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Social Identity Matters: Lived Experiences of Latina Teachers in Predominantly White Staff Schools

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SOCIAL IDENTITY MATTERS:

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINA TEACHERS IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE STAFF SCHOOLS

BY

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Abstract

The demographic makeup of student populations is undergoing profound shifts, with Latina/o students constituting a significant percentage. However, the representation of Latina/o educators within school systems remains disproportionately low. This incongruity between student demographics and educator representation may pose multifaceted challenges. To address this disparity, the present study delves into the lived experiences of Latina educators, illuminating the nuanced interplay of their social identities within educational contexts, particularly in relation to their interactions with White staff colleagues. Employing a phenomenological approach and supported by social identity theory and transformational leadership theory, this research endeavors to uncover the salient factors shaping the professional experiences of Latina educators, including the facilitators and impediments to the expression and integration of their social identities in professional settings. Drawing upon a purposive sample comprising six Latina educators from a designated school district in Washington State, data collection was conducted through structured interviews, with thematic data analysis serving as the primary analytical framework. The findings illuminate essential components of Latina teachers' social identities and their strategic utilization within the professional sphere. Moreover, the study identifies avenues for fostering a sense of belonging among Latina educators, delineates the barriers encountered within predominantly White staff environments, and suggests the pivotal role of leadership in fostering inclusive school cultures. Finally, actionable recommendations are presented for district and school leaders to generate an inclusive and supportive environment for Latina educators, thereby enriching their professional experiences toward attracting more as teachers.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the resilient Latina individuals who, in the face of systemic and political inequalities, persistently strive to realize their aspirations of becoming educators, committed to effecting positive change in the lives of others. Their pursuit is highlighted by the glaring absence of adequate representation of their ethnicity and culture within academia and professional realms, where they often find themselves consigned to mere tokens. Such circumstances stress the imperative for the recognition and esteem owed to these educators. Their example stands as a testament to resilience, deserving of scholarly acknowledgment and respect. May their endeavors serve as a guiding light for those who follow, affirming the significance of their voices and their invaluable contributions anticipated and embraced.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

In the public education system, a school organization's effectiveness depends on its agility to promptly adapt to changes and provide consistent quality services required by consumers and society. Hence, since all change initiatives revolve around the workforce, people are the change's primary co-creators, drivers, and participants, as well as beneficiaries of this transformation. Indeed, change initiatives prioritizing the inclusion of employees tend to be the most fruitful (Singh Goel & Ghosh, 2022). Moreover, people whose attitudes and actions will be altered by the change are the primary focus of change management because these individuals' values, voices, core intentions, and drives will influence whether transitions are successful. The premise of the change process is that its sustainability and efficacy depend on the "buy-in" and active engagement of leaders, followers, and consumers, particularly those who will benefit from this initiative (Kotter, 2012). To summarize, every people-centric initiative is a complex process that requires leadership to engage members at every level of the organization and ensure that they comprehend, influence, and contribute to its success.

Consequently, as the nationwide student population in schools becomes more diverse, district leaders recognize the need to initiate change regarding inclusive policies and procedures, promote racial diversity among staff, empower marginalized members, and make this a central tenet of the public organization's mission. Research demonstrates that racial diversity and inclusion among educators lead to more innovative approaches to teaching and problem-solving, teamwork and collaboration, performance and productivity, motivation and commitment, quality of decision-making, and new talent

attraction (Galinsky et al., 2015). At the same time, researchers argue that the ways to endorse, empower, and retain racially and ethnically diverse certificated staff need to be clarified and consistent (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Still, according to research, teachers of color are devoted to cognitively challenging curricula, social justice, and teaching across cultures for students of color (Sleeter, 2001). Scholars asserted that once members from underrepresented groups enter the teaching profession, they act as role models and mentors for students of color, significantly improving their academic performance (Ehrenberg, 1995; Carver-Thomas, 2018). Since Latina(o) and African American students benefit the most from having teachers who mirror them racially and ethnically (Carter, 2018; Huerta et al., 2020), these teachers are in high demand to reshape public education by sharing their experiences and empowering young scholars and those whose voices have been suppressed and silenced. At the same time, as Latina classroom teachers get hired, research shows that their attrition rate is also a concern (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Despite the prevalence of initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace, neither the objective of diversifying the workforce nor the retention of individuals recruited and employed has been achieved (Gershenson et al., 2022). Therefore, this study focuses on Latina teachers' lived experiences in predominantly White staff schools.

Problem Statement

A discrepancy between the growing number of students of color and a teaching force that is predominantly White poses difficulties for students of all backgrounds. Due to the current trend, there is a prediction that Latino(a)/Hispanic students will make up 56% of the student population by 2024 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). Still, 87.6% of the teaching force are White, and only 4.3 % are

Latino(a)/Hispanic. The lack of Latina-certified teachers' representation in schools leads to challenges for students' academic and behavioral needs, considering that Latino(a) students make up 40% of all suspensions compared to other racial groups (Shirrell et al., 2021). Thus, when students and teachers match culturally and ethnically, there is an increase in academic success and a decrease in suspensions and dropout rates since these teachers take more nuanced and culturally informed approaches to discipline and motivation for learning and serve as aspirational figures and mentors for students (Bristol, 2020; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

As Latina teachers become one of the most needed forces nationwide, educational leaders should seek ways to endorse, professionally develop, and retain teachers from this ethnic group. This proposed dissertation research begins to address this issue as a qualitative phenomenological case study that investigates the lived experiences of Latina teachers in predominantly White staff K-12 schools. Its purpose is to provide insight for district leadership regarding efforts to create an inclusive workplace and retain teachers of color—particularly Latina teachers—by investing in equitable and inclusive policies and programs to reflect the student demographic of K-12 public schools.

Purpose Statement

Reflecting on the ongoing racial and ethnic diversification of the student body nationwide, as well as what educational research continues to report about the significance of recruiting, endorsing, and retaining more Latina teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Borman & Dowling, 2008), it is crucial to understand the barriers that Latina teachers face and what factors prevent or enhance successful career growth and retention efforts for this group. Therefore, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of

Latina teachers and what characteristics they perceive as fostering or hindering the development of their social identities in their professional lives. This study also aims to identify critical factors that emerge from Latina teachers' perspectives that are useful for implementing strategies that promote and enhance Latina educators' social identities to increase their numbers in public schools and keep equity and inclusion efforts prolific and sustainable.

This research utilizes a phenomenological case study design to gather qualitative data. The purpose of a qualitative study is to offer in-depth evidence to support a case (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2018). The data obtained through the qualitative methods in this study will enable a more nuanced view of participating Latina teachers' lived experiences in a suburban school district in Washington State. Emerging themes should be helpful to leaders' efforts to institute equitable and inclusive practices. Considering fundamental values, merits, and participants' experiences, this study approach is suitable since it seeks to examine how people see themselves in social settings, their feelings and attitudes, what affects their behavior and actions, and other relational aspects within a school community (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Also, this method is "holistic, lifelike, and illuminates meaning" (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 376). The need to learn more about the role social identities play in the workplace for Latina groups and the implications for school leaders may help to improve the visibility of these underrepresented social identities and provide a safe and inclusive environment in which they feel comfortable voicing their opinions and making an impact.

Research Questions

1. How do beginning Latina teachers view their Latina social identities in the workplace?
2. How and to what extent do school settings create or eliminate barriers to Latina teachers' thriving personally and professionally?
3. How can school leaders recognize and support Latina teachers in ways that will empower thriving in predominantly White staff school settings?

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory

The first theoretical framework that grounds this study is *Social Identity* (SI) theory (see Figure 1). SI theory argues that people's sense of who they are and how they position themselves in the world is strongly influenced by the communities in which they participate (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SI theory may also explain why people are drawn to specific organizations by describing how people construct their sense of self through their connections to others (Banks et al., 2016; Sluss et al., 2012). According to this theory, people are likelier to maintain a consistent sense of who they are by comparing themselves favorably to the groups they associate with and avoiding associations with groups that negatively impact their sense of identity (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). The group members' characteristics and values become central to their sense of who they are as individuals. Thus, a more profound comprehension of such social identification processes can inform leaders' inclusion and diversity efforts and practices and provide insight into the phenomenon of developing employees as leaders while at the same time increasing their commitment to the organization (Banks et al., 2016). Since social identity functions as a mediator between established empirically-

supported predictor factors and the results of inclusion and commitment, social identity theory will be used as a lens to examine the lived experience of beginning Latina teachers in predominantly White staff public schools and what school practices and processes promote or hinder their sense of inclusion within their school workplace and community.

Transformational Leadership Theory

The second theoretical framework that grounds this study is the *Transformational Leadership* (TL) theory (see Figure 1). TL involves leading in a way that influences and empowers those within the more extensive social system. In its ideal form, it fosters positive transformation in its followers, aiming to mature them into leaders. When properly implemented, transformational leadership enhances followers' motivation, morale, and performance (Northouse, 2019). The TL model was initiated in a descriptive study on political leaders by James MacGregor Burns (1978), and lately has been widely used in organizational psychology. Burns argued that leadership is not about wielding positional power over corporate members; instead, it focuses on mutually empowering members/followers by promoting shared innovation, acknowledging accomplishments, cultivating credibility, and inspiring shared vision (Northouse, 2019). In this sense, leaders and followers depend on each other to advance higher morale and motivation. Burns (1978) admitted the challenge of drawing distinctions between management and leadership and argued that the differences lie in traits and habits. He differentiated between "transformative leadership" and "transactional leadership" and claimed that the transformational technique might dramatically alter the trajectory of an individual or an entire business. Employees' outlooks, priorities, and goals are all reshaped as a result. It relies not on a "give-and-take" relationship, as in the transactional

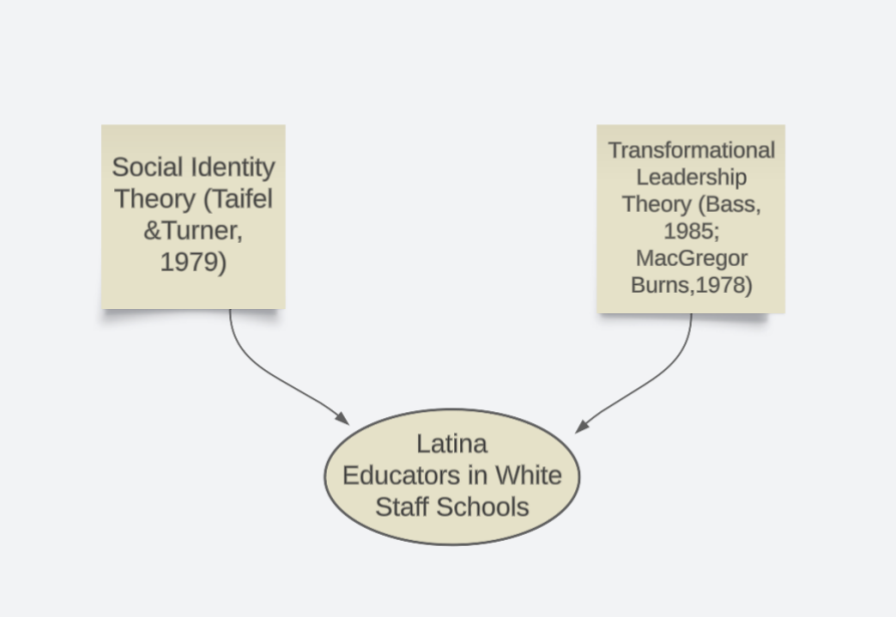
model, but on the leader's qualities and capacity to inspire followers to action through their behaviors, creating meaningful mutual connections that support followers to thrive personally and professionally. Leaders who effect change are viewed as moral archetypes because of their selfless dedication to empowering their followers in a team, company, or broader community. Moreover, Mason et al. (2014) found that when leaders were given training in transformational leadership, they improved their self-efficacy, increased their ability to examine and incorporate diverse views, and positively influenced their followers.

Accordingly, the implementation of transformational leadership has the potential to yield positive psychological benefits for all stakeholders. Hence, in this dissertation study, TL theory provides criteria for change to empower Latina educators and enable them to thrive in their careers. The transformational notion of "power with" rather than "power over" is necessary to initiate appropriate social justice change where power manifests itself more as a collaborative rather than a coercive activity. The concept of "power together" implies interrelated behavior as a process in which leaders empower followers in ways that open access to knowledge, information channels, and positions of influence.

The data for this case study will be obtained through interviews with Latina elementary school teachers. The researcher’s goal is to bring attention to the lived experiences of Latina teachers in predominantly White staff public settings to promote inclusive and equitable practices that may attract more Latina individuals into teaching careers. Participants for this case study were drawn from elementary public schools in a district located in the Northwest region of Washington State, and their experiences will

be investigated through the use of qualitative research methodology involving structured interviews.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



Significance of the Study

There are numerous studies conducted regarding Latina individuals' pipeline to college and teaching degrees and the positive impact they make on students' academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional development (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Bustos Flores, Riojas Clark, Claeys, & Villareal, 2007; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Ochoa, 2007; Quiocho & Rios, 2000). At the same time, studies on the qualities of educators of color tend to blur with those of Latina educators, despite the latter group's distinct social identities, barriers they experience, and factors that help them succeed. The experiences of Latina educators are also contextualized through the studies of Black educators or the contrasts between Black and White educators (Griffin, 2018).

Thus, it is essential to examine Latina teachers' experience in predominantly White staff public schools and understand their challenges, accomplishments, and turnover trends for this ethnic group. Moreover, this study intends to expand existing knowledge regarding inclusive and equitable organizational practices and professional opportunities as perceived by Latina teachers. Results could benefit district and university-level educational leaders in recruiting, empowering, and retaining Latina educators to increase their numbers in education, which in turn would increase their ability to be role models and mentors to address the "blind spots" or lack of cultural competence and understanding of the Latina ethnic group by non-Latina school/district leaders (Flores, 2011).

In addition, uncovering barriers, struggles, or accomplishments perceived by Latina teachers may help districts and university leaders shape change processes toward equitable and inclusive staff diversifying practices. Exploring the experience of Latina teachers in public schools through the lens of *social identity* and *transformational leadership* theories may help educational leaders and stakeholders understand the role of social identity and how it affects Latina professional life and willingness to invest in the organization to develop policies, structures, and intercultural competence of all members of an organization. Given Latino(a) students' significant and expanding presence in public schools, educational leaders require more nuanced mental models and improved abilities to hire, appoint, and empower underrepresented groups. Equally important, this study offers insights for organizational stakeholders on expanding opportunities for traditionally marginalized members of society by creating a platform for Latina(o) groups to enter positions of power where their multiple identities—including culture, gender,

immigration status, and experiences—serve as a bridge between educational organizations and the communities they serve.

Definitions of Terms

Latina: Individuals of Latin American origin, including Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. The author does not use the term Latinx as a gender-neutral noun to speak about this ethnic group due to the controversies regarding this term (Lopez, 2022).

White: People descended from the native populations of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Leadership: Leadership is the process of influencing others in both organizational and small-group settings (Northouse, 2010).

Marginalization: This term refers to individuals who are excluded from political, cultural, economic, social, power, and other societal structures. Factors defining marginalized populations include but are not limited to race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, language, and immigration status. A power imbalance between various social groups is the root cause of marginalization (Adams et al., 2018).

Oppression: The act of putting significant restrictions on an individual group or organization. Oppression can take several forms, including when a government or political organization in power sets restrictions, either explicitly or implicitly, on oppressed groups to make those groups more susceptible to exploitation and less capable of competing with other social groups (Barker, 2003).

District leaders: School district administrators responsible for providing instructional leadership and developing, implementing, and assessing the effectiveness of institutionalized educational frameworks and practices.

Certificated staff: A person who holds a professional education certificate issued by the Office of Superintendent and Public Instruction (in Washington State, often labeled Departments of Education in other states within the USA) and is employed by a contractor in a position for which such certification is required.

Chapter Summary

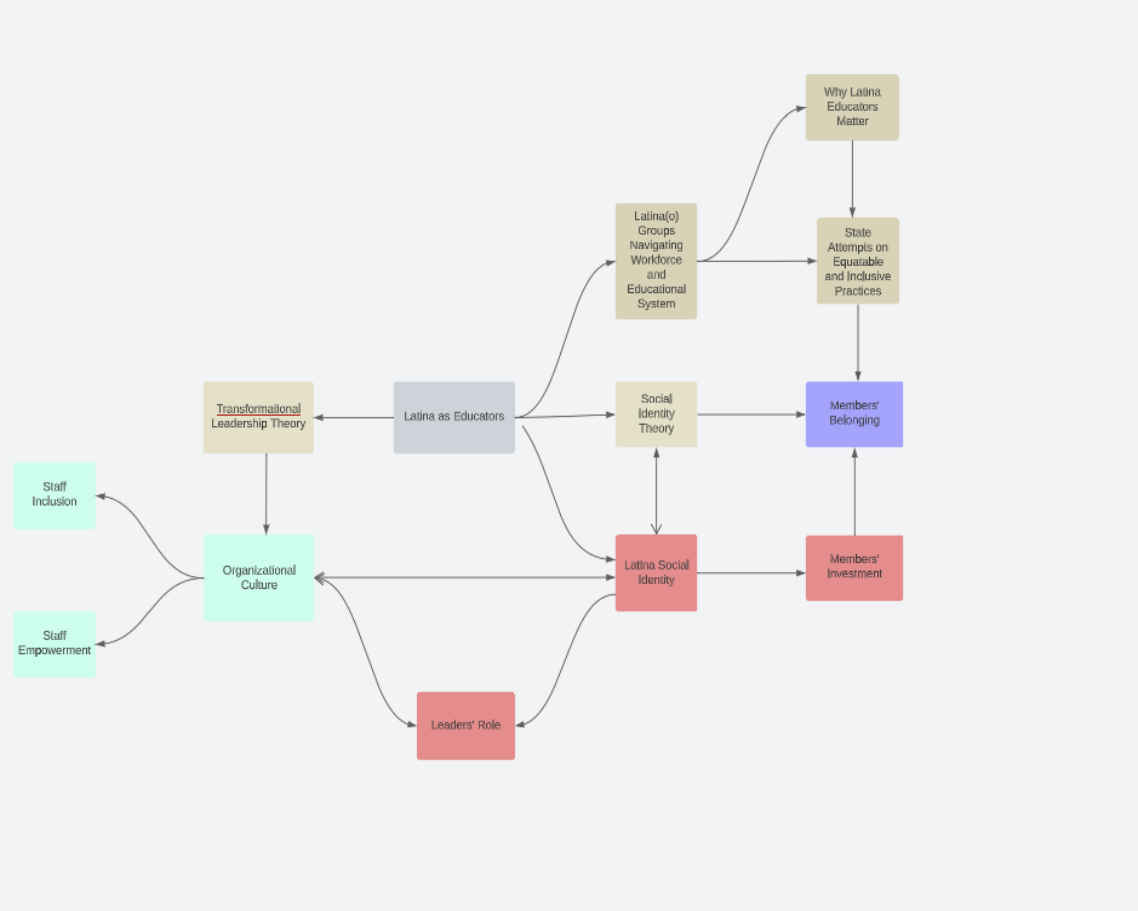
Chapter 1 discussed the problem observed in the educational field and included the purpose statement, theoretical framework, significance of the study, and definitions of terms. The theoretical frameworks of this study are based on *social identity* and *transformational leadership* theories as cornerstones for empowerment and the implementation of socially just policies by equipping organizational leaders to critically engage in evolutionary and sustainable practices that promote inclusive and equitable professional opportunities for marginalized groups. Moreover, it seeks to identify effective practices needed for inclusive workplace processes and applications. The inclusion and participation of Latina teachers in this study might assist educational leadership in making impactful decisions through the organizational change process by crafting reforms, policies, and practices necessary to dismantle institutionalized discrimination and promote inclusion and career growth opportunities for this ethnic group.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

A shortage of Latina-certificated teachers affects multilingual students nationwide (Bristol, 2020), perhaps especially those students whose first language is Spanish. In response to the need to increase Latina-certificated educators, district leaders implement change initiatives focusing on inclusive practices to promote policies and equitable opportunities for individuals from traditionally marginalized groups. As the pursuit of organizational effectiveness, sufficiency, and agility is greatly facilitated when diversity and inclusiveness are fostered inside an organization, this chapter examines the literature regarding the Latina position in US society and studies regarding *social identity* (SI) and *transformational leadership* (TL) theories as applicable in organizational development. Since Latina teachers are the focus of this study, the researcher discusses how this group's culture, values, identities, and experiences influence and inform the engagement and empowerment of these professionals and what role SI and TL play in the organizational culture and the career prospects of Latina educators. The following topics are included in this chapter: (a) literature on Latina(o) groups navigating the American workforce and educational system; (b) the importance of Latina teachers; (c) state attempts at equitable and inclusive practices**;** and (d) *social identity* and *transformational leadership* theories. Figure 2 displays and maps the interconnected relationships among these topics.

Figure 2. Literature Review Map on Latina Educators



Latina(o) Groups Navigating Workforce and Educational System

Years of study have shown that the meritocratic school system is more of an ideal than a reality. Holmlund and Nybom (2023) argued that schools currently facilitate social immobility and perpetuate existing inequalities in equal measures. In the fields of sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics, and education, scholars have found that schools contribute to the reproduction of existing social inequalities, even while they serve as vehicles for public and economic growth both up and down the stratification ladder for students of color (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). The United States Government (2021) indicated that the high school graduation rate for Latina students is lower than the

national average due to systematic and historical disadvantages faced by these students. In addition, when the first language of this ethnic group (Spanish) is viewed as a barrier in the classroom, their advancement and enrollment in upper-level courses becomes impossible. Research indicates that the Latina(o) community is experiencing a crisis in education because they are falling behind their counterparts at every stage of the educational pipeline (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012).

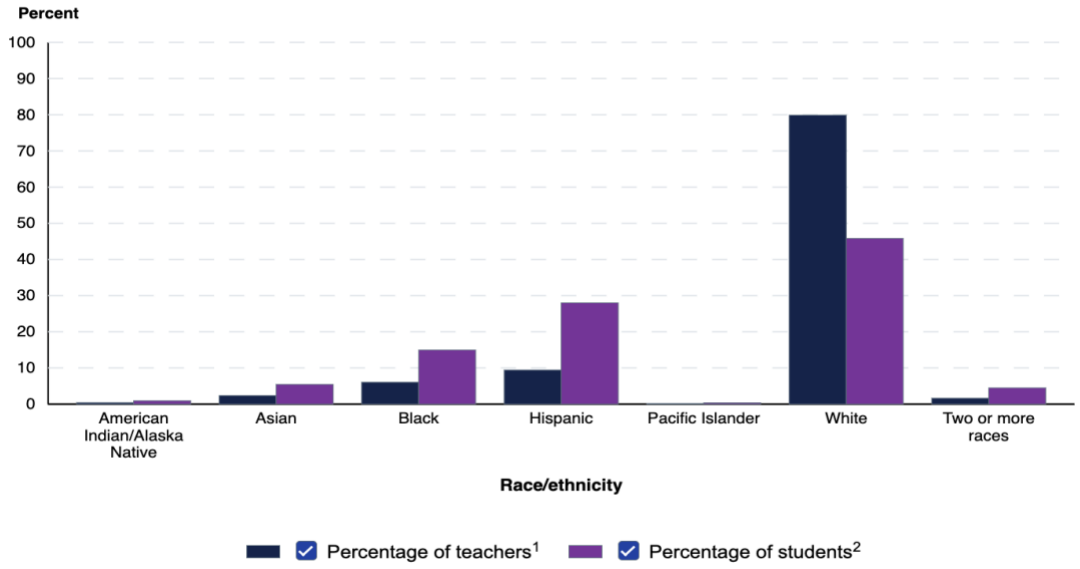
Consequently, social justice proponents and researchers have long called for social inclusion and dismantling of structural constraints that exist in all spheres of American society, including education for Latina(o) people, to create opportunities for their mobilities where they voice their opinions and equitably participate in the distribution of power and resources (Vasquez Guzman et al., 2020). Latina(o) comprise almost 20% of the U.S. population. In fiscal year 2018, the proportion of Latina(o) government employees rose to 9.1 %, up from 8.9 % in fiscal year 2017 (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2021). However, Latino(a)/Hispanic federal workers continue to face difficulties regarding employee retention. The number of Latina(o)/Hispanics working for the federal government who decided to leave their jobs rose from 9.3 % in 2017 to 10 % in 2018.

