

Ternura y tenacidad: Testimonios of Latina School Leaders

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Abstract

This study utilized *testimonio* as method to unearth the voices of four Latina school leaders from the southern region of the U.S. to shed light on their experiences, including triumphs and struggles, in navigating their career trajectories. The *testimonios* revealed distinctions as well as commonalities among the Latina administrators related to how they drew on their experiential knowledge and various forms of cultural capital in the process of their leadership development and roles. How they enacted agency, demonstrated signs of resistance and/or a commitment to social justice, and serving Latinx communities also emerged.

Ternura y tenacidad: Testimonios of Latina School Leaders

Within a week [as assistant principal], I remember coming out of my office one day and there were four moms up in the front who were talking to the receptionist, and they were telling her ‘we want to talk to the one, the new one, not the other one, not the white lady, we want to talk to the young one, the new girl that speaks Spanish.’ And so I was coming around the corner and I hadn’t met them yet. So I introduced myself to them. All they wanted to do was bring me what they had made. They had made *tamales* okay, what a welcome! Again, a very traditional, ‘we are here to welcome you.’ I didn’t know who they were, I didn’t know who their kids were, I didn’t know nothing [sic]. But to them that was like their welcoming, we’re bringing you this, and we just wanted to say

hello, and to introduce ourselves, you know all the *comadres*...I didn't know these people, I didn't have any idea who they were, but the fact [was] that they went out of their way because they had heard that there was somebody new [a Latina who spoke Spanish].

-Rachel, Latina elementary school principal

Latinx¹ students, parents, and communities are hungry, waiting in anticipation for school leaders that not only understand their struggles and lived experiences, but who also look like them, and value, respect, and speak their language. Such understanding comes with knowing that *familia* often comes first for Latinxs, that relationships are built on *confianza* and *respeto*, and that the *sacrificios* that Latinx parents make are necessary to ensure a better life for their children. This is not to say that all Latinx school leaders “get this,” but many do. Murakami, Hernandez, Méndez-Morse, and Byrne-Jiménez (2015) argue, “Latina/o principals, for example, can successfully cross language barriers and be role models for Latina/o students and teachers” (p. 5). As the first Spanish-speaking Latina administrator of her elementary campus, Rachel understood her critical role in serving a predominantly Latinx population with over 90% of students that qualify for free and reduced lunch and over 50% of English Learners. Her identity as a Spanish-speaking Latina was vital in “being able to have those relationships with those [Latinx] parents, for them to be able to open up and share” because she believed “they’re not just going to do that with anybody.”

What We Know about Latinx School Leaders

The contributions of Latinx teachers and administrators are significant as Latinx students represent the fastest growing ethnic group in U. S. public schools. Among the 45 million Latinxs in the country, approximately 13 million are school-age-children (Pew Foundation, 2008). Yet, the teacher workforce does not reflect such diversity. As of the 2011-2012 school year, 82% of U.S. public school teachers were White, while 7% were African American, 8% were Hispanic, and less than 3% were Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian and Alaska

¹ The term Latinx is a more inclusive, gender-neutral term used when possible, exclusive of direct citations.

Native (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013). Equivalently, of the 90,000 public school principals, 80% (72,070) were White, 10% (9,110) were African American, 7% (6,120) were Latinx, and 3% were of another race/ethnicity including Asian (820) and American Indian/Alaska Native (650) (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Females account for 52% of public school principals with the majority leading primary schools (64%); albeit the percent of Latina principals in particular is lacking (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013).

