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2003

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approved version of the following dissertation:

MEXICAN AMERICAN FEMALE PRINCIPALS AND THEIR CHAMELEON  
IDENTITY: WORKING AGAINST A SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED IDENTITY  
IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SCHOOL DISTRICT

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IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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**Dissertation**

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my two beautiful and courageous daughters, Alexandria Lauren Ball and Jordan Clare Ball. They have been my inspiration, my light, and my cheerleaders throughout this arduous task of completing a dissertation as a single mother. They have helped me be a more courageous person, and they have encouraged me to “do my homework.” I also dedicate this study to my parents, Minerva A. Trujillo and Arthur H. Trujillo, who have helped me recognize that having the identities of Mexican, American, and woman are wonderful gifts and can help propel me to accomplish great feats. My parents have always encouraged me to be thankful and proud of being a Mexican American female, and this study reflects their encouragement.

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patience, her suggestions, and her insight in making my dissertation a better and more accessible document.

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successful Mexican American female principals and have inspired me to aspire to a principalship while emulating them: dedicated and purposeful leaders of schools.

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## Preface

This dissertation is a study of the social constructions of identity and the ways those social constructions affect and influence Mexican American females as public school leaders. I have a deep appreciation for the 4 women who told me their stories and shared their insight on the influences on their identity. They are given different names within this study, but their stories are ones that illuminate the identity of respectable, conscientious, and passionate leaders. Their stories of identity are stories of inspiration.



MEXICAN AMERICAN FEMALE PRINCIPALS AND THEIR CHAMELEON  
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The identity of Mexican American women and the influences of the social constructions on their identity is the focus of this dissertation. The focus and purpose of the research was to reveal, to describe, and to examine the success of Mexican American female educational leaders and how their identities have been influenced by assigned attributes, self-assigned attributes, Chicana feminism, and educational leadership styles. The study focused on 4 successful Mexican American female principals and the influences on their chameleon identity from family, culture, and society. The three research questions that guided this research were (a) What does identity mean to Mexican American female educational leaders? (b) how does the

Mexican American female identity change due to experiences, influences, and expectations from family, culture, society, and self? and (c) what does the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader “look like” according to the narratives gathered for this study?

Qualitative research was used for this study, specifically the approaches of naturalistic and narrative inquiry. This approach was used to find in-depth stories of the experiences of 4 successful Mexican American female principals. The data were collected through two individual interviews with each participant and one group interview. The open-ended interview method was used to encourage informal conversations, which helped themes to emerge (Patton, 1990). This method allowed for spontaneous questions and uninterrupted narratives.

This study helps fill the gap in research on women and minorities. It serves as a beacon that illuminates the chameleon identity of successful Mexican American female principals. This beacon has implications for recognizing the need to identify Mexican American females as different from Hispanics and Minority women as a whole. Additionally, this beacon has implications for practice in schools, for policy at the district and state levels, and for further research. The study findings confirm other research in the area of female and minority identity, placement of female principals within a district, and influences in identity; they also provide a new realization of the prototype of a successful Mexican American female principal based on the 4 women’s stories.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Traditionally, men have dominated leadership positions in the field of education, particularly the positions of principal and superintendent. These positions have become increasingly available to women as well as minorities or those who do not identify with the White culture. Successful women and minorities have been given opportunities to succeed in administrative positions (Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Skrla, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Tallerico, 1999, 2000) to prove that administrative positions should not be filled only by men. These opportunities have helped women and minorities not only to become more visible and effective, but also to identify with educational administrators as leaders valuable in education (Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Skrla, 1999, 2000b; Tallerico, 1999, 2000).

Identifying with educational administrators involves accepting the responsibilities, characteristics, and attributes assigned and ascribed to that position. By understanding and accepting these responsibilities, characteristics, and attributes, women and minorities have changed their perspective on educational administration. Assuming a new role identity helps increase understanding and widens perspectives on educational positions. For example, a teacher has the responsibilities, characteristics, and attributes of caring and teaching for children and ensuring that they learn at the appropriate level and pace. An administrator has the responsibilities,

characteristics, and attributes of leading and caring for teachers and children, ensuring that they succeed at the appropriate level and pace. With increased opportunities in educational administration, women and minorities can become successful and change from the role identity of teacher to that of educational administrator.

The role identity of an administrator has many aspects, as each person who becomes an educational administrator brings individual experiences, background, and culture to the administrative role. This identity is shaped by the influence of the family, organization, and society (Curry, 2000; Powell, 1993; Restine, 1993). These familial, organizational, and societal influences are in turn dependent upon external, changing influences, beliefs, biases, ideas, and values (Curry; Powell; Yon, 2000). In other words, the role identity of the administrator changes according to the outside influences and needs of the students, teachers, and community. This myriad of forces helps shape a person's identity as an individual and as an educational leader.

The combination of these external forces with an individual's unique background and culture creates an identity for that person. As the external forces change, an individual's identity changes. For example, women may have identities as nurturers, caregivers, and diplomats when working with others. However, some women may possess the additional identities of disciplinarians, financiers, and authoritarians when working with others. The identity is shaped according to the need at a particular time and place and can change as needed and as appropriate (Curry, 2000; Yon, 2000). This changeability means that the attributes and characteristics



assigned to a person may not be observed or even be true for that person at any given time. For instance, although women and minorities have been assigned certain traditional attributes and characteristics, some women and minorities may never display those assigned attributes and characteristics. They may display other attributes and characteristics to fit their identity and need at that point in time. In other words, changing opportunities for women and minorities can lead to changing attributes and characteristics, or identities.

### *Context of Study*

Attributes and characteristics assumed by women and minorities depend on each individual and are unique to that person. This unique identity may not parallel or be consistent with the identity assigned by a culture, an organization, or a society. Therefore, identities are truly created by a person and not by a culture, an organization, or a society, although they may influence an identity. Understanding that women and minorities have unique identities may help increase their participation as educational leaders and lower the ratio of female teachers to female administrators.

Women have dominated the teaching field since the Colonial Age (Shakeshaft, 1989), but not the administrative field. Administration was assumed to be a domain for men, particularly White men. Minorities became more visible in education in the 1920s, but only as teachers (Gallegos y Chavez, 1979). The trend has

remained the same; minorities and women are more visible today in teaching positions, but the educational administration field has remained largely closed to them. For example, in a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (Holloway, 2000), the results of a School and Staffing survey demonstrated that the majority of females in education held teaching positions. Although almost half the female teachers were principals, they were mostly found in the elementary schools. Only about 11% of females were principals in secondary schools. Table 1 shows the large ratio of female teachers to female principals.

Table 1

*Percentage of Public and Private School Women Principals and Teachers, by School Level, 1987–1988 and 1990–1991*

Schools	Principals		Teachers	
	1987–1988	1990–1991	1987–1988	1990–1991
<b>Public</b>				
Elementary	30.0	36.5	82.8	83.2
Secondary	9.4	11.0	52.1	53.2
<b>Private</b>				
Elementary	65.1	65.7	88.9	88.6
Secondary	32.3	28.9	58.6	53.3

*Note.* Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School and Staffing Survey, 1987–1988 and 1990–1991, as cited in *Reading Today*, 1995.

The ratio between female teachers and administrators is disheartening. Even though the number of female principals may have increased slowly in elementary schools, the number has decreased in secondary schools. Other researchers have found similar results regarding the comparative number of teachers and administrators among men, women, and minorities. The National Center for Education Statistics found in 1993–1994 that of a total of 79,618 principals in public schools nationwide, only 27,505 were women (Holloway, 2000). Statistics on race showed that 85% of the 79,618 principals were White, about 10% were Black, and only 4% were Hispanic. *Education USA* (1999) reported another study regarding diversity among principals. According to a 1999 study by *Superintendent Prepared*, elementary schools supported the most diversity among principalships nationwide. Of elementary school principals, 41% were female and 17% were minorities. McCreight (2002) found evidence of small increases in principal diversity in research done by Educational Research Service, the National Association of Secondary Principals, and the National Association of Elementary Principals. Between 1987 and 1994, the number of minority principals increased from 13% to 16%, with Hispanics accounting for 4.1% of principals. In 1998, 4.5% of Hispanics nationwide were principals.

Although these statistics put women and minorities “on the map,” the percentages of successful women and minorities in principalship positions are still disproportionately small. More successful women and minorities must be given

opportunities to lead educational organizations and to bring unique and valuable identities to the field. Their unique and valuable identities can help provide a foundation for renaming or reassessing assigned attributes, because the assigned attributes placed on women and minorities are not always accurate. The assigning of inaccurate attributes and the assumption that a generalized array of attributes fits all women and minorities should be reconsidered. Unfortunately, there is not enough literature on women and minorities emphasizing attributes truer to their identities and also refuting the assumptions of generalized attributes.

### *Rationale*

Generalizing and assuming all women and minorities possess characteristics of assigned attributes can be dangerous for educational administrators. This danger has been documented in some research, but very little research has focused on the identity and assigned attributes of women and minorities in educational administration. Furthermore, the limited literature on women and minorities (Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Tallerico, 2000) has not specified how identity affects women and minorities in education. The literature also has not specified how women and minorities reeducate others not to judge them using assigned attributes. Hence, the research literature has the following gaps:

1. How does the identity of successful women and minorities affect educational administration and how does educational administration affect them?

2. What is the impact of the lack of successful females and minorities in educational administrative positions?

3. What are the individual roles and identities of women and minorities in education? Because the individual roles and identities of women and minorities in education are not fully explored in the research literature, it is important to understand that not all successful women and minorities are the same.

Educational research on minorities has focused mainly on the experiences of Black administrators (Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Tallerico, 1999, 2000). The educational research on women has focused on the experiences of White female administrators (Skrla, 1999, 2000b). Clearly, this sort of research on minorities and women cannot be generalized to pertain to all people of color and to women of color, in particular. The focus of past research might also lead to the incorrect assumption that all minorities and all women have similar identities with similar characteristics and attributes. However, although some similarities may be shared by all minorities and all women, researchers should not ignore unique and individual characteristics and attributes that are based on personal experiences, culture, and community influences. This unique and individual identity and the understanding that each person is different from the next are missing from the literature.

It is important to understand that successful women and minorities bring unique and individual identities when promoted to administrative positions.

Traditional attributes ascribed to administrative positions have probably been designed to fit only men, specifically White men, and cannot be placed on women and minorities. If successful women and minorities expect that their job performance will be judged by the experiences of White men, according to an inappropriate set of attributes, they may not be willing to join the ranks of educational leadership, in fear of high emotional and practical costs (Kivell & Phelps, 2002). If the experiences of White men are seen as the “norm,” women and minorities who adopt the norm will fit in better and will be more accepted (Brunner, 1999; Hampton, 1998). However, fitting in and accepting the norm ignores the unique and individual identities of each person. This also means ignoring any new characteristics, attributes, experiences, ideas, and competencies that challenge the norm and may improve the norm. Improving and changing the norm is a potential benefit of encouraging diversity in educational leadership.

Improving the norm and increasing diversity through the hiring of successful women and minorities is a difficult challenge because it involves changing the ideas of socialized norms. Socialized norms are those that society deems acceptable and by which it expects individuals and groups to abide. When the socialized norms are challenged, diversity and new ideas, perspectives, perceptions, and identities can be learned. For example, in educational administration, the leadership positions have mainly gone to White men (Grogan, 1996; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Skrla, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Tallerico, 1999, 2000). The socialized norm was based on the

leadership styles and characteristics of the White male. However, more women and minorities have earned the opportunities to lead schools and districts (Grogan, 1996; Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Ortiz & Marshal; Skrla, 1999, 2000b; Tallerico, 1999, 2000) and have changed the norm, which has changed the definition and face of leadership. This change has been a slow process, but the norms are changing as educational leadership slowly becomes more diverse.

Studying the increasing diversity of leadership and the changing definition of leadership should provide evidence that individuals with unique identities are the reason for the change. These unique identities are not always obvious because women and minorities have learned to hide, to ignore, or to dismiss their identities and to adopt the “normed” identity in order to be accepted (Chase, 1995; Edson, 1987; Grogan, 1996; Jones & Montenegro, 1983; Marshall, 1985; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Skrla, 1999, 2000a; Tallerico, 1999, 2000). This invisible identity becomes lost and discounted. This invisible identity also becomes the normed identity for women and minorities, which in turn is accepted as a socially constructed identity ascribed to all women and minorities. This invisible identity has led to problems in educational administration with successful women and minorities being lost or devalued, meaning their identities have been ignored. This may be a reason for the small numbers of successful women and minorities in educational administration.

*Socializing women and minorities.* Reasons for the small numbers of successful women and minorities in educational administration have been documented in research. Thomas' (1986) documented theory included three major reasons: (a) discriminatory practices against women; (b) limits placed upon women by themselves or by others because of traditions, career expectations, and social norms; and (c) the changing nature of school administration (p. 104). Thomas' theory supported Coursen (as cited in Weber, Feldman, & Poling, 1981), who reported that women and men have been conditioned by society to believe that women are not capable leaders. Like women, minorities have been overlooked as leaders. Marcano (1997) and Mendez-Morse (1999) found that minorities, specifically Hispanic females, were overlooked for administrative positions because of their cultural background and assigned attributes, which included a perceived lack of leadership skills.

Women and minorities have been conditioned and socialized to believe certain assigned attributes about themselves. Some women and minorities have believed these assigned attributes (Ortiz & Marshall, 1995), and some have worked at reconditioning their communities to accept them based on self-reassigned attributes (Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Skrla, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Tallerico, 1999, 2000). However, women and minorities in educational leadership positions have found reconditioning and resocializing difficult because they involve realigning the norm. Rather than face the arduous challenge of changing the norm, some women



and minorities have found it easier to conform or to acquiesce to the norm. For example, Ortiz and Marshal found that “females and minorities are ‘broken’ by White males from their personal attributes and are socialized to become educational administrators as conceived by White male” (p. 97). Consequently, females and minorities have their identities changed by the dominant hegemonic culture; they disregard their own identity in order to adopt the acceptable identity. This acceptable identity is one that discounts most, if not all, personal attributes that do not conform to the norm.

Accepting an externally applied identity to which one is not accustomed creates personal and career barriers for an individual. Furthermore, discounting the individual identity and replacing it with an accepted identity creates an invisible, repressed identity. Marshall (1985) referred to the barriers and the invisibility of being a woman and a minority as a stigma. This stigma becomes a reason for women and minorities to “play the game” by accepting normed identities and overlooking their individual status, which Grogan (1996) called positioning. Women tend to position themselves (e.g., by obtaining more academic degrees) in relation to the dominant expectations in education in order to be more appealing for administrative positions (Grogan, 1996). However, as Grogan warned, if women adhere to “giving” and “positioning” they run the risk of affirming certain incorrect assumptions, such as that

gender and color are attributes that can and should be controlled by the bearer (something like a sixth finger or a birthmark to be hidden from sight in order

not to offend); and second, that color and gender will lose at least some of their visibility if one is protected by academic degrees. (p.53)

In other words, giving in to the dominant expectation entirely and forgetting personal attributes means denying one's identity.

However, it may be assumed that women and minorities who deny their self-identity will be promoted to educational administration based on competence rather than "handouts" based on gender and race.

Women and/or minorities agree to deny racism and sexism because the denial may serve to delegitimize the assignment to positions common to both women and minorities. Women and minorities can lay claim to education administration like everyone else on competence rather than on racial and gender grounds. Hiring and promotion actions and decisions may then be justified on grounds that appear to obviate race and gender. (Ortiz & Marshall, 1995, p.98)

Women and minorities who want to be accepted for their competence at a job do not want race and gender to be deciding factors in their getting a position. Unfortunately, due to socially assigned attributes, race and gender, rather than competence and experience, may be the primary aspects affecting expectations of job performance. "Ironically, as women and minorities lay claim to educational administration positions, the necessity to disregard race and gender becomes more pronounced. To be accepted, women and minorities in educational administration must be silent about racism and sexism" (Ortiz & Marshall, 1995, p. 99). This silence becomes harmful when women and minorities no longer see their identities as unique and valuable and change their identities to meet expectations of the dominant culture. Ortiz and Marshall concluded that as women and minorities become administrators

they actively cooperate with the interactions and structuring that excludes and undermines them. They deny aspects of themselves, they do the extra work required, they gain insights about how to succeed, in spite of inadequate role models, stereotyping, and exclusionary treatment. Second, as they deny aspects of themselves (as women and ethnic minorities) and act, work, and interact as if educational administration were race and gender neutral, they reify meritocratic myths. Instead of being excellent models demonstrating to students and the community that the leadership of women and minorities expands dimensions of leadership, they help reinforce leadership as developed under White male traditions. Ironically, their participation undermines multiculturalism and equity. (p. 99)

Staying silent ensures that women and minorities may have a better chance at infiltrating the established network and thereby gaining quicker access to leadership positions. However, this invisible denial perpetuates the loss of individual identity and sets a precedent for future female and minority leaders that denying individual identities is good and conforming to the hegemonic culture is better.

Denying unique and valuable identities may be a result of a lack of support systems for women and minorities in administrative positions. Men have a traditional support system that promotes their interests. The “good ol’ boy” network is sponsorship for males, especially White males, and also serves as a mentoring and support group for men (Grogan, 1996). Women may be accepted in the “good ol’ boy” network, but they must be silent about their female status and follow the rules and norms set by the network (Grogan, 1996; Skrla, 2000a, 2000b). However, due to further socially accepted identities, women must follow a double standard; they must be aware of when to behave like men, to fit into the network, and when to behave like women, with traditional female qualities of nurturing and gentleness. Women must

walk this line because they do not want to be perceived as too pushy, too harsh or too docile, and too weak (Grogan, 1996). Grogan also found that women need sponsors visibility and participation in professional organizations be seen as leaders. Women and minorities in the presence of a dominant educational administrative culture often act differently or according to set expectations in order to be accepted (Tallerico, 1999, 2000). For instance, in Grogan's (1996) study, women felt it was their duty to help make men feel at ease with them. Women felt they must become "one of the guys" and blend into the dominant culture. However, Grogan also pointed out that men do not have to do the same for women. Men do not have to become "one of the gals" in order to be accepted. Their maleness/gender protects (Grogan, 1996) and elevates them from such games.

The dominant culture of an organization affects the hiring process as well. Acting affirmatively by hiring women and minorities seems to be defined "in practice as granting special favors to women and people of color, rather than as intentional pursuit and encouragement of qualified, nontraditional candidates" (Tallerico, 2000, p. 86). Segura (1994) called this a form of occupational segregation, where a range of social forces sustains the segregation in a method of ignoring individual identities and creating invisible identities. Invisible identities may be common among females and minorities, specifically Mexican American females, who may find it easier to abide by "the rules of the game" rather than to take the risk of projecting their true identities and possibly be seen as expecting to be granted a special favor. Projecting true

identities may help reassign attributes that better identify with the Mexican American Female.

*The Mexican American female and Chicana feminism.* According to the definition of individual identity, the true identity of each Mexican American female is unique. However, Mexican American women have been identified with certain socially ascribed attributes and identities. These assumptions regarding Mexican American females' shared attributes have been perpetuated by historical texts, film, and literature (Lux & Vigil, 1979; Weber, 1973). These characteristics and attributes have been based on assumptions and generalizations rather than true individual identities. However, Mexican American females are proving that assumed and generalized characteristics and attributes are not accurate, especially in the field of educational leadership (Gallegos y Chavez, 1979; Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995).

Successful Mexican American females have been occupying increasing principalships and superintendencies (Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 2000; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Tallerico, 2000). They have proven, slowly, that they are individuals who do not fit the normed social construction of the Mexican American female. The social construction or assigned attributes of the Mexican American female define her as submissive, sexual, subordinate to men, and traditional (Cabello-Argandona, Gomez-Quiones, & Duran, 1975; Cotera, 1980; Weber, 1973). Although some Mexican American females can identify with some assigned attributes, not all

Mexican American females can identify. In educational leadership, the assigned attributes have become a barrier for Mexican American females who aspire to leadership positions.

In educational leadership, Mexican American females, and Hispanics as a whole, tend to lead schools and districts that are heavily populated with minority or Hispanic students (Marcano, 1997; Ortiz, 1999). This “Hispanic ghetto” becomes the only place where Mexican American females and Hispanics in general are seen as valuable and needed in leadership positions. Placement in the Hispanic ghetto perpetuates the assigned attributes that Hispanic females have tried to redefine, perpetuating a sort of job segregation. In a sense, through this sort of segregated, limited job opportunity, Hispanic women have had their experience, knowledge, skills, and competence discounted and devalued. Many feel that they have been patronized or pacified by being placed mainly in Hispanic ghettos rather than in nonminority, White schools or districts (Marcano). This pacification becomes another hurdle for Mexican American females to overcome.

However, this hurdle has made Mexican American female leaders stronger (Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000, 2002; Ortiz, 1999; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Tallerico, 1999). This strength has developed from working toward harmony despite an environment of discrimination based on both gender and ethnicity (Marcano; Mendez-Morse 1999, 2000, 2002; Ortiz; Ortiz, as cited in Tallerico, 1999).

Women in general have developed the strength to face the challenges of gender discrimination through feminist theory and support. Mexican American women, facing dual discrimination, have developed their own specific feminist theory with the Chicana feminist movement. The Chicana feminist movement came from the Chicano movement of the 1960s (Cotera, 1980; Mendez-Morse, 2002; Trujillo, 1978; Weber, 1973). It was a movement that proved the motivation, initiative, and desire of Mexican American females (Cotera). It also proved to be the venue for Mexican American females to address the feminist issues that affected the Chicana specifically (Cotera; Garcia, 1991; Weber). Like other minority feminists, the Chicana feminists struggled to gain social equality and end sexist and racist oppression (Cotera).

Chicanas believed that feminism involved more than an analysis of gender because, as women of color, they were affected by both race and class in their everyday lives. Thus, Chicana feminism, as a social movement to improve the position of Chicana in American society, represented a struggle that was both nationalist and feminist. (Cotera, 1980, p. 271)

The Chicana feminists wanted to improve their status socially, racially, and sexually so that they could thrive in both the American and Mexican cultures.

The Chicana feminist, then, has become a strong identity for the Mexican American female. "History is a continuum, and the contemporary Chicana is a sum total of all the historical actions that have preceded her" (Trujillo, 1978, p.5). She is not only a minority female, but also a Mexican American female with historically assigned attributes assigned by her family or culture that she must defy to become her own person and display her own individual identity. This defiance can make her seem

disrespectful and going against her culture. Although there are those in her family, culture, or community who may see her as a *vendida*, the *falsa*, or an opportunist (Cotera, 1980), the struggle for equality is necessary for Mexican American females to advance in society and in the field of education with their own identities. “The Chicana must demand that dignity and respect within the women’s rights movement which allows her to practice feminism within the context of her own culture. . . . Her approaches to feminism must be drawn from her own world” (Cotera, p.283). The Mexican American female has made her own rules and wants to be accepted as an individual in society and education. Mexican American females are Chicana feminists who strive for equality and opportunities to advance in educational leadership with their own individual identities, rather than those ascribed by their culture, communities, or workplaces.

### *Purpose of Research*

The purpose of this study was to reveal, to describe, and to examine successful Mexican American female educational leaders and their identities through assigned attributes, self-assigned attributes, Chicana feminism, and educational leadership styles. This study fills a gap in the existing research, which fails to cover adequately the identities of successful Mexican American women in educational leadership.



### *Research Questions*

1. What does identity mean to Mexican American female educational leaders?
2. How does the Mexican American female identity change due to experiences, influences, and expectations from family, culture, society, and self?
3. What does the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader “look like” according to the narratives gathered for this study?

### *Methodology*

To answer the research questions, I used a qualitative approach to find and to study Mexican American females in school leadership positions. I interviewed 4 Mexican American females in principalship positions in Central Texas school districts. I interviewed each participant twice, with the possibility of a third interview, if needed. After each interview, the data from the interview were analyzed and used to prepare for the next interview. The focus of the interviews was the following: (a) how the participating principal identifies herself as a Mexican American female leader; (b) what path she took to reach the principalship; (c) who, if anyone, helped or mentored her in moving to the principalship; (d) what support systems, if any, were in place for her as a school leader; and (e) how her identity as a Mexican American female changed after becoming an educational leader. The 4 participants were asked to keep a journal or prepare for the upcoming interview by defining identity, thinking

about how they define themselves and their identity, and thinking about how they define or identify their leadership. They also were asked to journal what feminism and Chicana feminism means and how it affects their identity as a Mexican American, as a female, and as a school leader. In addition, as the researcher, I kept a journal throughout the process, and this journal became part of the research data. Once the interview journal data were gathered, the data were categorized and analyzed for themes that addressed the research questions.

### *Significance of the Study*

Addressing the research questions that guided this study fills a gap in the existing literature. The social construction of the Mexican American female identity needs to be researched and recognized so that Mexican American females and other Hispanic females have bonafide role models to follow and to emulate. This study contributes to understanding the unique and individual identities of Mexican American females. It informs researchers and administrators on the practice of hiring educational leaders, particularly regarding the role of successful Mexican American females in schools of all populations, not only minority or Hispanic children. The results of this study contribute to the research literature regarding shared identities of Mexican American females and the distinctive individual identities and experiences they bring to education as leaders. This study also serves as an impetus for

educational change by inspiring, selecting, and supporting successful Mexican American females for leadership positions.

### *Limitations*

Although this study fills a noticeable gap in the literature, certain limitations may exist. First, this study's focus was limited to successful Mexican American females. Thus, the outcomes of this study may not be generalizable to all Hispanics. Furthermore, this study involved successful Mexican American women who are educators in Central Texas; experiences of Mexican Americans in other parts of the United States may prove different, limiting the national generalizability of this study.

Additionally, this study may be limited by its small sample size. The sample size of this study was 4 principals. Although my interaction with the participants was intense, cumulative, and thorough, it cannot be assumed that the 4 principals' experiences are the same when accessing any other educational administrative position.

Finally, because I am a successful Mexican American female in an educational leadership position, I unintentionally and unconsciously may have imparted some of my biases and interpretations based on my experiences. Although I sought the purest information from my participants in an objective manner, in describing and interpreting their experiences my passion and deep interest may have shone through. It is possible that another researcher with different background

experiences and influences might have emerged from this study with a different perspective.

### *Summary*

Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to the theory of creation of identity. The context of the study includes a brief overview of identity research, including the gap in the research regarding successful Mexican American women in educational leadership. The purpose of this study was to fill that gap. Chapter 1 continued with an overview of the historical emphasis of traditional White male identities in educational leadership, the socializing of women and minorities in educational leadership with a specific section on the socializing of successful Mexican American females in educational leadership, and Chicana feminism. This chapter also included the research questions, significance of study, and possible limitations of the study. Chapter 2 will address related issues of this study by reviewing existing literature including the history and assigned attributes of the Mexican American, how the Mexican American female identity has evolved, and how educational leadership is identified.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

A person's identity development is influenced by a myriad of forces that help shape how a person will conform or not conform to a variety of social expectations, such as familial, organizational, and societal ones (Curry, 2000; Powell, 1993; Restine, 1993). These influences come from different sources, such as family, culture, media, environment, and the political nature and present status of the country and world. Influences of certain interests and skills may be imposed on a person by family and society that shape the beliefs, biases, ideas, and values for that person (Powell; Yon). Identity is an ongoing development (Curry; Yon), which is influenced by outside forces and people. Identity is who an individual is, which encompasses that person's values, goals, and beliefs (Curry; Yon). Identity then is a self-perception that encompasses the principles forced upon an individual from many external influences.

In this chapter, I will define and list the influences and principles that are imposed on an individual and her/his identity construction/development. More specifically, I will address the influences that are imposed on the Mexican American female and the way those influences help shape her identity. Throughout, I will use Stoddard's (1973a) three basic distinctions for identity: (a) externally bestowed, (b) projected, and (c) self-designated. Furthermore, I will specifically target how the

influences of the Mexican American female identity help her develop into a successful public school leader.

In the first section of this chapter, I will present relevant literature on identity, focusing particularly on the social construction and development of identity. In accomplishing this, I will draw on studies that focus on the Mexican American ethnicity, culture, and identity, along with the perceptions and expectations imposed by society. I will also examine how the Mexican American sees herself/himself and how society sees the Mexican American. I will investigate historical societal perspectives and events to illuminate the construction and development of the identity for the Mexican American. Finally, the social construction and development of Mexican American identity will be supported with literature on how the family, culture, and race are all influences on the creation and formation of the Mexican American female identity.

The first section will also include literature on the history and the social construction of the Mexican American. It will focus on the history of the Mexican and the Mexican American and will explore through the tradition, the language, and the native lands from which the Mexican and Mexican American originated. Studies of the Mexican American female and male identity constructs will help illustrate how the American society categorizes a whole race, culture, and people. Biases, prejudices, changes, and the voices of the past will also help illustrate the evolving history of the Mexican American female and male identity. Finally, the impact and

roadblocks of racial prejudices will be presented, along with the attempts throughout history at correcting society's ills through civil rights movements and legislation.

The second section will center on the feminist view of the Mexican American female identity, including a brief history running from the development of feminism to what feminism means today to females in general and to Mexican American females specifically. A theory of Mexican feminism will be presented and will include some discussion of the Chicana feminism movement and of issues Mexican American females have faced in order to be viewed as equals in society. Definitions of Chicana, Latina, and Hispania will further add to understanding of the identity construction and development of the Mexican American female. Finally, I will explore societal categories of gender and race through literature, which will help illustrate how both are social constructions that help society define and position certain populations.

The third section will encompass leadership and the ways leadership skills are determined through a constructed identity. Different styles, characteristics, and attributes will be discussed focusing on gender, power, and organization. Second, the leadership section will have excerpts of literature that point towards the success of certain leaders. This leadership success will be presented as reflections or stories of experiences from females, specifically from women of color. Finally, I will present literature that confirms that leadership, like race and gender, is a social construction that is developed according to the needs of an organization.

