frameworks to include the learning experiences that Latinas bring to the field. Additionally, the field of adult education will benefit from adding the intersectional factors of Latinas into their theoretical frameworks; this notion of intersectionality will broaden the perspective on women’s learning and the contextual learning factors previously studied.

Related to the leadership scholarship, Latina leaders have showed behaviors and/or traits of transformational and collaborative leadership styles. Furthermore, Latina leaders in this study lift up the community through an emancipatory leadership approach that empowers communities to improve their conditions. This emancipatory leadership
approach provides a framework for leadership theory and praxis to include issues of inequalities and oppression. The further development of the components of this emancipatory leadership style will make the field of leadership stronger and more inclusive of the multiple perspectives that Latina leaders bring to the field.

It is important to conduct more empirical studies on Latinas in leadership to identify and understand the leadership characteristics and styles that inform their practices and make them effective leaders. Even though “Latinas have always exercised leadership, especially in families and communities” (Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007, p. 267), leadership theories have yet not included the contributions of Latina leadership practices and their development in their theories or models. The necessity of adding Latina leaders’ experiences in the leadership scholarship corresponds to the emerging shift of Latinas holding leadership roles that will grow along with the changes in Latino demographics; additionally, “Latinas are just now beginning to achieve power and leadership in United States society” (p. 267). Culturally relevant and effective models of leadership development that account for Latinas leaders’ values and experiences need to be created and documented to expand the knowledge base of the leadership scholarship.

**Implications for Practice**

This study makes several contributions that can enhance the practices of both adult education and the field of leadership development; hence, incorporating the learning nature and motivations of Latina leaders can begin to maximize opportunities for Latinas to reach their potential. Further, the findings illustrate a process of how Latina leaders
learn and become emancipatory education agents in their communities, this process can inform or be integrated in leadership training programs.

Additionally, findings from this study have provided insights on what is important to the leadership development of Latina leaders in community development: Latinas have a great desire or “calling” to serve the community and their connectedness with the community becomes the main motivation for engaging in learning activities to improve the quality of life in their communities. Leadership development programs need to capitalize on Latinas transformative experiences to “expand their sense of agency in their leadership roles” (Debebe, 2009) by “creat[ing] an environment in which [Latina leaders] are willing to engage in deep and meaningful exploration of their problems” (p. 10) so that they can connect insights from their experiences to their leadership development.

Furthermore, leadership development programs for Latinas should be aware of the spirituality and connectedness learning nature of Latinas and include practices such as critical reflection and consciousness-raising to address perceived stereotypes and biases that challenge their leadership practices; “these stereotypes not only influence how various women lead (or ought to lead) but also where they lead (geographic or issue areas) and who they lead (groups of women, boards of directors, citizens)” (O’Brien & Shea, 2010, p. 48).

To conclude, findings from this study are also important to the human resource and organization development (HROD) field. These findings assist in recognizing and understanding the factors that influence the leadership practices of Latina leaders; thus, HROD practices can be designed around the values and experiences of Latinas to create
strategies that would advance and enhance Latinas’ pathways to leadership development and practices.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study focused on the learning experience of Latinas in leadership practices between cultures in communities of the Southeastern United States, I propose to replicate this same study with Latina leaders in the Southwestern, Northeastern and Northwestern regions of the United States with the purpose to identify similarities, differences and or unique characteristics of Latina leaders in the United States. These findings would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of Latina leaders that would inform the research and practice around Latina leaders and their learning and leadership development.

Another suggestion to expand this study is to explore the differences and similarities between Latinas born in the U.S. and Latinas immigrants.

The findings from the study have raised some other research questions that should be further included. For instance: What factors influence the learning of Latina leaders? How do Latina leaders define spirituality? What leadership model Latina leaders use to develop their practices? What are Latina leaders’ leadership traits? Furthermore, using this study as a foundation, I propose to conduct a grounded theory study to further develop the theory of the emancipatory leadership approach that emerged from this study. This study will allow for a theoretical analysis of the concepts and components of this leadership approach as well as to identify additional features in the model.

Additionally, I propose to expand the focus from Latina leaders to other ethnic or underrepresented women leaders in the Southwestern U.S. An exploration of how other women, for instance Vietnamese or Indian women leaders learn to negotiate their
leadership roles and what factors influences their leadership practices in the South can provide a valuable insight to be able to promote practices that break down stereotypes and biases.

The theoretical framework for future research should include intersectionality; “what we know about women’s leadership will increase as more scholars introduce intersectionality into their research” (Smooth, 2010, p. 39). This theoretical framework allows for a better understanding of the ways in which diverse and underrepresent women with their multiple identities navigate their worlds. Furthermore, methodology should include non-participant observation of the women work environment as well of their interactions.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the learning experiences of Latina leaders who work in community development in the Southeastern United States. I inquired about how Latina leaders learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills and what factors influenced their leadership practices. I concluded that Latina leaders have learned specific strategies to negotiate leadership practices between cultures and they are unique to their lived experiences in the Southeastern United States. Furthermore, the challenges Latina leaders face in their leadership practices correspond to the intersecting dynamics that their gender and ethnicity bring. Additionally, Latinas’ leadership practices spring directly from their cultural roots and family values; and spirituality and connectedness shape their learning experiences.