To support and sustain the growing Latinx student population, it is now critical that all school leaders are able to meet the needs of Latinx students (Murakami et al., 2015; Rodríguez, Martínez, & Valle, 2015). However, special attention to support and increase the number of Latinx school leaders becomes especially vital as evidence suggests that principals who are of the same background as the students they serve might be more readily able to understand and address inequities in student achievement (Magdaleno, 2006; Murakami et al., 2015). The work from a number of scholars (Hernandez, Murakami, Méndez-Morse, Byrne-Jiménez, & McPhetres, 2016; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Murakami et al., 2015; Pedroza & Méndez-Morse, 2016) suggests that Latinx school leaders understand the challenges Latinxs face in schools, while valuing their distinct cultural and linguistic attributes. They set high expectations for Latinxs, recognize the extended nature of Latinx families, and how the Spanish language can be harnessed to build sustaining, collaborative partnerships. Latinx school leaders can bridge existing gaps in communication and support between Latinx students, parents, and schools, and in some cases help reconceptualize schooling for those Latinx parents that experienced marginalization as students (Shah, 2009). The leadership styles of Latinx leaders are informed by their cultural values and beliefs: family, community, respect, service, humility, care, compassion, and social justice guide how they work with students, staff, and communities (Campbell, 1996; Hernandez, 2005; Hernandez & Ramirez, 2001; Magdaleno, 2004; Romo, 1998).

Experiences of Latina School Leaders

Historically, there have been few women of color in educational leadership positions, and this trend continues today (Jones & Montenegro, 1982; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Montenegro, 1993). Few studies investigate female administrators and only a handful that do include Latinas (Loebe, 2004; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Palacio, 2013). This phenomenon represents an “exclusion and neglect [of] the contribution[s] of Latina leaders” (Méndez-Morse, 2000, p. 584).

Most of what is known about Latina leaders comes from dissertation studies; revealing barriers that Latinas face in obtaining and sustaining leadership positions in schools. Loebe (2004) studied six Latina elementary school principals who perceived discriminatory hiring practices, and barriers to promotion, sometimes at the hands of Latino leaders. Some experienced tension “when they supported non-Latino individuals or causes and were accused of ‘crossing over’ by members of their own communities” (p. 438). Yet the ability to speak Spanish and having cultural insight were assets to build relationships and trust with Latinx parents. The eight Latina high school principals in Palacio’s (2013) dissertation study shared similar sentiments with regards to discrimination in their roles as principals, while divulging their identities as change agents in their schools. Palacio (2013) concluded that the Latina school leaders had “incorporated a different approach to analyzing data, problem solving, and resolving issues for fixing academic achievement gaps,” providing impetus for further study in this area (p. 221).

Undoubtedly, Latina educational leaders continue to face challenges within their careers related to their gender or race and inequitable hiring or promotion practices; challenges that need to be further explored (Hernandez et al., 2016; Loebe, 2004; Magdaleno, 2006; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jiménez, & Hernandez, 2015; Palacio, 2013). The lack of mentoring and networking available for Latina leaders presents another challenge, leaving many Latina leaders resorting to mentors outside the traditional mentoring paradigm, including their mothers (Méndez-Morse, 2004). Latina leaders also face conflicting roles at work and in the home; oftentimes feeling guilty for not meeting the societal expectations of motherhood, wife, and caregiver (Murakami-Ramalho, 2009). Therefore, an increased interest in understanding and documenting Latina educational leaders’ contributions and the challenges they still face and work to overcome in the field led to the present study.

Testimonio as Method

Testimonios are first-person narrative accounts rooted in an urgency to speak truth to the struggles of those facing “repression, poverty, marginality, exploitation, or simply [to provide a means of] survival in the act of narration itself” (Beverley, 2008, p. 572). *Testimonios* were first utilized to draw attention to the plight of marginalized Latin American peoples, and were harnessed as a methodological approach in Latin American studies (Beverley, 2008; Pérez

Huber, 2009; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). *Testimonio* is distinct from other methodologies such as autobiographies, personal narratives, and auto-ethnographies (Beverley, 2008; Delgado-Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012), but can be invoked and expressed through documents, journals, oral histories, song lyrics, and poetry (Beverley, 2008; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) describe *testimonio* as “a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere” (p. 13). Historically, this process was necessary because “the real protagonist or witness” was often “either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer” (Beverley, 2008, p. 571).