Latina(o) people have historically been more prevalent in low-wage service jobs and careers like housekeeping and secretarial work (Flores & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2014). To this point, Riccucci (2004) notes that organizational bureaucracy that is reflective of the population at large provides significant symbolic benefits, a concept known as *active representation* that occurs when an organization's demographics reflect the public it serves (Lim, 2006). When the government's workforce reflects the general population, it

communicates that all citizens are valued and included. "The composition of government workforces is illustrative of the level of openness of bureaucracies to persons of all backgrounds" and "it serves as an indicator of equality of opportunity and access" where the public agency proves its "legitimacy" to the diverse communities they serve (Riccucci & Saidel, 1997, p. 1).

Yet, the public school system is far from reaching an "active representation" state where Latina(o) educators are underrepresented at a noticeable number and, therefore also are less included in decision-making processes seeking reforms to policies, programs, and practices that are necessary to dismantle institutionalized discrimination and meet the unique needs of traditionally marginalized communities (Ocasio, 2014; Gershenson et al., 2021). By extension, White educators continue to dominate the public school system, comprising a vast majority of teachers and administrators. While just 20% of public school teachers were people of color in 2015–2016, 51% of students were non-White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). About one-quarter of the student body comprises Latina(o) students, making up the largest ethnic minority across the nation, and this proportion is projected to increase to one-third of the student body by 2026. Hence, the demographic gap between Latino(a)/Hispanic educators and students is the greatest (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021; see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Public School Teachers and Students by Race



Note. Figure 3 shows the racial and ethnic breakdown of elementary and secondary school instructors and students in public schools from kindergarten through 12th grade in the 2020–21 academic year. A more significant proportion of teachers belonged to the White racial group compared to the racial/ethnic group that constituted the majority of students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021).

Steele (2011) emphasized, "socioeconomic disadvantage, segregating social practices, and restrictive cultural orientations have all dampened the educational opportunities of some groups more than others, historically and in ongoing ways" (p. 47). Consequently, Latina(o) people in the United States have traditionally held jobs considered to be undesirable. Some sociologists have labeled this situation "double danger," "triple oppression," or "the simultaneity perspective" (Beal, 2008; Blakemore & Boneham, (1994), while others have pointed out that Latina(o) experiences in the

workplace are the result of a multifaceted interaction of circumstances (Flores, 2017). In addition, most studies on diversity in educational organizations discuss the shortage of Latina(o) educators. Yet, there is a need to investigate the cultural, economic, and political reasons contributing to the ongoing marginalization of this group, including school district leaders' attempts to recruit and hire Latina(o) teacher candidates. District efforts and attempts to diversify teaching staff will be discussed later in this chapter.

On the other hand, Ocasio (2014) provided an overview of current literature on how Latina individuals proceed through crucial junctures of the teacher pipeline, from gaining college credits to establishing themselves in teaching positions. This in-depth analysis of the Latina experience through each of these junctures provides a greater understanding of the potential and challenges this group encounters as educators, including their limited access and experience navigating government institutions and obtaining positions of power (Ocasio, 2014; Griffin, 2017). Due to these factors, this ethnic group often needs a network of appropriate support to navigate this journey effectively. Carver-Thomas (2018) found that although in recent years, many marginalized teachers of color, including Latina, are being hired, the lack of continuous support for new teachers contributes to them leaving the profession at a higher rate. Carver-Thomas further pointed out that these teachers are discouraged from remaining in their schools and the profession due to poor working conditions and low compensation, and teachers are being uprooted from high-need schools because accountability techniques have led to staff reorganization or school closures rather than investments in student learning.

Why Latina Educators Matter

Scholars argue that the academic achievement among Latina(o) students is linked to a lack of same-racial-identity educators who are fluent in their students' language, have knowledge about their cultural values, and can relate to their life experiences. There is strong evidence that students benefit significantly from having the same instructors of the same race in their classrooms because of the positive examples such teachers provide (Gershenson et al., 2022). Teachers of color, particularly Latina, who match racially with their students can empathize more with students of different ethnic characteristics and create a welcoming classroom environment. Consequently, there is theoretical support for racial or ethnic matching of students and teachers and positive effects on the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional functioning of Latino(a)/Hispanic students (Harbatkin, 2021). In addition, these teachers appreciate the cultural backgrounds of their students, which assists in fostering stronger relationships between the home, school, and community in which they live (Joshi et al., 2018). A potential focus of school-based policies to address achievement gaps and other educationally relevant disparities in U.S. elementary schools may be to increase opportunities for Latino(a) students to be taught by teachers of the same race, ethnicity, or cultural background.

Therefore, Latina(o) students in some states showed higher reading and math success when taught by the same-race instructors (Dee, 2004). More analysis of the same topic showed that racial matching helped narrow the kindergarten performance gap (Penney, 2017). Another study showed that students taught by educators of the same race were more engaged in class, had higher course grades (Harbatkin, 2021), and were less likely to be labeled as inattentive or disruptive (Wright et al., 2017). In addition, Nguyen

and Le (2022) found that students in a nationally representative sample of U.S. primary schools reported feeling more connected to their instructors when they were of the same race or ethnicity. Gershenson et al. (2022) also argued that teachers who mirror their students ethnically and racially provide a fresh critical slant to the classroom environment because of their life experiences. These educators generally have a deeper understanding of the political and social environments and barriers that Latina(o) students attempt to overcome for success. According to Rueda et al. (2004), Latina teachers can significantly impact students' academic and personal achievement due to their cultures, experiences, language, and expertise and their ability to relate to their voices, stories, values, family life, and communities. Also, Chopra et al. (2004) mentioned that Latina educators' strong ties with students and their families allow them to serve as liaisons between home and school and between families and civic resources.

State Attempts for Equitable and Inclusive Practices

Affirmative action programs and other methods of diversifying personnel have become more critical as the nation becomes more ethnically diverse, which is well reflected in public organizations and the significant shifts in the ethnic makeup of the people they serve.

Understanding how public organizations adapt to more diverse clients by recruiting, developing, and promoting members of underrepresented groups has become an agenda item for educational leaders. According to the Office of Superintendent and Public Instruction (OSPI, 2022) in Washington State, equal employment opportunities and no discrimination policies are two ways an affirmative action plan might aid school districts in pursuing educational success. Each public school district, including charter schools,

must create an affirmative action employment plan or program that includes appropriate provisions to eliminate discrimination based on gender, race, creed, religion, and other factors. Districts must submit their affirmative action employment plans to state educational agencies and agree on them with the board, unions, and employees.

The Equity and Civil Rights section of the OSPI (2021) provided the framework for this Affirmative Action Plan, where each district has to present a comparison between the district's minority staff in different job categories and the proportion of minorities in the available labor force. By adopting this policy, the districts reaffirm their commitment to ensuring that all employees are treated fairly throughout the hiring, dismissal, assignment, transfer, promotion, and training processes. These affirmative action pledges aim to guarantee an environment free of prejudice and equitable employment opportunities where district leaders and employees may ask to make a hiring or promotion recommendation and must do so in a fair and nondiscriminatory manner.

On the other hand, Schneider and Northcraft (1999) argued that the legislature-established “protected classes” to promote diversity in organizations so far is the most effective tool for getting reluctant organizations to join diversity and inclusion initiatives. The members of various socioeconomic groups are shielded from job discrimination by granting priority for entrance to qualified members of protected groups. These regulations interrupt the attraction, selection, and attrition cycle of preference for comparable others. However, scholars also observed that the paradox of addressing diversity and inclusion might challenge individual and management involvement by placing more constraints on the organization's ability to respond (Kulik et al., 2007). Even though diversity initiatives focus on representation and who is included, establishing an inclusive environment is not

the same as diversity efforts. It is not enough to say that individuals who belong to a wide variety of organizations are included in an environment; instead, the focus is on determining their participation in that organization or setting (Moore et al., 2020). Scholars argued that inclusion often receives less attention than the concept of diversity. The concept of inclusion pertains to the extent to which individuals within an organization perceive acceptance of their identities and ideas, a sense of belonging within the system through both formal and informal means, and the perception that their voices and opinions are valued and encouraged across all levels of decision-making (Mor Barak et al., 2016). In addition, according to Acquavita Pittman et al. (2009), research conducted on social workers in the United States found a strong association between enhanced job satisfaction and the implementation of inclusive practices within organizational processes. Therefore, although the intention to improve diversity is a crucial initial measure, initiatives that foster inclusion have a more significant effect on the retention and engagement of individuals.

On the other hand, if those traditionally marginalized newly join the organization without proper mentorship, resources, and support to fulfill their duties effectively, it would be easy to conclude that they were not suitable for the position they occupied from the beginning—another form of oppression. Hence, besides legal measures to prevent attrition of Latina teachers, it may be necessary to utilize a comprehensive implementation plan, including mentoring programs and group-level incentives to encourage positive collaborative contact and interaction among diverse members (Leeper & Greene, 1978). These tools are necessary as part of any resistant organization's plan for workforce diversification; this resulted in public policy taking on the responsibility of

fixing the diversity issue, as opposed to just alleviating its symptoms, such as by making organizations more inclusive on paper but not in practice (Schneider & Northcraft, 1999).

Equally important, government officials recognize the importance of funding diversity and inclusion programs backed by research (Heubeck, 2020). Also, some actions have been implemented by districts to improve teaching conditions and establish beginning wages and pay ceilings to provide teachers with a remuneration that is competitive and sustainable (Rickman et al., 2019). More grants become available for the programs and districts that collaborate with local universities and support teaching residencies, substitute teaching, paraprofessional work, and provide tutoring for teacher residents to get classroom experience while pursuing their degrees. In addition to offering organized, paid, on-the-job learning experiences in conjunction with job-related technical teaching with a mentor, the Registered Apprenticeship model (United States Government, n.d.) has a long history of building career paths in various sectors. Participants in such programs may be required to agree to teach for a certain number of years in a high-need region.

Scholars who study different staff diversification and inclusion programs mentioned that these programs could serve as a beacon of hope to embrace and empower teachers of color and secure their position in K-12 public schools. Such programs and initiatives have been purposefully designed to engage participants by explicitly highlighting why people of color are desperately needed in education (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019); this is done not only because of the members' racial or ethnic membership but also because of their lived experiences and deep understanding of their home communities. As highlighted, convincing people of color to become educational leaders

and make professional and personal commitments to education is challenging since traditionally marginalized groups typically do not view schools as inviting or safe places (Toshalis, 2014). To better understand the level of disenfranchisement that this group frequently experiences, besides surveys and staff racial representation data, it is necessary to examine actual lived narratives and experiences.

As scholars note, the various initiatives that focus on inclusiveness are not an end goal but a continuous, systemic, and transformational process that includes intentional recruitment, mentorship, placement, and retention of teachers of color (Sleeter, 2017). In addition, developing Latina teachers' capacity and building on their strengths, including rich ethical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds and the knowledge of local context and population, is essential for effective diversity and inclusion initiative implementation. Moreover, scholars indicated that models with specific commitments to furthering justice and equity are needed to bring about social change (Madda & Schultz, 2009; Gist, 2022). In efforts by educational leadership to include Latina educators, Gist (2022) recommended prioritizing intersectional views of ethnoracial diversity, treating teacher resilience as an essential quality, utilizing multiple modes of assessment as evidence of teacher learning, intentionally focusing on the development of these teachers' knowledge, skills, and expertise; using culturally responsive professional development; and building on local commitment to equity and inclusion. In addition, researchers determined that practices that focus on staff inclusion and retention must be adaptable and tailored to the needs and strengths of the marginalized members (Madda & Schultz, 2009; Gist, 2022). Indeed, Latina teachers are in greater danger of having their cultural distinctions neglected in the staff diversification and hiring process, which puts them at an increased

risk of emotional distress and discouragement in pursuing their jobs as teachers (Flores et al., 2007). As a result, scholars suggested that leaders focusing on retaining and mentoring Latina teachers must be mindful of individuals' identities, how they conceptualize themselves, and their ideas and values.

Parallel to this, Gist (2022) pointed out how the counternarratives challenge the unquestioned White supremacist assumptions and proposed alternative strategies for liberating educators of color. This includes challenging stereotypical notions of who teachers are and what matters most in their workplace, including their professional growth, and opening the opportunity for more people from traditionally marginalized communities to be included in decision-making processes and reach positions of power. In addition, Sleeter (2017) discussed that among all the challenges to retaining and empowering Latina teachers are (a) the lack of long-term funding to sustain initiatives and programs and (b) ambiguous (vs. clearly articulated) commitments to social justice through inclusion. Still, dismantling oppressive systems and White privilege to ensure Latina teachers have access and opportunities to grow professionally and move to positions of power is a critical criterion in these initiatives. Although district leaders have implemented various initiatives and programs to support, endorse, and develop Latina teachers for quite a while, limited literature is available about their efficacy (Tandon et al., 2015) and impact on these teachers in the long run (Bianco et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Amos (2016) found that methods of decision-making in schools that start at the top and work their way down show problematic power dynamics between school administrators and Latina teachers, in which the contributions of these educators are seldom considered. A significant number of participants reported feeling alienated,

marginalized, and unsupported by their coworkers and administrators and were rarely accorded the same rights and advantages as their White coworkers. Moreover, participants in the Amos (2016) study stated that they were never included in the decision-making processes or planning sessions for professional learning and career opportunities. Arce (2004) also revealed that Latina educators' voices were being stifled to prevent them from speaking out about their ideas for critical pedagogy among their White colleagues and school leaders. Simultaneously, Flores (2011) used the term "racialized tokens" to describe the impact of race, gender, and socioeconomic status on the professional lives of Latina educators who are in the minority among their mostly White coworkers. The author argued that Latina teachers, often treated as racialized tokens in the workplace, do not yearn for racial integration with White women because of the comfort and safety that self-segregation provides in a supposedly post-racial era of diversity and multiculturalism in the United States.

Intentional recruitment, retention, and continuous professional support are other necessities to increase the number of Latina teachers. Growing evidence shows that a concerted effort to recruit and develop minority educators in the classroom may result in a more representative and stable teaching staff (Goldhaber & Mizrav, 2021). Moreover, as scholars pointed out, to hire and retain prospective Latina teachers, state or district-funded comprehensive programs are needed to support these members in succeeding in their internships and first years of teaching by providing continuing mentorship, professional development, and assistance suitable to their interests and job placements.

Equally important, inclusion efforts have taken the form of developing state-level data systems to track and celebrate increased racial diversity among Latina teachers and

providing incentives for schools to find new ways to seek and encourage Latina educators' professional growth (Office of Superintend of Public Instruction [OSPI], 2022). Alvarez and Paterson (2021) presented several strategies for school districts to increase racial diversity in the workforce, including providing hiring priority at the beginning of the year; aspiring educators of color; and incentivizing current staff in spring to notify districts in case of retirement, leaving the district, or switching schools so as to get a head start on hiring new Latina teachers. In addition, district leadership considers developing collaboration with local teacher education programs. Notably, those schools that are dedicated to serving underrepresented Latina(o) populations are focused on providing measurable actions. Some examples include offering internships for incoming graduates and screening potential hires, developing diverse hiring committees, and financially rewarding Latina teachers to serve on interviews and attend recruitment fairs, establishing transfer policies that give priority to Latina teachers who are already working in low-income schools the opportunity to work at more affluent schools.

On the other hand, Madsen et al. (2019) indicated that besides establishing concrete measurements on attraction, inclusion, and development in teachers of color, particularly Latina, there is a clear need for districts to prioritize the retention of these teachers since these constituents are inextricably linked and affect each other. Teachers of color, according to the findings of Madsen and Mabokela (2013), often take on a "Black or Brown expert" position when hired at primarily White schools. As a result, White educators place less emphasis on teachers of color's pedagogical expertise than on their racial understanding of students of color. According to scholars, when teachers of color enter the teaching field, they bring distinct norms and cultural perspectives,

necessitating a negotiation of boundaries that prompts both groups of teachers to accommodate and adapt to these cultural differences. Intergroup disparities often arise as a consequence of shifting demographic patterns within educational institutions (Madsen & Mabokela (2013). If educators are unable to address these normative tensions effectively, it is likely to manifest in many adverse outcomes, including absenteeism and high turnover rates. In order to prioritize the inclusion of teachers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, it is important to emphasize how school leaders recognize and navigate intergroup disparities.

In light of this, we must investigate and learn the best strategies for recruiting Latina teachers and the factors contributing to their retention in teaching positions. Hence, the next part of the literature review will discuss SI and TL theories as instruments to analyze the professional environment and leadership style needed to create a proper environment for Latina educators to grow and thrive personally and professionally. Also, these theories shed light on how SI and TL may impact teachers' actions and their relations with others.

Theoretical Frameworks

Social Identity Theory in Organizational Systems

The term *social identity theory* is used to describe the idea that people's sense of who they are is formed in large part by their affiliations with various social groups, each of which serves a psychologically significant role in shaping how its members are seen and treated (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). An individual's sense of self as an interchangeable example of a social category is deeply individualized as membership in more visible in-groups becomes highly valued. Researchers also highlighted that a salient category has a

significant role in shaping an individual's perception, behavior, and their sense of belonging, particularly when one identifies strongly with a certain group. This identification is reinforced when perceived similarities with other group members are heightened. Studies have shown that individuals who possess a strong sense of identification with their organization, as well as its core beliefs, exhibit enhanced performance compared to those who lack such identification (Nohria & Khurana, 2010). The authors noted that higher cooperation, less conflict, and greater support for members of the group's minority were all associated with a more robust sense of group identity. Membership, actions, and empathy in the workplace are all intertwined with a sense of belonging. Increases in functioning like these tend to persist even when people are exposed to social isolation triggers like ethnic diversity. These findings are consistent with the self-enhancement drive, which underpins social identity theory.

Organizational civic behavior and connectedness to the organization are also linked to a strong sense of identification. Even when people are exposed to factors that could cause them to feel less connected to their group, such as ethnic differences, many of these functional gains hold steady. Social identity theory postulates that people tend to be more committed to the organization when they feel a sense of belonging to a group in which they share values and identities. Members are also driven by the need to feel close to and accepted by the group and to feel distinctive or to create and preserve a sense of self-identity.

Many organizations are eager to develop inclusive practices and increase the presence of Latina individuals, yet they are hesitant to realize the power and strengths of their social identity (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2007). Diversification and inclusion initiatives

in organizations require leadership to bring people's whole selves to work. Therefore, this study uses social identity theory as a lens through which to examine how members' social identities, particularly Latina women, interplay between individual and collective processes; this, in turn, affects members' commitment to the organization and willingness to engage in organizational efforts in a way that makes a positive impact on its members and the services that organization provides. Zhu Dalal et al. (2021) discuss that employees are inclined to devote themselves to organizations with symbolic representations (i.e., organizational personality) that allow them to project their authentic selves and build positive social identities. For instance, employees with varying social identity demands are attracted to organizations that vary along the two dimensions of the taxonomy, such as warmth and competence, and focus on more abstract, symbolic criteria, including values, goals, and reputation (Highhouse et al., 2007). Consequently, members would work for an organization that caters to their social identity demands and expresses their image of themselves through the opportunity to express themselves and influence others. Consequently, analyzing Latina teacher's experiences through social identity theory could help to understand how to increase their presence and retention rate in the teaching field and bring these members' holistic selves to the organization to embrace their culture, stories, values, language, and experiences so they feel empowered to make a meaningful impact on teachers, students, families, and the communities they serve.

Social Identity and Members Belonging

A member's sense of identity emerges from their affiliation with the organization (Dutton et al., 1994; Banks Kepes et al., 2016). Therefore, belonging to an organization is

an integral aspect of one's social identity or sense of self. As pointed out by Highhouse et al. (2007), organizational attractiveness depends on more than only the monetary benefits of a job but also on the symbolic values of working for a specific organization. Outside of the apparent qualities of income, benefits, and professional advancement opportunities in the organization, members and potential employees also acquire evidence about organizational culture and whether or not it satisfies or impedes their demands for self-identification within the organization.

Banks et al. (2016) argued that employees' inclusion and human capital development are among the most critical leadership goals, where members are drawn and committed to organizations that provide opportunities to develop and strengthen their social identities (including individual, relational, and group identities). In social identity theory, activation, appraisal, and identification result from shared predictors of members' desirability. Employees who have experienced "organizational identification" have developed a deep sense of belonging to their company. The terms "identity" and "identify" are both encompassed under the notion of organizational identification. These two concepts shed light on how people's social identities place them inside specific social contexts.

In line with this view, Tafjel and Turner's (1978) definition of social identity, an individual's sense of self arises from their awareness and positive evaluation of group or organizational participation's value and emotional significance. Hence, an individual's sense of unity or belonging to a group is formed through the process of social identification. With this shared identity in mind, people can focus less on what makes them distinctive and more on what unites them with others. Additional role actions,

commitment, inventiveness, and intention to engage or disengage are only some of the performance outcomes that, from this angle, can be influenced by a sense of belonging to the organization. Focusing on social identity has been useful in elucidating the driving forces behind people's actions. Thus, the tenets of social identity theory can be applied to examine the motivational basis of organizational behavior, such as employees' willingness to invest in the organization, seek professional growth opportunities, or leave the organization (Liu et al., 2013).

Social Identity and Group Member Investment

Korte (2007) concluded that social identity theory has the potential to be a unifying explanation of organizational behavior, even though many variables affect how people perform and act. Members' social identities at work are powerful motivators and significantly impact their investment in the workplace, including their willingness to participate in learning and professional growth. The impact of one's workgroup via a social identity is often overlooked in training and development initiatives that use either a top-down or bottom-up approach. Hence, as the scholar explained, one's social identity might shape how one perceives work-related roles, obligations, and even workplace dynamics.

Thus, social identity emerges as a crucial filter via which individuals take in information, assign significance, interpret meaning, and decide whether or not to commit and pursue further learning within the organization. Traditional diversity and inclusion methods may not provide the desired results if they do not consider the identity variables resulting from group membership (Itam & Bagali, 2019). This dissertation study will apply social identity theory and intersectionality theories as lenses to examine Latina

teachers' lived experiences. The interplay of psychological, social, and organizational aspects is crucial for elevating organizational development in its effort to reach diversity and inclusion. However, one of the biggest problems with relying on leadership's efforts to employ organizational change is that it might lead to burnout and empty promises (Korte, 2007). Social identity significantly impacts the members' actions, making it a crucial consideration of the initiative's application. Moreover, the high failure rate of inclusion initiatives and employee turnover may be attributed to the leaders' focus on the organizational or individual levels but not the crucial level at which people interact with the organization (Liu et al., 2013; Tajfel & Turner,1978). As a result, the theory of social identity is influential because it has profound significance for how members see themselves and fit into organizational communities.

Latina Social Identity in the Organization

As leaders strive to build favorable professional images, strong dedication and commitment to the organization, and solid work connections, the ability to successfully negotiate employees' social identities, including interracial encounters, is vital. Negative stereotypes, microaggressions, social isolation, and harsher evaluations in the workplace are common experiences for members of underrepresented and undervalued ethnic minorities (Roberts et al., 2014). As a result of their experiences with discrimination and marginalization, members of racial minorities are historically underrepresented and devalued and may be more attuned to how others perceive them in interracial exchanges.

Consequently, organizations that wish to employ Latina talents and professionally invest in them must examine this group's social identities and how they interact across the organizational culture. In this context, *culture* refers to the shared norms, values, and

practices that define an organization (Schein, 2010). It has been found that the culture helps this population feel connected with the staff and community and should encourage the formation of a prominent social identity, including racial/ethnic (Garcia et al., 2016). The members' implicit assumptions, ideas, stories, and values help them give meaning to their organizational identity and are all part of the cultural environment (Garcia, 2017). Consequently, the group's social identity is tied to the organizational culture, where culture is not another variable to be controlled but rather an environment within which identity is established, sustained, and transformed (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Latina members might feel a greater sense of community due to the institution's cultural norms. Evidence also suggested that organizational stakeholders, including staff and leaders, can help foster an inclusive culture while employing Latina members by acting as "institutional agents" to remove obstacles to this group's personal and professional enhancement (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Garcia & Ramirez, 2015).

In light of this, it is vital to recognize and honor the validity and diversity of identity orientations as legitimate responses to real-world challenges. From the literature about Latina professionals and their path to teaching career and progression, the author recognizes that meeting people where they are is crucial while empowering them to grow, advance, and transform. Greater knowledge and acceptance of within-group differences, and hence better cooperation, may be fostered by introducing elements of cross-cultural collaboration and the evolution of better collegial ties among Latina and members of other groups (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2007).

