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A GROUNDED THEORY ON BECOMING  
A REVOLUTIONARY LATINX  
STUDENT LEADER

by

Eva Martinez Powless, M.A.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,  
Marquette University,  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

December 2022

ABSTRACT  
A GROUNDED THEORY ON BECOMING  
A REVOLUTIONARY LATINX  
STUDENT LEADER

Eva Martinez Powless, M.A.

Marquette University, 2022

Research on the leadership experiences of Latinx college students and diverse populations suggests differences in the way these populations experience leadership on the college campus when compared to their White counterparts. These differences put Latinx students and other diverse student populations at a disadvantage and on the margins of leadership education. This qualitative, grounded theory study explored the leadership experiences of 11 undergraduate Latinx college students in the United States. The theory inducted from the data, and the three-stage model, brought to light three themes and 19 processes that explain how Latinx students become “revolutionary leaders” in college.

A revolutionary Latinx student leader is a change agent on the college campus, taking purposeful action toward equity, inclusion, and justice. By engaging in the struggle for change (stage one), Latinx students become revolutionary leaders (stage two) who engage in positional leadership roles on the college campus (stage three) to make a difference. Latinx students must progress through the stages with determination, commitment, strength, resilience, courage, persistence, drive, and a selfless mindset. Latinx students develop into revolutionary leaders by challenging negative stereotypes, engaging in student activism, navigating White spaces effectively, and embracing Latinx culture/identity. Students committed to fundamental change and advancing the Latinx community develop critical skills and abilities to trailblaze as first-generation bilingual, bicultural students.

Family members, role models, and communities influence Latinx students positively as ecosystems of support. Latinx students counteract negative influences, such as the lack of Latinx representation and mainstream societal expectations, by persisting through the struggles, building resiliency, and practicing leadership. As formal Latinx student organization leaders, students work toward positive social change and equity for all Latinx students. As revolutionary leaders, Latinx students make a difference on the college campus, find fulfillment in the struggle, and aspire to graduate from college despite the struggle. Engaging in formal leadership roles during college is one of the highest expressions of leadership for students in the study. The discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations provide a framework for Latinx student leadership development and suggestions for practice and research.

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Eva Martinez Powless, M.A.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The Latinx community experienced the second-fastest population growth between 2000 and 2019 (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021), accounting for a population of 62.1 million as of 2022, making the Latinx community the largest racial ethnic population in the United States (Passel, Lopez, & Cohn, 2022). This trend has contributed to the largest representation of Latinx students in higher education today—and the trend is expected to continue (Garcia, 2019). As of fall 2015, there were 3 million undergraduate Latinx students enrolled in colleges and universities across the nation, which accounted for 17.6% of the total undergraduate college population (Flores, Lopez, & Krogstad, 2016; Garcia, 2019). However, Latinx students remain underrepresented in higher education and have some of the lowest enrollment, engagement, retention, and graduation rates (Fry & Taylor, 2013; Garcia, 2019; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2008; Torres, 2003). Specifically, Latinx students face unique retention and persistence barriers, including finances (Ortiz, 2004; Phinney, Dennis, & Gutierrez, 2005), sense of belonging (Castillo et al., 2006; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), unwelcoming campus climate (Garcia, 2019; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Turner, 1994), identity development concerns (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Torres, 2003), leadership involvement barriers (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia, Huerta, Ramirez., & Patron, 2017; Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015), college adjustment (Russell & Petrie, 1992) and social support roadblocks (Gloria, 1997; Gloria et al., 2005). Respectively, only 18.8% of the overall Latinx population holds a bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census, 2020).

Despite the rise of the Latinx population and millions of Latinx students enrolled in postsecondary institutions, only 15% of the overall U.S. Latinx population holds a bachelor's or advanced/professional degree (Krogstad, 2016).

Latinx students' educational journey presents a major concern for colleges and universities that aspire to serve this population. As more Latinx students enroll in higher education, it is imperative that colleges and universities understand how to support these students (Garcia, 2019; Lozano, 2015; Torres, 2003). Although there are multiple and multi-faceted ways to retain and support underrepresented students (Gloria et al., 2005; Gonzales, Brammer, & Sawilowsky, 2015; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Oseguera et al., 2008; Torres & Hernandez, 2007), one way is through intentional leadership development programming (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Guthrie, Jones, & Osteen, 2016; Mahoney, 2016; Suarez, 2015). Dugan (2011) explains, “[leadership development] is a means to live the mission of higher education through the personal development of the next generation of societal leaders and change agents” (p. 80). For Latinx college students, leadership development programming addresses not only students' immediate developmental needs, but also builds leadership capacity for continued development of the Latinx community. As a branch of student development theory (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993), leadership development has been identified as a learning outcome and retention tool for college students (Astin, 1993; Dugan & Komives, 2011). However, leadership development programs are not inclusive of Latinx students' leadership realities and “racial, ethnic, and cultural ways of knowing” (Garcia, 2019, p. 49). Many scholars identify the paucity of empirical studies attending to the unique needs of Latinx college students to designing inclusive leadership pedagogy (Chin, 2013;

Dugan, Kodama, & Gebhardt, 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Komives, Dugan, Owen, Wagner, & Slack, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). While there is some literature that describes how Latinx college students view and define leadership differently (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015), these differences have yet to be explored in greater depth. As such, the intersection of Latinx identity, culture, and leadership remains understudied. More research is warranted to understand the intersections of race/ethnicity of Latinx students and their perceptions of leadership, their practice of leadership, and their navigation of leadership in predominantly White spaces. More knowledge on the topic can help leadership educators design inclusive leadership programs to prepare Latinx college students for leadership engagement.

This dissertation focuses specifically on Latinx college students and conceptions of leadership; however, many of the same concerns that apply to Latinx college students also apply to other underrepresented college student populations (Armino et al., 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). The chapter begins with a background of the study and a brief introduction to the concept of leadership. Next, an outline of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and significance of the study are provided. In the final section, key terminology used throughout the study is identified and defined. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

## **Background of the Study**

Demographic changes in higher education have resulted in a much more diverse student body that defines and practices leadership differently from traditional notions of leadership (Arminio et al., 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Lozano, 2015; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Suarez, 2015). However, despite significant demographic changes in society and higher education, leadership development theories and models have remained unchanged (Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer, 2016; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Wall, 2011). While leadership development models are useful for educating and developing White heterosexual men (Arminio et al., 2000; Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011), most leadership models do not fully explain the leadership voices of Latinx students, as the models often avoid a critical analysis of leadership in relation to gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, culture, power, and intersectionality (Arminio et al., 2000; Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan, 2011; Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Renn, 2007; Suarez, 2015). In addition, a dominant leadership narrative (i.e., leadership lens of cisgender, White heterosexual men) is embedded in the fabric of leadership theories and puts underrepresented populations at the margins of leadership education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Beatty, 2015; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Suarez, 2015; Wagner, 2011).

As Latinx college students seek opportunities to develop leadership skills, one can no longer assume that leadership theories and models used to design leadership

development programming apply to all student populations—as if race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation do not matter in the lives of Latinx college students (Chin et al., 2016; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Suarez, 2015). One cannot assume that Latinx students’ check their social identity at the door when engaging and participating in leadership development programming on the college campus (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, & Lovett, 2010; Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Hoyt, 2013; Onorato & Musuba, 2015; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). The intersectionality of one’s social identity shape students’ perception of leadership and the world around them (Abes et al., 2007; Arminio et al., 2000; Dugan, 2011; Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Renn, 2007; Suarez, 2015; Torres et al., 2003). Scholars contend that socio-cultural factors and developmental contexts shape Latinx students’ perceptions of leadership (Guthrie, Jones, & Osteen, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). For example, Abes et al.’s (2007) model underscores how students see themselves establishes the importance of social identities and developmental contexts in students’ meaning making process. They explain, “relationships between socially constructed identities represent a complex interaction among multiple domains of development” (p. 13). This finding suggests that multiple and intersecting identities, such as race and gender, may interact with how Latinx students perceive leadership and make meaning of leadership. While research shows that Latinx college students deviate from the word “leadership” and follow a unique path to leadership development (Arminio et al., 2000; Lozano, 2015), Latinx students’ leadership voices and journeys remain in question (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Dugan et al., 2012). Additional research is warranted to better

understand the leadership epistemologies of Latinx college students. More knowledge on this topic can help leadership educators design inclusive leadership pedagogy.

It is important for leadership educators to better understand how to serve Latinx college students and find ways to help Latinx students grow as leaders (Negrete, 2006). The complexity of leadership paradigms compounds the difficulty and importance of situating leadership in students' experiences. Thus, the next section provides a brief overview of conceptions of leadership, including the industrial and post-industrial leadership paradigms.

**Conceptions of Leadership.** The concept of leadership is complex, and multiple definitions of leadership exist. Leadership as a theoretical lens is associated with the industrial and post-industrial leadership paradigms, and the vast majority of leadership theories derive from organizational studies positioning leadership as socially constructed (Bass, 1995; Bordas, 2013; Grint, 2005; Klenke, 1993; Komives et al., 2011; Northouse, 2013; Weber, 1998). However, leadership studies have yet to embrace diversity and inclusion as a dimension of leadership thus avoiding a critical analysis of leadership in relation to gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, culture, power, and intersectionality (Arminio et al., 2000; Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan, 2011; Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Renn, 2007; Suarez, 2015). In most cases, the unique needs of Latinx and diverse individuals have yet to be explored within the U.S. context (Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2014). While Bordas's (2013) and Ramirez's (2006) Latinx leadership frameworks are examples of inclusive leadership design, leadership frameworks specific to Latinx college students have yet to be implemented in academia (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Dugan et al., 2012).



This section provides a brief introduction to the concept of leadership, discussing the industrial and post-industrial leadership paradigms, and potential limitations of these paradigms.

Industrial leadership theories derived from linear and bureaucratic management philosophies (Bennis, 2003; Northouse, 2013) often referred to as the “great man theory.” These theories consisted of heteropatriarchal philosophies, which situated leadership as male-centric, hierarchical, positional, and authoritative (Burns, 1998; Komives et al., 2006; Northouse, 2013; Rost, 1993). The post-industrial leadership paradigm situates leadership as collaborative, relational, values-based, and character driven (Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1998; Komives et al., 2005; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Northouse, 2013; Rost, 1993; Uhl-Bien, 2006). In the new post-industrial paradigm, leadership is seen as a shared process in which leaders and collaborators/members work together toward a common goal and/or to influence social change (Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1998; Covey, 2013; Komives et al., 2007; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2013; Rost, 1993). Unlike industrial leadership, the post-industrial leadership paradigm embraces the notion that anyone can be a leader and leadership can be learned (Bass, 1985; Bennis, 2003; Covey, 2013; HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 1998; Komives et al., 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2013). This viewpoint postulates leadership growth and development as a critical step towards effective leadership; however, leadership studies used to design prominent leadership development models often overlook race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and power (Arminio et al., 2000; Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan, 2011; Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Renn, 2007; Suarez,

2015). As such, leadership models continue to overlook power, privilege, oppression, racism, sexism, classism, discrimination, marginality, intersectionality, and heteronormativity, as well as specific positionalities like gender and race (Acosta, 2017; Chin & Trimble, 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Guthrie, Jones, & Osteen, 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015).

While post-industrial leadership values de-emphasize hierarchy and authority, there is consensus within the literature that leadership theories continue to promote a dominant leadership narrative. That is, a cisgender, abled-bodied, White heteropatriarchal leadership lens (Astin & Astin, 2000; Beatty, 2015; Chin & Trimble 2014; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Owen, 2012; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015; Wagner, 2011). This dominant leadership lens informs leadership development programs and puts the voices of women and diverse individuals at the margins of leadership education (Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Wagner, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015). For example, most leadership theories have been designed using predominantly White male samples (Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2014; Eagly & Chin, 2010), which reinforces the dominant narrative and overlooks the leadership epistemologies of women and diverse individuals. As such, leadership continues to be perceived as masculine and hierarchical, which benefits cisgender, heterosexual men (Astin & Astin, 2000; Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2014; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011).

As society changes and diversifies, new leadership frameworks that center the diversity of leaders as a dimension of leadership are needed (Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Mahoney, 2016). Current leadership theories do not reflect the leadership styles of all people in society and a better approach is needed to develop diverse individuals (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1998; Chin & Trimble, 2015; Covey, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Lord & Hall, 2007; Northouse, 2013; Rost, 1993; Rost & Baker, 2000). Although Bordas (2013) and Ramirez (2006) have investigated identity and culture within leadership studies, prominent leadership scholars have yet to build on multicultural and Latinx leadership frameworks. As such, leadership theories continue to conjure the traits, behaviors, and attributes of abled-bodied, cisgender, White heterosexual men. Emphasis on a heterosexual White male leader prototype is problematic because it fosters ethnocentrism and leadership bias (Chin & Trimble, 2014). For instance, researchers have found that characteristics of good leadership have often been associated with the traits and behaviors of White male leaders (Chin & Trimble, 2014; Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986). While White male leaders automatically attain trust and credibility, women and leaders of color often have to prove themselves in order to be seen as credible leaders (Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2014). Women and people of color also face scrutiny as leaders and must often conform to the prototypic leadership behaviors expected in the workplace (Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2015; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Lord et al., 1986). Because of the image of the prototypic leader in society (and within leadership theories), leaders of color are often perceived as ineffective leaders (Chin & Trimble, 2014). As such, the image of the prototypic leader (or dominant leadership narrative) is detrimental to the advancement

of leaders of color in all sectors of society (Chin & Trimble, 2014; Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

The dominant leadership paradigm continues to be problematic because it creates an image of a prototypic leader and sends the message that only White men can be leaders (Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2015; Eagly & Chin, 2010). This perception may discourage women, Latinx individuals, and other diverse populations from seeking leadership roles (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005). Further, the dominant paradigm contributes to inequity in leadership education by diminishing the voices of underrepresented groups in society (Chin & Trimble, 2014; Komives et al., 2011; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Because women, people of color, and queer individuals remain underrepresented (and many times invisible) in powerful and influential leadership positions in the nation (Chin & Trimble, 2014; Eagly & Chin, 2010), the dominant leadership paradigm remains a significant barrier to the advancement of diverse groups in society.

Leadership in a diverse society requires more diverse images of leaders (Komives et al., 2011; Lord & Hall, 2007) and leadership pedagogy that centers the diversity of leaders (Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2014; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). As the Latinx community continues to grow, it is important to design new leadership frameworks that center on the lived experiences and histories of Latinx people in society. Leadership pedagogy can become problematic when the voices of underrepresented groups in society are ignored (Eagly & Chin, 2010; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Mahoney, 2016). Given the growth in the Latinx population, Latinx leadership is essential to the future of the United

States and the positionality of the Latinx population in that future. The next section outlines the problem statement, which focuses specifically on Latinx college students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research on the leadership experiences of Latinx college students and diverse populations suggests differences in the way these populations experience leadership on the college campus when compared to their White counterparts (Arminio et al., 2000; Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Dugan et al., 2012; Garcia et al., 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011). These differences put Latinx students and other diverse populations at a disadvantage and at the margins of leadership education (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Komives & Wagner, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015; Wagner, 2011). For instance, leadership studies examining the experiences of students of color and Latinx students provide four patterns; (1) students of color do not typically participate in formal leadership development programs, (2) students of color stray away from the words “leader” and “leadership,” (3) students of color do not want to assimilate to White normative standards of leadership, and (4) students of color tend to seek culturally relevant leadership involvement where they are allowed to express their social identity (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015).

As more Latinx college students attend college (Garcia, 2019), one cannot assume that current leadership models apply to all students and that leadership programs are a

one-size fits all (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Suarez, 2015). For Latinx college students (and students of color), identity-based and multicultural campus organizations, which are identified as culturally relevant contexts by several scholars (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002), provide critical opportunities for Latinx students to develop as leaders and express their racial/ethnic identity (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008). Additionally, studies have documented that Latinx students and students of color disassociate from the word “leader” and “leadership” (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Komives et al., 2011). Instead, Latinx students use terms such as change, social justice, and activism (Arminio et al., 2000; Dugan et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2017; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015).

Furthermore, studies have found that prominent leadership development models overlook Latinx students’ leadership journeys (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Lozano, 2015; Suarez, 2015). For instance, the Leadership Identity Development Model (LID) (Komives et al., 2005) fails to address how students of color and students from collectivist cultures experience leadership identity development (Acosta, 2017; Beatty, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015). Onorato and Musoba’s (2015) study used the LID model as the theoretical framework to study 11 Latina women at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The study found that Latinas engaged in leadership roles (or activism) related to their identity as women and Latinx; however, the LID model was incomplete as it failed to address dimensions of gender, ethnicity, and culture in the developmental process of Latinas (Onorato & Musoba,

2015). This finding suggests that personal and social identities played a role in the leadership development process of Latinas; however, more research is needed to better understand how Latinx students make meaning of leadership. Another study by Renn and Ozaki (2010) found that student leaders' diversity in terms primarily of their gender and race experienced the first three stages of the LID model; however, the model did not consider how intersectionality and social identities influenced the leadership identity process of these students. Renn and Ozaki's (2010) sample consisted of 18 diverse students from varied social identities, mostly in terms of gender and race. More than half of the students in the sample identified as students of color, 8 identified as women, 7 identified as men, and 3 identified as transgender (Renn & Ozaki, 2010). These studies (Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010) show that diverse students' leadership identity development is multifaceted—and not necessarily linear. Hence, leadership models have yet to address how dimensions of personal and social identity (Abes et al., 2007), as well as developmental contexts, shape students' assumptions of leadership and the world around them (Abes et al., 2007; Arminio et al., 2000; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015; Torres et al., 2003; Wagner, 2011).

While leadership programs provide college students ample opportunities to grow as leaders (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Wagner, 2011), disparities exist in the way Latinx students experience leadership development on the college campus (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015). Several scholars have found that Latinx students (and students of color more generally) do not typically participate in formal leadership development programs and Latinx students' leadership experiences are

not affirmed by the collegiate environment (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musuba, 2015; Suarez, 2015). For example, Latinx college students often must navigate what they perceive as White normative standards of leadership (Arminio et al., 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007) and culturally irrelevant leadership (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Jones et al., 2002). Because leadership development programming has yet to embrace diversity as a dimension of leadership (Chin, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Mahoney, 2016), Latinx students tend to develop as leaders within the scope of multicultural student organizations and same-race groups (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Jones et al., 2002). These spaces allow Latinx students to express their cultural and ethnic/racial identity (Arminio et al., 2000; Guardia & Evans, 2008). Additionally, identity-based and multicultural organizations serve as counterspaces (Delgado Bernal, 2002), nourishing spaces (Ventura, 2017), spaces for activism (Arminio et al., 2000; Onorato & Musoba, 2015), and critical spaces for leadership development (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009). Nonetheless, institutions of higher education continue to operate in ways that diminish the leadership experiences and values of Latinx students (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia, 2019; Lozano, 2015; Suarez, 2015).

As demographics continue to change in higher education, new leadership theories and frameworks are needed to develop Latinx students (and diverse populations) for leadership in the twenty-first century (Dugan et al., 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Wagner, 2011). Emerging leadership programs are more sensitive to racial and ethnic



diversity. For example, in a study of 30 Latinx college students participating in a four-year, ethnically-based leadership program at a Christian institution, Case and Hernandez (2013) found that participation in the program facilitated Latinx students' cognitive, psychosocial, and ethnic identity development. By the end of the four year, Latinx students in the study "demonstrated understanding of bicultural skills and what it means to be a bicultural leader" (p. 74). Although the study explored Latinx students' ethnic identity within the context of a leadership program, the study documents the critical connection between Latinx students' leadership development and psychosocial development. The study offers important insight into Latinx students' ethnic identity and biculturalism, as a dimension of leadership (Abes et al., 2007). However, very little research has been conducted exploring Latinx students' leadership paradigms and what leadership means to Latinx students. Dugan and Komives's (2007) Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership documents differences in leadership outcomes for Latinx college students; however, these differences have yet to be explored in more depth. Other scholars have studied aspects of Latinx leadership development from a higher education lens (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia, 2017; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Lozano, 2015), but the literature on Latinx students' perception of leadership remains scarce. Overall, the intersection of Latinx identity, culture, and leadership remains understudied. This is an area of concern given the lack of leadership studies addressing the unique needs of Latinx college students (and diverse populations) as a means to designing inclusive leadership programs (Komives, 2011; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Wagner, 2011). Since additional research is needed in this area, the following section outlines the purpose of the current study.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding about how Latinx students' psychosocial identities shape their perception of leadership. More knowledge on this topic will contribute to the development of new leadership development frameworks. Prior studies have examined Latinx students' leadership development within the context of higher education. Collectively, these studies contend that gendered experiences, culturally relevant involvement, cultural values and beliefs, and ethnic/racial identity played a role in Latinx students' development as leaders (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia, 2017; Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). These studies explored dimensions of Latinx personal and social identity (Abes et al., 2007) around the concept of leadership; however, these studies all have the same limitations as they did not specifically address the unique needs of Latinx undergraduate students as a means to designing inclusive leadership pedagogy. Currently, there are no formal leadership models in academia that describe or explain the process through which Latinx college students develop as leaders. Bordas (2013) and Ramirez (2006) have contributed to a better understanding of Latinx leadership in general; however, their studies did not focus on college students. Lozano's (2015) capstone project provided a brief snapshot of a linear Latinx leadership development model; however, Lozano's (2015) study did not provide a critical analysis of race/ethnicity and how psychosocial identity shapes Latinx students' perception of leadership. As such, a multidimensional model of Latinx leadership was needed to better understand how race, ethnicity, culture, social identity, immigration status, and socio-cultural factors shape Latinx students' perception of leadership. To that end, this study employed a psychosocial lens. Bordas's (2013) Latinx

leadership framework was considered in this study as an example of inclusive leadership design, which centers Latinx culture and psychosocial elements.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership paradigms and experiences of Latinx undergraduate students in the United States. The following research questions guide this research study.

1. How do Latinx students perceive and make meaning of leadership?
2. How do Latinx students make meaning of their psychosocial identities and the ways in which they learn and practice leadership?
3. How do Latinx students navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces?

### **Significance of the Study**

As documented by several scholars (Armino et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Suarez, 2015), current leadership programs are not engaging Latinx students. Therefore, a different approach is needed to develop Latinx college students for future leadership. Further studies can help leadership educators identify ways to engage Latinx students in a purposeful and intentional leadership development process. As such, an in-depth understanding of Latinx students' developmental issues and concerns, as well as their leadership experiences, can provide greater knowledge to inform leadership education pedagogy. This knowledge can help leadership educators develop inclusive leadership programs that help facilitate Latinx leadership development and growth, as well as psychosocial and cognitive development (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017). As more Latinx students enroll in college, it is important for

leadership educators to become familiar with the unique needs of this population (Garcia, 2019). As a growing population, Latinx leadership is essential to the United States (Bordas, 2013; Ramirez, 2006); however, Latinx college students are lagging behind their peers in most aspects of higher education (Garcia, 2019; Gloria et al., 2005; Oseguera et al., 2008; Torres, 2003). As such, it is critical to close the education equity gap—and create new leadership pathways for members of the Latinx community.

To center the leadership voices of Latinx students, leadership educators must first understand how Latinx students' psychosocial identities, as well as developmental contexts, shape Latinx students' perception of leadership. Accordingly, it is important to understand the process in which Latinx students develop as leaders within predominantly White spaces. In addition, the findings from this research study can help researchers understand what compels successful Latinx college students to develop as leaders. Moreover, this study employed a qualitative grounded theory approach to better understand perceptions of leadership from the viewpoint of Latinx college students (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Instead of testing a leadership theory or model, grounded theory allowed me to look for concepts and categories within the data, which helped better understand how social identity and social-cultural factors shaped Latinx student's perceptions of leadership (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A grounded theory methodology was used to gain an in-depth understanding of Latinx students' leadership experiences and realities. As a qualitative approach, grounded theory has been used by prominent scholars to better understand how college students develop and grow (Komives et al., 2006; Torres, 2003). The next section identifies terminology used throughout the study. Then, a chapter summary is provided.

## **Terminology**

Specific higher education terms will be used throughout the study. The terms leadership, Latinx, Latinx community, diverse population, and students of color are identified and defined in this section. In addition, a brief explanation of the targeted population is provided.

**Leadership.** While the words “leader” and “leadership” will be used throughout the study, scholars contend that most definitions of leadership lack culturally relevant ways of knowing (Garcia, 2019; Lozano, 2015; Suarez, 2015). As such, I do not use a specific definition of leadership to inform my study.

**Latinx definition.** For the purpose of this study, I use the term Latinx to refer to individuals who identify as Hispanic or Latino/a. The *x* in Latinx is inclusive of men, women, agendered, trans\*, gender-nonconforming, gender-queer, and gender-fluid individuals (Pastrana, Battle, & Harris, 2017).

**U.S. Latinx community.** For the purpose of the study, the Latinx community is a multidimensional blend of Spanish, African, and Indigenous heritage (Bordas, 2013; Morales, Lara, Kington, Valdez, & Escarce, 2002). The Latinx community includes people from Mexico, Central and South America, United States, and the Caribbean (Bordas, 2013; Garcia, 2019). The largest subgroup within the Latinx community includes Mexican and Mexican Americans (Noe-Bustamante, 2019), who have historically lived in the lands we call Mexico and United States today (Bordas, 2013). Although there has been debate on whether the Latinx community should be classified as a race or ethnicity (Acosta, 2017; Bordas, 2013; Salinas & Lozano, 2017), in this study, I view the Latinx community as a race of people with its own history, language, and

cultural heritage (Garcia, 2019; Salinas & Lozano, 2017). Additionally, Latinx peoples have a history of colonization, marginalization, oppression, racism, and discrimination that cannot be ignored (Bordas, 2013; Garcia, 2019; Morales et al., 2002; Ramirez, 2006). Regarding higher education, the influence of colonization and imperialism on college campuses continues to create an unwelcoming environment for Latinx students and their families (Garcia, 2019; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Many institutions of higher education exercise oppression and “sustain a campus culture that marginalizes, devalues, and silences students” (Solórzano et al., 2005, p. 287). Subsequently, Latinx students (and students of color) often face alienating campus experiences attributed to microaggressions, ethnic/racial bias, and inequity (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia, 2018; Gloria et al., 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Turner, 1994). Alienating campus experiences contribute to high-stress levels (Beatty, 2015; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009; Turner, 1994), persistence and retention issues (Gloria et al., 2005), and lack of sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). As such, Latinx students’ positionality in higher education and society is considered in this study.

**Diverse populations.** The term “diverse students” and “diverse populations” will be used interchangeably throughout the study to refer to individuals and groups with specific identities connected to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (Chin, 2013; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). In addition, I use LGBTQ as an abbreviation to refer to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender-queer, gender-fluid, and gender nonconforming (Pastrana, Battle, & Harris, 2017). Jones and McEwen (2000) explain, “no one dimension [of identity] may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions” (Jones

& McEwen, 2000, p. 410). Because college students may hold one or more social identities (Abes et al., 2007; Renn, 2007; Torres et al., 2003), it is important to recognize and acknowledge students' multiple and intersecting identities and how these identities influence students' perceptions of leadership and the world around them (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Torres et al., 2003).

**Students of color.** The term “students of color” will be used to refer to students who identify as Latinx/Hispanic, Black/African/African American, Native American/American Indian, Asian, Arab, Pacific Islander, and Biracial (Garcia, 2019; Harper, 2012).

**Targeted Population.** Latinx undergraduate college students who are enrolled full-time in a U.S. college or university.

## **Summary**

Latinx college students remain underrepresented in higher education and at the margins of leadership education (Beatty, 2015; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015; Wagner, 2011). As more Latinx students enroll in higher education, there is a need to “deconstruct to reconstruct” leadership education (Suarez, 2015, p. 41), particularly in homogeneous spaces where Latinx students are underrepresented (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Garcia, 2019; Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2012; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Torres et al., 2003). This means, decentering dominant leadership narratives and centering Latinx students' histories, experiences, and “cultural ways of knowing” (Garcia, 2019, p. 49; Mahoney, 2016; Suarez, 2015). Thus, challenging power, oppression, racism, privilege, heteronormativity, and dominant leadership narratives within leadership education (Arminio et al., 2000; Bordas, 2013;

Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Guthrie et al., 2016; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015). As such, additional research was needed to better understand how race and ethnicity influence Latinx students' perceptions of leadership, how Latinx students' psychosocial identities influence the way in which Latinx students learn and practice leadership, and how Latinx students navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces.

In Chapter Two, I provide a synthesis of the literature associated with leadership as a theoretical foundation and college student populations. The following sections are discussed in the next chapter: leadership foundations and college student leadership.



## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

This chapter discusses the literature pertaining to the concept of leadership with specific focus on college student populations. The chapter is divided into two broad sections, with each section organized to consider the issues and concerns of the targeted student population as conceptualized by the literature. The first section of this review discusses the literature related to leadership within the context of U.S. society, which outlines leadership philosophical foundations and theoretical explanation. This section provides an overview of leadership theories concerning leadership education and leadership practice. As such, leadership theories reveal a dominant leadership narrative which promotes a cisgender, able-bodied, White heteropatriarchal leadership lens (Astin & Astin, 2000; Beatty, 2015; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Owen, 2012; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015; Wagner, 2011). While leadership education grounded in post-industrial leadership theories claim to be inclusive to diverse backgrounds, the dominant leadership narrative informs our understanding of leadership and guides leadership education today (Beatty, 2015; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Suarez, 2015). Also, the literature on leadership theories reveals that leadership education often overlooks power, privilege, oppression, racism, classism, discrimination, marginality, intersectionality, and heteronormativity (Acosta, 2017; Beatty, 2015; Chin et al., 2016; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Guthrie, Jones, & Osteen, 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015). Through an

examination of college student leadership education, I discuss the implications that may exist for the leadership development of diverse college populations.

The second section of this review examines the literature related to college student leadership development. This section provides an overview of the critical connection between leadership development and students' cognitive and psychosocial development (Astin, 1993; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Komives et al., 2005; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wagner, 2011). In this section, I analyze differences in the way diverse students experience leadership. In addition, I connect the ways in which social identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity, may influence students' perceptions of leadership. Specifically, this section examines the leadership experiences of women students, LGBTQ students, students of color, and Latinx students, which are understudied populations within leadership theories. Because college students may hold one or more social identity (Renn, 2007; Torres et al., 2003), it is important to recognize and acknowledge students' multiple and intersecting identities and how these identities influence students' perceptions of leadership (Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Torres et al., 2003).

Since this study focused on the leadership experiences of underrepresented college students, with a concentration on Latinx college students, I did not discuss social identities outside the context of higher education. This section of the review concludes by analyzing the literature related to Latinx college students, which suggests that Latinx students remain at the margins of leadership education (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015). That is,

Latinx students' culture, language, identity, history, and marginality continue to be overlooked within the scope of leadership theory and pedagogy. As such, while benefitting heterosexual White males, leadership programs are not inclusive of Latinx students (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Wall, 2011). In essence, a better approach is needed to engage all students in a purposeful leadership development process where all students gain the knowledge and skills to lead in a global world (Guthrie & Osteen, 2012).

Since one of the goals of higher education is to prepare all students for leadership, it is critical to understand the process in which Latinx students and diverse populations develop as leaders. As such, this review of the literature focused on the concept of leadership in relation to college student populations within the context of U.S. society. First, I discuss leadership as a theoretical lens to examine the foundations of leadership education and leadership programs. Then, I analyze leadership studies pertaining to college student populations.

## **Leadership**

The study of leadership is vast and leadership theories guide our understanding of what leadership means and how leadership is practiced today. Leadership theories guide curricular and co-curricular leadership education in a variety of contexts, which informs our knowledge of leadership and what leadership styles are valued in society. Further, the cadre of leadership theories guides the development of leadership skills, abilities, and capacity (Komives et al., 2011; Komives et al., 2005; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Mahoney, 2016). As such, leadership theories and models determine what is defined as effective leadership in society (Parker III & Pascarella, 2013).

Although leadership theories are extensive, very few scholars have investigated the unique leadership behaviors and lived experiences of diverse individuals and diverse college student populations within the context of U.S. society (Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Komives et al., 2011; Parker III & Pascarella, 2013; Wagner, 2011). To understand the concept of leadership as it relates to college student populations, this section provides an overview of the literature related to leadership as a theoretical lens. The section is divided into two subsections: foundations of leadership theory and concepts of leadership, which outlines different definitions of leadership.

**Foundations of leadership theory.** Leadership, as a socially constructed phenomenon (Grint, 2005), is a complex and ever-evolving concept influenced by time, place, values, experiences, culture, and society (Bass, 1985; Bordas, 2013; Klenke, 1993; Komives et al., 2011; Northouse, 2018; Weber, 1998). As such, the field of leadership studies has evolved drastically in the last 100 years, leading to a paradigm shift in the 1960s and 1970s (Bass, 1990; Bass & Bass, 2009; Burns, 1998; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Northouse, 2018; Rost, 1993). This paradigm shift changed our understanding of what leadership means today and how leadership is practiced. Although leadership theories have produced many frameworks, two philosophical foundations guide the field of leadership studies: the industrial and post-industrial leadership paradigms. As discussed in chapter one, both leadership paradigms provide a foundation for contemporary leadership theory. Scholars have also classified these paradigms as heroic (leader-centric, hierarchical, positional) and post-heroic leadership (leadership as a shared process, leadership as relational) (Komives, et al., 2007; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Rost,

1993; Uhl-Bien, 2006).). For the purpose of this review, I use the term industrial and post-industrial leadership.

During the nation's industrial era, trait and behavioral leadership theories dominated society (Bass, 1985; Bass, 1990; Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1998; Northouse, 2018; Rost, 1993). These theories derive from linear and bureaucratic management philosophies (Bennis, 2003; Northouse, 2018) often referred to as the "great man theory." Behavioral theories consist of leader-centric, individualistic, managerial, and heteropatriarchal philosophies, which situate leadership as male-centric, hierarchical, positional, and authoritative (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1998; Komives et al., 2007; Northouse, 2018; Rost, 1993). These theories were designed to improve production, management, and efficiency during the nation's industrial era. In essence, industrial leadership theories suggest that effective leaders needed to exhibit certain traits and behaviors (e.g., specific gender, interpersonal attributes, authority, power, logical thinking), which according to scholars excluded the leadership characteristics of women and diverse individuals (Bass, 1990; Bennis, 2003; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Rost, 1993; Rost & Barker, 2000). In other words, these theories were fundamentally designed for able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual White men during the nation's industrial era. Subsequently, a leadership paradigm shift occurred to meet the demands of a post-industrial society where a different type of leadership was needed (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1998; Rost, 1993). Pioneer leadership scholars Burns (1998) and Rost's (1993) emphasis on human relations and shared leadership propelled this paradigm shift.

As leadership evolved into the mid-20th century, leader-centric and hierarchical leadership styles persisted (Northouse, 2018), but a new wave of post-industrial

leadership theories, such as situational, contingency, motivational, servant leadership, goal-path, relational leadership, and reciprocal theory focused on the role of followers in relation to leaders (Bass, 1985; Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1998; Chin et al., 2016; Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012; Komives et al., 2007; Northouse, 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Rost & Barker, 2000; Uhl-Bien, 2006). This new paradigm influenced what Komives et al. (2007) refer to as “relational leadership,” a process in which leaders and followers work together towards a common goal. A relationship-focus leadership style has also been attributed to Burns (1998) and Rost (1993). Uhl-Bien (2006) expanded relational leadership theory by focusing on relational dynamics as a process where the outcome is leadership. Further, the new paradigm situates leadership as a collaborative and shared process focused on human relations (Bass, 1985; Bennis, 2003; Denis et al., 2012; Komives et al., 2007; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Northouse, 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Rost, 1993; Rost & Barker, 2000). Additionally, the new paradigm emphasizes shared goals and a values-based approach (Bass, 1985; Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1998; Covey, 2013; Komives et al., 2007; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2018; Rost, 1993). As such, leadership is no longer seen as positional, leader-centric, individualistic, or hierarchical, but rather as a shared and collective process in which leaders and collaborators/members work together toward a common goal and/or to influence social change (Bass, 1990; Covey, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Denis et al., 2012; Komives et al., 2007; Northouse, 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Rost, 1993). Moreover, the post-industrial paradigm embraces the notion that anyone can be a leader and leadership can be learned (Bass, 1985; Bennis, 2003; Covey, 2013; Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996; Komives et al., 2007; Komives et al., 2005; Komives et

al., 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2018; Rost & Barker, 2000), which posits leadership growth and development as a critical step towards effective leadership.

Ultimately, in the new paradigm, anyone can develop leadership skills to lead effectively in a global and connected world to tackle complex social, economic, and ethical issues (Bass, 1985; Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1998; Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2013; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Komives, et al., 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2018; Rost, 1993). While industrial leadership theories persist in the twenty-first century (Dugan et al., 2012; Northouse, 2018), the new leadership paradigm guides understanding of leadership practice today in various contexts, particularly in higher education. For this chapter, I refer to the new leadership paradigm as post-industrial leadership. The following section expands on the concept of leadership and addresses several limitations.

**Conceptions of leadership.** While leadership as a theoretical lens is associated with the industrial and post-industrial leadership paradigms, leadership as a concept is complex and multiple definitions exist to explain characteristics of effective leadership. As mentioned earlier in this section, theoretical definitions of leadership inform our understanding of leadership and guide leadership education. However, leadership studies have yet to attend to the unique needs of Latinx individuals and diverse populations within the context of U.S. society (Chin, 2013; Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). This omission has resulted in limited knowledge of how diverse leaders view and define leadership (Chin, 2013, Chin et al., 2016; Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010). Because leadership is socially constructed (Grint, 2005; Klenke, 1993; Northouse, 2018; Weber, 1998), one

cannot assume that leadership theories apply to all populations (Dugan et al., 2012; Beatty, 2015; Komives et al., 2011). Since leadership theories often overlook social identity and lived experience as an important developmental context (Chin, 2013; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Guthrie et al., 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Suarez, 2015), more knowledge in this area can expand understanding of what leadership means to Latinx individuals and diverse populations. This section provides an overview of the concept of leadership and identifies several limitations.