Numerous scholars in the fields of education, anthropology, psychology, and women’s and ethnic studies embrace *testimonio* today as a methodological approach (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). Women scholars of color have particularly embraced *testimonio* to document and/or theorize their own or others’ struggles, resistance, and survival (Pérez Huber, 2009). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) used *testimonios* to tell and reflect upon their life stories and gain “nuanced understandings of differences and connections” among group members; highlighting the individual and collective aspect to *testimonio* (p. 11). Individual stories provide space for solidarity, consciousness raising, and bridge building within communities of oppressed individuals or witnesses of the same marginalizing experiences (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012; Yudíce, 1991).

Most educational scholarship in the U.S. that draws on *testimonio* as method is done so by Chicanas and Latinas whose ways of knowing and agency align with a strong *feminista* ontology and who “use *testimonio* as a tool to express marginalization resulting from race, gender, and sexuality” (Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012, p. 528). This study falls in line with this tradition, as we, the authors and interlocutors, identify as Chicana/Latina females with roots in the U.S. borderlands of South Texas. We each have our distinct stories and experiences related to marginalization within schools and society, but share a *feminista* ontology and a common background as public school educators.

Knowing that the voices and experiences of Latina administrators are often not considered or centered in education research, policy, and practice, four Latinas who currently

or recently served as public school assistant principals or principals, referred to here as Elena, Rachel, Linda, and Beatriz, were invited to share their *testimonios* in being school leaders. At least one of us had an established relationship with the Latina school leaders, as former colleagues or current friends; providing for an increased level of *confianza* and understanding.

Testimonios were captured through audio-recorded oral history interviews conducted either in person or over the phone. Three of us captured the *testimonios*, with one or two interlocutors interviewing the school leader they knew. The *testimonio* interviews were guided by six questions, which reflected our intent to understand how participants' experiential knowledge and various forms of community cultural wealth, including aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and/or linguistic (Yosso, 2005), emerged in their leadership roles and experiences, and impacted how they served Latinx communities. Examples of questions included: 1) What role did your identity as a Latina (cultural and linguistic background) and your gender, play in your career trajectory as a school leader? 2) How did your identity as a Latina (cultural and linguistic background) and your gender shape your experiences as a school leader? 3) How did your identity as a Latina (cultural and linguistic background) and your gender impact or shape your leadership style?

Interviews were transcribed, checked for accuracy, and read numerous times to determine which aspects of each Latina school leader's *testimonio* would be shared through this study. As interlocutors we aimed to relay the most significant aspects of the leaders' *testimonios* to highlight each Latina's unique experiences as administrators, while considering the larger collective experience of participants. In this process, it became clear that participants shared a level of tenacity (*tenacidad*), or persistence even in the face of resistance, juxtaposed with tenderness (*ternura*), or a genuine kindness with regards to their roles as leaders and the communities they served. To further make sense of their shared experiences, portions of participants' oral histories were captured in three metaphorical themes that reflect the kind of *ternura* and *tenacidad* the Latina leaders exhibited: much like seeds planted, cultivated, and able to thrive in spite of weeds of resistance.

Latina School Leader Testimonios

The Latina school leaders in this study included: 1) Elena, an assistant principal at a Pre-Kindergarten Center with prior experience as an elementary and high school assistant principal,

2) Rachel, a principal at an elementary school with experience as an assistant principal at another elementary and middle school, 3) Linda, a high school principal with over twenty years of experience in education, and 4) Beatriz, a district level administrator with experience as an assistant principal and principal.

Sembrando la semilla: Upbringing, Relationships, and Preparations for Leadership

The idea of becoming administrators was not an original goal for all participants, but at some point throughout their lives individuals, some family members and/or mentors, and key relationships played a significant role in the development of the participants' leadership goals and styles. Elena began her *testimonio* by describing the significant role mentors played in her trajectory to become a school leader. Elena situated the relationship with her mother at the core of how her leadership evolved, which is congruent with what the literature (Méndez-Morse, 2004) suggests with regards to mothers being the first mentors to many Latina school leaders. "My mom was a great support. My mom at times even when I was going to [local community college] taking courses at night she would wait for me at the bus...at times when I was taking classes at night my mom would go with me." Elena recounted the role and influence of other mentors as well, key sources of social capital who guided and encouraged her to continue on the road to becoming a school administrator.