Latina Social Identities and Organizational Culture

While discussing Latina professionals' social identities in U.S. corporations, Cruz and Blancero (2017) also suggested that leaders in diversification initiatives pay attention to this group's cultural norms and values. Collectivism is the principle that unites most Latina members, in addition to the Spanish language. As an illustration, *familismo,* or the importance of family and social groups and the priority of group over individual goals, *personalismo* or the extent of harmonious and conflict-free interpersonal relationships, *respeto* or a high-power distance and deference to those in authority and fatalism or an external locus of control are cultural qualities that run counter to the ones emphasized by mainstream American corporations, which tend to emphasize individualism, autonomy, advancement, competitiveness, and equality of power (Anastasia & Bridges, 2015). That is why many Latina professionals in corporate America may experience a cultural split between their families' beliefs, attitudes, and actions and those of the larger society. By examining these cultural characteristics via this perspective, leaders can aid Latina professionals in overcoming the cultural gap that exists between their communities and the American public workplace. Therefore, factors such as personal and professional connections, mentoring, coaching, supervisor assistance, learning opportunities, and access to organizational resources are all examples of organizational sponsorship that serve as a predictor of Latina career success and a significant indicator of professional and personal career satisfaction and organizational commitment (Ng et al., 2005).

Scott (2020) reasoned that the underrepresentation of Latina professionals in organizations, in most cases, has to do with how these members feel their social identities are devalued by their interactions with White leaders and staff. Negative stereotypes,

conscious or subconscious prejudices, real or perceived discrimination, and microaggressions contribute to the denigration and marginalization of an individual or group's social identity. To reach goals of diversity and inclusion initiatives— including recruitment, development, and retention—it is important to understand how Latino(a)/Hispanic professionals manage their social identity while engaging with colleagues and encouraging them to bring their whole selves to work. Hence, according to Scott (2020), individuals either "play up" or "play down" while asserting their social identity. In other words, when promoting the substantial aspects of their racial/ethnic group, Latino(a)/Hispanic professionals often use their social identities to bolster their public profiles and become actively engaged in organizational life. On the other hand, when Latino(a)/Hispanic professionals feel that their social identities are not valued, they engage in recategorization actions in social situations by positively impacting their racial/ethnic groupings and avoiding discussions about race.

In addition, Bordas (2013) advocated for Latina professionals the importance of *conciencia* or redefinition, which is the act of recognizing their own worth by virtue of their heritage and identifying as such. The development of members in the dominant culture involves exploring and drawing on a person's cultural identity and addressing problems of prejudice and exclusion. Doing so may strengthen one's capacity to appreciate the profound impact of culture and race. Today’s leaders face a greater need to learn about and adapt to the customs of other cultures. Therefore, the leader's role includes discovering how to bring everyone's unique identities and talents to use.

Transformational Leadership Theory in Organizational Systems

James MacGregor Burns (1978) initially developed the notion of *transformative leadership* as the process in which leaders and followers influence each other in a way that increases both parties' morale and motivation to a higher level. Burns spoke to the challenge of distinguishing between management and leadership and said that the distinctions might be found in qualities and actions. He claimed that the transformative method brings about considerable change in individuals' lives and the companies they work for. The views and values of workers are redesigned, and their expectations and goals are altered as a result. It is not based on a "give-and-take" relationship as the transactional strategy is, but rather on the leader's personality, attributes, and skills to effect a change by setting an example, articulating an energizing vision, and challenging objectives.

The study of Burns (1978) was further developed by Bass (1985), who explained the psychological principles that underpin transforming and transactional leadership. The scholar found that the followers of a transformational leader had trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the leader. Other scholars asserted that the transformational leadership model positively impacts work performance, including job burnout and social loafing (Khan et al., 2020). According to the findings, there is a correlation between transformative leadership and the intrinsic motivation of mediators. The results also led researchers to the conclusion that transformative leadership has a favorable and substantial association with workplace performance. Therefore, they claimed that organizational leaders who possess transformational traits develop a better understanding of people in the organization and are able to motivate staff to accomplish substantial or expected results, which is essential for organizational success. Once leaders enact the

transformational leadership model, followers are given the authority to make decisions, boosting their self-confidence and productivity, motivating new learning, and creating an inclusive and supportive culture (Akdere & Egan, 2020).

Velasco and Sansone (2019) completed a study on seven transformational leaders in various organizations in the private and public sectors, including healthcare and education. Their findings indicated resistance to change toward inclusion and equitable practices manifested through passive and aggressive behavior. The most common resistance was the passive one, which consisted of not providing any information, recommendations, assistance, or support to marginalized groups. Hence, the scholars recommended the transformational leadership model as a remedy to educate people and effectively react to behaviors that are likely to undermine and delay the effectiveness of change when they can spot resistance behaviors in others. Some examples of transformational leaders' behavior are communication with staff regarding inclusive policies and voluntary participation in cross-functional teamwork.

Organizational Culture

Organizational development (OD) scholars stated that "the days when organizations had the time and luxury to 'unfreeze' and 'refreeze' before dealing with the next change project are clearly over" (Parry et al., 2014, p.1). Thus, to secure the change process regarding inclusive and equitable practices and their consistency and effectiveness, the OD scholars established the following steps and core philosophy stating that change is intentional, positive and purposive, data-driven, values-centered, action-oriented, and is based on experience grounded in theory and focused on learning (Galos, 2006).

At the same time, Senge et al. (1994) mentioned that unless there is a more robust dedication to the organization's overarching mission and vision that centers on the inclusion of marginalized populations, the personal functional objectives of the majority of staff will take precedence. The authors observed that a significant number of leaders attempt to articulate a new ideology that revolves around diversity, inclusion, and creating professional opportunities for marginalized members through empowerment. Yet, few organizations are working diligently to introduce resources, instruments, and system supports that enhance people's growth, as well as professional advancement, enabling them to obtain positions of power and make decisions, particularly those that optimize the entire system's performance. An organization's change initiative begins by analyzing how people think and interact. The following sections discuss transformational leadership and organizational culture as contributing factors to the inclusiveness of diverse teaching staff.

The term *organizational culture* describes the shared standards and expectations for conduct among personnel. Edgar Schein (1992), an expert in organizational culture and leadership, emphasized that “culture can be seen as its members collect your mental models, which is why you cannot change an organization without investigating its culture assumption" (p. 267). According to the author, organizational culture is a potent and intangible social force and a crucial determinant of a working environment for stakeholders and organizational performance. The empirical evidence suggests that organizational culture contributes more significantly to knowledge management and organizational effectiveness than organizational strategy and structure (Frantz et al., 2022). Hence, transformational leaders use organizational culture to achieve strategic

goals, including equitable and inclusive practices, by attracting and engaging diverse voices and holistically incorporating their cultural identities, stories, skills, knowledge, and experiences. Yet, in the workplace, including Latina individuals is not about their assimilation into the organizational culture but rather their holistic acceptance of who they are as individuals and what unique strengths they bring to the organization (Roberts, 2005).

At the same time, Tsai (2011) asserted that culture is the norms, shared beliefs, and customs that direct the work of all organizational stakeholders and is taught and passed on via social interactions among its members. Shared assumptions, values, and ideas are expressed in an organization's culture, which serves as the "social glue" that keeps a group together. What makes a culture robust is a set of benchmarks that govern how its members act. Staff members in a company with a shared set of beliefs and norms are more likely to work together to achieve organizational objectives. When transformative leaders establish a culture of inclusion, collaboration, trust, and respect where employees balance each other's strengths and weaknesses, individuals feel valued and are inclined to take responsibility and fulfill their duties with greater commitment and satisfaction (Nasution et al., 2018).

Because people are the company, organizational culture is shaped by individual identities, beliefs, ideas, and actions. Hence, the company's commitment to diverse voices and inclusion directs employees' work prospects and willingness to participate in organizational initiatives. Chen et al. (2003) found that most employees join an organization with predetermined career goals. Because professional enhancement and career, as detailed by Kakui (2016), helps employees cope with issues at work and

training increases their capability and competence in carrying out their duties, both strategic planning of diversification policy development and the involvement of followers in hiring processes can enhance diversity in an organization.

In the organization, innovation, integrity, learning, and collective knowledge generation happen when organizational culture nurtures and promotes diversity and inclusion. As a result, people are ready to embrace necessary change and "will be able to look forward to creating, instead of merely reacting to a new world that emerges" (Senge et al., 1994, p. 12). On the contrary, as the authors noted, many organizations are trapped in a never-ending cycle of band-aid solutions that only worsen things in the long term amid a growing feeling of helplessness. Educational organizations, in this essence, are not an exclusion, where they are viewed and operated as monolithic disjointed things rather than a set of interconnected processes (Senge et al., 1994). As such, school leaders and employees search for an external cause to blame rather than addressing the internal issues contributing to the lack of diverse, qualified staff.

Scholars pointed out that transformational leaders create a learning culture where members of an organization are not only permitted but actively encouraged and supported to pursue chances to make a positive impact by seeking ways to increase their expertise and knowledge and reach positions of influence. Hence, according to the findings (Weng et al., 2010), people rank organizational culture and professional advancement opportunities as two of the most significant aspects they consider when discussing their workplace. The culture of affective commitment describes employees' psychological connection to their organization. This attachment results from employees identifying with their organizations' goals and values. According to this definition, satisfaction,

commitment, and advancement in one's profession encompass fulfilling needs on several levels, which suggests that one's career opportunities would be positively associated with affective organizational commitment (Weng et al., 2010).

Affective commitment is measured by the degree to which an individual feels emotionally invested in an organization. Organizations with supportive and nurturing cultures provide their employees with opportunities for professional advancement by fostering the development of a mutually beneficial connection between their workforce and the organization (Tsui et al., 1997). On the other hand, candidates whose career objectives are challenging to reach, who allocate duties that do not allow for progress, and who feel no relationship between their efforts and the company's benefits have reduced emotional commitment to the organization (Weng et al., 2010). Accordingly, Bunderson and Reagans (2011) claimed that group members such as Latina who have socially disadvantaged status features are less likely to obtain positions of power and influence, including the teaching field, even if they have something unique to bring to the organization such as of cultural aspects, expertise, and experience.

Edmondson (1999) states that transformational leadership is mindful of people's psychological safety, facilitating learning behaviors that improve organizational performance, allowing diverse groups to participate in integrative decision-making processes, and enhancing members' ability to seize chances. Having a sense of psychological safety means believing that people will be accepted and respected for who they are despite social and racial differences. In organizations that promote a psychologically safe culture, members know they are cared for and respected for who they are; this allows them to fully immerse themselves in their job and career

opportunities as active participants and co-creators rather than outsiders. Thus, in an educational environment, when leaders recognize the broad knowledge and cultural richness of Latina members and “commit to constructing [a] collaborative process to enable [them] to share that knowledge, they create a culture that nurtures continued improvement and learning… in forms of action research, cycles of inquiry, and mentorship" (Speck & Knipe, 2005, p. 16).

Transformational Leadership and Staff Inclusion

Chen et al. (2003) found that in organizations with transformational leadership, leaders design programs and policies that promote staff diversity and inclusion where people improve their skills and expertise in the field, foster their values and motivations, and encourage them to pursue leadership roles. Also, transformational leadership is strongly associated with employees' organizational commitment (Monje et al., 2020), meaning that the leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Transformational leadership allows executives to focus on hiring diverse personalities and developing followers' potential at all levels of the organization by identifying their higher needs and inspiring them to go beyond their self-interests to achieve their organization's goals by achieving superior value systems, motivation levels, and moralities (Shields & Hesbol, 2019). The essence of transformational leadership is developing in employees a sense of pride, psychological empowerment, and trust in the organization and its mission and vision.

At the same time, research revealed that high turnover rates in organizations are mainly caused by a lack of inclusion, respect for diversity, and a lack of prospects for career advancement within the field (Chen et al., 2003). High expenses associated with

employee turnover may be mitigated with the support of well-designed career development programs tailored to the workforce's specific requirements. Conversely, as scholars noted, when individuals progress in their profession, their psychological requirements shift to match the nature of their tasks and responsibilities (Chen et al., 2003). Organizations may impact employee willingness to join the organization and their work satisfaction and commitment by adopting career development programs, which would affect the kinds of modifications deemed appropriate. The researchers acknowledged that different professional requirements would develop and grow in tandem with changes in status at different career phases and the degree of personal maturity.

Consequently, in the teaching field, newly hired teachers face unique career needs at each stage of their professional life, depending on factors such as their level of self-awareness, the importance they place on various aspects of their work, the scope of their responsibilities, and the unique abilities of the students they serve (Flores, 2011). Hence, the leader’s role is to provide various career enhancement options tailored to the specific requirements of employees at various points in their careers. Also, to meet employees' career goals and further increase their levels of job commitment, it is vital to focus on flexible and needs-oriented personal and career development programs through a continuous cycle of learning and growing (Korte, 2007; Itam & Bagali, 2019).

Scholars identified four such phases of learning and growth in a person's working life: exploration, establishing, maintenance, and disengagement (Schein, 1978). Thus, the transformational leader must align the first three stages with people's needs, beliefs, and aspirations. Moreover, Speck and Knipe (2005) wrote that the role of a leader in learning

organizations is to create a collaborative and inclusive culture where each member has a built-in network of support. Thus, it is essential not only to select the right people to be part of the organization but also to "formalize the structure" where they can succeed and grow in their careers (p. 24). In an educational setting, just like in any other public or private sector, the authors noted that the role of the leadership is to connect individuals to their values, their intention to become teachers, their intention to select education over business or other careers, and their intention to work in a school environment. Thus, it is essential for the organizational culture that conversations regarding values be brought to the surface (Speck & Knipe, 2005). The next segment of the literature review will discuss the importance of Latina teachers for students' academic achievement as well as for the communities that public schools serve.

Transformational Leadership and Staff Empowerment

Galos (2006) indicated that employee empowerment is a crucial priority of many transformational leaders. In his work, the scholar included different interpretations of empowerment. For instance, in work teams, empowerment as a reference frame combines profound, strong, and intimate ideals about others, such as trust, compassion, love, dignity, and the desire for growth (Ehin, 1995). Mohrman et al. (1995) defined *empowerment* as the competence to make a difference in attaining individual, team, and organizational goals. They suggested that access to sufficient resources and understanding the organization's course are necessary for empowerment. Spreitzer (1996) examined worker agency from the perspective of the cognitive characteristics and task assessments that ultimately decide an employee's motivation. Several mechanisms of

ingratiation may be employed to promote empowerment, including structural efforts directed to reimagine specific job assignments or tasks to satisfy employees' interests.

On the other hand, Seibert et al. (2011), in their meta-analytic review of organizational change, speculated that psychological empowerment for people from collectivist societies has a stronger reaction to signals encouraging identification and inclusivity. Their research showed a robust correlation between psychological empowerment and candidates' willingness to join organizations, positive work attitudes, job satisfaction, and commitment on the part of employees. Their findings were also consistent with the demands-control paradigm (job features impact employees' psychological well-being) in demonstrating that more autonomous people who are empowered to make decisions reported lower levels of stress and resistance.

Empowering employees is a major component of transformational leadership theory focusing on appreciative inquiry, various large-group interventions, and learning organizations (Galos, 2006). Moreover, Bowen and Lawler (1992) determined that participation in organizational decision-making and improvement of the organizational mechanisms, such as people, knowledge resources, or teams, that aid in employee engagement, are often cited as measures through which empowerment is created. As the scholar emphasized, the appointment of individuals to participate in organizational assessment and learning activities, such as the construction of a learning history and organizational change through the planning of solutions, is both a means by which these interventions are carried out and an outcome that is anticipated.

Conversely, Sarason (1990) argued that recognizing the invisible arrays of privilege and power dynamics and how personal identity and knowledge shape

organizational culture, policies, and authority relationships are necessary to transform an organization toward inclusiveness and diversification of voices. The new restructuring and initiatives would not amount to much permanent change if there were no fundamental alterations in how people interrelate, explore, interact, and accept each other. Changing how an organization responds to urgent needs requires rethinking organizational structure and the less obvious patterns of interactions between individuals and other parts of the system, such as the knowledge systems (Senge et al., 1994).

Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) concluded that organizations are required to adopt a set of strategies to implement widespread, effective change, reduce negative resistance to that change, monitor the change process, and manage the effects of that change. Despite numerous attempts to initiate organizational change, data show that only 30% of change initiatives succeed (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Given the wide variety of existing organizations, a single, prescriptive initiative or policy toward change is unlikely to be effective; instead, a holistic system-wide approach should be adapted to fit the needs of a specific organization. In addition, the authors who have discussed the topic of organizational change management acknowledge that the fundamental cause of failed initiatives is a clash of values between the organization, the initiative, and the kind of change it has embraced (Burnes & Jackson, 2011). At the same time, Gallos (2006) asserted that the factors that drive change in the organization are interconnected and mutually interdependent and that any action implemented to execute change has causal effects throughout the organization. Accordingly, since education is a social system, change initiatives like diversity and inclusion adhere to the guidelines described

previously and should be carried out with “care, attention, and perspective” to its targeted members and organizational mission and vision (Senge, 2012, p. 15).

Chapter Summary

This review of the literature provides relevant information on Latina(o) groups in America and highlights the roles that social identity and transformational leadership play in the organization as two pillars that influence members traditionally marginalized (such as Latina), professional growth, and inclusion in organizational life. Also, this literature review included research on corporate culture and how it promotes or hinders employees' social identities and their willingness to join and invest in an organization. Studies suggest that, overall, corporate culture is conducive to developing members' sense of belonging and inclusiveness if their social identities are recognized, activated, and stimulated. Moreover, literature on state and district efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in educational sectors also depicts the types of issues and practices of current concern. Chapter Three discusses the methodology chosen for this dissertation study toward examining how Latina teachers view and experience their social identities within their school settings, what empowers or blocks their sense of personal thriving and professional well-being, and how school leaders might leverage their actions to create conditions for an inclusive and supportive school culture.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to investigate the experience of Latina teachers and how their social identities play out in their professional school settings. The phenomenological case study methodology is suitable for this purpose because it allows an in-depth understanding of each case by analyzing the lived experiences of individuals involved in the phenomenon of interest. Specifically, qualitative research focuses on participants' perceptions, experiences, and how they make sense of their lives. The qualitative research paradigm explores phenomena in participants' natural environments, aiming to make sense of or interpret events in terms of the meanings the participants themselves bring to such events (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As described by Shank (2002), qualitative research is a "form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (p. 5). Scholars who engage in "inquiry into meaning" attempt to fathom how people conceptualize the world around them, which, in turn, reveals multiple realities and understandings (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). Findings typically progressively emerge as interview responses or observations are analyzed, compared, categorized, and classified as themes.

The qualitative methodology in this dissertation study involved structured interviews with six Latina teachers in public elementary schools situated in one school district within Washington State. This type of research method design is appropriate because it provides in-depth evidence for a case (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2018) and enables Latina teachers to share their perspectives and lived experiences about challenges or supports they encounter in their professional settings in relation to their social

identities. The interview comprised open-ended questions to elicit views and attitudes from the participants, eliminate potential sources of bias, and offer novel, nuanced perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One-on-one interview sessions with each participant occurred virtually via Zoom, lasting approximately 60 minutes. The interviews with each participant were recorded and transcribed, and the data were coded and organized to identify themes and patterns from each participant's point of view as well as across all participants' points of view (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this phenomenological case study are:

1. How do Latina teachers view their Latina social identities in the workplace?
2. How and to what extent do school settings create or eliminate barriers to Latina teachers' thriving personally and professionally?
3. How can school leaders recognize and support Latina teachers in ways that will empower thriving in predominantly White staff school settings?

Context of the Study

This research was conducted in a suburban public school district situated within Washington State. The school district was purposefully chosen due to its large Latina(o) student population and predominantly White certified staff (teachers). For example, student enrollment in this school district typically is in the 14,000 to 16,000 range with over a quarter of the students identifying as Latino(a)/Hispanic; about a quarter identifying as Asian; under a quarter identifying as White; under one fifth identifying as Black or African American; and about one tenth combined identifying as American

Indian, Native Hawaiian, or two or more races. Over three quarters of the teachers in the school district identify as White.

Participants and Recruitment

This study sought to learn about Latina teachers' lived experiences in predominantly White elementary staff schools and understand factors hindering or promoting their successful personal and professional journeys. Latina certified teachers employed in public elementary schools across the district in which this study was conducted were recruited for participation. Before contacting potential participants, the author obtained written permission to conduct the study from the appropriate school district office and received a letter of approval from the university IRB. The recruitment process consisted of the following steps: (a) compiling the emails of all elementary school certificated educators (teachers), (b) sending the invitation email to all elementary certificated educators via Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) for confidentiality in receiving and replying (see Appendix A), (c) resending the email invitation to all who had not responded to attain the desired number of participants which was six, (d) responding to teachers who agreed to participate with additional information about the research including confidentiality and potential dates and times for the interview, and (e) sending a follow-up email to teachers who agreed to participate with the date/time and the Zoom link for the scheduled interview. To take part in the study, the recruits needed to identify as being (a) Latina, (b) female, and (c) employed as an elementary school educator/teacher within the school district.

A purposive sampling method was used for recruitment. According to Creswell & Poth (2007), it is permissible for a small sample to share their personal experiences

relevant to the research questions in this study that focused on (a) how they viewed their social identities in their workplace/school, (b) how they perceived the school setting created or eliminated barriers to their personal and professional thriving, and (c) how school leaders can empower thriving of Latina educators in predominately White staff schools. The participants' purposeful selection allowed the researcher to choose people who could best inform the study, help better understand the case and the research questions, and obtain in-depth information about participants' work experiences and perspectives. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96).

All six Latina educators participating in this study held a teaching certificate in elementary education and were employed as full-time educators in various elementary schools across the district. Each participant identified as Latina and came from various parts of the Latin America region as well as the United States. Additionally, each participant is considered a beginning educator with less than 5 years of teaching experience; only one participant had more than 5 years of field experience including outside of Washington State. Also, all participants were actively employed as elementary educators in various schools in certificated positions within the school district. The Latina participants' native language was Spanish and they represented a wide range of cultural backgrounds which offered a broad spectrum of knowledge, perspectives, and expertise in the elementary education field. The stories of these women play a crucial role in comprehending the experiences, complexities, and motivations linked to attaining and securing teaching positions as Latina individuals. Understanding the background of the

participants and how it shapes their social identity and professional status as educators is a valuable factor for this research. Table 1 that follows summarizes the demographics of the six participating Latina educators (using pseudonym names to protect confidentiality) including the country of their origin, the number of years served in their current position at their current school, the number of years served in the school district, and the number of years served as a certified teacher.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudo-nym	Place of Birth	Ethnicity	Certificated Teacher	Years in Current Position	Years in District	Years as a Certificated Educator
Estrella	Honduras	Latina	Yes	< 1 year	6 years	< 3 years
Maria	Mexico	Latina	Yes	< 1 year	< 1 year	< 3 years
Gloria	Montana, US	Latina	Yes	2 years	2 years	2 years
Camila	Washington, US	Latina	Yes	< 1 year	< 1 year	4 years
Anna	Mexico	Latina	Yes	< 1 year	3 years	2 years
Sophia	Puerto Rico	Latina	Yes	< 3 years	< 3years	> 5 years

Data Collection

Creswell & Poth (2018) argue that researchers might best learn about study participants' real-world experiences using interviews. As Glesne (2016) emphasized, this type of methodology empowers participants to share their voices where the researcher takes the role of an observer: “casting yourself as learner correspondingly casts the

respondent as a teacher" (p. 134). As Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) indicate, during the interview, the knowledge is constructed, and the researcher "attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (p. 3).

The researcher developed the interview questions to align with the three research questions that guided this study, relevant scholarly literature, and the two theoretical frameworks that inform this study, particularly *social identity* and *transformational leadership*. Table 2 shows how the interview questions align with the research questions and Table 3 shows how the interview questions align with the literature and theoretical frameworks.

Table 2. Alignment of Research with Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. How do Latina teachers view their Latina social identities in the workplace?	1. What does being Latina mean to you? Are specific cultural values, traditions, or practices relevant to being Latina that you hold dear? What are they? Why are they important to you? 2. Where were you born, and how (if at all) does that influence your sense of self and identity? 3. Does being Latina influence how you view yourself as a teacher and/or how you view your role as an educator in your school? In what ways? Explain. 4. Do you think Latina teachers bring qualities or perspectives to education that are distinct from what teachers of other cultural backgrounds bring? If so, what are these qualities/perspectives, and how do they play out in the school setting? Explain. 5. As a Latina teacher, what strengths do you bring to your workplace?
2. How and to what extent do school settings create or eliminate barriers to Latina teachers'	6. What at your school enables you to thrive as a Latina teacher? Explain. 7. What at your school feels like a barrier to thriving as a Latina teacher? Explain. 8. Have you ever felt pressure to "downplay" your Latina "self" or Latina identity at school? If so, what

	thriving personally and professionally?	happened? Describe the situation. What types of emotions surfaced for you? 9. How do you experience a sense of belonging at your school? Explain.
3.	How can school leaders recognize and support Latina teachers in ways that will empower thriving in predominantly White staff school settings?	10. Do you feel that school leaders empower you to make a positive difference in your job as a Latina teacher? If so, in what ways? If not, why not? 11. Do you feel support from colleagues/peers? If so, in what ways? If not, why not? Explain. 12. As a Latina teacher, have you had opportunities to work with a mentor for support and/or growth? Was this helpful? In what ways? What did you most appreciate? Was there anything not helpful about the mentoring experience? Explain. 13. How can school leaders create opportunities for your Latina identity to be recognized, respected, and valued in the workplace? 14. What do you think school leaders could or should do to attract, recruit, and retain Latina teachers? 15. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience as a Latina teacher at your school and/or in your school district?

