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Perceptions of Latina K-12 Leaders' Experiences with Mentorship and Career Advancement

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Abstract
The purpose of the study reported in this article was to explore Latina leaders' perspectives about their mentorship and career advancement in K-12 education. Potential school administrators who are Latina are at particular risk to achieve a position of leadership within the educational setting for a variety of reasons (Méndez-Morse, 2000; 2004; Magdaleno, 2011). This article describes how six Latina leaders within California describe their mentoring and career progression, including their perceived barriers and sources of support from family and other mentors. Implications are presented for purposes of building the capacity of Latina K-12 school leadership in a way that is reflective of the ethnic community they serve.

Keywords
Latina leaders, Latina educators, K-12 leadership, career advancement, mentoring

Introduction

Latinas who pursue professional careers as educational leaders encounter many barriers in their efforts to successfully navigate the educational system. With an increasing number of Latina/o students in California schools, the need for Latina/o leadership is crucial. According to Magdaleno (2006), school leaders are "most often perceived by Latina and Latino students as positive role models who represent their future" (p. 12). Furthermore, because of "their inherent diversity and humanistic values," such leaders "are strategically poised to help create a culturally accessible and compassionate society that values people and community before material wealth and individual advancement" (p. 13).

Underscoring the critical nature of this view, Robicheau and Krull (2016) observed, "For the first time in history, the overall number of Latino, African-American, and Asian students in public K-12 classrooms is expected to surpass the number of non-Hispanic whites" (Maxwell, as cited in Robicheau & Krull, 2016, p. 24). Given changing demographics, racial education-achievement disparities (Raskin, Krull, & Thatcher, 2015),

and an opportunity gap (Tollefson & Magdaleno, 2016), an urgent need is for students of color to see people of color leading their school experience. "Leaders of color can empathize with students of color and provide a racial perspective when making decisions about student learning, as they have likely overcome barriers" themselves (Robicheau & Krull, 2016, p. 25).

However, there exists a relative lack of information describing the perspectives, leadership, and experiences of Latina/o school leaders. In an exception, Méndez-Morse (2000; 2004) developed a framework to examine Latina educational leaders' perspectives about how they sought mentors from various sources that met their specific needs and priorities, including family mentors. As she noted, by studying the unique characteristics of various minority female educational leadership, research can contribute to expanding the understanding of leadership in general, as well as recognition of the importance of particular qualities of minority women administrators. This study builds on Méndez-Morse's (2000; 2004) framework to explore further Latina educational leaders' perspectives about their career progression as well as those individuals who they considered significant mentors.

Literature on Latina Leaders

With exceptions (Magdaleno, 2011; Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, & Hernandez, 2015), studies examining the work attitudes and experiences of educational administrators have not often included Latina/o leaders. Those studies that have examined Latina women administrators' perspectives specifically (e.g., Méndez-Morse, 2000, 2004; Ortiz, 2001) have focused on Latina women administrators' perspectives on their work experiences and careers in K-12 settings, including both school site and central office positions. Thus, this study utilized literature on mentoring and Latina leaders' experiences with leadership preparation. This literature furthered better understanding of the challenges Latina leaders face and the role of important components such as mentoring to address the barriers.

Latina Educational Administrators and Mentoring

Among the barriers for Latina leaders, according to Méndez-Morse (2000; 2004), is stereotyping of what a Latina/Hispanic woman is or can be, the limited acknowledgment of historical Latina leaders, and the small amount of research focusing on minority female educational leaders. Using both the terms *Latina(s)* and *Hispanic* to refer to those of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Spanish, Central American, or South American descent, Méndez-Morse (2000) provided an overview of issues confronting Latina educational leaders. She identified stereotypes regarding Latina women in three areas dealing with issues inside and outside of the home. One area was male domination by a father, husband, or male sibling. A second area was fulfilling the traditional responsibilities of wife, mother, and homemaker. A third consequence from the first two was that these factors lead to limited access to educational and work opportunities outside of the home.