### *The Social Construction of Identity*

Identity is a social construction. One grows up to be a person that one's family has helped shape with influences from a culture or cultures and influences from the community or society in which one lives (Curry, 2000; Mendez-Morse, 2000; Meyer, 1996; Prouty, 1995; Restine, 1993; Sanchez, 1993, Stoddard, 1973a, 1973b). Identity then is putting meaning to being, describing who one is, has come to be, and will be in the future. Josselson described identity as follows:

Identity is the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world. It integrates one's meaning to oneself and one's meaning to others; it provides a match between what one regards as central to oneself and how one is viewed by significant others in one's life....Identity is also a way of preserving the continuity of self, linking the past and the present....In its essence, identity becomes a means by which people organize and understand their experiences and...share their meaning systems with others. What we choose to value and deprecate, our system of ethics—these form...our sense of identity. (as cited in Curry, 2000, p. 22)

Hence, each individual in society and within cultures has an identity, which is the portal to an individual's self.

Society's manner of identifying can be explained using Stoddard's (1973a) three basic distinctions for identity: (a) externally bestowed, (b) projected, and (c) self-designated (p. 38). Externally bestowed identification is an identity or values that society bestows or places on a group of people based on similar characteristics.

However, as Vaca stated, "it is erroneous for anyone to assign certain values to a specific group and treat them as homogenous (as cited in Stoddard, 1973a, p. 43).



Ignoring the vast differences within a specific group is ignoring the individual values of people and emphasizing stereotypes. Vaca dismissed certain externally bestowed values placed on all Mexican Americans, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Vaca's List of Externally Bestowed Values Placed on Mexican Americans*

Mexican American	Anglo American
Subjugation to nature	Mastery over nature
Present oriented	Future oriented
Immediate gratification	Deferred gratification
Complacent	Aggressive
Nonintellectual	Intellectual
Fatalistic	Nonfatalistic
Non-goal oriented	Goal oriented
Emotional	Rational
Dependent	Individualistic
Machismo	Effeminacy
Superstitious	Nonsuperstitious
Traditional	Progressive

*Note.* As cited in *Mexican Americans* (p. 42), by E. Stoddard, 1973, New York: Random House.

These attributes serve as an example of stereotypes that erroneously label most, if not all, Mexican Americans, perpetuating racism and inferiority status.

If society's externally bestowed identities or values are rejected, then the projective view may be adopted by a group of people. The projective view is how members of an ethnic group sees themselves and identify themselves by the criteria with which they evaluate other ethnic groups. "Ethnic groups reveal their class origin

and self-identity by the criteria they use to evaluate other groups and the manner in which they react to the behavior of others” (Stoddard, 1973a, p. 51). Hence, an ethnic group that feels inferior or rejected in some manner by society will promote their culture as superior to all other cultures and may even emphasize their culture’s parallelism to the dominant culture.

In order to live up to society’s projective view, a member of an ethnic group may ignore her/his culture in order to better assimilate into the dominant culture. “When the dominant society fails to allow minority groups equal access to social betterment, minority members must defy the present structure, and see it as an obstacle to their ethnic goals” (Stoddard, 1973a, p.57). For example, Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and San Antonio seem to have more hate directed at their own culture and themselves because the Anglo population is high and the Anglo population does not value the Mexican culture. Thus, the Mexican Americans of Los Angeles and San Antonio have accepted the projective view of the Anglo culture. Many Mexican Americans of Los Angeles and San Antonio may have accepted that Americaness is better and more valued than Mexicaness.

Furthermore, the names, labels, and terms that are assigned to an ethnic group may encourage the development of a certain ethnic group identity. According to Palmore, the self-image a member of a minority group has is in large part a result of the labels that are used to identify her/his minority group and her/his acceptance of these labels. Derogatory names that are used to identify a group as undesirable or

inferior are called ethnophaulisms (as cited in Stoddard, 1973a). As Stoddard (1973a) explained,

Social psychologists claim there is a close association between the amount of prejudice directed toward a given minority group and the number of ethnophaulisms coined to describe it. In the United States, such ethnophaulisms such as kike, polack, wop, nigger, meskin, and greaser are used to label people of “foreign” extraction, thereby subtly conferring on them an image of inferiority. (p. 56)

Inferiority, then, is projected from one minority group to another in order to elevate a minority group toward society’s expectations.

Self-designated terms, labels, or views are those that an ethnic group places on itself for identification purposes (Stoddard, 1973a, 1973b). Certain members of an ethnic group define their identity different from others in the same ethnic group.

Therefore, self-designated identification can be seen as more accurate for one person or group because the identification is individualized for that one person or group.

Because not one term can encompass a whole ethnic group, Stoddard (1973a, 1973b) explained,

Some ethnic labels are polite terms suitable for formal settings, while others are more suitable to the argot of the barrio. Knowing the wide diversity and heterogeneity of the Mexican American people, one expects that no simplistic, single label will capture these variations, nor is one single term functionally desirable (beyond the mere fact of having an overall category for Mexican Americans). (p. 58)

Hence, within the Mexican American culture are individuals with separate and unique identities. They conform to different societal settings as those settings prescribe.

*Individual identification.* One identifies herself/himself as a certain social person that is accepted in some ring of society. This identity serves as a projection of certain ideals, beliefs, culture, and experiences. These ideals, beliefs, culture, and experiences are a part of a person's ancestral history, which has helped shape her/his identity. The psychologist Carl Jung called this the ancestral experience held in a person's unconscious (Hannah, 1976; as cited in Hergenhahn, 1984, p.47). In the unconscious, a person holds a myriad of experiences that have been told, learned, or lived that shape the person's identity. Some experiences are common for all humans, and some experiences are unique (ancestral experiences) to each individual. The ancestral experiences are those that are registered in the brain and are needed, responded to, or remembered at certain times. These are called archetypes (i.e., "racial memories," "primordial images") (Hannah; as cited in Hergenhahn, p.47). Each person uses these ancestral experiences to respond and to identify with life experiences in some way.

These life experiences shape a person's outlook and reasoning in given situations. These life experiences also shape a person's values, goals, and beliefs. These life experiences emerge from a society's influence during the process of the development or construction of one's identity (Curry, 2000; Yon, 2000). This construction can be called careful or careless (Curry; Yon). For example, a careful construction of identity would be the way a mother socializes her daughter to think and to identify with society (Curry). A mother may tell her daughter always to cater

to her husband and to make her husband's needs come first. An example of a careless construction of identity would be the assigning of attributes to women and men, while giving little thought to how assigning these attributes harm our society. For example, saying, "Men are better leaders than women since they have more stamina and work better with other men" is careless because it is a generalization and not based on any empirical evidence. It is simply an opinion that includes a careless assignment of attributes.

However, it is important to understand that attributes help form identities (Alston, 1999; Brunner, 2000a, b; Curry, 2000; Donovan, 2001; Grogan, 1999; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Mendez-Morse, 1999; Restine, 1993; Stoddard, 1973a, 1973b; Tallerico, 1999; Yon, 2000). A person may assign self-attributes, such as being smart/dumb, fat/thin, happy/sad, or pretty/ugly. Society also assigns attributes such as female/male, Black/White, team player/rebel, or leader/follower. These attributes create a space within which a person acquiesces or resists the attributes. Further, it could be said that assigning attributes to a person based on race and gender create an even smaller space.

This smaller space has been the focus of researchers who have found that assigning attributes can be detrimental for certain ethnic populations. The research that is focus of this literature review has shown how assigning attributes to Mexican Americans have affected them in society. This affect has come from both within the Mexican American culture and from the whole society. This is one reason why

Mexican Americans have been categorized into different census labels and have been confused with other Hispanics.

It is necessary to address, then, what definitions for different labels assigned to Mexican Americans will be used in this research. First, the term Mexican American will be used without a hyphen. I feel that the hyphen accentuates society's perception of the lack of or insufficient "Americanization" or "acculturation" toward the American society. Furthermore, many Mexican Americans have been born in the United States, therefore are Americans. Secondly, other terms like Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Hispanic will be used synonymously with Mexican American unless otherwise specified. These synonyms will be used according to the historical era being discussed. Different labels or terms are pertinent to show the need for society to categorize and continually to label a minority group as different. These are the externally bestowed labels society has given Mexican Americans (Stoddard, 1973a). These labels and categories become the identity of a group of people, which becomes the identity of an individual.

The identity of an individual can be traced through the identity of a cultural group. When cultural groups are identified because of skin color, language, food, and religion, it is easy to assume and to give or externally bestow (Stoddard, 1973a) certain attributes based on these identities. Once attributes or labels have been given to an ethnic group, society expects that ethnic group to conform and to abide by those attributes or labels. Valdes and Pino (1974) explained,

Man has come to use hundreds of symbols or labels for various physical divisions of mankind as well as for the multitude of ethnic, nationality or cultural groupings of the human population. The symbols or labels, during time, acquire characteristics of their own, and man can respond to the symbol or label rather than the referent. Man, then, is able to decide upon certain standards through the manipulation of symbols and apply these standards to his behavior and to the creation of biases, prejudices and general and specific attitudes. (p. 2)

Externally bestowing or categorizing and labeling ethnic groups in order for society to easily identify said ethnic group has become the American way (Stoddard, 1973a; Valdes & Pino, 1974). Society's categorizing and labeling has ensured status of superiority and inferiority, which perpetuates racism amongst most, if not all, minority groups and the dominant culture.

When society assigns labels or terms to Mexican Americans, it becomes the identity for a whole group of people no matter what differences they may have. The same holds true for the differing labels or terms that have been assigned to all people who share similar characteristics of the Mexican American. They have been called, for instance, Hispanic and Chicana/o. The Hispanic term is the most used to refer to any person of Spanish origin. This term has become an umbrella term that easily, yet without accuracy, identifies an ethnic group's minority status.

Mexican Americans can be defined as an ethnic minority group because they share similar characteristics. Although Mexican American is a label or term used for identification, there are vast differences among the Mexican American people.

Stoddard (1973a) noted,

The “Mexican American” is merely a label, but it erroneously implies ethnic homogeneity in a population bloc containing many diverse and distinct groups whose members have in common a language and some similar customs, traditions, and surnames. Mexican Americans use many different labels for themselves—Mexican, Chicano, Latino, Mexican American among others—on the basis of such factors as traditional usage of a name in a given region, age group, urban or rural residence, generation, and social class or economic position. (p. 239)

Therefore, not all Mexican Americans are the same. Each has different life experiences and different life outlooks, which help shape each person with a unique and individualized identity.

Hence, Mexican Americans from different states (i.e., Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Colorado) see themselves as different from each other. They have chosen to self-designate an identification that fits their idea of how they see themselves (Stoddard, 1973a). They may share characteristics, such as skin color, ancestry, food, or music, but they do not share the same experiences, same social settings, or same family dynamics. Differences in Mexican Americans are vast when speaking in terms of the border, regions within a state, and regions throughout the country. In Texas and California, for the most part, Mexican Americans have identified with being Mexican. There are different tastes of music and food depending on the region. The same is true in New Mexico, where the Mexican Americans identify themselves as Hispanics and in Colorado as Spanish Americans (Munoz, 1989). However, “Spanish” is more than just a synonym for Mexican American. McWilliams indicated that one who is successful in the Anglo society is “Spanish”



and one who is not is “Mexican” (as cited in Montenegro, 1976, p. 15–16). This gives the false stereotype that being Spanish is superior and better than being Mexican.

Hispanic is a word used to describe all Spanish-speaking people, yet it does not include all people from Latin America (Ford, 1999). The word Hispanic tends to only include those who identify with Spain, but excludes so many other people. Hispanic is used to cover any race that uses Spanish as a language of communication. However, in the United States, Hispanics are usually referred to as Mexican Americans (Ford). “Because all these different Hispanos share a basic language, religion and any other highly visible cultural characteristics, many Anglos for reasons of ignorance, misinformation or prejudice, refer to all of them as Mexicans” (Valdes & Pino, 1974, p. 7). Depending on a term a person identifies with (i.e., Mexican American, Hispanic, or Chicano), that person values different ideals and aspects of the Mexican and American cultures (Martinelli, 1993). This means that the “term” or “label” an individual acquiesces or self-designates (Stoddard, 1973a) to use for identification purposes, denotes her/his level of identification toward either the Mexican or American culture.

Munoz (1989) further explained the use of different terms and labels used to identify Mexican Americans. Mexican-American, with a hyphen, referred to the generation of 1930s and 1940s and/or the political environment of those decades. Mexican Americans had already seen themselves as Americans because of their ancestors being on American soil before the Europeans; however, they also saw

themselves as being Mexican because their ancestry and family origin was from Mexico. According to Munoz, the unhyphenated term, Mexican American, is a generic term used to refer to people as a whole that are from Mexican descent born and raised in the United States. The term Chicano, Munoz described as specific to the Chicano generation and the Chicano movement of the 1960s. Chicano is a term that denotes a population of young Mexican Americans who want to separate themselves from the “American way” and stay loyal to the “Mexican way.” In the 1960s, “Chicano” became increasingly popular, especially among the young, militant Mexican Americans in the barrios (Stoddard, 1973a). The Chicano term became a name that the Brown Berets would use to identify with the civil rights movement for Mexican Americans. “The term Chicano is more than a label for a clearly delimited group. It is a term that for some implies pride in self and in race and for others an insult to life style” (Montenegro, 1976, p. 15–16). These different terms that have been used throughout the decades have been both externally bestowed and self-designated (Stoddard, 1973a), in order for Mexican Americans to find their own unique identity.

In order to keep the pride and respect of the Mexican race, Mexican Americans have tried to conform and abide by the externally bestowed and projective views (Stoddard, 1973a) and labels given them. Mexican Americans want to be seen as equal to their White American counterparts, but find the prejudices and inaccurate attributes hard to shake. Mexican Americans have been labeled, assigned attributes,

and signaled out more than any other minority group (Sanchez, 1993; Stoddard, 1973a, 1973b). “This diversity has been further complicated by the fact that Mexican Americans are among the most racially mixed non-White people in U.S. society. They are indeed a rainbow people difficult to define in traditional race and ethnic relations” (Munoz, 1989, p.8). Mexican Americans are racially mixed with an ambiguous social and legal position in American society—“They are discriminated against because they are only partly White, yet they have been spared the full impact of discrimination because they descend from Spaniards, one of the White peoples of Europe” (Menchaca, 2001, p. 37). Mexican Americans share the Mexican and American cultures, which make them neither just Mexican nor just American (Williams, 1990). The wave of immigrants has contributed to the generational and class differences among the Mexican Americans that have increased the social diversity (Williams). “The 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexican Americans are no longer Mexican, but neither are they Anglo American. As such, they are somewhere in between” (Gil, 1982, p. 59). This in between confuses the Mexican American identity, so that Mexican Americans must work harder to be accepted in either or both the American and Mexican cultures.

Another reason for the ambiguity of the Mexican American status in America may be due to the beginnings of the history of the Mexican American. Some say it started in 1848 at the end of the Mexican-American War, which is confounding, because then what is Mexican history and what is Mexican American history (Weber,

1973)? Some would say there is not much difference. After the Mexican-American War, Americans saw the Mexican American as inferior because she/he was of mixed races, forgetting that they themselves, Americans, were of mixed European races (Weber). Furthermore, as Weber posited, the Americans thought little of the Catholic religion and saw Mexicans as fatalistic, lazy, and inferior. However, the men were referred to as “Mexican,” whereas the women were referred to as “Spanish” (Weber), denoting the externally bestowed labels (Stoddard, 1973a, 1973b) that men were inferior and the women had more status. Since the Mexican-American War, Mexican Americans have not been valued as a people and have been punished for believing and behaving differently from the dominant culture.

This low standard in which Mexican Americans were held continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a 1911 United States Immigration Commission report, Mexicans were named as being poor, requiring public charity, unintelligent and illiterate in their own language, not valuing education, being criminals, not assimilating as other ethnic groups had, being slow to learn English, and not politically savvy (Weber, 1973). Hence, the Mexican Americans who saw themselves as already acculturated as Americans began to resent the Mexican immigrants and divorced themselves from being anything like them. Being divorced from the Mexican people proved difficult; no other ethnic group has their homeland contiguous to the United States (Weber). As McWilliams (as cited in Weber, 1973) charged, Mexican Americans were already on what is now American soil long before 1846, and the Southwest was conquered

during the Mexican-American War through military action, which made geographical names change, not people. Furthermore, from Mexico to Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, or California, there is little difference in the geography, architecture, language, food, and names of cities and rivers. The Mexican culture is evident in several arenas in America, but it is still not valued and seen as inferior.

Inferiority attributes are the most revealing and first evident with skin color. The skin color of a Mexican American establishes her/his social status and identifies her/him as either privileged or not privileged. Montenegro (1976) explained this differential:

White ethnic minorities can assimilate into American society. Historically non-whites have not been allowed to assimilate. If the Mexican-American perceives himself as a member of a white ethnic-minority, then he can foresee entrance into the dominant society for himself or for his children. Since the Mexican-American is a combination of Indian and European, in any proportion, he may appear either “light” or “dark”. If he is light, he may become acceptable to the dominant society by mastery in English and ignoring his culture. If he is dark, he may intermarry so that his children or grandchildren will lose the stereotypic appearance (short, stocky, dark) and the stigma attached to it.

This places the Mexican-American in a unique position because he often believes that he can choose. He may dedicate his life to becoming Anglicized and to gaining acceptance, if not for himself, then for his children. In effect he accepts the dominant culture’s valuation of the worth of the “American Way of Life” and, consequently, the limited value of his ethnicity. He may, on the other hand, identify himself as a member of a minority group that cannot or will not “melt” in the melting pot tradition of the United States. (pp. 5–6)

Skin color, then, becomes a part of one’s identity. This identity based on skin color either helps or ensures one’s status to be superior or inferior.

This idea/theory of Mexican Americans wanting to assimilate and or “melt” into American society may be a reason why some Mexican Americans try to conform to the “White” way of thinking. The Census Bureau classified Mexican Americans as White even though Mexican Americans did not see themselves as White and even though they had not enjoyed all the rights and privileges of the White majority (Montenegro, 1976; Valdes & Pino, 1974; Williams, 1990). In a study conducted about the perceptions of Mexican Americans in a small California town, Sewell (1989) found the following: (a) Mexican Americans valued racial Whiteness and White physical characteristics; (b) the more American one looked, the better off they would be; and (c) it would be better to be mistaken for American or Italian than Mexican, Black, or Japanese (p. 149). The importance of looking and being as American as possible is valued and elevates an individual’s status in society. This has perpetuated the Mexican American being characterized as “the forgotten people,” “the invisible minority,” and “the minority nobody knows” (Weber, 1973). “Ethnic identity can influence a wide range of feelings for individuals, such as a sense of belonging and self-esteem or a sense of marginality and alienation” (Martinelli, 1993, p. 19). Hence, the need to “melt” into the American ideal has some Mexican Americans adopting the externally bestowed and projective view (Stoddard, 1973a) of the White culture in order to be more accepted.

*The family construction of identity.* The ethnic identity is not a constant. It changes over time, changes according to certain regions, and changes according to social and political influences (Martinelli, 1993; Yon, 2000). Consequently, the ethnic identity influences the identity of a family and family members. If the ethnic identity of a group of people is derogatory and inferior, then the identity of a family and individual will be the same. Society perpetuates the identity of an ethnic group and conditions an ethnic group toward society's expectations. According to Ramos (1979), Mexican Americans have come to identify with certain behaviors and attributes because those attributes have been assigned to the group as a whole. The assigning of attributes is synonymous with Stoddard's (1973a) term, externally bestowed. Mexican Americans have been and are conditioned to adhere to these attributes assigned by schools, churches, and other government and societal agencies and institutions to believe the myths of the American Dream (Munoz, 1989). These myths are used by families and individuals in creating identities. For example, the individual creates an image of herself/himself based on the ethnic group in which she/he associates. This image is a reflection of the individual's interaction with society and society's expectations of that ethnic group (MacCorquodale, 1993). MacCorquodale called this "reflected appraisals," or as Stoddard (1973a) defined as projected view, that which an individual accepts or ignores in developing her/his identity. This image is created by society's ideas, stereotypes, and/or attributes, which have been placed on all Mexican Americans.

These “reflected appraisals” then become a basis for a family to develop an identity that an individual adopts. Hence, families socialize their children to behave in a certain manner in order for them to be accepted by society. The mother, in the Mexican culture, is the main influence for children in guiding and forming an identity (Gallegos y Chavez, 1979, p. 75). According to Gallegos y Chavez, “since she is the culmination of all the past events and experiences she must learn to survive and adapt herself to the new rules” (p. 79) that she teaches to her children and that become a survival lesson for being American. The need for survival in America is understandable when one looks at, for example, the research literature that has been written about the social construction of Mexican Americans.

The social construction of the Mexican American is historical and the construction changes according to era. Depending on what decade is discussed, the Mexican American has been seen as the same kind of person; the labels and terms have changed, but the social identity has remained constant. For instance, as a society, there have been those with the power of the pen to perpetuate stereotypes through nonempirical data. Ramos (1979) listed sociological researchers who have helped perpetuate and externally bestow (Stoddard, 1973a) the stereotypes of Mexican Americans: Celia S. Heller, William Madsen, Arthur J. Rubel, Florence Kluckhohn, Lyle Saunders, and Julian Samora. They have described the Mexican American as having the following attributes:

1. Present-time oriented and desires immediate gratification;



2. Nonintellectual; that is, formal education is not valued;
3. Nongoal, nonsuccess oriented;
4. Fatalistic and superstitious;
5. Prefers living within the extended family group; and
6. Believes in machismo and a male-dominated society (Ramos, 1979, p. 49).

The Anglo Value System, of course, is the direct opposite of the Mexican American's and is seen as better and more advanced. It includes the following attributes, according to the same sociologists:

1. future oriented,
2. intellectual,
3. goal oriented,
4. success oriented,
5. nonfatalistic, and
6. progressive (Ramos, 1979, p. 49).

With these stereotypes being recycled and emphasized as true, it is no wonder that Mexican Americans have continued to be an oppressed minority group and that families, especially mothers, socialize their children to survive as a Mexican American in the American culture.

Not all Mexican Americans socialize their children to survive; some encourage their children to conform completely. Unfortunately, there have been Mexican Americans who have degraded the Mexican American ethnic group for not

being as American as possible. Montenegro (1976) found that some Mexican Americans, afraid of other Mexican Americans impeding the advancement of Mexican Americans as a whole, voiced their concerns. In a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, a reader named Gilberto Hernandez stated,

Some of us are not really the ideal American citizen, not all of us have fought in the wars, we don't all pursue an education as we should, our accent is different and our skin darker. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that there is room for improvement.

Furthermore, he stated that Chicanos were “restless, ignorant, and misled juveniles” (as cited in Montenegro, 1976, p. 17). Hernandez, like so many Mexican Americans, was coping with the dual identities and finding a self-designated view to fit his identity; being an American means not being Mexican, but discounting the Mexican race should not be American.

The coping strategy is evident in one study done by Valenzuela (1999). Her study centered on the growing difficulty of Mexican American students (both immigrant and first-generation Mexican American students) to be accepted by both the Mexican and American cultures. She showed through her interviews and research that the students were torn on what identity to choose so as to receive the least amount of ridicule or bashing for not being more loyal to one culture versus the other. This was a form of living on the border of identity (Anzaldua, 1987). This refers to living on the border of two or more cultures, crossing from one world to the next, and identifying with one culture versus another. Her study also pointed to the reluctance of some teachers to accept the cultural differences that Mexican Americans held and

their insistence that all Mexican Americans either learn the English language or go back to where “they” came from. Finally, she showed how the history and literature classes spent a minute amount of time on Mexican history or Mexican figures (e.g., the Alamo, Caesar Chavez) compared to the vast amount of time spent on White history and White figures. When they did spend time on the Mexican history, the distortions were incredible and the Mexican was portrayed as dysfunctional.

Distortions of Mexican and Mexican American history are one reason Mexican Americans have difficulty identifying with either the Mexican or the American culture. Yon (2000) explained that ambivalence is part of the process of identity development and that the development of “racial identities is a two-directional process: In the process of claiming who one is, one is also announcing who one is not” (p. 102). Hence, “identity categories and labels are often unable to satisfy the desire to be recognized as complex subjects. Identity is therefore always partial, capable of telling us something but unable to tell us all” (Yon, p. 72). Mexican Americans have been torn between two identity processes. Identity development becomes even more complicated for Mexican American females.

### *Feminism*

The identity of an individual is developed through her/his accepting and claiming who one is and who one is not (Yon, 2000). A female identifies in the same manner. A female accepts being female, but also accepts not being male. Not being

male means not having some of the privileges that are automatic for males. Not being male means not having the same equality for women. Feminism, then, has come about to help females obtain and keep the equal rights that men have enjoyed. “Feminism is, especially, but not only, about women, but it is primarily the activity of giving them a voice, an access to power hitherto denied” (Thom, 1992, p. 25). Hence, feminism is the vehicle women use to be heard, noticed, valued, and recognized as credible human beings.

Getting power and voice was a main concern of feminists. Some feminists simply wanted to be heard and valued as human beings with the same rights as men. Others were more radical in demanding equal rights and treatment. This dichotomy set the stage for two kinds of feminist movements that started other feminist movements (e.g., Chicana feminist movement). These two kinds of feminist movements were described by Sommers (1994) in two waves: First Wave and Second Wave. The First Wave feminism focused on the importance of obtaining the same rights for women as for men. “A First Wave, ‘mainstream,’ or ‘equity’ feminist wants for women what she wants for everyone: fair treatment, without discrimination” (Sommers, 1994, p. 22). First Wave feminists did not want a divide between women and men. They sought harmony based on equal human rights for all people.

This “fair treatment without discrimination” was the catalyst that started feminism in 1848 with the foremother of feminism, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The beginning of feminism dates on July 14, 1848, when Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth

Cady Stanton placed an announcement in the *Seneca County Courier* for “a convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women” (Sommers, 1994, p. 33). Their intent was to gain and to win elementary rights such as the right to divorce without losing property and children, the right to be educated, the right to vote, and the realization of full legal equality (Sommers). The First Wave feminists, or Old Feminists, believed in equal rights and human rights. It was not a defeatist or gender-divisive entity, but a humanist one (Sommers). This became the philosophy of the Second Wave feminists, or New Feminists, but with more radical ideas and agendas.

Those females who wanted more from feminism were a part of the Second Wave feminism. The Second Wave doctrine was that “women, even modern American women, are in thrall to ‘a system of male dominance’ variously referred to as ‘heteropatriarchy’ or the sex/gender system” (Sommers, 1994, p.22). The New Feminists were more radical in that they twisted truths, elaborated or embellished issues and events, and/or demanded a more feminist approach to all things (i.e., women’s studies disregarding history and focusing always on the power that men have over women). Hence, they believed that

feminism is something *more* than the effort to express women’s experience: it is at once a relatively comprehensive analysis of power relations between the sexes, and the effort to change or undo any power system that authorizes and condones male power over women. (original emphasis; as cited in Campbell, 1992, p.11)

The Second Wave feminists blamed all men for women's second-rate status in society. Therefore, New Feminists sought equal rights between women and men, but in a more radical, abrupt manner, which can be offensive to other women and to men.

This male power may have been the catalyst of the Second Wave momentum in the 1960s when anger of the antiwar and antigovernment movements revived and radicalism ensued (Sommers, 1994). The struggle was to be against patriarchy and sex/gender issues (Sommers) and to find a separate or self-designated (Stoddard, 1973a) identity. The Second Wave feminists focused and still focus their energies on resentment and anger pointed towards a "culprit," a man, who has harmed a woman either directly or indirectly where another woman "feels" the pain and indignation vicariously (Sommers). This resentment manifests itself in anger towards men who, according to "resenter" feminists, take every opportunity to harm, to humiliate, and to exploit women purposefully and with pleasure (Sommers). Much of this is mythic and unfounded and harmful to society; there are no groups of men with war offices plotting against women (Sommers). Nevertheless, Second Wave feminists want to preach this through women's studies, conventions, and pamphlets. However, Iris Murdoch believed and warned:

Men "created culture" because they were free to do so, and women were treated as inferior and made to believe that they were. Now free women must join in the human world of work and creation on an equal footing and be everywhere in art, science, business, politics, etc....However, to lay claim, in this battle, to *female* ethics, *female* criticism, *female* knowledge...is to set up a new female ghetto. (Chauvinist males should be delighted by the move....) "Women's Studies" can mean that women are led to read mediocre or peripheral books by women rather than the great books of humanity in

general...It is a dead end, in danger of simply separating women from the mainstream thinking of the human race. Such cults can also waste the time of young people who may be reading all the latest books on feminism instead of studying the difficult and important things that belong to the culture of humanity. (Original emphasis; as cited in Sommers, 1994, p.78).

Consequently, Second Wave feminists must insure while seeking equal rights for all women that women who fight for equality are not stereotyped as Nazi feminists.

The “separating women from the mainstream” may be how other feminisms that were more individuated to certain feminist groups came about. One such self-designated (Stoddard, 1973a) feminism was Chicana feminism. The Chicana feminist movement was born from the Civil Rights Era (Mendez-Morse, 2002). As Mendez-Morse explained, Chicanas confronted the stereotypical views and chauvinistic attitudes of Chicanos and catapulted Chicana studies as a separate and legitimate area from the Chicano and Mexican American studies. It was also a time when Chicanas saw themselves as valuable individuals with valuable aspects of the Mexican culture and female culture to offer. The Chicana movement came about since the Women’s Movement focused on White female issues and not issues of the minority female.