There was [also] this lady she was my supervisor [when I worked at a bank while attending college] she was African American and I lucked out because she was the only African American in the bank at that level and she was my mentor there. She was single, she was a very smart beautiful woman...[Later] Ms. V she took me in, well she was the principal at [an elementary later] and she was there for 12 years. So then she was the one that was a 5th grade bilingual teacher [when I became a teacher]...She was the one that told the principal to hire me [at the elementary school]...I was there for three years and the principal there, she told me just give me one more year, just give me one more year, and the reason for that is that she wanted me to replace a teacher that had left. So she kept her promise, but one thing about it is that she sent me to a lot of trainings and she took me under her wing. With that I did learn quite a bit and after the three years, I applied for an ESL position in which there was only one position at

[my former high school where I graduated]...And I applied and got it and I was the only bilingual, I was the only ESL teacher [at the high school].

Rachel's *testimonio* was grounded in her childhood educational experiences growing up on the South Texas border. She shared her thoughts on the overwhelmingly White and male demographics of her former school administrators, and revealed how her desire to pursue a leadership role was informed by memories of power structures in the educational system; in this way she drew on her resistant capital to shape her trajectory.

When I was thinking about it, the principal at the elementary school he was a man you know and yes he was a Hispanic male but it wasn't [a female] and so as far as I can remember I think maybe only one in my schooling here in Texas that I can remember was a female. And that was the only one and if I remember correctly I don't even think she spoke Spanish...

Rachel also spoke to the role of mentorship, or social capital, in navigating her administrative career and developing into the kind of school leader she wanted to be.

There was one principal in particular who I taught for and that is actually where I was teaching where I became an assistant principal at the same campus and that does not happen very often, but it was under that particular principal's leadership that she encouraged me to get my mid-management [certification]...And you know she was very instrumental, like very much, really just encouraging my leadership, giving me leadership opportunities. She obviously saw something in me that I wasn't quite sure of it in myself yet because I hadn't been teaching that long, maybe five years at the time and she would continuously ask me, "Have you thought about going into administration? Have you looked into any programs?"

Beatriz's *testimonio* began with her transition from bilingual teacher to school principal. Her aspirations to become a school principal were rooted in her personal desire to be responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of Latinx students and families. Beatriz's familial and resistant capital proved vital in this process.

For me as a bilingual teacher, it was important for me to be a model for my students so that my students know that there's nothing that Latinas or Latinos can't do. I wanted them to see that there's a variety of choices and I wanted

them to be able to dream about that and see leaders in their school that reflect their same cultural background...It was also important for the community to see that, to see that the leadership of the schools also looked like the population. I could speak to the parents and children. They didn't feel intimidated or anxious whenever they came into school to speak about a problem. They knew that they had a leader at the campus that they could effectively communicate with. So, I think I made my parents feel more at ease knowing that somebody like them culturally was leading the campus and taking care of their children.

Linda was the first person in her family to go to college and attain a university degree. In her *testimonio* Linda revealed she never intended to become a school principal, but was encouraged by her White male boyfriend who was a school principal to get her administrative certification; he was a source of social and familial capital, as extended kin.

I taught math for fourteen years, I was a math major. I knew I wanted to do math. My main goal was to go and be a secondary curriculum math director or something in that vein. And when I was at a particular school district there was a really good one [director] there and there was just no room for growth unless she happened to leave which didn't seem like it was going to happen anytime soon, and nor did I want her to leave, she was great and did a really good job. And so my boyfriend advised me to pursue looking for administrator certification just in case. I never really considered the administrator route...I really had my heart set on a math director/coordinator, that position, but I am glad I did. I am glad I kept my mind open because it led to different roles that have ultimately led me here [principalship].

Cultivando la tierra e enfrentando malas hierbas: Building Community Amidst Challenges

The Latina leaders transformed the obstacles in their leadership journeys into opportunities to grow, engage, and flourish while being true to their identities. Elena recognized the vital role of her cultural and linguistic ties to her community and how those ties impacted the sustainability of her leadership. Her cultural capital enabled her to make connections with

students and serve Latinx communities, although this was met with resistance at times from other non-Latino administrators.

