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MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN URBAN OKLAHOMA: A HERMENUETIC PHENOMENOLOGY

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP and POLICY STUDIES

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents Frank and Elizabeth Lopez. They instilled a “You can do it” attitude that has helped me on my journey. I am sure my mom is smiling in heaven, and probably like my dad saying “finally!” I cannot forget my brothers and sisters, Louis, Rachel, Rebecca, Michael, Philip, Martin and Rosemary. Without their love and support, I could not have finished. I give special thanks to Rachel and Rosemary, my “committee” who shared the family responsibilities in order to give me time to work, and encouraged me along the way. I am truly blessed to have such a wonderful family.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates three Mexican American female school leaders in an urban school district in Oklahoma. To this end hermeneutic phenomenology was used to obtain, analyze and interpret rich descriptive data to explore each of the Mexican American female participant's lived experiences pertaining to their role as educational leaders. Max van Manen's (2014) *Phenomenology of Practice* provided a methodological framework and guide for my study. Max van Manen's five existential life-worlds: temporality (lived time), corporeality (lived body), relationality (lived self-other), spatiality (lived space), and materiality (lived things) is used to analyze the Mexican American female school leaders, lived experiences and to examine how Mexican American females describe the experiences of school leadership in an urban district.

Thematic threads of culture, language, family, education, leadership, and mentoring emerged through data analysis. These themes provide a rich understanding of addressing the research question: What are the lived experiences of Mexican of Mexican America females' as leaders in an urban public school in Oklahoma?

The data in my study revealed several implications for improving school leadership practice in terms of Mexican American female school leaders to include balancing family time with leadership responsibilities, the significance of bilingualism and the importance of building relationships. I address and make specific recommendations related to the issues identified in the theme clusters, *a) Culture, Family, and Language; b) Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers,* and *c) Absence and Desire for Mentoring.*

Keywords*:* hermeneutic phenomenology, Mexican American female, educational leader, urban school, Max van Manen, lived experiences

PROLOGUE

Researchers' Reflexivity and Positionality

As a qualitative researcher, it is my obligation to clarify my role and position in relation to the research question of this study. The concepts of positionality and reflexivity are critical elements of the role of the researcher in this type of study.

McDowell (1992) states that researchers must especially be aware of their own position in relation to the research participants and research setting. In particular, the researcher must establish the insider/outsider status of one's positionality in respect to education, class, race, gender, culture and other factors. This provides us better tools for understanding the dynamics of researching within and across one's culture (England, 1994; Merriam, S. B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M., Kee, Y., Ntseane, Y., and Muhamad, M., 2001; Rose, 1997).

I am a first generation college student, a Mexican American minority, and a woman navigating through an educational system based on *white middle class mainstream values*. I began acquiring the mainstream values in the first grade since I did not attend kindergarten but stayed home with my grandparents. My first experience of school took place in a Texas parochial school system. I learned to obey the teachers (nuns) and stay out of trouble or be severely punished.

My professional experiences began as a bilingual paraprofessional in 1978. Fortunately, I was able to attend college part time through the assistance of a federally funded grant program. After eight years of undergraduate education, I received my bachelor's degree in Spanish education.

As a Spanish/ESL teacher, I have worked in various Oklahoma districts: Kingfisher, Moore, Yukon, Putnam City, Oklahoma City and Edmond. As a teacher, I developed curriculum and management skills. I also learned about curriculum-based and standardized assessment. During this time, I furthered my education and received my master's degree in education with an emphasis in Bilingual/Teaching English as a Second Language. I later moved into a public school administration role collaborating with teachers in five middle schools on English language learners as part of a federal grant as a facilitator. In 2000, I was given an opportunity to work as a facilitator for a Title III Career Ladder federal grant at the University of Central Oklahoma. I continued to work there and in 2007 was hired as a coordinator of another Title III grant project called Supporting Excellent Education for Diverse Students (SEEDS) and as an Instructor in the Bilingual/TESL master's degree program. Currently, I am a doctoral student in the Educational Administration Curriculum and Supervision (EACS) program at the University of Oklahoma (OU). I have my teaching credentials in Spanish, Bilingual/Multicultural education, and English as a Second Language. I also hold Elementary, Middle level and Secondary Principal Certification and hope to add a Ph.D. to my degrees already earned.

All of my above credentials and successes have come through learning how to conform and navigate through the educational system. As impressive as this may be on paper to some, it is not that impressive to my family. Although they have an appreciation for my hard work, they cannot fully understand it.

To my family I am just plain Gina, the designated matriarch of our family by default after the passing of our mother in 2005. It is and always will be about the

family. *Familia* in my Mexican heritage means security, nurturance, love and comfort; it is idealized as something sacred (Brice, 2002). My family is large; there were twelve of us in our household. I have four brothers and three sisters and my grandparents lived with us until they passed away. However, having eight children in ten years is common for a traditional Mexican-American Catholic family, as Brice (2002) noted in his work *The Hispanic Child: Speech, Language, Culture and Education*. He points out large Mexican-American Catholic families are linked to spirituality; children are considered gifts from God, or God's will.

Both sets of my grandparents came from Mexico and immigrated to the U.S. My mother's side was from Guadalajara and my father's side from Guanajuato. My grandparents on my mother's side were both migrant workers who picked crops, until they settled in Ft. Worth Texas. My mother was born in Minnesota; her family picked potatoes and Minnesota was on the agricultural migratory route. My father's family worked in the meat packing factories and other factories in the Ft. Worth, Texas area. Neither sets of grandparents spoke English, but not much English was required to do that type of blue-collar labor. Both of my parents are bilingual and biliterate but their Spanish writing skills are very weak, since the only practice they had in literacy was in Spanish classes that neither of them took very seriously since the teachers were Caucasian Americans.

Thus, my siblings and I are second generation Mexican-Americans. Typically, by the third generation the language is lost unless there is a concerted effort to keep it (Brice, 2002). I made that concerted effort to maintain my language skills and I am a firm believer in the benefits of bilingualism.

My professional connection with the Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS) began in 1978 as my family had just moved to Oklahoma from Ft. Worth, Texas. I was hired as a bilingual teacher's aide and maintained that position until I graduated with my BA in Spanish Education in 1986. I continued to teach in various districts as both a Spanish teacher and English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, until graduating with my Master's degree in 1996 in ESL and Bilingual/Multicultural Education. Throughout my public school teaching career, I have continued to be involved in OKCPS as a guest speaker to classrooms, as a consultant, as a member of advisory boards, and as a student teacher supervisor to list a few. My interest in Mexican American women in leadership roles stems from reflections on of my own educational development over the years and from my observation of the dramatically increasing Hispanic student population in the Oklahoma City area in recent years. I have also observed the lack of Hispanic role models in general, both as teachers and as principals. Since my arrival in 1978, there has been very little increase in the number of Mexican American female administrators in OKCPS, yet the number of Hispanic children in the schools continues to rise (Retrieved July 7, 2014 Oklahoma City Public Schools http://www.okcps.org/).

My reflection on this reality led me to the following research question: What are Mexican American females' lived experiences in an urban public school leadership role in Oklahoma? While I believe this research will add to a small but growing body of knowledge, the question is important to me personally and as a researcher. Being a Mexican American female now in higher education in Oklahoma, I encounter a similar question, what are the lived experiences of Mexican

American women in higher education? Even though the setting is different, the overarching question is the same: What are the lived experiences of a Mexican American female in an educational system? I have observed the continuing trend of an increasing population of Mexican Americans who are not finishing school and becoming dropouts. It is difficult to reach out to Mexican American students if they drop out before ever encountering a role model who is like them, and who understands them and believes in them. I have witnessed this in my own family through the experiences of my nieces and nephews. Not enough Mexican American children stay in school long enough to receive their diploma. Even fewer are going to college, whether by choice or financial circumstances. Those who do "make it" through the educational system must continue to prove themselves as competent and adapt to the mainstream educational culture. The few who manage to obtain a position in school leadership have very few role models or mentors, especially in Oklahoma.

The reality of the lack of Mexican American females in an urban setting in Oklahoma is quite real. Sharing the essence of the experiences of Mexican American females in an educational leadership role will provide valuable information for other women who may be able to relate to the participants' stories and give them insight into the working of an urban school system. This information could provide them with the spark of inspiration they need to choose a career in educational leadership.

Because of my own experiences with overcoming some of the adversities that many Mexican American women face, I feel the need to share my story. This will

allow me to be more self-aware, reflective, and to examine my own biases. This is consistent with the idea of reflexivity, as defined by Schwant (2007).

I believe my experiences will allow me to truly relate, understand and more accurately interpret my participants' stories since our backgrounds may be similar. I have my own lived experience as a Mexican American female in an educational setting to provide me schema for what my participants share. As a researcher, I was mindful of my pre-understanding, suppositions, and assumptions that predisposed me to interpret the nature of the phenomenon I studied.

I chose to emphasize my personal story through an original poem. I am a musician-songwriter by avocation, and after reading the literature on women in history and the barriers faced by Latina women in particular with regard to school leadership roles. I was inspired to write the following poem. I am a Mexican American female who is "trying to make it" in higher education. I have been fortunate enough to be able to continue my education. I would never have dreamed that I would be in a doctoral program and already working at a university in a tenure track position. My doctoral degree completion will be a dream come true, one that I never thought possible. My completion will help me to dispel the ever-present self-doubt of my abilities. Although I am no *Robert Frost,* I believe others may be able to relate and find meaning in the words of my poem, my story.

¿No Puede Ser? (How can it be?)

In my infancy I was loved by my *familia,*

Mom, Dad, brothers, sisters, *abuelos, tíos, and primos*

and one by one we went off to school

To learn to play by a different set of rules

¿No Puede Ser? (How can it be?)

Little by little I learned in school

my family was different, and so were the rules

my food, my speech, my color, my physique

What does it mean to be in the mainstream?

¿No Puede Ser? (How can it be?)

Don't be so loud, Don't stand so close

Don't run around, I needed some hope

only speak English

and we will let you in

but I was born here, what's the difference then?

¿No Puede Ser? (How can it be?)

And so it began *adiós* to my language

abuelita, don't cry

Hasta la vista, until we meet again

deeper into the system I tried

but did I get in! No!

¿No Puede Ser? (How can it be?)

I did my best to assimilate

I raised my hand, and learned to wait

I spoke only English, wasn't that great?

Again I was asked, aren't you Mexican?

Why don't you speak Spanish then?

¿No Puede Ser? (How can it be?)

So back to the beginning I had to go

Hola, Buenos días, and *¿Cómo está?*

Yes, learned to speak Spanish and learned it well

Now I am bilingual as hell!

¿No Puede Ser? (How can it be?)

In my journey I have learned

to take the best from both worlds.

the rules are still different for me I know

Why are they different? I'll never know.

¿No Puede Ser? (How can it be?)

I will never be tall, blond and blue-eyed

But, I still have American pride

I will always be of Mexican descent

proud of my *raíces* and *tradiciones*

¿No Puede Ser? (How can it be?)

That I would ever want to be anyone but me

by Regina López

(2013)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"I was raised in what I consider to be not a melting pot, but a salad bowl. The onion stayed the onion, the tomato stayed the tomato, the lettuce stayed the lettuce, with maybe a little Russian or Italian dressing. And it tasted real good. No one lost their identity, and I thought that was what life was like."

Olmos, Edward James Actor (1947-)

Discovering what works for minority women becomes increasingly important since according to the 2010 census, the Hispanic population increased by 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). This 15.2 increase accounts for over half of the 27.3 million increase in the total population of the United States. Specifically, the Mexican origin population had the largest increase of 54 percent. The Mexican population grew from 20.6 million in 2000 to 31.8 million in 2010. In 2011, one-quarter (25%) of public elementary school children were Hispanic. Hispanics make up 21% of enrollment in all public high schools. By the year 2036, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanics are projected to compose one-third of the U.S. children ages 3 to 17 (U.S. Census Bureau retrieved 2012).

According to Pew Hispanic Center (2011) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data, more than 12.4 million Hispanics were enrolled in the nation's public schools pre-K through 12th grade in October 2011. For the first time in public school data, one-quarter of public elementary school children were Hispanic. Hispanics also made up twenty-one percent of all public high school enrollments. Although Hispanics are at a new high in numbers, only 76.3% have a high school diploma or

GED and are eligible to attend college. Only half of the completers (45.6%) were enrolled in a two or four-year college where they accounted for approximately 2.1 million. This is lower than Caucasians who have 51% completers accounting for approximately 7.9 million. From this number, only 13.2% of Hispanics received an associate's degree and 8.5% received a bachelor's in 2010. This telling data is significant when considering the importance of preparing our youth to become tomorrows' leaders.

Oklahoma presents a similar picture of Hispanic student's underachievement (Pew Research Center, 2014). I chose to focus on Oklahoma for this study because of my work experiences in several of the metropolitan school districts with rapidly growing Hispanic populations and with extremely low representations of Hispanics as educational leaders in school administration.

In 2000, the Oklahoma City population was 660,448 and the total Hispanic population was 57,336 (8.7%). In 2010, the total population in Oklahoma City was 718,633 and the total Hispanic population was 108,543 accounting for 15% of the city's total population. The population of Oklahoma City increased by 9% between 2000 to 2010 but the Hispanic population increased by an astounding 51,207 at 89% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

The large number of Hispanic population is seen in the demographics of urban school districts such as Tulsa Public Schools and Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS), which is the largest urban school district in the state. According to the OKCPS website, their total student population in 2013-2014 was 43,000

students. The OKCPS district is located in the center of Oklahoma and covers 135.5 square miles.

OKCPS consists of 55 neighborhood elementary schools, 17 secondary schools, 4 special centers and 13 charter schools. The district population by ethnicity breakdown is as follows: African American 27 %, Asian 3%, Hispanic 45%, Native American 5%, and White 20%. Of the total population, 31.6% have been identified as English language learners (ELL). This ELL population represents more than 40 native languages with Spanish being a majority. In contrast, fewer teachers and administrators reflect the ethnic demographics of the student population.

It is important for Hispanic students to have role models of teachers, administrators and other educational personnel who have similar life experiences and background (Sanchez, Thorton & Unsinger, 2009). However, OKCPS district profile report of personnel classification for 2012-2013, (OKCPS, 2013 Website: http://www.okcps.org) indicates there is shortage of Hispanic leaders and teachers. Including the central office personnel, there were 228 employees who were categorized as “administrators”. Of the 228 employees, nine females self-identified themselves as Hispanic. Of those nine Hispanic women only six are actually principals or vice-principals, making them the least represented ethnicity group in OKCPS in 2014 (OKCPS, 2014 http://www.okcps.org/).

I explored the lived experiences of the Mexican American female administrators in an urban district in order to understand their experiences in regards to their professional goals and positions of leadership as Mexican American females. Because the generic term ‘Hispanic’ is used in identifying these individuals, there

was no way to know with any certainty how many of those six self-identified "Hispanics" were Mexican American until I contacted them. Given the limited number of female Mexican American school leaders in Oklahoma, my sample size to ask for voluntary participation in my study was limited to this fact. Hence, the total number of potential participants contacted for my study was four female school leaders. Three participants met my study criteria of being bilingual, working or worked in an urban district, and willing to participate in my study. Three of these individuals participated in this study.

This study used hermeneutic phenomenology to obtain, analyze, and interpret descriptive data to explore each of the Mexican American female participants' lived experiences pertaining to their role as educational leaders in an urban district. Max van Manen's *Phenomenology of Practice* (2014) provided a methodological framework and guide for my study. This study addresses the following research question: What are Mexican American females' lived experiences in an urban public school leadership role in Oklahoma?

To this end, hermeneutic phenomenology is primarily a philosophic method for discovering or drawing determinate conclusions of the phenomenon being studied. This method realizes that insights come to individuals in the mode of musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed with sources and meanings of lived meaning (van Manen, 2014). Therefore, exploring the lived experiences of Mexican American female administrators in an urban setting in Oklahoma, viewed through this method, has shed light on the lack of Mexican American females in a leadership role.

Background

Mexican Americans and Education

"One of the greatest things you have in life is that no one has the authority to tell you what you want to be. You're the one who'll decide what you want to be. Respect yourself and respect the integrity of others as well. The greatest thing you have is your self-image, a positive opinion of yourself. You must never let anyone take it from you."

Jaime Escalante, Educator

In trying to understand the under-representation of Mexican-American women in educational leadership roles, research shows women of color face multiple challenges based on a history of oppression and marginalization (see Grant and Simmons, 2008, Ortiz; 1982; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Conventional strategies that have been used and found successful to retain minority men and women administrators may not work with Latinos (Grant & Simmons, 2008). Their development differs from that of non-Mexican American women and men. Social issues for Mexican American women are brought about due to the components of values and culture being foundational in their career choice process (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Ortiz, 1982; Rivera, Anderson & Middleton, 1999).

The under-representation of Mexican American women begins with the educational process. Currently, the educational needs of the Hispanic population are not being met. According to the National Center for Policy Analysis (2007), 22.4 percent of Hispanics, age 16 to 24 dropped out in 2005. The Hispanic student dropout rate is more than double the rate of African American students (10.4%) and

three times that of Caucasians students (6 %). These statistics are alarming as graduation rates are fundamental indicators of whether or not the nation's public school system is educating our youth to be productive citizens (National Center for Policy Analysis, 2007). The Alliance for Education (2007) estimates that 85 to 90 percent of high-wage jobs will require some postsecondary education and having a high school diploma and skills to succeed in college or the work place. High school graduation is valued because it usually leads to higher income that affects individuals, communities' and nations.

Educated citizens have greater productivity and economic growth (Delong, Katz & Goldin, 2003). Educational attainment has also been linked as a predictor of health (Berger, & Leigh, 1989), mortality (Lleras-Muney, 2005), teen childbearing (Black, Devereux & Salvanes, 2004), marital outcomes (Stevenson, & Wolfers, 2007), crime (Lochner, & Moretti, 2004), and a range of other areas. Considering the above factors, how will minorities, specifically Mexican Americans achieve the American Dream without a strong, basic education?

Much has been written about factors that possibly play a role in the underachievement of Mexican Americans in the educational system from elementary school through college (Cummins, 1989; Helgesen, 2009; Iber, 1992; Valverde, 1986). Carillo (2008) states Latino students in the public school system often suffer psychological, sociological and economic costs because of assimilation and acculturation. These factors include language preference, cultural heritage, cultural identification, ethnic pride and affiliation, ethnic social orientation and perceived discrimination. It is important to consider the effect of these factors on Latino

students because of the role they play in educational underachievement and the strong influence they have on “the self", which Blumer (1986) describes as the simple symbolic interaction of one's self and society.

The educational underachievement of Mexican American students’ in school is attributed to the perceived meaningless of the experience and culturally based interaction between teacher and students. Tinto (1987) identified factors that contributed to the withdrawal of Mexican American students from college in his theory of student departure. The theory focused on three major categories including background characteristics, individual characteristics and other outside characteristics. Tinto’s theory identified background characteristics, including family background, socioeconomic status, and parent’s education, quality of relationship with family, interests, and expectations of parents. Individual characteristics were also considered and these included the student’s ability, grade performance, and standardized test performance. Past educational experiences, environment of school setting, personal goals, and commitment were also mentioned, as well as the possible influence of gender. Although Tinto’s model for the dropout rate is related to students in higher education, the factors seem to be also relevant to high school.

Another factor to consider in understanding the under-representation of Hispanics in educational leadership positions is the extent to which differences in English language proficiency may play a role to career advancement because language is considered a factor for educational success (Warren, 1996). This is significant when looking to develop educational leaders from the public school population. Warren (1996) suggests that if Mexican Americans were as fluent in

English as white Anglo students were, the gap between the mainstream in achievement could be reduced.

Because language difference is considered a factor in educational success as well as career advancement, the dropout phenomenon among Mexican Americans needs to be traced back and include an analysis of the elementary schools. The success and failure in education of Mexican American students begins upon entry to the school system.

Dropping out and disengaging in school does not just start at the high school level; it starts when limited and non-English speakers first show up at school at any level. The engagement with the school system begins with the reception these families receive when they show up to enroll their children (Warren, 1996).

Family influence variables are another widely studied area with regard to the educational attainment of Mexican Americans. There is a significant relationship between a student's sibling dropping out and the individual student's risk of dropping out (Valverde, 1986). Family relationships are a cultural value in many Mexican American homes. Therefore, if a brother or sister drops out of school, their sibling may also drop out as an act of solidarity or not wanting to appear better than their sibling. Parent's attitudes and parenting styles can also influence educational attainment. Most Mexican American parents want their children to have a better education than they did (Valverde, 1986). However, they are socialized in their home culture and not the culture of American public schools, which is based on White middle class values. This mismatch in cultural values and expectations may

contribute to the difficulties for Mexican American students to succeed in school (Faltis, 2006).

Peers are another factor that influences student dropout rates. An analysis of social behavior in schools found that Mexican American students were more likely to report having higher numbers of friends in school, as well as placing more importance on their friendships. Another factor is students' perceptions of themselves as students, their own self-esteem, and perseverance. Iadicola (1980) suggests that Hispanic students have lower levels of aspirations and expectations to graduate from high school than either African American or Caucasian students. However, a later research study by Casas, Furlong, Solberg, and Carranza (1990) reported that in the rating of importance of graduating, there was no difference between successful Mexican American students and those students considered at-risk. Ream and Rumberger (2008) note that it is unclear how the role of close friendships and rating of importance for high school graduation influences Mexican American student's decisions to stay in school.

In Texas, where there are large numbers of Mexican immigrants, Perreria, Mullan and Lee (2006) find that the differences in human, cultural, school and community capitol can be attributed to the differences in dropout rates. They also find, compared to their parents, first generation immigrants are less likely to be high school dropouts, but the relative gains in schooling attainment decreases by the second and third generation.

Mexican Americans and Educational Leadership Challenges

"Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future, and the future is ours."

César Chávez

The imbalanced representation of Hispanic women in leadership roles as compared to Caucasian and African American women is significant because of the potential impact their presence could have on the academic success of Hispanic children in the public schools (Méndez-Morse, 1999). This mismatch of student minority population and the number of minority principals is a problem. The lack of Latina principals translates into a lack of mentors and educational leadership role models for Hispanic women who wish to pursue this career (Kohli, 2009).

The obstacles for Hispanic, or more specifically, Mexican Americans, in pursuit of the elusive American Dream pose a daunting task for schools and educators. Research has shown the overall presence of minority educational leadership in schools can contribute to improvement in educational attainment among Hispanic youth. There is evidence that shows that minority administrators and teachers are effective role models (Magdaleno, 2006; Tillman, 2004). Sanchez, Thorton and Unsinger (2009) found that minority administrators and teachers are effective role models because they share cultural understanding and experiences. This allows them a unique opportunity to connect with students, parents and other stakeholders. This role modeling is significant to those learners' future aspirations

and identity development because they can raise the students comfort level, motivation and achievement in school (Sanchez, Thorton & Unsinger, 2009). The National Council of la Raza (NCLR) echoed this idea and added that Hispanic administrators provide a needed connection between the parents and the school (Fisher, 1998). Hispanic principals can provide guidance to parents and students who are unfamiliar with the educational system. As Hispanic principals, they understand the cultural differences of the school setting, the language barriers, and obstacles their students will face because they also had to face them.

Moreover, minority educational leadership in schools that represent the cultural and ethnic groups that make up society is important for all students because they will become adults entering a diverse society. Minority principals can make unique contributions to schools with high minority populations, such as raising the students comfort level, motivation and achievement in school (Sanchez, Thorton & Unsinger, 2009). However, the growth of minority leadership, particularly, Hispanic educational leaders, has not kept pace with the shifting population demographics. Minorities and women continue to be under-represented in educational leadership roles in general, and the percentage is even smaller for minority women in leadership roles.

The lack of women in a school leadership role such as a school principal is not only a national but also a worldwide phenomenon (Coleman 2003). One-half of secondary teachers in the US are women, yet they are in the minority in secondary administrative positions (Coleman 2003; Mc Lay & Brown 2001; Morris 1999).

Tallerico (2000) suggested that shortages in administration might stem from barriers from within the job or system itself. He reported that the underemployment of women candidates could be due to system-wide obstacles, including biases, social norms, and concerns over commitment to family.

Mexican American women are located at a nexus of intersecting hierarchical power relations. They are positioned subordinately as women, as a member of an economically disadvantaged class and a member of a minority group (Briscoe, 2009). Other employment challenges to Mexican American women include cultural stereotypes, access to influential people, and lack of effective mentoring (Catalyst, 2003; DeAnda, 2005; Vélez-Ibánez, 2004). Research on Hispanic women leaders indicates that family support for achieving educational goals is also crucial (Méndez-Morse, 1999). Most women leaders face the act of juggling competing roles. These roles such as leader, wife, mother, or caretaker of aging parents, are all important (Loder, 2005).

An investigation of minority women in leadership studies is important, because the literature on effective leadership (Coleman, 2003; McLay & Brown, 2001; Méndez- Morse, 1999; Morris, 2000) indicates that the qualities that have been identified as crucial for affecting student learning and school change are, in fact, overlapping. Leaders with the natural skills and management styles are already suited for women in leadership positions. Couple this with the added benefits of providing role models and identity development for the growing Hispanic student population, and the increasing need for Hispanic women as school leaders becomes self-evident. Again, the imbalanced representation of Hispanic women in leadership roles is

significant because of the potential impact their presence could have on the academic success of Hispanic children in the public schools.

Several questions remain, how do we increase Hispanic representation when the system that young Hispanic females must navigate in order to reach leadership positions is the very system that must change? How can the development of Hispanic women leaders in education occur if the navigation of the entire educational system from kindergarten to college is a constant conflict? From those rare Hispanic women who have managed to achieve some level of success in educational leadership roles, what can we learn about the challenges and barriers they overcame, and their personal and cultural characteristics that may enable them to persevere and be effective school leaders? What are the life world experiences of Hispanic women in leadership?

Contribution to Theory and Practice

Other studies about Hispanic women in leadership roles include Beck-Lethlean's (2008) case study of *Latina Women Negotiating the Process to and Through Higher Education*; Carr's (2008) narrative inquiry on *Social Challenge of Being Mexican American Working as a Professional Educator in a Bicultural Dominate Community*; Enríquez-Damian's (2009) heuristic study on *Leadership on Mexican American Women in Education: Challenges and Rewards*; Glante's (2010) quantitative study on *The Influence of Cultural Factors on Mexican American Women in Leadership Roles in El Paso County, Texas*; Vásquez-Guignard's (2010) phenomenological study *Latina University Professors Insights into Journeys of Those Who Strive to Leadership Within Academia*; and Wurshen and Sherman's

(2008) study on *Women Secondary School Principals: Multicultural Voices from the Field*. Garza's (2008) *First-Time Superintendent: Challenges to Leadership for Social Justice* and Pennington's (2007) *African American Woman Quitting the Workplace* both use auto-ethnography as a methodology in their studies of both Hispanic and African American subjects.

My study is unique; it is situated in an Oklahoma urban school district and explores Mexican American females in an educational leadership role. This situated site and population has not been researched. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology to discover what it means to be a Mexican American female in a leadership role in an urban school in Oklahoma, is not, I have found, to be commonly used. Most studies seem to use case study, narrative inquiry or auto-ethnography. I consider my participants as pioneers in this area since Oklahoma urban districts have so few Mexican American female administrators. Therefore, discovering their lived experiences and sharing the participants' stories add to the small but growing body of knowledge in the area of understanding minority female leadership. I have yet to find another study that researched specifically this population in this setting in Oklahoma.

Sharing the lived experience of the few Mexican American female educational leaders found in urban schools in Oklahoma may lead to a better understanding of ways to encourage and cultivate more Mexican American women to pursue school leadership roles. The completion of this research study adds new information to the body of empirical literature specific to understanding the lived experiences of Mexican American women in an urban public school leadership role.

This study explored van Manen's (2014) life worlds: *relationality, corporeality, spatiality, temporality* and *materiality* of my participants, as well as the emergent themes of *Culture, Family and Language*; *Leadership Features and Leadership Successes and Barriers*; and *Absence and Desire for Mentoring*. The study findings illuminate information particular to understanding female minority school leaders' role in Oklahoma urban public school systems.

A review of the literature has helped me to discover many things about myself personally and professionally as a Mexican American female in higher education, as well as my experience in the education system as a whole. Sharing the participants' stories and insights of their accomplishments and struggles in educational leadership is important because of the disparities that still exist in the educational system evidenced by the low representation of Hispanic females in leadership roles. Furthermore, the impact of their influence on Hispanic children cannot be measured if they are not in positions of educational leadership.

Problem Statement and Research Question

It is important for Hispanic students to have role models of teachers, administrators and other educational personnel who have similar life experiences and background (Sánchez, Thorton & Unsinger, 2009). Oklahoma's urban districts have experienced a rapidly growing Hispanic student population. In my work experiences in several Oklahoma metropolitan school districts, I saw a low number of Mexican American women in a leadership role. I wondered why. Can the lived experiences of the few Mexican American women in leadership roles shed light on this phenomenon? This problem led me to investigate, why there are so few. This thought

guided my research question: What are Mexican American females' lived experiences in an urban public school leadership role in Oklahoma?

