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Para Eso Estudiastes:

How Latina Executives Navigate

Higher Education Institutions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Vanessa Militza Tejada

2021

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Para Eso Estudiastes:

How Latina Executives Navigate

Higher Education Institutions

by

Vanessa Militza Tejada

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Diane Durkin, Co-Chair

Professor Kimberley Gomez, Co-Chair

This study investigated the navigational and strategic skills of Latina executives and how they say they acquired those skills to obtain their positions at the University of California (UC) institutions. While studies on Latinos/as in higher education describe their lack of representation, these studies do not specifically focus on Latina women in senior positions. This study aimed to respond to the absence of research in this area. The nine participants were comprised with a job title of Associate or Assistant Vice Chancellor. My research design consisted of in-depth 1-1 interviews which were semi- structured and utilized

narrative inquiry that was necessary for the participants to narrate their experience. The analytic framework was guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and the Leadership Labyrinth, all contributing to framing the experiences of these Latina women as they navigated higher education institutions. Findings indicated that: (1) the strategic decisions that contributed to Latina executives' career are ones that they themselves sought. Latina executive women considered themselves to be leaders, making the journey their own, and expanding their professional portfolio in advancing to senior positions. Such a picture emerging from their stories indicates that opportunities to become a leader are not given. (2) Latina executives feel like they just represent an "image" check mark to the university. These Latina executives felt that they were token hires and faced barriers, such as being pigeon-holed into diversity work, in their workplace because of their culture. (3) Higher education institutions need to be mindful of what message they are sending to candidates. My study found that the entire hiring process in higher education institutions are set up in a way that serves as a disadvantage to Latinas and people of color from the beginning such as in the access of recruitment material to the final interview. Higher education institutions need to do a better job at selecting who sits on their search committees, advertise to a diverse population and reevaluate their strict position requirements that might instantly disqualify a diverse candidate with a nontraditional path. Implications for practice are discussed, including suggestions for aspiring Latina executives, current Latina executives, higher education institutions and their leadership teams.

The dissertation of Vanessa Militza Tejada is approved.

Megan Franke

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University of California, Los Angeles

2021

DEDICATION PAGE

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Ruperto Tejada. The last conversation we had was him encouraging me to pursue my doctorate. His spirit is the wind beneath my wings. I did it dad. I hope I made you proud and I miss you every day.

To my mother, Maria Elena Navarrete, who is my inspiration and has given everything to make sure her daughters have a chance at a better life. I owe who I am to her sacrifices and I am forever grateful.

To my sisters, Gabriela and Jacqueline, who are my biggest cheerleaders. They keep me humble, remind me that life is short and motivate me to continue doing better. They have helped me in more ways than they know.

Most importantly, I dedicate and share this degree with my life partner, Jaime Acosta Jr. who supported me every step of the way. Your patience with me within these last three years cannot go unrecognized. Thank you for your unwavering support, love, and for looking after our furbaby Canela. This doctorate is for us. Can't wait to see what our future holds.

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I would also like to acknowledge and thank my study participants. I am grateful for your time, insights, and willingness to help others. Your stories of perseverance and success, the roadblocks you faced, your courage and advice you shared have inspired me and I know it will inspire other women who seek to learn how to navigate their educational institutions and advance in their careers.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Dr. Felicia Hunt for her continuous encouragement, support, time and flexibility. I always believe what matters the most in the workplace is the people you work with and I could not have asked for a better supervisor during this time. Thank you.

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Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my Latinxs del Barrio friend group who since my undergraduate studies have been like a second family full of support, love, sarcasm and playful banter that is needed to remain positive in life. Thank you for always being so supportive and being part of my extended family.

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CHAPTER 1

Summary of the Problem

This study investigated navigational and strategic skills of Latina executives and how they say they acquired those skills to obtain their positions at the University of California (UC) institutions. While the Latino population continues to grow in California, UC leadership positions do not reflect the population they serve. Women in California make up about 50.3% of the population (Census, 2018). However, data in 2016 show that only 8% of college and university presidents in the United States at doctorate granting universities were women and only 5% were minority women (Johnson, 2017). The California Department of Education defines Hispanic or Latino as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (CDE, 2020). For the purpose of this study, the California Department of Education definition of Latina will be applied. Understanding how Latina executives acquired their skills can help ameliorate the leadership pathway for future generations.

Census data show that Latinos in California make up 39.3% of the population (Census, 2018). In 2016, 17% of all college and university presidents in the United States were minorities. However, only 4% were Hispanic/Latino and, as noted above, minority women only made up 5% of college and university presidencies (Johnson, 2017). Men outnumbered women in obtaining positions as presidents with 78% being male and 22% female (Johnson, 2017).

Despite these numbers, the UC campuses have stated that it is “dedicated to building a more diverse workforce, particularly including those from underrepresented racial and

ethnic populations in the U.S.” (UC Accountability Report, 2019, p.6.1). Currently, there is low representation of Latinos in executive positions at all UC campuses. As of fall 2003, only one of the ten UC campuses had a Latino chancellor, and just three Latinos had served as presidents at the 23 campus California State University (CSU) (Leon and Nevarez, 2007). The UC Accountability Report of 2019 reports that there is less than 15% of Latinos in their senior management group.

As the pathway appears full of obstacles, this study sought to learn how Latinas in executive positions (with a title of Associate or Assistant Vice Chancellor) at the University of California institutions say they navigated their way to the position that they currently hold and what beliefs and actions propelled them into their position.

Background to the Problem

Not just Latinas but women in every industry across the nation are underrepresented in leadership positions. It is telling that no major political party put forth a woman as their nominee for president, the nation’s top leadership position, until 2016. She lost. The problem is mirrored across the country where in 2016, even though 50.8% of the U.S. population was women, women only held about 20% of the seats in the United States Congress (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017). Five years later, history is made as the first female Vice President is sworn into office, also becoming the first Black Vice President and the first person of Indian descent to hold the office (Camera, 2021). She may be the first, and hopefully not the last.

Women in Business

In 2017, just 6.4% of the Fortune 500 companies had female CEOs, which was actually an increase from 5% in previous years (McGregor, 2017). Women in 2017 made up

almost half of the employees in S&P 500 companies with 44.3% but lacked representation in leadership positions. Further, women held only 36.4 % of first-to middle-level management positions, 25.1% of senior-level executive positions, and 19.9% of the corporate board seats (Warner, et al., 2018). As of January 2019, the women in CEO positions at S&P 500 companies has fallen to 5.4% (Catalyst, 2019).

In California, UC Davis Graduate School of Management conducted a study that showed that women held just 12.3% of board seats and highest paid executive positions (UC Davis, 2017). The study also showed that the percentage of women directors in corporate boardrooms in California in 2015 was a high of 13.3%, while the number of female CEOs was at 17, which count as only 4.3% of 400 companies (UC Davis, 2017).

Women in California

Recognizing the dearth of leadership positions filled by women, California has taken steps to diversify some of its leadership divisions. In October of 2018, California enacted a new law mandating female representation on public company boards. Senate Bill No. 826 mandated that by the end of the 2019 calendar year, “a domestic general corporation or foreign corporation that is a publicly held corporation...have a minimum of one female, as defined, on its board of directors, as specified. No later than the close of the 2021 calendar year, the bill would increase that required minimum number to 2 female directors if the corporation has 5 directors or to 3 female directors if the corporation has 6 or more directors” (LegInfo, 2018, p. 94). Data show that from 2014 to 2016, nearly one-half of the 75 largest IPOs went public with no women on boards (Smith, 2018). In California specifically, the legislation states that “26% of the Russell 3000 companies based in California have no women serving on their boards” (Smith, 2018, p.1). While the law mandates companies hire

women in leadership roles, few companies have determined how to elevate women to these roles.

Women in Higher Education

Legislation such as SB 826 lends opportunities for educational institutions to increase opportunities for women in leadership positions; however, women are still underrepresented. In the higher education industry, in 2016, women made up 30.1% of all college presidents, with 3.9% identifying as Hispanic (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2017). For the academic year of 2018-2019, the background of new Chief Executives at colleges shows that women still are not equally represented as top administrators. Out of the newly appointed college presidents, 37.3% were female, while 62.3% were male (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2019). Even when women do have the title and the experience, they are still questioned about their credentials and minimized in their accomplishments. In 2020, Dr. Jill Biden, Madam First Lady, was called a kiddo, and asked to drop the “Dr.” before her name as her doctorate in Education came into question by a Wall Street Journal article (Epstein, 2020). Although there was a big outcry in support of Dr. Biden, the article sets the tone for what many women go through in academia and how they need to continuously show their worth.

Latinas in Higher Education, Specifically UC

The Universities of California (UC campuses) are also taking steps to diversify their leadership team. As the UC campuses’ core mission is to serve the interests of the State of California, it must also seek to achieve diversity among its student bodies and among its employees (UC, 2019). As of Fall 2020, there were a total of 285,862 students enrolled in all ten UC campuses combined. Females made up 53%, while males made up 46% of the

student population. Further, 27% of the students identified as underrepresented minorities and 40% as first-generation (UC, 2021). As of March 2021, 22% of undergraduate students identified as Latino/as (At a Glance, 2021). For employees, the UC Accountability Report of 2020 reported that 6.6% of Senior Management identified as Hispanic/Latinos (UCOP, 2021). In addition, female employees trailed behind males. Males made up 61.8% while females made up 38.2% (UCOP, 2021).

Despite taking steps to diversify, the student population, like the leadership, does not represent the state's current population. For the academic year of 2011-2012, the biggest ethnicity of students in California in K-12 was considered Hispanic/Latino with about 52% compared to white at about 26% (California Department of Education, 2012). The UC campuses need to continue to find ways they can support women to gain leadership positions within their institutions to better serve this population.

Clarifying the Problem

According to the National Center for Education Statistics within the Department of Education (NCES, 2019), women earned 58% of bachelor's degrees, 61% of master's degrees, and 53% of doctoral degrees. Yet, even with women graduating with advanced degrees, the percentage of college and university leadership positions held by women in the United States remains low with only 30% of women leading higher institutions in 2016 (Moody, 2018). These educational institution statistics mirror women in leadership in other fields such as Congress or the Fortune 500 companies as mentioned above. Research has shown that executive women still are most highly concentrated at community colleges and least likely to head research universities (King and Gomez, 2008). Data indicated as the prestige of the institution increases, women fall significantly behind (Huang, 2012).

Although the percentage of women presidents has slowly increased over the last two decades, from 19% in 1998 to 30% in 2016 (Nugent, 2019), the most recent American College President Study (2017) from the American Council on Education found that the majority of the 30% lead institutions with the fewest resources and the least national recognition. The study further found that women were most underrepresented among doctorate-granting institutions and were more likely to lead public institutions than private.

The low share of women in senior academic roles is troubling, because those positions form the primary pathways to presidency. According to *The American College President: 2017 Edition*, only 14% of presidents came directly from a position outside academe. 24% came to their current presidency immediately after leading another institution, and 1% moved directly to the presidency from a faculty or department chair position. The remaining 61% of presidents came from other senior administrative positions within higher education (Johnson, 2017). Overall, in higher education, the last White House Project Report on Women Leadership (2009) stated that women accounted for less than 30% of the members on college and university boards.

Existing Gaps

While studies on Latinos/as in higher education show their lack of representation, these studies do not specifically focus on Latina women in senior positions. In addition, while a few studies on Latinos and Latinas in higher education have been conducted, they have been regional or state specific rather than national (Gorena, 1996, p.1).

Studies have shown that women have to navigate around a variety of biases at work, but rarely is the focus of these studies specifically on Latina women in senior positions.

Obstacles include, but not are not limited to, gender discrimination, ethnicity barriers, familial responsibilities/expectations, and lack of networking and mentorship opportunities.

One of the work biases that Latinas must navigate is gender discrimination. Discriminating a person by their sex is illegal to do in the workplace; however, that does not stop it from happening. A 2017 Pew Research survey found that about four in ten working women (42%) in the United States say they have faced discrimination on the job based on their gender (Parker & Funk, 2017). In addition, LeanIn conducted their Women in the Workplace study, which is the largest comprehensive study of the state of women in corporate America. The study found that one in four women believe that they missed out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead because of their gender. A few more women believe that it will be harder going forward because of their gender (McKinsey & Company, 2019).

In addition to gender discrimination, Latina's face ethnicity barriers. A new study published by the Center for Talent Innovation in 2016 found that more than three out of four Latinos (76%) intentionally spend time stifling parts of their personalities at work. Latinos tend to change their appearance, body language, communication style, and leadership presence. The study also found that an even higher percentage (53% of Latinas and 44% of Latino men) agree that executive or leadership presence at their companies is defined as conforming to traditionally white male standards (Marte, 2016). Furthermore, more than half of Latino professionals (59%) experience slights and snubs in the workplace. Of the 59%, 24% say that others are given (or have taken) credit for their contributions, 22% say that colleagues tell them jokes that make fun of certain ethnic or religious backgrounds, and 18% say they are excluded from after-work "get-togethers" (Marte, 2016).

Beyond gender and ethnicity discrimination, Latina's struggle to choose between having a career or a family. A study done in 2014 shows that each child a woman has cuts 4% off her hourly wages; in contrast, men's earnings increase by 6% when they become fathers, after controlling for experience, education, marital status, and hours worked (Kitroeff & Silver-Greenberg, 2019). The Women in the Workplace study found that 20% of women who have taken a leave say it negatively impacted their career, compared to 10% of men (McKinsey & Company, 2019). Furthermore, another study on women in the workplace found that while only 2% of working women plan to leave the workforce for family reasons, 43% of highly qualified women opt out or off-ramp on their way back to work post-baby (Ferrante, 2018).

A fourth bias Latinas face is the lack of effective networks and mentors. The Women in the Workplace study found that only 32% of women indicated they had a sponsor (McKinsey & Company, 2019). Similar to mentorship in providing honest coaching and feedback, sponsorship takes it a step further by also creating career opportunities (Williams, 2021). Of that 32%, 30% of Latina women felt they had equal access to sponsorship compared to 32% for white women. In terms of management providing opportunities to showcase work, only 38% of Latinas felt they had that opportunity vs. 41% of white women (McKinsey & Company, 2019).

The Project

This study examined how Latinas in executive positions at the University of California institutions navigated their way to the position that they currently hold and what they did, distinctively, that they believe propelled them into their position. The study will not compare the experiences of women to men's, nor compare Latinas to other woman in other

racial/ethnic groups. Rather it aims to find common themes among women who identify as Latinas in executive positions to provide guidance for future Latina leaders. This work specifically focuses on Latinas who identify as from Mexico, Central America and South America.

Research Questions

This study investigated navigational and strategic skills of Latina executives and how they say they acquired those skills to obtain their positions at the University of California (UC) institutions. The following research questions guided this study in exploring in detail the obstacles, decisions, and chosen strategies leading to the success of Latina executives, and what they say would have made their journey in obtaining their position smoother.

1. What decisions did Latina executives make that they perceive as having contributed to their advancement to senior positions in the UC system?
2. What impact, if at all, do Latina executives perceive their cultural backgrounds had on their leadership journey?
3. What strategies do Latina executives recommend that institutions use to recruit and retain future Latina executives?

Research Design

This project used a qualitative design as the study sought to explore and understand the journey of Latinas in senior positions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For a qualitative design, “the process of research will involve emerging questions and procedures...data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4). This study employed a semi-structured interview protocol allowing additional related questions and

issues to be probed and discussed as needed, building, on participants' responses. Furthermore, the data were sorted into major coding categories based on the research questions as I interpreted the meaning of the data. As Maxwell (2013) explains, qualitative researchers try to "understand the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions" (p. 30). This study focused on a small number of Latinas and their experiences in navigating their way to a senior position. The research focused on the process by which events and actions take place (Maxwell, 2013). No other design other than qualitative captures the depth, meaning, and perspective of the narrative that my study was aiming for.

Data Collection Method

Data collection was conducted through two in-depth interviews for each of the nine participants, since the one-on-one setting enabled the researcher to gain rapport, ensure confidentiality and extend empathy (Guest et al., 2013). Qualitative interviews generate various perspectives on the research questions related to the strategic and navigational skill of Latina executives in higher education. Qualitative interviews unveil a social phenomenon, as respondents can reflect and reason on a variety of subjects in a different way (Folkestad, 2008). Unlike other qualitative data collection methods, they allow for questions about polarizing, sensitive, confidential or highly personal topics (Guest et al., 2013).

Interviews were my primary data source. My design of inquiry was narrative research because I asked participants to share their journey in their workplaces (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) established the educational importance of narrative inquiry as a research methodology, defining narrative inquiry as "the study of the ways

humans experiences the world” (p.2). Narrative inquiry researchers “describe the lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p.2).

I used Critical Race Theory to identify and analyze how different cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by Latinas in executive positions may be beneficial even though they usually go unrecognized or unacknowledged in society. I used the Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) lens to articulate the unique experience of having a Latin background in an executive position in higher education institutions. A LatCrit theoretical framework in this study considered the intersectionality of race and other issues such as ethnicity, and culture that Latina executives navigate in their professional journey. Lastly, the Leadership Labyrinth conceptual framework was used to describe from a woman’s perspective the personal and professional journeys that Latinas endure in all position levels to have reached their current executive position.

