5-2016

A case study of Hispanic female school superintendents in rural schools of the Rio Grande Valley in deep south Texas

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A CASE STUDY OF HISPANIC FEMALE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS IN RURAL

SCHOOLS OF THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY IN

DEEP SOUTH TEXAS

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2016

Major Subject: Educational Leadership

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May 2016

ABSTRACT

Castillo, Irma C., <u>A Case Study of Hispanic Female School Superintendents in Rural Schools of the Rio Grande Valley in Deep South Texas</u>. Doctor of Education (EdD), May, 2016, 137 pp., 4 figures, references, 102 titles.

Underrepresentation of women in the position of school superintendent is an ongoing dilemma impacting social constructs, as well as public education. The few Hispanic females that lead schools tend to be employed in rural schools. The dearth of female Hispanic school superintendents questions the factors impacting such a trend. This study explored the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents; attempted to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and examined the discrimination issues these women may have experienced. A qualitative, case study methodology was used and employed purposeful sampling, specifically criterion sampling, to select the case study participants. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility. Findings suggest there were numerous commonalities, differences, and unique points to each participants' experiences. Further research is recommended to explore other racial or ethnic groups to identify if similar limitations and factors affect other women superintendents of other minority groups. Finally, it is recommended that the findings of this study be used to develop a quantitative examination of the specific factors identified herein to offer the ability to provide generalizations to a larger population of female superintendents.

DEDICATION

The completion of my doctoral studies would not have been possible without the love and favor of my Lord Jesus Christ. Marta Olvera Cervantes, my beautiful mother, is my inspiration; her memory allowed me to endure this doctoral journey. My mother taught me that everything is possible through dedication and hard work. My beloved children, Nicole, George Jr., Monique, and Ilyssa motivated me to complete this degree in order to demonstrate that perseverance and passion can change your life and make you even stronger. They are my happiness, my pride and joy, add purpose to my existence, and will always be the best part of me. To my loving and supportive husband, George, and brothers, Richard and Robert Cervantes, I wholeheartedly thank you. You always lent an ear, dried my tears, and calmed my fears. And finally, thank you to all my friends and family that believed in me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The rank of a superintendent is the highest administrative position in the public education sector. Underrepresentation of women in this leadership position is an ongoing dilemma impacting not only the social constructs of their lives, but of utmost importance, public education. The position of school superintendent is highly dominated by the male gender within the United States. According to Derrington and Sharratt (2009), "women often have to fight harder, wait longer, and survive more scrutiny to become a superintendent" (p. 10). "Research on women in educational administration has focused primarily on white females. Although this research area is rich with data concerning women, there is limited information on minority female administrators" (Brunner, 1999, p. 125). Nationally only 20% of school superintendents are women, yet an overwhelming 75% of teachers are female; these statistics do not reflect equity (Manuel & Slate, 2003; Keller, 1999). Additionally, in 1982, the American Association of School Boards reported only four Hispanic female school superintendents in the entire United States (Brunner, 1999). Based on data from the Texas Education Agency during the 1997-1998 school year, women represented 1.4% of superintendents in the state of Texas. According to Grogan and Brunner, only 18% of school districts in America employed female superintendents (Sampson & Davenport, 2010, p. 143). The dearth of female Hispanic school superintendents begs to question the factors impacting such a trend. Henceforth, there was a need to conduct a study that explored the factors contributing to the scarcity of female Hispanics in school

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superintendent positions. There are few Hispanic females in school administration and they tend to lead rural schools; this required further research to explore and remedy this disparity.

The importance of rural education can be clearly understood by Brewton's 1939 statement, he wrote: "one of the nation's greatest educational problems is to discover ways and means of improving rural school and through them the quality of life in rural America" (p. 397). The task to improve rural education was under the direction of professional female educators. A hundred years later, many issues and concerns continue to loom in rural schools; but the only difference is the ethnic and cultural demographics of the region. The shortage of research in the area of Hispanic female leaders and their roles in rural schools has yet to be fully examined. In 1991, only one case-study on Hispanic women superintendents had been carried out (Brunner, p. 126). Unfortunately, there is no change in available research of Hispanic female superintendents (Manuel & Slate, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 2000; Quilantan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004).

Women have faced great struggles based on gender inequality throughout history; however, it is not salient to continue this trend in the year 2016, specifically in the area of public school administration where women clearly lag behind in leadership positions compared to males. This inequality is also prevalent in our institutions of higher education; De la Rey (2005) attests these associations are "hierarchically organized in ways that privilege hegemonic masculinities" (p. 8). It is through studies as this researcher has provided, that we as a society can combat gender and race discrimination to improve our schools. "Aside from a few studies documenting the numbers and administrative positions attained by Hispanic females, limited information concerning other aspects of this specific group's experiences in educational administration is available" (Brunner, 1991, p. 126). Research on Hispanic women superintendents remains absent from the literature as described by Mendez-Morse (2000), "there

are very few Latinas in administrative ranks, especially the superintendency. Nonetheless, absence from historical accounts or research studies does not mean nonexistence. Rather, it indicates exclusion and negates the contributions of Latina leaders" (p. 584).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in terms of postsecondary education, "in 2008, females earned more degrees than males within each racial/ethnic group"; however, once again women are not equally represented in the male-dominated roles of public school administration (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010, p. vi). "If 75% of teachers in the U.S. are women and teaching is the first position on the pathway leading to the superintendency, we would expect to see many more women in the role" (Katz, 2006, p. 15). Women and men are not equally represented in public school leadership; in fact, more women are enrolled in educational leadership courses and superintendent certification programs. This emphasizes the need for research to explain why women do not hold equal or more school superintendent positions than men (Brunner, 2000; Tallerico, 2000).

Another element to consider is the shift of demographics in the United States. "Between 1980 and 2008, the racial/ethnic composition of the United Stated shifted- the White population declined from 80 percent of the total population to 66 percent; the Hispanic population increased from 6 percent of the total to 15 percent" (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010, p. iii). When the majority of students served in a school district belong to one ethnic group, it is important to provide role models for them which can serve as a springboard to success for many of these minority students.

Exposing the personal and professional experiences, as well as sharing the life accounts of current Hispanic women leaders would expound on the limited research of these individuals, both their obstacles and accomplishments. Works such as Franco, Ott, & Robles (2011) have

revealed research on the self-reflective personal and professional leadership roots of Hispanic women school leaders (p. 12). In the research study by Franco et al. (2011), three Latina superintendents shared their stories about their childhoods, their careers, and challenges along the way. Each participant discussed how their gender, cultures, and search for quality education motivated them to succeed in their careers. The participants stated their female identities had to be masked by their professional successes. The superintendents in this study also urged readers to follow their personal compasses and not to hesitate in demonstrating their leadership capacity due to their gender (Franco et al., 2011). Further research is needed to explain and understand why women with accomplished educational backgrounds and leadership qualities are not equally represented as men in the position of school superintendent, which has been monopolized by men for centuries.

Sharing the stories of Hispanic female school leaders can lend confidence to professional women educators aspiring to become school superintendents. The Hispanic community holds a wealth of cultural diversity. Accordingly, these experiences and stories must be communicated with different people from all walks of life within the realm of public schools, rural and others-cultural wealth can transform education (Yosso, 2005). Academics and society must embrace and promote research such as this in order to advocate for all women, specifically those seeking the coveted, male-dominated school superintendency.

Statement of the Problem

The majority of teachers are women, in fact approximately seventy percent of teachers are female, yet the majority of superintendents are white males; these numbers do not correlate (Manuel & Slate, 2003; Keller, 1999). "In 2012, 13.3 percent of education administrators were black or African American and 7.9 percent were Hispanic or Latino" and in 2007-08, slightly

over 50% of elementary principals were women but only 28.5% of secondary principals were women (Department of Professional Employees, 2013, p. 2). The problem remains that there is a serious underrepresentation of the experiences, challenges, and successes of Hispanic female superintendents. Leadership should be gauged upon data and educational improvement, not on gender and race. On the contrary, gender and race are always observed according to one respondent from the study by Franco et al. (2011) who stated, "others wanted to define her as a Latina rather than a qualified administrator; we found that many painful situations that reflected our culture, language or female identity were hidden under the exterior of our professional successes"; therefore, these women's voices must be heard and their stories told, so educators and communities understand professional women's struggles and appreciate their triumphs (2011, p. 13). The issue remains, women are not equally represented in the upper echelons of public school administration and thus may be misunderstood and misrepresented. Further research is required to address this concern.

Another issue to be examined if it should surface during this research study, is the discrimination Hispanic women may have encountered in the pursuit and acquisition of the coveted school superintendent position. "As room is made at the table for people of color to participate in a collaborative relationship, some members from the dominant culture may feel resentment at allowing the newcomers in, since these new participants may seek changes to the status quo" (Martinez-Cosio, 1996, p. 67). Women experience various forms of discrimination. Brunner (1999) writes, "gender is the mediating force in superintendents' selection, effectiveness, and retention" (p. xi). Brunner & Kim (2010) conducted a national study to examine misunderstandings of women superintendents in the United States. Their study included women that were superintendents and those that had the superintendency as a personal goal.

Their participants maintain women face school board prejudices. These prejudices support that "gendered norms create barriers for women seeking the superintendency" (p. 300). This researcher examined discrimination confronted by the Hispanic female superintendent participants as they evolved from the study. As such, the researcher also examined other issues that evolved from this study.

Purpose of the Study

Research shows roughly 33% of early twenty-first century schools are in rural areas where a substantial number of the nation's female superintendents serve (Garn & Brown, 2008). The public school superintendency is dominated by males and is socially constructed as masculine (Skrla, 2000, p. 293). There is a need for additional research in terms of the school superintendent position. Political and U.S. education policy, via the voice of female school superintendents and their experiences, must also be explored and considered (Skrla, 2000, p. 294). Furthermore, research on school superintendents is rooted in the perspectives and experiences of males; hence the same information based on a woman's behalf was researched (Skrla, 2000, p. 298). The purpose of this study was threefold:

1.) to explore the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents;

2.) to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and

3.) to examine the discrimination issues these women may have experienced.

The researcher intends to add to the narrow body of knowledge available related to female superintendents in rural schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used as a guide in conducting the study:

1. What factors contribute to the low rate of female Hispanics school superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas?

2. Why do Hispanic women superintendents secure positions at small rural school districts in the Rio Grande Valley?

3. To what extent have Hispanic female superintendents felt discriminated against?

Methodology

In order to carry out this research study, I utilized a qualitative, case study methodology since it is the "approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case)…over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The aim of this study was to understand the experiences and challenges of Hispanic female superintendents of rural schools in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas. In order to accomplish the intent of this study, case study methodology was ideal because it allowed me to delve through multiple facets of data and artifacts to the point where the researcher became a *bricoleur* weaving various forms of information into a meaningful piece about the cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4).

The participants for this study were Hispanic women who were serving as rural school superintendents at the three designated school districts. These superintendents provided a clear perspective and understanding of the study variables, yet they remain as a minority group within school superintendents.

This study utilized multiple-case sampling (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p.33). "Multiple-case sampling adds confidence to findings. By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying *how* and *where* and, if possible, *why* it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, validity,

stability, and trustworthiness of the findings" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 33). The researcher employed purposeful sampling, specifically criterion sampling, to select the Hispanic female superintendents as case study participants. Convenience sampling was also be used for greater geographic accessibility to the participants (Miles et al., 2014, p. 32).

Once IRB approval was secured, the researcher used guided interviews, participant observations, surveys, and document analysis, as research methods that resulted in multiple case studies. Research suggests that multiple-case studies should employ no more than ten individuals; therefore, the researcher selected three participants that are Hispanic female superintendents of rural Rio Grande Valley schools (Miles et al., 2014). Interview data was audio-recorded; the data was then transcribed by the researcher. Qualtrics software was used to create, administer, and collect survey data. Fieldnotes were kept by the researcher during all participant observations. And, electronic notes were kept throughout the document analysis process as well. All data was entered and stored in the researcher's computer which was encrypted via BitLocker, a security measure which accompanies Microsoft Windows Enterprise software. Another means of data storage included a personal pin drive which was encrypted using Rohos Mini Drive software. Rohos Mini Drive software allowed the user to encrypt a USB drive via a two-step process, which added security to the user's files (Houston interview, 2015). Efficient access to data and records was paramount since the analysis of such a plethora of resources is the next step.

To reinforce the quality and integrity of this qualitative research study, credibility via triangulation was maintained, trustworthiness for validity, and the researcher exercised member checking as well, to ensure accuracy of the study results (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As with other qualitative research, generalizations cannot be made; therefore,

transferability is best in "showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Definition of Terms

Discrimination in this study is defined as "the practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2014).

Harassment to annoy persistently or to create an unpleasant or hostile situation for especially by uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical conduct (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2014).

Hispanic in this study is defined as "Americans who identify themselves as being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America and other Spanish-speaking countries" (U.S. Congress Public Law 94-311, 1976).

Rural Schools are defined as schools with enrollment between 300 and the median district enrollment for the state and an enrollment growth rate over the past five years of less than 20 percent or with an enrollment of less than 200 students (Texas Education Agency, 2009).

Significance of the Study

This study expanded on the existing, deficient body of knowledge involving Hispanic female superintendents. Keller (1999) reports "the dearth of data about superintendents signals an alarming lack of attention to the problem…and only about five percent of superintendents are members of minorities" (p. 3). "The issue of negative perceptions of women being in charge will be there as long as there is a dearth of women in the top CEO positions. This has been a hard wheel to turn, and it continues to move very slowly" (Franco et al., 2011, p. 15). Knowing the

student populations we serve in our local schools are predominantly Hispanic and we are charged with educating all students, it would be helpful and proactive that they have adequate and relatable role models for success, which can begin with Hispanic school superintendents. In addition, the rate of growth of the number of Hispanics is not only disproportionate but also does not reflect the number of female Hispanic students (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). In terms of elementary and secondary education, "from 2000-01 to 2007-2008, the proportion of public school enrollment composed of White students decreased from 61 to 56 percent. During the same period, Hispanic school enrollment increased from 17 to 21 percent of the total enrollment" (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010, p. iv).

Research on Hispanic female superintendents and how they have attained the school superintendent position, a profession that has been traditionally dominated by males, must be explored further especially in rural South Texas where over 90 percent of the student population served is Hispanic. In order to address the challenges Hispanic students and communities encounter, further research on Hispanic female school leaders can offer the key to needed changes for further success of minority students and future, minority educational leaders. Unfortunately, "In 2007, the status dropout rate was higher among Hispanics (21 percent) than among Blacks (8 percent), Asians/Pacific Islanders (6 percent), and Whites (5 percent)" (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010, p. v). Dreary statistics such as these justify the need for more research to ensure minority students of rural South Texas are being served and represented in a manner which offers opportunity to all students- tomorrow's leaders.

There is a dire need for studies such as this due to the slow progress women are making in terms of acquiring the school superintendency, of particular importance in rural schools. This study will reveal salient responses to barriers women have overcome in their journey to the

superintendency. FeKula & Roberts (2005) disclose that the percentage of women completing superintendent certification from 1980 through 1990 surpassed that of males doing the same, yet males pursued the superintendency more so than females (p. 220). "It is precisely because of their low, almost invisible, numbers that attention should be afforded to this singular group of women who have become the chief executives of public school systems, especially when those positions are synonymous with white male educational leadership" (Brunner, 1999, p. 126). School communities should be cognizant of these women's experiences, challenges, and perspectives. In addition, a deep understanding of Hispanic female superintendents' experiences and the attributes they bring with them would benefit public school leadership.

Hispanic women continue to be underrepresented in the superintendency, with this research, the existing body of knowledge was expanded and more Hispanic women may be empowered. Brunner (1999) supports that, "learning about the experiences of Hispanic female superintendents, contributes to understanding how women, particularly minority women, have managed to become superintendents" (p. 126). In other schools with similar demographics and issues, this type of research will be able to improve and understand leadership practices as well as school performance (Jallow, 2011). This study was fundamental since the sector of Hispanic female superintendents has not been fully investigated and this research will add to the limited body of knowledge available to educators, students, and the public (Manuel & Slate, 2003).

The importance and need for this study was based on several reasons. First, there exists a knowledge gap to the immediate factors of low appointment rate of female Hispanics in the superintendent position. Previous studies demonstrate a disconnect in the demographics between male and female superintendents in different regions of the United States. Therefore, this study

focused on the rural regions of deep South Texas with a keen interest on Hispanic women who are the minority in the school superintendent position.

Secondly, the study generated new knowledge especially to social scientists, educators, and policy makers in understanding the revolving factors around the deficiency of female Hispanics in the position of school superintendent. Based on the existing laws against discrimination, this study was relevant in illuminating any discrimination practices against gender and racial backgrounds in the Rio Grande Valley of deep South Texas towards Hispanic females.

Finally, this study provided new information, both academically and for future researchers who wish to pursue similar research on the scarce appointment of school superintendents in different regions based on gender and racial backgrounds.

Limitations

There were various limitations as in any study. The limitations for this research study were as follows:

1.) limited to three participants,

2.) limited to three rural school districts in the Rio Grande Valley of deep South Texas,

3.) limited by the timeframe of one year for data collection, and

4.) limited by qualitative, case study methodology to explore research questions.

Despite the limitations, the researcher sought the participant's trustworthiness to inform the research questions.

Summary

In order to address the research questions I explored the experiences and barriers of each of the Hispanic female superintendents that participated in this research. Through this research I can apply these findings to similar women and schools, so that we can learn from their stories

and gain a better understanding of how Hispanic women leaders may benefit schools, social/racial structures, and various demographics. With more research and insight we can transform our perceptions about Hispanic women leaders, so that they can instead inspire and motivate. As an educator and member of society, I have contributed to the diverse and innovative discourse surrounding Hispanic women superintendents and their influences to the positive academic practices in public schools (Gammill & Vaughn, 2011, p. 120).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature that emphasizes the underrepresentation of Hispanic women in leadership positions, specifically in the school superintendency. This study was valuable in adding to the minimal literature available addressing this topic. Literature-based rationales for the lack of females in positions of leadership, as well as the social and political factors that influence the appointment of female superintendents, and the capacity of current female Hispanic superintendents in leadership roles was also discussed. In chapter two, I provide a review of the literature which covers: the history of women in public school systems, women as educational leaders, Hispanic women as educational leaders, factors impacting female leaders, and women as school superintendents in rural schools.

Derrington & Sharratt (2008) highlight the dismay of this gender inequality for school leadership positions suggesting that, "at the current annual rate of increase, it won't be until the year 2035 that we will see a 50-50 gender ratio in superintendents" (p. 8). Originally in 1993, Derrington and Sharratt conducted a study of 200 female superintendents from Washington State. This research study was replicated in 2007 with 140 women superintendents, members of a Washington job list service, by the same researchers. Interestingly, both studies in spite of the fourteen year gap, identified similar barriers perceived by the female participants. The perceived

barriers included the following in 1993: sex role stereotypes, sex discrimination, and lack of role models/mentors to guide women into the superintendency; and the following for the 2007 study: self-imposed barriers, the "good old boys" which favor men versus women, and school boards not well informed of female candidates' qualifications (p. 12). The barriers presented by women both in 1993 and later in 2007 were the same, but the rankings differed. The sex role stereotyping and sex discrimination barriers revealed in 1993, were the top two identified by women, per se the authors deemed them as "institutionalized and rooted in societal discrimination practices" (p. 9). In opposition, the 2007 study demonstrated "self-imposed" issues and the "good old boys" network to be the top barriers for women to the superintendency. Derrington & Sharratt (2008) elaborated on the self-imposed barriers such as, family responsibilities and motherhood. The authors also shared that "women with children in grades K-8 are rarely superintendents" (p. 10). These two factors, aside from others, tend to keep women from pursuing the time-consuming and demanding position of school superintendent.

The appointment of Hispanic female school superintendents has gradually facilitated heated debates and studies on its effectiveness towards the achievement of gender balance and non-racial discrimination. "Women in the superintendency balance two sets of expectations: role-related and gender-related" (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008, p. 10). The superintendent position is mainly characterized by leadership style geared towards improving the academic processes, ensuring growth in student learning, and enhancing learning outcomes in terms of performance (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). Therefore, a superintendent according to Townsend and MacBeath is a person who holds a position responsible for educational activities within a community. In the capacity of school superintendent, they initiate change, manage structures, curriculum, community relations, and institutional practices using the available

resources (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). Demonstrating political savvy is a key principle for holding the superintendent position.