Research Method

I used van Manen's (2014) methodological process because it allowed me to explore my participants' lived experiences. He stated, "Phenomenology is primarily a philosophic method for questioning, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions. But in this questioning there exist the possibilities and potentialities for experiencing openings, understanding, insights…" (p.29). Insights into the phenomenon of Mexican American female administrators in an urban school setting in Oklahoma were what I was seeking. To this end, I selected my site and study participants. I began the data collection process of my participants' lived experiences through in-depth interviews. After which I began my analysis of the data and the lived experiences according to van Manen's (2014) five existential life-worlds: *temporality* (lived time), *relationality* (lived self-other), *spatiality* (lived space), *materiality* (lived things) and *corporeality* (lived body). From this analysis emerged the theme clusters of a) *Culture, Family and Language*, b) *Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers*; and c) *Absence and Desire for Mentoring*.

Significance of the Study

Most of the existing literature focuses on the barriers that inhibit the achievement of Latinas in comparison to their non-minority counterparts (Steward, 1995). Therefore, my study adds to the literature of the lived experiences of Mexican American female leaders in an urban public school setting in Oklahoma in that it

focuses on the evolution and progress of their careers in education. My study also presents the emergent theme clusters that influenced their lived experiences as school leaders.

It is my hope that this research may inspire other Mexican American females to believe that reaching their educational and leadership goals is possible. By highlighting Mexican American females who may have taken "the road less travelled," (Frost 1916), my hope is that the findings of this study will make a difference and be a source of inspiration to other Mexican American females to pursue their educational aspirations as teachers, principals, superintendents, or college professors in higher education.

Definitions of Terms

I am defining administrators for my study as principals or assistant principals. Details of the methodology, the selection of the research participants, and how the data was collected are reported in chapter three of this study.

Throughout my literature review, the terms Hispanic and Latina are used interchangeably. There is still much discussion on which term is more appropriate to use to identify this population. According to Retta and Brink (2007) in their report on cross culture communications, 75% of respondents to the survey do not self-identify with either term. Most prefer instead to identify with some other term referring to a specific country of origin (e.g. Mexican American). Research from the Pew Hispanic Center (2007) found that only 25% of both first and second generation Latinos report using Latino or Hispanic to express their identity. My study is specific to Mexican American women; however, they may choose to identify themselves as

Latinas, Hispanics or *Mexicanas*. In this study, the three participants identified themselves as Mexican Americans. Hence, I use their self-describe identifier to reference them in presenting their lived experiences of being a school leader.

For the purpose of this study, I am using the following definitions given by the Collins English Dictionary and the American Heritage Dictionary unless otherwise cited from another source. I will be also using the following terms, as they are used interchangeably; Hispanic, Latino/Latina, *Mexicano*/Mexicana and Mexican American according to each participant's self-identification.

Bilingual: "Able to speak two languages, especially with fluency, written or expressed in two languages, a bilingual person." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Community: "A group of people who live in the same area, a group of people who have the same interest, religion, race, etc., a group of nations." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Corporeality: "Lived Body-How the body is experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied." (van Manen, 2014)

Culture: "Is the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge, which constitute the shared bases of social action. The attitudes, feelings, values, and behavior that characterize and inform society as a whole or and social group." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Diversity: "Recognition and acknowledgement of differences that are unique to each group that is a part of the multicultural community." (The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition n.d.) Education: "The action or process of teaching someone especially in a school, college or university, the

knowledge, skill, and understanding that you get from attending a school, college or university, a field of study that deals with the methods and problems of teaching." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.) Employment: "Use, purpose, activity in which one engages or is employed, an instance of such activity, the act of employing." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Family: "A group of people who are related to each other, a person's children, a group of related people including people who lived in the past." "Family." (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Gender: "The sex of an individual, male or female, based on reproductive anatomy" (The American Heritage® Stedman's Medical Dictionary, n.d.) Hispanic: "A person of Latin-American or Spanish descent living in the US." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Language: "The system of words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other, any one of the systems of human language that are used and understood by a particular group of people, words of a particular kind. Language." (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Latino/Latina: "An inhabitant of the US who is of Latin American origin." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Leader: "A person who rules, guides, or inspires others; head." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Leadership: "The position or function of a leader, specifically for this study the term will refer to the roles of administrative position in a school setting as a school principal." (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Lived experiences: “The lifeworld-the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, or reflect on it” (van Manen, 1990)

Materiality: “Lived Things -How things are experienced with respect to the phenomenon.” (van Manen, 2014)

Mentor: “A wise or trusted advisor or guide.” (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Mexican-American: “A term used to reflect Mexican Americans' dual heritages and mixed culture.” (The American Heritage® Stedman's Medical Dictionary, n.d.)

Minority: “A group that is racially, politically, religiously and ethnically different, from a larger group of which it is a part. For purposes of this study I will consider members of historically underrepresented groups in positions of authority, specifically, African American, Hispanics, Native American, and Asian American as minority.” (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Relationality: “Lived Self-Other-How self and others are experienced with respect to the phenomenon.” (van Manen, 2014)

Spatiality: “Lived Space-How space is experienced with respect to the phenomenon.” (van Manen, 2014)

Successful: “Having succeeded in one’s endeavors, marked by a favorable outcome, having obtained fame, wealth, etc.” (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Temporality: “Lived Time – How time is experienced with respect to the phenomenon.” (van Manen, 2014)

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation begins with a prologue to reveal the researcher's reflexivity and positionality. Following the prologue, Chapter 1 introduced the growth of the Hispanic population nationally and locally specific to Oklahoma. Chapter 1 also drew attention to Mexican Americans in education in general and the challenges Mexican Americans face in educational leadership roles. Chapter 1 further provided a discussion of the contribution to theory and practice, the problem statement and research question, an overview of the research method, significance of the study, and definition of terms.

Chapter 2 is the literature review and explores the interpretive lenses empirical studies have used to describe effective leadership and leadership theory. The literature review discusses empirical studies that examine women in educational leadership roles and the challenges they face when pursuing these roles. Further, Chapter 2 provides specific empirical literature about Mexican American females noting the specific barriers and challenges they face when in leadership roles.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology. The research design of this study is hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology or interpretive, descriptive phenomenology is more a method of questioning rather than answering. It involves using reflective questioning to gain insights into the phenomenon in order for it to be seen. This research method guided the data collection process, data analysis, research protocols, study participants and interview questions as presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 describes the study findings and contains individual profiles of the participants, as related to van Manen's (2014) life worlds: *relationality, corporeality, spatiality, temporality* and *materiality*. Excerpts and quotes are used to illustrate the lived experiences of the participants, as well as to further describe the key themes that emerged in understanding the participants' lived experiences as female Mexican American school leaders.

Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the findings as linked to empirical literature and summary based on the key themes of a) *Culture, Family and Language*, b) *Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers*; and c) *Absence and Desire for Mentoring*. Also included are implications for school leadership practices, recommendations for school leadership practice in Oklahoma and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Introduction

"To lead people, walk beside them...As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear, and the next best, the people hate...When the best leader's work is done the people say, 'We did it ourselves!'"

Lao Tzu, Philosopher

In examining the lived experiences of Mexican American female leaders, it is important first to have an understanding of what literature tells us about leadership in general, and then to focus more specifically on women in leadership roles.

Leadership theory abounds, ever moving on into so-called minorities and women. Because much of it may not provide the best way to interpret my data, this chapter will only summarize particular foci. Therefore, my literature review is organized into three main sections. The first section focuses on Effective Leadership and Theories. The second section Women in Educational Leadership and the Barriers on the Road to Leadership. The third section is specifically looking at my target population, Mexican American Female Leadership and Barriers of Latina Women.

Effective Leadership and Theories

Defining leadership is not as precise and refined as one might think. Bennis (1989) opined that, "leadership is like beauty- it is hard to define, but you know it when you see it" (p. 418). Another typical definition provided by Chemers (1997)

asserts that, “leadership is a of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task" (p.1).

According to the University of Council Educational Administration (UCEA) (2003), most definitions of leadership indicate there are two core functions*:* *providing direction* and *exercising influence*. This perspective, although seemingly simplistic, has several important implications. I have paraphrased their definitions here: In public education, leaders do not merely impose goals, but work with others to create a shared sense of purpose and direction. This sense of purpose and direction is increasingly centered on student learning, including both academic knowledge and skills and the learning of important values and dispositions. Leaders primarily work through other people. They also help to establish the conditions that enable others to be effective.

Leadership impact on school goals is both indirect as well as direct. Leadership is a function that is often invested in or expected of persons in positions of formal authority. Leadership encompasses a set of functions that may be performed through delegation by many different persons in different roles throughout the school (p. 2).

Leadership models have undergone many changes in recent years. In 2003, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) published *School Leadership: Concepts and Evidence,* in which they adapted a typology from Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1998) to identify and condense the different models of leadership styles. The following is a paraphrased version of the typologies of leadership as defined by NCSL: *Instructional Leadership* focuses on teaching and learning and on

the behavior of teachers in working with students; *Transformational Leadership* describes a particular type of influence in which the leaders seek to engage the support of teachers for their school vision. *Moral Leadership* is based in the values and beliefs of leaders, which is similar to the transformational model but with a stronger value base, that may be spiritual. *Participative Leadership* is concerned primarily with the process of decision- making; it supports the notion of shared or distributed leadership and, is linked to democratic values and empowerment. *Managerial Leadership* focuses on functions, tasks and behaviors. Influence is exerted through positional authority hierarchy. It is similar to the formal model of management. *Post-Modern Leadership* focuses on the subjective experience of leaders and teachers where there is no objective reality, only the multiple experiences of organizational members. This model offers few guidelines for leaders except in acknowledging the importance of the individual. *Interpersonal Leadership* focuses on the relationships leaders have with teachers, students and others connected with the school. Leaders adopt a collaborative approach, which enable them to operate effectively with internal and external stakeholders. *Contingent Leadership* focuses on how leaders respond to the unique organizational circumstances or problems they face. Leaders need to be able to adapt their approaches to the particular requirements of the school, and of the situation or event requiring attention (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999). I believe that the fact that there are so many models for leadership accounts for the new pressures placed on schools for accountability. Moreover, the above models are still mostly based on white male middle class culture. None of the

leadership models described above place any special focus on women or minority leaders.

A core set of basic leadership practices for success has been identified by UCEA (2003) and is considered applicable in almost all educational contexts. These practices have been divided into categories and each category contains more considerations that are specific. The three broad categories include setting directions, developing people, and developing the organization. A more detailed description is given below.

The first category (i.e., setting directions for the future) includes: identifying and articulating a vision, creating shared meaning, creating high performance expectations, fostering the acceptance of group goals, monitoring organizational performance and communicating. This dimension of leadership practices is focused on developing school goals and inspiring a vision of the future in others. Effective leaders are able to communicate their vision effectively to all stakeholders (UCEA, 2003).

The second category is developing people. This may seem obvious since most work is accomplished through the work and efforts of human capital. Development of human resources in an educational setting is vital when promoting growth. In order to promote growth, offering intellectual stimulation, providing individual support and providing an appropriate model are essential. Modeling desired dispositions, showing respect to all, providing structure for change, providing incentives, and monitoring progress are all actions that fall under this category (UCEA, 2003). This is very important especially in communities where the principal

may be considered the outsider. If the principal is a woman, what amount of respect or adherence to traditional roles does the community expect?

The final category is developing the organization. In this case, school is considered an organization as well as a community. As an organization, there are internal and external relationships that must be attended to. The factors the educational leader must work on are strengthening school culture, modifying organizational structure, building collaborative processes and managing the environment, all of which include working with parents, community members, businesses, and other influential people in addition to the teachers and students (UCEA, 2003). If the principal is a woman she may be considered an outsider. In this case, what amount of respect or adherence to traditional roles does the community expect?

Goleman (1998) discovered that the most effective leaders have one crucial element in common: they all have a high degree of what has been defined as emotional intelligence, which can be linked to social emotional learning. The five components of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Goleman (2006) links six leadership styles to his emotional intelligence components. These leadership styles include: (a) Visionary leaders, (b) Coaching Leaders, (c) Affiliated leaders, (d) Democratic leaders, (e) Pacesetting leaders, and (f) Commanding leaders. Goleman (1998) acknowledges that only the first four of these leadership styles would be effective in a second-order change initiative. I would argue that women in general have a high degree of

emotional intelligence yet are criticized for some of these same emotions when in a leadership role.

Gold's (2002) research in English primary, secondary and special schools demonstrated values and beliefs using the following descriptors from their participants: inclusivity, equal opportunities, equity or justice, high expectations, engagement with stakeholders, cooperation, teamwork, commitment and understanding. These descriptors also fall under the umbrella of moral leadership. Once again, these descriptors were based on mostly males. The conclusion of the report suggested that there has been a shift in expectations of American principals from the 1960s-1970s as managerial positions, to the 1980s as instructional leaders, and to the 1990s where the trend was leaning to transformational leadership. Further research has also suggested further exploration of the link between leadership and school outcomes. This shift in expectations however does not discuss the shift in people applying for these educational leadership positions such as minorities and women.

Finally, the Wallace Foundation published a report in 2013 *The Principal as Leader: An Overview* that describes what effective principal practices are. The following practices for being an effective school leader entail five key responsibilities:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards.
- Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.

- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision.
- Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn to their utmost.
- Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement (p. 6).

According to the research from the Wallace Foundation (2013), the data for these practices have been gathered since 2000, in which time the demographics and culture for principals is still white male middle class dominated. Women and minorities are being held to these same standards, yet they must overcome more barriers to earn respect and acceptance from the school and communities.

As literature on educational leadership evolves more and more focus is on minorities and women. There is very little directly targeting this study's target group of Mexican American female administrators in urban school settings.

Women in Educational Leadership

"Until we get equality in education, we won't have an equal society."

Sonia Sotomayor

Women have long been a part of education all over the world. It was the woman's duty to teach their children how to live and survive in their world. This section will focus on the western female experience in school administration. According to McNeil (2007), women have a history of being forward thinking and progressive in their vision of education. Schwartz (1997) states that even as early as the 1880s women had developed and conducted research in the classroom centered on students. McNeil (2007) found that the philosophy of leadership in the 1800s by

Elizabeth Seton focused on collaboration, confidence, respect, and compassion for the school community, which are characteristics in many of today's theories of leadership.

According to Blackmore (1989), Capper (1992), and Regan and Brooks (1992), it was not until the 1970s that women seriously began to consider leadership positions at the various levels of the school hierarchy. During that time, most doors were still closed to women who sought administration positions, and they were given very little support, if any, in their job searches. Conventional methods were used by colleges in developing male faculty members to become administrators and were not very sensitive to issues about gender. These conventional methods when applied to women only yielded them positions as low-level administrators with extremely limited opportunities for upward professional development in school administration.

Because of these limitations, in 1975 women established networks to support, mentor and encourage each other. This network was the Northeast Coalition of Educational Leaders (NECEL). The NECEL currently has more than 500 women mostly from the Northeast area including Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. The goal of this organization is to increase the number of women in administrative positions, and once they have a position, to increase their opportunities for success. Through the years, this organization is including more diversity throughout their membership. Even though this group is predominately white women, they are working toward being more inclusive to minority women.

Scheckelhoff ‘s (2007) study discovered that despite the fact that women leaders came from varying backgrounds, they shared common leadership characteristics. These characteristics included: (a) strong belief in social justice, (b) work ethic, (c) strong support system, (d) dealing with constant pressure of juggling career and family well, (e) guiding vision, (f) innate passion, (g) solid sense of integrity, (h) understanding of the importance of building relationships, and valuing people, (i) using positive communication to strengthen leadership, (j) the value of honesty and authenticity, and (k) the importance of knowing oneself. Many scholars identify some of these same characteristics as essential qualities for today's educational climate. Several of these characteristics are seen in the field of educational leadership, especially in the definition of effective leadership.

Keller (1999) stated that often the leadership styles engaged in by women were quite different from the norm. She observed that women superintendents typically remained feminine while succeeding in a masculine role by the use of incredible negotiation skills, working towards a common end, instead of command and control (Keller, 1999). Greenberg and Sweeny (2005) found that women leaders tended to start from the others’ point of view rather than their own. This type of communication and collaboration style aligns with community building, which is essential in dealing with more racially and ethnically diverse student populations. Grogan and Brunner (2005) found that women felt they were hired to be community leaders, change agents and instructional leaders, which coupled with their experience in the classroom to make them more effective when working with diverse communities of parents and other caretakers.

Grogan and Brunner (2005) stated most women acknowledged that they were selected as educational leaders for their ability to be instructional leaders. As the role of instructional leaders with background in curriculum and instruction becomes increasingly more important to school boards for the success of districts, this may change the odds to favor women in leadership positions (De Casal & Mulligan, 2004).

Three defining characteristics of female leaders are building and maintaining relationships, communication and collaboration. Women placed emphasis on democratic leadership, inclusion, value of others, and hearing and listening to others as a priority (Clark, Carafella, & Ingram, 1998). Greenberg and Sweeney (2005) also found in their study that women leaders were more likely to be inclusive, use a team building leadership style, and when it came to decision-making and problem solving, they were genuinely interested in hearing all points of view. Duffy (2003) also noted that the three components of effective leadership were trust, commitment, and collaboration. Bolman and Deal (2003) concurred that democratic leadership invests in people, participation through cooperation and equity. The development of people was the key to successful leadership (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005).

Regan and Brooks (1992) define collaboration as the ability to work in a group offering and eliciting support to each member, creating a synergistic energy, which transferred to the environment. Lenz and Myerhoff (1985) state that one of a woman's hidden sources of power is the ability to be cooperative. Women share their stories of how they reach out to other people, ask for help, and are inclusive of everyone. All of these collaborations help them get the job done. The result from this

approach produces a significant side-product, which is the development of greater self-esteem and new leadership. Women in educational leadership positions create collaborative experiences for both their staff and students.

Women are associated with various leadership styles such as transformational, democratic, communal, and agentic, which all place an emphasis on interpersonal relationships (Baker, 2008; De Casal & Mulligan, 2004). In order to reach goals and make decisions, women tend to engage others in the process (Beasely, 2005). Clark, Carafella, and Ingram (1998) cite two key insights about women in their study of women in leadership. The first is that women view relational leadership as paramount to success for encouraging others, and second, leaders must be aware and receptive to the voices of others and be responsive to the context in which they work. Results from the Greenberg and Sweeny (2005) survey suggest that in today's diverse workplace the distinct personality and motivational strength provided by women may be more conducive for effective leadership.

Challenges on the Road to Leadership

"It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees."

Emiliano Zapata

Historically, both women and minorities have encountered many obstacles in their journey to leadership. Pasour (2000) points out that in the field of administration men have dominated educational research and the voices of women, no matter how loud, fell on deaf ears and were mostly ignored. Schwartz (1997) acknowledges that, unfortunately, historians have overlooked many of the accomplishments of women. This silencing of women's contributions in education

made it much more difficult to uncover their historical significance, according to Reynolds and Smaller (1996).

Christensen (2008) argues that educational and occupational opportunities are limited due to the stereotyping of women. These stereotypes reflected the expectation society placed upon women to be passive, quiet, lady-like and non-competitive. These expectations limit the opportunity for women to advance in the field of leadership. One way women have been marginalized is financially through teacher pay, for example. Reynolds and Smaller (1996) bring to light the disparity between male and female teachers and reveal that even as early as the 1890s this complaint was recognized. They noted that a male teacher earned approximately twice as much as a female teacher and a male principal could earn up to four times as much as a female teacher in the early twentieth century. One of the main reasons women left the teaching profession in the early 1900s was because at that time marriage was forbidden for female teachers. In addition, the retirement policies required women to retire earlier than men, which added to the disparity.

Even today in the early twenty-first century, there is a divide between the opportunities of men and women. Only 38 percent of university faculty members are women, and only 28 percent are full professors. Also, according to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) (2005) women on average earn only 80 percent of what their male counterparts earn. Women tend to accept and are grateful for being hired at a university at any level instead of trying to negotiate. It seems the higher the prestige of the institution, the greater the gender gap *(*Pew Research Center, 2015).

To resolve the issue of the paucity of women in higher education, the Committee of Ten was formed in 1892 (Ornstein, Allan, & Levine, 1993). It laid the foundation for the superintendency. This committee was made up of only men and therefore defined in male terms. This view excluded women in upper level leadership positions. The role of the superintendent was understood to be a teacher of teachers from 1865 to 1910, but that role changed to a business model in which the superintendent was viewed as more of a business manager or executive position (Harris, Ballenger, & Jones, 2007). Glass (2000) asked, "Why then are there so few women heading school districts? Is there discrimination on the part of school boards and others involved in the hiring process? Or do women educators, for whatever reason, choose not to pursue the superintendency?" (p. 28). These questions are being asked in regards to mainstream middle class American white women. No consideration is being given to why minority women may not be choosing to seek superintendence positions. What keeps women from challenging the norms of educational leadership? Is it discrimination, intimidation, or fear? Women in educational leadership must exhibit courage, which is the ability to move ahead into the unknown. According to Regan and Brooks (1992), there is a separation of public and private spheres. In educational administration, the public sphere is a male dominated space. This space and hierarchical structure is both initiated and sustained by male rules. If women want to succeed in the sphere they have to obey these rules in order to become a full-fledged member of this group. Women must display courage to figure out the rules and play by them. This becomes a problem, and thus a barrier, if the rules go against or conflict with women's core values.

Harris, Ballenger, and Jones, (2007) noted that women have typically been steered towards instruction while men have been guided and encouraged toward management. They found that when a male enters the field of teaching, he views this as a step on the path to administration, while women often seek to teach. This relates back to the traditional role of men being the breadwinner of the family. Because of this, women typically spend more years in the classroom teaching than men do. The researchers also noted that women enter administration much later, in their late 40s. They wait until their own children are older, while men enter administration much earlier, generally in their mid-20s (Harris, Ballenger, & Jones, 2007; Keller, 1999).

In 1928, 55 percent of elementary principals were women but that number dwindled to 19.6 percent by 1973 (Grogan & Bruner, 2005; Harris, Ballenger & Jones, 2007; Skrla, 2000). During the 1980s, the number increased to 25%, and increased to 48 percent during the 1990s; however, only 12 percent of these female administrators were classified as secondary high school level principals.

Education has always been thought of as a way to level the playing field, a doorway to opportunity. This door remained shut for a long time for women in the education field (Goodman, 2002; Irby & Brown, 1995; McCreight, 1999). Slaton (2008) stated that the beginning of feminism runs parallel to the history of women's education. She asserts that education gave women the ability to break through social constraints.

Horany (as cited in Slaton, 2008) also stated that once women were allowed to participate in pursuing an education, it did not mean that they were treated as equals compared to their male counterparts. Women were particularly marginalized

when it came to leadership roles. Keller (1999) noted much of the problems incurred by women stemmed as much from subtle notions of gender and leadership as from blatant discrimination. The source of this discrimination could emanate from males or females in the same field.

A study conducted by Glass (2000), found that nearly 82% of women superintendents surveyed indicated that school boards did not recognize them as strong managers and 76% were not viewed as capable of handling district finances. The male superintendent's survey indicated that 43% agreed that women were not seen as capable of managing a school district by the school boards (p. 31). Skrla (2000) pointed out that educational administration is one of the most gender-stratified positions even according to the U.S. Department of Labor. I would add that it is also stratified by ethnic diversity.

Other factors outside gender bias may account for women's' low representation in leadership roles including their commitment to their families and home. This could be classified as a voluntary or societal barrier for women. Noddings (2001) discovered that women who chose to forgo having a family to opt for a career were viewed as unnatural or uncaring; often women found it difficult to have a happy traditional home and a successful professional life. Society is untrusting of women who do not have children. Harris, Ballenger and Jones (2007) stated that according to the National Education Association (NEA) study in 1930-31, 77 percent of all districts would not hire married women and 63 percent dismissed a teacher after she married. Even in 1974, teachers in their fourth month of pregnancy were being dismissed due to society's view that this was not appropriate for children

to be exposed to the pregnancy of their classroom teacher (Harris, Ballenger, & Jones, 2007). Women's barriers to educational leadership have been constantly linked to marriage, family responsibilities or cultural stereotyping (Harris, Ballenger & Jones, 2007).

Glass (2007) found that seven out of ten women put their spouse's career as first and their own career as secondary. Mobility is also an issue for women, Ninety percent of women would not consider relocating due to their spouse; however, 75 percent of men surveyed would relocate regardless of their spouse's employment prospects (Harris, Ballenger & Jones, 2007). This again stems from the traditional view that women should follow their husbands.

Limerick and Anderson (1999) recognize that much research has examined why women do not achieve promotion in schools even though teaching is seen primarily as a female domain. They hypothesized that even though teaching is considered an extension of mothering, the culture of administration is masculine since it is viewed as a field of business management. McCreight (1999) cautions that we send a silent and dangerous message that girls can only dream of becoming a teacher while boys can dream of becoming leaders. There are many hidden messages girls receive in school as stated earlier such as to be passive, to not be assertive or they will call you bossy, girls aren't good in math and many more. This is evident in schools where the majority of students are female and the administrator is male.

In recent years, women in education have made progress, yet much has continued to remain the same. Harris, Ballenger and Jones (2007) state that in order for women to be viewed as competent leaders, they must have more credentials, be

better prepared and more informed. Women continually work at being better in order to prove themselves in what is still considered a man's world.

Morse (2002) found that women in leadership roles often paid a high price for being unconventional. The mere fact that we are using the term unconventional to describe women in leadership indicates there is much work to be done in this area. Morse goes on to state that women in leadership roles often suffer when trying to balance their personal and professional lives. This suffering may occur in their personal life or professional life or both. She advocates for a society in which both men and women could live intellectual and creative lives. In my opinion, as long as we as a society cling to traditional gender roles and prejudices, we may not see this equality for mainstream women or minority women.

Research is available on the numbers of women who have been in the role of educational administrator; however, little research has been done on the actual experiences and perceptions of women in this line of work (Skrla, 2000). Even less research can be found on minority women, and fewer still on Mexican American educational administrators.

Mexican American Female Leadership

"You can be a thousand different women. It's your choice which one you want to be. It's about freedom and sovereignty. You celebrate who you are. You say, 'This is my kingdom."

Salma Hayek

Leading today's diverse schools demands leaders who can create an environment that will nurture and educate the whole child (Gardiner & Enomoto,

2006). Culturally proficient leadership provides a school setting in which students feel safe and welcomed regardless of their backgrounds. Culturally proficient school principals are dedicated to serving all students with curricula that are both formal and informal and respectful of various backgrounds (Gerhart, Harris, & Mixon, 2011).

While the literature is clear on the necessity for socially conscious leaders, there is also a documented need for minority leaders to take on this role (Peters, 2011). As the student population continues to grow more diverse, the same cannot be said for school leadership. Sánchez, Thorton and, Unsinger (2008) tell us, "90 percent of principals are White" (p. 2). In order for Latina/o students to achieve a social justice and educational equity in their schools, they need an advocate at the highest leadership position.

The American education system, Kohli (2009) explained, promotes "White cultural values and perspectives, devoid of other culture and perspectives. The absence of culture and perspectives of Communities of Color is a subtle, but powerful, form of racism" (p. 241). The lack of Latina/o principals translates into a lack of educational leadership role models and mentors as examples for Latina/o students.

The lack of minority leadership is bad enough, but magnified when one considers how even fewer of these minority leaders are women. As documented earlier, this is clearly the situation especially among Oklahoma educational leaders. There is even less literature available concerning Mexican American women in positions of leadership. In addition, there is a lack of ethnic minority researchers who study them (Benham, 1997; Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Ortiz, 1982; Méndez-

Morse, 1999). The studies that are available concerning minority principals indicate that although many of them are well trained, and highly experienced in the classroom due to their years in education, Mexican American women do not move up the ranks into the principalships as quickly as their White counterparts do. Their pace is considerably slower and takes them longer to achieve the position of principal (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Ortiz, 1982).

Drawing an inference and my analysis of this literature review, I find that there are very few successful, Mexican American women in educational leadership positions as compared to the mainstream of Caucasian women and African American women. This imbalanced representation of Hispanic women in leadership roles is significant because of the potential impact their presence could have on the academic success of Hispanic children in the public schools. Research shows that African American and Latino administrators are effective role models for minority students (Magdaleno, 2006; Tillman, 2004). Because minority principals share cultural understanding and experiences, they can link with students, parents and other stakeholders. This role modeling is significant to those learners' future aspirations and identity development (Sanchez, Thorton & Unsinger, 2009). It is, thus, important to encourage the entrance of more Hispanic woman into the field of education leadership

Lack of role models and mentors in school leadership positions has long been an issue for Mexican American women. Due to the small number of educational administrative positions occupied by minority women, it is difficult to find a role model or someone to go to when they encounter problems (Ortiz, 1982). The lack of

mentors is one of the career barriers according to the research conducted by Kowalski and Stouder (1999). Due to the paucity of minority women in administrative positions, there are not many mentors of similar race and gender who can assist and advise women of color (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000).