A theme counted as something that captures the key idea about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clark, 2006). A theme attains full significance when instances are linked to form a coordinated picture or an exploratory model (Bazeley, 2009, p.9). The formula that was used to examine themes was Bazeley’s (2009) “Describe-Compare-Relate” which allowed me to relate categories and in turn structure my data (p. 10). In recording the results of my analysis, I first *described* the necessary background to provide a basis for comparative analysis and then *compared* meaningful associations. Lastly, I *related* the themes to others already written about (Bazeley, 2009). Although the participant received no direct benefit from participating in the study, they were aware that the findings will have impact in the leadership journey of future Latina leaders.

Significance

As the population of Latinos grows in the United States, it is important that the population is represented in all levels of power, including executive positions. Given the low number of Latinas in executive positions in all fields, it is critical to understand how Latina women who are at the senior levels of administration managed to succeed. The research from this study serves as a guiding point to the next generation of Latina women who aspire to be in executive positions in higher education institutions. This study and findings are limited to higher education. However, as noted above, women are not reaching senior-level positions across many fields. Findings from this study will be able to inform the research on women executives in other fields and roles.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Latinas are underrepresented in senior-level positions in higher education institutions. This literature review supports an investigation into how Latinas in senior-level positions navigated their way through the University of California system to obtain their position. The current statistics on Latina leadership does not represent the present-day or projected population of Latinas in the United States which is slated to grow. Such data are important because a cultural match between educational leaders and students improves student outcomes. Given major projected population numbers, increasing Latina leadership is critical if we want to better represent the future population of the U.S. To do so, we must first understand the journeys of those who have already achieved leadership status and have them share their experience for others to follow.

This literature review begins with an overview of the experience of women in college presidency positions, followed by the underrepresentation of Latinas in senior-level positions

in higher education institutions. This overview includes analysis of research on the lack of a Latina leadership pipeline. To provide context for this underrepresentation, I then examine the history of leadership in higher education and how it was not built with minority people in mind. The review next explains why stories of Latinas in senior-level positions matter. The final section of the literature review looks into how Latinas are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how Latinas in power represent themselves. It discusses critical race theory and the leadership labyrinth as the theoretical framework, followed by a summary that identifies gaps in the literature.

Women and the College Presidency

The percentage of women in leadership positions within higher education is slowly increasing but has yet to reach equality to men. As mentioned above, only 30% of all college presidents in the United States are women. However, that percentage is inflated because most women presidents lead two-year institutions, where female leadership makes up 36% (Gardner, 2019). A study done by Insider Higher Education found that women are better represented in senior-level positions than in presidency positions but still make up fewer than half the chief academic officers and even a lower proportion of deans in higher education institutions (Jaschik, 2017). Although the study found that women tend to have leadership styles that are subtly different than men, many attribute the lack of women presidents to the culture of the institutions and the fit between the values and approach of the individual with the institution (Gardner, 2019).

At the California State University system, 12 of the 23 presidents are women compared to only 3 in 2012 (Gardner, 2019). Having women in positions of power on campus cannot only change the tone, but also the conversations. According to the state

university system Chancellor, Timothy P. White, the female majority among the presidents bring to the table “more understanding, more compassion, more willingness to look at a series of solutions rather than one size fits all” (Gardner, 2019).

Although women have shown to be leaders, search committees representing institutions have suggested that candidate pools are not diverse in gender or in race (Stewart & Valian, 2018). However, data from Isaacson Miller, an executive search firm that works with higher education institutions, show that women are increasingly prevalent in candidate pools. Women make up about 15% of candidates in presidential searches the firm handled in 2008; while in 2018 it was 26% (IMSearch, 2019). Furthermore, a study done by Harvard Business Review found that if there is only one woman in a candidate pool, there is statistically no chance she will be hired (Johnson et al., 2016). Johnson et al. (2016) state that there is a bias in preserving the status quo and because 94% of CEOs are white men which can lead to board members unconsciously continuing to hire more white men for leadership roles. However, when there are two or more women in the pool of finalists, the statistics change (Johnson, et al., 2016). Until the candidate pools get to be 50/50, there will always be some implicit bias at work (Gardner, 2019). As more work is done to continue to increase women in leadership positions at higher education institutions, it is important that the diversity within the women also increases. The percentage of women compared to men is uneven, however, the percentage of minority women in leadership positions at higher education institutions is even lower.

Underrepresentation of Latinas in Senior-Level Positions in Higher Education

While the Latina/o population and college-going rate continues to grow, women remain grossly underrepresented in senior-level positions. Latinos in the United States are the

majority minority. The U.S. Census projects that by the year 2060, the population of Latinos will continue to increase to an estimated 111.2 million, making it 28% of the population in the United States. Currently, Latinos make up 19% of the U.S. population (Census, 2018). In California alone, it is expected that Latinos will make up 43% of the population by 2030, and increase to 49% by 2060 (Latino Caucus, 2017). The growth of the Latina population in the United States is also estimated to grow. One in five women in the U.S. is a Latina and one in four female students in public schools across the nation is a Latina. It is probable that by 2060, Latinas will form nearly a third of the female population in the U.S. (Gandara, 2015).

Even with the population of Latinas growing, the pipeline myth posits that there are too few degree holding women qualified for leadership positions. On the contrary, data show that there are more than enough qualified women to fill available leadership positions. In fact, the pipeline is preparing women at a greater rate than it does men (Johnson, 2017). Between 2003 and 2013, Latinas raised their high school graduation rate by more than 14% (Gandara, 2015). In addition, female students have earned half or more of all baccalaureate degrees for the past three decades and of all doctoral degrees for almost a decade (Johnson, 2017).

The rate of college-going Latinos overall has been increasing and continues to increase each year. Research shows that even though overall college enrollment decreased 6% from 2010-2016, the population of Latinos enrolling in college those same years increased by 25% (EdExcelencia, 2018). Minorities make up a larger share of postsecondary students than ever before. Between 1996 and 2016, the non-white share of undergraduates grew from 29.6% to 45.2%, while the non-white share of graduate students grew from 20.8%

to 32% (Espinosa et al., 2018). Latinos' degree attainment has grown significantly while overall degree attainment has increased more slowly over the past 6 years.

Despite their increased degree attainment, more Latinos need to obtain a higher education. The number of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) has been increasing within the last few years (Amour, 2020). HSIs are defined in federal law as accredited and degree-granting public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with 25% or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Within 2007-2017, the number of HSIs grew from 264 to 523 (98% nationally (EdExcelencia, 2019). Although the requirement for an institution is to have at least 25% of their student population be Hispanic to be considered HSI, many of them have a larger population of Latino students. Almost half of students enrolled at HSIs (46%) were Latino (EdExcelencia, 2019) however, the ethnic makeup of Latino populations at the institutions varies tremendously by region.

Although Latinos in the United States continue to rise both in population and attainment of education, they remain underrepresented in many leadership areas. In education leadership, Latinos comprise only 8% of teachers, 4% of board members, and 2% of senior education leaders (Fernandez, 2018). In fall 2003, fewer than 6% of those in administrative positions were Latina/o in 2-year public colleges and the Latina/o representation lessens when examining 4-year public institutions. In 2003, fewer than 4% of administrators were Latina/os (U.S. Department of Education, 2005 in Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013).

Furthermore, a 2013 study revealed that not once has a CSU or UC campus maintained an equal distribution of Latina/o representation among incoming students, tenured faculty and senior level administrative. In addition, the study shows that the state's flagship universities,

namely UC Berkeley and UCLA, have largely underrepresented Latino/a student, faculty and administrative populations in comparison to their local population (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). Data highlight that the pipeline myth is indeed false, suggesting some other phenomenon must be occurring that explains the underrepresentation of postsecondary Latina leaders (Johnson, 2017). The pipeline myth is the idea that there are too few women qualified for leadership positions when in reality, there are more than enough qualified women to fill available leadership positions and the pipeline is preparing women at a greater rate than it does men (Johnson, 2017).

In terms of women's leadership, the American Council on Education found that the representation of women in college presidency has nearly tripled since 1986. However, women remain underrepresented as of 2016. About one-third of college and university presidents in 2016 were women, and only 5% of all presidents were minority woman (Grey, 2017). In community college alone, only 26 or 2% of college presidents were Latina in 2006 and the majority of those were in Hispanic populated colleges (Muñoz, 2009). Women comprise the majority of students in community colleges, and while Latino enrollment is growing, the representation of Latinas in higher education presidencies is woefully small (Muñoz, 2009).

Overcoming Barriers to Leadership

The lack of representation of women in leadership positions does not only pertain to higher education. Women in all fields encounter a variety of barriers that keep the representation low. Forbes reported that women CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies are at 5.4% as of 2018 (Forbes, 2018). In the law profession, although more women are attending law school, men still lead in obtaining leadership positions in private practice. Men made up

67% of attorneys in the private sector, while 21% of them are women. Furthermore, 12% of those women were considered in high leadership roles (Zaretsky, 2018). In the medical field, while women have made up at least 40% of U.S. medical students, women account for 34% of physicians, 18% of hospital CEOs and 16% of all deans and department chairs (Manguarian et al., 2018). Despite high levels of education, women remain grossly underrepresented as leaders in nearly every industry.

Even with the increase of women in the workforce, the most significant key barriers precluding women from obtaining leadership positions are a lack of women representation in leadership, caregiving responsibilities, outdated corporate culture, and unconscious bias and discrimination (Foster et al., 2018). With the lack of women representation in leadership positions, women leaders often lack networking supports (Foster et al., 2018). Men still surpass women in having networks to learn about opportunities, find mentors, and sponsors to advocate their advancement (Hill et al., 2016). In corporate America, the executive-level positions are made up of 77% men and 22% women, with minority woman comprising only 4% (Foster, Klein, & Gee, 2018). Minority women are further impacted negatively at disproportionate levels at every step in the career ladder (Foster et al., 2018). According to an early report by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (2000), the benefit of forming networks within their own culture “enhances learning, combats feelings of isolation, and creates a place for sharing feelings about cultural dissonance” (as cited in Horwedel, 2007, p.2). Research has shown that individuals who are “onlies” (e.g. the only woman, the only LGBTQ person, the only person of color, etc.) are subject to a higher percentage of bias and discrimination from members of the majority group, whether intentional or not (General Assembly, 2019). According to a report by Bentley University’s

Center for Women and Business (Walsh, 2018), “The lack of women in executive level positions is a self-perpetuating cycle. Young women do not see role models or potential paths towards executive-level leadership and are more likely to deselect themselves out of higher-level leadership roles” (p.5). In order to combat being one of the few, women in leadership tend to seek out a “sisterhood” which aims to garner support from other women and empower each other (Forbes, 2018).

A second common barrier is being able to balance their caregiving responsibilities. A common saying is that women cannot have it all. This saying refers to having both a thriving career and family life. Although many struggle with the transitions that growing a family involves, women leaders credit having a different perspective with their success. One woman in business leadership shares how instead of “work-life balance,” she views the combination as a “work-life blend” and integrates work in her personal life in a strategic and realistic matter (General Assembly, 2019, p.1).

A third barrier is the lack of funding available to female leaders. According to a Fortune article, in 2018, female entrepreneurs received 2.2% of venture capital funds (Hinchliffe, 2019). That is the same percentage that was reported by Forbes in 2017 (Zak, 2017). In terms of compensation, many women are also challenged to establish authority and give services away for free; they are often afraid of not charging enough or underpricing (Forbes, 2018). To deflect these barriers, women in leadership positions encourage other women to become involved in education and support networks dedicated to helping women become successful leaders in their field (General Assembly, 2019).

Within certain Latin cultures (Horwedel, 2007), cultural norms have traditionally encouraged women to marry and have children rather than seek careers. However, with the

increase of Latinas earning doctorate degrees, new professional opportunities are available to them (Horwedel, 2007). In addition, cultural traditions have changed, and the majority of young women have delayed having children in favor of advancing their careers (Stahl, 2020). Despite their educational advancements and these new opportunities, Latinas continue to be unrepresented in senior-level administration positions.

Cultural barriers further affect how Latinas advance themselves. In the Latino culture, women are raised to avoid verbal confrontation. Indeed, as Horwedel's (2007) research shows, the art of negotiating does not come naturally to Latinas. Horwedel notes, "once you get into higher-ed, it is who can talk the loudest, or convince the group that you should be given a leadership position, who comes out ahead" (p.2). Furthermore, a report from Bentley University's Center for Women and Business highlighted that Latinas stand out among all women as the least likely to negotiate pay and promotion (Walsh, 2020). In 2006, Harvard Business Review conducted a survey which revealed that 65% of senior corporate executives viewed introversion as a barrier to leadership (Featherstone, 2018). Additionally, an analysis of BBC data by Sutton Trust found that highly extroverted people were 25% more likely to land a top job (Featherstone, 2018). Research suggests that a woman who opts not to negotiate their starting salary will lose between \$650,000 and \$1 million over the course of a 45-year career (Janasz & Cabrera, 2018). Not only can negotiating increase your salary but negotiating generally can also lead to an advancement to your career. Hannah Bowles, a professor at Harvard Kennedy School, shares that the art of negotiation should broaden beyond just negotiating pay (Megias, 2020). Negotiating should include career advancement in terms of development opportunities, leadership opportunities, and advancing careers into high-authority positions that are also the highest paying (Megias, 2020). The cultural norms

and expectations of many families who self-identify as Latinas from countries as diverse as Mexico, Columbia, and Cuba communicate an expectation of young Latinas that they must have, and demonstrate, respect for authorities in their homes, schools, and workplaces which can hinder their careers making them unwilling to ask for help or deserved promotions (Gomez et al., 2017).

Furthermore, according to Muñoz (2008), stereotypical perceptions and unconscious bias have continued, and Latinas are held responsible to clarify boundaries and expectations as well as to educate others, including Latinos. The Latinas in Corporate America report found that 76% of Latinos repress part of their personas at work and 53% of Latinas say that their executive presence at their company conforms to traditional white, male standards (Gomez et al., 2017). Latinas, like other women of color, are often placed in a role that have diversity-related responsibilities (Perez-Litwin, 2012, p.1). As Latinas are confined to diversity-related positions, many find it difficult to climb the leadership ladder. Climbing that ladder takes knowledge of how to navigate the system. Unfortunately, a majority of professional Latinas are first-generation professionals and are the first in their families (and close social network) entering these “new spaces” (Perez-Litwin, 2012). According to Perez-Litwin (2012), “[Latinas] lack the knowledge and strategies necessary to navigate these spaces” (p.1). Furthermore, Latinas often have no one to turn to for career advice and professional development because of a lack of other influential Latina mentors (or other mentors, in general) in the workplace. With the lack of Latina representation in high-level positions, a study done by the Center for Talent Innovation reported that 47% of Latina women have reported being mistaken for administrative or custodial staff (Hewlett et al., 2017). Thus, it is important for women who are in leadership positions to share their

experiences and advice so that others following in their footsteps can be successful as well (Gomez et al., 2017).

Lack of Latina Leadership Pipeline in Higher Education

Despite well-qualified Latina candidates, senior-level positions woefully lack Latina participation. The table below reflects the minority representation within leadership of higher education institutions in the year 2008.

Table 1
Minority Representation in Higher Education Institutions

Job Titles	2008
college and university presidents	14%
executive, managerial, and administrative staff	19%
full-time faculty members	22%
part-time faculty members	25%
governing board members at public colleges and universities	22%
governing board members at independent colleges and universities	12%

(Betts, K., et al., 2009)

By 2016, the numbers had not changed much. Minorities still only held 16.8% of all presidencies, minority women held only 5.1% of all presidencies, while Latinos overall held 4.7% (Espinosa et al., 2018). In 2014, the Bureau of Labor reported that 83% of all the individuals employed across roles in the education sector were white, compared to the student population which stood at 50% white. At the leadership team, 74% of chief executives identified as white (Padamsee & Crowe, 2017). Although the number of people of color in higher education administration continues to increase, the number of minorities in executive positions remains almost the same. The table below reflects the representation of

racial/ethnic minorities and black/Hispanic women in leadership positions by professional area in 2020.

Table 2
2020 Professionals in Higher Education

Professional Area	Racial/Ethnic Minorities	Black or Hispanic Women
Academic Affairs	19%	9%
Athletics	11%	2%
External Affairs	13%	6%
Facilities	13%	3%
Fiscal Affairs	28%	17%
Information Technology	16%	3%
Institutional Affairs	25%	12%
Research & Health Science Professionals	11%	3%
Student Affairs	26%	14%

(Whitford, 2020)

The 2020 Administrators in Higher Education annual report conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources details very little change from previous years (Pritchard et al., 2020). The report found that women are better represented in lower-level, lower-paying administrative positions than in top executive positions. Furthermore, women are paid less than men in nearly all administrative positions and racial/ethnic minorities are better represented in lower-level administrative positions (Pritchard et al., 2020). As women representation in college administration is growing, they remain underrepresented at the top of the organizational chart and hold less than 40% of executive leadership roles (Whitford, 2020). Overall, higher education administration is 80% white with minorities only making up 13% of top executive officers (Whitford, 2020). Much of the literature on the experience of women of color in executive position focuses on the struggles to reach those positions but does not examine the decision-making process that went into their journeys (Smith, et al., 2018, Bloomberg, 2020, Kramer, 2020).