The school superintendency demands high qualifications, both academically and in terms of experience. According to Carter, Glass, & Hord (2013), candidates holding degrees and doctorates are given higher consideration for a school superintendent. Higher education is linked to the high expectations of a school superintendent. Moreover, certain qualities such as professional judgment, good personality, open mindedness, physical and mental health, poise, rich cultural background, intelligence, and sense of humor are considered in the selection of a superintendent (Carter et al., 2013). In terms of experience, studies show a majority of school superintendents have teaching and administrative experience. Despite some superintendents having obtained the position with little or no experience, Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellersen (2011) noticed large numbers of superintendents had teaching experience between 6 to 10 years, with 7% accounting for having more than 21 years. Similarly, they revealed those with administrative experience had previously worked as assistant principals, principals, district coordinators, directors, or assistant superintendents for several years before attaining the superintendent position.

Focusing on the demographics between men and women, it is evident the female gender forms the minority cases in attaining the school superintendent position. Males over the years occupied most of the superintendent positions in the United States (Kelsey, Allen, Coke, and Ballard, 2014). Moreover, male superintendents outnumber females in the entire United States; however, females comprise the majority of teaching staffs in schools. The increasing rate of women attaining the superintendency has been characterized by sluggishness with recent studies revealing only 24.1% of females in the United States occupy the superintendent position

(Kowalski et al., 2011). Arguably, the ratio between certified women who aspire to become superintendents does not correspond to those attaining the position, which compels the researcher to question gender related bias in terms of the school superintendency (Kelsey et al., 2014).

"Mexican-American female superintendents are a small, unique, but nonetheless important population. Hispanic females whether Mexican American or Cuban or Puerto Rican or Central or South American- are severely underrepresented in all educational administrative positions, especially considering the superintendency" (Mendez-Morse, 1999, p. 125). Despite efforts to build leadership capacity among women in educational programs and the slight increase of females in leadership positions, both in and outside of public education, a significantly low number of Hispanic women occupy the position of school superintendent (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Brunner, 2000; Tallerico, 2000).

Research has revealed there are more women in leadership positions in general as well as in the school superintendency; there was a marked increase during the 1990s (Gates et al., 2003). The American Association of School Administrators' 2000 survey indicated the number of women superintendents doubled since 1992, to thirteen percent; regarding minority superintendents, a bit over five percent were represented in the United States, which was a thirty percent increase since 1992 as well (p. 20). However, the number of women in school leadership positions, specifically superintendents, remain inequitable in comparison to the amount of women in the field of education, specifically teachers. Well over 70% of public school teachers are female, while less than a quarter of that percentage represent the women employed as school superintendents (Manuel & Slate, 2003; Keller, 1999). It is clear, despite these gains we

continue to identify gaps in the number of female representation in school leadership; therefore, a related history behind this trend should be noted.

History of Women in Public School Systems

Historically, the urge for more teachers in the 1960s marked the starting point for women involvement in education. Noticeably, Rhode, Rosenbloom and Weiman (2011) described the number of female college graduates to have increased sharply so as to meet the demand for education especially after the World War II. Accordingly, the authors shared that most women enrolled in courses such as: the humanities, sciences, and social sciences. The social role of women at home was changing, women were now encouraged to join the profession of educating the upcoming generation. Significantly, an increased number of women joined elementary schools to teach as well. Tracing history, Eagly (2013) described how the rate of female superintendents dropped from 8.9 percent in 1910 to 1.2 percent 1982 and then rose to 13.2 percent in 2000. Profoundly, during the 20s, Eagly (2013) revealed that 65% of school teachers were women, 43% principals, 57% were officer administrators, and 33% served as assistant superintendents.

Tracing from history, Pasque & Nicholson (2012) share that the first school system superintendent was appointed in Buffalo, New York in the year 1837. The second school superintendent was named a month later in Louisville, Kentucky (Rhode et al., 2011). School superintendents' tasks included maintaining the school building, paying and hiring teachers and keeping financial records. In addition, school superintendents served as managers who mainly distributed state funds and collected data. Before this period, it was the work of state boards of education to oversee public schools systems. The school superintendent position has slowly evolved regarding previous demands

which were mainly managerial, through recent times where now leadership is highly emphasized and now more women have become holders of the coveted superintendent position and have also therefore implemented different leadership roles. With time, the state saw there was a need to come up with volunteer committees that would aid in supervising the finances of schools (Cooley & Floyd, 2013). The increase in complexity of local and state schools led to the hiring of finance officers who assumed additional operations in the day to day activities of the school. The need for better supervision was brought about by national growth (Eagly, 2013). This is because it translated in the growth of local communities forcing the creation of local school systems.

The back to basics movement in 1970 played a significant role in the number of Hispanic superintendents in public institutions. In addition, their perception was shifted to that of an instructional leader from that of a manager. The external influences of this movement included the shift to minority-majority from a white majority in urban district schools, increased state and federal mandates, and increased levels of poverty. Ideally, Cloke (2013) highlights the internal influences of this movement as shared decision making at the district and campus levels, increased union powers, and improved site-based management. According to the United States Department of Education (2012), the publication on the role of superintendents prompted legislators to carry out reforms in the education sector. They were stripped of their roles as managers. They were mandated to not only act as master politicians but also comprehend thorough reforms.

Today, superintendents are responsible for the progress and achievement of their students (Rhode et al., 2011). In their research, Rhode et al. (2011) have shown that the number of minorities and women has increased over the past five years. Particularly, they revealed that 14.1

percent of the superintendents in 2000 were women, of which 5.1 percent were Hispanic. The percentage accounts for Hispanic females in the entire United States; this poses the question of how Hispanic female superintendents are represented in South Texas.

Women began to emerge as school superintendents in the 1800's and early 1900's as a result of voting in local school district elections. However, the women serving in these roles were primarily White and unmarried, as well as resided in urban areas (Gammill & Vaughn, 2011). By the twentieth century, almost 280 women served as county superintendents and a bit over a decade from that point, that amount more than tripled (p. 114). Unfortunately, as the twentieth century progressed, the number of women superintendents floundered; luckily, later that century women superintendents began to make their mark as school superintendents once again. "Not until the 1970s did the proportional numbers of women slowly creep about the all-time high of 10% in 1930. Early in the twenty-first century that figure rose to around 17%, but just 5% was non-White" (p. 114).

Madden (2005) describes five principles within a sociocultural context to offer a history of women's positions in administration and leadership. An early group of women leaders included *the Predecessors*; they were women who were leaders during World War II and the Great Depression. These women tended to embody male models of leadership. *The Instigators* resulted from the civil rights and anti-war movements in the 1960s. They participated in a feminist movement looking for scholarly opportunities in education and in the workplace. *The Inheritors* were women that emerged in the 1990s and held "th*e Instigators* as role models and visionaries" (p. 4). There is acknowledgement of progress in equity between men and women, however gender stereotyping continues to affect leadership. Women were viewed as competent, if they were not "feminine enough" or "not nice". Women in administrative positions tend to

emphasize male driven characteristics so they are not stereotyped as weak. "Because people more easily perceive men as being highly competent, men are more likely to be considered leaders, given opportunities, and emerge as leaders than women" (p. 5).

Women as Educational Leaders

Research such as that by Christman & McClellan (2008), examine men and women's leadership styles and qualities. These authors identified components found in women administrators in educational leadership programs, which make them resilient in finding and maintaining leadership positions. Key components and markers of resiliency, ranked by women, in order from most to least important were: type A personality; perseverance; appreciating relationships/valuing people; role models for others; sense of having to succeed; support from families, partners, husbands, and colleagues; optimism; voice for minority women; excited about responsibility; feelings of success and satisfaction with teaching and scholarship; and tenure (p. 14). The researchers expected women leaders to embrace their feminine characteristics; on the contrary, women exhibited more male-type leadership styles. Christman & McClellan's research also revealed when women wanted to initiate change, their credibility decreased in comparison to male-initiated change. Brunner (2000) echoed this burden: "sometimes beliefs and actions quite natural for men superintendents were unnatural for the women because of the gender-specific expectations of our culture" (p. 83). Previously, Brunner (1999) emphasized female administrators do not conform to the "social gender expectation" of the typical leader (p. xi). A factor contributing to this includes people being placed in gender categories where women should behave like women and men should act like men (p. 6). The ability to overcome adversity, referred to as resiliency theory, was key for women maintaining their leadership positions.

Opposing leadership styles between men and women have also been researched and these differences may contribute to the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions (De la Rey, 2005). The following traits were described by this recent researcher, as associated with leadership: effective communication, task completion responsibility, problem solving, and originality, among others (p. 5). De la Rey also researched modern perspectives concerning leadership styles of men and women. This author argues men and women lead differently, but one leadership style is not better than another. Women's leadership often incorporates increased collaboration, consultative decision-making, and providing caring working environments (p. 5). Some argue there are no differences in leadership styles practiced by men and women; however, many women who experience success in non-traditional leadership positions reject feminine characteristics and tend to practice similar styles as men (Christman & McClellan, 2005, p. 6.)

Additionally, De la Rey (2005) contends women tend to be more: participatory, democratic, sensitive, nurturing, and caring. Good conflict management, interpersonal skills, excellent listeners, being tolerant, and having empathy are other characteristics found in women leaders (p. 5). "The differences are attributed to gender-specific socialization practices and life experiences" (p. 6). Brunner (2000) and Marcano (1997) also allude to leadership styles, indicating female superintendents reported they had to be "lady" like and could not be too direct for fear they would be labeled as bitches. Regardless of leadership styles and whether men and women practice a specific type or a blend of styles, the fact remains "women's access to leadership positions has been hindered by discrimination and stereotyping" which will be further expanded upon in the next section (p. 6).

Accordingly, Gammill & Vaughn (2011) express, "a successful leadership style varies according to personality and contextual perceptions of appropriate gender roles" (p. 114). Being

in a leadership role dominated by males, Sampson & Davenport (2010) pointed out female superintendents should hide, not display, certain attributes such as caring, while administering within the leadership role. Authors also reported women demonstrated the ability to utilize power and resources, and to be able to surpass public scrutiny and engage in political elicitation, thus disproving critics. Previous women superintendents, according to Sampson & Davenport (2010), achieved success in their leadership roles by coping with power, conflict, and authority, and maintaining their focus on the opportunity they had.

Moreover, the assumption that both men and women have different leadership traits and skills poses the question of how women are able to sustain their superintendent positions and ensure more women attain it (Sampson & Davenport, 2010). Female superintendents have increased their capacity to manage the leadership role through other means as well, including seeking informal mentors. Mentoring of women for the superintendent position has been accredited with positive effects such as confidence, empathy, trustworthiness, encouragement, active listening, and integrity, which facilitate success for women in leadership positions (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). First, most female superintendents seek support systems after getting appointed (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). Educational support has been most beneficial for female superintendents as a means to explore and access professional principles and practices necessary for this leadership role. Second, these mentors enable female superintendents to network with others in similar positions, thus they share common experiences and professional capabilities which enable them to record success within their area (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). Moreover, these educational support systems provide aspiring female superintendents with mentorship and other educational requirements, such as collaboration, discussion panels, and book reviews, encouraging them to tackle their roles effectively.

Gammill & Vaughn (2011) report politics and gender also impact female superintendent's job performance and success. In their study, Gammill and Vaughn interviewed 40 female superintendents in rural schools and their stories had many similarities in terms of struggles within the superintendent position. The study investigated an alternate, post-modern look at the impact of social factors on female leadership (p. 116). To reinforce the latter, they share "I learned that as a female superintendent I needed to be aware at each juncture how I perceived myself as a woman, how my school patrons saw me, and how I could use my gender to accomplish my goals" (p. 116). The authors' model of leadership revolved around the following four components: organizational structure, leadership behavior, external forces, and beliefs, attitudes, and values (p. 116). Gammill & Vaughn (2011) concluded women's journeys toward breaking the glass ceiling are based on the "individual and context" (p. 120). The authors report politics and power are a must in the superintendency. Women must decide how they want to be perceived, lady like or more similar to their male counterparts. They point out, "successful leadership style varies according to personality and contextual perceptions of appropriate gender roles", which echoes the need for further research regarding the dearth of women as superintendents (p. 114).

Hispanic Women as Educational Leaders

Texas schools are a good demonstration of how women are not well represented in leadership positions despite the recorded increases. As noted by Kelsey, Allen, Coke, and Ballard (2014), out of 1,198 school districts, 278 were led by female superintendents, an increase from 189 in 2011. A marginal increase from 18.4% to 25% is promising, yet a significant gap still exists between male and female representation in the school superintendency. Tracing the history of ethnicity in schools, Kowalski et al. (2011) noted the United States struggled to

overcome racial segregation of school superintendents which separated people based on skin color. A study by the Council of the Great City Schools (2010) noted the number of superintendents in terms of race as 47% white, 41% black, and 11% Hispanic. Further analysis indicated only 2% of the superintendents were Hispanic females as of 2010. In relation to these findings, it is clear the Hispanic community is highly unrepresented both in terms of race and gender. These outcomes are clearly prevalent in the state of Texas. Despite the increased population of the Hispanic community in Texas, Goffney & Edmonson (2012) highlighted their number in superintendent positions cannot be reflected as such compared to the increased minority population of Hispanics. They described female Hispanics as part of the minority in relation to the superintendent occupation as well.

Leaders face a plethora of challenges and decision-making which are compounded by the perplexities of managerial demands. Marcano (1997) elaborated on the 'glass ceiling' women have long battled to break. She explains achieving adequate representation and advancing in school leadership positions. Marcano interviewed and surveyed ten Hispanic females in school leadership positions in Chicago, Texas, and Wisconsin. She examined how Hispanic women relayed their experiences in educational leadership. She researched women's leadership in terms of experiences, challenges, and victories. These women stressed language and culture were at times a hindrance, but also gave way to successes. When communities of the schools they headed were majority Hispanic, the women were embraced and accepted; yet, in situations where school communities were unlike the Hispanic female leader, the opposite occurred. One participant shared the fact her campus lost a few families because the communities doubted her leadership and skills due to her gender and race. Oftentimes "the women protested the way in

which their leadership was questioned in terms of gender and culture. This created a highly stressful work environment for the women who constantly had to prove themselves" (p. 2).

Participants also felt isolated because of their gender and race, which led them to question their own leadership capabilities. Even when successful leadership was observed by the school community or student performance, it was difficult for the Hispanic women to accept the accolades of their leadership. Because of culture and race, most of these women felt they could not "sing their own praises"; they attributed success to teamwork and collaborative efforts. According to Ortiz, "the match and best fit between the Hispanic female and the school districts is one in which the superintendent serves to represent the Hispanic groups who may be sources, or perceived as sources, of conflict or unrest in the school district" (Brunner, 1999, p. 96). Unfortunately, some of the women's supervisors in Marcano's (1997) study perceived the female superintendents' gender and race as a weakness, instead of trying to understand the underpinnings of race, gender, and culture in the women's responses to power and/or success. The women also reported being continuously scrutinized to gauge whether they were acting "too Hispanic" (p. 4). Undeterred by race and gender expectations of what Hispanic female leaders are supposed to be, these women forged their own support systems by "creating opportunities to teach and lead others into understanding" as a result of the worst situations they encountered (p. 5).

Notably, the majority of the ten participants in Marcano's study also reported overt and covert sexual and racial harassment. In reference to harassment, it still exists and has in fact led to the departure of some women from the superintendency (Brunner, 1999; Marcano, 1997). However, harassment may not be overt; as a matter of fact, Brunner (2000) asserts these types of obscure practices resemble silence; silence concerning women having to hide their emotions,

expressing themselves differently when among their male counterparts, and "the discomfort they felt in groups of men because of the nature of their conversations" (p. 91). This research yielded numerous findings including questioning of the women's gender and culture; lack of support systems among women leaders; and cloaking practiced by women to find success despite their challenges. This study reiterates the need for additional research to battle such inequities.

Race, also described as color, has to some extent failed to demonstrate equality among the diverse cultures of American people (Carter, Glass, & Hord, 2013). In their study, they found more than 83% of female superintendents and teachers were non-Hispanic, amid other communities that were also underrepresented. Both Latinos and Hispanics accounted for 5.1% of appointed superintendents. It would be therefore correct to argue America may face a problem with employment discrimination, specifically in relation to the education system. To reiterate, "if we are to ever make progress toward redefining the superintendency to include the presence of women's representative numbers, we must come to a better understanding of how the social constructions of gender, power, and politics play out in lived experiences and the workplace" (Gammill & Vaughn, 2011, p. 116). The underrepresentation of Hispanic females in administrative positions have become a common occurrence observed in the United States. Noticeably, Kim and Brunner (2008) describe how women in educational programs have struggled to increase and build leadership capacity. Their success has been elevating, but the fact remains Hispanic women are underrepresented in the position of school superintendent.

Another issue contributing to the fact women superintendents are not as prevalent as male superintendents is the role of school boards. Discriminatively, Eagly (2013) reveals school boards fail to consider female applicants, while at the same time, they do not consult institutions that recommend female aspirants, as well as relying on the executive members who recommend

their favorite to the position. Sampson & Davenport (2010) characterize the superintendent appointment procedure as being skewed towards the male superintendent candidates because the majority of school boards are headed by male counterparts, some whom served as superintendents in the past. More considerably, district board members always have an upper hand in the selection of school superintendent. "The majority of school boards are composed of males, and search firms are predominantly led by retired or current superintendents who are also predominantly male. As a result, many school boards have recruiting practices in place that are skewed toward male candidates" (Sampson & Davenport, 2010, p. 146). According to Kowalski et al. (2011), school boards represent the state government at the district level and implement national policies to the community. The board's decisions in relation to hiring a school superintendent is based on skilled personnel with managerial, administrative, and leadership qualities, together with professional skills that will enable him or her to direct schools towards a specific mission (Carter, Glass, & Hord, 2013). Derrington & Sharratt (2008) disclose women's perceptions that school boards are "not well informed regarding the qualifications of female candidates" (p. 12). Brunner (1999) confirms there are contentions among many school boards to hire female superintendents. Manuel & Slate (2003) support the former; their study revealed that over 50% of Hispanic women felt school boards failed to recruit females and that school boards also perceived women as unqualified to deal with fiscal issues. To reiterate this pattern, Brunner & Kim (2010) maintain school board's prejudices include a perception of women as inefficient managers and less than proficient with the demands of school budgets (p. 300). The authors also suggest, school boards often hire women based on their expertise

surrounding curriculum and instruction, while men are traditionally hired as superintendents centering on their presumed proficiency surrounding management including finances and budgets (291). To reiterate the former, Brunner & Kim (2010) share the following, "approximately 77 percent of women superintendents, compared to approximately 25 percent of men, believe that school board members perceive that women are less qualified than men in the area of finance" (p. 292). These biases experienced by women as a result of school board perceptions, serve as catalysts for what Brunner described as the impetus or turning point for women. Fortunately, these biases can serve as springboards for teachers, from the pre-leadership role to that of superintendent.

The literature also revealed another issue women have faced as superintendents, power. Power is frequently linked to grandeur or authority, but in terms of how many women view the paradigm of power, the emotional and analytical arrangements are quite unique. A qualitative study carried out by Brunner (2000), elaborated how women view power. The majority of the twelve, female participants, all superintendents, felt they did not have power. Instead, the women in the study "downplayed" the power their superintendency represented. Their ideas with respect to power included the following: "power was a gift to her from others; power to me means serving; and you really give yourself power when you watch the success of those that you work with…be all they can be" (Brunner, 2000, p. 88). In essence, "women in this study talked about power as a collaborative, inclusive, consensus building model with their own voices heard in concert with others" (p. 88). Discourse examining women's reaction to and use of power continues to be contemplated; women's power 'with/to' and power 'over' reflects an ongoing struggle for professional women (p. 88).

An additional concern addressed through the literature was the fact that more women than men were enrolled in educational leadership courses and superintendent certification programs. However, once again women are not well represented in the actual school superintendent position (Brunner, 2000; Tallerico, 2000). To support the latter statement, 37% of females (ages 25-29) completed their bachelor's degree in comparison to only 30% of males within the same age range; only 5.7% of males completed a master's degree in comparison to 9.2% of females; and doctoral degrees conferred in the area of Educational Leadership and general administration were 63% for women and 29% for men (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

When women are ready to embrace the position of school superintendent, Brunner (1999) affirms the following are "critical stages" female leaders have experienced: participation in a leadership project, committed to the school superintendent position candidacy and role, and have deeply contemplated the implications and responsibilities that the superintendency embodies. Trying to understand the role of women superintendents is a challenge; not only the struggles, factors, and biases women face, but the fact "it is only during the past 20 years that one finds research directed specifically to women superintendents" (Brunner, 2000, p. 29).