Culture and values play a large part in the career development of Mexican American women along with their decision-making abilities. They must deal with a variety of social issues according to Rivera, Anderson, and Middleton (1999). Their development differs from that of non-Mexican American women and men. Social pressure is evident due to the components of values such as the responsibility of taking care of the family and culture evident in family structure and traditional sex roles reflected in their career choice process (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Ortiz, 1982; Rivera et al., 1999). Rivera Anderson and Middleton, (1999), defines values as "a set of general beliefs, opinions, and attitudes about what is preferable, right, or simply good in life" (p. 94). Mexican American women are continually contemplating their career choices when it comes to education and how that will affect their value system (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Rivera, Anderson & Middleton, 1999). The added cultural elements of being female and a minority further complicate matters.

Culture can be described as the existence of a collective, shared system of rules that emphasizes knowledge, beliefs, concepts and ideas (Campbell, 1996). The ability to interpret events and behave in a given role is dependent on the individual's ability to conform to cultural norms of society. Rivera, Anderson and Middleton (1999) argue that because such a strong influence in the culture of Hispanics exists,

"elements such as language, family structure, sex-roles and religion make up culture and impact the career decision processes of Mexican American women" (p. 97). Each of these elements play a critical role for Hispanic women and great impact can be caused by the absence or imbalance of any one of them. These elements are considered deep culture.

Family is an important factor that influences Mexican American women's lives. This includes family size, multigenerational households, sex roles of male dominate figure and passive female role which all falls under the umbrella of Hispanic familism. These factors cause Mexican American women to deal with the sex-role stereotype not only in society but in their culture, as well (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Rivera, Anderson & Middleton, 1999). There seems to be an ongoing internal struggle when making career choices.

This internal struggle causes them to question whether to maintain the basic cultural values, or deal with making new cultural transitions. An evaluation of what modifications will need to be made to accommodate the traditional roles when life events or major decision-making needs to occur in their career (Leonard and Papa-Lewis, 1987; Rivera, Anderson & Middleton, 1999).

For many Mexican American women, decision-making and career development choices are heavily influenced by their perceptions of personal and cultural values. The social issues they face involve the perceptions society has about women and minority leaders. However, for Mexican American women, they not only face society’s perception but the perception within Mexican culture and community. These perceptions can be viewed as a double-edged sword in that they can help

advance the career development of minority women or create barriers and thus, influence their ability or inability to create both formal and informal networks in order to develop as a professional.

Barriers of Latina Women to Leadership Positions

"Preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures." *César Chávez*

Research released almost 30 years ago in educational leadership related to minorities, continues to reflect some of today's barriers. Haven, Adkinson, and Bagley (1980) identified the following obstacles in terms of minorities moving into educational leadership roles:

> 1. Lower career aspirations result when minorities perceive that the values of the educational system are ignoring or conflicting with their community.
>
> 2. High percentages of minorities major in education, but their aspirations are not encouraged by the educational environment. Minorities need more support for aspirations but often receive less.
>
> 3. Minorities aspiring for principalship face conscious and non-conscious resistance from the educational system.
>
> 4. Few role models and mentors exist. Negative stereotypes often exist. There is a lack of research on minority principals and their career aspirations. (pp.3-4)

Some Mexican American women face some of the same issues as white women in administrative positions; however, Mexican American women must also deal with the issues relating to their minority status, family status and the effect the position may have in these areas (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987). Other issues may include whether or not they speak English with an accent, their physical build and religion.

Language is another important factor to a majority of Hispanic women because it is considered a crucial element to maintain traditions and practices. It is more likely that culture will be vulnerable to change if language is diminished or lost (Rivera, Anderson & Middleton, 1999). Maintenance of the language is considered vital to the continuation of culture, yet this same fact can also "create barriers" for not only Mexican American women but also all Hispanic women's participation in the work force (p. 97). As previously mentioned, having an accent depending on how heavy it is could be detrimental to pursuing a career in educational leadership when communication is highly valued.

Another barrier for women in general is unequal access to administrative positions and subsequent exclusion from upward mobility into these types of positions (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Ortiz & Covel, 1978; Ortiz 1979; Ortiz, 1982). The phenomenon is even more challenging for minority women because of institutional policies traditionally placing minority women in "prescribed molds [which are] narrow, static, superficial and generic" (Benham, 1997, p. 299). One ethnic minority female principal noted by Benham (1997) was a Cuban American.

Her record as a principal was exemplary; however, her leadership and professionalism were still questioned by the upper administration. Due to her strong advocacy for minority students, her openness and vocalization of the limited opportunities for minorities in the district, she was often labeled and dismissed as 'an angry Hispanic woman' (p. 295) and could not be considered a credible minority campus leader.

In a study by Ortiz (1979) on the social and vertical mobility of minority male and female principals, he found that although they both experienced some degree of opportunity, the social and vertical mobility of men was greater (Leonard & Papa- Lewis, 1987). "Minorities who are permitted into the world of education administration tend to have few opportunities for career mobility" (Patterson, 1994, p. 5; as cited in Ortiz, 1982). Overall women tend to encounter many more obstructions and hardships than men in the workforce, but Hernández and Morales (1999) found that Mexican American women's professional opportunities are even more restricted due to the degree of discrimination and dealing with the double oppression of racism and sexism. Therefore, hiring practices in general are not equally provided to them.

The ethnicity of Mexican American women is not a disadvantage but could be considered an obstacle on the path to advancement. They are targeted to be placed in school districts with similar ethnic groups to theirs on the bases of their ability to relate to the population (Ortiz, 1982). Mexican American candidates (ranging from principal to school superintendent) are often placed in districts that are poorly resourced and underperforming simply because they are deemed qualified to serve this type of district by their ethnicity. This type of placement for this group of women can unfortunately result in dead end careers (Ortiz, 1982; Patterson, 1994).

Ortiz (1982) presented a report on Hispanic female superintendents and their selection. Data were compiled from 12 Hispanic female superintendents from several southwestern states. They differed in their educational experiences as well as the types of districts they had worked in. According to Ortiz, out of 15,000 school

districts, fewer than 1,000 women hold executive leadership positions and of that number, only 25 to 30 of these women are Hispanic. Ortiz set about trying to discover how this was possible.

He discovered that women view or consider the position of principal as the ultimate position whereas men aspire to the position of superintendent. In addition, advancement in educational administration requires sponsorship or a mentor; women are less like to have a sponsor. It is even more difficult to have mentor who is a minority of the same ethnicity.

School boards will often use search committees when looking to hire. Search committees as a rule "pay attention to social class, race, ethnicity, and values" (Johnson, 1996 cited in Ortiz, 1982, p. 4). The typical frame of mind of such search committees is the perception of whether the candidate could become "one of us" or will there be "feelings of comfort for all" (Ortiz, 1982, p. 4). In contrast, the appointment of Hispanic females tends to carry with it symbolic and political overtones. Hispanic females are often met with skepticism of their abilities as well as suspicion that she will favor her own ethnic group over others. In Ortiz's (1998) study, out of the twelve Hispanic female superintendents, ten were placed in districts with problems such as bankruptcy, consolidation, and demographic and economic changes. These women were dedicated and made improvements in their situations. It was concluded that none of the Hispanic females were recognized for their leadership, social or political skills.

Although women make up at least half of secondary teachers, Wrushen and Sherman (2008) point out they are in the minority for secondary administration

positions. Moreover, minority women in leadership roles are especially underrepresented. In order to better understand the experiences, characteristics and challenges of diverse women in secondary leadership roles, Wrushen and Sherman designed a qualitative research study to examine their differences and commonalities through their own voices. The researcher posed two primary research questions “1) Who are women secondary school principals? and 2) How are they experiencing their leadership roles at the secondary level?” (p. 458). The authors used the women's experiences and voices in order to utilize gender as a valid lens for looking at leadership. Although women make up at least one-half of secondary teachers, Wrushen and Sherman point out that they are in the minority for secondary administrative positions. The authors used the women’s experience and voice in order to utilize gender as a valid lens for looking at leadership.

The Wrushen and Sherman (2008) study included a sample of eight women secondary school principals representative of diverse ethnic backgrounds: African American, Asian, Caucasian, and Hispanic, from three eastern areas of the US. Their personal narratives of lived experiences were collected and transcribed in order to search for possible patterns or themes. “Two of the women [were] African-American, four of the women [were] Caucasian, one of the women [was] Asian, and one of the women [was] Hispanic” (p. 460). They ranged in age from 33 to 58 years old. Their years of teaching experience also ranged from three to fifteen years of teaching experience prior to moving into the area of educational administration.

The Wrushen and Sherman, (2008) study found that although these women were of various ethnicities, their experiences as secondary school principals were

more similar than different. Each subject referred to their personal backgrounds and early influences, personal and professional balance, gender and leadership, ethnicity and leadership and power. All of the women participants indicated both positive and negative background experiences, but a common theme appeared a desire to reach high-risk, high-need student populations in difficult school environments.

The Wrushen and Sherman (2008) study helps to support the significance of my study for two reasons: (a) the research design of collecting and analyzing the personal lived experiences of minority female leadership and the examination of the cultural influences and / or experiences that contributed to the development of their leadership identity and style; and (b) the desire to further explore and clarify the emergent theme in Wrushen and Sherman of the motivation to reach high-risk, high need students in different school environments.

Many of the women indicated frustration of not being heard due to their gender or ethnicity as women leaders according to Wrushen and Sherman (2008). When the discussion of power arose, none of the subjects felt comfortable in describing themselves as powerful. The researchers concluded that before women leaders could stop questioning their own abilities to contribute to secondary education; society must assume the responsibility for breaking the cycle of male school leadership dominance in secondary education.

In another study by Carr (2008) through a series of interviews and narrative stories of Mexican American female principals in the Rio Grande Valley region of Texas, the researchers focus on the “personal and social challenge of being Mexican American and female working as a professional educator in a bicultural, male

dominated community" (p. 2). The student population in the area is predominately made up of Mexican migrant and immigrants and has a high rate of poverty. At least 50 percent of the adults are predominately Spanish speakers and speak very little English. Carr discovered that "27 percent of school principals are female, and of those only 6.4 percent are minorities" (p. 3). Of this number, three of the women are elementary principals, and three are high school principals.

The six Hispanic women who were participants in Carr's (2008) study had lived most of their lives in the region. One participant, Laura, refers to herself as Mexican American even though, she was born in Mexico City and came to the US with her parents, both of whom hold college degrees. Laura, an elementary principal, is described as a stylish, attractive woman. Anna, another participant in Carr's study, refers to herself as Hispanic and is the youngest of the six principals. Anna is bilingual and biliterate; she has five siblings, all of whom also have college degrees. She is the first female principal of a newly established school located in an upper class area of a Mexican American neighborhood. Celia, yet another participant in Carr's study, is one of 12 children, and refers to herself as Hispanic. All of her siblings hold college degrees. Celia is the first female principal of a new elementary school. Marla, another elementary principal participant, is a second generation Mexican American who, came from a poor background. She holds a principalship and is the first female appointed to this position. Serena is a high school principal who attributes her education and work experience to hard work and traveling outside of the Rio Grande Valley region. Serena consciously chose to change her ethnic identity from Mexican American to Hispanic. Her high school has a number of

academic and personnel problems. The final participant discussed in Carr's (2008) study was Barbara. She is actually an Anglo married to a Mexican American husband for 20 years. Barbara was educated in various schools and had lived in different areas across the US She is in her first principalship. Understanding of the ethnic and social group identity of these women is essential in helping to understand their views, according to Carr.

Carr (2008) discovered from the narrative stories of the participants that all of the subjects preferred compromise and avoided conflict in order to resolve problems. All but one had a male principal in a mentoring role and considered themselves to have a definable leadership style. All six of Carr's participants stressed collaboration, teamwork, group decision making, respect for others, and tolerance for diversity as key factors in order for them to be successful in a school leadership role. Carr concluded that increased emphasis is needed in recruiting women and minorities to school leadership roles and "in the development of teachers and administrators with increased multicultural sensitivity, skills, and appreciation" (p. 28).

A study conducted by Pennington (2007) is an interesting reversal of the African American discrimination factor, which is that of a White administrator in a school of color. Pennington uses auto-ethnography as a teaching method in working with pre- service teachers (PST) in a predominately Hispanic school. Recognizing that auto-ethnography is used as a method for qualitative inquiry that allows the researchers to explore themselves as well, Pennington believed that it would help her overcome the context of power within which she was viewed. Based on her own personal experiences

As a PST educator, she translated the auto-ethnographic qualitative research methodology into a method for teaching that would increase the understanding of her students of color perspectives along with her own issues of whiteness. Pennington stated, “Recognizing our White privilege as a disadvantage was the beginning of finding our footing in the racialized world of the school; the beginning of seeing ourselves as the families and teachers of color might see us” (p. 101). According to Pennington, race is not only skin color but also a social construct, and the true definitions of race or ethnicity disqualify the general view that the color of one’s skin is a measure of their race.

In working with the PSTs, Pennington (2007) encouraged her students to write their own auto-ethnographies, which they shared with her. She viewed these auto-ethnographies as a way to understand the participants. Their auto-ethnographies allowed her to view the similarities they shared, such as skin color, backgrounds, placement in a school, and community of color. Pennington, using auto-ethnography to teach and model self-study, discovered a new area in teaching. Through auto-ethnography, she could demonstrate how the value of a self-study type of existential orientation to education is transformative.

In another study, Benham (1997) researched the stories of three ethnic women school leaders and focused on the professional “self” versus the personal and cultural “self” (p. 283). Jolie, one of the participants in Benham's study, was an African-American woman who revealed her understanding of the rigid, mechanical organization of schools that stood in the way of more progressive and caring work. Margaret, another participant, was born and educated in India before coming to teach

in the United States, and stated she experienced "culture shock" on a variety of levels. Her story reveals how she was overlooked in leadership advancement in the district school administration.

Catherine, the other participant in Benham's study, was a Cuban American school principal who revealed that regardless of her exemplary record both in teaching and in administration, her professionalism and leadership ability were still questioned by her supervisors.

Benham (1997) describes five themes that appear in all three of these women's stories. These themes are in response to his question "What is it about these particular women's lives that reveal the essence of being a school leader and how their political discourses and practices challenge the traditional structures of hierarchy, competiveness, and exclusion?" (p. 298). Benham (1997) identified these themes as self-identity, experiences of marginalization, connectiveness, leadership and vision of best practices. One of the first themes to emerge throughout the stories was that each woman revealed her perception of her work as a classroom teacher and school leader. The second emergent theme was that each woman “embraces the concept of connectiveness and collective work as a source of power and employs this network to challenge the bureaucracy of schools… that are culturally based (e.g., Latina, Indian, and African-American)” (p. 283). He contends that “an important theme in these women’s lives is how each has forged her own identity against mass stereotypes that serve to oppress, and how each has recast the sadness this causes as compassion and commitment toward social justice” (p. 283). Marginalization is another theme that is focused on; it inspired each woman to re-draw cultural,

geographic, and institutional boundaries. In its conclusion, each story presents a vision of passion and best practices that calls for a responsibility to help correct social injustices in schools. Minority principals can relate to the struggles and barriers of minority students and can guide them to academic success.

Literature Summary and Importance of the Study

In review of the empirical literature, there is a substantial amount of research on educational leadership. Literature on educational leadership is abundant through the Wallace Foundation (2003), University of Council Educational Administration (UCEA) (2003), and National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2003), and many more; all of which clearly acknowledges the need for more information on minority leadership. Within this scant amount literature on minority leadership, there is even less specifically related to minority women. Needless to say, within the literature on minority women, there is even a greater paucity of legitimate examination of Mexican American women in administration leadership at a public school level. Finally, of literature on Mexican American women in urban school administration, the literature specific to Oklahoma is virtually non-existent. My study adds to the literature on Mexican American female experiences in an urban school setting in order provide insight and information that could be used to encourage and validate the aspirations and growth of Mexican American women choosing educational leadership as a goal.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

"Only when our entire culture for the first time saw itself threatened by radical doubt and critique did hermeneutics become a matter of universal significance."

Gadamer, 1983, p.100

This study employs the qualitative methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate the following research question: What are the lived experiences of Mexican American females' as leaders in an urban public school in Oklahoma?

Understanding Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the methodological approach that I am using to unearth an in-depth understanding of an administrators' work life. Phenomenology is the study of lived experience or the life world (van Manen, 1997). This type of inquiry asks, "What is this experience like?" It is an attempt to uncover meanings as they are lived by a person not separate from the world or reality (Valle, King, & Halling, 1998).

This type of experience includes what we experience pre-reflectively, without categorization, or conceptualization. It often includes a state of wonder, a quest for the origin, to see those things that are taken for granted or those that would come under the heading of common sense (Husserl, 1970). Husserl posits that a person needs to bracket out the outer world as well as individual biases if one were to achieve contact with essences. This reflection process or bracketing is considered a safe guard from imposing assumptions or bias of the researcher. This process of

bracketing is where phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology diverge. The hermeneutical approach allows the researcher to engage in a process of self-reflection as an essential part of the interpretive process. For this reason, I chose to use hermeneutic phenomenology for my study since I believe one cannot truly bracket oneself from the experience. Since I am a Mexican American female educator who has worked in an urban school district in Oklahoma and now in higher education, where there are few Mexican American women. I believe my experiences in many cases mirrored those of my participants. I engaged in both the exploration of motifs of experiences with them but I was mindful to not use my personal experiences to bias the analysis but as a lens to better understand the participants' own lived stories as female Mexican American school leaders. This process is core to using reflexivity in hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the human experience or "life world" as it is lived. Heidegger (1927/1962, p. 27) focuses on '*Dasen,*' translated as 'the mode of being human' or 'situated meaning of the human world.' Heidegger viewed human beings as creatures principally concerned with attention on their fate in an alien world. Heidegger (1927/1962) does not separate consciousness from the world; he views it as a formation of historically lived experience. He presupposes that understanding is a basic form of human existence in that understanding is not a way we know the world, but instead the way we are (Heidegger as cited in Polkinghorne, 1983). Koch (1995) delineates Heidegger's stresses on the historicality of understanding as one's background or how one is situated in the world. According to Koch (1995), this term refers to a person's history

or background, which includes what a culture gives a person from childbirth and is handed down, introducing ways of understanding the world. Through this understanding, one is able to determine what is real. Heidegger, however, also holds that one's background cannot be made completely clear.

According to Heidegger (1972/1962), pre-understanding is a framework for being in the world. Pre-understanding is not something a person can put aside or step outside, as it is understood as already being with us in the world (Laverty, 2003). Pre-understanding is present before we understand and become part of our historicality, background, sense of being, or past. Heidegger insists that nothing can be encountered without connecting to how a person makes meaning of life. Koch (1995) describes this cycle in which meaning is discovered as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are creating this world from our own background experiences. There is a bond between the individual and the world as s/he constructs and is constructed by each other (Munhall, 1989). We are constantly being affected by our experiences in the world and in turn make decisions based on those experiences (Hertz, 1997). Because I am of the same culture as my participants and have worked in the same urban district, I understand the strong cultural connections that influence the world experiences and decisions based on those influences (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Rivera, Anderson & Middleton, 1999). This study explores the co-construction of reality and self through the lives of my participants.

Interpretation is also a critical piece of hermeneutic phenomenology. Heidegger (1927/1962) emphasizes that claiming to be human is to interpret and that

every experience involves an interpretation influenced by an individual's background. Anells (1996) regards hermeneutics as an interpretive process that searches to bring understanding and exposure of phenomena through language. Furthermore, hermeneutics is the study of human cultural activity as texts with an outlook towards interpretation to find proposed or expressed meanings (Kvale, 1996). Hermeneutics regards texts to include things such as written or verbal communication, visual arts, and music. This inclusiveness of the previously mentioned allows for more flexibility and creativity when it comes to interpretation (Kvale, 1996). In this research, the inclusion of music has a special attraction for me. As a musician with a background in *Maríachi, Tejano* and American music, and some song writing experience I could relate and understood my participants' perceptions about the importance of culture. My intention, as a concluding act of analysis, for this research study, is to someday write a Mexican *corrido* to represent the lived experiences of my participants. For now, the poem written in the prologue of this document is my closest expression of my own life-world in relation to my journey from an unremarkable, underachiever from a big family to a Mexican American female school leader in higher education.

Gadamer (1960/1998) views the works of hermeneutics as clarifying the conditions in which understanding itself takes place and not as developing a procedure of understanding. He states, "hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditionary text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which it speaks" (p. 295). Gadamer posits, "Language is the

universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting" (p.389). Gadamer (1960/1998) believes to have a horizon means being able to see beyond what is nearby. A 'horizon' he defines as a range of vision that includes everything seen from a particular vantage point. He also states questioning is an important interpretive process as it helps in making new horizons and understanding the possible:

> Understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else's meaning. Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject...To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were. (p. 375)

Annells (1996) agreed with Gadamer (1960/1998), stating that understanding and interpretation are tied together and interpretation is constantly an evolving process; therefore, a definitive interpretation is likely an impossibility. Gadamer (1960/1998) was not against methods to increase understanding or to overcome limited perspectives. He is emphatic in his opinion that methods are not totally objective, separate, or value free from the user, and to think it possible he considers absurd and ludicrous.

When it comes to methodology, Polkinghorne (1983) proposes the use of the term methodology rather than method to clarify the use of hermeneutic phenomenological traditions. A methodology in this sense is not a correct method to follow, but a creative approach to understanding whatever approaches are responsive to select questions and subject matter. Methodology used this way requires the ability of the researcher to be reflective, insightful, sensitive to language, and

constantly open to experience being lived (van Manen, 1997). It is the approach of van Manen that I chose for my study because it provided me the flexibility to explore the lived experiences of Mexican American female administrators in an urban school setting in Oklahoma, which has never been empirically addressed. Using van Manen's (2014) methodological process allowed me to explore my participants' lived experiences. He stated, "Phenomenology is primarily a philosophic method for questioning, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions. But in this questioning there exist the possibilities and potentialities for experiencing openings, understanding, insights…" (p. 29) Insights into the phenomenon of Mexican American female administrators in an urban school setting in Oklahoma is what I was seeking.

Both phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology are cyclical rather that linear in their process. This process begins with self-reflection as a part of a preparatory stage of research, which could include the journaling of these reflections for reference during the analysis process (Colazzi, 1978; Polkinghorne, 1989). This reflection process, specifically the assumptions and biases of the researcher, is not bracketed and set aside as they are in phenomenology, but rather are embedded and essential to the interpretive process. The researcher is called on to give considerable reflection to his/her own experience and explicitly examine the ways in which their position or experience connects or relates to the issues being researched. The personal assumptions and biases of the researcher and the philosophical bases from which interpretation occurred may be included in the final document (Allen, 1996;

Cotterill & Letharby, 1993). The researcher keeps a journal that is reflective in nature in order to assist them in the process of reflection and interpretation.

In hermeneutic phenomenology, to better understand how the researcher interprets participants' realities, data can include the researcher's personal reflections on the topic. To capture the participants' perceptions of experiences, interviews, literature such as poetry and paintings and music can be used as data (Polkinghorne, 1989). The participants selected for a hermeneutic phenomenological study are ones who have lived experience that is the focus of the research, who are willing to share and talk about their experience, and who are diverse enough from one another to better the chances of rich and unique stories of the particular experience being explored (Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1997). There is no set number of participants required; it is dependent on the nature of the study and the data gathered along the way. Researchers may continue to interview the participants until they believe they have reached a point of saturation. A point of saturation is defined as being the point in which a clearer understanding of the experience will not be found with further discussion (Sandelwoski, 1986).

The outcome of this process includes the self-interpreted conception of the researcher and each participant, hence reflecting many constructions or multiple realities. Allen (1995) emphasizes the importance of reading and writing as core to the construction of meaning in hermeneutic strategy. There cannot be a finite set of procedures to structure the interpretive process since interpretation emanates from pre-understanding and dialectical flow between the parts and the whole of the texts

involved. The interpretation comes from the researcher, the participants as well as the texts, its context. The interpretation is a unique synthesis.

Key to this process is the writing process, the hermeneutic circle, imagination, and the attention to language. Smith (1991) characterizes hermeneutic imagination as asking what is at work in distinct ways of speaking or acting to help promote an ever-expanding appreciation of the world or lived experience. Madison (1988) believes much attention should be given to the ways in which language is used, an awareness of life as an interpretive experience, an interest in how we make sense of our lives and human meaning. He believes these experiences need to be integrated into a new semantic context and viewed in a new and imaginative way that has not been seen before.

Gadamer (1960/1998) interprets hermeneutics as a means of co-creation between the researcher and participant in which the very fabrication of meaning materializes through a circle of readings, reflexive writing and interpretations. Hermeneutic research insists on self-reflexivity, an ongoing dialogue about the experience, while at the same time living in the moment, actively formulating interpretations of the experience and questioning how those interpretations came about (Hertz, 1997). van Manen (1997) posits the act of writing forces an individual into a deeply reflexive mindset in which one writes ones' selves in a collective way. This interpretive process goes on until the moment in time where one has come to rational meanings of the experience, void from inner contradictions (Kvale, 1996).

Since qualitative research is an interpretive research, I included reflexivity to attend to the importance of understanding my own background, culture and

experiences. In the prologue of my study, I explain my background as a Mexican American female in education and how I feel a personal connection to my participants by culture, gender, work history and family. Although in a different setting, I am a Mexican American female in higher education in Oklahoma. There are a small number of professional educators who are Mexican American females in higher education much like there is in the public schools. I use my own lived experiences to help me better understand, reflect and gain insight into my participants' lived stories. The reflection of the lived experiences of my participants aligns with Schwandt (2007) in that reflexivity of the research allowed self-questioning, self-understanding and how inquiry should proceed to acquire new knowledge of the phenomenon.

In this hermeneutic phenomenological research study, I, as the researcher, accumulated all of the data and analysis of my participants for this study. Since I am, also a Mexican American female, but situated in higher education, I was conscious that my analysis not be based on pre-conceived notions, which is a disadvantage to any study. Being aware of both, my own personal biases and experiences I employed van Manen's (2014) qualitative procedures for conducting research.

Max van Manen (1990) suggested being aware of the interpretative meaning of the participants' interviews with the researcher's personal experiences, and this interpretative meaning within this research was themed using van Manen's (2014) Lifeworld Existential Guides to Reflection.

My personal background provided meaningful context to understanding the lived experiences of being a Mexican American female in an American educational

system. This study provides insights to the experiences of Mexican American female leaders in an urban public school in Oklahoma, their successes, challenges, and barriers.

Max van Manen's (2014) Phenomenology of Practice as a Method

Phenomenological research according to van Manen (2014) "begins with a question that comprises an element of wonder: discovering the extraordinary in the ordinary, the strange in the taken for granted."(p. 298) He reminds us that a "phenomenological question does not aim for empirical or descriptive generalizations; it does not formulate a social scientific law of how some things or some people behave under certain circumstances; it does not test a hypothesis; it does not ask for people's opinions, views, perceptions, or interpretations of an issue or phenomenon; it does not aim for gender-based, ethnographic. Or other types of explanation; it does not aim for theory development; it does not ask for moral judgements; it does not describe specific (empirical) ethnic, cultural, or social groups of people; it does not anticipate codified categories for analysis"(pp.297-298). Max van Manen (2014) states the phenomenological question should be experientially recognizable, experientially accessible, evoke an element of wonder, and asks what is given in immediate experience, how it is given to appear to us, and what a possible human experience is like.

My research question, "What are the lived experiences of Mexican American females as leaders in an urban public school in Oklahoma?" Does this question meet the criteria posited by van Manen (2014)? First, the awareness of my participants in their leadership role is both recognizable and experientially accessible to them. How

my participants achieved this status as a Mexican American female leader in Oklahoma evoked an element of wonder. The participants' cultural influence due to their heritage and gender is present in their immediate experience since these are permanent characteristics. Additionally, their stories reveal how they perceive others view them, as well as how they view themselves. Finally, I explored the participants' human experience as leaders in an urban school, and as Mexican American females in Oklahoma.

I used van Manen's (2014) existential methods, as a guided existential inquiry in order to help with the reflective inquiry process. This reflective process uses the existential of lived relation (p.302) (*relationality*), a reflection on how self and others are experienced with respect to the phenomenon. Lived space (*spatiality*) is a reflection on how space is experienced with respect to the phenomenon. Lived time (*temporality*) is a reflection to ask how time is experienced with respect to the phenomenon. Lived things and technology (*materiality*) explore how things are experienced with respect to the phenomenon. Finally, Lived body (*corporality*) is a reflection on how the body is experienced with respect to the phenomenon. Using van Manen's (2014) reflective inquiry method, I was able to uncover the participants' lived experiences and discover other significant themes that influenced their lived experiences as female Mexican American urban school leaders.

Site and Sample Selection

I started participant selection in Oklahoma using an urban school district in Oklahoma for finding participants. Although hermeneutic phenomenology does not require a certain number of participants to conduct a study, my goal was to identify

as many participants as possible in urban districts in Oklahoma. The participants needed to meet my criteria: between the ages of 25-75, Mexican American, bilingual, experienced as an assistant principal or principal in an urban district, a certified administrator, a current or former assistant principal or principal in an urban district, and a volunteer to participate in my study. Using a website for urban schools, as well as the snowball recruitment method, out of the 228 employees in an urban district, nine females self-identified themselves as Hispanic. Of those nine Hispanic women, only six were actual principals or assistant principals. I found four Mexican American bilingual administrators eligible and who were willing to participate in my study. Some were current and some were former administrators of Oklahoma. I found this low number to be significant and in line with the research as it pertains to the findings few minority women leaders in other studies related to Mexican American female educational leaders (Catalyst, 2003; Coleman 2003; DeAnda 2005; Mc Lay & Brown 2001; Morris, 1999 Vélez-Ibánéz, 2004).