Table 3. Alignment of Interview Questions, Literature, Theoretical Framework

Interview Question	Scholarly Literature	Theoretical Framework
1. What does being Latina mean to you? Are there certain cultural values, traditions, or practices relevant to being Latina that you hold dear? What are they? Why are they important to you?	Literature shows that in addition to language, collectivism, the importance of family, and prioritizing the group's interests over personal goals are qualities that are prevalent in the Latina group (Cruz & Blancero, 2017; Anastasia & Bridges, 2015).	SI theory states that a person's sense of who they are and how they place themselves in the world is heavily impacted by the communities in which they engage (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).
2. Where were you born, and how (if at all) does that influence your sense of self and identity?	The notion of social identity was developed as a mechanism to examine how individuals construct their sense of self in relation to the social	An individual's personality is comprised of a social identity. People's identity is shaped by the social groups they are affiliated with, which together

		collectives they are affiliated with. It provides an explanation for the circumstances in which social identification impacts intergroup behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).	contribute to their overall sense of self. Some elements of social identity are values, beliefs, age, gender, place of birth, and other similar characteristics (Sluss et al., 2012).
3.	Does being Latina influence how you view yourself as a teacher and/or how you view your role as an educator in your school? In what ways? Explain.	Research argues that many Latina professionals face a cultural divide between their values, attitudes, and behaviors and those of the greater community where they live and work (Ng et al., 2005).	SI theory focuses on members' implicit assumptions, ideas, stories, and values, which help them give meaning to their organizational identity and their impact on the organization (Garcia, 2017; Hatch & Schultz, 1997).
4.	Do you think Latina teachers bring qualities or perspectives to education that are distinct from what teachers of other cultural backgrounds bring? If so, what are these qualities/perspectives, and how do they play out in the school setting? Explain.	Scholars have contended that the academic performance of Latina(o) students is associated with teachers who share their racial identity, language, and awareness of their cultural values and can establish a connection with their life experiences (Gershenson et al., 2022; Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Ochoa, 2007; Salinas & Castro, 2010).	Including elements of cross-cultural cooperation and the development of greater collegial relationships between Latina and members of other groups may encourage increased understanding and acceptance of differences within a group, thus improving levels of collaboration across these differences (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2007).
5.	As a Latina teacher, what strengths do you bring to your workplace?	Literature indicated that Latina educators substantially influence marginalized students' academic and personal achievement (Rueda et al., 2004). Latina educators play a significant role in establishing and maintaining close connections with students	SI theory postulates that an individual's perception of self is derived from their recognition and favorable assessment of the importance and emotional value associated with their involvement in a particular group or organization (Tajfel & Turner, 1978).

		and their families, enabling them to effectively bridge the gap between the home, school, and the community (Chopra et al. (2004).	
6.	What at your school enables you to thrive as a Latina teacher? Explain.	According to the literature, developing culturally responsive models explicitly promoting justice and inclusion is crucial to increasing Latina presence in public education (Madda & Schultz, 2009; Gist, 2022).	Using the SI framework has been shown to help comprehend the underlying motivations behind individuals' behaviors. This behavior significantly influences individuals' choices to participate in organizational life and seek growth for professional development (Liu et al., 2013).
7.	What at your school feels like a barrier to thriving as a Latina teacher? Explain.	Academic research pointed out that Latina members often face “double danger," "triple oppression," or "the simultaneity perspective" (Beal, 2008; Blakemore & Boneham, 1994). Scholars have highlighted that the workplace experiences of Latinas are influenced by a multifaceted interplay of various factors (Flores, 2017).	SI plays a pivotal role in shaping people's information processing, assigning importance, interpreting meaning, and determining their commitment and willingness to engage in further learning within the organizational context (Itam & Bagali, 2019).
8.	Have you ever felt pressure to “downplay” your Latina “self” or Latina identity at school? If so, what happened? Describe the situation. What types of emotions surfaced for you?	Marginalized groups such as Latina often encounter negative stereotypes, microaggressions, social isolation, and harsher appraisal in the job (Roberts et al., 2014).	Employees' commitment to their jobs, satisfaction, belonging, and their interest in organizational participation may be profoundly influenced by the social identities they cultivate at work (Korte, 2007; Itam & Bagali, 2019).
9.	In what ways do you experience a sense of	The emergence of an individual's sense of identity is closely linked to	Based on SI theory, the formation of an individual's feeling of

belonging at your school? Explain.	their affiliation with an organization (Dutton et al., 1994). The appeal of an organization is not just determined by the financial advantages associated with a job but rather by having a sense of belonging to an organization (Highhouse et al., 2007).	oneness or belonging to a group is achieved via the process of social identification. Given this collective sense of identity, individuals may shift their attention away from their unique characteristics and instead emphasize the commonalities they share with others (Banks et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2013).
10. Do you feel that school leaders empower you to make a positive difference in your job as a Latina teacher? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?	Scholars found that methods of decision-making in schools show problematic power dynamics between school administrators and Latina teachers. The participants reported feeling alienated, marginalized, and unsupported by their coworkers and administrators (Amos, 2016; Ochoa, 2007).	TL theory offers leaders and followers more than work for their own benefit by also allowing them to develop and expand their social identities, along with inspirational goals and vision (Bass, 1985; Khan et al., 2020; Akdere & Egan, 2020).
11. Do you feel support from colleagues/peers? If so, in what ways? If not, why not? Explain.	Literature indicates that Latina teachers, who are often treated as racialized tokens in the workplace, do not yearn for racial integration with White women colleagues but would rather self-segregate themselves (Flores, 2011).	TL theory focuses on recruiting and engaging various perspectives in the decision-making process by using people's cultural identities, stories, skills, expertise, and experiences holistically. However, Latinas' inclusion in the workplace is not about their "assimilation" into the corporate culture but rather the acceptance of who they are as individuals and their contributions (Roberts, 2005; Nasution et al., 2018).

12. As a Latina teacher, have you had opportunities to work with a mentor for support and/or growth. Was this helpful? In what ways? What did you most appreciate? Was there anything not beneficial about the mentoring experience? Explain.	Studies indicate that the absence of sustained support for teachers of color has resulted in a greater attrition rate (Ocasio, 2014; Griffin, 2017).	TL theory pays attention to the followers' psychological safety by offering them with necessary professional and personal growth opportunities (Edmondson, 1999; Tsui et al., 1997; Speck & Knipe, 2005; Weng et al., 2010).
13. How can school leaders create opportunities for your Latina identity to be recognized, respected, and valued in the workplace?	Many teachers of color reported being discouraged from staying within their schools and the profession, primarily due to unfavorable working conditions and lack of professional support (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Roberts et al., 2014).	SI and TL theories emphasize that employees' social identities need to be activated, which can be achieved through the holistic inclusion of Latina members in organizational life and encouraging them to act as "institutional agents" to remove obstacles to this group's personal and professional enhancement (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Garcia & Ramirez, 2015; Liu et al., 2013).
14. What do you think school leaders could or should do to attract, recruit, and retain Latina teachers?	This question supports the notion that qualitative research attempts to understand how people conceptualize the world around them (Shank, 2002).	By evaluating participants' views via social identity perspective, leaders can build the bridge for Latina professionals and American workplace (Ng et al., 2005).
15. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience as a Latina teacher at your school and/or in your school district?	This question aligns with the qualitative research method, which empowers participants to voice their experiences and for the researcher to gather	During the interview, the knowledge is constructed, and the researcher "attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the

	additional information (Glesne, 2016).	meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p. 3).

Each participant's interview occurred via Zoom and each was situated in a preferred private location of their choice to minimize disruptions and maintain confidentiality. The one-on-one interview session was conducted via the Zoom platform and had an estimated duration of 60 minutes. Each interview was recorded on the researcher's computer for future reference and then stored on OneDrive with a two-step verification system. The researcher tried to develop trust with the participants by discussing the rationale and use of the study data. Also, to respect the potential power imbalances between the researcher and participants, the researcher selected a speaker-view option on the Zoom platform to give the participant full attention and to minimize drawing attention to herself.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher reviewed protocol (see Appendix B) and provided and reviewed with each participant a copy of the Informed Consent Information Sheet (see Appendix C). The researcher read the consent form to participants and they were asked to provide their verbal agreement to participate. Also, participants were informed that the interview would be recorded for transcription-only purposes. Following each participant's consent, the recording was turned on and each again was asked to provide verbal consent. The researcher provided each participant with a copy of the interview questions for reference during the interview (see Appendix D).

During each interview, the researcher continually practiced reflexivity by carefully monitoring one's thinking and facial expressions and avoiding any comments

throughout the interview. Moreover, during data collection, the researcher considered how her identity and presence could affect the participants' answers. For this reason, she fixed her camera to eye level to ensure that she maintained eye contact throughout the interview and covered her face with the research questions to avoid looking at herself during the interview and to give undivided attention to the participant. Equally important, the researcher incorporated reflexivity during the data analysis phase on an ongoing basis, by reflecting on personal implicit biases, values, and experiences, mitigating their influence on findings and interpretations, and presenting the information and data as accurately and authentically as possible as it was delivered by the participants.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed all interview data by transcribing, precoding, developing analytical memoranda, completing multiple readings, and then coding in greater detail to produce themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), instead of using a singular, linear approach, the qualitative researcher takes part in a process of iterative analysis to successfully record the significance of events via the eyes of the participants, which in this case were the Latina teachers who participated in the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researchers who use qualitative methods take pride in their ability to unearth and present a variety of perspectives on a given topic. As Nowell et al. (2017) mentioned, researchers analyze interview transcripts to spot recurring themes and select quotes from participants that are directly related to the study's central issue or phenomena of interest. Hence, the interview is the primary means of accessing a variety of realities and analyzing individual statements, identifying overarching themes, visually representing

results, and developing an overall theory as the primary goals of qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To examine the interview data produced by the participating Latina teachers in this study, interview responses recorded via Zoom were transcribed verbatim and saved. Each participant chose and was assigned a unique pseudonym for reference and to ensure anonymity. The researcher listened to the recordings numerous times, which included listening for accuracy and overarching themes. The researcher then utilized Delve qualitative data analysis software in conjunction with Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis that included the following phases: becoming acquainted with the data, producing codes, developing themes according to codes, establishing the importance of each theme, and disclosing findings. Each of these phases are elaborated below.

The first phase comprised consistent interaction with data, triangulation of various data collection modes, recording theoretical and reflective insights, documenting thoughts about potential codes/themes, and organizing data storage archives. In this case study, the researcher familiarized herself with participant data during the first phase. Since the data were collected interactively, the researcher recorded initial thoughts, interpretations, and questions about the data and learned about the depth and breadth of the information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data collected through the interviews and saved as transcriptions were used for a thorough analysis by meticulously listening and reading multiple times while looking for patterns and meanings. Analyzing data at various times helped to gather ideas and revealed patterns that appeared. The researcher used the analysis as a faithful witness to the accounts in the data, she was honest and

careful about participants' perspectives, pre-existing thoughts and beliefs, and developing theories (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The researcher recorded theoretical and reflective thoughts as she worked with the data and any ideas for coding that appeared (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The second phase involved using a coding framework by reading through the data and thinking critically about what the data presented (Creswell, 2007). Also, reflexive journaling occurred in this phase. The researcher analyzed the collected data, conceptualized it, and coded it. Coding helped the researcher to concentrate on specific data properties and to transition from unstructured data to data interpretation (Morse & Richards, 2002). While reading and analyzing the interviews, the researcher marked key passages to index them by themes. Boyatzis (1998) said that "good coding" conveys the study's qualitative richness (p. 1). Delve software was used to analyze the interviews.

Braun and Clarke (2006) advised researchers to look through the whole data collection, giving each data item equal consideration, to uncover noteworthy characteristics that may create themes throughout the data set. Codes should have clear boundaries to avoid duplication (Attride-Stirling, 2001). For this case study, the collected data from the interviews were coded several times in various themes. Hierarchical coding allowed the researcher to study texts at several levels of specificity, with broad higher-order codes offering an overview and precise lower-order codes allowing for case-by-case differences (King, 2004). Creswell (2014) presented a systematic data coding approach that analyzes statements and groups them into themes that characterize the phenomena of interest. Hence, the researcher established a codebook to examine topics and detect patterns (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Also, the researcher used reflexive

journaling, which provided an audit record of data interpretations and relationships (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the third phase, the researcher created diagrams to make sense of how themes were connected and kept detailed notes about the development and hierarchies of concepts and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher organized coded data into the themes. Attride-Stirling (2001) recommended using networks to arrange codes and topics into a web-like network, making text-to-interpretation processes clear. The thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify themes with consistency throughout the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

King (2004) advised beginning theme analysis with a few predetermined codes to focus on the themes that would help to comprehend the phenomenon. Hence, the researcher used initial codes to create themes and subthemes and created "miscellaneous" themes to temporarily store codes that did not fit into core themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, in reference to Halpren (1983), the researcher retained extensive notes on the idea and theme development, as well as hierarchies for the audit trail and confirmability.

In the fourth phase, the researcher reviewed the themes, identified prominence, and documented the theme naming. Then, the researcher evaluated each theme's coded data extracts for coherence. Validity was assessed to determine whether specific themes correctly represented the meanings of each data set. Also, selected concepts were developed into themes that were narrow enough to be distinct to encompass ideas from many text segments. Data were condensed into critical topics summarizing the information (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

In the fifth phase, the researcher learned the themes, how themes fit together, and what data narrative they conveyed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher described the coding and analysis process in sufficient detail, defined the context, and provided a report on the rationale for the study's theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Strong theme names were determined that instantly conveyed the concept. The researcher analyzed how each theme fit into the broader data set narrative concerning the research questions. King (2004) also advised that themes should not be finalized until all data have been examined and the code reviewed twice. Consequently, time spent generating themes increased the likelihood of trustworthy findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher clearly identified themes and non-themes before the conclusion of this phase to articulate the breadth and content of each theme. The narrative passage approach was used to convey the findings of the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Quality

When determining quality, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested three broad criteria, including credibility, transferability, and dependability. Triangulation reinforced a claim's credibility by establishing recognizable patterns using many procedures or information sources gleaned from the field. The researcher documented, systematized, and disclosed analysis techniques in sufficient detail to establish trustworthiness. Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), was an effective tool for comparing the experiences of study participants, illuminating commonalities and contrasts and uncovering novel insights.

Positionality

The researcher identifies as a middle-class White woman and a first-generation immigrant from Ukraine. Her accent and cultural traits immediately disclose her place of origin. Coming to Canada as a teenager, she experienced hurtful comments due to the lack of English language and the challenges of meeting financial needs and reestablishing credentials and social position. However, her immigration experience has helped to develop an understanding and compassion for those in similar circumstances.

At the same time, the researcher believes in the power of people's voices and personal stories and that all information collected through research serves as a means to bring attention to participants' personal experiences, act as allies to those who are in a disadvantageous position due to their identities, and advocate for social justice change. The researcher obtained National Board Certification in English Language Learners (ELL) and has worked for over 10 years as an ELL specialist in a school district serving Latino(a)/Hispanic students and immigrants from diverse cultures and communities. The researcher also serves as an Adjunct Professor at a local university and shares research interests in public education and teacher preparation programs by lecturing and performing scholarly work. While preparing future educators, her research interest is recruiting, hiring, retaining, coaching, and mentoring educators of color, especially Latina. In addition, the researcher recognizes the significance of cultural and individual identities and is interested in learning from individuals who are immigrants and traditionally marginalized, encouraging them to become teacher leaders by helping them embrace their stories in student-centered teaching practices. Through story sharing, the researcher believes that members from underrepresented groups could become change agents, inspired to improve current practices and shape educational policies and

educational opportunities for marginalized communities.

On the other hand, the researcher must be aware at all times of her status as a White female and her position of power so as to create an interview space in which participants feel comfortable sharing and discussing their personal stories. The participants might be unsure if they can trust the researcher due to the differences in their racial backgrounds and might question her ability to understand them. Thus, Chavez (2012) emphasized the importance for the researcher to enhance cultural humility by listening to individual stories and drawing awareness to the experiences and issues that individuals encounter, advocating for change, and creating a broader, more inclusive view of the world.

For this study, the researcher was employed within the school district in which the study was conducted and therefore was as an insider. She acknowledges her positionality and how it might affect the analysis and interpretation of the results and, therefore, kept this at the forefront of her awareness throughout so avoid bias. Being an insider researcher provides the advantages of having knowledge and access to information that an outsider researcher might not have, including the depth of the topic being studied; nuances such as the nature, dynamics, and structure of the public entity being studied; along with the challenges and opportunities this type of organization encounters. At the same time, the familiarity and closeness to the setting (the district) may lead to subjectivity and bias. Hence, the researcher will practice continuous reflexivity to mitigate any inadvertent bias while interpreting the study results. This process entails critically, purposefully, and analytically reflecting upon thoughts and

concepts to uncover and elucidate one's convictions based on the acquired knowledge (Fleming, 2018).

Credibility

The credibility of any study depends on how well it "fits" with the respondents' actual experiences and the researcher's interpretation of them (Nowell et al., 2017). Persistent observation, data collection triangulation, and researcher triangulation were used to ensure credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the same time, the evaluation of early results and interpretations against the raw data and data triangulation were used to investigate the evidence provided by the sources and utilized to construct a justification in support of the themes. This procedure contributed to the case study's validity by showing that the themes created were based on the convergence of different viewpoints from participants.

The researcher performed an inspection of the transcripts to ensure that they did not include errors made during transcription. Also, the researcher inspected if there was not any change in the definition of the codes. Throughout the coding, the researcher continuously analyzed data by creating notes regarding the codes and their meanings. At the same time, the purpose of this qualitative research was not to generalize its findings to people, places, or locations that were not the subject of the investigation, but as Gibbs (2007) pointed out, the value of qualitative research was found in a specific description and appeared to grow in the context of a particular place. This particularity, as opposed to generalizability, was the hallmark of this qualitative research.

Also, a member-checking approach was used to ascertain the accuracy of the qualitative results. The researcher scheduled a follow-up interview with participants and

presented the particular descriptions or themes, asking them whether they believed these descriptions or themes were accurate. The participants were given a chance to comment on the results. Moreover, the researcher worked with two outside auditors to examine the case study. The auditors were not acquainted with the researcher or the project; thus, they offered an impartial, objective evaluation after the study's completion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The procedures involved having the independent investigators look over many aspects of the case study, including the accuracy of transcription, the relationship between the research question and the data, and the level of data analysis from the raw data through interpretation.

Two external auditors from the researcher's professional network who were impartial to the study voluntarily reviewed procedures, analysis, and outcomes. The first holds a doctoral degree with expertise in methodology and data analysis. She evaluated the research design, data analysis, themes, and potential biases within the broader context and found no bias irregularities or protocol deviations. The second holds a master's degree in education with 45 years of experience as an instructor, instructional coach, and university field supervisor, plus holds endorsements in literacy, curriculum and instruction, and human relations. She assessed the content of the study and offered insights to enhance clarity and coherence. Both auditors provided written feedback to the researcher.

Dependability

In terms of dependability, Yin (2007) proposed to describe the case study technique and to document as many of the phases of the procedures as feasible. The researcher used peer debriefing or peer scrutiny, which helped to build trust. An

independent auditor also was invited to read and respond to the researcher's case study notes which served as a confirmation that helped establish tacit reality (Stahl & King, 2020).

Transferability

When conveying the results, the researcher provided a detailed and rich description (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The description transported readers to the environment and offered the conversation a sense of common ground via shared experiences. The researcher meticulously detailed the participants and their roles within the organization. However, to protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms were used. At the same time, as Stahl and King (2020) recommended, a transfer is not a recipe but a proposal that must be tested in a new environment.

Controls for Bias

The researcher described any preconceived bias that may have influenced the study by practicing reflexivity which involves maintaining an ongoing internal conversation and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality, in addition to active awareness and explicit understanding that this position could impact the research process and output. Since reflexivity is an essential aspect of qualitative research, the researcher explained how her background, such as gender, culture, history, immigration status, and social and economic origin, might influence the interpretation of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Practicing reflexivity through the research process is essential, beginning with developing a research question and continuing through data gathering, analysis, and conclusion drafting (Bradbury-Jones, 2007). Consequently, self-reflection helped the

researcher to identify questions and content that she internally may have reacted to during the interviewing process by either shying away from or emphasizing. It also helped the researcher become aware of her reactions to interviews, thoughts, emotions, and the triggers that caused them. The content analysis and reporting helped alert the researcher to possible "unconscious editing" because of sensitivities. As a result, it enabled fuller engagement with and a more in-depth comprehensive analysis of the data. It also helped avoid "unconscious editing" because of sensitivities (Berger, 2015). Moreover, scheduling a follow-up interview with the participants to check for accuracy in results and interpretations, keeping a research journal, and creating an audit trail of the researcher's reasoning were the strategies used to control for possible bias and maintain reflexivity (Bradbury-Jones, 2007).

Delimitations

This dissertation case study was conducted in a suburban public school district in the Northwest region of Washington State, which was unique to the particular district's geographic location, participants' social backgrounds, such as Latina individuals, and the social phenomena that were happening at the specific site. This study was limited to Latina teachers' experiences because it aimed to investigate their lived experiences at their schools. The particular district was chosen due to the high Latina(o) student population and efforts to make the teaching field more inclusive for Latina teachers. The participants in this case study had to self-identify as Latina, hold a teaching credential, and hold a certification position in an elementary school within the public district. The researcher was interested in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants and their lived experiences as teachers during their employment at the particular school

district in order to provide school leaders with themes that could be applied to creating school cultures that are inclusive and supportive of Latina teachers. Broad generalizations would not be appropriate because of the qualitative nature of the study and the small sample population.

Although the interview questions were not piloted, they were crafted and cross-checked to align with the research questions as well as the key concepts and concerns noted in the scholarly literature, particularly the theoretical frameworks of social identity and transformational leadership. Additionally, the structured interview format presents certain limitations, particularly that follow-up questions are not part of the interview process. This might have restricted the participants' ability to fully express themselves, potentially leading to constraints on fully understanding their perspectives and experiences.

This research was conducted in the English language yet Spanish was the first language of all participating teachers, which may have affected communication and/or meaning, although all participants responded fluently. In addition, the interviews were conducted via Zoom, a technology platform that may have influenced communication throughout the interview process in unknown ways. Moreover, the temporal aspect of a phenomenological study suggests that it focuses on a current phenomenon that is dynamic and may change. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this study may not be applicable (or applicable in the same manner) to these six teachers in the future, even if they maintain the same school and the same position. This is because their working environment may undergo changes that could influence their experiences and views.

Finally, the researcher's closeness to the topic and setting in which the research was conducted was a delimitation that needs to be considered. However, being an insider researcher provided unique insights, including the establishment of trust with the participants and access to information and knowledge that an outsider researcher might not have.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included a description of the process for collecting and evaluating data to address the research questions and overall problem that grounded this study. The methodology and the study's population were explained, which included selecting a purposive sample. Ethical considerations, including procedures to protect the privacy and identity of research participants, were also described. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study.

Chapter 4. Findings

Overview

A phenomenological case study was conducted to examine the experiences of Latina teachers in a predominately White staff school system and the ways in which their social identities manifest themselves in the context of their professional school settings. This approach aims to elucidate the fundamental nature of an event by examining it through the lens of those who have directly encountered it. This type of research design "…is often itself a form of deep learning leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, and increased thoughtfulness" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 82).

Six elementary public school Latina educators participated in this study and themes emerged with attention to maintaining methodological integrity. A phenomenological approach to this study allowed the researcher to capture the participants' lived experiences, including their feelings, attitudes, and insights regarding their professional entity and career as educators and how their social identities intervene within this process. During the individual interviews, participants shared their personal stories as Latina individuals. In total, four interviews had an approximate duration of 60 minutes each, whereas two interviews lasted between 45 and 50 minutes.