This stereotyping of Latina women, however, may limit consideration of them as leaders. Méndez-Morse (2000) demonstrated, through a review of scholarship on Latina leaders (Avery, 1982; Carranza, 1988; Colon Gibson, 1992), that such leaders did not adhere to these stereotypes. From her review, Latina professional and entrepreneurial women received encouragement and support from their spouses and their families.

Spouses accommodated schedules, provided moral support, and assisted with household chores including child care, and family members provided strong role models. Additionally, women drew on family members and community Latina leaders as role models, thus "Hispanic women have *created* their own paths of leadership development" (Herrera, as cited in Méndez-Morse, 2000, p. 592).

Following up on the theme of mentorship, Méndez-Morse (2004) explored mentoring among six Mexican American female administrators in West Texas, finding that these leaders created paths to leadership by constructing "a mentor from varied sources that collectively met their specific needs and priorities" (p. 561). Her goal was to identify the role models and mentors of these women. She defined a role model as "someone whose characteristics or traits another person would want to emulate," and a mentor as "someone who actively helps, supports, or teaches" (p. 561) the mentee so that she will succeed. Other research on mentoring has identified key aspects of leadership development. "Mentoring for leadership development is a long-term, one-on-one dynamic process of role modeling and reflection designed to amass knowledge, skills, and self-confidence for personal development and leadership empowerment" (Hasting and Kane, as cited in Crisp and Alvarado-Young, 2018, p. 38). In Méndez-Morse's (2004) study, the significant role models and mentors of the six Latina educational leaders studied were often from nonprofessional areas of the women's lives, mitigating "the absence of a formal, traditional mentoring relationship" (p. 561). However, unlike many states, California has been active for several years in providing formal administrative mentoring cohort programs for Latina and Latino leaders (Magdaleno, 2011; Center for Leadership Equity and Research, n.d.).

According to Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, and Hernandez (2015), female educational administrators are often similar "in having experienced limited recruitment, a focus on elementary school or curriculum areas, and more years of teaching experience than their male counterparts" (p. 173). Eckman (2004), in her study of male and female principals in the Midwest similarly found female principals to be older when acquiring their first principalship, with more years of teaching experience. Further, Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, and Hernandez (2015) noted that compared with non-minority female administrators, minority female administrators often lacked sponsors or mentors to facilitate their career advancement. Furthermore, they were "largely leaders of predominantly minority student campuses or districts, and contend[ed] with the double burden of ethnic or racial as well as gender stereotyping" (p. 173). Expanding on the burden of ethnic and racial experiences, Robicheau and Krull (2016) focused on the lived experiences of a sample of (male and female) African American school administrators. They found leaders experienced barriers of three types, a) those racial in nature, b) those involving requirements to prove leader quality, and c) those involving microaggressions or "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities" (p. 32). Robicheau and Krull (2016) advised that "communities that engage in dialogue and discussion about race will be more likely to see and remove barriers" (p. 36) for leaders of color. What might these potential barriers look like for Latina leaders?

Ortiz (2001) explored the perspectives and barriers of three California Latina superintendents. Additionally, she employed the framework of social capital to analyze their perspectives, focusing on such aspects as "social structure" reported by women and networks "consisting of social ties between members" (p. 62). Maintaining that women "develop multilayered networks to gain access" (p. 68) to higher-level administrative

positions, she noted that women and people of color may not have access to "as extensive a network of influentials" (p. 68) as those of White men. Women's multi-layered networks included, for example, "professional connections, multiple mentors from inside and outside their immediate circles, and groups who may not appear immediately beneficial but may be in the future " (p. 68). According to Ortiz (2001), with a growing Latino student population in the U.S., K-12 district top leadership would benefit from leaders who represent their community's population. In mid-sized districts at the time of her study, she observed there were approximately 25 to 30 Latina superintendents nationally, the majority located in Southwestern states.