The following was my criteria for selecting the participants in the study:

- Between the ages of 25-75 years;
- Mexican American female;
- Bilingual Spanish/English;
- Has experience specifically as a principal, or assistant principal;
- Certified/Credential as an Administrator;
- Works or has worked in an urban district (Oklahoma);
- Expressed an interest to volunteer to participate in my research study;

- Willing and able to participate in an interview of 90 minutes, and a 60 minute follow up and correspondence via email or phone;
- Provides permission to be audio and video recorded each interview session;
- Willing to share any other significant documentation such as newspaper articles, journals, photos or any other meaningful artifacts;
- Willing to sign IRB consent form.

Study Participants

I chose to research Mexican American female administrator's experiences in an urban setting in Oklahoma. This minority population has never been given a voice or explored in an urban school district in Oklahoma. Using hermeneutic phenomenology allows me to document and share their lived experiences and provide information that may help and encourage other Mexican American females to pursue educational leadership roles or provide urban Oklahoma districts with information on how to recruit, support and retain Mexican American female administrators.

Four possible participants qualified for my study and voluntarily agreed to participate. I note that after the first initial interview, one of the four participants did not complete the interview process that involved further participation in a second or possibly third interview, along with follow up emails and phone calls. I attempted several times to communicate with the participant but due to no response, I decided not to use the partial data I collected. Therefore, my number of participants went from four to three. Each of the participants has a pseudonym.

The first participant was Victoria, a forty-six-year-old woman who had a total of ten years' experience in an urban public school setting. The second participant was Lucía, a thirty-eight-year-old woman who has a total of five years' experience as an administrator in an urban public school setting. I am disclosing that my third participant, María is a relative of mine. She is sixty-three and has a total of four years' experience in an urban public school setting. María is my first cousin and has had a strong influence on my educational career. Because of this, I was careful to follow consistently my research interview protocols for each participant in order to maintain an unbiased interpretation of the participants' data.

Data Collection Process

Personal one-to-one interviews and conversations with each of my participants served as the primary means of data collection. First, I gave my participants a demographic survey (see Appendix A) ahead of time in order to save time during the interview process and to establish how the participants self-identify themselves. The survey allowed me to familiarize myself with their present or past situation professionally and enabled me to refine my interview questions (see Appendix B for interview protocol).

Again, the data was collected primarily through a series of personal, in-depth-interviews, and also emails and phone calls with each of the three participants. All of my participants had experience in working in an urban school district. Because my research question meets the criteria outlined by van Manen (2014), I gathered lived experience descriptions (LEDs) through the interview process (van Manen, 2014). I collected participants' narrative material, stories, and the notes and shared anecdotes

that I used in the reflective inquiry process as posited by (van Manen, 2014). Through this reflective inquiry process, I explored the phenomena: What are the lived experiences of Mexican American females as leaders in an urban public school in Oklahoma?

In-depth Interview Process

The phenomenological interview served a specific purpose. During each interview process, I gathered experiential narratives material, stories, or anecdotes as resource material for phenomenological reflection in order to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomena as posited by van Manen (2014). The interview questions were open-ended and did not lead to any assumption on my part. Examples of the interview questions include: What are your experiences as a Mexican American female administrator in an Oklahoma urban public school leadership role? What was your educational experience growing up? Did ethnic background, race, or gender have any impact on your professional growth? Are there challenges both personal and professional being a Latina female administrator in an urban district? (see Appendix B for interview protocol). The main ideas behind the questioning process asked for the true lived experiences of each participant in terms of the phenomena of being a Mexican American female leader in an urban public school in Oklahoma.

I asked each of the participants to describe in as much detail as possible, the story of their unique, lived experience on becoming and being a Mexican American female school leader. As Koch (1996) notes, openness is critical and the discourse should be completely open, with few direct questions. I followed this approach, and

each interview process stayed as close to my participants' lived experience as possible. Geertz (1973) describes this interview process as getting at what participants truly experienced, from the inside out, not simulations of what they believe they experienced. Further, Kvale (1996) warns that it is important to look for not only what is said, but also what is inferred between the lines. Therefore, I pursued this approach of capturing, recording, analyzing, and writing up the lived experiences of my participants from the interview data I collected. The idea of verbatim does not always capture what is being communicated by participants.

Further, van Manen (1997) believes in the importance of paying attention to silence, including different types of silence, such as the absence of speaking or the unspeakable. This was important to my study because of the highly emotional and personal events in my participants' stories. I was conscious to give them time to collect and organize their thoughts and regain their composure after recounting sensitive memories.

Speaking more procedurally than above, I conducted open-ended interviews with Mexican American female administrators who are currently working in an urban district in Oklahoma or who have previously worked in an urban district in Oklahoma, in order to listen to their unique points of view and to examine their leadership and experiences from their personal perspectives. During the interview process with each participant, I used a digital and a video recorder in order not to interrupt the flow of conversation, and as a means to archive the conversation, which enabled me to review and transcribe the interviews later. I also took notes of other qualitative information such as emotional, facial and physical reactions of the

participants during each interview. The duration of each participant initial interview was approximately 90 minutes. The second follow up interview was approximately an hour in length. Some participants had a third interview, while other exchanges were made via email or phone calls. The recorded and videotaped interviews were transcribed and I shared the transcriptions with the participants to review and modify or clarify any part of their story. The transcript lengths for each participant ranged from approximately 35 to 80 pages. I stored the encrypted digital file on my home computer. One year after my dissertation is complete; I will delete the encrypted files from my home computer.

Data Analysis Procedures

Theming

My first step to analyzing the life world themes as described by van Manen (2014) from the participants' data was to read and re-read each transcription, mining the data for the motifs of lived worlds: *relationality, spatiality, temporality, corporality* and *materiality*. Next, I viewed and reviewed the videos of each participant's interview session making notes of facial expressions, voice, tone and pitch, pauses and emotions as they recounted their stories. I color-coded each participant's lived world experiences in the transcriptions to provide me a visual of their stories. After identifying and exploring each participants' lived experiences according to van Manen's lived worlds, I felt the presentation of each of my participants lived stories solely using, van Manen's (2014) lived worlds did not provide a complete representation of them as Mexican American female school leaders in an urban school. So I further analyzed the data to illuminate reoccurring

themes I encountered about each of the women's leadership roles, the themes are *Culture, Family and Language; Leadership Features, and Leadership, Success and Barriers;* and *Absence and Desire for Mentoring*

The term "theme" is to refer to a component that frequently occurs within text. Theme analysis, according to van Manen (2014), is the process I used to discover the themes or strands of themes, which evolved from my participants' lived experiences. In order to have a full textual phenomenological study it is also necessary to determine themes around which the data can be woven. Max van Manen (1990) states: "In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (p.107). Identification and exploration of essential themes from my participants' interviews made a robust study.

In the process of identifying, my participants 'lived world experiences I noticed commonalities within the stories of each of my participants. Using the strategy of a web graphic, I placed their name in the center and then drew lines out to another circle, which contained different categories such as culture, family, language etc. After using this process for each of my participants, I compared their web graphics to see if there was any overlap of information or key understandings about their experiences as school leaders. I began to identify and categorize the emergent understandings across the participants' stories. This process led to the identification of three theme clusters of a) *Culture, Family and Language,* b) *Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers;* and c) *Absence and Desire for Mentoring.*

Once I completed this process and included my findings along with my analysis of their lived experiences, I felt the written representation of each of my participants' was a more robust understanding of their lived experiences as a female Mexican American leader.

Max van Manen (1990) further states that lived experiences are an applicable source for discovery of thematic traits. He described themes as an effort to unearth the structures that make up the experiences. Hence, I followed and adhered to van Manen's 2014) approach for identifying significant themes from each of the participants' lived stories and then compared the emergent themes across each participant.

In summary, I used an inductive, iterative process to analyze the data from my participants' interviews to better understand their lived experiences as female Mexican American education leaders.

Max van Manen's Life World Existentials

First, using van Manen's existential methods to assist the reflective inquiry process, I identified van Manen's life world relation (*relationality*); lived body (*corporeality*); lived space (*spatiality*); lived time (*temporality*) and lived things and technology (*materiality*) for each participant. Max van Manen (2014) explains that we experience lived relation, body, space, time, and things in each of our lives. I used van Manen's life worlds as a framework to guide and code the experiences of my participants. After examining my participants lived experiences I discovered commonalties, which emerged as themes that I noted above as described as a)

Culture, Family and Language, b) *Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers;* and c) *Absence and Desire for Mentoring.*

Hermeneutic Circle

The use of a hermeneutic circle is a strategy I employed when mining my data according to van Manen's (2014) existential life worlds. I created text from the interview data I collected from the participants, including notes I had taken. Through this circle process, an emergence of understanding was established. An overall picture of my participants lived experiences was created in the interpretation of the data as it moved the parts of the experience to the whole in line with understanding each of the participants' life worlds. The hermeneutic circle helped me to identify key understandings and emergent themes from the data that reflected deeper insight of the lived experiences of my participants beyond the descriptive life worlds as posited by van Manen (2014).

Analyzing the data from Mexican American female school leaders in a recursive hermeneutic cycle allowed me to identify other influential themes beyond the life world categories as espoused by van Manen (2014). These themes include a) Culture, Family and Language; b) Leadership Features and Leadership Successes and Barriers; and c) Absence and Desire for Mentoring.

Bias, Trustworthiness and Fidelity

As a Mexican American female working in education, I am familiar with Mexican American female experiences in an educational setting. Because of my own lived experiences, it was important for me to be mindful not to exaggerate the data based on my own experiences in order to reduce researcher bias to the study. As

Gadamer posits in van Manen (2014), “Prejudices are not only unavoidable, they are necessary, as long as they are self-reflectively aware” (p. 354 Familiarity within the study could lead to a loss of objectivity, so I was very careful not only during the interview process, but in the analysis of the data to be self-reflectively aware of my own bias of what it means to be a Mexican American school leader. In order to reduce researcher bias, I conducted pre-research in which I reflected on my topic for my study and my own relationship to the topic. During the data collection stage, deep and sometimes painful reflection of myself was needed before exploring my participants’ responses. My reflective analysis was done through my notes before and after each interview session with my participants. Through my data analysis stage rich insights emerged while examining their stories and examining my own responses to their stories, in a way that I had to remove my personal experiences from my participants’ experiences to not misinterpret their unique lived experiences.

I established trustworthiness and fidelity with my participants by co-constructing the data to ensure credibility and transferability which is noted by of their lived experiences of being a Mexican American female school leader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Co-constructing of the data included recapping what was said after each interview to give the participants an opportunity to clarify, and providing them with transcripts of each interview session to give them another opportunity to change, clarify or add to their story. Follow-up emails and phone calls were also made for further clarification of their respective lived stories as communicated to me. This co- construction helped to establish dependability and confirmability of their lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Protocol

In accordance with the University of Oklahoma's Institutional Review Board (OU IRB) regulations, I asked each participant I solicited through personal contact to sign an informed consent form to participate in my study. This consent form contained information on the purpose of the study, the number of participants, procedures I followed, the length of participation, the risk, confidentiality, compensation, voluntary nature of the study, waivers of elements of confidentiality, and audio and video recording of study activities. Hence, I worked on developing an application to OU IRB to conduct my research study to include my interview questions and contact protocol that I submitted to the IRB office and was granted approval to conduct this study (see Appendix C for OU IRB approval).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents my research methodology. It begins with an introduction to understanding hermeneutic phenomenology and discusses van Manen's (2014) phenomenology of practice. Included in this chapter is my site and sample selection method, study participants, and data collection process including in-depth interview procedures. Further, I explain my data analysis process first using van Manen's (2014) life worlds to understand each of the participants lived experiences, and relied on the hermeneutic circle to engage in recursive review of the data to further explore emergent themes. This process enabled me to capture a deeper and richer understanding of the participants' stories as being female Mexican American school leaders in an urban school. Lastly, the chapter describes researcher

bias, trustworthiness, fidelity, and the approved research study by OU IRB office with notation on my research protocol.

CHAPTER FOUR

Phenomenological Narratives

Presentation of Findings

"My mother gave me one piece of advice that stuck with me. She said don't forget where you came from."

Eva Longoria

Max van Manen (2014) introduces different ways to conduct theme analysis. He describes the process of thematic analysis of a phenomenon as a creative complex process consisting of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure of information. He states formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but an act of seeing (van Manen, 1997). Max van Manen (2014) also acknowledges that there is not one way to conduct analysis and that phenomenological writing and reflection may involve such genres as visual, auditory languages of images, art, music or even cinema.

In order for me as the researcher to reach the level of seeing that would allow me to adequately describe motivation, values, and world views of Mexican American females in a leadership role, I chose to use van Manen's (2014) lived world experiences as an etic to help me dig into the data provided by my participants. In this chapter, I will interpret the lived experiences as expressed by the participants through the lens of van Manen's (2014) existential life worlds; *temporality* (lived time), *spatiality* (lived space), *relationality* (lived relation), lived body, *materiality* (lived things), and *corporality* (lived body) as they relate to each participant and their lived experiences as Mexican American female leaders in an urban school setting in

Oklahoma. I provide examples using quotations from each participant that exemplify each life world. Each participant is introduced with a pseudonym and fictitious name for her school site.

In addition to van Manen's (2014) existential life worlds, through data analysis of the participant voices, I encountered reoccurring themes about each of the women's leadership roles which include *Culture, Family and Language; Leadership Features, and Leadership, Success and Barriers;* and *Absence and Desire for Mentoring.*

I felt all their lived experiences influenced their decisions when they embarked on their journey as a school leader. These emergent themes provide a comprehensive insight in addressing my question: What are the lived experiences of Mexican American females as leaders in an urban public school in Oklahoma? In this chapter, I further describe these themes, and explain what role these themes played in my participants' lives as a school leader in the presentation of my findings.

Participant One: Victoria

Participant One, Victoria, is a forty-six-year-old Mexican American female, mother of one. She self-identifies with the following terms: Mexican-American, Hispanic, Latina, or Chicana. She is currently divorced and has a daughter who is twenty-eight years old. Her parents are both Mexican immigrants, and Spanish was her first language as a child. She has eighteen years of education resulting in a Master's degree, eight years as a classroom teacher, three years as a vice principal and seven years as a principal in an urban district in Oklahoma.

The urban middle school, in which she spent the most time working will be referred to as City Middle School. When Victoria was principal City Middle School had 950-1150 students, 90% of whom were on free or reduced lunch. The ethnic breakdown was approximately 50% Latino, 40% Caucasian, and 10% African American. Approximately 34% of the student population was identified as English language learners. Students at the school received services from federal programs Title I and Title III.

Temporality (lived time)

Max van Manen's (2014) notion of *temporality* (lived time) asks us to reflect on objective (cosmic) time and subjective (lived) time and how we experience them differently as individuals. Victoria had a total of ten years of experience in administration in an urban school setting in Oklahoma. In her last administrative assignment as principal, she explained she was the youngest and longest-lasting principal at City Middle School. During her assistant principal years at a prior school, that I will refer to as City Heights High School, the district was constantly asking her to apply for a head administrator job even though she had limited experience in actual school administrative practices. Her first response to this request was as follows:

> So about six months in, Rafael [pseudonym] calls me [from the district office] and asks me if I want to apply for principalship at City Middle School. What? I have been here [City Heights] for six months, this is all I can do. Heck No! I barely figured out what I am supposed to be doing as an assistant, I am not ready to do that.

Not much later on, she was asked again to take the head administrator job at another building where the demographics of Hispanic population had increased

significantly. Victoria vividly recalled the conversation with the district administrator [Rafael] about her administrative advancement.

> [The district administrator told me] There is a school that is going to be open very soon, and we know you are hesitant about leaving where you are now. Now we thought maybe you would consider this one, it would be a principalship. I said I have been an assistant principal for a year, just a little bit over a year, I don't know that I am ready to do that. [The district administrator further said] Well you think about it and you get back to me. So I go back in and I talk to my principal, I said I got this call. He says Victoria, this is the third time, no way that they are going to ask you again, so you better take it. I said, well it's not an offer, it's just telling me I can apply for it. Sure enough, I was given the opportunity to become the principal at City Middle School. So this was a year and a half after becoming an assistant principal that I moved over there. I was there for seven years; I was the longest running principal there.

In reflecting on Victoria's lived experience considering the job offer, she experienced *temporality* (lived time) as the amount of time she was given to learn her job as an assistant principal. She felt like she was being rushed into taking the job as principal of City Middle School. She also felt as if she could not keep declining the position for fear she would never get a leadership role. Later in her interview she stated, she would have liked to have had more time to learn the job of being a principal instead of learning by trial and error. She felt like part of the reason she was being pushed to become the principal of City Middle School that there was a lack of Hispanic principals in the district where the population of Hispanic students was on the increase. Whether she was ready or not to assume the principal position, her time to take on a leadership role happened quickly. In light of van Manen's (2014) *temporality*, "lived time," Victoria's experience can be likened to *telos*: the wishes, plans and goals we strive for in life. Victoria's ultimate plans and goals were to

become a driving principal, but she felt rushed and unprepared when the initial opportunity was presented to her.

Spatiality (lived space)

Max van Manen's (2014) *spatiality* (lived space) guides us to reflect on how space and place are experienced. For Victoria, this takes place on several levels. City Middle School's faculty proved to be challenging to lead since she was younger than most of the faculty and not of the same cultural background. Most of the teachers' had been there many years and there was a strong teachers union in the building. Victoria felt it was hard to build relationships because of the differences in age and cultural backgrounds between herself and her staff. She reflects on the early encounters with her staff.

> I'm gonna say they probably treated me not a whole lot different than the other ones [referring to former principals] initially, then they started trying to find different nick picking items that they could find and they [SIC] in what was different from me to what their cultural norms were.

The *Spatiality* (lived space) of this relationship was initially reflective of the chasm she perceived between her and the staff. She was later able to start closing the relationship distance by referencing the shared spaces in their backgrounds. She explains:

> When we could come together on stuff was when I'd refer back to Oklahoma City history or the societal norms that I grew up with here in the city. It was difficult for them [the teachers] to actually see me as having the same history that they did because I looked different. You could see that they were surprised that I knew about different things that happened here in the community in the 70s or that I literally used to run these streets when it was the busy commerce area. And so whenever I could tie it back to that [city history], then we're good; but anything outside of that that was cultural then, oh no.

In discussing *spatiality* (lived space) aspect van Manen (2014) also describes how we shape space and how space shapes us. Victoria intentionally created space in her work environment as an administrator between her staff and assistant principals. She remarked:

> I'm by nature more of a… - I keep it to myself, don't really tell other people what the issues are I just figure it out. One thing that I've learned is that I will figure out how to deal with whatever situation without outside support.

Victoria's attitude of not asking for help from anyone at school created more division or space between her faculty and assistant principals. Her self-reliance did little to improve the disconnect she felt from her faculty and staff, but also her disconnect from school district administration. She felt it was important to keep a professional line between herself and her two assistant principals who also happened to be Mexican American women. This was highly unusual to have three Mexican American administrators all in one building at that time. It would be unusual even today in Oklahoma's urban districts. Victoria was also younger than both her assistant principals, which also created some distance or space between them. This, however, did not keep them from offering her advice because they were older. For example, one of the assistant principals who had been in the school system in different roles offered Victoria advice on being an administrator in the school. Victoria recalls:

> I think… tried to always maintain that line of professionalism … understanding that I was the supervisor and she [referring to assistant principal] was the subordinate. I think that she always tried to maintain that line, but tried to still advise me properly as far as you're gonna have to play this game. You play the game but you don't let your guard down with this [administration]. You can't be as honest with these

> people. You can't be as honest as what your thoughts are with everyone like you tend to be.

Victoria expressed that one of the most difficult things for her to deal with was the disconnect or distance, created between the school district upper administration, which at that time was experiencing a great amount of turnover in personnel. She also struggled to stay connected to her own school when as a principal she was often called away from her school site to attend to responsibilities and meetings at the district central administration building.

Being out of the building happened often to principals. Victoria sadly recounted one of her experiences with a student that reminded her that she needed to be visible to her students and school community in spite of the void created by needing to be out of the school building.

> My last year I was standing in my gym one day and this little girl in a wheel chair she's looking up at me. We talked a little bit about what was going on and she says, 'Do you work here?' I said, 'Yeah Baby, I work here.'[Victoria recalled and then commented] Crap, they have us out of the building so much that my kids don't even know who I am. Now of course, granted, I had 1,110 students and as long as I know who the teacher is it's what's important to me, but it would be kind of good if they [my students] knew who their principal was. That just kind of broke my heart. It's a battle that we still fight today; principals have to go down there [to the district offices] for the communication. I don't know what a better way there is to do it.

In review of Victoria's story, it can be seen that van Manen's *spatiality* (lived space) also took form in the distance or space between Victoria and her faculty, peers, and the district administration. In Victoria's case, the space and places of her experiences show how a person is affected by space and how a person creates space (van Manen, 2014).

In Victoria's circumstances in being principal of City Middle School, she deliberately created part of the distance or space because she was used to doing things on her own and not asking for help. Another part of the distance was created by outside circumstances, such as having to be out of the school for district meetings. With her teachers, the distance Victoria experienced with her staff had to do with cultural distances and background experience that were overtly expressed to her from the teachers in her building. With her assistant principals, cultural understandings or misunderstandings did not play a role between Victoria and her assistant principals since they were all Mexican American women school leaders. However, Victoria felt, in order to not be perceived as showing cultural favoritism, she needed to establish boundaries for professional purposes. Additionally, Victoria expressed that since she was younger than both assistant principals, she felt compelled to establish a line between her personal and professional relationships in order to maintain her authority and role of leader. The divide that Victoria created between herself and her assistant principals was in response to the fact she was younger than both her assistant principals and, in fact, one of the youngest principals in the district. She felt her youth might compromise her credibility as a school leader and thus she cloaked her self-perceived vulnerability with aloofness and distance.

> I think that she [assistant principal] always tried to maintain that line [of respect], but tried to still advise me properly [as a young principal] as far as you're gonna have to play this game. You play the game but you don't let your guard down. You can't be as honest with these people [faculty]. You can't be as honest about your thoughts with everyone like you tend to be.

Hence, the greatest void was between her and the district administration. She attributed this void in her relationship with district administration to the amount of turnover that was going on at the district level.

In Victoria's case, the space and places act as fundamental themes of understanding her experiences as an administrator in an urban district. The details of Victoria's *lived space* experiences demonstrates how she was directly affected by space and how she attempted to create space so she could do her job more effectively as a Mexican American female leader in an urban school setting in Oklahoma.

Relationality (lived relation)

Relationality (lived relation) has many motifs according to van Manen (2014). These motifs include how people or things are connected, ethics of being together, family relations, otherness, sacrifice, dedication, or service, even love and friendship. Victoria's *relationality* manifests in the connectivity she experienced with people and places. In her home relationships, Victoria received criticism from her father for not learning how to cook, the unimportance of her job since she did not earn as much or more than her first husband did, and the expectations of her second husband that she be home every night, with dinner made and be there for him. All the significant males in her life were Mexican or Mexican American. These criticisms are tied to Mexican cultural expectations.

In Victoria's professional life, she has a long history with an urban school district in Oklahoma since she started out as a bilingual assistant at the beginning of her career. The entire time she worked on getting her educational degrees she had the opportunity to get to know students, teachers, and administrators. She had built a

strong relationship with the district community as a bilingual assistant before ever becoming a district administrator herself. Her relationship with the district administration however varied depending on the people who were in charge at the time. She remarks on the relationships she had with the district administrators in her early employment years as both an assistant principal and principal.

> The first three years I had Rafael [pseudonym], I had Miguel Soto [pseudonym], [I] had Daniel Casas [pseudonym], all Latinos; very supportive and I suspect very protective, to an extent to where I may not have been aware on how much they protected me, based on recognizing now some of the politics that goes on. Rafael left and I still had Miguel and Daniel. So the first three years there was [SIC] significant gains made. Pretty much anything that I asked for or suggested or questioned I had their support. After that, everyone started leaving. So first, I lost Rafael, and then I lost Miguel. Miguel left, so after that, the constant struggle trying to get anything done. I went through five different supervisors and, you know, principal directors.

Victoria continued to express her thoughts about all the changes in the district and how that affected her. She expanded on how naïve she felt about the politics at the administration level.

> So I went through five different ones [district administrators] and each one had their own thing. And I think all of them had the experience, understanding the politics, and suspecting those around you, that there was always an ulterior motive. At that time, I still had not caught on to that game. So silly me, I was honest and asked well why, or if I disagreed, why do you want me to do that? It doesn't make sense to me. You tell me. I am going to do it, I just want to understand, and that was the type of conversation I would have. And that ended up not working too good for me.

Victoria continued to expand on what she found frustrating when dealing with district politics. Her tone was one of frustration and her hand gestures increased to emphasize her frustration with the system.

> When I took on the position one of my fears was, I don't know that I know how to do this job. I barely know how to be an assistant principal.

> Oh 'just call us, if you have any questions, just call us we'll help you.' Well, that's not really true. They have good intentions; the reality of it is there is just no way they can help you as much as you need…as much as I needed it.

Victoria's conversation about her development of relationships at the district level with the administrators clearly expresses that the lack of support played a significant role in her decision to leave the district as a principal. Victoria recalled how she felt:

> So, it would get frustrating, cause you would get told, one thing over here and something else over here. … and when this doesn't work, whatever you did they are both saying, well it's because you didn't do what I said. And so that support system wasn't there really.

She also had to struggle with cultural misconceptions, the way Mexicans or Hispanics interact with each other as opposed to the interaction with Caucasians. Victoria's supervisors were *Latinos;* therefore, she interacted with them differently than if they were Caucasian. Victoria recollected how she felt she was viewed by the mainstream Caucasian culture in regards to her Mexican culture and the mainstream culture at the district level.

> So, I would bring them [Latino administrators] food, that my mother made, homemade food. Why I knew that Miguel's family wasn't here and so if I could provide him a homemade meal, that was, I mean I knew that he would appreciate that. Now, our new superintendent for example, his family is out of town, but it wouldn't occur to me to take him food because he wouldn't necessarily appreciate those homemade *tamales* or those *chili rellenos* or whatever it is. So I would take some to Rafael and Rafael is really picky about what he eats, he's a very very healthy eater, but Miguel, he would eat, so I would take him stuff. It wasn't for me, it wasn't flirting, it [bringing food] was the same thing I would do if you were my cousin or brother, or you know you don't have your family here to feed you this homemade stuff. I have some, I'll take it, I'll share, but people see that differently.

Victoria's actions, such as giving food to a Latino supervisor at the district office, was often misunderstood or misinterpreted by school individuals who were not Mexican American and just could not understand the culture and reciprocity and extended friendship that is embraced in the Hispanic culture. Her relationship with other district personnel, particularly Caucasian males viewed this level of familiarity critically. This relationship of familiarity with Latino district administrators, in turn, reflected on her performance as a principal that Victoria inferred others held the notion that the only reason she got her job was due to her relationships with the Latino administrators. Max van Manen's (2014) *relationality* (lived relation) can also be seen in Victoria's feeling of alterity or otherness, the feeling of cultural marginalization and devaluation, simply being different. She points out how she was viewed differently from others not only in her building but also at the school district level because of people's misinterpretation of her image and a false rumor.

> So I am Latina, I do try to always look presentable, to what my standard of looking presentable is, so I think because of that I was, I feel as if I was regularly categorized as to what you would put the ditzy blonde. It's not something that I've earned, or that I'm capable of doing or confident in. It was because supposedly someone I slept with. Heck [lowers voice], I wish I was there maybe I would have enjoyed it.

When considering van Manen's *relationality* (lived relation), Victoria's social and personal awareness in her role as principal were anchored in understandings and misunderstanding of her culture and who she was as part of practicing and embracing her cultural values and beliefs. Victoria experienced significant skepticism of her as a principal because of the cultural misunderstanding. She explained others, her staff and district administrators, did not understand the so-called cultural difference, the differences in her upbringing, beliefs and cultural

values, as opposed to theirs. Her story illuminated the criticism of her relationship with other Latinos in administration and the relationships in general and this affected how the school community viewed her as a principal. Clearly, Victoria felt that she was culturally appropriate in her actions and behaviors towards other Latinos but she felt and described how she was being judged unfairly by their mainstream standards. This judgement or view caused others in the district to not take her seriously as a principal. She felt the loss of supportive relationships at the administration level affected her ability to be a more effective leader. There were no other Latina principal mentors available to help her. Max van Manen's (2014) *relationality* (lived relation) in respect to self and others are evident in Victoria's experiences as a Mexican American female administrator in an urban school district.

