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# Rising to the top: the personal and professional journeys of four Hispanic women leaders in higher education

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**Rising to the top: The personal and professional journeys  
of four Hispanic women leaders in higher education**

by

Lyvier Leffler Aschenbrenner

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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## ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to determine, through interviews, what educational and socio-cultural characteristics Hispanic women leaders in higher education possess. This study also provides an outlet for four Hispanic women leaders to share their unique experiences and journeys during their rise to administration. They were able to share their perceptions of their own career paths. The results offer advice for other Hispanic women aspiring to ascend into leadership positions. The in-depth descriptions of their personal experiences provides an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the types of barriers associated with access to higher educational leadership positions. The findings of this study expand the current body of knowledge, contributing significant information about Hispanic female leaders.

The research design of this study was qualitative, using inquiring interviews to unleash the stories of four Texan Hispanic women leaders. The findings were based on face-to-face interviews with the Dr. Margot Perez-Greene, Director of NISOD, Dr. Juliet Garcia, President of Southmost College and the University of Texas at Brownsville, Dr. Ana “Cha” Guzmán, President of Palo Alto College, and Dr. Tessa Martinez Pollack, President of Our Lady of the Lake University. This qualitative study focused on five research questions: (1) What childhood or family background experiences and academic preparation did they have? (2) What career paths and patterns they have? (3) What were their perceived professional barriers? (4) Who were influential persons in their lives? and (5) What advice might they offer other Hispanic women wishing to become leaders in education? Each woman’s unique story provided emerging themes using statements provided by the women themselves. The



uniqueness of their stories deserved their own chapter in this dissertation. The syntheses of their emerging themes are displayed in the form of a matrix chart.

This study provided a voice to Margot's, Juliet's, Tessa's, and Cha's life stories—Hispanic women seeking leadership positions in higher education can comprehend what four women experienced and in their own way apply it in their attempt to reach a similar level of educational leadership. Further research is recommended to include the life stories of additional Hispanic female leaders in other states across the nation to identify shared characteristics and emerging themes.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Promises are made every day; some are kept, and some are not. Some promises are made just to appease others, while some are made from the heart. A promise is what brings me to this point in my life and in my educational journey. A college education was something my mother expected of me. It was never a matter of *if* I would go to college, it was *when* I would go to college. I recall her saying, “*Get your education. It’s something that nobody can take away from you, no matter what. Just get it. If you don’t use it, put it to the side, as there may be a day in your life when you’ll need to dust it off and use it.*” Little did I know the truth behind mom’s words.

In order for you to gain a greater understanding of the basis of this dissertation, I need to disclose more about myself. Until my research proposal meeting, my POS (Program of Study) committee members at Iowa State University were unaware of the personal meaning this research and dissertation had to me. This personal significance is what has helped me not only persevere through my studies but also through life.

During the 2002-2003 academic year I was nominated and selected to participate in the Leadership in the New Century (LINC) program sponsored by Iowa State University and the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees. As a part of this leadership development program, I was fortunate enough to meet and hear a wonderful Hispanic woman speaker, Dr. Margot Perez-Greene. She was the first Hispanic woman leader in higher education that I have ever had the privilege of meeting. That encounter created a desire in me to learn more about Margot, as well as, other Hispanic women leaders within higher education. Little did I know that initial encounter would lead me to an educational journey

that included a Ph.D. program and ultimately this study as a part of this process. The story of Margot is described in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. I will forever be amazed how life events and encounters can develop, mold, and guide us in more ways than we may realize at the time of their occurrence.

### **My Mother**

My mother, Liduvina Garcia, was a Hispanic woman from Brownsville, Texas. She did not speak English when my father, Walter Leffler, met her. He was on vacation and it was truly love at first sight. The story of their lives together almost seems surreal, like a fairy tale.

Liduvina and Walter corresponded by letters and phone calls through the translation skills of my mother's cousin, Lupita. As time passed they found that being apart from one another was unbearable, and they soon married in June of 1963. Mom moved to Iowa with her young son, Ruben, from a previous marriage. To add joy to their new marriage they had two children together: my sister, Ludy (short for Liduvina) in 1964, and me in 1967.