Cabello-Argandona, Gomez-Quiones, and Herrera Duran (1975) explained,

Superficially, it has been assumed, by far too many people, that women’s Liberation is a cohesive and inclusive movement, bringing together women from all ages, occupations, religions, and races. In practice, however, there are obvious as well as subtle differences that foster fragmentation within the Women’s Movement and result in Chicana reservations and suspicion regarding close association with their Anglo counterparts. (p. 21)

Additionally, Chicanas did not “win” any rights or privileges from the women’s movement. The rights of Chicanas were not considered in the Women’s Liberation Movement.

Therefore, the Chicana needed to speak not only on behalf of Mexican American females, but also on behalf of all Mexican Americans. “The Anglo movement is a distinct movement for women, whereas Chicana feminism is integrated into a larger movement for the enhancement of power and status of an ethnic group” (Mason, 1980, p. 105). Because the Chicana movement was to promote an ethnic group, the term Chicana replaced Mexican American female because the term Chicana projected a more grabbing effect than Mexican American. Chicana, as described by Mendez-Morse (2002), “is a word used by some women of Mexican descent to describe themselves as culturally and politically conscious and/or active individuals” (p. 2). Mendez-Morse continued, “the term ‘Chicana’ includes resisting the impact of sexism and other institutional and individual practices that contribute to the alienation, exclusion, or marginalization of women of Mexican descent” (p.2). Hence, the Mexican American female has adopted both the projective view and the self-designated view (Stoddard, 1973a) in Chicana feminism: the projective view to show parallelisms of the Chicana female struggle with the White feminist movement and the self-designated view to show a distinction from the White female movement.



Accepting the Mexican culture with the female culture is the focus of Chicana feminism. There is much more to the feminist movement for the Chicana because “it’s just not gender” (Mendez-Morse, 2002, p.10; Trujillo, 1978). Hence,

a woman who describes herself as a Chicana is one who embraces selected cultural aspects of her ethnicity, who promotes bilingualism and/or the maintenance of the Spanish language, and who rejects and resists discriminatory practices that limit her participation and that either ignore or exclude her contributions. (Mendez-Morse, 2002, p. 2)

Mendez-Morse asserted from her research that oppressions such as gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, language, and sexual orientation are intersections that influence Chicana feminism. This distinguishes Chicana feminism from White feminism because White feminism has focused mainly on the impact of patriarchal practices (Mendez-Morse, 2002). As Blea asserted,

minority women tend to have a more holistic view of the world because they recognize their lives shaped by a number of factors that do not affect other women. Their experience has been different, even unique, since being a female is complicated by being a minority. (as cited in Mendez-Morse, 2002, p. 5)

Hence, the Chicana has a unique minority-female identity, which can either help or hinder her status in society.

These different and unique minority female experiences were reasons why the Chicana feminist movement was developed as the victories from the Women’s Movement did not include victories for the Chicana. As Cotera (1980) stated,

The greatest victory for the women’s movement was not victory for minority women. The suffrage amendment did not enfranchise Chicanas and Black women. Chicanas were affected by the aftermath of the suffrage amendment when women’s movement activities slowed down, because white women

achieved their desires, but Chicanas, like other minority women, had to continue to struggle for mere survival. (p. 217)

Additionally, “the Anglo women’s movement is the depiction of women’s traditional identity as defined primarily in relation to men” (Mason, 1980, p. 104). The Chicana movement was and is the depiction and a contribution of a different perspective of identity as defined by race/ ethnicity, sexuality, class, religion, language, and gender (Mendez-Morse, 2002). The Chicana movement helped all Mexican Americans, females and males, to accept an identity different from the White culture and other minority cultures.

The complex contributions of the Chicana movement have not been valued or accepted. One reason the Women’s Movement was not victorious for Chicanas was that, as Guzman stated, “The Chicana in this period was not recruited into the women’s movement because of the low opinion that white women in the movement had about them. Chicanas were considered too passive and too submissive to their men and families” (as cited in Cotera, 1980, p. 225). Hence, Chicanas relied on themselves for unity and strength (Cotera). Stereotypes and popular myths about the Mexican American female, or Chicana, have her seen as a young dark-eyed beauty with a full figure and a fiery temper or the motherly/grandmotherly “Mamacita” who is rotund, always surrounded by brown-skinned children and always cooking (Cabello-Argandona et al., 1975). These stereotypes of the Chicana have affected her place in society. The Chicana has not only the job of counteracting the stereotypes about her with truths of a strong, intelligent, leading Mexican American female, but

also the job of re-educating the men in society, including those in her culture, to understand her unique identity (Cabello-Argandona et al.). Furthermore, skin color played a role in discrimination. As Mendez-Morse (2002) explained,

Often it is difficult to separate culture from ethnicity/race, but skin color is a physical characteristic that is quickly noted. Chicana feminists recognize that skin color, as well as race/ethnicity and subsequent racist or discriminatory practices, further limit and influence the life experiences of a person. The inclusion of race/ethnicity with discussions of the impact of skin color within Chicana feminism and Chicana literature contributes to further understanding how oppression, based on skin color, is present not just between different racial or ethnic groups, but also within such groups. (p. 11)

Skin color, for Mexican American females, as for all Mexican Americans, is one sure ticket of acceptance/discrimination to the White society. Fair acceptance of race and gender was a tenet of the Chicana movement.

*Gender.* Mexican Americans have strived for fairness and acceptance based mainly on race. Mexican American females have strived for fairness and acceptance based on race and gender. Gender is sometimes confused with sex, thus, I will define both. Gender and sex are social constructions that are assigned according to certain attributes or characteristics females and males may display (Thorne, 1993). Gender is described as being a dichotomous split between girl/boy, woman/man, female/male (Thorne, 1993). It is also how physiological aspects define a girl from a boy. Hence, gender serves as a reference for the terms feminine and masculine (Reese, 1995, as cited in Skrla, 2000b). Sex is the term to refer to the biological aspects of a male or female based on genitalia or chromosomes (Reskin, 1991; West & Zimmermann, 1991, as cited in Skrla, 2000b). These differences between gender and sex seem

subtle, especially when factoring in the psychological status of an individual.

However, gender is used to identify a female differently from a male using assigned attributes and stereotypes. For the purpose of this research, gender will be the focus.

The Women's Movement came about because of the different treatment of females and males. The "rules of the game" have always been those of the male and have always been regarded as better or the standard to which everyone, including women, must abide and conform (Skrla, 2000b). Ellen Goodman professed:

When the 'male' standard is regarded as the "higher" one, the one with the most tangible rewards, it is easier for women to reach "up" than to convince men of the virtues of simultaneously reaching "down." It has proved simpler—though not simple, God knows—for women to begin traveling traditional (male) routes than to change those routes. It is simpler to dress for success than to change the definition of success. (as cited in Markus, 1987, p. 107)

Women have tried and have changed some "rules," but it has been a hard road.

Howard and Hollander (1997) explained that there are prescriptions (the dos) and proscriptions (the don'ts) that people learn as young children. These dos and don'ts that children are socialized to learn set the externally bestowed (Stoddard, 1973a) stereotypes, attributes, and characteristics of females and males. "Gender stereotypes carry prescriptive implications, manifested in gender roles—prescriptions for two opposite sets of behaviors and characteristics, one believed to be appropriate for women and the other appropriate for men" (Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 33). This then serves as the precipice for the self-fulfilling prophecy. "Women and men may have the same abilities, but because they face different societal constraints and

expectations, they often make different choices from this repertoire of options. Gender expectations can thus act as *self-fulfilling prophecies*” (original emphasis; Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 38). Hence, gender expectations may prevent a female from obtaining leadership positions in the workplace.

Gender can serve as a hindrance or an asset depending on the given situation. The issue of gender, like race, is a situational and contextual social construction. Whenever gender serves a purpose for affirmative action, equal opportunity, or quotas, gender, like race, can be manipulated to meet the desires or agendas. “Like other aspects of self-presentation, gender is actively manipulated in the service of particular goals” (Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 109). However, the same can be said for gender being the reason for blame if a female or male does not behave as society expects. As West and Zimmerman summarized, “a person engaged in virtually any activity can be held responsible for performance of that activity as a woman or a man, and their incumbency in one or the other sex category can be used to legitimize or discredit their other activities (as cited in Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 37). Society’s expectations help create the identity of a female and male, which perpetuates the behavior, mannerisms, and/or performance within her/his family, culture, and workplace.

## *Leadership*

Legitimizing or discrediting female leadership seems to be a nonissue because there is little literature on females in leadership positions. The research on females in education, especially the female superintendent, has been done by females (Brunner, 1999). This reflects the attitudinal neglect and dismissal of women as leaders because the lack of data connotes that women are not important enough to research (Brunner, 1999). Additionally, the absence of research of successful minority women in leadership roles, especially Hispanic females, denotes a lack of respect for minority women as leaders. Tallerico (1999) stated that only in the past 20 years has research on female and minority superintendents surfaced. One reason for the deficiency in literature on Hispanic female leadership is that most literature focuses on women as a whole, or on Anglo or African American female experiences (Marcano, 1997). According to Mendez-Morse (1999), the research that has focused on women in educational administration has been done on White females; hence, studies, data, or information on Hispanic female administrators is absent from the literature. This lack of research neglects the valuable influences and contributions that Hispanic women have made in educational administration.

The lack of literature on Hispanic women specifically, and all women in general, may be due to the definitions given to the positions of leader and the styles of leadership. For instance, Gardner (1990) defined leadership as “the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to

pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers” (p. 1). Morgan (1998) defined leadership as “ultimately involving an ability to define the reality of others” (p.171). Hence, leadership is having the ability to collaboratively work with a team to pursue a common goal. Leaders become the teachers who teach and lead by example (Gardner). They become a symbol for their communities to reflect what their communities are or want to be by meeting the expectations of their communities or followers.

However, these definitions have been used and created through the externally bestowed (Stoddard, 1973a) attributes based on male characteristics. The male attributes or characteristics of leadership have been seen as more valuable and worthy than female attributes of leadership (Blackmore, 1993; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1989; Skrla, 2000a, 2000b). Gardner (1990) eloquently stated that one definite reason why more women are not in leadership positions is that “on the upward path to leadership most of the gatekeepers are men and many still cannot fully accept women as leaders” (p. 178). Thus, one might assume gatekeepers cannot fully accept female leadership attributes. Discounting female attributes have perpetuated erroneous stereotypes of men being better suited to work with other men (Logan, 1998), men being more trustworthy (Tallerico, 1999), men being able to adapt to the normed male leadership style (Hampton, 1998), and men fitting better in the patriarchal hierarchy (Brunner, 2000b). These “male” attributes of leadership have created barriers for females.

Green and Manera identified three barriers that women face and categorized these barriers as internal, external, and androcentric (as cited in Alston, 1999, p. 81). The internal barriers are social constructs of behaviors and roles that society has identified for women and to which women have been pressured to conform. This closely relates to Stoddard's (1973a) externally bestowed view. The external barriers are socially constructed stereotypes and organizational structures imposed on women, which parallels Stoddard's (1973a) projective view. The androcentric barrier is that which assumes women should behave as men and view everything from a male perspective. These barriers become hindrances for women, especially Hispanic women, when striving for leadership positions in education. For example, in 2000 the American Association of School Administrators reported that of 2,262 superintendents nationwide, 297 were women (Brunner, 2000b), barely double the number—115—reported in 1982. The numbers imply that female and minority superintendents/administrators were and are underrepresented and White women and men hold the majority of superintendencies (Brunner, 2000a). Furthermore, in a study done by Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999), women were more often deputy superintendents than superintendents. Allowing a female to be the deputy superintendent signifies gender equality; however, it also signifies that only men are capable of being superintendents.

The deputy superintendency has been coined the “female ghetto” because search consultants, headhunters, and school boards do not recognize women as viable



choices for the superintendency (Mathews, 2001). Ignoring qualified females for top leadership positions has been in part seeing the superintendency or leadership as a male attributed construct. One might assert that men are more qualified and experienced as leaders and deserve leadership positions over women. However, Glass (as cited in Tallerico, 1999) found that women and minority superintendents usually have more credentials, more education, are more liberal politically, and place curriculum and instructional issues first compared to White male superintendents. Brunner (2000b) found that females usually hold higher degrees than men. Furthermore, in preparatory leadership classes and programs, women outnumber men (Logan, 1998), yet the ratio of female leaders to male leaders is low. Women are preparing and aspiring to leadership positions, but are not given the opportunity; women are outnumbering men in interviews for leadership positions (Logan, 1998), yet are still not getting the jobs. Women are being ignored because the gender expectation has prescribed male attributes as best for leadership positions.

Barriers and gatekeepers are discriminators, which are used against qualified females because of gender stereotypes. In a 1992 study by the American Association of School Administrators, it was clear that women felt discriminated against because of gender and that sex discrimination was a barrier. It was also clear that men did not think sex discrimination existed and that if any barriers did exist, they were not a factor in preventing females from obtaining the superintendency or any other administrative positions. As Brunner (2000b) concurred, it is incredibly dangerous if

men do not think women face barriers when seeking the superintendency because this absence of awareness will prevent men from changing, understanding, or helping to prevent discrimination. This discrimination holds even truer for Hispanic females who have aspired to leadership positions.

There are assumptions that Hispanic females are atypical when it comes to administrative positions in education. Additionally, “Latina superintendents can be considered not as atypical but rather as women who are representatives of leaders who are hidden because of a stereotype that is seldom questioned” (Mendez-Morse, 2000, p. 598). Mendez-Morse identified three assumptions and stereotypes that have sparked this belief. First, Hispanic females are stereotyped as being a certain kind of female, subordinate to their husbands or any male figure. Second, there are rare accounts in history books that portray Hispanic women as leaders. Third, researchers have not focused on Hispanic women. Hispanic women also have to work on advancement with no professional support system. White women and men benefit from a support system, mentoring, or sponsorship that Hispanic women do not enjoy (Mendez-Morse, 2000). Therefore, Hispanic women rely on themselves, family, or friends as their support system.

Hispanic women who have attained leadership positions such as the superintendency and principalship have found not only a lack of support, but also blatant discrimination. One study (Ortiz & Ortiz, as cited in Tallerico, 1999) revealed that Hispanic female superintendents were faced with double discrimination—gender

and ethnicity—“and that this outsider status prompts suspicion of favoritism toward members of her own group, skepticism of her abilities, and increased need for support from her school board when implementing changes” (p. 40). This is one reason why women, particularly Hispanic women, are not sought for superintendent positions as much as men (Ortiz, 1999). Also, although Hispanic women hold top administrative positions, the majority of them are found in the Southwestern states (Ortiz). Hispanic women are seen as best leaders for schools, communities, and districts that are heavily populated with Hispanics or other minorities (Ortiz). This is like the female ghetto and the deputy superintendency; the Hispanic ghetto is one where Hispanics are valued only to lead Hispanic or minority populated schools, communities, or districts.

When a Hispanic female is appointed to the superintendency, there are always symbolic and political overtones (Ortiz, 1999). Ortiz posited that the Hispanic female serves as a “symbol for the community and the school board, and challenges the existing school organization structure” (p.98). This can create tremendous tension for the superintendent as she becomes scrutinized because of gender, ethnicity, capabilities as superintendent, and suspicions of favoring Hispanics (Ortiz). Usually when a Hispanic female is appointed to the superintendency or any other administrative position, it is because no one else wanted to walk into a district with major problems and difficulties (Ortiz); hence, because no one else wants to do

difficult jobs, Hispanic females are “leftovers” who fill the positions. They fill the Hispanic ghetto positions fueled with dysfunction and dejection.

Once a female, especially a “leftover” Hispanic female, attains a leadership position, she must adapt a different identity in order to accomplish educational goals. Mendez-Morse (1999) stated in her study that the Hispanic females who were superintendents went through a “metamorphosis” that involved a significant “alteration in character” (p.136). Mendez-Morse continued with three significant realizations these women went through which redefined their “self.” First, the women noticed that people interacted with them differently. They realized they were perceived as different since they became superintendents. Second, they were no longer considered a person, but the position; “they were the position first and a person second” (p.137). Third, they realized they were at the top and they were alone. Women, especially minority women, shape their identities to fit into an organization.

In another study, Ortiz (as cited in Tallerico, 1999) found that women and minorities are not socialized or conditioned to become leaders. As Hudson (as cited in Tallerico, 1999) found in her study, men are better accepted and trusted as leaders, whereas women and minorities must prove themselves before trust is considered. This trust is what school boards and search consultants use as reasons for seeking men. Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999) presented reasons consultants had given as why they did not hire women. One reason was that women were seen as weak and emotional. Another reason was if women behaved like women, they would be seen as too

feminine, but if they behaved like a man, they would be seen as a “bitch.” A third reason given was that women and minorities have barely made a mark as administrators; therefore, they have not proven themselves as much as White men because men have had longer to be administrators. Finally, women are entering the superintendency at an older age (in their 50s), whereas men are retiring at age 55. It seems evident that women and minorities will be and have been discriminated against for almost any attribute that is different from the male hegemony.

For women in general and Hispanic females specifically, the discrimination of race and gender has narrowed the path toward leadership positions. Certain paths to the principalship and to the superintendency may be ascribed when following Tallerico’s (1999) three usual paths to the superintendency:

1. First Path: from the curricular or instructional supervisor to administrator of instruction to assistant superintendent to superintendent.

2. Second Path: from curricular or instructional supervisor to assistant secondary principal to secondary principal to superintendent.

3. Third Path: from assistant elementary principal to elementary principal to superintendency. This path is usually the path women are on, and it rarely leads to the superintendency.

Women will seek leadership positions when they see women similar to themselves as role models. When women have information about other women in leadership

positions they will be more ready to pursue the principalship, superintendency, and other school leadership positions.

### *The Principalship*

The principalship defies definition. It differs from school to school, from elementary to secondary, and by student population size and staff and faculty size (Amramowitz, Tenenbaum, Deal, & Stackhouse, 1978; Blank, 1987; Pankake & Burnett, 1990). It is a position that is different from other school leadership positions because persons in that position must be responsible for children's well-being and academic success (Blank; Pritash, 2002, Vander Jagt, Shen, & Hsieh, 2001; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). At the same time, they must be responsible for the adults who work at achieving that academic success. Hence, the principalship can be defined as a demanding and difficult position with the grand responsibilities of educating children and leading adults to that lofty goal.

The principalship is unique and quite different from other leadership positions such as those in a district's central office (Doud & Keller, 1998; Pankake & Burnett, 1990). It involves leading a school, which houses not only students and teachers, but also custodians, lunch crew, parent volunteers, community volunteers, and visitors (Amramowitz et al., 1978; Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). The principalship is a leadership position found at all three levels of education: elementary school, middle school, and high school (Amramowitz et al.; Blank, 1987; Pritash, 2002). It is a

leadership position that can differ depending on grade levels, job descriptions, and expectations of the community (Kimbrough & Burkett; Pritash; Wolcott, 1973).

Principals face demands from communities, from the teachers, and from school staffs (Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). Furthermore, principals must abide by all district policies and procedures along with state and federal laws. (Ambramowitz et al., 1978; Yerkes & Guaglianone). Hence, the principal is responsible for (a) instruction and curriculum, (b) pupil services, (c) community and school relations, (d) personnel, (e) organization and structure of the school, and (f) school plant facilities (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). Principals must understand budget, curriculum, school law (including law dealing specifically with personnel, family, and special programs), and school-wide planning (Pritash, 2002).

In research detailing the jobs of principals and the enormous task of being the leader of a school, Pritash (2002) found that principals do numerous jobs in order to help students be ready for education at the next level of endeavor. Those jobs are the following:

1. Working with “the complexity of the twenty-first century child.” This child is one who may come from a well-balanced home with a mother and father, or this child may come from a one-parent, divorced parents, etc. Some children may have a happy, healthy home while other children may have a home with great conflict, neglect, poverty, or violence.
2. Supplying children with what they need to survive in order for them to be ready to learn. Children need food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare; more schools are providing these basic needs to children.
3. Assessing children so that there is accountability of student learning. Even though this may be a necessary trend, assessment alone does not take into account students’ home life and socioeconomic backgrounds; hence,

children may fail, not because they do not know the material within the assessment, but because their basic needs are not being met.

4. Creating an environment, which combats the effects of the media and society. Dress codes, student codes of conduct, and school policies and procedures must be put in place because of the increasing preoccupation with sex, violence, drugs, and materialism in society. (Pritash, 2002, p. 93)

Although all principals have great tasks to accomplish, there are differences between the elementary and secondary principal. Pankake and Burnett (1990) found in their study that

effective elementary principals do frequent monitoring of student progress toward the identified outcome. They also serve as the instructional leaders of their schools. They use their expertise to support and guide their teachers in delivering the most effective instruction possible. (p. 120)

They are the caretakers of the school whose relationship with students, teachers, parents, and the community is usually cohesive and familial.

Along with being a caretaker of a school, the elementary principals sometimes have a smaller staff and student body, but this is not the only difference (Ambramowitz et al., 1978; Doud & Keller, 1998; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). The leadership styles of the elementary and secondary school principals differ by kinds of responsibilities. Both deal with student interests, but the student interests differ from one level to the next. Firestone and Herriott (as cited in Blank, 1987) espoused that the elementary principal is seen as an instructional leader, whereas the secondary principal is seen as a leader who delegates the instructional leadership to department heads and lead teachers. Secondary principals rely on assistant principals and department chairs to deal with curriculum and instruction while the principal deals with managerial concerns (Ornstein, 1993). Although elementary principals work



closely with curriculum, instruction, and the needs of students, they also deal with managerial concerns (Ornstein).

The secondary principal has responsibilities that parallel those of the elementary principal in certain respects, but are unique to the age and needs of the students (Amramowitz et al., 1978; Doud & Keller, 1998; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). For example, high school and middle school principals usually have a bigger staff, a larger student population, and more curriculum and discipline issues (Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). Furthermore, as programs become more complex, as courses and instructional settings become more varied (e.g., vocational and advanced placement), and as other areas grow, the high school principalship may assume yet more roles that are collegial, managerial, and ambassadorial (Abramowitz et al.). Furthermore, the secondary principal has a 60- to 80-hour work week, supervising day and evening activities, addressing specific concerns and problems with student attendance, and managing a complex workload that carries very high expectations of constituents and employer (Doud & Keller; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998).

The principalship, regardless of type or level, is a job that both women and men have had opportunities to obtain. However, there is little research literature on the leadership styles of women and the success of women as principals (Bloom & Erlandson 2003; Dunshea, 1998), which can be construed as researchers ignoring women.

Clearly, failure to research women in leadership does constitute discrimination since their experiences are unexplored and therefore devalued. It is as though

it is still believed that the experiences of women can be generalized from the experiences of men despite the fact that feminist literature has made it clear over the past 20 years that this is not the case. (Dunshea, p. 205)

Furthermore, the research on female principals has compared them to the male model, which is seen as the norm of leadership (according to Shakeshaft, as cited in Bloom & Erlandson; Dunshea). Additionally, minority female principals have not been researched fully, and the evidence of their success has not been recorded (Bloom & Erlandson).

The research that has been conducted on females in general and Black females specifically has shown that race and gender discrimination and assigned attributes have hindered women and minorities from gaining leadership positions in education (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Dunshea, 1998). For example, according to Petrie and Lindauer (2001), sexual discrimination is a major reason for women not seeking administrative positions in schools. Additionally, when women do seek and aspire toward the principalship, they are at a disadvantage because the principalship has been seen as a paternal role (Edwards, 2000). Women find this paternal role a hard one to play, especially because women are more prone, as principals, to use both the paternal and maternal roles as needed (Edwards).

Interestingly, minority women face a similar predicament as other women do regarding the paternal norm. Bloom and Erlandson (2003) learned through their research that expectations for Black female principals were based on the White woman's norm.

Asking questions from a White woman's view without incorporating race and class issues into the conceptual framework highlights the unwanted outcomes of such practices: (a) perpetuating the practice of intellectual and cultural exclusion by creating the appearance of acceptance in women's studies using an ethnic additive model and (b) failing to acknowledge that White women retain White privilege; women of color do not hold a color privilege, thereby making African American women's experience similar in some way to women in general but deviant from the White female norm. (Bloom & Erlandson, p. 344)

This also applies to Mexican American females in principalship roles; regardless of ethnicity, placing minority females into a generalized category may perpetuate and confirm racism and may deny the minority female experience. Thus, the generalization that the male experience is the "right" experience may perpetuate and confirm sexism and deny the female experience (Dunshea, 1998).

Denying women and minorities a platform to share their experiences can prove to be detrimental because their experiences can add positive data to the leadership literature. For example, Shautz (1995) found that female principals hold a greater understanding of what is taking place in the classrooms than do male principals. Additionally,

Marshall and Mitchell indicated that female principals had a greater preference towards activities related to instructional leadership and communication and avoided authoritarian solutions. The extended length of time that they spend as classroom teachers would emphasize their expertise in this area. (Shautz, 1995, p. 214)

Even with the great expertise and length of time spent in the classroom, women are not gaining leadership positions.

Another reason women may not be gaining leadership positions or aspiring to leadership positions is a lack of female role models (Petrie & Lindauer, 2001). Petrie

and Lindauer also found that females do not have role models to emulate, and they must overcome stereotypic biases, fears, and sexual harassment when seeking administrative positions in public education. Furthermore, when they do choose to aspire to a principalship, they are neither taken seriously nor seen as capable.

As women seek to establish a personal and professional identity as principals they sometimes find themselves on their own, in unfamiliar and unfriendly territory. Obtaining a principalship and being accepted as competent and effective in that position are not necessarily the same. (Petrie & Lindauer, p. 51)

Being accepted as competent and effective as a principal seems to be a barrier for minorities also.

Minorities have been given opportunities to gain leadership positions in education (Mendez-Morse, 1999; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995), but have been assigned to principalships according to their ethnicity. Murtadha and Larson (as cited in Bloom & Erlandson, 2003) posited that even with the university preparation and the availability of minority leaders, “principals of color, especially African American women, typically emerge as the leaders of urban schools that are undersupported and economically depleted” (p. 346). Furthermore, Hill and Ragland (as cited in Bloom & Erlandson, 2003) stated,

Default situations are often offered to women. Many school boards, usually in inner city schools, face school leadership...where a number of men have failed as leaders. With their backs to a wall, hiring a woman is the only remaining choice. This situation is especially common in the too rare instances when minority women are given administrative position. (p. 346)

This concurs with the research of Ortiz (1999), who found that Mexican American females are usually given opportunities as superintendents in districts with a large

Hispanic population or a deficit or serious problem that needs attention. The principalship for minority females, then, becomes an even more demanding position because of both the “basic” job of running a school and living up to the expectations of those who granted the principalship.

For women and minorities especially, and all educators in general, the principalship is a demanding job, very different from all other public school leadership positions. It is a job that puts the principal in the line of fire when dealing with the welfare and success of children. Wolcott (1973) summed it up best when he stated, “A career in the principalship provides no surcease from ambivalence, although ambivalence is not a prerequisite to the office” (p. 326). Hence, no matter the gender or race, the principalship is an entity that changes according to the needs of the students, the community, and the staff of each individual school and according to the leadership style of the individual principal.

### *Conclusion*

The social construction of identity affects women in all aspects of their lives: race, gender, and educational leadership. In this chapter, I have presented the influences and principles that are imposed on an individual and her/his identity construction/development, focusing on Mexican Americans and females in general, and Mexican American females specifically. I have presented the theoretical framework from Stoddard’s (1973a) three basic distinctions for identity: (a)

externally bestowed, (b) projected, and (c) self-designated. These were applied to address the influences imposed on Mexican Americans, especially Mexican American females, in identity creation. Finally, I have addressed the barriers that the Mexican American female faces when aspiring educational leadership positions. Chapter 3 will have a detailed plan for research and methodology.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to dialogue with successful Mexican American female educational leaders to describe how they see and understand their identities as related to socially assigned attributes, self-assigned attributes, Chicana feminism, and educational leadership styles. This study fills a gap in existing research, which has not covered adequately the successful Mexican American female experience as an educational leader. Specifically, it investigated how the Mexican American female aspires to educational leadership, how she achieves educational leadership positions, and how her identity changes in the process. This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What does identity mean to Mexican American female educational leaders?
2. How does the Mexican American female identity change due to experiences, influences, and expectations from family, culture, society, and self?
3. What does the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader “look like” according to the narratives gathered for this study?

In order to address these research questions, this study used a qualitative narrative research method and design. A qualitative approach enabled an in-depth, interactive understanding of the participants because “qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and in detail” (Patton, 1990, p.12). This

chapter will include the reason for qualitative research, as well as the research design, data collection and analysis procedures, and validity and credibility, concluding with a brief summary.

### *Qualitative Research and Naturalistic Inquiry*

This study used a qualitative narrative approach because it best fits studies collecting data from small samples (in this case, 4 study participants). “Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases” (Patton, 1990, p.14). This wealth of detailed information brings meaning to relationships between the knower and the known and includes the participants’ cultural characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives of their reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ropers-Huilman & Graue, 1999). The knower–known interaction is best described through Lincoln and Guba’s descriptors. The first descriptor is the *indeterminacy*. This involves the reciprocated involvement and interaction between the knower and known. For example, the observation process may affect the results, even in the naturalistic setting; because participants know the observer is watching, they may alter their behavior slightly. The observer watches the knower in order to seek the known, but the knower has the power of allowing specific information to transfer during the interaction.

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) descriptor of secondary support, *mutual causality*, focuses on how the observer/researcher and observed/participant are part of a whole



picture, and each affects the other as well as the whole. The researcher affects the whole by wishing to study a certain part of the whole; thus, because only a part is being studied, any description of reality will always be partial (Lincoln & Guba). This partial reality belongs to the participants and is shared with the researcher as a puzzle piece of the whole.