Higher education institutions are led mostly by white people, who hire white people (Krupnick, 2018). Within college and university administrators, chief student affairs and student life officers were the most diverse positions on campus. A study showed that a little more than one-quarter of individuals in these positions identified as a racial or ethnic group other than white (Espinosa et al., 2018). In recognition, higher education institutions are calling for change. The American College President report (2008) states, “the imperative of rapidly changing economic, demographic, and political conditions suggests the need for adaptability and diversity in educational institutions and their leaders” (p.58 in Betts, et.al., 2009). However, the history of higher education institutions showcase why it is so hard for change and why so little has happened since they were established.

Women’s Historical Role in Higher Education

The U.S. has a long history of excluding women and minorities from positions in education. Higher education institutions were not initially built for women. The first institution of higher education in the United States began with Harvard College which was founded in 1636 in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Rudolph, 1990), and did not allow women. Harvard College, now known as Harvard University, was part of the colonial colleges and allowed only men to attend, men who were “shaped by aristocratic traditions and [who] served the aristocratic elements of colonial society” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 18). The first institution for women was not established until 1742 (Lewis, 2019). Bethlehem Female Seminary, established in Germantown, Pennsylvania, became the first institute of higher education for women in the United States. Not until 1863, did Pennsylvania officially recognize the institution as a college, and it allowed the seminary to issue bachelor’s degrees (Lewis, 2019).

Women experienced increased access to higher education institutions in the late 1800s. Yale and Princeton, in 1969, were the first Ivy Leagues to begin to admit women. However, the decision to admit women was not based on the moral stance to educate women, but more out of self-interest. Coeducation meant that the schools would be able to matriculate “a first-rate student body” and to “improve the experiences of men” (Malkiel, 2019). Women who attended higher education institutions in the early years showed a lot of perseverance in the face of opposition to coeducation. In addition, just because coeducation did occur, it did not mean that the complex problems between the genders such as sexual harassment and assault were resolved. As Nancy Malkiel, in her ‘Keep the Damned Women Out’: The Struggle for Coeducation (2019) states, “educating men and women together does not mean that their experiences have become identical” (p. 7). Women continue to deal with challenging personal and social issues related to their gender (Malkiel, 2019).

Another reason for low higher education enrollment of Latinas is their status of often belonging to the lowest socioeconomic class. Latinos experience higher rates of unemployment than the population as a whole. The median household income is about three-quarters that of whites (Maloney, 2019). Furthermore, Latinas earn only 54 cents for every dollar earned by white men. The median net worth of Latino households in 2016 was only one-eighth of the net worth of white households and Latinos are 1.7 times more likely than whites to live in poverty (Maloney, 2019).

Studies also show that money also plays a big role in which college and level of degree program a student enrolls in. A report by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that students from the lowest economic quintile who attended college were more than 42% likely to first pursue an

associate degree than a bachelor's degree. Their peers from the wealthiest quintile, however, were 78% much more likely to first seek a four-year degree at than a two-year degree (Fain, 2019). Furthermore, 37% of higher-income students enroll at a highly selective college or university compared to 7% of lower income students (Fain, 2019). Studies have shown that college completion rates are correlated with socioeconomic status. The Pell Institute report (2018) estimated that students from families in the highest-income quartile are 58% more likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree by age 24 than students in the lowest-income quartile at 11% (The Pell Institute, 2018).

Even with low-socioeconomic status being a barrier in obtaining an education, there is an expected increase in the participation rate and labor of Latinas in the United States. It is projected that by 2024, nearly 14 million Latinas will be in the labor force, and in the following years, the Latino community will become a larger portion of the labor force and population for the United States (Heinrich, 2018). This makes the obtainment of higher education for Latinas of outmost importance as they will be a big influence in the future of the nation.

Benefits of Latinas in Senior-Level Positions

As the numbers of Latinas continue to increase in the labor force, workplaces will need to adapt to having a diverse staff population. Organizations with greater leadership diversity are associated with significantly higher levels of focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion in their recruiting practices. They are at least 5% more likely to enable job candidates to meet with people from their identity groups and to yield a diverse group of new hires (Padamsee, & Crowe, 2017). In higher education institutions, research shows that students encounter minorities more in service roles than in faculty or leadership positions

(AAC&U News, 2019). In fact, minorities represent less than 20% of senior executives, 42.2% of service and maintenance staff, and 33% of campus safety personnel (Espinosa et al., 2018).

When in senior-level positions, Latinas have an impact on the students of color in their institutions, facilitate their career aspiration, and prepare all students to live in a diverse society and share a range of scholarly work (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). A recent study found that students feel safer in schools and in life when they are educated in a diverse setting (Queens University, n.d.). Having representation of their culture in leadership positions has an impact on students' advancement in education and the Latina/o community (Avila, 2018). As faculty, Latinas also have a big impact on students and their success. As Ponjuan (2011) notes, Latino faculty engage students in a way that improves Latino student retention, and degree completion rates. Furthermore, research has shown that having Latino faculty directly impacts student learning outcomes. Although little research targets Latina administrators in senior-level positions specifically, significant research demonstrates how administrators of color help increase students' success, sense of belonging, and graduation rates.

Data have shown that when students have faculty members of color as role models, students of color in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) are likely to persist toward degree completion (Ponjuan, 2011). A study noted that students perform better on tests when a faculty member of color is present. Their presence mitigates feelings of self-doubt, lack of belongingness, and stereotype threat (Marx & Goff, 2005). Furthermore, diversifying faculty and staff at institutions helps create a more cultural and inclusive environment and brings in different perspective and experience that increases success rates for students of color (Banks

& Dohy, 2019). One study by the Higher Education Research Institute (2013) notes that there is a positive relationship between faculty diversity and the extent of which students report academic validation (Hurtado & Alvarado, 2013.). Experts on diversity argue that minority leadership sets positive examples for minority students (Stout et al., 2018). Students do realize the value of having faculty of color on campus. Analysis of the demands of student organizations across 76 higher education institutions and coalitions show that 86% of students demand for the increase in the proportion of minority students, faculty, staff, and administration on their campus (Chessman & Wayt, 2016).

Although students are asking for diversity in the leadership of administration in higher education institutions and Latinas in leadership positions bring much to the table, they are not well represented in higher education institutions or in the broader view of leaders. In 2019, Forbes released their annual list of the World's 100 Most Powerful Women. Out of 100 women, not one Latina from the United States was listed. Thus, Latinas who do have positional leadership need to share their decisions, strategies, and lessons learned, in order to continue to increase the diversity in leadership positions not only in education, but in all fields of work. This study will investigate the navigational and strategic skills of Latinas in executive positions and share their journeys by recording their voices.

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Race Theory

To tell these stories, I will be looking through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is a framework that can be used to “theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses” (Yosso, 2006, p. 70). Merriam (2002) describes CRT as the lens to “investigate how the social and

political aspects of the situation shape reality” (p.4). This study will use CRT to identify and analyze how different cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by Latinas in executive positions may be beneficial even though they usually go unrecognized or unacknowledged in society. CRT draws from multiple disciplines to challenge dominant ideologies embedded in educational theory and practice, ideologies that shape the way researchers understand the educational experiences, conditions, and outcomes of people of color (Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Yosso, 2006). CRT assumes that communities of color must adapt to that knowledge in order to be successful. Yosso argues that communities of color bring their own wealth of knowledge in terms of their culture which can nurture and empower them. Yosso defines culture as “behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people” (Yosso, 2006, p. 75).

Multiple frameworks have stemmed from CRT. One in particular, most applicable to this study, is LatCrit. LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the experiences of Latinas/os specifically (Huber, 2010). LatCrit evolved as a challenge to the black-white binary that often guides racial discourse, providing a more focused lens for researchers to examine the experiences of Latina/o communities (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). LatCrit extends the efforts of CRT and acknowledges issues specific to the ways Latinas/os are confronted with subordination due to immigration status, language, culture, ethnicity, and phenotype (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). LatCrit aims at focusing on the multiple issues impacting the Latino population specifically. LatCrit will be used to identify the cultural knowledge that Latinas in executive positions in higher education institutions used to successfully navigate obstacles through the leadership pipeline. The study will also look to

identify opportunities that positively impact Latinas in leadership attainment within higher education institutions.

The Leadership Labyrinth

Latinas not only navigate through the leadership pipeline through a cultural lens but also a gender lens. The second lens I will be looking through is a conceptual framework of the Leadership Labyrinth from the work of L.L. Carli and A.H. Eagly (2007). In their book, *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth about How Women Become Leaders*, the writers examine why the path to executive leadership positions is difficult to navigate. Leadership labyrinth presents the notion that the invisible barriers such as the glass ceiling in which women are allowed to a certain point and no further, or the concrete wall where women are not allowed, are no longer useful metaphors. They no longer represent the reason why there is a lack of women in senior positions (Haber, 2009). Rather, the labyrinth is an alternative metaphor which represents the journeys women endure. These journeys present challenges in all position levels to reach executive positions (Dubin, 2019). In discussing the Leadership Labyrinth, McDonagh and Paris (2012) vivify the journey: “this challenging maze lacks a map or directions, so many women feel left to fend for themselves on this pathway or opt to abandon their pursuit of executive-level leadership position” (p. 24). Confronted with continuous challenges, women must work extra hard to persist to success (Greguletz et al., 2019). The Leadership Labyrinth focuses on a women’s journey from beginning to end (Carli & Eagly, 2016). The Leadership Labyrinth conceptual framework will be used to describe from a woman’s perspective the personal and professional journeys that Latinas endured in all position levels to have reached their current executive position.

The Importance of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is used as a methodology for inquiring into experience and allowing for an intimate study of an individual's experience over time and context (Clandinin et al., 2016). Narrative inquiry aims at understanding and making meaning of experience through conversations, dialogue, and participation in the ongoing lives of research participants (Clandinin et al., 2016). Research on narratives has become very popular in the last decade (Phoenix, 2017). Narrative inquiry has been used in a number of studies including; sharing the experience of Latina teachers within the context of daily classroom practice working with diverse learners (Ulanoff et al., 2016), the narratives of Latinas and how they have negotiated career advancements (Pertuz, 2017), and how Latina teachers have been shaped by their life experiences into their current professional identify as language teachers (Kayi-Aydar, 2018).

My study focuses on how Latinas get to senior level positions, and thus, by using narrative inquiry, I am able to investigate not just how their stories are structured and how they work, but also by what means (Andrews et al., 2013). As these Latina executives are considered successful as they are one of the few in their position, their narratives will serve as a form of resistance to existing structures of power (Andrews et al., 2013). By sharing their narratives, these Latinas will become agents of change and use their lived experiences as guidance for others to learn from.

Summary

This review of the literature demonstrates the need for the increase of Latinas in senior-level positions in higher education institutions. Although most studies show statistics of various leadership positions obtained by Latinas, their personal journey, experience, and

cultural impact of the experience is limited. Using a theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, this review shows that cultural knowledge does play a fundamental role within Latinas in senior-level administration. The United States will continue to diversify, and the Latino population will soon become the majority minority. Higher education institutions need to adapt to their future student population in order to be prepared to best serve them. Through the findings of my study, more in-depth information regarding the path to senior-level positions are shared by the participants. Future Latinas can better prepare to develop professionally and personally for their opportunity for future advancement in executive leadership.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

As graduation rates of Latinas have increased, Latinas will continue to grow in the workforce. However, to become successful in the workplace, Latinas often must learn how to navigate toward leadership in male-dominated and mostly white industries. In order to address the lack of Latinas in executive positions in higher education institutions, I studied the navigational and strategic skills of Latinas in senior-level positions. Using Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, and the Leadership Labyrinth theoretical and conceptual framework, I proposed to identify (1) the decisions that Latina executives perceive contributed to their advancement to senior positions, (2) how their leadership journey can be impacted by their cultural background, and (3) recommendations to recruit and retain future Latina executives. This chapter describes how the following research questions were studied. I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What decisions did Latina executives make that they perceive as having contributed to their advancement to senior positions in the UC system?

2. What impact, if at all, do Latina executives perceive their cultural backgrounds had on their leadership journey?
3. What strategies do Latina executives recommend that institutions use to recruit and retain future Latina executives?

Design Rationale

I conducted a qualitative study to examine how Latinas in executive positions at the University of California institutions navigated their way to the position that they currently hold and what they did, distinctively, that they believe propelled them into their position. Because I wanted to explain a phenomenon by relying on the perception of a person's experience, a qualitative study was appropriate (Stake, 2010). A mass survey of all Latina leaders would have yielded broad data, but not the in-depth data that I needed. As the perceptions of Latina executives may differ, quantitative research was not the ideal method for my study. Qualitative research allows participants to share their perception, journeys, and experiences that will guide inspiring executives in their own journeys. My study incorporated narrative inquiry as a way of understanding the experiences of these Latina executives.

Narrative research is a methodology inquiring into the experiences of participants thus allowing for an intimate study aimed at understanding and making meaning of experience through conversation and dialogue (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Furthermore, narrative research allows researchers to present experiences holistically in all their complexity and richness regarding the stories being shared (Bell, 2002). Chase (2011) describes two major principles of narrative analysis: "1) narration is a major way in which people make sense of experience, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning, and 2) personal narratives, no matter how unique and individual, are inevitably social in

character” (p.79). Narrative inquiry is an appropriate method for gaining an understanding of important social issues (Chase, 2011). Narrative inquiry is useful in keeping a balance between sharing the stories of participants and understanding their collective experience as a produce of social context (Pertuz, 2017).

Data Collection Method Rationale

This study utilized in-depth 1:1 interviews with nine Latina leaders. During these interviews, I aimed to probe the experiences that contributed to their position advancement, how their culture may have had an impact on their leadership journey, and their advice on recruitment and retention strategies for Latinas. My expectation was that the information gathered from these interviews would shed light on the different experiences that Latinas navigate in order to become “successful.” The Latina executives are from higher education institutions.

Semi-structured interviews were the methodological approach that I determined would be most useful, because they allow the interviewer to build a fruitful dialogue instead of engaging in a blunt, question and answer format (Floyd & Fowler, 2014. p.71). Interviews are used to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 2014, p. 426). As Patton describes, “the purpose of interviewing, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 426). Interviewing becomes necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While focus groups, observations, or surveys could be appropriate, they would not provide the setting for respondents to share in-depth experiences and responses. Interviews also allow the researcher control over the line of questioning while allowing the participants to provide historical information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Compared to other methods such as focus groups or

observations, interviews allow the researcher to control the dynamics of the discussion and engage in dialogue with a specific individual one at a time (Nyumba et al., 2018). Conducting in-depth interviews allows the researcher to get “deep” answers beyond the basic facts and focus on the *how* and *why*, and in turn, “help researchers to understand their interviewees’ views of processes, norms, decision making, belief systems, mental models, interpretations, motivations, expectations, hopes, and fears” (Guest et al., 2013).

Using narrative inquiry was important as it allowed me to analytically probe to “understand people’s narratives, people’s identities, what they are claiming, and the meanings that they want to put over” (Phoenix, 2017). The purpose of the narrative interview provided an opportunity to the participant to share their experience (Kartch, 2018). The goal of narrative interviewing was to understand the participants’ meanings, and experience, and is used as a means of obtaining this understanding (Kartch, 2018). Having a semi-structured interview gave the ability to ask open-ended questions for more in-depth information (Newcomer et al., 2015). The flexible structure of the interview provided an opportunity to learn the reasons behind the answers (Barclay, 2018). The semi-structured interview format with narrative inquiry gave me the freedom to probe the participant to elaborate, to follow a new line of inquiry if introduced by what the participant is saying, and allowed participants the freedom to express their views in their own terms (Barclay, 2018).

The questions asked pertained to the interviewees’ professional and personal journey and what specific actions and experiences they credit in helping them obtain the job they currently have. My interview questions were connected and informed by the theoretical frameworks guiding the study as they are rooted in the assumption that race, ethnicity, and gender all impact the experience of individuals in their journey to obtaining executive-level

positions that are not meant for women or people of color. My interview questions revolved around how participants use their cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities outlined in CRT in their executive positions. In addition, LatCrit was specific to the interview questions as they focused on being Latina. LatCrit examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity and culture (Solozano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). The interview questions were also informed by the Leadership Labyrinth as I asked them to share as a woman their perspective in their personal and professional journeys and what they have had to endure to reach their current executive position.

The initial interviews typically lasted an hour and a half and were scheduled through Zoom, an online video platform. The interviews were recorded using the Zoom online platform, a digital audio recording device, and an iPhone as back up. While the interview was being conducted, I took notes on what I was hearing. A second 45-60-minute follow-up interview was scheduled to have the interviewee clarify and elaborate on issues raised in the first interview.

Recruitment

To select the nine participants, I used the snowball sampling technique to generate a list of Latina women in executive positions with a job title of Associate or Assistant Vice Chancellor in the UC institutions. In every UC institution's organization chart, the title Associate and Assistant Vice Chancellor are near the top. As a top position in the UC system, they have deciding influence on how the UC operates. This list was compiled with the help of Latina executives, through personal knowledge or references. In my initial email which used the same script, I asked potential interviewees if they were interested in participating and also asking them to refer me to others who might identify as a Latina executive.

Access

Although I currently do not work at a UC institution, the student affairs profession is a small field and the concept of six degrees of separation does exist. Although this closeness does allow me access to my population, it also could reduce participation, and create ethical issues because of privacy concerns.