They recounted their experiences about reaching their position in education and the barriers and catalysts they encountered during their career climb. The phenomenological research design was meant to "…empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45).

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do beginning Latina teachers view their Latina social identities in the workplace?
2. How and to what extent do school settings create or eliminate barriers to Latina teachers' thriving personally and professionally?
3. How can school leaders recognize and support Latina teachers in ways that will empower thriving in predominantly White staff school settings?

Interview questions were crafted to elicit responses from the participating Latina teachers to explore and gain in-depth understanding of their multiple realities and meanings relevant to the research questions. Therefore, in the sections that follow, findings are organized and reported according to the research questions.

Research Question 1: Latina Social Identity in the Workplace

The first research question was intended to capture beginning Latina teachers' positioning regarding their social identity and professional lives and what distinctive aspects, qualities, and awareness they bring to their spaces: How do beginning Latina teachers view their Latina social identities in the workplace? The following themes emerged: (a) maintaining whole self and cultural pride through language, religion, and family ties; (b) being different, an immigrant, a less than, a secondary, an English language learner; (c) embracing community and collectivism as driving forces; and (d) being a connector, a mirror, a reflection.

Whole Self and Cultural Pride Through Language, Religion, and Family Ties

While the narratives of Latina educators are distinct in terms of the countries of their origin and immigration routes, all six participants communicated the importance of

preserving their language and Hispanic ethos and serving as a “cultural source” for the families and students they mirror. Being Latina for these teachers meant more than speaking the Spanish language, it also meant staying true to their religious identity and familial ties. Also, all Latina educators emphasized that family, religion, holidays, and food are paramount for their social identity. For instance, Camila stated,

> I just love how my culture brings so much joy in everything it does. It's loud, it's joyous! I have a lot of traditions that I hold dear to my heart like holidays which also connect to the importance of like ancestors in the culture. How we honor ancestors because we see, our ancestors as people we can ask for prayers. My culture is so tied to Catholicism. There are always prayers in the religious aspect of everything as well. That, I think it is like a pillar in my identity and culture. If you meet Latina or Latino person, you're really meaning one individual with a complex identity. We do have things in common like cultural values and family is really important to me. I think the word Latina comes from a socially constructed way of people grouping us. I don't mind the label, Latina, but I think of my experience and I identify more as Mexican American. Latina is very much an umbrella. When I think of cultural values, that impact who I am, I think of those specific, like Mexican cultural values.

Sophia emphasized the significance of holidays in Latin culture, which hold great social value. While American holidays are important, her family also celebrates holidays that are unique to Puerto Rico. Things like food, music, and entertainment are essential to her identity. Food, in particular, is a central part of her culture. As she recalled, not having

access to food was a real hardship. Despite these challenges, she remained committed to honoring her traditions and creating meaningful experiences for her family.

> My culture stems around holiday practices, things that bring our family together, not necessarily being just limited to traditions or American holidays. There's a lot of holidays that are important in Puerto Rico that my family still celebrates. And it's interesting navigating that because we may not have access to resources like food and entertainment value of it. The music is just part of it when you are celebrating it in Puerto Rico.

In addition to highlighting cultural differences between Latin America and the United States, Anna emphasized the significance of family.

> Hispanic family is really important. That is one of the main things. It's kind of different from White culture, which is more individualistic, and it is the most important part for us. Your family is so important that you are willing to give whatever it needs. Even if you are an adult, if your parents need your support, you will stay with them and you will take care of them, or your family will take care of you. So that is something that is important for me. It is part of my identity.

Other participants emphasized that they transfer their identity and personal experiences to the work they perform. Estrella explained,

> I'm bringing with me my culture…my family…even the experiences that I've had being separated from my family back home. Being Latina means being a hard worker, but also it means being tough through all the obstacles that life brings. Gathering with my family and celebrating Christmas and different holidays, food,

> dancing, and music, are important for me. All of that is part of me…and my culture.

All six participants underlined that the Spanish language is at the core of their identity. Even though some participants have been immersed in the English language from an early age, maintaining Spanish contributed to their identity and who they became. Sophia noted the following about her native language.

> As opposed to someone who spoke English first, and then…adopted a second language, for me, it's very important that I still maintain Spanish. Even though Spanish was my first language, and I was, immersed in English with that kind of thinking that I needed to leave Spanish and immerse myself in English. To be successful, maintaining my home language and other traditions is very important.

Being Different, an Immigrant, a "Less Than," a Secondary, a Language Learner

All six participants attested that Latina identity encompasses multiple facets along with other complexities. They described themselves as being "different" which includes being an English language learner, an immigrant, or "less than" others. For instance, Estrella elaborated,

> I'm different…because I'm coming from somewhere different than other people are. I speak Spanish and I have an accent. I don't view myself like my peers, like other teachers. I view myself as less than them because I know I wasn't born here. I know that I might not have the educational experience they have had. I have gaps in my education which make me less experienced than the other teachers. My mom had to work two jobs [while] I was staying at home. I had no one to help me with my homework. My mom had to come here. I was left in Honduras when I

> was 4, and that's part of my identity. She came to this country for a better life, and better opportunities. So, where I was born…influenced my identity and who I am as a person.

As participants shared the mosaic of their Latina identity which evolves throughout their lives, they recalled stories where every aspect of them contributed to who they are. Coming from Mexico to the United States, Anna recalled some forms of discrimination that she experienced.

> When I was in Mexico, being a Latina, it was like everybody was a Latina. We actually didn't identify ourselves as Latina other than the times that we were filling out some forms or passports. It wasn't until I came here to the United States that I noticed that I'm kind of different. I'm not seen as the White people. It was the first time that I encountered discrimination about being Latina. And you know, they don't know all the culture, all the reasons. They put all Latinos in one box and they don't understand that there's a diversity of people.
>
> I have family that come from Spain to Mexico and part of the family is from native people in Mexico. I'm what we call a Mestizo and that is something that you cannot erase and say, oh, I'm going to be a new person here in the United States. It's part of your identity. That's why, for me it’s so important to transfer these to my daughter, for example, to be proud of who she is, and to never think that she's less than anybody else.

Gloria discussed her parents’ immigration experience, their struggles to learn a new language, and how it affected her life.

> Being Latina, there are two major things. One is the immigrant experience like my parents are first-generation immigrants to the U.S. Seeing them struggle to learn English and adapt to living here, and then that transferred over to me as well, because at home we only spoke Spanish. When I entered school, a lot of my schooling was just learning English.

Simultaneously Camila disclosed the dualities of two worlds including being born in the United States from immigrant parents and how it has shaped her identity and sense of self as Mexican American. She experienced two extremes and a "weird" feeling of trying to fit in and not wanting to be different.

> I was born in Washington. I think Washington is an interesting place to grow up when you are a person of color. There's obviously pockets of diversity within Washington, but the overall perspective I have is a Mexican American. Is it very interesting, people who are born in Mexico, they're saying, you're not Mexican, you're American. You're from there, from the States. But then I come here, they are like, "Okay, well, what are you like? I know you're like American, but what are you like, where are you from? So, I think it's a hallmark of a conversation every Mexican American has. Yeah, I'm not from there, but I'm not from here, it's just weird.
>
> It's an interesting thing about our identity as Mexican American. I think it's influenced me in a way to have those reflections about it. I feel like I fit into pieces of my community. If I go back to Mexico, they hear my little accent, because that just is what it is and they're like, Yeah, you're from the States. I used to get really self-conscious about it when I was younger, like adolescence. I'd be

> really timid and quiet because I didn't want them to hear my Spanish and judge me. I think I grew out of that. It impacted my adolescence a bit more. When I was here, it always just be, “Oh, she's Mexican, she can speak Spanish, ask her to say something.” And it's this balance between two extremes. It influenced my sense of self and identity, because when I was younger, I'm like, well, I don't really want this attention, I'm like everybody else, I don't want to be different and whatnot. And then, you go on to your adolescence and figure out…I'm proud to be, from wherever I'm from. I'm proud to have a family that's really proud of being Mexican, being proud of who I've become as a Mexican American person.

In addition, Sophia views her identity as a strength as she can apply the experience of being different to her work with multilingual students.

> My language is something that takes top priority, maintaining my language and being able to hold on to it in a society where it's seen as like a secondary and also being seen secondary as someone who is not originally from here. I myself was one of those students and it is a strength for me because I had to learn English as my second language. I had to come from a different country, different place and kind of leave who made me, who made my family, my culture, not necessarily leave it behind, but [put it on] a back burner to me, trying to immerse myself in a new culture on top of having to learn math, all of these things that you could be seen as barriers, obstacles. Those were the things that I had gone through. And while that definitely helps me to be mindful. Be a little bit more intentional as to how I work with students who are not in the same position, not necessarily just Latino students, but students who have had that same experience. I think it's a

> great perspective to offer to students who do not have that experience, who are primary English speakers, who, are citizens here, and have been citizens since birth so as their families, and maybe do not see like those obstacles.

Embracing Community and Collectivism in a Profession

Latina educators shared how their identity influences them as educators and impacts their work with students, enabling them to see students holistically. The intersectionality of identity and pedagogy has emerged as a critical focal point, particularly within the narratives articulated by Latina educators. These educators have actively delineated the nuanced interplay between their personal identities and professional roles, illuminating the profound influence of cultural heritage, lived experiences, and communal ethos on their instructional practices. Central to their testimonies is the acknowledgment of the multifaceted nature of student identity, wherein a holistic comprehension is essential for fostering inclusive and responsive educational environments. Camila emphasized that in her work she views students from the collectivistic prism.

> Latina is a very broad label, so it's looking at one person. We come from a little bit of cultural differences, but at our core we're very collectivists. Even personally, or professional, I've seen how that has impacted my way of like seeing students. We talk about seeing students holistically and culturally. That's always been the case coming from like a Latino culture. You just never see the individual or one piece of the individual, you always see who are they connected to and what makes up the entire person, and not just like this small thing they're either expressing or showing, or add a data point that we're looking at. That kind of

> helps me understand students better. I would feel it gives Latina educators a different perspective on how to work with children or like students in general, just that collectivist standpoint of like seeing the whole child saying and bringing in their family like, bring all their systems and structures, their family, their community. It's all one big picture. Even though, our regular-day-at-school student is the only one showing up, but the student is connected to so many other people.

Sophia also utilizes the importance of community in her work. She indicated,

> Just how a community can bring so much support and can heal and just is such like an important part of my identity. Unlike American culture because it's so individualistic. And it's so like, you had to do it all by yourself. But that's not at all like what I learned growing up in my culture. So, collectivism is, and family is really important to me.

To add to the same point, Gloria confirmed that at the core of her nature is community and working together which she projects into her teaching and learning,

> One of the things that being Latina, makes you kind of more aware of or defines you as a person is like your collectivism. You don't really work alone. You don't see yourself as being just like an individual. You're always a part of a larger community. So, that's a value that I carry with me. As Latina…I value collaborating with my coworkers, colleagues, and I value not isolating myself in my classroom, but really thinking of joining a learning community.

Being a Connector, a Mirror, a Reflection to Students

All Latina participants have had the experience of being identified as second language learners. While sharing their stories, they came up with several characterizations of how they view themselves in their roles as educators, including being a reflection of those who follow similar journeys. Anna can relate to students by empathizing with them.

> Being Latina, especially in this district was something that it so important…I knew that I was able to support Spanish-speaking students in a way that I really understood how they feel when they are learning a second language, how difficult it is to achieve a second language, even it was for me. I went to a bilingual school. I didn't feel comfortable with my English [when] I moved here to the United States. I work with a lot of students that are Latinx themselves. I want to be a role model for them. I want to say you can do this and you can see yourself in me. You can identify yourself with me because we speak English as a second language, with me as someone who has an accent when I speak English. They can see themselves in mirrors and not just see windows through their teachers. I think what is important is that you understand the culture behind it in a different way.

Moreover, Sophia offered her viewpoint that she sees herself as a bridge or a connection point for her students.

> They [students] are either like Spanish speakers or came from some kind of Latinx culture, where it's, sometimes that connective piece that allows me to bridge gaps and create relationships with students. Where they might not be able to do that because they don't have people who celebrate similar holidays, who speak the same language, like just these cultural anomalies that are not traditional

> to American culture. That allows me, to make that relationship and then get to the academics. Every single time you have an opportunity to present a mirror to students of either themselves or someone else who may not be a traditional mold. It's so important, so needed, because not only do kids need to see themselves like in all of these roles, in books, in these positions that we hold as like educators, as like these, connected pieces, as administrators. They need to be able to also envision and have somebody cheering them on.

Meanwhile, Estrella reflected on how she relates to students and how her personal experience as a non-native speaker enables her to connect with students on a deeper level. She called her ability to connect to students a "superpower."

> My superpower as a Latina teacher is being able to connect to students as I've walked the shoes that the students are walking. I know what it feels like to be in a classroom where you don't understand the language. You see the teacher teaching in front of the classroom and she's just talking, and you're not understanding. I know how it feels to be different, skin colors. When a teacher says, "Can you please repeat that again?" I know how it feels when an educator might not believe in you. I had a lot of that. As I was going through [schooling], I didn't have a teacher with whom I could connect and a teacher who could tell me, you can do this. I feel I just had that grit inside of me, where I love education. I wanted to make a difference in the community with Latino students. We bring again qualities like our language, our culture, and the experiences we've had as multilingual learners in this country. Latina teachers can identify with the students we are teaching.

In addition, Maria brings her personal experience while planning and delivering the lessons to ensure multilingual (ML) students can fully participate in the learning process. She mentioned,

> Bringing in my ML background, I always think about when I'm scaffolding for my ML students, the vocabulary when it comes to math problems or just reading passages. My bilingualness, being fluent and bilingual, goes a long way, and being able to be culturally responsive. It's a great opportunity to do more for students. I can, progressively, have these thoughts in mind whenever we're talking about inequities or whenever an idea comes to me. That I can share and hopefully [make] a difference or [make] an action take place. It really affects students when you don't have someone who looks like you or speaks like you, and it also affects their parents. And we know there are inequities because of that. Progressive teachers are really responsive to that and to our students of color.

Gloria also shared a similar perspective,

> I think that I'm very empathetic towards most students. I can identify with the struggles that they might have. I also speak two languages which is helpful. I also understand the difficulties of learning a new language and can empathize with students in that manner.

Camila, for instance, stressed how her Latina core beliefs broaden her understanding of students.

> I think I would go back to those core beliefs within our cultures. Latina is a very broad label. It's looking at a person who might have a different culture. At our core, we're very collectivist and that I mean, even personally, or professionally

> like. I've seen how that has impacted my way of seeing students because we're seeing students holistically, and culturally. That's always been the case coming from a Latino culture. You just never see the individual or one piece of the individual, you always see who are they connected to.

Summary

In summarize, the first research question prompted Latina educators to share how their social identity including culture, language, religion, and values intertwine with their experiences and roles as educators. Their responses revealed many facets of their Latina social identity that they bring to their work setting. By revealing the highlights from Latina stories, the evidence suggests that their social identity is shaped by many personal complexities that make up the whole individual and that their ethnic/cultural background plays a major role in how they view themselves and in how they experience their professional world.

Research Question 2: School Setting and Latina Teachers' Fulfillment

The second research question sought to uncover the opportunities and barriers that Latina teachers encounter in school settings and what elements prevent or stimulate their capacities to develop professionally: How and to what extent do school settings create or eliminate barriers to Latina teachers' thriving personally and professionally? Several themes emerged, including (a) belonging through Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and teamwork; (b) the systemic issue, a predominately White district with dominant White voices; (c) the absence of mentorship and administration support centered around Latina identity; and (d) belonging versus proving oneself.

Belonging Through Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Teamwork

For the Latina identity to thrive and advance as well as have a sense of belonging in the workplace, participants confirmed that, for them, it is crucial to work in communities and teams and have opportunities to share their voices and experiences. Hence, Camila emphasized,

> Education has a push towards the PLC model of learning, and like really focusing on learning communities. I've always felt that being Latina made me just be a part of my community and really feel connected to it. So, I think it transfers to school. So, I really enjoy working with like a group of teachers. I feel like [this] because I can work with a group. I can take ideas and apply them to my own learning. It makes me not be resistant to growth and change. It makes me open to it. I get along pretty well with not just my [grade team], but I've made connections with the [upper grade] team, and some of the specialists. We talk about work and support each other at work, but we also support each other in our personal lives.

Sophia also confirmed that the work in PLC helps to develop a sense of belonging,

> I think a sense of belonging here really… revolves around our work [with] students and staff relationships…Our communication stem around…how we can best support students, either by doing clubs or joining PLC groups where we plan with grade-level teams. There are…relationships, too, that are based on friendships. As you know, we've worked with colleagues for a long period of time.

Also, similar to other participants, Estrella and Anna found that they feel a sense of belonging to their school community or school family when administrators create opportunities for them to work in teams. Estrella stated,

> When I think about how the school helps me to be successful is when the admin gives me that opportunity to sit and talk to them. I'm used to talking to other people. I want to be part of you, the school family. I feel part of my community as a Latina is the family again, being in that group of family, and being able to work with other people. So, that's what helps Latino teachers because that's part of us, that's part of our culture, our identity. Working in groups, working with my admin together, or when my admin [gives] me that opportunity. And if I don't have that in my workplace, I feel isolated, I feel all alone.

Moreover, Anna shared that the younger generation is more inclusive and empathetic toward her as a Latina individual due to the work that has been done around oppression which helps her to feel included. She mentioned,

> Being a part of my team, I feel that I'm a valuable person, I feel a part of my school. The younger generation is more open because they already are learning about the importance of identity, about oppression, they understand how the system works, and the oppression works. They are supportive of that and they understand the importance of having a Latina teacher. I think they understand for example, that sometimes my pronunciation is not perfect, or sometimes I make little mistakes when I try to express myself.

The Systemic Issue, a Predominately White District with Dominant White Voices

On the contrary, while the majority of Latina participants believed that they belonged to their workplaces and felt valued, they shared that working in a predominately White district where White voices have more power is challenging. Also, the educational system in general perpetuates inequity and contributes to stagnation towards inclusion and fair treatment. Camila, for instance, shared that even though at her current school she did not experience pressure to downplay her Latina identity, due to the systemic oppression and her experience, she is learning to get comfortable bringing her whole self to work.

> Just the acknowledgment that we do work for the education system as a whole, [the school district] is not…very equitable, and [there are] just a few people of color. I acknowledge that I work within that system, and how that can create harm and a barrier to people of color in education and educator role. We are working for a systemic system that has oppressed people and kids for a long time. I mean, we are unlearning, but it's a system problem, it still creates harm and barriers. Just because throughout my educational experience, I've had to learn how or like train myself to like code switch and not show too much. I could survive within the educational system.
>
> I don't think it's pressure from other people. Sometimes I'm still getting comfortable showing my or fully embracing my identity within my work. Because if you talk about professionalism, my identity as a person of color, and where I come from sometimes that doesn't translate into professionalism. It was always about training yourself to always be like, don't say anything out of the norm, you are the perfect coworker, and you can't mess up, because if you mess up, the

> consequences are a lot. The consequence can be bigger than your White counterpart, at least like in perspectives, or in general. It's always been, how much can I show myself? But it's never been pressure from anybody else here. It has felt really welcoming since, my first day here. It's just me needing to untrain myself a little bit and be more comfortable.

Furthermore, Anna recalled that she encountered obstacles to becoming a teacher in the United States, which as she explained is a system issue.

> As a bachelor teacher coming directly from Mexico, different from people that were born here, the older teachers are more like, “What is this person doing here”? The younger generation of teachers understand the importance of having a diversity. Those are kind of obstacles that you encounter. But it's more like the system, not the school. I was trying to find ways to become a teacher and I encountered a lot of obstacles. I could encounter obstacles that sometimes they gave permission to White teachers [who take teaching courses] to start teaching without their certification and gave them the opportunity.

Gloria shared that her district is predominately White and people’s resistance to change is an obstacle.

> It is a predominantly White district. I think a lot of people can be resistant to new changes. And I would say, that's one of the things that would get in the way is the hesitation towards moving towards new places.

When Estrella was asked about the obstacles she encountered at her workplace that prevented her from thriving personally and professionally, she became vulnerable and teared up. She felt people who were in power silenced her and would not allow her to

advocate for her students. Estrella recalled her kindergarten experience of being a shy and quiet multilingual learner who was referred to special education because of her English language deficiency.

> Dominant White voices and being the only Latina here in this school with mostly White teachers. I feel like some teachers do respect my voice, but others don't. And I feel there's a wall preventing me from even advocating for my students because they don't want to hear me. Even though I'm hired…in a school that is mostly Spanish-speaking students. They don't really want to hear my own personal experience. I need to advocate for some things that are not correctly done. They shut me off. So, I think it's that power and me being Latina and just being with other White teachers. I always think, what would it be like if we had a Latina principal? Would I feel the same way? I feel now that there is a wall. When we're in referral meetings that experience of making sure we're following all guidelines to refer a student or not. It's really touched me. It is really something powerful to me because of my own experience as growing up. When I was in kindergarten, I also was going through a referral process for [special education], because I was shy and I didn't speak English. When I'm in one of these types of meetings sometimes I want to downplay myself as Latina, because I want to say, hey, we need to be careful with this. But instead, I feel, if I share this, what will they think about me? I stay quiet and downplay my identity as Latina. I get upset and I get frustrated because I feel, they don't want to listen. And we are somehow not allowing the students to be successful because we don't give them the time they need. When I was growing up, I had a multilingual teacher who

> fought for me. And she said, “No, give her more time. I will work with her.” I am mad, I'm frustrated because I feel like it's a huge problem, and that's not just here, this, that this is nationally where we are preventing these students from being successful. And I was part of that. And if I didn't have that one teacher who said, give her more time, I would probably be in the special education system, too.

Absence of Mentorship and Administration Support Around Latina Identity

The majority of participants indicated there is no mentorship or coaching available for them as Latina individuals. As the participants explained, the support that is available for them is focused on students’ academics. Hence, participants believed that there is no support system available for them from school administrators to thrive professionally as Latina educators. Sophia indicated that she has not had a mentor. She shared,

> I have not had mentorship as a teacher. I see the admin approaches it just being willing to [have]…conversations with me about…how we can support students that are also Latinx. As far as support that I received specifically, isolating my Latinness, I don't know if I have that. I definitely have the support around the academics portion of it…there's a lot of discussion. There's a lot of rapport around engaging students and families from multicultural backgrounds. I don't think, not anything necessarily specifically for the Latinx community as educators there. I know there's a little bit through like my union. There are identity groups that offer kind of support systems that way. You know how that can help you as an individual, and then well, then, hopefully, give you an access to help you thrive as an educator. But yeah, not too much from admin.

At the same time, two participants mentioned the lack of administration support and unfair treatment concerning being new educators. Hence, Maria recalled her experience of unfair evaluation and how it affected her psychologically and professionally as a beginning teacher.

> I'll share with you one of my recent experiences. I had a disagreement with my [administrator] and I still feel it. I feel that's part of my stress, too. I thought about it for a long while. I wrote an email to my [administrator]. I just feel the stress of it, because I feel like there's just so much unfairness to what I experienced. I'm [a beginning teacher], and I've been told, "You have to be very careful when you're, a [beginning teacher], especially in the first three years. But I know when something doesn't sit right with me, and I can't be myself. I included facts, a diagram, and a comparison of what I was talking about because I just felt I included this factual stuff, for my administrator.

Besides being cautioned to act carefully for the first few years of teaching, Maria wrote an email to her administrator where she stated all the facts and rationale behind her disagreement. While restating the email she opened up how she felt about the observation process and how it affected her.

> I experienced belittlement when my [administrator] used words like "very easy" and "so basic to use" and these condescending comments. I firmly believe that I was approached and communicated to by my [administrator] like the majority of the certificated staff are here, 40 or 50-year-old White women. I felt being brushed off, not following up on written imbalanced data on comparison of past observations, and not being taken seriously as a new teacher. As a BIPOC

> immigrant woman, my efforts for family-centered DEI [diversity, equity, inclusion] efforts were not taken seriously and action pursued. When I wrote about detailed ideas for this, they were instead passed on to someone else with no plan of action. I felt strongly about a present school bias. So, I went to [another administrator] with the same comments, concerns, and action-oriented ideas. When I did this, the [other administrator] immediately made an action plan, and it was addressed. Trust was then broken after comparing responses to my race relations bias concerns and ideas to address this. I listed my identity because this hurts even more. I have been that young, immigrant BIPOC kid in school who has not been served culturally in response to my identity experience in mostly White spaces of education and work. Many times, I've heard said how important DEI work is at this school.