The strife met by women superintendents is a glimpse into the peculiar situation female Hispanic superintendents' experience due to the combination of their gender and race. Tallerico's (2000) study of superintendent searches and their practices, referred to as headhunting, sheds light on the barriers which keep women minorities from reaching school superintendent positions as easily as white males. The term "headhunting" is often used to describe the process of school superintendent recruitment. Headhunting rings a bit negative when the purpose of hiring a superintendent should be a positive process because it should promote

learning, sponsor student advocacy, and ultimately increase student success. Tallerico (2000)

explains how Lewin's gatekeeping theory is aligned to superintendent headhunting when dealing

with minorities and females. Accordingly, gatekeeping is a "flow process" that controls which

applicants advance to the next stage of the process. This process has several stages and "each

section of channels reflects "in" or "out" decisions points…controlled either by "a set of

impartial rules" or by a person with differing degrees of power" (p. 19). Tallerico (2000) also

utilizes Riehl & Byrd's career mobility model to explain how gender-related circumstances

negatively impact women's career advancement in educational administration. Both gatekeeping

theory and the career mobility model shape the fact that:

> positive effects of personal and socialization factors such as aspirations,
>
> qualifications, and experience do not assure women equity with men in
>
> administrative career development, given the powerful gender-stereotyped
>
> contextual, structural, and social forces that serve to counterinfluence individual
>
> action for advancement (p. 22).

Supporting Tallerico's findings, a plethora of research has also brought to light race, gender, and

"ethnic factors that parallel these gendered obstacles to accessing the superintendency, including

systemic biases, professional socialization patterns, tokenism, and cultural exclusion" which

continue to hinder career advancement (Tallerico, 2000, p. 22). As a result of Tallerico's (2000)

study, three observations can be established: how best qualified is defined, stereotyping and

cultural issues, and the influence of "good chemistry" during the interview process. Interestingly,

the rapport established during the interview can possibly impede aspiring, Hispanic women

superintendents since the majority of superintendent search corporations are comprised of white

males in terms of their inherent susceptibility to Byrne and Kanter's similarity-attraction theory

(p. 37). The similarity-attraction effect subscribes to the belief "people seek out and are attracted to other people with similar attitudes because agreement with other people satisfies the self-evaluative drive or need to hold correct attitudes and beliefs" (Layton & Insko, 1974, p. 150).

Mendez-Morse (2000) held a different perspective, which demands that the role and significance of female Hispanic superintendents not be explicated as "atypical". Her research proposed to describe why Hispanic women have been forgotten in terms of leadership. Mendez-Morse (2000) argues stereotyping has allowed Hispanic female leaders to go unnoticed and their contributions unappreciated (p. 594). According to Mendez-Morse, the stereotypes attributed to Hispanic women in general include: these women are dominated by men; Hispanic women are stay at home mothers; and Hispanic women lack role models that are Hispanic female leaders. She asserts the strength, capability, and innate drive in Hispanic women should be viewed as normal and inherent to their race and gender. Mendez-Morse's (2000) first premise posits Hispanic women do not fit the stereotype of relations with men, traditional domestic roles, and limited out-of-home work and educational opportunities. Mendez-Morse (2000) contends the reasons Hispanic women are viewed as submissive and powerless are the result of the scarce research on Hispanic women leaders and the fact there are few Hispanic female leaders, relative to non-minority males and females, in leadership positions (p. 584).

Moreover, Campbell (2011) posited that a different perspective in the study of leadership has been added by women. Thus, the inclusion of Hispanic women in the education sector has brought new challenges and dimensions to the theories and patterns that describe leadership. He added that the inclusion of Hispanic women has helped overcome language barriers in schools. Their ability to speak in two languages has enabled them to teach in institutions whose students

are of different races. He further added that the appointment of Hispanic women as educators has helped overcome the gender and cultural barriers that exist in the society.

The challenges people experience in the work place are constant. When Hispanic women are placed in this configuration, the demands are no different except when gender-based biases further exacerbate their career challenges. When race is yet another element that can impact women's careers, then supplementary complexities surface; such are the trials many Hispanic female school superintendents experience throughout their careers. Great strides have been made to improve equality in terms of gender and race in the realm of public school leadership, unfortunately we cannot turn a blind eye from the fact many women's "unsettled experiences were the result of the social norm that suggest it is "not natural" to have women in the role of superintendent, given the gendered cultural beliefs governing attitudes about whether a particular job is an "acceptable" position for a women" (Brunner, 2000, p. 83). Hispanic women are faced with overwhelming barriers throughout their journey to the school superintendency. Gratefully, "the stories of the minority leaders allow their protégés to understand that society can be changed, but it takes bravery, leadership qualities, and the willingness of the followers to see the vision for a new society with equality"; therefore, women's stories must be shared (Quilantan, 2002, p. 67).

Factors Impacting Female Leaders

Historically, scholars continue to question why women fall short in attaining superintendent positions despite being the majority in the education system, accounting for 76.1% of the educators in the United States (Kelsey, Allen, Coke, and Ballard, 2014). In their study, Kelsey et al. (2014) sought to answer the question by describing seven attributes which the female gender encounters before attaining the superintendency. First, more female teachers

were found to teach in elementary schools, which is a disadvantage for them in attaining this leadership role than their male counterparts- males are primarily employed at secondary schools which serve as bridges to school leadership opportunities. Secondly, it was evident women were not attaining school superintendent credentials along with their educational preparation programs. The outcomes of this would be affecting the necessary knowledge and skills needed to succeed in superintendency roles. Another factor was based on the assumed lack of women's proficiency with fiscal management, referred to as masculine work and an area of specialization for men.

In addition, women were characterized to spend their free time with their families, rather than focusing on work. Fifth, school boards tend to hire males, over females for superintendent positions. Sixth, women spend more time teaching and upgrading their educational credentials and do not opt for the school administration path. Finally, women tend to commence their leadership roles later in their careers than men (Kelsey et al., 2014, p. 4).

However, the previous factors can be criticized based on society and relevant institutions that often resist reform. In contrast, women have been identified to be effective and efficient leaders as they have occupied most professions apart from the superintendent role (Catalyst, 2012). It was noted more than 40% of executive positions are led by women, specifically pointing at financial industries, health services, political representation, and to some extent, education sectors (Catalyst, 2012).

According to Carter, Glass, & Hord (2013) women tend to plan and position their career path by teaching, then seeking administrative appointments such as principals or vice-principals, and later aspire to superintendent roles. However, males tend not to follow this path. The majority of males have secondary teaching experience which more easily facilitates appointment

to the school superintendent position. Subject to this, other factors revealed by scholars about male dominancy to the superintendent position could facilitate their appointment, such as self-sufficiency, risk taking, competitiveness and stoicism (Sampson & Davenport, 2010, p. 145).

Gammill & Vaughn (2011) reveal in order to understand social constructs in terms of gender and power, the stories of female superintendents must be told and understood (p. 116). They report women consistently face dilemmas, "I learned that female superintendents face exaggerated political problems compared to their male counterparts. They are torn between behaving as traditional women or as men: juggling this conundrum by having two homes, one within and the other without the community" (p. 118). One highlighted struggle the authors propose is that between adopting the "masculine-identified autocrat" style or not; the community was unsure what to expect, especially since gender equity continues to escape resolve. The most discussed social factors hindering women from attaining superintendent positions include: patriarchy, gatekeepers, selection processes, glass ceilings, lack of mentors for women, family expectations, feminine expectations, and societal perceptions of women's leadership abilities (Miller, 2009). Patriarchal structures lend to further societal barriers which continue to place emphasis on male gender to dominate the leadership positions in nearly all sectors. This has attributed teaching in schools to be a female role, while males monopolize leadership positions.

Moreover, Miller (2009) revealed gender roles have led women to experience difficulties in accessing superintendent positions. The argument was that society has detached the superintendent job from women based on their feminine behavior which has been unaligned to the expectations of the school superintendent position. Females are characterized by dependency, passivity, nonaggression, non-competiveness, inner orientation, interpersonal orientation, empathy, sensitivity, nurturance, subjectivity, receptivity, inability to risk, emotional liability,

and supportiveness behavior which Miller (2009) cited as creating conflict for women who pursue the attainment of superintendent position (Skrla, 1999).

Other social factors such as education played a role in determining female appointment to the superintendent position. According to Carter, Glass, & Hord (2013), the current appointments for superintendent positions to both males and females are based on higher degrees acquired. Statistically, Miller (2009) found out that 56.8% of female superintendents have a doctoral degree compared to 43.7% of male superintendents, yet females remain underrepresented as school superintendents. The reported statistics regarding doctoral degree completion rates could be related to the pressure placed on women seeking superintendent positions, pushing women to acquire the highest education qualifications to assist in successfully acquiring the coveted leadership position of school superintendent.

Political powers have also constrained the appointment of female superintendents in the United States. As noted by Miller (2009), the position of superintendent has over the years been dominated by the state, who are the main financial providers of school districts. It is revealed that political powers control superintendent positions by establishing offices and overseeing distribution of budgetary allocations from state and national governments. As a result, superintendents require political support which facilitates adequate funding necessary to successfully satisfy school and student needs (Miller, 2009).

In the past, women obtained superintendent positions after election by a majority of community members who saw them as responsible and devoted more time to their work, yet did not demand a raise in pay (Miller, 2009). Ironically, their male counterparts formed organized groups in colleges/universities which increased requirements for superintendents' certification and more educational administration programs were developed for those who wished to become

superintendents (Miller, 2009). Noticeably, Miller describes a majority of women were denied admission to such programs since they did not meet the necessary qualifications. The number of female superintendents began to decline as a result of these forces. Furthermore, their male counterparts adopted political appointments, rather than going through the established selection procedures for acquiring the school superintendency (Miller, 2009). This trend also contributed to female discrimination regarding school leadership positions.

Recently, Carter et al. (2013) described the activities of politicians, who are responsible for the development and welfare of the community and have shaped the core roles of a superintendent. They described areas such as board meetings and public forums where school management issues are discussed in a political manner. These practices align with findings that revealed over two-thirds of school managers agree political influence can determine certain financial decisions within the district, which ultimately impact superintendents (Carter, et. al, 2013)

Women as School Superintendents in Rural Schools

The term rural has attracted various definitions depending on the context and social group describing the matter (Cloke, 2013). According to Cooley and Floyd (2013), some have defined rural in terms of population size, agricultural and economic activities, geographical location, and growth rate. For this study, rural schools were defined as those schools with enrollment between 300 and the median district enrollment for the state and an enrollment growth rate over the past five years of less than 20 percent or with an enrollment of less than 200 students (Texas Education Agency, 2009). Current research significantly places distinction between rural schools and urban schools based on barriers such as migration, job losses, economic changes, family expectations, and poverty faced by the community (Cooley & Floyd, 2013).

Rural schools began as a 'one class one teacher' approach that was offered within villages (Cloke, 2013). The schools were characterized with voluntarily attendance, different winter and summer terms, and different head teachers for each term. Ideally, men attended classes during the winter and tended to farming during summer sessions (Cooley & Floyd, 2013). Similarly, during winter, male head teachers were assigned due to the high population of male children. In contrast, females led the teaching responsibilities during the summer time. The differences encountered were due to the fact rural schools did not operate under formal rules and regulations, instead students were to observe certain values within and outside of the school environment.

Apart from offering education to students, Cooley & Floyd (2013) reveal rural schools were important in facilitating social activities such as recreation, cultural and civil events to the community, continuing education of community training, shelter in case of disaster or emergency, and acted as a pride and identity to community members. The implication here is that, most rural schools serve community purpose in that, they ensure their children are equipped with necessary education and they too can utilize the facilities for community purposes vis-à-vis private schools as well as urban schools. The practice can also be traced in modern rural schools since they still exist within the remote areas and their populations continue to develop at a rate below the average.

To date, rural schools are still in existence. For instance, Texas is classified as having the highest number of rural settings; 84 percent of the district schools are described as rural, offering education to over 400,000 students in the region (Cooley & Floyd, 2013). These schools according to Cooley & Floyd (2013), still share features

experienced in the past such as poverty, low student population, poor infrastructure, and geographical isolation.

The state of female superintendents in rural areas has better off compared to those in urban schools. A report by the United States Department of Education (2012) illustrated that the percentage of women in superintendent positions was 24% in 2010, and of that, 55% of those were employed in rural areas. However, there are still too few women superintendents employed in rural areas which is especially worrying considering women have managed to break the barriers associated with administrative positions in other fields (Pasque & Nicholson, 2012). The education field continues to be a major concern for women especially in the rural areas. This trend can possibly be attributed to among other things, the low rate of interest from women to fill these positions in the rural areas.

Minority members usually get appointment to rural schools, with few of them getting positions in urban schools. A striking 45.8% of minority groups were employed in rural school districts, while only 23.7% were slotted in urban district schools (Carter et al., 2013). Notably, the racial balance of students has also attracted increased employment of minorities in such areas. Research has indicated a marked increase in Hispanic student enrollment across schools in the United States. In particular, they found a great majority of minority groups were employed in schools with racial difference over 50% while a small number of minorities were employed in schools where color difference was below 5% (Carter et. al, 2013).

Specifically for women, in the 2008-2009 school year 16% of the superintendent positions were occupied, yet females comprised over 70% of the teaching staffs in the United States (Sampson & Davenport, 2010, p. 149). The direct impact of the former on Hispanic female superintendents in rural schools is supported by the fact the majority of women

superintendents in Texas are Caucasian; likewise, 68.8% of female superintendents in Texas are employed in rural school districts (p. 149).

Moreover, Pasque & Nicholson (2012) shared that appointment of female superintendent tends to be in rural and small town district schools. Males are appointed as superintendents within developed urban schools in terms of population growth and regional demands. However, this practice is discriminating against women who possess similar qualifications as their male counterparts. In addition, Pasque & Nicholson (2012) revealed the appointment of female superintendents based on color within the urban settings is at times influenced by cultural permission to evade future failures.

Summary

The researcher examined a plethora of research which lent itself to explaining which factors contribute to the low rate of female Hispanics school superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas, why Hispanic women superintendents secure positions in small rural school districts in the Rio Grande Valley, and to what extent have Hispanic female superintendents felt discriminated against. In the following chapter I present and describe the methodology used to collect, analyze, and report data findings.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study methodology was to explore the factors

contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents, to understand why Hispanic

women work at small rural schools in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas, and the extent

to which discrimination has impacted their journeys to the superintendency. The researcher

shared the participants' stories regarding their career trajectories towards public school

superintendent positions. The study maintained a focus on how their experiences shaped their

ideas and attitudes toward becoming rural school superintendents. In chapter three, I describe the

research design, research questions, context of the study, gaining access, instrumentation, data

collection procedures, and data analysis procedures in order to answer the research questions.

Research Design

Qualitative research emphasizes the significance of varied, individual perspectives and

how their views contribute to inform personal meaning (Creswell, 2007). When exact variables

are unknown and an in-depth understanding is required, qualitative research is ideal (Creswell,

2007). According to Creswell, case study research is a qualitative approach in which the

investigator explores a bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time,

through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (for

example, observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports

a case description and case-based themes (p.73). A case study can be considered a methodology,

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strategy of inquiry, or research strategy. It involves the study of an issue through specific cases. In case studies, emphasis is placed on exploration and description.

Case studies allow the researcher to thoroughly inquire into a setting or context in great detail, accordingly this method is ideal in serving the purpose of this study which is to explore the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents; to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and to examine the discrimination issues these women may have experienced. The researcher added to the narrow body of knowledge available related to female superintendents in rural schools. The decision to choose case study methodology served to best answer the research questions in alignment with Creswell's (2007) premise that a case study "explores a bounded system (a case)…over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (p. 73).

Denzin & Lincoln (2011) propose "knowledge and expertise also lie at the center of the case study as a research and teaching method; or to put it more generally yet- as a method of learning" (p. 303). VanWynsberghe & Khan (2007) contest case studies are not a methodology because "it does not provide a parsimonious theory of how research should proceed with conceptually coherent methods and accompanying data collection procedures that map onto the theory" (p. 4). Instead the former researchers suggest case studies are "a transparadigmatic and transdisciplinary heuristic that involves the careful delineation of the phenomena for which evidence is being collected" (p. 2). Yin (2009) submits, "the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p. 4). Skrla (2000) reiterates the purpose of case study methodology with making

"particularization" the key, instead of generalization; she emphasizes research serves to "appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of" the case (p. 301). Given the purpose of this research study, qualitative case study methodology will be optimal in bringing light to the experiences of these Hispanic female rural school superintendents.

This study employed a cross-case analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 101). Cross-case analysis increases generalizability of research findings and allows the understanding of the participant to deepen (p. 101). In order to discover similarities and differences among various cases, cross-case analysis is useful to link related cases (p. 101). Specifically, the researcher used a case-oriented approach enabling the entire case to be considered and consequently develop understandings of cause/effect or associations within the case (p. 102). The research study was instrumental in essence, due to the specificity of these women's rural school superintendent positions in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). The researcher employed purposeful, homogeneous sampling, specifically criterion sampling, to select each of the three participants (Miles et al., 2014, p. 32). The criteria used to select the participants included the following: the participants had to be female, they had to be of Hispanic origin, and must be currently or have been employed by a rural school district in the Rio Grande Valley of deep South Texas. The researcher utilized surveys, individual, semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analyses in order to develop a thick description of the cases (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Geertz, 1973).

In order to situate the research method employed by the researcher in this study, it was necessary to devise a theoretical framework. I operated under the Constructivist paradigm due to the congruence of the knowledge claim, strategy of inquiry, and methods used in this study (Creswell, 2007). Constructivists build their own knowledge and perspectives, in opposition to

the positivists that count on systematic and definite realities that are the same for all individuals and systems. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) and Creswell (2007), both suggest qualitative research is defined by the philosophical assumption it follows.

Creswell (2003) posits that the constructivist philosophical assumption is closest aligned for qualitative research, which aims to construct realities based on the participants' experiences, or their ontology. How the researcher comprehended their realities is the epistemology, which was carried out through various data collection methods including interviews, participant observations, surveys, and document analysis. Axiology spoke to preserving the integrity of the participants' stories, experiences, and data collected, in terms of appropriateness of the case study methodology to answering the research questions. Finally, under the Constructivist approach the research study maintained validity, reliability, and objectivity, which alluded to elements such as thick description, triangulation of data, and member checks (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2011), a process must be followed to allow for a researcher to report findings as they observe them, but also allows for the participants' experiences to be brought to light (p. 11). This research process was comprised of five phases: researcher as multicultural subject, theoretical paradigms and perspectives, research strategies, methods of collection and analysis, and the art, practices, and politics of interpretation and evaluation (p. 12). Phase one of the process included placing the researcher, in history and in and out of the self, as well as ethics. The second phase included selecting the theoretical paradigm that best fit the research study. For this study, I selected constructivism. Phase three for this study aligned most closely with case study methodology, as the researcher solicited the experiences and stories of a few, purposeful cases. Semi-structured interviews, participant

observation, surveys, and document analysis fulfilled phase four, which served as data collection

methods. The fifth and final phase impacted a plethora of areas from interpretation of data to

applied research. The research process described by Denzin & Lincoln (2011) encompassed the

researcher, the participants, and society as a whole.

Research Questions

In order to guide the study, three research questions were developed. The research

questions were integral to ensure that the purpose and significance of the study were established.

The research questions were explanatory in nature, "because such questions deal with

operational links needing to be traced over time", as described by Yin (2009). The intent of these

explanatory research questions was "to explain patterns related to phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007,

p. 107). In pursuance of qualitative research questions being "open-ended, evolving, and

nondirectional", the following research questions were used for this study (Creswell, 2007, p.

107).

1. What factors contribute to the low rate of female Hispanics school superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas?

2. Why do Hispanic women superintendents secure positions at small rural school districts in the Rio Grande Valley?

3. To what extent have Hispanic female superintendents felt discriminated against?

Context of the Study

Given that the purpose of this research was to explore factors contributing to the low rate

of Hispanic female superintendents, to understand why Hispanic women work at small rural

school districts, and to what extent have these women experienced discrimination, it was

necessary to study Hispanic female superintendents that worked in rural schools of the Rio

Grande Valley in deep South Texas. The Rio Grande Valley is located in the southernmost tip of

South Texas. Warm weather, exotic birds, and a vast array of citrus orchards are the hallmarks of

The Magical Valley of the Rio Grande, as it is affectionately known to its residents and visitors (RGV Business Directory, 2015). Its proximity to the Rio Grande River, which serves as a boundary between the United States and Mexico, is nearly null as it lies along the river's waters. Interestingly, the Rio Grande Valley is not a valley, but a delta. The Rio Grande Valley has numerous landmarks such as the highly-coveted South Padre Island and Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. Beach lovers, bird-watchers, fisherman, and shoppers frequent the Valley's many attractions. Its proximity to Mexico also attracts many visitors to the Rio Grande Valley. In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the population of the Rio Grande Valley at 1,305,782 of which over 90% are Hispanic.