The concept of leadership is multifaceted, and the majority of leadership definitions promote post-industrial leadership values (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Rost, 1993). As such, several leadership scholars define leadership as a shared process in which people with shared goals work together towards social change and/or a common goal (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bennis, 2003; Bordas, 2001, 2013; Denis et al., 2012; Dugan and Komives, 2010; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Northouse, 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Rost, 1993). For example, one of the most important definitions of leadership comes from pioneer leadership scholar Joseph C. Rost (1993), who defines post-industrial leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p. 102). Rost’s (1993) emphasis on post-industrial leadership, or leadership for the twenty-first century, influenced numerous scholars to define the concept of leadership from various lenses. Accordingly, Komives et al. (2007) define leadership as a relational and ethical process that results in positive social change. Leadership values such as change, ethics, collaboration, and human relations are common themes in the literature, particularly in studies examining college students (HERI, 1996;



Komives et al., 2007; Komives et al., 2011). Further, Northouse (2018) describes transformational leadership as a process concerned with the values, ethics, motives, and emotions of human beings. Similar to Rost (1993) and Komives et al. (2007), Northouse (2018) and Covey (2013) view leadership as a process that highlights interpersonal growth and development, which is a fundamental value in post-industrial leadership. As mentioned earlier, in the twenty-first century, anyone can be a leader and leadership can be learned; however, leadership theories do not reflect the leadership styles of all people in society (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1998; Covey, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2018; Rost, 1993; Rost & Baker, 2000). As society changes and diversifies, a critical analysis of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation is needed to develop inclusive leadership frameworks that center on the diversity of leaders.

Building on the work of Rost (1993) and Burns (1998), Kouzes and Posner (2008) embrace the notion of leadership as empowering others to accomplish a shared goal or vision. Further, Astin and Astin (2000) define leadership as a “purposive process which is inherently value-based” (p. 8). Although definitions of leadership may vary in some respects, most definitions include dimensions of change, shared leadership, ethical behavior, interpersonal growth, empowerment, and process orientation. Astin and Astin (2000) move these definitions further and into the college context by focusing on a purposeful leadership process, which implies the notion of intentionality. Regarding a multicultural and Latinx leadership lens, Bordas (2013) and Ramirez (2006) posit multicultural leadership as a shared process grounded in the values and character of the leader. Unlike prominent leadership scholars (Astin & Astin, 2000; Covey, 2013; Dugan

& Komives, 2007; Komives et al., 2007; Komives et al., 2011), Bordas (2013) and Ramirez's (2006) leadership is grounded in culture, collective purpose, and community stewardship. In addition, Ramirez (2006) outlines four qualities associated with Latinx leaders: character, competence, compassion, and community servanthood. These leadership characteristics align with post-industrial leadership; however, Bordas (2013) and Ramirez (2006) include the additional influences of Latinx culture, values, and socio-cultural influences on those qualities. The notion of collective purpose outlined by Bordas (2013) and Ramirez (2006) aligns with collective leadership, which dates back to the Australian Aboriginal people (Sveiby, 2011). Collective leadership encourages consensus, respect, collective control, followership, and rotation of task experts. It emphasizes the power of women and non-leaders during and throughout the leadership process (Sveiby, 2011). Bordas's (2013) Latinx framework will be discussed in greater detail later in this review.

Together, most definitions of leadership promote post-industrial leadership values, which position leadership as a collaborative and collective process where power is shared (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bennis, 2003; Bordas, 2001, 2013; Denis et al., 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Northouse, 2018; Rost, 1993). Notably, these definitions inform understanding of leadership today and guide leadership pedagogy in higher education (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Wagner, 2011). However, there is limited knowledge addressing the leadership voices of Latinx individuals and diverse college populations (Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan et al., 2012; Mahoney, 2016; Wagner, 2011). Although the field of leadership studies is extensive and the cadre of leadership theory informs leadership education in higher

education (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Komives et al., 2005; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Mahoney, 2016), industrial and post-industrial leadership paradigms have certain limitations.

Regarding inclusive and culturally relevant leadership theories, prominent leadership scholars postulate that leadership theories have yet to embrace diversity and inclusion (Chin et al., 2016; Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Mahoney, 2016; Suarez, 2015), which avoids a critical analysis of leadership in relation to gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, culture, and intersectionality (Arminio et al., 2000; Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan, 2011; Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Renn, 2007; Suarez, 2015). Although Bordas (2013) and Ramirez (2006) have investigated identity and culture within leadership studies, prominent leadership scholars have yet to build on Bordas's (2013) and Ramirez's (2006) work. As such, diverse leadership theories from within the American context have seldomly been explored (Chin, 2013). Global studies have explored cultures across the world (Chhokar et al., 2013; House et al., 2004), but it cannot be assumed that racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. mimic the leadership styles reflected in their country of origin. Thus, there needs to be a specific focus on women and diverse groups within the U.S. cultural context (Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Eagly & Chin, 2010). Although contemporary leadership scholars argue that social identity and lived experience shape the way in which leaders and members enact and practice leadership (Bass, 1990; Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Eagly & Chin, 2010), more research was warranted to better understand the diversity of leaders as a source of leadership (Chin et al., 2016; Ospina & Foldy, 2015).

While many researchers have studied leadership as a theoretical lens, including college student leadership, rarely do these studies recognize or center the voices of Latinx individuals and diverse populations (Bass, 1990; Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Eagly & Chin, 2010). As a result, researchers and administrators still do not know much about the leadership paradigms of Latinx individuals and diverse college populations. Additionally, most leadership studies have been conducted at the organizational level and have used predominately White samples (Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016). Therefore, several scholars assert that leadership theories promote a dominant leadership narrative (Arminio et al., 2000; Astin & Astin, 2000; Beatty, 2015; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015; Wagner, 2011). That is, a cisgender, able-bodied, male-centric White heteronormative leadership lens. Specifically, this lens influences leadership education and what type of leadership styles are valued in society. Regarding the leadership voices of Latinx individuals and diverse college students, the dominant leadership narrative has implications for how these populations develop as leaders, particularly in predominantly White spaces.

Furthermore, as women and people of color remain underrepresented in powerful and influential leadership positions in the nation (Chin & Trimble, 2014; Eagly & Chin, 2010), one can conclude from the literature that leadership theories continue to conjure the traits, behaviors, and attributes of able-bodied, cisgender, White heterosexual men. Although the new leadership paradigm positions leadership as a shared and collective process in which people with shared goals work together towards social change and/or a common goal (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bennis, 2003; Bordas, 2013; Denis et al., 2012;

Dugan & Komives, 2010; Komives & Wagner, 2016; Northouse, 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Rost, 1993), the literature provides evidence that leadership practice is still very much hierarchical and benefits White men (Astin & Astin, 2000; Chin, 2013; Chin & Trimble, 2014; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011). As a result, the leadership voices of women, Latinx individuals, and diverse student populations remain invisible within leadership theories and at the margins of leadership education (Dugan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015), which has implications for leadership education in higher education.

As leadership theories have produced limited knowledge about diverse groups (Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dungan et al., 2012; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Komives et al., 2007; Wagner, 2011), further research was warranted to examine the leadership experiences of Latinx students and diverse groups in higher education. In this study, I considered the following questions to address this gap: (1) How do Latinx students perceive and make meaning of leadership? (2) How do Latinx students make meaning of their psychosocial identities and the ways in which they learn and practice leadership? (3) How do Latinx students navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces?

What follows is a synthesis of the literature related to leadership theory with a specific focus on college students. In addition, the next section provides an overview of leadership and diverse student populations, which examines social identities in relation to leadership.

## **Leadership and College Students**

In the last 30 years the literature on college student leadership has been theoretically grounded to examine leadership identity, efficacy, development, and capacity (Arminio et al., 2000; Astin, 1993; Dugan, 2011; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Garcia et al., 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Komives et al., 2005; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn, 2007; Renn and Ozaki, 2010; Wagner, 2009). Researchers have designed leadership development models for college students compatible with the post-industrial leadership paradigm (Astin & Astin, 1996; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Parker III & Pascarella, 2013). These models include the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996; Tyree, 1998), Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Posner, 2004; Posner et al., 2010), the Relational Leadership Model (Komives et al., 2007), and the Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2005). These models encourage democratic citizenship (HERI, 1996), socially responsible leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2007), relational leadership (Komives et al., 2007), and post-industrial leadership values (Rost, 1993; Rost & Barker, 2000). The models describe and explain the process in which students may develop as leaders. The social change model of leadership development and leadership identity development model will be discussed later in this section as the models are widely used in higher education.

Although the number of studies examining student leadership is growing, scholars postulate that believing that one can be a leader (self-efficacy; Bandura, 1997) and gaining the skills, behavior, and mindset (capacity) to be a leader is essential to leadership growth and development (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives et al., 2005). As an outcome of higher education (Astin & Astin, 2000), leadership development programs

encourage students to develop an understanding of who they are as leaders in relation to others and in relation to their community (Dugan & Komives, 2007; HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2005). However, leadership education has yet to cater to the unique needs of Latinx and diverse populations (Dugan et al., 2012; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). As such, researchers and administrators still don't know much about Latinx students' leadership development. There is limited knowledge addressing social identity as a key dynamic in students' perceptions of leadership (Komives et al., 2011; Ostick & Walls, 2001).

Since leadership is socially constructed (Grint, 2005), several scholars postulate that leadership can mean different things to different groups (Arminio et al., 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Walls, 2001; Parker III & Pascarella, 2013; Renn, 2007). This section, and the sections that follow, will discuss the literature related to leadership and diverse student populations. Specifically, the section highlights differences in the way Latinx students and diverse populations experience leadership on the college campus. Several studies are examined in detail to outline the implications that may exist for the leadership development of diverse student populations within the context of higher education.

**Leadership and diverse student populations.** The college years provide critical opportunities for students to develop holistically and as leaders. Studies affirm that higher education and the collegiate environment positively impact student development and growth (Astin, 1984; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2012; Tinto, 1993), leadership development (Arminio et al., 2000; Astin, 1993; Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan &

Komives, 2011; Owen, 2012; Wagner, 2011), cognitive development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1981), psychosocial development (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Erikson, 1994; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Phinney, 1989; Renn, 2007) and educational attainment (Astin, 1984; Gloria et al., 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, involvement in co-curricular activities has been identified as a retention tool (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993), particularly for Latinx students and vulnerable student populations (Arminio et al., 2000; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Gloria et al., 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Regarding student involvement in formal leadership programs, there is consensus within the literature that leadership education puts women students and diverse students at a disadvantage and at the margins of leadership education (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Komives & Wagner, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Owen, 2012; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015; Wagner, 2011). While leadership education programs do not intentionally exclude Latinx students and other diverse populations, the impact on the development of these vulnerable populations is significant. Latinx college students and diverse populations do not have the same opportunities as their White peers to develop as leaders on the college campus. For example, Latinx students (and diverse populations) do not typically participate in formal leadership programs (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017) and Latinx students' leadership experiences are not affirmed by the collegiate environment (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). These dynamics hinder Latinx students' holistic



development and sense of belonging to the campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Torres et al., 2003). As a result, Latinx students (and students of color) seek inclusive and culturally relevant leadership involvement that allows them to express who they are as diverse leaders (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Since one of the goals of higher education is to facilitate holistic development (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016), institutions are not doing enough to create inclusive contexts where Latinx students and diverse populations can develop as leaders.

This section provides an overview of the issues and concerns of diverse student populations. Specifically, the following subsections are discussed: leadership and gender, leadership and sexual orientation, leadership, students of color, and Latinx student leadership. I divide the section into four parts. First, the Multi-Institutional Leadership Study (Dugan & Komives, 2007) is discussed to highlight differences in the way women and diverse students experience leadership. Second, the work of Renn (2007) and Renn and Ozaki (2010) is discussed to focus specifically on LGBTQ identified student leaders. Third, the leadership experiences of students of color (Arminio et al., 2000) are discussed to examine developmental factors contributing to students' understanding of leadership. The section concludes by focusing specifically on the literature related to Latinx college students, which is the focus of this study. First, leadership and gender are discussed.

**Leadership and gender.** Women college students make up more than half of enrollment in higher education (Thelin, 2004). Still, they are underrepresented in positional leadership roles and overall involvement in college at co-ed institutions (Ostlick & Wall, 2007). Due to marginalization and women's place in society, women often face

obstacles men don't usually encounter (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt, 2010; Ostick & Wall, 2007). Unlike cisgender, heterosexual White men, scholars postulate that college women are considered a vulnerable population, which puts their voices at the margins of leadership education (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt, 2010; Ostick & Wall, 2007). Unlike cisgender, heterosexual White men, scholars postulate that college women are considered a vulnerable population, which puts their voices at the margins of leadership education (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ostick & Wall, 2007). For example, studies suggest that women college students are underrepresented in leadership roles in college due to societal gender role expectations (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), lack of women leader role models (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000), and overall experience in a highly gendered college environment (Harper, 2012; Onorato & Musoba, 2015).

Specifically, in the national Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), Dugan and Komives (2007) examined leadership outcomes and found differences between men, women, and underrepresented populations. The study included a sample of 50,378 college students at 52 institutions of higher education, both public and private institutions. Dugan and Komives's (2007) quantitative study examined students' leadership outcomes using the Social Change Model of Leadership (HERI, 1996) as the conceptual framework and the Scale of Socially Responsible Leadership (Tyree, 1998) to measure eight constructs. The social change model is grounded in post-industrial leadership, which focuses on social change for the common good; it was developed for college students and leadership development advocates, according to Komives and Wagner (2009). The model has two goals: (1) to enhance student learning and participation through self-knowledge (e.g., values, talents, interests) and develop

leadership competence (capacity to mobilize one-self and others to serve and work collaboratively), and (2) facilitate positive social change in the institution or community (actions to help institutions/community) (HERI, 1996, p. 19). The model consists of 7 C's, which are interconnected dimensions that contribute to leadership for social change: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, community, and citizenship. Additionally, the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (Tyree, 1998) was used in the study to measure student involvement with 7 constructs of the social change model. The constructs include change and the 7 C's of the social change model discussed earlier. Leadership self-efficacy, which is the internal belief of leadership capacity (Hanna, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008), was also measured in this study. Findings from this study suggest that men and women have distinctively different leadership outcomes, but they both have the capacity to lead. While men reported higher leadership efficacy, women reported higher leadership competency overall (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Women scored higher than men in seven of the eight RLS constructs measured—except for change (Dugan & Komives, 2007). These findings are consistent with post-industrial leadership theories describing women's leadership styles as democratic, collaborative, and relational (Hoyt, 2013).

Furthermore, using multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), differences in ethnicity were examined using the RLS's eight outcomes. The study found significant differences in six of the eight RLS constructs, except for collaboration and common purpose. Concerning underrepresented groups, this study found that LGBTQ-identified students, first-generation college students, Latinx students, Black/African American students, and biracial students scored higher in the "change" RLS construct than their

White and Asian peers, meaning they had the capacity for socially-responsible leadership. This finding is consistent with other studies that have found social change to be a unique leadership value for Latinx students (Garcia et al., 2017; Onorato & Musoba, 2015) and students of color (Arminio et al., 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007). In addition, Dugan and Komives's (2007) findings highlight ten things that matter for student leadership outcomes: pre-college experience, gender, ethnicity, openness to change, mentoring, involvement, positional leadership roles, and involvement in leadership programs. Some of these findings are supported by qualitative and quantitative researchers who demonstrate in their studies the key role of identity and gender identity (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Hoyt, 2013; Onorato & Musuba, 2015; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005), pre-college leadership experiences (Garcia et al., 2017), and the influence of race/ethnicity on leadership involvement (Arminio et al., 2000; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Jones et al., 2002). As such, the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2007) provides evidence that psychosocial identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity/race, matter in students' leadership involvement and students' subjective meaning of leadership. However, this study is limited since it did not elaborate on these differences or why social identities mattered in students' perceptions of leadership. Additionally, more studies are needed to affirm women's leadership styles using a feminist leadership lens (Irby & Brown, 1995) that centers intersectionality and addresses power (Arminio et al., 2000; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Guthrie et al., 2016). To understand what leadership means to women and underrepresented students, future research should examine these differences.

Because the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2007) is foundational to the study of leadership, the findings have implications for leadership studies, leadership education, and leadership practice. Preparing all students for future leadership requires intentionality (Astin & Astin, 2000; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012), particularly in homogeneous spaces where Latinx students are underrepresented (Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2012). As documented by several scholars (Armino et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017), leadership programs are not engaging Latinx students and students of color. Therefore, a different approach is needed to engage students—and not alienate Latinx students and other marginalized populations (Garcia, 2019; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2012).

Further studies can help leadership practitioners identify ways to engage Latinx students and students of color in an intentional and inclusive leadership development process where they too can gain the skills to develop as leaders. To further analyze leadership and social identity, the following section highlights the literature related to leadership and sexual orientation, which focuses on the foundational work of Renn (2007) and Renn and Ozaki (2010) whose studies examine LGBTQ identified college student leaders and activists.

**Leadership and sexual orientation.** A growing body of literature has examined the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) adolescents and college students (Abes & Jones, 2004; Dilley, 2005; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010), which has contributed significantly to our understanding of the dimensions of sexuality and the lived experiences of LGBTQ-identified students. Research suggests that LGBTQ students face many developmental issues in higher education related to identity

and leadership involvement (Renn, 2007; Sanlo, 2002). Specifically, LGBTQ students must navigate the collegiate environment and leadership activities carefully to avoid homophobia and possible discrimination (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005).

For example, in a qualitative study using grounded theory, Renn (2007) examined the intersection of LGBTQ identities and leadership identity of 15 LGBTQ identified college student leaders and activists. A common pattern that emerged from the data posits involvement in the LGBTQ student group leads to increased leadership involvement and “increased outness” on campus and other spaces (p. 317). Renn’s (2007) findings align with Astin’s (1984) and Tinto’s (1993) involvement and persistence models, which identify campus involvement as a key aspect of retention and persistence. Other scholars have also found that involvement in identity-based and multicultural organizations (e.g., Latinx Student Association, Black Student Council, Multicultural Sororities and Fraternities, LGBT Student Association, Women’s Empowerment Groups) is key to diverse students’ leadership development (Arminio et al., 2000; Cress et al., 2001; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Thus, involvement in identity-based and multicultural organizations contributes to student retention and persistence (Astin, 1984; Gloria et al., 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1993). For some LGBTQ students, LGBTQ student groups/organizations provide a safe space to grow as leaders and express their identity, which highlights the importance of these spaces in students’ cognitive and psychosocial development (Abes et al., 2007; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1994; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Marcia, 1966; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1981; Phinney, 1989; Renn, 2007). Renn’s (2007) study provides insight into students’ psychosocial identity as it relates to leadership, which has

implications for the leadership development of students with intersecting and multiple identities.

For example, scholars have suggested that college students grapple with identity development during college years more than any other time in their life (Marcia, 1966; Phinney, 1989). Accordingly, studies demonstrate the importance of developing a psychosocial identity (Lord & Hall, 2005; Phinney, 1992; Renn, 2007) and a leadership identity (Komives et al., 2005) to help college students answer the question “Who am I?” (Chickering, 1969) in relation to others and their community (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives et al., 2006). Specifically, in a qualitative study using the Leadership Identity Model (LID) (Komives et al., 2005) as the theoretical framework, Renn and Ozaki (2010) explored LGBTQ students’ leadership experiences and social identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation). The sample included eighteen LGBTQ identified college student leaders involved in identity-based organizations at a Predominately White Institution; seven men, five women, and three female-to-male transgender students. Further, the sample was ethnically, racially, and religiously/spiritually diverse. Two identity paths, parallel and merged, were identified to describe the saliency of psychosocial identity and leadership identity. In the parallel path, students view their psychosocial identity and leadership identity as separate. In the merged path, students view their psychosocial identity and leadership identity as one, such as “gay leader” or “Latina activist” (Renn & Ozaki, 2010, p. 14). Students in the study experienced all six stages of the LID model: (1) awareness, (2) explorations/engagement, (3) leader identified, (4) leadership differentiated, (5) generatively, and (6) integration/synthesis (p. 559). The LID model will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Findings from this study (Renn & Ozaki, 2010) provide evidence of the importance of identity salience in the leadership development of LGBTQ individuals who might also identify as ethnically or racially diverse. Furthermore, Renn and Ozaki (2010) suggest that LGBTQ specific activities promote the leadership development of LGBTQ students. Future studies should explore dimensions of sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and leadership. While research examining the leadership experiences of LGBTQ students is growing, the research on queer students of color and students of color remains dismal. To better understand the leadership experiences and voices of students of color, the following section provides an overview of Arminio et al.'s (2000) study, focusing specifically on student of color leaders at a PWI.

**Leadership and race/ethnicity.** During the last decade, several authors have driven the further development of the study of leadership and students of color (Arminio et al., 2000; Dugan, 2011; Dugan et al., 2012; Komives et al., 2005; Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn, 2007). However, most leadership theory (e.g., Covey, 2013; Komives et al., 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2018;) and college student leadership models discuss race and ethnic diversity at a surface level (Chin, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Dugan et al., 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Komives et al., 2011; Suarez, 2015; Wagner, 2011). This superficially avoids a critical analysis of leadership in relation to power, privilege, oppression, discrimination, marginality, race/ethnicity and intersectionality (Arminio et al., 2000; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Guthrie et al., 2016; Ledesma & Carderon, 2015; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musuba, 2015; Suarez, 2015). This has implications for how students of color may develop as leaders in predominantly White spaces.



Specifically, there continues to be a gap between the leadership experiences of students of color and the leadership experiences of their White peers. For example, in a longitudinal study using a phenomenological theme analysis, Arminio et al. (2000) examined the leadership experiences of 106 students of color at two PWIs to determine why student of color participation in leadership development programs was lower than other student groups at each respective institution. This study examined whether or not student leadership development programs were congruent with the leadership values and experiences of students of color. The sample included 22 Black/African American women, 12 Black/African American men, 25 Asian American men, 12 Latinx women, and 17 Latinx men.

Findings from Arminio et al.'s (2000) study revealed inconsistency and incongruence between the leadership experiences of students of color and conventional notions of college student leadership. These findings include, "disdain for the label of leader, the personal costs of holding leadership positions, the different experiences predominately White, multiracial, or same-race groups experience, group loyalty over individual needs, gender differences in leadership experiences, and lack of on-campus staff and faculty role models" (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 497). While the term "leader" and "student leader" is highly glorified on college campuses, students of color in Arminio et al.'s (2000) study did not see themselves as leaders and felt that being labeled a "leader" separated them from their racial group; this was seen as buying into the oppressive system (i.e., PWI oppressive climate; Garcia, 2018). This finding is supported by Dugan et al. (2012) who found that students of color disassociate from the word "leadership" and other scholars who postulate that students and individuals from collectivist cultures view leadership as a

shared responsibility rather than hierarchical or individualistic leadership (Bordas, 2013; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Lozano, 2015; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Ramirez, 2006).

Specifically, students of color in Arminio et al.'s (2000) study deviated from the title "leader" to best serve their communities. Additionally, students viewed leadership as a shared responsibility to the group or to their family, which is an important leadership value in collectivist cultures according to Bordas (2013). Arminio et al.'s (2000) study also document the key role family plays in the leadership development process of students of color, particularly for Black/African American and Latinx students. However, knowledge in this area is limited. Regarding leadership and personal cost, Arminio et al.'s (2000) study indicates that students of color participating in formal leadership roles "walk a fine line" and "lost something" by serving on leadership roles (p. 501).

Moreover, Arminio et al.'s (2000) study provides insight into the role of identity salience and leadership, which Renn and Ozaki (2010) identified as key in the leadership development process of LGBTQ and diverse students. For example, students of color in Arminio et al.'s (2000) study felt that it was easier to be themselves in same-race groups than in predominately White groups. That is, students of color in the study who were involved in White groups expressed feeling pressured to assimilate and did not feel they could express their cultural and ethnic identity (Arminio et al., 2000). On the other hand, students of color who joined White groups claimed to have gained traditional leadership experience, which they defined as the "ideal leadership experience" (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 503).

Concerning group orientation and psychosocial identity, students of color in Arminio et al.'s (2000) study became involved in student organizations because they felt a sense

of responsibility to their ethnic/racial group. These students' involvement was highly influenced by their desire to make things better for their ethnic/racial community (Arminio et al., 2000) and make a difference. This finding has been affirmed by Harper and Quaye's (2007) study of student leaders which found that African American college men continuously emphasized the central role identity-based and multicultural organizations played in their college journey—particularly as critical and beneficial spaces for ethnic identity expression, racial uplift, and activism. Solórzano et al. (2000) also suggested that students of color get involved in activism to better their communities by contributing to social change. Further, Eagly and Chin (2010) found that people of color are “concerned with integrity and justice, especially with inclusion and fair treatment” (p. 219). These studies postulate that students of color engaged in activism (i.e., leadership) due to social-cultural factors connected to oppression, racism, discrimination, marginality, Eurocentricity, power, and privilege. However, there is limited knowledge examining social-cultural contexts that influence students' perceptions of leadership.

Arminio et al.'s (2000) findings are supported by many scholars who have documented differences and disparities in the way students of color experience the college campus (Delgado-Guerrero, Cherniack, & Gloria, 2014; Hurtado et al., 1997; Jones et al., 2002; Maramba & Velazquez, 2012; Torres & Hernandez, 2007) and leadership (Acosta, 2017; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). From Arminio et al.'s (2000) study one can conclude that students of color lived experiences and leadership values are not validated or affirmed by the collegiate environment. The

pressure to assimilate to White normative standards of leadership influenced students in Arminio et al.'s (2000) study to get involved in multicultural organizations and same-race groups. Specifically, multicultural organizations offered students opportunities to practice leadership, develop as leaders, and express their cultural and ethnic/racial identity. Although students of color in Arminio et al.'s (2000) study valued post-industrial leadership characteristics (change, social change, shared leadership, social responsibility), these students engaged in the leadership process because of their own positionality in society. This has implications for leadership program design and equity in leadership education.

As students of color continue to be underrepresented in higher education (Garcia, 2019; Harper, 2012), this has important implications for leadership education and the development of students of color. Regarding Latinx college students, the next and final section of this review discusses the literature related to Latinx leadership development, which offers a critique of the Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2005) and Bordas's (2013) Latinx Leadership Framework. Further, this section expands on multicultural student organizations as critical spaces for leadership.

**Latinx student leadership.** As a vulnerable and underrepresented population in higher education (Garcia, 2019), it is important to understand the process in which Latinx students develop as human beings and as leaders. The unique characteristics of Latinx college students have been examined by a number of scholars (Castillo et al., 2006; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Garcia, 2019; Garcia et al., 2017; Gloria et al., 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lozano, 2015; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009; Ortiz, 2004; Phinney et al., 2005; Torres, 2003);

however, studies attending to the unique needs of Latinx students as a means to designing inclusive leadership programs are dismal. This section provides an overview of the existing research on leadership and Latinx students and highlights differences and disparities in the way Latinx students experience leadership on the college campus. This section also outlines several limitations associated with the Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2005) and Bordas's (2013) Latinx Leadership Framework, which are widely used models in higher education.

Studies show that Latinx students' involvement on the college campus drastically increases retention and persistence rates (Astin, 1984; Gloria et al., 2005; Tinto, 1993) and enhances Latinx students' overall experience on the college campus (Hurtado & Carter, 2007; Nelson et al., 2007). Involvement in Latinx-based and multicultural organizations offer Latinx students many benefits since these organizations serve as counterspaces (Delgado Bernal, 2002), nourishing spaces (Ventura, 2017), and critical spaces for leadership (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009). However, although Latinx students bring a wealth of assets to the college campus, their development as leaders normally occurs within the scope of identity-based and multicultural organizations.

For example, in a mixed-methods study using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, Garcia et al. (2017) investigated Latinx college men using the LID model as a theoretical framework. Quantitative data was collected from the Higher Education Research Institute, Cooperative Institutional Research Program, 2007 Freshman Survey and 2011 College Senior Survey. The sample included 222 men who identified as

Mexican/Chicano (43%), Puerto Rican (11%), and other Latinx identities (46%).

Students in the sample attended 69 institutions across the nation; mostly private institutions. Most of the students in the study were U.S. citizens and did not identify as first-generation college students. Garcia et al.'s (2017) study sought to understand what contexts contributed to Latinx men's "leadership development, capacity, and experiences" (p. 4).

Findings from the study suggest that students' self-concept and confidence influenced their development as leaders. The study also found key factors associated with Latinx men's leadership growth and development: pre-college involvement, pre-college teachers, fraternities and Greek letter organizations, internships, peers, and culturally relevant involvement. Garcia et al.'s (2017) study provides evidence that pre-college experiences influenced Latinx men's leadership development in college, which is supported by Dugan and Komives's (2007) Multi-Institutional Leadership Study. Moreover, Latinx men's leadership development was positively influenced by the collegiate environment in terms of involvement, academic opportunities, and peers. While this finding is affirmed by other scholars (Arminio et al., 2000; Astin, 1984; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Guardia, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lozano, 2015; Maramba & Velazquez, 2012; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Tinto, 1993), Latino men's leadership development was significantly influenced by culturally-based involvement (e.g., cultural organizations, multicultural organizations). Noteworthy, similar to Arminio et al.'s (2000) study of student of color leaders, Latinx students in Garcia et al.'s (2017) study did not participate in formal leadership development programs. This is problematic given the high number of formal

leadership programs implemented at most institutions of higher education (Dugan et al., 2012).

Regarding fraternities, Greek letter organizations, and culturally relevant involvement as critical spaces for leadership, Garcia et al.'s (2017) findings are supported by a number of scholars (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Lozano, 2015; Maramba & Velazquez, 2012; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015). In addition, Garcia et al. (2017) and other studies discussed in this review (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Garcia et al., 2017; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010) provide evidence that Latinx students (and diverse populations) experience leadership differently than their White peers. These differences point to disparities in three areas: (1) Latinx students experience leadership within the scope of multicultural organizations, (2) Latinx students' leadership development is not affirmed by the collegiate environment, and (3) Latinx students (and diverse populations) do not typically participate in formal leadership programs.

As previously discussed in this review, leadership development theories and programs have yet to embrace diversity and inclusion as dimensions of leadership (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Wall, 2011); therefore, it is no surprise that Latinx students (and diverse groups) do not generally participate in formal leadership programs. For example, in a qualitative study using grounded theory methodology, Komives et al. (2005) examined the leadership experiences of 13 undergraduate students. The sample included 8 White students, 1 Asian American, 3 African Americans, and 1 African immigrant. A 6-stage conceptual model

of leadership identity development emerged from the data; Leadership Identity Development Model (LID). The LID model is grounded in post-industrial values, relational leadership, and values-based approach. As college students develop and interact with others, students' sense of self evolves and changes (Komives et al., 2005), leading to a broader perspective of leadership. The LID model posits leadership development as a six-staged period with transitions in between: (1) awareness, (2) explorations/engagement, (3) leader identified, (4) leadership differentiated, (5) generativity, and (6) integration/synthesis (p. 559). The LID model postulates that leadership identity is influenced by family, peers, involvement, and reflective learning. However, the LID model fails to address how students of color and students from collectivist cultures experience leadership identity development (Acosta, 2017; Beatty, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015).

Because Komives et al.'s (2005) LID study did not include an ethnically diverse sample, several scholars have tested the LID model using diverse populations. For example, in a qualitative study of 18 college students serving in positional leadership roles in identity-based campus organizations, Renn and Ozaki (2010) found that student leaders experienced the first three stages of the LID model; however, the model did not address intersectionality or social identities. Renn and Ozaki's (2010) study contributes to a better understanding of social identity in relation to leadership development within the scope of the LID model. In another qualitative study examining Latina leadership within the LID framework, Onorato and Musoba (2015) found that the LID model did not address essential characteristics of Latina leadership development and therefore neglected to address the influence of gender, ethnicity, and culture in the developmental process of



Latinas. As such, these studies (Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010) provide evidence that the LID model is not inclusive or culturally relevant; therefore, a better approach was needed to develop Latinx students and diverse populations for future leadership.

While the LID model is foundational to the study of college student leadership, the model was developed using a predominately White student sample. As such, the LID model, which is consistent with post-industrial leadership values, overlooks identity, culture, power, racism, sexism, classism, privilege, discrimination, and heteronormativity (Acosta, 2017; Guthrie et al., 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015;). As the LID model provides a process in which students develop a leadership identity, it is critical to engage all students in a purposeful and intentional leadership development process. Neglecting to critically analyze identity and culture as important dynamics in the development of Latinx students (and diverse populations) can continue to perpetuate the dominant leadership narrative (e.i., leadership styles of White cisgender heterosexual men) discussed earlier in this chapter.

Furthermore, fostering inclusive leadership contexts that center the unique experiences of Latinx students is required to bring Latinx students (and diverse populations) from the margins to the center of leadership education. However, there is limited knowledge addressing the intersection of Latinx identity and leadership development. As such, a better approach is needed to develop leadership skills in Latinx students. For instance, in a mixed-methods longitudinal study at a Christian-based institution, Case and Hernandez (2013) studied the experiences of 30 Latinx college students involved in an ethnically-based leadership program over four years. Case and

Hernandez (2013) found that ethnically-based leadership programs facilitated Latinx students' ethnic identity and cognitive development. This finding is supported by Arminio et al. (2000) and Harper and Quayle's (2007) studies, which highlight the key role of ethnic identity in the leadership development process of students of color. Garcia et al.'s (2017) study also support Case and Hernandez's (2013) findings by establishing the critical connection between culturally relevant leadership activities and leadership development, particularly for Latino men. Further, Case and Hernandez's (2013) study specifically illustrates the significance of Latinx identity as it intersects with leadership development. This means that Latinx students whose identity is salient get involved in culturally and ethnically-based leadership activities as a way to express their culture and identity. However, we still don't know enough about Latinx students' leadership experiences. The intersection of Latinx identity, culture, and leadership remains understudied.

Research on student leadership outlines the importance of designing inclusive leadership models to engage all students in a purposeful leadership process (Astin & Astin 2000; Bennis, 2003; Bordas, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Wagner, 2011). However, student leadership models do not address the unique needs of Latinx students or diverse student populations (Armino et al., 2000; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Additionally, studies affirm that Latinx students and students of color do not typically participate in formal leadership development programs (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017).

Specifically, the ability to develop all college students into relational (Komives et al., 2005) and socially responsible (HERI, 1996) leaders requires that leadership educators design intentional and inclusive leadership pedagogy. For example, Bordas (2013) has provided a foundation for scholars to begin to study diverse approaches to leadership. Bordas's (2013) Latinx leadership model is multidimensional and inclusive to Latinx identities and collectivistic cultures. Similar to other models, Bordas's (2013) framework situates Latinx leadership as character-driven (Covey, 2013), relational (Komives et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien, 2006), and collectivistic (Arminio et al., 2000; Sveiby, 2011). However, one main characteristic that distinguishes the model from others includes the following culturally relevant tenets: "Latinx culture, inclusiveness, social activism, collaboration, collective community, family, coalition building, celebration, character, spirituality, global vision, and immigrant spirit" (pp. 14-16). These tenets guide what Bordas (2013) defines as effective Latinx leadership in the United States.

Bordas's (2013) model is supported by several studies discussed earlier in this chapter. These studies affirm that Latinx college students' leadership values involve the concept of "change" (Dugan & Komives, 2007), social justice (Onorato & Musoba, 2015), shared-responsibility to the group or family (Arminio et al., 2000), openness and honesty (Arminio et al., 2002), and collaboration (Arminio et al., 2002; Dugan et al., 2012). Although the model provides a culturally relevant foundation, Bordas's (2013) framework was developed using qualitative interviews with self-identified Latinx leaders across the nation. The sample did not include Latinx college students. As such, the Latinx leadership model (Bordas, 2013) does not address college students' cognitive or psychosocial developmental dynamics. While this is a limitation, the model provides a

culturally relevant leadership foundation from which to build. In this study, I consider Bordas's (2013) Latinx leadership framework as an example of inclusive leadership design.

This section provided an overview of the leadership experiences of Latinx college students. The literature reveals significant differences in the way Latinx students experience leadership development when compared to their White peers. These differences put Latinx students at the margins of leadership education. Specifically, leadership programs are not inclusive to Latinx students and continue to benefit heterosexual White men (Arminio et al., 2000; Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011). This speaks to the dominant leadership narrative embedded in the fabric of leadership education. As a result, a better approach is needed to engage all students in a purposeful leadership development process. The next section provides a summary of the literature review.

### **Summary**

The literature review provides evidence that leadership theories guide college student leadership education. In other words, leadership theory determines leadership education pedagogy in higher education (Dugan & Komives, 2011). As such, college student leadership learning, education, training, and development are highly intertwined with student development theory, which explains students' cognitive and psychosocial development in college. This summary provides an overview of the literature related to leadership theory, college student populations, and Latinx college students.

Leadership theories reveal that a paradigm shift occurred in the 1960s and 1970s leading to a shift in how we understand and view leadership today. Specifically, this

paradigm shift influenced a movement away from hierarchical, leader-centric, and authoritative leadership to situating leadership as collaborative, relational, inclusive, and process-orientation. In this new paradigm, leaders and followers work together to influence change within the community, organization, and within themselves (Bennis, 2003; Burns, 1998; Covey, 2013; Komives et al., 2007; Komives & Wagner, 2009, Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Northouse, 2018; Rost, 1993). As numerous explanations and philosophies exist to inform our understanding of leadership today, the literature review revealed the critical connection between leadership theory and student development theory, particularly psychosocial theories.

As discussed previously in the literature, studies provide evidence of the positive impact higher education and the college environment has on student development and growth (Astin, 1984; Evans et al., 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2012). As such, the college years provide critical opportunities for individuals to develop holistically (Astin, 1984; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). That is personal, academic, social, and professional growth. In addition, these theories explain and describe the process in which students may develop as leaders.