Besides Gloria said,

> I haven't had any mentoring experience in this district. I think the most mentoring would be through the coaches. But we all receive the same mentoring, regardless of our ethnic background.

On the other hand, Estrella pointed out that during her years as a paraeducator, she worked with people who mentored and coached her and encouraged her to obtain a teaching certification.

> Now, in this position as an [educator], I don't have a mentor, and for me, it’s like a leadership role. I'm always scared to make a mistake. Because I'm teaching myself along the way. I have to constantly look for the answers to my questions. I would love to have a mentor to help me grow because I love being in [my role].

Conversely, Anna reported a positive experience of working with two mentors who coached her in various perceived professional needs such as teaching and learning and technology-administration needs. She feels very supported because it is not a “sink or swim” approach for a new teacher, but rather carefully planned mentorship through explicit guidance on how to advance in teaching as well as to manage the clerical part of the job. She described,

> I’ve had the pleasure to work with two different mentors, and both of them have been supportive to me…they've been mentors in different ways. One mentor is all for these administrative things…like evaluation…paperwork…trying to observe me and give me feedback in ways that I can help my students. And they are giving me feedback…in a positive way. They always tell me these are things that I notice that you are doing well, these are things that you can improve. They don't even use the word “improve.” Usually, they said, I have questions about this…those are your opportunities to grow. I really appreciate it, because I'm always open to accepting ways of becoming better. The important thing is that they are always respectful. They always ask me, what do you need help with. But it's your choice, your decision. I don't feel like I'm navigating it by myself. It's not like, okay, let's see if you survive. No, it's like there's someone there next to you that it's sailing in. And then it's like, okay, you're in the open water, but you are strong enough now to go to the open water. But I was there all the time, you know, kind of shadowing you to be able for you to succeed. [This mentor] is more academic. I see these things, and I see these opportunities for you to grow. What

> can we do? What else? I'm going to come here…and model for you. Then it's your turn to do it. I really feel I have someone there really next to me.
>
> The other mentor is about what is really useful for me…like how to put the grades in skyward and how to bring the report cards. [Both of my mentors] just want to support me in the way I need.

Belonging Versus Proving Myself

Camila on the other hand mentioned that she does not have mentorship in her current role. However, she said that she was fortunate during her graduation year to work with Mexican American mentors which was a beneficial match.

> Surprisingly, I was really lucky, in a way, in my grad program in [the university] to have to work under two [mentors] who were both Mexican heritage or ethnicity, at least. Both of them were half Mexican, which I thought was really interesting because that's the only time in my life, where I ever had a mentor, person, and authority of who is also like a person of color, coming from the same ethnic background. It's really interesting to see their perspectives. They're a little different from mine because of the acculturation they lived. We were more on the spectrum of American culture and Mexican culture since they didn't have too many experiences with Mexican culture. But it’s still a positive experience, because there are people out here who come from where I come from, who are doing this work, too. They have their perspectives, too. They're a little different from mine, but I could still [identify] and it helped me feel I had a place within the [education] world.

Half of the participants reported that they feel they belong to their school community and do not experience the pressure to downplay their Latina identity, as the staff appreciates their presence and sees them as venues to connect with Hispanic students and families. However, half of the Latina participants also felt they needed to prove themselves and deserve the trust of White colleagues. Camila shared that work around equity and the implementation of affinity groups at her school are helpful to lessen the isolation of people of color particularly as a Latina person. She shared,

> I think the fact that we do so much work around like equity and I know we've done some work on like racial affinity groups here. The fact that we are having those conversations and everything we do helps me feel less isolated, in a sense. It makes me feel safer to be here, or safer to show… my wholeness as a person, and not… code switch or… suppress… who I am fully.
>
> The first experience I had coming into the building and how kind everybody was, and welcoming. You can tell, this community in general, they ask questions because they want to know, and not because they want to be polite. It seems people around here generally care about how everybody else is doing around them. So, I have felt a sense of belonging and people wanting me to be here, and have received a lot of affirmations from people and compliments…Working with the people in this building as my experience in other buildings has not been the same, [it's] been very sterile, which is not something I'm used to…The fact that there's so much care and work on belonging really goes back to that point of what I'm used to within my own culture. We're very friendly as people and we're very community oriented, and I feel that here.

Sophia mentioned that her ability to relate and communicate with students and parents has helped her to earn affirmation and recognition from colleagues.

> It has been acknowledged that me, being Latina, being able to communicate with families in their home language, and me being able to make those relationships with students who share my culture. That it's been, you know, very much needed and recognized.

At the same time, two participants mentioned that they feel they need to prove themselves as professionals either at their current position or at the beginning of their careers as educators. Estrella disclosed,

> I am always trying to prove myself to others, that I can do what everyone can do. Also, because English is not my first language, I'm constantly so careful about what I'm saying and how I'm pronouncing words. So, all this stress. When I'm speaking to a White teacher. All this stress is in my mind. Am I going to sound correct, the way I'm speaking, is my pronunciation correct?

Estrella also emphasized that she loves her job as an educator but she has a hard time finding a supportive group of coworkers and doesn't feel like she belongs at her school.

> This year has been hard because I'm [at this position] at this school, I'm part of a new community of people and that's one of the challenges I have as [an educator]. I am trying to find a group of people that will open their arms and say, you're welcome in this school. But right now, that's one of the struggles I have. I don't feel connected to the school, but I love what I do. One White teacher once told me "I thought you knew what you were doing." But I always remind myself that I'm

> here for my students, and that's what keeps me going. But a sense of belonging, I feel I don't have. I hope it will change.

Anna recalled the experience at the beginning of her teaching career as a paraeducator and when she was perceived as "less than" other professionals. She stated:

> The time that I felt that I, or they made me feel that I was less, was when I was working as a paraeducator. I feel that I was seen less. I noticed some of the White teachers, were like, "Who's this person? What is this person doing here?" And the only thing that I continued doing, was doing my work, continued showing that I was capable, continued showing that I was a responsible person, that they could trust me…that I was able to put 100% or more into whatever I needed to do. And by doing that, I got the respect from these teachers. But now, working as a [certificated] teacher, I think they see me as their peer. We're colleagues here. They don't see me less.

Summary

In summary, the Latina educators provided valuable insights and views about their work styles, personal stories, and experiences which align and resonate with their unique ethnic identity. The participants shared that a collaborative work culture resonates with their identity and increases their sense of belonging. At the same time, the systemic issue of White voice dominance, privilege, and power places Latina educators in a siloed and silent position. Furthermore, the participants overall noted an absence of identity-centered administration support and shared methods they use to navigate and fit into their working environment.

Research Question 3: Leadership and Latina Empowerment

The third research question in this study centered on the role of school leadership in empowering Latina educators through recognition of their identities and strengths that they bring to the field: How can school leaders recognize and support Latina teachers in ways that will empower thriving in predominantly White staff school settings? The responses from each of the participants revealed three unique themes including, (a) empowerment through sharing Latina voice; (b) being invited to conversations about Latin culture; (c) mindfulness of race, Latina/o identity, and its core beliefs; (d) culturally competent mentorship and leadership; (e) race centered conversations and (f) investing in Latina/o paraeducators and recruiters.

Empowerment Through Sharing Latina Voice

Four out of six participants shared that they appreciate how school leaders provide them opportunities to voice their opinions and input from a Latina perspective. By sharing their voice, they feel empowered to make a difference. Their unique perspectives and experiences bring cultural sensitivity to the table, leading to a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and increasing inclusivity. Camila affirmed,

> The leaders have definitely made sure there are different opportunities to share my voice as a Latina educator, whether it's leadership teams or SIP teams about the Latino community at my school that I co-facilitate.

Sophia also confirmed that she feels recognized and appreciated at her workplace when she is invited to contribute her knowledge and experience as a Latina individual.

> There's like a lot of celebration and kind of engagement as me being able to bring to the table like part of my Latina identity. Especially when it comes to how I'm able to support kids. The administration is very good about…recognizing those

> opportunities, being mindful of just being, bringing me into conversations regarding cultural sensitivity and having conversations with families in their home language, and making sure that materials and things are accessible to students and families in their home language or Spanish. I think there is a lot of acknowledgment of the need.

Further, Gloria perceived that school leaders appreciated her input on family engagement as she was able to address misconceptions and assumptions about Latin families and ways to eliminate the barriers to their participation in school life.

> The school leadership does empower me to make choices and voice my opinion as a Latina teacher. For example, we were talking about one of the school goals, how to increase family engagement, and what increasing family engagement would look like. I did bring up some of the concerns, especially for the Latino population. It is not so much that families don't want to be engaged, it's just other barriers like a language barrier, a feeling of not belonging. We as a school would need to work on those things before people start engaging with us. And the leadership was very receptive to that and opened to my ideas.

Anna, at the same time, feels she has all the necessary support and affirmation from the school administration.

> [Administrators will be supportive] if they really understand their population and the importance of what you bring to the table. As a teacher, I think they are supportive. It comes from admin and they never questioned me. They always said, "Go for it." If you think this is going to support them [students], go for it.

On the other hand, two Latina educators shared that they do not feel supported or empowered by their school leadership in terms of their professional growth and advancement. Maria believes that her principal is biased and unfair in the evaluation that she received as a beginning teacher. She described her experience.

> I'll just speak to my current experience. I mean, I think at the beginning, I did feel valued. They told me at my interview, that your story really resonated with us. I told them about my "why" of being a teacher. But I feel that there is just such a lack of, for many very different reasons, mostly oppression, of Latina teachers. I compared my last observation to my other one, and just like how the logistics of that were just so different. I feel, disheartened. I feel like even though my administrator for the very beginning was like, "It's not about being perfect" but instead how my administrator scored me. And then also, it's not just coming in and just doing something that just seems like a very unfair, biased, and unbalanced view of my teaching. I felt I did a really good job being professional and really calling to attention the facts of this observation and what were the things that were done. I just feel disheartened because I didn't get much of a response other than like, "Hey, let's just talk about it." It makes me feel uncomfortable around my administrator.

In addition, Estrella stated that she does not feel that the school leader empowers her in her professional role since there is no proper environment to share her voice as a Latina educator.

> No, I don't feel that school leaders empower me to make a difference in the job, especially because they're not giving me that opportunity to speak in a

> welcoming environment. So, mostly when I'm talking to my administrators, it's about student academics. They don't ask me, "How do you feel and what can we do to help you?" They hired me but now that I'm hired, I would love for someone to ask me, "What can we do to help you grow professionally?" That's a wondering I have as a Latina teacher. Would it be different if a White teacher was in my spot? Would the trust be different? I feel like my voice is not valued or respected, not enough trust. I feel like other departments in this school have more say than me, their voices are heard more than mine.

Being Invited to Conversations About Latin Culture

When the Latina participants were asked if they feel affirmed by their colleagues, they shared that they feel supported and appreciated when the school stakeholders invite them to conversations about Latina/o students and Hispanic culture in general. The participants believe that these dialogues build knowledge and help to address evolving questions on how to better serve this ethnic group. Indeed, Gloria stated,

> I do feel supported by my colleagues and peers. I think the way that I feel supported is when, for example, they have cultural questions, like if teachers are White and they have students who are Latino, and their families are Latino. They might come to me for support, or to ask me some clarifying questions, or how to best approach a family.

Gloria compared her job experience with other districts and concluded that in her current district the colleagues treat her with more respect.

> My colleagues have been more respectful. The way that they talk about the student body, who is Latino, has been more respectful than in other places where

> it has been. The cultural difference between the White staff and the Latino population was very palpable in other school districts. So, far at this district, I feel like my identity has been respected a little bit more than at other districts.

In the same way, Anna feels supported by her colleagues when they ask her to share her cultural knowledge about Hispanic families and trends they observe with the Latina/o students.

> I am another teacher with another point of view, with different ways of seeing things. I think my team really appreciates me. And I've been working really well with them. They were really appreciative of me being a Hispanic, me being able to explain things to them that I encountered. I'm able to explain to them, why do people who come to the United States and three families live in the same house. Why is that something that you see really constant? I feel supported by my team.

Camila stressed that in her position, colleagues' affirmation is very important to her.

> I definitely feel supported. It's really important to me to lead my job with a lot of transparency. I think that has helped as well to receive buy-in and support from my co-workers, and what I'm doing in a school. I haven't felt any pushback of any sort yet.
>
> At times I could be isolated. But I feel very empowered to be who I am and be in this role because I know you know historically, the education system has not hired people like me, or people who come from where I come from. I'm just very proud of who I am and where I've gotten, and what impact I can make as a Latina educator.

Mindfulness of Race, Latina/o Identity, and its Core Beliefs

Participants were asked for their suggestions on how schools and district leaders could achieve the goal of attracting, recruiting, and retaining Latina educators. Therefore, the participants provided several recommendations. Maria, for instance, shared,

> I wish that we would continue with those affinity groups. It's been 5 months [since]…and I did feel a really big sense of belonging since then. But I think if you're saying how important the work is, which the principal did say, then you should also invest time. You know, some of our meetings that we have those days that we're just supposed to talk about PD [professional development]. And if it's so important, then we should have the opportunity to meet more often during part of our late start, Fridays are probably when we're supposed to have these meetings because that would that help.

Sophia suggested that the district leaders be more culturally mindful and considerate regarding Latin culture.

> As a whole, the district may be a little bit more mindful about certain holidays that Latin people do not celebrate, do not acknowledge versus ones that they do. Being mindful about resources and curriculums that we are offering to our students that they are accessible in Spanish. I think having communication, you know, consistently being available in Spanish is important. I think accessibility just overall, I think, is very important. Highlighting just the culture, we've seen like this shift, towards the lens of Black history awareness, move throughout our schools, our districts. And it would be great to have that happen…for Hispanic

> heritage month—September through October every year, and very rarely does it get highlighted, and that's such a great opportunity…when we are talking about…accomplished people who sit in these positions of leadership [for students to see]. And then we're also trying to highlight other people like in sports, in science, that we can bring to the table. People of like that are Latinx as well. Again, kids need to see themselves mirrored. And you know, in all of those positions, and not for only them. It's validating for us, as educators, then to see these people in these positions, also being highlighted.

Gloria suggested that school leaders should center their rationale for attracting and retaining Latina educators on the valuable cultural values of these ethnic group. She said,

> I think school leaders, could retain and attract Latina teachers if they emphasized the diverse student body that we have in the school district. The PLC learning models and that you're not working in isolation. There's always somebody available to help and support you. [The] school leadership could recognize and support Latina identities by listening to them, listening to their ideas, listening to what they know about their own communities. Taking their input [and] valuing the different perspectives that we have.

Culturally Competent Mentorship and Leadership

Another theme that emerged after asking participants about their views on how to retain and empower Latina educators was to provide access to culturally competent mentorship. Estrella made this point,

> I would love right now to have someone to work alongside me because I have different projects that I want to do. But again, going to my culture, going to my

> identity, I am used to working with other people, and it's so challenging for me right now in which way leaders can create opportunities such as allowing Latina teachers to work with other leaders like me, even other leaders in the community…in different schools. I feel that people [who hired me] were intentional because they also see the need of having a representation of a Latina teacher, especially because we're in a Spanish student population. But now I would love for them to give me whatever I need to be able to be successful in my job. I need them to provide me the resources and mentorship to be successful.

Camila stressed a similar viewpoint about having mentors who share the same ethnicity and hold comparable cultural values and beliefs.

> Having those mentors that understand, at least like part of your identity, from your culture or [who] have those perspectives. So, it doesn't get taxing for the Latina educator to always explain, where they're coming from or what perspectives they had and how they got to that perspective. Sometimes it's just, okay, you come from a very different background than I do, and I had to explain my opinion in a way that you understand…because of things like my culture, my background, my identity…that can be taxing at times. Maybe pairing them or having some type of social group.

Another focal point Maria brought up is that the school administration leads with authenticity and progressive thinking by focusing efforts on intentionally growing Latina educators and offering necessary measurements to ensure these individuals feel that they belong, are appreciated, and are empowered.

> Hopefully, these school leaders are authentic and progressive, and they should say…you know the difference that you can make, and these are the supports we're going to have for you…this is how I'm going to support you…It makes a really big difference that there are at least two other staff members who identify in my culture. It's a value to [the district]. I'm used to just being the one Latina in any base that I'm in, and it feels, it's hard. And you notice that. And you want to ask for more staff that looks like you. I have done that in the past when I was in a good place with my [supervisor] and there's that belonging that you need. Also, the population calls for it in any place that you're [in]. I used to work in [another] setting…and they need more people who speak Spanish, and who look like you, for the staff to be representative of the people. So, have more people who have those cultural values and acknowledge that. And [having] colleagues who really recognize you as being Latina and the cultural representation that you bring is important, too.

Anna shared her personal experience of coming from Mexico with a teaching degree. She faced obstacles to practicing teaching in the United States because the district did not consider her teaching experience from Mexico, yet allowed White teachers to be employed as teachers and continue attending teaching programs. Anna suggested the district leaders approach Latina teachers individually and ask for their stories and aspirations to become certified teachers.

> When people hire you in human resources, maybe they can just ask, are you willing to…pursue becoming a teacher, and start discussing the things that [they]

> can work with this person in an individual way. [Ask] the person "Tell me about your story, because there are other paraeducators who want to become teachers." I wanted to become a teacher, I had my master's [degree] in education, research, and development, and the [district indicated] like, "Oh, but you don't have the teaching part." And I said, "I studied one year and a half of teaching in Mexico…" "Oh, we don't count that." They just put obstacles for you and [I wonder] how can [the district] support White teachers and let them go to a program and allow them to teach, but don't allow to teach people who are from another country? Also, maybe [the district] gives the opportunity…to offer classes like advanced English for teachers who speak English as a second language.

Race-Centered Conversation

The participants expressed that in order for the workplace to be inclusive and equitable, the leadership must continue to have ongoing conversations about race and identity, not only for the benefit of employees but also for other stakeholders like students and families. Camila confirmed this sentiment by sharing,

> Just continue to center race and ethnicity in the conversations. It's just really important, especially for our kids to feel like they belong [and] professionally for me. I'm still learning how to integrate that piece of my identity being Latina, into my professional role, because for so long you were told not to do that, you were told to hide it. Suppress it. It's not professional, you just do your work here and go. I think just creating or having those conversations, by telling that identity really helps, and also the creation of SIP [school improvement plan] teams is really important. It's a lot of work that we do, and it sometimes feels a little bit

> overwhelming. But if I have that supportive admin, it helps [people] listening to, and we are not working behind doors and like feel siloed in the work that we do.

Anna shared that when the district leaders hire people like her, they show that they value racial diversity among staff and what she brings as a Latina individual. These leaders also show families that Latina educators are appreciated and that identity matters, including everything that comes with it, such as her accent and the minor grammar mistakes she makes when speaking or writing.

> If [district leaders] appreciate that you are different, [families] also value that. People trust me, people believe in me, and people understand that I bring something valuable. The Hispanic families appreciate you a lot, but also other families from different identities. They really value that their kids have the opportunity to have someone different and grow with a diverse population…from different countries. On the contrary, families don't say, how is this person going to teach my student? They are a new generation of White [people]. I sent a little [note] to parents…and [I am] honest and say, "Well, I'm so sorry if I make a mistake in English, it is my second language." And they are like, "No, don't worry, I'm happy my daughter is with you, or my son wants to learn Spanish. Is there a way that you can teach him"?

Investing in Latina/o Paraeducators and Latina Recruiters

When asked about the strategies that the district can implement to increase the number of Latina teachers the participants suggested investing in a paraprofessional pool and supporting them to obtain their teaching certification. This question particularly

resonated with several participants since they began their teaching careers as paraeducators. For instance, Anna suggested,

> [Have] opportunities for paraeducators to become teachers or people that have partial education. The leaders should ask, "How can I support you or people who are not Latinas, from other countries that are also working [for] the [district]? How can I support you in becoming a teacher? First, I will say, give opportunities to the people that need to enroll in programs to become teachers.

Estrella as a former paraprofessional also shared the need to provide opportunities for professional enhancement to the support staff. At the same time, she believes that for the job recruitment fairs, Latina educators should be on the front line.

> I started as a paraeducator and what inspired me to go into the certificated teaching was working with people who believed in me. I think, connecting paraprofessionals with teachers and with mentors. I think that would attract them. Also, district recruitment fairs, I never see Latina teachers there, so they should send Latina teachers to these recruitments and talk to Latina students who are interested in going into the field. You always see White people there, but I think it would help sending out Latina teachers.

Equally important, Maria shared a similar perspective of recruiting and engaging Latina/o students to become educators.

> For the district to have programs for Latino students who want to go into teaching, bring other Latino teachers to talk to them about what teaching looks like. And I think retaining them by providing them with the tools they need to be successful in their job, and…listening to them. The tools might look like pairing

them with mentors or coaches and also making the school somehow welcoming for Latina teachers.

Summary

The responses of all six participants reveal fundamental insights into how school leaders can recognize and support Latina teachers in predominantly White staff school settings. Hence, they offered their positions and opinions, including creating spaces for Latina individuals to share their views and testimonies about their culture and core beliefs, being mindful of the race and diversity of people who work for the district, supporting Latina/o paraeducators and recruiters, engaging in race-centered dialogues, and offering culturally competent mentorship and leadership.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented key themes that emerged from this phenomenological case study that captured depth and nuance provided by six beginning Latina educators through structured interviews about their perceptions of their ethnic/cultural identities in the workplace, what they experienced as facilitative or impeding to thriving professionally, and what they believe leaders can do to empower thriving in a predominantly White school district. Chapter 5 will discuss the significance and implications of these findings.

Chapter 5. Discussion

Overview

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the phenomenological case study results about beginning Latina educators' lived experiences in predominantly White staff elementary schools in the chosen school district. The objective of this study is to investigate what Latina educators encounter in their professional journeys including catalysts and restraints that either hinder or accelerate their career advancement and empowerment. By utilizing the structured interview approach this study identifies the specific factors recognized by Latina teachers that might contribute to the effectiveness and sustainability of equity, inclusion, and diversification efforts and initiatives.

Furthermore, the preceding chapter brings to light the compelling accounts and concepts that lay the groundwork for this chapter's discussion of the invaluable perspectives on the experiences of beginning Latina educators. The investigation of beginning Latina educators' experiences was based on a theoretical framework guided by social identity (SI) theory and transformational leadership (TL) theory. As was discovered from participant responses Latina social identity encompasses multiple pieces and each piece plays a crucial role in how Latina individuals navigate their professional setting including establishing relationships with colleagues, administration, and students and accomplishing their professional goals. Despite the awareness of "being different" or seen as "less than" within the melting pot of American culture while trying to find their calling and fulfill their purpose through immigration, integration, and new language acquisition, Latina educators continue to fulfill their calling as educators by impacting and transforming the lives of those around them. Some are seen as appreciated springs of

Latin heritage knowledge, and some are seen as invincible minority tokens. Table 4 summarizes all of the themes that emerged from transcript analysis and the sections that follow will discuss implications and applications for impact.

Table 4. Summary of Findings

Research Questions	Thematic Findings
1. How do beginning Latina teachers view their social identities in the workplace?	• Whole Self and Cultural Pride Through Language, Religion, and Family Ties • Being Different, an Immigrant, a "Less Than," a Secondary, a Language Learner • Embracing Community and Collectivism in a Profession • Being a Connector, a Mirror, a Reflection to Students
2. How and to what extent do school settings create or eliminate barriers to Latina teachers' thriving personally and professionally?	• Belonging Through Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Teamwork • The Systemic Issue, a Predominately White District with Dominant White Voices • Absence of Mentorship and Administration Support Around Latina Identity • Belonging Versus Proving Myself
3. How can school leaders recognize and support Latina teachers in ways that will empower thriving in predominantly White staff school settings?	• Empowerment Through Sharing My Latina Voice • Being Invited to Conversations About Latin Culture • Mindfulness of Race, Latina/o Identity, and its Core Beliefs • Culturally Competent Mentorship and Leadership • Race Centered Conversation • Investing in Latina/o Paraeducators and Latina Recruiters

Summary and Significance of Findings

Based on participant responses, the professional journeys of beginning Latina educators are guided by complex layers of their social identity and are highlighted by the intersectionality of elements such as language, country of birth, gender, religion, immigration path, family dynamics, race, socioeconomic factors, education experience, and new cultural expectations. Even though the social classification system in the United States mingled Latinos/Hispanics into one category or a "box" that perceived them as a monolithic Hispanic group (Pew Research Center, 2015), the features of each identity are distinct, as was reflected in the professional lives and work of the educators who participated in this study. The results of this study suggest that cultural heritage plays a significant role in shaping Latina identity at work and the application of their Spanish language, customs, and traditions. Latina educators often navigate unique challenges at the intersection of ethnicity, class, gender, and immigration status, facing issues related to racism, social exclusion, and experiences of discrimination (Roberts et al., 2014). Moreover, their immigration experience provides nuance to their social identity, influencing their sense of belonging, cultural adaptation, and workplace establishment.