I worked to build rapport (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with the interviewees by introducing myself before beginning the interview and explaining my study more in detail, sharing my journey as a Latina working at higher education institutions, the goal of what I would hope to achieve with my study, and sending the interview questions ahead of time. I gained access and recruited interviewees by first asking Latina executives that I knew personally or was aware of if they would participate. Through snowball sampling, if they declined, I asked for their assistance in referring others. I also emailed Latina executives working in the UC campuses by looking them up in directories, obtaining permission to email listservs, and posting on social media sites.

Strategies of Inquiry

Site

In order to understand the problem, I needed a site that has stature in the field, low Latina leadership representation, and a leadership team that does not match their student population. The UC system fit these criteria as all ten UCs are considered the most prestigious public university system in the U.S. Data indicate that as the prestige of the institution increases, the number of women in senior-level positions falls (Huang, 2012). In 2019, five of the UCs were among the top ten universities for undergraduate education in the country, and all nine UC undergraduate campuses ranked among the top 75 (UC, 2018).

Furthermore, data show that the percentage of women holding senior administrative positions (34%) is lower at doctorate-granting institutions than at any other type of institution (King & Gomez, 2008). All ten UC campuses are doctorate granting institutions, and nearly all are classified at the highest levels of research activity by the Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education (UCOP, 2018). Additionally, while the Latino population continues to grow in California, UC leadership positions do not reflect the population they serve. Women in California make up about 50.3% of the population (Census, 2018). However, data in 2016 show that only 8% of college and university presidents at doctorate granting universities were women and only 5% were minority women (ACE, 2021).

Since there are so few Latina executives at the senior level, in order to get adequate interviews, I included all ten institutions. By interviewing Latina executives at seven out of the ten institutions, I was able to get a variety of data in leadership experience even within the same institutional system. Although some UCs are similar, each institution has their own culture, traditions, and politics that can affect someone's leadership experience. The diversity allowed me to understand the experience of Latinas in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The only UC that is distinct from others is UC San Francisco in that it is the only UC that is a graduate school only. I included it in my study since my sample is based on staff positions and not student population. The ten universities invited to participate in my study included; UC San Diego, UC Riverside, UC Irvine, UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, UC Merced, UC Davis, UC Berkeley, UC San Francisco and UC Santa Cruz.

Participants

I invited executive-level Latinas to participate in the study from every UC institution for a total of nine study participants. I contacted all potential interviewees individually and

invited them to participate in an interview via my UCLA provided email address with a description of the study, its purpose, the benefits and risks, a guarantee of anonymity, and their willingness to have the interviews videotaped via Zoom.

Data Collection Methods

I used interviews, asking participants to share specifics on their decisions, actions, and experiences that contributed to their advancement to senior positions. I also asked if, and if so, how their cultural group had any specific impact on their decisions, actions, and experiences, in addition to contributing to their barriers and systems of support. Specifically, I probed for known leadership attributes, actions, experiences, and navigational skills such as seeking mentorship, prolonging family, and continued education.

Broadly speaking, the respondents' comments pointed to having family obligations, different viewpoints, being Latina and female, knowing when to stand your ground, and having a good lawyer. For the final research question, I expected the interviewees to share strategies they believe institutions can use to recruit and retain future Latinas. Respondents' comments pointed to having people of color on hiring committees, providing diversity trainings to employees, and offering opportunities for professional development and providing mentorship.

Data Analysis

My unit of analysis was the navigational and strategic skills of Latina women in obtaining executive level positions, including mentorship-seeking, organizations to be involved with, what projects to invest in, etc. While reading over the transcript of each interview, I sorted the data into each major coding category based on the research question. I derived my coding categories initially from my research questions and my interview

questions and as needed, I added additional categories based on what emerged from the data and from the literature review. The categories for the first research question include the answers to involving the actions and experiences around their professional journey such as seeking mentorship, networking, continued education, or asking for promotions. For the second question I expected the answers to include how their cultural background impacted, if at all, their professional journey. Based on the literature review, some answers included having a lack of role models, not getting the same opportunities as others, having a strong family support network, creative approaches, etc. In order to push beyond what was in the literature, I made sure to probe for specific examples, get the participants to tell stories, and share the lessons they have personally learned in their professional and personal journey.

After the first interview, I transcribed the interview, conducted an analysis guided by CRT, LatCrit, and the Leadership Labyrinth of the transcripts, and generated codes. After the initial interview, a second 45-60-minute follow-up interview was scheduled to have the interviewee clarify and elaborate on issues raised in the first interview. The follow-up interview provided an opportunity for the interviewees to offer any additional insight into their professional history that might be relevant for understanding their journey as an executive Latina in the UC institution. The audio-recorded interviews via Zoom were transcribed and read over to check for accuracy. Before sorting the data, each participant was provided with a copy of the interview transcript to verify its accuracy. I then did a second round of analysis where I coded within each bigger category to determine trends, patterns, and themes. I generated findings from each sub-category by creating thesis statements that I supported with evidence from my data. I derived my coding categories initially from my theoretical and conceptual frames, research questions, and my interview questions. As

needed, I added additional categories based on what emerged from the second round of coding. I used Dedoose.com for data management, excerpting, coding and analysis.

Ethical Issues

Positionality

As an aspiring executive-level Latina student affairs professional, I was in a position to interview colleagues in the field. As someone whom the participants can relate to, participants were likely be more open to sharing their personal experience and developed an additional layer of emotional access that otherwise would not have been possible.

Confidentiality

The primary ethical issue from this study was the potential for participants' responses to affect their employment. As the focus of my study is the underrepresentation of Latinas in executive positions, participants provided critical viewpoints about their place of work, and even their colleagues/supervisors. To address participants' fear of retaliation, I emphasized the confidential nature of this study. Interviews were conducted through an online platform, Zoom, and participants were assured that their responses would not be overheard by anyone other than the interviewee. Recordings and transcripts were stored in a hard drive and only labeled with randomly selected pseudonyms. The recordings of the interview were destroyed after the participant verified the accuracy of the interview transcript.

I used a number to identify participants and kept names separate from answers. The randomly selected pseudonyms were used throughout the data analysis and the findings section of the study. The intent of the use of pseudonyms is that no data can be linked back to any single individual or worksite (Guest et al., 2013). Furthermore, the real identity of the pseudonyms and tapes were stored separately in my home in a locked safe. Participants'

names were not included anywhere in the write up of my study and any identifiable answer such as the institution employed, or location was removed. When addressing the results, I grouped together all the UCs to reduce the likelihood that readers will be able to identify one particular UC institution. All electronic files were password-protected and only the researcher knew the password. Finally, after two years, all hard copies and electronic files regarding the study will be shredded and destroyed to ensure participants' confidentiality.

Credibility and Validity

This study was susceptible to threats of bias, reactivity, and a small sample size.

Bias: My own bias exists as an aspiring executive-level Latina student affairs professional. My bias assumed that gender and culture do have an impact on Latina executives and that in turn, Latinas in these positions make certain decisions and must navigate their workplace differently than others in order to be successful. This study was conceived from my desire to learn how I can personally navigate educational institutions and be successful in my career.

The study's research design served as a reliable check to counter my bias as qualitative data collected from Latina executives could provide detailed descriptions in how gender and culture may play a role, but not to the extent that can be detrimental to a successful career. In addition, I checked emerging hypotheses with a co-coder who helped me determine if my biases influenced the way in which I viewed and analyzed the interview data.

Reactivity: Latinas with executive job titles at UC institutions are in a position of power and are highly visible in their institution and the system as a whole. A threat of reactivity may exist as they can share what they think I wanted to hear or change their

behavior in order to make the UC institution seem favorable. This threat was minimized by using a triangulation method of Latinas interviewed across the UC system to get a clear picture of the common themes in their professional and personal journey.

Also, I shared my process as to how I protected their identity and clarified that the goal of the study was to make sure that experiences like theirs are better known. By assuring them that I wanted to make their voices heard, I hoped I encouraged participants to be as forthcoming and honest about their experiences. When necessary, I changed identifying information or withheld particular quotes from participants if any data would have made it possible for readers to identify specific individuals. In addition, one of the reasons I chose to share their stories in a collective was to increase the likelihood of maintaining the participants' confidentiality.

Small Sample Size: As this is an in-depth qualitative study, the sample size of Latinas in executive positions at UC institutions is limited. There are few Latinas working at UC institutions in senior-level positions, and they deserve to have their voices heard. The study does not claim to be generalizable. By having a small sample size, this study delved deeply into the navigational and strategic skills they acquired to obtain their position, which can open the doors for future studies. It will be up to each reader to determine to what extent these findings generalize to their own campuses and contexts.

Summary

This qualitative study sought to explore the navigational and strategic skills of Latina executives and how they say they acquired those skills to obtain their positions at the University of California (UC) institutions. Through in-depth interviews, Latinas in senior-level positions were able to share their personal and professional journeys. Although focused

on just the UC system and Latinas, this study can be used as a guide to all students of color in any field to learn how to navigate their professional and personal experiences. In addition, institutions can also use it as a blueprint for the retention and recruitment of more Latinas on their campus. In the following chapter, I will present the findings of the data analysis. In Chapter Five, I will conclude with a discussion of the findings, implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Background

Although the Latino population continues to grow in California, UC leadership positions do not reflect the population they serve. While there are studies on women and how they navigate the workplace, and studies on Latinos/as in higher education showing their lack of representation, these studies do not specifically focus on Latinas in senior positions. This study addressed that gap, and identified the decisions, cultural impact, and factors that contribute to the retention and recruitment of Latinas in senior-level positions at institutions of higher education. The findings of this study will serve as a blueprint for aspiring Latina leaders in navigating their professional and personal journeys. In addition, higher education institutions can use these findings as a reference for the recruitment and retention of Latina professionals on their campus.

Nine Latina executives were interviewed for the study. The interview process consisted of an initial and follow-up interview for a total of 18 interviews. Interviews were conducted with current self-identified Latinas working at a University of California institution with a position as Associate or Assistant Vice Chancellor. The participants in this study included three Associate Vice Chancellors and six Assistant Vice Chancellors from

seven out of the ten UCs. The length of time that participants had held their current positions ranged from three months to six years. The range of education levels within the participants ranged from bachelors to doctorate with a majority holding a terminal degree which is the highest degree available in any given academic discipline. In addition, the number of higher education institutions worked at per participant was from one to four, not including nonprofits, school districts, corporate, etc.

Initial and follow-up interview questions were provided to the participants before the interview to allow them time to reflect. All interviews were audio-recorded which allowed the researcher to capture opinions, viewpoints, phrases, and other verbal data. The audio recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service (Zoom) into Word documents, and the researcher used the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose to apply codes to the data which resulted in the identification of themes.

Overview of Findings

The interviews revealed that these Latina executives often sought out opportunities to advance in their career. Findings support the research that the institutional culture does play a role in the lack of women leadership (Foster et al., 2018). Participants who have often been the first in their network to navigate these professional spaces learned how to do so by building up their political acumen. My initial review of research led me to believe that women remain underrepresented in leadership positions in higher education institutions. My study confirmed that although that is true, the number of minority women in leadership is even lower. Although the UCs have made some strides with their first Latino Chancellor, women of color in leadership positions are still lacking. These Latina executives agreed with the research regarding the lack of a Latino/a leadership pipeline. However, they extended

these known findings by underscoring the need for obtaining terminal degrees required for senior-level positions. They described a deficient pipeline of Latino/a in the associate/bachelor's level, but no pipeline once they tried to reach leadership positions. Because of the low representation, Latina executives feel they represent an image to the university and are often pigeon-holed in job responsibilities because of their culture. These findings go hand in hand with existing research about unconscious bias being one of the barriers Latina leaders face in obtaining leadership positions. Contrary to previous research, these Latinas did not struggle with being an extrovert in higher education, but many struggled with balancing pride in and promotion of their accomplishments with the cultural value of remaining humble.

When it comes to higher education institutions and what they can do to retain and recruit Latina leaders, these findings support the research that recruiting practices continue to hold biases in preserving the status quo. Study participants suggest that the university needs to be more aware of the subliminal messages they are sending potential candidates when it comes to the diversity of their institution. Furthermore, participants cite the importance of aspiring Latina leaders being involved in professional organizations to increase their network. However, they note that while professional organizations should serve as a space for networking and mentorship, aspiring leaders should not count on these organizations solely to obtain senior-level positions.

This study also extends the research on the concepts of mentorship and networking as it relates to supporting Latina leaders. Study participants shared the concept of sponsorship and the impact it has in opening doors of opportunity for them. Unlike mentorship in which you are provided guidance, advice, and support through conversation or shared experience,

sponsorship creates opportunity. One participant explained sponsorship as “actions that go beyond goodwill” and “sponsors take the next step in helping people walk through the doors.” In addition, the study reveals that Latinas carry a secondary load of expectations in the workplace and are consistently struggling to adjust to an institutional system that was not built for them and underscore the importance of a variety of mentorships relationships. In this chapter I present the results of interviews with nine women about how they navigated and strategized their skills to obtain their positions at UC institutions. I also describe the contextual factors that impacted the ways they navigated those pathways. I then present additional findings that emerged from the research questions.

Key Decisions

The first research question sought to find specific decisions that Latina executives felt they made that contributed to the advancement of their career. Participants were asked questions about their professional journeys including their thought process behind the navigation of decisions, and the barriers they encountered in making those decisions. The protocol probed on professional associations, politics in higher education, and mentorship relations. From the responses, the following themes emerged: *Strategic Moments* and *Political Acumen*.

Finding #1: The Strategic Moments that Contributed to Latina Executives’ Careers are Ones that they Themselves Sought

Many of the study participants attributed advancement in their career to their self-advocacy, or “advocating for myself” as one participant mentioned. Participants also stressed the importance of identifying opportunities of growth such as “something that clearly needs

to be done, stepping up to do it, even when it was outside my role.” A strategic moment for many participants was realizing that in order to become a leader, they had to have the mentality that they already were a leader. As one participant described, “I just kind of step into that piece. Bit by bit, just growing the role into these different domains of knowledge, and different networks on campus and system wide.” Another Latina executive shared, “no one taught me - like this is how you become the CEO, let alone, this is how you become a CEO in less than three years in higher education.” These Latina executives stressed the need to make “your journey your own” and that throughout their journey they received many opinions that ranged from what to wear, what job to take, to what to say. These Latina executives shared that they were well grounded in what they wanted, and it served as a guide in their decision making. Many of these Latina executives indicated that they did not know what it meant to be an executive for a university nor had someone teach them how to become one. However, they found ways to advocate for themselves, strengthen their skills, stand out in the workplace, and own the responsibility that came with becoming a leader on campus.

The second strategic moment was that as an aspiring Latina executive, it was important to recognize opportunities for growth and to continue to expand their professional portfolio in each position that they had. One Latina executive advised, “it’s about not being afraid to expand slightly outside of your role and to look for any opportunity to do something above it. If someone has to step out, you can ask if you can step in temporarily and help.” By taking any high visibility assignment, participating, volunteering for committees and groups on either the campus or system-wide scale, it was seen as an opportunity to not only expand their experience, but also show to others that they were eager for the next steps. They showed that they were “training for the kind of work that you want to do.” The participants indicated

that by taking on leadership roles, they built their credibility, reputation, and familiarity with senior-level administrators who would be able to speak about their work. As one Latina executive shared, “at the end, it is all about scaffolding worthy work, asking questions, looking at data that would answer those questions. These were moments of clarity that I knew I was training for the next level, even though I didn’t know that I was.”

A third strategic moment was that these Latina executives reported that they became “bolder in applying for higher-level positions” and realized that they were ready to advance in their career when they were getting final interviews. Being bold, taking risks, and not being afraid to fail was a decision that Latina executives contributed to their advancement in their career. According to the participants, there is no handbook that outlines the necessary steps to becoming a senior-level administrator at a higher education institution. Many participants shared that they sought out any opportunity to take risks in order to advance in their field. A common theme shared was that they applied to job postings even when they did not necessarily meet every single requirement. As one Latina executive shared, “we [women] feel like we need to have every single bullet on that list. No, that is not the case. We need to have it in the ballpark. You need to know what the job is, but you don’t need to know all of that.”

Study participants urged that aspiring Latinas should “throw their name in the hat” because by applying to a higher position, it sent a message that they were ready for more. These Latina executives also shared that by not applying for higher positions, it could send a message that one is okay with being where they are. One Latina executive shared her experience: “oftentimes as women of color, because we don’t have all the experiences that we want, we don’t apply, we don’t try, but yet, white folks, men and women, they just apply

even though they have half of the requirements and they get it. But because we don't apply, and we don't take that chance, we don't put our best foot forward. We will never know. So, I started to become bolder in applying for higher-level positions."

Applying for higher-level jobs is the first step to becoming a senior-level administrator, but once the new position has been obtained, participants noted the importance of "owning it." A Latina executive shared, "sometimes as women of color, we step into these roles and we don't own them. It's almost like you step into it, and you question it. Wow, am I really here? Yes, you are. So yes, own it." Participants shared that once they reached their senior-level positions that they still had self-doubts. Surprisingly they found that so did many other people in similar positions and that the feeling was quite common. As a Latina executive commented, "I realized that nobody is an expert in every single part of what they have to do." Another mentioned, "remember, that no one has any clue on what they're doing, and they are just learning as they are as well." This realization demonstrated that the title and responsibility of a job position should not be a factor for aspiring Latina leaders to not apply for higher-level positions and that if hired, it is a statement that they can be successful in the position.