A review of the literature on student of color leadership reveals significant disparities in the way underrepresented students of color and White students experience leadership on the college campus (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). Collectively, studies suggest that women students, LGBTQ students, and students of color remain at the margins of leadership education. Therefore, the unique leadership voices and journeys of

Latinx and diverse student populations remain invisible within leadership education. Specifically, a dominant leadership narrative (i.e., able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, White male lens) is embedded within the fabric of leadership education and overlooks identity, culture, power, privilege, oppression, racism, classism, discrimination, marginality, intersectionality, and heteronormativity (Acosta, 2017; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Guthrie et al., 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015). In addition, while the literature highlighting the experiences of students of color in higher education is growing, their experiences remain understudied within leadership theories putting students of color and diverse populations at the margins of leadership education (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015).

As higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to prepare college students for future leadership, institutions are responsible for creating and implementing leadership programming to prepare all students for effective leadership. This means being intentional about leadership education programming. Thus, challenging power, oppression, and privilege within leadership education pedagogy. As outlined in the literature, in order to develop inclusive and culturally relevant pedagogy, leadership educators must understand the intersection of power, privilege, oppression, gender, sexual orientation, ability, culture, identity, faith, and ethnicity/race; and how these intersections influence the leadership experiences of college students. As such, preparing future leaders requires leadership programs to engage all students (not just White groups) in a purposeful leadership process in which students gain the knowledge, skills, and values (Astin & Astin, 2000; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012) to lead in a global world.

In order for institutions to prepare all students to lead in a highly uncertain and complex global world (Bennis, 2003), we need to understand what leadership means to diverse groups of students, what social-cultural factors influence students' understanding of leadership, and what developmental factors such as ethnic identity development shape students' understanding of leadership. Since there is a gap in the literature pertaining to Latinx college student leadership development, an in-depth understanding of Latinx students' developmental issues and concerns, as well as their leadership experiences, can provide greater knowledge to inform leadership education pedagogy. As such, leadership educators can be more equipped to design and develop inclusive and culturally relevant curricular and cocurricular programs.

### CHAPTER III Methodology

The purpose of this study was to better understand leadership from the perspective of Latinx college students. To add to the body of knowledge, this study addressed the intersection of Latinx students' social identities, their perceptions of leadership, their practice of leadership, and their navigation of leadership in predominantly White spaces. To that end, Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative nature of the study, selection of grounded theory approach, research questions, information on the sample and participants, procedures for protecting the rights of participants, data collection and data analysis procedures, trustworthiness strategies, researcher's positionality, and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary outlining the main points.

#### **Qualitative Inquiry**

This study employed qualitative methodologies to better understand the leadership voices and experiences of Latinx college students. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative methods are appropriate for "the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 37). Qualitative researchers investigate research questions associated with how individuals or groups make meaning of their experiences and the world around them (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007). They serve as instruments of the research by collecting and analyzing data, applying an inductive process through which patterns, themes, and theories emerge from the data, and write a description or interpretation of what was studied (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam, 2009).



Qualitative researchers develop an in-depth understanding of the problem or phenomenon, mainly from the viewpoint of participants in the study (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Moreover, qualitative researchers are concerned with richness, texture, and raw data, as they attempt to uncover what is happening underneath the surface (Creswell, 2007). Quantitative methods, such as numerical data and statistical analysis, can be used as qualitative research tools; however, qualitative inquiries are designed to interpret qualitative data (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Qualitative studies bring to light new meanings, realities, understandings, and theories (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Neuman, 2006). For example, Glaser and Strauss's (1967) qualitative grounded theory approach attempts to generate an abstract understanding of phenomena in order to provide practical explanations of real-life situations.

Qualitative researchers employ emerging qualitative approaches to inquiry, such as case studies, grounded theory, phenomenological studies, and ethnography, to study a problem or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In this study, I employed a grounded theory approach to understand leadership from the viewpoint of Latinx college students. Instead of testing a leadership theory or model, grounded theory methodology allowed me to look for comprehensive concepts and categories in the data that capture a picture of Latinx students' leadership realities (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The conceptual model and themes that emerged from this study help better understand how Latinx students' psychosocial identities shape their perception of leadership. Before outlining this study's grounded theory methods, it is important to understand grounded theory's theoretical orientation. In the next section, I provide a summary of grounded theory's theoretical foundations and philosophical assumptions.

## **Grounded Theory Approach**

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) are considered the founders of grounded theory methodology. They developed grounded theory during their seminal work examining terminally ill patients' experiences and during a time in which quantitative methods prevailed in refining and testing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory's theoretical orientation comes from medical sociology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); however, grounded theory research can apply to many disciplines and fields of study, including leadership and education. For example, Komives et al. (2006) developed a grounded theory outlining the process through which college students develop a leadership identity—Leadership Identity Development (LID) model. The researchers wanted to understand college students' leadership experiences, meanings, and processes. The LID model is a prominent college student leadership framework used in higher education to develop students for leadership roles.

Grounded theory research is concerned with the “actions, interactions, and social processes of people” (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). It attempts to discover social and psychosocial processes that explain phenomena (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Grounded theory moves beyond description to generate theory from the data collected (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Rich data helps grounded theorists develop an explanation of phenomena through the development of concepts and categories. Grounded theory's research design “explains why and how something happens” (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 15). Thus, grounded theorists employ a rigorous and sequential approach to data collection and data analysis that focuses on individuals'

social processes as influenced by their actions and interactions (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Over the years, grounded theory has evolved to include more than one methodological design, from positivist and post-positivist paradigms (Creswell, 2007). The three main grounded theory designs include: (1) traditional grounded theory, which is the classical positivist work of Glaser (1992) whose focus is on the emergence of theory as an ongoing and open process that explains patterns of behavior (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019), (2) Strauss's (1987) post-positivist grounded theory approach that uses systematic procedures to data collection and analysis "to develop theory that explains process, action, or interaction on a topic" (Creswell, 2007, p. 64), and (3) constructivist grounded theory which was developed by Kathy Charmaz (2006) and focuses on how participants and researchers co-construct meaning. All three grounded theory designs have similarities like sequential data gathering and data analysis, constant comparison method, category building and development, and theory generation (Creswell, 2007). However, each approach looks at the data differently. Strauss's (1987) systematic approach is associated with the prominent work of Corbin and Strauss (2014).

Although each approach has similarities, there are factors to consider when choosing to use grounded theory. For example, the researcher's philosophical position should align with the type of study selected, the purpose of the research and what it hopes to accomplish, and what kind of resources are available to conduct the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Because leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon (Bass, 195; Grint, 2005; Klenke, 1993; Northouse, 2013; Weber, 1998) and leadership development involves a social process (Bass, 1990;

Komives et al., 2006; Weber, 1998), a systematic approach to grounded theory was suitable for this study. In this study, I employed Corbin and Strauss's (2014) systematic approach to grounded theory design because the study focused on Latinx students' leadership perceptions and social processes as they created meaning through action and interaction.

Before outlining this study's methods and research design, it is essential to understand Corbin and Strauss's (2014) philosophical assumptions. The next section will discuss Corbin and Strauss's (2014) philosophical assumptions, highlighting their pragmatic and symbolic interactionist orientation.

**Philosophical assumptions.** Corbin and Strauss's (2014) systematic approach to grounded theory stems from symbolic interactionism philosophy, which has roots in Pragmatism (Dewey, 1934; Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionism theory is attributed to George Herbert Mead (Denzin, 2016), and it is concerned with how individuals make sense of the social world (Denzin, 2016). Symbolic interactionism assumes that "knowledge is created through action and interaction," which positions the development of individuals as a social process (Blumer, 1969; Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 19). In other words, the development of individuals is influenced by the meaning (or symbols) individuals assign to things (Blumer, 1969; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Dewey, 1934). As individuals interact with the world around them, individuals can change the meaning they assign to ideas, people, places, and situations (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Dewey, 1934; Morgan, 2020). Change is inherent in symbolic interactionism since it assumes that people play an active role in changing the world around them (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Denzin, 2016). There are three underlying assumptions in symbolic interactionism: (1)

action depends on meaning (people act on the meaning they give to things), (2) people give meaning to something based on social interaction (different people have different definitions of the social world), and (3) the meaning people give to things is not permanent—meaning can change throughout life (Blumer, 1969; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Mead, 1972). Through this lens, “meaning is socially constructed” and influenced by how individuals make sense of the world around them (Merriam, 2002, p. 3).

Symbolic interactionism assumes that meaning is constructed through language and symbols, symbols are fundamental to the meaning individuals assign to things, and assumptions and understanding of the social world shape an individual’s perception of reality (Blumer, 1969; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Dewey, 1934; Morgan, 2020; Shalin, 1991). Morgan (2020) explains, “[pragmatism] emphasizes the linkage between beliefs and action...it focuses on the consequences of acting on a set of beliefs” (p. 65).

Symbolic interactionism theory emphasizes human agency, and the role people play in the construction of their reality (Shalin, 1991). Under these assumptions, grounded theorists become part of the social recreation process, bringing their assumptions to the study to gain a better understanding of the social processes experienced by participants (Baker et al., 1992; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Strauss, 1978). The purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual understanding of the intersection of Latinx students’ race/ethnicity, their perception of leadership, their practice of leadership, and their navigation of leadership in predominantly White spaces. The next section outlines the research questions.

## **Research Questions**

Latinx students' leadership realities and "racial and cultural ways of knowing" remain underrepresented within the fabric of leadership theories and leadership studies (Arminio et al., 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Garcia et al., 2017; Lozano, 2015; Mahoney, 2016; Suarez, 2015). Although recent studies have attempted to understand this topic (Acosta, 2017; Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017; Lozano, 2015), Latinx college students' leadership voices and journeys remain poorly understood. Corbin and Strauss (2014) explain that qualitative research questions should be broad enough to explore the topic and multiple possibilities. They argue, "it is necessary to frame the research question(s) in a manner that provides the investigator with sufficient flexibility and freedom to explore a topic in some depth" (p. 35). To that end, the following research questions will guide my study:

1. How do Latinx students perceive and make meaning of leadership?
2. How do Latinx students make meaning of their psychosocial identities and the ways in which they learn and practice leadership?
3. How do Latinx students navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces?

## **Sampling Design**

This study implemented a purposeful sampling design (Patton, 2015) to select the participants for the study. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to obtain rich information (Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2006) and better understand a qualitative phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theorists implement a purposeful sampling design called theoretical sampling. They select participants that have theoretical

relevance to the development of concepts and categories. Instead of sampling individual participants, grounded theorists sample incidents, events, happenings, conditions, action/interaction, and consequences (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Corbin (2014) explain, “in theoretical sampling, it is concepts and not people, per se, that are sampled. So, when researchers sample theoretically, they go to places, persons, and situations that will provide information about the concepts they want to learn more about” (p. 135). In this study, theoretical relevance required a population of undergraduate Latinx college students attending higher education institutions. The geographic location for the study is limited to the United States. This study focused on the concept of leadership within the scope of higher education.

**Participants.** The population of the study included undergraduate Latinx college students enrolled full-time in a U.S. institution of higher education. As of fall 2015, there were 3 million undergraduate Latinx students enrolled in colleges and universities across the nation (Flores et al., 2019). This number accounts for 17.6% of the total undergraduate college population in the United States (Flores et al., 2019; Garcia, 2019). Although the Midwest has seen an increase in Latinx college enrollment, most Latinx students attend Hispanic-Serving Institutions in California, Texas, Puerto Rico, Florida, and New York (66%; Excelencia in Education, 2020). Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are two-year or four-year, public or private, not-for-profit higher education institutions that enroll at least 25 percent, full-time undergraduate Latinx students. Because higher education institutions (including HSIs) have historically struggled to serve Latinx students and diverse populations successfully (Garcia, 2019; Thelin, 2004),

the majority of Latinx students in college perceive higher education as unfriendly and unwelcoming (Garcia, 2019; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Turner, 1994). Additionally, Latinx students are viewed as a monolithic group. Still, there are differences in the language spoken at home, the varied ways Latinx students identify (e.g., Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano/a, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican), and generational differences (Garcia, 2019). Latinx students' positionality in higher education and the diversity within the Latinx community was considered in the study.

Consistent with grounded theory design, the study included a theoretical sample with flexibility in increasing the number of participants depending on emerging categories and saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). The study's population consisted of 11 undergraduate Latinx college students from across the United States enrolled in two-year and four-year institutions. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, recruiting participants was challenging in the middle of a drastic change in the environment; however, reaching out to student affairs professionals through social media and email communication was helpful during the recruitment process. For example, the study's recruitment flyer (see Appendix C) was posted on various social media platforms and emailed to Latinx-identified student organizations.

The data gathering process began by identifying Latinx student organizations and making a list of student affairs professionals. Once this process occurred, 30 email invitations went out to Latinx student organizations and 10 student affairs professionals, along with the invitation letter (see Appendix A) and the consent form (Appendix B). Participants interested in being part of the study were contacted individually and allowed to sign consent forms electronically. A pseudonym replaced participants' names to ensure



anonymity. Providing electronic signatures increased the number of participants in the study, especially as students navigated virtual and in-person environments due to the pandemic. Eleven undergraduate Latinx college students made up the sample of the study. Most ( $n = 8$ , 73.0%) participants were involved in extracurricular activities and held leadership roles. Seven (64.0%) participants held an elected or executive leadership position within the Latinx student organization. Participants were involved in diverse leadership and extracurricular activities such as Latinx student organization ( $n = 7$ , 64.0%), Society of Hispanic Engineer Professionals ( $n = 1$ , 0.1%), Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán ( $n = 1$ , 0.1%), and Ballet Folklórico ( $n = 1$ , 0.1%). Three participants (27.0%) had no extracurricular activities. One (0.1%) participant was a commuter student, and another one (0.1%) participant attended school virtually. Regarding geographic diversity, four participants (36.0%) lived in California, three (27.0%) lived in Wisconsin, two (18.0%) lived in North Carolina, one (0.1%) lived in Florida, and one (0.1%) lived in New Jersey. Table 1 shows a summary of participant demographic information.

Table 1  
*Summary of Participant Demographic Data*

Interview	Pseudonym	State	Type of Institution	Year in College	Career
1	Sirena	CA	4-year Public, PWI	Junior	Sociology
2	Ayla	CA	4-year Public, PWI	Junior	Psychology, Education Minor
3	Lupita	WI	4-Year Private, PWI	Junior	Business
4	Rodolfo	WI	Community College	Second Year	Associates/Business Gender Studies
5	Laura	NC	4-Year Public, PWI	Senior	Psychology
6	Flor	FL	4-year Public, HSI	Junior	Physiology/Kinesiology
7	Jennifer	CA	4-Year Public, HSI	Freshman	English
8	Fabiola	CA	4-Year Public, HSI	Sophomore	International Studies/French
9	Andy	NC	Community College	First Year	Associates/Business
10	Stephanie	NJ	4-year Public, PWI	Junior	Social Work
11	Francisco	WI	4-year Public, PWI	Junior	Civil Engineering

The Latinx heritage and identity of each participant included cultures from Mexico ( $n = 9, 82.0\%$ ), Colombia ( $n = 1, 0.1\%$ ), and Puerto Rico ( $n = 1, 0.1\%$ ). Ethnic identities included Latina/Chicana, Mexican/Latinx, Latina, Hispanic Colombian, and Mexican. All ( $n = 11, 100.0\%$ ) participants identified as first-generation college students who spoke fluent English and Spanish. Two (18.0%) participants identified as white-passing Latinx, one (0.1%) undocumented, and one (0.1%) bisexual. Nine (82.0%) participants were born in the U.S. but maintained close connections to their parent's home country and immigration stories. All ( $n = 11, 100.0\%$ ) participants demonstrated respect and appreciation for their parent immigration story and expressed pride in their heritage, culture, and identity.

Latinx students in the targeted population represented a diversity of leadership experiences and college experiences, which allowed for flexibility and variation in concept development (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). This broader scope allowed for different concepts (also known as themes) to emerge from the raw data, which was essential to developing a well-rounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In the next section, I highlight the use of theoretical sampling in the study.

**Theoretical sample.** Theoretical sampling is a sequential process of data collection through which the researcher collects and analyzes the data based on emanant concepts. Theoretical sampling allowed me to sample incidents, events, actions/interactions, conditions, and consequences, resulting in the development of ideas and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). For example, the initial interviews in this study guided subsequent interviews in terms of what data to collect, thereby creating a subsequent ladder of concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). As new ideas arose during data

collection and analysis, I was able to increase the number of interviews to learn more about emerging concepts until all concepts and categories reached saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Corbin and Strauss (2014) define saturation as “the point in the research when all major categories are fully developed, show variation, and are integrated” (p. 135). As a result, the process of developing theory grounded in the experiences of participants required flexibility and openness to emerging and developing concepts and categories (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Because grounded theorists are concerned with sampling concepts, I did not select a specific number of participants before the study. Corbin and Strauss (2014) suggest using a higher number of participants for IRB purposes and to ensure I had enough participants for the study. The sample size for the study was 11 Latinx college students who volunteered to participate in virtual interviews and follow-up communication. The sample size produced 11 transcribed interviews, 11 notes, 20 memos, and 6 emails totaling 51 data sources. The theoretical samples of similar studies reached saturation with samples of 8 to 15 participants (see Komives et al., 2005; Renn, 2007; Torres, 2003). Renn’s (2007) and Torres’s (2003) study addressed race and ethnicity as a centering point and provided insight into students’ identity development concerning leadership. The next section addresses procedures implemented for protecting the rights of participants.

**Confidentiality.** In this study, I followed standard IRB protocol and employed procedures for protecting the rights of participants. To maintain confidentiality, each participant created a pseudonym for the study. Using a pseudonym protected the participant identity during the investigation and increased the privacy of research data

and information (Neuman, 2006). In the final report, pseudonyms were assigned to colleges and universities to protect the participant identities. Participants were informed that their interviews would be video-recorded, transcribed, and kept in a secure, password-protected location. A summary of the conceptual model highlighting significant themes was emailed to each participant for review and to ensure participant voices were accurately represented (Seidman, 2006). Participants were notified and assured that all research records would be kept confidential, and I made all efforts to discard information identifying the participant. Participants were assured that consent forms, research data, research files, and interview transcripts would be kept in a secure, password-protected location with their pseudonyms. After three years, video/audio recordings will be destroyed, and de-identified transcripts will be kept in a secure, password-protected location. Ethical issues related to privacy and confidentiality were given its highest consideration during the study (Neuman, 2006). The following section provides a detailed summary of the study's data collection process. The section outlines qualitative interviews as the primary data collection instrument for the study.

### **Data Collection Process**

The data collection process for the study included gathering data from semi-structured interviews, memos, notes, and subsequent participant follow-up communication. Interviews allowed me to collect rich and in-depth data about Latinx students' leadership realities (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007). According to Charmaz (2006), theory can be developed by collecting rich and in-depth data through interviews, observations, and focus groups. The use of memos facilitated the theory development process by documenting ideas about the codes and keeping record of properties and

dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The data collection process began shortly after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. The IRB is the administrative body responsible for reviewing research proposals and evaluating risks to participants. The IRB granted permission to conduct the study under exempt status using the proposed research design. This section provides detailed information about the data collection process for the study.

**Interviews.** The main instrument for collecting data for the study was the use of one-on-one interviews. According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), interviews allow the researcher to gain a rich and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. In this study, interviews allowed Latinx college students to tell their stories about how they understood and made sense of leadership. The recruitment process for one-on-one virtual interviews began by contacting potential participants via email using the invitation letter for the study (see Appendix A) and consent form (see Appendix B). Interested participants were contacted individually to confirm that they understood the nature of the study, requirements (e.g., agreement to video record the interview), and rights as participants. After contacting participants individually, the next step consisted of scheduling individual virtual appointments at a convenient time for the participant. As a result of the recruitment process, a total of 18 students expressed interest in participating in the study; however, only 11 students met the criteria to participate in the study (i.e., Latinx undergraduate students enrolled full-time in a U.S. college or university). Theoretical samples of similar studies looking at the experiences of college students reached saturation with samples of 8 to 15 participants (see Komives et al., 2005; Renn, 2007; Torres, 2003).

All interviews took place in a virtual setting using Microsoft Teams. Before each interview, I provided information about the study, including the purpose of the study, consent, and confidentiality. At the beginning of each interview, I asked for verbal consent and permission to record the interview. The interviews included open-ended questions using an interview protocol and guidelines (see Appendix D) that included opening and closing procedures, probing, and sensitizing questions and research questions. Each participant had ample time to answer each question in depth.

The interview protocol was guided by existing literature on student leadership and addressed topics related to the meaning students assign to leadership. Although I used a semi-structured interview guide to conduct the interviews, using theoretical sampling required flexibility and openness to emerging concepts and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Theoretical sampling allowed me to ask sensitizing questions about emerging concepts related to leadership. As interviews unfolded, I asked participants questions about emerging concepts and themes. Sensitizing and probing questions were used as a technique to help collect quality data related to the research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Applying this technique helped me look for “situations that offer variations or different properties of the concept in question” (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 141). The technique helped me better understand the intersection of Latinx students’ race/ethnicity, their perception of leadership, their practice of leadership, and their navigation of leadership in predominantly White spaces.

During the interviews, it was important to build trust and rapport with the participants to collect quality data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Patton, 2015). In the Latinx community, building culturally relevant rapport is key to building trust (Bordas,

2013). As a Latinx researcher, and someone who understands Latinx culture first-hand, I found it easier to build trust and rapport. Participants felt comfortable sharing their leadership experiences and were able to open-up during the interviews. Although the time commitment for each interview included up to one hour, the average length of the interviews was 40 minutes. The average time did not include opening and closing statements. At the end of the interview, I informed participants that they would receive follow-up communication, if needed, as well as follow-up communication related to the themes of the study. Because grounded theorists are concerned with reaching saturation of concepts and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), all participants received a summary of the core categories (themes) for review and feedback. Six (55.0%) participants provided feedback and answered follow-up questions via email.

After each interview, a meeting transcript was edited for accuracy. All interviews were conducted in English, but some participants incorporated phrases and words in Spanish, which were then translated into English for coding purposes. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were used for coding and included the participant's pseudonym. In the final report, pseudonyms were given to colleges and universities to further protect the participants' identities.

**Memos and notes.** Another critical element in the analytic process included memos and notes. Corbin and Strauss (2014) argue that “it is difficult to develop theory that is dense and shows variation without keeping a record of properties and dimensions in memos” (p. 121). They argue, “[grounded theorists] have an ethical obligation to participants to represent them fairly and show the complexity of the range of issues that participants are dealing with in their daily lives” (p. 120). Furthermore, Saldaña (2015)

argues that all memos are analytic, and their objective is researcher reflexivity, since memos provide opportunities for researchers to challenge and confront their assumptions, actions, and decisions. Accordingly, memos helped me document insights, thoughts, ideas, and meanings throughout the research process.

In this study, I collected additional data using notes and memos during the interviews and after the interviews ended. Notes included keywords related to patterns observed in the interviews, non-verbal communication observations, demographic information, and observed behaviors. The notes included connections to the literature review and information about the participant's leadership journey. Analytical memos were written after each interview and during the coding process to compare interviews, patterns, and categories (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Memos helped establish a relationship with the data, question subjectivity, and helped raise ethical concerns (Saldaña, 2015). Memos and notes helped me compare interviews, patterns, data, and codes. Memos assisted in triangulating the data during the three phases of coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2007). The 11 interviews, 11 notes, 20 memos, and 6 emails totaled 51 data sources. Appendix H represents an excerpt from a memo. The next section describes this study's data analysis and coding procedures.

### **Data Analysis Process**

Data analysis is the stage where researchers make sense of the data and give meaning to the data (Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding the data for meaning is an essential process in grounded theory analysis. Charmaz (2006) explains, "through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what



it means” (p. 46). Unlike other qualitative approaches, grounded theorists begin analysis shortly after the first data are collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2007). In this study, data collection, data analysis, and theory development took place simultaneously (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As I went back and forth comparing the data collected, the constant comparative method became a salient process in the coding procedures (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data analysis process consisted of making sense of the data using the grounded theory coding phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The open coding process allowed initial categories and subcategories to emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2006). Axial coding connected dimensions and properties of the categories to the central phenomenon of the study. The last phase in the coding process was selective coding. In this phase, a theory was identified as the core category, and a graphic model showing related categories was created.

The analysis process began by reading each interview, making comments in the document’s margins, and going over the notes and memos. The first round of open coding was conducted manually using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel software. Each interview transcript was coded for meaning using a Microsoft Word document. Then, I selected the text and added a new comment representing a code, and codes were then copied and pasted into an Excel spreadsheet. After this task, the interviews and initial codes were uploaded to NVivo 12 software. NVivo is a qualitative data management software. The second round of open coding was processed using NVivo. NVivo was also used to analyze notes and memos, compare codes, and initial findings, and organize defined categories. These processes involved 1,321 references associated

with open coding, axial coding, selective coding, model generation, and theory development.

**Open coding.** Open coding is known as “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 61). Open coding is the early coding stage, where chunks of data are broken apart into practical pieces. During this initial stage, I reflected on data from the memos and began conceptualizing meanings based on the interpretation of data from interview transcripts. Open coding allowed for the most salient concepts to come up to the surface, as well as potential properties (subcategories) and dimensions (Charmaz, 2006).

The first step in the analysis process consisted of breaking apart the data into incidents, acts, ideas and events using line-by-line and section-by-section coding (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Each line or section was given a code using the participants’ actual words or what Creswell (2008) defines as *in vivo* codes. The initial coding process yielded 1,119 codes. Interview transcripts were kept in a Microsoft Word document with respective interview numbers and pseudonyms. As I coded interview data manually, margin comments were added to the transcript. *In vivo* codes were then transferred to an Excel spreadsheet simultaneously.

All interview transcripts and coding files were organized by interview number and participant’s pseudonym. Each spreadsheet containing *in vivo* codes was imported into NVivo data management software for the second round of open coding. Because categories in grounded theory research must emerge from the data, the second round of open coding was conducted using NVivo software to help delineate the concepts. Once the most relevant concepts were compared and validated, these concepts were labeled and

used as representations of incidents, actions, and interactions (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Then, I assigned specific codes to an emerging category or subcategory. This process resulted in 12 preliminary categories and 50 subcategories (See Appendix I). Corbin and Strauss (2014) highlight the importance of developing preliminary categories and subcategories during open coding; however, final categories for the study were developed and refined during the axial and selective coding process. Open coding required constant comparison of the data, questioning the data, and reflecting on the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Once concepts and categories reached saturation (Charmaz, 2006), I was able to transition to the next stage of coding (axial coding).

**Axial coding.** The second phase in the coding process is axial coding. Since open coding was used to identify concepts and categories, axial coding helped connect different groups of categories to then develop a hierarchy of the most relevant categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In other words, axial coding explored the relationships between categories to develop a more coherent and hierarchical explanation of the core category or phenomenon. This process involved the application of the following analytic strategies: (a) identifying properties and dimensional variation of each category, (b) identifying conditions, action/interaction, and consequences related to the core category, and (c) finding connections between categories and relating categories based on the relational paradigm (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

The study's core category or central phenomenon emerged through axial coding: becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader. This process involved the development of a relational paradigm that allowed me to knit together concepts to explain the core category conceptually (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Corbin and Strauss (2014) outline the

context and conditions influencing the core category or phenomenon based on the relational paradigm as: causal conditions (events, incidents, influences); events and incidences that influence the phenomenon; intervening conditions (why, when, how, and why things happen); contextual conditions (location of events); action/interaction strategies (how participants respond to the phenomenon); and consequences (result from action/interaction strategies).

Open and axial coding required the process of constant comparison of each category against conditions (events, incidents, influences), context (location of events), action/interaction strategies (how participants respond to the phenomenon), consequences (result from action/interaction strategies), and statements (how categories and subcategories are related) (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Tie et al., 2019). The continual comparison of notes and memos resulted in category saturation. Corbin and Strauss (2014) define saturation as “the point in the research when all major categories are fully developed, show variation, and are integrated” (p. 135). Axial coding procedures yielded 25 saturated categories and helped identify four categories related to causal conditions, three related to contextual conditions, three related to intervening conditions, four related to strategies, and two related to consequences from 123 relational subcategories. Appendix J represents the findings of axial coding by relating subcategories and the new categories. The following criteria for selecting a core category (Strauss, 1987) facilitated the creation of a coding diagram for this study.

1. [the core category] must be sufficiently abstract so that it can be used as the overarching explanatory concept tying all the other categories together.

2. [the core category] must appear frequently in the data. This means that within all, or almost all cases, there are indicators that point to that concept.
3. [the core category] must be logical and consistent with the data. There should be no forcing.
4. [the core category] should be sufficiently abstract so that it can be used to do further research leading to the development of general theory.
5. [the core category] should grow in-depth and explanatory power as each of the other categories is related to it through statements of relationships. (Strauss, 1987, p. 36)

Axial coding explored the relationship between categories to then develop a hierarchy of the most relevant categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The next section outlines the last phase in the coding process: selective coding. Selective coding is the process of relating and integrating categories to a central theme or core category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Selective coding.** Selective coding was the final phase of the coding process. Selective coding helped integrate categories to a central theme or core category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Selective coding helped select one main core category and related categories to the core category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process helped transform the data into a conceptual model illustrating Latinx students' leadership experiences. The core category explains this study's central phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saldaña, 2015). Each emerging category developed through axial coding was divided and dimensionalized with related properties and dimensions. This process yielded 19

saturated categories with corresponding properties and dimensions influencing the core category (See Appendix K).

Participants were contacted during selective coding via email communication to compare the data and ensure that participants' voices were reflected in the final categories. Six (55.0%) students responded via email communication. Selective coding focused on pattern development by comparing and analyzing the data at the dimensional level. Finding connections between the data, patterns, and concepts was a critical step during the final coding phase. It was essential to better understand the interconnectedness of the data conceptually before determining this grounded theory's final story or narrative. The following techniques suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2014) helped facilitate the theory integration process: (a) use of diagrams and (b) sorting and reviewing memos. These techniques helped tweak and refine the core category at a conceptual level; however, the core category emerged from relating categories, constant comparison methods, and analysis.

Grounded theory research is concerned with people's "actions, interactions, and social processes" (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). For this study, the core category or phenomenon that emerged is the process Latinx college students engaged in as they become revolutionary student leaders (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The conceptual model and relating categories serve as a visual representation of Latinx students' leadership development process (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The three-phased sequential approach to analysis, coding, data collection, and following up with participants helped develop this grounded theory and triangulate the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2015).

I employed Corbin and Strauss's (2014) analytical tools during the analysis and coding process. The analytic process involved looking for concepts, categorizing concepts, and connecting categories to a core category or central theme (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A key element of grounded theory analysis is the constant comparative method inherent in grounded theory methodology (Creswell, 2007; Tin et al., 2019). The constant comparative process involved a sequential approach to data comparison, consistent follow-up, and asking questions of the data (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain, "analytic tools are the mental strategies that researchers use when coding" (p. 58). Corbin and Strauss's (2014) analytical strategies helped me give meaning to the data during analysis. Through the analysis, the following strategies were employed: (a) questioning (what, how, when, where, why, who) and thinking about the answers from the participant's perspective, (b) making comparisons that allow me to develop concepts into properties and dimensions, (c) analyzing words and phrases that participants give meaning to, (d) using the flip-flop technique to turn "a concept inside out or upside down to obtain a different perspective," and (e) being aware of personal biases, assumptions, and perspectives during the analytic process (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 97). I was able to utilize strategies and techniques to enhance the data's quality and consistency during the analytic process. The next and final section addresses the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points discussed.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research—and grounded theory—studies are evaluated by how well the research findings (or central category) describe or explain the phenomenon studied

(Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although the evaluation of trustworthiness in qualitative studies varies, trustworthiness is often associated with validity and reliability (Creswell, 2007). Validity is generally concerned with issues of credibility, reliability, applicability, and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this grounded theory study, it was appropriate to use trustworthiness criteria rather than validity and reliability, often associated with quantitative research methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that researchers can establish trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Therefore, in this study, I employed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four constructs to achieve trustworthiness.

**Credibility.** Credibility evaluates the probability that the study's findings and interpretation provide an accurate account of the study's phenomenon (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is associated with the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility can be achieved through an in-depth description of the study's context, familiarity with the topic and setting, prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation of data, and member checking (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation refers to the multiple data collection sources used in the study to ensure consistency of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). This study employed member checking and triangulation strategies to increase the credibility of the study. For example, participants were given the opportunity to review the accuracy of the study's findings including the core category and subcategories (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002). The use of memos and notes helped triangulate the data.



Chiovitti and Piran's (2003) methods for improving trustworthiness in grounded theory research was carried out in this study. These guidelines included: "(1) let participants guide the inquiry process, (2) check the theoretical construction generated against participants' meanings of the phenomenon, (3) use participants' actual words in the theory, (4) articulate the researcher's personal views and insights about the phenomenon explored, (5) specify the criteria built into the researcher's thinking, (6) specify how and why participants in the study were selected, (7) delineate the scope of the research, and (8) describe how the literature relates to each category of the emerged theory" (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003, p. 427). These guidelines were carried out in this study to improve the study's credibility, auditability, and fittingness (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003).

**Transferability.** Transferability refers to the study's applicability to different contexts, settings, times, and populations (Brown et al., 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In grounded theory research, the study's transferability increases when the researcher provides enough detail and thick description of the research process, sufficient evidence on how the data was collected and analyzed, and a detailed account of the different groups from which the theory derived (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, I provided explicit information about the procedures used to carry out the research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) and how the new grounded theory was developed (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For this study, I employed Corbin and Strauss's (2014) checklists and guidelines to increase the quality, credibility, and applicability of the grounded theory research (see Appendix G). In-depth and detailed description of concepts and categories was provided in the findings chapter, as well as documentation of all changes that transpired during the research

process (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss's (1976) criteria for the applicability of grounded theory results helped the study achieve transferability.

1. Findings provide insight into a specific area of research.
2. Findings can be easily understood by any person, including research professionals.
3. Findings can be applied to diverse populations and situations.
4. The theory should provide the user with sufficient control to bring about change in situations. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 237-250)

**Dependability.** Dependability is concerned with the research process's integrity and consistency from beginning to end (Carcary, 2009). Researchers can establish dependability by ensuring the study's findings are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2002). Additionally, researchers can achieve dependability by demonstrating the "fitness" of the methodology in answering the research question, research design concerning methods, sample and data analysis process, and results regarding participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although methodological consistency in grounded theory methods contributes to dependability (Corbin & Strauss, 2014), the study's context and participants' views are subject to change, making the study difficult to replicate (Carcary, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, Creswell (2007) argues that qualitative researchers seek dependability because "the results [of a study] will be subject to change and instability" (p. 204). As such, qualitative studies should be evaluated based on transferability and dependability rather than reliability and objectivity (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This study's dependability (Ritchie,

Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013) increased by constantly comparing data within and against each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) and triangulating the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) from different sources (e.g., memos, notes, participant follow up, coding process, literature review). I also provided explicit information about the development of the core category (or theory) and documented the research process from beginning to end. The process contributed to the study's consistency and integrity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Confirmability.** Confirmability is established when a different researcher can confirm the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Audit trails can strengthen the study's confirmability because they help researchers document steps and decisions taken during the study from beginning to end (Brown et al., 2002; Carcary, 2009). Audit trails also help ensure that research findings reflect participant voices—and not the researcher's subjectivity (Brown et al., 2002). As such, audit trails were implemented in this study to increase the study's confirmability (Carcary, 2009). Using in vivo codes helped bring Latinx students' leadership voices to the surface (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

### **Researcher Positionality**

In qualitative research, it is essential to discuss how the researcher's positionality can impact the research process. Corbin and Strauss (2014) explain, "the direction the research takes depends upon the nature of the data and the analyst's interpretation of the data, bringing the researcher and the data together in the process" (p. 139). Because grounded theorists are responsible for selecting concepts and categories used to develop theory, their perspectives, values, and beliefs influence the methodology, analytic process, and interpretation of findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Thus, researchers need

to be aware of their own biases and assumptions. I maintained audit trails and memos to help address potential bias during the research process (Carcary, 2009; Saldaña, 2015). In this study, it was important to articulate my positionality concerning the study (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). As such, the following section provides an overview of my subjectivity.

**Researcher subjectivity.** Qualitative research involves a subjective interpretive process through which researchers grapple with notions of personal subjectivity (Creswell, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Denzin, 2017). As a Latina and Mexican/indigenous-identified woman in a brown body, doing research in leadership and education is a personal commitment to advancing communities of color in society. My life experiences, such as my educational background and work experiences, influenced my choice to research the topic. My academic history in leadership studies—and my leadership philosophy—positions me to view leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon (Grint, 2005; Merriam, 2002). I believe the concept of leadership is influenced by the essence of who we are, our values, our culture, and our worldview. Leadership for me comes from a collective and consensus approach where a group of people work together toward change and a more just society. This worldview also influenced my decision to study Latinx student leadership, which I view as an asset.

My interest in looking at the perceptions of leadership among Latinx students comes from a decade of professional work experience in higher education, working directly with underrepresented college students (including Latinx students), and taking leadership courses. I acknowledge that my identity as a Latina may have raised the potential for bias in data interpretation (Seidman, 2006). However, my familiarity with student development theory, leadership frameworks, Latinx college students, Latinx

culture, and higher education context gave me opportunities to obtain in-depth and rich data from the participants (Charmaz, 2006). My familiarity with Latinx college students, the Spanish language, leadership theories, and the higher education language was essential to this study (Seidman, 2006). As a Latina researcher, I anticipated participants to see me as an insider due to my ethnic identity, which helped build trust and rapport (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Some participants may have viewed me as an outsider because the research occurred with Latinx participants from diverse institutions across the United States. As an outsider, I anticipated participants to see me as a neutral researcher, which also helped participants open-up and feel comfortable answering the questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Being an outsider and an insider helped participants provide rich details of their experiences in the interviews.