Materiality (lived things)

Materiality (lived things) encompasses a variety of life issues according to van Manen (2014). Life aspects defined as not just objects but responsibilities, technology, and morality, extensions of our bodies or mindset. The lived things that Victoria experienced as a school principal dealt with the mindset she had of having to do everything herself and not trusting others. This mindset developed from not being able to rely on her parents in her childhood. Her childhood circumstances as she described resulted in her having to become independent and not relying on others for help. Doing things for herself played a significant role in her leadership. She acknowledges that the influence of her childhood could be a double-edged sword. On one side was the ability to be independent and do things on her own, and on the

other, not knowing how to delegate or ask for help. Issues such as trust and asking for help were areas she had to deal with as a principal.

> Knowing that, how to do everything myself has helped me, but at the same time hinders my ability, in my opinion, to be the effective leader that I try to be. Because part of being a leader is helping others problem-solve. And, when my skill set of problem solving is I will do it myself instead of pulling in resources, well I really can't help someone else develop that skill set when I still struggle with it. So that continues to frustrate me.

Victoria felt that her leadership style went through an evolutionary process the more years of experience she had in the role of being a school principal. She definitely felt that her style from the beginning to the end of her years in administration changed her for the better. She described her evolutionary process in leadership in an urban school district:

> It [my leadership style] did change [in the end]. I was able to do more, to bounce ideas off of people that I had confidence in, who were [SIC] trusted in me to go wherever I needed to go. They had more trust than I did, they had more trust in my decision than I did. But I was able to bounce the ideas from them and at least see or hear their reactions to help me decide whether or not this was what I was going to do. The things that did not work out, they were there to help me kind of guide back. [She recalls the beginning of her years as head principal of City Middle School and the evolution of her leadership style.] Those first years I made it difficult on myself because it was me; it was, I'm going to solve this like I do everything else. By the end I was much more about, even though I told them you're the expert I'm just facilitating, I still believe that, but by the end, not only are you the expert and I'm facilitating, I'm actually going to release the reins, and actually support whatever decision you make to allow us to get where we need to be. Had I been able to have that shared leadership in the beginning of my principal role I think we [the teachers and I] would have had a little bit different results, a little bit more support from beginning. Instead of my last year, which was when we had more of that type of relationship.

Materiality (lived things) in Victoria's story of her principal experience manifested itself as her exhibiting and being self-reliant and independent when it came to her

leadership and decision-making. Since Victoria was used to solving problems herself and handling all the responsibility, it took her longer to be able to develop a leadership style that was more cooperative or distributive. Her self-reliance is directly connected to her family life and childhood upbringing where she recollected that she learned early how to take care of herself and others. *Materiality* (lived things) asks a person to view how things are experienced. In Victoria's majority years as a school principal, she was very much more self-reliant and independent.

Corporality (lived body)

Max van Manen's (2014) *corporality* (lived body) asks for reflection on how the body is experienced with respect to the phenomenon; in this study, being a Mexican American leader in an urban school district in Oklahoma is studied. During the interview process, Victoria's body language was relaxed as she sipped her coffee. Drinking coffee, however, did not interfere with her use of hand gestures while she was recounting her stories. When she spoke of her ex-husbands, she rolled her eyes with a hint of sarcasm and determination when dealing with situations involving them and her daughter. When speaking about her professional experiences, her voice would raise with a tone of frustration when she would reflect on how her actions were misinterpreted by the mainstream culture of both teachers and district administrators who were not Mexican American. This frustration in her voice continued as she spoke about the lack of support from the district administrators to help principals.

She stated after the first interview with me that she felt like she was going through therapy having to go back and talk about her experiences growing up and as

a vice principal and principal in an urban school district. She was surprised at the different feelings that emerged when speaking about the different people in her personal and professional life as well as the situations. Victoria was very animated when it came to her conversation about helping students; she spoke with passion about helping the community.

There was a tone of sadness at the loss of a friendship when a line was crossed between professionalism and friendship. I could see it was a mixed bag of frustration and sadness in her eyes and voice when she spoke of feeling as if she had to leave the district, and regretted she could not do more for the students and families. Victoria was completely unaware of how her body posture, tone of her voice and hand movements would adjust to the emotions of the stories she was recounting to me. Max van Manen (2014) speaks of how we experience being touched by something or by a person. Victoria clearly demonstrated her *corporality* (lived body) in how she was affected by the decisions she made in her role as an administrator. Victoria was equally expressive in her personal decisions, as these decisions were intertwined with her professional ones. She recalled a situation between herself and a friend.

> She's a teacher who decided to say, well, you know, Victoria and I are friends we do everything on the weekends so if I say so this is what's she [Victoria] is gonna do I probably would, if that's her recommendation. Because, she [the teacher] again, was very knowledgeable, very good at what she was doing, I promoted her, supported her and gave her advice as much as she would accept. That's where it [our friendship] broke; you cannot use a personal relationship that you and I have against other staff which is what you're doing. That's not acceptable. You know if there has to be a break somewhere; that was it. [It put an end to their friendship].

Victoria's tone of voice changed to a more somber one. The teacher trying to play a power game using their friendship hurt her feelings. She knew as a school leader, that this type of behavior was not acceptable. She went on to explain.

> Yeah, it hurt. I think once she realized, I think she tried to start playing a little power game. And when it starts affecting what my purpose is there's no more game. I'm the boss, period. So either I'm going to help and support you, but you're not gonna be here very long. Because my job is to ensure that this entire building works effectively. And if you're causing that big of an issue that's going to inhibit me from being successful in this area in what we're trying to accomplish, so I'm not gonna allow that. So things went downhill really quickly, really bad. That friendship will not develop again.

Victoria was visibly sad and disappointed. She slowly sipped her coffee and looked off into the hallway to see if anyone was approaching.

Participant Two: Lucía

Participant number two, Lucía, is a thirty eight year old Mexican American female. She is married with two children, she has a seven-year-old son and a four-year- old daughter. Lucía identifies with the term Hispanic. She was born in Mexico and both her parents are Mexican citizens. Lucía's first language is Spanish; she immigrated to the U.S. in order to attend college and went through the immigration process to become a U.S. citizen. Lucía has a total of eighteen years of working in education, nine as an elementary teacher one year as an assistant principal, and four years as an elementary principal. She is currently the principal at an elementary school Jones Elementary, which is located in an urban school district in Oklahoma.

Jones Elementary has a population of approximately 497 students. Of the student population, 84% are Hispanic, 11.5% are Caucasian, 3.3 % are African American, and the remainder are other nationalities. Jones is 83.1% free or reduced

lunch. Of these students, 61.3% identified as English language learners. Jones Elementary is a Title I school, A+ School (whose framework supports the whole school, particularly in schools with strong principal leadership, high faculty engagement and regular OKA+ professional development), and a Great Expectations (which is a professional development program that provides teachers and administrators with the skills needed to create harmony and excitement within the school atmosphere and elements for inspiring students to pursue academic excellence)**.** Jones received a D+ on the State Department's A-F report card system.

Temporality (lived time)

As stated earlier, van Manen's (2014) *temporality* (lived time) asks us to reflect on objective (cosmic) time and subjective (lived) time and how we experience them differently as individuals. Max van Manen (2014) reminds us that lived space and time are mingled. Lucía experiences the phenomenon of being a Mexican American administrator in an urban school district in Oklahoma in regards to van Manen's (2014) *temporality* (lived time) differently since she is currently still a principal in an urban school district in Oklahoma. Lucía is completing on her fifth year as principal at Jones Elementary School. Lucía had previously been a teacher in the district while working on her Master's degree. Even during her time as an assistant principal in an urban school setting, she felt as though the district did not adequately prepare her for the job as a school principal. She recounts her thoughts on how she felt when she began her position as an assistant principal.

> As a teacher I had no idea, no clue. Even as an assistant principal, it was just a little glimpse, and you really depend on your principal to be able to train you to learn things. If your principal is more like, 'well you do discipline and I'll do the reports and the manpower, and all of

> the other things,' and then if she leaves you with just doing discipline and referrals then you don't learn all that part. So I think it depends a lot on your principal to see how much you're gonna learn and experience to be prepared for being a good principal.

Lucía experienced *temporality* (lived time) as the lack of time to not only learn how to be an administrator but the lack of time to be able to get all the things done that are required to be an effective principal. She finds it difficult and frustrating to not get the things done in the timely manner that the district requests. She felt that she also did not have adequate time to learn how to be what she considers an effective administrator. Personal and professional time as well as time management affect her *temporality* (lived time) in regards to her role as a Mexican American female administrator in an urban school district.

Spatiality (lived space)

Spatiality (lived space) described by van Manen (2014) includes how we shape space and how space shapes us. Lucía makes an effort to close the space between herself and her faculty along with families and district personnel. Lucía makes a conscious effort to visit her teachers and students regularly so they can feel like a community. Because of her building's design she must make an extra trip to visit the part of the building that is across the street.

Lucía feels very at home in the school building and with her students, teachers, and parents. She feels that since she is bilingual she is able to bridge any communication gap there may be between the school and her parents, largely because the majority of her student population is Hispanic. She regularly reaches out to include her school community both in Spanish and in English to promote programs or school needs.

However, Lucía felt that there was not only a communication gap between the district administration and the school but between all the departments within the district administration itself and how they communicate with each other. The lack of communication between departments causes stress on building principals. Lucía explains how the lack of communication within the district directly affects her as principal.

> They [district administration] give us deadlines or reports that we have to submit. I feel like, do you all know that you [different departments in district administration] all gave us assignments [at the same time]. I'm just one person or can you spread out your deadlines or at least what I would like is to have at least a district calendar that says on Tuesday turn in this to the Curriculum department, on Wednesday this is due to the Language and Cultural Services department, in two weeks you will have this due for that department. So I don't know that they communicate with each other to say oh we piled these three things on them they're all due in the same week.

I see Lucía's experience with *spatiality* (lived space) as a lack of communication between the different offices and departments in administration in the central school office downtown. Although the departments share the same building space, they function as islands. It seems to her as if the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing; stressful situations are caused for her as a building principal, especially in the case where she has no help. Her school does not qualify for an assistant principal due to her enrollment numbers being low; therefore, all report preparation and accountability reports, in addition to running the school, fall directly on her as the main school principal. Lucía experiences van Manen's (2014) *spatiality* (lived space) in regards to space and place as the gap of communication between the district office and her as the school principal, but also between departments in the central administrative offices. This space or gap directly affects her role as an

administrator in an urban school district, in particular to managing of her time and oversight of the school. She wants to be able to be an effective leader in her school, but expressed she wished the communication about accountability reports and other matters coming from the school district would be more synchronized and mindful of the daily principal duties in running a school.

Relationality (lived relation)

Max van Manen's (2014) *relationality* (lived relation) has many motifs, such as how people or things are connected, ethics of being together, family relations, otherness, sacrifice, dedication, or service, even love and friendship, as mentioned previously.

Lucía's *relationality* (lived relation) connection with respect to her personal and professional life is very evident from her descriptive story when it comes to the motifs mentioned. Lucía expressed that her family is the support that helps her do her job as a principal. Her in-laws are both retired teachers and watch her two children so they do not have to go to any type of day care. Her own parents help her by coming in from Texas to watch her two children during important times in the school year. This gives her in-laws a break and allows her two children to spend time with their other grandparents. Lucía explained how the orchestration of her family works in order to help her do her job as a school principal.

> My mom comes...every two months...she comes and stays here for about two weeks at least, sometimes two weeks and a half… three weeks… a week and a half. She comes and stays and watches the kids. I've told her there have been times when she needs to be here, for instance state testing that is coming up and all those booklets come and we have to stick around, she knows she needs to be here for testing. She knows she has to be here for the beginning of the year, when we are getting the school ready, when we are doing enrollment of students

> she has to be here to watch the kids. Once again cause those are long days for me.

Lucía's husband is also an elementary principal in an urban Oklahoma school district, so they both benefit from their families' support, which gives them time to do their jobs as principals. This type of extended family support is not unusual for Mexican families (Brice, 2002). Lucía viewed her employment with the district not so much on her credentials, but on the relationship and reputation of her husband who was already a principal in the district. She vividly recalls the role her husband played in her advancement to being a school principal.

> So when I got hired as assistant principal they were hiring [for] several administrative positions [in the district]. And if anything I'd say that my husband said, 'hey my wife is looking for an administrative position.' So I would probably say because she [director for secondary schools] trusted him [her husband] and liked him and thought she is probably like her husband, she will probably do a good job.

The *relationality* (lived relation) aspect that stood out the most in Lucía's case was the relationship with her family. Her reliance on both her in-laws and parents to create dedicated time for her job is remarkable. She did not mention any help from the district; she relies on help from her teachers and her family to get things done. Lucía explained how she gets help.

> I try to stay, we [Lucía and teachers] usually stay at least once/twice a month I stay late here for something that we have at school. For instance, I think it was December; we had a dance for the students so I stayed late. So, we [Lucía and her husband] try to stay late once a month, twice a month I stay here for whatever event we have going on. So like my mother-in-law…say for instance last week we had parent/teacher conferences and I was here until like 7 p.m. [So your mother-in-law, your in-laws pick up…] So yes, I'm like oh yes this is my day of the month you [in-laws] have to keep the kids. They understand [because they're teachers].

Her husband, who is also a principal in the same district, is her sounding board when she is frustrated or needs advice. She said it would be nice to have an assigned mentor, but there is no one she can call so she does the best that she can. She credits her husband with encouraging her to become a principal and for helping her get hired. The saying, 'it is not what you know but whom you know,' may be applicable in her case. However, she is well qualified and can stand on her own merits. Lucía also believes the fact that she is Mexican and bilingual helps with her relationship with the community. Lucía experiences van Manen's (2014) *relationality* (lived relation) at many levels both personal and professional all of which play an important role to her as an administrator.

Materiality (lived things)

Materiality (lived things) includes life aspects defined as not just objects but responsibilities, technology, and morality, extensions of our bodies or mindset as mentioned previously. Lucía experiences van Manen's (2014) *materiality* in the form of time and time management as a principal. Lucía cites time being the most valuable and difficult thing to manage in her experience as a principal. When she was a college student and an elementary teacher in Texas, she was expected to complete assignments by given deadlines. Her experience as a principal, however, has been different. She compares her experience with time and time management as a college student, elementary teacher and principal.

> Time management, being able to acknowledge that there are so many things and you are not gonna get to do all of them at once. As a teacher or anything that I had experienced before as a teacher or as a student in college, you know, you have this report due and it's due by this date. That's your deadline; or as a teacher you have your lesson plans to do for next week and you got them done, prepared, you delivered your

> lesson plans and you moved on. But you plan for things and you get them done.

She continues to explain the difference in perspective from her experience as a student, teacher and vice principal. Lucía found it difficult and frustrating because she was trying to meet all the district's deadlines. She recalled:

> As a principal, when I became just an assistant principal, I was like, these things need to get done, this needs to get done, this needs to get done; I felt like there were all these thousands of things that had to be done, and I was like 'I'm not doing enough, I'm not doing enough. What am I gonna do?' And listening to my principal, it's like, 'no it's fine, you're doing great, don't worry about it.' But I [was thinking]'No, but this needs to be and this needs to be done.' 'No, that's okay that's the way it is.' I'm like, 'No this needs to be done, things need to be done and they get done….' Then I would tell my husband, who was a principal as well, and he was like 'yes, that's the way it is, you just have to come to grips with it. That's the way it is.' I was like, 'No, but it's not supposed to be like that.' So you just got to know that that's the way it is, I guess.

In Lucía's case *materiality* (lived things) for her is time and time overlaps with her *temporality* (lived time). She spoke of never having enough time to get things done. She would like to give her teachers, who are pursuing their Master's degree in administration, time to do an internship so they can have real experience as an administrator. She would like teachers to have more time to collaborate and time to get involved with the community. She also places a high value on the time she gets to spend with her family. She wants to ensure that her children have time with both sets of grandparents so that they will have time to develop bilingualism. As expressed earlier, in *temporality* (lived time), navigating time and accepting bounded time for Lucía's *materiality* plays a strong role in her success for both personal and professional life.

Corporeality (lived body)

With respect to van Manen's (2014) *corporality* (lived body), how the body experiences the phenomenon of being a Mexican American female administrator, Lucía's case was interesting. During the interview process, Lucía was very modest in her demeanor. She questioned what she could contribute to this study in comparison to the other participants. I noted a little nervousness in her voice as we began. I was unsure if this was due to English being her second language, and as a result, she was unsure of herself, or is she concerned about sharing since she is still employed with the district.

Once we began our conversations, she seemed to relax and speak freely. During the interview process, I noted her office was very organized. She spoke with passion when it came to the well-being of her students and their parents. Her passion was accentuated during our conversations by the use of her hands. Having gone through the immigration process herself, she had great empathy in her voice when about speaking trying to help her families with the immigration process. Lucía expressed frustration with the lack of training by the district. She wished she had a mentor who she could call when she started. She pointed to her chest as she remarked,

> I think it's tough being a principal in Oklahoma because you learn as you go. It is a lot of learning as you go. I don't think there is a good enough training process or program at all.

Lucía also expressed frustration by shaking her head when talking about the challenge in trying to raise her children to become bilingual. Lucía wants her children to stay connected to their Mexican heritage. She expressed that it is difficult

trying to get them to realize that bilingualism is a good thing. Lucía's challenge is formidable when English surrounds her children and Spanish is not valued by the mainstream culture in Oklahoma. Max van Manen's (2014) ideas about how bodies experience the phenomenon of *corporality*, explain a great deal in Lucía's case. She did not seem inhibited in any way in expressing how she felt as a principal and doing her job. I also noticed that during our first interview she was dressed comfortably and looked fine but had on little makeup. She was concerned with how she looked when she remembered I was also going to video our interview. In our next interview, she was dressed in bright colors and had more makeup and lipstick on so she would look better on the video, even though I assured her no one would be viewing them but me.

Participant Three: María

María is a sixty-three-year-old Mexican American female, who is married with two children: a daughter who is thirty-five and a son who is thirty. María self identifies with the term Chicana. She was born in Texas, both parents are Mexican American and Spanish was her first language. She has a Master's degree in Reading along with her Principal's certification. María has four years of experience in a public urban district in Oklahoma at the high school and middle school level. She is currently the principal of a private elementary school and has been at that school for the past three years.

The student population in the high school and middle in which she worked had dominant Hispanic student population ranging from 50%-65% and approximately 95% of the students on free and reduced lunch. She worked with Title

I, Title III and Indian Education. María also has experience as an administrator for seven years in the 1980s as the director of the Title VII Bilingual/ ESL program for an urban school district in Oklahoma.

Temporality (lived time)

María's experience of *temporality* (lived time) and space are mingled. Max van Manen's (2014) description of the mingling of space and time are evident in María's lived experiences when applied to the phenomenon being a Mexican American female administrator in an urban setting. María started her career as an assistant principal at General High School, where she worked as an assistant for three years. Her experiences there shifted with the changing of the head school principal. María recollects her experiences as an assistant principal where her *temporality* (lived time) changed. In her story, María uses the terms English Language Learner (ELL) program and English as a Second Language (ESL) program interchangeably.

> The first two years were fabulous, I felt like I came in just being able to do some fantastic things. But the principal had hired me …that principal wanted me there and he said 'First thing that I want you to do María, is I want you to look at our ELL program.' He said, 'That's one of the reasons that I was very interested in you because we need to do something about our ELL program here at General. I don't really feel like we have one; I don't feel like we're servicing the kids and so I'm going to put you as the principal in charge of the ESL program.' He said, 'I have four assistant principals here and each one of them gets a different duty in which they must focus; so you'll be the principal that focuses on the ELL program.' It was a very fun year because our tests scores were… I don't know… they were a mess. So I got that straightened out, I brought in some help to get it straightened up.

In her third year as assistant principal at General High School, María was reporting to a new principal. This new principal was a Caucasian female. This principal was brought in to raise test scores and she hired her own assistant principals

who were also Caucasian. Along with María, only one male African American assistant principal remained for a short time and the principal later transferred him to another school.

María felt like her time there was threatened. She was very candid about her feelings when describing the change in principal leadership. María recalled,

> Someone else [a principal] that was brought in that was very racist to the kids. Again, I couldn't keep my mouth shut. I didn't say too much to her but I said it to parents. She tried to run kids off because they didn't speak English, wrote letters [to the families to have students drop] which I had to prove that she did and, long story short, I got the most horrible evaluation I've ever gotten in my entire life. She told me that if I didn't resign that she would make my life miserable and that I needed to move on or learn to keep my mouth shut and that our conversation would never go anywhere because no one was hearing our conversation but me and her and that she would ruin me if I decided to stay on.

On her way to resign, María ran into the Assistant Superintendent at that time, who convinced her to stay on because there was such a need for bilingual Mexican Americans in leadership position. He said he would approve her transfer to another school. Later that day she received a call informing her that she was being transferred to Rose Middle School as an assistant principal. Her time there was short; due to the fact the principal of her new school had a close relationship with the principal of General High School, which was her former school. Once again, she felt she was being pushed out.

She was asked to resign again, this time from Rose Middle School. María decided to resign because she was tired of fighting the powers in charge and the district administration system as a whole.

Later, María filed a civil suit against the school district and the principal of General High School. She wanted to fight the injustice she had experienced and to bring awareness to prejudice experienced by students in the schools. She was very emotional when recounting her experience.

> I fought the case, she [the lawyer] took the case and we won with a $35,000 lawsuit for inequality. I had to say that I would never mention it [the civil suit], that I was never allowed in Rose Middle School again. But, after 33 years I'm fighting the cause of all of the injustice. I could honestly say because of my Anglo friend who we referred to as the lady with the brown tongue and three other beautiful Hispanic women, we had won together and I have to tell you it wasn't easy. I went, I had to face that principal that did those things, in a deposition where I was questioned for 11 ½ hours. Of course, by the time that I finished paying the court case and the attorney got her $17,000, the settlement ended up being something like six or seven thousand dollars. But, it wasn't about the money, it was about the cause [fighting injustice].

María's *temporality* (lived time) experiences as an administrator have been marked by specific events in her career where she has spoken up for the rights of students or tried to make improvements only to be met with opposition. She had been asked on numerous occasions to stand down or keep quiet. The aforementioned are but a few examples of her story. María's *temporality* (lived time) experience provides examples of van Manen's (2014) *telos*: the wishes, plans, and goals we strive for in our lives.

Spatiality (lived space)

Space and place in van Manen's (2014) life worlds often intersect and overlap in regards to the phenomenon. Such is the *spatiality* (lived space) of María in General High School. María never expressed any difficulty with getting along with the students, faculty or community. She has always felt at home when working with students and their parents. Part of this she attributes to being bilingual and having the

same culture as the school's population. She had a sense of belonging within the school community and made the parents feel like they were part of the school. At General High School, she started a modified transitional bilingual program. She explains how she created a place or space where students felt they belonged.

> The second semester that I started was a plan in which it was a transitional bilingual program in that actually for the four subject areas of language arts, mathematics and science they would go through a strand in which they had ELL teachers or bilingual teachers that worked with them. It was so wonderful because one of the first things we found is that kids, those kids were no longer ditching school. They started coming to school. It was unbelievable the change as far as discipline. The change as far as absenteeism, it had changed tremendously. I wish that I had been there long enough to be able to analyze, it would have been a great dissertation for someone, to be able to see the change that having that program made with having high school students. The students felt like they belonged, if they had problems with other subjects they felt they had a teacher that they could go to.

When María was transferred to Rose Middle School, she was in charge of the sixth graders. Where, again, she helped to create a space in the school that opened up the sense of belonging to the parents. The school had a space for them to feel included. She explained how she used the building space to create a place for students and parents.

> So, we started having basketball, and we started making Mexican food, and we had absolutely a wonderful opportunity for parents and for students. And in a year and a half, I was called to my principal's office after I had asked, I had asked to see her, because she had told me that I could no longer have my celebrations, my end of quarter celebrations, where kids I gave certificates and they got a pizza party for excelling and I had them…they got awards for coming to school, for not being tardy and for good grades. She told me that the other principals didn't have time to do that and that it wasn't fair for me to just do that for the sixth graders and so I couldn't do it anymore.

Max van Manen's (2014) *spatiality* reflects on how space is experienced by the phenomenon. As a Mexican American female administrator in an urban school setting, María experienced *spatiality* as uncomfortable and out of place, especially when she was amongst her peers at meetings held at the district level. She did however feel closeness with the Hispanic community, her students, and parents. María was able to create a supportive space or environment, which was for her students in the schools where they had previously felt estranged.

Relationality (lived relation)

R*elationality* (lived relation), connectivity or the lack of, is one of the motifs in van Manen's (2014) existential inquiries that is most apparent in María's lived experiences as an urban school assistant principal. María's job as an assistant principal affected her professionally and personally. Professionally, a female assistant superintendent who was an African American gave her advice on how to conduct herself when in principal's meetings, at the district board, and among her peers. She valued this relationship, since it was the closest thing to guidance of a mentor she had. She tearfully recalls her meeting with the assistant superintendent.

> The assistant superintendent at the time was African American, she just happened to be there (at meeting) and she said, 'I need to see you in my office, can you make an appointment next week?' and I said, 'Well, yeah. Am I in trouble?' She said, 'no, no, no, you're not in trouble.' She said, 'I just need to talk to you about something.' So I made the appointment and I went in to see her. She said, 'I'm going to tell you something, I'm going to tell you, you could become one of our best principals in the district.' Notice I'm using the word 'could.' [as María continued her voice began to shake and eyes began to water.] She said, 'María you are going to dry up those tears, if you really want to be of help to your children that are disadvantaged. Hispanic, young people.

The assistant superintendent continued to give advice and clarification on how María could be an effective administrator. The assistant superintendent explained the challenges María would face as a minority woman,

> I'm saying you are dealing with two issues here, you're dealing with the disadvantage of being very low income in the Title I schools you work and also the fact they're Hispanic and they also deal with the language difference.' She said, 'You've gotta dry up, you've got to dry up the tears, you've got to be tough, you've got to be tougher than anyone else and you have to be hard.' She said, 'If you want to cry you do it behind closed doors but you've got to learn not to let it show in front your colleagues because they are seeing you as weak and they're discounting you and you must make that change to make a difference. And if you cannot, you will not make a difference in your position. And that's all I have to say. 'Now you can give me a hug and leave here, and I will pray that what I have said to you today will make an impact.'

This advice from the assistant superintendent had great impact on María since it came from a minority woman, and she was the first person at the district level to take an interest in her career. This scenario between the African American Assistant Superintendent and María illustrates María's desire for relationship and mentoring. She craved this shared experiences of an older, wiser minority female in a position of authority even though she was not of the same ethnicity. María's desire for connectedness with other minority females demonstrates the relational aspects reflected in van Manen's (2014) motifs of *relationality*.

On a personal level, María never realized how her career choice had affected her own children until a few years ago when her daughter, who is a teacher, was working in a different urban school. María was taken aback by her daughter's experience and tearfully remembers their conversation:

> The biggest impact [on me as a school leader] was as my daughter became a teacher and also worked in a Title I school with ELL students

> and started a program. This time it wasn't ELL; it was a dance program and her kids…she became [like] her mother as much as she probably didn't want to. You know those things kind of rub off on you and she had kids she got involved in dance and got out of gangs and things like that.

Family closeness and the quality of relationships between María and her children are very important to her. This relationship in her nuclear family and influence is very strong. María recollected,

> Probably the best thing that ever happened to me was two years ago when she [my daughter] said to me, she called me crying and she said, 'Mother, I'm sorry,' I said, 'Why? What did you do that I don't know about?' She said, 'I'm sorry for the way I felt about you I really resented you Mom, the time that you spent with the other kids instead of us.' She said, 'But today, today I realized why.' She said, 'I became you.' She said, 'As bad as I fought it she said I've become you.' She said, 'There's not any way that you can become a role model in the life of other students and it not impact your own life.' She said, 'I find myself not doing for my son because I'm compelled to deal with the needs of the children I serve.' But she said, 'I think God put that before me so I could understand it better, so I had to call you and apologize for all the years I have resented you for not spending the time that I felt you should [have] spent with us.

Continuing our conversation, María's voice filled with tears as she continued to explain the epiphany her daughter reached when reflecting back on watching her mom work with students and the community. María further described,

> She [my daughter] said, 'I see myself doing the same thing, I'm really gonna have to look into it and remember how I felt and see if I want to do the same to my child because it's happening.' She said, 'Mom I have to tell you this I have been working at my job now, this is my 9th year and I have graduated five kids that are going to college, what a joy.' So we as women, Hispanic women, in those positions we can make decisions many times that seem little, but they are huge in the lives of other students. So it [helping students] did impact my life personally.

María's *relationality* (lived relation) has a broad range, but aligns with van Manen's (2014) many motifs of *relationality*, such as how people or things are

connected, ethics of being together, family relations, otherness, sacrifice, dedication, or service, even love and friendship. Her relationships with her peers varied but were negatively experienced when she stood up and advocated for the Hispanic students against discrimination. From her perspective, her ability to connect to the community and have them rally around her was threatening to some district personnel. Great effort was made by the district, according to María, to keep things quiet in the press and played down so the damage to the districts reputation would be minimal. María seemingly paid a heavy price for her advocacy, her reputation, self-esteem, and belief in relationships. The system damaged her both professionally and personally. Yet, she has little regret about the time and effort she spent in an urban school district helping students and her community. She reports she continues to have parents come up to her and thank her for the things she has done to help them. Although María is currently a principal at a private school, she is still an advocate for public education. María's career is filled with examples both positive and negative and challenging experiences of the *relationality* (lived relation) as described by van Manen's (2014) existential inquiry.