The fourth and final self-sought strategic moment that contributed to Latina executives' careers was setting personal boundaries and creating a work-life balance that catered specifically to their needs. Out of the nine participants, five of them mentioned being a mother and having to balance family obligations with work expectations. These family obligations ranged from having children, to caring for aging parents, to having external family members to support in another country. Many of the participants with children mentioned an unspoken tension in the culture of the workplace regarding having children and

the responsibility that comes with it. The issue of balancing family obligations with work expectations has been well documented in literature and it is a key barrier for all women in obtaining leadership positions (Foster et al., 2018). A study participant shared, “women are expected to mother as if they don’t have jobs and they’re expected to work as if they don’t have children.”

Many of the participants turned down opportunities because of their family commitments. Some of the decisions made involved staying on one campus because they were “simply not in a position to do that [accept other campus offers] with my marriage and family” and denied opportunities to travel for work because “when she [daughter] was little because it would have made me travel a lot and I said I can’t live with myself if I’m just gone all the time.” Every Latina executive disagreed with the statement, that “women cannot have it all.” But most of them did agree that “one cannot have it all at the same time.” Whether it was balancing having a family, learning to say no, and realizing the importance of self-care, these women all had to reflect on their personal needs and made decisions based on them.

Having family obligations was not the only reason why study participants focused on setting personal boundaries. These Latina executives shared that they also set boundaries for self-care and knowing when to say no. A struggle encountered by the participants who did not have children was that they felt the pressure to “always be available”, and they were “inclined to be a person of service, because as women, we have been taught, raised, encouraged to serve, to help, to fix, to assist, and to mend.” Learning to say no and having a robust life outside of their professional workplace was a must from a mental health perspective and from a self-preservation point of view. One Latina shared her newfound

philosophy that incorporated both and stated, “I work to live and although I love what I do, I’ve learned not to love my job. So, it’s not about the job, it’s about loving what you do.”

These Latina executives acknowledge that figuring out their boundaries was “a very hard place to come to” and that it was “a journey, and a process” because as a society, there is an internalization of the stigma of over-working and having to prove oneself. Learning to say no was not easy, but it was a strategic moment in becoming a senior-level administrator as they were able to prioritize their personal time and chose work projects that not only made them feel good but added to their professional growth. One Latina executive shared, “I learned to say no. That was a big lift and that was a huge lesson and I think it’s incredibly gendered. I think it’s really much harder for women.” Another mentioned, “I’m starting to say no to certain things and become very productive in my windows of time by compartmentalizing tasks.”

Learning to have a work-life balance is hard for women and it will continue to be as society has placed many expectations on women but does not offer the support in accomplishing them all. The study participants suggest that it is important to remember that although difficult, it is possible to achieve it all with time, a support system, and planning. One participant shared, “I have a lot of young women ask me, am I going to have to give that up [having kids]? I would never say you have to give it up, but you’ll have to make choices.” Another shared that she made the conscious decision to have one child later in her career but that in turn, she was in a senior-level position that offered her with a lot of flexibility that supported her when she became a mother. All the participants stressed the importance of taking care of oneself, putting their self-care first and having a positive, healthy outlook. One participant shared her mindset about personal boundaries and work-life balance as, “it is

about contributing to a holistic approach of mind, body, and soul. Teaching us how to set boundaries and how to protect our energy in these roles.” Although sometimes it felt “limiting” because one is turning away opportunities, seeking to learn how “take yourself away [from work] and taking care of yourself” has been a pivotal moment that these Latina executives confirmed contributed to the advancement of their career in the long run.

Finding #2: Higher Education Institutions are Highly Political, and it is Critical to have Political Acumen to be Successful as a Leader

In addition to self-sought opportunities that Latina executives took to advance their careers, all the participants shared the importance of knowing the political climate in their institutions in order to become successful in their roles. In this study, political acumen is defined as the “understanding of the needs and positions of stakeholders; judgement of political feasibility; communication skills that to a degree can only be learned or practiced, not taught” (Pal & Clark, 2017). Political acumen has been recognized as a crucial skill by practitioners (HM Government, 2013 in Pal & Clark, 2017) and it is a developed expertise in networking, advocating, and negotiation in order to be effective. As a Latina executive shared, “We [higher education institutions] are like any organization which resembles a small city. You always need to be cognizant of the moving parts and aware of that. How you manage up at internal politics is an absolutely necessary skill for leadership.” As political acumen is not something that can be taught, and it can be completely different at every institution, it can take new aspiring Latina leaders some time to be able to navigate it comfortably and successfully throughout their professional career.

These Latina executives shared that it is rare for entry-level administrators to have a sense of the political climate of a university. Not having an understanding of it can cause frustration when agendas do not move as quickly as one would like. With time and advancement in their career, Latina executives shared that their lens broadened, and they began to see things from an institutional level. One Latina executive explained the development of knowledge in political acumen as “it’s almost like you start at 10 feet above the ground, and then as you move up, you learn how to look at things from 30,000 feet point of view and you learn how to connect all the dots institutionally instead of what impacts you directly.” Political acumen comes with time and experience.

The experience one gets in learning the political climate in their university varies greatly with every person. Most of the time, the political climate in institutions functions with unspoken expectations and traditions that have been passed down. These Latina executives shared that they got a sense of the political climate of their university by sometimes “reading the nuance of a room” and “the behavior of people.” Political acumen can have many complex layers, and these Latina executives shared that because of the lack of mentorship for Latinas and women of color, learning the political climate by experience is “a struggle” and can sometimes be “painful.” These negative experiences can cause many to leave the field compared to others who already have a sense of how to navigate it and tend to ascend quickly in positions. These Latina executives shared that in every institution they worked at, it was important to understand that there were unspoken expectations of how professionals conducted themselves around the workplace. Part of building and having political acumen that fits one’s institution was realizing the power of being observant, learning how to

communicate with your peers to get things done, knowing when it was time to move on from the institution, and realizing the significance of picking and choosing your battles.

The Power of Observing

Whether they were starting in a new institution or moving to a new role in the same institution that they had worked at for years, these women needed to be aware of the shifting power dynamics that come with each move. To begin, many Latina executives shared how they have built their political acumen just by being observant and seeing how people interacted, reacted, and how that correlated to the importance of timing. A Latina executive shared, “observing people is listening for what’s underneath what they are saying. Because as you know, there’s what they say and then there is what they meant.” Observing also assisted in realizing how people interacted with each other and realizing who held institutional knowledge that could become a guide in learning how to navigate within the institution. One participant shared that one of the first things they did once they began at a new institution was to “get to know who the holders of institutional knowledge are since they are helpful to get the background story of how things work.”

With observing came the ability to get a sense of timing. The ability of timing and knowing when to propose their agenda worked in their favor when they were trying to get things done. Regarding timing, a Latina executive shared, “there is a right place and a moment for everything, but for most things, you have to kind of develop that sense of when is the right time to mention something or to talk about something. Political acumen is having the ability to know, okay, I should say things. I should propose this.” However, these Latina executives shared that learning to navigate the political climate within their institution with time was not guaranteed as it all depends on the person and the “professional maturity” that

they have. One Latina executive shared her experience as: “I think there are different levels of sophistication that people start out with [political acumen]. There are people that have been in the field longer than I have and they still don’t have that. They don’t have the lens.” Having political acumen is not a natural talent that grows by being a professional in the field. Making the personal effort to build and know the political climate in one’s institution is a key decision that these Latina executives shared and that contributed to the advancement of their careers. However, these Latina executives share that one of the main struggles of building over time your political acumen was obtaining the lens in how their peers like to communicate.

Learning to Communicate

Working in higher education institutions meant that these Latina executives work with a variety of people in different roles at the same time. These Latina executives shared that a hard aspect of political acumen that they had to learn was adjusting to better communicate with other senior-level administrators. These Latina executives shared the concept of “code-switching” in which they have learned how to communicate within a “formal environment where the conversation is more restrained.” A constant theme that came up was Latinas figuring out how people want to be communicated with and realizing that being “direct”, “straightforward”, or “upfront” was not seen as a welcoming aspect. These Latina executives had to refrain from their preferable communication style to fit the one that was preferable at their institution. One Latina executive shared how she had to develop the skill of how to communicate and shared that “it wasn’t a natural skill and I had to learn it.” Instead of being upfront, another Latina executive shared that she learned that this style was not the way people liked to talk and talking with senior administration at the university was

all about “softening.” If they disagreed with someone, learning how to disagree with them and challenge someone’s argument without simply stating it. These Latina leaders stressed the importance of learning how to disagree and communicating to come off in a “collaborative way” instead of “being direct and putting the person on guard” or having them “feel called out.” These Latina executives are in a point in their careers where code-switching feels “natural” to them and sometimes they do not recognize how much they have “formulated into these environments” until they enter other spaces where they feel like they can “exhale.” Knowing how other senior-level administrators like to communicate and reframing how you speak in order to come off as a collaborative leader where people do not feel threatened by feedback was a valuable experience to gain in learning the political climate in an institution.

Know When it is Time to Go

Not being able to navigate the political climate of an institution did not mean that these Latina executives were not successful. But they learned that the difference in political climate between them and their institutions caused difficulties in every-day decisions. Since every institution is different, the difference in political acumen gave these Latina executives the option to realize when it was be a good time to leave an institution and find one that was a better fit especially when they became outspoken in not supporting institutional decisions. A Latina executive shared that “some people [senior-level administrators] don’t like to be questioned. So, you become marked. You’re marked so there is no way that they’re going to promote you and they will always find a good way of it when you do this enough.”

Being in tune with the institutional political climate and where one stands was important and something that constantly has to be reevaluated. The power of observing also

came into play in helping these Latina executives get a sense of where they stood, and they were able to reflect on how the institution was showing support in their decisions and career. By paying attention to their environment and being in tune with the organizational climate, they understand that if it is time to go, it does not mean they failed, but they have done everything that you could at that moment, at that place, and it was time for them to move on to better things. They advised to “know when to leave on a high note.” Realizing that it is time to go was difficult but staying in an institution that was constantly clashing with their decisions was “disheartening as a professional” as matters did not start to go their way.

Political acumen is a hard subject to nail down because it is an aspect of higher education institutions that is widely known but not directly spoken about. The important part of political acumen is getting a sense of how an institution functions, how peers like to be communicated with, and knowing when it is time to throw in the towel and move to an institution that better fits your political acumen style. Being in tune with knowing when to let go and when “to stay and fight” was also a key decision that these Latina executives felt like they made that contributed to their advancement in their career.

Picking and Choosing your Battles

Another extension of political acumen that these Latina executives learned was how to pick and choose their battles. Not only was this a life lesson to master, but it played an important part in the professional world, especially as a senior-level Latina administrator. As a senior-level administrator, these Latina executives have the voice and the power to make important decisions in their institution, however, it was important they realized what decisions they were determined to make go their way and which ones they were open to negotiating. Many of these Latina executives shared common advice along the lines of

realizing that “it is important to conserve your strength, because there are an endless number of things to change, and one has to realize that you cannot change them all overnight.” When it came to picking and choosing their battles, these Latinas shared that the mindset should be that it is a marathon, rather than a sprint. A Latina executive shared that when they want to call something out, within a span of a few seconds, they had to think about how they would come across, and who would support them. They also shared how sometimes it “killed” them to prioritize what to speak out against because they knew that it was not right, but they felt like they could not say anything.

These Latina executives shared that part of picking and choosing your battles was knowing how others will react and the support they would have received from their peers as one person “cannot move the needle.” Having an idea of the pushback and support they obtained was essential in knowing when to “go to battle.” These Latina executives communicated that if they went to battle on too many issues, it became “detrimental” in how their reputation came across to other senior-level administrators. By being outspoken on too many issues, and not learning how to prioritize the important ones, it can cause them to be placed in a position where their voice and power to make decisions could be weakened. This was a negotiation and a “huge tradeoff” that these Latina executives were aware of and realized that they sometimes had to save their voice for another day rather than to lose their credibility all together. These Latina executives realized that they sometimes had to restrain themselves in what they really want to say because they would “rather have a platform and the opportunity to continue to do the work rather than lose it” because other senior-level administrators would see them as “too radical.” In order to advance their careers and make some long-term institutional changes, these Latina executives used their political acumen to

realize that they had to be smart with what issues they wanted to aggressively lean in as “we only have so many bites at the apple, especially at a leadership level” and sometimes they had to become “comfortable with keeping my mouth shut.” Many of these Latina executives shared how they knew others who had become “absolutely exhausted” with always speaking up at injustices they witnessed and lost their credibility to the point where they “couldn’t get anything done.”

Some people may think that picking and choosing your battles is not staying true to yourself and that is not the case. These Latina executives learned that part of political acumen was realizing that they are working within a bigger structure and that one person alone cannot change the system as a whole. However, by picking and choosing what issues to advocate for, executive Latina administrators have learned to create change where they can and save the energy to tackle other issues in the future. These Latina executives acknowledge that a key decision in advancing their career was continuing to build their political acumen by picking and choosing their battles and that by continuing to advance in their career, they will continue to strengthen their voice and can possibly build more support for change in the future.

Cultural Background

The second research question sought to uncover how the cultural background of senior-level Latinas impacted their leadership journey. Study participants were asked questions about what they meant to the institution as a Latina leader and what barriers they faced because of their culture. From the responses, the following themes emerged: *being a checkmark, the responsibility of representation, the cultural clash of remaining humble.*

Finding #3: Latina Executives feel like they just Represent an Image Check mark to the University

As mentioned in chapter two, having senior-level Latina administrators provides many benefits to higher education institutions such as having an impact on the students of color in their institutions, facilitating their career aspiration, preparing all students to live in a diverse society, and students' advancement in education and the Latina/o community. However, all nine of these Latina executives did not feel like the institution appreciated the cultural wealth that they had to offer and felt like they just represented an image to the university. These Latina executives felt that the university saw them as marking off a "checkmark" to showcase that the university was moving forward with the concept of diversity, but when it came to creating change to further open doors for diversification, those actions fell flat. A Latina executive shared, "for my institution, I am going to be really honest, I think it's like a little check mark. Like, okay, we have a Latina leader. Check." Other Latina executives shared similar feelings in which they felt that they were used by the institutions to be able to "put their best foot forward" in terms of community engagement.

These Latina executives felt that by having a Latina leader, the institution was able to seem open to the community and have leaders that reflect the diversity of their students, but the goal of the institution is to have the PR of having "a competent representative of the university that's Latina." One Latina executive shared how she has had conversations with the Chancellor's cabinet about the need to have more Latinos in senior leadership and how she felt that other than the image of diversity, the other benefits such as the unique perspective and talent of having a Latina/o leader are not understood. This Latina executive realized that for white individuals, they often perceive a person different from their identity,

whereas in the Latin culture, their identity is an important part of who they are and the current leaders “can’t connect those pieces.” As this Latina executive shared, “they don’t understand that there’s something special that we bring to the conversation. They vaguely think, it’s great you reflect the students, but they don’t really know what that means.” All the participants shared stories and experiences of sometime being invited to sit at the table or to events “because you are a brown person” and feeling like they are just a checkmark the institution marked off to appease the concept of diversity but did nothing above the bare minimum to create the supportive structure to create long-term change. These Latina executives shared that the institution needs to really make an “intentional, concentrated effort to diversify and not checkboxes by hiring one or two.” These Latina executives shared that “a handful of people cannot create system-wide change.” If institutions continue to have a limited amount of diversity representatives to satisfy the status quo, no real change will occur and institutions will continue to do the bare minimum to place Latinas in leadership positions solely as representation where their cultural wealth is not valued, welcomed, or acknowledged.

Furthermore, these Latina executives shared that in addition to feeling like a checkmark to their institutions, they oftentimes felt like they were pigeon-holed into holding diversity-related responsibilities that sometimes were outside of their job duties just because they were Latinas. All the Latina executives shared that they understood the importance of being a part of these extracurricular duties and sometimes even felt “the responsibility as being one of the few”, thus struggled to push back on these extra duties that oftentimes left them exhausted mentally. The extra duties because of their culture did make them feel “tokenized” because oftentimes, the involvement was “more of an expectation rather than an

option” compared to their peers. These Latina executives shared that sometimes they would be placed on committees without even being asked, be placed on a Latinx staff council, or asked to create cultural programs such as a mentorship program for Latinx professionals because they were Latinas. Although these Latina executives saw the value of these initiatives and committees, they felt that they were not necessarily things that they had time for as they had to cater to broader responsibilities. These extra responsibilities were assigned to them without being asked and based on assumptions. These Latina executives shared that it becomes exhausting consistently dealing with the assumptions of others, but they understand that it is “indicative of what happens to us sometimes.” These Latina executives share that although exhausting, they do feel a responsibility as a Latina to carry out the initiatives assigned to them as they do not know how to say no and draw boundaries. One Latina executive shared that most of these instances happen so quickly that she sometimes left wondering, “how did I end up doing this?”