Being a Latina researcher granted me certain benefits, such as building rapport more quickly and understanding the participant's culture/language (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). However, I maintained a certain distance from participants to ensure my role as a Latina researcher—and the established rapport—did not influence how participants responded to the questions (Seidman, 2006). Building rapport was a vital component of the interview process as the quality of the data collected depends on my ability to build rapport with the participants (Patton, 2015). However, I maintained a balance between too much rapport and too little rapport (Seidman, 2006). In the Latinx community, building culturally appropriate rapport is key to building trust. My professional and personal experiences working with Latinx students helped establish rapport, which allowed students to open-up during the interviews (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

During the study, I became keenly aware of my worldview and positionality as a Latina researcher. I was mindful of how my ethics, views, and values informed the research process (Merriam, 1998). I acknowledged how my worldview and positionality shaped how I made sense of the world around me and my identity as a Latina. First, migrating to the United States during adolescence (and living in a border town) shaped my view of equality, equity, racism, and justice. Encounters with poverty, discrimination, inequality, injustice, racism, prejudice, sexism, and immigration continue to influence my personal and professional experiences. Second, I wrote this chapter during a time of high racial tensions after the tragic murder of George Floyd (a Black man) at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. Thousands of individuals (including myself) protested an end to racism, injustice, police violence, racism, and white supremacy. Third, I wrote this dissertation at a time when undocumented Latinx immigrants were kept in concentration camps—now called detention centers. Hundreds of undocumented children had been placed in jail cells resembling cages, were being separated from their families, and were being violently abused by a system that oppresses those of us who are not heterosexual European White men. Such cruel realities are a continuum of the colonization (and genocide) Native people have endured since Columbus's arrival in the Americas in 1492. Furthermore, the unjust slavery system employed by the “founding fathers of America” continues in reinvented and modern ways (e.g., police brutality, poverty, health disparities, education disparities, school segregation). Inequity, injustice, and racism are pillars of U.S. society. These realities impact the fabric of who I am and shape how I navigate society and higher education as a brown woman.

A justice-orientation guides my interpretation of the world around me—and how I navigate this research study. I believe Latinx students are holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002) and deserve to be seen and heard in all areas of higher education. As a Latina scholar, I am committed to providing a counternarrative and asset-based perspective for Latinx students in higher education. As a former director of an LGBTQ Resource Center, Multicultural Center, and now a Chief Diversity Officer, I feel a deep sense of social responsibility to center the voices of Latinx and underrepresented student populations. I did not take this study lightly. My personal and professional responsibility is to move the needle in higher education because “when we know better, we can do better,” and therefore, we must do better.

### **Limitations**

The study aimed to capture the leadership voices and realities of Latinx college students. The data collection process was carried out during the peak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which is a limitation of the study. Virtual interviews (and the pandemic) may have contributed to heightened sensitivity and influenced how participants responded to the interview questions. For example, the pandemic changed the operations of many colleges and universities, which presented challenges for college students. During the interviews, Latinx students had a heightened awareness of equity issues, which the pandemic and virtual environment may have exacerbated. Therefore, carrying out the data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic is a limitation.

All participants in the study identified as bilingual (English/Spanish) first-generation college students. First-generation college students encounter more obstacles than non-first-generation students (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004),

which may have influenced how the participants responded to the interview questions. This study might have yielded different results if the sample had included monolingual non-first-generation students. The study's sample is a potential limitation because not all Latinx students are first-generation, thus there may be some voices missing.

Corbin and Strauss (2014) identify some limitations associated with grounded theory research: “a) data collection can go on for a long time, but the researcher must accept when the concepts are developed enough for the study, and b) limitations exist because some concepts will not be developed and it is up to the researcher to make that call, and c) what has not been covered in the study is a limitation” (p. 140). This study is limited to the intersections of Latinx race/ethnicity, Latinx students’ perceptions of leadership, Latinx students’ practice of leadership, and Latinx students’ leadership navigation in historically White spaces. Anything outside of the research questions may not be explored in greater depth. Also, generalizing the findings to all Latinx college students should be approached with caution since the study focused on 11 Latinx college students from diverse institutions across the United States. However, the study is valuable because it attempts to address a gap in the literature by centering on the leadership voices of Latinx college students. Also, the findings and recommendations can help guide and inform leadership practitioners and faculty members in leadership disciplines.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a summary of the qualitative nature of the study by outlining its grounded theory methods and procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2014), theoretical orientation, philosophical assumptions, research approach, theoretical sampling, data collection and data analysis procedures, trustworthiness strategies,



researcher's positionality, and limitations. Eleven Latinx college students representing a wide variety of experiences and geographic regions participated in the study. The data collected through interviews reflected the participant's perceptions, beliefs, values, lived experiences and realities. Corbin and Strauss's (2014) grounded theory research approach was employed in this study. The three-phase coding approach (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding) facilitated the process of inducting theory from the data. Open coding resulted in 12 preliminary categories and 50 subcategories. Axial coding yielded 25 saturated categories and helped identify four categories related to causal conditions, three related to contextual conditions, three related to intervening conditions, four related to strategies, and two related to consequences from 123 relational subcategories. Through selective coding, emerging categories were developed and assigned corresponding properties with dimensions. Selective coding yielded 19 saturated categories with corresponding properties and dimensions influencing the core category.

Chapter 4 provides detailed information about the findings of the study. The findings of the study, and emerging Latinx leadership grounded theory, are presented through a conceptual model in the following order: causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and consequences.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to better understand leadership from the perspective of Latinx college students in the United States and to develop a theoretical explanation of the participants' leadership experiences and social processes as they created meaning through action and interaction. Eleven Latinx college students from diverse geographical regions and higher education institutions participated in the study. This grounded theory explored the following research questions:

1. How do Latinx students perceive and make meaning of leadership?
2. How do Latinx students make meaning of their psychosocial identities and the ways in which they learn and practice leadership?
3. How do Latinx students navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces?

This chapter describes the study's findings and outlines the process for generating theory from the collected data (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The findings center the voices and leadership realities of 11 Latinx students whose experiences resulted in a theoretical explanation of the process through which Latinx students become "revolutionary leaders" on the college campus. The findings of the study, and emerging Latinx leadership grounded theory, are presented through a conceptual model in the following order: causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and consequences. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

### **Grounded Theory: Becoming a Revolutionary Latinx Student Leader**

Grounded theorists' systematic approach to theory development focuses on participants' experiences and social processes as they create meaning through action and interaction (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). This grounded theory emerged from the data collected rather than existing theories or literature reviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The participants' experiences in higher education revealed a three-staged multidimensional leadership process influenced by context and conditions. Conditions are processes influencing the phenomenon that help explain why things happen and the meaning Latinx students assigned to the concept of leadership (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Latinx students in the study attended different types of institutions and lived in five diverse geographical regions in the United States; however, they shared common leadership experiences and perspectives. As students experienced disparities on the college campus, their awareness of equity and justice issues increased. An increased awareness of equity and justice influenced students to begin internalizing their feelings about the lack of educational resources for first-generation, bilingual (English/Spanish) Latinx students. Simultaneously, they began to internalize a leadership identity and contemplate choices. As Latinx students face institutional barriers (i.e., "the struggle"), they considered their role as potential leaders and started to believe in their capacity to make a difference. Once they internalized a leadership mindset, students consciously chose to engage in the leadership process as Latinx student organization leaders. The struggle sparked an internal desire for revolutionary change on the college campus. Latinx students' inner desire for change and equity influenced them to enact leadership by engaging in formal leadership roles.

For this study, the phenomenon is the actual process of becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader. The interrelationships between categories that emerged from the data worked together to create the core category: becoming revolutionary. The following three stages or themes capture the leadership experiences, perceptions, and realities of Latinx students in the study as they become revolutionary student leaders. A revolutionary Latinx student leader is a change agent on the college campus, taking purposeful action toward equity, inclusion, and justice.

Stage 1: Latinx students must consciously engage in the struggle for change and accept responsibility to become leaders by challenging negative stereotypes, engaging in student activism, navigating White spaces effectively, and embracing culture/identity. Latinx students who experience disparities will have an increased awareness of inequity and injustice issues. In turn, they begin internalizing a leadership identity and contemplating choices. As Latinx students consider their role as potential leaders, they start to believe in their capacity to make a difference. Once a leadership mindset is internalized, Latinx students consciously choose to become leaders. Latinx students engaged in the leadership process must balance recurring influences related to Latinx representation, family expectations, and community expectations.

Stage 2: Latinx students committed to fundamental change on campus and advancing the Latinx community, develop into revolutionary leaders. Latinx students must have the mental strength and emotional intelligence to overcome obstacles, effectively succeed in college despite unknown factors, trailblaze as first-generation students, and have a high sense of identity as bicultural, bilingual Latinx leaders. Latinx students developing into revolutionary leaders must counteract the intersecting influences

related to role models they look up to, perceived leadership narratives in society, and education influences.

Stage 3: Latinx student leaders achieve their goal of becoming influential change agents on the college campus by persisting through the struggles, building resiliency, and practicing leadership. Latinx students must implement these leadership elements (strategies) as they become revolutionary leaders on the college campus. The consequences or outcomes of their strategies positively impact the institution and the larger Latinx community through improved equity. For example, by graduating from college, Latinx students positively affect their families and the larger Latinx community. As Latinx students practice leadership on the college campus, they find fulfillment and personal gratification.

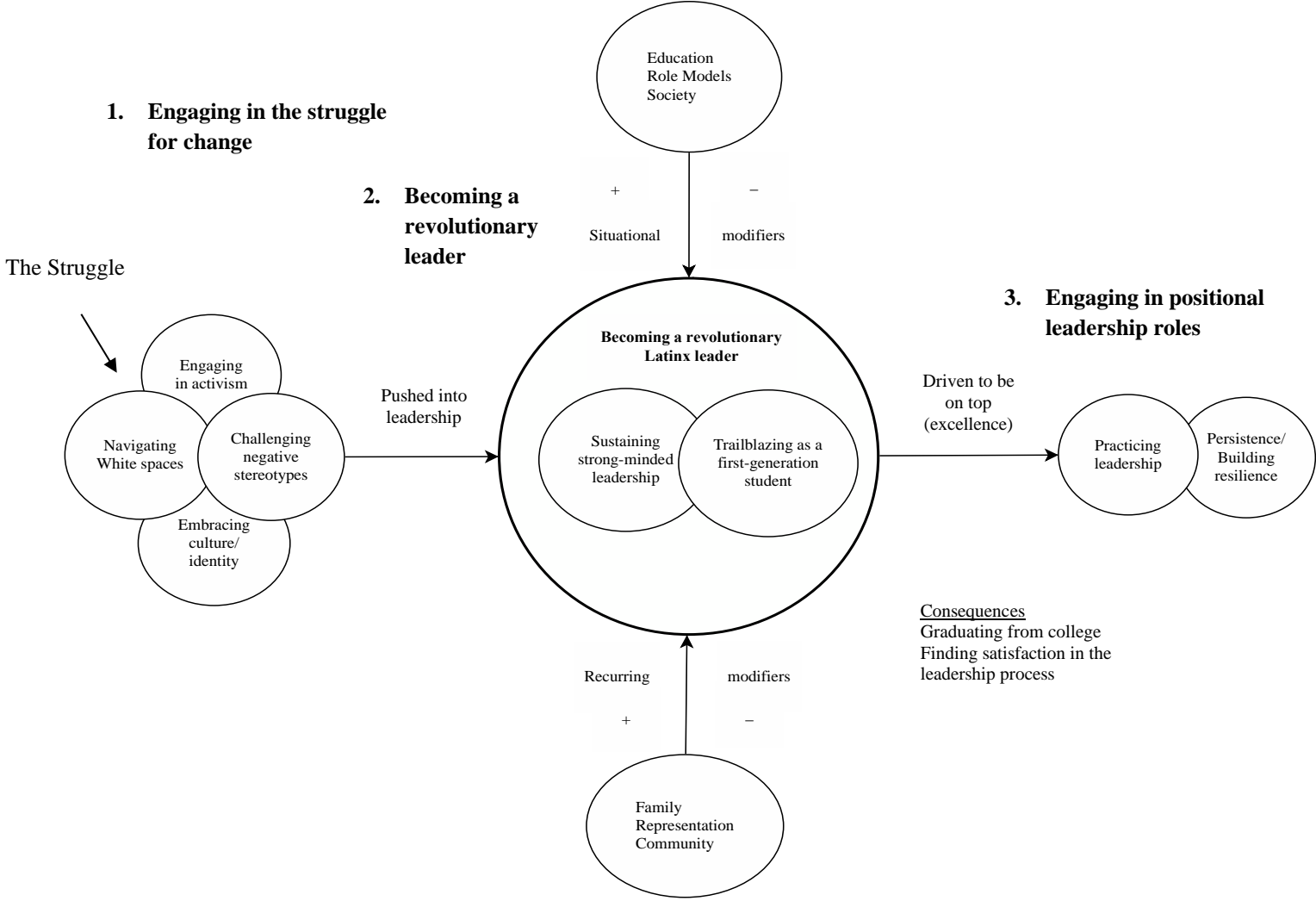
The three stages serve as umbrella explanations applicable at various levels during and throughout the leadership process of becoming revolutionary. The core category (becoming revolutionary) and three stages of leadership that emerged from the data provide a picture of how Latinx students perceive leadership, how they make meaning of their psychosocial identities in relation to leadership, how Latinx students learn and practice leadership, and how they navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces. The following section provides a visual representation of the grounded theory model for this study (see Figure 1). The model was designed using Corbin and Strauss's (2014) grounded theory framework. In subsequent sections, I provide evidence from the interviews to support the development of the model. Afterward, detailed information is provided about the findings of this study through

causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and consequences.

### **Latinx Student Leadership Model**

A three-staged Latinx student leadership model emerged from the data and analytic process (see Figure 1). The model serves as a visual representation of the study's findings, and provides context for the phenomenon through causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and consequences. The model shows the interconnections and relationships of this grounded theory. The Latinx student leadership model tells a story about the process of becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader. Latinx students make sense of leadership through three developmental stages that require emotional readiness, self-awareness, and decision making. By engaging in the struggle for change (stage one), Latinx students become revolutionary leaders (stage two) who engage in positional leadership roles on the college campus (stage three) to make a difference. Latinx students must progress through the stages with determination, commitment, strength, resilience, persistence, drive, and a selfless mindset. They must consider contextual (e.g., education, role models, society) and intervening conditions (e.g., family, representation, community) as recurring and situational modifiers. Latinx students in the study engaged in the leadership process because they wanted to make a difference. The outcomes of their strategies include finding fulfillment in the struggle and graduating from college despite the struggle. The remainder of the chapter provides detailed information about and evidence of each model component through causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and consequences.

**Figure 1.** Latinx Student Leadership Development Model



*Figure 1.* Latinx student leadership model showing the process of becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader through three themes (engaging in the struggle for change, becoming revolutionary Latinx student leader, and engaging in positional leadership roles). The model shows recurring and situational modifiers influencing the phenomenon.

The first section provides the findings for causal conditions (stage one, engaging in the struggle for change). The second section outlines the results for the central phenomenon (stage two, becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader). The third section provides the findings for the strategies (third stage, engaging in positional leadership roles). The last section discusses the consequences and answers to the research questions. First, I will outline the findings for causal conditions.

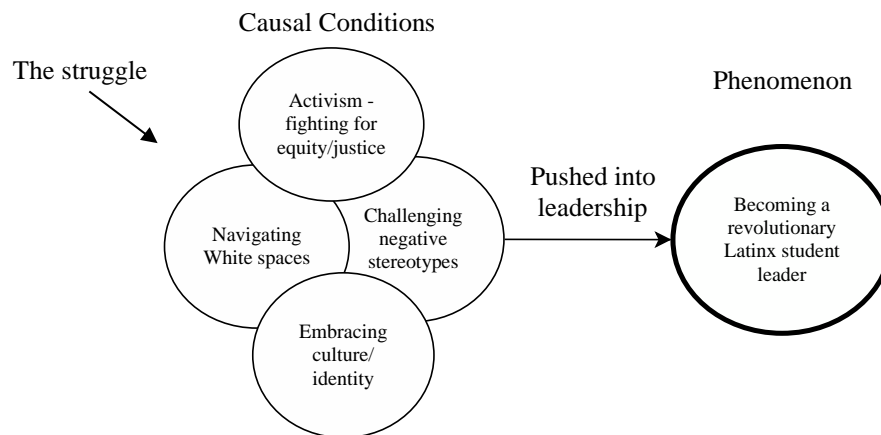
### **Causal Conditions: Engaging in the Struggle for Change (Stage One)**

Causal conditions are the events and incidences influencing the phenomenon of becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The category engaging in the struggle for change is the first stage in the process of becoming a revolutionary Latinx leader. In this stage, the following four causal conditions that emerged from the analysis influenced Latinx students' awareness of self as a leader and leadership choices: challenging negative stereotypes, navigating White spaces, engaging in activism, and embracing culture/identity (see Figure 2). This section provides details about engaging in the struggle category, which is the umbrella category for causal conditions and the first stage in becoming a revolutionary leader.

In the study, all Latinx participants (100.0%) defined the struggle as institutional obstacles and inequities negatively impacting their college journey. The struggle umbrella process was not an easy path for participants in the study. The struggle encompasses academic and non-academic barriers related to access, resources, stereotypes, and campus climate. The struggle as a developmental process interconnects with four other processes: activism, challenging negative stereotypes, navigating White



spaces, and embracing culture/identity. Together, these processes spark revolutionary leadership.

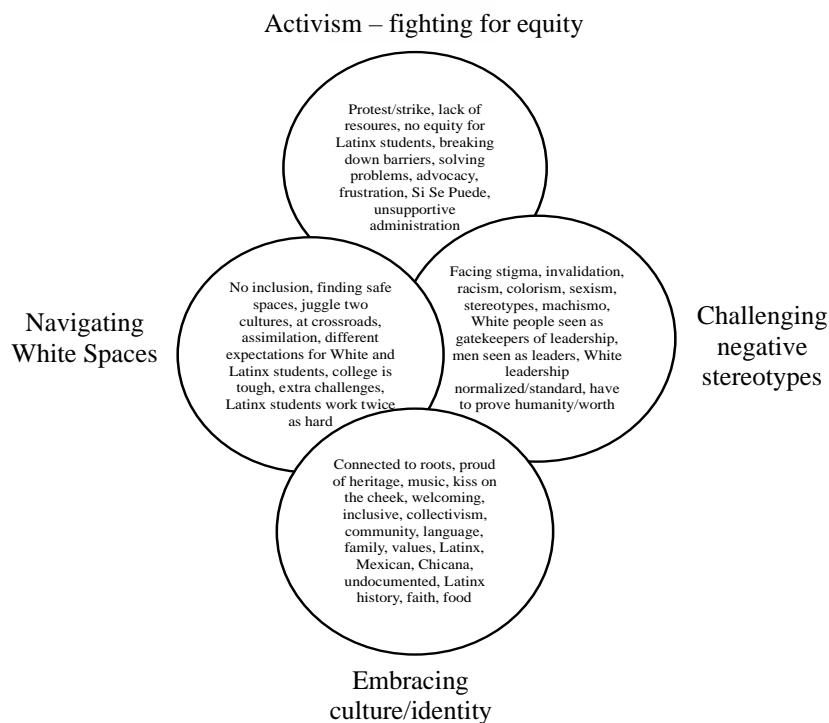


*Figure 2.* Causal conditions (activism, challenging negative stereotypes, navigating White spaces, embracing culture/identity) are the events and incidences influencing the phenomenon of becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader.

As mentioned previously, engaging in the struggle is interconnected with four other simultaneous processes. Collectively, the process of challenging negative stereotypes, navigating White spaces, engaging in activism, and embracing culture/identity give meaning and purpose to Latinx students as they develop a leadership mindset. Figure 3 shows causal conditions (activism, challenging negative stereotypes, navigating White spaces, embracing culture/identity) with corresponding properties and dimensions. The following section discusses challenging stereotypes as a developmental process.

**Challenging stereotypes.** The participants viewed challenging negative stereotypes as positive or negative and expressed awareness of negative stereotypes related to Latinx culture, ethnicity, language, immigration status, race, color, gender, and accents. Negative stereotypes influenced how Latinx students saw themselves as leaders

on the college campus and in society. Participants believed racial stereotypes influenced their college and leadership process negatively.



*Figure 3.* Shows the struggle of being a Latinx college student leader through causal conditions (activism, challenging negative stereotypes, navigating White spaces, embracing culture/identity) and corresponding properties and dimensions.

All participants (100.0%) expressed that negative stereotypes were related to misconceptions of Latinx people in terms of class, color, gender, culture, leadership, race/ethnicity, immigration status, and language. Nine (82.0%) participants expressed that negative racial stereotypes frequently lead to racism, stigma, bias, prejudice, invalidation, machismo/sexism, microaggressions, and fewer leadership opportunities. Five (45.0%) participants reported that negative stereotypes contributed to the feeling of “having to prove their humanity” and “feeling a lack of authenticity” as Latinx students. Sirena elaborated on how she felt about negative stereotypes:

Being courageous, even if people are putting you down. Like, not letting that get to you. And like, you know, even if there's an obstacle in your way, you keep going and things like that, but when people put you down, like when they have racial bias against you, you keep showing them that that's not true.

Sirena, Rodolfo, Flor, and Andy developed courage and resilience through the struggle; however, the path was not always easy. Latinx students had to learn to understand, manage and express their emotions in healthy ways. For example, ten (91.0%) participants mentioned that racial stereotypes and bias toward Latinx people influenced how they viewed themselves, which was a negative aspect of their college journey. Ayla explained how she felt about stereotypes:

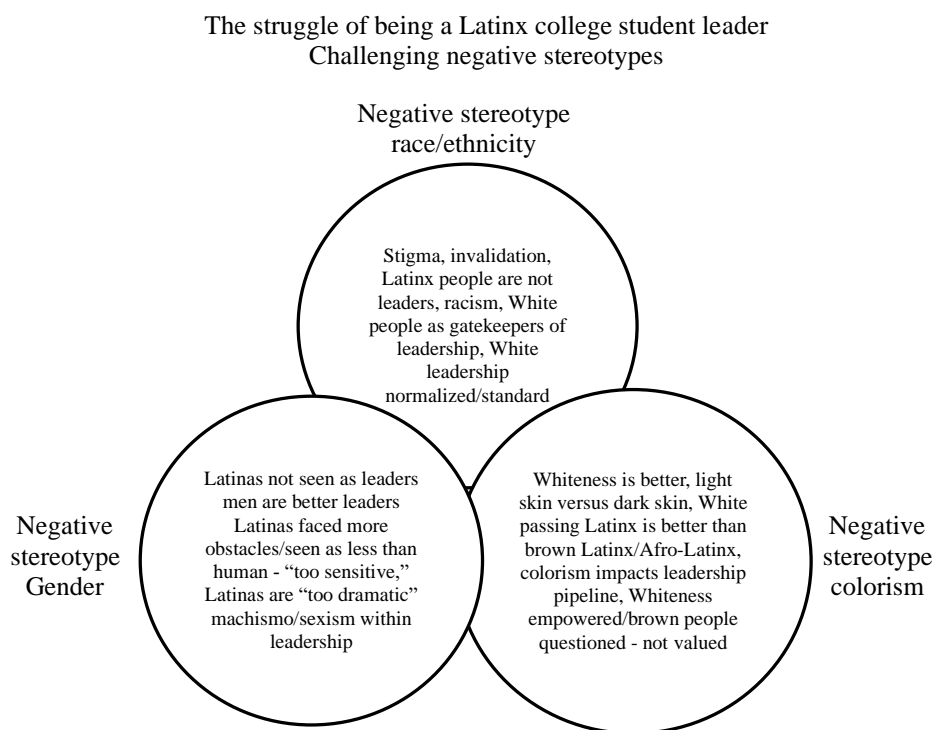
For White people, leadership is a given and they are empowered to be leaders. For POC [people of color], they are undermined and questioned and not seen for their qualifications but only through the lens of color...I don't know, I feel like you have to prove yourself 100 times more than like, nonpersons of color. So, it's just a lot of pressure.

Ayla's perception highlights emotional and psychological processes students in the study experienced as they engaged in the struggle for change by challenging negative stereotypes. All (100.0%) participants expressed concern with racism, bias, stereotypes, sexism, and colorism. Lupita brought up the issue of racism, colorism, sexism, stereotypes, and bias as Latinx students navigated leadership roles. Lupita reflected on how she felt about racism:

But I feel like just sort of bringing light to you know, more women and people of darker complexions because obviously there's nothing wrong with that. But in a

lot of people's eyes and minds, they need to see a lighter skin tone in order to take them seriously. They need to be a man in order to take them seriously...racism is obviously still prevalent in the United States...And that's just rooted, you know, other issues again, like sexism and colorism that's oftentimes really prominent in the Latino culture, sadly.

Lupita outlines everyday stressors among participants in the study: racism, sexism, bias, and colorism. Negative stereotypes stem from racism and prejudice on the college campus, often compounded by the burden of being a first-generation student. Therefore, five (45.0%) participants expressed a desire to unlearn racism and bias as a leadership trait for a new generation of college students (as Lupita elaborated). Figure 4 shows negative stereotypes influencing participants negatively or positively.



*Figure 4.* Shows negative stereotypes (race/ethnicity, colorism, and gender/sexism) impacting Latinx students negatively or positively. Latinx students challenge three types of negative stereotypes.

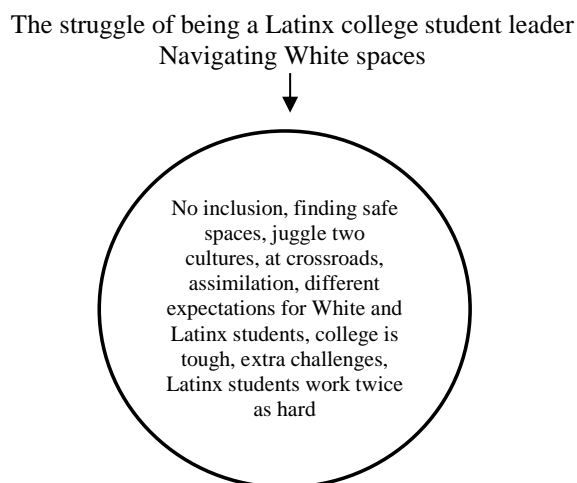
In addition to being college students, Latinx students felt they had to work 100 times more than White students and fight against racial stereotypes. Laura explains:

I think the way that we act as leaders is also impacted because it's just like, okay, like, miraculously like we got elected for something and it's just like...okay, be cautious, because if I say anything that's out of pocket, they're just gonna then label me as like, oh, explosive behavior dramatic. I'm very like, you know, we have to be very conscious about what we say and do. Because not only is it a big deal to be elected to certain positions but now we still have to maintain that image that we're actually good people...like if a White person were to do that, it was just like, Oh, they're just a college student. It's okay. And for us it is like no, you must be very professional...while the White person can just go out to drink one night. Yeah, that's fine. But let's say you go out to play...that's unprofessional. It's like they're waiting to just find any flaw in you, which then just gives you [that feeling or] that pressure to be like, okay, I cannot mess up.

Nine (82.0%) participants expressed “feeling pressure” as a Latinx student leader.

The compounded stress of being a Latinx student leader and the first person in the family to go to college was a shared experience by most of the participants in the study. As Laura bravely articulated, negative racial stereotypes negatively impacted the participants' psychological health. All participants (100.0%) reported that Latinx student leaders must continue to be brave as they challenge stereotypes of who they are as Latinx student leaders. Latinx college students effectively challenged stereotypes by being aware of their actions, working harder, and engaging in leadership activities.

**Navigating White Spaces.** The participants in the study viewed navigating White spaces as a negative experience in their college journey. Participants expressed concerns with the lack of inclusion and safe spaces for Latinx students and students of color.



*Figure 5.* Shows the struggle of navigating White spaces with properties and dimensions.

Regardless of the type of institution students attended, participants in the study believed that navigating White spaces was a stressful and challenging experience. For example, ten (91.0%) participants expressed difficulties navigating White spaces because of the lack of inclusive spaces and the notion that White people do not understand the complexities of being a Latinx student. Lupita expressed the importance of intentional spaces for connection and leadership:

But there was still a space that we were offering for Latinx students. And we were, you know, Latinx based, but like, not only for Latino [students], so it was really encouraging, you know, like, my Asian friends to join and like my White friends to like, go ahead and pop up whenever they want to, because it's not just, you know, my Latinx students, anyone can join. But we were, you know,

clarifying that it is definitely a safe space and a fun space for the Latinx community to get together and share their culture a little bit.

Participants in the study similarly mentioned the critical role of safe spaces for Latinx students and students looking for learning opportunities. Safe and inclusive spaces helped Latinx students in the study cope with a lack of sense of belonging, an unwelcoming environment, and negative racial stereotypes. On the other hand, navigating White spaces also impacted the participants' sense of identity. Nine (82.0%) participants reported that juggling Latinx culture and mainstream culture was challenging. For example, three (27.0%) participants expressed that they had to assimilate to college campus culture to navigate leadership roles effectively. Francisco explains how he feels about assimilation:

Unfortunately, there are times where I've even myself I've had to assimilate to kind of get to where I want to be. So, I think in that sense, Latinx leaders are in a position right now that are at a crossroads, where they kind of have to assimilate to Caucasian culture, or their own period of progress, because at the same time you have hierarchies [racial hierarchies in leadership].

What stands out from Francisco's reflection is his ability to navigate two worlds effectively. Francisco's cultural lens allows him to understand differences and manage to live in two worlds simultaneously. Laura reported that Latinx student leaders have higher expectations than White student leaders. Latinx students face obstacles while navigating White spaces, but they also have added pressure to advocate for themselves, other Latinx students, and the larger Latinx community. Having higher expectations was viewed by the participants as stressful and frustrating. Laura explains how she feels as a Latina student:

There's definitely much more pressure to be able to fill the role and not only like the basics but also feel that you have to do more. Like as a minority, I was able to fill in a spot for example...oh, [but] this room usually goes to White men, and as a Latina now I have to prove that I am capable of this so like when I think of Latina Latino leadership, I just see like a lot of pressure, both good and bad. And that idea of like, wanting to meet those expectations, but also surpass them. And also, I'm not just doing this for myself. I'm doing this for all the other Latinos on campus or all the other Latinos in the state. And at the end of the day, it's much more of a community aspect, if that makes sense.

Participants like Laura were aware of the expectations Latinx students have on their shoulders. Most of the students in the study felt pressured to surpass leadership expectations because they engaged in the leadership process to improve the experience of the entire Latinx group. A collectivist orientation guided Laura's leadership mindset.

Latinx students in the study did not feel seen or heard in White spaces. For example, ten (91.0%) participants indicated that White people do not understand the Latinx community. Sirena explains:

It's been hard because like here where I live in California, like I used to live in LA on the beach but when I moved up here to the high desert like there were more White people and I feel like some of them don't understand, like things about like, our community, and they have like these biases towards like Latinos, like they think bad things about immigrants and, like, about like borders and things like that. So, like I've had to tell them, you know about my experiences with that.

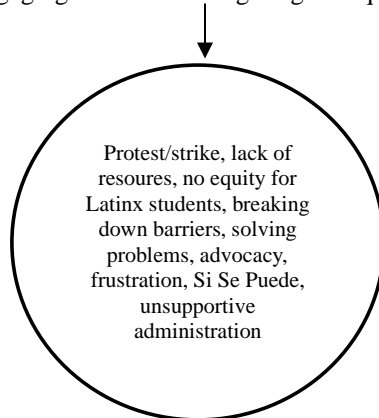


As Latinx students like Sirena navigated White spaces, they became aware of prejudice and bias. Ten (91.0%) participants reported feeling like they have to suppress their feelings and identities because of differences between White and Latinx students. For example, seven participants (64.0%) expressed that White leadership is valued and normalized on college campuses, but Latinx leadership is devalued and questioned. For the participants, proving their humanity as leaders (and students) resulted in stress, assimilation, frustration, and a lack of sense of belonging. In addition, five participants (45.0%) expressed that Latinx student leaders are viewed as the “diversity unicorn” in the group and not necessarily viewed for their accomplishments and qualifications.

Participants believed that White people are given an automatic pass to leadership and empowered to take on leadership roles. However, Latinx students are often “judged” by the color of their skin, questioned, undermined, and used for diversity quotas. Although it was a negative experience, participants navigated White spaces effectively by joining cultural student organizations, finding inclusive spaces on campus, and developing community.

**Engaging in activism.** As participants in the study processed obstacles and various negative experiences related to stereotypes and navigating White spaces, they simultaneously engaged in activism as a vehicle for paving the way and demanding accountability. The participants viewed activism as a vehicle for advocacy, equality, equity, resources, and fair treatment. Participants believed activism influenced their leadership process positively and negatively. Figure 6 shows approaches to activism with corresponding properties and dimensions.

The struggle of being a Latinx college student leader  
Engaging in activism – fighting for equity



*Figure 6.* Shows the struggle of engaging in activism with corresponding properties and dimensions.

Engaging in activism was viewed by the participants as an opportunity to “fight” for all Latinx students. For example, eight (73.0%) participants expressed that they engaged in student activism because it was one of the best ways to influence change on campus. Jennifer highlights what is like to protest on the college campus:

At my school, there’s a protest going on. It’s been going on for like maybe two weeks because we have these organizations at school like the Pacific Islander organization and Black Association. We have all these organizations and they’re all fighting for the same things because the chancellor isn’t giving them as much money as they should to each organization to pay for the counselors for each organization. And so, they’ve been doing it like a sit-in right in front of his office [the chancellor at a public institution]. It’s been going on for like, two weeks maybe. And they have to go through all of that just to be heard and they still haven’t even got any word back. It’s my second quarter here, but I haven’t heard

anybody else fighting for anything similar, or even if they are, maybe it gets resolved much faster and they don't have to go to this extent.

Jennifer highlighted existing disparities in higher education. In addition to being typical college students, Latinx students (and students of color) have to fight for resources and demand accountability from the administration. Participants in the study viewed activism as engaging in the struggle for change and more significant equity for all Latinx students. Most participants (73.0%) mentioned that Latinx students have to fight and advocate because higher education institutions do not support their success. Participants were aware of existing inequities, so advocating for change involved: speaking up against the status quo, peaceful protesting, and demanding resources from the administration.

Jennifer captures how she feels about Latinx student activism, which similarly reflects the voices of Rodolfo, Laura, Andy, Stephanie, and Francisco. Jennifer explains:

Yeah, I feel like they have much more pressure on them, mainly because I was just thinking about this the other day because for the strike, they're missing out on school. They're missing out on all these things just to fight for that [resources]. And like they're fighting even though it's only like maybe 60 people in the strike they're fighting for all the Hispanics at the school. That really put things into perspective for me because I thought people who are the next people who are leaders, they have so much more on the line.

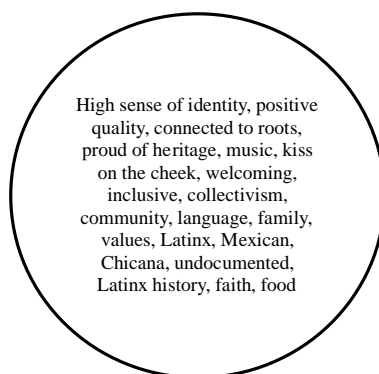
As a student observing others' leadership, Jennifer points out that Latinx students put themselves on the line for others by offering their mental energy and labor to influence change on the college campus. For example, five (45.0%) participants mentioned that Latinx students felt voiceless because of the administration, and they expressed a

disconnect between senior leadership and students of color. Through activism, Latinx students brought the issues and concerns of the Latinx community to the forefront. Despite the struggles, participants engaged in activism because they thought it was the right thing to do. They expressed a desire for change and felt they had a social responsibility to make things better for all Latinx students.

**Embracing culture and identity.** As students in the study engaged in the struggle for change, they had a high sense of self as Latinx students navigating historically White institutions. Participants (82.0%) embraced Latinx culture and identity as a positive influence for building emotional readiness and leadership self-efficacy. They viewed Latinx culture as a valuable element of their identity and heritage. Figure 7 shows embracing culture/identity with related properties and dimensions.

Embracing culture and identity emerged as a positive influence for building a leadership mindset. For example, ten (91.0%) participants expressed the importance of culture and identity during and throughout their college journey.

The struggle of being a Latinx college student leader  
Embracing culture/identity



*Figure 7.* Shows embracing culture/identity during the struggle with corresponding properties and dimensions.

Being family-oriented and hardworking were common attributes of Latinx culture, which participants highlighted as cultural influences in their development as leaders. Sirena explains the intersection of culture and leadership development:

I think it's different to be a Latino leader because Latinos have a different culture and we we're like all about family and different things that we have in our Mexican culture if we're Mexican, or if we're like from Honduras, or different places so that [Latinx culture] always goes into our leadership roles and how we act towards other people.

As participants developed into college leaders, they began to make sense of leadership from a cultural lens. A cultural lens facilitated students' development into leaders. For example, nine (82.0%) participants mentioned that cultural norms (kiss on the cheek, welcoming spirit, respect for authority, optimism, family, hard work, community), Spanish language, class, religion, gender, family, collectivism, and biculturalism influenced the way they made sense of the struggle. However, expressing cultural dimensions sometimes impacted students negatively because they did not feel welcomed in White spaces—and institutions. Latinx students' sense of self as a Latinx students—and authenticity—was sometimes questioned. However, Latinx students in the study embraced their culture and identity despite the struggle.