Materiality (lived things)

Materiality in van Manen's (2014) motifs does not deal with tangible material items, but more with abstract ideals: injustice, prejudice, and inequality. María's materiality experiences throughout her career as an assistant principal are full of her experiences specific to how Hispanic students were being treated unfairly, and how she was pushed out of her assistant principal position in order to silence her. She felt that the school leadership expectations, such as dress and the way she

communicated were different for her as a Mexican American female administrator in an urban school district since she did not belong to the majority Caucasian culture of the district administration. She explains how she felt while being an administrator in an urban setting in Oklahoma.

> I think that for the very first time I felt that when I became an administrator … became involved as a Latina, young Hispanic woman especially going into administration, real administration, as a principal I felt like I had to work harder at being better. I had to dress better, be able to present myself in a manner in which was acceptable by my colleagues. Everything had to be twice, done twice as much as I think my other colleagues.

María recalled some advice she was given as a college student working on her teaching degree. One of her professors, who was also Hispanic, told the class they would have to be twice as good as Caucasians in order to succeed. She acknowledges the connection between what she was being taught at that time and her reality as an administrator.

> I learned from a Hispanic woman, her name was Dr. Rodriguez [pseudonym]. She always told us you have to be better; you have to do better because you will not be selected because of who you are. I never had anybody tell me that before. That when I went for an interview I was better because I had a dual language; but I wouldn't be hired unless I proved it through my grades, through my ability. I always had to do better, not just better but twice, twice as much, give twice as much.

María realized the same work harder ethos was true whether she was a teacher or an administrator. She felt that even though she had the educational degree or principal certification, it was never enough because of the expectations of the majority community in which she had to prove herself. María felt she was not given the same amount of respect because she was a Mexican American woman. She felt her work was scrutinized more closely, her ideas, when shared, were often dismissed

and that she was accused of showing favoritism to the Hispanic students. María mentioned to me during her time as the school leader, that she was one of five Hispanic assistant principals in the district and none of them were offered or given a head principal position. The inequality and injustice motifs of van Manen's (2014) *materiality* are evident in María's school leadership experiences with her senior level leaders.

Corporeality (lived body)

Out of all the participants interviewed for this study, María's conversations with me were by far the most emotional. Many others may perceive referring to herself as a "cry baby" an accurate description. During our interview conversations, María's body language and expressions called up all her emotions. Max van Manen (2014) references this reaction in respect to the many motifs of *corporeality*, such as how people or things are connected, ethics of being together, family relations, otherness, sacrifice, dedication, or service, even love and friendship. María shed tears when reflecting on her struggles as a child in school, fighting for the rights of immigrant children, and recounting the painful events of her resignation and civil law suit. Throughout the different interview sessions, her passion could be heard in her voice when she spoke about being an advocate for all children, and not just Hispanic children. Tears flowed freely when she spoke of her daughter's epiphany in their relationship, of choosing work over family for a greater good. She was also greatly moved by the support she received from her friends as well as the students and community during her civil suit. She states her opinion very openly about injustice and inequality.

> It [injustice] may seem trivial and nothing like things that have gone on. But here, in this era, in this day and time of age, these things still continue to happen and we cannot move on and on and on without knowing that those injustices happen and that we must continue to be an advocate for all children in education... No matter their race, their gender, or their creed. I mean we as educators, if we are called to become teachers or administrators, we have a responsibility to be advocates for children. So, even though I've been a crybaby through this [interview], and you have made me revisit things [experiences] in my life that maybe I have put in a corner, I must tell you it has been a rewarding experience.

María's body was completely engaged in our conversations in demonstrating van Manen's (2014) *corporality* of her lived body experiences as a Mexican American female administrator in an urban school setting. Passion is evident in her today when she speaks about her current position. María's voice as a principal in a private school has a tone of satisfaction and determination for the good of all children in her school.

Existential Life Worlds Aggregate Analysis

In order to assist in my reflective inquiry process in a heuristic manner, I employed van Manen's (2014) existential life worlds, as they are universal themes of life in the sense they belong to everyone's life world. I have condensed the participants' responses to van Manen's (2014) existential life worlds to explore the phenomenon of being a Mexican American female administrator in an urban school setting as follows:

Temporality (lived time)

All participants expressed a need for more time to learn their leadership roles and management of their duties. All of them also valued and tried to protect their family time.

Victoria wanted more time to learn the job of being a school principal and felt rushed to move from her job as vice principal to that of a principal in a school whose population was both high need and high in Hispanic students. Lucía felt she was not given enough time to learn her role as principal, segmented out duties were not representative of the complete role of a principal. María's *temporality* changed as her colleagues and head principal supported and acknowledged her expertise versus suspicion and resentment because of her connection to the community.

Spatiality (lived space)

The participants experienced a need for close communication and expressed pride working with the community that often resulted in suspicions, apprehension and sometimes distrust from district administration.

Victoria's *spatiality* demonstrated how space shapes us and how we shape our own space. She shaped her own space through the dynamics of professionalism between her staff and vice principals. Victoria's space was also influenced by the fact that she was a young Hispanic woman. The outside influences that shaped her *spatiality* was the requirement to be out of her school for district meetings. In Lucía's case, she was trying to close the communication gaps between teachers and administrators, school and community, and school and district administration. María's *spatiality* took form in her making space that allowed her to create supportive programming for students and parents, but fear of community caused administration to be resistant.

Relationality (lived relation)

All three women had a need for close networks of compatriots, whether friends or family, because they believed more was expected or required to prove their worth because their status as female and of Mexican American descent.

Victoria's *relationality* dealt more with the inconsistency of the relationships she had with people; especially with Central Office district administration and how those relationships were misperceived. Lucía's *relationality* was rooted in her family and the support she received not only to help her do her job as a school principal but also with her children and her wish for them to become bilingual. María always felt that she had to do more, be better, and cry in private to save face in front of her peers. Her *relationality* seemed to be an inner battle between personal and professional.

Materiality (lived things)

Responsibilities, technology, morality and injustice are included as part of lived things in materiality. All three participants had different stories but they each had to learn that leadership is give and take. Sometimes things may not get done, and if you are doing something that has never been done, or giving voice to the voiceless there may be resentment.

Victoria's childhood experiences led to self-reliance, and working independently and not relying on others for help. These traits helped her leadership style to a degree but eventually her leadership evolved into a more distributive and cooperative leadership style. Lucía's issues dealt with time management, deadlines, and the shift in mindset to accept that not everything gets done. She still struggles

with this mindset and it causes her stress. María struggles with the different standards for Hispanic women and fear of advocating for marginalized students, especially when the school is hyper- focused on improving test scores.

Corporality (lived body)

True to the stereotypes of individuals from Mexican American culture, all three female school leaders were highly expressive and animated, at times emotional and passionate. However, these qualities seemed to enhance not stymie their effectiveness as school leaders.

Victoria's body language, expressiveness, tone, and emotional expression during our interviews aligned with her recounts of her experiences as a school principal. Lucía's poise and demeanor was more reserved until she spoke of things she was more passionate about, and then her voice and gestures were much more animated. She would pause to gather her thoughts before she spoke. She would also self-correct her pronunciation if she mispronounced a word. She was much more conscious of her language. María's *corporality* of the three participants seemed to be the most intense. She actually re-lived the different events she spoke about during our interviews through her mannerisms, voice, and body language. Her recollection of her school leadership experiences in the urban school district was as if she was telling me about something that had just happened to her yesterday.

Emergent Themes Analysis

Max van Manen (2014) describes thematic analysis as the process of recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text. When I compiled all the participants' lived

experiences, several lived-worlds theme strands emerged. Again, as described in chapter 3, these themes include a) *Culture, Family and Language*, b) *Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers;* and c) *Absence and Desire for Mentoring.*

These themes were identified by analysis of the overall data from all three participants. I discovered that they shared several experiences unique to Mexican American women in leadership roles in Oklahoma. Max van Manen's (2014) motifs acted as a springboard into a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of my participants by exposing these emergent themes to provide a complete picture of my participants.

Since the participants and research focus to understanding a unique population of school leaders, specifically as Mexican American females, the first theme cluster of *Culture, Family, and Language* was inescapable as a key factor in understanding their lived experiences as minorities in school leadership roles. Also, it was impossible to distinctly separate out the elements of culture, family, and language, as stand-alone themes, since family and language are key components of culture.

The theme of *Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers* addresses the self-perceptions of the participants' strengths and weaknesses as leaders within the framework of leadership skills literature mentioned in Chapter Two. Using the model of core leadership practices identified by the University Council of Education Administration (UCEA, 2003), three categories of practices were used to characterize the leadership experiences of the participants. These

categories are setting direction and vision, developing people, and developing the organization.

The third theme that emerged, *Absence and Desire for Mentoring*, was the vivid descriptions of my participants' desire for mentoring and consequences of the absence of mentorship and guidance for improving their roles as school leaders.

The participants' stories reveal aspects of the lived experiences that greatly influenced them as administrators. Their stories are described in further detail below within the framework of these three clusters of themes: a) *Culture, Family and Language,* b) *Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers;* and c) *Absence and Desire for Mentoring.*

Culture, Family and Language

In each of their personal lives, my participants explained that sacrifices were made since, as principals, they had to juggle competing roles, which included that of a leader, wife, mother, caretaker that is consistent with Loder's (2005) study on women in educational leadership roles. All three women spoke of the sacrifices and compromises made to their own families to better serve their students. They spoke of the Mexican culture duties and responsibilities to take care of their own children and their husbands and keeping the household running. All three participants exhibited what one might consider typical Hispanic women expressions. They all used their hands extravagantly when speaking and the pitch and volume in their voices changed when telling stories of family, conflict, and frustration.

Culture and family play a significant role in the lives of the participants. The culture of being Mexican American means to be raised with the strong sense of

family that goes beyond the nuclear family but to the extended family (Brice, 2002). This theme runs deep through all the interviews. For Victoria, it was the criticism from her father about not learning how to cook, the unimportance of her job since she did not earn as much as her first husband did, and the expectations of her second husband that she be home every night, with dinner made and be there for him when he needed to talk. Victoria did not follow the traditional expectations of a Mexican American woman. Since all the significant males in her life were Mexican or Mexican American, they expected her to cook, clean, and take care of them.

Victoria's family was from Mexico and Spanish was her first language. She later was a high school dropout, but then persevered to obtain her GED. She remarks:

> Both my parents were undocumented, and so some of the things you would suspect as far as family things that might occur were obviously typical in our situation, which means we moved around a lot depending on where there were opportunities. We also grew up in what we would say is a dysfunctional family… alcoholism.

During our interview conversation, I could tell by Victoria's tone and movements that talking about her family, particularly her father was a sensitive matter. I redirected my questioning in order to allow her to keep talking about her family without insisting on revealing painful memories. So I asked, "What did your parents do?" Victoria replied,

> You name it, minimal education. My father was absolutely an alcoholic and so a lot of the domestic abuse you might expect with something like that is very much what happened in the household, so that we would mean we would move around a lot, so it was a different school on a very regular basis. I can't tell you how many elementary schools I went to, so it was a number of them.

Victoria chose not to go into too much detail but gave me the impression that there was a lot of arguing and physical fighting, but I can only speculate. She

continued to share that after her parents divorced, the home life of a single-parent home was not conducive to parent involvement in her education. Keeping a roof over their heads, putting food on the table, and paying bills came first.

> So when you have that type of home environment[alcoholism] academics is not the priority, you're looking more at Maslow's what do we need to continue to survive and so working with the schools, or parent meetings, or PTA or things like that was so far down the line that is was not happening. Not to say that it was not important, that my mother, they divorced so I was around ten, pretty much he was completely out of the picture by that time. So, as a single parent, my mother being the single parent, raising the four of us working two and three jobs, you're not going to get a whole lot of, oh what's going on at school. It's I need to get to sleep, you got to stay quiet while I get some sleep if I go to work again, that type of thing.

For Victoria the typical cultural support from her immediate family was not much of a contributing factor to her later success of a Mexican American female school leader but it did shape her resolve to do things in her own way and to be self-reliant as a school leader.

Victoria also spoke about her extended family and what role they played in her early years of education. The closeness of family allowed her to attend the same school for many years, but eventually the strong parental family tie developed with her grandparents.

> I actually moved, I [chose to leave home]. Out of my siblings, I was the one who actually moved from living with my mother in that situation to living with my aunts and uncles and my grandparents. Just a lot of trouble at home between my mother and I so I would live with my aunts and uncles and grandparents. Wherever I lived they would take me back to the same school…. then I moved to Tulsa to live with another uncle, obviously could not commute. Did freshman year there and I came back over here and living with my grandparents who I call Mom and Dad.

Victoria's dysfunctional family greatly influenced the mindset she developed in being very independent and not counting on others, and to persevere when it came to completing her education. She developed a closeness not with her parents but with her grandparents who were supportive of her while pursuing her education. Victoria's leadership style at the beginning of her career strongly reflected these influences. Her lack of trust in her faculty and staff made it difficult for her to delegate school responsibilities to others.

For Lucía, her father also believed a woman should know how to run a household and did not necessarily need to be educated, although he wanted his daughter to be. With her husband, who is also Mexican American, she has now internalized the cultural expectation that his career takes priority. He is working on his doctorate so Lucía is the one who picks up the kids, makes sure they eat, and get their schoolwork done. Her extended family now plays a key role in enabling her to meet her family and career duties when her duties at school are stretching her too thin. They help her at work and in the home when she must attend to school deadlines and other responsibilities.

Lucía spoke about the tradition of her family growing up. She explained,

> Then my family, being a Hispanic family, your bachelor's [degree is] going to take at least four years [to complete] so we're going with you. So my family moved over here, being the traditional Mexican family. So I started my bachelor's [degree in business, since that was my father's degree].

Lucía also told a story of how she met her husband and how he had agreed to move to Texas to date her but when they married she would have to move to Oklahoma

since that was where he was from. She spoke of her mother's reaction when she was going to move.

> So then again, being from a Mexican family, when I told my mom when we had been here for two years now is my time to move to Oklahoma you know because of a promise deal we had. My mom said, being a Mexican mom, she said "Mija you don't have to keep your promise; tell him to stay here." You know stay with us [family] cause you know they moved from Mexico to Texas to be with me.

Lucía also spoke of the family support she receives which helps both her and her husband in their careers as principals.

> Luckily, and I guess I can go back to the background of being Mexican or Hispanic, a close family knit, my husband is from Hispanic background, his mother is from Mexico, from Guadalajara, and his father well he was born here [U.S.], his father's dad was Mexican so his family has Mexican background and his family also, his dad and mom were teachers, they're both retired teachers. So thank God they're retired, they're the ones to help with the kids rather than doing day care or anything like that, oh well no we'll help you with the kids cause we don't want them to go to a daycare or anything like that. We only use daycare for whenever they want to like be able to socialize and share toys and things like that. But I have that support from the family.

When reflecting on family, Lucía also discussed cultural values. She explained what she considered to be a traditional Mexican family.

> The traditional Mexican family I guess, close knit, deep in cultures and traditions, very close to each other, close to family relationships…, you don't leave until you're married and you get married with your white dress.

Lucía's family and deep cultural values play an important role in her life. Her family supported her in continuing her education, but they also were committed to Hispanic traditions such as not leaving home until you are married and providing support for childcare for her two children. Lucía credits her husband for encouraging her to pursue her leadership role as a principal, and her family and in-laws for

helping her with her children in order to give her time to fulfill her after school responsibilities as a principal. All the support she receives in her leadership role as a principal comes from her family.

For participant María, she is married to an Anglo, but because of her Mexican heritage she always felt she needed to perform family duties first. This included making sure her children were always taken care of, cooking and cleaning, and since she was the oldest daughter she took care of her elderly mother until she passed away. She put the demands of her culture on herself, whereas her husband, a Caucasian, did not have the same specific expectations.

María spoke of her family values when she was growing up and how religion played an important part of her family.

> My parents felt that it was important to send us to private [parochial] school, because they felt that education was very important and they wanted to make sure that we got the best that we could get in their eyes. Being Catholic they felt that Catholic school would be very beneficial to me and to my siblings.

She reflected on how her mother worked with her so that she would improve in her reading skills and the expectations of her parents since she was the oldest of four siblings.

> I think it's important here to say that I used to get holy cards for reading with expression because I really worked hard at that and my mother worked hard with having me read at night to her. I was the first-born child and she wanted me to excel and so she actually worked with me and helping me read.

María also spoke about how her family believed in close relationships and nurturing those through their actions.

> My mom and my dad always believed that I could have any of my friends over at any time. We're a very, very close family that comes

> from my ethnicity. Mom always cooked and we had this thing, it makes no difference how big your house is *todo cabe sabiendo acomodar;* which means that we would all get in a little ball and we could find room for as many of us as we wanted to, there was always room on the floor. So my friends thought that was fun.

Family also helped María while acquiring her education. Her mother worked with her to improve her reading skills and her parents encouraged her to develop relationships with others. María's ability to connect with others and nurture relationships was an advantage when it came to her role as a school leader. She was able to connect with her community and empower them to advocate for themselves.

All three women spoke Spanish as their first language. Language and learning English had an influence in their lives from elementary school to their present positions. Each participant provided examples of how language and language learning influenced their role as a school leader.

Victoria discussed the role language and culture played in role as a leader. She expressed how important it was for the students and parents who came to the school wanting to be understood in their own language.

> It's very frustrating. I had a lot of people who would not talk to assistant principals [at my first school] because they wanted to speak directly to somebody who's going to understand them. It wasn't so much that they wanted to speak to me as it was they wanted to be understood and I was the only one [who spoke Spanish]. Understanding the language, knowing the language is understanding the culture. There are things we say a certain way, that we understand the meaning but it doesn't translate into the other language exactly because part of it is just cultural norms and if you don't truly understand the language, then you don't understand the cultural norms.

Victoria also spoke about her daughter and the language development in her home for her daughter.

> But I spoke Spanish to [my daughter] when she was little. Her dad spoke Spanish and her little *abuela* spoke Spanish. Well her grandparents spoke Spanish. But her cousins, aunts and uncles all spoke English and she heard English a lot because I still only spoke English to him[her father]. I don't know why… So she heard a lot of it. So by the time she started school she was absolutely bilingual, [which is] very important.

Language played an important role in Victoria's family and career. In order to stay connected to the culture of her parents and grandparents she needed to maintain her Spanish language. Her ability to speak English and Spanish helped her get her first job as a bilingual assistant. Later her degree in Spanish and her experience as a principal enabled her to be able to communicate directly with her Hispanic students, parents and community.

Being Mexican American, Victoria understood the cultural nuances of the language, which helped her in her role as a school leader to communicate with the large Hispanic community in the school district.

Although all three participants spoke Spanish as their first language, Lucía learned English later in life and consequently struggled with the language while earning her degree. She continues to refine her English. She recalled her conversation with a friend,

> One thing that has stayed in my head and I've never forgotten: I told a friend, when I was learning English and he had learned English, I say, 'How long did it take you to learn English?' Cause now you know everything, … you went through this process I'm going through. ' How long did it take you?' 'I know English for the last 10 years, I can tell you that you never stop learning!' and I, like, oh man! I ask you for encouragement, so you have 10 years? And he said, 'And I'm still learning, I don't know it all.' Well that's not what I wanted, but okay and it stuck in my head.

Lucía has empathy for her students who are learning English as well as their parents who struggle with the language. She realizes she has an accent and still makes some errors but is confident in her communication skills as a principal. She remarked,

> Yeah it's hard, I remember when I was learning English, one of the things that they said and it was one of those sayings, you know how in Mexico they have a lot of sayings, one of the sayings that they said, that once you dream in English then you probably learn English.

Lucía also talks about the development of language in her children in trying to raise them to be bilingual.

> My first one is [bilingual]. My second one isn't yet, I think it's a process, my second one I think is starting. Okay my first one, he's seven years old, so all I can tell you that when he was a baby I was talking to him, both and he couldn't reciprocate or tell me no, when he was like four years old and he could talk back to me, he would say don't talk to me like that, don't…he couldn't appreciate two languages and like. He didn't want to cause [SIC] then he had to think about how to use Spanish; because English came naturally to him because of the environment that he grew up in… Now he speaks, it's not you know great, he has to think about it and he speaks. Now I'm going through that with my second one. My second one, she understands everything, put on your shoes, close the door, flush the toilet, things like that, she can do it. But the speaking part, she is the one now that is struggling, like don't do that just talk to me like this.

Language and learning English for Lucía played a strong role in her leadership mindset. As a second language learner and immigrant, she has great empathy for the English language learners in her school. Lucía understands how it feels to leave your native country. She also understands how difficult it is to raise children to be bilingual when their heritage language does not seem to be valued. Lucía wanted to be a school principal in a school where she could use her bilingual skills to help others.

María also started with Spanish as her first language and struggled through her first years of schooling. She reveals how her struggle with English and reading affected her as a teacher and administrator.

> I think it's so important, your first impressions in education, because it makes a real impact on your life whether you enjoy going to school or not, or whether it takes away from your self-concept.

María expressed the importance of self-concept and how that has affected the way she treats her students and teachers. María recounted,

> My first year of experience there were a lot of vocabulary words that I didn't know [in English], that took time for me to figure out what the meaning of those words would be using the context clues that at that time I didn't know that's what they were. It took me a little more time to do that.

María continued to explain how she behaved in class and the strategies she employed since English was not her first language. As she recalled this experience, tears, began to roll down her cheeks, as this was a traumatic childhood experience for her. María spoke about her childhood school experiences,

> When things messed up [the round robin reading order], and the teacher picked me first [to read aloud] and it wasn't round robin as far as answering questions, … I can remember a couple of times, when I would ask to go to the bathroom and make myself throw up so that my mom could come and get me and I wouldn't have to be embarrassed about my reading failure as at the time I saw that.

María's traumatic experiences in education influenced how she would treat children who were second language learners. She wanted to be a positive influence and help build the self-esteem of non-English speaking children. María's bilingualism helped her to be able to communicate effectively with parents as a school leader. Her bilingualism also gave her more work since the non-Spanish

speaking administrators would send all the Hispanics to her regardless if they were assigned to her.

Each of the three participants in this study strongly expressed personal and professional situations about their Mexican American culture, family and language. Culture cannot be separated from them; it is part of what makes them who they are. This, in turn, affected the decisions they made as educational leaders as each of their lived experience stories echoed this fact. Their Spanish language is intertwined in their Mexican American culture. English, not being their first language, was an issue since they attended schools in the US where English is the dominant language. Evident from each of the participant's stories, we understand that having to learn a second language gives the participants a sense of empathy and understanding of the issues for non-English speaking students and parents. Understanding the family values and expectations of students and parents from the same ethnic and cultural background gives them an edge when it comes to educating all students. According to Sánchez, Thorton, and Unsinger (2009), minority principals share cultural understanding and experiences they can link with students, parents and other stakeholders. This role modeling is significant to those learners' future aspirations and identity development.

Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers

When organizing and analyzing the data from my participants' lived world experiences, the theme of leadership was expressed in terms of their perceived successes and barriers in becoming a school principal. Referring back to the literature on effective leadership by UCEA (2003), there are three essential school

leadership qualities: (a) vision, which includes identifying and articulating a vision for the school and creating a shared meaning among faculty and staff; (b) developing people, providing individual support for professional growth, and providing structure for change; and (c) developing the school as an organization, which includes strengthening school culture, modifying organizational structure, building collaborative processes and managing the environment, all of which include working with parents, community members, businesses, and other influential people in addition to the teachers and students.

Strengths and or perceived weakness in these areas of leadership contributed to successes and barriers each of the three participants experienced in their journey to becoming school leaders.

Vision

Each of the three participants expressed they had a strong vision for their school and education in general. They all wanted to promote educational equity for all children and especially Hispanics and other marginalized children. Each participant told how their ability to implement their visions with their school community was wrought with both successes and barriers from both district school administration and the local school sites.

Victoria had to establish herself in her building as principal. She had to establish her vision of keeping students in school not only with students, but also with her teachers and other administrators. She vividly recollected the school community environment at that time noting,

> Changing the population, [was/is], one of the biggest frustrations or fights that we had was that I would not suspend students like they [the

> teachers] wanted. Their answer to everything was to get rid of the kid' cause that kid is not allowing me to teach. Well, my thing was [to tell the teachers] the reason you are teaching is because we have that kid, that's your job is to teach that kid, so we can't teach him if we suspend him. Aside from that, that's what they want, they [the teachers] want to go on a vacation. You know an endorsed vacation in the middle of the semester. That's not helping anybody. So I would try to find other ways of dealing with them [the students] that did not mean suspending them.

Lucía explains how her being an immigrant, female Mexican American, provides her with a clear vision of how to help her school community. She explained,

> [Being able to] communicate with the families and the parents [is] better. Reach out to the community, I know hearing from one of my parents that they're very excited to have somebody, you know, like them [Hispanic] or that they can communicate or talk to. They didn't have to rely on a translator. So reach out to your community and your students, your parents will be happy to have you. [I tell them to] call with any questions that you have, I'm here to help you out and support you.

Lucía believes she can share her vision and make informed decisions because she can directly communicate with the parents and knows the process of relocation to the US from another country. She explains,

> I also left my country, I know what that is. I went through the legal processes that some of my families are having to go through. You know like, 'My husband does not have papers, so I need a letter for my child to say if that they deport my husband they will struggle, so that I can take that to immigration.' Okay, 'I understand what that is, I know where you are coming from, 'cause I went through that citizenship process.' So sometimes when I have parents that need documentation that need the kids grades to prove that they are here because they are going through the residency process, I understand that cause I went through that.

For María, her story depicts conflict with the school district administration in the implementation of her leadership vision because she empowered the Hispanic community in all the buildings she worked in. She explained the difficulty she had in

going along in the school district system, which was not flexible or culturally sensitive to the needs of the school community.

> I really tried to mind my own business, but I couldn't help doing what I needed to do for the students. I was over the sixth grade, they were…I had incentives for them, their scores were going up, my incentives were to have a celebration every month for the kids that were excelling and doing well. I started a PTA that involved over 100 Hispanic parents coming on Saturdays because people don't have parent meetings on weekends when parents can come; they have them after school when parents can't come.

María's leadership as a school principal were value-laden to her being a female Mexican American school leader demonstrating the cultural values that impacted her decision making. When María was told by the principal to stop the extra activities since it was not fair to the seventh and eighth grade students, María's reply, although honest in her mind, was viewed as harsh, insisting that the other two assistant principals should not be so lazy. María had embraced her vision of leadership responsibilities as an assistant principal, yet her success did not appear to be rewarded or valued by her principal who was a Caucasian female, which made her job more difficult.

Each of the three participants experienced personal challenges and decisions to make along their path of leadership. Connecting to their communities and helping their families and others was their vision of leadership. Each of their stories reflects their personal and professional challenges related to their vision of leadership in being a school principal in an urban school district.

All three participants had a vision for improving their schools as well as intrinsic motivation to help their communities. From each of their stories, the notion of being a Mexican American female administrator in an urban district meant it was

important to focus on the need to give back to the community through their leadership skills, which they perceived as part of their job. Giving back is a sense of obligation all three participants shared even though they felt they had little support from the district. They perceived that their visions for school improvement and explicitly addressing the needs of Hispanic children were not always validated by the district administration.

Vision also included how they felt the district administration, their colleagues, and the community as a whole perceived them. The perception of themselves in a leadership role was challenged by a degree of discrimination from district administration. According to Hernández and Morales (1999), women tend to encounter many more obstructions and hardships than men in the workforce, and Mexican American women's professional opportunities are even more restricted due discrimination and dealing with the double oppression of racism and sexism. Victoria, in particular experienced this oppression of being viewed critically. She stated,

> So I am Latina, I do try to always look presentable, to what my standard of looking presentable is, so I think because of that I was, I feel as if I was regularly categorize as to what you would put the ditzy blonde. It's not something that I've earned, or that I'm capable of doing or confident in, it was because supposedly someone I slept with.

María's vision of herself as a school leader was influenced by what she perceived others thought of her as school leader. She described,

> As a principal I felt like I had to work harder at being better. I had to dress better, be able to present myself in a manner in which was acceptable by my colleagues. Everything had to be twice, done twice as much as I think my other colleagues…I would know that our Hispanic children were being treated unfairly or different and I would

> cry and I would be in meetings with all of the Anglo…I'm just gonna say it like it is…Anglo majority principals

Lucía did not experience this kind of racism and sexism. Although, according to research by Ortiz (1982) and also by Patterson, (1994), Mexican American candidates (ranging from principal to school superintendent) are often placed in districts that are poorly resourced and underperforming simply because they are deemed qualified to serve this type of district by their ethnicity. This type of placement for this group of women can unfortunately result in dead end careers. The district in which Lucía works is poorly resourced and underperforming, However, Lucía's vision for being an effective school leader was to work in a school where she could help a community with her bilingual skills, and she does not feel like she is in a dead end career.

Developing People

Developing people in your school and community includes the following: encouraging professionalism among staff and promoting growth of human resources in an educational setting; providing individual support; modeling desired professional school leadership dispositions; showing respect to all; and providing the needed structure for school change to occur (UCEA, 2003). Each of the three participants shared examples of the importance of developing staff, students and community while they were school leaders.