Finally, Metzger (2003) drew on a psychological as opposed to a social capital perspective to study educational leaders' work experiences. She explored the self/inner development of educational administrators, utilizing a sample of superintendents and college deans. Not all respondents provided their racial/ethnic designation but three deans indicated they were African American, and two superintendents were Latina or Hispanic. The study suggested a number of concepts that might be usefully applied to leaders, including the importance of self/inner development. In her study, administrators had an "aware[ness] of the current trend and the importance of focusing attention on inner and spiritual dimensions of leadership" (p. 683). As she proposed, self/inner development was likely associated with the following six themes: balance, self-actualization, personal improvement, values, inner focus, and relationships. These factors also appear in related research that cites personal qualities of education leaders including fostering loyalty, displaying humility, and providing recognition to others (Miskel, Fevurly, & Stewart, 1979; Bolman & Deal, 2011). Some of these characteristics also appear akin to descriptions of Latina and Latino school leaders as positive role models grounded in the values of "service, integrity, fairness, and equity" (Covey, cited in Magdaleno, 2011, p. 87). This article describes how Latina school leaders in California describe their mentoring and career progression, while considering the literature on the perspectives and barriers of Latina leaders related to leader preparation.

Current Study

Literature on Latina leaders emphasizes that with a growing Latina and Latino student population in the U.S., school district leadership will benefit from leaders who represent the community's population (Magdaleno, 2011). Méndez-Morse (2004) emphasized the quality of mentoring relationships and leadership that Latina leaders are able to establish, and Ortiz (2001) suggested that leaders who are connected to external as well as internal networks may be even more successful.

Given these issues, the purpose of this study was to explore K-12 Latina leaders' experiences with mentorship and their career advancement. Three associated sub-purposes were to 1) expand the literature pertaining to the perspectives of California Latina school leaders; 2) describe and analyze the experiences that prepared them to become leaders and the challenges they encountered; and 3) describe and analyze how these leaders acquired mentors and role models, and how they perceived their race and gender influencing their opportunities to become leaders. That is, what preparation did Latina leaders view as preparing them for leadership? What were some challenges they encountered along the way? The primary participants were six Latina educational administrators known to the researchers as actively employed in their career in educational leadership positions in

southern California. The aim was to include Latina leaders who had experience in K-12 administration/governance and whose career longevity could offer reflection concerning their administration advancement. Their perceptions on challenges and barriers were also sought, even as administrative mentoring programs continue to be formulated and developed in the state.

Participants and Procedures

The research followed several steps. First, the individuals were contacted and the study's purposes explained, and permission requested for interviews. All individuals were geographically accessible to the researchers and some were in districts with a history of collaborative working relationships with the local university where the researchers were working. Next, we scheduled interviews with the administrators at a location of their choosing. Study participants are displayed in Table 1, as well as their age ranges, levels of education, and positions held. There were six study participants: Alejandra, Berta, Caridad, Delina, Elisabete, and Fairuza (all names are pseudonyms). With respect to age, two were between 35 and 45, one was between 45 and 50, and three were over 60. All had held positions in K-12 education. Three study participants worked in K-12 education at the district level as coordinators or directors, two had served as school board members, and another held an elementary principalship.

Table 1.
Participant Description

Female Latina Leaders	Age Range	Highest Level of Education	Positions Held
Alejandra	60-65	Master's Degree	Grant writer District-level-coordinator (administrative-services-and communication)
Berta	40-45	Education Doctorate	Teacher Principal District-level-director(English learners, parent engagement)
Caridad	45-50	Education Doctorate of Philosophy	Researcher District-level coordinator (public-private partnerships)
Delina	35-40	Master's Degree	Higher education administrator School board member (former)
Elisabete	60-65	Master's Degree	Instructional aide Teacher Multilingual program director Vice principal Principal
Fairuza	60-65	Education Doctorate of Philosophy	School board member State university professor

Interview Protocol

Interview questions probed specific areas related to the leaders' backgrounds, mentoring received, goals and challenges encountered, and views of leadership. For the questions on background and mentoring we drew on descriptions of interview questions from Méndez-Morse (2004). We added specific questions about how these leaders' childhoods influenced their perspectives on leadership. Sample questions from the interview protocol included:

- *Background* - Could you describe your family/professional background? What attracted you to leadership/administrative work? How has your childhood affected your leadership role?
- *Mentoring* - How does a leader acquire mentors throughout his/her career? Tell me how you acquired assistance and from whom?
- *Goals and challenges* - What are your goals in education and what prevents you from being successful in meeting your goals? How do you think women administrators may encounter challenges? Please describe how you address challenges?
- *Views on male/female leadership* - How do you see a woman leader acquiring a mentor as opposed to a male leader? Do you think a woman's style of leadership differs from a man's? How do you think male leaders experience the same challenges as female leaders?
- *Views on Latina leadership* - Describe any professionally-related interaction that you have had that made you feel that you were being excluded or treated differently because of your ethnicity.