Similar to Francisco, participants in the study expressed that they often had to juggle Latinx culture and mainstream culture on the college campus. This theme appeared throughout the data as students reflected on identity and cultural influences. For example, six (55.0%) participants reported leadership style differences between Latinx and White cultures. They mentioned that the Latinx culture is open, welcoming,

community-focused, and inclusive; White culture is closed-off, not welcoming, exclusive, and individualistic. Eight (73.0%) participants expressed that White male student leaders are the gatekeepers of leadership—and that Latinx student leaders did not fit the prototype of the “White male leader” dominating college campuses. As Latinx students developed a leadership identity and began to believe in their capacity to make a difference, they recognized dominant leadership narratives different from Latinx culture/identity. Laura describes how she viewed college student leadership:

We just got through student body elections yesterday, and I believe we finally have the first Black woman as our student body president, or if it's not the first it's one, it is one of few in so many years. So, history was made yesterday. Just thinking about that, like wow, this took a long time to happen. Like, we're in 2022. It's just like, wow, you would assume that all these prejudices and subconscious racism is gone. But no, it's still there. Even if a lot of people like to claim, like yeah, sure you're not screaming names at us, but you know, subconsciously you still have this prejudice. I think that's reflected in just seeing all these positions of power be filled with majority White men...

As Latinx students embraced culture/identity, they also experienced uncertainty and frustration when the college environment did not validate their lived experiences. For example, participants (55.0%) felt frustrated about anti-Latinx bias and racism. Ayla explains that Latinx student organizations (and other cultural organizations) are perceived as cultural clubs and not leadership experiences:

I feel as the Latinx leader in school [that] our White counterparts, kind of be like...oh, that's like a cultural club. Like, that doesn't count. So, I don't know to

what extent, but it's very motivating [being a cultural organization leader] and at the same time, when you're with your own community, it's very empowering.

Like, we're here. And we can do it.

Despite the dominant leadership narrative privileging White student leaders, culture and identity gave the participants in the study a sense of purpose, drive, and ambition. Despite the struggle, participants (55.0%) in the study were proud of their culture and identity. As Latinx students in the study developed as leaders, it was vital for them to make meaning of leadership from a cultural lens. Shared values such as family, culture, identity, purpose, and community began to shape Latinx students' sense of self as leaders. Fabiola explains:

[Being a Latinx leader] means representing the Raza because I remember seeing that [University of Mountain High] admit rates used to be very low Hispanic [students], but now it's like the second highest in the city... Yeah, I feel like the leadership position isn't just for them. It's for representing their culture and their family, their community.

Despite the struggle and mainstream leadership narrative, the participants in the study maintained a "Sí Se Puede" (Yes, we can) leadership mindset, as Stephanie defined during the interview. Francisco also highlighted the importance of culture and identity:

I always, like growing up, I always had a strong sense of family. So, my dad, and my godfather, my uncle, like they've all been like strong patriarchs, right into the family, and my culture as a whole and it's... I'm very fortunate culturally. Like I love listening to my community, like traveling to Mexico. So, I'm not ashamed of my roots or anything... that's just like me still having that strong sense of culture

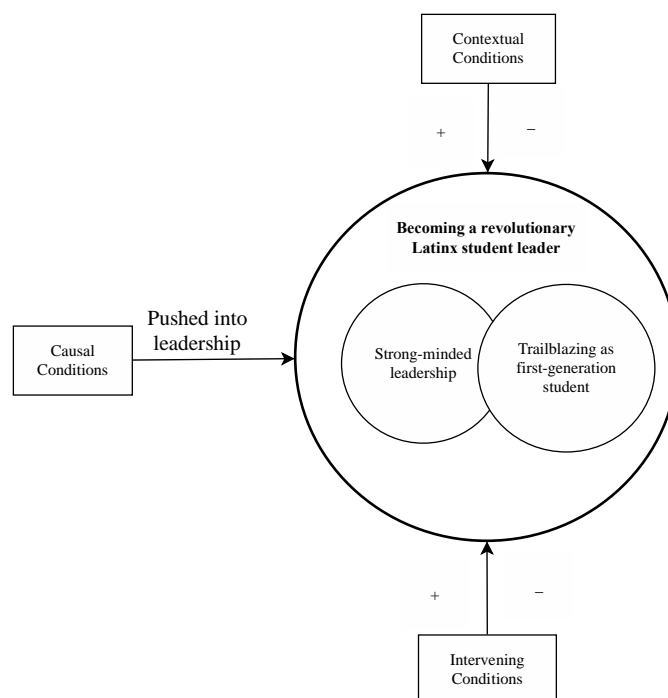
and at the same time, being in a good academic career. So, if you have that drive and ambition to work towards goals.

Although the campus environment did not value Latinx culture/identity, participants embraced Latinx culture/identity as a positive influence for building emotional readiness and confidence. Latinx students developing as leaders had to balance recurring influences related to Latinx representation, family, and community. Once Latinx students learn to navigate White spaces and challenge negative stereotypes as bicultural Latinx leaders, they are emotionally ready for the second stage in the leadership process—developing into a revolutionary student leader.

**Central Phenomenon: Becoming a Revolutionary Latinx Student Leader**  
**(Stage Two)**

The causal conditions discussed in the previous section (challenging stereotypes, navigating White spaces, engaging in activism, and embracing culture/identity) resulted in the development of two interrelated categories that influence the phenomena: sustaining strong-minded leadership and trailblazing as a first-generation bicultural, bilingual Latinx student. The central phenomenon of this grounded theory is becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader. Figure 8 shows the central phenomenon of the study, influencing conditions, and internal processes found within the phenomenon. Pushed into leadership is the process that influenced Latinx students in the study to take purposeful action in becoming revolutionary. This section outlines developmental processes influencing the phenomenon of becoming a revolutionary leader: pushed into leadership, sustaining strong-minded leadership and trailblazing as a first-generation bicultural, bilingual Latinx student.





*Figure 8.* Shows the central phenomenon of the study, influencing conditions, and internal processes found within the phenomenon.

**Pushed into leadership.** As Latinx students faced institutional obstacles, they encountered emotions and psychological processes that influenced their choice to engage in the struggle for change. Internal psychological processes affected students positively and negatively. All (100.0%) participants defined the struggle as institutional obstacles and inequities preventing Latinx students from succeeding in college holistically. In this first stage of awareness, participants had to choose whether to engage in the struggle for justice, advocacy, or change at their respective institutions. Francisco explains:

That's [to be a Latinx leader within school and society] more of a disadvantage because being a Latinx leader definitely paves the way and it's like revolutionizing the Hispanic community as we go. So, I think we're just breaking barriers as we go. And what it means to me, I guess, is just breaking that stigma

that Hispanics aren't just landscapers, construction workers or blue-collar workers. But you can educate me as educated as anybody else. It doesn't matter. We're not bait really, or skin color does not define us. So just breaking the barriers and paving the way for the next generation.

Francisco's progressive view of revolutionizing the Hispanic community reflects other students' feelings, desires, and emotions (91.0%) in the study. Like Francisco, students in the study were aware of how the world views Latinx people—and they fearlessly challenged the status quo and provided a counternarrative through leadership.

Because of the struggle, students in the study similarly described an initial desire to break barriers and pave the way. The struggle became clear as Latinx students encountered obstacles and negative college experiences, and the struggle sparked an internal longing for revolutionary change. As Latinx students in the study faced obstacles on the college campus (the struggle), they also became aware of systemic barriers impacting the larger Latinx community. This realization influenced Latinx students to take purposeful action by engaging in the struggle for change to make a difference.

Jennifer describes why she feels Latinx students are involved in the struggle for change:

Yeah, oh, yeah, I think it's different [Latinx leadership]. I feel like you have to go through more challenges. You have to find many more loopholes to be a leader because I feel like when you're trying to be a leader, it's because you're fighting for something that isn't right. And so, because you're doing that, you have to go through all of these loopholes so that the people you're going against don't think that you're just complaining or that you're just being dramatic. I feel like you kind of have to look for even more receipts to back up the thing that you're

fighting for because even though it may seem like a good cause, you just have to have even much more evidence than somebody who maybe isn't Latinx because you don't have the same privilege.

As students in the study became aware of the challenges they faced on the college campus, they also became more aware of sociopolitical issues impacting the larger Latinx community. Issues like oppression, inequity, racism, bias, stigma, stereotypes, privilege, colorism, sexism, class, and gender emerged as students became aware of their positionality on the college campus (and in society). Henceforth, Latinx students had to choose to engage (or not) in the leadership process. Five (45.0%) participants mentioned that issues Latinx students faced collectively contributed to their choice to engage in leadership opportunities. For example, three (27.0%) participants in the study became executive members of the Latinx student organization because they wanted to influence change on campus. Four (36.0%) participants said the struggle pushed people into leadership, and eight (73.0%) participants expressed motivation to advocate and fight for additional resources. Rodolfo outlines the reasons Latinx students engaged in the leadership process:

A leader must fight for the students and for their rights, you know, to represent them. For me, that's kind of the main thing just to fight for, for better, you know, better opportunities, and better education. So, they could have a better experience in college. That's kind of the main thing [for me as a leader]. That's [leadership] a big responsibility. It's a responsibility and I think nobody told me once. Oh, it's a full-time job.

Latinx students' desire for change and equity influenced their leadership process and choice to engage in leadership opportunities. As they contemplated different options and choices, they viewed their role as a sprouting leader as a critical step toward positive social change. A strong sense of social responsibility was a driving force that gave meaning to Latinx students who made a conscious decision to engage in the leadership process. As they faced obstacles and became more aware of systemic racism and inequities impacting the Latinx community, they developed a substantial commitment to the progress and advancement of the Latinx community. For example, all (100.0%) participants reported that their main goal was to positively impact the Latinx community. Rodolfo strongly desired to influence the greater Latinx community and future Latinx students. Flor expands on Rodolfo's expression by adding that Latinx student leaders become change agents by breaking barriers and creating paths for others to follow:

Specifically, being a Latina woman, it makes you even more of a minority group. And I want to break those unfair barriers...I have experienced unfair treatment. So being a leader, to a bunch of college students who might not know or are just looking to find their thing, I think that's very important in being able to shape their path. Everyone has met someone who has influenced them for the better. Hopefully, if you're in a leadership position for the better, but sometimes it happens for the worse. So, I think it's important because you have the power to change someone.

The participants in the study engaged in the leadership process with the end goal in mind. Flor's greatest hope as a Latina leader was to break barriers and open doors for other students. That is, leading with purpose while expanding opportunities for the next

generation of Latinx students. Jennifer similarly articulated that she is positively impacting the quality of life of Latinx students because she is helping create opportunities she did not have. Almost all participants (91.0%) reported that being a Latinx leader meant working toward change and fighting for all Latinx students. Three (27.0%) participants believed that higher education institutions were built against them and their prosperity; therefore, engaging in the leadership process was a social responsibility to the Latinx community (and other underrepresented students). Jennifer believed Latinx student leaders had additional emotional stressors because they felt the higher education system was built against them. Jennifer shared the following about Latinx student protests: “they [Latinx student leaders] seem very angry, or frustrated. Just like, the whole system that they feel is built against them or like against their prosperity, especially with the protest that’s going on.”

Latinx students believed the higher education system was built against them; therefore, they engaged in the leadership process to influence positive social change. Latinx students’ anger and frustration was transformed into purposeful action. Although being a Latinx student leader was seen as a challenge by seven (64.0%) participants, they felt it was necessary to take on the leadership challenge. Jennifer is proud to be a leader but also acknowledged the obstacles she faces as a first-generation Latinx student leader:

At the end of the day, it is really hard. And so, once I talked to all my peers and I realized like, oh, like, they can call their parents at night and ask them for help with their essay or their math homework, or stuff like that. I think it makes me want to see even more people who, like, I already wanted people to succeed that were like me, but now that I’m in this position it’s like you wanted even more

because it's like you're at the school with people who have access to so many more resources, but you still got in the same position. So, I just want you to succeed. It just makes me want to succeed even more and whatever that might be. And so, I think that's why I developed this sense of leadership because it just makes me proud yet frustrated that I don't have access to these resources, but it makes me proud that I still am here. So, I think that's why I developed this sense of leadership.

As the struggle pushed Latinx students into leadership, they also felt strong social responsibility to the larger Latinx community. As Latinx students chose to engage in the struggle, they developed a leadership identity and believed in their capacity to make a difference. The notion that Latinx students are “pushed” into leadership to make a change appeared as an essential element in becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader.

**Sustaining strong-minded leadership.** As Latinx students engaged in the struggle and leadership process, it was necessary for them to sustain strong-minded leadership. Latinx students' ability to be change agents—and fight for change—was dependent on their capacity to be mentally strong. For the participants in the study, mentally strong leaders were not afraid to stand up for what is right. The participants viewed strong leaders as people who can inspire change and fight for change despite the challenge.

Eleven (100.0%) participants believed leaders are strong-minded individuals and being strong-minded was seen as a critical leadership trait. The participants defined a “strong leader” as someone with the mental power and emotional intelligence to overcome setbacks. Seven (64.0%) participants believed that strong leaders are influential

people who are unafraid to challenge the status quo. Flor explained what strong-minded means to her:

[in leadership] the biggest thing is confidence in yourself, because you have to believe in yourself more than anyone else around you...so being confident and strong minded that she knows her place. She knows what she can do. And I think that's the most important thing [in leadership].

Similar to Flor, six (55.0%) participants defined strong leaders as brave, bold, and driven individuals. From the participant's view, strong-minded leaders tend to be courageous, do not give up, get things done, bounce back from obstacles, and have inner strength to fight for justice. Participants described strong leaders as those who possess the inner power to speak up on behalf of an entire community and are outspoken about things that matter to them. Rodolfo elaborates on his strength as a student leader and President of the Latinx student organization.

I was talking with a senior leader. People asked me, how do you do that? I mean, you just went to do that. Uh, yeah. I wasn't scared. I'm not scared. Because I don't have anything to lose ...but I just need to say [that] I'm going to do what I'm going to do [as student leader].

First-generation Latinx students like Rodolfo overcome stereotypes, racism, and institutional obstacles by not letting things get to them. The struggle influences Latinx students to become strong leaders who advocate for themselves, create opportunities for others, and hold institutions accountable. One area that needs further exploration is gender and strong-minded leadership. Four (36.0%) participants expressed that Latinas

must be stronger because they face gender obstacles and institutional barriers. Jennifer recognized gendered leadership influences:

I feel like the women if they are trying to be a leader and they are trying to fight against something I feel like they're seen as being more dramatic or complaining about something. So, I feel like the women are often seen as being more dramatic and the men are out and like they're backed up and sometimes even by the women, because I feel like something that also pops in my head is like, the whole thing about how you have to give the man the food first [cultural norm in Mexican culture]. Or like he doesn't get up from the table. You go and serve him and there's sometimes even situations where the grandma will tell her daughter like oh, like go give them the food. And it's like she's a woman but she's not on her daughter's side. She's telling her to go and serve them [bring the food to the men – to be subordinate to men] and so I feel like there definitely is an inequity where the woman is seen as more dramatic.

Jennifer is describing a Mexican cultural expectation where the women are expected to be subordinate to the men in the family and cater to the men. Grandmothers, as Jennifer mentions, are often responsible for teaching their daughters and granddaughters to obey and uphold the patriarchy. Jennifer expressed disagreement with these cultural expectations—and raised gender inequity issues. Similarly, Latinas in the study (73.0%) had different expectations than the men in their families, which impacted the way they navigated leadership on the college campus. However, the Latinas in the study believed in themselves and their ability to lead as strong and resilient leaders. From the



participant's view, strong-minded leaders tended to be courageous, did not give up, got things done, bounced back from obstacles, and had the inner strength to fight for justice.

Sustaining strong-minded leadership appeared as an element of Latinx leadership because students who engage in the leadership process must have the mindsets and strategies to overcome adversity. Overcoming the struggle and developing as a revolutionary leader required students to be mentally strong.

**Trailblazing as a first-generation latinx student.** As Latinx students in the study engaged in the leadership process, they were leading the way as trailblazers for future generations. Latinx students faced multiple priorities in college; however, protecting and uplifting their communities took center stage. For example, nine participants (82.0%) reported that paving the way or trailblazing was essential to them due to the lack of resources for first-generation Latinx students. Andy describes purposeful leadership and future generations:

I think at least I've learned from the leaders I've had in my life. Like they all come together with other Latinos. And the reason they became leaders is the reason they're doing what they're doing. It's so that like, you know, the next generations or like more Latinx students can have better opportunities that they don't have, but that you know, that they get more chances to be whatever their best version of themselves is.

Andy's reflection derives from a collectivistic orientation, and she is not thinking about individual gains but emphasizes the group's success. Most importantly, Andy pays it forward by thinking of future generations. Participants in the study made meaning of their leadership experiences from a multi-generational lens. For example, all participants

(100.0%) were the first ones to attend college, so their presence on the college campus paved the way for their families and community. Francisco was very connected to his roots and believed he was paving the way for his family:

I just came to understand those roots [Latinx cultural roots] and understanding my own cultural aspect is something to be proud of. And I know I make my family proud and I kind of paved the way. I kind of set an example for other people because anytime I mentioned that I'm an engineering student, everyone seems to be so impressed, but it's mostly been the fact that I've applied myself and have dedicated myself to pursuing this path and finishing it. So even being a leader, I feel like it kind of gives other students a sense that anything is possible. Because I know I feel a certain type of way when I see Latinos and Hispanics in STEM fields like science, technology, and engineering because there's so very little of us. So having a role like, that is amazing. And then being able to like to reach out to students and kind of bridge the gap between leadership and the chancellor as a whole and then students.

Although navigating college as a first-generation Latinx was difficult for the participants, they embraced every challenge because they viewed themselves as trailblazers. For Francisco, trailblazing as a Latinx leader included: awareness of self, making the family proud, paving the way, role modeling, commitment, empowerment, and bridge building. Most of the students in the study shared similar feelings and prioritized the group over the individual. Participants in the study faced challenges related to family influences; however, they implemented mindsets and behaviors that helped them balance the college journey. Lupita explains her experience as a first-generation Latinx student leader:

I feel like it has a lot to do with being first-generation Latinx student that obviously their parents would come from a different country where they're taught more traditional conservative values that aren't as inclusive and progressive as the newer generations tend to be. So, it's the, like, first-generation, new generations of Latinx students that are sort of breaking apart from being subjective to that authority and not questioning and following blindly because our parents say so [or] because our grandparents say so. So that's, that's something that, again, takes a lot of courage and commitment to just follow through.

Lupita was aware of family influences, but she built courage and forged a new path for herself and others to follow. For first-generation Latinx students, trailblazing can be stressful; however, students in the study had the skills to pave the way by balancing cultural and family expectations.

Another aspect of trailblazing was helping others and leading with the community in mind. Seven (64.0%) participants mentioned the importance of supporting the community, responding to community needs, and paying it forward. Four (36.0%) participants aspired to open the door for future generations by breaking barriers and generational cycles of oppression. Francisco describes what it means to be a first-generation Latinx student leader:

I'm the leader to serve not only myself, but like the people around me to produce even more and in that aspect, especially like Hispanics within [multicultural] centers, because there's not really a lot of Hispanics in positions [of power] or doing graduate school or anything in college. So being moved in that sense and opening the door for more than a generation. So being a leader is like the woman

delegate that kind of paved the way for the rest of the team to follow along. So, asking those difficult questions and putting in that extra work for the rest of the family or students' progress.

Francisco practiced leadership from a multi-generational perspective—for current Latinx students, his family, and future generations. Two (18.0%) participants (not involved in positional leadership roles) also believed that it was essential to represent the Latinx community and pave the way for others. Andy explained purposeful, driven leadership:

Oh, yeah, absolutely. I think at least I've learned from the leaders I've had in my life. Like they all come together with other Latinos. And the reason they became leaders is the reason they're doing what they're doing. It's so that like, you know, the next generations or like more Latinx students can have better opportunities that they don't have, not as hard but that you know, that they get more chances to be whatever their best version of themselves is.

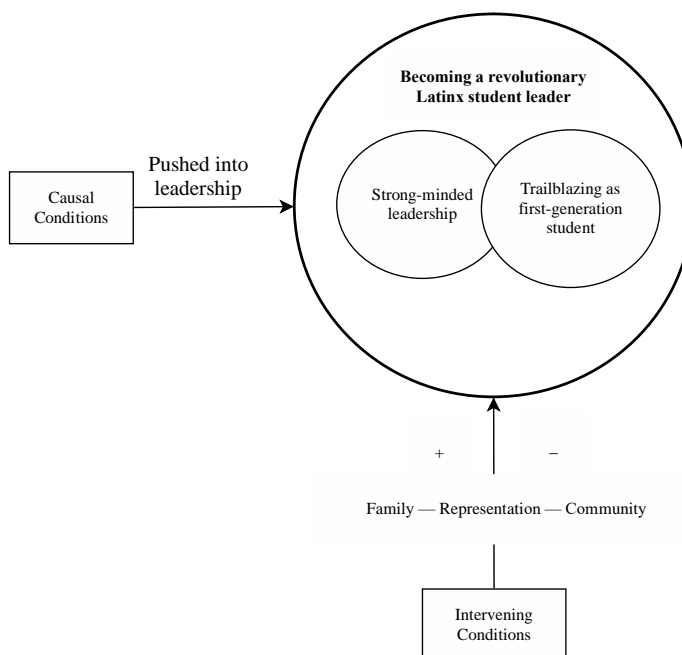
Trailblazing as a first-generation college student involved specific leadership skills and mindsets. Participants in the study needed a clear leadership vision and internal motivation to carry out their purpose—to trailblaze and pave the way for future generations. As participants in the study became leaders, paving the way for others became a priority.

### **Intervening Conditions: Recurring Modifiers of Revolutionary Leadership**

Intervening conditions are recurring modifiers that shape the causal conditions influencing the phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Latinx students make a conscious decision to become revolutionary leaders. They are inspired and encouraged by family members, a desire for more Latinx representation, and a desire to give back to the

community. Data from the interviews established the following categories as intervening conditions influencing Latinx students positively or negatively: family, representation, and community. Figure 9 illustrates the relationships between intervening conditions and the phenomenon.

**Family.** Ten (91.0%) participants acknowledged family as a critical influence during and throughout college. The family was an important influence for participants because of the close-knit relationships with immediate and extended family members. Participants referred to family members as father, mother, uncles, aunts, and grandparents.



*Figure 9.* Shows relationships between intervening conditions (family, representation, and community) and the central phenomenon.

As participants navigated college, they often felt pressure to balance college and family influences. Lupita highlights the importance of family and community:

I see how we are servant leaders, especially considering how, like in the Hispanic Latino culture, just serving others overall is already embedded into our morals. That which is really community based, like family oriented, and just adding along that we're already very tied to our people, our community, and our families. Just adding that extra layer of wanting them to be better too, because we don't want to see our parents be racist, we don't want to see them be homophobic, because we might have an intersectionality identity and one of those things that they might disagree with, therefore, we want them to outgrow those ways. We are literally unlearning all those things that they might have taught us.

Lupita highlights critical components of Latinx culture and identity: service, morals, community, family-oriented, connection, and intersectionality. In Lupita's reflection, she also pushes back against homophobia and racism in the Latinx community. Although the participants had much pressure to balance college, leadership, and family, they felt supported by family members. Participants balanced college activities and family responsibilities effectively. They were inspired by their family's immigration story and resiliency to overcome obstacles. Flor reflected on family influences:

My sister and my mom. I spoke about them briefly. My sister I'm so proud of her. So that is really kind of, even at younger ages they'd be right about your role. I would write about my mom and read about my sister. She's just so intelligent and bright that I always want to be like her. And my process has been like a little jealousy. She's so much better than me. But she really paved the path. She's definitely a big sister and I don't know where I'd be without her. And then just thinking of my parents, you know, coming all the way here [immigrated to the

U.S.] leaving their family behind. That's incredible too. And I don't know if I'd be able to do that. That's terrifying in my opinion, but they were strong enough to do it. They wanted us to have a better life.

As Latinx students navigated college (and leadership), it was important to honor their family's struggles and immigration stories. Family members like Flor's sister had a positive influence on the participant's leadership journey. Jennifer shared similar feelings:

My grandma because I look at her characteristics. She has, she's just so hard working and so persistent. Like she came here with nothing...she came here with my mom and my tia [aunt]. And she built this whole life, and she was like a single mom. Her husband had just died, and she came here, and she did all of this and like she got my mom and my dad through high school through middle school, high school, and college, and I just think that's so crazy because I mean, they have their careers.

Participants in the study believed that Latinx leaders needed to acknowledge and honor their family's immigration story and sacrifices. Jennifer and Flor stressed the importance of family in the leadership journey. They highlighted specific family members (sister, mother, and grandmother) that have paved the way and are viewed by the participants as pillars of change. On the other hand, three (27.0%) participants supported family members due to language barriers. One (0.1%) participant did not believe Latinx families supported student leadership because most Latinx families had never been to college.

Rodolfo elaborates on the level of support he provides for his family:

My older sister...but then she left [to Mexico] and I kind of was the next one [responsible for supporting family]. And then you know, my mom and my dad, they didn't speak English. So, I had to step up for them pretty much, you know, pretty much because they are in charge of my brother, and the family. They see me as the leader [of the family] of some sort and the community. Yeah, that's kind of how my family works. They kind of will come up to me for a lot of things, you know, none of them speak English. It was very hard that she wasn't here. I wish she was here and because she was a role model. And now I'm kind of like the older brother for my little brother, little sister.

First-generation Latinx students in the study had multiple priorities, including family responsibilities. Rodolfo described a hectic life juggling academics, leadership, and family responsibilities. For most participants in the study, the family was viewed as a pillar of support, inspiration, and encouragement. For the participants, being the best leader required "not failing your family" and "honoring their struggle." Although first-generation Latinx students in the study did not have an easy path attending college, the family served as an ecosystem of support. Family influenced Latinx students' leadership process positively.

**Representation.** Participants in the study viewed the lack of Latinx representation on the college campus as a negative influence. For example, ten (91.0%) participants reported that Latinx representation mattered to them; however, they did not believe there was enough representation across their college or senior leadership. Almost every participant (91.0%) mentioned that it was necessary to see themselves reflected in the fabric of higher education. Although five (45.0%) participants attended minority-



majority and HSI institutions, they expressed concern with the lack of Latinx representation in the student body, faculty ranks, and senior administration. This finding similarly reflects the perception of participants attending PWIs (55.0%). For example, one (0.1%) participant who attended a PWI felt discouraged because she was the only Latinx student in the classroom. Three (27.0%) participants reported difficulties finding Latinx leaders in college because they did not exist. Stephanie shared the following about Latinx representation: “Yeah, I hope there’s more Latinx leaders, you know, people, stepping out to do, you know, bigger things, stuff like that. You know, they are falling behind on education.” Stephanie, Ayla, Francisco, and Jennifer believed in representation and learning about leadership from people that look like them. They expressed frustration with learning about leadership from a White male lens. Participants believed in the value of Latinx leadership. Still, they felt that Latinx leaders are invisible in higher education. Ayla describes how she feels about the lack of Latinx representation and why representation matters:

Yes. I have a mentor that I look up to. I’ve known him since my first year. And I guess, like we mentioned before, like there’s very little representation of Latinx individuals in higher education, and being a first-year student, you’re very new to higher education, and so just seeing somebody [Latinx] in grad school navigating the space, and like doing all these research opportunities. It just motivated me to achieve the same. They’ve just always been there sharing the resources and making sure I’m on top of my stuff, too. So yeah, just another Latinx leader looking out for others, distributing the resources.

Ayla speaks to the power of Latinx representation on college campuses. Representation helped Ayla feel a sense of belonging and connection; however, the lack of Latinx leadership representation was a negative experience for participants in the study. Participants attributed the lack of Latinx representation to systemic racism and inequities. However, participants were optimistic as more Latinx students emerged as leaders in college. Drive and determination influenced the participants to “want it even more,” as Jennifer stated. Ayla expands on Latinx representation:

I am the only Latinx student in classrooms, it's just really intimidating. Really discouraging. I will definitely second-guess myself. Oh, like, if I have a question, I will not raise my hand to add or ask it because I'm just like...that's like a dumb question. Oh, like everybody probably knows the answer. Um, but it is so refreshing to see another Latino as the next student. Like, instantly you see them, and you become friends. Um, I don't know, it's just really discouraging to be in a space that kind of shows you that...Oh, no, like, you don't belong. Like you're not the majority. The way I speak isn't welcomed or, which is why again, I don't participate. It's tough, to say the least. And then, like, I feel as the Latinx leader in school, I feel that our White counterparts [think] like oh, that's [Latinx student organization] like a cultural club. Like, that doesn't count. So, I don't know the extent. But it's very motivating...when you're with your own community [Latinx community], it's very empowering. Like, oh, no, like, we're here. And I can do it.

Ayla and Jennifer provide a clear example of the benefits of Latinx representation: empowerment, inclusion, belonging, and connection. On the other hand, Jennifer provides an example of the negative effects of the lack of diversity representation:

discouragement, intimidation, lack of sense of belonging, invalidation, and an unwelcoming environment. The lack of Latinx representation in higher education negatively impacted Latinx students in the study. However, Latinx students' desire for change and equity countered the effects of contextual conditions. With drive and determination, the students in the study became leaders by not letting external factors get in the way of their success.

**Community.** At a local community level, participants reported the influence of the Latinx community on their leadership journey. Six (55.0%) participants mentioned that connecting to the Latinx community was essential to their success as leaders and college students. Andy elaborates on what community means to Latinx student leaders:

Just had to face so many extra challenges, because like I said, it's harder to find scholarships for students, you know, it's usually harder for Latino families to afford a higher education. So, I guess it kind of means that you have to...it feels like you have everything against you. But there's like a community behind you so you're still able to make it.

Andy highlights the challenges of being a first-generation Latinx student and elaborates on the power of community. Because the college environment was viewed by the participants as unwelcoming, the participant's Latinx community (both, inside the school and outside the school) served as a place where students felt loved, validated, and appreciated. The local Latinx community impacted students positively at all levels. However, they also felt much pressure on their shoulders to represent themselves and the entire Latinx community. For example, five (45.0%) participants expressed that Latinx student leaders lead with the community in mind because their goal is to improve their

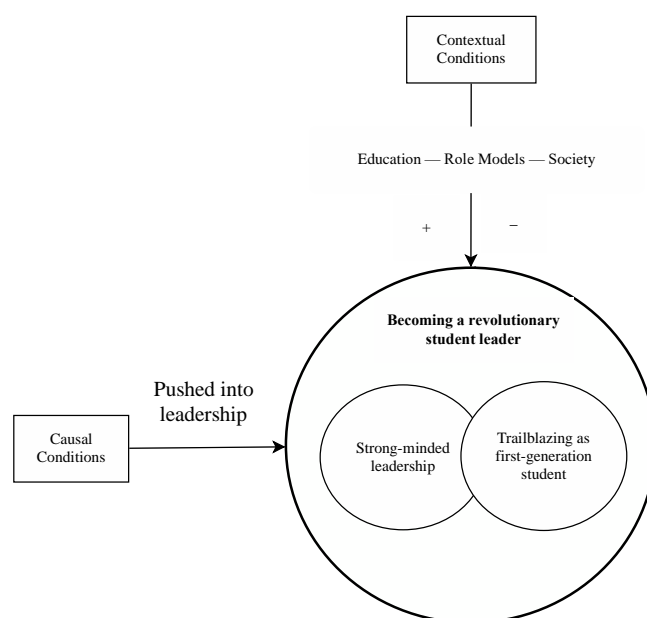
communities. Participants viewed social justice movements in the community as a positive influence. Participants had an internal desire and willingness to work toward change, and their desire was fueled by social and economic injustices impacting their community. A sense of collectivism was expressed throughout the interviews. Participant Laura elaborates on what community means to her:

You have to sort of protect and defend your community...one day I want to be able to just fulfill the role of taking care of my parents. And I think I wouldn't see that as a submissive position. Obviously, that is more of a leader position or leadership characteristics. And I guess it's a lot like, I want to protect them. And I guess that also reflects on, like, I want to protect my community because a lot of people in my community look like my parents...[they] are like my parents...so one day, I want to be able to provide this protection when they won't have to do that.

Laura's reflection provides insight into the reasons why Latinx students engaged in the leadership process—protect and defend their community. A collectivistic orientation, along with community and family influences, guided Latinx students' leadership values. The Latinx community, both on campus and off campus, provided a sense of connection and belonging. The Latinx community was a positive influence because it became a place where Latinx students felt seen and heard, loved, validated, and appreciated. Intervening conditions such as Latinx community, family and representation influenced the process of becoming a revolutionary leader. The next section outlines contextual conditions influencing Latinx students' leadership process.

### **Contextual Conditions: Situational Modifiers of Becoming Revolutionary**

Contextual conditions are situational influences at a specific time and place that create situations the participants respond to through action or strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Figure 10 shows contextual conditions (role models, society, education) influencing the process of becoming a Latinx student leader negatively or positively. This section outlines macro influences, such as U.S. society and education, impacting how participants view and make sense of leadership.



*Figure 10.* Shows contextual conditions (role models, society, education) influencing the process of becoming a Latinx student leader negatively or positively.

**Role models.** Well-known, Latinx leaders in the U.S. positively influenced participants' perception of Latinx leadership. All participants (100.0%) reported that national and local role models positively influenced their understanding of leadership. Participants brought up role models like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), John Lewis, Selena, Cesar Chavez, and Pope Francis, and they also mentioned Latinx teachers, Latinx administrators, and family members. These role models exhibited certain leadership

qualities from the participants' perspective—empathetic, inspirational, and relatable. Ten (91.0%) participants described role models as compassionate and understanding.

Participants described empathy as someone who understands the needs of people and different situations. They also defined empathy as listening, compassion, acceptance, and tough love. Being a good listener was a crucial leadership characteristic. Andy elaborates on the importance of being a good listener: “it [leadership] will mean to be respected by all of your peers. And that will mean that you also have to be respectful to your peers. And you know, be a good listener and good problem solver.” Participants in the study believed that being a good listener was a key leadership characteristic because leaders must role model what it means to be empathetic and compassionate. Ayla expands the definition of a good listener: “leadership is being a great example, but also listening to others. So not just being like the main star of the show, but like a leader that likes to listen to their team.” Ayla, Sirena, Lupita, and Andy described empathy as someone who understands the needs of people and different situations. Sirena takes the definition of empathetic leadership further:

They [Latinx leaders] have to be determined. And they also have to know how to help those around them because everybody has a different situation. So, they have to be good listeners to know what other people's needs are.

Nine (82.0%) participants reported that inspirational leaders who shared their struggles and stories were viewed as role models because they inspired Latinx college students.

Participants identified AOC as revolutionary because she is a rebellious woman leader moving an entire community forward and challenging the status quo as a Latina leader in

politics. Six (55.0%) participants mentioned AOC as an impactful, powerful, and inspirational Latina leader. Francisco explains how he views national leaders like AOC:

I would probably just say like, Alexandria, Ocasio Cortez (AOC), just because she's really like breaking ground and she doesn't just let anything get in the way of her goals. And her goal has always been like bettering our own population as a whole. So just seeing someone that looks like me, from my background, in that position of power is awesome.

It was essential for Francisco, Ayla, Laura, Flor, and Jennifer to have relatable and approachable role models like AOC in their lives. Role models like AOC supported Latinx students' interests, values, and goals. For example, two (18.0%) participants mentioned that Latina leaders faced struggles due to gender inequalities; therefore, they looked up to AOC as an influential Latina leader role modeling what leadership looks like for Latina women at the top levels of Congress. They described AOC as an out-of-the-box leader who overcomes obstacles through determination to fight against injustices and racial stereotypes. National and local role models positively influenced participants' leadership journeys. Participants aspired to become empathetic, inspirational, and relatable leaders. They learned about what it means to be a leader from Latinx role models.

**Society.** In addition to facing institutional challenges related to the college environment and climate, the participants in the study also acknowledged macro societal stressors. Societal stressors like overt racism and discrimination, pressure to assimilate to White leadership standards, and anti-Latinx sentiments negatively affected the participants. These stressors influenced how Latinx students saw themselves as leaders—

and their desire for revolutionary change. For example, perceptions of leadership from a macro societal lens influenced how participants made sense of leadership. Nine (82.0%) participants reported that societal barriers such as discrimination, sexism, White privilege, lack of national role models, and White normative perceptions of leadership influenced their leadership journey negatively.

Participants believed that mainstream society values White leadership and devalues Latinx leadership. Five participants (45.0%) expressed that White people are the gatekeepers of leadership, negatively impacting their leadership journey. Ayla explains:

I think it's a lot more pressure [being a Latinx leader]. I feel like you have a lot more eyes on you to do better. I feel that [leadership] it's a White individual empowerment. Everyone's just like, oh, yeah, that's a leader. Like, their [White leaders'] actions are not questioned. What they say is like taken. It's not questioned. And, if you're like a Latinx individual, I feel like you're constantly questioned, and I don't know...people will try to undermine you, and kind of show you that you're not deserving of that position of power [as a Latinx leader]. So, sometimes it's hard to know if you really earned it for your qualifications. Or if you're just like the diversity unicorn in the group, and that's why you're accepted. Just like a lot of pressure honestly, because I feel that we are just judged by the skin color and hair type. Like you just don't fit in the image of a leader. Yeah, but just a lot of pride showing up for your community.

Ayla expressed that White leadership is glorified and valued; however, Latinx leadership is questioned and devalued. Ayla refers to what several participants pointed out during the interviews— existing bias and racial hierarchies within college student leadership.



According to Ayla, Latinx leaders must earn leadership positions and prove themselves, but White leaders have an automatic pass to leadership. Francisco shared a similar sentiment when he said that “Latinx leaders are in a position right now that are at a crossroads, where they kind of have to assimilate to the Caucasian culture...because at the same time you have [racial] hierarchies.” Although the participants embraced Latinx culture and believed it was a valuable leadership asset, they spoke extensively about injustices, racism, and bias they experienced in the larger society. Five (45.0%) participants believed intersectionality played a role in Latinx leadership. For example, the participants felt that gender, color, language, and immigration status impacted them negatively as leaders in U.S. society. Lupita expressed that it is more difficult for Latinas to break barriers because they are seen as “sensitive and dramatic.” She expressed that Latinas have external influences telling them they are not enough and are not supposed to be in positions of power. Ayla highlighted her experience as a Latina leader:

I think being a Latina leader is a lot of pressure because there’s just so many obstacles in your way or so many things telling you that you can’t do it that like you’re not supposed to be in that position of power. I feel like you have to prove yourself 100 times more than a non-person of color. So, it’s just a lot of pressure. And I feel that even though I’ve held leadership positions, it doesn’t feel that way. It feels like that’s what I’m supposed to do. It doesn’t feel like a leadership position. I don’t know how to explain it. It’s a lot of pressure. I guess it’s like a self-doubt kind of thing. Like, you’ll never be that leader. There’s just a lot of obstacles. I think we share the same obstacles as Latinx individuals, but again, men have a greater advantage than women.