To further limit understanding, this piece of the participants' partial reality that is shared with the researcher is only understood by the researcher's perception of the participants' reality. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) descriptor of primary support, *perspective*, describes those perceptions the researcher brings to the study. Where and how a researcher looks at the whole or parts will affect what the researcher finally observes. Therefore, the researcher's perspective affects what will be known. The researcher must balance her perspective with multiple perceptions in order to be fair and not biased and prejudiced. This balance will help limit the effect of perspective on the whole or parts of the study.

The goal of any researcher is to conduct a study with the intended interpretations of the participants' reality. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) final descriptor of the knower-known interaction is *objectivity*. Of course, objectivity can never be absolute because reality is determined through individuals and their varied perceptions. However, this reality is held as true by individuals to make sense of their natural setting and their reality.

Another descriptive look at qualitative research taking place in the natural setting has been espoused by Rallis (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Rallis stated that qualitative research and the qualitative researcher have certain characteristics. These characteristics are as follows:

#### Qualitative research

1. takes place in the natural world,
2. uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic,
3. is emergent rather than tightly prefigured, and
4. is fundamentally interpretive (Rallis, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

#### The qualitative researcher

1. views social phenomenon holistically,
2. systematically reflects on who she is in the inquiry,
3. is sensitive to her personal biography and how it shapes the study, and
4. uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative (Rallis, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 3).

To summarize, qualitative research, involves seeking information from participants in their natural setting. It is finding multiple methods of interaction with participants, with ethical and humane intentions, to find information that will better the field of study. It is research that develops themes that emerge from ideas, stories, and histories of the participants. Qualitative research is interpreted by the researcher

and reader according to their experience and personal insight. The qualitative researcher is empathetic to the stories of her participants and uses their insight to create a study that will encourage diverse reasoning and interpretation. Hence, with qualitative research the researcher seeks to answer the research questions by looking at how the whole affects a part and vice-versa within the natural setting.

Because the natural setting is the focus of this qualitative study, it was imperative to conduct this investigation in an unobtrusive, natural manner. Furthermore, because the topic for this study is controversial and unique, it was necessary to employ a research method that enabled collecting the most accurate data in a naturalistic manner. Hence, qualitative research was appropriate for this research study: “Human actions are significantly influenced by the setting in which they occur; thus, one should study that behavior in real-life situations” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 57). Human behavior was a focus of this study, and naturalistic inquiry allows for events to occur naturally in the research setting without manipulating that setting in any manner (Patton, 1990).

The qualitative, naturalistic approach is used when observing and interpreting reality with the aim of developing a theory that will explain what was experienced. The quantitative approach is used when one begins with a theory (or hypothesis) and tests for confirmation or disconfirmation of that hypothesis. (Newman & Benz, 1998, p. 3)

According to Marshall (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999), qualitative methods help researchers find natural solutions to problems and provide a way to study problems in cases where experimentation would prove unethical. To find natural

solutions and study problems in the naturalistic venue, narratives were collected through interviews and journals.

*Narrative study.* Narrative analysis, a traditional approach to qualitative research,

seeks to describe the meaning of experience for individuals, frequently those who are socially marginalized or oppressed, as they construct stories (narratives) about their lives. Life stories, biographies and autobiographies, oral histories, and personal narratives are all forms of narrative analysis. Each specific approach assumes that storytelling is integral to understanding lives and that all people engage in the construction of narratives. (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 5)

Additionally, according to Bloom, Munro, and Lather (as cited in Marshall & Rossman), narratives may be emancipatory for participants when framed by feminist or critical theory. Hence, narratives serve as a beneficial method of qualitative research, giving participants a voice.

This voice can be heard through the holistic approach. The qualitative holistic approach relies on narratives that describe the participants' positions and experiences (Yin, as cited in Scholz & Tietje, 2002). This holistic approach takes into account all aspects of the participants' lives to help make sense of their personal and professional journeys. As Chase (1995) elaborated,

The narrative process—making sense of experience and shaping self-understanding—is at once a personal and a cultural endeavor. Like all narratives about the self, professional women's stories display the culture in which the women live. When professional women narrate their experiences of power and subjection, they draw on meaning systems—discourses—that American culture provides for talking about professional achievement on the one hand and inequality on the other. (pp. 5–6)

Hence, narration makes self-understanding possible because the narratives and stories shape the lives of those narrating (Chase).

In this study, professional, successful women in educational leadership positions narrated their self-understanding and how their life stories have shaped their identities as educational leaders. Focusing on the narratives deepens the comprehension of how “American culture constrains professional women’s self-understandings and how they struggle against those constraints. This dynamic relationship between culture and experience comes to light only when we attend to the narrative process itself” (Chase, 1995, pp. 5–6). The narrative process not only increases the self-understanding of women’s experiences, but also helps increase the understanding of those who are not familiar with the educational sector. “Using more familiar realist narrative forms should help bridge the vast and growing cultural gulf between academics and ordinary people” (Foley, 1998, p.126). Consequently, narratives may help academic research reach a more diverse population of readers and increase the definition of reality according to those who narrate.

The narrative inquiry method assumes that narrated stories are the constructed realities of the participant (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The participant tells her story, and the researcher explores that story through an in-depth interview, for example (Marshall & Rossman). Within the natural setting, the in-depth probing helps the researcher find unique characteristics that are meaningful at that particular time, place, and audience (Chase, 1995). This means that

while people construct self-understanding by making use of available cultural resources, their life stories are also particular. First, cultural resources constrain but do not wholly determine their use. A narrator draws on cultural resources as she tells her own story, a story that is distinguishable, for example, from her mother's or father's or any other individual's story. At the same time, a life story is never wholly idiosyncratic; its particularity must be culturally intelligible. Second, even when one tells an often-told story, there is something unique about *this* occasion of its telling. (Chase, p. 7, original emphasis)

Therefore, unique narratives reveal only one part of the whole as they are told for a particular study.

Collecting data from these unique narratives requires many forms of media. Narratives can be told through journal records, photographs, letters, autobiographical writing, and other data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) that occur within the natural setting. The construction of the written product may be done collaboratively so that the true meaning of the participants' narrative is evident. The intended meanings of the participants' narratives are crucial to making sense of and learning from their individual experiences (Chase, 1995).

Some information about Mexican American females has already been revealed through meta-narratives (Chase, 1995). Meta-narratives are communicated through media such as literature, popular culture, and the natural and social sciences (Chase). These meta-narratives, or the dominant culture's natural expectations, show how female characteristics have evolved and changed to meet the needs of family and society and how assigned attributes still affect women. When a woman's narrative is in contrast to the dominant culture's idea of model women, the meta-narrative, her

story then becomes a counternarrative (Chase, 1995). According to Chase, confident, accomplished, successful women have found a place in present-day American culture with narratives filled with their experiences and individuality. These counternarratives can affect the meta-narrative. “Often it is in the narratives that people tell about others that we can see the power of accepted norms of behaviors” (Grogan, 1996). These counternarrative, individual stories become an instrument to change the accepted norm and idea of the model woman.

Accepted norms or constructed ideals of how women should look, act, and be are being changed through narratives and movements. As Chase (1995) explained,

Although stories about discrimination have not achieved a prominent place in American culture, the legacies of the civil rights and women’s movements have made such stories familiar by giving them at least some public currency. In addition, such stories flourish in the safe spaces created when people who share similar experiences come together. (p. 10)

Because narratives may contain sensitive information, it is imperative that trust and openness between the researcher and participant are established through a mutual and sincere collaboration, much like a friendship that is established over time (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Furthermore, the researcher must be an active listener and learner, giving each narrator, or participant, full, undivided attention, even though within the written research document, many voices may be heard (Marshall & Rossman).

Narratives that allow voices to be heard may have some limitations. Even though I endeavored to understand the intended meaning of each participant’s

narrative, the narratives were limited by memory and perception or the realities of each participant. As Ross and Conway (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999) explained, narratives are based on the recall of the participant; this recall may be selective and may only focus on certain events. The narratives are stories being told from memory; therefore, inference or reinterpretation of the past may become the participant's reality at the moment of the participant's telling (Ross & Conway, as cited in Marshall & Rossman). The narratives also were limited by the perceptions and personal experiences of the learner or researcher. To try to determine the information intended by the narrator, this limitation was alleviated through member checking, as well as other techniques as discussed in the Trustworthiness and Credibility section, later in this chapter.

### *Participants*

The participants of this qualitative study were 4 successful Mexican American females in principalship positions in Central Texas public schools. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study because it "is used as a strategy when one wants to learn something and come to understand something about certain select cases without needing to generalize to all such cases" (Patton, 1980, p. 100). It may also be used to find in-depth, detailed information about a case with the opportunity to generalize as needed or interpreted (Patton).



The participants were chosen by the following criteria:

1. Each participant selected identified, described, or recognized herself as a Mexican American female.
2. Each participant selected had been principal for at least 3 years in the same district. The principalship could be at any level (i.e., elementary or secondary).
3. Each participant selected was an active principal at a successful public school. Success was defined as having a Recognized school rating according to the TEA guidelines.

With such criteria, the purposeful sampling enabled gathering possibly sensitive information from the participants within the natural settings. The natural setting was in a “Hispanic ghetto,” a school populated mainly with Hispanic children. This alleviated some of the concerns for anonymity and confidentiality because the 4 Mexican American female principals came from public schools with various kinds of ethnic populations.

*Participant selection.* The participants were identified through their reputation and through the input of fellow colleagues, professors, and public school educators. The pool of names included only successful Mexican American female principals at Central Texas public schools that had achieved Recognized status according to the TEA guidelines. Once I had chosen 4 possible participants, I called each of them and asked if they would be willing to participate in this study. I ensured confidentiality and explained my plan of action, including my research questions, purpose, and ways

of gathering data. After telling the potential participant that I was interested in studying successful Mexican American female principals, I asked her how she identified herself. If she identified herself as Mexican American, then she was asked to participate in this study. After the participant accepted, I followed up the phone conversation by mailing or delivering a brief written outline of my research. When I found 4 participants that were willing to work with me on this study for 7–10 weeks, and who seemed likely to contribute to this research, I was ready to investigate their personal and unique identities through interviews.

### *Research Design*

The research design was flexible because it was based on the emergent themes that arose from the narratives through interviewing and journaling. The research design for this study was unique because it revolved around the participants' unique stories or narratives about their experiences as successful Mexican American female principals. It also was idiosyncratic for this particular study, meaning that the participants' narratives had meaning for this particular time, place, and audience.

Participants' narratives were collected via interviews at their workplaces (in the naturalistic setting). These interviews were conducted in three phases, following participant selection.

*Interview phase 1.* The first interview took place in the participant's office to ensure the natural setting; I could ask additional questions based on what I saw (e.g., awards, pictures). I also wanted to meet the principals at their offices because I believed they would feel more comfortable on their own "turf." I wanted them to feel at ease with me and with answering the questions and contributing from the heart with no fear of retribution. Because the main stipulation of choosing participants was self-identification as Mexican American, I focused my first interview on what *Mexican American* means to them. I will ask a series of questions based on being Mexican American in general:

1. What does Mexican American mean to you?
2. What does Mexican American look like?
3. What attributes have society, family, and organizations placed on the Mexican American and the Mexican American female in particular?
4. How do those assigned attributes differ from you and what you know?

I followed those questions with a series based on identity:

5. How has knowing and defining yourself as Mexican American helped you identify yourself in society?
6. Is your identity created due to influences from family, culture, community, society, and education? If yes, then what are those influences?
7. How has your identity evolved or changed throughout childhood, teen and college years, and through your career until now?

8. How do you identify yourself as a successful Mexican American principal?

Finally, after each participant described her identity as a Mexican American principal, I followed up with questions related to the heart of this research, her position in educational leadership:

9. What path did you take to reach the principalship?

10. Were you helped, mentored, or sponsored as you aspired then acquired the principalship?

11. Were and are there support systems in place for you?

12. How did your identity change after becoming a principal?

The first interview typically took 1–2 hours to complete. At the end of the interview, I asked each participant to keep a journal or prepare for the next interview with information pertinent to anything that might come to mind about her identity as a female, Mexican American female, educator, and principal and to write down any self-assigned attributes as a successful Mexican American female principal.

Participants e-mailed or kept their journals or preparations for the next interview. I told the participants that I kept a journal of my thoughts and of what I learned from the participants as I reflected on my experience and my identity as I heard and read their stories.

Narratives and data from the first interviews were analyzed immediately.

Tapes were transcribed and I began to code and to thematize the data. In other words,

I found similar words or phrases and coded them; then I thematized these codes to help me organize the data. After organizing the data, any tangent themes, ideas, or areas could be pursued in the second interview phase.

*Interview phase 2.* At the second interview, I used member checking to ensure that I interpreted the first interview the way the participant intended. I again met with each participant for about 1–2 hours asking for clarification and collecting additional information based on the emergent themes of the first interview. After the second interview, tapes were transcribed immediately and I continued coding and thematizing the data. At the end of the second interview, I began planning for the third interview phase by inviting each participant to meet the other participants at a designated time and place.

*Interview phase 3.* I invited participants to meet for a third interview as a group to discuss the questions that I had asked in the individual interviews, the themes that had emerged, and the stories shared throughout the process. This group meeting was a time for each participant to get to know other successful Mexican American principals and to hear their journeys as Mexican American females aspiring to the principalship. This also was a time for me to debrief the group about the inspiration for and status of the study. I explained the emergent themes that I had found and pointed out the similarities and differences in their experiences. This sharing inspired more narratives and more information about each participant's

unique and personal identity. I strove to have all participants present, which they were.

Information from this third phase of interviews was organized using Microsoft Word and my own system of “banking” the information according to the codes and themes found. I continued to code and to thematize the data, making the information easy to retrieve, read, and extract. I ensured that member checking occurred through e-mail so that the participants were able to view their recorded stories for accuracy and interpretation. I asked them to discuss with me any necessary changes.

Throughout this nearly 10-week process, I kept a tape recorder on me at all times. This tape recorder was used when I had questions that I might not have thought of during an interview; when I had thoughts I wanted to address either to the participants or in my writing; to help me organize, connect, or pursue my words and thoughts throughout the 10 weeks; and to journal. I gave my phone numbers and e-mail address to the participants so that they could reach me at any time; they did the same in return.

#### *Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures*

The researcher is the instrument in qualitative research and inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Therefore, naturalistic inquiry guided my research so that my questions could be answered through data collection. I used the data-collection

techniques of naturalistic inquiry along with narratives, including interviewing, journaling, and analyzing information.

*Interviewing.* For this study, the participants were interviewed one-on-one and then in a whole group, as described in the Study Design section. “The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 1990, p. 278); hence, I wanted the participants to tell me what had stayed on their mind about the social construction of identity. I engaged the participants in a conversational dialogue so that they were more at ease when telling their stories and describing their individual identity. Informal conversational interview is an open-ended interviewing method that may occur while the researcher is observing the participant in the natural setting (Patton, 1990). This method encourages spontaneous questions to be asked during a conversation that the researcher guides through set criteria. However, answers to some questions may bring new ideas or information to the forefront that the researcher may have thought not pertinent to the research. With new ideas or information, the researcher may need to have follow-up interviews in order to get as much detailed information as possible about the topic of research. There is no structured format, and the researcher may take notes, tape-record, or refrain from taking notes and record her thoughts after the interview.

This interviewing technique, which is relaxed and allows the participant to freely tell her narrative without consequence or the limitations of a formalized set of questions, helped in collecting as much information as possible about the participant

and her experiences. Further, this technique allowed for trust between researcher and participant, increasing credibility. Credibility was also enhanced because the participant was able to ask questions about the interview and the intent of the research. When rapport is developed, a participant's experience can be probed deeper with a permissive intrusion, and the researcher can ask additional clarifying questions (Prakash, 1979). As Patton (1980) emphasized,

Topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject. Thus, the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to work questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style—but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined. Interview guides can be developed in more or less detail depending on the extent to which the researcher is able to specify important issues in advance and the extent to which it is felt that a particular sequence of questions is important to ask...deciding how best to use the limited time available in an interview situation. (pp. 200–201).

The interview, then, is one vehicle to help participants tell their understanding of their reality through conversation with the researcher.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis began immediately following the first interview and continued as new information was gathered. Beginning analysis at the start of the study helped to categorize emergent themes, thoughts, and ideas (Patton, 1990). Information was coded according to the three research questions guiding this study. The information found in the interview and journal documents contained reoccurring words or phrases, which then were categorized into 10 codes to find emergent themes.



I took those codes and created banks using my own method and Microsoft Word. As I completed an interview and had it transcribed, I “dumped” that information into the bank according to the code or theme that emerged. I then extracted only information that I felt was pertinent per code or theme and cut and pasted that information into a second code or theme bank. I also included the line numbers of the transcript so that I could use the interview document for further clarification when needed. Finally, I included any notes I had (i.e., a quote may fit into two code or theme banks; therefore, my notation reflected that double reference).

### *Trustworthiness and Credibility*

Polkinghorne (1991) defined validity (or credibility) as the connection between findings and reality. Trustworthiness is the ability to persuade an audience that the results of a study are important, relevant, and worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This persuasion can be accomplished by providing an array of information to back up the results and data. In this study the information gathered from the participants was unique to their experiences and was justifiably credible. Accounts and stories were not second-guessed or discounted; however, trustworthiness and credibility was achieved through triangulation and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), peer debriefing, disconfirming evidence, and a reflexive researcher journal (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998).

*Triangulation.* Triangulation is finding data to support the research by employing a combination of methodologies (Patton, 1980). “Triangulation is an approach of finding three related incidents to support the conclusions that are stated. Triangulation is to make the qualitative data seem as objective as statistical data” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 18). Interviewing participants and gathering their narratives illuminated related incidents such as their pathway to the principalship, which supported the conclusions of this study. This strengthened the research and helped the data become more generalizable. Triangulation was achieved in this study by comparing data among the literature review, interviews, and journals. Triangulation also was achieved because each participant was interviewed three times, in two one-on-one and one group interview, at different times and in different settings. Additional credibility was established through member checking.

*Member checking.* Member checking refers to how accurate the data are and how accurately the researcher presents the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher met with each participant and discussed the information in the final draft of the study. Participants were able to contribute their clarifications, editing, and rephrasing in order to present their stories in a manner both agreeable to and accurate for the researcher and the participant.

*Peer debriefing.* Peer debriefing is strengthening the research by seeking an outsider's view of the conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peers helped me identify strengths and weaknesses of the conclusions, gave input and insight on the developments of the study, and helped me keep the focus of the research.

*Disconfirming evidence.* Including data that complements or conflicts with other data is disconfirming evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, to avoid potential personal bias, the researcher actively seeks data that may differ in a critical manner. This method helps the researcher develop different perspectives about the subject (Lincoln & Guba). Further, including disconfirming evidence strengthens the research because data must undergo an array of measures or tests designed to discount the expected conclusions (Lather, 1986).

*Reflexivity.* I reflected on personal experiences through journal entries, which became part of the data and also ensured trustworthiness. Smyth and Shacklock (1998) described being reflexive as “giving back to the community of researchers of which we are so much a part” (p.8). Smyth and Shacklock continued,

As we see it, the process of reflexivity is an attempt to identify, do something about, and acknowledge the limitations of the research: its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis, and how accounts recognize that the construction of knowledge takes place in the world and not apart from it. Indeed, reflexivity in “critical” research work is important in honestly and openly addressing issues concerning the validation of research findings, as well as those ethical and political questions which arise from relations between the researcher and the researched that are implicit to the research agenda and the research methods. (p. 7)

### *Methodological Limitations of the Study*

Despite efforts to maximize trustworthiness and validity, this study has methodological limitations. First, the sample was limited in both size and diversity. Because this study focused on the experiences of 4 successful Mexican American female principals, generalizing among other Hispanics is limited due to different cultural and societal expectations. Furthermore, the 4 participants have unique experiences, and it should not be assumed that all successful Mexican American female administrators hold the same experiences.

The second limitation is the qualitative methods used for this study. Qualitative research does not rely on experimentation or duplicating the results of the study. Hence, within the naturalistic setting, the narratives of the participants were gathered in regard to a specific time, place, and audience. This means that the results of this study are for this study only. The results may not be applied or compared to another study because the same participants, setting, and natural environment cannot be replicated. Furthermore, as the researcher, my interpretation of the data for this time, place, and audience cannot be reinterpreted without the danger of altering the results.

Third, because the qualitative method of naturalistic inquiry is based on natural events and occurrences within the natural setting, human participants will participate differently. Humans think in different ways and hold different perceptions of a social situation; however, the participants had similar perspectives on the social

situations they described in their interview. Additionally, only certain data made it to the final written draft, which may confuse the “whole picture” (Prakash, 1979). With the vast amount of data I gathered, I had to pick and choose what was relevant and necessary to address for the purpose of this research.

The fourth limitation is the researcher. I came to this study with preconceived notions and expectations that I hoped to keep abated. However, I unintentionally and unconsciously might have allowed my ideas, philosophies, attitude, and biases to surface throughout the interviewing and journaling process. This might have altered the participants’ outlook of the interviewing and journaling process. This also might have altered the outcome of this research.

Finally, I came to this research as both an insider and an outsider, a strength and a weakness at the same time. As an insider, I was able to gather information from the participants that I might not have been able to gather if I were not a Mexican American female. Furthermore, I was able to relate to many experiences and stories that they told. As an outsider, I came to the research as an objective observer. I was not a part of the district of which they spoke. I did not grow up in a Hispanic Ghetto, nor did I work in a Hispanic Ghetto. As an insider, I became very close to the women, and I may have become biased and subjective toward the end of the research. As an outsider, I may not have fully understood growing up in a predominantly Hispanic community, growing up poor, or growing up lower middle class. However, both these strengths and weaknesses helped me to truly appreciate the women’s stories.

### *Summary*

This chapter focused on the qualitative method and design that were used for this study. Specifically, this study employed naturalistic and narrative inquiry methods. The basis of and rationale for participant selection along with the process for interviewing and journaling was presented. Data collection, data analysis and coding, trustworthiness, credibility, and methodological shortcomings were also included. The fourth chapter will contain the data, including coding and emergent themes of the interviews and journal entries.

## Chapter 4

### Results

In this chapter, the results presented come from each participant's narratives gathered through interviews and e-mails. These narratives present the participants' passions, insights, and perceptions of their identity as Mexican American females in a leadership position and the ways that social constructions have affected their identities. I explain the identity of each participant according to one of the three research questions and the themes that evolved from the interviews. I explain and strengthen the three questions and the cross-section of themes by quotes from each participant's interviews, and in some places have combined quotes from more than one interview.

In the first section of this chapter, I introduce the participants to include their current leadership status as well as a brief description of each participant's background. In the next section, my answer to each research question includes data from the interviews but also quotes from my self-reflective journal. I kept a reflective journal throughout the data-gathering process, which served as my way of understanding my identity compared to other Mexican American women. The final section will be the conclusions and summary of this chapter.

In developing this chapter, I have taken great care in capturing each participant's voice so that her story is told correctly. Furthermore, because the number of women who are Mexican American principals in Central Texas is

relatively small, and their names may be easily discernable, I have altered the details of their personal lives in order to protect their privacy. Additionally, I have changed the names of people and places. In order to make a point, I have changed the names of schools from low socioeconomic areas to Hispanic Ghettos and high socioeconomic areas to non-Hispanic Ghettos.

### *Participants*

Four Mexican American female principals participated in this research. All participants are in their late 30s or 40s and have a common trait; that is, none aspired to the principalship. They wanted to be educators and followed a path either of teaching or counseling, but the principalship came, according to these women, with great mentoring and coaching from superiors who saw promise in each participant. Three of the participants are middle school principals, and one is an elementary principal. They all are from a Central Texas school district with a population of students nearing 75,000. All of the women hold at least a master's degree in educational administration, and one woman holds a doctorate in educational administration. The women talked with passion about their students, their school, and their goals as principals. Furthermore, each woman had a wonderfully spirited story to tell.



*Lidia Herrera.* When I met Lidia in person, she spoke with such passion and pride about her life story and her journeys in education. She spoke with great pride about her students, her staff, and most of all her family. She described herself as a person who cares nothing about material things, but about being happy. With joy, she showed me pictures of her family, including her sisters, mother, children, and husband. She described each family member with stories about where they have been and where they will be going.

Lidia did not begin her career in education. She worked as a psychological associate for a Texas university, helping students, including ex-convicts, find jobs. As she continued her work at the university level, she interned as a school psychologist in a nearby elementary school. With the help of the internship, Lidia found her calling and joined the ranks of educators. She worked first as a teacher, but she then earned a promotion to an assistant principalship and then obtained a principalship.

Lidia has been a principal for 7 years, with the last 4 at Laredo Middle School, which is populated with over 900 students. Laredo's demographics are 85% Hispanic, 13% African American, and 2% other. Between 86% and 87% of students are on the free and reduced-price lunch program. Laredo is a Title I school with high ESL and special-education populations. In 2001–2002, Laredo became a Recognized school and achieved the same rating for 2002–2003.

*Vicky Garcia.* My first meeting with Vicky was exciting because I had heard she was one of the best educators in her district. With grace and class, she told me her story without hesitation and with much pride. Vicky started her story by letting me know she did not aspire to become a principal. She was adamant about becoming a teacher, a great teacher, one who would cater to the needs of the students. Multiple Teacher of the Year awards hanging on her wall were evidence of the kind of teacher she has been.

Taking the skills she learned as a teacher, Vicky became a principal. She was a principal at an elementary school, which achieved Recognized status under her leadership for 3 years. Then, in an effort to help another school improve, she moved one year ago to Smokey Hill Middle School, where she claims to be the lead teacher, not principal, of 613 students. Demographically, Smokey Hill has about 90–92% Hispanics, 8–9% African American, and 1% other. Nearly 87% of its students are on free and reduced-price lunch. In terms of accountability, Smokey Hill has not been recognized for the last 2 years, largely due, in Vicky’s opinion, to major redistricting changes.

*Valerie Ortega.* Valerie is the only participant who identified herself as Mexican American and Puerto Rican American. Valerie has been the principal of Willow Elementary for the past 2 years. In our first interview, she identified with being Mexican American. However, she also identified with her Puerto Rican roots when speaking of her father. Valerie believed having two distinct Hispanic cultural

influences has helped her understand different people and different cultures. Since she learned to understand people, Valerie believed she could reach more children through counseling than teaching. After teaching for 3 years, Valerie served as counselor for 16 years, working in different Texas cities before settling in her present district, where she has resided since 1986. She has served 4 years as an assistant principal and 2 years as a principal at Willow Elementary.

Willow Elementary is predominantly minority with 98% Hispanic, 1% African American, and 1% other. Willow has 96% of its students on free and reduced-price lunch; a large population of students lives in low-income homes. The total student population is over 400. Willow is a Recognized school and, in fact, became Recognized under Vicky Garcia, who left Willow last year to become principal of Smokey Hill. Valerie intends to earn this Recognized ranking for the upcoming year.

*Regina Escapa.* Regina earned her doctorate 10 years ago from The University of Texas. Although her doctorate is in Educational Administration with an emphasis in the superintendency, Regina believed she needed more experience as a principal. Regina has been a principal for 8 years. She spent 7 years in one district where she worked with predominantly high socioeconomic status Anglo students and families. However, Regina believed she needed to find another school where she would be a better fit and could contribute more to the community. Hence, Regina

moved to her present district with the distinct honor of helping a reconstituted school become successful again.

Maxdale Middle School has had several principals before Regina. She is the 10th principal in the past 10 years and has come to a community of students and families who do not have much hope or faith in the school or the school district. Maxdale has a student population of 800, comprised of 65% Hispanic, 30% African American, 4% Asian, and 1% Anglo, with 80% of students participating in the free and reduced-price lunch program. Maxdale has not been Recognized in several years, but Regina is adamant about helping students learn and feel successful.

*Laura Trujillo-Ball.* I am presently a special education coordinator at a high school. I have taught Kindergarten through eighth grade, both regular and special education, for 8 years. I have been an administrator for the last 3.5 years. I am at a school that has a TEA rating of Acceptable, and our overall TAKS scores are poor. I have been at this school for nearly 4 years.

My community sees the high school as a non-Hispanic school. It has earned the reputation and title of “the rich school,” even though it has about 55% of the students on the free or reduced-price lunch program, and the school is populated with predominantly minority students. In addition, the community is very demanding, and the parental support is high, although mostly through the football, band, drill team, and cheerleading clubs. The school is also predominantly populated with children whose parents are in the military.

### *Research Question 1*

What does identity mean to Mexican American female educational leaders?

The participants' narratives of their perceptions and understanding of identity and the meaning of what it is to be Mexican American female educational leaders were gathered through individual interviews and one group interview. Each woman was encouraged to narrate her story with the fewest of prompts. This narration allowed emergent themes to develop. These themes provided valuable insights into the construction of each woman's identity. The emergent themes found among the three research questions may not be isolated and only associated with one research question. Research Question 1 contains three main themes: (a) their identities related to their mentors and role models, (b) their identities related to being principals, and (c) their identities related to their schools.

When the women spoke about identity, they told of those who mentored them in becoming leaders. These mentors and role models encouraged them not only to become the best teachers they could be, but also to seek positions of higher responsibility, to become leaders of educators. They identified themselves as leaders very much like those they emulated, with great passion for those they serve. They also spoke of the identity of their schools and how this identity is shaped by the identity of the Hispanic children and their families. All 4 principals felt they are well equipped to serve the Hispanic children and their families because they are Hispanic

females who have faced similar challenges as their students face today. As they professed, they were meant to be at the schools they serve because other principals might not serve their schools as passionately as they do. Hence, the identity of mentors and role models, the identity of a principal, and the identity of a school is how the women answered what identity means to them, Mexican American educational leaders.