The first author conducted and transcribed all interviews, which were audiotaped. In order to obtain a more holistic understanding of who these women were and their experiences, we first developed detailed portraits of each Latina leader. These portraits were shared among the research team and used to develop a set of initial themes. These themes included background influences, mentoring experiences, barriers (e.g., racial), male/female roles, and Latina leadership roles. We then revisited the portraits to develop more fine-grained categories, following the two-stage process described by Grubb and Flessa (2006) in their portraits of schools. They characterized this process as "analysis from the bottom up" (LeCompte & Schensul, as cited in Grubb & Flessa, 2006, p. 524). We then chose to articulate the emergent categories to organize our findings. These categories became the sections of this paper: (a) leadership developed and cemented at an early age, as well as a sense of purpose to help children; (b) primacy of family and professional mentors; (c) barriers, including race; gender; the need to prove oneself; and micro-aggressions; and (d) strategies for overcoming barriers.

Findings

Regarding background, all study participants were Mexican Americans, creating a special setting for the study. These study participants mirrored the population they served and, moreover, identified with the children their school districts served.

Early Family Life Influential on Educators' Leadership Roles and Sense of Purpose

The influence of early family life formed a foundation for the study participants' leadership roles and the purposes they gravitated to in their public education careers. As Delina, one of the study's two former board members, stated, "I learned a lot from my parents. Even though they didn't go to college, I learned a lot about some fundamental skills that I still feel have helped me be successful." Alejandra, a district-level coordinator, described her father (a mechanic) as her mentor, teaching her to do her best in whatever she did, saying, "'Whatever you do, ... you do the best job you can' . . . I've always heard him in my head for all of my life pretty much giving me some direction." Although he was not initially supportive of her choice to attend college far from home, she perceived her father as a strong early influence. Consistent with Méndez-Morse's (2004) description of support provided by mothers, all participants identified their mothers as mentors. Alejandra noted that her mother "supported [her family] in what we did" as, for example, one of the only room mothers in her school's PTA. And, Berta, a district-level director, identified both her mother and father as "the ones who guided me and supported me" but said that her mother had especially been her personal and professional mentor for life.

Study participants also described an important influence from their backgrounds: the roles these leaders took on as children. These assumed roles shaped their later careers by underscoring that leadership started in the home. As Berta said, her leadership role was cemented from a young age when, as oldest child, she was expected to be responsible for and to lead younger siblings. As a second grader, she cared for a younger sibling, feeding her breakfast, dressing her for school, and walking her to and from school. Delina, as the first grandchild in her family, would care for her younger cousins, guiding and playing with them. She commented, "When you're the eldest you care. You think of [the] people you lead and you support [them]. . . . Some of those skills translated into who I am now, I think so." Another participant, Elisabete, an elementary school principal, was a middle child with older siblings who worked in field labor, so she cooked and otherwise cared for her younger siblings. She indicated that it was this responsibility that taught her to be a leader.

Our participants also articulated a belief within their families that education was influential, which shaped their own choice of an educational leadership path. Delina said that she chose to pursue leadership "to benefit students . . . because it probably touches on a personal background," adding, "Education was a big and major game changer for me and for my family."

Our participants also found society's mistreatment of their parents as influential, as they noted an early recognition and awareness of institutional disadvantage for the children and parents they would serve as leaders. Caridad, a district-level coordinator, said that she witnessed racism against her parents, partly because her parents did not speak English and they relied on her and her siblings to translate for them. She stated: "Of course, you as a child come to know what's being told to [parents] because you're translating it." Elisabete provided another example of being reprimanded by a teacher for speaking Spanish. She said that she associated the teacher's definition of the Spanish language to her mother's language as something shameful, extending this feeling of shame to her mother. When Elisabete became a principal, she mended her relationship with her mother, and included this lesson in her school leadership. She stated, "I don't think any child should feel embarrassed of who they are or the language they speak or be embarrassed of their parents. I think that's wrong and that was one of the things that drove me into education."