Most of the time, these Latina executives did not mind being a part of some of these different groups, even when they sometimes fell outside of their work responsibility. However, because they were often one of the few Latinas and it became more of an expectation rather than a choice, being the only Latina representing the executive level became exhausting. Because of these experiences, these Latina executives expressed the importance of having more Latinas in the field. Although most of the time they did not mind “being pulled in” because it was work they felt connected to, they expressed the need to share the responsibilities of representing diversity within different groups if the institutional structure continues to put these responsibilities on women of color. One Latina executive expressed that the institution needs to do a better job at building the capacity of the next tier

of staff to be able to help in these situations because it “shouldn’t just be leaning on one or two of us who get pulled into everything” because the “departments aren’t diverse enough.” The experience of these women shows the importance of having more Latinas in senior-level positions to share the workload that is needed because the student population is diversifying with more diverse needs and that equates to a need for a more diverse senior administration.

Furthermore, the lack of diversity in leadership positions shows the importance of institutional support that Latinas need in order to be successful in their role, a topic that I will expand later on in this chapter. What my study found was that Latinas in senior-level positions felt like their culture only represents a checkmark to the university in terms of diversifying their senior-level positions, and as the expected diversity representative to different groups on campus are given extra duties because they are Latinas.

Finding #4: Latina Executives Carry the Responsibility of Representation

With so many few Latina executives in higher education, it was abundantly clear when they were one of the only ones in their office, department, or even the institution. Being only one is also very noticeable within the students. As Chessman and Wayt (2016) mentioned; “students do realize the value of having faculty of color on campus.” My study found that Latina executives feel that students tend to seek help from them more than others because of the similar cultural background and because students feel like the Latina executives have an understanding of their cultural wealth and how to best use it to not only be successful in their studies, but in life. These Latina executives shared that students gravitate towards administrators that look like them because they are not seen from a deficit lens. Latina executives are able to articulate the positive attributes students of color bring to

the campus community and these students need to hear that because it can be rare when a first-gen student who is struggling with basic needs hears how valuable they are and how much they contribute to the enrichment of the campus community. Since Latina executives share the similar background, they can “articulate that, and we can be their cheerleaders and they [students of color] know it.” All the participants understood the responsibility of being a representation to the student and one participant even shared the consciousness of her choices when it came to making it known she was Latina. She shared, “I was really conscious of keeping my last name because people need to see it. I’m a doctor. I’ve always been aware that I just need to keep putting it out there so people know that we’re here.” Other participants continued to share the experiences they had with students and how it made them realize the responsibility they had to them in order to try to create change at a bigger scale. These Latina executives shared that students of color “often resonate” with them and call them “approachable and accessible.” These Latina executives feel this connection with students of color is because “they see somebody who looks like them doing the work” and although the students do not realize it, having a person of color in a leadership position “means a lot to them and they may not even know it means a lot to them.” These Latina executives urge the institutions to “think about how we change ourselves because we are going to see more and more students that are coming from these backgrounds, because our landscape is changing and especially in Southern California.” Higher education institutions need to begin making changes to fully support the diversity of their student population. In recent findings (Avila, 2018), students having representation of their culture in leadership positions has an impact on students’ advancement in education and the Latina/o community. Latina executives bring in a different perspective that might resemble the experience of the

changing student population. Knowing the student's perspective and their experience is important if institutions want to continue to best serve their students. Being a senior-level Latina in higher education is not only being an administrator but also feeling like you are a representation to students in addition to your community as well. A Latina executive shared, "I am suppressing this imposter syndrome and just brushing it off. I think the other part of it is my sense of responsibility. If I'm the only one here, then I need to speak up and I need to make sure that our voices are heard." Because there are few Latinas in leadership positions, there is a sense, among the participants, that they always have to be aware of being the only one. These Latina executives shared that there is much more to be done to normalize more Latinas in senior-level positions in order for it to "not a commodity that we're in these roles. The more normalized it can be and the less weight it places on one individual." These Latina executives feel like they have their "hands in every play because the diversity just isn't there at our level." This constant responsibility to be a Latina representative in various events often makes them wonder "where is everybody?" and it is a constant reminder that "there's not enough of us." By being one of the few, these Latinas are "always at a table, always fighting, always at meetings because there's a few of you."

Finding #5: There is a Latina Cultural Clash of Remaining Humble in the Workplace

These Latina executives shared their thoughts on feeling like a checkmark to the university. The university assigned these Latinas extra tasks on them for being one of the few and these Latinas felt a self-imposed responsibility to represent their communities. However, a surprising barrier that they mentioned was the cultural clash of getting recognized and staying humble with the work that they do. A Latina executive mentioned, "I think it is

culturally relevant for Latinas, in particular we tend to not think we should be garnering recognition. You have to learn about how to walk that fine line between not looking like a showboat, like you're showing off, or trying to make yourself look like you did everything."

All the Latina executives urged aspiring Latina leaders and other Latinas to embrace their accomplishments and be "unapologetically comfortable" in their own capacity to solve problems. Many grew up with the Latino culture that focuses on working hard and just "feeling grateful to be able to do so." As aspiring leaders and Latina executives, having that mentality helps your work ethic but it can backfire on getting acknowledged at work for all the work that one has done. A Latina executive expressed Latinas' work ethic as "Latinas are always ready to be worker bees, but we're not always ready to be queen bees." In addition to not get acknowledged for the hard work that is done, being overly humble can also hinder your capacity for advocacy. By being humble, coworkers did respect their experience, but it was not quantifiable. These Latina executives figured out that they had to work to make their experience quantifiable to get the response of the impact and listening that they wanted. As one Latina executive shared, "you have to fight really hard to get that work and those skills and expertise formally recognized, acknowledged, and compensated. The campus is happy you're doing it, but it's invisible." By embracing one's accomplishments, it can seem like it is a hard line to walk but it is coming to terms with the fact that one deserves those opportunities and not be apologetic to them. A Latina executive shared, "it is all about knowing your worth and being able to say it. You know, there's time to be humble and there are times to absolutely not be humble. When you're advocating for yourself, when you're writing up your accomplishments for the year, and when you're negotiating for something." By sharing their experiences, it is evident that by embracing accomplishments, it can really

help in career advancement when one needs to show the work that one has done and serve as documentation when it comes to negotiating your next position.

Recruitment and Retention

The third research question sought strategies that Latina executives recommended that institutions should use to recruit and retain future Latina executives. Participants were asked questions about the strategies institutions can use to retain and recruit Latina leaders, and professional organizations that have helped them in their professional career. From the responses, the following themes emerged: *message being sent by institutions*, and *the use of professional organizations*.

Finding #6: Higher education institutions need to be mindful of what messages they are sending to candidates

The current climate in the United States has given higher education pressure to continue to focus on diversity, equity programming, and to empower their students to create change. However, with all the support statements for diversity and equity, the hiring practices of these institutions largely remain the same, causing no diversification of candidates, especially for leadership positions. The entire hiring process is set up in a way that serves as a disadvantage to Latinas and people of color from the beginning such as in recruitment materials to the final interview. As a Latina executive shared, “we’ve started to implement diversity statements as part of just hiring practices. We’ve tried to find ways of doing different types of recruitment and a university campus is death by panel. But that’s really important as who you put in that panel and how those panels are comprised and composed. I

think there's been intentionality when it comes to having people that would be more open to diverse candidates.”

In order to do a better job at recruiting and retaining Latina leaders, the study participants all suggested that higher education institutions take a moment to reflect on how they can be perceived to diverse candidates when it comes to the composition of their leadership teams and the underlying message they are sending to candidates because as one participant shared, “people don't want to come to a place that you know that's not diverse”. Although not spoken of, people do pay attention to the diversity of the existing office when interviewing and that sends a message about the office culture and plays a part in the candidate deciding if they want to be a part of it. A Latina executive shared, “when you see a team, and it's all white, you are kind of like, there's a secret message, you probably don't need to apply here.” Another shared, “when you look at a team that is all white, that is not by accident, and that is not a function of meritocracy. That is a concentrated effort to keep it like that.” Not only do they send messages to potential candidates, but it also sends a message to their peers within the institution, and it is something that people notice and share their thoughts on with others that can further push diverse candidates away. A Latina executive shared, “there was one unit where everyone in that center's unit was white. They had an opening, so they had an opportunity to diversify. They decided not to, and they decided to go again with a white candidate. So, you know what I tell people is like, that's a very clear message. That's a very clear message that you're sending on how you want to keep those themes but also when you look at internal dynamics.”

Not only is being aware of the subliminal message being sent important, but also the actions of those that are placed in power in making decisions of hiring candidates. It is

important for HR to place professionals who are aware, supportive, and actively pushing to continue to diversity the institution in positions where they can interview and hire diverse candidates. Many study participants shared experiences in search committees where they noticed that there was an opposition to change, and diverse candidates were placed in positions where they had no chance to continue in the search. A Latina executive shared what she noticed in her experience in search committees as “there is real resistance to diversify at those levels. There is the talk and all that, but when you get into those search committees and those trainings, there is a real resistance for us to access those roles.” Another shared, “on one occasion there was a candidate who was very well qualified but they were criticizing her with a different level of surveillance to minimize her credibility so that can get this other person.”

Another Latina executive even shared that in addition to the message being sent by HR, search committees and the institutions need to review their requirements for senior-level positions as “diverse candidates offer a diverse field of experience that can be beneficial to the institutions, still be extremely qualified for the position but not meet the structured requirements set forth.” The Latina executive shared that institutions should “try to suspend some bias to use rubrics to look at the resumes. But that is a disadvantage to women, particularly Latinas, because one of the things that is also true is that we don’t have a typical trajectory to getting here. The trajectories of people of color, specifically women, are not the same.” As mentioned before, Latina executives suggest university campuses do a whole review of their hiring process from recruitment materials to interview protocols in order to ensure that their practices align with the diversity support statements they proclaim.

Finding #7: Professional Organizations will not directly lead to a new job, but aspiring Latina leaders should use them to gain new knowledge, network, and dabble in leadership opportunities.

Within higher education there are a multitude of organizations and associations that serve professionals in their professional development, community building, and leadership opportunities. All the Latina executives in my study have been or/and are part of at least one professional organization. Although the organization did provide networking opportunities to these Latina executives, many of them felt that instead of providing additional growth in their careers, they felt that in turn, they provided the organization with more service. As one Latina executive shared, “I feel like when you are part of a board in a professional organization, you’re bringing more to the table than they bring to you, aside from more work. I can name off all the boards I’m on but I’m doing them the service instead of them to me.” Another Latina executive shared, “I don’t think they [organizations/associations] are advancing our careers, but they gave me a leadership opportunity.” Furthermore, participants shared that although the professional organizations have been great opportunities to attend as professional development events, the most important aspect of these organizations is the network that they are able to achieve, especially in culturally based professional organizations. These Latina executives shared their experience with culturally based professional organizations as “me centered”, “comfort” and “having my soul fed.” A Latina executive explained, “I feel like I’m home and that one [AHHEE] because it’s Latina/Latinx administrators from across the country getting together and really talking about and sharing experiences navigating the system.” Another shared, “I think it is a good starting point for Latinas, specifically emerging professionals, to connect with” and “there are a lot of like-

minded professionals in the space that I work with. I knew that part of their goal and focus is positioning Latinas in leadership and supporting.” Some other professional organizations that were mentioned were HOPE, and the Latino Knowledge Community within NASPA. All the participants urged aspiring Latina leaders to join professional organizations if they have the option as they provide “the opportunity for leadership and that kind of endorsement.”

Emerging Themes

Unexpectedly, there were some additional findings that surfaced from the interviews that took place. These were unexpected because I did not specifically inquire about them. However, while I may not have been asking specifically for this information, there is some literature that supports my findings. From the responses, the additional themes emerged: *the secondary load Latinas carry, institutional adjustment requirements, mentorship vs. sponsorship and the responsibility of current Latina executives.*

Emerging Finding #1: Being a Latina in Higher Education Requires You to Carry a Secondary Load

At its foundation, being a Latina executive in higher education is a gendered experience as there is plenty of research about the differences in leadership between men and women. However, Latinas face an additional cultural expectation. This is a secondary load that these women need to carry and by being a Latina executive, one is always managing the traditional and cultural expectations at all times. According to these high-level Latina executives, ethnicity continuously affects identity. They are particularly conscious of how others see them and how they see themselves in their everyday work. This heightened consciousness makes the journey “an uphill battle.” These women leaders revealed extreme

awareness of their visible characteristics such as being “Latina,” “brown,” “young,” “angry,” “ditzy,” “female,” “long hair and earrings” and wearing “nothing but black suits for a long time.” They also showed heightened awareness of the particular expectations for them as Latinas such as being the “representative”; “the only one in the room” the one “at the table”; and having “to show up” for specific events. Their identity as Latinas was continuously under group and self-scrutiny. These Latina executives became aware earlier in their career that they had to work harder to gain respect, and authority, and felt that they were always trying to compensate for their cultural traits. Their expected contributions as Latinas were also under scrutiny. These include being the one to continuously “provide context” to discussions. Each “entry into a room” activates this challenge to identity: At times, these Latina leaders are expected to discuss objectively the very group to which they belong – making them feel that they, as Latinas, are “not there.” For one Latina executive, this split (being both the subject and object of discussion) evoked an inner angry voice, as if silently yelling to her colleagues: “I’m one of them [Latinas]. I’m one of them. I am right here.” Another Latina executive worried about not “losing herself in the journey.” This same participant worried that as she climbed the ladder, she might “lose that edge” [her Latina background]. Another participant, anticipating one day leaving “her environment,” worried that she would then have to experience all over again “that whole legitimacy journey.”

With identity under pressure, Latina executives stressed the need for voice. “You have to jump in, you know” one participant cautioned her Latina mentee. “You have to say something in every meeting.” Another participant discussed the importance of talking to community members outside the university, for an “uplifting voice” or to “talk [a problem] through.” Age and experience seem to help somewhat: One participant noted that it may take

years before one gets to “just walk in”- as she does now-to have the authority that is automatic “when you're male, when you're white, when you're older,” as another leader put it. But as these leaders show, such a sense of oneself takes continuous “hard work.”

Emerging Finding #2: Higher Education institutions are asking Latina executives to adjust to institutional climate rather than the institution adjusting to its population needs

According to these Latina executives, they are constantly trying to adapt to their institutional culture but feel like the institution has a responsibility to adjust to their administrators and to the changing body of the student population. In recent findings (Malkiel, 2019), women continue to deal with challenging personal and social issues related to their gender in higher education institutions. The current institutional culture does little to adjust to accommodate the experiences and needs of Latina executives. These participants are aware that they are in an institutional climate they often described as “a good old boys club without the good old boys” and how they are often in a position of trying to build “equitable structures within an inequitable structure.” This constant battle, as one participant describes it, as “exhausting” and is a constant reminder to Latina executives that “higher education institutions were made for white men” and that “structurally the systems were not designed for us [Latinas].” Historically, as mentioned in my literature review, higher education institutions were made for white men and even in current times, the institutional climate still holds a sense of “soft racism” in which Latina executives share that there is “a sense that Latinos are lesser than.” The institutional climate in many higher education institutions still feels like they are built for and cater to white men in how it operates and throughout the years, they have not adjusted to their changing population in every aspect.

This “daily battle” within the institutional climate can sometimes surface suddenly or indirectly and as one participant shared, “some days it’s just racial fatigue. Your values are questioned, your intention is questioned, your credibility is questioned. So, it’s a constant need to exert your justice lens with the cultural frame like I know it’s an asset.” With many Latina executives feeling drained from the everyday microaggressions within the institution, they share that in order to create real change that will help Latina executives feel more supported within the institutional structure, the institution cannot just give “lip service” to it because “when it really boils down to it, this is not their highest priority.” The institution needs to focus on the climate for Latinas and it needs to come from a structural level. As one participant shared, “I think that climate is key and it’s critical in attracting high quality Latina executives that will not only take the job but that will want to stay.” Oftentimes, since many of these Latina executives are the “firsts” and “onlies” we tend to forget the toll it can take. They are celebrated and often left to navigate the impossible standards and expectations of trying to get things done in the same old system that was not built for them to be there. Institutions need to focus on how they can change their climate either by offering professional development opportunities catered to Latina executives, changing systems and operations to be culturally mindful, and providing more structural support so that not only will Latinas and diverse populations want to come work with them, but the current leaders that they have can feel supported professionally, culturally, and personally.

Emerging Finding #3: Having a supportive network can make all the difference in your career experience.

Latina executives identified the need for mentors throughout their careers in order to successfully navigate through their higher education careers. A 2019 General Assembly study found that women in leadership positions encourage other women to become involved in education and support networks dedicated to helping women become successful leaders in their field to deflect barriers. The first theme within having a supportive network that emerged was the importance of reframing the concept of the qualities a mentor should possess and to build their “mentor board” with a variety of people from different backgrounds and experiences. These Latina executives shared that one should be open to a variety of mentorship relationships as one is “multi-talented” and “multi-interested” and a good mentor is “not always the person who is older, the same culture, with a degree, and/or has job connections.” The goal of mentorship relationships should be not to only expand your career opportunities but to also provide emotional and personal support. Many of these Latinas quoted their moms, family members, coworkers in different departments, or “someone who has your back” as some of their mentors. These Latinas mentioned that a mentor is sometimes just someone who can provide “a different lens than you and can see things in different ways.” These Latina executives shared that the idea that a mentor needs “to be older, and more experienced” is misconstrued and that for them, mentors are “folks that we can just call up to brainstorm and think different things I had not thought about.”