*Their identities related to mentors and role models.* Each woman told of different people who served as role models and to whom she could relate or identify with. Each one focused on at least one individual who she saw as making a difference in the lives of children and whose example she wanted to follow. Additionally, they used the words *role model* and *mentor* synonymously. These role models appeared at different times in their lives and led by example. These examples of leadership, as told by the women, helped them relate to an identity of leadership, which they shaped as their own leadership identity. For instance, Lidia related,

Let me tell you someone that I respect and admire, who just rocks my world, and that, in a moment's notice, if that person said, "Jump," I would jump. In a moment's notice if that person, you know, said, "Leave your job," I'd leave my job. And that would be my husband. He always reminds me that I, I'm doing a good job. Yeah, but he would be the one. You know, he is such a straight-laced guy, always doing the right thing for the person. And he's just wonderful. So when I look at him, I look at him with admiration and respect.

Inarguably, Lidia saw her husband, who works in a leadership role himself, as her role model. She spoke highly of her husband and told about his many journeys as a naval officer in great detail. Because her husband is in a leadership role, it is easy for

Lidia and her husband to relate to each other when talking about ideas and situations at their respective workplaces. This has also helped Lidia, as she stated, to define her identity as a leader and as a principal. Regina also identified a male relative as her main role model. She said,

My dad? I guess definitely, yes, so because I, I think my brothers and I looked to him so much, because here's a man with an eighth-grade education who has built a fantastic business all on his own out of just pure hard work and determination to make it. . . .and then I had some really good teachers along the way. And one of my first mentors was actually my high school track coach.

My husband was a high school principal in, at a nearby district, at that time, you know over 3,300 kids, one of the largest high schools in Central Texas. And so, I looked to him for, for direction, and looked to him for mentoring, and to this day, he's still my mentor, my main mentor at home.

Regina spoke of both her parents as role models in her interviews, but she spoke more of her dad as a role model and mentor. She talked about his persistence in getting a family business started and in being, as a father, the leader in the family. The leadership identity that her father exemplified helped Regina find her identity as a leader, as she told in her interviews. She also spoke of her husband, whom she met when she became a principal. She saw him as a successful leader, which helped her as she regularly sought advice on how to lead a successful school. Again, Regina's husband helped her define how she saw herself as a leader of a school. Valerie also saw her father as her main mentor. She said,

Well, part of me, I did see my dad as a mentor, you know, because he did do a lot of things with his students. So, so I think that I looked up to him; that he was different from the teachers I had in school.

Clearly, Valerie is very proud of the accomplishments of her father. Her father was a high school teacher and, according to Valerie, a very successful, caring, and devoted teacher. He was adamant about teaching his students to set high expectations and to meet those expectations. Valerie remembers going with him on trips with his students or watching him tutor his students with love and devotion. Valerie explained that her father's compassion and patience helped her identify the skills and talent of a leader. The great respect her father had for his students, of course, inspired Valerie to form her identity as a leader. Vicky was another participant who saw her father as her role model. She noted,

I, you know, obviously, my dad, and I'll tell that to anybody. I was very close to him. And he was just everything, I just saw him as very successful, and I know that the education influence came from him. I would not even have gone this path if he had not always talked so much about finishing school and all of that.

She spoke at great lengths about her father. She credits him with her education and her success as a principal; she relates to her father's work ethic. Vicky explained that her father was a diligent and hard worker who always put the good of his family first. Vicky wanted that for herself. She identifies herself as a leader with a keen focus, goals to accomplish, and a desire to provide the best for all students.

In my own case, my mentor, in contrast to my participants, is my mother. She is the reason why I am an educator and why I aspire to be a superintendent someday. My mother is strong, and I admire her for not only living through difficult times as a military wife, but also for waiting for my father's return from three Vietnam tours and



raising three successful children. My mother has a strong identity, which has made her a strong leader. Identity defined, for my mother means being fair, compassionate, passionate, and loving. My first assistant principal, Dr. Susie Cunningham, mentored and encouraged me to go back to school to earn my master's degree. Because she was working on her Ph.D., I had so much respect and admiration for her that I followed her advice. I saw her as a mentor, a caring leader who believed in the children and their ability to succeed. Partly because of her, I am pursuing this doctorate.

Interestingly, then, the majority of the mentors were family members. Additionally, they were male family members. Vicky, Valerie, and Regina saw their fathers as their first and lifelong mentors. They understood being the leader of a family meant being in a leadership role. Regina and Lidia also saw their husbands as mentors. They saw their husbands as leaders being successful in working with people and accomplishing set goals. The father and husband figures as mentors seem interesting, especially when focusing on the identity of these women. Furthermore, with the stereotypes of leadership being based on male characteristics (Blackmore, 1993; Brunner, 2000; Hampton, 1998; Logan, 1998; Ortiz & Marshal, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1989; Skrla, 2000; Tallerico, 1999), it is fascinating that all the women emulated their fathers, leaders of their families. Their identity of leadership, then, came partly from their father's modeling leadership within their family.

*Their identities related to being principal.* The four women traveled different paths, but all gained the identity of the principal of a school. Years of being a teacher,

a counselor, a psychologist, a mother, a wife, and a woman created this identity. Each of their identities is unique and different because each had her own personal journey and experiences. This identity, then, is just a piece of their whole self.

For example, one identity of a principal is knowing how to behave appropriately and how to understand people, making a difference, as Lidia expressed. Another identity of a principal is leading by example, as Regina and Valerie espoused. A principal also works in a the school affecting the way success is achieved by keeping a certain part or aspect of the teacher identity, as Vicky vehemently believes. The principal must work at not letting people down and must provide good leadership, as Valerie stated. A principal must be an example, as Regina explained, in order to lead a school organization. This identity of a principal was explained by Lidia's response when I asked, "What is your identity as a Mexican American female principal?"

How I see myself as the principal of the school, is, like I said, I have to make sure that I act in the appropriate manner that this school deserves. So I have to know the information that I'm talking about; I have to stay up with the latest technology and interventions and curriculum, but I also have to understand people, because I could have all the textbook knowledge, but if I don't understand people, then I can't deliver it. So that's the most global thing, is understanding people. How I see myself is, I'm just another person who's trying to make a difference in many kids' lives.

Interestingly, Lidia spoke about her identity as a principal along with "doing the right thing for the kids." Whenever she talked about her identity as a principal, she would tie that identity into the identity of the school and serving the students. She would also use that identity when speaking and visiting with the parents of her students and

with the community members. Her need for knowing how to understand people and identify with them was evident in her stories about meetings with parents, teachers, and students; she believed that this made her a better principal.

Valerie saw her identity as a Mexican American female principal as a role model. This principal was her first principal and she respected the way she lead the school. She also realized that this principal was a great role model because all the teachers respected her. That was the kind of principal identity Valerie wanted. She explained,

You know, how that role as a principal is so important in being able to provide good leadership. You know, leadership that people can look up to and can respect. And that's a huge challenge...to also to be able to fulfill that everyday. You know, that you don't let people down, that you are a good role model, not only for your teachers, but for kids, you know, for your parents, that they see you, you know, that will give their kids the background. And you want to be a good role model. You want to be able to provide the leadership instructionally, and emotionally, spiritually; all those things are really important to a school's success.

Avidly, Valerie spoke about her constant awareness of needing to ensure that the needs of the students are met in a healthy, moral, and instructionally excellent manner. She saw this constant awareness as a key aspect of her identity as a principal. She spoke greatly about being the kind of educator and leader she wants her teachers to be. To her, this is a big job that is challenging and a bit overwhelming at times. She said she liked being an assistant principal because the "buck" did not stop with her. Now as a principal, the "buck" stops with her; she does not take this responsibility lightly. Regina also saw herself as a role model. She said,

I have to be the example for the other teachers; and so this is why I, I'm always reading and constantly learning, because just because I have a degree doesn't mean I have arrived, that just means I have been taught to learn even more. So, I think if I expect my teachers to be up with the research and to be up with what's happening as far as educational trends, I have to provide that example.

Refreshingly, Regina spoke with ease and confidence. She has been a principal for 8 years, longer than the other participants. This explains, in my opinion, her poise and straightforwardness in answering my research question. She does not take herself too seriously, and she seems to be very grounded. This demeanor was evident when I heard her speak with her assistant principals. She was very pleasant and professional, yet playful and laid back.

Vicky identified herself as a lead teacher of teachers instead of a principal. She adamantly believes that she has been and will always be a teacher at heart and will make decisions as a teacher. She also believes that thinking like a teacher in a principalship role helps her empathize not only with her teachers, but also with the students. This empathy helps her realize the needs of the school. She explained further,

I still see things from a teacher's point of view, and I don't think that's a bad thing, and I even tell teachers I know that I'm the principal. But the way I see a principal's job now, having worked with, with my last principal, is principal is an adjective, and principal is a noun. I said, "I am not principal the noun." I said, "I'm principal, the adjective, in that I feel like I'm the principal teacher on this campus, but I'm not the principal." I said, "I am another teacher that happens to be a teacher of teachers; and, yes, ultimately I, I am the leader on the campus, but it's only because I'm the lead teacher on this campus, and I hope I never lose that."

Intriguingly, Vicky's identity as a principal is an identity that has not left the classroom. Vicky identifies herself as a leader, but a leader of teachers. She is the principal and identifies with the duties and responsibilities of the principal; however, she identifies with being a lead teacher who happens to have the duties and responsibilities of the principal. This dichotomous leadership identity of teacher and principal is one that Vicky believes helps her understand and work with her teachers and staff in achieving success and helps her understand and work with her students in learning and understanding the curriculum.

As for myself, I am not a principal. I do want to be the principal of a high school someday, before taking on a superintendency. However, at this moment, I am a Special Education Coordinator of a high school. In this leadership position, I see myself behaving as both a leader and a parent. My identity as a leader is based largely on the good of the students and how I would like my two children to be educated. Additionally, I identify with the leadership role I presently have by identifying with the responsibilities and expectations of the role. Performing these responsibilities and expectations creates an identity, which reflects who I am as a leader.

The identity of a principal differs from participant to participant. This difference is due to how each participant sees herself in the principal role. Although each participant sees herself as an example, all also expressed certain aspects of the leadership position as unique to themselves. For instance, they shared that the identity

of a principal is one that has many facets: one who is well read, one who understands people, one who sets the example, and one who identifies with those she leads.

*Their identities related to their schools.* All participants shared their perceived identities as principals and the influences their mentors and role models had on their identities. They also spoke about how they related to their schools and how those schools reflect the expectations of the community and society. In speaking about the identity of their schools, the 4 women explained that they work in a large district divided by an imaginary line that separates families of high socioeconomic status from those of low socioeconomic status. Non-Hispanic Ghetto schools, as I refer to them, are populated by students of high socioeconomic status with few minority, non-Hispanic students. These schools seem to have a higher success rate, according to the women, due to the diligent care the district provides to those campuses. Students of low socioeconomic status and a majority of minority students including Hispanic students populate Hispanic Ghetto schools, as I refer to them. These schools seem to lack the recognition or help needed to encourage student success, according to the participants.

When using the terms Hispanic Ghetto and non-Hispanic Ghetto in interviewing the women, I noticed that they felt the word Ghetto carried negative connotations and resentment. I paired the word, Ghetto with Hispanic, Hispanic Ghetto, to recognize the place where Hispanic female administrators are placed and left to stay without opportunities to work in a nonminority school. As Mathews

(2001) defined in her research, the female Ghetto for female superintendents was the deputy superintendency. The deputy superintendency was a position where an aspiring female would get “stuck” and would not be allowed to move up to the superintendency. Hence, I defined the Hispanic Ghetto as a school populated mainly by minorities including Hispanics, in which the majority of principals are minority and are stuck, not having the opportunity to lead a non-Hispanic Ghetto school. I defined the non-Hispanic Ghetto as a school populated with mainly White students and in which the majority of principals are non-minorities. Regardless of my definitions, the 4 participants were adamant that they were in a school they chose to be, where they were needed and not stuck, and where they would do the best for the students, no matter the socioeconomic status of the student population or the community.

Furthermore, the women not only defined the identity of their school, but also gave reasons for those certain identities. Although they resisted my definition, they eventually turned it around and made it a positive as they explained that society is in a sense a ghetto, according to Vicky’s definition. It has a standard based on the White middle class, which focuses on the acceptable manners and characteristics needed for the workplace. Additionally, the participants expressed that this White middle-class standard or identity affects all ghettos, especially the Hispanic Ghetto, because this standard is different from the standard in the Hispanic Ghetto community. However, the women stressed that there must be a medium in which the students in the Hispanic

Ghetto can keep their identity but are also taught to adopt other forms of identity in order to cope. In identifying with her school, Vicky clarified the word ghetto:

The word ghetto sort of has that negative connotation, but for me, there are lots of ghettos. I mean, for example Plano, Texas, is a ghetto in some ways, and it doesn't matter. It's a group of a people isolating themselves from everybody else, for whatever reason. Whether it's economics or religion or, uh, ethnicity, or whatever. I mean you go into a city and you have the Italian district, and the Asian district, and you know it's that, whatever. People sort of segregate themselves, because they're drawn together by some passion. I mean, our own school is a ghetto because it's a community that has separated itself from everything else. And my hope in whatever, ghetto or not, learning community, you know, that the school itself is in a separate ghetto, within a ghetto, within a ghetto. You know, that we expand to where we are not just stuck in the building, but we're in everything that's around us.

Unmistakably, Vicky defined a ghetto as a community with like characteristics and standards. Additionally, it is a place where one identifies with the majority of the people within that ghetto. Hence, the identity of her school is a ghetto with like characteristics and standards. However, these like characteristics and standards are different from the middle-class characteristics and standards, which may be disconnected to the Hispanic Ghetto, as Regina explained,

There's a disconnect. Especially with the families that I see coming in here who, who seek my assistance with their children. Their, their children are going through an educational system that's grounded in middle-class America, and that type of individualistic type thinking, that competition. And so it doesn't, there's a disconnect with what we're teaching the children in classrooms and what they see at home, because the Hispanic family is so global and such at the center of everything that you do. Everything is about the family, and yet when they come to school, it's about the individual. How well can you do? How many good grades can you make? And at the end, and you know it's about recognizing the top kid and the top achievement. Very rarely do you recognize the achievements of a group. See what I mean? And look at all our recognition programs. It's about the kid that makes the best grade, it's about the kid who has the perfect attendance, the kid who gets the



most scholarships. It's all about I, I, me, me. That's what seems to be valued, and yet that's not what's valued in a family. So until we kind of bridge that disconnect, I think we're going to continue to miss many of our Hispanic children. I think there's a conflict with what they learn at school and with what's being taught at home, in traditional families.

Inarguably, Regina spoke about the identity of the Hispanic Ghetto as one where there is a "disconnect" with the schools. She also explained that the identity of the Hispanic Ghetto schools should include not only the White middle-class identity, but also the identity of the Hispanic family. She and the other participants believe that bringing the identity of the Hispanic family into the school will help create an identity of the school more closely related to the identity of the students. Hence, the participants' Mexican American female identities would closely parallel the identity of the school. This creates a fit, a balance, and a desire to lead Hispanic Ghetto schools, as the women professed.

The Hispanic Ghetto is a place where the 4 participants have asked to lead. They have agendas, which include helping the families in the Hispanic Ghetto and pride in being a part of the Mexican American culture. They have also learned to balance their Mexican American or Hispanic identities with their White middle-class identities. Adopting the White middle-class identity to go with their Hispanic identities, the 4 women described the Hispanic Ghetto as a place they feel they "fit." This fit, as they explained, means understanding the identity of the majority of the community and understanding the identity of the majority of society. For example, Regina said,

I think there has to be a fit. 'Cause that's what's most important. For me, I feel like I fit at Maxdale. I feel I like I belong. Because at my previous school, even though I loved it, and I enjoyed my position there, I never really felt like I belonged. Uh, my way of doing things, I could see it in people's reactions; you, they'd give me a look or their body language about things that I valued or things that I wanted to do. And after a while you just kind of retreat, and you go along, but it's not really who you are. And I really, I, at Maxdale, I feel like I fit. And when I say something, or when I use English and Spanish in a sentence, nobody looks at me funny. And I, and they understand.

Regina believes her identity as a principal fits at Maxdale because she can relate, she is not seen as different, and she is accepted for who she is. She explained that at Maxdale she doesn't have to put on a façade, nor does she have to value other ideals and disregard hers in order to fit. She feels like she belongs and that her identity as a principal fits the identity of the school. She also feels that the students have a sense of belonging and a sense of fitting because they can relate to her because she is Hispanic. Olivia also talked about fitting, but shared a story about a prospective teacher's feeling of fitting in. She said,

She [the prospective teacher] said, "When I was waiting out there," she said, "everyone was speaking Spanish. And the parents in the hallways, and the kids," she said "and you have a lot of teachers that are Hispanic." I said, "Yeah, we have a large percentage of them that are Hispanic." She said, "It feels like home. It feels like being back in El Paso." She said, "I feel very comfortable." I said, "Well, that's good." But that was interesting because, I mean, and that's how I see when I...being here, it's all Hispanic.

Obviously, the prospective teacher felt "at home" because she could identify with the identity of the school. Olivia shared this story to illustrate how her identity as a Mexican American female principal fit not only the identity of her school, but also the identity of prospective teachers, as well as present teachers. Furthermore, Olivia described her feeling of fitting in at Willow and her previous schools in the Hispanic

Ghetto as a feeling that helped her better understand the needs of the students and the needs of the community.

This fit, as the women described, is powerful and invokes not only pride, but also a sense of belonging and determination to make their schools successful places where all students feel they belong. The women feel that this fit becomes a sense of passion, which becomes an impetus for changing the Hispanic Ghetto to a better place for Hispanic students. This passion became utterly clear when the women talked about making their schools a paradise. Lidia clarified,

It's the passion within each person that makes it a paradise. If you don't have that, and if you believe you're in a ghetto, then you're not going to get anywhere. I believe I'm in a paradise. So, I believe in what we're doing here; I believe that this is a paradise. I believe this is a well-kept secret. That it's going to be explosive one day in the sense of the technology and everything we're bringing into this campus. It's, I mean we're being spotlighted by the state of Texas. You know, but it's what you feel in your heart that makes it one or the other; and if you don't belong, if you feel it's a Hispanic Ghetto, well then, you know, step aside, someone else can make it a paradise.

Lidia explained that the passion is the reason a school is a paradise. This passion is easy to possess if one can identify with the school and community, as all the women posed. Lidia also spoke of how, after her job is finished at Laredo, she will be that much more experienced and prepared to lead another school. She spoke of an alternative school that she already feels passionate about leading when the opportunity arises. Regina also explained the passion of leading her school and that a paradise is a place where children are not lost. She said,

I definitely don't think I'm in a ghetto. Uhm, is it paradise? Not yet, but that's what we're striving to do, is to create that well-functioning system so that it

does become a paradise and we don't, where we don't lose children whether they're Black, or Hispanic, or White. We're still losing too many children.

In earlier interviews, Regina talked about her experience at a well-functioning school in her previous district helping her lead Maxdale. She believes that all principals should have an opportunity to run a well-functioning school so that when they have the opportunity to go to a school that needs work, they have a basis from which to move forward. She also described how her identity did not fit the identity of her previous school, but the experience has and will help her lead Maxdale successfully.

As the women spoke and described their place of work being a place where good things happen and where they want to be because they "fit," I reflected on the school where I presently work. Although I am not in a Hispanic Ghetto, being a special education coordinator, I see many students who are from poor families or who are monitored in special education. Hence, the Ghetto I work in is the Special Education Ghetto. I feel that I belong in the Special Education Ghetto because it is my duty to ensure that students with disabilities are treated fairly and are given opportunities to learn. I also feel that I fit because I am an educator who understands the overwhelming duties that teachers face every day. I help the students and the teachers learn and accept the ever-changing tenets of education, a standard of the White middle class, by encouraging them to keep their true identities while adopting the expectations of the White middle class. My identity as a Mexican American leader, then, is one that is shaped by the needs of the students in the Special Education Ghetto and is perpetuated by the White middle-class standard because the

White middle class has a strong influence on the development and legal standards of the special education law.

The women have shared what identity means to them as Mexican American female principals. They have shared how their identity has been created by emulating their role models and mentors, by defining their own characteristics of leadership, and by fitting in with the identities of their schools. They have told how their identities have been shaped by the standards of White middle-class America and by the standards of the Mexican culture. They see themselves as Mexican American female principals with identities that have been influenced and created to fit their needs.

### *Research Question 2*

How does the Mexican American female identity change due to experiences, influences, and expectations from family, culture, society, and self?

The participants spoke of influences that shaped or changed their identity. They spoke about their families' expectations, Mexican American influences, and the way those expectations and influences affected them from childhood through adulthood. They also spoke about the influences and expectations society has placed on them not only as women, but also as Mexican Americans. Hence, as the women told their stories, two themes emerged. These themes are (a) family and Mexican American cultural influences and expectations, and (b) influences from the "kitchen table."

*Family and Mexican cultural influences and expectations.* Influences from the family are different from family to family, yet a strand of commonality was woven through the women's stories. Within this section, I have combined the influences of family and the Mexican American culture because I was unable to draw a clear and concise line between the two. Throughout this section, the women speak about the societal influences and the ways those influences have helped shape their identity. The first question I asked, to find out about the family and Mexican cultural influences, led the participants to tell me about their family backgrounds and the identity of their parents. I felt that learning about the participants' family backgrounds and family identity within the Mexican American culture would illustrate their experiences, influences, and expectations from their family and culture. Furthermore, as the women spoke, they gave me insight into their family traditions and the way that they still practice some of those traditions today; I began to see that their families and cultural expectations helped shape their identities. I, therefore, asked, "Tell me about your family and the Mexican culture?" Valerie responded,

I'm an only child of a Puerto Rican father and a Mexican, native Mexican, mother. And she became an American citizen, probably when I was around 10 years old, but she met my dad and they were married, moved to New York City and I was born a year later. So, the first part of my life we spent in New York City, and it was very rich in the Puerto Rican culture. And we would visit Puerto Rico, so I knew and was very much aware of even then, or maybe because you just talk about it so much, you know the cultures. And I remember just my mom and my aunt talking about just the differences between the Mexican culture and the Puerto Rican culture. So, I grew up hearing a lot about, you know, being Hispanic in general, being a Latina in general, but also that there were differences between just those different cultures.

Interestingly, Valerie sees herself as a Hispanic woman with two distinct Hispanic backgrounds. When she spoke about the earlier part of her life, she described to great extent the Puerto Rican culture and the influences she learned from her Puerto Rican roots. However, because her mother is Mexican, she also learned about the Mexican traditions and influences. Thus, although she grew up knowing two distinct Hispanic cultures, she understood the different influences from both cultures, which impacted how she saw herself and her identity. Valerie continued,

I then got into about third grade; we moved back to Texas. My mom is from Nuevo Laredo, Texas, and we moved back to Laredo because she wanted to be closer to her other family and all that and my dad agreed.

However, for the first 8 years of her life, Valerie grew up with the Puerto Rican influences and traditions. Since then, she has lived in Texas with Mexican American traditions and expectations. Living in both cultures and being immersed in the traditions and identity of both cultures helped Valerie realize two different aspects of her identity. She continued talking about her mother's identity:

My mom never finished school...because her father died when she was very young, but her family was very much focused on education, and they wanted for her to succeed and all that. The only thing is that when she turned like around 13, she had to drop out of school in order to support the family. So, that need was much more...she didn't have her dad to kind of help the family so it was just my grandmother and her. So early on she had to start working, but she was able to go up to about the eighth grade, and she went to school in Laredo, Texas, to learn English. So, but she always wanted to finish, and she eventually did ...she was able to go back and get her GED and even take classes at the community college and, you know, she has a strong value for education.

Valerie's mother was thus an influential figure, especially because of her determination to gain an education. This drive and persistence was clear when

listening to Valerie speak about her mother and was evident when Valerie spoke about herself.

Valerie described her father as an influential figure in the creation of her identity. For example, his influence and persistence in getting a job and wanting to go back to school helped her shape her identity and value work and education. She said,

When we lived in New York, he had a TV and radio repair shop, and he decided to, you know, go back, and agreed to move to Texas at that point, and kind of start up his business. And he also wanted to go back to school.

Valerie spoke very highly of her father, of his determination in serving his country as a soldier, and of the fact that he had earned a bachelor's degree. This determination helped influence Valerie in understanding that she would need to be persistent in achieving her goals. This determination also helped her break tradition and find an identity to suit her needs. She realized in part, though, that her identity was closely related to her father's. She continued about her father,

And my dad, he went and joined the Army and that's when they met; but he always talked about being able to go back to school, so when we moved to Texas, he did. He got a bachelor's, and at that point, . . . he went and taught at a high school, radio and TV, so he was the vocational teacher early on. And he loved education.

Her father definitely focused Valerie's view of success. She made it clear that she saw success as having a love for what one does. She perceived her father as a success and identified her father as one who enjoyed what he did as a teacher. Valerie feels she, too, like her father, has identified with success because she has enjoyed her job as a counselor, as a teacher, and now as a principal.



The influence of both her parents and the influence of two distinct Hispanic cultures shaped Valerie's identity. Valerie learned to appreciate the Puerto Rican culture while living in New York. She identified with those roots. She identified with the Mexican American roots also as she learned about her mother's culture. She appreciated living in Texas as a Mexican American and learning the influence of the culture on her identity as a Hispanic woman.

Lidia spoke about the influences of her parents on her and her identity. She spoke in length about her parent's devotion to the family and how her family learned to work together in order to help the family as a whole survive. She also spoke about the era her parents lived. This era had expectations different from the expectations today and that is one reason why her parents were never formally educated. She said,

My parents weren't dropouts, they were never drop-ins. They were never formally educated. My mother for sure never was. My dad I think maybe went first maybe second grade, but then he dropped out, and their family, they lived on a ranch. And my mother was born, 1916, she just celebrated her 87<sup>th</sup> birthday. My father was born 1919, and then the depression came, and then there was a lot of hard work, and people weren't in school. So, when, you know, you say about dropouts, well, they didn't count the dropout that never dropped in. They never were enrolled.

Lidia's identity, shaped by parents who never "dropped in" to education, did not just happen; it was shaped by her parents who learned the value of education through their having to do work that did not require an education but instead required tremendous physical exertion for money they needed to simply survive. They did not have the opportunity to be educated because, during their adolescence, they were more concerned with survival. Furthermore, nobody questioned their failure to attend

school because there were no laws about compulsory attendance. However, Lidia and her family had to face even more difficult circumstances.

My father was disabled in 1968. My little sister and I, both, well my family received social security benefits after 1968; you know, food stamps, that whole thing. So I even failed the seventh grade in 1968, because my father was disabled, and I stayed home to take care of my sister's kids while she took my mother to the hospital to see my dad everyday. And, I'm giving you this story so that you'll know that education, I don't want to say wasn't valued, but it was not the priority at the home, because survival was. You know, food, stuff, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. But my upbringing was one of love and gratitude and believing in God, but education was not. Well, the payments would have stopped for my father if I stopped going to school, right? So, I went back into the seventh grade that year. And I took a test, and I passed, and they promoted me to the eighth grade.

Lovingly, Lidia spoke about the trials her family faced to survive. She believes this experience had a great deal of influence on her identity because she learned to understand the trials and tribulations her students and their families face. In her present position as principal she has empathy for their efforts to survive, which others might view as not valuing education. She also has empathy for their efforts to change their identity and conform to the identity of the community. She continued by saying,

There was always food, there was always love, there was always attention. Money was scarce, we didn't go hardly anywhere on vacations or anything, but you know what was a vacation? You know, nothing expensive, lots of hand-me-down clothes from cousins or relatives or stuff. So it, it was an experience that made me appreciate a lot of what I have now. And definitely appreciate education, which is a downfall for my own personal kids because they've never lived in the situation where I lived, or where you had to struggle.

Although education was not a priority for Lidia's family members because they were busy surviving, it became a priority once she had to go to school in order for her family to have the means to live. However, having this opportunity to go to school

became an asset that motivated her and changed her identity to one that gave education a top priority. Gaining an education then, became her way of surviving. Consequently, her family and the difficult circumstances they faced helped shape her identity.

Although Vicky's family did not experience extremely difficult circumstances as Lidia's family, Vicky's parents did have their share of difficulty while growing up. Their experience as children helped them learn about survival and learn to appreciate family. Their experience as children also helped them find an identity that placed education first. This helped shape Vicky's identity as one who also placed education as a priority. She explained,

My parents didn't finish high school. My mother dropped out in the sixth grade. My dad dropped out in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. He was being raised by his grandparents, who were very old. Once they took him on and by the time he was 13, he was working 40 hours a week and trying to go to school, and by 10<sup>th</sup> just couldn't do it. So he quit. But I think probably he valued education the most. He always wished that he had finished school. He would buy me books, and he would read to me at night, even though by the time I was born he was working three jobs; and when he was home, he would read to me.

Vicky learned from her father that he had to work in order to help the family endure. Her father valued education and made it clear to her and her brother that education was a priority. Her father modeled the importance of education by reading to Vicky nightly. This helped Vicky create her identity, that of a hard worker who found the time to help his daughter appreciate education. She also stated,

And, I do remember conversations between my parents, which I guess would be conversations even before I was born, that his children would go to college.

You know, not that we'd be teachers or anything like that, but that his children would finish school, and his children would go to college.

Vicky stated that her identity and the identity of her family changed because her parents instilled in her and her brother the value of gaining a college education. She shared one story of her father moving the family from their hometown so that she would not end up pregnant and would have an opportunity to go to college. She also shared how her mother would participate in many parent organizations to help Vicky and her brother gain the identity of children preparing for college. She continued with her mother's influence on her identity. She said,

And my mother's job was to make sure that happened. She never worked outside of the home, and she worked a lot in the home, but she never worked outside of the home. He wouldn't allow it. We're very much in some ways a very traditional Mexican American family in that my dad worked, he did the yard, any kind of the strenuous work; my mother did grocery shopping and cleaned the house and cooked. He insisted on three hot meals a day and that means she couldn't go anywhere unless I went with her or he went with her, but she didn't go alone. She certainly didn't go out with a group of female friends or anything like that, because her job was to be at home, or with her husband, or with her children. And so, her job also was to make sure that I, I read, I was ready for school, I had clean clothes for school, lunch for school.