It was hard for Liduvina growing up in Iowa in those days; as such, she frequently became homesick. Thus, we would load up the old station wagon and make the long drive to Brownsville every six months so she could be reunited with her family. Sadly, mom never found happiness in Iowa, but sacrificed her joy for that of her family. Mom's accent was thick and broken, which was beautiful to us. However, she was very self-conscious of her accent and distanced herself from community events to avoid ridicule. Although she did make a few good friends who loved her for whom she was, overall, she was very lonely.

Mom instilled upon me some rather harsh words at an early age. “Don’t count on a man for anything,” and “Don’t have any more babies than you can afford to raise on your own.” She felt the pathway to independence was education, for she had come from a terrible, loveless first marriage where she described feeling trapped. Her first husband was Hispanic, whom she described as abusive and controlling, where everything she did was either wrong or not good enough for him. She would sometimes relive that phase in her life as she told her story; the story where she ran away from her husband’s house (Ruben, Sr.) in the middle of the night with baby Ruben to her parents’ house. Her parent’s home was where she lived and worked until she met my father.

Mother achieved a high school degree from a Catholic school. She recalled the strictness of the nuns on the young girls, but she also had fond memories. She loved telling the stories about when the nuns would leave the music room, and she would jump up and start playing the piano, and her friends would get up and dance on the tables. Oh, they would get in trouble, but the story as she told it brought a sparkle to her eye and laughter to her voice! The escapade was, no doubt, well worth the trouble that it may have caused her or her friends.

My father, Walter Leffler, was born in 1910, and was 26 years older than mom. He was also married before, and I have a half-sister, Patty, and half-brother, Terry. I am sure it was the talk of my Dad’s family when he remarried a Hispanic woman the same age of his children. However, the Lefflers embraced mother and took her under their wings with full acceptance. My dad had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education. He was an auctioneer during the day and worked in an ammunition factory at night. He was also what one would call a “hobby farmer” wherein we would have a small variety of livestock on our farm: a few cows, horses,

chickens, pigs, geese, ducks, and so on. I recall there was even a time that we had a beefalo (half buffalo and half cow) and a zebra. Dad would say we lived on old McDonald's farm and, for a young girl, living this type of country life was a dream come true. Dad was a huge advocate for hard physical labor. He believed if you worked hard enough, you could achieve whatever you want to in life.

Mom and Dad would frequently debate on whether or not a college education was something we children should obtain. Mother ultimately won that debate, with my brother, Ruben, achieving a Bachelor's degree; my sister, Ludy, attending college for a short time; and then me, Lyvier, continuing to receive my Master's degree. At the completion of my Master's, my mother urged me to continue on for my PhD, and there was a constant battle about it. At the time I graduated with my Master's, I had just married and I needed to be with my husband while he pursued his professional baseball career. I promised Mom that I would get my PhD. Mom understood my reason for waiting, but still mentioned it every chance she had, and made me promise her over and over again that I would go back for my PhD.

Little did I know that 6 months after I graduated, Mom would be killed in a terrible car accident. I was sickened by the fact that she would never see me raise a family as well as the fact that she would not see me keep my promise to her. Life continued as it always does, no matter what painful experiences we must endure. My marriage of 7 years ultimately ended in a divorce and left me with two small daughters to raise alone.

Thank God I had my education, or I don't know how I would have made ends meet. It was at that time in my life when I realized what Mom meant about not counting on a man for anything, and not having any more babies than I could raise on my own. I was reaping

the truth of her very words. I knew I needed to keep my promise to her now, more than ever, or else I would grow old and regret it the rest of my life. Someday my daughters will have a greater understanding, by reading this study, why I echo my mother's words of advice and expectations for higher education to them. So here I am, ABD (All But Dissertation) from Iowa State University and, with Mom's help from up above, I present my story.

### **My Study**

There is a paucity of research on Hispanic women in leadership positions in higher education. For this reason, as well as a personal yearning for a deeper understanding of Hispanic women in leadership educational positions, this study was selected for further research. I was intrigued to learn of the career paths traveled by successful Texas Hispanic women leaders in higher education, and desire to know what distinguishing characteristics Hispanic women bestow.

Over the last three decades, a recognized need has developed for colleges and universities to become more representative of the diverse demographic and cultural makeup of the United States population. During this period of time, the number of working women has also increased within all areas of the workforce, including higher education. In fact, women are the fastest growing segment of the population within higher education, and more women are receiving training and degrees in administration (Faulconer, 1995; Gomes & Fassinger, 1995). Beginning with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, courts have required organizations to mandate equal treatment in the hiring and promoting of men and women, which has served as a tool to encourage women to strive for leadership positions (Stansbury, Warner, & Wiggins, 1984).