A belief that education was a game changer and an early awareness of institutional disadvantage shaped a common desire for these study participants to help children. Alejandra's commitment to help children was reflected in her volunteer work at her own children's school while working outside of education, and then securing an education position involving grant-writing to acquire additional resources for students. Berta's initial career choice was teaching in order to support students and help them learn. Later, she entered administration, believing she could extend that support to more students. She also searched for "progressive [districts in which employers were] willing to push the boundary and not sit on the status quo, who were at the cutting edge of student learning, and who wanted to make a difference." Elisabete's choice of teaching was also a "way to serve" students, and, in an administrative job, the "possibility of positively influencing or impacting more students than those who were just in my classroom." She stated:

> We have an opportunity to make an impact on a growing life and it's such a precious time in such a short amount of time that I would…want to do everything I can in my power to make it a positive and a great learning experience for children…childhood is such a formative and powerful time in a human being's life.

Particularly emphasized were personal experiences leading to sensitivity that participants brought to their leadership roles. Delina felt leadership was the means to helping students who did not have easy access to the education system. She indicated that her personal experience as an English learner provided her with the sensitivity to understand "underrepresented students who traditionally have lower-than-average rates for a lot of major areas: education, employment, health and so on." Caridad's personal motivation to help children was based on her experience growing up in poverty. She desired to support children, especially the socioeconomically disadvantaged. A large part of that goal was the "assurance that in our [educational] system, that there was a voice from, not only a Latina, but also from someone who grew up in poverty and understood the importance of supports for children." Elisabete said that her experience as a migrant working child gave her the sensitivity to understand the challenges that such children encounter as they moved from one school to the next.

Primacy of Family Mentors and Finding Professional Mentors

As noted, the study participants indicated that their first mentors were family members, and most identified their mothers as their primary mentors. Other family members named included fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Delina emphasized that several members of her family were mentors, including her parents, who did not go to college but from whom she learned "some fundamental skills that I still feel have helped me be successful now, such as being responsible, time management, commitment to values, not giving up, and perseverance." She also mentioned "aunts and uncles who went to college [who she] definitely looked towards to get some guidance academically." As they grew, participants sought and cultivated educational and professional mentors. Several received guidance in applying and attending college. As Elisabete said,

> [In high school,] I had a special mentor . . . who came in through a program called Upward Bound. . . . He looked at my records and stuff and he noticed that I had straight As…[and] asked, "Has anyone talked to you about college?" I said, "No." . . . And he said, "Well you need to apply. . . . You know he kind of got me into doing that.

Regarding professional mentors, several study participants mentioned Latina/o leaders as their professional mentors, with others including White non-Latina/o professionals and even parents in a school, and women who were educators or parents. Citing "multiple mentoring relationships" (Magdaleno, 2011, p. 93; Ortiz, 2001), Elisabete indicated that her three mentors consisted of a male Latino superintendent, a male White non-Latino vice principal, and a female White non-Latina administrator. Fairuza sought male Latinos in leadership positions in her community to be her mentors, asking them how they started on their paths to leadership positions. She also sought women, both educators and parents in the schools where she worked, as mentors. As she stated,

> So [mentoring] was from the women I spoke to--and not just women who were in highly visible positions but, for example, mothers who were part of school site councils and [other committees]. . . . I honestly learned quite a bit from those mothers. Even though they didn't have a high level of education, they were very involved in their child's school [and would initiate and bring issues to the school's administration].

Delina stressed that her professional mentors were individuals with the same values who had her best interests in mind when advising her.

When discussing a leader's acquisition of a mentor Elisabete said that sometimes "mentors just present themselves without you really knowing it." She provided an example of a superintendent who approached her asking whether she had ever considered going into administration. She said:

> And it's not something I have to say I really thought about. I thought about it afterward, after he [spoke] with me, but not only was he a mentor…he also provided support along the way. . . . For instance, instead of going directly into a principalship, he is the one who advised, "You really should try being a vice principal first." [He] gave me the opportunity of being a vice principal at actually two separate schools so I was able to see how two separate principals worked under their guidance.