The Rio Grande Valley consists of four counties: Cameron (population: 420,392), Hidalgo (population: 831,073), Starr (population: 62,955), and Willacy (population: 21,903) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Hispanics are the majority in the four counties, Cameron's Hispanic population is 88.5%; Hidalgo's Hispanic population is 91%; Starr's Hispanic population is 95.7%; and Willacy's Hispanic population is 87.4% (2014). Rural schools are prevalent in the Rio Grande Valley as demonstrated in the following demographics. Willacy County has four school districts of which three or 75% are classified as rural; Starr County has three school districts of which one or 33.3% are under the category of rural schools; Hidalgo County is the largest of the four counties- it is composed of twenty-one school districts and six or 28% are rural schools; and Cameron County is made up of eleven schools and one or 9% are rural schools (Texas Education Agency, 2014).

The research study was conducted in the area closest to the researcher, specifically in three rural school districts embedded within that domain. Three cases were selected for this research study. Patton (1990) wrote, "sample size depends on what you want to know, the

purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (p. 244). The sample participants were selected though use of purposeful sampling from preselected locations by the researcher to enhance the facilitation of obtaining data that would address the focus of the research study. Participants were chosen that met each of the established criteria in order to deepen understanding of why there is a scarcity of female Hispanic superintendents.

Gaining Access

Gaining access has been termed by many a tedious and time-consuming task (Johl & Renganathan, 2010; Wanat, 2008; Shenton & Hayter, 2004). The process of gaining access to the research site "involves both securing entry into a particular organization and ensuring that individuals associated with it, such as employees or users, will serve as informants" (Shenton & Hayter, 2004, p. 1). In order to gain access to the participants of this study, the researcher emailed a letter to each school board president of the respective superintendent. The letter thoroughly explained the purpose and need for this research study. The researcher then called each participant to verify receipt of the emailed letter. After confirmation, the researcher emailed a Qualtrics-generated survey, which ensures security, confidentiality and willingness to participate. The survey helped to secure responses that informed the research questions. Shenton & Hayter emphasize that "the use of contacts in terms of members or staff within the organizations can be invaluable in ensuring that the investigator gains the access that is desired"; therefore rapport must be established (p. 227). Establishing rapport was essential in participant observation, as the researcher and participants took on the same goal and ideally built some level of trust as De Walt & De Walt described (2011, p. 47).

Another issue addressed was the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and approval. When the researcher completed the dissertation proposal and it was approved, then the researcher submitted the extensive IRB application and waited for approval. It was after securing IRB approval that the researcher proceed with the research study.

Instrumentation

Often times the nature of qualitative research demands the researcher become the instrument and it was as such for this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). According to Creswell (2007), "the qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants. They may use a protocol- an instrument for collecting data- but the researchers are the ones who actually gather the information" (p. 38). "The researcher is the key person in obtaining data from respondents. It is through the researcher's facilitative interaction that a context is created where respondents share rich data regarding their experiences and life world. It is the researcher that facilitates the flow of communication…" (Chenail, 2011).

Denzin & Lincoln (2011) assert interviews give researchers access to the realities of the participants; therefore, interviews will be used as the chief method of data collection. Interviews will be semi-structured to allow for the interviewee's perspectives and understandings to be shared with the researcher, which adds flexibility to the interview (Mason, 2002). Individual, semi-structured interviews were absolute for this case study on the grounds that the researcher audio-visually observed participants' gestures and attitudes. Interview questions that are open-ended, such as those used in semi-structured interviews, grant "openings through which interviewees can contribute their insiders' perspectives with little or no limitations imposed by more close-ended questions" (Chenail, 2011, p. 255).

In order to support triangulation of data, participant observations, surveys, and document analysis were also included as data collection processes in this research study (Clandin & Connely, 2000; Morrow & Smith, 1995). Researchers gather information using fieldnotes to conduct observations as participants and/or observers; as well, they should first observe as "outsiders" and over time transition to "insiders" (Creswell, 2007). In terms of survey instruments, a clear conceptual framework must be established to synthesize a thorough and effective survey that will capture the participants' responses informing the research questions (McClintock, et al., 1979). Surveys are oftentimes akin to quantitative research, but the qualitative survey aims to describe diversity not distribution (Jansen, 2010).   The survey used in this research study was generated via Qualtrics software to ensure validity of the instrument. Qualtrics software also allowed the researcher to administer the surveys in a fashion that preserved the confidentiality of the participants' responses. Finally, document analysis added to the data collection instruments used for this study. The researcher reviewed a plethora of the participants' documents, ranging from letters and emails, both internal and external, to meeting agendas and superintendent newsletters.

During the interviews, participant observations, and document analyses processes it was imperative the researcher to be cognizant of personal bias; therefore, the researcher utilized a reflexive methodology which assisted in this effort (Mason, 2002). Reflexivity "means that the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 243). For this reason, there were some personal biases in the data collection and analysis sections of this study. In accordance with Lincoln & Guba (1985), other issues to consider are validity; internal validity deals with credibility, external validity deals with transferability, reliability in terms of validity deals with dependability, and objectivity

in terms of validity deals with confirmability. In keeping the former intact, triangulation of data, thick description, and member checking were all carried out (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to collecting data, the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for protection of human subjects granted permission to proceed with the research study. The researcher submitted the required application, complete with all information pertinent to the study, participants, and potential harm possibilities, if any, in order to be considered for allowance to begin collecting data. Creswell (2007) outlines the data collection activities used for qualitative research; they include: locating site/individual, gaining access and making rapport, purposeful sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data (p. 118). The first three activities were described in previous sections of the dissertation, so the researcher began explaining from the data collection step. "Interviewing, along with field observations and document analysis, is one of the major ways qualitative researchers generate and collect data for their research studies"; therefore, the researcher generated the aforementioned types of data (Chenail, 2011).

The goal of this study was to delve into the experiences that led to the superintendent position for these Hispanic female women employed by rural school districts. Consequently, individual, semi-structured interviews were carried out in order to capture the essence of the participant's answers to the research questions. In addition, surveys, observations, and document analyses were used. Since interviews allow participants to share their accounts of experiences, interviews were the largest source of data collected for this research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In-depth qualitative interviewing transpired due to the fact "researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives

other than their own" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3). The data collection process including individual, semi-structured interviews, surveys, participant observations, and document analyses were on-going in a simultaneous fashion.

Preceding the research study, the researcher emailed a letter, which included the details of the study and whether the participants wanted to be part of the study. Closer to the scheduled interview dates, a reminder email was sent to each participant that agreed to share their experiences. All interviews with participants took place in a comfortable setting as deemed appropriate by both researcher and participant. The researcher ensured the spaces used for interviewing had optimal lighting and space and that sound was not jeopardized for listening and recording purposes. The researcher also ensured audio recording equipment was secured prior to the interviews in order to verify correct functioning of the items.

Previous to the interviews, the researcher established interview protocol. Creswell (2007) posits, "interview protocol enables a person to take notes during the interview about the responses of the interviewee. It also helps a researcher organize thoughts on items such as heading, information about starting the interview, concluding ideas, information on ending the interview, and thanking the respondent" (p. 135). Before the researcher and participants began the interviews, the researcher newly secured permission for research study participation and the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study. The researcher also gave clear details of the purpose of the study to the participants and reiterated the voluntary participation of the participants in the study.

So that participants were confident about anonymity conservation, the researcher shared the fact that the aliases collaboratively selected by participants and the researcher, would be used to protect participants' responses (Creswell, 2007). There was no established duration of the

individual interviews, but these type of interviews generally spanned forty-five minutes. At the

conclusion of each interview, each interviewee was offered a copy of the report, which was

available at a later date. Each research participants was afforded the opportunity to review

interview transcripts in order for the researcher to fulfill the member checking attempt.

Interviewees' responses were captured using a digital audio recording device as well as those

contained in the researcher's field notes, which included any physical observations noted

throughout the interviews. Conducive to triangulation, the researcher also reviewed any pertinent

documents that lent to the participants' stories along with the survey data and field notes on

participant observations. Storage of data was carried out by maintaining two encrypted, digital

copies at all times. The first dataset was stored in a personal pin drive and the other on a

computer hard drive. And, the interview recordings, participant observation field notes,

document analyses, and survey data were kept in a secure safe at the researcher's home.

Participant observations were carried out after the researcher and participant had

conversations and met at least once in order to begin building rapport (De Walt & De Walt,

2011). The researcher kept fieldnotes while conducting participant observations. According to

Creswell, the researcher should begin with lots of observation and few notes and as the study

progresses, the reverse should occur. He also suggests funneling, described as the researcher

focusing on the broad then to the narrow. The on-going struggle of the I-Thou or self and other is

constant; therefore, the researcher must be reflexive in all data collection procedures, which

alludes to avoid "going native" (Varga-Dobal, 2012). Other possible challenges of participant

observations included: potential deception, impression management, potential marginality as

researcher, being able to step-in/-out of the participant/observer roles, and "going native"; as

well, how the researcher can disclose themselves to the participants appropriately, sharing

relationships with them, and being able to disengage from participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 134). To streamline these challenges, the researcher maintained meticulous and detail-oriented fieldnotes which will be descriptive in nature and include maximum information and details including physical settings, specific events and activities, and even the researcher's own reactions (Mays & Pope, 1995). Also, the researcher developed an observation protocol for fieldnotes to ensure the continuity and replication among participants.

A Qualtrics-generated survey was administered to the three participants before the interviews (see Appendix D). Surveys in qualitative research do not "aim at establishing frequencies, means or other parameters but at determining the diversity of some topic of interest within a given population…it establishes a meaningful variation (relevant dimensions and values) within that population" (Jensen, 2010, p. 2). Given this premise, surveys in this research attempted to understand the perspective of the participants prior to meeting them. Survey data should be a formative evaluation of the participant's experiences. The survey included fifteen questions, beginning with basic demographics such as name, marital status, number of children, educational and professional experience, and items that addressed the three research questions: what factors contribute to the low rate of female Hispanic school superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas; why do Hispanic women superintendents secure positions at small rural school districts in the Rio Grande Valley; and to what extent have Hispanic female superintendents felt discriminated against. Qualtrics software assisted the researcher in creating the survey instrument as well as administer the survey on-line. This software also assisted in analyzing the data which is shared in the following section.

The final step in data collection for this study included document analysis. The types of documents which were used were numerous; therefore, the researcher used the following public

documents: external and internal meeting agendas, external and internal memos, external and internal emails, superintendent newsletters, and historical pieces. Certainly such an undertaking of document analyses was accompanied by challenges, which included: locating the documents, some of which were physically distant, accessibility of the documents, and securing permission to retrieve some of the documents (Creswell, 2007).

Data Analysis Procedures

Following data collection, the process of data analysis commenced. The researcher dismantled the vast data collected and then arranged it together in a manner that had meaning according to the participants' viewpoints and their congruence to the research questions. Identifying themes among the data sources was paramount (Creswell, 2007). "Finally the researcher develops naturalistic generalizations from analyzing the data, generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases" (p. 163).

As the digital recordings of the interviews were captured, I began to transcribe the interviews using Microsoft Word. The interview transcripts were then analyzed for codes and ultimately themes. Analyzing the survey data was facilitated by the Qualtrics software which supported the researcher in the following ways: creating and administering surveys, managing data and ideas, enabling query data, creating graphical models, and extracting reports from the data (Payne & Medina, 2014).

Physically, the researcher began the data analysis process with coding. In order to sift through the wealth of data collected from interviews, participant observations, surveys, and document analyses, coding was helpful in chunking data into categories and labeling the chunks with key words that helped the researcher retrieve data as needed (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana,

2014, p. 73).   Coding was necessary for qualitative analysis because it "is deep reflection about and, thus, deep analysis and interpretation of the data's meanings" (p. 72). For this research study, the researcher employed a combination of descriptive and values coding (pp. 74-76). Descriptive coding is more basic and is associated more closely with social environments and to summarize; this type of coding is appropriate for interviews with each of the participants specifically towards the latter end of the data analysis process. The researcher ensured the values, attitudes, and beliefs of each of the participants are heard, honored, and portrayed in the research results; therefore, values coding serves to fit this purpose (p. 76). When carrying out the coding process, the researcher utilized inductive coding to uncover the larger themes within the research (p. 81).

When the coding process was complete, the researcher condensed the codes in order to begin generating themes (Creswell, 2007). In furtherance of this process, Creswell's Data Analysis Spiral was used as a guide to facilitate data analysis. The Data Analysis Spiral highlights: data managing; reading and memoing; describing, classifying, and interpreting; and representing and visualizing (p. 151). Researchers espouse codes to the spiral system in order to describe data, develop themes, and interpret codes via the spiral process guide (p. 151). The resulting descriptions are *in situ* which establish the setting of the participant, a condition that is paramount for case study research (p. 151). In terms of generating themes, the researcher should develop three to five overarching themes to categorize the codes in order to make naturalistic generalizations (p. 163). Lastly, the researcher prepared a report with an "in-depth picture of the case using narrative, tables, and figures" as deemed most effective for communicating the findings resulting from the research study (p. 157). In order to maintain security and confidentiality of all secured data throughout the research study, the researcher encrypted the

information contained within the USB drive using Rohos Mini Drive software as described in chapter one. The data stored in the researcher's home computer was encrypted via BitLocker, a security feature native to the Microsoft Windows Enterprise software utilized by the researcher.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a thorough description of the research design, research questions, context of the study, gaining access, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures which will serve to answer the research questions. "The case study is ideal for generalizing using the type of test that Karl Popper called 'falsification', which in social science forms part of critical reflexivity…is one of the most rigorous tests to which a scientific proposition can be subjected" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 305). In order to maintain focus on the cases, I expounded on the processes used to ensure the research design, research questions, context of the study, gaining access, instrumentation and data collection procedures. Finally, I describe the data analysis procedures that thoroughly explored: what factors contribute to the low rate of female Hispanics school superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas; why Hispanic women superintendents secure positions at small rural school districts in the Rio Grande Valley; and to what extent have Hispanic female superintendents felt discriminated against. In the following chapter, I present the findings of this research study.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The fact that women continue to be underrepresented in educational leadership positions such as school superintendents, merits research to uncover this imbalance. Research reiterates the scarcity of women in school leadership positions. The school superintendent position is no different; it has been dominated by males since its inception. There is a dire need for additional research regarding this disparity. The purpose of this qualitative, case study research was to explore the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents; to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and to examine the discrimination issues these women may have experienced. In order to gain knowledge and shed light on the fact women hold less school leadership positions than men, data were collected from Hispanic, female superintendents that met the inclusion criteria of the study. The participants were interviewed one-on-one; interviews were audio recorded, then transcribed, and finally analyzed for emergent codes and themes. Online surveys were administered and analyzed using Qualtrics software. The participants were observed in their workplace and the researcher kept reflective field notes. In addition, the researcher conducted a document analysis throughout the research study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, communication with school community members, and the essence of school superintendents. The research study conducted yielded findings which were reported here

to answer the following research questions: what factors contribute to the low rate of female Hispanics school superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas; why do Hispanic women superintendents secure positions at small rural school districts in the Rio Grande Valley; and to what extent have Hispanic female superintendents felt discriminated against. A description of the research settings follow in order to establish a framework for readers.

Three different school district superintendents participated in the study. Each participating superintendent worked or has worked at a rural school district in the Rio Grande Valley. The school districts are as follows: Palm Valley Schools headed by Ms. Monica Sanchez; South Lakes school district led by Ms. Juanita Martinez; and Ms. Sonia Tello who heads Twin Springs Independent School District. For this research study, rural schools were defined as those schools with enrollment between 300 and the median district enrollment for the state and an enrollment growth rate over the past five years of less than 20 percent or with an enrollment of less than 200 students (Texas Education Agency, 2009).

In this chapter, I present the data collected and analyzed regarding Hispanic female school superintendents in rural school of South Texas. First, the ethnographic portraits of Monica Sanchez, Juanita Martinez, and Sonia Tello were offered in order to help the reader understand their respective stories. The ethnographic portraits elaborate on the demographics and settings for each participant and the respective school districts they serve. I have also examined perceived impacting factors generated as a result of the data collected from the participants. Finally, I analyzed data which was clustered, as suggested by qualitative research guidelines, into themes that represent the findings. The four themes which emerged from the participants' accounts included: extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility.

Ethnographic Portraits

The following are ethnographic portraits that allow the reader to understand the stories of each participant in order to help answer the research questions. The research study was instrumental due to the specificity of these women's rural school superintendent positions in the Rio Grande Valley. I employed purposeful, homogeneous sampling, specifically criterion sampling, to select each of the three participants. The participants were chosen based on the following criteria: the participants had to be female, Hispanic, and currently employed by a rural school district in the Rio Grande Valley of deep South Texas. In order to preserve the integrity of qualitative research methodology, I utilized various sources lending to triangulation of data: online surveys, individual, semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analyses. A process was followed to report findings as they were observed and allowed participants' experiences to be highlighted; therefore, Creswell's data analysis spiral was used for this purpose (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 11). Following are the ethnographic portraits that include demographics and describe the settings for each participant and the respective school districts they serve.

Monica Sanchez

The first participant was Monica Sanchez; she leads Palm Valley ISD. Monica Sanchez, superintendent of schools for Palm Valley Independent School District has served in this position for three years. Prior to her appointment there were two superintendents over the last three years (Texas Education Agency, 2014). Palm Valley Independent School District serves one thousand and forty two students, from early childhood education through grade twelve. Palm Valley ISD's ethnic distribution is 99.0% Hispanic, 0.8% White, and the remainder of students were identified as African American or two or more races (Texas Education Agency, 2014). In terms of special

populations, 90.3% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, 60.7% of students are at-risk, and 34.3% of their students have been identified as English Language Learners or ELLs. The 2014 senior class had a 100% graduation rate (Texas Education Agency, 2014). Of the one hundred and forty seven staff members employed by Palm Valley ISD, 68.8% are teachers of which 100% are Hispanic and 74.2% of all teachers are female.

Sanchez has lived in the Rio Grande Valley for forty years; however, she was born and raised in Mexico. During the Sanchez family's time in the Rio Grande Valley, they inhabited two small, rural communities. When she was fourteen years old, her family moved to the United States. Sanchez has three siblings, two sisters and one brother; they all graduated from small, rural high schools. Of her siblings, she and one sister are college graduates. Her parents were not formally educated; both of Sanchez's parents were educated in Mexico without graduating from what is known as high school in the United States. Her father went to school through the sixth grade and her mother through first grade. Despite the fact her mother only completed first grade, Sanchez stated that her mother, "had good reading skills because she read the bible daily; she gave lessons to us kids" (Sanchez interview, 2016). The Sanchez family wanted a better life for themselves and their children, so they decided that migrant farm work would be a means to that end. Her family was the prime reason Sanchez strived for more and to always have more than her own hard-working parents could provide. Sanchez is married and has no children. Sanchez stated her family motivated her to excel, "they always pushed us; we had to have better education than they did, so we could be better off and have a good life". Sanchez states her personal and professional beliefs were shaped by the fact her parent's work focused on physical labor. Sanchez stated, "they were always good role models of dedication, hard work, and commitment" (Sanchez interview, 2016).

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Before becoming a school superintendent, she taught for ten years both at the middle and high school level. After teaching, she became an assistant principal and then a principal for ten years; it was a very interesting principalship. Due to the small school district where she was employed, Sanchez served as principal for two different campuses simultaneously, one elementary and one middle school. Sanchez states, "I felt prepared since in a small district an administrator wears many hats"; hence, she credits her hard work and dedication to the simultaneous tasks and projects, which created rich and diverse experiences and learned skills. These gained assets fueled her goal in moving forward towards the school superintendency (Sanchez online survey, 2016). Her following position was in fact the school superintendency; she has served in that capacity for three years. In order to begin her career as an educator, Sanchez obtained her Bachelor's degree in education, followed by her Master's degree. Sanchez enjoyed her teaching career, but she wanted to realize her dream of leading a school district, so she sought a superintendent certificate and completed that feat seventeen years after she secured her Master's degree. In her superintendent certification courses, Sanchez stated there were equal numbers of males and females in her superintendent certification cohort.

Sanchez recalls thinking and even dreaming about becoming a school principal; she often envisioned her office and how it would look. To that end, Sanchez could vividly describe her brief case and how she would carry it as she walked into her own office, symbolizing her accomplished leadership position. When asked what event led her to choose the school superintendency, she replied "not one particular thing. I always knew. I always thought ahead because I felt it. People don't believe in premonitions, but you must walk in those shoes, think it, and believe in yourself" (Sanchez interview, 2016). In order to prepare herself for what she knew she was destined to do, Sanchez read more, took on more initiatives such as central office

duties, suggested new initiatives for the district, shared best practices with peers and began grant writing. When the school superintendent at that time noticed Sanchez's work ethic and drive, he gave her opportunities to grow and Sanchez gladly took advantage of them. Sanchez stated, "you should always be prepared for the next job" (Sanchez interview, 2016).