Victoria spoke of how her leadership style changed from when she first started as a principal and how she dealt with the responsibilities of the job through her years as a school leader. She then spoke of her last year as a principal where she began to develop people in her building.

> It was a constant struggle trying to figure out what I'm supposed to be doing. Again the last couple of years were probably where I had the most confidence in my decisions; however, those were also the years that I didn't, I mean everybody would feed me because I wouldn't stop to eat. I worked literally 12-14 hours, sometimes 16 hours a day, just to make sure things were done. Again, I still had that habit of doing things myself instead of delegating; maybe it's a trust factor. Nonetheless, those last couple of years where I really started to develop the leadership within the building that I could allow them to do things.

Victoria began to develop and empower other people in her building by delegating more responsibilities and standing behind her faculty and staff.

> When I actually left my last semester, I told my administrative staff I was planning to leave so I needed them to start doing some of the things that I normally do as principal. I was going to give them the opportunity to learn about it, so I give one of them the finances, so I worked on all the budgets with him, he did all that one. I give one of them academics. I really tried to empower them, whatever decision you make whether I agree with it or not I'm standing behind you. That's it, that's what we're going to do. That was obviously my easiest semester because they were doing a whole lot, I was just reading what they did, but that was my most stressful one because it was my last year there.

Victoria also addressed the difficulty of developing people and the line between professionalism and friendship.

> Build up the people who you need to build up, but at the same time call an ace an ace. You know if something is incorrect you have to address it not just because you're friends. I think that within our community we don't want to help each other too much. I would say it kind of backfired on me once, it's changed how I visit with, the relationships that I develop, I still consider them friends but there's an absolute line between the professional and the friendship, you can't cross that. If I want to always be able to support and encourage those around me, I can't cross that line because then that breaks the trust, the professional trust. That's probably something that was difficult to learn, especially when it did backfired on me.

Victoria continued to recount an instance when she was trying to develop someone. She recalled how she lost a friendship.

> She's a teacher who decided to say, well you know Victoria and I are friends we do everything on the weekends, so if I say so this is what's she [Victoria] gonna do and I probably would if that's her recommendation because, she again, was very knowledgeable, very good at what she was doing and I promoted her and supported her and gave her advice as much as she would accept. That's where it broke; you cannot use a personal relationship that you and I have against other staff which is what you're doing. That's not acceptable. You know if there has to be a break somewhere that was it. Because my focus, our purpose is our kids. I'm not going to cross that line. That one was tough.

Victoria realized through her experience as a principal she needed to develop her own leadership skills before she could begin to develop others. Once she began to develop her skills, she was able to delegate responsibilities to her faculty and assistant principals. Victoria commented that her job became much easier in her last year once she empowered others at the school.

Lucía provided some suggestions on how she felt she could help the district develop teachers, to become future educational leaders.

> I have two teachers that are going through the master's degree for administration to be principals. This past semester they just started the classes… here in next year they will probably be done. So why not have one of those teachers to be like an intern and have part of their day or one day a week do administrative duties. Experience administrative experiences so that when they actually get the job they're not fresh, like have no clue and I think that would be cost effective for the district the teacher will benefit, the district will benefit and I would benefit. That would help each other you know.

Lucía also gave an example of how she tries to encourage the development of people in her school community. She spoke of a Mexican mother who has brought her son lunch since he was in first grade, and now he is in fifth grade. She brings it during lunchtime so it is nice and fresh. Lucía questions the mom on whether or not

she will continue this practice when he moves on to middle school. She gives the mom encouragement to learn English.

> He's a big kid, he's in fifth grade and so I said what are you going to do when he goes to middle school are you still gonna bring him the *taquitos* or what, she said no I don't think so. So I said you're gonna have free time, what are you gonna do with your time? we can offer you a job. She said no I'm going to go to classes to learn English at OCCC, I already enrolled. And so yesterday I was kidding with her and told her I already told the staff that you're taking English classes, they can't talk to you in Spanish anymore, so you have to practice your English and you have to come in say Hello and things like that and she said I know, I'm shy, I'm shy. I said it is hard, it's always embarrassing, you've got to try, gotta push you. But that too I went through that process of learning another language and yes it's hard, and it's embarrassing mispronouncing things.

As a school leader, Lucía continues to try to find ways in which she can develop her teachers who are in programs to become administrators. She wishes to provide them opportunities to experience the responsibilities of becoming a school leader. Lucía shows empathy for her parents and is aware of the effort they must make to become proficient in English. She provides encouragement and is a role model for them.

María explained the different programs she created which helped to develop and empower the Hispanic students and their parents as an assistant principal. Below is only one example of how she developed the Hispanic parents in her school community.

> So I started out by having a, like a fiesta, a kind of activity where I told parents that we were going to have pot luck on Sunday and to come and join us: and I had played Mexican music and had a short meeting, 30 minutes. And then had a social time for 30 minutes, and pretty soon it became a, every once a month on Sunday. Then one of the ideas that came out of it was to have basketball for the kids on Sunday when they came could they do an alternative activity by having a basketball league and a parent volunteered to do that and we set up ways in which they

> could make money. No one in their whole lives had seen an active PTA that, at the high school, I mean that's never been done for English speaking parents but how could that be done with Spanish speaking parents was the thing. But it happened so because I was also training them in the importance of their participation with their children and becoming their advocates before you know it in a year they were asking questions about why are you suspending my child for coming late to school, I can't get them here any earlier.

María continued recounting the story with much pride in her voice about how the Hispanic parents began to advocate for themselves.

> Before you know it the director of high schools were there and they were planning meetings with them there and asking them what could we do to make a change in school time. All of this was done through translations you know but they felt good about being able to do that. Before you know it I could give you and show you sign in sheets to this day where we had between 100 and 150 parents coming to Sunday parent meeting because it became a family day and not just a parent meeting.

María also tried to develop a fellow Hispanic female principal and give her some advice on how to make it in administration. She explained,

> When I worked for a Hispanic principal, I walked up to her and I said, I'll never forget, I'll give you some advice. I see you as myself 20 years ago, maybe it wasn't quite 20, but I told her I said you will not win the war, you will win the battles along. Professionally, you will win battles but you will never win the war. I've been around the block, I can tell you that when I was your age thinking that I could conquer the world and make changes. Really what I learned as I became older was that winning the battles was okay but that I was not going to make the change on the top until I really made those changes through legislation, legislative decisions, but really impact the schools and you're working with uneducated people. I'm not saying uneducated, but they really don't know about first and second language learners.

María continued to give her advice on how she could develop the school board and district administration to make them more aware of the difficulties of acquiring a second language and being able to achieve academically. She also

wanted to try to make the school board and district administration more aware of the needs of the Hispanic community.

> I told her I said you really need to see if there's some little short workshop that you can give to board members. I still believe that the schools don't get it, that the colleges that they need to first, even if it's 30 minutes of a workshop to [school] board members [on second language acquisition]. They're oblivious of what a second language learner goes through. Thirty minutes is an awareness, something. That has to happen. The other thing is this, that I told her, I said if you will stay within your area and you do what you can for the children that you can do it for that's good enough. You know, if you can do that you have made great changes. The minute that you let everybody know what you are doing and what you are about is when they [district administration] will cease [to support you]. I told her that because of my experience. I have to tell you, later she said I should have listened to you. You tried to tell me but I had to learn that lesson for myself 'cause later on she was asked to leave as I had been asked. It's a sad thing that that's the world in which we live.

María had great success in developing Hispanic students and parents in the community because she was Mexican American and bilingual. In each of the schools she worked in, she was able to empower the students and parents to advocate for themselves at the school and district administration level. For her this was rewarding yet ultimately detrimental to her career in the district as earlier noted.

Each of my participants worked at trying to develop their students, parents and staff by modeling professionalism, showing respect to all, and providing structure for school change to happen. Through their lived experiences, all of my participants viewed developing people as part of their job.

Developing the Organization

Participants in my study also worked in trying to develop the organization, in this case, the school and the school district. Developing the school includes internal and external relationships, which include working with parents, community

members, businesses, and other influential people in addition to the teachers, and students. The following quotes are examples of the type of school organizational development that occurred in each of the participants lived experiences as school leaders with their district and school community.

Victoria discussed how she had to change her leadership style to a distributive leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach, 1999) approach by giving her assistant principals more trust so they could feel ownership and that they were contributing to the development of the school even if she did not always agree. She recalls how difficult that was for her.

> She [the assistant principal] did things that I wouldn't do certainly not the ways I would do it, but she was effective at it and I trusted her with that and I would let her. And that's part of what helped me develop the ability to have more of that distributive leadership of where I would allow them to make their decision and we're going to go with it even if I disagree, if I think there's a better way, we're going to do it your way because I need you to have that ownership of it and you're gonna have ideas I don't have so I need to build that. So I think that she's part of what allowed me to build that skill. Moreover, improve the school.

According to Lucía, in order for her to better develop her school she needed more assistance from the district administration. She had to learn her principal duties on the job and realized how difficult it is.

> I would suggest [to the district] that training before hand, [leadership] training before you start on the job, like we have the summer [time for training] or even before the classes start. All the programs that we [principals] use; there's so many programs, like for Special Ed, the fine arts program, manpower, all of those. So being able to learn about the systems that are used before we are in the job, would help the school and the district.

Lucía felt if she were allowed to use her teachers as interns together, they could help develop the school as an organization.

María tried to develop the school district as an organization by changing what she perceived as the district's discriminatory practices of not hiring Hispanic assistant principals and not granting interviews for them to become principals. She spoke about how she organized the other Hispanic assistant principals in the district so they would be given an opportunity to interview for principal positions. María recounted,

> I got five Hispanic assistant principals, we all met at my house, and some of the things that we talked about helped. In fact, we went to an attorney that was a race issue attorney because we had all, for three years, been applying for principalships [in the district] and none of us as much as got an interview. So when we [the Hispanic assistant principals] went together and all of us wrote a letter and signed it to the [school district] administration that said that we were not even given the opportunity to have an interview and we had two Ph.Ds. in the bunch of us. We started getting interviews then. But we never ever were placed as principals until I left [the district].

All three participants express strong passion to serve in their school community and urban school district in the capacity as the school principal. Along their journey in becoming a school leader, each participant experienced both successes and barriers in their role of carrying out the duties of being a school leader in their respective school communities. All three participants showed evidence of the three essential characteristic leadership qualities identified by UCEA (2003), which as presented above in this section, include having a vision for improving their school, developing people, and developing the school as an organization. However, each participant had successes and barriers on their journey in being a school leader that was evident in their stories as related to their respective abilities to promote a vision, develop people, and develop the school as an organization. I present a brief summary below of the participants' successes and barriers in their leadership.

Leadership Success

Victoria's successes as a school leader began when her leadership style evolved into practicing distributive leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999) where she empowered her staff and faculty to create educational programs, take over budgeting responsibilities, and develop ways to get the community involved in the school. These efforts improved her ability to create the vision of a school that addresses the needs of all its students. Moreover, it gave her staff more access and input into some of the important aspects of school leadership and aided their professional growth while improving the efficiency of school management.

Lucía's successes as a school leader include her ability to share and articulate her vision of educational equity that was bolstered by her own immigrant status and her willingness to go where she was needed as a school leader. She also has volunteered to assist with the development of her teachers to take on more administrative roles, and working with the parents to provide the documentation needed to allow the parents to file for citizenship or visas. She expressed her view that these efforts would not only serve the community and the teachers in the school, but would develop the school's ability to realize the vision of student learning and connecting to the community.

María's leadership among the Hispanic community is undeniable as she led them to express the power of their collective voices. For her, leadership success came in the vision of promoting educational and social justice for minority children. She was able to start an active Hispanic parent teacher association (PTA) in each of the schools she worked. María helped to develop and improve ELL programs. This is

evidence of developing people and organizing school resources to meet the needs of the community she served.

The data on these three participants provided many examples of the qualities of leadership in setting vision for school and student success, developing people, and developing the organization. The participants also encountered, through their lived experiences in a leadership role, different barriers and successes in these categories that I describe in the next section.

Leadership Barriers

Victoria's barriers in being a school leader included her personal style and independent work ethic that hampered her ability to work with faculty until she learned how to delegate and develop others. This was evident in her story above about developing people and developing the school as an organization. She recounted how the change in her leadership style affected her staff and the school and improved the quality of the shared vision of keeping students in school. Moreover, due to this change, her last year as principal seemed to be the easiest.

Lucía's challenge in being a school leader was the frustration of time management and not knowing everything in order to organize to get things done. This was evident in her story about not being allowed to develop the teachers in her school studying to become administrators. She expressed the frustration in the district organization for not providing administrators with better training.

María's difficulties as a school leader stemmed from her vision to serve the community, because she developed Hispanic school PTAs and improved ELL programs without realizing the impact it might have on non-Hispanic colleagues who

perceived her efforts as a means to outshine them. Although she was able to organize school resources for the PTA and ELL programs, these resources ended once she fell under suspicion for inciting parents and students from the school to question district administration policies. She inspired and advocated for the Hispanic community.

Absence and Desire for Mentoring

The participants telling of their lived experiences in being a Mexican American school principal clearly illuminates a disconnect between them and the district administration when it came to feeling prepared for their role as a principal or vice principal, to being supported or encouraged, and the need for a mentor. They each noted specific aspects of these experiences in their individual stories:

Victoria expressed her desire in developing a mentor relationship with someone who could share the secrets for being a successful principal. She wanted to connect with someone who understood her but there was no such opportunity.

> As a professional, as a Latina administrator, we have to count on other administrators to provide us that support as well. To prepare those paths, tell you what some of the secrets are [for being a successful principal]. So if there's not somebody that you can develop that relationship with that you that understands you, and that you understand them and that you see similarities then you're not going to be able to develop that mentor/mentee relationship with anybody.

Victoria continued to reflect on herself as a principal. She expressed her frustrations with district administration and feeling isolated because there was no one she could call for help at the district level. She continued,

> That [job as principal], would be the one that I definitely struggled with, … whenever I was upset about something, you know am I taking this personally because I think they're picking on me because I'm Latina or because I'm a girl or because I'm young or is this just normal and I just need to pull my big girl panties up and go at it [my job as principal].

Lucía expressed similar sentiments of the desire for a mentor who she could talk to about school issues and programs. She talks about the absence of a mentoring program from district administration. She states,

> I think it's tough being a principal in the district because you learn as you go. It is a lot of learning as you go. I don't think there is a good enough training process or program at all. You know the principals are nice to say hey if there's anything [you need] just give me a call, but it's different you know if you have an assigned person and they were told you are to mentor this person.

Lucía continued to speak about her desire to have a mentor within the school and through mentoring there could be more assistant principals. She comments on how mentoring could be done given that it was absent for her.

> Having a mentor, an assigned mentor so you can feel more comfortable approaching that person. Then probably trying to grow our assistant principals [through mentoring] into the job so it's less of a shock. And I think this would be great and cost effective for the district, having a teachers like I have right now, I have two teachers that are going through the master's degree for administration to be principals [I could mentor them].

María echoed the sentiments of the other participants in regards to being prepared to be a school principal and her desire for mentoring. She felt more could have been done by her district administration to mentor principals, specifically minority women. María also felt that female Hispanic school leaders need to support each other. María expanded on her needs for feeling supported by other Hispanic female school leaders in district administration:

> As a principal, I felt like I was dealing with issues that no one understood. We don't set up training especially for Hispanic women that are in the school system in administration. In fact we separate them, it's almost like the crab effect of she gets up [in administration], and I'll pull her down. We have to learn to set up teams so that our Hispanic women especially, feel that they are being supported by other

> Hispanic women. We have that for other programs, we have mentors, and we have people that mentor people that really help them. If it had not been for that one African American assistant superintendent that brought me in [to her office to speak to me about how I should conduct myself] I don't think I would have been able to do what I was doing. All it took was that one little talk.

María expressed a strong desire to be mentored along with the desire to be supported by other Hispanic women in a leadership role. From her comments, I infer that there was an absence of support from other Hispanic women in a school leadership role.

The lack of mentoring from district administration or other school leaders is clearly expressed in the lived experiences from all three participants. They all expressed their desires to connect with other principals or mentors as well as to be groomed by their district administration for their specific principal role. They also described a desire to be more supported and helped in their career by a mentor. They shared a sense of having to prove themselves as an educational leader. All of their stories depicted their strong will to persevere as school leaders despite the absence of formal mentoring. They all have a willingness to give back and help other Hispanic females who wish to become principals and to continue to help their urban school communities.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I describe the participants' lived experience as a school leader, in an urban public school district. I used van Manen's (2014) five existential life worlds to give voice to each participant in regards to *temporality* (lived time), *spatiality* (lived space), *relationality* (lived relation), *corporality* (lived body) and *materiality* (lived things). In this chapter, I also introduced the significant themes of

a) Culture, Family and Language; b) Leadership Features and Leadership Successes and Barriers; and *c) Absence and Desire for Mentoring* as key descriptions that further emerged as I delved deeper into the life world experiences of the female Hispanic school leaders. I explained how these emergent themes are part of their life experiences both personally and professionally and the impact these factors have on their role of being a Mexican American female school leader in an urban district.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Interpretations of Findings

"People think of Latina women as being fiery and fierce, which is usually true. But I think the quality that so many Latinas possess is strength. I'm very proud to have Latin blood."

Zoe Saldaña

My findings from the exploration of the research question: "What are Mexican American females' lived experiences in an urban public school leadership role in Oklahoma?" does not seek to answer a question but rather to provide insight into the experiences of three Mexican American female school leaders through the lens of phenomenology described by van Manen (2014).

Max van Manen (2014) notes "Phenomenology is more a method of questioning than answering, realizing that insights come to us in that mode of musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed with sources and meanings of lived meaning (p. 27)." The Mexican American female school leaders who work in an urban school setting provided insight into their lived experiences. In chapter four, I presented my findings of the participants' lived experiences as analyzed through van Manen's (2014) existential life worlds of *temporality, spatiality, relationality, materiality and corporality.* At the conclusion of chapter four, I provided an Existential Life Worlds Aggregate Analysis in which I condensed the participants' responses to van Manen's (2014) existential life worlds to explore the phenomenon of being a Mexican American female administrator in an urban school setting.

Through my inquiry of van Manen's (2014) existential life worlds of my participants, several other theme clusters emerged from the data, *Culture, Family and Language; Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers;* and *Absence and Desire for Mentoring* which provided me with another lens with which I could expand my findings on my participants' lived experiences.

In this chapter, the research findings are presented and linked back to the empirical literature in regards to the theme clusters of *Culture, Family and Language; Leadership Features and Leadership Successes and Barriers;* and *Absence and Desire for Mentoring* as the theme clusters relate the participants' lived experiences in their unique life world of being a Mexican American female school leader; a topic that has not been previously explored. The findings illuminate insight to the study's research question: "What are Mexican American females' lived experiences in an urban public school leadership role in Oklahoma?'

Culture, Family and Language

The first cluster of themes is Culture, Family and Language. Rivera, Anderson and Middleton (1999) argue that because such a strong influence of the Hispanic culture exists, "elements such as language, family structure, sex-roles and religion, can significantly impact the career decision processes of Mexican American women" (p.97). These themes are intertwined throughout the lived experiences of my participants but for the purpose of this research I discuss them separately.

Culture

Culture had a significant influence on all three participants. As Mexican American females they are proud of their heritage. True to the literature, these women continually contemplate their career choices and paths when it comes to education in order to monitor how it will affect their cultural value system (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Ortiz, 1982). This need to stay true to their cultural value system increases stress and guilt when the value system is in conflict with the reality of being a professional school leader. These women continually had to deal with professional role versus cultural role conflicts and dilemmas. So, for instance, the decision to work late as a good professional woman because there is a project that needs to be finished in order to meet a deadline might also mean to the participants that they are not a good mother and wife. They continually dealt with moral dilemmas of what they should do because of who they were.

Each participant was influenced by elements such as language, family structure, sex-roles and religion, which are considered elements of deep culture for Hispanics, according to Rivera, Anderson and Middleton, (1999). The concept of "family" is further described separately below, but is included in the discussion here as a critical element of the overarching concept of "culture." Lucía and María experienced the cultural conflicts between home and work as moral dilemmas in which they were continually trying to straddle the cultural roles and responsibilities of both domains, and thus often experienced feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Both Lucía and María suffer from guilt if they are unable to complete their duties at home for their families due to their leadership role and time spent away tending to

school leadership responsibilities, some of which take place before and after school and on weekends. Being a principal requires extra time for activities and programs offered in their buildings for students and parents (Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Ortiz, 1982).

Victoria, on the other hand, assumed the expectations of strong decisiveness of the male- dominated sphere in educational administration (Regan & Brooks, 1992). According to Regan and Brooks (1992), if a female wanted to succeed in the sphere she had to obey the rules in order to become a full-fledged member of this group. Victoria felt she needed to be a dominate figure for her school leadership role and that carrying over those behaviors may have affected her interactions with family members at home. She expressed that this may have contributed to disruptions in her home life and her divorce. Glass (2007) found that women tend to put their spouse's career first and their own second. Victoria could not do this. She could not conform to the traditional Mexican American concept of *machismo* in which men are the dominant decision-makers and more powerful in family dynamics than women (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey, 2008). Assuming the mindset of a strong, independent female, which she felt was necessary to fit into the education system as an effective principal, had consequences for Victoria in her cultural expectations at home. She believed that because she did not succumb to the traditional role of a Mexican mother and wife as far as cooking, cleaning, and putting her husbands' needs first, she experienced two divorces.

Keller (1999) noted many of the problems incurred by women in leadership stem as much from subtle notions of gender and leadership as from blatant

discrimination. Being Mexican American women in school leadership roles, my participants' experienced cultural judgements from the White middle class Americans whose mainstream attitudes towards deep cultural values such as grooming are a mismatch to Mexican American culture (Faltis, 2006).

According to Leonard and Papa-Lewis (1987), Mexican American women must deal with the issues relating to their minority status, family status, their physical build and religion and the effect on their leadership position. Each of the three participants also expressed feeling that they were often assessed superficially according to mainstream cultural norms for professional dress and appearance. They felt they had to pay more attention to how they dressed in order to achieve credibility in the work place. These judgements affected them both personally and professionally.

My participants' Mexican American culture was significant throughout their lived experiences as it influenced their decision-making in both personal and professional realms, leadership style, their success and barriers in leadership, and the relationships they desired with other administrators or Hispanic women who could relate to their cultural challenges.

Family

The importance of family had a significant influence in all three participants' lives, although not always positive. Victoria's negative experiences in her family caused her to be independent, self-reliant, and led her to be untrusting of her staff and less willing to work with them. She assumed a commanding leader (Goleman, 2006) approach to leadership in her early years, including traits such as dictating

policy and being intolerant of differences of opinion. These traits did not lead to good working relationships with her staff in an urban school. Lucía and María experienced more positive influence from their families, which influenced their professional lives in a very different way. Lucía credits her husband for pushing her to get her master's degree and putting the idea of becoming a principal in her head; she never had considered it since she was happy being a teacher. María had a lot of encouragement from parents and family to be successful not only in school, but in other aspects of her life since she was the oldest child. The literature from (Brice, 2002, Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Ortiz, 1982; Rivera, Anderson, & Middleton, 1999) supports the strong connection to family.

The reality of depending on family helped both Lucía and María to do their jobs as administrators. The strong values of family are consistent with the research (Brice, 2002, Leonard & Papa-Lewis, 1987; Ortiz, 1982; Rivera, Anderson & Middleton, 1999). Family is an important factor that influences Mexican American women's lives. This includes family size and multigenerational households. A multigenerational household played a significant role in Victoria's life as she spent time also living with aunts and uncles and was raised by her grandparents, whom she calls mom and dad. She experienced multigenerational and extended family patterns but did not necessarily feel supported by her nuclear family, and in fact, adopted a more independent, self-sufficient reaction to it. Family contributed positively to the evolution of leadership for María and Lucía, and its absence contributed to the commanding leadership approach that Victoria took in her early days as a leader that proved unsuccessful for her.

In addition to the typical barriers faced by women in educational leadership, Mexican American women in leadership must deal with their own cultural family values, which do not match the values of the white mainstream culture (Faltis, 2006). All three participants' career choices are linked to what is best for their own families. In Victoria's case, the lack of support by her parents caused her to be more supportive of her daughter in her educational experiences. For each participant there seems to be an ongoing internal struggle about how to balance or reconcile family responsibilities and society expectations of school leaders. Lucía and María's families provided strong support to help them carry out their roles as school leaders. This help includes babysitting, preparing meals, and picking up their own children from their activities. Rivera, Anderson and Middleton (1999) reminds us that those Mexican American women not only face society's expectations related to professionalism, time demands, etc., but also the perception within Mexican culture and the Mexican American community about conforming to the norms of Hispanic *familism*. Research on Hispanic women leaders indicates that family support for achieving educational goals is crucial (Méndez-Morse, 1999) if they are to successfully overcome these barriers. My findings of the importance of family were consistent with the empirical literature of Mexican American women in leadership by Campbell, (1996), Rivera, Anderson, Middleton (1999), and others. Harris, Ballinger and Jones (2007) indicate marriage, family responsibilities, or cultural stereotypes are the main barriers women face when attempting to enter the role of an educational leader. Once a Mexican American woman is in an educational leadership role, these same areas seem to influence their styles of leadership. Family

contributions to leadership, whether as a result of positive family support, lack of support, or negative non-support, are relevant and impactful. The importance of the role family plays in relationship to leadership styles is undeniable. I found the influence of family resonates as a strong influence for each of the participants' school leadership path throughout their articulated lived experiences.

Language

Each of my participants is bilingual as per my criteria for my research. All three women feel it is important for them to maintain their Spanish and English languages. They also believe that, unfortunately, in American society bilingualism is not highly valued. According to Rivera, Anderson and Middleton (1999), the element of language is crucial to maintaining cultural traditions and practices. This notion is found to be the case with the participants in this study. All three participants believed it was to their advantage to be bilingual and to belong to the same cultural group as the school population. They considered these qualities essential for them to best perform their roles as leaders in an urban school where the majority of the student population is Hispanic. These characteristics allowed them to relate better to both students and parents. This is congruent with Magdaleno, (2006) and Tillman, (2004), whose research shows that African American and Latinos are effective role models for minority students because they share cultural understanding and experiences; they can better meet the needs of students, parents, and other stakeholders. While Victoria was able to communicate directly to students and parents, she was also fortunate to have two bilingual assistant principals at her last school assignment to work with the students, parents and community.

Lucía began learning English as a second language later in life. The language impact was not just that she was bilingual but also that she was an ELL and did not grow up bilingually as Victoria and María did. She acquired English later and that gave her a keen awareness of what ELL students are often subjected to. It also means that she had a noticeable accent. She had to acquire not only basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) but also cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins,1999) in order to get through American colleges using her weaker English proficiency, she purposely left her literature classes till the end of her degree when she felt she had developed more academic language. Middleton (1999) states having a heavy accent could create barriers and be detrimental to pursuing a career in educational leadership when communication is highly valued. This was not the case for Lucía who was the only participant with a noticeable Spanish accent. Because Lucía is bilingual, she was asked by her district on several occasions to do interviews and speak on several Spanish radio stations on various topics representing her school and district.

In participant María's case, being the only assistant principal in a large high school who spoke Spanish caused her to have double duty. In her high school each assistant principal was given a grade level to be responsible for. Since none of the other assistant principals spoke Spanish. They would send their Hispanic English language learners to her for discipline, want her to make all the Spanish parent phone calls or translate for parents at meetings. María's bilingualism was both a positive and a negative when it came to her workload of leadership responsibilities.

Language is an important part of my participants' culture as Mexican American women. Each of the three participants children are bilingual or on the road to bilingualism. According to Rivera, Anderson and Middleton (1999), the diminishment or loss of a language increases the vulnerability of maintaining one's culture. For each of the three participants, the maintenance of both language for themselves and their families was important. Being bilingual has helped all three participants to better connect not only with Hispanics but also with the mainstream culture. Their bilingualism has helped them to be more effective school leaders because they can communicate with students, parents and other community stakeholders in Spanish and in English. As a bilingual, Mexican American researcher, I was able to provide my participants the opportunity to share their lived experiences using both English and Spanish.

Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers

Defining leadership is not an easy task. I agree with Bennis (2000) in that, "leadership is like beauty-it is hard to define, but you know it when you see it" (p.418). Leadership is a very significant theme since it directly connects to the research question of being a Mexican American female administrator. The UCEA (2003) identified a core set of "basic" leadership practices for success that are considered applicable in almost all educational contexts. The three broad categories include vision, developing people, and developing the organization.

Vision

All three participants shared the vision of creating an environment that would nurture and educate the whole child consistent with the principle of a vision for excellence for all children as a part of the Multicultural Leadership Framework (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Each of them sought to be a culturally proficient leader who provides a school setting in which students feel safe and welcomed regardless of their backgrounds. Gerhart, Harris, and Mixon, 2011 note that "the principal is critical in establishing a more positive school culture" (p. 268). Each participant is a strong advocate for social justice and an advocate for equity like those in Benham's study (1997). Victoria shared her vision for trying to keep students in school instead of suspending them, as her faculty would have suggested. Lucía's experience as an immigrant provided her with the vision to help advocate for the immigrant parents in her school. María's vision was to champion for social justice for minority children in her school and in her district and to this end she filed a civil suit. Having a vision about equity for all students was an important part of each participants' work as a professional leader in a multicultural school setting.