Barriers to Latina Leadership

Study participants mentioned gender and race and the need to prove as barriers, as Robicheau and Krull (2016) previously identified in their study of leaders of color (i.e., African-American school leaders).

1. Gender and race. Noting "I definitely think that there could be challenges in the daily experiences of Latina or women administrators," Delina noted challenges associated with the perceived scarcity of women leaders and as a result their striving to be visible:

> I think that there's [a] perception [that] we don't have as many women in educational administrator roles in this state. So therefore, to break through to be *heard, to be seen,* to really have the opportunity to be that vehicle--to get to the end goals for our students--is going to be harder for women who have not typically been seen as the catalyst to get us to the educational goals that we're trying to get to.

Once in their positions, study participants pointed to the differential treatment of males and females and leaders of color, thus providing an additional barrier. Elisabete perceived that

> male leaders are treated differently than female leaders and I know it's not just my imagination because I've seen that. White leaders are treated very differently from

> Latino or Black or leaders of color. And White women are treated differently from Latino [leaders] or leaders [who are] women of color, yes. Our society is so engaged [with this difference].

Associated with micro-aggressions (Robicheau & Krull, 2016), racial and ethnic-based disparities in treatment were often noted as surprising and unpleasant. In one example, Elisabete was a member of a recruitment panel that was interviewing applicants for a classified position. One applicant displayed disrespect toward Elisabete (a first-year principal) by laughing and saying, "Ha, you can't be the principal! . . . " when she introduced herself. One panel member commented, "I've been in numerous interviews with different principals and I have never ever witnessed such disrespectful behavior!" Elisabete stated, "I wish I was making this up, but you know how many White principals are going to be faced with that? I don't think too many."

Other participants expressed being misunderstood and/or not valued by their male superiors. For example, for Berta, her work at her school was not appreciated until after she left her district. She shared, "[My supervisor] underestimated my work and was not necessarily very supportive, but, after the fact, after I left that district, he reached out later on to tell me that I had done amazing work and he had not realized the kind of work I was doing at that particular school." She went on to express her disappointment of being misjudged, "which is very disconcerting. It's very unfortunate that [supervisors] are not able to realize the kind of work that individuals are doing to serve the community until they're gone." She added, "Eventually, even the male parents who had been difficult reached out and said 'I'm sorry for not realizing the kind of work that you were doing.'"

Another key concern was that despite the importance of mentoring, it was viewed by all participants as more difficult for women than for men to find mentors who could support them on their career path. Indeed, "mentors may not be as readily available to women as they are to men" (Magdaleno, 2011, p. 93).When asked to share their impressions, Elisabete, for example, stated that that male leaders were "groomed for . . . the next position up," and Fairuza that opportunities increase for male leaders as a result of the expectation that males acquire leadership positions.

2. Need to prove. Study participants expressed a "need to prove their quality and readiness for advanced leadership work" (Robicheau & Krull, 2016, p. 32). For example, to a question about how her sensitivity to others affects her leadership role, Berta responded, "It impacts my role every day. I think I have to be very cognizant about how others are going to perceive what I say or don't say and how that's going to be interpreted in relationship to my leadership practice." She shared that as a female leader, she perceived working harder than her male colleagues to ensure her completed work was of highest caliber. It was more important that she completed her work in a timely manner, which meant she worked longer than the contracted workday to complete her assigned tasks. As she commented, "We have to work twice as hard to even be considered for the same position. I think we have to continue to push ourselves and do better in order to be considered equal or even close to it."

Caridad echoed that female leaders must prove they are capable of fulfilling their responsibilities. She believed female leaders must conduct themselves to be "conservative" in approach--i.e., not being loud, opinionated, or bossy, while acknowledging that the same behavior might be perceived as a strength for male leaders. She believed female leaders therefore must be continually strategic in their thinking and be prepared for questions as

to, for instance, 'why' a leadership directive was given. Caridad noted the exhaustion female leaders could experience from constantly and consciously strategizing.