This study adds to the women’s learning scholarship and brings forth the need to continuously address issues of gender, ethnicity and their associated stereotypes and
discriminations in the scholarship of adult education and leadership. More specifically, there should be more research that highlights how Latinas in leadership roles make meaning of their multiple identities when they intersect and the contributions they make. The nine Latina leaders in this study are successful, they have made it! It is my hope that their stories counter the negative perceptions about Latinas, and their learning inspire the next generation of Latina leaders.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

RESEARCH LETTER OF INVITATION

There are certain considerations unique to women residing in the U.S. regarding their learning and leadership experiences and I am interested in your learning experiences as a Latina leader. I am currently conducting a qualitative RESEARCH to explore the learning experiences of Latinas leaders who work in community development. There have been few studies conducted by Latinas about Latinas and this makes for an exciting opportunity.

The findings from this research will tremendously advance our knowledge in Latinas’ learning and leadership experiences. This Research aims to elicit answers to supplement the women’s ways of learning and women’s leadership scholarship. The benefit of exploring Latinas’ learning and their leadership experiences is crucial to create a more balanced representation of women in our scholarship, and more inclusive environments for work.

My name is Carolina Darbisi and I am hoping that you will be willing to talk with me about your learning experiences and your leadership role in the community.

I understand time is valuable, my research design includes two (2) face to face meetings, with an interview protocol that is designed to last less than 2 hours of your time, with time and location for meetings arranged according to your convenience. In addition, follow ups from your interview answers are designed to be conducted via email or phone to be respectful of your time and contributions to the research.

Eligibility criteria for the research:

- Are you a woman of any Latino background?
- Are you older than 25 years?
- Are you the executive director/CEO/president of a non-profit organization or an appointed or elected board member of a non-profit organization?
- Do you have at least five years of experience in leadership roles?
If you answer yes to the four questions and you would like to participate in the research, please respond to my invitation by email at cdarbisi@uga.edu. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions about the research or the eligibility criteria.

I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Sincerely,

Laura L. Bierema (Primary Investigator)
Professor
Adult Education/HROD
The University of Georgia
850 College Station Road
405 River’s Crossing, Athens, GA 30602
706-542-6174 voice ~706-542-4024 fax
bierema@uga.edu

Carolina Darbisi, MEd (Co-Investigator)
PhD Candidate
Adult education
The University of Georgia
cdarbisi@uga.edu
(706)-714-2109
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the learning experiences of Latinas leaders who work in community development.

1) How do Latinas living in the U.S. learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills?

2) what are the perceived barriers that Latinas experience in practicing their leadership skills? and

3) what are the perceived supports that Latinas experience in practicing their leadership skills?.

I. Participants’ Background and Learning

1. Tell me about your early life experiences and influences that have led you to do community work

2. What were the most important things you learned from your family?

3. Tell me about your schooling experiences

II. Current Leadership Role or Position

1. Describe the work that you currently do

✓ What do you like the most about your current role?
✓ What do you dislike the most about your current role?
2. Describe at what point in your life you realized you could be a leader for the community
   ✓ How do your background and beliefs influence your role as a leader?
   ✓ How have you learned to be a leader?
   ✓ Describe the most important skills that you have
   ✓ How do you nurture your leadership skills?

3. Tell me about when you find yourself working in different cultures
   ✓ How this challenges you?
   ✓ How have you learned to figure out how to function among different cultures?
   ✓ How have you learned to effectively practice your leadership skills when you find yourself in different cultures?
   ✓ What have you had to learn to be able to pursue leadership roles?

III. Barriers and Challenges

1. What is difficult about you being a leader?

2. Tell me about obstacles you have encountered
   ✓ how they have had positive/or negative effects on you

3. How do you overcome challenging situations or conflicts associated with your leadership role?

4. Tell me about people in your life who nurture your leadership

IV. Reflecting and summary

1. If you were to be a mentor for an emerging Latina leader,
   ✓ What would you teach her?
   ✓ What are the most helpful things you have learned?
   ✓ What are the least helpful?

2. If you could start your path to be a leader in your community over again, what would you change?

3. Reflecting on our conversation, is there anything else you would like to share?
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

I, _________________________________, agree to participate in a research study titled “Learning Experiences of Latinas Leaders” conducted by Carolina Darbisi, a graduate student from the University of Georgia, cdarbisi@uga.edu under the direction of Dr. Laura Bierema, a professor in the Adult Education Department, bierema@uga.edu. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without any penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information that can be identified as mine returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the learning experiences of Latinas leaders who work in community development. The following research questions guide the study: 1) How do Latinas living in the U.S. learn to negotiate between cultures to practice their leadership skills? 2) What are the perceived barriers that Latinas experience in practicing their leadership skills? and 3) What are the perceived supports that Latinas experience in practicing their leadership skills?