The increase in women's employment was assisted by significant changes in the legislation designed specifically to benefit women in the workforce (Rhode, 1990; Stansbury et al., 1984; Touchton & Davis, 1991). While women may not statistically be the minority, they fit the definition of a minority group as singled out for differential and often discriminatory treatment (Ward, 2002). A minority group is a group of people who are singled out because of their physical or cultural characteristics and receive unequal treatment (Gillett-Karam, Roueche, & Roueche, 1991). Singling out by gender, in academia, wouldn't have been discussed a few decades ago; however, women have begun to gain parity in many academic areas over the past few decades.

Since changes have occurred within the legislation, women have and are continuing to hold more upper-level administrative positions in academia. They are pushing hard against the glass ceiling; As Ward (2002) stated, "The glass ceiling has started to crack" (p. 10). Although there are still three of the eight "Ivy League" schools in the United States that have women presidents today, the same amount since 2002 (Retrieved March 27, 2006, from <http://www.brown.edu>, <http://www.dartmouth.edu>, <http://www.princeton.edu>). Ward (2002) recognized that, "These gains owe much to the other minority struggles for affirmative action, anti-discrimination laws and [consciousness-raising] among men" (p. 11).

Although colleges and universities are showing a greater concern for the recruitment and retention of women and minority faculty (Gomes & Fassinger, 1995; Wunsch, 1994), women's low representation in higher education's management continues in comparison to their high level of presence in the classroom (Faulconer, 1995). Data reveal that males continue to hold the majority of educational administration positions and females continue to teach (Retrieved March 27, 2006, from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu>; Feldman, Jorgensen, &

Poling, 1988; Housen, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987). The number of women in senior administrative positions has increased since the mid-1980s; however, it is still not proportionate to their faculty rank. Women comprise approximately 46% of the administrative positions in community colleges (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002).

Institutions have responded by attempting to increase the number of underrepresented people of color and women into their student, faculty, and staff populations (Villalpando, 2002). Many of these institutions are dealing with various challenges associated with obtaining administrative diversity. Colleges and universities need to obtain an equally diverse administrative staff in order to build and maintain an institutional culture and climate that supports the American dream of obtaining a college education (Jackson, 2003). Caucasians make up 80.1% of current community college presidents. Only 8.7% of community college presidents are African Americans, and just 6.8% Hispanics (Retrieved March 27, 2006, from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu>). Those statistics include both genders, making women still underrepresented in higher educational leadership positions even though they possess the qualifications and skills to be effective administrators (Gomes & Fassinger, 1995; Stansbury et al., 1984). In the past 10 years, the percentage of female community college presidents has nearly tripled, from 11% to 27.6% (Retrieved March 27, 2006, from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu>).

The challenges are difficult, as the student demographics at American colleges and universities continue to expand and become more diverse. The Hispanic population is the fastest-growing minority group in the United States today. More than one in eight people in the United States are of Hispanic origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). In 2002, there were



37.4 million Latinos in the United States, representing 13.3% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

Although education historically has been the path for upward occupational, economic, and social mobility in the United States, Hispanics are an ethnic group that continues to complete college at a much lower rate than other ethnic groups and is more likely to drop out of high school (Soresnes, Brewer, Carroll, & Bryton, 1995; Vernez & Mizell, 2001). More than two in five Hispanics aged 25 and older have not graduated from high school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Hispanics are projected to contribute two-thirds to the growth in the size of the high-school-age population over the next decade. By 2010, Hispanics will comprise one out of every five young people of high school age, compared with one in ten in 1990 (Vernez & Mizell, 2001).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, the Hispanic population of Texas, which is already the “minority-majority,” is projected to expand by 66%: from 18.7 million in 1995, to between 27.2 and 28.2 million in the year 2025. With the emerging population of Hispanics, it is not surprising that Hispanics comprise 32% of the Texas population, and the figure is projected to jump by 59% by 2040. Only 4.9% of Texans enroll in higher education, compared with 6.1% in California, 6% in Illinois, and 5.6% in New York. By 2015, college enrollment in Texas is projected to dip to 4.6% or less (Arnone, 2003). Texas collegiate officials are concerned with the growth rate they are experiencing and are fearful they will not be able to meet the needs of this population (Arnone, 2003). Because of these reasons, coupled by my personal interest in Texas, I decided to focus on the demographic area to the State of Texas for this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a significant lack of Hispanic women leaders in higher education. Faced with the documented changes in demographics and labor forces, there appears to be an undeniable need for encouragement of Hispanic women to enroll in higher education institutions, pursue advanced degrees, and strive for employment in higher education administrative positions. As revealed in the literature review in this study, Hispanic women aspiring for careers in leadership positions in higher education frequently are faced with barriers that may affect their promotions.