In addition to reframing conceptually what qualifications a mentor should have, a second theme that emerged was that it is important to remember that “your skin-folk are not always your kinfolk.” Contrary to the belief that most of the time it is women of color helping other women of color, some of these Latina executives came to realize that the whole notion of women of color supporting each other was “shattered” for them and that many

times the encouragement came from white colleagues. One participant shared her experience with another woman of color as a “competition” and as she was going through her career, she often felt a “competitive feeling vying for resources”. Although others had positive experience with other “skinfock”, many of these Latina executives did contribute to other cultural groups to the success of their professional journey as Latinas are not the gatekeepers of advancement in higher education institutions.

The third theme that emerged within having a supportive network regards how to obtain a mentorship relationship and sustaining it. Many participants spoke about the difference between the two types of mentorship relationship: mentorship and sponsorship. As these participants explained, a mentorship is “where you meet for coffee, talk, and are given advice. They might look over your resume and say good luck.” On the other hand, sponsorship is about “going beyond goodwill” and “taking the next step” in helping people walk through the doors of opportunities such as making calls, getting you connected to hiring panels, or actively sharing with others that “you’re doing a kick ass job.” Sometimes formal structures in assigning mentors did not work because in order to successfully maintain a mentorship relationship, there has to be a certain connection that cannot be forced. As these Latina executives shared, the best type of mentorship relationships need to be “reciprocal” and be a type of relationship in which they “actually want to be friends with them.” Part of the reciprocity was to be mindful of what they brought to the relationship and how they in turn help the mentor. Although sometimes intimidating because they felt like they did not have anything that might help, it was important to realize that everyone can always learn something from someone. A Latina executive shared, “I think understanding that we are

always open, and we are always evolving and learning no matter where we are in the organizational level. You can always learn from anybody.”

Emerging Finding #4: Current Latina executives have a responsibility to keep the door open for the next generation of Latina leaders

This study is meant as a blueprint for aspiring Latina leaders, however, current Latinas in senior-level positions can also use the findings of this study to continue to remind themselves that the work is not done. These Latina leaders shared that they have an obligation to continue to keep the door open for those who come after them as the door is currently just “slightly ajar.” These Latina executives further shared that as a senior-level Latina in a higher education institution, there is an obligation to give voice to the rest of the community to continue counteracting the narrative and moving the needle of change. Of course, one Latina cannot do it by themselves, and that is why it is important to pull others with you, open doors for those who you can, continue to create space, and always make time for mentoring. When asked what current Latina executives can contribute; these Latina executives shared the concept of “bringing the elevator back down.” This concept signifies that Latina leaders should have “the inclination to pull people up” as they are moving up. In addition, these Latina executives advised other Latina leaders to “be true” to themselves and to “bring forward the cultural capital and the cultural wealth” that are important to counter current narratives. Latina leaders have a responsibility to show aspiring Latina leaders that they do not have to give themselves up in terms of their culture, identity, values or family system approach. By continuing to share their story, Latina executives give voice to a different narrative, even when it is a Latinx audience that needs to be heard to make it the

new normative. Although not one person can create change, by paving the way for others, current Latina executives can give others an opportunity to rise in leadership opportunities and continue to grow in numbers so that in the near future, the change that is needed can happen.

Conclusion

In summary, this study investigated the navigational and strategic skills of Latina executives and how they say they acquired those skills to obtain their positions at the University of California (UC) institutions. The interviews revealed that the Latinas often self-sought out opportunities to advance in their career and the importance of learning to navigate the political aspect by building on their political acumen. In addition, because of the low representation of Latina executives, current Latina executives feel as though they just represent an image to the university and are often pigeon-holed in job responsibilities because of their culture. The findings indicate that this group of Latina executives also struggled with balancing how to be proud of their accomplishments and make them known with balancing the cultural aspect of remaining humble. When it comes to institutions and what they can do to retain and recruit Latina leaders, these Latina executives suggested that the university needs to be more aware of the subliminal messages they are sending potential candidates when it comes to the diversity of their institution and that aspiring Latina leaders should get involved in professional organizations to increase their networking but not necessarily count on it to solely obtain positions. In addition to my initial findings, my study revealed that Latina executives carry a secondary load of expectations in the workplace, are consistently struggling to adjust to an institutional system that was not built for them, the importance of a variety of mentorships relations and have a responsibility to continue to

create opportunities for the next generation. The Latinas interviewed were hopeful to continue their current positions and advance to a higher-level position either in their institution, another higher education institution, or leave the field altogether depending on the opportunities that came up. However, there is no doubt that in order to continue advancing in their careers it is crucial to have a supportive network and to continue to seek out opportunities in order to do so.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Study Overview

This study investigated the navigational and strategic skills of Latina executives and reports their descriptions of how they acquired those skills to obtain their senior positions at the University of California (UC) institutions. This final chapter begins with an overview of the study. Next, I offer a consideration of my findings in relations to literature that explored the experiences of aspiring women leaders in higher education and related institutions. I then discuss the limitations, and describe implications for aspiring women leaders, higher education institutions and leaders. Finally, this chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

This study expanded on what has been reported about Latinas in executive positions in higher education institutions. In capturing their stories, especially in decision making, this study supports the literature regarding Latina leaders finding a strategic work-life (General Assembly, 2019). It also elaborates on aspects along their career path that include underrepresentation of women leadership, caregiving responsibilities, outdated corporate culture, and unconscious bias and discrimination (Foster et al., 2018).

Summary of Findings

Contributions to Career Advancement

To detail, my findings extend the scant literature reflecting the decisions Latina executives make that contributed to their advancement to senior positions in the UC system. I found that the strategic decisions participants identified were the ones that they sought. While many studies exist about the lack of representation of Latinos/as in higher education, and how women have to navigate around a variety of biases at work, few studies focus on Latinas in senior positions and their experiences. Findings from the literature led me to expect that the lack of women in leadership positions is a self-perpetuating cycle. Young women do not see role models or potential paths towards executive level leadership roles. They are thus more likely to deselect themselves out of these positions (Foster, et al., 2018, Walsh, 2018, Zaretsky, 2018). By contrast, the findings in this study suggests that these Latina executives did not deselect themselves out of executive level positions. This is a significant finding in that it contrasts with the literature that explores women's decision-making in applying for or failing to apply for executive level positions. Further, this finding adds to the literature in noting that Latina executive women considered themselves to be leaders, making the journey their own, and expanding their professional portfolio in advancing to senior positions. Such a picture emerging from their stories indicates that opportunities to become a leader are not given. Rather, with time, focus and determination, when the opportunity arises, one needs to be prepared to successfully take on the role.

Another significant finding came from participants' comments on how critical it is to have political acumen to be successful as a leader and how they had to gain it on their own. This insight confirms earlier work that characterized a majority of professionals who self-

identify as Latinas as first-generation career professionals and are also the first in their families entering these “new spaces.” My study supports Perez-Litwin, (2012), and Forbes (2018) who have found that Latina executives often lack the knowledge and strategies necessary to navigate these spaces. These Latina executives had to develop their political acumen with experience and time to obtain and be successful in their positions. Like Perez-Litwin (2012), Gomez et al., (2017) and Hewelett et al., (2017), this study, detailed their learning that by being observant, learning how to communicate with other senior-level administrators, becoming aware of when it was time to leave an institution on good terms, and learning how to pick and choose their battles, these Latina executives acquired the political acumen of their institution which then aided them in moving up to a leadership position. Especially revealing was the comment that “as you move up, you learn how to look at things from 30,000 feet point of view and you learn how to connect all the dots institutionally instead of what impacts you directly.” This description signifies the importance of time and experience in learning how to successfully navigate political acumen both as a new professional and ongoing in a senior-level position.

Impact of Cultural Background

While cultural barriers have been examined for how Latinas navigate around the workplace (Horwedel, 2007), these studies do not focus on the approaches women use to navigate senior- level college positions. There is little literature that explores Latina executives’ decisions and only some that explores the decision making of Black and Asian female executives. These studies suggest that these groups also struggle with a leadership representation ceiling and racial and gender biases at work (Smith, et al., 2018, Bloomberg, 2020, Kramer, 2020). This study contributes by describing what Latina executives say they

do and what worked for the University of California- in particular what their presence meant to the institution as a Latina leader and what barriers they faced because of their culture.

Prior literature suggests that women executives, especially women of color, felt that they were token hires. They were the diversity representative in leadership positions. They pointed to the impact of their race or culture on their leadership journey. My study confirmed this perspective. For instance, the women executives in this study pointed to being invited to sit at the table or to events because they are “a brown person,” be placed on a Latinx staff council, or asked to create cultural programs such as a mentorship program for Latinx professionals because they were Latinas. Participants’ stories add to previous qualitative research by the Latinas in Corporate America that found that more than half of Latina/os repress part of their personas at work because their cultural wealth is not valued. Other research details how Latinas conform to traditional white, male standards (Munoz, 2008, Perez-Litwin, 2012, Gomez, et al., 2017) which participants detail. Especially revealing was how this feeling of a “checkmark” pervaded everyday conversations and responsibilities. These Latina executives often felt other executives in their institutions did not “understand that there’s something special that we bring to the conversation.” Given the small percentages of Latina in the UC senior executive positions, Latina leaders reported that their cultural wealth was not valued, welcomed or acknowledged. This sense of tokenism was referred to multiple times where participants felt they were hired to fulfill a diversity requirement within the institution, but they were offered no framework of support to be successful in their position. This “checkmark” concept is a sense of tokenism and responsibility that the institute is fulfilling to meet their own needs of diversity hiring without the obligation to meet the person’s needs of professional development.

This study contributes to the literature on Latina executive women by confirming the enormous sense of responsibility that Latina executives feel that they represent to students and staff as the only one from their culture in their position (Ponjuan, 2011). They pointed to a sense of responsibility, particularly in perceiving that such leadership positions impact students' advancement in education, and aids career aspirations (Marx et.al., 2005, Ponjuan, 2011, Santos et. al., 2013, Avila, 2018, Stout, 2018, Banks, 2019) and that students of color seek help from them more than from others because of the similar cultural background. They understand the cultural wealth of the Latina culture and how to best use it to not only be successful in their studies, but in life. The continued responsibility to be a Latina representative at the institutions reminded these Latinas that their scarcity in leadership positions creates a need for more Latina leaders in higher education institutions.

The Latina executives in this study perceived a Latinx cultural clash between remaining humble in the workplace and seeking leadership roles. This finding supports prior literature which in, examining the role of culture on workplace expectation found that the Latina cultural norms and expectations require respect for authorities in their homes, schools and workplaces - which can hinder their careers; the requirement can make them unwilling to ask for help or deserved promotions (Horwedel, 2007, Gomez, et al., 2017, Featherstone, 2018, Magias, 2020). My findings add that there is pressure to remain humble about accomplishments to not come across as a "showoff." These Latina executives shared that remaining humble while still showcasing their accomplishments at work has been a hard balance to manage. They had to "walk that fine line between not looking like a showboat or trying to make yourself look like you did everything." These Latina executives stated that being able to share and be acknowledged for their accomplishments has contributed to the

advancement of their career, but they always felt like they need to be aware of how others perceive them and how showcasing their accomplishments can come across. These Latina executives acknowledge that it is important to embrace their accomplishments. There are moments, such as negotiating for a promotion, to know their worth, and it becomes imperative that one validates the assets they bring to the institution.

Recruit and Retain Latina Leaders

Higher education institutions would benefit from examining the messages they may be communicating to candidates in their recruiting practices. My findings confirm what we already know about the recruiting practices of many higher education institutions and how they do not match the diversity statements they announce. These hiring and recruiting practices are led mostly by white people, who hire white people (Espinoza et al., 2018, Krupnick, 2018). This study sought to uncover what strategies institutions can implement to retain and recruit future Latina executives. The literature led me to believe that institutions with a diverse leadership team tend to yield a diverse group of new hires (Betts, et al., 2009, Padamsee & Crowe 2017, Espinosa et al., 2018). However, my findings found that entire hiring process is set up in a way that serves as a disadvantage to Latinas and people of color from the beginning such as in recruitment materials to the final interview. The literature and my study confirm that the pipeline myth, that is, the myth that posits that there are too few degree holding women qualified for leadership positions is indeed false, suggesting some other phenomenon must be occurring that explains the underrepresentation of postsecondary Latina leaders (Johnson, 2017, Maloney, 2019, Pritchard et al., 2020, Whitford, 2020). My findings extend what is known about how women executives perceive the hiring practices of higher education institutions. My findings suggest that higher education institutions need to

do a better job selecting who sits on their search committees, advertise to diverse populations, and to reevaluate their strict position requirements that might instantly disqualify a diverse candidate with a nontraditional path.

My findings also speak to the lack of women in leadership positions. Foster, Klein and Gee (2018) argue that with the lack of women representation in leadership positions, women leaders often lack networking support. They further argue that Latinas often have no one to turn to for career advice and professional development (Horwedel, 2007, Walsh, 2018). My findings support this claim and extend it, outlining the benefits of professional organizations. The Latina executives were able to speak to how they often used professional organizations as a support network and as a way to give back and mentor newer professionals. The story from one Latina executive particularly unveiled how professional organizations served as a good starting point that allowed her to share her experience navigating the system with other “like-minded” professionals. These Latina executives noted that there are a lack of professional organizations and mentorship programs that are catered towards Latina executives. My findings indicate that although professional organizations will not directly lead to a new job, aspiring Latina leaders should use them to gain new knowledge, networks, and dabble in leadership opportunities.

The significance of my study’s findings derived from the need to address the gap of Latinas in senior positions in higher education institutions. All the findings confirm or extend the current literature, however, one of most significant findings is the Latinx cultural clash of remaining humble in the workplace. These Latina executives learned from experience that oftentimes hard work alone is not rewarded with opportunity. None of these Latina executives obtained their senior-level position solely because of hard work - but rather

because they did not deselect themselves out of executive level positions: indeed, they sought them out. These Latina executives learned that they had to let go of the notion of remaining humble and embrace being “unapologetically comfortable” in their accomplishments. However, claiming accomplishment is counterintuitive to the Latinx community.

Many of these Latina leaders consider themselves first-generation and are one of the only Latinas in their office, department or even institutions. Prior to obtaining their senior-level positions, they had no lived experience on how to navigate higher education institutions. In order for aspiring Latina leaders to be successful and move up to senior-level positions, they had to let go of the notion of remaining humble and believing that their hard work will be automatically rewarded. The significance of my findings is to share with aspiring Latina leaders that people who get awarded with opportunity and promotions are- as these Latina executives shared “the ones that are able to get their work, skills, and expertise formally recognized, acknowledged, and compensated.”

Limitations

While this study provides insight into Latina executives' leadership pathway, it is not without its limitations. These limitations serve as a future research consideration for individuals who might want to study the topic. This section will address the most significant limitations and provide suggestions for future research.

The first limitation was the small number of Latina professionals from across the UC system. The study involved participants who self-selected to participate. Therefore, self-selection bias may exist and may negatively impact the internal validity of the study (Creswell, 2014). With the findings of this study, it is not possible to generalize these findings to other colleges and universities within a statewide or national level. There was

only a total of nine study participants. The findings can serve as a starting point for discussion and future research on Latina leaders across all fields.

Secondly, the study only examined Latinas who work in the UC system within a specific administrative title and did not include the experiences of other Latina administrators in the UC system. The cultural background and life experiences of these women may not represent the experiences of all Latinas in different or similar roles.

The third is to highlight my own bias as a researcher. Although I was careful to not allow any personal biases to affect the study, I am aware that a researcher's bias cannot be eliminated. As an aspiring higher education Latina professional, this study is of interest to me. Sharing a part of the identity of the women in my research, it is possible that my personal experiences and assumptions may have shaped the study design and my interpretations. I may have seen gender barriers or cultural discrimination where none existed. A co-coder examined the data compiled and analysis for the purpose of eliminating any bias that may have been reflected in my conclusions.

Lastly, timing and financial constraints did not allow for additional coding to be conducted by multiple researchers. The addition of multiple coders would strengthen the reliability of the findings. Despite the limitations of the study, it does provide a platform for future studies in seeking to understand the experiences of Latinas in all fields as they navigate through their leadership journey. This study might be useful for educational practitioners, educational leaders, policy makers, higher education institutions, and women of color as they navigate through their own challenges as they continue to work towards leadership roles in their fields.

Implications

Implications for Aspiring Latina Executives

My hope is that aspiring Latina executives can draw on the findings of this study to navigate through their own professional and personal journeys. As there are not many senior-level Latinas administrators in higher education institutions, aspiring Latina executives can use this study to hear and learn stories that may be similar to their experience and be able to apply the lessons learned. It can sometimes become un motivating and difficult to navigate the landscape and politics of higher education when there is no representation from your culture or gender in leadership positions. As these Latina leaders who participated in the study advised: aspiring Latina leaders should be unapologetically comfortable in their accomplishments, self-advocate, and most importantly, be willing to take bold steps in applying for senior-level positions. The findings from this study highlight the potential culture classes that some aspiring Latina executives may experience. Specifically, findings highlighted the potential for a personal struggle with the cultural clash of the need to be recognized for accomplishments, on the one hand (an important factor in being considered for promotions) and staying humble. Findings suggest that aspiring Latina executives should converse with their supervisor or mentors to find ways in which their accomplishments can be shared in an environment where they feel enabled to do so. As fearful as they may be, aspiring Latina executives need to take risks and always apply to that next position, even if they are unsure if they will get an offer. Going through the process can serve as an experience for next time. By reading the journeys and the navigational and strategic thinking of other Latina leaders, this study can be used as a blueprint to help aspiring Latinas leaders

take the next step towards their career and reframe their way of thinking into an asset-based lens.