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. If I chose to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- Meet with interviewer, to openly and honestly answer questions about my experiences in my leadership. Researchers may contact me up to 10 times during a period of six (6) months.
- Complete Demographic Questionnaire, which will take approximately 10 minutes.
- Answer questions in a face-to-face, audio recorded, interview which will last approximately 90 minutes.
- At the time of the interview, voluntarily provide documents that are related to my daily work such as job description, recommendation letters or newspaper articles.
- Be contacted by email or phone to clarify or follow up on my interview answers at any time during late January 2012- July 2012. If I choose to follow up with my answers via phone, the phone call will be scheduled to last approximately 45 minutes.
- Review a summary of my interview to verify that the researchers understood my intended meaning. This review will take approximately one hour of my time.
As a participant, I will not benefit directly from this study. However, my participation will contribute to the body of knowledge in Adult Education about how Latino women leaders learn and develop their leadership skills. I will have an opportunity to share what I have experienced and learned in my leadership role while working in the community as well as my perceptions and insights on this topic. This could better allow me to understand what makes me a leader and how I learn to develop my skills.

I will be asked to choose a pseudonym and this pseudonym will be used to identify my interview transcripts. The researchers from the study may call me to clarify my information at any time from January 2012 to July 2012.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. My name and the name of my organization will not be used on documents related to the research; only criteria for the selection of participants will be published.

Interviews will be audio-recorded and will be transcribed by the researcher(s) and/or a hired transcriptionist, and they will be kept for five years, at which time will be destroyed. Names or specific affiliations will not be included in any report or publication of the study findings. Quotes used in any report of the findings will not be attributed to the participant by name or in any other way that would lead to identification of the participant or the organization.

Carolina Darbisi who can be reached by phone at 706-714-2109 or by e-mail at cdarbisi@uga.edu will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I give my permission for the researchers to audio-record my voice during my interview. Circle one: YES / NO. Initial _____.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Carolina Darbisi
Name of Researcher    Signature    Date
_________________________    _______________________  __________

Name of Participant    Signature    Date
_________________________    _______________________  __________

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please take the opportunity to complete the following demographic questionnaire. It is being requested of all participants in the research study titled “Learning Experiences of Latinas Leaders” conducted by Carolina Darbisi, a graduate student from the University of Georgia, cdarbisi@uga.edu, under the direction of Dr. Laura Bierema, a professor in the Adult Education Department, bierema@uga.edu. As stated in the consent form, your participation is voluntary and you can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without any penalty. You can ask to have all of the information about you returned, removed from the research records, or destroyed. Thank you for your cooperation!

Personal Background

1. Please select a pseudonym: ____________________________________________

2. What is your place of Birth? _______________________________________

3. In what year were you born? _______________________________________

4. Please describe your parents’ or guardians’ highest educational level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mother or other guardian</strong></th>
<th><strong>Father or other guardian</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>(check one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ No diploma</td>
<td>☐ No diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ High school diploma/GED</td>
<td>☐ High school diploma/GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Some college</td>
<td>☐ Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Associates’ degree</td>
<td>☐ Associates’ degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Bachelors degree</td>
<td>☐ Bachelors degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Graduate degree</td>
<td>☐ Graduate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I don’t know</td>
<td>☐ I don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. What was your household income as a child? (Please check the appropriate box)

- [ ] Less than $20,000
- [ ] $20,000 - $29,999
- [ ] $30,000 - $39,999
- [ ] $40,000 - $49,999
- [ ] $50,000 - $59,999
- [ ] $60,000 - $69,999
- [ ] $70,000 - $79,999
- [ ] $80,000 - $89,999
- [ ] $90,000 or more

6. How many people in your household as a child? _________________________

7. What is your marital status? (Please check the appropriate box)

- [ ] Single
- [ ] Married
- [ ] Divorced
- [ ] Widowed

8. Do you have children? [ ] Yes [ ] No If so, how many? ______________

9. How do you identify yourself in terms of race? ____________________________

10. Do you identify yourself as Latina? [ ] Yes [ ] No

11. Are you currently employed? [ ] Yes [ ] No

12. Job Title/Position: ___________________________________________________

13. Number of years in the profession: ______________________________________

**Educational Background**

14. What is your level of educational attainment? _____________________________

15. If applicable, please provide your Major or Specialization area:

   Undergraduate: __________________________________________________________

   Graduate: ______________________________________________________________

16. If applicable, please list any certifications or vocational training:

   ________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________
Leadership Background

17. What is your current leadership role? __________________________

18. Number of years in your current leadership role:__________________

19. Number of years in leadership roles: _____________________________

20. What is your estimated annual salary? ___________________________