Hispanic student enrollment data in higher education indicate statistically that the odds are against Hispanics succeeding in education. Students need role models in educational leadership positions so they may aspire to attain terminal degrees in college. Yet, where are these Hispanic leaders? Hispanics account for 2.9% of full-time college faculty members, and 3.2% of college administrators (Schmidt, 2003). More Hispanic women leaders in higher education are needed. Women seem to encounter more barriers than contributors for occupational promotion than men do, and being minority only appears to compound the existing barriers for women (Basset, 1990; Escobedo, 1980; Nieves-Squire, 1991; Shakeshaft, 1987).

### **Overview and Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to reveal the personal and professional characteristics of four Texas Hispanic woman leaders in higher education posses. The findings are based on face-to-face interviews with four purposefully selected recipients. The study examined the women's background, which included childhood and family experiences. It included

informal and formal academic preparation experiences, including institutions attended and degrees held. The research also identified career paths the women experienced.

This study also attempted to identify any perceived barriers as well as opportunities for the women's professional successes. This will benefit present leaders in higher education as they face increases of the Hispanic populations in their demographical areas.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding the study focused on the following five questions:

1. What childhood or family background experiences and academic preparation did they have?
2. What career paths and patterns did they have?
3. Were there any perceived professional barriers?
4. Were there influential persons in their lives?
5. What advice might they give to other Hispanic women wishing to become leaders in higher education?

The results of this study can be used as guidelines for other Hispanic women in their attempt to reach a similar level of educational leadership.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study, the personal and professional experiences of the selected Hispanic women leaders was best uncovered through qualitative research as this method involves perceptions about a phenomenon through their eyes. This study was designed to capture, through phenomenological interviewing, a wealth of valuable data regarding the qualities Hispanic women leaders possess. The interview is seen as a negotiated accomplishment of

both interviewers and respondents that is shaped by the contexts and situations in which it takes place (Bloom, 1998; Claire, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interview process utilized in this study was a linguistic interaction in which the meanings of questions and responses were contextually grounded and jointly constructed by each woman and myself.

The occupational paths shared by the women revealed significant obstacles.

Discovering how the women gained control of their careers, whether they faced their journey alone or if they were mentored throughout their careers, provided beneficial data. The feminist theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation by Gottfredson (1981) describes the development process leading to the formation of occupational aspirations. Gottfredson's theory emphasizes women as having the power and self drive to lead and take control of their own occupational desires. Thus, Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation was applied to guide, inform, and enrich the study.

Addressing the racial and minority barriers the Hispanic women may have encountered is imperative. Critical Race Theory (CRT) also enriched the study in addressing racial and minority barriers. A central methodology in CRT is to "provide counter truths of racism and discrimination faced by African American, Latinos/as, and others, through racial storytelling and narratives" (Villenas et al., 1999, p. 33). "CRT theorists have built on everyday experiences perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a better understanding of how Americans see race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 38).

The methodological framework of the study was qualitative, using phenomenology interviews to tell the stories of four Texan Hispanic women leaders. This study engaged me,

as the researcher, in the use of phenomenology to assist in achieving an enhanced understanding of the personal and professional experiences of these women.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant due to the lack of research conducted on Hispanic women leaders in higher education. Discovering and giving voices to their experiences are important for two reasons. First, sharing the stories of Hispanic women who have obtained positions in higher education administration will offer encouragement to new and emerging Hispanic women leaders in education. Second, new upcoming leaders could model the experiences described by the recipients and apply successful strategies that are appropriate to their situations for their career advancement. Exclusive of the information this study contributes, rising leaders who are aspiring to advance in higher education must travel this path alone without gaining knowledge from specific examples.