According to the literature, women in leadership careers often face various barriers and discrimination. Tallerico's findings highlight the fact race, gender, and ethnicity "parallel these gendered obstacles to accessing the superintendency, including systemic biases, professional socialization patterns, tokenism, and cultural exclusion" (Tallerico, 2000, p. 22). Sanchez's reply to questions regarding experiencing discrimination varied from the literature; she shared that as a female, she had not experienced discrimination. She could recall only one instance of gender discrimination and it was while she was a school principal under the leadership of a male superintendent. She felt he was threatened by her knowledge and experience. Sanchez mentioned the male superintendent went as far as "blocking initiatives I had suggested and at that time the school board was made up of five males and only two females; that would not happen now. We have majority females on the board and we have one shared vision among superintendent and school board members" (Sanchez interview, 2016). Equally incomparable to the literature, Sanchez stated she had never experienced racial discrimination. The only event that came to mind, which she attributes to ignorance of different cultures versus racial discrimination, was while working on an internship in North Texas. Sanchez explained that being one of the few Hispanic females in the internship program, her mentor allowed her to hold presentations about the Hispanic culture to different audiences, made up of undergraduate and graduate students from the local university. She thought that experience was very rich in educating people about Hispanics, but did not feel racially discriminated.

Another significant factor referenced in the literature regarding women in leadership positons is politics. Gammill & Vaughn (2011) report that politics and gender impact female superintendent's job performance and success. They interviewed 40 female superintendents in rural schools and their stories had many similarities in terms of struggles while in the superintendent position. The authors conclude, "achieving the superintendency is not simply breaking the glass ceiling that sexism creates…rather, women's rise to the top varies by individual and context…keeping the positions is based on any number of factors related to the way one acts to develop an organizational structure" (p. 120). As such, Sanchez states small community politics "really get in the way of our doing" (Sanchez interview, 2016). She continues to share that large schools have school boards that are not aware of this happening, so the politics are different. Rather, in small, rural communities, the school board members are community members and are aware of various factors such as personnel, issues and concerns. "Is it political? Yes. We always have to be one step ahead. It's hard not to take things personally, but we must not do it. I am the person here to guide them. Then the school board makes the decisions" (Sanchez interview, 2016). In order to deal with the work related politics, Sanchez voiced the best practices for doing just that. Sanchez stated transparency, self-reflection, and communication are the keys to capitalizing on such politics. She does not take political matters personally and she maintains constant, on-going communication with board members such as weekly memos addressing areas including: academics, personnel, safety, and community relations. Of course communication with the entire community is paramount, especially when small, rural areas are concerned. Sanchez believes in being visible and being part of the people. When issues arise, Sanchez reflects on the issue at hand and questions herself based on experience, knowledge, community, and most importantly, student needs and benefits. The

driving factor when dealing with politics, Sanchez feels, is "how will this decision help the students if I am truly here to serve the students" (Sanchez interview, 2016). Setting the former as guideposts for dealing with the demands of the superintendency, keeps Sanchez at the helm of her district.

As I heard the story of Monica Sanchez, I thought of Carol Gilligan's (1993) work regarding the difference between men and women's concept of self and morality. She contends, "given the differences in men and women's conception of self and morality, women bring to the life cycle a different point of view and order human experience in terms of different priorities (p. 22). As a woman, my identity is constantly shifting from leader to mother to parental caretaker to school disciplinarian. I am a female principal in a man's world, and these skillsets require a different point of view as described by Gilligan (1993). As a female leader, I can identify with Monica's story because I, too, juggle multiple roles that are not always congruent with my feminine sensibilities. We must act like women and lead like women, yet we are part of a career that was created by males. I am a Hispanic female school leader and like Sanchez, I made education a priority because of the belief I had in education to transform my life and future. Like Sanchez, my parents were not college graduates, so we shared the dream- the dream that we would reach the top despite personal challenges.

Juanita Martinez

The second participant was Juanita Martinez. She leads South Lakes ISD and has served in this position for two years. Prior to her appointment, the district experienced extraordinary instability in leadership. There were three different superintendents within the short span of four years (Texas Education Agency, 2014). South Lakes Independent School District serves six hundred and two students, from Pre-Kindergarten through the twelfth grade. Of the students

served, 99.3% are Hispanic and 0.7% are White (Texas Education Agency, 2014). South Lakes' special populations include 90.4% as economically disadvantaged, 67.6% of their students are identified as at-risk, and 22.1% of their students are English Language Learners. The senior class of 2014 had a 100% graduation rate as well (Texas Education Agency, 2014). There are one hundred and two total staff members of which 62% are teachers. Hispanic teachers make up 94%, 4% are White, and 2% are Asian; 64.3% of all teachers are female.

Martinez has lived in the Rio Grande Valley her entire life along with her two brothers and her parents who have also been lifetime Valley residents. They lived in a rural community throughout their residency in the Valley and Martinez graduated from a rural school as well. Martinez is currently divorced and has one child. Her family was the paramount contributor of motivation which led Martinez to excel, "my family was educated. The expectation was there and it was just a matter of time before I did the same…they nurtured me. I had the support systems and I'm very blessed to have had that," (Martinez interview, 2016). Formal education was not foreign to Martinez; her paternal grandfather had a Bachelor's degree, her mother had a Master's degree in education, and her father served in the military and later held a government job. The expectation for Martinez to be educated and successful was eminent. Martinez shared that her personal and professional values were defined by her family; she fondly states, "I saw parents that always gave…my mother, being a prekindergarten teacher, was a *madrina* to so many girls and boys…when people needed something, they gave. So I saw that and I think that transpired to my profession about giving. I sacrificed myself; that's why I'm still single- I never left the office" (Martinez interview, 2016). The literature reveals that men and women tend to have different leadership styles, highlighting women to have more of a nurturing style to which Martinez attributes the following, "I never missed a game; never missed an activity for kids. I

mean one night could be one somewhere and the other night another and if it was two the same day, I'd be half at one then the other- it's just the way I am" (Martinez interview, 2016). As well, she recalled mimicking her mother's celebration of family birthday's to her profession, "as a principal, and now superintendent, all my students got birthday cards, and my employees, and I write in them…I used to have a school of over 2000 and they all got one in the mail" (Martinez interview, 2016). Women's leadership often incorporates increased collaboration, consultative decision-making, and providing caring working environments (De la Rey, 2005, p. 5). The impact of family on professional behaviors is evident in Juanita Martinez.

Martinez's leadership journey began as a social studies and Spanish teacher at both the middle and high school levels for a total of eight years. Martinez's account of her teacher stint reiterates the literature regarding the fact women stay in teaching longer than men to improve their craft, increase their skills sets, and at end be better prepared for leadership positions. Kelsey, Allen, Coke, and Ballard (2014) explain women spend more time teaching and upgrading their educational credentials and do not immediately pursue the pathway to school administration. In addition, females tend to begin their leadership journeys later in their careers compared to men (p. 4). Intrinsically, amidst the numerous years of teaching embedded with summer school, teacher-leader roles, and various organization sponsorships, Martinez sought her Master's degree and completed it in only one and one-half years. She shares, "I've been very fortunate that even as a department head or you know teacher level, I was always got called on to lead, to lead groups. I never thought I'd be a teacher period, let alone a superintendent; but, the opportunity just sort of fell on my lap. It was a chance that I had. I think I'm good at it. I just don't like to play politics" (Martinez interview, 2016).

After teaching, she became a middle school assistant principal for one year. The next stepping stone in her journey was the principalship. She served as middle school principal for six years and five years at the high school level. Martinez was inspired to pursue a leadership role when a male administrator visited her classroom for her annual evaluation. She recalled him playing with a cup, gifted to her by a student, during the evaluation and she shares, "this man was actually playing with it (cup) and I was watching him, and I'm teaching, that's when I realized it's time. That was a pivotal moment, um this is the man that is evaluating me, I don't' think so. It was a poor leader that motivated me to say you know what, teachers don't deserve that" (Martinez interview, 2016). Always being motivated to stay ahead of the curve, along with the feeling that she "saw too many that did not truly care about the total program", Martinez began work on her doctorate in educational leadership which she completed in two and one-half years (Martinez survey 2016). Martinez soon realized she needed her superintendent certification in order to move up the ladder so to speak, therefore, she worked towards that goal and concurrently completed her certification while she earned her doctoral degree in educational leadership. In her superintendent certification courses, Martinez noted there were equal numbers of males and females in her superintendency certification program.

Martinez felt she was not prepared for the political demands of being a school superintendent. When Martinez was asked how she dealt with politics, she instinctively responded "as graciously as possible" and laughed. She elaborated by sharing, "being that I was in a small district, the dynamics of the politics was unbelievable because they hired mainly from within in the upper level positions…now how I felt about that is that I did not compromise my ethics" (Martinez survey 2016). Allen (2011) writes, "power is a resource that is unequally and unjustly distributed between men and women; hence, one of the goals of feminism would be to

redistribute this resource in more equitable ways" (p.4). Part of politics is the power one has as superintendent. Over and over, Martinez resounded with the fact her ethics would not be compromised; she admitted, "I did struggle with that (politics), because I refused to break the laws and rules" (Martinez survey 2016). However, it was very interesting that Martinez noted politics could also be used for positive reasons, "as far as the dynamics you can really use it to your favor within the school. You have to know how to work with all kinds of people. You have to be visible, at events that are important to them. That is where I had no problems with parents; I had no problem with kids…people can see that you value what's important to them" (Martinez survey 2016). She further explained her strategy, her own politics, when she first secured the superintendent position. She scheduled meetings with the cafeteria ladies, not their supervisor; then she met with maintenance workers and understood their concerns and she worked her way up with teachers and so forth. Martinez built relationships with all school community members, not only with members of the upper echelons within the school system. Politics can of course, have a negative impact, as such, Martinez shared, "superintendents that have lasted many, many years yes, they compromise and I can't. It goes back to that question about my values and my beliefs…most recently a politician told me, you need to give in sometimes. I know how to give and take…when school boards ask for certain things, but there are times where a man would have just ignored it…I don't mean to sound gender biased, but I've seen it" (Martinez survey 2016).

When asked about barriers and discrimination in the school superintendency regarding gender, Martinez distinctly states, "oh, we're not tough enough; women aren't strong enough. We don't play and I really believe, not all women, there are some, but my experience the people that I deal with…my little world of female superintendents, we don't play the game- the good

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old boy game. And, if people think it doesn't exist, they're lying" (Martinez survey 2016). Racial discrimination impacting her leadership journey, Martinez mentioned was slim to none. Her only comment was based on her attendance at a recent state conference where she noted that in a session of approximately 300 people, she was the only female Hispanic superintendent that stood up when all superintendents were asked to stand, to which she observed, "oh my goodness, what is this" (Martinez survey 2016). In addition, when she participated in a Harvard University sponsored leadership workshop, she was one of two female superintendent participants and the only Hispanic. The number of male participants was seventeen.

Another area of discrimination pointed out by Martinez was of the sexual nature. This is supported by the literature. In a research study by Marcano (1997), discrimination was reported, both overt and covert, sexual and racial harassment. Authors suggests it still exists and often leads to women leaving the superintendency position (Brunner, 1999; Marcano, 1997). Harassment is not always obvious in fact, Brunner (2000) reports these obscure practices of harassment silence women, taking away their voice and having to behave and react differently in situations compared to males in the same positions (p. 91). Regarding sexual harassment, Martinez shared, "I'm not saying I'm the most beautiful person in the world or nothing like that, but that's sexual. Where they think that because you're a woman and that I'm single…they think let's go have a drink…and all of a sudden it's more than that- no, no, no" (Martinez survey 2016). In general, discrimination faced by Martinez was related to gender and sexual harassment and her story is similar to many women based on current literature.

Drawing from Anzaldua (1987), Martinez struggled with not belonging to the good-old-boys group or not compromising her ethics; she had to be a school leader, divided between two worlds- the man's and the woman's. Martinez did not fit the mold of female leader in terms of

following man's rules. Gilligan (1993) best describes this with, "qualities deemed necessary for adulthood-the capacity for autonomous thinking, clear decision-making, and responsible action-are those associated with masculinity and considered undesirable as attributes of the feminine self" (p. 17). I as a Hispanic, female, principal wrestle with this traditional paradigm on an on-going basis. When long hours must be worked, the expectation is that as a mother I should be home to care for my children; when school budgets must be prepared, men should be able to guide me; and when politics come into play, males hold the top positions, which make definitive decisions.

Sonia Tello

The third participant was Sonia Tello. She is the school superintendent for Twin Springs Independent School District and has served the district for four years. Prior to her appointment, her predecessor was a male superintendent who led the district for only two years prior to resigning (Texas Education Agency, 2014). Twin Springs Independent School District serves four hundred and seventy five students of which 97.3% are Hispanic, 1.5% are White, and the remaining students were identified as Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and Asian (Texas Education Agency, 2014). The special population counts served by Twin Springs are: 73.7% economically disadvantaged, 62.5% at-risk, and 12.4% of their students have been identified as English Language Learners. The 2014 senior class had a 100% graduation rate (Texas Education Agency, 2014). Of the eighty eight staff members employed by Twin Springs ISD, 40.4% are teachers, 97.2% are Hispanic and the remainder are White. Of all teachers, 69.1% are female.

Tello has lived in the Rio Grande Valley her entire life and was raised in a small, rural community. As well, Tello graduated from a small, rural high school. She is currently divorced and has one child. Regarding her own family, Tello stated that even as a young girl, her own

family motivated her to be the best, "I am very driven and I guess I owe that to both my parents. They have always been very driven. Besides the jobs they had, my mom and dad owned their own business on the side. I was raised in a household that worked hard and continued to work hard even on the weekends" (Tello interview, 2016). Her parents were very educated, in fact, her mother was a teacher and her father ended his career as a school superintendent. Tello credits her personal and professional philosophies to her parents and her upbringing. Tello admits she and her father have a strong bond. As such, she has adopted many of his beliefs as her own and shares, "many of the things I fight for as an educator are the same things he fought for twenty years ago…I've always felt like we're here to mold these kids and so our jobs are so crucial because these kids, you know we're leaving an imprint on them as young adults and that's what they keep with them" (Tello interview, 2016). Tello's family taught her many lessons including using resources and networks and reading to increase knowledge base, in addition to always being fair and consistent in the workplace. As an adolescent, traveling with her father in his position as school principal to a basketball game, events that transpired one night, let Tello know she would become a school leader. She has fond memories of being at home, listening to her father's work stories and discussions with her mother; these led her to believe she could be an administrator.

Before becoming a school superintendent, Tello had a varied and elaborate pathway in the education realm. As echoed in the literature by so many female leaders before her, she taught at the elementary level. She served in this capacity for seven years. After teaching, she became a campus program facilitator at a middle school for two years. While moving up the ranks, in addition to being a single parent, Tello pursued her Master's degree. She then left public schools and was employed by the regional service center for a few years as a senior consultant

supervising a local program initiative. Tello then returned to public education as an assistant principal for two years at an elementary school campus. Her goal at that point in her life was to become a superintendent. She wanted to follow in her father's footsteps of school leadership. Finally, Tello became an elementary principal for four years with one school district and later she served as campus principal at an elementary for a period of three years in a different school district. Tello soon realized she needed her superintendent certification in order to advance her career in the leadership tract, so twelve years after her completion of the Master's degree, she completed the school superintendent certification. After her stint as principal, she became superintendent of schools for Twin Springs. She has held that position for the past four years. In her superintendent certification courses, Tello shared there were more males in the majority of classes and she felt the program did not completely cover the political demands of the school superintendency. Tello continued with the following, "It's difficult to be fully prepared to take on the role as superintendent. There are many aspects of this job that require on the job experience. Having nine years campus administrator experience was very helpful in many aspects" (Tello survey, 2016). Specifically about rural school politics Tello shared, "it's pretty low key when it comes to politics here. I've been very fortunate that here politics don't really play a factor for me and my decisions or anything that comes with it here. My seven board members are pretty much on the same page. I've never been asked to do favors, nothing…so you can say there's minimal politics compared to large districts" (Tello interview, 2016). Tello shared experiences that are unlike those presented by the literature concerning women and politics in leadership positions.

Regarding barriers and discrimination surrounding the school superintendency, Tello shared that her career has not been impacted by such factors, which counters current literature.

Tello's response to questions about barriers due to gender included the following, "honestly I've never felt that… I knew it was a man's world, but maybe that was my apprehension and I knew a lot of the superintendents were men and most of those were my apprehensions because I've never been treated by any male superintendent like my opinion didn't count" (Tello interview, 2016). Tello continued by sharing that in her region of rural schools, five of seven school districts are led by female superintendents and she points out that some male superintendents have given her leadership opportunities, instead of hindrance from them as reported in the literature. Based on her ideals about gender, she takes a positive stance and increases her networks with male and female superintendents when she has questions about work practices. Race has not been an issue for Tello either. Her reply was a firm, "I don't think that way ever…I don't think that at all" (Tello survey, 2016).

According to the literature, Tello is unlike many women leaders, especially Hispanics. She has managed to elude gender and race barriers in her journey towards the school superintendency. I believe her upbringing truly impacted her journey. The fact her mother was a lifetime school teacher and her father a superintendent, truly groomed her for leadership. Aligned with Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986), Tello best demonstrates the constructed knowledge way of knowing for women. It is my opinion that early in life Tello had developed her own sense of self and therefore, positioned herself in a pathway directly towards leadership, which was apparent in her attainment of the school principalship before the age of thirty. Belenky et al. (1986) posit, that women have confidence and strong integrity at the constructed knowledge phase. Tello embodied this as she taught, led programs at the regional service center, and then returned immediately to a public school leadership position. I, like most women, was not privileged to fit in the world I desired- leadership. My journey included barriers, such as

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ignorance of educational processes due to lack of education on my parents' behalf and the lack of familial financial support, which seemed to slow my advancement towards leadership positions. Drawing from Yosso (2005), as Tello was rich in knowledge and experiences regarding education and all its branches, I had my own cultural wealth. I had aspirational capital because my mother always believed in me, taught me to work hard for my goals, and she motivated me to be a leader (p. 77). My strong family bond demonstrated my abundant familial capital; *mi familia fue mi fuerza para todo* (p. 79). And now as a researcher, I exhibit resistant capital, which "refers to those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). I refuse to allow the traditional beliefs and practices that favor males in leadership positions. I refuse to be a minority when it comes to Hispanic, female leaders in public school leadership positions.

All three research participants had different childhood and family experiences, varied journeys leading them to the school superintendency, and different experiences, challenges, and successes in their leadership positions, so how do we use that information to teach? The aforementioned descriptions of the Hispanic women superintendents' stories were shared in order to add to the existing body of knowledge, which is minimal in its existence.

Perceived Impacting Factors

The female participants of the study shared several common experiences with varied details influenced by numerous internal and external factors. Their voices are not uncommon to those resonated in the literature. In sync with the purpose of this research study, the following was proposed to address the three core research questions including: to explore the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents; to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and to

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examine the discrimination issues these women may have experienced. The wealth of data yielded from data collection procedures including interviews, observations and field notes, online surveys, and document analyses offered an overarching perspective to help inform the research questions.

Research Question One

The initial research question sought to explore factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents. To this end, Monica Sanchez added that a large contributor to the acceptance of female superintendents is situation-oriented, "I came to a district where females held this position in the past, so it depends on the community and whether they believe a woman can also do these jobs" (Sanchez interview, 2016). She also shared that the superintendency requires physical and spiritual virtues, which is why she begins each day with a ritual including prayers asking for guidance and strength to succeed. Sanchez also believed that fear can navigate women away from such leadership positions, which is why mentors are needed to "push" them in the right direction. In order to make a difference in the dearth of female superintendents, Sanchez makes it a personal mission to empower other females to become leaders. This includes motivating females to continue their education, setting high expectations, and definitive goal setting to achieve a clear vision and purpose for attaining leadership positions. Sanchez does this in hopes of closing the gap between the numbers of male to female superintendents.

Juanita Martinez is no different; she consistently leads the crusade to increase female representatives in the superintendency. She like Sanchez, motivates and follows-up with staff members to increase educational attainment. During an observation, the researcher witnessed Martinez in a school hallway discuss with a teacher, her career goals and returning to school for

a Master's degree. The fact Martinez knew the teacher by name, interest, and goal demonstrates her intentions to empower her peers. Strikingly different from Sanchez, Martinez boldly stated the chief reason women are underrepresented in the superintendency was "the good old boys network- some females learn to play the game and they will do whatever to stay there" (Martinez interview, 2016). In order to continue advocacy for female leadership empowerment, Martinez demands young girls be educated in these opportunities; she feels the Hispanic culture favors males in terms of their options and possibilities, whereas expectations for females are limited and directed mainly by their patriarchs. Martinez is a proponent of gender equity and continues to nurture leadership in young females within her district.