Vicky described her traditional Mexican American family where her father worked and her mother stayed at home to care for the children and home. Although this worked for her parents, she wanted an identity where she did not have to follow tradition, but where she could follow her expectations for herself. She wanted an identity she created for herself with the help of her family influence. She stated that she wanted a different identity from what her parents had growing up. She continued telling her story of growing up.

We didn't have a lot of money for the early part of my life, what I consider probably the formative years of my education. And so, I do remember wearing my cousin's hand-me-downs, and I do remember, you know, how hard it was sometimes to even have a lunch for school. But, I remember taking tacos for lunch, tortillas, you know, it was different from what the other kids have. And you know, I didn't know those differences 'til I went to school, you know, because I grew up in an area in a little town, a small town, which is near Beeville. Very much like here, predominantly Hispanic, but very much run by the Caucasian population of the town.

Vicky understands that her family's influence, traditions, and expectations helped shape her identity. She also understands that others shaped her identity as well. She realized that not everyone had the same traditions when she faced the differences in her lunch and that of others and when she found that another ethnic group established the expectations of the town. The experiences in and out of the home aided in her changing her identity to one that eventually complemented her desired role as a Mexican American female.

Regina talked about the influence from her family and expectations of the Mexican American culture. She talked about her mother's and father's background and how they learned to survive during very trying times. She also spoke about their determination to succeed during their time of growing up. She first spoke of her mother's survival as she said,

My father, my mother did not finish high school, she left school...at 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and partly because there was no one at home. Her mother died when she was 2, so she grew up with a series of stepmoms. And her father of course, very traditional Mexican American, didn't really expect her to go beyond high school. And there was very little encouragement for her at home, and so when she lost interest as an 11<sup>th</sup> grader, she was allowed to drop out. Her father got mad at her, but didn't really make her go back to school.

Tradition and expectations prevented Regina's mother from finishing high school. Although Regina's mother did value education, her family circumstances and expectations from society did not allow her to finish high school. Regina's mother also saw survival as a priority and did not feel the need to further her education because she had to work and because no one expected her to finish school. The expectation of dropping out of school was confirmed by her father's inaction in not making her go back to school and the school's inaction in not having compulsory attendance. Regina continued,

And my father finished the eighth grade, and he was a migrant worker. He attended school sporadically, but always wanted to go to school and begged his mom to let him go to school; but he needed to work the fields to support the family as the only male. So, when we were, as we grew up, my father always aspired to have a college education, and because he didn't, he made sure all of us did. So, I was the, I was the eldest; I had three brothers, us, all of us have college degrees. I'm a principal; my brother, who follows me, is in business; he graduated from UT. My third brother is a civil engineer, and my fourth brother is aspiring to be an administrator as well.

Again, tradition and expectations did not allow Regina's father to finish school because he had to work to help the family. Working as a migrant worker was the priority. However, because her father understood the value of education, he expected his children to pursue a college education. Regina's parents vigorously pursued the expectation that Regina and her brothers would attend college. She also stated,

[My mother] worked, she met my father at work, and they worked together for several years. And then she stayed home when I was born. Stayed home for a few years. And then it was hard to make ends meet, so she went back to work. When I was 13, my father was able to obtain a small business loan to start his own business. And so then my mother became his secretary. And so both of

them always worked together; to this day, they are still working in the same business.

Interestingly, Regina's mother and father worked toward an identity that helped them change the identity of the traditional Mexican American family. Although Regina's mother stayed home to care for her and her brothers, her mother was able to find an identity of a working woman. Both her parents continued to break the identity of the traditional Mexican American family by applying for and obtaining a small business loan. Both her parents were able to create a family business with that loan and still own the business today.

Regina and the other participants made it clear that, although they grew up with family, cultural, and societal expectations, their families encouraged them to break the mold and to set higher expectations. The breaking of this mold and changing the Mexican American female identity helped the women find identities different from their mothers' and other females'. Their families also helped change the identity of the Mexican American female by helping them become strong women who attended and graduated from college. They were able to create their own individual Mexican American female identity.

Interviewing the 4 women has given me a guide to reflect on my life as a Mexican American female. I grew up in an entirely different world than the 4 participants. I grew up in a military world, as a military brat, living and traveling in different countries and states. My father and mother grew up in Roswell, New Mexico; but my father was born in Brownsville, Texas, whereas my mother was born

in Chihuahua, Mexico. My father came from a middle-class family, whereas my mother came from a very poor family. They graduated from the same high school, and then they earned their bachelor's and master's degrees at universities in New Mexico and at Auburn University. My father spent 24 years in the military and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. My mother has spent her professional life in education and today works as a principal of an elementary school.

Throughout my childhood, there was no question of going to college. There was also no question of having a professional job and being independent because that is what a college degree could get someone. I remember wearing sweatshirts from Auburn University and staying in the dorms of Eastern New Mexico University with my mom as she worked on her master's and specialist degrees. Both my parents were the first to graduate from college in their families, and they knew that was what they wanted for my brother, my sister, and me. Going to college was such an expectation that my brother graduated from the Air Force Academy and my sister and I earned our bachelor's degrees from The University of Texas.

Our parents also reminded us to be proud of our Mexican American heritage and of the family. My dad regularly chanted, "Never quit, and if you don't succeed, suck it up and drive on, soldier!" However, I do not remember them making a big deal about ethnicity or race. It was more about just being a good person, being good at something and making the family proud. Nevertheless, when we would go visit our grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, the Spanish language and traditions



surrounded us. My “Big Grandma” made homemade tortillas, beans, enchiladas, migas, and bunuelos. My “Little Grandmother and Grandfather” owned a tortilla factory and Mexican restaurant, so we were constantly eating homemade tostadas, salsa, pan dulce, and Mexican candy. Hence, when we were with our extended family, we participated in the Mexican American traditions. However, because my parents’ careers were in the middle-class world, we would succumb to middle-class traditions as a nuclear family. Therefore, the family and Mexican American cultural influences and expectations on my identity as a Mexican American female came from both my parents, my experiences and relationships within my Mexican American extended family, and societal influences from both the military and middle-class worlds.

The 4 women in this study also had their identities shaped by their Mexican American families and cultural influences. Their family influences and expectations helped them to recognize education as a valuable asset, which helped them all pursue college educations. Their family influences and expectations also helped them to recognize societal influences that reshaped not only the family identity, but also their own individual identity. Finally, they recognized the traditional expectations and identities of the Mexican American female; however, they changed those expectations and identities to shape their own unique identities.

*Influences from the kitchen table.* Expectations and influences from family, culture, and society were taught and learned at the “kitchen table,” according to the

women. They spoke about learning about whom they should become and how to achieve success for themselves and family. They explained that the kitchen table conversations helped shape their identity and helped them change traditions and expectations to form identities that fit their own expectations for themselves.

Furthermore, the women agreed that the kitchen table is a constant, always the congregating area for the females of the family to set expectations. Vicky explained how the kitchen table was a place of learning. She said,

I thought, where did I really get my learning? The kitchen table. You know, the kitchen table at either my grandmother's house or my mother's house. Where we always went to the kitchen no matter who was there; you always went to the kitchen and that's where you learned everything. And we learned about being a Hispanic female. We learned about history... a lot of learning goes on there. And yet you go into a school, with the same kinds of stories and stuff being told, but you're disengaged. What happens in the kitchen at home, that's not happening in the classroom; and how can we create that same kind of culture in the classroom?

Inarguably, Vicky sees the kitchen table as a place of learning for Mexican American families. She wants to bring this comfort of the kitchen-table teachings to the classroom because it is an influential tool in the creation of identities for Mexican American and Hispanic children. As a group, the 4 women discussed bringing the "kitchen table" to the classroom as a goal they wanted to achieve. They also discussed why the kitchen table is so powerful. For example, Lidia gave one reason for the kitchen table being such a good place to learn. She said,

Well, in the kitchen there's a lot of love because of the food presentation and the aromas and everything. It creates an environment that's easy to just kind of slide into it and feel comfortable and start talking and sharing.

Lidia gave her reason for the kitchen table being a learning tool, but all of the participants were at a loss on how to bring the kitchen table to the classroom. They all had ideas on possible ways of incorporating the kitchen table into the classroom, but they did not know how to initiate the idea. Furthermore, they all agreed that as teachers they brought some aspect of the kitchen table to their own classrooms, but wanted to bring more now as principals. Nevertheless, they agreed that the kitchen table is a useful tool in helping Mexican American families identify with family, cultural, and societal expectations.

In my upbringing, the “kitchen table” was at my grandmother’s house. My aunts and cousins would gather around the kitchen table to learn how to cook, how to act, what was acceptable, and what the history of the family was about. As I got older, the boys and men joined the kitchen table, and I remember “dark secrets” of the family being revealed—things never discussed otherwise. We also learned about other cultures and families. Ultimately, we learned how we should identify with what was acceptable for our family, for our culture, and for our society.

The kitchen table is still a part of my life and my daughters’ lives. At my mother’s house, my family still gathers around the kitchen table to discuss politics, to discuss societal expectations of different people, and to discuss family expectations. My brother and my father are eager participants, and at my grandmother’s house, my uncles and male cousins always have ideas they want to impart. The kitchen table has become a safe place for my family to discuss tough topics and important agendas. As

a result, the kitchen table is influential and needed for my family to learn about identity.

As a group, the 4 women shared how the influence of the stories and expectations talked about at the kitchen table influenced their identity. They talked about the expectation of their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. They talked about the expectations of the men of the family. They also talked about their own expectations in the creation of their own identity. Regina started this conversation by saying,

Well, my mother, interestingly enough, even though she wanted me to succeed, and she's very proud of me, I get, I still, till this day, I'm 42 years old, and I still get chastised if I don't get home and cook a meal. Or if I'm not home when the children get there. That's the expectation. You are the mother, and it's ok to have the job, as long as you can keep, maintain your household. And it is just so interesting to see her, because I've got three brothers, and two of my brothers are married, one is still single, but the two that are married are very involved in their homes. They get home, and they start supper, and they take care of the kids, and my mother just thinks that is so appalling that my brothers have to go home and cook dinner! And yet, as a daughter, I'm expected to go home and cook dinner. I said, "Mother, what would be so wrong with my husband cooking dinner?" "But that responsibility is not his." And it's just, it's a double standard. It's not ok for my brothers to do it, but it's ok for me to do it. And I keep bringing that to her attention. She says, "Ay! Es que asi son las cosas." So it's an interesting struggle. It's ok to be successful; and I know she brags about me to her friends all the time, but yet don't neglect your family responsibilities. Don't neglect your house and don't neglect your children. Make sure you're ironing your clothes and keeping the house spic and span, that's your job. You want to work 12 hours a day, well, then you better find a way to make your house look just as good as your school.

Regina kept the family identity learned at the kitchen table, but she has expanded on that identity by learning other identities. She is very comfortable in being a principal

and allowing her husband to take on some of the responsibilities that are traditionally female. She also explained that, although she and her husband recognize her traditional Mexican American identity has changed, she reverts to her traditional Mexican American identity when she visits her family. The lessons learned at the kitchen table still exert great power when she returns to visit her relatives. Vicky explained she could relate with Regina's frustration about her mother's expectations. She stated,

But yet, you know, my mom will say the same thing. You know, "And are you spending time with your husband?" You know, "Are you doing this for Vince? Well, you need to do this." And it's not, it's because good wives do this. And again, because I only know what it's like to be a Hispanic, you know, I don't know if that, I think that it's probably a gender thing more than an ethnic thing. Only because, I mean you see, the horror stories. You don't see men stealing their kids' Ritalin so that they can be superman at the house. You see mothers doing it and being put on speed and stuff because they have to have their jobs, and they have to clean their house, and they have to have their dinner parties for their husbands, and be the soccer mom, and everything else. I, I, when have you ever seen a man doing that? Never.

The expectations for women learned at the kitchen table haunt the Mexican American females long after they have attained positions of leadership with great responsibility; however, Vicky expressed that the expectations for females come from not only the Mexican American culture and family, but also from society. She believes that the expectations placed on her were related more to gender than being Hispanic. She believes that the expectations of the culture, the family, and the society placed on females are placed on them because of gender because most women suffer from the dual identity of being a mother and being a working woman.

However, although two women agreed with Vicky about other cultures placing similar expectations on females, Regina disagreed. She feels that the role of the Mexican American female, as learned at the kitchen table, is extremely difficult to change. She said, "I don't know. I think it's more prominent with the Hispanic women just, it's just been my experience. There are higher demands about being present in the home." Evidently, Regina believes that the expectations that women should stay at home and not work are more predominant in the Hispanic culture. The women talked about their own expectations for themselves, but stated that there are demands and expectations, mostly learned around the kitchen table, unique to Hispanic women. They also gave examples of the demands and the expectations including, being submissive to men. Vicky offered a possible reason for this strong influence on their identities:

Do you think because, part of it is the Catholicism that a lot of Hispanic homes have, and so women stay in marriages, and you know, that martyr complex? The more you suffer, the quicker you get to heaven or something, I don't know what it is. But, so your husband cheats on you, but God put you together and, and you stay married till you die, kind of complex?

Although no one responded directly to Vicky's explanation, it was interesting that Vicky brought up this point. It was interesting because the women did not talk about religion except for this brief interjection from Vicky. The female Mexican American identity is created by the influences of the family, culture, and society, which are mainly learned at the kitchen table, as the women explained. However, there may be

an ulterior reason or motive for them to accept an identity not acceptable in other cultures: religious beliefs and influences.

Nonetheless, Valerie explained that she could not accept an identity that did not fit her needs, no matter if that identity was dictated to her by the influences and expectations of the kitchen table. She gave this as the reason for breaking family tradition and creating her own identity. The other women interjected, confirming what Valerie was saying. Valerie said, “That’s why I left Laredo, too. I mean, it’s 99.99 Hispanic....and at my point when I left Laredo, I was like 28, unmarried and, that was like...” Lidia interjected her comment as the other women emphatically agreed with a nod, because committing a sin was emphasized at the kitchen table. She said, “Committing a big sin, yeah, leaving there.” Valerie continued by describing an additional tradition she broke, “Yeah, that’s right. And I was living alone which was even bigger. It was like, ‘You don’t get along with your parents?’” Vicky interjected a comment that emphasized Mexican tradition, again learned at the kitchen table, as she uttered, “You don’t do that.”

Valerie continued speaking about how she continued to break tradition,

And, I was like, you know I don’t need this, you know, I don’t, I wasn’t fitting in to what was the Hispanic woman’s role of having the children before this and having, and you know, I need to get out of here.

Regina interjected that some traditions are understood or implied, as learned at the kitchen table, by saying, “You know what, and it’s not so much that it was overtly said or clearly stated.” Lidia concluded by confirming the learning and teaching that

came from the kitchen table. She said, “Those were all taught at the kitchen table. It was all the expectation; it was what was criticized and what was said about women.”

As a group, the participants spoke about expectations and influences from the family, Mexican American culture, and society, which were learned at the kitchen table. Valerie spoke of how her actions caused uneasiness for the town of Laredo because she did not follow traditional Mexican American expectations. All participants agreed that this type of uneasiness is taught and learned at the kitchen table in the Mexican American family. With these lessons learned, the participants chose their own set of expectations for their identity. For example, Vicky chose not to be the traditional Mexican American female who stayed at home raising children. She explained,

I wanted to be, I wanted to have a job, and I remember telling my mom, she was trying to teach me how to cook, that I didn't need to know how to cook since I was going to have a job. And I, that I was not going to have kids and probably was never going to get married. And I would make, and you know this was 1950s and I'd, I'd make at least \$10,000 a year, and have my own house, and I wouldn't need to have a husband to do. You know and so she would laugh saying, “Yeah sure.” But that's also interesting because I remember telling my mom, I will never marry a Hispanic man because I thought they were all like my father. I said, “He'll never let me work like this.” In fact, the guy I dated in high school and through college, and everyone thought we'd get married, and we thought we'd get married when we finished college, but as I got closer to the end, I realized he really doesn't want me to work. And I really wanted to teach, that his vision, was that someday, “Ok. She'll do this.” But when I had children I would stay home and be a full-time mother and wife. And I never in my life wanted to do that. Never.

Throughout each interview, Vicky adamantly explained that since she could remember, she wanted a teaching career and the freedom her father enjoyed as a



working man, which was the complete opposite from what she learned her identity should be from the kitchen table. She never aspired to have the identity of a working mother and she did not choose to follow tradition in her family. She did not aspire to be a housewife. Her goal was to be like her dad, and her family did help her fulfill that dream, even if it did not match the expectations of the family, the Mexican culture, or the kitchen table. She gained a unique and individual identity. In addition, Vicky shared one example of her mother helping to change tradition and to create her unique and individual identity.

I finished school, and I graduated in the top 10% of my class, and, but I remember also going to the counselor and them wanting, and telling them that I wanted to go to college, and I didn't know how, what I had to do. But I wanted to be a teacher and I needed to know what to do. And he explained to me that I had probably really already overachieved by graduating from high school. That you know, that it looked like I was going to graduate from high school, and that I had done so well in my school, but I might really want to think about going to a junior college, or some type of vocational school and maybe learn to be a secretary or a cosmetologist. Something I can do in 2 years because I would probably be married and have children before I finished college. And I was devastated. And I went home and I was in tears. And my mother kept asking me what was wrong and I wouldn't tell her. It took me 2 days before I finally told her that the counselor told me that I probably shouldn't go to college. And, you know, here's my mother who absolutely hated school.... She dropped out of sixth grade, it's something she never regretted, she never regretted never having finished school. But because of my dad had, you know, insisted her being involved, you know, she had joined PTA and she'd been a den mother, and she had done all the things to give us those experiences. And I know she called the counselor and said, "You know, my daughter will go to college and how dare you say these things to her, because our expectations are that she will go. We raised her believing she will go to college, and she will go to college."

Inarguably, Vicky and her mother changed the expectations and traditions of their family, of the Mexican American culture, of society, and of the kitchen table by

confronting the counselor and demanding guidance for college. Vicky explained in another interview that changing tradition was a way of life since her father taught her that she needed to work twice as hard as non-Mexican Americans and males in order to change expectations.

Hence, Vicky, as she explained, created her identity by striving to be the best and accomplishing the goals she set for herself despite what was expected from her culture, society, or kitchen table. However, no matter how hard one may try to change expectations and perceptions of outsiders, family traditions and kitchen table expectations may be harder to change. Regina explained,

For example, my husband in particular who is Caucasian, he's white, from Louisiana, says that when I'm around my family, I am a totally different person. I kind of blend into the shadows. And here I am, a principal of a school, responsible for 114 adults, and \$1 million in an operating budget, and yet when I'm in my family, I take, I'm just another member. I don't exert my education or what I know on anybody. I just become one of the family. He says, "It's just amazing to see you step into a role where you're serving your father and your brothers, and you let them take over conversations, and you let them, you just kind of let them take over what's happening." It's not that I let them, you just kind of, I guess you do it subconsciously, unconsciously, without even realizing that you are doing that. But an outsider would notice that. I mean, my husband noticed that immediately, so I think it just depends. I think we learn, I, I've learned just norms of behavior, and that's what I've tried to teach my children as well, is a certain level of behavior depending on the setting, and there's a time to be the center of attention, and a time to step back and be, you know the participant, not necessarily the leader.

Regina, like the other women, explained that her family identity is one that is very different from her identity at work. At her family's kitchen table, she learned that females must be subservient to males. She reverts to that female role when she visits her parents' home by subjugating her feelings and needs to those of her father and

brothers. She has these two identities so that she can satisfy the expectations of both her Mexican American family and society.

I know well the expectations of the family and society that the women have shared. I hold on to my traditional Mexican American female identity as a school administrator and use it as needed. For example, if a Hispanic student is in need of encouragement, I may use a specific Spanish phrase to emphasize a point. However, my identity has also been greatly influenced by the identity of the military child and the military wife. As both a military child and military wife, I learned that I must always present myself as a proper person. I must always use etiquette and have impeccable manners and conversational skills. I learned that I am the identity of the soldier of the family, and that although I may have my own identity separate from the military, at military functions I am expected to act as the daughter or wife of a soldier first. This influence and expectation of the military has affected my identity as a school administrator especially because I work with children from military families. This military identity is an identity I hold and use as necessary.

The influences and expectations of the family, the Mexican American culture, and society have many facets. All 4 participants shared some of these influences and expectations, which have affected their identities and their lives. They also shared how they changed those expectations and influences to ones that fit their unique identities. Their expressed determination to have identities different from the identities of the kitchen table is clear in how they have become public school leaders.

### *Research Question 3*

What does the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader “look like” according to the narratives gathered for this study?

The 4 women of this study, women who shared stories about their Mexican American identities and how their identities have been shaped and influenced by different factions and expectations, have achieved leadership roles in their district. The influences and expectations placed on them have come from role models and mentors, family, culture, society, the kitchen table, and the schools in which they have worked. Because these influences and expectations have had a large impact on the creation of their identity, I wanted to know how that impact influenced their identities as leaders. In order to find out the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader, I asked the women a series of questions, which helped themes emerge. Those themes are (a) choosing education as a career, (b) “games” they learned to play in order to be successful, and (c) success as it “looks like” to the women.

The 4 participants shared why education is important to them and why they chose it as a career. They spoke about holding jobs such as counselor, psychologist, teacher, and assistant principal, but they all stated the job they hold as a principal enables them to help more students succeed. Additionally, they shared that the identity of principal is different from the other identities they hold. All participants

spoke about the “games” they had to play in order to break out of their traditional Mexican American female identities and form Mexican American female leadership identities. Finally, they spoke passionately about their destiny. They all feel that being at the schools they lead is their destiny. They added that they are successful because they believe in the students and their students’ families. Hence, the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader is a woman who knows and identifies with the principalship, who knows how to play the “games,” and who has a passion for the job destiny has bestowed upon her.

*Choosing education as a career.* When visiting with all 4 women and hearing their stories, their passion became very clear. They are passionate about their students, their community, their teachers, their parents, and their schools. They are passionate about making their schools just as academically challenging as the schools in the non-Hispanic Ghetto areas. They are passionate about changing the minds of their community and other communities. They want others to learn about Mexican American females as leaders and about children in the Hispanic Ghetto. Because of this passion, my first question had to be about their career choice and why they identified with that career. I wanted to know why these women chose education over any other profession, why education is so important to them, and how choosing education can become a prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader. Vicky stated,

I wish I could tell you that. I mean except, I mean, I don’t have, if I wanted a logical answer I’d say, because my dad always talked about school, and

teachers, and when I go to school, and when I finish school, and it just seemed like such a noble thing; that these were people that my dad admired. So, if my dad admired them and I became one, you know he'd admire me even that much more. I will have done something to please him. I guess that, though consciously I couldn't tell you that's why I did it. I don't, it was something, something inside me that just knew.

Vicky spoke highly of the educational profession throughout her interviews and explained why she chose education in an indirect manner. For example, she wanted to have a career where she would succeed and make her family proud. She felt that being successful was having the identity of a teacher because her father respected the teaching profession. Appreciating this respect is how she sees the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader.

Valerie also learned to respect those in education because her father had the identity of a teacher. She respected her father's identity of a caring and empathetic educator. She felt that his caring and empathetic manner helped him become a successful teacher. She respected, as well, a counselor who had a caring and empathetic identity. She shared,

He loved teaching....So, I mean, to me, that was very impressive, you know, and I always thought he was a pretty neat kind of teacher, you know, and I felt that that would be something that maybe later on I would like to get into. But that was probably the thing that influenced me the most about going into education. I think the other thing that kind of influenced me about education, too, was that I had a counselor in high school. We took a psych class as an elective, but he was the counselor of the school, and we used to have like groups, and we used to do activities, you know, with kids, and other grade levels like mentors and things like that or Pals, what they call Pals now. And I thought that that would be a nice profession, too, because he, I would see him talk about stuff that was really important to kids, and kinda like what my dad did. It wasn't just teaching, but it was trying to guide people to be the best that they could be, and talk about friendships and relationships and things like that.

So, I think when I was a senior I decided that I wanted to be a counselor. Not so much a teacher, you know. And that I could probably help more kids in counseling than I could, you know, just being a classroom teacher.

Interestingly, Valerie wanted to become an educator and have a career in education as her first choice because of her father. However, she wanted to be an educator who guided students in finding what is in their best interest. She spoke much about her father helping her see the success teachers can have with their students. She also said that even though teaching looked rewarding, counseling seemed to promise more of the educational identity where she would find success for herself; hence, her prototype of a successful Mexican American female leader started in counseling.

Regina, on the other hand, did not choose education as a first choice for a career. She knew she wanted to go to college and be a professional, but she wanted to be a medical doctor. Her reason for choosing education was a decision based on needing to get out of a college with a bachelor's degree as soon as possible. She needed a career choice quickly because she was on the way to starting a family. She explained,

Unfortunately, I chose education for all the wrong reasons. Because at that particular time in my life, it was what was most popular at the college in Brownsville, and it seemed to be the quickest way to a degree and into a job. So I didn't get into education with all, for all the right reasons. You know, I didn't grow up thinking I wanted to be a teacher, I didn't grow up thinking I wanted to make a difference in the lives of children. That was never part of what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to study medicine and be part of research and do all those sorts of things that my girlfriends and I talked about while we were growing up. But just, life dealt me a different, different set of cards and I had to work with them. But I think destiny places you where you need to be, because once I got into education, then I loved it.

Regina spoke about her childhood friends and their plans to be doctors in one field or another. Although she became a Ph.D., she admitted that she did not seek education as a career choice. However, in her position as a principal, she is leading a school, which has turned out to be her destiny, her identity, and her success. Her vision of the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader is one of a woman who loves her identity and her destiny of leading a school.

Lidia believed that her destiny was also in education. She spoke of how she loved children especially because she helped care for her nieces and nephews when she was younger. She also spoke of how she cared about helping children succeed. She explained her journey toward her destiny as she told of her beginnings as a youth tutor. She said,

Oh, because I always wanted to be, because I was a youth tutor and a youth person; is where seniors in high school went to elementary schools after school, and we tutored kids. And funny enough, I tutored some kids in math, you know, it was multiplication tables, something very simplistic. It was 1974, but still simplistic. And that's when I really got the bug for it, I really wanted to. And then I had a teacher that just really inspired me, she was a government teacher, and I felt like that was really what I wanted to do, and even as a little girl, I had dreams of being a teacher. I didn't know how to become one, even in high school, I didn't know how to become one, because counselors didn't call you into their office to say, "Let's talk." And some kids were already marked off it, not going to school, not going to college. But teaching for me was always something I wanted to do, and I felt that I could contribute; not only just the knowledge of the content but other things of my self, and to show other kids, that I, that you can make it and you can do it.

Unequivocally, Lidia chose education as a career because she always had the desire to help others in their school work. For example, Lidia spoke about feeling very comfortable and successful as a teacher because her students told her they enjoyed



her classes and the way she taught. Furthermore, she helped students in their school work by viewing success as an educator as making sure that students are not “marked off” the college list. For her, this was part of her identity, which helped her define the prototype of a successful Mexican American female school leader.

As for me, I chose education because I, too, always wanted to be a teacher. I remember pretending to teach my dolls, along with my brother, how to read and spell. However, when in college, I strayed and majored in theatre until I substitute taught during Spring Break my sophomore year. I fell in love with students in special education. That is when I knew that education would be a part of my identity and that the prototype of success was becoming a special education teacher. Hence, I chose education as a career choice because it would give me an opportunity to work with students with disabilities, which has helped make me feel successful.

The 4 women spoke of education as a career choice and how they knew it was where they needed to be. They chose education because they have a passion for learning and for working with children. They see teaching as a noble profession. Success for them is ensuring that the children and families that are a part of their schools are successful.

The women are able to reach more people and change more lives because they possess the identity of a principal. Because they have the identity of a principal, they are also more aware of the explicit and the inferred rules of leadership. These characteristics, abilities, and choice of education as a career is their definition of what

the prototype of what a successful Mexican American female educational leader looks like.

*“Games” they learned to play in order to be successful.* The 4 participants were adamant about being good principals and leaders in order to serve as positive role models for their children and community. They achieved the principalship after much persistence and have made a conscious effort to change the way society looks at Mexican American women in leadership roles and to change the way schools in the Hispanic Ghetto are led. In order to effect this change, the women have found that they must “play games” dealing with gender and race. They explained the prototype of a successful principal is one who helps their students succeed, and one who plays these games. Olivia spoke of games in general by stating,

I used to observe like, my ex-principal and the games. And I used to say, “Loretta, you know, I don’t know if I can play those games.” I don’t think I have the stomach for it. It seems hard, it seems like you’re not yourself. It seems like you have to force, like what she was talking about the flirting, the, and I don’t mean in a sexual way, I mean in what, whatever kinds of flirting there is (laughter) you know. And, I, it’s like you know, if you really want what’s best though, if you really want to get what you aspire for kids, you have to.

Olivia stated she learned from a colleague that in order to get the needed things for a school, one must play the games. Olivia said she accepts needing to play the games to be successful, but she does not want to be untrue to herself. She wants others to see her true identity, that of a leader, not that of a Mexican American female who must play games in order to serve her school. The aspect of the prototype for a successful

Mexican American female educational leader is to not deny your true identity while playing the “games” needed to succeed.