I always had that inside me that I wanted to be at the high school level, there's a lack of minority leaders. I remember if you would look at the directory you would see the Hispanic names in the foreign language department, the custodial staff, the cafeteria, and if you found a Hispanic name in other departments like in math or science they didn't know how to speak Spanish...So, on the first day of school, I remember I was used to doing this, I would go into the classrooms [and] I would introduce myself and I was the AP [assistant principal]. It was a new admin staff they did a wipe out. "It doesn't matter, I'm here to help you out," but I said it in Spanish as I was introducing myself. Well, word got to her [the new female African American principal] that I was speaking in Spanish and then she called us up on the radio. I was the first one there, that is when she told me, "You know what, I don't want you to be talking in Spanish, you can't speak Spanish here" and I was shocked and I didn't know what to say. I had heard it [happened] from older Hispanic women in Crystal City, but not in my time and I was stunned...It [the school] was predominantly Hispanic and they [students] were not treated fairly and the custodial staff they used to tell me "*Tu eres la primera, tu eres la primera Hispana que habla español.*" They had a Hispanic [administrator], but she didn't know how to speak Spanish so they would call me *la primera*...Also, [at] our little admin meetings she [the principal] would look at me directly, literally she would yell at me and look at me directly and I was able to pull my composure because deep down inside I remember one time I had so much anger and I knew that what she was doing was wrong and I felt like you know what? I did start to think that good guys do come last.

Elena was assigned to another high school as an AP after this incident. Thereafter, her AP high school position was cut when student enrollment decreased, and she had to return to the classroom for several years until she was hired as an elementary AP with the help of a mentor. In closing, Elena noted how Latina school leaders need to be aware of the racial and political aspects of the job, and how "Not everyone who is in a higher position is in it for the kids. They are more in it for themselves and if they see somebody who can outperform them

they feel threatened.” While she admitted she still had some “resentment and anger” given some of her experiences, she felt there were “more positive things than bad things and somehow I have been able to come out of that misery.”

Beatriz made the transition to the principalship and worked on building a sustainable community of parents, teachers, and learners where trust was at the center of her leadership. However, the principalship also came with difficulties. Beatriz endured hardship that impacted her leadership style, her professionalism, and her identity as a school leader.

I am going to speak first to gender and even age discrimination. When I came into leadership, I was still in my 20's. I think so, I was in my late twenties, yes, when I started in administration and I used to look very young. People would question my experience or how could I be there. I looked very young, short in stature and a little petite. I felt like I had to overcome and get the respect that I felt I should have as a school leader. Yes, maybe it was something that I perceived but I had one parent at one point when I was an assistant principal, he questioned my credentials. He said “Well I want to see where it says that you can do this because you look very young.” He was just upset with the outcome of his child and that was the first thing in my first year as a vice principal...I felt like I had to keep proving myself. I felt like I had to do everything quicker, faster, farther and I had to be on top of my game constantly. I was being compared with others that had more experience or males that had that job.

In addition to the gender and age discrimination she experienced, Beatriz described a meeting with an interim superintendent to discuss budget and staffing allocations, which resulted in a sexual harassment case.

That meeting was inappropriate. He basically was telling me about his ranch. He said it's where he goes to ponder the decisions that were going to impact everybody. Consequently, what I took away is that he told me that he wanted me to go to his ranch before he made his decision, so that I could help him make his decision. He was giving me directions on how to get to his ranch and what to do if he had some flag up because his wife was there...Of course, I was very upset about that. I left that evening and ran into the assistant superintendent. She called me in and said “You look like you just saw a ghost, are you ok?” She gave

me something to write with and she said I needed to write everything down. Consequently I filed a sexual harassment complaint. I had three days left to my contract and so I took three personal days and I finished all my work...I was the youngest principal there, female. I dressed very professionally with a jacket and either slacks or skirt. I wore professional clothes not trendy or fashionable. I have always been very professional and I want people to look at me and not how I dressed. All that came into question and I thought 'oh my goodness'. At that moment they would never say that to a man but that line of question would never come in with a man and ask about their clothes. It was just the fact that I was female and again going back to that I was Latina.