More than half of the participants (55.0%) expressed similar sentiments as Ayla, highlighting negative gendered influences on Latinas involved in the leadership process. Gender impacted the way Latinas viewed themselves as leaders and in society. Participants believed that systemic barriers like racism and inequity were the most significant obstacles preventing Latinx people from advancing into leadership roles in society; however, they overcame these barriers by standing strong in their identity and cultural roots. Francisco explains what it is like for him to embrace his culture and first-generation status:

I'm very fortunate culturally. I love listening to my community, like traveling to Mexico. I'm not ashamed of my roots or anything...that's just like me still having that strong sense of culture and at the same time, being in a good academic career. My driving ambition is that I'm so proud to be able to say I'm a first-generation college student, and I'm making a difference and just like working towards where I want to be. It's a big thing.

Because of the existing leadership narrative glorifying White leadership in U.S. society, Francisco and the other participants in the study similarly described a desire to create a unique path for others to follow. As they became leaders on the college campus, macro influences impacted the way Latinx students engaged in the leadership process and made decisions simultaneously. Participants in the study sustained a strong mentality and trailblazed as leaders despite the struggles.

**Education.** The participants in the study viewed higher education as an important vehicle for advancement in society. Five (45.0%) participants believed the Latinx community was falling behind in education, impacting the leadership pipeline for future

generations. Participants felt that early outreach to Latinx students and a change in mindset about higher education are needed to advance the Latinx community. Stephanie wished more Latinx leaders would step up because Latinx people are falling behind in education. Francisco expressed that there is not enough pressure for Latinx students to go to college, which leads to leadership underrepresentation. Francisco explains:

Unfortunately, inequity does that [referring to lack of Latinx representation] and especially because I have a lot of friends and family that continue to do the work that our parents did, like construction, a lot of landscaping, and they don't really pursue a secondary education because of the sense that they don't say that they're smart enough for it or that they just want to make money right away and not take those for two years to actually get a degree and be in a white collar type of job. So, in that sense, I don't think there's enough pressure for Latinos to pursue secondary education because I think it's around 11 or 12% of Latinos in the United States that hold a bachelor's degree. And within a master's, there's even less PhDs. The standard representation within STEM alone is laughable. I rarely I see Mexicans or any Hispanic engineers. It's like very few that I've met. So, I don't really think there's enough pressure in that sense. And that's why it's kind of disheartening for even our generation...the whole idea of coming to this country is for a better life...not for us to continue to do the same thing that our parents did.

Francisco is a senior in college and plans to pursue an Engineering master's degree after graduation. During his college years, Francisco has been involved in culturally relevant leadership opportunities such as the Society of Hispanic Engineer Professionals, the

Latinx student organization, the Latinx cultural center, and community based Latinx organizations. These opportunities have helped Francisco learn first-hand about existing education inequities in the Latinx community. Francisco was aware of systems of oppression and had ideas for moving the Latinx community forward. He was proud to be one of the few Latinx students in STEM at his institution. Francisco valued higher education because college has positively changed his life. Like Francisco, participants (55.0%) in the study viewed higher education as a positive and valuable opportunity for advancement—especially for low-income first-generation Latinx students. However, students acknowledged systemic barriers impacting their experiences in college and society.

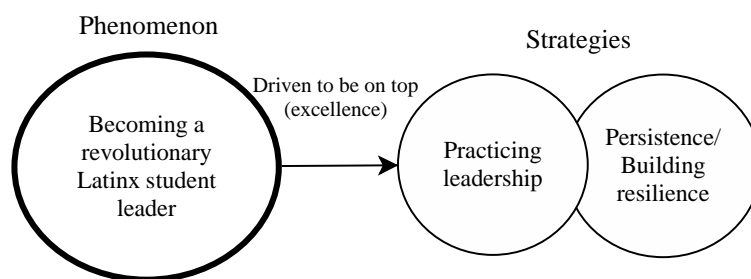
### **Strategies: Engaging in Positional Leadership Roles (Stage Three)**

Strategies (or action-interaction) are the reactions participants make in response to problems or situations that ultimately influence the phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). For this study, the strategies that surfaced from the data are included in the process of becoming revolutionary: practicing leadership and persistence/building resilience. Driven to be on top (excellence) is a mindset influencing the strategies Latinx students implement as they become leaders. Figure 11 shows the strategies participants implemented as they became revolutionary leaders.

**Driven to be on top (excellence).** Driven to be on top (excellence) is a mindset influencing the strategies Latinx students implemented as they become leaders. Francisco, Rodolfo, and Fabiola similarly shared that what counts as a leader is drive and ambition to work toward goals. Fabiola believed Latinx students had the drive to accomplish goals:

I feel like when they do try to accomplish something, Latinos would be able to because, you know, they're already here so they can do whatever they put their heart into. So, it doesn't always have to be one specific thing. I know like most of them study the big stuff like being a doctor or lawyer, but they can do whatever they want now. It [being a Latinx student] gives you reason to be a leader and to accomplish whatever you want to do.

A combination of culture/identity influenced students in the study to have a sense of drive and ambition to be the best possible leader. As they engaged in the leadership process, Latinx students held themselves to high standards to be the best version of themselves. Causal conditions like negative stereotypes and navigating White spaces interacted with the students' approach to excellence and being on top. They were determined to overcome the struggle through hard work, confidence, determination, perseverance, and purpose. Participants in the study effectively responded to the events and situations impacting their leadership experiences.



*Figure 11.* Shows the strategies (practicing leadership and persistence/building resilience) participants implemented as they became revolutionary leaders.

**Practicing leadership.** Participants in the study strongly desired to lead change on the college campus through elected positional leadership roles. Their desire for fundamental change and justice influenced their choice to run for an elected student

leadership position to advocate for all Latinx students. For Latinx students in the study, adversity empowered them to become leaders on the college campus. For example, ten (91.0%) participants viewed a formal leadership role (e.g., President of a Latinx organization) in college as a hierarchical position of power and influence. One (0.1%) participant expressed that leadership can be informal; however, most participants acknowledged that to push toward change and equity, Latinx student leaders had to be elected to a formal leadership role.

As participants engaged in the leadership process as positional leaders, they exhibited the following leadership values, mindsets, and behaviors: team-centered approach, care for the needs of the team or executive board, inclusivity and a welcoming spirit, and equity-minded focus. Although not stated explicitly, Latinx leaders pointed to leadership characteristics common in collectivist cultures. Participants believed communication was an essential leadership skill because Latinx student leaders needed a natural ability to speak up against injustices. Five (45.0%) participants mentioned that being a “good communicator” was a leadership asset. Lupita explains:

I feel like people with confidence are definitely the key to all of this. Because you need to have confidence first of all, to speak up against the injustices or speak up against subtle issues that go on. And just sort of having the confidence and courage to say something, whether it's to our family members, to our friends, to leaders that we are oftentimes taught to not question.

Lupita is speaking about building confidence and courage during the struggle, since these abilities help Latinx leaders speak up against the status quo. For example, ten (91.0%) participants believed Latinx leaders had to be assertive and equity-minded in the

decision-making process because getting things done entailed prioritizing the community's needs and being vocal about injustice. Fabiola made meaning of leadership from a cultural lens: "yeah, I feel like the leadership position isn't just for them. It's for representing their culture and their family, their community." Throughout the interviews, participants (100.0%) acknowledged that it was important to them as Latinx college students to have influence and impact as formal student leaders. Francisco viewed his role as President of the Hispanic Society of Engineers as the middle person between students and senior leaders at the institution. He viewed his leadership role as building bridges, communicating concerns, and expressing ideas for improvement. Ayla viewed her role as secretary of the Latin American Student Organization as having an impact on others by addressing the cultural needs of Latinx students on campus. Rodolfo viewed his role as President of the Latinx Unidos as helping students overcome barriers, developing the community, and putting pressure on the administration. Jennifer viewed Latinx leaders as resource brokers who help guide other students:

They're so positive and they're always like hoping for the best for us and they're always like telling us about all these outside resources. I also think I see them as a role model because they also come from the same backgrounds as me.

Participants viewed Latinx student leadership as a positive aspect of their college experience because leaders had shared goals to improve educational resources and opportunities for all Latinx students. Latinx students in positional leadership roles practiced leadership with change and equity in mind. They desired positive change concerning equity, inclusion, and access. Rodolfo was unafraid to challenge the status quo:

I had one of my advisors...she was very surprised that I was talking with [senior administration] for a long time. I was talking with a senior leader. She asked, how do you do that? I mean, I just went. I wasn't scared. I'm not scared. Because I don't have anything to lose. I'm a student. I know you [advisors] worry about your jobs, but I [as a leader] need to say and go do what I'm going to do.

Rodolfo wants to help other students by serving as a bridge between the Latinx organization and senior administration. Rodolfo is unafraid to stand up for himself and his community. As the Latinx student organization's President, Rodolfo used his formal leadership position to advocate for resources.

As participants engaged in the leadership process, they expressed a desire to continue to develop as bicultural and bilingual leaders through care and compassion. Participants defined care and compassion as caring for other Latinx students and serving all Latinx students on campus. Latinx students engaging in positional leadership roles demonstrated the following mindsets, behaviors, and values: inclusive, equity-minded, team-centered, compassionate, caring, assertive, vocal, and good communicators. The participants viewed these leadership characteristics as critical components of Latinx leadership.

Another element of practicing leadership is the concept of selfless leadership. Practicing selfless leadership was viewed by the participants as an important leadership mindset and behavior. For example, participants (100.0%) believed that selfless leadership is key to helping students overcome difficulties. Sirena explains that selfless leadership is about helping others and guiding others. She defines leaders as "someone that leads people to a purpose or just helps them and guides them." The participants



described selfless leadership as “paying it forward, leadership for others, guiding others, putting others first, and helping everyone succeed.” Latinx student leaders who are selfless stand up for others and against injustice. For the participants in the study, working toward change and equity involved elements of selfless leadership. Laura describes what selfless leadership means to her:

I know one of the women presidents of the Latinx organization, and I really do look up to her because not only is she selfless when it comes to making these decisions, and just like, always asking for the opinion of the executives and the chairs even though we’re below her. She prioritizes what we have to say. I think just that selflessness. Like, oh, yes, I’m in a position of power. Yes, I am the leader but it’s not just my decision to make. And, for me is just like standing up for the people that can’t speak or don’t speak up. Like I said, we’re in a predominately White institution. And I know not only she is the president for the Latinx organization, and she also ran for school Senate. Like, I think the character that I look up most has been this idea that she wants to stand up for the community. So, like standing up for minority groups. It’s very important

The participants in the study made sense of selfless leadership from a community perspective rather than from an individualistic point of view. Leadership was viewed from a collectivistic lens placing focus on service to the community. Laura elaborates on selfless leadership from a cultural lens:

As I mentioned earlier, I feel like Latinx leadership has much more selflessness when compared to other people who might be like, non-Hispanic White, where it’s a little bit more selfish.

As the participants described their perceptions of mainstream leadership, they made clear distinctions between Latinx leadership and White leadership. The participants perceived White leadership as “not welcoming” and individualistic and challenged the status quo by emphasizing selfless leadership. Francisco describes what it is like to lead with community and inclusion in mind:

I feel that I carry the responsibility of providing opportunities for all students. So, my biggest goal is to provide opportunities for all students, whether I don't agree with your political views or your beliefs. My job is to provide you with the opportunities that you're looking for. And not let my own ideals or views get in the way of you pursuing your education. That's like the most important thing for me. I'm fortunate to not allow these people in positions of power [college administrators] use their position to implement their own ideologies within our school.

For the participants in the study (and Francisco), practicing leadership on the college campus meant going beyond individual gains and focusing on what is best for the group. Students acting in a leadership capacity and those observing others' leadership practice expressed making sense of leadership from a selfless lens. For student leaders in the study who held a positional leadership role (64.0%), selfless leadership was one of the strategies implemented as they practiced leadership. Students observing others' leadership (36.0%) believed influential leaders had to be selfless. A selfless mindset and behavior are critical dimensions of Latinx leadership.

**Persistence and building resilience.** All participants (100.0%) expressed that Latinx leaders must have high confidence in overcoming obstacles through persistence

and resilience. As student leaders and the first ones in their families to attend college, participants believed in their ability to build resilience through overcoming obstacles and pushing forward despite personal and institutional challenges. The participants viewed the college campus as a complex process where they had to develop resilience, courage, persistence, grit, and emotional intelligence. Although their college journey and leadership process were complicated, they overcame these challenges through perseverance, persistence, resilience, application, and dedication.

Nine (82.0%) participants expressed that Latinx student leaders needed to challenge the status quo and practice inclusivity (73.0%). Challenging the status quo entailed calling things out, putting pressure on the administration, being vocal and voicing concerns, standing up for minority groups, demanding resources, being unafraid to stand up for justice, and being vocal about exclusion. Participants acknowledged that they must work hard to gain equal treatment and opportunities. On the other hand, they felt that White students had privileges and did not fight for resources. They reported that White students have the entire campus for them to be White; however, Latinx students (and students of color) must fight for safe spaces and resources. These dynamics impacted participants negatively as they engaged in the leadership process and responded to institutional challenges. Jennifer explains her observations of Latinx leaders on campus:

A lot of the leaders...they seem like they're very angry, or frustrated. Just like, the whole system that they feel is built against them or like against their prosperity, especially with the protest that's going on. I've been picking up more on those leaders. I feel like they all just seem very frustrated with what they're

fighting for...with what they're fighting against, because it might seem like common sense at some point. I feel like a lot of them seem very frustrated because they aren't getting what they are fighting for, even though they have been working there for days and have been getting a lot of support from similar people, but just the people in administration are the ones doing it. That it's only one person in administration that controls everybody else. When in college, the student body should be the ones that are controlling everything because you're paying to be at this school, you're paying for all these fees. And you kind of don't have a voice because at the end of the day you can be telling the administrations...this is what I want, but at the end of the day, they get to choose whether they say yes or no. And the fact that a lot of the time the people who are in admin don't look like you or are nowhere near your age. So, they also don't understand what it's like being a college in 2022.

Jennifer's feelings and observations tell a story about what Latinx student leaders (and leaders of color) face on the college campus. As Latinx students fought for resources and engaged in activism, they found themselves feeling frustrated with the lack of progress. During these times of high stress and frustration, it was important for the students in the study to be strong, persistent, resilient, and selfless. As Jennifer points out, working toward change and equity was not an easy path for Latinx student leaders. Latinx students had to practice emotional intelligence and diplomacy as they challenged the status quo and challenged disconnected senior administrators. This process was complex for the students and perpetuated feelings of exclusion.

Participants in the study had to “fight” for access and resources. Therefore, they developed equity and inclusion mindsets as student leaders. The notion of inclusiveness came up in the data several times. For example, seven (64.0%) participants expressed that being “inclusive” was a positive leadership characteristic. Lupita defines inclusion from an intersectionality lens:

So that sense of intersectionality is something that allows us to empathize with other people, and sort of include more people into the conversation to be more inclusive, because like White women would think of other women only. And I see that a lot with like feminism. It’s like [for] White women, feminism doesn’t really include people of color and women of color. And there’s like extra struggles, you know, because of the color of the skin [and] because of stereotypes.

Being inclusive meant having an open mind, accepting all people, connecting to others, having unity and shared cultural spaces, and collaborating across student organizations. As Latinx student leaders navigated college, it was necessary to role model inclusivity and work across differences to provide resources and help everyone succeed. Because participants (91.0%) experienced a lack of belonging, safe spaces, and inclusive spaces on campus, they felt a greater responsibility to create welcoming and inclusive spaces for other Latinx students. As participants became revolutionary leaders, they persisted because of their resiliency and ability to push forward. The participants viewed the process as a positive aspect of Latinx leadership.

### **Consequences of the Strategies Used by Participants**

The participants in the study have been successful in their academic and leadership journey; therefore, the strategies mentioned in the previous section have been

effective thus far. The consequences of the strategies the students implemented include: finding fulfillment in the struggle and graduating from college despite the struggle. Consequences are “anticipated or actual outcomes of the action and interaction” or strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 159). The consequences of Latinx students’ strategies will positively impact the institution and other Latinx students through improved equity. By graduating from college, Latinx students will positively impact their families and the larger Latinx community.

**Finding fulfillment in the struggle.** Because of the lack of Latinx representation, participants viewed their college and leadership journey positively, contributing to a more significant cause. Latinx students became formal leaders on the college campus, contributing to a collective struggle for change and equity in higher education and society. Laura reflected on her journey as a Latinx student leader:

And the way I’ve always associated Hispanic leadership is this idea of, I just want to represent my community out there. Or we need more Latina small shop owners like we need more mental health clinics, you know, stuff like that. It’s more about it [collective purpose]. It’s like representation mainly, and I don’t think that representation is there.

As a student leader, Laura believed in the power of using her unique leadership voice. Laura understood who she was as a Latina student leader—and finding her voice through leadership was a rewarding experience. Latinx students’ college and leadership paths contributed to positive change at the individual and group level. At the personal level, Latinx students felt satisfied to be the first ones to accomplish important milestones: 1) they broke barriers by being the first in the families to attend college, 2) they broke

barriers by being the first in the family to become a leader in college, 3) they broke barriers by challenging the status quo in predominantly White spaces, 4) they broke barriers by being the only Latinx student in the classroom, 5) they broke barriers because they refused to assimilate, 6) they broke barriers when they challenged the administration, 7) they broke barriers by protesting and putting themselves on the line, and 8) they broke barriers by enacting leadership and being brave during and throughout the struggle. Sirena elaborates on her determination to push forward despite the struggle:

It's taken me a lot to be in college [the struggle] but I'm still here and I'm still determined to get my degree and everything [finding joy in the leadership journey].

Sirena's reflection outlines the complexity of being a first-generation Latinx college student, which can often be a difficult path. However, Sirena and other participants in the study found personal gratification in attending college as first-generation college students. At a group level, Latinx students believed they were contributing to something greater than themselves—contributing to a wave of rising Latinx leaders pushing for equity and change. Lupita explains:

My community is people of color; therefore, I know, and I see their struggles, and I am oftentimes around for those struggles. So that sense of intersectionality is something that allows us to empathize with other people, and sort of include more people into the conversation. Oftentimes Latino leaders might struggle through and it's also breaking through those misconceptions of Latinx people. Because a lot of racism is obviously still prevalent in the United States...I see how we [Latinx students] are servant leaders, especially considering how in the Hispanic

Latino culture, serving others overall is already embedded into our morals. That which is really community based, like family oriented, and just adding along that we're already very tied to our people, our community, and our families.

Lupita brings empathy, service, struggle, community, intersectionality, culture, and family into the conversation. For Lupita, leadership was a vehicle for doing the right thing for others and the community. Similarly, Latinx students (91.0%) made meaning of their leadership experiences from a cultural and collectivistic lens, influencing their sense of cultural pride and satisfaction. Fabiola reflected on her leadership and college journey by saying, "it [Latinx culture] gives you a reason to be a leader and to accomplish whatever you want to do." Fabiola, Rodolfo, Laura, Francisco, Sirena, Lupita, and Ayla engaged in the leadership process for the right reasons. Latinx students (91.0%) found fulfillment in the struggle because they were contributing to positive social change. Helping other students succeed in college and pushing for positive social change helped an entire community move forward. Contributing to the collective struggle for change was a rewarding experience for the participants, and they broke barriers and paved the way.

**Graduating from college despite the struggle.** Recognizing the obstacles and challenges of being a first-generation Latinx college student, ten (91.0%) participants expressed that the highest accomplishment was to graduate from college as a first-generation Latinx student leader. One (0.1%) participant mentioned that being respected by their peers was a success. Participants simultaneously advanced their communities and uplifted their families as they graduated from college as first-generation, bicultural, bilingual Latinx students. The participants viewed graduation from college as a high



achievement for themselves, family, and the community. For example, four (36.0%) participants wanted to honor their parent's struggles and sacrifices. Fabiola describes her family's immigration sacrifices:

I feel leadership will be someone who is selfless, and you know it doesn't always speak about themselves but is there for others too. They do all the work to better themselves and to do everything for the best basically. I feel I see this most through my mom because she showed leadership when she left Mexico. I think she was 18 years old to come here and she's never returned there for almost 30 years. And she really made a really big impact on her life and her family's life because she took the leadership of working hard here to send money over there, to build a house for my grandma and I feel like that's a strong example for me of leadership.

As participants practiced leadership on the college campus, they were oftentimes reminded of the reasons why they made the choice to become leaders. For the participants, the leadership journey was viewed as an opportunity to impact change and equity; however, they ultimately aspired to honor their parent's struggles and sacrifices by graduating college as a successful first-generation Latinx student leader. Francisco explains what success means to him as a first-generation Latinx student leader:

That means being the best you can be at whatever you hold yourself to, whether it be the classes, your friend group and even your family. I also think a lot about my family because of the struggles that both my parents face, even in coming to this country for me to have a better life and me capitalizing on those opportunities. It makes me proud to get to be this far in my academic career. And it gives me a

sense of...that they are working it off, and I kind of feel even more driven by them in that aspect. I need to finish this bachelor's and pursue my master's because not only am I doing it for myself, but I'm doing it for them as well. I think it's just something to be proud of.

As a first-generation college student, Francisco is proud of his accomplishments and achievement. He expresses a sense of humility and gratitude for his college journey and acknowledges his family's immigration struggles. Francisco and other student leaders in the study (73.0%) became revolutionary leaders because of the struggle. Believing in themselves, and leading with the end goal in mind, was a critical aspect of navigating college successfully as a Latinx student leader. By graduating from college, Latinx students in the study positively impact their families and community. In the end, Latinx student leaders felt a sense of fulfillment because they engaged in the leadership process for the right reasons. Contributing to the collective struggle for change was rewarding and satisfying for the participants. Graduating from college as a first-generation Latinx student leader was the highest accomplishment.

### **Answers to the Research Question**

All participants were allowed to provide feedback on the final categories and subcategories developed through the analytic process. Participants were asked to provide feedback on whether the proposed grounded theory represented how they viewed and perceived leadership and navigated leadership as Latinx college students. The purpose of the follow-up communication was to ensure participants' voices were reflected in the findings, which helped triangulate the data. Table 2 represents the conceptual model that

was emailed to students. Six (55.0%) participants responded through email communication.

*Ayla:* These findings look great! I agree with them and believe they represent my input. Thank you for sharing.

*Lupita:* Thank you for your message. These notes are accurate to my perception of leadership. Thank you.

*Rodolfo:* Sí, estoy de acuerdo. Sí representa mi voz como student leader. [Yes, I am in agreement. Yes, it represents my voice as a student leader].

*Jennifer:* Thank you very much and I do agree and believe that represents my voice in the findings!

*Fabiola:* I hope this email finds you well. To answer your question, yes. The information you sent me does reflect the way I view and perceive leadership as a Latinx college student. Thank you so much for allowing me to participate in your research study!

*Andy:* I believe what you have is accurate.

Table 2

*Conceptual Model Presented to Participants for Feedback*

Theme: A Grounded Theory on Becoming a Revolutionary Latinx Student Leader	
1. Latinx college students become revolutionary student leaders by	Engaging in the struggle Challenging negative stereotypes Engaging in activism (fighting for resources, advocating for change) Navigating White spaces effectively
2. Paving the way for future generations	Becoming revolutionary By being strong-minded Trailblazing as first gens/Latinx Embracing culture/identity
3. Practicing leadership on the college campus	Having impact and influence Leading student organizations (formal leadership) Practicing selfless leadership Persistence/resilience

Table 2  
*Conceptual Model Presented to Participants for Feedback*

Theme: A Grounded Theory on Becoming a Revolutionary Latinx Student Leader
4. External factors influence Latinx students' leadership experiences positively or negatively Family: Strength, support, and making them proud Representation: Not enough Latinx leaders in college, school, or society Community: Giving back, advancing community Education: Seen as an equalizer and pipeline for Latinx leaders Society: White leadership is normalized; Latinx leaders need visibility/exposure
5. Outcomes: Why Latinx students become revolutionary leaders Leadership impact: Impact on others, institution, families, and communities Success: Become best version of self by graduating from college/working toward change Making family proud (honoring family story)

Participant responses, data collected, interviews, notes, follow-up communication, and memos helped triangulate the data. Based on this grounded theory analysis, three umbrella categories emerged from the data: 1) engaging in the struggle for change, 2) becoming a revolutionary leader, and 3) practicing leadership. Umbrella categories, and respective properties with dimensions, emerged as a three-staged multidimensional leadership process influenced by context and conditions. The grounded theory that emerged from the data is the process of becoming a revolutionary Latinx leader.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 provided an overview of the study's findings and answers to the research questions. The proposed Latinx leadership model serves as a visual representation of the process of becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader. The interrelationships between categories that emerged from the data worked together to create the core category (becoming revolutionary) over three leadership development stages. The three developmental stages capture Latinx students' leadership experiences, perceptions, and realities: 1) engaging in the struggle for change, 2) becoming a revolutionary leader, and 3) practicing leadership. The struggle sparked an internal desire

for revolutionary change on the college campus. Latinx students' internal desire for change (and equity) influenced them to enact leadership by engaging in formal leadership roles. Latinx students must progress through the stages with determination, commitment, strength, resilience, persistence, drive, and a selfless mindset. They must consider contextual (education, role models, society) and intervening conditions (family, representation, community) as recurring and situational modifiers. The outcomes of their strategies include finding fulfillment in the struggle and graduating from college despite the struggle. The core category (becoming revolutionary) and three stages of leadership that emerged from the data provide a picture of how Latinx students perceive leadership, how they make meaning of their psychosocial identities in relation to leadership, how Latinx students learn and practice leadership, and how they navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces. Chapter 5 discusses the findings, future directions, and recommendations for research and practice.

## CHAPTER V

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

The literature highlighting the leadership experiences and realities of Latinx students in higher education remains scarce (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Garcia, 2017; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Lozano, 2015). The Latinx community is the largest ethnic population in the U.S. (Passel et al., 2021); however, Latinx students remain underrepresented in higher education and have some of the lowest enrollment, engagement, retention, and graduation rates. As a branch of student development theory (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993), leadership development has been identified as a learning outcome and retention tool for college students (Astin, 1993; Dugan & Komives, 2011). However, leadership theories do not include Latinx students' lived realities and "racial, ethnic, and cultural ways of knowing" (Garcia, 2019, p. 49). Inclusive leadership development models not only address Latinx students' developmental needs but help build leadership capacity for the continued development of the Latinx community. An area of concern is the lack of leadership studies addressing the unique needs of Latinx college students (and diverse populations) as a means of designing inclusive leadership programs (Komives, 2011; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Wagner, 2011).

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to gain a better understanding of the leadership experiences of undergraduate Latinx college students, how Latinx students' psychosocial identities shape their perception of leadership, and to develop a leadership development model from the theory inducted. The questions this study sought to answer were:

1. How do Latinx students perceive and make meaning of leadership?
2. How do Latinx students make meaning of their psychosocial identities and the ways in which they learn and practice leadership?
3. How do Latinx students navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces?

The study's findings may extend the literature regarding Latinx student leadership development and may contribute to building capacity for the continued growth of the Latinx community in the United States. Chapter 5 is the final chapter and contains a discussion of the findings in the context of existing literature, the conclusions, and recommendations of the study. The first section provides a summary of the study's findings, a discussion of the findings, and the leadership model. The second section of the chapter highlights implications and recommendations for practice and research and concludes with a summary of the study.

### **Summary of Findings**

The study's purpose was to better understand how Latinx students' psychosocial identities shape their perception of leadership. This study used a qualitative grounded theory approach to explore perceptions of leadership from the viewpoint of Latinx college students (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A grounded theory approach allowed a story to emerge from the data collected, which led to the development of a model explaining the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Mainstream leadership models have not yet catered to the unique needs of Latinx and diverse college populations (Dugan et al., 2012; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015), resulting in a lack of knowledge about the

ways Latinx college students develop as leaders. As such, new leadership models focused on the unique leadership voices of Latinx students are warranted.

Several researchers have designed leadership development models for college students from various perspectives (Astin & Astin, 1996; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Parker III & Pascarella, 2013). These models include the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996; Tyree, 1998), Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Posner, 2004; Posner et al., 2010), the Relational Leadership Model (Komives et al., 2007), and the Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2005). These models describe and explain the process through which college students may develop as leaders; however, since leadership is socially constructed (Grint, 2005), leadership can mean different things to different groups of students (Arminio et al., 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Walls, 2001; Parker III & Pascarella, 2013; Renn, 2007).

This study focused on the leadership processes that emerged from 11 interviews of Latinx students as they become revolutionary student leaders in college. The findings of this study provide a counternarrative focusing on Latinx students' leadership assets as they navigate college. Corbin and Strauss's (2014) systematic approach to grounded was utilized for this study. Eleven Latinx college students from diverse geographical regions in the United States and institutions participated in the study. The theoretical sample for the analysis produced 11 transcribed interviews, 11 notes, 20 memos, and six emails used as data for the study. Three stages emerged through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding analysis, highlighting a three-stage process through which Latinx students become revolutionary leaders on the college campus. A revolutionary Latinx



student leader is a change agent on the college campus, taking purposeful action toward equity, inclusion, and justice. A summary of the stages are as follows:

Stage 1 is the process of engaging in the struggle for change. Latinx students must make a conscious decision to engage in the leadership process and accept responsibility to become formal leaders by challenging negative stereotypes, engaging in student activism, navigating White spaces effectively, and embracing culture/identity. Latinx students who experience disparities develop increased awareness of equity and justice issues. In turn, they begin internalizing a leadership identity and contemplating choices. As Latinx students consider their role as potential leaders, they start to believe in their capacity to make a difference. Once a leadership mindset is internalized, Latinx students consciously choose to become formal leaders. Latinx students engaged in the leadership process must balance recurring influences related to Latinx representation, family expectations, and community expectations.

Stage 2 is the process of becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader. Latinx students committed to fundamental change on campus, and advancing the Latinx community, develop into revolutionary leaders by having the mental strength and emotional intelligence to overcome obstacles, effectively succeeding in college in the face of unknown factors, trailblazing as first one in the family to attend college, and having a high sense of identity as bicultural, bilingual Latinx leaders. Latinx students developing into revolutionary leaders need to counteract the effect of intersecting influences related to role models they look up to, leadership narratives and perceptions in society, and education influences.

Stage 3 is the process of engaging in positional leadership roles on the college campus. Latinx student leaders achieve their goals to become influential change agents on the college campus by persisting through the struggles, building resiliency, and practicing leadership. Latinx students must implement these leadership elements (strategies) as they become revolutionary leaders. The outcomes of their strategies include finding satisfaction in the leadership process and graduating from college despite the struggle. Figure 1 shows the Latinx student leadership model from the study. Next, I highlight key findings within each of the three stages of the proposed Latinx Student Leadership Development model while comparing these findings within each stage to the extend student leadership literature.

### **Stage One: Latinx Students Engage in the Struggle for Change**

The study's findings revealed that Latinx students go through three stages of leadership development that require emotional readiness, self-awareness, and decision making. As Latinx students face college obstacles (the struggle), their awareness of equity and justice issues increases. An increased awareness influences students to contemplate choices and internalize a leadership identity. The first stage of awareness is consistent with Komives et al. (2005) leadership identity development model (LID); however, the LID model does not address stereotypes, White spaces, activism, or cultural/identity as causal conditions in developing a leadership identity. This is an important distinction because the LID model is widely used in higher education to develop students into leaders. After students internalize a leadership mindset, they consciously choose to engage in the struggle for change. This finding is similar to the first component (individual values) of the social change model of leadership, which

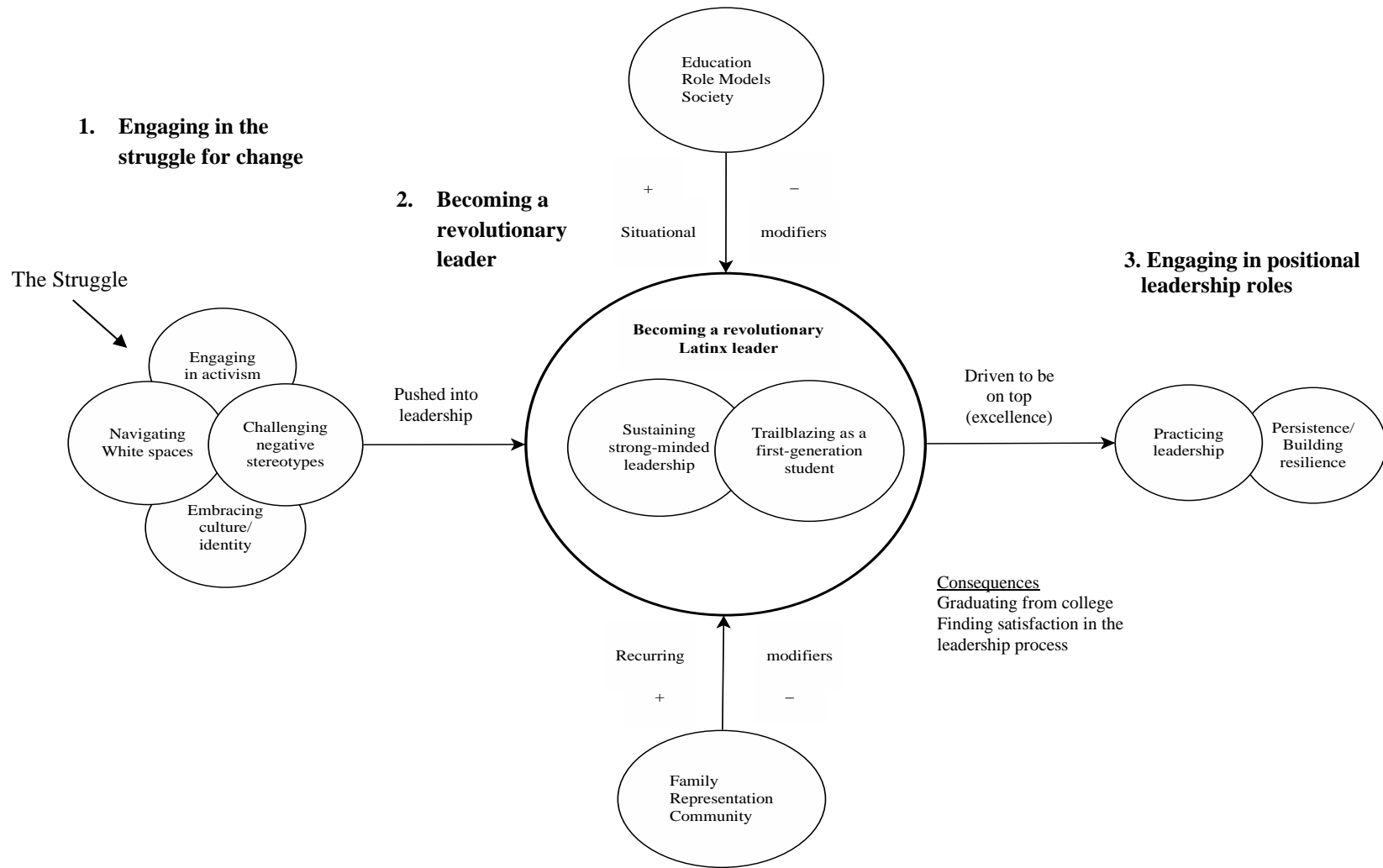
focuses on the consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment (HERI, 1996). The social change model embodies the core value of positive social change and has interconnecting values like equity, social justice, collaboration, service, civility, and citizenship. Some of these values (change, equity, justice, service) are similar to the inherent values of Latinx students in this study; however, the social change model was not designed for Latinx students and cannot serve as a prescriptive development tool for all students. The social change model does not recognize the Latinx culture/identity, language, knowledge, and experiences Latinx students bring to the college campus. This study's findings extend knowledge into why Latinx students engage in the struggle for change. The struggle (obstacles and inequities) sparks an internal desire for revolutionary change on the college campus.

Latinx students define the struggle as institutional obstacles and inequities negatively impacting their college journey. In Lozano's (2015) study, the struggle was experienced by Latinx students; however, Lozano (2015) did not elaborate on the struggle as a developmental process. My study is significant because engaging in the struggle for change is the umbrella process (stage one) that interconnects with four other simultaneous processes: challenging stereotypes, navigating White spaces, engaging in activism, and embracing culture/identity. These processes work together as an ecosystem for character building, emotional readiness, and purposeful action. Together, these processes spark revolutionary leadership.

**Challenging negative stereotypes.** One of four critical developmental processes Latinx students experience is challenging negative stereotypes. Negative stereotypes include misconceptions of Latinx people regarding class, color, gender, culture, language,

leadership, race/ethnicity, immigration status, and language. Negative stereotypes can result in racism, stigma, bias, prejudice, invalidation, machismo/sexism, and microaggressions. The analysis revealed that Latinx students challenge three types of negative stereotypes and unfair and inequitable practices: racial/ethnic stereotypes, stereotypes associated with colorism, and stereotypes related to gender roles. Sadly, Latinx students who aspire to become formal leaders on the college campus must challenge negative stereotypes by carefully navigating interactions, working harder than White students, and engaging in positional leadership roles. Racism, for example, is going to be a barrier that Latinx students must grapple with during and throughout the leadership journey. The pressure to assimilate to White standards of leadership and to challenge negative racial stereotypes are barriers student leaders must overcome with emotional intelligence, resiliency, leadership self-efficacy (Hanna et al., 2008), and mental strength. The way Latinx students navigate barriers tells a story about Latinx students' developmental issues and concerns. Because leadership education oftentimes overlooks power, privilege, oppression, racism, classism, discrimination, marginality, intersectionality, and heteronormativity (Acosta, 2017; Beatty, 2015; Chin et al., 2016; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Guthrie et al., 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015), it is important to recognize challenging negative stereotypes as an important developmental context for Latinx students. For Latina leaders, negative stereotypes result in a much more difficult path. The intersection of race/ethnicity and gender become compounded barriers for Latinas.