Advocacy is also embodied by Sonia Tello. In fact, she was the co-founder of a regional collaborative network for female superintendents initiated two years ago. There was a need to provide female superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley with a venue to share best practices, discuss common goals, and network. Tello shares lack of the former attributes to the low rates of female superintendents. She also felt sometimes women are not perceived as independent; therefore, some believe women need males to guide them in personal and professional endeavors. In pursuance of strengthening the number of females in the school superintendency, Tello believes women must serve as role models to their peers and voice their stories in venues such as graduate classes or superintendent certification courses. She has done this herself in hopes of motivating women to take on school leadership roles.

Research Question Two

Next was the quest to understand the extent of why Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts. Cooley & Floyd (2013) report rural schools were major contributors to social activities such as recreation, cultural and civil events to the

community, continuing education of community training, shelter in case of disaster or emergency, and acted as a pride and identity to community members. In rural schools, the number of minority members outweigh those found in urban schools; amazingly, 45.8% of minority groups were employed by rural school districts, while only 23.7% were reported for urban district schools (Carter et al., 2013). Each of the three research participants shared rural schools are gems in their own right. Paralleled aspects described by participants that attracted them to rural schools included smaller community which lends to strong relationships and superintendents are able to be visible and involved, "wearing many hats" regarding job responsibilities. In turn, these responsibilities yield great learning and knowledge. As far as rural schools specific to deep South Texas, participants shared that rural schools are "warm and communities…they expect *el beso y el abrazo*".

Research Question Three

Finally, the last research question addressed any discrimination issues these women may have experienced. Sanchez reported she had not felt discrimination in any fashion. She was confident it was a matter of time before the number of female superintendents was equal to that of males. In addition, she shared, "nowadays it is not uncommon for females to be superintendents". Sanchez felt gender discrimination was not a factor since the job responsibilities among all superintendents are the same. Tello's sentiments regarding discrimination echoed the latter. She shared, "actually my journey was a lot quicker than males in this position. A lot of the male superintendents are older and did a lot of time before becoming superintendents. This community was just ready for a female leader" (Tello interview, 2016). Martinez on the other hand, offered a different perspective. She shared experiences of gender bias due to the good-old-boy network as well as sexual harassment by males towards her. In

addition, she alluded to discrimination by sharing, "rural communities still have that male-dominated mentality; when asked about gender differences regarding leadership, she responded, "men would have compromised, they have less to lose" (Martinez interview, 2016).
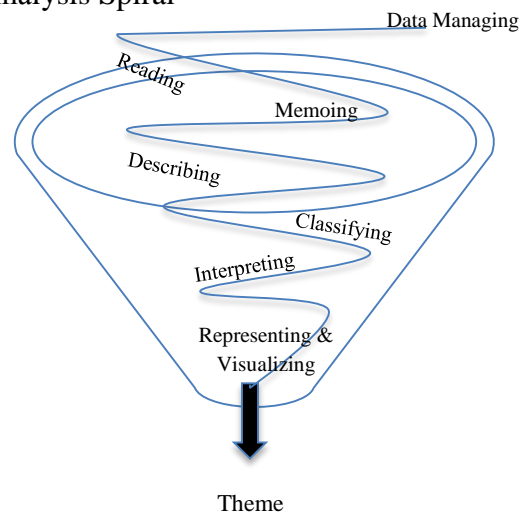
The fact that few Hispanic females hold the traditionally male-dominated position of school superintendent begs the question of why. Research such as this, to qualify the strengths of female leaders as well as their challenges, requires additional work to understand such imbalance between male and female superintendents. Following is a description of the data analysis process followed to yield thematic descriptions of the research findings.

<div style="text-align:center">Data Analysis</div>

The plethora of data collected was consistently reviewed in order to accurately capture the essence of the participants' responses. As data was collected via online surveys, individual interviews, document analyses, and field observations, coding was an ongoing process. Coding allowed the researcher to cluster data into groups of information that later served as significant themes. I began reading through the interview transcripts, documents, survey responses, and field notes. As I read through the data, I made notes of what stood out as commonalities and differences. I especially took notice to the unique responses. A few days later, I would evaluate the datasets once more and formulate new notes. Then I grouped or chunked similar responses, which after several cycles of this process were the resulting codes. The process of coding facilitated the review and reflection of collected data that lent to more in-depth consideration of the participants' responses. The voice of the participants, along with their beliefs, values, and attitudes came to light and added to the existing body of knowledge.

Developing themes from the data was paramount in order to understand and report research findings; therefore, I used the process represented below (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Creswell's Data Analysis Spiral

Data Managing

Reading

Memoing

Describing

Classifying

Interpreting

Representing & Visualizing

Theme

Creswell's data analysis spiral includes the following steps: data managing; reading and memoing; describing, classifying, and interpreting; and representing and visualizing. Following is a description of the data analysis process I utilized in my research. For me, the data managing included organizing all the collected data in the form of interview recordings and transcripts, field notes from observations, survey responses, and the plethora of documents gathered. Organization of such a collection of data sources can be overwhelming. Accordingly, I created an organization system for each type of data collected by participant and date. In terms of reading and memoing, this was an ongoing process. I reviewed data sources multiple times and each round revealed more and different information that helped answer the research questions. For memoing, I recoded written notes from the various data sources. Later, I reviewed the memos, which assisted in formulating connections among participants and the research questions. Most engaging and revealing were describing, classifying, and interpreting. I began the describing process with the existing memos because each note represented a fact, story, or data bit shared by participants via surveys, transcripts, field notes, or documents. However, I had to dig deeper and analyze how they answered the research questions. The classifying was grouping the descriptions into categories of similarities, differences, experiences, and so forth. I

engaged in this step of the spiral many times in order to ensure depth in the data analysis process. Each cycle revealed more information that addressed the research questions. Then I moved onto the process of interpreting which was most challenging because I had to delve deep into my own knowledge and experiences in order to make connections among the participants' responses, my own ideals, and the research questions. I answered how the data made sense of what was being researched and what that meant to me and ultimately society, in terms of using research to ignite transformation. Finally, I had to develop a theme to best represent each set of resulting codes. This step required much questioning, confirmation among all collected data, and self-reflection. Representing the entire data collected into three to five themes, as suggested by qualitative research, must be succinct. I generated four themes as a result of the data analysis process, which included: extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility. Ultimately, the themes and data analysis must be represented to help the reader visualize the findings, so I created figures to address this step of Creswell's data analysis spiral process.

For this research, case study methodology was chosen to best answer the research questions in alignment with Creswell's (2007) premise that a case study "explores a bounded system (a case)…over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (p. 73). The three research questions attempted to explore the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents; to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and to examine the discrimination issues these women may have experienced. Case study methodology allowed the researcher to capture the varied experiences of the participants, otherwise unavailable or unseen. Unique to qualitative work, the researcher became the instrument. According to Creswell (2007), "the qualitative researchers collect data themselves through

examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants. They may use a protocol- an instrument for collecting data- but the researchers are the ones who actually gather the information" (p. 38). Following this premise, the researcher included their experience as a Hispanic female school leader.

Coding was necessary for qualitative analysis as it served for "deep reflection about and, thus, deep analysis and interpretation of the data's meanings" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 72). A code is a word or phrase assigned to a portion of text from field notes or interview transcripts, as well as other collected datasets. The coding process can involve various cycles to ensure proper grouping or categories. There are several coding types; however, I employed a combination of descriptive and values coding (pp. 74-76). Descriptive coding is associated more closely with social environments and summarization. This type of coding is most appropriate for participant interviews. The values, attitudes, and beliefs of each of the participants was intended to be heard, honored, and portrayed in the research results. Fundamentally, values coding was used to fit this purpose (p. 76). Inductive coding was used throughout the data analysis process to reveal emergent themes (p. 81). For this study, the researcher administered various cycles of coding to ensure accurate categories. Interview transcripts, survey responses, field notes, and documents were coded to reveal links among participants' responses and experiences via collected data. The format below demonstrates an overview of the coding process I followed for data analysis.

I began by reviewing all collected data sources. Specifically with interview transcripts, for example, I employed descriptive coding. Inductive coding was a predominant process since it served to reveal emergent themes. Descriptive coding allowed me to delve into the social environments of each of the three participants and summarize their responses, stories, and

experiences. Following is a specific example of my coding process for the interview transcripts (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Summary of Thematic Codes and Emergent Themes

	Family and Personal Backgrounds	Personal and Professional values and beliefs	Educational Leadership	Gender, Race & Discrimination
Question Stems				
Participant Responses<	No question about attending college; Raised in the Rio Grande Valley; Parents are college Graduates and assisted financially; Parental role models; Parents demonstrated commitment & dedication; and Community service	Value all people; Be role models; Attend student/ community events; Connect with people; Career preparedness; and Listening skills	Others helped in school and on the job; Support; Guidance; Communication with school board; Spend time at campuses; Work with community; and Rural schools are "hubs" and "hearts" of the community	Learning as a result of "wearing many hats"; Problem-solving skills; Communication with stakeholders; good-old-boys games; jeopardizing ethics; own apprehensions of professional abilities as a woman; and Always considering what is best for students
Codes<	Parental foundation; Small communities; Support; Guidance High expectations; Advocacy; Dedication	Professional family; Impact on lives; Open communication; Treat like family; work politics	Support; Mentors; Visibility; Opportunities; Communication; Leadership; Contribution of knowledge; Shared power; Community priorities	Ethics; Problem-solvers; Communication; Politics; self-perception
Themes<	Extended Parental Support	Familial Work Environment	Networks	Versatility

First, I organized the interview transcripts by participant to ensure reliability of the data analysis process with each of the participants' responses. Second, I read the interview transcripts multiple times, each time making notes of their specific responses. For instance, when participants were asked about their backgrounds, some of their responses included: their parents' education, family traditions that impacted their lives and beliefs, the support and guidance provided by their parents which participants emulate today, and a focus on community service. This step was repeated numerous times with each participant's interview transcripts, for each interview question, and each round revealed more information. Next, I compared and grouped all three

participants' responses according to similarities and differences. This process gave rise to the codes, such as parental foundation, high expectations, or dedication for the participant responses listed above. As I reviewed and evaluated the resulting codes, I cross-referenced the codes with other collected data such as survey responses and documents, to ensure there was a repeating pattern or trend among the data. After this process, I again compared and grouped the codes into an overarching theme that best represented the stories, experiences, values, and beliefs of each of the participants.

The process of coding was influenced by the researcher's analytic lens. A theoretical framework was necessary to situate the research method employed by the researcher; therefore, the researcher operated under the constructivist paradigm due to the congruence of the knowledge claim, strategy of inquiry, and methods used in this study (Creswell, 2007). Constructivists build their own knowledge and perspectives, in opposition to the positivists. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) and Creswell (2007), both suggest qualitative research is defined by the philosophical assumption it follows. Creswell (2003) posits that the constructivist philosophical assumption is closest aligned for qualitative research, which aims to construct realities based on the participants' experiences, or their ontology. Given this research aims to explore the serious underrepresentation of Hispanic female superintendents, the analytical lens used will operate under the premise of Belenky et al. (1986), from a critical feminist perspective.

Abundant information, experiences, and stories were collected from each participant, but how this knowledge was acquired was unique to each participant. Belenky et al. (1986) suggest women experience five stages of knowing. They explain how a woman's decision-making skills are affected by their feeling of inferiority to their authorities, but how they can overcome this. The first stage, silence, speaks to how women keep to themselves under many circumstances (p.

25). They depend solely on their authorities and are fearful of punishment for speaking out. Women do not speak of their personal lives or thoughts. If their life is spoken about, it deals with their lack of voice in society. According to data, participants experienced this stage as young ladies when they were under their parents' care and in their professional lives, as teachers. Initially, the women followed set protocol as they had few experiences on which to base their decisions. As the female participants climbed the leadership ladder, they moved on to the next stage.

Following silence is received knowledge. Belenky et al. (1986) posit that women are not trained to create original work and therefore depend on others for knowledge. They tend to reword what they were told by superiors, which in turn leads to less confidence in themselves (p. 44). In this stage, women need their friends to have the same thoughts. They see authorities as sources of truth solely because of their hierarchical positions. Because of reliance from those around them, women believe if they allow themselves grow, others will suffer. The three female Hispanic research participants were familiarized with this stage as teachers working on their Master's degrees. They received knowledge from professors and veteran educators. In fact, this stage can be beneficial if positive and strong mentors are involved.

The third stage deals with subjective knowledge. The authors report, women tend to believe that abstraction, analysis, and logical decisions are not things women are capable of achieving. The literature supports this belief by school boards and male school leaders, specifically in public education regarding finances and budgets. Modesty is something women are forced to have, but eventually a voice will rise inside of them. They learn truth comes from experience, not authority (p. 79). Each of the three research participants shared such culminating moments. Most willingly, Juanita Martinez openly shared that she was not willing to

compromise her ethics or silence her opinions by pointing out wrongdoings within her school district. "Women become their own authorities." Procedural Knowledge, the next step, is when women fully begin to empower themselves and believe in their own ideas (p. 109). A woman's inner voice becomes critical as she begins to analyze subjects with greater detail. A process is created to obtain knowledge. The three women superintendents hinted at this when each of them shared their leadership opportunities and the fact that their rural school expertise could be shared with audiences around the nation.

Knowing others can be tackled after knowing the self. This speaks to connected knowing, which deals with a woman's tendency to want understanding with another person (p. 115). Dialogue becomes important because it leads to a better understanding of the ideas and ultimately a better decision. Separate knowing forces women to realize that authority is not always correct. The separation of feelings and emotion from self is also a fundamental part of separate knowledge. Mentorships and close ties with communities and families exemplifies this stage as described by the authors. The women participants wanted to be connected with the school community members. They wanted to attend students' events and the fact that rural schools were referred to as the "hearts" of the community demonstrates the participants' want to understand and connect with others.

Finally, constructed knowledge is the point at which a woman develops a "narrative" sense of self, according to Belenky et al. (1986). Women trust in themselves and develop a strong integrity. Women will now have an open mind to the world around them and embrace what they are trying to understand (p. 150). Reviewing the collected data, including interview transcripts, surveys, field notes, and documents it is evident the three female Hispanic superintendents in this study achieved this final level of knowing. They were confident in

themselves for being leaders in rural schools and the knowledge gained by "wearing many hats".

Participants recognized the underrepresentation of Hispanic women leaders in public schools and

attempted to address this issue by becoming presenters in their areas, by forming committees that

address such concerns, and by recognizing that their efforts impact students and the future. It is

through this analytical lens, under a constructivist framework that the following codes were

revealed.

In order to capture the participant's responses and in essence their experiences as

Hispanic female school superintendents, it was necessary to review all collected data, which in

turn revealed a plethora of codes (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Data Analysis Process

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┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
│ Participant  │  ⇨     │    Codes     │  ⇨     │    Themes    │
│  Responses   │        │              │        │              │
└──────────────┘        └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘
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The interview question regarding family and personal background yielded a wealth of insight.

Participants' responses included: there was no question about attending college; raised in the Rio

Grande Valley; parents had college degrees; parents helped finance education; parents were role

models; parents demonstrated commitment and dedication; and educators serve their

communities. From these and similar responses, codes such as the following were identified:

parental foundation; small communities; support; guidance; high expectations; advocacy; and

dedication. These codes gave way to theme one, extended parental support.

Other codes that were recognized included: professional family; service to community;

impact on lives; open communication; treat like family; and work politics. These codes resulted

from another interview question which was, "in terms of your background, what values and

beliefs shaped who you are today both personally and professionally". Participants were forced

to reflect on their past and their present. The women recalled special and difficult moments that

shaped who they are and what they do. The participants' responses encompassed the following:

value all people, from custodians to administrators; role models; attend student/community

events; connect with people; career preparedness; and listening skills. The latter interview

responses coupled with the former codes listed surfaced theme two: familial work environment

(see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Example of Data Analysis Process
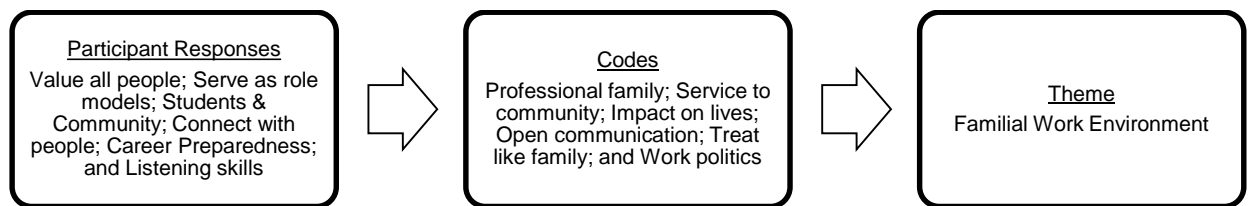
Additionally, the interview questions that sparked considerable self-reflection in the

participants were those regarding decisions to become educational leaders and ultimately their

journey to the superintendency. Participants responses involved: others helped during education

and on the job; support was offered by others; guidance; strong communication with school

board was a must and had to be ongoing; spend time at campuses; work with community; and

schools are "hubs" of communities. The women repeatedly mentioned their jobs were not done

in isolation. From these responses, the subsequent codes developed: support; mentors; visibility;

opportunities; communication; leadership; contribution of knowledge; shared power; and most of

all community. Gilligan (1993) highlights that "female identity formation takes place in a context

of ongoing relationship", which is how the participants have perceived they ascension to

leadership positions. Emanating from the participants' responses and responding codes was

theme three: networks.

Finally the fourth code emerged from the data. The last interview questions inquired about gender, race, and discrimination in their careers. Instinctively, the participants responded most issues had not been present; however, as their responses went on, so did their self-refection. The women's responses to such questions incorporated: vast learning from "wearing many hats"; increased problem-solving skills; frequent communication with school board members; playing the good-old-boys game; jeopardizing ethics; own apprehensions of professional abilities as a woman; and always doing what is best for students. These profound responses align with Gilligan's (1993) account of women struggling with competitive achievement and that this stems from femininity versus success. For the participants, there were lessons learned from working harder, preparing professionally more than male counterparts, or dealing with their own perception of what is meant to be a female leader. Challenges regarding gender, race, or harassment afforded the women versatility. Versatility is defined as the quality or state of having many uses or being able to do many different kinds of things (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2016). The research participants each exhibited versatility for instance, when voicing their opinions despite going against others; refusing to participate in good-old-boy games; or gaining knowledge from challenges, problem-solving, and community relations. These experiences and responses yielded theme four: versatility.

In qualitative research themes emerge from codes, which are categories of linked information from various datasets. The aforementioned codes revealed the following themes: extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility. In the next section, each theme will be elaborated on to give an in-depth explanation of each participant's contributions.

Significant Themes

As a result of the data analysis process previously described, common relevant responses from the participants were determined. During the research process, participants were asked open ended questions that addressed the research questions. Some of the interview questions asked of the participants are listed below (see Appendix C).

- Please share your family or personal background;

- In terms of your background, what values and beliefs shaped who you are today both personally and professionally;

- When did you realize you wanted to become an educational leader; describe in detail how you began your journey towards the superintendency;

- What barriers, if any, have you experienced during your educational leadership journey due to your gender or race; and

- What types of discrimination, if any, have you experienced in your educational leadership journey

In answering the questions, the female participants offered accounts relating specifically to their personal and professional experiences and factors that shaped their current philosophies and therefore their professional aspirations and practices. Their collective responses were categorized into thematic categories in order to identify themes related to the research questions guiding this study. Following are the descriptions of each of the four identified themes: extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility.

Theme One: Extended Parental Support

Parents are traditionally the first teachers for their children. They teach their kids right from wrong, to make wise choices in life, and to stand up for their beliefs; all are true for the

families of the research participants as well. Not only did their parents teach them these virtues, but they also taught them to work hard, about perseverance, the value of education, and advocacy. Each of the participants were raised in two parent households. In two of the three households, parents held at least Bachelor's degrees; however, regardless of formal education each participant shared that their parents always expected them to graduate from college and beyond.