Lidia continued with the statement that she believes one must play games to be successful, but she calls the game she plays the “aggressive game.” She said she does not play race or gender games, just the aggressive game. She told of one example when she was mistaken for a man, because of her reputation of being tough and decisive. She explained that the aggressive game is to be played in order to be successful and that is one aspect of the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader. She explained,

And I heard this said about men before, “Gosh he is such an awesome leader because he knows what he wants for his school, or he knows what he wants for his business.” When a woman is aggressive, “Oh she’s such a bitch.” You know, I have a problem, I never go around saying, “Gee I’m Lidia Herrera, I’m Hispanic.” Or “Gee, I’m Lidia Herrera, the principal.” Or “Gee I am Lidia Herrera the female.” I am the person first, and the principal within that person and then to get the job done. I dislike it when people come and tell me, I’ve been told, “Well, you know you’re not Mexican enough.” Well, that’s because you don’t like the decision that was being made. Or, “You’re too rude about this.” Well, had it been a man saying it, they would have thought he was a genius. And yea, I sometimes need to tone down what I say, and it depends which arena I’m in and how I use it. So I think of myself as a person who has multifacets within myself. Different profiles within me that I, I use that profile or that facet of me to what’s appropriate to what I’m dealing with. So that’s the game I play.

Lidia feels that she has gotten the needed technology, discipline plan, and curriculum for her school by playing the aggressive game. The aggressive game she plays has helped her students succeed. It has also made her successful even though she has

what she refers to as a male identity: doing what it takes to get a job done. For Lidia, having that male identity is part of the prototype of being a successful leader.

Regina also admitted to playing games in order to be successful. She explained there are certain games to be played at certain times and that sometimes, the game being played is the game of recognizing people as individuals. For example, she explained how she always has cold water and snacks ready for the district maintenance crew who comes periodically to fix things in the school. She said this attention to the individuals in the maintenance crew help her be successful. Paying attention to individuals is another aspect of the prototype of a successful Mexican American female principal. She continued to explain and stated,

It's funny that you should ask me that because I think what it's going to take, is, you have to be really savvy, and you have to be willing to play, not play, but you have to understand the good ol' boy system. You can't fight it, because it is so ingrained in Texas. You gotta be attractive and you've gotta play, you have to flirt, and not necessarily, I'm not saying, sleep your way up to the top, because that would never be, that would be compromising physical integrity. But I think you need to use your sense of being a woman, and it, use it to where, to the extent that it opens a door and then hit them with your intelligence. But unfortunately, the good ol' boy system functions in that way. If you try to go in with brains first, you're going to turn them off completely. And just kind of depends where you are in Texas. If I were in the Valley, no problem, it's about intelligence, because I'm dealing with peers, with peers. But if I'm in Central or North Texas, where it's dominated by White males, then I'm going to have to play to their egos, and then come in the back door with what I can do with the job. That's the name of the game.

Intriguingly, Regina said the game she plays is one that the "good ol' boys" have established. She said that she plays and identifies with the male role in order to succeed. She also stated that she feels the need to play this game only outside the

Valley because she can easily succeed in the Valley because she is with peers. Regina went on to explain that society sees Mexican American women with characteristics of nonleaders. However, she believes that these assigned societal characteristics have helped her identity as a successful principal and that some assigned societal characteristics are part of the prototype of being a successful Mexican American female principal. She explained,

Society, I think sometimes I feel like Mexican American women or Hispanic women are perceived to be very docile, very submissive, and someone you can run over...I think as a female administrator, I, often times...keep those attributes that I learned from my grandmother and my mother about being a warm and accommodating and loving and nurturing with having to make tough decisions about what it takes to run a school. Especially a school like Maxdale, a school in transition, a school going through restructuring.

Regina, believes that because she has all the characteristics she learned from her mother and grandmother and uses those along with the “rules” of the games from the good ol’ boys, she is better able to run a tough school successfully such as Maxdale. She is also better able to be successful because she is able to mix the stereotypical characteristics of Mexican American women with the characteristics of a leader and find a leadership identity that fits her needs. Knowing and recognizing the characteristics of the Mexican American female and the characteristics of a leader are part of the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader.

Valerie also believes that the stereotypical characteristics of women pertaining to race and gender have affected how she identifies with being a leader. She also stated because she is a new principal, she is learning the “rules” of the game. She

does believe race and gender are almost synonymous for her, but that race sets the stage for all other games. The prototype of success must include understanding race as the vehicle of influence for all other games. She explained,

I don't know if it's so much about race or if it's about gender, you know. And I think it's gotta be a combination of both because that's gender, I mean because race influences a lot of things. I'm kinda at the beginning of that process you know of the getting there, and so I'm learning a lot about what it is to be a Hispanic leader, a female leader, a principal, which is a part of those two, you know....And I think it's gotta be a combination of both because that's gender, I mean because race influences a lot of things.

Valerie feels that race influences people's perceptions before sex or gender. She stated that the games principals and other educational leaders play involve both race and gender. She gave an example of race playing a major part as she explained that she works on a team within her district that is predominantly Hispanic. This team is predominantly Hispanic because all of the team members work in the Hispanic Ghetto side of town. For Valerie, success is having that Hispanic team to work with. She said,

But the fact that it was Hispanic, predominantly Hispanic, to me that was a good thing, you know. It was a good thing. There's nothing wrong being hired based on that....Kids, like I said, kids need to see people, their own, of their own race, culture, being highly successful.

Valerie was adamant that she believes it is a good thing for Mexican American leaders to populate the schools in the Hispanic Ghetto because the children, parents, and community are able to see successful and positive role models. She believes that she is successful, and that the prototype for success is having the opportunity to work in the Hispanic Ghetto. She has learned the games needed to succeed in the Hispanic

Ghetto. However, even with playing the games, her identity as a Mexican American woman in a Hispanic Ghetto school has been challenged. She explained this by sharing a comment made to her by a former colleague,

And then, I went into administration. But, I remember one time at the very beginning when I got hired at the school, somebody in the district said, “This doesn’t bother you, that you were hired?” Because her sister kept trying to get in to be a counselor, and she was never hired. And when I got to the school, I think she had applied for the position and didn’t get it. So, I think she was talking out of resentment or just a little bit of anger. And she asked me, “Doesn’t it bother you that the only reason you got this job is because you’re Mexican?”

Valerie explained that she never really thought about working at a Hispanic Ghetto school versus a non-Hispanic school. She said she always felt comfortable working in the schools where she was placed and thought nothing of it until this question was asked of her. She said she feels she does not care if the reason she is a principal at Willow is because she has a Mexican American female identity, as long as her students succeed. Obviously, a game is being played, as she is a Mexican American female principal in a Hispanic Ghetto school. However, she knows that this part of the game has helped her students be successful and is part of the prototype of success for her, a Mexican American female educational leader.

Ironically, Regina knows that she got the job in her present district because she has a Mexican American female identity. She spoke in length about how she really did not have to play games in the Valley. She learned about playing games when she moved into the district before the one she is in now. She, then, has two prototypes of success; one being for the Mexican American female education leader

in the Valley; the other one being for the Mexican American female education leader who works with the “good ol’ boys.” She explained,

In, in Brownsville, I think I got the jobs because I felt that I had the qualifications. I never felt that it was because I was female, and because I had the skills to do it. Now, here, I think I got the job not just because I had the skills, but because I was the right color.... Well, I take that back, I had the qualifications, but I think if you look at the ethnic breakdown at Maxdale and 65% is Hispanic and 30% African American, so they had to go with either a Hispanic principal or an African American principal.

In Brownsville, Regina always felt she was hired based on her skills and her past success and experience. However, in her previous and present district, she feels that she was hired based on having a Hispanic identity; hence, the game of race played a factor in her getting a principalship in both districts. Nevertheless, she feels that she is more successful in her present principalship in a Hispanic Ghetto school because she can reach more children because of her Hispanic identity. Her Hispanic identity has become her prototype of what has made her a successful Mexican American female educational leader.

Vicky also believes that more children can be reached and can be successful when the Hispanic Ghetto has more Hispanic leadership representation. She believes that the prototype of a successful school is having a successful leader. Then, the prototype of a successful leader is one who recognizes that good learning and teaching can be achieved in a school no matter the population of the students. The prototype of a successful leader is also one who is recognized as successful both within the Hispanic Ghetto, and outside the Hispanic Ghetto. She explained,



I think in some way Lidia, Regina, myself, Valerie, yeah, all of, all of us who are Hispanic females, you know even being in the Hispanic Ghetto, if that was the district's choice, well okay, minority women, minority area of town, that's where they have to teach. I think if you're good at what you do, you begin to change the opinion outside of the Hispanic Ghetto, too. You know people recognize that you're good no matter what. And they see the improvement here, and they see or hear our parents speaking more positively about the school, and they see our students being successful in other assemblies and at competitions. And they see us out there in a more positive way, we still affected the non-Ghetto side of town. You know we still have the attention then of other principals of other schools and other parents who know these women are doing a good job, you know. We still brought ourselves somehow to their attention so that people understand there are good leaders everywhere.

Vicky stated that even though the race game may be played when placing principals in the Hispanic Ghetto, more and more people are recognizing the successful schools in the Hispanic Ghetto. She also stated that more and more people are recognizing that the successful schools are being led by successful Mexican American female leaders. This has changed the perceptions of people within the district and has changed the identity and the prototype of a successful leader within the district.

These perceptions are slowly changing the minds of people in the Hispanic Ghetto, too. Valerie found it saddening when the parents of the Hispanic Ghetto felt the prototype of a successful school was to have more White children attend than minority children. She also found that educating parents about what the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader "looks like" in the Hispanic Ghetto, will help change their minds about wanting to move their children to schools in the Non-Hispanic Ghetto side of town. Valerie expressed the following concerning the Hispanic Ghetto schools,

We want our kids to be successful. You know and I want our kids to go to Smokey Hill. You know, and I had had parents who had said, "I want them to go to a non-Hispanic Ghetto, you know, because they provide a better education over there." Why? Well, and they sometimes even say, "There's more Whites over there." So they have a higher standard, you know, like Mexicanos don't? You know, yeah, we do, too. And I think that's probably what unites us, is that we are very, we have very high expectations of our kids, because we are Hispanic. And we want for them to be successful and to be familiar with, it's not a bad thing. You know we push them to make it, I mean that's the driving force, we tell them, you can make and it you're going to be very successful.

Valerie is adamant about proving to her students, parents, and community that successful schools exist in the Hispanic Ghetto and that good things are happening at these schools. She tells students and parents that there are high expectations for the schools in the Hispanic Ghetto and that students will succeed. In this instance, Valerie believes that the race game may prove to be an asset to the students in the Hispanic Ghetto because she believes that she has a successful identity and that the prototype of both a successful school and a successful leader are being changed based on the success of the schools in the Hispanic Ghetto.

Ironically, even with Hispanic principals in leadership positions, Regina cautioned, students may not succeed. She made it clear in her interview that not all minorities can lead a majority minority school and that the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader may not be one that fits all Mexican American females. Having minorities in leadership positions does not necessarily equal success. She explained,

I think you hit upon something real key, when you were asking me about the Hispanic Ghetto side, about the Non-Hispanic Ghetto side, and how minority

women, Hispanic women, Mexican American women, or even African American males get placed in these high-need campuses. And I think we need to be there. I felt a need to be here, but with the proper training. And don't assume that just because we're minority, we know exactly what to do. It has nothing to do with the color of your skin, or where you grew up, or what language you speak. It's what skills you bring, because those skills override anything you bring with your culture. I think just, if what we look like determines how successful we are, than someone's made a terrible decision, I mean someone's made a terrible mistake on, on placing us here just based on that.

Regina asserted that minority women and men need to be in minority-populated schools, but they need the training necessary to be successful principals. She carefully expressed that playing the race game and assuming that all minority leaders are successful or that by putting them in minority-populated schools they will be successful is a mistake. However, Regina does not believe that race has a big part in a district's reasoning in placing someone in a leadership position. She believes that it is a gender issue. She said,

And it's not just because I'm Hispanic, I think it's about being female, period. Because I think, and I really never really thought about it until the kids here, were, kept asking me if I was White, or if I was Mexican American or what I was. I, I think now, you can play both ways. So, I don't think it's so much about being Hispanic, it's about being a woman, period. Now, I think African American women, though, do have to deal with race, more so than Hispanic women, but I think it's all about being female, and about a male thinking that a woman can run all over you.

Regina feels that having a Mexican American identity does not affect placement in a principalship by a district's school board. She believes that the game of gender is a factor in how a person gains a principalship and that the game of gender is part of the prototype of being a successful female principal. Vicky agreed with Regina. She interjected, "But if I really had to say, it's not about being Hispanic. If I sensed any

type of prejudices in this district or, it's about being female. It's about being female.”

Vicky believes strongly that people are placed in leadership positions based mainly on gender, no matter if they are successful or not. She does not believe that race has a big part in hiring decisions. She continued with her explanation,

But in this district, I mean one of my issues is definitely that there's now a big push to get more females as secondary administrators. But for a long time, if you were female you got elementary schools and the secondary positions were for men. So that women who took those jobs did have to work twice as hard. You know, did have to, you know, it's acceptable in our society, for whatever reason, for men to work and not be available for their families as often, as much as the mother figure in the family. But it's not acceptable in our community or in our society for women to do that. Hence, when women do that, their husbands are upset about it, 'cause they want their wives at home. You know, “Yes do the job, but keep my house clean, and raise the children and get them to school, and make sure there's stuff for the bake sale,” and you know, that kind of stuff. And that's, that's tough. I, I don't know who can do that kind of stuff. And I have known principals even at the elementary level, I remember someone who I thought was a phenomenal administrator, you know I found out one day I saw the job posted and I called and said, you know, what's going on. She says, “I just can't do it. I'm, I'm really going to have to choose at this point between being a principal or being a wife and mother. You know because, because I can't do both, you know something's going to give. My husband wants a good mother for our children, and a wife that's available to help him with his career too, and I can't do both, so if I have to choose, I choose to be a wife and mother.” You know, and men don't often have to make that choice.

Ironically, Regina explained the unequal parallel between female and male leaders and principals in her district. She gave an example of a woman leaving her principalship so her husband could be successful as a professional. She also emphasized that women must work twice as hard and give up much more than men when leading a school and trying to succeed. Regina believes that the identity of a woman is less valued than the identity of a man in the working world and that is why

she feels, along with Vicky, that gender plays a much bigger part in the games they play as principals. Hence, in order for future Mexican American female educational leaders to be successful, they must understand that the prototype of success must include the understanding that gender games are the bigger games to play.

As for me, I have learned to play the games very well. I have learned to play by watching my mother in her leadership positions. I have also learned first hand. What struck me most about the games was that in my experience, it always was about race. My identity as a Mexican American was much more curious for people than my identity as a female. In addition, it did not matter what prototype of success I used, because no matter how successful I might have been, my race was an issue. I remember living in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and being asked by several White educators, "What are you?" Although that question was very awkward for me to hear, I tried to give the interrogators the benefit of the doubt, seeing them as curious people instead of racists. However, in Denver, because I am brown skinned, I was always referred to as a Mexican. In Denver, being a Mexican was a bad thing, especially if one lived in certain parts of town. I do remember my own sister-in-law telling me about the "Greasers" that lived near her and that they were "low-lives."

However, I have not seen the game of gender as a real problem. Only once did gender play a part in a job I did not get. After applying for an assistant principalship, I was told that I did not get the job because the young man against whom I competed had a wife who just had a baby, and he needed the extra money. Ironically, I had just

had a baby at that time and could have used the extra money. Regardless, my identity as a Mexican American has caused more unease and curiosity than my identity as a female. Hence, the game I play and seem to encounter more often is the game of race. My own prototype of success is based on my experience with coping with the outsider's issue and problem with my race.

The 4 participants explained the games they played and how they played the games in order to be successful. All recognize that there are games involving both race and gender, but Regina and Vicky believe that the main game played is the one concerning gender. Valerie believes that the games of both race and gender need to be played in order to succeed, whereas Lidia stated she plays the aggressive game. Regardless, it is clear that games are played, and the women have identified with being successful leaders who learned how to be successful because of and in spite of the games. They have provided their insight of what the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader is, which includes knowing how to play the game of race and sex.

*What success “looks like” to the women.* Although they play the games, a sense of something greater helps the 4 women feel successful. They have explained that they are in a principalship because they “fit” and they were meant to be there. They also described what success looks like for a Mexican American female in a leadership role, specifically the prototype of a successful Mexican American female principal. Within the group interview, all the women agreed that being principals was destiny, a position that was given them because of divine intervention. Vicky explained her thoughts,

I think everybody has a purpose. You know, and when you find yours, you grab it. You know, I, I can give you the whole, you know I have some friends that just call it Woo Woo, phenomenon, you know Christian friends that go, “You know it’s God’s path for you,” or whatever. But it, it’s like the whole principal. I didn’t want it. You know, but here it was put in my path and there’s a part of me that knows, you know that says, “Oh my God, I’m going to be a principal.” And it’s like, I don’t want to. And I ignore it, and I ignore it until it’s like right there and I’m going to have to really, I can’t even step over it anymore. I have to go way out of my way to go around it and you go, “Okay, you know, if, if this is what I’m supposed to be, then I’m going to do it.”

Vicky, along with the other women, knows she has a purpose, not only as a principal, but as a principal at her school. All have been given the opportunity to help students, parents, and community members find success. Having this opportunity to help others is how the women define success for themselves, how the women define the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader, and how they define what success looks like for them.

Regina called the divine path as of being a principal in the school she is in “something bigger.” She believes that the “something bigger” led her to education instead of medicine. She also believes that the prototype of a successful leader is listening to that “something bigger.” She explained further.

There’s also a reason for getting up every morning; something bigger than you. And that the fact that, I’m going, that’s what gets all human beings going. And somehow, we need to make sure that that’s happening for the teachers who work with us and then for the kids in the classroom. They’ve got to have a reason to get up. They gotta have, they’ve gotta want to be in that building with those adults and with the other kids.

Inarguably, Regina sees herself as a successful leader because she has a reason for getting up in the morning: her passion and need to lead a school toward success. She identifies with her teachers in that they also must feel a “reason for getting up in the morning” because teaching is a difficult job. Hence, to Regina success looks like having a reason for doing a job and finding success in that job.

Vicky agreed with Regina that everyone needs a reason for getting up in the morning. She believes that recognizing the “something bigger” can make one successful. She told of one example of how she avoided the principalship until, she finally had to recognize that “something bigger” was encouraging her to take the principalship. She believes recognizing the “something bigger” is part of the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader. She explained the reason for her identity as a successful principal,

I can’t think of, you know, I started thinking if I weren’t an educator, what would I be? And I could think of some things I’d like to dabble in, but I can’t think of anything that I could do day after day, after day, after day, for 10



years if I'd done this, and get up and think that what I do makes a difference. That what I do is important, you know... I'm sure that everybody that has a place, something that they do, that they enjoy feels that what they do is important, something that's bigger than yourself, you know, of realizing that, you know, what you do, affects so many people...you know what I think is, my salary compared to Michael Jordan when he was playing basketball. And will I know he was important to basketball, you know, what does that do for the world? You know, how is that going to change the world? You know, and then I see a great teacher that's not even making a 100th of what Michael Jordan makes each time he plays a basketball game. And I think, this is the value of the kids? And then how heroic is this person that's going to get up everyday with a passion to work with children, knowing that they're only getting what, a small amount of money and still want to come here every single day.

Vicky feels that her identity as a principal is a successful one because she has a passion for children and their education. She also feels that she has to share that passion with her teachers as they affect children positively everyday, and do so for a relatively small salary. This passion is what success looks like to her and the teachers. Finding this passion is part of the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader. Lidia understood Vicky's thoughts and words as she agreed that one must have a passion for working with children. She emphatically stated,

You know that theory, if you point a finger, then there's three more pointing back at you? Well, that is very true, and as I work with the teachers, it doesn't matter what walks in the door. It's what walks in the door that we have to deal with. Don't cry. You know, the doctor can't cry when the emergency patient rolls in the emergency room. A gun shot wound to the head, to the ribs. Well, I'm sorry, I'm only doing legs today. You know, it doesn't work that way. And education can't work that way either.

Passionately, Lidia explained her belief that some teachers do not appreciate the educational position and the educational identity. Their position and identity affect children, either positively or negatively. Lidia wants to ensure that the effect is

positive and has had to explain to her teachers that they do not have a choice in whom they educate when they work in public education. She sees her identity and success as affecting many people; hence, success for her looks like leading by being a good role model for her teachers. Leading by example is part of the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader.

Additionally, Vicky noted that being a leader affects many people. She also believes that this effect along with success is a constant for everyone. She does not believe there is much difference in the definition of success because it is what one enjoys doing. Success looks like having fun performing your job, which in turn makes other people's jobs easier to perform. She explained,

See, I don't think I would make it any different than anybody else. I mean, for me, I feel successful because I enjoy what I do. I enjoy what I do, and I see other people's jobs made easier because I do what I do. I see children coming to school because I do what I do. You know, I see parents coming into the building that may not have because I do what I do. I see a building finally being painted and trees being planted and, and you know that face lift, because I do what I do. But that's what all good principals would do to feel successful. You know you're successful because you're doing what you have a passion to do.

Vicky tenaciously insisted that success looks like having a passion for what you do. She emphasized that because she has a passion for what she does and because she sees her identity as a successful principal, she has helped make success easier for her teachers and students. Making things easier for others to achieve their own success is part of the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader and

what success looks like for Vicky. Making things easier for others has also become the leader identity for Vicky.

Valerie agreed that her position and passion for education and her identity as a leader is what success looks like. She also believes that making a difference in your own life and other's lives is being successful. She explained earlier, that as the principal, the buck stops with her. Success then is ensuring that the buck makes a positive difference in the lives of her students, teachers, parents, and community. She explained,

I believe that when you're in your last dying breath, and you're looking back, you're able to say your life was a success, because you did what made you happy and what made an impact. And that you hope you had created change in others, because you along the way changed, too, in your life. And I think that is what success is. You're able to change in your life into the different experiences that you had. And you're still happy and you're able to still connect with other people. And make a difference not only for your own self, but make a difference for other people. So I would think that would be success. That would be the definition of success.

Interestingly, Valerie's definition is similar to those of the other women; success is being happy with your job and helping make others happy doing their job. Success is having a principal understand that lives will change because of the leadership that is imposed on them. The women also defined success as recognizing that because of the example of leadership from the principal, the students, teachers, and staff will follow. These are the tenets of what success looks like, and the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader.

I also believe that success looks like having fun working in the educational position you hold. I agree with Vicky that there is a divine reason why certain people are given the opportunity to be educators. I also believe that success is what one makes of it. My success is in education and being in a leadership position. Therefore, the prototype of success for me would include having fun with your job, accepting divine intervention, and performing a job that encourages others to be successful.

The 4 women know what success looks like and know how to achieve success. The prototype of success is having a passion for what you believe is good for children. They all have an identity they see as successful. This success is mostly intangible. All 4 women see the ascension to their leadership positions as destiny and having “something bigger than you” intervene in their lives. They also believe that the prototype of success looks like having a successful leadership identity that positively affects others.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I presented the data gathered to answer the three research questions. I also presented the themes that emerged and that I used to answer the three questions. I gathered the answers and used the themes that emerged from two individual interviews and one group interview. I have also interwoven excerpts from my journal to compliment the data gathered from the interviews and to help answer

the questions. Chapter 5 will present implications of this study's findings as well as recommendations for practice and future research.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Interpretation, and Implications

In this chapter, I provide the summary of the research, an interpretation of the results, the implications of the results, a review of the strengths and limitations of this research, and the conclusion. The summary is a brief overview of the first four chapters, highlighting the research project and the reason for this dissertation. The second section includes the meaning and my interpretation of the results of the research. The third section includes implications of the findings with specific attention to the possible application of the results (a) for practice in schools, (b) for policy at the district and state levels, and (c) for further research. The fourth section is a review of the strengths and limitations of this study, with the conclusion as the final section of this chapter.

#### *Summary of the Research*

The subject of this dissertation is the social constructions of identity and the ways that those social constructions affect Mexican American female educational leaders in public schools. The social constructions of identity assigned to Mexican American females have been of interest to me because I am a Mexican American female with aspirations of succeeding in public school leadership positions. I have also been both interested and disappointed in the social construction that identifies

Mexican Americans in the broad category of Hispanics. This broad category does not emphasize the unique identities of each person of Mexican American descent. This category does, however, include stereotypes, characteristics, attributes, or social constructions that society has placed on Hispanics, Mexican Americans particularly, and Mexican American females specifically (Cabello-Argandona et al., 1975; Cotera, 1980; Stoddard, 1973a, 1973b).

Mexican American females have often been characterized by society as submissive, docile, weak, incompetent, and sexual (as study participants Regina and Vicky indicated; see also Cabello-Argandona et al.). These societal and cultural attributes have made it difficult for Mexican American women to gain public school leadership positions. Additionally, because Mexican American females are identified as Hispanic instead of Mexican American, society is less accepting or aware of their unique individual identities. Their different and unique experiences, family traditions, and cultural expectations become blurred in the broad category of Hispanic. This problem is compounded by the fact that little research has been conducted on women in general, on Hispanic women in particular, and on Mexican American women specifically (Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Tallerico, 1999, 2000). In addition, although there is some research literature on women in administration, there is not enough on women as school principals.

Researchers that have studied women and minorities have not always focused on the identity changes women and minorities must endure to succeed in the

dominant culture. Women and minorities have learned to deny, become silent, ignore, or change their identities in order to be accepted (Grogan, 1996; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Skrla, 2000a, 2000b) into leadership positions in education, positions dominated by men (Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Skrla, 2000a, 2000b; Tallerico, 1999, 2000) and positions based mainly on traditionally male characteristics (Blackmore, 1993; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1989; Skrla, 2000a, 2000b). Knowing this, I wanted to prove that women can lead successfully, and I wanted to find Mexican American female participants who lead successful schools. Furthermore, I wanted to bring to the forefront the experiences and stories of Mexican American women who serve as public school leaders, because the literature on minorities in education is based mainly on the experiences of Black women (Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Tallerico, 2000). Moreover, the limited literature on minorities as administrators indicates that minorities are placed mainly in majority-minority schools, or what I termed Hispanic Ghettos, due to the assumption that a minority leader can successfully lead only a majority-minority school (Ortiz & Marshall).

Hence, for this study, I used a qualitative approach with naturalistic and narrative inquiry. I used this approach to find in-depth stories of the experiences of the 4 women who are successful principals of schools in the Hispanic Ghetto. I selected the 4 women from a Central Texas district where all are practicing principals. I selected the participants based on a purposeful sample of three specific criteria:



1. Each participant selected identified, described, or recognized herself as a Mexican American female.

2. Each participant had been principal for at least 3 years in the same district, though the principalship could have been at any level (i.e., elementary or secondary).

3. Each participant selected was an active principal at a successful public school. Success was defined as having a Recognized or better TEA rating.

I did find 4 female principals who identified themselves as Mexican American; but of the 4, only 3 had been in the principalship for 3 years or more. All 4 women have led Recognized schools; but only 2 of the participants are currently leading Recognized schools.

I collected the data for this research from a series of in-depth interviews: two individual interviews, and one group interview. The research was flexible in that I did not have prepared questions for the interviews, but instead had a loose focus of what I wanted to know from each participant on the first interview. The flexibility allowed themes to emerge from the narratives of each of the interviews. I audiotaped and transcribed each of the interviews myself or used a second transcriber. I analyzed each interview immediately after the transcriptions were available. As themes emerged, I used the results to create a focus for the upcoming interviews. As I completed the analysis and interpretation of the data, I encouraged the participants to member check through e-mail attachments. I also kept a journal, recording how I

related as a Mexican American female to the stories the 4 women shared with me, and I used this journal as part of the data for my study.

The open-ended interview method helped the participants and me hold informal conversations, which, in turn, helped the themes to arise more easily (Patton, 1990). This method encouraged spontaneous questions and free, uninterrupted narratives from the women. It also helped establish a trust between the participants and me, resulting in a rapport throughout their storytelling. In addition, I used peer debriefing to help me keep a focus on what I asked and what I learned from each interview. It helped me with my journal writing and with becoming reflexive in writing the results.

This study contributes to the educational literature the voices of 4 Mexican American female principals. It fills a gap in the existing literature by adding the voices of both women and minorities. This research also fills a gap in the literature regarding the social construction of identity and the ways these social constructions affect Mexican American women. This study illustrates that females in general, and Mexican Americans specifically, have unique and individual identities that are valuable and needed in leadership positions. This study also strengthens the literature on Chicana feminism because 4 Mexican American females in principalships are its focus. Finally, this study contributes to the field of education where the critical importance of inspiring, selecting, and supporting successful Mexican American females for principalships must be recognized.

### *Interpretation of the Results*

After nearly 10 weeks of gathering data, I deciphered the results. The results were juxtaposed to the literature review so that I could find similarities or differences between this study and other research. I found results that aligned closely to the literature review, but with a flavor of originality and individualism from the women's narratives. They told their stories, including the influences on their identities, as Mexican American females in public school leadership positions.

*The Mexican American female and her chameleon identity.* The 4 women spoke about the different identities that they use, dependent upon the situation and audience. Each spoke of the identity she has when she is at home as a wife. Each spoke of the identity she has as a principal. Each spoke of the identity she has as a Mexican American female with her parents. All have an array of identities they use in order to succeed in their professional and personal worlds.

Thus, the women learned to adopt a chameleon identity: an identity that changed according to the assigned attributes and expectations of society, family, and culture. This has been partly the reason why Chicana feminism has become a vehicle for Mexican American women. The Chicana feminists and other Mexican American females work at counteracting the assigned attributes and expectations as well as re-educating men to include those in the Mexican American culture (Cabello-Argandona et al., 1975). Those who espouse the Chicana feminism ideals feel that Mexican

American females and Mexican American males should accept and be proud of their identity. Mexican American females have unique identities and should not feel obligated to have to have a chameleon identity in order to be accepted or to succeed in society. The chameleon identity parallels Anzaldua's (1987) idea of the border identity; she posited that there are borders, both physical and indefinable, where one lives and where one racially identifies with two or more cultures. Her idea of living on the border of two or more cultures, crossing from one world into another, and identifying with the expectations of many cultures closely aligns to my findings of chameleon identity. The chameleon identity also relates to the idea of Martinelli (1993) and Yon (2000) that identity changes over time, identity changes according to certain regions, and identity changes according to social and political influences.