The second part of vision includes how participants saw themselves as school leaders and how they felt they were perceived by the community and district administration. All three participants' expressed a level of self-doubt and insecurity in the vision of themselves as effective school leaders. Even after getting her master's degree and becoming a principal, Victoria felt she did not have the pedigree needed to be respected as a school principal. She experienced self-doubt in her abilities as a principal, causing her to question how she would be viewed as a school leader by her

faculty. Her self-doubt also caused her to distrust that the district administration supported her as a principal. Education has always been thought of as a way to level the playing field and provide a doorway to opportunity (Goodman, 2002; Irby and Brown, 1995, McCreight, 1999). In a sense, Victoria's education opened the door to her becoming a principal, but it was not sufficient to drive out her self-doubt about her leadership skills, a self-doubt originating from her cultural difference with the mainstream of educational administration.

Lucía also had the education and credentials to be a principal but she continued to have doubts about her leadership skills due to her feelings of lack of preparedness. Harris, Ballenger and Jones (2007) state that in order for women to be viewed as competent leaders, they must have more credentials, be better prepared and more informed. Women continually work at being better in order to prove themselves in what is still considered a man's world.

For María, she also had self-doubt and low self-esteem in terms of her views of how others in the mainstream setting perceived her. She reported that she felt there was a lack of support from the district school administration that combined with her own feelings of low-esteem further led to her to feelings of inadequacy as a school leader. She felt others perceived her as not being smart enough or good enough to do her job. María's education was filled with many hidden messages such as "be passive, don't be assertive or they will call you bossy," and "girls aren't good in math" McCreight (1999). These stereotypes reflected the expectations society placed upon women to be passive, quiet, lady-like and non-competitive. Rivera, Anderson and Middleton (1999) remind us that the stereotypical expectations for

women in general, combined with Mexican cultural expectations, added to their insecure visions of themselves as leaders.

Developing People

Developing people is considered a core leadership attribute (UCEA, 2003). All three participants were also able to help other people develop as leaders. Women are associated with various leadership styles such as transformational, democratic, communal, and agentic, all which place an emphasis on interpersonal relationships (Baker, 2008; De Casal & Mulligan, 2004). This is highly compatible with Mexican American cultural values (Kohli, 2009). It is through these interpersonal relationships that my participants were able to develop people. The development of human resources in an educational setting is vital when promoting professional growth of others. In order to promote professional growth in faculty and staff, offering intellectual stimulation, providing individual support and providing an appropriate model are essential to be an effective school leader (UCEA, 2003). Both Victoria's and Lucía's development of people were localized in their buildings. Victoria accomplished *people development* by delegating more responsibilities to her faculty and staff. Lucía accomplished it by seeking to increase her staff with community parents and develop the teachers in her building by encouraging them to seek a degree in administration. María's development of people occurred in every school she worked in and on a larger scale. She had by far the most examples of developing people, including advising another Mexican American female principal and helping parents develop PTAs to name a few.

Developing the Organization

The final category, developing the organization was also accomplished by all three participants. School is considered an organization as well as a community. When considering school as an organization, there are internal and external relationships that must be attended to. The educational leader must work on strengthening school culture, modifying organizational structure, building collaborative processes, and managing the environment. In addition to working with the teachers and students and developing those relationships, it also includes working with parents, community members, businesses, and other influential people (UCEA, 2003). For Victoria developing the organization includes modifying the school culture and environment as well as changing her authoritarian leadership style to one that was more collaborative. Lucía's development of the organization also included strengthening her school culture using her empathy for immigrants to clarify or provide appropriate documentation for her parents immigrant status as well as working to strengthen her management of the environment to meet deadlines. In María's case she organized Hispanic PTAs in each of the buildings she worked in and organized parent meetings as well. María also engaged in organizing the other Hispanic assistant principals. They organized as a group to hire an attorney for the purpose of sending a letter to the district administration regarding needs of the Hispanic students and teachers, particularly the need for more Hispanic administrators in schools in her district. In essence, she developed the district administration's organization through this advocacy process. The district began granting interviews to Hispanic principals for administrative job openings.

While the literature is clear on the necessity for socially conscious leaders, there is also a documented need for minority leaders to take on this role (Peters, 2010) in order to better serve a growing diverse school population. Because minority principals, such as Mexican American women, share cultural understanding and experiences, they can link with students, parents and other stakeholders (Sánchez, Thorton, & Unsinger, 2009). It was evident through the lived experiences of my participants that they were socially conscious leaders through their actions regarding *vision, developing people* and *developing the organization.* Engaging in these aspects of effective leadership, my participants experienced some successes and some barriers.

Leadership Success

I have paraphrased UCEA's (2003) definitions here: In public education, leaders do not merely impose goals, but work with others to create a shared sense of purpose and direction. As stated in chapter four, Victoria's successes as a school leader began when her leadership style evolved into practicing a more coaching or democratic type of leadership which could be identified as a more socially intelligent form of leadership (Goleman, 2006). She successfully changed her leadership style to become a more effective leader through the empowerment of her staff and faculty. Victoria began to build and maintain relationships, and increase communication and collaboration among her staff, faculty and community. Her more democratic leadership style placed an emphasis on inclusion, value of others, and hearing and listening to others as a priority which Clark, Carafella, and Ingram, (1998) note as effective leadership practices. The evolution in Victoria's change in school

leadership practices aided her professional growth and that of her faculty and staff while improving the efficiency of school management.

Lucía's success as a school leader was her ability to be inclusive, use a team building leadership style; and when it came to decision-making and problem-solving, she became genuinely interested in hearing all points of view; an administrative style identified by Duffy (2003). Because of this style, she was able to work with the parents to provide the documentation needed to allow them to file for citizenship or visas. Her own immigrant status bolstered her willingness to go where she was needed as a school leader. Lenz and Myerhoff (1985) state that one of woman's hidden sources of power is the ability to be cooperative, share their stories of how they reach out to other people, ask for help and are inclusive of everyone. All of these collaborations help them get the job done. In order to get the job done, Lucía volunteered to assist with the development of her teachers to take on more administrative roles. She expressed her view that these efforts would serve the community and the teachers in the school seeking to become administrators. She believes in helping others be successful confirming Lenz and Myerhoff's (1985) view, that as one of woman's hidden sources of power is the ability to be cooperative.

María's leadership among community is undeniable as she led them to express the power of their collective voices. For her, leadership success came in the vision of promoting educational and social justice for minority children. She was able to start an active Hispanic Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in each of the schools where she worked. María helped to develop and improve ELL programs at

her schools. This is evidence of developing people and organizing school resources to meet the needs of the community she served. The data on these three participants provided many examples of the qualities of leadership in creating and sharing their vision, developing people and developing the organization, as well as successes each accomplished and barriers they encountered.

Leadership Barriers

For many Mexican American women, decision-making and career development choices are heavily influenced by their perceptions of personal and cultural values. Mexican American women, not only face society's perception but the perception within the Mexican culture and community. These perceptions can help advance the career development of minority women or create barriers and thus, influence their ability or inability to create both formal and informal networks in order to develop as a professional.

One of Victoria's barriers was her perception of herself not having the same pedigree as other school administrators. Another was her authoritarian leadership style in her early years, which lead to her spending an inordinate amount of time on the job and thus causing conflict in the home. In addition, to feeling unprepared for the role as a school leader, she felt little support from school district for her role as a school administrator. Another barrier for Victoria is that she saw not having a mentor or someone who she could connect to for help with questions and concerns regarding her role as a school leader, was a barrier for her.

Like Victoria, Lucía's barriers to effective leadership dealt with her feelings of not being properly prepared by the school district for her role as a school leader.

Another barrier for Lucía was changing her mindset from that of a teacher, in meeting deadlines and accepting that some work may not be done or deadlines not met. In addition, not having enough staff to help her due to low enrollment numbers made her work more difficult. Lucía also mentions lack of mentoring as a problem. Although she acknowledges the help of her husband, who is also a principal in the same district.

As with the other two participants, María shares their feeling of not being adequately trained as a school leader. She also had a feeling of self-doubt in her abilities as a school leader. María's biggest barrier to being an effective school leader was being perceived as a threat because of her ability to organize and inspire the Hispanic community to question school and district authority for their perceived injustice and inequity.

Discrimination was also a barrier for two of the three participants. Both Victoria and María experienced forms of discrimination throughout their careers. Victoria's discrimination was more personal in that she was viewed by mainstream administration as a flirt, and using her looks to get ahead. María's discrimination was more institutional. She spoke up against what she considered discriminatory practices by the school district and was perceived as a threat, or dismissed as an angry Hispanic woman (Benham, 1997) who was showing favoritism to the Hispanic population.

Absence and Desire for Mentoring

Mentoring has been shown to be effective for not only students and teachers, but for administrators also (Magdaleno, 2006, Sánchez, Thorton & Unsinger, 2009,

Tillman, 2004). All three participants desired to be connected with mentors of similar ethnicity and gender who could assist and advise them as women of color (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000).

The paucity of *Latina* principals translates to a lack of mentors and educational leadership role models for Hispanic women who wish to pursue this career (Kohli, 2009; Catalyst, 2003; DeAnda, 2005; Vélez-Ibánez, 2004). Due to the small number of educational administrative positions occupied by minority women in their urban district, it was difficult to find a role model or a trusted confidant to go to when they needed guidance. As Ortiz (1982) notes, due to the small number of educational administrative positions occupied by minority women, it is difficult to find a role model or someone to go to when they encounter problems.

Each of my participants complained that there was no one they could call for advice or help. Lucía is the only one of my three participants who can rely on her husband for advice since he is also a principal, and Mexican American, in the same urban school district. He is not a female role model, but he at least could give advice on policy and procedures if she needed it. Lucia would have preferred a professional mentor who was not also her husband. She wished that the position of assistant principal could be more structured as like an apprenticeship where she could learn all of the duties of the principal, instead of being assigned only one part of the overall responsibilities. She felt she did not have a complete picture of her job when she later took a principal position. This was frustrating for her, because she feels she is driven to perform her duties professionally and thoroughly for her school and

community, and sometimes she had to resign herself to the fact that some things would not be completed in a timely manner.

Victoria commented on her lived experiences that, early in her career, there were three *Latino* male administrators at the district level whom she felt she could call on for advice. However, her contact with them was misinterpreted by some as flirting. This informal type of mentoring did not last long as all three *Latino* administrators left the school district. However, this misunderstanding of intentions left her feeling more isolated in her role as principal and less willing to ask for help than she already was.

For María, her meeting with an African American female Superintendent who gave her career advice, made her realize how much she needed a mentor. She felt the advice and "big sister" approach with her was what she needed to guide her actions and realize that her professional persona was important in maintaining respect of peers and supervisors in her role as a school leader. She had hoped that in one of her schools, where there was a female Mexican America principal, she might be able to at least establish a mutually supportive rapport, if not exactly mentoring, but the principal, who was younger actually needed a mentor herself. She tried to offer advice, and be the mentor she had not been able to find.

Haven, Adkinson, and Bagley (1980) state that minorities need more support for aspirations but often receive less. Minorities aspiring to become school administrators face conscious and non-conscious resistance from the educational system. Role models, especially of the same ethnicity and gender, could help them as they navigate the duties, responsibilities, and policies of their positions. When the

number of minority, specifically Mexican American females in leadership roles, is so low, few role models and mentors exist. All three participants' had a desire to have mentors and to be a mentor for other Hispanic women.

In summary, these theme clusters, *Culture, Family and Language; Leadership Features and Leadership Successes and Barriers;* and *Absence and Desire for Mentoring* emerged from my participants' lived experiences. The perceptions and lived-world experiences in these three areas help us understand their view of their path and reality as female Mexican American leaders in an urban school.

Implications for School Leadership Practice

This hermeneutic phenomenological study researched three Mexican American female principals' in an urban school setting in Oklahoma. Max van Manen (1997) explains that formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but an act of "seeing." This study reveals the relationship of their life worlds lived experiences and emergent theme clusters. This further helps us understand their roles as school leaders. The guiding research question for this study explored: What are Mexican American females' lived experiences in an urban public school leadership role in Oklahoma?

My first theme cluster included *Culture, Family, and Language.* As stated earlier, these three themes are intertwined but for discussion purposes, as a researcher, I teased them out. For my participants' *Culture, Family* and *Language* represent a seamless composite of who they are as individuals. Culture was the overlay under which family and language fell. Throughout their lived experiences,

both personal and professional, the decisions they made stemmed from their cultural Mexican heritage and influences. Tinto's (1987) theory identified background characteristics, including family background, socioeconomic status, and parent's education, quality of relationship with family, interests, and expectations of parents, as key factors in Mexican Americans success in education. The role that *Culture, Family,* and *Language* played in their leadership practices was strong. Balancing family time and responsibilities with that of leadership school responsibilities weighed heavy on my participants. Most women leaders face the act of juggling competing roles (Méndez-Morse, 2004). These roles are all important such as leader, wife, mother, caretaker of aging parents, etc. (Loder, 2005). This juggling act of various roles, and the accompanying sense of guilt when one role was not fully attended to was evident for all three of my participants.

My participants' bilingualism and cultural connections could be interpreted as a blessing or a curse because it enabled them to better serve their communities, but it also added to their workload. Their bilingualism was not rewarded financially or even acknowledged as an employment asset (except in crises) by the district. The district did not allow them more time in their work responsibilities for time lost in translating for parents or working in the community. One implication of *Culture, Family* and *Language* for Mexican American females in a school leadership role is there is a need for more support from the school district in terms of understanding and appreciating the cultural strengths and values they bring to the school setting. There should be sensitivity to the cultural experiences that shape them, their ability to connect with the community, and the family demands that they experience.

My participants' bilingualism should not be taken for granted or even expected by an urban school district, but should be rewarded either monetarily or by providing or actively recruiting more staff and teachers who are bilingual to help with school responsibilities. This added help implies they would be able to complete their duties and responsibilities as school leaders and not have to stay late to write reports and to meet district deadlines. This help, in turn, would allow them to go home and spend time with their families and fulfill any family duties and responsibilities they feel they have.

My second cluster of themes *Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers* is also connected to my first cluster of *Culture, Family,* and *Language,* although perhaps indirectly. The National Council of la Raza (NCLR) states that Hispanic administrators provide a needed connection between the parents and the school (Fisher, 1998). They can provide guidance to parents and students who are unfamiliar with the educational system. As Hispanic principals, they understand the cultural differences of the school setting, the language barriers, and obstacles their students will face because they also had to face them. Their leadership styles are reflective of their cultural and background experiences (Sanchez, Thorton, & Unsinger, 2009). My participants in this study connected their childhood backgrounds with their leadership decisions and styles.

In Victoria's case, her lack of support and dysfunction in her nuclear *family* in her youth resulted in her adoption of a commanding authoritarian (Goleman, 1998) type of leadership style in her early years as a school leader. She was very independent and self-reliant. Because her self-reliance made it difficult for her to

share or delegate responsibilities to her faculty and staff, she had to spend more time at work to get things done which left less time for her *family*. This leadership style caused a barrier for her both professionally and personally. It affected her professionally because of the long hours she would spend at work, and the lack of trust she placed in the people she worked with to get things done, and personally, because she spent less time with her husband and family which resulted in two divorces. Victoria's successes as a school leader came when her leadership style became more of a participative approach (NCSL, 2003) concerned primarily with the process of decision-making. It supports the notion of shared or distributed leadership that is linked to democratic values and empowerment (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999).

Both Lucía and María had more family support through their own personal educational experiences as children, and therefore had more exposure to collaboration. The implication is that their ability to collaborate in a family setting influenced their leadership style. Lucía's leadership style was more interpersonal and collaborative. She focused on her relationships with teachers, students, and others connected with the school. Lucía's collaborative approach enabled her to operate effectively with internal and external stakeholders. As Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) note, women tend to have a more collaborative style of leadership. Lucía's collaborative leadership style was recognized by the school district administration when they asked her to speak on their behalf to the Hispanic community on Spanish-language media via radio and T.V. (which links to *language* in the form of bilingualism). She willingly accepted this duty to be both the voice of

her students, and the district. She also offered to help develop the teachers seeking to become administrators in her building. Lucía's leadership success comes in the form of her ability to collaborate with others. Her barriers in her role as principal deal with allocating time appropriately, effective time management skills, and getting work matters done so she can spend time with her *family*.

I found María's leadership style to be a combination of transformational, moral, and interpersonal as these styles are expressed in the research by Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1998). Through her ability to form interpersonal connections with others, she was able to engage and transform the parents in each of the school communities she worked in. The transformation she inspired were based on her own moral values and beliefs as a leader as described by NCSL (2003). Her lived experiences contained many examples of her ability to connect, inspire and organize people in the community for a cause to improve student success and equity in educational opportunities. María's school leadership success was based in her ability to inspire and organize people; her barrier to be effective in some roles was the perception of her efforts on the part of colleagues and the district as being threatening or trying to make others look bad. Maria's leadership successes and barriers suggest that schools often misunderstand and view suspiciously the motives of Mexican American female school leaders who possess the ability to connect, inspire, and organize people. The implication is that schools could and should nurture those abilities instead of viewing them as a threat or dismissing them. Benham (1997) states strong advocacy for minority students, openness and vocalization of the limited opportunities for minorities in a district, often cause

Hispanic women to be labeled and dismissed as “an angry Hispanic woman” and one who could not be considered a credible minority campus leader. I see this demonstrated most clearly in María’s lived experiences as a Mexican American female school leader.

The final cluster of themes is the *Absence and Desire for Mentoring* that each participant spoke of. Mentoring as discussed by Magdaleno (2006), Sánchez, Thorton, and Unsinger (2009), and Tillman (2004) has been shown to be effective for not only students and teachers but for administrators as well. All three participants desired to be connected with mentors of similar ethnicity and gender who could assist and advise them as women of color as noted by Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan (2000). Each of my participants expressed a desire to be mentored in their career and a willingness to mentor others. My participants felt the absence of not having someone like them to talk to not just about their leadership roles but someone who could also understand their cultural roles. According to Ortiz (1998), it is even more difficult to have a mentor who is a minority of the same ethnicity because there is a lack of minority women in this role to begin with.

This was true for all three participants. Victoria, for a short time was able to seek advice from three *Latino* men in district administration but felt abandoned when they left the district, and also felt maligned when her intentions were misconstrued as flirting. Lucía uses her Mexican American husband as a mentor since he is also an administrator for the same district she is in. However, he cannot fully understand her concerns as a female Mexican American school leader. She also felt when she was an assistant principal, her principal did not allow her to learn from her as a mentor.

After María's meeting with an African American female superintendent, even though she was not of the same culture, she realized what impact their conversation had on her as a professional, and in turn understood more deeply the importance of mentoring.

The lack of *Latina* principals translates into a lack of mentors and educational leadership role models for Hispanic women who wish to pursue this career (Kohli, 2009). The implication of my participants lived experiences with the *Absence and Desire for Mentoring* is that school districts should have a systematic approach for mentoring minority women (or anyone, for that matter). The mentors for Mexican American female leaders must communicate strategies on how to balance their *culture* and *family* in their roles as school leaders. The mentor's role would be enhanced if there were a shared understanding of culture and language (Catalyst, 2003; DeAnda, 2005; Vélez-Ibánez, 2004). The *Absence and Desire for Mentoring* communicated by the participants also implies that merely getting a degree in administration or leadership is not enough for Mexican American females, or perhaps minority women in general, to be successful. In order to have culturally compatible mentors for this population, Mexican American women must be hired as school leaders. However, the lack of such school leaders is painfully evident in the low number of school leaders identified as Mexican American females for my research study in an urban district in Oklahoma with a very high percentage of Hispanic students. One interpretation of the fact that the number of female Mexican American administrators is so low could be that professional opportunities are even more restricted due to the double oppression of racism and sexism as described in the

research by Hernández and Morales (1999). Therefore, leadership opportunities in general are not equally provided to them.

The participants lived experiences illuminate the significant themes of a) *Culture, Family and Language*, b) *Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers;* and c) *Absence and Desire for Mentoring.* These areas need to be fully understood and addressed by urban school districts, such as Oklahoma as it relates to my study site and sample population if districts wish to both recruit and retain Mexican American female school leaders. Because Oklahoma ranks 48th in education (Education Week Research Center, 2015), it does not draw educators or administrators to seek employment on Oklahoma school districts. Mexican American female school leaders can go to the surrounding states and make more money. Meeting the need of Mexican American female leaders is crucial for Oklahoma as a state since the number of Hispanic students in urban districts is large. All three of my participants stay in Oklahoma, not for a monetary reason but because of *family* ties. The implication of this study is that schools have much to gain by employing and nurturing the professional development of Mexican American females in leadership roles, especially when the demographic make-up of the school community is so overwhelmingly Hispanic. Programs for recruitment, acknowledgement of the value of bilingualism and culturally responsive leadership, and sustained professional development through mentoring may provide districts with the tools they need to tap into this valuable resource.

Another implication would be to look at institutional barriers such as the current policies and practices that are in place in regards to leadership. These policies

and practices should be reviewed for any biases or discriminatory procedures when hiring minorities, specifically Hispanic women for principals or assistant principals.

A final implication is the role of culture and understanding how it binds female Mexican American women strongly to family and their assumed matriarchal role in the household. It would be important for school district leaders and community organizations to reach out to the broad community and educate Hispanic parents to understand the value of education for girls, and to emphasize that girls can learn how to uphold their traditional Hispanic values with that of mainstream values regarding leadership roles. Further, young Mexican American girls need role models and mentors early on in their educational experiences and communication from schools can emphasize that they can aspire to be a teacher leader and eventually a school leader while still embracing and integrating their family role with their work leadership roles.

Recommendations for School Leadership Practice in Oklahoma

The data in my study revealed several implications for improving school leadership practice in terms of Mexican American female school leaders. My recommendations are congruent with the factors mentioned by Leonard and Papa-Lewis, (1987); and Rivera, Anderson, and Middleton, (1999) about how Mexican American women deal with elements such as language, family structure, the sex-role stereotype not only in society but in their culture, as well.

Therefore, in this section I address and make specific recommendations related to the issues identified in the theme clusters (*a) Culture, Family, and Language; (b) Leadership Features and Leadership Success and Barriers;* and (*c)*

Absence and Desire for Mentoring. Here are my recommendations to address these issues:

1. Start with the pool of existing Mexican American teachers. Encourage them to continue their education and through partnerships with the local universities, foundations, and community agencies and guide them through the process of seeking and applying for tuition fee waivers and financial aid to obtain their degree in school administration or educational leadership. School districts can seek out federal grant opportunities to provide support and financial assistance.
2. Special programs could be designed to assist potential Mexican American leaders to cope with their family obligations such as developing childcare centers or support and training the female school leaders in strategies to manage their time in order to balance their households and do better at balancing work and home obligations. One suggestion would be to have the school district partner with community agencies such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Latino Community Development Agency, and churches. This will provide emerging administrators with specific names of people they can go to for help.
3. School districts should value the positive impact that bilingualism has on school administration and community relations. Districts should provide release time, reduction of duties, or financial reward for bilingual services provided by Hispanic administrators.

4. School districts should provide a mentoring program to coach potential principals and allow leave time duties for teachers who are working on their administration degree. Districts start small cohorts of Mexican American or Hispanic female teachers pursuing a degree in administration and provide them with a Mexican American female facilitator, coordinator, or coach who can help them navigate the higher education system. Further, female Mexican American teachers, who aspire to be principals, can be supported with tutorial programs for when they are taking courses towards receiving and administrative degree or principal certification.
5. In the interim of increasing the number of Hispanic female administrators who can serve as mentors, school districts can provide cultural sensitivity training to existing administrators on how to effectively mentor Hispanic women in early career school leadership positions.

Suggestions for Further Research

My study has uncovered areas in which to conduct further research on Mexican American female leaders in an urban school district. Understanding their lived experiences will help create an awareness of Mexican American women in this role and the circumstances surrounding their leadership practice. The following are my suggested questions to further explore what it means to be a female Mexican American school leader:

1. Why are there so few Mexican American female administrators in urban public school districts in Oklahoma?

2. How can an urban district cultivate a pool of potential female Mexican American school leaders? How can an urban school district develop the existing population of Mexican American females who may already be in the school system as teachers to cultivate to become school leaders?
3. What policies and procedures could school districts design to provide more access for potential minority school administrators, and validate and respect their non-traditional cultural patterns?
4. What can university leadership and administrative preparation programs do to meet the needs of minorities seeking to become school leaders, in regards to understanding unique cultures, and balancing family and the job as a school leader?
5. What is the impact, quantitatively and qualitatively, of bilingualism among school administrators on school climate among community, staff, and students?

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Appendix A

Demographic Survey

Personal Information

The confidentiality of my participants is of the utmost importance. As such, I am asking that you create the pseudonym of your choice that does not provide and identifiable information in the space provided.

_____

Please provide a pseudonym for your campus that does not provide an identifiable information in the space provided.

_____

Please state your ethnic background on your paternal side.

_____

On your maternal side _____ What term do you use to self-identify you ethnicity (example, Latina, Hispanic, Chicana etc…)?

_____

Age _____ Marital Status _____

Number and ages of your children, if applicable

_____

Was English your first language? _____ If not, what was your first language?

_____

Professional Information

Total years of education _____ How many years as a classroom teacher?

_____

Total years as a principal? _____ Total years as a vice principal? _____

At what level(s) elementary, middle, high school? Or combination?

_____

_____

Current campus population _____ Campus ethnic composition

_____

Percentage of students on free or reduced lunch?

_____

Other programs for school improvement?

_____

_____

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Guiding open-ended question for interview

1. What are your experiences as a Mexican American female administrator in an Oklahoma urban public school leadership role? This primary question will lead into other types of probing questions that cannot be predetermined at this time.

Possible follow up questions

1. What was your educational experience growing up?
2. Why did you choose education as a profession?
3. Why did you seek out the principalship?
4. How would you describe your experience as an administrator in an urban district?
5. Did ethnic background, race, or gender have any impact on your professional growth?
6. Are there challenges both personal and professional being a Latina female administrator in an urban district?
7. What advice would you give to other Latina administrators?

APPENDIX C

OU-IRB

Signed Consent to Participate in Research

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?

I am Regina Lopez from the EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP and POLICY STUDIES and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN URBAN OKLAHOMA: A HERMENUETIC PHENOMENOLOGY. This research is being conducted through the University of Oklahoma, where I am a current doctoral student. You were identified to contact as a possible participant because you are one of the few Mexican-American females in administration in an urban school district in Oklahoma.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.

What is the purpose of this research? I have chosen to research Mexican American female administrator's experiences in an urban setting in Oklahoma. This minority population has never been given a voice or explored in an urban school district in Oklahoma. Using hermeneutic phenomenology will allow me to document and share their lived experiences and provide information that may help and encourage other Mexican American females to pursue educational leadership roles or, although not the focus of this research, provide urban Oklahoma districts with information on how to recruit, support and retain Mexican American female administrators.

How many participants will be in this research? About 4 people will take part in this research.

What will I be asked to do? If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked to participate in a series of interviews. During the interview process you will be recorded (if you agree) using a digital and/ or a video recorder as a means to archive the conversation, which will enable me to review and transcribe the interviews later. The researcher will also be taking written notes during the interview process.

How long will this take? Your participation will consist of an initial interview approximately 90 minutes long. The second follow up interview is approximately an hour in length. Other exchanges will be made via email or phone calls as arranged. The recorded and videotaped interviews will be transcribed so that you will be able to review and modify or clarify any part of your story. One year after my dissertation is completed I will delete the encrypted files from my home computer.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate? There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research.

What do I do if I am injured? If you are injured during your participation, report this to a researcher immediately. Emergency medical treatment is available. However, you or your insurance company will be expected to pay the usual charge from this treatment. The University of Oklahoma Norman Campus has set aside no funds to compensate you in the event of injury.

Will I be compensated for participating? You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

Who will see my information? In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institution Review Board will have access to the records.

You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research. However, you may not have access to this information until the entire research has completely finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Will my identity be anonymous or confidential? Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses unless you specifically agree to be identified. The data you provide will be destroyed unless you specifically agree for data retention or retention of contact information at the end of the research. Please check all of the options that you agree to:

I agree to being quoted directly. ___ Yes ___ No

I agree to have my name reported with quoted material. ___Yes ___ No

I agree for the researcher to use my data in future studies. ___Yes ___ No

Audio Recording of Research Activities To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty.

I consent to audio recording. ___ Yes ___ No

Video Recording of Research Activities To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews, may be recorded on a video recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to video recording. ___ Yes ___ No

Will I be contacted again? The researcher would like to contact you again to recruit you into this research or to gather additional information.

_____ I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future.

_____ I do not wish to be contacted by the researcher again.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints? If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at 405-488-7333 or rlopez2660@yahoo.com or my advisor Dr.

Kathrine Gutierrez kjgutierrez@ou.edu or 405-325-568

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date
Signature of Witness (if applicable)	Print Name	Date