For Monica Sanchez the dream was big, being that her family was from Mexico and even the language barrier was grand. Sanchez adopted her parents' dream of success via education; her parents always insisted, "*para que tengas mas que nosotros*" (Sanchez interview, 2016). Despite the fact Sanchez's mother did not speak English and she had only completed education through the first grade, she always told Sanchez that education would empower her to accomplish anything she set out to do. Juanita Martinez always knew she would be a leader; it was what her parents and grandparents expected. She said she was blessed with family support systems. She excelled in school and graduated from high school at the tender age of sixteen. Her parents helped people in need when they lived on their ranch, without an expectation of payback. Martinez continues with, "I saw my grandparents give and my parents always gave. My dad was very generous and he had a giving heart. My mom was a prekindergarten teacher, so she was very giving as well…people needed, they gave" (Sanchez interview, 2016). Martinez always knew she would serve people and its community as her parents had, so she chose school leadership as the vehicle to satisfy the desire to give. Tello had big shoes to fill since her mother taught for over thirty years and her father had been a school superintendent himself. She stated her parents were very driven and to that she commented, "I learned from my parents to work

hard, to fight for what is right as an educator, and be an advocate. We have to mold these kids, so our jobs are so crucial" (Tello interview, 2016).

As an instrument of data analysis in qualitative work, the researcher offered a constructivist framework analysis. The participants formed their knowledge of families by the members living immediately within their homes. Each of the women lived in families with mothers and fathers. In those relationships they learned the meaning of bonds, reliance on others, and regarding others as essential in life. Within the family units, the message of the power of education resounded, especially while most of the parent sets held college degrees. The knowledge constructed through lived experiences helped shape the participants.

Perhaps part of their teaching stemmed from the fact that each participant was raised in a rural community. They were accustomed to the happenings and procedures associated with small communities, as they had always been the norm in their own nuclear families. The participants as superintendents, in essence as community leaders, were natives in their own familiar land and surroundings.

Theme Two: Familial Work Environment

Women tend to work in rural school communities because of the opportunities for personal communication, the sense of family among the community and to serve as advocates for school community members. Sanchez shared, "it's easier to lead a rural school because you get to know the community…you don't connect as much in larger schools" and this, in essence, is "more attractive to females than males" (Sanchez interview, 2016). Reinforcing this ideal, Tello shared a story about a father that came to her office when his wife was diagnosed with cancer and he did not know where to turn. At end, the entire school community pulled together to raise funds for his wife's treatments and medication. The commitment to family, rural school

community family, was immeasurable. His wife did pass away; however, it highlighted the deep ties of rural community families, especially to the three children left behind. Notably, research reinforces what participants shared, that students in rural schools do not operate under traditional expectations and constraints, but instead practice and observe values within and outside of the school environment (Cooley & Floyd, 2013). Tello also honors the value of contribution between schools and community members, as one would for family members. Hence, she created parent and student roundtable meetings to ensure that every member had a voice. Family is all about communication and respect among its members and Tello follows suit in as many outlets as possible.

As well, all events are tied to school. Sanchez stated rural schools are the "heart" of communities and Tello echoed her sentiments when she described them as "hubs" for families during good and bad times. During an interview with Sanchez, she explicitly mentioned the need for schools to provide meaningful, family-oriented activities in order to give the entire community a common venue for these type of occasions. In sync with the literature, Cooley & Floyd (2013) revealed rural schools were important in facilitating social activities such as recreation, cultural, and civil events to the community; continuing education of community training; shelter in case of disaster or emergency; and acted as a pride and identity to community members. Most recently, in her past cabinet meeting, Sanchez presented the idea of community movie nights at the football stadium during the summer for such opportunities. She constantly advocates for the needs of both students and parents. For that reason, Sanchez consistently maintains communication and open arms for her rural community family: all written communications are provided in English and Spanish; parent meetings are presented in English and Spanish and the

traditional *pan dulce y café* are always served; community pep-rally's and English/Spanish holiday programs are priority as well. Endless family-oriented behaviors and actions are apparent under the leadership of Monica Sanchez.

In the spirit of extended family, Martinez has adopted a practice since her principalship. She makes it a point to mail home a birthday card to every single student and staff member; included in each card is a personal note, handwritten message. Martinez mentioned some students personally thank her because their own parents did now acknowledge their birthdays and the simple card made such a difference for them. Martinez attributes this practice to her mother's birthday rituals, "my mom always baked us a small cake for our birthdays and even though it was something so small, it meant so much…and I always remember this" (Martinez interview, 2016). Martinez also demonstrated the sense of family work environments in several ways such as: the make-shift library outside her office where students can pick up free books to take home and enjoy- a small, red, old-fashioned school house type of wooden box; the "caring closet" initiative she began to gather coats for families in need; the personally-paid newspaper ad praising her career and technology students; and consistently sending positive and motivating text messages to her staff for jobs well done.

Tello truly created a familial work environment in many ways, but most impressive was the fact she prepares food for her administrative team meetings- the last meeting featured homemade peach cobbler, where she even served staff members. Similarly, Tello emulates the concept of family in the workplace such as knowing every staff member by name and most students as well. Tello shares, "when I go visit schools I can pretty much identify most students by name and I probably know their parents too…I understand the families and the culture of rural communities. The Hispanic families, which are Spanish dominant, appreciate and need

someone like that. Hispanics are close-knit families; they are hands-on, like *el beso y el abrazo*"

(Tello interview, 2016). Tello enjoys the family feel of rural schools. She stated "they know me,

they know what I'm about" (Tello interview, 2016).

A constructivist framework would question how the participants' actions came to be

learned. Cooking for staff meetings and handwriting birthday cards mailed home to students may

be foreign to school superintendents, but not to families. Theme two addressed familial work

environments. The research participants purposefully mimicked their family traditions and

beliefs in the work place in order to establish rapport and help make schools/workplace the

"hearts" and "hubs" of the communities. As one would advocate for a child or sibling, the

women superintendents made it a point to be a voice for children, from calling them by name to

attending their events. These Hispanic women superintendents constructed their knowledge of

familial work environments from their own lived experiences.

A commonality among all three participants was their desire to serve and commitment to

community. Opposing leadership styles between men and women have also been researched and

these differences may contribute to the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions

(De la Rey, 2005). De la Rey also researched modern perspectives concerning leadership styles

of men and women. This author argues men and women lead differently, but one leadership style

is not better than another. Women's leadership often incorporates increased collaboration,

consultative decision-making, and providing caring working environments (p. 5). Some attribute

these characteristics to servant leadership. Additionally, there are the issues of family, culture,

and gender weaved into the theme of familial work environment. Yosso (2005) describes

"aspirational capital" as common among Hispanic families. Despite challenges, the Hispanic

culture uses other currency such as family traditions, resiliency, and family support to move

forward. The research participants demonstrated that through the relationships with their work families they were able to lead their schools. Another attributing factor to the familial work environment, can be *mestiza consciousness*, which address commitment to community. *Mestiza consciousness* is multifaceted in its focus and purpose, but its general premise is that we learn these strategies in our homes (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Ruiz (2004) echoes Delgado Bernal's sentiments with respect to the struggles of Mexican American, Chicana, and Latina women; they surmise that women are instruments of change and hold incredible power to do so.

Demonstrated by behaviors of the female participants in this research study, which are school superintendents- the top school leaders, they feel satisfaction knowing they have served the people for the greater good. They are advocates for children, adults, and the community.

Theme Three: Networks

As the famous adage goes, it takes a village to raise a child. Accordingly, it takes a network to do the same for aspiring women leaders. Mentoring of women for the superintendent position has been accredited with positive effects such as confidence, empathy, trustworthiness, encouragement, active listening, and integrity which facilitate success for women in leadership positions; consequently, many female superintendents seek support systems after securing superintendent positions (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). Tello credits a fellow, rural school superintendent with her first year's success as superintendent and shares that a university professor, even today continues to mentor her regarding school finance and other issues. Sanchez attributes her motivation and attainment of the superintendency to a mentor she had since her principalship. She continued by adding she always knew her goal of leadership, but she especially appreciated that her mentor often motivated her, reminded her of her dreams, and pushed her to advance professionally. Mentors enable female superintendents to network with

others in similar positions. They share common experiences and professional capabilities which enable them to record success within their area (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). Tello exemplified this premise with her founding support of the regional collaborative group for female superintendents within her educational service center region. The support systems, formal or not, provide aspiring female superintendents with mentorship and other educational requirements, such as collaboration, discussion panels, and book reviews, encouraging them to tackle their roles effectively (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012).

Another networking opportunity aside from mentorship includes opportunities. Each of the three participants fondly described at least one opportunity that led them to believe in their own leadership capacity, as well as empowering them to continue their educational leadership journey. Sanchez recalled an internship opportunity for her principal certification. She was invited by a university professor to share background and cultural information to educate individuals about Hispanics. Another opportunity arose early in her superintendent position, where she was invited to speak at a conference regarding technology and successful initiatives she implemented in her small, rural school district. Sanchez perceived these as "blessings" and networking opportunities to share the strength of rural schools. Martinez resonates the same appreciation for the opportunities afforded to her. From the very start of her career in education, Martinez credits leadership opportunities given to her by her department head teacher, later her principal, and recently by her school board. As a teacher, opportunities such as serving on campus and district level decision-making committees led her to contribute directly to curriculum, instructional strategies, and long-term planning. Later as an administrator for example, she was asked to present at a conference in New Mexico, where she shared best practices occurring in her rural school district. As a superintendent, she continues to be afforded

such opportunities. Recently she presented at a national conference in Washington D.C. where again she represented rural schools. Martinez credits these and other opportunities to the success she has experienced as a female school leader.

Being an instrument of data collection in qualitative research suggests that the researcher can examine events and behaviors in various ways; however, using a constructivist lens, theme three would suggest cultured experiences added to the participants' knowledge regarding networks. Participants all noted a mentor that helped them advance in their leadership careers. Each woman described their mentor and how motivational tendencies propelled them to move forward in their careers. Tello shared details about the regional collaborative committee she spear-headed, addressing Hispanic female superintendent's job responsibilities. She learned the importance of networks through experience. Support systems and their positive effects resounded in each participants accounts. They learned the significance of having others to guide them, as well as the opportunities to lead. Collectively, their experiences taught them what they know about networks.

Theme Four: Versatility

Traditionally, in order for women to enter the workplace and especially to be school leaders, they might have felt compelled to leave their families and perhaps even jeopardize some personal obligations. Brunner (2000) shared, "sometimes beliefs and actions quite natural for men superintendents were unnatural for the women because of the gender-specific expectations of our culture" (p. 83). Previously, Brunner noted that women leaders were atypical of societal expectations. Gender categories have been perceived for years, where women should behave like women and men should act like men (p. 6). Madden (2005) shares, "Because people more easily perceive men as being highly competent, men are more likely to be considered leaders, given

opportunities, and emerge as leaders than women" (p. 5). However, even more significant than social norms, women have had to be versatile in all endeavors including the superintendency. Versatility is defined as the quality or state of having many uses or being able to do many different kinds of things (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2016). In line with this definition, the three research participants exemplify versatility with what female school superintendents are charged with daily.

For Monica Sanchez, Juanita Martinez, and Sonia Tello versatility is a given for both their personal and professional lives. Sanchez demonstrated versatility as early as age fourteen when her family migrated to the United States for a better life. She managed to learn the language and excel in school, all while envisioning herself as a leader in the future. In her journey towards the superintendency, she was faced with challenges such as the two campus leadership positions she held requiring dual-principalships. In her first principalship, Sanchez worked at both an elementary school and a middle school and the other principalship, she concurrently led the middle and high school campuses. Sanchez felt, "I learned a lot by doing this and I admired what people did at every grade level, especially elementary teachers" (Sanchez interview, 2016). This experience allowed her to understand and later make decisions based on her own experiences and the good of the students.

Martinez's position also demanded versatility. She stated her family played a large role in supporting her to complete her leadership journey, including her doctorate; however, her challenges were different than those of Sanchez and Tello. According to Martinez, she dealt with gender bias and sexual harassment issues, where versatility allowed her to succeed despite the former. Martinez's ascension to the superintendency proved to be easier than maintaining it. She has had to be versatile regarding leading the rural school district and handling political issues.

Those issues include battling typical female stereotypes such as, "we don't play the game- the good old boy game; male board members seem to think males can handle discipline better; and males are worth more, even to search agents" (Sanchez interview, 2016). Martinez works to get the job done despite these challenges. Her versatility allowed her to be visible at campuses, be accessible to students, staff and parents, as well as listen to the needs of the community.

Tello was always supported by her parents, but her own choices forced her to practice versatility as she moved forward in life. At one point after teaching, she realized she wanted to advance in her career and chose to pursue counseling; she got pregnant and health concerns kept her from pursuing that dream. Years later after having divorced, she was a single mother wanting more from life, so she decided to return to school, but this time in school administration. Despite challenges, she was versatile in making decisions for her daughter, for herself and her career. Tello shared, "I knew it was a man's world, but maybe that was my apprehension". She applied to principalships at large school districts and secured them. Later in her career, Tello became superintendent at Twin Springs ISD, a small rural community, resembling where she was raised and what she was accustomed to (Tello interview, 2016). Regardless of the formal definition of versatility, the three participants exhibited grit and were always goal-oriented. The grit and goal-based ideals embodied and exercised by the women are apparent in their stories and experiences.

As qualitative research suggests, the researcher becomes the instrument of data analysis and from a constructivist approach, these women constructed their practice of versatility due to the circumstances they lived. Each participant had a different story. Sanchez had to battle immigration to a new country, with all its hardships, yet she never strayed from her dream of becoming a school leader. Martinez sacrificed her personal life for school leadership, but never regretted the school events with students nor did she miss an opportunity to motivate others.

Similarly, Tello sought out school leadership and she secured the superintendency at a very young age. Her marriage did end in divorce; however, she continued to lead and was committed to all school community members in her rural district, a rural school like the one she knew from her own experience. As a constructivist, the participants embody versatility due to its persistence in their own, respective existences.

Four themes emerged from the participants' accounts. The themes include: extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility. These themes attempt to describe the commonalities, the differences, and the uniqueness of each of these women.

Discussion

I have learned about these Hispanic women's experiences regarding the school superintendency in rural schools of the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas, but I have also learned about myself and how I have wrestled with the in-and-out of socially assigned roles between womanhood and leadership. Growing up I expected my mother to cook and care for us, she was a female and my mother. Later in life, I had children of my own and society expected me to do the same. I am an individual. I am a woman. I can choose to do what I want for my family because I have placed myself in a position of knowing that truth, not because society delegated that responsibility to me (Belenky et al., 1986, p.138). I also learned society, including women in general, consciously or not, perpetuate the belief that women are primarily family caretakers, nurturers, subordinate in leadership positions, and continue to support traditional, male-favored practices by allowing them to happen. However, using a critical feminist lens, I have discovered that women are powerful, women are leaders, and they must lead the change that will transform society's perception and practices regarding empowerment of women. I am a Hispanic, female leader that will add to the dearth body of knowledge regarding Hispanic,

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female leaders via this research; I will contribute to the awareness of women leaders by sharing my own experiences and overcoming societal-based barriers; and I will advocate for empowerment of women, starting with young girls, by implementing programs that will model female leadership and knowledge that soon may become their norm.

Summary

In chapter four, I analyzed the data collected from the three research participants to answer the research questions. In order to maintain the integrity of qualitative research and triangulation of data, I collected various data sources, including: online surveys, individual interviews, document analyses, and field observations. The three core research questions answered with data collection and analysis included: what factors contribute to the low rate of female Hispanics school superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas; why Hispanic women superintendents secure positions at small rural school districts in the Rio Grande Valley; and to what extent have Hispanic female superintendents felt discriminated against. I analyzed the collected data and constructed four themes from the responses and experiences of each participant. The four themes which emerged from the participants' accounts included: extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility. In the following chapter, I present the conclusion and implications of this research study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was threefold and included (a) to explore the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents; (b) to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and (c) to examine the discrimination issues these women may have experienced. Through this case study exploration, the researcher added to the narrow body of knowledge available related to female superintendents in rural schools. The following research questions were used as a guide in conducting the study:

1. What factors contribute to the low rate of female Hispanics school superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley in Deep South Texas?

2. Why do Hispanic women superintendents secure positions at small rural school districts in the Rio Grande Valley?

3. To what extent have Hispanic female superintendents felt discriminated against?

This research study employed a qualitative, case study methodology to explore data collected via interviews, observations, field notes, online surveys, and archival documents toward addressing the research questions. Because the purpose of this study was to explore the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents; to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and to examine the discrimination issues these women may have experienced, data were collected

from Hispanic, female superintendents. The one-on-one interviews were audio recorded and transcribed then analyzed. Online surveys were administered and then analyzed using Qualtrics software. Observations of participants were conducted in the workplace and the researcher kept reflective field notes. Lastly, the document analysis was used to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, communication with school community members, and the essence of school superintendents.

Summary of Findings

Several themes were revealed from the analysis of the data. The themes included extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility. These common themes revealed from the data support understanding of the factors affecting the problem of continued low frequency of women, and particularly Hispanic women, in the position of superintendent in the schools, especially rural settings where it may be more common for Hispanic women.

Extended Parental Support

Participants in this study expressed the common experience of parental expectations for educational advancement in terms of higher education; this was true regardless of formal education. Family support was apparent as they perpetuated the belief in the power of education. Support and family were heavily stressed as Tello shares, "I learned from my parents to work hard, to fight for what is right as an educator, and be an advocate. We have to mold these kids, so our jobs are so crucial". Each participant was raised in a rural community, familiar with the events and circumstances associated with small communities. As superintendents in rural communities, the participants lead within familiar surroundings.

Familial Work Environment

Women tend to work in rural school communities because of the opportunities for personal communication, the sense of family among the community, and the opportunity to advocate for the school community. Sanchez described the enhanced community connection shared within rural districts, which, according to her, was "more attractive to females than males" (Sanchez interview, 2016). The commitment to the rural school community family was strong. Research has reinforced that students in rural schools tend to practice and observe values within and outside of the school environment (Cooley & Floyd, 2013). This was evident in the example of the creation of parent and student roundtable meetings to ensure that every member had a voice, providing an example of how the community family evolves from communication and respect among members.

In a rural setting, schools were noted by participants to be the "heart" of the community. Examples offered by participants included constant communication to support events such as a community pep rally, community movie nights, Spanish-English holiday programs, and other family-oriented programs. Rural schools foster community pride and identity, often through facilitating social activities in the rural community, such as social and cultural events, recreation, continuing education opportunities, and emergency shelter (Cooley & Floyd, 2013). One participant described community support efforts such as the make-shift library outside her office where students can pick up free books to take home and enjoy, and the "caring closet" initiative to gather coats for families in need, in addition to supporting students and faculty within the school. Resulting from this community link, the familial work environment was supported in other ways within the school as well, such as preparation of homemade foods for team

meetings, birthday wishes, leadership knowing every staff member and most students by name, and understanding the families and the culture of rural communities, particularly among the Hispanic community.

Networks

Networks are critical to supporting aspiring women leaders. Mentoring of women for the superintendent position has been accredited with positive effects such as confidence, empathy, trustworthiness, encouragement, active listening, and integrity which facilitate success for women in leadership positions; consequently, many female superintendents seek support systems after securing superintendent positions (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). The participants in this study credited mentor roles in support of their success as a superintendent through knowledge sharing and motivation to push oneself professionally to achieve desired goals and dreams. This finding supported previous literature that contended mentor roles enable female superintendents to network with others in similar positions, sharing common experiences and professional capabilities which enable them to record success within their area (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). Specific professional opportunities, often afforded through mentor and network relationships, also were noted to support the participants' self-belief in their own leadership capabilities, empowering the individual and fueling the drive toward educational leadership.

Versatility

The participants of this study demonstrated versatility, defined as the quality or state of having many uses or being able to do many different kinds of things (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2016), in their role as superintendent. In their personal journeys to the superintendency, these participants faced challenges such as dual-principalships, gender bias and sexual harassment issues, battling typical female stereotypes and handling political issues within

the rural setting. Versatility allowed for success despite these challenges, supporting visibility at campuses, accessibility to students, staff and parents, as well as the ability to listen to the needs of the community. Regardless of the formal definition of versatility, the three participants exhibited perseverance to remain goal-oriented.

Summary

The four themes that emerged from the participants' accounts included: extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility. The themes are used to attempt to describe the commonalities, the differences, and the uniqueness of each of these women toward addressing the research questions of the study. These findings are further discussed in light of the current literature and implications for the future.

<div align="center">

Discussion and Implications

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The number of women in school leadership positions, specifically superintendents, remains inequitable in comparison to the amount of women in the field of education with well over 70% of public school teachers being female, and less than a quarter of that percentage representing women employed as school superintendents (Manuel & Slate, 2003; Keller, 1999). In addition, despite efforts to build leadership capacity among women in educational programs and the slight increase of females in leadership positions, a significantly low number of Hispanic women occupy the position of school superintendent (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Brunner, 2000; Tallerico, 2000). Despite these gains, we continue to identify gaps in the number of female representation in school leadership, especially among Hispanic women.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked: What factors contribute to the low rate of female Hispanic school superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas? One factor noted was the male dominated network from which the participants found little opportunities for

shared knowledge and experience. Participants described fighting the "good old boys network" and having little opportunity to share best practices, to discuss common goals, and to establish or build a network. More specifically related to the Hispanic culture, one participant described the culture as favoring males in terms of their options and possibilities, and maintaining limited expectations for females. The social perception of women was described as not independent, and requiring the assistance of males to guide personal and professional endeavors.