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

Our participants offered suggestions for overcoming obstacles and advancing in leadership, giving examples from their own experience. Several emphasized the importance of networking among one's peers and colleagues so they could support and learn from each other. Alejandra said that she built and utilized peer networks and felt they were important because "we share the same objectives and challenges." Delina too, had networks which she sought to build and utilize, also seeking various networks to assist her in supporting others. The type of networks sought were professional networks, collegial networks, or simply networks of people who shared the leader's values and ideas. Delina stated that she does not work alone, but has always worked with others or networks of allies to assist her in successfully supporting others. As she commented,

> I feel that it's those networks and those allies, as we call them, that I've needed. I don't think that I am in this position of leadership alone, by working by myself. I think that…I got here because of so many people I work with.

She added, "in my mind everything I do is with the hope that there is a collective benefit to what I'm doing, that people are benefiting by the programs by the ideas and initiatives that I'm moving forward."

To build and utilize her networks, Berta mentioned connecting with educational organizations such as the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators or CALSA (see Magdaleno, 2011); California Association for Bilingual Education or CABE; and the University of Southern California or USC Trojan network. She networked with Latina superintendents and keeps current on the latest research in education. A political organization, the Mexican-American Political Association (MAPA) was also mentioned as part of networking. Returning to the mentoring theme, these participants mentioned the importance of cultivating mentors as a way of building networks. As Berta emphasized:

> If you have cultivated a relationship through a mentorship process, then you're going to hear about different opportunities more readily. [You] are going to be encouraged and invited to participate [in these opportunities, whereas] if you haven't been able to develop those networks, then you might not hear about them.

Continuing on this theme, Delina suggested that there were a few ways to make mentoring happen. The first option was to "actively pursue them." But the second was that they might "just fall into place. They're the people that you have repeatedly gone to, to seek advice, and then you realize after some time, 'Gosh, they really are mentoring me.'" These mentors could be found "subconsciously" by looking for the behaviors, styles and skills the mentee wanted to duplicate. But they might also be "those people we connect with, that we tend to go to seek advice to help us personally, professionally, and in other areas."

Berta, too, reflected that leaders might consider two different ways to acquire a mentor in an administrative position. "You either seek them out, or they are individuals who see the caliber of work that you produce and therefore will offer to support you." However, it might be more difficult for women to seek out mentors (previously described), and women may "anticipate more problems stemming from this relationship" as reflected

in "genderlects" (Magdaleno, 2011, p. 93). As Berta put it, male mentors "might not necessarily understand your perspective or your reality in trying to navigate the system and really aspire to grow as a professional." Fairuza added that she "always look[s] to see if [she] could find female mentors because women in leadership positions face different obstacles." As a Latina woman then, Berta advised being "very mindful and very intentional as to who you are engaging with" as mentors. Further, she reflected on her own learning about how to navigate between (her) culture being Latina and Mexican descent first-generation Spanish-speaking, "making sure that I've connected and been able to work within my cultural environment and community but also learn how to navigate in the dominant culture, the white English-speaking male-dominated environment."

Others spoke broadly of styles and skill sets that could be pursued by prospective or acting Latina leaders. Berta took care to build specific skills before aspiring to an administrative position. "We, as women, might be very mindful and want to master a certain skill or some area before moving into the next space, a male might just want to take it on." In a separate point about how she approached administrative tasks, she suggested that Latina leaders could consider the difference between the performance of daily tasks for female and male California K-12 public education administrators. If a male administrator is direct and to the point, the perception is that the male administrator means business and one needed to adhere to his directive. If a female administrator is direct and to the point, the perception could be that the female administrator was aggressive, inflexible, and/or unwilling to work with others. As a result, female leaders might find a different way than their male colleagues to do their daily tasks:

> You have to figure out a way to get to get your work completed [according to] your vision and [have] your vision realized…You have to find a way to make it a reality…It could be very straightforward with a male, [but for] a woman you have to figure out another way of being able to bring people along in order to engage in that process.