The first research question sought to understand how Latina individuals view themselves and others in relation to their social identities including organizational system politics, work dynamics, and social categorization, by asking: "How do beginning Latina teachers view their social identities in the workplace?". Hence, according to participant responses, it was found that Latina educators preserve their whole selves through cultural pride, the Spanish language, beliefs and religion, tradition, the value of community and closeness, and family ties by transferring these aspects into the work environment and

their relationships with people. As participants shared, they do not leave elements of their identity behind nor do they become “new person[s]” when they enter their workplaces. Thus, cultural clashes or disequilibrium occur when the dominant White culture’s expectations and standards are not aligned with the expectations and values of minority ethnicities and ethos. The existing literature (Scott, 2020) appeared to suggest that Latina individuals’ underrepresentation in organizations directly relates to how their social identities are being accepted or rejected. As a result, to avoid dominant group exclusion, the minority individuals “play down” or “play up” their identity striving to “prove themselves” and their abilities to succeed as professionals.

The second research question sought to understand, “How and to what extent do school settings create or eliminate barriers to Latina teachers' thriving personally and professionally?” Participants’ responses revealed their perceptions of how work culture and dynamics in their school settings impacted their personal and professional development. The exploration showed the importance of belonging for Latina educators through various collaborative work and mutual projects around students’ socio-emotional development and academics. This aspect was also supported by Ng et al. (2005) who suggested that if organizational culture does not support collaboration and community efforts, Latina professionals often encounter a cultural disparity between their personal beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors and those prevalent among the broader society in which they reside and operate. Moreover, Dutton et al. (1994) mentioned that the development of an individual's conceptualization of self in professional life is meticulously connected to their association with an organization, which in the case of Latina educators is the need to be actively engaged in collaborative work around students, particularly with Latina/o

affinity groups. In addition, the key determinants of Latina professional success are culturally focused mentorship or lack thereof and the presence or absence of trust from administration and co-workers. The attractiveness of an organization is not just based on the financial benefits linked to work, but also on the feeling of affiliation with the company (Highhouse et al., 2007) which could be effectively achieved with the fulfillment of employees' professionals and personal goals and support and affirmation from administrators and peers, especially from dominant ethnicities.

The third research question sought to understand Latina educators' perspectives on how school administrators can appreciate and empower them by implementing strategies that foster their holistic and justful inclusion within the dominant White faculty environments by asking: "How can school leaders recognize and support Latina teachers in ways that will empower thriving in predominantly White staff school settings?" Participants' responses exposed preventative mechanisms to reduce attrition (Ocasio, 2014; Griffin, 2017) and job disengagement. Numerous scholars ascertain that educators from minority groups, including Latinas, report being discouraged from staying within their schools and the profession, primarily due to unfavorable working conditions and lack of in-group affiliation, and inclusion, and professional support (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Roberts et al., 214).

As participants shared, educational leaders have the opportunity to empower Latina teachers through various means of support in schools where the staff is predominantly White. This involves acknowledging and appreciating Latina teachers' unique viewpoints and voices, ensuring their involvement in discussions concerning Latin culture, promoting awareness of race and Latina/o identity along with their

fundamental beliefs, providing mentorship and leadership opportunities that are culturally sensitive, facilitating open dialogues centered on racial issues, and allocating resources towards the training and recruitment of Latina/o paraeducators. These initiatives not only serve to recognize the valuable input of Latina teachers; they also contribute to establishing an environment conducive to flourishing and meaningful engagement within the educational community.

Examination of Latina educators' experiences in predominantly White educational environments led to a deep understanding of how their social identities evolve in professional settings and what factors activate or deactivate their sense of self at work. The participant accounts in this research shed light on the multifaceted and evolving teaching journeys of Latina individuals. They mirror the communal experience of these women, manifested by ongoing personal constraints and tactics employed to cope with unfair evaluation, find a sense of belonging at their schools, and the need to advocate for their Latina/o population. Key insights from the themes that emerged include the following: (a) recognizing the compound tapestry of Latina social identity that exists in White-dominated school environments, (b) understanding the challenges of balancing dualities of Latina identities, (c) acknowledging the importance of integrating immigration experiences and language acquisition in pedagogy, (d) embracing Latina distinctiveness while upholding shared commitment via collectivism, (e) establishing experiences of Latina belonging versus ostracism, (f) navigating the influence of a White hegemony system, (g) embracing inclusion and empowerment via mentorship and professional support, and (h) activating and sustaining social identity homeostasis.

Complex Tapestry of Latina Social Identity in a White-Dominated Environment

While organizations employ and invest in Latina professionals, the understanding of Latina as an ethnic group is necessary to ensure that all aspects of who they are and what they bring to the organization are recognized and activated. Prior research confirms that the lack of Latina professionals in organizations often stems from their perception that their social identities are undervalued by White leaders and staff (Scott, 2020; Bordas, 2013). Thus, expanding the Latina identity beyond cultural factors such as nationality, language, heritage, and individual experiences involves recognizing the multifaceted nature of identity and acknowledging the intersectionality of various elements that contribute to one's sense of self.

Consequently, this study contributes to the existing body of research on Latina professionals by delving into various aspects of their experiences, challenges, and achievements in the workplace. By examining the intersectionality of ethnicity and professional identity, this research sheds light on the unique dynamics faced by Latina professionals in predominantly White organizational contexts. One of the keys that this study highlights found in the participant responses is that there are additional features of their identities that play an important role in shaping their actions and employment functioning that include commitment and service to their job and organization. As a result of separation from parents at an early age, immigration experience, being raised in impoverished environments, acquiring a second language, or just growing up in a multiethnic environment, many Latinas find themselves juggling multiple cultural identities. Although this duality makes them feel that they are “different” or “less than” or conflicted by societal norms, it is important to keep in mind that their lived stories and

experiences matter and that they are vulnerable yet invincible and agile enough to juggle more than one identity. In addition to navigating multiple identities, scholars also indicate that Latina professionals continuously undergo a redefinition process which involves recognizing and embracing their own values stemming from their heritage (Bordas, 2013). Growing up in a dominant White culture involves navigating issues of discrimination and exclusion while also exploring and reinforcing one's own Latina identity.

Balancing Dualities of Latina Identities

Based on Latina educators' narratives, this study found that cultural elements like language competency, familism, and collectivism impact Latina teachers' interactions, decision-making, and career goals at work. Furthermore, some complexities in relation to their social identities include striving to conform in either one or another culture. One of the participants, Camila, who is first-generation Mexican American narrated,

> If you meet [a] Latina or Latino person, you really mean one individual with a complex identity…I think [the] word Latina comes from a socially constructed way of people grouping us…People who are born in Mexico, they're saying, you're not Mexican, you're like American. You're from there, from the States. But then I come here, they are like, "Okay, well, what are you like? I know you're like American, but like, what are you like, where are you from? I think it's like a hallmark of a conversation every Mexican American has. Yeah, I'm not from there, but I'm not from here, it's just weird. It's an interesting thing about our identity as Mexican American. I think it's influenced me in a way to have those reflections about it. I feel like I fit into like pieces of my community. If I go back

> to Mexico, they hear my little accent, because that just is what it is and they're like, Yeah, you're from the States. I used to get really self-conscious about it when I was younger, like adolescence. I'd be really timid and quiet because I didn't want them to hear my Spanish and judge me…It impacted my adolescence a bit more. And it's like this balance between two extremes. It influenced my sense of self and identity.

Additional facets of social identities were shared by other participants whose childhood experiences shaped their beliefs and as a result, affected their professional paths. Estrella stated,

> I'm bringing with me my culture…my family…even the experiences that I've had being separated from my family back home. Being Latina means being a hard worker, but also it means being tough through all the obstacles that life brings.

Integrating Immigration Experiences and Language Acquisition in Pedagogy

Even though numerous studies confirm the importance of racial matching among teachers and students and the positive impact it makes on students' academic achievement and behavior (Gershenson et al., 2022; Penney, 2017; Harbatkin, 2021; Wright et al., 2017), one of the new insights that this current study provided is how immigration experiences had a profound impact and formation of both Latina educators' social identities and professional trajectories, particularly in their work with students. The participants who are immigrants in the United States or who are first-generation born in America confirmed that as migrants they navigated the complexities of acculturation, language acquisition, the presence of an accent when speaking, and the assimilation process, confronting challenges that fostered resilience and a natural sense of empathy.

These experiences not only enriched their understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds but also cultivated empathy for the struggles faced by immigrant families. This reflective empathy served as a cornerstone in their work with students, enabling them to forge meaningful connections and provide tailored instructions, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among students grappling with similar transitions. One of the Latina participants asserted,

> My superpower as a Latina teacher is being able to connect to students as I've walked the shoes that the students are walking…My mom had to come here. I was left in Honduras when I was 4, and that's part of my identity. She came to this country for a better life, better opportunities…Where I was born has influenced my identity and who I am as a person.

Participants further expanded upon the interplay between cultural dynamics and individual challenges including English language acquisition and proficiency. These facets collectively shape educators' identities and define boundaries, thereby influencing their pedagogical position. Moreover, the participants stressed the nuanced lens through which they navigate the educational landscape, contrasted against their counterparts from prevailing dominant White cultural backgrounds. This discourse underscores the deep impact of cultural environment and personal struggles on the pedagogical ethos, revealing dimensions often overlooked within mainstream discourse.

> Maintaining my language and being able to hold on to it in a society where it's seen as like a secondary, and also being seen secondary, as someone who is not originally from here. I myself was one of those students and it is a strength for me because I had to learn English as my second language. I had to come from a

> different country, different place and kind of leave who made me, who made my family, my culture, not necessarily leave it behind, but [put] it [on the] back burner to me, trying to immerse myself in a new culture on top of having to learn math, all of these things that you could be seen as barriers, obstacles. Those were the things that I had gone through. And while that definitely helps me to be mindful, be a little bit more intentional as to how I work with students who are not in the same position, not necessarily just Latino students, but students who have had that same experience. I think it's a great perspective to offer to students who do not have that experience, who are primary English speakers, who are citizens [families] here and have been citizens since birth...and maybe do not see those obstacles.

Embracing Distinctiveness While Upholding Shared Commitment via Collectivism

The phrase "racialized tokens" characterizes Latina educators who are a minority in White staff settings. The term suggests that these educators are seen as representatives of their racial or ethnic group rather than as individuals with unique skills and talents. It speaks to the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate their identities and seek support and solidarity within their professional communities (Goldhaber & Mizrav, 2021). The existing literature indicates that Latina teachers, who are often subjected to racialization in the professional environment, do not seek racial integration with their White female colleagues but, instead, tend to engage in self-segregation (Flores, 2011). However, according to this study’s findings, one of the key strategies Latina teachers employ is leveraging common ground. Whether it is a commitment to student success, fostering a supportive learning environment, or promoting inclusivity, these shared

objectives serve as a foundation for collaboration and professional learning. Findings in this study indicate that Latina educators actively seek to form support networks within their professional communities. These networks provide a space for sharing experiences, pursuing advice, and finding solidarity. By connecting with colleagues who respect their cultural differences and value the knowledge that Latina teachers bring to the profession, they can find strength in unity and advocate for change within the educational system. Thus, all the Latina participants underscored the crucial role of the communal bonds among colleagues which, according to research, not only promote collaboration and mutual support but also enhance overall organizational productivity and employee satisfaction (Galinsky et al., 2015; Ingersoll et al., 2019). In addition, many Latina educators have found strength and resilience in recognizing and embracing their differences while also building upon their assets. One of the participants articulated the significance of community and collaboration within the school context by stating that,

> One of the things that being Latina, makes you kind of more aware of or defines you as a person, is your collectivism. You don't really work alone. You don't see yourself as being just like an individual. You're always a part of a larger community. So, that's a value that I carry with me. As Latina…I value collaborating with my coworkers, colleagues, and I value not isolating myself in my classroom, but really thinking of joining a learning community.

This observation stresses the importance of nurturing cohesive interpersonal relationships within professional settings, thus contributing to the attainment of collective goals and fostering a sense of belonging. The endeavor of Latina teachers to foster collaboration with their White colleagues, reinforced by a genuine aspiration to enrich educational

experiences through cultural exchange and identity sharing, embodies a shared commitment to student well-being and success. Through the distribution of cultural insights and the sharing of personal narratives, these educators strive to promote a climate of respect, humility, empathy, and understanding among students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Camila emphasized,

> I've always felt that being Latina made me just be a part of my community and really feel connected to it. So, I think it transfers to school. I really enjoy working with a group of teachers… because I can work with a group, I can take ideas and apply them to my own learning. It makes me not be resistant to growth and change. It makes me open to it. I get along pretty well with not just my [grade team], but I've made connections with the [upper grade] team, and some of the specialists. We talk about work and support each other at work, but we also support each other in our personal lives.

Moreover, in this study, Latina teachers indicated that they provide insights and understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Latino students, including language barriers, cultural differences, and systemic inequalities. Numerous studies also confirmed that Latina teachers play a significant role in shaping the lives of Latina/o students as they often serve as role models, “mirrors,” or “reflectors” for them (Carter, 2018; Huerta et al., 2020; Gershenson et al. 2022), inspiring them to embrace their identity, celebrate their heritage, and strive for excellence in their academic pursuits. Anna elaborated on this point by sharing,

> I work with a lot of students that are Latinx themselves. I want to be a role model for them. I want to say you can do this and you can see yourself in me. You can

> identify yourself with me because we speak English as a second language, with me as someone who has an accent when I speak English. They can see themselves in mirrors and not just see windows through their teachers. I think what is important is that you understand the culture behind it in a different way.

This study supports the concepts being discussed in prior research that indicates educational leaders play a pivotal role in fostering genuine acceptance instead of "assimilation" (Roberts, 2005; Nasution et al., 2018) of Latina professionals into the American workforce by employing a framework rooted in social identity analysis (Ng et al., 2005). This entails a comprehensive examination of the perspectives, experiences, and challenges faced by Latina individuals within the context of their social identities.

Experiencing Belonging or Ostracism

Despite the prevailing affirmation among the majority of participants regarding their sense of belonging within the professional network, it is noteworthy to highlight a contrasting perspective articulated by a single participant. Exploring how people interact within professional settings can uncover various dynamics including power dynamics, collaboration, and support, and reveal fundamental causal factors of the complex dynamics of social unity within their profession. Accordingly, Estrella stated,

> This year has been hard because I'm [an educator] at this school, I'm part of a new community of people and that's one of the challenges I have as [an educator]. I am trying to find a group of people that will open their arms and say, you're welcome in this school. But right now, that's one of the struggles I have. I don't feel connected to the school, but I love what I do. One White teacher once told me, "I thought you knew what you were doing." But I always remind myself that I'm

> here for my students, and that's what keeps me going. But a sense of belonging, I feel I don't have. I hope it will change.

Consequently, the phenomenon of social isolation among Latina educators originates from a lack of vigorous collegial networks. For these teachers navigating the complex terrain of academia, the absence of such an interconnectional system stimulates a sense of separation, delaying their professional development and potentially compromising their efficacy in teaching. This aligns with research by Speck and Knipe (2005) stressing the importance of fostering a culture of collaboration and inclusivity and ensuring that every member feels supported through a network of connections. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a well-defined collaboration framework that enables employees' attainment of personal and professional goals.

Navigating the Influence of a White Hegemony System

In the discourse surrounding the experiences of Latina educators within educational contexts, it is necessary to acknowledge the persistent influence of historic and systemic discrimination, which perpetuates continuing stereotypes and fosters perceptions of difference and inferiority. Moreover, as is confirmed by scholars, Latina individuals often encounter what is referred to as "double danger" or "triple oppression" (Beal, 2008; Blakemore & Boneham, 1994) because they experience unfavorable stereotypes, microaggressions, social exclusion, and get harsher evaluations in the workplace (Roberts et al., 2014). This observation highlights the relationship between individual perceptions and broader sociocultural frameworks, which shape the professional identities and lived realities of Latina educators within predominantly White institutional spaces.

The prevailing response among the majority of Latina participants in this study indicates a notable absence of the necessity to "downplay" (Scott, 2020) or minimize their Latina identity, thus affirming a sense of acknowledgment and esteem for their authentic selves. However, as the findings in this study reveal, negative stereotypes against Latina teachers do not solely originate from explicit acts of discrimination perpetrated by school leaders or White colleagues. Rather, these stereotypes are deeply engrained within the fabric of societal norms, historical narratives, and institutional structures, thus having a profound influence on the self-perception, social identity, and professional experiences of Latina educators. By contextualizing this phenomenon within a structure that considers political and systemic factors, one gains a deeper understanding of the multifaceted challenges confronting Latina educators. The phenomenon of Latina educators viewing themselves as "different" or "less than" must be understood within a broader perspective. For example, Estrella in this study illustrated this idea by saying,

> I'm different…because I'm coming from somewhere different than other people are. I speak Spanish and I have an accent. I don't view myself like my peers, like other teachers. I view myself less than them because I know I wasn't born here. I know that I might not have the educational experience they have had. I have gaps in my education which make me less experienced than the other teachers.

The fact that the participants in this study perceived that they may be regarded as inferior or "less than" others denotes an extensive and deeply ingrained belief system within their cognitive framework. Such a subconscious paradigm highlights the enduring impact of societal norms, interpersonal interactions, and dominant cultural White narratives on people's personal and social identities. This aspect was also corroborated by Bordas

(2013) who emphasized the significance of *conciencia* or redefinition for Latina professionals which involves acknowledging their own worth based on their heritage and embracing it as an integral part of their identity. Camila explained,

> We are working for a systemic system that has oppressed people and kids for a long time. I mean, we are unlearning, but it's a system problem, it still creates harm and barriers. Just because throughout my educational experience, I've had to learn how or like train myself to like code switch and not show too much. I could survive within the educational system. I don't think it's pressure from other people. Sometimes I'm still getting comfortable showing my or fully embracing my identity within my work. Because if you talk about professionalism, my identity as a person of color and where I come from, sometimes that doesn't translate into professionalism. It was always about training yourself to always be like, don't say anything out of the norm, you are the perfect coworker, you can't mess up, because if you mess up, the consequences are a lot. The consequence can be bigger than your White counterpart, at least like in perspectives, or in general.

Moreover, the internalization of negative stereotypes among Latina educators highlights the dangerous nature of systemic discrimination, which not only manifests externally but also infiltrates individual perceptions of their own worth. This incorporation process can provoke feelings of inadequacy and a persistent sense of “difference” or “otherness” as a result, thereby undermining the confidence and professional aspirations of Latina educators.

Inclusion and Empowerment via Mentorship and Professional Support

Research has shown that minority educators are more likely to leave their positions due to a lack of the consistent provision of resources (Ocasio, 2014; Griffin, 2017). Moreover, according to Carver-Thomas (2018) and Roberts et al. (2014), marginalized teachers were discouraged from remaining in their schools and the profession mostly because of unwelcoming working circumstances and a lack of professional support. In addition, the scholars confirmed that increasing diversity within an organization without providing the necessary support structures can lead to tokenism and further marginalization. This suggests that mentorship programs and comprehensive implementation plans are essential for ensuring that individuals from marginalized backgrounds not only enter but also thrive within an organization (Leeper & Greene, 1978). The findings in this current study corroborate such experiences and the desire for support and mentorship, as all six Latina participants underscored the importance of support and mentorship. While the beginning Latina educators in this study acknowledged the presence of district guidance concerning students' academic matters, the visible scarcity of culturally centered support was apparent. This deficiency, particularly in the realm of mentorship, creates implications for the holistic development and social identity activation of Latina individuals (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Garcia & Ramirez, 2015; Liu et al., 2013).

When Latina educators enter teaching, they encounter numerous challenges, including the acquisition of pedagogical skills, classroom management techniques, and the navigation of White staff institutional dynamics. Central to this experience is the presence of appropriate support and affirmation from the administrator where the lack of

both results in unfair performance assessments for novice educators (Roberts et al., 2014). Therefore, despite the majority of Latina participants reporting having support from their administrators as beginning teachers, the study revealed contrasting experiences for a few individuals. Specifically, two participants expressed feelings of being unsupported, while one of them reported experiencing unfair evaluations, where she faced unjust scrutiny and criticism, compounded by the usage of tactless language that deviated from professional conduct norms. This incident resulted in a lack of leader–follower trust, thus causing adverse complications to the morale, motivation, and socio-emotional welfare of this Latina educator. She stated,

> I experienced belittlement, my [administrator] used words like "very easy" and "so basic to use" and these condescending comments. I firmly believe that I was approached and communicated to by my [administrator] like the majority of the certificated staff are here, 40- or 50-year-old White women. I felt…not being taken seriously as a new teacher. As a BIPOC immigrant woman, my efforts for family-centered DEI efforts were not taken seriously and action pursued…I felt strongly about a present school bias…. Trust was then broken…I list my identity because this hurts even more. I have been that young, immigrant BIPOC kid in school who has not been served culturally in response to my identity experience in mostly White spaces of education and work. Many times, I've heard said how important DEI work is at this school.

Ultimately, ensuring fair evaluation is not only a matter of ethical imperative but also a fundamental prerequisite for nurturing a thriving educational partnership beneficial to the success and well-being of Latina educators. Roberts et al. (2014) highlighted the

challenging encounters confronted by members of underrepresented ethnic minorities within the professional scene, including but not limited to harsh evaluative criteria, social marginalization, perpetuation of negative stereotypes, and subtle yet malicious acts of microaggression.

This singular instance of perceived inequitable evaluation warrants attention, primarily owing to the persistently low representation of Latina educators within educational institutions (Gershenson et al., 2022; Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Ochoa, 2007; Salinas & Castro, 2010). Furthermore, it stresses the focal responsibility of educational leaders to cultivate a supportive environment favorable to the professional advancement of all staff members, thereby fostering institutional efficacy. Conversely, any barriers to the career progression of individuals, particularly those belonging to underrepresented demographic groups, not only contradict principles of equity and inclusion, but also impede the realization of organizational mission, vision, and objectives (Gallos, 2006).

In addition, the results of this current study serve as a compelling reminder for educational leadership to prioritize inclusive practices and invest in the holistic development of their personnel, exceeding the boundaries of individualistic egocentric interests to generate a culture of empowerment and collective growth (Roberts, 2005; Nasution et al., 2018). In the context of organizational inclusion, the involvement of historically marginalized individuals without adequate provisions of necessary resources, mechanisms, and culturally centered mentorship for the fulfillment of their roles may unintentionally perpetuate systemic institutionalized oppression, producing a scenario

where these individuals are unjustly deemed inadequate for their designated positions (Flores, 2011; Korte, 2007; Itam & Bagali, 2019).

Activating and Sustaining Social Identity Homeostasis

In the present study, social identity and transformational leadership theories are prominently acknowledged for their theoretical groundwork pertaining to the activation and affirmation of employees' social identities within organizational contexts (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012). The fundamental tenets of these theories stress the significance of recognizing and leveraging individuals' social identities as integral components of their self-concept by exerting influence on their attitudes, behaviors, and performance within organizational settings (Garcia & Ramirez, 2015; Liu et al., 2013). By amplifying Latina voices and experiences and treating these individuals as "institutional agents," both theories advocate for greater recognition and elevation of their prominence within professional spheres. This entails creating platforms and mechanisms that facilitate the expression and dissemination of their perspectives, narratives, and insights where Latina professionals are not merely "token" participants but rather proactive catalysts for change and progress. One of the participants shared having a positive experience of being a Latina leader at her school. She stated,

> There's like a lot of celebration and kind of engagement as me being able to bring to the table like part of my Latina identity. Especially when it comes to how I'm able to support kids. The administration is very good about like recognizing those opportunities, being mindful of just being, bringing me into conversations regarding cultural sensitivity and having conversations with families in their home language, and making sure that materials and things are accessible to students and

> families in their home language or Spanish. I think there is a lot of acknowledgment of the need.

In contrast, a subset of participants articulated a lack of occasions where they were offered the platform to disseminate their funds of knowledge and expertise as Latina individuals and reported the deficiency of such opportunities to engage in professional collaboration with recognized leaders. The participants' insights were also echoed in previous research that reports the lack of such opportunities stems from multifaceted factors, including hierarchical structures embedded within organizations, limited avenues for inter-organizational exchange, and prevailing cultural norms that prioritize individual achievement over collaborative learning and development (Gallos, 2006; Madda & Schultz, 2009; Gist, 2022). Estrella explained,

> I would love…to have someone to work alongside me because I have different projects that I want to do. But again, going to my culture, going to my identity, I am used to working with other people, and it's so challenging for me…Leaders can create opportunities such as allowing Latina teachers to work with other leaders like me, even other leaders in the community…[and] in different schools. I feel that people [who hired me] were intentional because they also see the need of having a representation of a Latina teacher, especially because we're in a Spanish student population. But now I would love for them to give me whatever I need to be able to be successful in my job.