**Figure 1.** Latinx Student Leadership Development Model



*Figure 1.* Latinx student leadership model showing the process of becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader through three themes (engaging in the struggle for change, becoming revolutionary Latinx student leader, and engaging in positional leadership roles). The model shows recurring and situational modifiers influencing the phenomenon.

Negative racial and gender stereotypes diminish the voices of Latina leaders on the college campus. They can overcome negative stereotypes by standing strong, leading with courage, calling things out, and going against stereotypes; however, Latinas must become aware of stereotypes and learn not to internalize them. If Latinas (and Latinx leaders) internalize stereotypes, it can negatively impact their cognitive development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1981) and leadership development. Latinx student leaders (and Latinas) possess mental strength that helps them overcome negative racial stereotypes through connection and purpose. Latinx students are courageous individuals who learn to rise as leaders despite struggles. Learning to rise as a leader is an asset of Latinx student leadership.

**Navigating white spaces.** The analysis revealed that Latinx students go through a developmental process of navigating White spaces, and this process interconnects to the process of challenging stereotypes, engaging in activism, and embracing culture/identity. Latinx students are aware of existing racial hierarchies perpetuating oppression and privilege during the leadership process. This perception informs how students cautiously navigate leadership on the college campus, providing evidence that Latinx students make sense of leadership through a racial and cultural lens. In other words, race, and culture matter in the leadership process of Latinx students. Latinx students' racial and cultural ways of knowing (Garcia et al., 2017) must be recognized as critical developmental contexts because they influence the meaning Latinx students assign to the concept of leadership.

As Latinx students navigate White spaces, they become aware of a dominant leadership narrative that values Eurocentricity. This awareness is essential to understand

because Eurocentricity is highly valued in society and dominates leadership education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Beatty, 2015; Chin, Desormeaux, & Sawyer, 2016; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Owen, 2012; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015; Wagner, 2011). For Latinx, this affects how they navigate leadership activities in White spaces. Latinx students may feel pressure to assimilate to White normative leadership standards, which Arminio et al. (2000) clarified. Through this process, Latinx student leaders rely on various support systems such as community, Latinx student organizations, and family. Students who navigate White spaces effectively build emotional readiness and cultivate essential skills for leadership. These findings bring Latinx students' leadership voices from the margins to the surface. Latinx students' drive and purpose are a foundation of strength.

**Engaging in activism.** As Latinx students challenge negative stereotypes and navigate White spaces, they participate in activism to work toward change and equity for all Latinx students. Solórzano et al. (2000) suggested that students of color get involved in activism to better their communities by contributing to social change. Futher et al. (2010) clarify that people of color tend to be concerned with fairness, justice, and inclusion. These studies postulate that students of color engage in activism because of social-cultural factors connected to oppression, racism, discrimination, marginality, Eurocentricity, power, and privilege. The findings of this study are similar; however, previous research does not address collectivism as a unique leadership quality for Latinx students. Lumping all students of color under one leadership umbrella is unfair because Latinx students experience leadership through a cultural lens.

By engaging in activism as a process, Latinx students develop a mindset of collectivism rooted in equity. Bordas (2013) explains that a “we” or collectivistic orientation centers on the wellbeing and independence of Latinx people. For Latinx students, it is vital to shaping institutional policies and practices because the collective group’s success trumps individual gains. However, fighting for all Latinx students can come at a cost for first-generation Latinx students. Arminio et al. (2000) clarified that students of color engaging in activism and formal leadership roles “walk a fine line” and “lost something” by serving in leadership roles (p. 501). These dynamics are essential to understand because activism can become a student success obstacle for Latinx students.

As Latinx students become aware of existing inequities, they choose to engage in campus activism. Latinx students engage in activism during and throughout the leadership process. Campus activism is a way to show support for the community—and be at the forefront of confronting institutional inequities. Latinx student leaders believe in the power of student activism and value community, service, justice, equity, equality, and positive social change. These leadership values are affirmed by Bordas’s (2013) Latinx leadership model; however, Bordas’s (2013) model does not address developmental contexts influencing the experiences of college students. A key finding of this study is the interconnecting processes influencing the leadership perceptions of Latinx students. No other research has focused on the meaning Latinx students assign to leadership as they challenge stereotypes, navigate White spaces, engage in activism, and embrace culture/identity. Challenging stereotypes, navigating White spaces, and engaging in activism are interrelated processes that influence each other and give meaning to Latinx



student leadership. These causal conditions shape the meaning Latinx students assign to leadership because they are complementary.

**Embracing culture and identity.** At the individual level, culture and identity become salient influences as Latinx students navigate White spaces and challenge negative racial stereotypes. As Latinx students face obstacles, they begin to understand who they are and the world around them. Through this process, Latinx students embrace Latinx culture and identity as a positive dimension of leadership. Latinx students integrate cultural expectations into the stream of leadership values, mindsets, and behaviors. As Latinx students integrate cultural dimensions into the leadership process, they feel a sense of pride and connection to their roots—which helps facilitate ethnic identity and cognitive development (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Fernandez, 2013; Harper & Quade, 2007). This integration allows Latinx students to lead as bicultural leaders.

Torres's (2003) bicultural orientation model categorizes Latinx students with high levels of acculturation and ethnic identity as bicultural. A bicultural student leader has preferences for both Latinx and Anglo culture during the leadership process. However, engaging in the leadership process as a bicultural student leader can impact students positively and negatively, mainly because Latinx cultural norms are not widely accepted or welcomed in White spaces. Ultimately, Latinx students choose to merge culture/identity and leadership, which Renn and Ozaki (2010) define as the merged leadership path (psychosocial identity and leadership identity as one). These findings are significant because they provide evidence that Latinx students navigate leadership from a psychosocial lens. Latinx students do not check their culture or identity at the door when

engaging in the leadership process. Social identity and culture shape Latinx students' perception of leadership, which Bordas (2013) clarified. However, Bordas's (2015) model is limited because it does not consider critical cognitive and psychosocial development elements of college students. For example, culture/identity are essential contributors to Latinx student wellbeing because culture/identity provides a sense of belonging, safety, and security.

Latinx students must maintain a "Sí Se Puede" (Yes, we can) leadership mindset as they consciously choose to engage in the leadership process. They must balance recurring influences related to Latinx representation, family, and community expectations. Latinx students' sense of self as a leader—and authenticity—may be questioned and undermined. Once Latinx students learn to navigate White spaces and challenge negative stereotypes as bicultural leaders, they are emotionally ready for the second stage in the leadership process—developing into a revolutionary student leader.

### **Stage Two: Becoming a Revolutionary Latinx Student Leader**

The study's findings revealed four interrelated processes influencing the development of Latinx students into leaders. As Latinx students become aware of institutional obstacles, they are pushed into leadership by the struggles they face. Pushed into leadership is the process that sparks the phenomenon of revolutionary leadership. Becoming a revolutionary Latinx student leader is the umbrella process (stage two) that interconnects with two other processes: sustaining strong-minded leadership and trailblazing as a first-generation Latinx student. In stage two, students are emotionally ready to develop into leaders.

**Pushed into leadership.** Pushed into leadership is a critical process in becoming a leader. As Latinx students develop emotional readiness and confidence in their ability to lead, they make a conscious choice to become leaders by accepting responsibility to work toward equity for all Latinx students. Garcia et al. (2017) found that a sense of self-concept and confidence influences Latinx men's leadership development, capacity, and experiences. Onorato and Musoba (2015) found that Latina college students struggled to develop leadership confidence because they had to reconcile gender role expectations of Latinx culture and heritage. Although Garcia et al. (2017) and Onorato and Musoba (2015) provide a snapshot of the importance of confidence in the leadership development of Latino and Latina students, the findings of this study expand the literature by establishing confidence and emotional readiness as cognitive capabilities required for developing as a leader (for both, Latino and Latina students). The results of this study have theoretical implications because confidence and emotional readiness influenced the development of Latinx students in the study. This key finding contributes to a better understanding of leadership mindsets required to rise as a Latinx student leader.

As Latinx students face obstacles on the college campus (the struggle), they also become aware of systemic barriers and sociocultural issues impacting the larger Latinx community. This realization pushes Latinx students into leadership, which Lozano (2015) affirmed in her study. However, Lozano (2015) did not provide details about the cognitive process Latinx students experience as they are "pushed into leadership." Through this developmental process, Latinx students develop an equity-minded lens aligning directly with Latinx students' leadership values. Latinx students believe in their capacity to lead and demonstrate emotional readiness through their actions. Sociocultural

factors highly influence Latinx leadership values. Arminio et al. (2000) found similar dynamics in the leadership process of students of color.

Latinx students develop a substantial commitment to the progress and advancement of the Latinx community. A collectivistic orientation influences the leadership process of Latinx students. Bordas (2013) defines collectivism as a focus on the “common good rather than individual gain” (p. 51). It is vital to acknowledge collectivism as a value because Latinx students lead with the community in mind and infuse a justice orientation during and throughout the leadership process. Latinx students are committed to positive social change because they value service, equity, and community. This finding aligns with the college student research on positive social change (Dugan & Komives, 2007), social justice (Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015), and collectivism (Arminio et al., 2000; Bordas, 2013). Leadership values such as positive social change are common themes in the literature, particularly in studies examining college students (HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2007; Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Wagner, 2009). The social change model, for example, focuses on social change for the common good. The model was developed for college students and focused on enhancing learning and participation (HERI, 1996, p. 19; Komives & Wagner, 2009). However, working toward positive social change is a learned leadership behavior in student leadership models. For Latinx students, working toward change and equity is inherent in who they are as marginalized peoples.

Latinx student leaders do not learn a “positive social change” mindset—they are dedicated to creating a more just society to change the social and economic conditions affecting their lives as a collective group. Latinx students experience leadership

differently from their White peers (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Fernandez, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Garcia et al., 2017; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Becoming a revolutionary leader is a critical step toward positive social change; however, some students may not be ready for the challenge or perceive the cause as unworthy. Latinx students who accept responsibility are positioned to become formal campus leaders.

**Sustaining strong-minded leadership.** According to the findings, Latinx students developing into leaders must sustain specific values and mindsets. Sustaining a strong leadership mindset is one of the critical characteristics of becoming a revolutionary leader. Latinx students' ability to become change agents—and stand up for justice—depends on their capability to be strong-minded. Latinx students are required to be strong leaders because challenging the status quo is a frustrating task. Latinx leaders must be brave and bold to overcome challenges. The struggle influences Latinx students to become strong leaders. To be successful as leaders, Latinx students need to stand strong in their ability to lead and sustain their strength amid adversity. Developing confidence and mental strength is a requirement for leadership. Latina leaders need to maintain their strength throughout the leadership process, since they face more barriers than Latino men. A growing body of literature has explored the role of gender and leadership, demonstrating that women face gender-based leadership barriers (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt, 2010; Ostick & Wall, 2007). Studies highlight that women students are underrepresented in leadership roles in college due to societal gender role expectations (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), lack of women leader role models (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000), and overall experience in a highly gendered college environment (Harper, 2012; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). Although this study did not focus

on gendered leadership influences, Latinas must be mentally strong to manage sexism and gender-based stereotypes. This finding is significant because sustaining strong-minded leadership is critical for becoming a revolutionary Latinx leader. Strong-minded Latinx leaders effectively overcome setbacks during the leadership process.

**Trailblazing as a first-generation latinx student.** Latinx students who make a choice to become leaders believe in uplifting their family and community by trailblazing as first-generation Latinx students. Latinx student leaders help underserved students and aspire to impact future generations. As they challenge the status quo and demand accountability, they make history in several ways. As first-generation students, they are the first ones in the family to attend college and become campus leaders. Latinx students' leadership on the college campus is symbolic because of their collective contributions to a more significant cause (equity). Through trailblazing, Latinx students learn to practice emotional intelligence and a collectivist mindset. Trailblazing is a difficult path—but students' trailblazing attitude overrides stress and frustration. Emotional intelligence and collectivism are critical elements of Latinx student leadership. These findings shed light on a new wave of knowledge about the mindsets and values of Latinx student leaders. Although collectivism is a dimension in Latinx leadership (Arminio et al., 2000; Bordas, 2013), the concept has not appeared as a dimension of trailblazing.

Latinx students have a clear leadership vision and internal motivation to carry out their purpose. Although Latinx student leadership tends to be an afterthought in the wave of leadership studies (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Komives et al., 2011; Mahoney, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015), Latinx student leaders continue to lift each other, build coalitions, and fight for one another. This finding is consistent with a

collectivistic orientation (Arminio et al., 2000; Bordas, 2013) and equity value. A trailblazing mindset focuses on rising as a leader because of the lasting contributions to the advancement of the greater Latinx community. As Latinx students become leaders, paving the way for others becomes a priority. Latinx student leadership efforts are waves of change on college campuses—they are moving the needle collectively in higher education.

### **Influence at the Individual Level: Family, Representation, and Community**

Internal and external factors influence Latinx students' development into leaders. At the individual level, Latinx students are influenced by family members, a desire for Latinx representation, and a willingness to give back to the community. These influences are the intervening conditions in becoming a revolutionary leader. Family members, both immediate and extended, are critical influences of support for Latinx students during and throughout college. Family immigration stories and stories of the struggle influence how Latinx students view themselves as leaders. Latinx students learn about leadership from their family's immigration struggles and have developed deep-rooted commitments to "not fail the family" and "honor the family's struggle" during their leadership journey. Family is a critical dimension of support and part of the Latinx student leader ecosystem, which is consistent with the research on collectivistic cultures and Latinx students in higher education (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Komives et al., 2005; Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Suarez, 2015). In Lozano's (2015) study, most Latinx students identified family members as role models and essential support systems. Arminio et al. (2000) documented the family's pivotal role in the leadership development process of students of color, particularly for Black/African American and Latinx students.

In the LID model, family and peers influence students' leadership identity (Komives et al.'s (2005) and Bordas (2013) highlights family as an essential tenet of Latinx leadership. Together, these studies outline the importance of family as a critical support system for Latinx students developing into leaders. However, these studies do not illustrate how family influences the development of first-generation Latinx students into leaders. The findings of this study expand the literature by recognizing family's immigration stories and sacrifices as intervening conditions and recurring modifiers during and throughout the leadership development process of Latinx students. This key finding contributes to a better understanding of the values and mindsets that influence Latinx students to develop into leaders.

Latinx role models in particular influence Latinx students' leadership perceptions. Leadership qualities such as "being a strong leader" and "being selfless" influence Latinx student leadership development because they are likely to adopt similar leadership qualities as the role models in their life. However, the lack of Latinx role models in college (and society) is a negative leadership influence because students prefer to learn about leadership from individuals that look like them. With drive and determination, Latinx students develop into leaders despite the lack of representation. This finding is significant because it provides insight into Latinx students' cognitive development and inner strength to persevere despite the challenges.

At a local community level, it is instrumental for Latinx student leaders to connect to the larger Latinx community as the community offers a sense of belonging and safety. As Latinx students progress through the leadership process, they utilize the local Latinx community as an ecosystem of support. Andy elaborates on what this means by saying,



“it [college] feels like you have everything against you. But there’s a community behind you, so you’re still able to make it.” This student and others highlight the Latinx community as a safe space for validation and appreciation. For Latinx students, the community provides a sense of connection and belonging on and off campus. A connection to external social-community organizations is consistent with Hurtado and Carter’s (1997) sense of belonging study. Bordas (2013) and Lozano (2015) demonstrate the importance of community during the leadership process mainly from a collectivistic orientation. In Lozano’s (2015) study, Latinx students’ leadership journey began with a desire to find and build community. Although Bordas (2013) and Lozano (2015) clarify key community influences, the findings of my study expand the literature by recognizing the Latinx community as a pillar of support, connection, belonging, safety, and validation. This key finding contributes to a better understanding of the Latinx community concerning Latinx student leadership development. The Latinx community is an intervening condition and recurring modifier during the leadership development process of Latinx students.

A connection to family, community, and relatable leaders provides students a foundation of support, encouragement, and confidence to develop as leaders. Latinx students possess an internal desire (and willingness) to work toward change, and their passion is fueled by social and economic injustices impacting their community—intervening conditions such as community, family, and representation influence the process of becoming a revolutionary leader. As Latinx students progress through the three stages of leadership development, it is crucial to acknowledge external developmental forces serving as support ecosystems.

### **Influence at the Societal Level: Role Models, Society, and Education**

Contextual conditions like role models, education, and societal expectations are situational and recurring modifiers in becoming a Latinx student leader at the macro level. Role models are essential in leadership development because Latinx student leaders learn about leadership from recognized leaders. This learning happens through the unique ways Latinx students identify with leaders as role models. Role models like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), John Lewis, Selena, Cesar Chavez, Pope Francis, Latinx teachers, Latinx administrators, and family members exhibit leadership qualities that are important to students. These qualities include empathy, compassion, understanding, listening, inspiration, and relatable. Latinx students adopt a shared leadership vision similar to the role models in their life: shared struggle and story, moving an entire community forward, challenging the status quo, impactful, powerful, resilient, and determined. Astin and Astin (2000) define leadership as a “purposive process which is inherently value-based” (p. 8). For Latinx students, a shared leadership vision is grounded in the value of equity.

As Latinx students become leaders, they will encounter societal stressors related to leadership perceptions and systems of oppression. Societal barriers like discrimination, sexism, racism, bias, and privilege impact students negatively. These barriers are external influences that hinder the holistic development and success of Latinx college students (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia, 2018; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lozano, 2015; Torres et al., 2003). Latinx students are likely to experience bias and microaggressions during the leadership process. They must counteract these barriers by sustaining a strong trailblazer mindset rooted in culture and identity. Although Bordas (2013) and Lozano (2015) discuss Latinx cultural dynamics and leadership, the findings of this study expand the

literature by recognizing several vital elements that the majority of highly effective Latinx student leaders have in common (strong-minded, equity-minded, trailblazing, drive, character, purpose, bicultural, merged identity, emotional readiness, selfless, perseverance, resilience, emotional intelligence, persistence, positional leadership, etc.). This key finding contributes to a better understanding of the values, mindsets, capabilities, behaviors, and styles needed to develop into a revolutionary Latinx leader. Situational modifiers such as role models, society, and education serve as developmental influences for Latinx student leaders. The relationships between the three modifiers help Latinx students understand who they are as leaders and their place in the world. As a result, Latinx students become revolutionary leaders by sustaining a strong mind and trailblazing as first-generation students. Once Latinx students can balance recurring and situational modifiers, they transition to stage three of the leadership development process—engaging in positional leadership roles.

### **Stage Three: Engaging in Positional Leadership Roles**

The analysis of this study revealed that after Latinx students internalize a leadership identity and choose to become leaders, they transition to the third stage in the leadership process: engaging in position leadership roles. Latinx students develop into strong leaders and can overcome the struggle by breaking barriers and trailblazing. In that case, Latinx students are ready to transition to stage three to develop the following two processes: practicing leadership and persistence/building resilience. Driven to be on top (excellence) is a mindset influencing the strategies Latinx students implement as they become leaders. Engaging in positional leadership roles is the umbrella process (stage

three) that interconnects with the three processes. These processes collectively give meaning and purpose to Latinx students as they enact leadership on the college campus.

**Driven to be on top (excellence).** Driven to be on top (excellence) is a mindset influencing the strategies Latinx students implement as they become leaders. Francisco, Rodolfo, and Fabiola similarly shared that leaders must have drive and ambition to work toward goals. As Latinx students engage in the third stage of the leadership process, they need to hold themselves to high standards to be the best version of themselves.

Challenging negative stereotypes and navigating White spaces (stage one) interacts with Latinx students' approach to excellence as they practice leadership.

**Practicing leadership.** For Latinx students, it is essential to enact leadership through formal and hierarchical positions of power. Through positional leadership roles, Latinx students effectively navigate Latinx culture and mainstream culture. This finding opens a conversation about the meaning Latinx students assign to leadership. Although the post-industrial leadership paradigm situates leadership as a shared process focused on human relations (Bass, 1985; Bennis, 2003; Denis et al., 2012; Komives et al., 2007; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Northouse, 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Rost, 1993; Rost & Barker, 2000), Latinx students view leadership as a position of power.

Latinx students practice leadership through positional leadership roles and executive board members of Latinx student organizations. This finding is consistent with the research on students of color and Latinx students (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017; Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). Latinx students value team-centered approaches, compassion, inclusivity, making a difference, equity, empathy, communication, and positive social change. Many of these values align with the post-

industrial leadership paradigm, which focuses on shared goals and positive social change (Bass, 1990; Covey, 2013; Chin et al., 2016; Denis et al., 2012; Komives et al., 2007; Northouse, 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Rost, 1993). As Latinx student leaders challenge the status quo, they are challenged to practice courage and demonstrate integrity. This finding is critical to understand because leadership involvement requires students to develop cognitive and psychosocial skills (Abes et al., 2007; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1994; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Marcia, 1966; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1981; Phinney, 1989; Renn, 2007). Latinx student leaders experience stress and frustration during the leadership process; therefore, they must manage emotions successfully. Latinx student organizations serve as critical spaces for leadership, community, and belonging (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009).

Selfless leadership emerged as a dimension of practicing leadership on the college campus. Selfless leadership means working toward the greater good for the benefit of all Latinx students. For Latinx students, selfless leadership is about helping and guiding others toward their goals. Selfless leadership allows student leaders to stand up for others and against injustice. This finding reinforces a collectivistic orientation placing the focus on service and community. Bordas (2013) describes Latinx leaders as servant leaders and community stewards. Laura says, “Latinx leadership has much more selflessness when compared to other people who might be like, non-Hispanic White, where it’s a little bit more selfish.” This sentiment suggests that Latinx students make meaning of leadership from a cultural lens. They have developed clear distinctions between Latinx leadership and White leadership, guiding their meaning-making process. For example, Latinx

students perceive White leadership as “not welcoming” and individualistic; therefore, they challenge White normative standards of leadership by practicing selfless leadership. Latinx student leadership decenters Whiteness and centers inclusion. The relational leadership model encourages college students to become inclusive leaders by developing talent, listening, and engaging in civil discourse (Komives et al., 2005); however, the model assumes that college students can learn to be inclusive leaders. For Latinx student leaders, inclusion is a way of life and a dimension of Latinx culture (Bordas, 2013); therefore, they are inherently inclusive because of their collectivistic orientation.

Practicing leadership is a strategy implemented by students as they develop into leaders. Practicing leadership on the college campus meant going beyond individual gains and focusing on what is best for the group. Students acting in a leadership capacity (73%) and those observing others’ leadership practice (27%) make sense of leadership from a selfless lens. As inclusive leaders, Latinx students challenge the status quo to make room for historically marginalized communities.

**Persistence and building resilience.** Being a first-generation Latinx student leader on the college campus is a difficult path that requires persistence and resilience. Through persistence and building resilience as a developmental process, Latinx students tap into their inner strength and adapt to the environment during the struggle. As Latinx students advocate for resources on the college campus, they can become frustrated with the lack of progress. During times of high stress and frustration, students need to persist through the struggle by building resilience. Students learn to be resilient by learning from others and utilizing their skills. As inclusive leaders, Latinx students have an open mind, accept all people, connect to others, support unity and shared cultural spaces, and

collaborate across differences. Students must remain focused on the goal and role model inclusive leadership behaviors.

Although the college climate and culture are a negative experience for Latinx students, the leadership process is a positive experience for rising as a leader. However, the path is not easy, and students will have to endure difficult situations and experiences. Latinx students must demonstrate high levels of mental fortitude to overcome challenges and build resilience, especially in White spaces where they feel pressure to assimilate. Latinx students' mental strength, trailblazing spirit, and purposeful driven leadership (Astin & Astin, 2000) help them enact leadership on the college campus. Astin's (1984) and Tinto's (1993) involvement and persistence models identify campus involvement as a critical aspect of retention and persistence. For Latinx student leaders, culturally relevant involvement is essential to their success as students and leaders. This finding is supported by several scholars (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Fernandez, 2013; Lozano, 2015; Maramba & Velazquez, 2012; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Suarez, 2015). A crucial dimension of Latinx leadership—and culturally relevant involvement—is Latinx students' ability to tap into their inner strength and adapt to historically White institutions.

### **Latinx Student Leadership Success**

Latinx students who are successful in their academic and leadership journey identify two main outcomes of their success: finding fulfillment in the struggle and graduating from college despite the struggle. These outcomes represent what Latinx students value during the leadership process. The key to Latinx leadership is finding fulfillment in the process of becoming a leader, which enables students to be successful

student leaders. By graduating from college, Latinx students positively impact their families and the larger Latinx community.

**Finding fulfillment in the struggle.** As Latinx students become formal leaders on the college campus, they contribute to a collective struggle for change and equity in higher education and society. Latinx students find fulfillment in the leadership process because it contributes to transformational change at the individual and group level. At a personal level, Latinx students feel satisfied to be the first ones in their family to accomplish the following milestones: they are breaking barriers by being the first in their families to attend college, they are breaking barriers by being the first in the family to become a leader in college, they are breaking barriers by challenging the status quo in predominantly White spaces, they are breaking barriers by being the only Latinx student in the classroom, they are breaking barriers by refusing to assimilate, they are breaking barriers when they challenged their White professors and peers, they are breaking barriers by protesting and putting themselves in the line, and they are breaking barriers by rising as leaders despite the struggles.

At a group level, Latinx students find fulfillment in the leadership process because they are working toward change and equity. For Latinx students, helping other students succeed through the struggle and pushing for institutional change help an entire community move forward. For Latinx student leaders, contributing to a collective effort for change is a rewarding and satisfying process. Collectively, Latinx student leaders are a wave of positive social change. Individually, Latinx leaders can become isolated events in the struggle for change—but collectively, the wave of Latinx student leaders creates a revolution. Contributing to the collective struggle for change is rewarding and satisfying



for Latinx college students developing as leaders. Knowing they are part of a more significant leadership wave propels them to rise despite the struggle.

**Graduating from college despite the struggle.** For Latinx students, the leadership journey impacts change and equity; however, they ultimately aspire to honor their parent struggles and sacrifices by graduating college as successful first-generation Latinx student leaders. Francisco says, “I also think a lot about my family because of the struggles that both my parents face, even in coming towards this country for me to have a better life...I need to finish this bachelor’s and pursue my masters because not only am I doing it for myself, but I’m doing it for them as well.” Latinx students become successful leaders because they persist through the struggle—their resiliency and leadership style carry them to the finish line.

As a result, Latinx students view their leadership journey as a revolution for future generations to carry on. By believing in themselves and leading with the end goal in mind, Latinx students can navigate college as successful students and leaders. By graduating from college, Latinx students positively impact their families and community by opening the door to increased opportunities, economic stability, and leadership pathways. The outcome of their leadership efforts positively impacts the entire Latinx community through improved equity. One of the highest accomplishments for Latinx students is to graduate from college as a first-generation, bilingual, bicultural Latinx student leader.

### **Latinx Student Leadership Model**

The model shows a three-staged process that resulted from the leadership experiences of Latinx college students. By engaging in the struggle for change (stage

one), Latinx students become revolutionary leaders (stage two) who engage in positional leadership roles on the college campus (stage three) to make a difference. Latinx students must progress through the stages with determination, commitment, strength, resilience, persistence, drive, and a selfless mindset. Latinx students must consider contextual (education, role models, society) and intervening conditions (family, representation, community) as recurring and situational modifiers. These multidimensional processes surfaced from the analysis as common themes and tell a story about Latinx student leadership. Latinx students who want to make a difference as leaders may have higher probabilities of rising as a leader—and succeeding as a revolutionary leader—by progressing through the three stages of leadership.

The model is useful because it explains the phenomenon and meets the guidelines for fitness, understanding and generality of grounded theory (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The focus of the study was on Latinx college students, and the model tells a story from the data collected from participants about the students' leadership development. The model is applicable to participants and explains interrelated developmental processes related to leadership. The model portrays the fullness of all the data from participants. The processes that emerged from the analysis relate only to Latinx college students, such as the process of challenging negative stereotypes, the process of navigating White spaces and the process of embracing Latinx culture/identity. Cultural dimensions influence the processes in the model and contribute to Latinx students' sense of self as a leader in the collective struggle for change. For example, Latinx role models influence leadership perceptions because students are likely to adopt similar leadership qualities as the role models in their life. Latinx students also integrate cultural

expectations into the stream of leadership values, mindsets, and behaviors. This integration influences connection to Latinx cultural roots, which facilitates ethnic identity and cognitive development (Arminio et al., 2000; Case & Fernandez, 2013; Harper & Quade, 2007). As bicultural student leaders, Latinx students have preferences for both Latinx and Anglo culture (Torres, 2003); however, this can present challenges because Latinx cultural norms are not widely accepted or welcomed in White spaces.

Culture and identity, as well as language and first-generation status, influence recurring and situational modifiers. Family—and the overall Latinx community—are critical support systems for Latinx student leaders. A collectivistic orientation is consistent with Latinx cultural values (Arminio et al., 2000; Bordas, 2013; Garcia, 2018; Lozano, 2015; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). The following leadership processes did not appear to be connected to Latinx culture/identity: strong minded, resilient, trailblazing, positional leadership, selfless leadership, persistence, and resilience. Latinx students may influence their own processes, such as engaging in the struggle, pushed into leadership, and driven to be on top (excellence). Contextual conditions, such as education and societal expectations, are situational and recruiting modifiers in the process of becoming a Latinx student leader. Latinx students developing into leaders are influenced by internal and external factors. At the individual level, Latinx students are influenced by activism, community, representation, service, justice, equity, equality, and positive social change. Becoming a revolutionary student leader is a critical step toward positive social change. The model tells a story about the process of developing as a revolutionary Latinx leader. Latinx students find fulfillment in the leadership process as they learn to rise as leaders—they also graduate from college despite the struggles.

The model provides insight into the leadership experiences of Latinx college students from diverse regions in the United States. The transferability of the model to other contexts can be applied to diverse Latinx student populations and situations. Further research, however, is needed to compare the model to prominent student leadership models. Further investigation about the applicability of the model to other students of color populations and a more diverse Latinx student population is also needed.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The research findings and conclusions provide implications and recommendations for future research and practice. These are bound to the results of this study. The results can be implemented by higher education administrators working in student development, multicultural affairs, leadership development, Hispanic-Serving Institution initiatives, and faculty teaching in leadership disciplines. Community organizations working directly with Latinx college students can benefit from utilizing the recommendations to build leadership capacity and agency.

**Implications and recommendations for practice.** One of the goals of higher education, and student affairs administrators, is to facilitate the holistic development of all students (Patton et al., 2016); however, the findings of this study conclude that higher education institutions are not doing enough to support the development of Latinx students. Higher education institutions can better support Latinx students by creating inclusive and equitable contexts where students can develop as leaders and human beings. Addressing Latinx students' holistic development and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Torres et al., 2003) is critical to their success as leaders and

members of the Latinx community. The findings from this study have implications and recommendations for practice.

***Culturally relevant leadership development.*** Latinx students in the study did not feel a sense of belonging and struggled to navigate White spaces. Their experience in higher education impacts Latinx students' leadership development. As such, curricular and co-curricular leadership programs and pedagogy must center on the lived experiences, realities, histories, and cultures of Latinx college students. Providing culturally relevant leadership programs (and inclusive pedagogy) should reflect the leadership mindsets and values of Latinx students. Developing inclusive leadership programs can facilitate Latinx students' cognitive and leadership development.

***Culturally relevant involvement.*** Most students in the study participated in Latinx student organizations and found Latinx organizations as safe and inclusive spaces for leadership. Student affairs practitioners must find ways to connect Latinx students to multicultural organizations such as fraternities, Greek letter organizations, and Latinx student organizations. These organizations serve as culturally relevant involvement and critical spaces for leadership (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009). Latinx students' involvement drastically increases retention and persistence rates (Astin, 1984; Gloria et al., 2005; Tinto, 1993) and enhances Latinx students' overall experience on the college campus (Hurtado & Carter, 2007; Nelson et al., 2007). Involvement in Latinx-based and multicultural organizations offer many benefits as these organizations serve as counterspaces (Delgado Bernal, 2002), nourishing spaces (Ventura, 2017), and

critical spaces for leadership (Arminio et al., 2000; Beatty, 2015; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Garcia et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009).

***Culturally competent educators.*** As Latinx students navigate White spaces and challenge negative racial stereotypes, they may feel isolated and invalidated on the college campus. Faculty, staff, and administrators (particularly non-Latinx individuals) can support Latinx students by developing cultural competence and awareness of oppression, microaggressions, privilege, bias, and racism in the Latinx community. Student affairs practitioners (and faculty) can support Latinx students by becoming familiar with the literature on Latinx student development. Developing culturally competent educators can make a difference in the lives of Latinx students, as they benefit from mentors and allies.

***Latinx leadership development.*** Latinx students in the study are highly influenced by culture and identity. In an era when many higher education institutions aspire to become Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), there is a need to challenge the status quo. Institutions of higher education must be “Latinx student-ready.” Institutions need to fund and support culturally relevant high impact practices—and allocate fiscal resources to hire more Latinx faculty, staff, and senior leaders. To create a safe, equitable and inclusive environment for Latinx students, institutions must shift their practices and systems to meet the needs of a growing Latinx student body. This shift needs to be operationalized through an equity and anti-racist lens to improve the experiences of Latinx students (and students of color) in higher education. Higher education institutions need to invest in the holistic development of Latinx students. Multicultural affairs and Hispanic affairs offices need to fund and develop inclusive leadership programs for a new

generation of Latinx students. Latinx leadership programs can engage more students if they focus on the pillars of Latinx leadership—family, language, identity, culture, change, equity, role models, selflessness, strong mindedness, resilience, and collectivism.

***Familial engagement.*** Family is an intervening influence in the leadership development process of Latinx students. Higher education institutions must develop intentional engagement opportunities for Latinx families, especially during orientation and graduation events. Building culturally relevant (and bilingual) orientation and graduation programs can increase students' sense of belonging and connection to the campus. Arminio et al. (2000) document the family's pivotal role in the leadership development process of students of color, particularly for Black/African American and Latinx students.

***Inclusive leadership programs.*** Research on student leadership outlines the importance of designing inclusive leadership models to engage all students in a purposeful leadership process (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bennis, 2003; Bordas, 2013; Dugan & Komives, 2011; Guthrie & Osteen, 2012; Mahoney, 2016; Ostick & Wall, 2011; Wagner, 2011). Higher education institutions can support the leadership development of Latinx students by creating inclusive leadership programs that foster the unique leadership values and mindsets of Latinx students. This effort can increase the number of Latinx students participating in leadership programming (Arminio et al., 2000; Garcia et al., 2017). The proposed leadership model provides opportunities for intentional leadership development and conversation.

**Implications and recommendations for research.** The findings from this study have implications for future research. The implications offer opportunities for greater

exploration and continued research related to the leadership development process of Latinx college students. The unique characteristics of Latinx college students have been examined by several researchers (Castillo et al., 2006; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Garcia, 2019; Garcia et al., 2017; Gloria et al., 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lozano, 2015; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009; Ortiz, 2004; Phinney et al., 2005; Torres, 2003). However, very few studies have focused on the unique leadership realities of Latinx students. There is much to learn about Latinx student leadership, and one main suggestion is to explore student leadership from multiple research methods.

*Intersection of race/identity and leadership.* Concerning research implications, further studies should examine Latinx students' intersecting identities and how they might impact the leadership development process from a psychosocial lens. Latinx students in the study viewed selfless leadership and strong-minded leadership as critical elements of Latinx leadership; however, both dimensions deserve further research and exploration. Latinx students' cognitive and psychosocial development process deserves further investigation, especially the process of navigating White spaces and challenging negative stereotypes. Additional research can extend the body of knowledge related to Latinx student development.

*Positional leadership.* This study revealed that Latinx students view leadership as a formal position of power. Latinx students in this study embraced the title of "leader" as a person leading a student organization. However, several studies have documented that Latinx students and students of color disassociate from the word "leader" and "leadership" (Arminio et al., 2000; Dugan et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2017; Lozano,



2015). This dynamic deserves further exploration because students from collectivistic cultures typically view leadership as a shared responsibility rather than a hierarchical position of power (Bordas, 2013; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Lozano, 2015; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Ramirez, 2006). The notion of the struggle influences Latinx students' meaning-making process, and further research is needed better to understand positional leadership and the notion of the "struggle." Additional studies are required to understand better Latinx students' notion of the struggle and how it shapes leadership development. Future studies can explore the struggle in the classroom, service-learning programs, study abroad programs, and immersion trips.

***Gendered leadership influences.*** Latina students in the study faced additional barriers related to gender and sexism/machismo. There's a need to conduct studies exploring Latina college student leadership. Exploring the way Latina women trailblaze through the struggle could provide data for understanding the leadership development of Latinas. There's much to learn about Latinas as a college population and how compounded barriers impact their leadership journey. Further research from a critical feminist lens can help uncover the power of Latina leadership.

***Social change and leadership.*** Latinx students in the study were committed to positive social change because they value service, change, equity, justice, and community. Although this finding is in alignment with the college student research on positive social change (Dugan & Komives, 2007; HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2007; Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Wagner, 2009), social justice (Lozano, 2015; Onorato & Musoba, 2015) and collectivism (Arminio et al., 2000; Bordas, 2013), many of these values are inherent in Latinx culture (Bordas, 2013). Further studies should explore

Latinx student leadership using the social change model as a theoretical framework. Data from this research can provide a clearer picture of social change as a learned leadership value.