In this way, participants indicated a woman's style of leadership also needs to be different from a man's style. Women leaders need to be able to assess a situation, listen to different perspectives, and bring people along in order to make changes in the organization. As Berta said, "We have to take into account the needs of a group [and] adjust our leadership style to make things happen. [This] ultimately results in a very fruitful product because you're actually moving everyone along within the process." Further, delivery seems to be important for the Latina leaders we spoke with. The challenge is to "make adjustments—constantly—to how you are delivering your style or delivering your message based on your audience and based on what you want to achieve." Berta believed women were able to multitask and perceive things differently from their male colleagues, which could be a strength.

Perhaps most broadly, Delina expressed that while still in school, female Latinas in education should be encouraged to become leaders and praised for their leadership skills. She commented, "Are we identifying the ways that they can get there? Are we being strategic and thoughtful and actually asking them so that we have more women who are interested?"

Summary and Conclusion

Although of a small sample of Latina leaders in one state, this study indicated that participants considered such factors as parental mentoring and support, responsibilities assumed at an early age, and the experiences of child poverty and/or family discrimination as influential in guiding them to assume educational leadership roles. Influences of early family life included teachings from parents and the roles these leaders took on as children. Ceja (2004) indeed reported parents as important influences, sources of support, and encouragement. Further, in the present study, helping siblings and other relatives underscored that leadership started in the home. For one participant, for instance, caring for younger cousins translated to her skills as a leader. These characteristics of early family life fostered leading and supporting others, seemingly consistent with Metzger's (2003) approach by placing people at the forefront. The influence of early family life thus formed a foundation for the participants and their orientation to leadership. Our findings also paralleled Méndez-Morse (2004) by indicating that the Latina leaders in this study often wanted to become educators to "mitigate the negative experiences they had when they were children" (p. 580), such as society's mistreatment of parents.

Later, the leaders in this study sought and cultivated educational and professional mentors as they advanced their educational careers. As a result of their conducting themselves to work hard to prove they were capable for their leadership positions, they continued to strategize about their career progression. Nevertheless, stress was reported with having to constantly perform at a high level as they experienced discrimination and/or feelings of isolation as a result of their ethnicity or gender. Furthermore, consistent with Méndez-Morse's (2004) study, throughout their careers these leaders "constructed" or assembled mentors from different sources including parents, educators, and supervisors. One participant said there were two paths, however. One was seeking out a mentor, and the other was coming to the attention of a mentor who saw the "caliber of work you produce." Another participant agreed that there were a few ways to make mentoring happen. These additional paths appeared closer to the notion of a traditional mentor, contrasting somewhat with the earlier findings of Méndez-Morse (2004).

In terms of study implications, school districts might do more to work with students, parents, and parental outreach to encourage female students who are still in school. As one participant suggested, female Latinas in education should be praised for their leadership skills and encouraged to become leaders. She suggested that more care might be taken to be "strategic and thoughtful" in encouraging females who might envision and pursue leadership career paths. In addition, consistent with Magdaleno's (2011) call, formal mentoring programs should be considered. Mentoring for Latina leaders might leverage cultural capital based on cultural values of "family, respect, service, humility, care, and compassion" (p. 88) As he indicated, the close Latina and Latino community is a strong base for supporting new school leaders and being models for teachers and families.

This study has several limitations that suggest some directions for future research. First, the study utilized a small sample of leaders within California's southern region. Future studies might expand research efforts to include larger samples as well as other regions in the state. Second, while our focus was on similarities in perspective within a relatively experienced group, more fine-grained analyses of Latina leaders with different experience levels could be conducted. That is, given the scope of this paper to examine Latina leaders with substantial experience within education, studies might include newer entrants to the education profession. Third, whereas most of our participants were first in

their families to attend college--and they considered parents, particularly mothers, their most important mentors--future research might examine whether there could be differences for Latina women who were not first in their families to attend college. Such research could discern whether there are first-generational differences that influence the perspectives of the participants. Fourth, given Magdaleno's (2011) description of formal mentoring programs (e.g., the CALSA administrative mentoring program), a future study could be situated in just such a program. Research might explore, for example, the experiences of "pairs" of mentors and mentees. For example, such a study could examine how and whether such mentoring mitigates some of the challenges reported by Latina leaders.

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