This illustrates and emphasizes that the activation of social identity among Latina individuals is intimately intertwined with their engagement in decision-making conversations, where they have the opportunity to assert their stories, share cultural

narratives, and shape collective outcomes. By recognizing the significance of these conversations as sites of empowerment and cultural affirmation (Liu et al., 2005), educational leaders can work toward removing barriers and creating brave spaces which, according to Espinoza and Espinoza (2012), enable Latina individuals to serve as "institutional agents" facilitating Latin culturally centered interactions, implementing policies, and promoting the inclusion and diversity values of the district they serve.

Theoretical Implications of the Study

The foundations of social identity (SI) theory and transformational leadership (TL) theory in this study offer powerful frameworks for examining Latina educators in professional settings. SI theory provides insights into how individuals' sense of self is influenced by their affiliation in social groups specifically in a professional setting and how the elements of their social identities shape their perceptions, attitudes, and behavior within and across group boundaries. The stronger the identification of Latina teachers with the social or professional group, the more they are inclined to act in manners that contribute positively to the collective benefit of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1970).

In addition to SI theory, TL theory, offers a comprehensive lens to delve into the complexities of Latina individuals' professional lives. Specifically, it facilitated an insightful analysis of the various stimuli, both positive and negative, that permeate Latina teachers' collective atmospheres. Central to this framework is the exploration of the dynamic interactions between Latina teachers' colleagues and leaders, illuminating the complex layers that underpin professional relationships (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Moreover, it enabled an examination of individuals' self-perceptions within the professional atmosphere, offering valuable acumens into their sense of identity and

agency. The results of this current study suggest that, by employing this theoretical perspective, researchers are equipped to navigate the environment of professional experiences fostering a deeper understanding of the factors that shape individuals' professional trajectories.

Leadership via the Prism of Social Identity

The qualitative insights gathered from participants' responses in this study emphasize the imperative of integrating social identity considerations into professional settings. Garcia (2017) stressed the complex relationship between the self-perception of Latina/o individuals within organizational contexts and the external perceptions they encounter. Accordingly, emphasizing the crucial role of these perceptions, they not only influence the dedication exhibited by Latina/o individuals but also significantly impact their potential contributions to both internal and external stakeholders. This assertion features the complex dynamics at play within organizational environments, wherein members' identities or self-identification intersect with organizational culture and perception (Highhouse et al., 2007), thereby shaping levels of belonging, commitment, and engagement.

Building upon this premise, Hatch and Schultz (1997) clarified the reciprocal relationship between organizational investment in the development and nurturing of Latina/o individuals and the consequent benefits accumulated by both the organization and its participants. Their assertion underlines the reciprocal nature of organizational development initiatives, where proactive investment yields proportionate earnings in terms of enhanced performance, heightened engagement, and enriched organizational culture. This phenomenon is frequently overlooked within initiatives aimed at

organizational change. By fostering an environment conducive to the holistic growth of Latina/o individuals, organizations stand to attract and retain diverse talent pools while reinforcing their competitive advantage as public entities. Moreover, it is important to highlight that in a professional setting, taking into consideration individuals' identity means learning their stories, their beliefs, core values, and cultural and ethical features and supporting them to incorporate these elements into professional practice. Consequently, such a nuanced approach resonates with the tenets of transformational leadership wherein leaders harness the power of appreciative inquiry to glean insights into the unique elements of identity, experiences, and perspectives of Latina professionals (Bowen & Lawler, 1992).

Amplifying Latina/o Voices Within and Beyond Organizational Realm

The prevailing discourse surrounding White hegemonic norms and conceptions of superiority and dominance manifests across various echelons of societal organization, notably including but not limited to education. This pervasive influence extends its reach into the lived experiences of Latina individuals, particularly those who are immigrants or first-generation citizens of the United States (Flores & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2014). Within this context, a recurrent theme emerged from participants' narratives, elucidating a prevailing perception among Latina individuals of potential marginalization or stigmatization based on their ethnic identity. Central to this dynamic is the phenomenon of generalization, wherein Latina individuals are often generalized and homogenized into a monolithic construct, under a singular "Hispanic" designation. Consequently, nuanced diversity and complexity within the Latina community are obscured, downgrading

individuals to a reductive and stereotypical representation that fails to acknowledge their multifaceted identities, experiences, and narratives.

Moreover, deeply rooted within these narratives is the substantial apprehension of being perceived as “different” in a derogatory light thus reinforcing feelings of inferiority. Such trepidation is strongly embedded in the hegemonic norms and standards propagated by the dominant culture, which not only perpetuate notions of racial hierarchy and power dynamics but also provoke a sense of alienation and marginalization (Ocasio, 2014; Gershenson et al., 2021). By revealing the lived experiences of Latina individuals, scholars and practitioners can obtain a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent of Latina experiences within organizations and can examine and challenge the prevailing structures of power and privilege that perpetuate systemic inequities.

The link between social identity and transformational leadership practices features the multifaceted dynamics shaping the professional experiences of Latina/o people. By actively involving this ethnic group as integral agents of change to share their stories and take charge of decision making, organizations can cultivate a more equitable and representative governance framework. This participatory approach not only intensifies diverse voices within organizational discourse but also fosters a sense of ownership and belonging among marginalized groups (Seibert et al., 2011).

Practical Implications of the Study

The findings in this study, in concurrence with the theoretical frameworks that underpin it, present a promising avenue for broader application across diverse cultural cohorts within different social and political echelons that include the Latina experience. Central to this aspect is the nuanced exploration of ethnic group social identities, with

particular emphasis on leadership roles, aimed at fostering representation and influence within organizational frameworks. To foster professional environments that are diverse and socially accepting, it is crucial to highlight cultural barriers and resolve disparities in representation on all levels within an organizational entity. Furthermore, comprehensive understanding of how to activate members' social identities in their organization contexts can significantly enhance the presence of individuals from traditionally marginalized groups, amplify the diversity of voices, and potentially catalyze innovation and sustainability within organizations.

Fostering Social Identity Facets in Organizations

In the present landscape of professional development, the integration of social identity elements such as gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, immigration path, nationality, education, language and communication skills, family, and culture into mentorship and coaching mechanisms stands as a critical endeavor. This integrative approach aims to harness the unique abilities of employees and foster an inclusive culture that embraces the holistic social acceptance of each individual. Moreover, it serves as a proactive strategy to address biases, discrimination, and manifestations of both micro- and macroaggression among coworkers.

Central to the effectiveness of this approach is the recognition of the "leader–follower" relationship as a pivotal venue for the application of acquired knowledge concerning social identity dynamics. Leaders must adeptly navigate the multifaceted dimensions of their followers' identities, requiring a commitment to the nurturing of cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). For leaders, embracing cultural humility entails a continuous process of self-reflection fostering awareness regarding

personal biases and creating a culture of inclusivity across the organization. Furthermore, the utilization of social identity as a cornerstone in mentorship and coaching policies not only can facilitate the acquisition of comprehensive knowledge about followers but also can foster the cultivation of trust and understanding where followers become “co-creators” and active living entities in an organizational unit (Edmondson, 1999; Speck & Knipe, 2005). Also, such a framework supports and can be used to foster an environment where members feel valued and empowered to contribute to the organization. This holistic approach serves to dismantle barriers to advancement, promote equitable opportunities for growth, and develop workforce resilience to various acts of social and institutionalized injustice.

Social Identity Based Performance Evaluation Framework

The incorporation of culturally relevant instructional practices within educational frameworks, as emphasized by Danielson (2007), not only stresses the importance for educators to have profound knowledge about students' diverse ethnic backgrounds but also extends to the evaluation of pedagogical performance. As educators are encouraged to leverage students’ background information to enrich instructional practices and foster meaningful engagement, similarly district administrators and principals should embrace culturally responsive criteria in evaluating teachers' efficacy, especially when teachers are from cultural groups that have historically been marginalized.

Much like the necessity for teachers to comprehend the multifaceted identities of their students, administrators must cultivate a deep understanding and awareness of their followers and the nuanced contributions they bring to the school. Prior to the assignment of mentorship or coaching roles, an in-depth comprehension of individual narratives or

stories and the current course of personal and professional development is paramount. Such insight not only informs tailored support mechanisms but also helps ensure alignment between mentorship initiatives, a necessary network of professional support, and the evolving professional needs of educators (Speck & Knipe, 2005; Korte, 2007; Itam & Bagali, 2019).

Moreover, the recognition of shared ethnic backgrounds between mentors or coaches and their mentees emerges as a salient factor in mitigating power dynamics and fostering a humble appreciation for the sociocultural dimensions of the mentoring relationship. As one of the participants in the current study emphasized,

> Having those mentors that understand, at least like part of your identity, from your culture or [who] have those perspectives. So, it doesn't get taxing for the Latina educator to always explain where they're coming from or what perspectives they had and how they got to that perspective.

By facilitating congruence in ethnic identities, administrators can stimulate an environment favorable to equitable exchanges of knowledge and experiences, thereby stimulating the efficacy of mentorship interventions.

Social Identity Centered Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

The efficacy of diversity and inclusion initiatives is widely recognized as pivotal for fostering equitable environments favorable to enhanced productivity and innovation (Senge et al., 1994; Galos, 2006). Central to the success of such initiatives are recruitment, hiring mechanisms, and strategies that prioritize the representation and inclusion of individuals from marginalized groups. This study’s findings demonstrate the importance of deploying recruiters who represent the ethnic backgrounds of people

sought for employment and who also possess a profound understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of these people's social identities. This understanding is instrumental in discerning the nuanced drivers influencing candidates' actions and motivations in relation to organizational affiliations and their professional contributions.

Cruz and Blancero (2017) stressed the necessity of recruiters being cognizant of social identity elements and their implications on candidates' aspirations and inclinations toward organizational membership. By anchoring recruitment practices within a framework informed by the awareness of group cultural norms and values, recruiters can skillfully guide through the challenges inherent in attracting and engaging individuals from historically marginalized groups. This approach not only facilitates the cultivation of a diverse talent pool but also stimulates cultural agility and humility where candidates perceive that their identities are affirmed and recognized.

Moving beyond recruitment, the results of this study also suggest that it is vital to implement hiring initiatives and retention practices grounded by the lens of social identity. When employing new personnel, in addition to the traditional assessment of a candidate's qualifications and competencies, there is also a need to integrate the candidate's stories, narratives, and aspirations into the hiring process. This holistic appraisal not only facilitates the identification of individuals poised to thrive within diverse school networks but also fosters the cultivation of leaders attuned to the complexities of social identity dynamics. By actively seeking to understand and engage with the various arrays of social identities, leaders can catalyze transformative change, attracting a full spectrum of talents.

Recommendations for Practice

Despite gradual increases in the employment of Latino(a) educators, a considerable gap persists between the representation of Latina educators specifically and the diverse student populations they serve (Ocasio, 2014; Gershenson et al., 2021). As the results of this study suggest, Latina educators continue to confront a myriad of challenges that hinder their full participation and advancement within the field of education. Hence, this section presents practice recommendations tailored for district leaders and school administrators, informed by the findings of this study as revealed through the perspectives and insights articulated by the Latina educators who participated. By reflecting upon the narratives and experiences shared by Latina educators within their professional contexts, leaders can take steps to proactively expand the representation of Latina individuals within the teaching cadre and, therefore, foster more inclusive and socially equitable educational institutions. The following is a list of possible steps educational administrators can take to expand a diverse and inclusive certified teaching staff in their schools.

- It is pivotal for leaders to foster race-centered conversations. Such prioritization should be manifested in staff meetings and professional development, where educators can engage in brave dialogue, critical reflection, and collaborative inquiry aimed at cross-examining prevailing racial norms, biases, and power dynamics. A rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of these dialogues in fostering greater racial awareness, sensitivity, and cultural competence among educators is required for the improvement of these approaches and strategies. This entails evaluating immediate outcomes, such as educator attitudes and behaviors,

and examining the broader institutional impacts, including the relationships among diverse teaching staff within PLC activities.

- Administrators most likely will require comprehensive training that encompasses an understanding of the multifaceted components of social identities and their impact on employees' motivation, productivity, and willingness to contribute to organizational objectives. This knowledge is acutely applicable in the context of teacher evaluation, where beginning teachers, in particular, stand to benefit from tailored support and resources that align with their unique social identities and professional needs.
- Administrators should prioritize the provision of mentorship as an identity development process where mentor–mentee relationships are built on learning the mentee’s core values, beliefs, stories, and aspirations, allowing for targeted provision to identify obstacles and meet the career objectives of novice Latina teachers.
- The development and implementation of evaluation criteria need to be sensitive to the social identities of employees. This can help ensure that the contributions and achievements of all teachers, including Latina, are accurately assessed and recognized.
- Implementing staff training in social identities through storytelling is a powerful strategy aimed at fostering cultural humility and awareness. By integrating narratives that highlight diverse experiences, perspectives, and identities, members can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in human interactions and challenge hidden biases and assumptions.

- Fostering coalitions and network support within the Latina paraprofessional staff can amplify resources and expertise, facilitating greater collaboration and empowerment. Investments in the Latina paraprofessional workforce entail a multifaceted approach that incorporates personal interviews, gathering valuable insights into the needs, aspirations, and challenges faced by Latina paraprofessionals to develop a tailored provision system for obtaining teaching certificates.

These recommendations synthesize this study's findings and narratives of Latina teachers aimed at expanding the representation of these educators within educational institutions. Drawing upon the empirical evidence provided by this study, the proposed recommendations offer a comprehensive approach to address the challenges faced by Latina teachers and promote their increased participation as educators. Also, the recommendations offer a practical approach to reaching the holistic inclusion of Latina educators in the school system for the benefit of students, educators, families, and communities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Even though this study aimed at investigating the social identities of Latina educators and their interplay within professional environments and has contributed to the scholarly discourse on inclusion and diversity of voices within educational settings, it is necessary to acknowledge the complex and multilayered nature of Latina social identities, suggesting further research toward continuing to expand and refine knowledge to inform useful courses of action.

- Future research should prioritize an in-depth investigation into the Latina paraprofessional workforce, including members who hold teaching certificates from other countries or possess aspirations to advance their professional trajectory toward becoming certified educators. Such inquiry should delve into the factors that either hinder or foster their progression within the field of education. By examining the challenges and motivations inherent in Latina journeys, researchers can illuminate pathways to empower these individuals, address systemic barriers, and cultivate environments tailored to their professional development.
- Future research should explore the career paths of Latina immigrant educators to better understand the myriad challenges they encounter. Immigrant educators often face unique hurdles, ranging from language barriers to cultural adjustments, all while striving to excel in their profession. By delving into their career trajectories, researchers may gain insight into the resilience and determination they exhibit in navigating unfamiliar settings and create policies and practices to support successful goal accomplishment.
- In this study, Latina participants emphasized the vital importance of collaboration and the establishment of professional learning communities. Therefore, future research should delve deeper into the dynamics of professional relationships, particularly in examining the interaction between teachers from historically marginalized groups and their White counterparts. Understanding these dynamics in PLC structures and activities hold potential to shed light on the barriers to collaboration and inclusion that may exist within educational boundaries and how these may impact students and their learning.

- Future research should examine the impact of ethnically matched coaching and mentorship within educational settings to identify practices and effective strategies that can be implemented to support the academic and personal development of educators from diverse backgrounds.

Understanding the integral components of Latina identity and recognizing conducive stimuli relevant to this demographic has the potential to achieve tangible improvements in the fundamental work environments occupied by Latina educators. Through the comprehensive examination of institutional variables, researchers may distinguish salient points of intervention capable of remedying existing disparities, fostering an inclusive and supportive educator community, and harboring the capacity to enrich pedagogical praxis tailored to the needs of Latina/o students. In essence, all proposed future research stresses the interdependent relationship between the professional welfare of Latina educators and the educational outcomes of Latina/o students.

Summary

This research employed a phenomenological case study design to better understand the lived experiences of beginning Latina educators and the impediments and enhancers to their career growth and retention. The findings derived from the participants' structured interviews revealed that their reflective perspectives centered on their self-perception as a "collective we" that strongly grounded the dynamics of their social identity. Central to these revelations is the interchange between social identity and its manifestation within their professional school context. The discourse surrounding the significance of social interaction emerges as pivotal, as it serves as a channel for fostering

a sense of belonging and inclusion within the organizational context and among its stakeholders.

Overall, findings revealed that the participating Latina teachers' social identities become especially galvanized when they saw their participation in a certain group as a core element of their self-concept and had strong emotional connections to the group. For these educators, being associated with a group of colleagues or leaders provides a sense of self-worth, which contributes to the maintenance of their social identity. Also, the inquiry explored the power imbalances within educational contexts, particularly as experienced by Latina educators functioning within settings of dominant White cultural narratives. Central to the discourse is an examination of how these educators negotiate their sense of worth and belonging. This exploration was grounded in the frameworks of social identity theory and transformational leadership theory, thus offering a comprehensive lens through which to interpret the multifaceted dynamics at play.

Particularly, the findings derived from participants' narratives illuminated the relationship between individual experiences grounded by ethnic and cultural identities and broader systemic structures. The findings are instrumental to better understand the multifaceted interrelations between Latina educators' social identities, the prevailing organizational settings in which they work, and the transformative leadership practices in those settings. Such insights offer valuable opportunities for developing and adopting effective strategies that educational leaders at district and school levels might implement to enhance the prominent absence of Latina representation within teaching staff in predominantly White school systems. Furthermore, the study suggested a roadmap for prospective research actions aimed at deepening the understanding of the complexities

surrounding Latina educators' social identities. Finally, the study offers proposals for methodological theoretical extensions through future research, with particular emphasis on the exploration of latent dimensions of Latina educators' professional experiences and potential interventions capable of fostering a more inclusive and supportive professional field while nurturing pedagogical approaches that are attuned to the unique needs of Latina educators.

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Appendix A

Initial Email Seeking Participants

Hello Educators,

I am a doctoral student from Seattle University who is conducting a study to learn about the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Latina teachers and how school communities can support their thriving and successes. This study is part of the fulfillment of the Doctor of Education degree in the Educational and Organizational Learning and Leadership program at Seattle University. To achieve this, I am seeking participants who identify as Latina, and currently hold a teaching position in an elementary public school.

If you identify as a Latina and are a teacher at a public elementary school, I would like to invite you to participate in an individual interview to share your views. The interview session will take about 60 minutes, will be conducted over Zoom at a time convenient for you, and will be recorded for transcription and encrypted for security.

Your confidentiality is important to me. Please reply to this email if you would like to participate, and I will provide you with additional information about confidentiality, informed consent, and scheduling. All data collected through the interview will be kept confidential, and your identity will never be revealed.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me by email at orzhiskiy@seattleu.edu or by phone at (253) 334-3045. Also, if you know of any Latina elementary school teachers who might be interested in participating in this study, please share my contact information with them.

Thank you for your time,
Oksana Rzhiskiy
Doctoral Candidate
Educational and Organizational Learning and Leadership
Seattle University

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION

Hello, and thank you for participating in this interview and for your willingness to share your time and perspectives about your experiences as a Latina teacher. My name is Oksana Rzhiskiy, and I'm a doctoral student at Seattle University conducting this study as part of my dissertation. The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of Latina teachers and what factors they perceive as fostering or hindering professional thriving and success within the school community. Your input will be recorded, transcribed, and summarized—and your identity will be kept confidential. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

Again, I want to assure you that your privacy and confidentiality are of the utmost importance to me, so I would like to read the **Informed Consent Information Sheet** to you (Appendix C).

Do you have any questions or concerns before we proceed forward? Do you give your consent? Please respond "Yes" or "No". Once the recording starts, I'll ask for your verbal consent again so that it's documented.

Now I will start recording, and you can accept the recording when the prompt shows up on your screen. Please change your screen name to protect your confidentiality. Please ensure that you are in a private location and that there are no unconsented individuals being recorded.

Appendix C

Informed Consent Information Sheet Individual Interview

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: Social Identity Matters: Lived Experiences of Latina Teachers in Predominantly White Staff Schools

INVESTIGATOR: Oksana Rzhiskiy, Doctoral Student
Educational and Organizational Learning and Leadership
Seattle University
(253) 334-3045
orzhiskiy@seattleu.edu

ADVISOR: Laurie Stevahn, PhD
Professor of Education
College of Education
Seattle University
(206) 296-2559
stevahnl@seattleu.edu

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate Latina teachers lived experiences in predominately White staff schools. You will be asked to participate in an individual interview about your experience via Zoom that will last approximately 60 minutes.

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being conducted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Seattle University.

RISKS: There are no known risks associated with this study. However, if any topics during this interview cause concern or distress, please express this to the interviewer.

BENEFITS: This study will support reflection on the ongoing racial and ethnic diversification of the student body nationwide and on what educational research reports about the significance of recruiting, endorsing, and retaining Latina teachers. This study may help district leaders and school administrators to understand the lived experiences of Latina teachers, the barriers they face, and what factors enhance or block successful career growth and retention for this group.

INCENTIVES: You will receive no gifts, incentives, or compensation for this study. Participation in the project also will require no monetary cost to you.

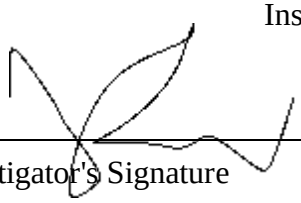
CONFIDENTIALITY: Any names that may be spoken during the interview will be deleted in the transcription. The video recording will be destroyed immediately after transcription. All participant input will be de-identified (no names) and therefore cannot be traced back to you. Your name will never be used in any public dissemination of data/input (such as publications, presentations, etc.). All research materials and verbal consent to participate will be stored electronically and encrypted for security. Only the researcher will have access to the data. Human subjects research regulations require that data be kept for a minimum of three (3) years. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from transcriptions and all of the information you provide will be kept confidential. However, if we learn you intend to harm yourself or others, we must notify the authorities.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. Please contact Oksana Rzhiskiy via email at orzhiskiy@seattleu.edu or phone at (253) 334-3045.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any concerns about my participation in this study, I may call Oksana Rzhiskiy, who is asking me to participate, at (253) 334-3045**.** If I have any concerns that my rights are being violated, I may contact Dr. Michael Spinetta, Chair of the Seattle University Institutional Review Board at (206) 296-2585.



Investigator's Signature

08/23/2023

Date

Appendix D

Interview Questions for Participants

Being Latina

1. What does being Latina mean to you? Are there certain cultural values, traditions, or practices relevant to being Latina that you hold dear? What are they? Why are they important to you?
2. Where were you born, and how (if at all) does that influence your sense of self and identity?
3. Does being Latina influence how you view yourself as a teacher and/or how you view your role as an educator in your school? In what ways? Explain.
4. Do you think Latina teachers bring qualities or perspectives to education that are distinct from what teachers of other cultural backgrounds bring? If so, what are these qualities/perspectives and how do they play out in the school setting? Explain.
5. As a Latina teacher, what strengths do you bring to your workplace?

Latina Teacher in a Predominately White Staff School

6. What at your school enables you to thrive as a Latina teacher? Explain.
7. What at your school feels like a barrier to thriving as a Latina teacher? Explain.
8. Have you ever felt pressure to “downplay” your Latina “self” or Latina identity at school? If so, what happened? Describe the situation. What types of emotions surfaced for you?
9. In what ways do you experience a sense of belonging at your school? Explain.

Latina Teacher and School Leadership

10. Do you feel that school leaders empower you to make a positive difference in your job as a Latina teacher? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
11. Do you feel support from colleagues/peers? If so, in what ways? If not, why not? Explain.
12. As a Latina teacher, have you had opportunities to work with a mentor for support and/or growth? Was this helpful? In what ways? What did you most appreciate? Was there anything not helpful about the mentoring experience? Explain.
13. In what ways can school leaders create opportunities for your Latina identity to be recognized, respected, and valued in the workplace?
14. What do you think school leaders could or should do to attract, recruit, and retain Latina teachers?
15. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience as a Latina teacher at your school and/or in your school district?

Demographic Questions

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher at your current school?
2. How many years have you worked as a teacher in this school district?
3. How many total years have you worked as a teacher?

This is the end of the interview. Thank you for sharing your insights and experiences with me. Your input is highly valuable and I appreciate your time and effort.