*Latinx leadership research.* This study focused on the leadership experiences and perspectives of Latinx college students. All the participants identified as first-generation, bilingual (English/Spanish) college students whose families immigrated to the United States from a Latin American country. It will be valuable for future research to explore the leadership experiences and perspectives of Latinx college students who do not identify as first-generation or bilingual. It will also be valuable to explore the leadership journeys of Latinx students whose families have always lived in the United States and do not have an immigration story. Given the limited body of knowledge addressing the leadership journey of Latinx college students, further research will be beneficial using a critical lens, testimony, counternarrative, and phenomenology studies. A mix-method approach and quantitative method can help highlight variables outside the scope of qualitative analysis.

### **Summary of Study**

This qualitative grounded theory study explored the concept of leadership from the perspective of undergraduate Latinx college students in the United States. The purpose of the study was to develop a theoretical explanation and leadership model highlighting the leadership experiences of Latinx students. The goal was to contribute to the limited body of literature addressing the unique leadership experiences of Latinx students—and provide a better understanding of how Latinx students develop into leaders. Based on the analysis of the data from 11 Latinx college students, Latinx students must

progress through three stages of leadership development: engaging in the struggle for change (first stage), becoming a revolutionary Latinx leader (second stage), and engaging in positional leadership roles (third stage).

In the first stage (engaging in the struggle for change), Latinx students experience obstacles on the college campus, resulting in increased awareness of equity and justice issues. As Latinx students challenge negative stereotypes, engage in activism, navigate White spaces, and embrace culture/identity, they begin to internalize a leadership identity and contemplate choices. Once Latinx students internalize a leadership mindset, they consciously choose to become leaders. The struggle sparks an internal desire for revolutionary change. In the second stage (becoming a revolutionary leader), Latinx students develop into leaders by sustaining a strong-leadership mindset and trailblazing as the first one in the family to attend college. At the individual and societal level, Latinx students must balance positive and negative influences such as family, community, representation, education, role models, and societal expectations. In the third stage (engaging in positional leadership roles), Latinx students enact leadership by becoming Latinx student organization leaders, persisting through the struggle, building resiliency, and practicing leadership. The outcomes of Latinx leadership are graduating from college despite the struggle and finding fulfillment in the struggle for change.

As a result of this study, it can be concluded that Latinx students' leadership development is a multidimensional process. Social-cultural factors and developmental contexts influence how Latinx students define, practice, and make meaning of leadership. Post-industrial leadership theories (and Latinx leadership studies) situate leadership as a shared process in which people with shared goals work together towards social change

and a common goal (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bennis, 2003; Bordas, 2013; Denis et al., 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Komives & Wagner, 2016; Northouse, 2018; Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Rost, 1993). Through this lens, leadership is not about a single leader but rather a group of different people working together. However, this study provides evidence that Latinx students define leadership from a cultural lens and position of power. Therefore, Latinx student leadership is not linear but rather complex and multidimensional.

One of the goals of higher education is to prepare college students for future leadership roles in society. Institutions of higher education have a unique opportunity to transform Latinx students' leadership development, which addresses students' immediate developmental needs, and builds leadership capacity for the continued growth of the Latinx community. The findings and recommendations of this study can be utilized by administrators working in student development, multicultural affairs, leadership development, Hispanic-Serving Institution initiatives, and faculty teaching in leadership disciplines. The Latinx leadership model provides a basis for further exploration and serves as an inclusive framework for bringing the leadership voices of Latinx students from the margins to the center of leadership education.

Latinx students are holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002), and they deserve to be seen and heard in all areas of higher education. We have a moral obligation to marginalized student communities—and when we know better, we can do better. We must do better.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Invitation to Participate in the Study

Date

Email

Dear [Latinx college student],

You are being invited to participate in a research study. The principal investigator of this study is Eva Martinez Powless, a doctoral candidate in the Interdisciplinary PhD Program in the College of Business and College of Education at Marquette University. The purpose of the study is to help institutions of higher education better understand the leadership experiences and development process of Latinx college students. The study will include up to 20 undergraduate Latinx students enrolled full-time in a U.S. two-year or four-year college or university. As such, I am honored to invite you to participate in the study. Participation in the study includes one interview of one hour and follow-up conversations via phone, email, or virtual meeting. Your participation as an interviewee will require a total of approximately 2 hours of your time. The interview will take place virtually and will be video and audio recorded. After the interview, the interview will be transcribed, and a summary of major themes will be sent to you for comments, feedback, and revisions.

The purpose of the interview is to learn about your leadership experiences and leadership journey. I am seeking to understand how you make sense of leadership, how your social identity influences the way you learn and practice leadership, and how you navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces. During the interview you will be asked questions about your leadership experiences, your leadership journey, and how you navigate leadership as a Latinx college student. The questions will serve as a guide, but the format of the interview is designed for you to share what is important to you in terms of your leadership experiences. Your participation in the study is voluntary. If you elect to participate in the study, you can withdraw at any time without penalty. As a token of appreciation, you will receive a \$25 gift card to a local food vendor.

If you choose to participate in the study, your name will not be related to any of the data. The results of the study will be published; however, your identity will be protected, and all research records will be kept confidential. Your participation in the study does not present any harm or foreseeable risks. All the information you share with me will be kept private and confidential. You will be able to select a pseudonym of your choice, which will serve as your identifier for the study. Your college or university will also be assigned a pseudonym in the final report. If you agree to participate in the study, please read and sign the attached consent form and return to me via email with your electronic signature. You have a couple of options for returning the consent form to me: 1) you can sign the consent form electronically and send it back to me via email or 2) you can reply to my email by re-attaching the consent form and stating that the email is your electronic signature for the consent form. In your email, please include your contact information to schedule the interview at a time convenient to you. If you have any questions or concerns related to the study, you can reach me at 414-553-1484 or [eva.martinez@marquette.edu](mailto:eva.martinez@marquette.edu). You can also contact my project advisor, Dr. Jody Jessup-Anger at 414-288-7403 or [jody.jessup-anger@marquette.edu](mailto:jody.jessup-anger@marquette.edu)

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Eva Martinez Powless

Marquette University, Interdisciplinary PhD Student 555-555-5555

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## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

#### **PURPOSE:**

- The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of how Latinx students' psychosocial identities shape their perception of leadership. More knowledge on this topic will contribute to the development of new leadership development frameworks and help institutions of higher education better understand the leadership experiences of Latinx college students.
- You will be one of approximately 20 participants in this research study.

#### **PROCEDURES:**

- Participation in the study involves being interviewed by the principal investigator. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and subsequent communication will last about 30 minutes. The purpose of the interview is to learn about your leadership experiences and leadership journey. You will be asked questions related to leadership, how you make sense of leadership, how your social identity influences the way you practice leadership, and how you navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces. Interview questions will serve as a guide, but the format of the interview is designed for you to share what is important to you in terms of your leadership experiences.
- You will be audio and video recorded during the interview portion of the study to ensure accuracy. Notes will be written down during the interview. The audio recording will later be transcribed and destroyed after 3 years beyond the completion of the study. For confidentiality purposes, your name will not be recorded. Before the interview begins, you will create a pseudonym of your choice for the study, which will serve as your identifier for the study. If you do not select a pseudonym, the principal investigator will select one for you. In addition, a pseudonym will be assigned to your college or universities in the final report.
- After your interview is transcribed, a summary of major themes will be sent to you for comments, feedback, and revisions.

#### **DURATION:**

- Your participation in the study will consist of one 60-minute virtual interview and subsequent follow up dialogue lasting approximately 30 minutes. Participation in the study will require a total of approximately 1.5 hours of your time.

#### **RISKS:**

- Your participation in the study does not present any harm or foreseeable risks.
- You will spend approximately 1.5 hours participating in the study, which can be a potential risk in terms of time allocation for the study.
- During the interview, you may feel uncomfortable and may have specific reactions to the questions. You will be asked to disclose personal and social identity so you may experience discomfort disclosing personal information.
- You will be asked to complete an electronic student demographic form prior to your interview. Although completing the demographic form is voluntary, you may feel obligated to disclose personal information. Collection of data using the internet involves the same risks that a person would encounter in everyday use of the internet, such as hacking, or information being unintentionally seen by others. All efforts will be made to minimize the risks associated with your participation in the study.
- Although your privacy is very important, if you talk about actual or suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child or elder, or if you talk about hurting yourself or others, the researcher or

other study team member must and will report this to the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Services, or law enforcement agency.”

**BENEFITS:**

- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. This research may benefit society by gaining a better understanding of Latinx college students’ leadership experiences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

- Data collected in this study will be kept confidential.
- All your data will be assigned a pseudonym of your choice rather than using your name or other information that could identify you as an individual.
- All research data will be kept confidential and the principal investigator will make all efforts to discard information identifying you as the participant. Your consent form, research data, research file, and interview transcript will be kept in a secure password-protected location with your pseudonym name.
- The data collected in this study may be deidentified and used for future research or give to another investigator for future research without additional informed consent.
- Audio and video recordings will be stored in a secure password-protected location.
- When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name.
- Direct quotes from the interview transcript will be used in reports or publications.
- The research data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files three years after the completion of the study.
- Your research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

**COMPENSATION:**

- As a participant in the study, you will receive a \$25 electronic gift card to a local food vendor or a vendor of your choice. The electronic gift card will be emailed to you right after the interview.

**INJURY OR ILLNESS:**

- Marquette University does not have money set aside to pay for treatment, lost wages, lost time, or pain. However, you do not waive any rights by signing this consent form.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:**

- Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty.
- Your research data will not be used if you withdraw from the study.
- You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.
- Your decision to participate or not will not impact your relationship with the investigator or Marquette University.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION:**

- There are no known alternatives other than to not participate in this study. If you do not wish to participate in this study you can choose not to participate by calling, texting or emailing the principal investigator.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

- If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Eva Martinez Powless, at 555-555-5555 or [eva.martinez@marquette.edu](mailto:eva.martinez@marquette.edu) or Dr. Jody Jessup-Anger, 555-444-4444 or [jody.jessup-anger@marquette.edu](mailto:jody.jessup-anger@marquette.edu)

- If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University’s Office of Research Compliance at 555-444-4444.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

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(Printed Name of Participant)

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(Signature of Participant) Date

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(Signature of Participant) Date

---

(Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent) Date

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(Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent) Date

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Flyer for Students

## ARE YOU A COLLEGE STUDENT WHO IDENTIFIES AS LATINX/HISPANIC/LATINO/A?

If so, and you are enrolled full-time as an undergraduate student in a U.S. college or university, I'd like to interview you as part of a research study related to leadership.

**1**

### YOUR INPUT IS IMPORTANT

The study is an effort to better understand what leadership means to Latinx college students.

**2**

### YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Your leadership voices will contribute to a larger body of knowledge about college student development.

**3**

### PARTICIPATION

Participation is voluntary. You will receive a \$25 gift card.

**4**

### NEXT STEPS

If you would like to participate in the study, contact **Eva Martinez Powless** ([eva.martinez@marquette.edu](mailto:eva.martinez@marquette.edu)). If eligible, you will be invited to voluntarily participate in an interview. If you have any questions about the study, please reach out to Eva Martinez Powless ([eva.martinez@marquette.edu](mailto:eva.martinez@marquette.edu)).

## THANK YOU

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
of Marquette University.

Protocol Number: 3808 -- Version Number: 1 -- Approved on Mar 08, 2021

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol and Guidelines

Research Study: Latinx college student leadership development

Interviewer: <name>

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Introduction**

- Thank the participant for agreeing to be part of the study
- Go over consent form information
- Describe the interview process
- Attain verbal permission to video/audio record the interview
- Reinststate that the interviewer will take notes during the interview
- Start audio recording

#### **Main question to start off the interview -**

As a Latinx individual, what messages did you get about being a leader growing up?

#### **Research questions:**

How do Latinx students perceive leadership?

How do Latinx students make meaning of their psychosocial identities and the ways through which they learn and practice leadership?

How do Latinx students navigate conventional notions of leadership in predominantly White spaces?

#### **Sensitizing questions** (these questions may change depending on theoretical sampling strategies)

- What is your definition of leadership? Why?
- When you think of leaders, who would you identify as an exemplar? Why?
- What does it mean to you to be a Latinx leader? Why?
- Do you believe it is different to be a Latinx leader? If so, why?
- What does it mean to be a Latinx leader in U.S. society? Why?
- What does it mean to be a Latinx leader in college? Why?
- Tell me about your experience navigating predominately White spaces as a Latinx leader?
- Tell me about your experience navigating conventional notions of leadership (or mainstream leadership styles different from your own)?
- What does it mean to you to be a successful Latinx leader in college?
- Tell me about a key leadership experience in college or in the community, if you have had any. What did you learn from that experience about leadership? Why?
- Do you see yourself as a leader? Why?
- Tell me about someone you admire and consider a role model. What leadership characteristics do you admire in that individual?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with me that we did not cover during this interview?

#### **Theoretical questions** (process, variation, connections)

- How does your culture and heritage influence your perception of what leadership means to you, if at all? Why?



- What, if anything, does it mean to be a Latinx leader holding multiple social identities (e.g., gender identity, race/ethnicity, bicultural, etc.)?
- What, if any, socio-cultural factors influence the way in which you learn and practice leadership? Why are these factors important in your development as a leader?

**Practical/structural questions** (direction)

- What does leadership mean to you?
- How do your culture and identity as Latinx influence your perception of leadership? Why?
- What contexts, such as college, society, history, influence your perception of leadership?
- What messages did you get about being a leader growing up? What messages do you get in college about being a leader?
- What do Latinx college students need to do to become influential leader in the United States? Why?

**Closing**

- Thank participants for their participation in the study
- Stop video/audio recording
- Outline next steps: interview will be transcribed and emailed to participant for review, follow-up communication will take place as needed.

Notes:

## Appendix E

### Participant Demographic Form

#### Survey

Research Study: Latinx college student leadership development

Interviewer: <name>

Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

#### Interview Demographic Form for Students

Please complete the following demographic form prior to your interview:

Name of College or University:

Year in College (e.g., first year, second year, junior, senior)

Major:

Are you currently involved in leadership activities in college or in the community? If so, please list organization and title.

Gender Identity and pronouns:

Do you speak Spanish?

How do you identify? Ethnic Identity:

Highest parental level of education:

Social Economic Status (please select one):

Low Income                      Middle Income                      Upper Middle Income                      Upper  
Income

Date:

Please select a pseudonym of your choice. The name you select will serve as your identifier for the study. If you do not select a pseudonym, one will be chosen for you.

Your pseudonym for this study: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Email to Administrators Soliciting Student Participation

Hi [University Administrator],

I hope this email finds you doing well. I am writing to you today to ask for your help in identifying students for my doctoral research study exploring the concept of leadership.

The purpose of this study is to better understand what leadership means to Latinx undergraduate college students within the context of U.S. higher education. My goal is to interview 20 Latinx college students. Each student will participate in one interview and follow-up conversations lasting up to 2 hours in duration.

As an important student affairs administrator who advises college students, I am asking for your help in identifying Latinx college students who might be interested in participating in my study. One of my goals is to recruit participants who demonstrate diversity of leadership experiences, which may include positional and non-positional leadership roles. Students who wish to participate in the study, must meet the following criteria:

1. Identity as Latinx, Hispanic, and/or Latino/a
2. Currently enrolled in college full-time as an undergraduate student in a two-year or four-year U.S. college or university

Please feel free to share the flyer attached with students who meet the criteria for the study. You can also share my contact information with interested students.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [eva.martinez@marquette.edu](mailto:eva.martinez@marquette.edu) or 555-555-5555

Thank You!

Eva Martinez Powless  
PhD Candidate, Interdisciplinary Studies (Higher Education & Leadership)  
Marquette University

## Appendix G

### **Checkpoints for Evaluating the Quality and Applicability of a Grounded Theory Study** (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, pp. 351-352)

1. What is the core category, and how do the major categories relate to it? Is there a diagram depicting these relationships?
2. Is the core category sufficiently broad so that it can be used to study other populations and similar situations beyond setting?
3. Are each of the categories developed in terms of their properties and dimensions so that they show depth, breadth, and variation?
4. Is there descriptive data given under each category that brings the theory to life so that it provides understanding and can be used in a variety of situations?
5. Has context been identified and integrated into the theory? Conditions and consequences should not be listed merely as background information in a separate section but woven into the actual analysis with explanations of how they impact and flow from action-interaction in the data. Describing context enables potential users of a theory to compare or fit the situations under which the theory was developed to situations to which they might want to apply it.
6. Has process been incorporated into the theory in the form of changes in action-interaction in relationships to changes in conditions? Is action-interaction matched to different situations, demonstrating how the theory might vary under different conditions and therefore be applied to different situations?
7. How is the saturation explained, and when and how was it determined that categories were saturated?
8. Do the findings resonate or fit with the experience of both the professionals for whom the research ended and the participants who took part in the study? Can participants see themselves in the story even if not every detail applies to them? Do professionals and participants react emotionally as well as professionally to the findings?
9. Are there gaps, or missing links, in the theory, leaving the reader confused and with a sense that something is missing?
10. Is there an account of extremes or negative cases?
11. Is variation built into the theory?
12. Are the findings presented in a creative and innovative manner? Does the research say something new or put old ideas together in new ways?
13. Do findings give insight into situations, and provide knowledge that can be applied to develop policy, change practice, and add to the knowledge base of a profession?
14. Do the theoretical findings seem significant, and to what extent? It is entirely possible to complete a theory-generating study, or any research investigation, yet not produce findings that are significant.
15. Do the findings have the potential to become part of the discussion and ideas exchanged among relevant social and professional groups?
16. Are the limitations of the study clearly spelled out?
17. Are there suggestions for practice, policy, teaching, and application of the research?

## Appendix H

### Sample of Memo Excerpt

Memo - Participant 10 (Stephanie): Interview February 17, 2022.

As I reflect on this interview, Stephanie is influenced by older sister who is working to get a PhD. Stephanie is a commuter student and lives in a predominately Hispanic neighborhood. She identifies as a first-generation Latinx student and recently came out as bisexual. She comes from a low-income household where Catholic values are held to high standard. From this interview, I can tell those intersecting identities and values seem to play a role in the way Stephanie sees herself and her college experiences. As a first-generation college student, whose parents emigrated from another country, Stephanie must juggle Mexican and American culture. Seems like Latinx students must juggle multiple identities and external factors (societal norms, education). We cannot view Latinx students as Latinx students only – we must think about socioeconomic status, first-generation status, sexuality, parent’s immigration story, language, social justice struggle, values, beliefs about leadership, and the end goal of obtaining a college degree (that is, to help themselves, their families, and their communities). This is such a powerful and inspirational story. Latinx students bring so much to the college campus—perseverance, strength, community, resiliency, culture, open mind, determination, selfless leadership, servant leadership, and inner strength to fight against the lack of institutional resources and support. If we need to learn something about Latinx students, we need to learn the following: They are here to stay. They understand their purpose, vision, and mission. They are for social justice - not just for Latinx students but for all underrepresented student of color. Latinx students will succeed and overcome the challenges of attending historically White institutions. They are creators: spaces, paths, trailblazers. Hard work is of essence (and this is not just physical hard work, but they will go the extra mile to work twice as hard as White students to attain the same level of resources and education. They feel the pressure to be seen as “good people” and they will code switch, speak perfect English, and become book smart in a minute. They work hard against the stereotype because they are trailblazers in the making. They know that each one of them will leave a legacy behind and work toward ensuring that Latinx student leaders are seen as powerful individuals. Their leadership - is not just for them, but for those to come afterwards. They will build a welcoming and inclusive community for those who come after them (community minded). They honor their parent’s sacrifices in coming to this country and these stories serve as critical influences. Their efforts are not in vain - and they will continue to step into spaces where they are not welcomed and often excluded (and never designed with Latinx students in mind as Suarez (2015) documented). They are not afraid to be the only ones in a classroom in front of a White professor because they have to be strong despite the challenges. They are not afraid to run for an elected student leader position because they understand that being the first one is not easy. They are not afraid to hold people accountable. They are not afraid of the system. They are not afraid of the system that has historically kept their communities oppressed. They are powerful and influential Latinx leaders who challenge the status quo by going against the stereotype. Latinx students are reclaiming their power and space in education.

## Appendix I

### Open Coding Results

Table I– 1  
*Results from Open Coding: 11 Interviews*

Number	Category/Subcategory	Frequency	%
1.	How Latinx student leaders overcome barriers		
1.1	Strong-minded, headstrong, strong stance	11	100.0
1.2	Unafraid to challenge status quo	7	64.0
1.3	Being brave, bold, and driven	6	55.0
1.4	Don't back out easily	6	55.0
2.	Purpose driven leadership concept (motivation)		
2.1	Paving the way for family/community	9	82.0
2.2	Help others/pay it forward	7	64.0
2.3	Representing family/community	6	55.0
2.4	Opening the door for future generations	4	36.0
2.5	Breaking barriers/generational cycles	4	36.0
3.	Leadership impact on college campus		
3.1	Latinx students have impact on others	11	100.0
3.2	Engaged in positional leadership roles	10	91.0
3.3	Making institutions more equitable	8	73.0
3.4	Show up for the family (other Latinx students)	8	73.0
3.5	Influencing change (equity/justice)	6	55.0
4.	What success means to a Latinx leader		
4.1	Advance the community/finding fulfillment	11	100.0
4.2	Graduate from college as first gen	9	82.0
4.3	Making family proud, honoring their struggle	8	73.0
4.4	Be respected by peers	1	0.1
5.	Latinx students' perception of leadership		
5.1	Revolutionizing the Latinx community	11	100.0
5.2	Trailblazing as first gen Latinx student	11	100.0
5.3	Leadership for others	7	64.0
5.4	Guide other students/resourceful	4	36.0
6.	Rising despite the struggle concept		
6.1	The "struggle"	11	100.0
6.2	Challenging stereotypes	11	100.0
6.3	Racism, bias, stereotypes	11	100.0
6.4	Persistence/resilience	11	100.0
6.5	Navigating White spaces	10	91.0
6.6	Intersection of Gender-Race	9	82.0
6.7	Activism	8	73.0
7.	Role models concept		
7.1	People they look up to	11	100.0
7.2	Empathetic mentors/advisors	10	91.0
7.3	Inspirational leaders	9	82.0

Number	Category/Subcategory	Frequency	%
7.4	Relatable leaders	8	73.0
8.	External influences on leadership development		
8.1	Representation matters	10	91.0
8.2	Family	10	91.0
8.3	Community-minded	6	55.0
9.	Cultural influences on the leadership journey		
9.1	leading (bicultural) in elected role	10	91.0
9.2	Juggle two worlds	9	82.0
9.3	Pride in culture/identity	6	55.0
10.	Barriers to leadership development		
10.1	Perception of societal barriers	9	82.0
10.2	White people as gatekeepers of leadership	8	73.0
10.3	Discrimination/racism in society	7	64.0
10.4	Sexism impacts Latinas in society	7	64.0
11.	Strategies for becoming a change agent on campus		
11.1	Selfless	11	100.0
11.2	Challenging the status quo	9	82.0
11.3	Inclusive	8	73.0
11.5	Communication	5	45.0
12.	How Latinx students view Latinx leadership in society		
12.1	Very few Latinx leaders in society	7	45.0
12.2	Latinx falling behind in education	6	55.0
12.3	White leadership is normalized	6	55.0

## Appendix J

### Axial Coding Results

Table J1  
*Contextual Conditions: Categories and Subcategories (from 11 interviews)*

Number	Codes	dimensionalized subcategories	Categories
7.1	people they look up to	tough love in the college journey	
7.2	empathetic mentor	listens to the stories of Latinx students	
7.2	empathetic mentor	accepting/understanding	
7.3	inspirational	inspirational rebellious leader	
7.3	inspirational	family members overcome immigration challenges	
7.1	people they look up to	impactful leaders like AOC	
7.4	relatable leader	down to earth/understand issues	
7.4	relatable leader	leaders remember where they come from and their struggle	
7.4	relatable leader	seeing yourself reflected in leaders	
10.1	barriers	difficult to find Latinx leader role models in society	
10.2	barriers	White people are gatekeepers of leadership, no Latinx leaders	
10.3	barriers	discrimination prevents leadership advancement	
10.4	barriers	sexism impacts Latinas in society	
12.1	leadership perception	very few Latinx leaders	
12.2	leadership perception	Latinx students falling behind in education	
12.3	leadership perception	mostly White people represented in leadership positions	



Table J2  
*Causal Conditions: Categories and Subcategories*

Number	Codes	dimensionalized subcategories	Categories
6.1	struggle	must fight to prove humanity	Struggle/ obstacle
6.1	struggle	double standard for Latinx leaders	
6.1	struggle	Lack of support for first gen/Latinx	
6.1	struggle	pressure to be a student leader	
6.1	struggle	you have everything against you	
6.2	stereotypes	fighting against the stereotype	Challenging stereotypes
6.2	stereotypes	misconceptions Latinx people	
6.2	stereotypes	stigma, invalidation, stereotypes	
6.2	stereotypes	stereotypes lead to lack of authenticity/value in ourselves	
6.3	facing racism/bias	experience bias/racism	Strategy for overcoming obstacle
6.3	facing racism/bias	humanity is questioned	
6.3	facing racism/bias	face sexism/colorism/stereotype	
6.3	facing racism/bias	Spanish/accents not welcomed	
6.4	persistence/resilience	overcoming obstacles	Resilience
6.4	persistence/resilience	adapting to White spaces in college	
6.4	persistence/resilience	finishing college despite struggle	
6.4	persistence/resilience	first one/not easily discouraged	
6.4	persistence/resilience	perseverance, persistence, dedication to finish college	
6.4	persistence/resilience	push through struggles	
6.4	persistence/resilience	driven to lead for the right reasons	
6.4	persistence/resilience	work hard juggle school/leadership	
6.4	persistence/resilience	movimiento (movement)	
6.4	persistence/resilience	influence change, hard work	
6.5	navigating white spaces	juggles two worlds	obstacle
6.5	navigating white spaces	mainstream/Latinx culture	
6.5	navigating white spaces	stressful-not belonging	
6.5	navigating white spaces	White leadership normalized	
6.5	navigating white spaces		Navigating White spaces

Table J2  
*Causal Conditions: Categories and Subcategories*

Number	Codes	dimensionalized subcategories	Categories
6.5	navigating white spaces	people of color not seen as leaders	Navigating White spaces
6.5	navigating white space	need safe spaces to be Latinx	
6.5	navigating white spaces	big differences between Latinx people/White people	
6.6	race/gender intersection	sexism/machismo impact Latinas	Gender/ race intersect
6.6	race/gender intersection	gender/race intersect in leadership	
6.6	race/gender intersection	brown Latinx face extra obstacles	
6.6	race/gender intersection	men privileged in leadership impacts Latinas	
6.7	activism	lack of resources pushes Latinx students to fight	Engaged in struggle
6.7	activism	seek equality, equity, fair treatment	
6.7	activism	advocating for all Latinx students	Student activism on campus
6.7	activism	frustrated with system; pushed into leadership	
6.7	activism	org. leader protest/strike for change	
6.7	activism	students juggle everything, huge obstacle	

Table J3  
*Strategies: Categories and Subcategories*

Number	Codes	dimensionalized subcategories	Categories
3.1	motivation	care about have impact on others	Formal leadership role
3.3	motivation	making institutions more equitable	
3.4	motivation	show up for family/community	
3.5	motivation	driven to influence change	
2.5	purpose	breaking barriers	
15.5	motivation	formal leadership role as important	Practicing selfless leadership
11.1	selfless	helping others overcome obstacles	
11.1	selfless	paying it forward by	
11.1	selfless	leadership for/with others	
11.1	selfless	puts others first	
11.1	selfless	helps everyone succeed	Strong-minded leader
1.1	Strong-minded	strength to fight for equity/justice	
1.1	Strong-minded	courageous leader gets things done	
1.3	Strong-minded	powerful, bold, brave leader	
3.2	positional leadership	position of power/influence	
9.2	cultural influences	juggle two cultures	Practicing leadership
3.2	positional leadership	team-focused gets things done	
3.2	positional leadership	prioritize needs of people	
9.1	cultural influences	bicultural leaders/elected position	
11.2	challenging status quo	calling things out as they see it	
11.2	challenging status quo	you must be strong	Practicing leadership
11.2	challenging status quo	Outspoken/strong leader	
11.2	challenging status quo	engaged in leadership process	
11.2	challenging status quo	standing up/speaking for others	
11.2	challenging status quo	being vocal about exclusion	
1.2	challenging status quo	unafraid to stand up for justice	Practicing leadership
11.3	inclusive	open minded/accepting of all people	
11.3	inclusive	appreciate differences	
11.3	inclusive	unity, connection, cultural space	
11.3	inclusive	collaboration/input from people	
11.3	inclusive	welcoming spirit of Latinx people	Practicing leadership
18.0	communication	essential skills for leading	
18.0	communication	transparent	
18.0	communication	natural public speaker	Practicing leadership
9.3	cultural influences	Pride in culture/identity	

Table J4  
*Intervening Conditions: Categories and Subcategories*

Number	Codes	dimensionalized subcategories	Categories
8.1	representation	lack of representation (systemic)	
8.1	representation	inequities lead to lack of representation	
8.1	representation	rare to see powerful leaders like AOC	
8.1	representation	no access to Latinx leaders in college	
8.1	representation	systemic - bias, prejudice, racism	
8.1	representation	need to see themselves in leadership	
8.1	representation	matters in the college journey	
8.2	family influences	stressful/must figure it out (first gen)	
8.2	family influences	informal mentors	
8.2	family influences	language, immigration, education (fears)	
8.2	family influences	Latinas have more pressure	
8.2	family influences	they work hard/sacrifice a lot	
2.1	pave the way/community	leading with community in mind	
2.3	pave the way/community	representing family/community	
2.3	pave the way/community	connected to all Latinx students across state (collectivism)	

Table J5  
*Consequences: Categories and Subcategories*

Number	Codes	dimensionalized subcategories	Categories
2.4	purpose	opening the door for future generations	Leadership process/ fulfillment
2.2	purpose	paying it forward	
5.1	leadership	Revolutionizing community as we go	
5.2	leadership	trailblazing as first gen Latinx student	
5.4	leadership	leadership for others (servant leadership)	
5.5	leadership	resourceful/helpful leader	
3.3	success	influencing change in society/campus	
4.1	success	advance community/fulfillment	
4.1	success	making community better	
7.0	impact	having long-term impact for future generations (Selena example)	
8.0	success	highest accomplishment is to finish college	Uplifting family/ making family proud
4.4	success	being respected by peers	
4.1	success	moving community/family forward	
4.3	success	uplifting family/making family proud	
4.2	success	overcoming challenges as first gen/Latinx student	
4.1	success	improving quality of life for myself and others	
4.3	success	not failing family/honoring their struggle	
4.3	success	being best version of myself	

## Appendix K

### Selective Coding Results

Table K1  
*Properties and Dimensions Related to Causal Conditions Category*

Causal category (process)	Property	Dimension	
1. The “struggle” (influencing decisions)	Decision to engage in leadership	Conscious	Unconscious
	Approach	Run for elected leadership position (perceived as	Don’t run for elected position (perceived as
	Social	Desire to lead/make change	Desire to follow/don’t make
	Activism	Engaged	Not engaged
	Encouraged to lead	Voluntarily	Involuntarily
2. Stereotypes (challenging)	Latinx people are not leaders	Negative impact on leadership pipeline	Positive impact leadership pipeline
	Related to gender, race, color	High impact on mental health	Low impact on mental health
	Less than human	Negative impact on development	Positive impact on development
	Immigration, accents	High impact on development	Low impact on development
3. White spaces (navigating)	Race, gender	Devalued	Valued
	Support	Welcoming, sense of belonging	Unwelcoming, lack of sense of belonging
	Latinx representation	High impact on development	Low impact on development
	Leadership	White leadership valued (impact identity)	Latinx leadership devalued (impact identity)
4. Culture/Identity (Influencing leadership)	Related to Latinx culture	High sense of self as bicultural leader	Low sense of self as bicultural leader

Spanish language	Valuable	Invaluable
Family	Involved	Not involved
Class	Poor	Wealthy
Collectivism	Positive impacts leadership (perceived)	Negative impacts leadership (perceived)

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Table K2  
*Properties and Dimensions Related to Contextual Conditions Category*

Contextual conditions category (process)	Property	Dimension	
1. Role Models (influence positively or negatively)	Politics	Democrat	Republican
	Race	Relatable (based on identity)	Not relatable (based on identity)
	Story	Relatable	Not relatable
	Gender	Women	Men or non-binary
	Culture/identity	Latinx	Non-Latinx
	Reason	Differences	Similarities
2. Society (influencing positively or negatively)	Leadership trait	Positive attribute (inspire)	Negative attribute (don't inspire)
	Caring	Positive (empathetic)	Negative (apathy)
	Latinx culture	Positive (connected to roots)	Negative (culture seen as hardship)
	Latinx leadership - perception	Positive (rising leader)	Negative (stereotyped, not valued)
	White leadership - perception	Positive (normalized)	Negative (excludes)
	Mainstream culture	Values Latinx people	Devalues Latinx people
2. Education (influencing leadership pipeline)	Latinx leadership pipeline	Positive (increases opportunity for advancement)	Negative (seen as unfair/inequitable)
	Level	High school	Graduate
	Perception	Valuable	Invaluable
	Lack of resources	Needed for first generation families	Not needed for privileged/wealthy families
	College	Expensive for the poor	Inexpensive for the rich



Table K3  
*Properties and Dimensions Related to Central Phenomenon Category*

Central Phenomenon (process)	Property	Dimension	
1. Revolutionary (becoming)	Desire for fundamental change	Positive impact on others	Negative impact on others
	Advancing Latinx community	Influenced by external institutional forces	Influenced by internal power to lead
	Knowing oneself	Awareness	Lack of awareness
	Reason Capacity Support	Justice Low Enough	Injustice High Not enough
2. Strong Mindset (sustaining)	Related to being a strong leader Obstacle	Strong (bouncing back from obstacle) Many obstacles	Not strong (quitting) No obstacles
	Mental power	High emotional intelligence	Low emotional intelligence
	Approach	Vocal outspoken Fearless	Not vocal soft spoken Afraid
3. Trailblaze (influencing positively or negatively)	Related to being first in family to attend college	Difficult path (face barriers)	Easy path (no barriers)
	Pioneer	Succeeding in the face of unknown factors	Failing in the face of unknown factors
	First gen leader in college	Happy to be the first	Unhappy with lack of support
	Latinx leader in society	Responding to community need	Not responding to community need
	Blazing trail for others	Equipped (confidence)	Not equipped (no confidence)

Table K4  
*Properties and Dimensions Related to Consequences Category*

Consequences category (process)	Property	Dimension	
1. Satisfaction/ fulfillment (with leadership process)	Making institutions equitable	Challenging the status quo	Not challenging the status quo
	Process Purpose	Satisfied More equity	Dissatisfied Less equity
	Style	Collaborative Collective agenda Pushing for change	Authoritative Individual agenda Passive
	Mindset	Commitment to community	Lack of commitment to community
2. Success (influencing negatively or positively)	Personal	Believing in themselves to overcome challenges (Internal)	Not believing messages of who they should be in society (external)
	College	Positive college outcomes (graduating)	Negative college outcomes (not graduating)
	Life	High desire to be best version of themselves	Low desire to be best version of themselves
	Family	Honoring immigration story	Not honoring immigration story

Table K5  
*Properties and Dimensions Related to Intervening Category*

Intervening category (process)	Property	Dimension	
1. Family (influencing negative or positive)	Family members	Important	Not important
	Immigrant Class	Yes Poor	No Affluent
	Responsibility to family	High	Low
	Balance	Successful	Not successful
	Pressure Support	High Positive (provide support)	Low Negative (balance expectations)
2. Latinx Leadership Representation (influencing negatively or positively)	Society	Enough Latinx leaders	Not enough Latinx leaders
	College	High % of Latinx students/leaders	Low % of Latinx students/leaders
	Community	More Latinx leaders	Less Latinx leaders
	Latinx role models	Positively influence college journey	Negatively influence college journey
	Latinx leadership	Positively impacts student success/sense of belonging	Negatively impacts student success/sense of belonging
3. Community (influencing negatively or positively)	Inequities in community	Involved in social justice movements in college (positive)	Not involved in social justice movements in college (negative)
	Quality of life	Desire to improve the community (positive)	Lack of desire to (negative)
	Approach	Leading with community in mind (positive)	Not leading with community in mind (negative)
	Support	Connection to community (positive)	No connection to community (negative)

Table K6  
*Properties and Dimensions Related to Strategies Category*

Strategies category (process)	Property	Dimension	
1. Leadership (practicing)	Cultural student organization leader	Active (positive)	Passive (negative)
	Building skills	Proactive development (positive)	No development (negative)
	Style	Driven/goal oriented (positive) Care/compassion Bicultural, bilingual	Passive (negative) Monolingual Apathy Monocultural,
2. Selfless leadership (influencing journey)	Leadership for others mindset	Putting others first (positively influencing leadership)	Does not put others first (negatively influence)
	Responsibility Approach	Desire to serve others Service oriented Collectivistic	No desire to serve Does not help individualistic
3. Positional leadership (influencing negatively or positively)	Type	Cultural student organization	Mainstream student organization
	Level	Elected position	Non-elected position
	Style/Approach Purpose	Team-centered Centers the needs of others/team Inclusive Welcoming Assertive Equity minded	Leader-centered Centers the needs of the leader Exclusive Not welcoming nonassertive indifferent
4. Persistence/ Resilience (building)	Natural ability	Confidence in ability to overcome obstacles (high)	Confidence in ability to overcome obstacles (low)
	Resilient	Strong character Overcomes difficulties Elasticity Adapts to environment	Weak character Does not overcome difficulties/Rigid Does not adapt
	Emotional Intelligence	Self-aware, regulates emotions	No self-awareness
	Persistent	Pushes through despite difficulties. Grit (positive) perseverance Dedication to finish college	Gives up easily No grit (negative) lack of perseverance Lack of dedication to finish college