Resilience in finding and maintaining leadership positions has been found to be supported by personal characteristics of type A personality; perseverance; appreciating relationships/valuing people; role models for others; drive to succeed; support from family, partners, husbands, and colleagues; optimism; voice for minority women; excitement about responsibility; feelings of success and satisfaction with teaching and scholarship; and tenure (Christman & McClellan, 2008). Female superintendents have increased their capacity to manage the leadership role through other means as well, including seeking mentor relationships. Such relationships among women seeking a superintendent position have been shown to support confidence, empathy, trustworthiness, encouragement, active listening, and integrity which facilitate success for women in leadership positions (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). These mentors also enable female superintendents to network with others in similar positions, allowing them to share common experiences and professional capabilities, which enable them to record success within their area (Goffney & Edmonson, 2012). Educational support can provide aspiring female superintendents with mentorship and other educational requirements, such as collaboration, discussion panels, and book reviews, encouraging them to effectively handle the leadership role. In fact, to support female superintendents, the participants highlighted the importance of women serving as role models to their peers and voicing their stories.

Thus, the data obtained in this study also supported a more indirect means of addressing this research question, through information gained related to the factors that support female leadership to the superintendency, contradicting the low rate of female superintendents, in general and in the region. For example, participants described their own contributions to supporting the continuation of female leadership through motivating others to continue their education and to set high personal expectations and goals. All three participants shared their contributions to combat gender inequity regarding female leadership. Participants engaged in professional presentations to other school districts and leadership institutes such as, Harvard University's, to decrease the disparity among female and male leadership positions. Such participation and collaboration should compel districts and other entities to incorporate such opportunities for female educational leaders. This strategy may prove successful in the long run, and is evident in the educational statistics of women with higher degrees, which show that 56.8% of female superintendents have a doctoral degree compared to 43.7% of male superintendents (Carter et al., 2013). Although the appointments for superintendent positions are based on higher degrees acquired, females remain underrepresented as school superintendents. These statistics regarding doctoral degree completion rates could be reflective of the perceived need for women seeking superintendent positions to acquire the highest education qualifications to assist in successfully acquiring the leadership position of school superintendent.

Previous research has supported that gender roles create difficulties for women in accessing superintendent positions and this was supported with the findings of the present study (Miller, 2009). Social constructs of the superintendent job and the role of women in society remain unaligned. Women tend to be characterized by dependency, passivity, nonaggression, non-competiveness, inner orientation, interpersonal orientation, empathy, sensitivity, nurturance,

subjectivity, receptivity, inability to risk, emotional liability, and supportive behavior. According to Miller (2009) and Skrla (1999), these characteristics create conflict for women who pursue the attainment of superintendent position. Gender-specific expectations serve to limit female superintendency due to the belief that certain leadership actions, which are considered natural for men, were considered unnatural for women (Brunner, 2000). Indeed, aligning with the conclusions of Brunner (2000), the participants in this study were atypical of societal expectations. Thus, women have had to be versatile in their professional endeavors, a theme revealed in this study as well.

Specific to Hispanic women, misaligned stereotypes are even more severe. Hispanic women often are socially considered to be dominated by men, and to be stay at home mothers (Mendez-Morse, 2000). In addition, Hispanic women often lack role models of Hispanic female leaders, further supporting the need for mentor type relationships. Farrow (2008) supports this premise by stating, "the lack of mentoring and the subsequent lack of opportunities and substantive career movement to the top, beyond the 'concrete ceiling,' are said to be barriers for minority women in U.S. companies (p. 25). Magdaleno (2006) shares, "having encountered years of lower expectations and the continued presence of a career 'glass ceiling,' Latina and Latino educational leaders frequently find it difficult to ascend to, and sustain positions at subsequent levels of school administration. As a result, the number of positive role models in leadership positions for Latina and Latino students is limited" (p. 13). Through this research study, participants have demonstrated these societal expectations vary in the Rio Grande Valley. The three Hispanic female superintendents did not fall victim to the stereotypes typical of Hispanic females; they did have effective mentors that guided them in their journeys to leadership positions; and they were able to attain top leadership positions in the public school sector despite

the 'glass ceiling'. The research participants were able to effectively navigate their way through the dual-worlds of womanhood and leadership. They drafted a new way of thinking explained by *mestiza consciousness*, which allowed them to transform societal expectations and adopt a new leadership direction for themselves.

Research Question 2

The second research question explored why Hispanic women were more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts. Rural schools are major contributors to social activities such as recreation, cultural and civil events to the community, continuing education of community training, shelter in case of disaster or emergency, and act as a source of pride and identity to community members (Cooley & Floyd, 2013). The minority population in rural schools of deep South Texas far exceeds what is found in urban schools; in terms of school employees, 45.8% of minority groups were employed by rural school districts, while only 23.7% were reported for urban district schools (Carter et al., 2013). Each of the three research participants in this study described rural schools in this way. Common responses among the three participants in this study revealed that the smaller community in the rural setting is what attracted them to rural schools. Participants described the smaller school communities in South Texas as "warm," supporting strong relationships and allowing superintendents to be visible and involved, with many job responsibilities and opportunities for learning and knowledge acquisition. Belenky et al. (1986) would best explain the participants' responses with connected knowing. Connected knowing addresses women's quest for understanding others and their ideas. At his point of knowing, women realize authority is not always correct. I believe the research participants made a conscious decision to work in rural schools because they connect to the community and they are able to impact its constituents, unlike their probable role in large school

districts where they become another face among the crowds of students and staff.

The community based role of the schools in the rural setting seems to align more closely to the common leadership style and characteristics among women leaders, and particularly Hispanic women leadership. Because of the integrated role of the schools in the community in terms of social activities and the source of pride and identity to the community, the schools serve a community purpose.

Prior research has suggested differences in leadership styles between men and women and these differences may contribute to the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions and seem to shed light on the preference for participants in working in rural school settings (De la Rey, 2005). The reported hallmarks of women's leadership include increased collaboration, consultative decision-making, and providing caring working environments. The women superintendents in the study by De la Rey (2005) felt satisfaction in serving the community and advocating for children and adults in the community. The findings of the present study align with this described leadership style, as the participants described their own leadership and the school community as centered on collaboration and a community working environment.

Thus, the findings of previous research highlighting women's leadership and an increased collaboration, consultative decision-making, and the provision of caring working environments aligned with the leadership style described by the participants in the current study (De la Rey, 2005). Many women who experience success in non-traditional leadership positions have reported rejecting feminine characteristics, adopting practice that is similar to the leadership styles of men (Christman & McClellan, 2005). Women also tend to demonstrate a different conceptualization of power. In prior research by Brunner (2000), female superintendents downplayed the representation of power in the superintendency, choosing instead to highlight

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power as a means of serving, feeling that a sense of power is gained with the success of others. Results of Brunner's (2000) study showed that the female superintendents viewed power as a collaborative, inclusive, consensus building model in which leadership succeeds in concert with others. This notion of power aligns with the participant responses in this present study focused on the school as a center for the community and as a means of serving the community in the rural setting. The terms used in Brunner's study, such as collaborative and inclusive, seem to reflect the familial community mentality of the participants in this study.

Women leaders tend to be more participatory, democratic, sensitive, nurturing, and caring. In addition, women have been found to have conflict management skills and interpersonal skills, to be excellent listeners, tolerant, and have empathy (De la Rey, 2005). De la Rey (2005) noted these differences can be attributed to gender-specific socialization practices and life experiences. This leads to the question as to whether the Hispanic female superintendents experience discrimination due to these differences.

Research Question 3

The third research question asked: To what extent have Hispanic female superintendents felt discriminated against? This final research question sought to determine discrimination issues among the participants. Two of the participants in this study did not report feeling discrimination in any way. One participant asserted that it is not uncommon for schools to have female superintendents and feels that gender discrimination is not a factor. One participant even felt her ascension to the position was quicker than her male counterparts.

However, the third participant shared experiences of gender bias reportedly resulting from the good-old-boy network and experiences of sexual harassment. In addition, this

participant noted that rural communities in particular demonstrate a male dominated mentality. For example, the expectations from going out to have a drink after work was not equivalent among male groups and female/male groups. Although the participant reported resisting sexual advances due to her strong ethics and professionalism, she recognized the gender bias related to top leadership positions. As a researcher from a critical feminist perspective, women have experienced gender discrimination and sexual discrimination, specifically regarding sexual harassment for years. In a culture where males have been expected to set the rules and standards, the norm has been for women to be submissive to man's needs, even when those women are professional school leaders. Until we as a society transform our way of thinking; stop perpetuating unconscious behaviors and actions that allow girls to believe they are second to men; and we demand women be respected for what they know and their hard work, the man's world will continue to exist.

Thus, this present study supported both evidence of discrimination issues and the lack of noted discrimination in the experiences of the participants. With prior research supporting discrimination as a hindrance to women achieving the position of superintendent, this study provides evidence to contradict the notion of universality of such discrimination among this population. Previous women superintendents, according to Sampson and Davenport (2010), achieved success in their leadership roles by coping with power, conflict, and authority, and maintaining their focus on the opportunity they had. However, participants described feeling isolated because of their gender and race, which led them to question their own leadership capabilities. These Hispanic women superintendents found it difficult to accept compliments on their leadership due to cultural norms, despite their successful leadership within the school community and high student performance. Rather than accept personal praise, the participants

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expressed attributing their success to teamwork and collaborative efforts.

Although this may seem like a hindrance to leadership skills, it actually may serve these women well in a rural community that maintains a focus on a collaborative, familial work environment. Prior research has suggested that Hispanic, female superintendents best fit in a school in which the superintendent serves to represent the minority group (Brunner, 1999). Findings in this study align with such a statement, as the three research participants seemed to describe discovering a purpose in serving the school community. This study reinforces the underpinnings of race, gender, and culture positively impacting women's response to power and success. This research also supports movements against deficit thinking and best aligns with Yosso (2005) and her description of cultural wealth, which Hispanics have an abundance of, in familial and aspirational capital.

The literature described some female superintendents feeling culturally scrutinized; however, these participants remained contrary to gender and racial expectations, related to being a Hispanic and female leader, choosing to support their leadership through teaching and leading others toward a greater understanding. This aligned somewhat with prior research by Marcano (1997), who found that female Hispanic superintendents were accepted easily into school communities that were comprised of a majority Hispanic population; whereas, in contrast, in school communities that were demographically dissimilar to the superintendent, it was more difficult to gain acceptance. In this study, however, the participants described their own leadership focused on educating the community toward acceptance. The participants emphasized how female administrators reject conformity to the social gender expectation of leadership and that their resilience was critical to their ability to succeed and maintain their leadership positions.

Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young (2005) report, "perceptions that women are in organizations to support and not to direct. The perceptions of culture, ethnicity, and gender roles are brought into the workplace and have a profound effect on women of color" (p. 214). As a Hispanic female leader, like my research participants, I combat discreet and invisible biases every day. I have experienced male administrators within their own groups, while in the work place, discussing sports and their weekend plans, while the females work diligently on curriculum and planning. I have also witnessed males being given the 'more significant' projects, such as budgets or building planning, while women are assigned instructional responsibilities. It is research such as this study that highlights the fact women should hold more leadership positions due to their overwhelming presence in teaching, superintendent certification courses, and doctoral programs, as well as their career preparedness coupled with substantial knowledge and skillsets.

Conclusion

Female administrators seem to have more success in attaining positions of superintendent in rural areas compared to those in urban schools, with statistics showing 24% of superintendent positions held by women in 2010 and of those, 55% of those women were employed in rural areas (United States Department of Education, 2012). Despite this progress, difficulties for women achieving superintendent level administrative positions remain. The analysis of data obtained from the research participants addressed the research questions. The three research questions were: which factors contributed to the low number of women superintendents, particularly Hispanic and other minority women, why have women been able to secure positions in rural areas, and whether the participants experienced discrimination as a factor contributing to the low prevalence of Hispanic female superintendents in rural schools of deep South Texas.

Results pointed to four themes revealed from the data analysis including: extended parental support, familial work environment, networks, and versatility. These themes are used in conjunction with prior research to discuss the experiences of participants, highlighting factors affecting the prevalence of Hispanic women in the education field attaining the level of superintendent.

In my own experience of being a Hispanic female leader in public schools and simultaneously a researcher exploring why few women hold the position of school superintendents in rural areas, I had to reflect on my own perspectives. My position as a Hispanic female school leader allowed me to be accepted more easily into the private world of the three superintendent participants; I was an insider. They saw me and I was like them. The participants felt their stories were not foreign to me. However, as a researcher, preserving the integrity of qualitative work, I had to separate myself as an outsider in order to observe and report without bias. It was a strength to be able to join the participants in their stories and their experiences due to a sense of similarity and likeness; nonetheless, this was a limitation because I had to continuously reflect on how and if I was being neutral in my data analysis. As an insider I was able to collect richer and in-depth data, but as an outsider I had to dig deeper into what research informed me about, not just the participants' responses. The experience of qualitative research in terms of the researcher being the instrument of data collection and analysis, proved to be a dual-role responsibility, charged with continuous reflexivity to ensure quality research.

As a result of this research, it is apparent we can adopt a new paradigm where women leaders can become the norm like males have been for so long. Research studies such as mine are relevant to begin societal transformation. Just as we have learned the

traditional gender roles of males and females, we must also unlearn the biases these labels bring with them. As a society it is essential that we embrace the capacity and potential women offer to leadership in our public schools.

Recommendations for Further Research

Given the noted limitations, further research is recommended to continue the investigation into the factors affecting the ability for female administrators to rise to the level of superintendent. A mixed methods research approach can be considered that would possibly generate different findings. Additional similar research using a larger sample size is recommended to identify additional factors may support limitations on this population. Moreover, other racial or ethnic groups can be included to identify if similar limitations and factors affect other women superintendents of other minority groups. Furthermore, participant samples outside of the region used in this study may yield differential findings. Finally, it is recommended that the findings of this study be used to develop a quantitative examination of the specific factors identified herein to offer the ability to provide generalizations to a larger population of female superintendents. Convincingly, this research study still leaves more questions to be answered with future research, such as: what are the power relationships between male and female school superintendents; what additional factors contribute the underrepresentation of Hispanic females in school leadership positions; and what can society do to transform current paradigms regarding Hispanic female leaders.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviews will be conducted by Irma Castillo, doctoral student at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (email: irma.castillo01@utrgv.edu).

The purpose of this study is intended to explore the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents; to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and to examine the discrimination issues these women may have experienced.

Prior to each interview, the participants will receive an email reminder about the interview date. Before each interview, the participants will be asked where and when will be the most convenient place and time for the interview. The researcher will secure permission before starting each interview. Participants will be allowed to view the transcript of each interview so they may ensure that the researcher accurately captured their responses to the interview questions.

All interview responses will be treated confidentially. Any individually identifiable responses will be securely stored and will only be available to those directly involved in this study. In order to maintain security and confidentiality of all secured data throughout the research study, the researcher will encrypt the information contained within the USB drive using Rohos Mini Drive software and the data stored in the researcher's home computer will be encrypted via BitLocker, a security feature native to Microsoft Windows Enterprise software utilized by the researcher.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at 956-665-2889 or irb@utrgv.edu.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Date

Irma Castillo
2605 Alabama Street
Weslaco, TX 78599
irma.castillo01@utrgv.edu

RE: **A Case Study of Hispanic Female School Superintendents in Rural Schools of the Rio Grande Valley in Deep South Texas**

Dear Irma Castillo,

I am granting permission for you to conduct interviews which will be audio-recorded; the data will then be transcribed by the researcher; Qualtrics software will be used to create, administer, and collect survey data; fieldnotes will be kept by the researcher during all participant observations; and, electronic notes will be kept throughout the document analysis process at Name of City ISD, as part of your UTRGV research project, **A Case Study of Hispanic Female School Superintendents in Rural Schools of the Rio Grande Valley in Deep South Texas**. I understand that participants will be asked to complete a survey, participate in interviews, and be observed at the work place in order to obtain data needed for the study. All participant responses will be collected confidentially; therefore, the researcher will use aliases. All participant data will be reported via a dissertation publication.

If you have any questions regarding site permission, please contact: [INSERT TELEPHONE NUMBER OR CONTACT INFORMATION]

Sincerely,

Mr. or Mrs. President
Name of City School Board President

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please share your family or personal background.

2. What is the highest level of education attained by your parents?

3. In terms of your background, what values and beliefs shaped who you are today both personally and professionally?

4. When did you realize you wanted to become an educational leader?

5. What was the event or moment that triggered this decision?

6. Describe in detail how you began your journey towards the superintendency.

7. Describe how you secured your current superintendency, including any challenges.

8. What barriers, if any, have you experienced during your educational leadership journey due to our gender?

9. What barriers, if any, have you experienced during your educational leadership journey due to your race?

10. What types of discrimination, if any, have you experienced in your educational leadership journey?

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your name?

2. Are you Hispanic based on the following definition: "Americans who identify themselves as being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America and other Spanish-speaking countries"? _____

3. How many years and at what time in your lifetime have you resided in the Rio Grande Valley?

Number of years _____   **AND**

(check 1 or more) ___Childhood; ___Young adult; ___Adulthood; ___Lifetime

4. Marital status? ___Single   ___Married   ___Divorced   ___Widowed

5. Do you have children? ___No. If yes, how many? _____

6. How many years did you teach and at what level(s)?

Number of years _____   **AND**

(fill in the number of years)   _____Elementary; _____Middle school; _____ High school

7. How many years did you serve as a campus level administrator? _____

8. How many years were you employed as a district level administrator? _____

9. How many years have you been a school superintendent? _____

10. Did you earn a Bachelor's degree in education? ___Yes. ___No, I qualified for an

emergency permit or I participated in an alternative certification program.

11. Your Master's degree is in what area and do you have a doctoral degree; if so, in what area?

Master's degree in _____; Doctoral degree ___No/___Yes:_____

12. How soon after securing your Master's or Doctoral degree, did you complete your

superintendent certificate? _____ years after Master's degree; ___concurrent to earning

Master's degree; or _____years after Doctoral degree; ___concurrent to earning Doctoral degree

13. Why did you choose to pursue your superintendent certificate?

14. Generally, were there more females or males in your superintendency courses/program?

___more females; ___more males; ___equal enrollment; ___ unobserved

15. As a female, do you feel you were prepared for the superintendency? Why or Why not?

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E

ONLINE CONSENT FORM

This survey is being conducted by Irma Castillo, doctoral student at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (email: irma.castillo01@utrgv.edu).

The purpose of this study is intended to explore the factors contributing to the low rate of Hispanic female superintendents; to understand the extent to which Hispanic women are more likely to secure positions in small rural school districts; and to examine the discrimination issues these women may have experienced.

This survey should take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If there are any individual questions that you would prefer to skip, simply leave the answer blank.

All survey responses I receive will be treated confidentially and stored on a secure server. However, given that the surveys can be completed from any computer (e.g., personal, work, school), we are unable to guarantee the security of the computer on which you choose to enter your responses. As a participant in my study, I want you to be aware that certain technologies exist that can be used to monitor or record data that you enter and/or websites that you visit.

Any individually identifiable responses will be securely stored and will only be available to those directly involved in this study. Deidentified data may be shared with other researchers in the future, but will not contain information about your individual identity.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at 956-665-2889 or irb@utrgv.edu.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Irma Cervantes Castillo was born in San Juan, Texas and raised in Donna, Texas. She is the daughter of Pablo Cervantes and Marta Olvera Cervantes. She is married to George Castillo and is the proud mother of four children: Nicole, George Jr., Monique, and Ilyssa. Their family resides in Weslaco, Texas. Irma always had a passion for education, as such she graduated from the then-new South Texas High School for Health Professions, known as Med High, in 1992. She then went on to graduate with a Bachelor's of Science degree in 1996, from Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Irma taught high school science for eleven years at Donna ISD, while she earned a Master's degree in Secondary Education from the University of Texas Pan American, in Edinburg, Texas, in 2004. Educational leadership drew her back to Med High in 2007, where she served as assistant principal for seven years. In 2015, she was named the first ever female principal of the nationally recognized Science Academy of South Texas, referred to as Sci Tech, in Mercedes, Texas. Irma completed requirements for the degree of Doctor in Education in May 2016.

Permanent address: 2605 Alabama Street, Weslaco, TX 78599