While Beatriz suggested that such incidents led to her resilience, she acknowledged that the incidents also contributed to her own need to protect herself by portraying a particular professional identity (Crow, Day, & Moller, 2016), "I had to overcome that and I had to overcome the fact that I am Latina and that I did. I would say that I don't know how to describe myself but very professional and put together."

Floreciendo y creciendo raíces: Nurturing a Path and a Spirit for Social Justice

*No se raje mi prietita,
apriétese la faja aguántese.
Su linaje es antigüísimo,
sus raíces como las de los mesquites,
bien plantadas, horadando bajo tierra
a esa corriente, el alma de la tierra madre-
tu origen. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 200)*

This excerpt from Anzaldúa's poem, "No se raje, chicanita" urges the brown skinned Chicana to remain steadfast in the face of adversity, knowing that her roots are ancient and strong like the mesquite tree; roots that physically and metaphorically are born from mother earth. These roots are similar to the kinds of paths that school leaders must forge in the quest for social justice. School leaders must nurture the conditions for meaningful collaboration among educators that stimulate collective thought, inquiry, and reflection, while supporting the

personal and professional development and leadership capacity of teachers. The foundation for *floreciendo* and *creciendo raíces* that nurture a spirit for social justice requires a deep understanding of the importance of building and sustaining relationships with both school staff and local community members that work to transform the educational experiences of children. In their roles as school leaders, the Latina administrators leveraged power as mentors, supporters, and dream makers inviting teachers to re-imagine the possibilities and to push boundaries. They equally nurtured and sustained a community of learners built on the assets and strengths of people; empowering their respective school communities and ultimately students and families. Such was the case with Linda, Elena, and Rachel, *chicanitas* who essentially leveled the power dynamics of traditional school leadership into a more collective approach.

Rachel had applied and interviewed for several principal positions before she was successful in securing her current role. Her superintendent reassured Rachel that her patience was worth it saying, “You are what they need in this community.” To her, “as an Anglo male superintendent, he was recognizing what our district needed because of the population that we served.” Now Rachel reciprocates the guidance and mentoring she received to develop future school leaders, and particularly Latinas.

I think it’s important, I look back, like “Ok, what can I do now to encourage that growth and leadership in my teachers?” And so I look to, particularly again, my strong Latina teachers that just have a strong foundation in curriculum, they have all those good pieces and I try to do some of the coaching and some of the mentoring that I feel was done with me and hopefully again inspire and light something up in them like was done with me. And say, “You know, I see this in you and I really want to encourage you to go for it.” And I can say that in the last couple of years and even when I was an assistant principal, you know that I don’t give my teachers the opportunity to waive their summative conferences. I sit down with every single one of the teachers that I appraise and we talk about professional goals because there’s people that I know want more, and I want them to want more, and I want them to want to become an instructional coach. I want them to become a dyslexia intervention teacher. I want them to become a librarian. And I can say that in the time that I’ve been there we’ve had a lot of promotion and growth with teachers that you know have gone back to school

and gotten their master's degree...So I think it's just a matter of encouraging them and them knowing that they have support and if they need to take a day off to take their state exam or if they need to go do observations for their internships that I'm there to support them because I know that the cause for education extends, it's more than just in-outside of our walls you know what I mean? These teachers will hopefully have a greater impact and I want them to...To me that's a sign of a good leader. I'm growing more leaders because I know where the need is...

Rachel's dedication in supporting Latinx communities, as well as future Latina school leaders was evident. She recognized there were other leaders "that don't feel the same way I do," but she enacted her own agency for the greater "cause for education".

When speaking about leadership, Linda acknowledged that most leaders do not look like her. She did not fit the White, male archetype; her mere presence was a sign of resistance.