Implications for Current Latina Executives

An important implication is for those who are working in the University of California system and mentor aspiring Latina executives. As I noted in Chapter four, these Latina executives recommended other current Latina executives to continue to create space and keep the door of opportunities open for the next generation of Latina leaders. These study participants also noted the importance of being the voice of their community as one of the only in their positions and counteracting the narrative, even within a Latinx audience to make it the new normative. A final reminder from these Latina executives is the concept of pushing the button to the elevator when you reach a senior-level position to give the opportunity to bring people up with you.

Implications for Higher Education Institutions

The University of California's had record-shattering applications for fall 2021. These showed surges in Black, Latino and other underrepresented students seeking admission, possibly dismantling long-standing admission barriers and building a student body that reflects the state's diversity (Watanabe, 2020). UC institutions are in a unique position to not only have a student population that reflects its surrounding environment, but they can also lead the way in having administrators reflect their student population. UC institutions can use this study to help them recruit and retain Latina administrators and advance them to leadership positions on campus.

Study participants mentioned the establishment of the UC Chicano Latino advisory committee to the President as a way to advance a thriving Chicano/Latino presence on all UC

campuses. The UC website states, “the Council provides input to UC leadership on approaches to address the lack of representation of Chicanos/Latinos in senior faculty and administrative positions, and it recommends strategies for improving Chicano/Latino student success along the educational pipeline. The Council identifies the most significant barriers to achieving greater Chicano/Latino student, faculty and staff presence at UC and works across the system with campus leaders to remove those barriers and advance UC as a national model of Chicano/Latino leadership in higher education” (UCOP, n.b). Although this is a great start, it should not be the only answer. According to the findings of my study, institutions need to do a better job in their job recruitment by infiltrating informal networks and using them as a strategy to recruit. They can do this by partnering up with professional organizations that are culturally related or be more targeted in their search.

Once Latina leaders made it through recruitment and offered a position, the study found that many struggled with navigating to the political acumen of the institutions. UC institutions need to implement a better onboarding process in which helps aspiring and new leaders navigate the political acumen faster. Furthermore, UC institutions need to look at the Latinas that are currently in the system and offer more support professionally. There needs to be more effort placed in not only diversifying the student population but also the staff. In addition, institutions need to readjust their work culture and incorporate the cultural wealth that people of color possess and integrate them in the workplace. By creating a more inclusive supportive environment that is catered towards their specific needs, not only will higher education institutions retain Latinas, but they will continue to foster leadership opportunities for the new generation of aspiring leaders.

Implications for Higher Education Institutional Leadership

Higher education like any other big organizations is a context undergoing constant change. Most of the time, policies that address structural racism, and sexism are hard to implement fast, but individuals are different. Leaders make choices every day. This is a call of majority action where the higher education institutional leadership needs to reflect and ask themselves how and what they are doing in supporting their Latina leaders on their campus. Higher education leaders have a responsibility and the ability to pave the way for aspiring leaders that come after them. Higher education leaders can be an advocate for changes such as offering sponsorship opportunities, increasing women representation in leadership roles, addressing unconscious bias, and changing the outdated corporate culture at their institutions. The current leaders in higher education need to support these changes by making them a part of their policy and practice and not just speaking about diversity for the sake of diversity. Institutional leadership can implement an institutional structure that would enable people, including Latinas practices and experiences that regularize opportunities for staff and administrators to share their accomplishments, without having to individually seek opportunities to do so. One example could be to require all senior management administration to start their staff meeting encouraging everyone to share one thing they have done or are proud of that month. The culture of higher education is slowly shifting and will continue to do so unless the current leaders generate the change themselves and slowly start moving the needle with their leadership power.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should investigate the phenomena of a “secondary load.” For Latina executives, higher education institutions still dominated by male leadership are sites for

additional burdens. Latina executives in addition to dealing with gender experiences, carry a secondary load of cultural expectations. Latina executives feel that their ethnicity continuously affects identity. They are particularly conscious of how others see them and how they see themselves in their everyday work. Future research might involve a large-scale study of Latina executives throughout the United States to learn more about the scale of this phenomena and how the executives perceive and respond to it.

Additional research should explore Latina executives and their experience acclimating to higher education institutions. Latina executives feel that it is a daily battle to work within a system where they are continuously reminded that the institution was not built with them in mind. Since many Latina executives tend to be the first and only Latina in their position, they often bring a different lens for change that is often not acknowledged or welcomed. Future research might involve the need for culturally specific professional development programs, changing systems, and operations for a diverse population that are culturally mindful and structurally supported so that current and future Latinas can feel supported professionally, culturally and personally.

Another future research opportunity should investigate how a supportive network can have an impact on your career experience. All these Latina executives acknowledged that they alone did not get to their positions and that they had help from a variety of mentors along the way. These Latina executives advised that aspiring Latina leaders should have a mentorship relationship as one is “multi-talented” and “multi-interested” and to be more open about who is considered a mentor. These Latinas feel like there is a concept that a mentor should be someone of the same gender, culture or a professional that you aspire to be. These Latina executives found that the most significant mentor that contributed to their career

sometimes did not fit any of those. They urge aspiring Latina leaders to obtain mentors in which they can sustain a friendly relationship, can offer advice and support and to be open to being mentored by people outside your culture. Because white men do hold most of the leadership positions on campus, it is crucial for Latinas to build those relationships as they can offer guidance in successfully navigate higher education institutions. Future research might involve a large-scale study of Latina executives throughout the United States to learn more about their specific supportive network and the impact it had on their careers.

My findings confirmed the importance of administrative representation and the positive effects it has on student success. Latinas in faculty positions also remain underrepresented and research is needed to investigate the journeys of those Latinas who successfully navigate higher education institutions to faculty rank. Further studies can include how Latina faculty are able to navigate the field and the impact of their cultural background has on their experience.

My findings also confirmed the importance of professional organizations and networking. Future research can explore the lack of mentorship for Latinas in senior-level positions. More in-depth research is needed on what type of formal or informal mentorship networks are in place to support Latinas in senior-level positions. As my research found, these Latina executives provide support to aspiring Latina leaders, but often feel alone and without any mentorship within their own rank.

Although my study focused on Latinas in executive positions at the University of California system and their experience in navigating to those positions, future research can explore the experiences of women executives who are not in a university setting such as in nonprofits, K-12 administration or corporate America. Future research can consider the

experiences of women executives in these settings and how they experience being one of the only ones, finding mentors, and navigating the workplace politics in advancing to senior-level positions.

Finally, future research can examine the Latino executive experience in higher education. Although being male, they are still a person of color in a white dominated field. Latino representation in higher education institutions continue to be underrepresented. Research is needed to investigate how Latinos successfully navigate higher education institutions and how gender and culture combined plays a role in their experience to obtain their senior-level positions.

Personal Reflection

This study provided the leadership journey of Latinas in senior-level positions and investigated the navigational and strategic skills of Latina executives and how they say they acquired those skills to obtain their positions at the University of California (UC) institutions. As an aspiring Latina identifying leader, this study allowed me to hear from other female leaders in my field, strengthen my skills as a leader and expanded my network of leaders to support me professionally. I meant for this research to serve as a blueprint to aspiring Latina leaders not only in the field of higher education but in all fields. Research shows that women are not equally represented in leadership across professional sectors, even though women represent at least half of the population. This study can be one of many resources to change those statistics and inspire others to continue to conduct similar much needed research.

The Latino population will soon be in the majority population of racial and ethnic groups in the state of California. One of the University of California's fundamental missions is to provide public service that benefits California and the nation. To best meet the needs of

California and its student population, the UC institution is in a unique position to be the leader in making the necessary opportunity changes. The senior-level administration needs to reflect the state population and the student population that they are serving. The UC institutions have the talent and have the power to continue to open pathways to Latina leaders and continue to take steps to diversify their leadership teams.

Appendix A

Recruitment Email

October 2020

Dear Dr. [REDACTED],

You are invited to participate in a study on investigating navigational and strategic skills of Latina executives and how they used those skills to obtain their positions at University of California institutions.

My name is Vanessa Tejada, and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program, at the University of California, Los Angeles.

All Latinas who are currently holding a full time senior administrative position with a title of Associate or Assistant Vice Chancellor are eligible to participate in this study. Each Latina administrator who agrees to participate in this study will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview and a 30-40-minute follow-up interview. The interview will be conducted through Zoom between October- December. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your work experiences and career aspirations and how your Latina identity may have impacted these experiences.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and highly appreciated. If you grant permission, the interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. **All conversations will remain confidential; your name, your specific UC campus, and other identifying characteristics will not be used in reports and presentations.** Every effort will be made to minimize the risk of a breach of confidentiality.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this study. I really hope that you will grant your consent to participate in this important study. While there is no direct benefit to you, the results of this research may help others become more aware of what is needed for Latina women to achieve executive level positions at institutions of higher education. If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact me as soon as possible at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

In addition, if you know of other self-identifying Latina Assistant Vice Chancellor's working in the UC institutions that I could reach out to, it would be much appreciated.

I look forward to the possibility of hearing about your journey in higher education.

Sincerely,
Vanessa Tejada



Doctoral Candidate
UCLA, Educational Leadership Program

Appendix B

Reminder Email

October 2020

Hello Dr. [REDACTED],

This is a friendly reminder that in one week, I will be conducting my initial interview for my study. I will be sure to send a reminder the day before as well. As promised, the interview questions are attached, and the Zoom information is below. In addition, a consent form is also attached (no need for signature or to return it), it is just for your information.

Monday, 10/12 from 10:00 a.m. -11:30 a.m.

Join Zoom Meeting

[REDACTED]

Meeting ID: [REDACTED]

I look forward to speaking with you next week. Please let me know if any questions come up in the meantime.

Thank you,
Vanessa

Appendix C

Initial Interview Protocol

Date:

Time of Interview:

Interview Number and Pseudonym:

Interviewee Title:

Hello and thank you for taking the time for this interview. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my research. As I indicated, this interview will be incorporated into my study of Latina executives in higher education institutions. The interview will take about 60-90 minutes. I would like your permission to audio record this interview so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time you wish to discontinue the interview, or the use of the recorder, please feel free to let me know and we will stop. The content of the interview will be confidential and will only be used for research and educational purposes. Your identity will not be disclosed. Do you have any questions you would like me to answer before we begin?

My research project as a whole is seeking to understand your professional and personal journey into the position you are currently hold. My study does not aim to specifically focus on the barriers but rather discover the ways successful women have navigated overcome the different obstacles they encountered along their career paths.

Warm Up Questions:

- Can you tell me long have you been in your current position?
- What is your highest degree received?
- How many institutions have you worked at?

Questions:

Related to RQ #1 - What decisions do Latina executives make that they perceive as having contributed to their advancement to senior positions in the UC system?

1. Please describe your journey to the seat you are sitting in today.
2. What were the challenges/barriers as well as supports that were particularly significant for you personally and how did you navigate them?
 - a. As a Latina navigating the system to get to your current position and
 - b. As a Latina executive currently in your institution
3. Throughout your professional journey, were their pivotal moments in your career trajectory? If so, what were they?
4. When you faced important decisions in your career, how did you navigate the decisions around your career trajectory?
5. Can you tell me a bit about the factors that have led to your current position, that is, moving from your former position? What factors played a role in your deciding to pursue and accept your current position? What reservations did you have, if any?

6. If you had or have a mentee, what types of skills would you tell the mentee are necessary for a female identifying professional to make it to executive positions in the UC system?
 - a. Of these skills, which did you have, and which did you develop? How did those work for you as you moved up the ladder?
7. Did you have specific people or situations that were influences in your professional journey, and if so, how, by whom and what part did they play?
8. Do you have an artifact, picture, quote, etc., something that is always meaningful to you in your leadership journey? If so, would you mind sharing it with me?

Related to RQ #2- What impact, if at all, do Latina executives perceive their cultural backgrounds had on their leadership journey?

9. How would you describe your ethnicity and identity in general?
10. In what ways, if at all, do you think your ethnicity has an influence on the ways you navigate the workplace?
 - a. In what ways, if at all, do you think your ethnicity has an influence on the way that others perceive you in the workplace?
 - b. Has your ethnicity been a positive influence? If so, in what ways?
11. What does being a Latina executive in higher education represent to you and your institution?
 - a. In what ways, if at all, did your ethnicity/culture play a deciding factor in pursuing/accepting the position?
12. If you were to rank the features of your identity with respect to the ways they have impacted specific decisions you make at this institution, how would you rank them, and does it vary? If so, how?

Related to RQ #3- What strategies do Latina executives recommend that institutions use to recruit and retain future Latina executives?

13. As of October 2018, less than 10% of Senior Management identified as Hispanic/Latinx at UC institutions. What do you think about the representation of Latina women in senior level UC positions- too many, not enough, about right? Why?
14. Having a diverse leadership team has been associated with a higher focus on diversity, equity and inclusion in their recruiting practices. What strategies do you believe could be beneficial to institutions looking to recruit and retain Latinas?
15. If you were to create an organization to address the underrepresentation of Latinas in those positions (or currently belong to one) what factors would you suggest are essential?

16. What contribution, if any, can Latinas who currently hold executive level positions make?

17. What is one thing you wish Latinas who aspire to be in executive positions would remember as they navigate through their professional journey?

Concluding Questions:

18. Do you have a guiding mantra or guiding idea that you refer to in your life? If so, would you be willing to share that with me?

19. Are there any other questions that you feel I should have asked to help me fully understand your experience as a Latina leader in the UC system?

20. Any final thoughts as we end this interview?

Appendix D

Follow-Up Interview Protocol

Date:

Time of Interview:

Interview Number and Pseudonym:

Interviewee Title:

Hello again. Thank you so much for taking the time for this follow up interview. The interview will take about 60 minutes. As before, I would like your permission to audio record this interview so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time you wish to discontinue the interview, or the use of the recorder, please feel free to let me know and we will stop. The content of the interview will be confidential and will only be used for research and educational purposes. Your identity will not be disclosed. Do you have any questions you would like me to answer before we begin?

Questions:

Related to RQ #1 - What decisions do Latina executives make that they perceive as having contributed to their advancement to senior positions in the UC system?

1. What organizations/affiliations are you a part of that have helped you grow professionally and/or personally?
2. What strategies have you used, if any, over the years, to identify and work with personal mentors?
 - a. Which, if any, of those strategies have you found most effective? Which if any, would you recommend to Latinas who aspire to be in executive level positions?
3. How have you developed your political acumen within your institution?
 - a. In what situations have you needed to use your political acumen the most?
4. Looking back over your career, thus far, what have been your highs and lows? How did you navigate them?
5. What motivational strategies have you used, over the years, to stay motivated to continue in your career aspirations?

Related to RQ #2- What impact, if at all, do Latina executives perceive their cultural backgrounds had on their leadership journey?

6. In what ways, if at all, has your cultural background aided or affected your professional journey and have you been pressured to hold diversity-related responsibilities? If so, can you share your experience with me?
7. A common saying is “women cannot have it all.” What strategies have you used to manage to create a work-life balance that works for you?
8. Have you ever had a situation in which you have thought about whether and how you might be viewed as a role model? For example, what do you think being a Latina executive in higher education represents to your Latinx students?

Related to RQ #3- What strategies do Latina executives recommend that institutions use to recruit and retain future Latina executives?

9. What are your aspirations in your position as a senior level Latina in your institution and what if any, are the next steps for you personally and professionally? How are you navigating it?
10. As a senior level executive, how do you navigate the workplace differently than when you were in an entry or mid-level position?
11. If your supervisor were to provide you one thing beyond financial resources that would be a game changer for you as a professional or for your work, what could your supervisor provide?

Concluding Questions

12. Any final thoughts as we end this interview?

Appendix E

Final Coding Scheme

Initial Interview

The screenshot displays a software interface for managing a coding scheme. At the top, a teal header bar contains the word "Codes" and four icons: a magnifying glass, a list icon, an exclamation mark, and a plus sign. Below the header, a list of codes is presented in a light gray background. Each code is preceded by a small teal pill-shaped icon. Some codes are expanded, indicated by a downward-pointing triangle to their left. The codes are as follows:

- Latinas should remember as they navigate professi...
 - Skills needed
 - Contributions Latina executives can make
 - Decisions that Helped Advance Career
 - Factors to accept current position
- Identity and Ethnicity
 - Quote, Artifact, Picture
 - Perception of Ethnicity by others
 - Ethnicity in Workplace Navigation
 - Representation to Self
- Institutional Structures
 - Political Acumen
 - Representation of UC Latina women in senior posi...
 - Representation to Instiution
- Challenges/Barriers
 - Family Obligation
- Mentorship
 - Confidential People
 - Organization factors
 - Pivotal Moments
 - Retain and Recruit Latinas
 - Supports
 - Surprises

Follow-Up Interview



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