Their chameleon identity, then, is influenced by their family, by the ways that they see themselves, by the ways that others see them, and by society's assigned attributes. Hence, with the chameleon identity, the women are in a cycle of perpetual negotiation of portraying the identity that will be acceptable in any given social situation. They are constantly working toward changing their identity to fit the norm of any given social situation. Finally, they have learned to change their identities to fit all the expectations from their families, themselves, and society in order to be accepted, seen as successful, and seen as viable leaders of schools.

Being accepted and being able to succeed in society has much to do with the teachings from the "kitchen table": a place of learning, recognizing tradition, setting

examples, setting expectations, and a place of influence. The kitchen table is both a place and time for sharing and loving, cooking, and being a family. This time is used to set the traditional expectations and influences. Those influences learned at their kitchen table still haunt the women; although they are successful leaders in a man's world and hold leadership positions, they still abide by the Mexican American cultural traditions when at home (i.e., cooking, cleaning, and serving the males). This need to live with a chameleon identity closely relates to Williams' (1990) assertion that 20<sup>th</sup>-century Mexican Americans had learned to live as neither Mexican nor Anglo American, but as someone in between.

The women learned to be Mexican American women at the kitchen table and they did abide by most of the kitchen table expectations and influences, but they aspired to be like their fathers or husbands. They wanted to have a job, to have freedom. They wanted to have a man's life with certain aspects of a woman's life. They wanted to have their own identities, they wanted to be accepted as Mexican American women, and they wanted to be accepted with their own identity to educational leadership. They wanted to follow the attributes assigned by family, culture, and society so that they could also live the American dream (Munoz, 1989). This is why the women feel so comfortable in the Hispanic Ghetto; they can relate to the student population and community where their identity is accepted. They do not have to endure the chameleon identity to work in a Hispanic Ghetto school to be successful. Although working in the Hispanic Ghetto does relate to Ortiz's (1999)

research about Hispanic women being placed in schools, communities, and districts that are heavily populated with Hispanics or other minorities, the women of this study requested to be placed in the Hispanic Ghetto to build success.

It is important to note, however, that the term *Hispanic Ghetto* is my term. I chose to use that term after reading Mathews's (2001) article about women getting "stuck" in the deputy superintendency and not being able to reach the superintendency. The term Hispanic Ghetto was used by Mathews to reflect a place where the 4 women got "placed" and "stuck" because they are women of color and because they would not likely or, at least, easily be able to move to a non-Hispanic school as a leader. In response to my use of the term, the 4 women were determined to let me know that they did not like the word Ghetto to describe their schools; however, they did not have a replacement word to describe their schools. Instead they chose to redefine the word Ghetto in order to fit the identity of their schools. Consequently, I chose to keep the word Ghetto to define their schools according to the new definition they created. It is also interesting to note that their definition of the word Ghetto is more aligned to a cultural definition describing a ghetto as a community of members with similar identities, language, food, customs and celebrations.

Because they are successful, the 4 women are changing the leadership identity as Hispanic leaders in the Hispanic Ghetto where they chose to be. They feel they need to be in these schools so that they can continue to change the expectations

society has about Mexican Americans, Mexican American females, and minorities. Changing the expectations of society may allow Mexican Americans, Mexican American females, and minorities to use their own identities instead of chameleon identities. Additionally, society must recognize that being a minority does not guarantee success in leading a majority-minority school, just as being White does not guarantee success in leading a majority White school. Regardless of the identity, in order for principals to be successful, they need training.

The 4 participants emphasized that principals need training to help them be successful, regardless of gender. As the women spoke, the gender issue seemed to be the bigger issue for 2 of the 4 women. They spoke of the preferential treatment men receive in educational administration. They also spoke of the male characteristics of leadership as being more valuable and worthy than the female attributes of leadership, confirming other researchers' findings (Blackmore, 1993; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1989; Skrla, 2000a, 2000b). Men can negotiate their salaries and may get a choice of schools they want to lead. Women must make sacrifices for the family, as society expects that men should work and lead their families, whereas the women should stay home and take care of the children and the home front and, if necessary, work outside the home. Men leading their families closely aligns to the research of Edwards (2000), who found that the principalship was viewed as the paternal role of school leadership, even though women in leadership positions use a combination of the paternal and maternal roles in leadership. Hence, in order for

women to succeed in the educational administration arena, they must hold different identities or a chameleon identity, as the women professed. They also must adopt an identity closely related to the male identity.

It is fascinating that I found no literature or research that focused on the identity of the hegemonic culture. Specifically, there has been no research on the identity changes, or the chameleon identity, of White males in order to succeed. There is, however, a growing amount of literature on women and gender issues espousing that women must change their identity in order to be accepted into administration. Some researchers have pointed out the need for minorities to change identities when in educational leadership positions (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Grogan, 1996; Mendez-Morse, 1998). However, minorities must change identities not only when gender becomes an issue, but also when race becomes an issue (Mendez-Morse, 1998). The issues of gender and race, then, become a kind of game, which minorities learn to play in order to succeed.

*The game of silence, denial, and adaptation.* The Mexican American female principals of this study spoke in depth about the games they play, including the games of race and gender. These games parallel the same games played by participants in Skrla's (2000b) research. The women's chameleon identities encompass playing the games of race and gender by keeping silent, denying racism or sexism or adapting their identities to conform. However, only Valerie acknowledged that both race and gender played a part in her advancement to administration. Two participants, Regina



and Vicky, avidly denied that race is an issue in the district; they feel that if there is an issue, it is an issue of gender. Nevertheless, although they talked about gender being a main concern in their district, they continuously brought up the issue of race. This made me realize that they have been conditioned to see race as a nonissue and to focus on gender as the issue related to having female or minority principals in the district. This also led me to believe that, although race can never be denied, the women learned to disassociate any negativity regarding race in promotions to higher positions. In addition, Lidia never said that race or gender were games she played. In fact, she said she played the aggressive game. This also seemed very telling because I interpreted the aggressive game as the male game. This would indicate that she wanted to be accepted and played the male or gender game. That game became the game of aggression.

Whatever the game, the women have learned to adapt their identities to accomplish their educational goals. They have gone through a “metamorphosis” that involved a significant “alteration in character” (Mendez-Morse, 1999, p. 136). This metamorphosis and alteration of character have helped perpetuate the erroneous stereotype that Mexican American females are not viable leaders. Furthermore, because the women have felt the need to adapt, change, deny, or ignore their true identity and conform to the traditionally male attributes of leadership, they have, at times, been forced to discount their own identities. Learning to play games to succeed and to be accepted in society and in leadership positions must be difficult, especially

when it results in losing, denying, or discounting one's true identity. Discounting one's true identity relates to Yon's (2000) idea that because minorities must claim different identities, their identity is always partial and not ever really quite whole.

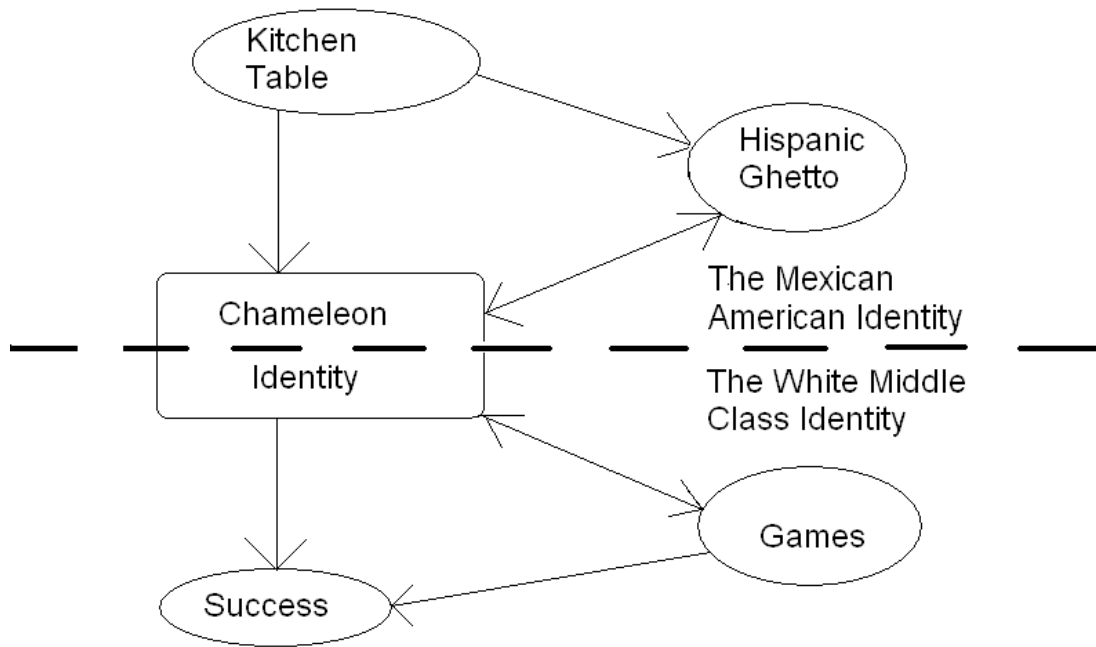
The women's true identities do not match or parallel the middle-class identity, but they have learned to bridge the disconnect by playing the game of having an identity that is Mexican American and an additional, different identity that is middle class. For example, in the Mexican American family, all members of the family share the identity of the family. This was found by other researchers such as Anzaldua (1987), who stated that individuals exist first as part of a family or kin then as themselves. In the middle-class American family, identity is individualized and may not reflect upon the family. The Mexican American family works toward team and family unity, whereas the middle-class family works more toward individualism and competition, as referenced by Regina, Vicky, and Valerie, correlating to what MacCorquodale (1993) called reflected appraisals. Reflected appraisals are the basis for a family to develop an identity that an individual adopts so that she is accepted by society. Therefore, the participants have learned to deny parts of their Mexican American female identities. They have adopted parts of the middle-class identity to bridge the disconnect and have an opportunity to lead schools. They have learned to juggle these two distinct identities to help their students succeed, becoming successful leaders of schools in both worlds. This, I believe, makes them successful leaders of schools.

*The successful Mexican American female principal prototype.* The easiest and quickest interpretation of the results was the prototype of a successful Mexican American female principal. The women spoke about what success looks like to them and what has made them successful principals. In talking about their success, they also spoke about “fit” and the passion they have about the students and the community in which they lead. They belong in a Hispanic Ghetto where they are able to do more to help students succeed because they understand the Mexican American family and the Mexican American child. Having fit and passion means being truer to one’s identity (e.g., speaking Spanish and English in one sentence). Fitting is feeling comfortable and sharing a Mexican American identity with other Mexican Americans in the Hispanic Ghetto. For the women passion usually equals success. That is why they felt that the Hispanic Ghettos are well-kept secrets and that only those with fit and passion should lead these schools.

In summary, a ghetto is a community filled with members who share a common culture, a similar identity, and similar traditions. This commonality helps ensure fit and passion for the leaders of the schools. It also helps leaders of schools appreciate the members of the ghetto. This possibly happens in other ghettos such as the “White Ghettos” in Plano or the “Asian Ghettos” in Killeen; the commonality of culture, identity, and traditions helps all the community members and school leaders fit and possibly have a passion for educating students within their community.

*The results presented in a diagram.* Figure 1 illustrates the Mexican American female's chameleon identity and the ways she lives on a perpetual border to gain an acceptable identity at any given time. According to the stories from the 4 women, the Mexican American female learns about her chameleon identity at the kitchen table. From the kitchen table, she also learns what her identity should be and what the expectations of the Hispanic Ghetto are. Hence, the Mexican American female learns about her identity at the kitchen table and she learns about her identity in the Hispanic Ghetto, which helps her create her own chameleon identity.

However, the 4 women explained that if they wanted to be successful in the White middle-class world, they needed to adopt the White middle-class identity when they were in that world. Therefore, the women crossed over to the White middle-class world while staying on the border so as not to lose their whole identity as a Mexican American female. With the White middle-class identity, the women learned the games of race and gender, which helped them learn how to be successful in educational administration. Therefore, the women sit on the border with their chameleon identity and become more Mexican American or more White middle class according to the social situation and their need to be accepted in a particular situation.



*Figure 1.* The Mexican American female’s chameleon identity and how she lives on a perpetual border to gain an acceptable identity at any given time.

*Implications of the Findings*

The identity of the women of this study has been assigned to them by family, by culture, and by society; this identity has been perpetuated and accepted in the educational sector. However, the women have their own individual identity, which may be different from the expectation. In order to know their true identity, their stories must be given due attention; these stories may reveal possible reasons why other Mexican American women are not advancing to leadership positions. Hence, this research may shed light on how social constructions of identity have affected the

advancement to public school administration of Mexican American females in general. Therefore, there are implications for practice, for policy, and for further research based on the social constructions of identity and how society's assigned attributes affected the Mexican American females in this study.

*Implications for practice in schools.* The women of this study have acknowledged not many Mexican American females have achieved principalships. This parallels the research findings of Ortiz and Marshall (1995) that not enough women and minorities are in leadership positions and the research findings of Bloom and Erlandson (2003) and Dunshea (1998) that female principals are not given due attention in the research arena. Hence, educators and school boards must ensure that more women and minorities get the opportunity to lead schools and to serve as role models to aspiring principals. Because there is a majority of women in the teaching profession (Holloway, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989), it is imperative that they see more female role models leading schools. Additionally, with the possible number of minority students continuously increasing, there is a social need for more minority leaders to lead schools so that minority students also have role models.

Adapting their identities to fit is a constant for minorities (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000). The 4 successful Mexican American female principals of this study spoke much about their minority students and how they feel they are a positive role model for their students. They want their students to see that minorities and women are capable of successfully leading a school and that

their identities in leadership positions are important. This, in turn, helps the minority students of the participants' schools understand that their identities are also important as they reflect the community identity. Children, teachers, community members, and society as a whole need to see more women and minorities in school leadership roles. Then, and only then, the leadership identity of women and minorities will become more accepted.

There are possible reasons why women are not seen as having a leadership identity. Women as a whole may not feel comfortable aspiring to leadership positions in education because they do not have role models to emulate (Petrie & Lindauer, 2001). Instead, women may see men as natural leaders and emulate their style. For example, the women in this study stated that their main role models while growing up and as adults were either their fathers or husbands. They saw men as leaders and emulated men in order to succeed as principals. Although the influences and expectations of the family, of the culture, and of society dictated that they must follow tradition, the women chose to defy the assigned attributes and became leaders of schools.

The assigned attributes, however, may serve as a starting place for leaders of schools to find an identity. The women explained that they learned about their identity at the kitchen table. The kitchen table in the Mexican American family is a place to find out the expectations of the family, culture, and society. The women recognized the power of the kitchen table and wanted to bring that learning and

comfort to the classroom. However, they did not know how to develop and deliver a “kitchen table curriculum” that would incorporate the “middle-class expectations” of schooling and still continue to be true to the Mexican American culture. One need for schools, then, is to develop a plan of action to encourage the comfortable learning environment of the kitchen table so that more Mexican American children are engaged in succeeding and achieving at school. This may help Mexican American children embrace their Mexican culture proudly while also embracing the White middle-class culture with pride. This also would help Mexican American students learn and accept their individual identity and possibly be more successful in school and be more successful as adults.

*Implications for policy at the district and state levels.* District and state leaders must recognize and consider the need for more women and minorities in principalships and must recognize and consider them as viable leaders of schools. Also imperative is recognizing and considering the possible reasons, such as the games of race and gender, for the low numbers of women in educational leadership positions (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Dunshea, 1998; Grogan, 1996; Skrla, 2000a, 2000b). The games of race and gender, as the women of this study have revealed, are played by the rules created by the “good ol’ boy” system and middle-class expectations (Grogan, 1996; Skrla, 2000a, 2000b). These games prevent women and minorities from gaining leadership positions in schools. Furthermore, women and minorities find that they have to change their identity to play by the rules of the



games. However, women and minorities must reassign attributes and change the rules of the game so they can have a successful leadership identity as a woman and as a minority. Hence, each woman has learned to be successful by becoming a “culmination of all the past events and experiences she must learn to survive and adapt herself to the new rules” (Gallegos y Chavez, 1979, p. 79)

The 4 participants spoke about having a successful leadership identity by keeping their true identity. Keeping their true identity helped the women be less ambivalent about projecting who they are and how they want to be identified. This is part of Yon’s (2000) explanation of how ambivalence is part of the process of identity with the understanding that minorities go through a process where they develop racial identities as part of a “two-directional process: In the process of claiming who one is, one is also announcing who one is not” (p. 102). The way the women kept their true identity by claiming a more whole person and not discounting any part was by leading schools that had a similar identity to theirs. They called this fit. The principal of a school must fit the identity of the school and community so that the principal can have a passion for leading effectively and with a purpose. This does not mean only a Mexican American can lead a Hispanic school or that only a White American can lead a White school. What it does mean is that only those who have the passion for leading children toward success and high achievement should lead schools. It means that the principal, the students, and the community members usually fit through

having a common identity. This fit becomes apparent by student success under the leadership of the principal.

*Implications for further research and principal preparation programs.* There is no question that more literature is needed on women and minorities (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Dunshea, 1998; Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Tallerico, 1999, 2000); thus, the implications for further research based on the findings of this research are simple. More research needs to be done on successful Mexican American female principals. More research needs to be done on the assigned attributes from society that hinder women and minorities in gaining leadership positions in education. More research is needed on women and minorities as principals. With more research being done in these areas, it may help the principal preparation program become more effective in helping graduate students realize that women and minorities in general, and Mexican American females specifically are needed role models and leaders in education.

Mexican American females are being successful as leaders in education (Grogan, 1996; Marcano, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Ortiz & Marshal, 1995; Skrla, 1999, 2000b; Tallerico, 1999, 2000). Their identities are accepted more and more because they are successful leaders of schools. However, women and minorities still must deal with the erroneous assigned attributes that have been placed on all women and all minorities (Blackmore, 1993; Cabello-Argandona et al., 1975; Cotera, 1980; Howard & Hollander, 1997; Mendez-Morse, 2002; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995;

Ramos, (1979); Shakeshaft, 1987, 1989; Skrla, 2000a, 2000b; Stoddard, 1973b; Valdes & Pino, 1974; Weber, 1973). As the women of this study affirmed, they learned to adapt their identity to the acceptable expectations of the community or group with which they came in contact. The women could not obtain leadership positions with the identity they possessed as Mexican American females alone. They had to adopt the identity of the White middle class in order to be given an opportunity to lead a school. An identity is powerful. Hence, the influences on the identity of a Mexican American female must be given due respect in the literature and research. Researchers must study the meanings of Mexican American females' identities, give them the appropriate recognition and consideration, and investigate why adapting these identities is necessary to succeed in educational leadership.

These studies could become a teaching tool to be used in principal preparatory programs. Stories about the lives of female and minority principals, specifically Mexican American females, need to be shared in graduate classes. These stories must be heard in order to learn about the cultural adaptations and identity changes Mexican American females endure. A healthy discussion about cultural adaptations and identity change could elicit feelings about race and gender that may help graduate students recognize their own prejudices and help them address their own feelings.

This healthy discussion could also help graduate students recognize and understand taboos and their effect on the identity of Mexican American females in principalship positions. This taboo discussion could lead into why women and

minorities, specifically Mexican American females, change or adapt their identities to be accepted and recognized. These stories could also help graduate students understand, empathize, and react to the stories of race, gender, and identity change so that they may understand the history of assigned attributes and perpetuated identities placed on Mexican American females, in most cases erroneously. In addition, recognizing and working through their own prejudices may serve as an impetus for graduate students to research successful Mexican American females, women, and minorities.

Increasing the research data on successful Mexican American female principals also would mean increasing needed data on Chicana feminism. Many socially assigned attributes, social constructions, characteristics, and assumptions of the Mexican American female identity have been grossly exaggerated and misrepresented (Cabello-Argandona et al., 1975; Cotera, 1980; Mendez-Morse, 2002; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Ramos, 1979; Stoddard, 1973b; Valdes & Pino, 1974; Weber, 1973). The stories of these women prove that although some characteristics may be germane to women in general, Mexican American women are distinct and unique. The stories of the participants also show examples of strong Mexican American women who have changed and will continue to change the inaccurate assumptions and generalizations about them. These stories illustrate unique and valuable individuals with identities that are important for the role of the principalship. This study gives an example of successful Mexican American females advancing in

leadership positions with their own identities, proving that although they have adapted their identities to meet some social expectations, they are proud of being a woman, a Mexican, and an American.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

Although I took great care in trying to ensure that this research would fill gaps in the literature and that trustworthiness and validity were maximized, this study has strengths and limitations. The strengths of this study are that 4 successful Mexican American female principals have been interviewed about how their life experiences have affected their position. These stories are from a Chicana perspective and through a Mexican American identity defined by each woman. Second, this research strengthens Chicana feminism because it illuminates the identities of 4 Mexican American females. This is a strength because it fills the research gaps of race and gender from a minority female perspective. It also fills the gap of research on identity and the social constructions that affect Mexican American female principals.

Another strength is that this research parallels the research that has been discussed in the literature review. For example, Ortiz (1999) found that Hispanic female superintendents were only given a chance to lead in communities mainly populated by Hispanics or where a school district was deficient in some manner. Bloom and Erlandson (2003) found that Black female principals were usually placed in urban schools or schools that were undersupported and economically depleted. In

this research, the 4 Mexican American females are all leaders of majority-Hispanic schools, which are not as well kept as other schools populated with nonminorities. They are also in schools that are located in the Hispanic Ghetto. However, whether or not this was an intentional placement by their districts, the women were adamant that they would not have gone to any other kinds of schools. They said they were Mexican American female principals leading Hispanic children, so there was a fit.

Additionally, the research concerning identity in the literature review paralleled this study. Mendez-Morse (1999) found that Hispanic females who took a superintendency did so by adapting their identity to one that would be accepted by the community. The women of this study have told their stories of changing and adapting their identities to conform to expectations and to play the games of race and gender successfully. They also spoke about adapting their identities in different situations. For example, they claimed having a leadership identity and a daughter identity. Both identities are used to conform to the expectations of either a school district and a community or a family.

The final strength is that this study helps fill the gaps in existing research on female principals. The 4 women have spoken about their identity as a principal and how that identity has been successful for them and their students. They have also shared that with the identity of a successful principal, they know they have a purpose and a goal in leading their students toward success. This strength, like the other

strengths of this study, will help successful Mexican American female principal voices be heard.

Although this study helps fill a noticeable gap in the literature, certain limitations may exist. First, this study's focus was limited to successful Mexican American females in the principalship. Thus, the outcomes of this study may not be generalizable to all Hispanics or all educational leaders. Furthermore, this study involved successful Mexican American women who are educators in Central Texas; experiences of Mexican Americans in other parts of the United States may prove different, limiting the national generalizability of this study.

Second, this research was instigated because of my interest as a Mexican American female in a public school leadership position. Hence, I unintentionally and unconsciously may have imparted some of my biases and interpretations based on my experiences. I have been as objective as I possibly could and have described and interpreted the women's experiences according to their stories. However, it is possible that another minority or nonminority researcher with different background experiences and influences could have emerged from this study with a different perspective.

Another limitation may be the size of the sample and the diversity of the participants. Only 4 Mexican American females were asked to participate. Furthermore, even though the interviews were conducted so that my interaction with the participants was intimate, cumulative, and thorough, generalizing among other

Hispanics may be limited because of different cultural and societal expectations. Additionally, it cannot be assumed that the 4 principals' experiences will be the same when accessing any other educational administrative position.

The final limitation is the use of qualitative methods. Lacking an experimentation group or a process, results could not be duplicated. Moreover, a naturalistic and narrative inquiry approach was used. The narratives of this study were gathered in a natural setting and are only appropriate for this study. The participants answered the questions according to their own identity and according to their own perceptions of social constructions of identity.

### *Conclusion*

It is important to understand why this research was done. I felt it necessary that the identity of the Mexican American females be recognized as unique and individual and not as "clumped" with the identity of all other Hispanic females. Hispanic females include those from the Mexican culture, the Cuban culture, the Puerto Rican culture, and other Latin American cultures. Although Hispanic females may have similar aspects as other Hispanics, they have very different ethnic identities. For example, a Mexican American may identify with the Aztec Indian culture, whereas the Puerto Rican American may identify with the Iroquois Indian culture. It is important to recognize these seemingly subtle differences.



This research was important for Mexican American females because the women spoke about their identities and about how they changed and adopted different identities, their chameleon identity, throughout their lives. The women have explained that they have changed, adapted, or accepted different identities in order to cope with the demands of the different worlds in which they live. For example, they have the identity of a principal and follow their identified prescribed characteristics of a leader: role model, knowledgeable, and family oriented. Also, they have the identity of a Mexican American female; for some, they know that the family expectation is to cater to the men of the family before fulfilling their own needs. These women must develop and deal with a multitude of identities, their chameleon identity, throughout their lifetime and specifically three on a daily basis: being a female, being a Mexican, and being an American.

The multitude of identities and the chameleon identity is somewhat disheartening because minorities and women seem to be the ones who must comply with the hegemonic expectations. In “complying, women and minorities have learned to cope, hide, ignore, dismiss, adopt, and adapt to the normed, accepted, hegemonic expectations set for women and minorities (Chase, 1995; Edson, 1987; Grogan, 1996; Jones & Montenegro, 1983; Marshall, 1985; Ortiz & Marshall, 1995; Skrla, 1999, 2000a; Tallerico, 1999, 2000). These adapted and adopted identities are evident in the stories of the participants. These identities’ voices are hard to hear, however; I feel that because these women have adopted identities, they have lost, in some part, the

very essence of who they are: Mexican American women. Additionally, the 4 participants have learned to have different identities in order to cope in different worlds, such as the middle-class world, so that they may be successful professionals. However, it is curious that a possible reason for the small number of women and minorities, specifically Mexican American females, in leadership positions may be due to Mexican American females' refusing to change, adapt, or adopt White middle-class identities to be hired. Thus, those Mexican American females who are not hired may be holding onto their individual identity and wanting to be hired based on that identity and not based on the hegemonic, expected identity.

The participants spoke about their identity learned from the kitchen table. The kitchen table was a place to find an identity that was acceptable to the Mexican American culture, the Mexican American family, and society. The women spoke about the influences and expectations that the females of their families placed on them at the kitchen table. These influences and expectations are ones that the women have not relinquished, but instead have adapted to fit their needs. Interestingly, the women spoke quite consistently about their different identities, even though they never defined the different "persons" they became as identities. They spoke about needing to adapt to different situations as they grew up and now as principals; they spoke about needing to adapt to the middle-class standard as a leader. Hence, their identity as a principal more closely paralleled the identity of a White male or female instead of the identity of who they are, Mexican American females.

It could be said then, that Mexican American females, through a process of fitting in and being accepted, adapt to having a chameleon identity. To be successful by the rules that have been created and set by family, culture, and society, the Mexican American female develops a chameleon identity so that she can play the games with success. This game has been played successfully by the women of this study—so much so, that I realized that the prototype of a successful Mexican American principal is one who behaves as follows:

1. Acting appropriately and professionally, recognizing oneself as a role model and example.
2. Being well read on current educational trends, curriculum, and issues.
3. Realizing that leading a school will make a difference in students' lives.
4. Identifying and understanding the needs of the students first hand, meaning understanding the language, the customs, the traditions, and the culture.
5. Being respected for doing a job well and keeping the focus on the children.
6. Never losing the teaching identity and leading teachers with a teacher's point of view.
7. Finding ways to help students succeed in the classroom and being there as a listener.
8. Choosing education, having a passion for education, loving education, and loving children.

9. Understanding that destiny places a person where she is needed.

In addition, the prototype of a successful Mexican American female educational leader is one who has a purpose in leading a school. She is aware of the goals for the students. She helps the teachers, the parents, the community members, and the students accomplish those goals. She is successful because “something bigger” helps her realize that she was placed in a position where she performs well and in turn helps others perform well. As she shares her pride, her culture, and her knowledge, as a leader, she recognizes that her leadership style affects those that she leads.

The Mexican American females of this study are unique individuals with successful leadership identities in education. They are present in education and their voices will be heard. They are not invisible. As cited in Bloom and Erlandson (2003), Ellison stated a hypothesis that the African American is invisible: “I am invisible because people refuse to see me” (p. 364). Mexican American women are no longer invisible because they are succeeding as leaders of schools and proving to society that their leadership should be respected and recognized and that their leadership identity is visible and viable.

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## Vita

Laura Angelica Trujillo-Ball was born an “army brat” in Fort McClellan, Alabama, on October 22, 1969. She is the daughter of Arthur Hiram Trujillo and Minerva Artemia Rodriguez Trujillo, both of Roswell, New Mexico. She graduated from C. E. Ellison High School, Killeen, Texas, in 1987, and from New Mexico Military Institute in 1989, where she earned an Associate in Arts Degree. She then entered The University of Texas at Austin as a junior transfer student and earned a Bachelor of Science in Education in 1992. She started her master’s at The University of Texas at Austin in 1994 but finished at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee, due to a family military move. She has been employed as an elementary and middle school teacher both in special education and regular education and currently works in a high school as a special education coordinator. While teaching sixth grade in Denver, she entered a doctoral program at The University of Denver; however, due to a divorce, was fortunate to enter The University of Texas at Austin Cooperative Superintendency Program with the XIV Fellow Cohort.

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