I am sure you can understand we tend to have male White leaders whether in schools, whether in companies. Always, that is the ideal statue. That is what we see a lot and leaders come in all shapes and sizes and genders and I think that is important for our kids to know, for our parents to know. It doesn't have to be the strong White male it can be a softer type of female figure that still has the vision and goals and the leadership qualities to run a company, or to run a school, or an organization. But I never made that my overlying mission. I am not that overly feminist. I am all about feminine values but I am not overly annoying feminist, "Oh we have to do this, we have to do that, and we have to prove it because we are women." We have to prove it because we are good leaders and good people and we are female at the same time.

Moreover, when asked if her culture had an impact on her leadership she responded, Not overtly I don't think. I have had a lot of mentors from all [cultures] that I respect and took pieces from but I wasn't trying to be a copycat of anybody. There were just some things I admired from my role models including my mother that influence some of my leadership qualities. I certainly don't want to be portrayed, I shouldn't say this, I don't want to be portrayed as the angry Hispanic lady that only cares about the Hispanics you know, or that I am trying

to get vengeance on the wrongs of Hispanic culture. I am just trying to close the gaps that exist and still exist and trying to get better, but we still have a long way to go because of the discriminatory practices that happened in education a long time ago that we had no part of but we are dealing with and still dealing with those effects. I certainly know of leaders I don't want to be like, and I try hard to avoid mimicking those leadership qualities and I know I have a lot of leadership role models that I highly admire and use pieces of them, but I make it my own.

Linda's experiences highlight the importance of her mentors, including her mother, who encouraged her to seek administrative roles and informed her leadership style. Interestingly, Linda's story also captures the tension of being a Latina school leader who does not want to be seen as a feminist or as solely an advocate for Latinx children and families.

Reflections and Hopes for the Future

The *testimonios* presented here reflect the tensions and triumphs that can come with being a Latina school leader. They also reveal the collective themes of *ternura* and *tenacidad*, while honoring the unique lived experiences and cultural ways of knowing of each Latina leader. The use of *testimonio* as a deliberate methodological approach breaks traditional and colonized forms of research and places power and knowledge creation back into the hands of a marginalized community of women within the public school system. This study challenges future research and scholars to adopt more congruent methods like *testimonio* that are culturally responsive to Latinx/Chicanx communities and are grounded in non-traditional epistemological frameworks.

Given the *testimonios* shared, school districts in conjunction with their respective superintendents and school boards are also called to be more deliberate in hiring and providing support and mentorship to recruit and retain more Latina principals. Investing in the development of mentoring and peer coaching programs for aspiring and novice school leaders is key (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2008), although such efforts should utilize culturally responsive and sustaining approaches, such as same-race mentoring (Magdaleno, 2006), and be flexible in their structure to foster mutual learning and the development of nonhierarchical relationships between mentors and mentees (Peters, 2010). Schools and districts can draw upon aspects of successful mentoring and peer coaching programs for school leaders both from within and

outside the U.S. to guide them in the development of their own programs (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2008). They can also partner with principal preparation programs in their local communities to share in the costs, development, and implementation of mentoring and coaching programs, as well as professional development opportunities that provide support to current and aspiring Latina school leaders.

Moreover, principal preparation programs must make courageous efforts and become more cognizant of the realities faced by Latina school leaders in particular, to ensure their success once in the field. Principal preparation programs can begin engaging in these efforts by devoting greater energies into preparing social justice school leaders ready and willing to serve Latinx communities. Programs should also prepare Latinas, as well as other aspiring leaders of color, for the microaggressions and overt discrimination they may face by explicitly discussing such possibilities and coaching aspiring leaders on how to respond (Peterson & Vergara, 2016). Inviting current school leaders to share their experiences and strategies for dealing with such inequities in the field is also recommended (Peterson & Vergara, 2016). Preparation programs can also ensure their graduates, including Latina leaders, continue to be supported in practice by establishing alumni network organizations that incorporate formal and informal opportunities for the development of mentoring relationships and safe in-person and online spaces to discuss the realities associated with being female school leaders of color. Only when more safe and candid spaces for deliberate conversation and support are created will the pipeline for Latina school administrators begin to grow.

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