This research also provides an opportunity for four Hispanic women leaders to share their unique experiences and journeys during their rise in higher education administration. Each woman was able to share her perceptions of her own career path as well as offer advice for other Hispanic women aspiring to ascend into leadership positions. The in-depth descriptions of their personal experiences offers an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the types of barriers associated with access to higher education leadership positions. By analyzing the educational profiles and career paths of this small group of Hispanic women, this study identifies the characteristics these women share. The findings of this study will expand the current body of knowledge by contributing significant information about Hispanic female leaders and their career paths. It will also provide a voice to their stories to

enable Hispanic women seeking leadership positions in higher education to comprehend what these women experienced and, in their own way, apply it to their lives and leadership opportunities.

These data will assist current leaders in identifying paths that will facilitate educational leadership opportunities for Hispanic women. This study may also provide valuable information for other Hispanic women aspiring to become future leaders in higher education.

### **Limitations**

The focus of this study was designed to research the characteristics of Hispanic women leaders in higher education. While ethnographic in nature, this study was limited to one 90-minute interview, news stories, and biographies about each of the subjects. I did not have the ability to be with these Hispanic women and view their everyday interactions for a longer period of time. An in depth observation period may have proven beneficial and allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of their personal and professional lives.

### **Delimitations**

The research was delimited to four Texas, self-identified, Hispanic women in leadership roles in higher education who were selected by a purposefully sampling process. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to other Hispanic females in administrative positions. I may be biased because of my own background and experiences. As a Hispanic woman in a position of educational leadership, I might have influenced participants' responses regardless of a conscious intent to eliminate or minimize any display of bias.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms were used for the purposes of this study:

*Barriers:* Perceived obstacles faced by the Hispanic women leaders in their ascension to leadership positions in higher education.

*Career Path:* The sequence of identifiable professional positions held over an individual's work history.

*Color:* People who identify themselves as African American, Mexican American/Chicano/Latino/Hispanic, Asian American, or Native American.

*Gender Gap:* The singling out of women for differential and often discriminatory treatment (Ward, 2002).

*Glass Ceiling:* The promotional barriers that restrict, prevent, and/or delay a woman's mobility within an organization or occupation (Mattis, 1994).

*Hispanic:* It should be noted that persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race (Bureau, 2004). Both terms, Hispanic and Latino, are used interchangeably. However, many groups reject the term Hispanic as being too broad and inappropriately give it to the Latino groups without consent. Many argue that the term Hispanic does not acknowledge the heterogeneity in the Latino group. However, there are regions where Latinos prefer the term Hispanic. Some college students prefer the term Latino over Hispanic, indicating that Latino(a) is even more sensitive to people with *mestizo* (European people, culture, and lifestyle) background and not Spanish heritage. However, the term used by government agencies and the media is Hispanic (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

*Human Capital:* The type of education, professional experiences, and mobility people hold and/or have access to (Jackson, 2003).

*Leadership:* The process used by anyone, regardless of rank, to create a meaningful collaboration among individuals for a common purpose (Pearman, 1998). For the purpose of this study, leadership in academia refers to those individuals working in higher educational upper administration. Nevertheless, leadership is “to help people achieve what they are capable of, to establish a vision for the future, to encourage, to coach and to mentor, and to establish and maintain successful relationships” (Levine & Crom, 1993).

*Minority:* A portion of the population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 presented the introduction of the study. This study was developed out of my personal and professional interest about the difficulties that are common to the professional success of Hispanic women. There are very few Hispanic women in leadership positions in higher education. Hispanics (men and women) account for just 2.9% of full-time college faculty members, and 3.2% of college administrators (Schmidt, 2003). Therefore, this study offers the valuable summaries of the personal experiences and professional career paths of four Hispanic women, and offers advice for upcoming Hispanic women aspiring to become leaders in the field of higher education. Identifying the characteristics, experiences, and career perceptions of successful Hispanic women leaders will benefit not only young Hispanic women aspiring to become leaders in higher education but also Hispanic women who dream of a better life for themselves and their daughters.



## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a review of the literature, and examines the background and evolution of Hispanic women leaders in higher education. The structure of the review of the literature is from a broad-based perspective of women in general to the more narrow focus on Hispanic women. The literature reveals a significant lack of research on Hispanic women in leadership positions in higher education and the barriers they face. The literature review is divided into seven categories: (a) gender barriers (Castellanos & Jones, 2003); (b) advancements (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Jackson 2003, 2004); (c) mentoring (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002); (d) networking (Dunn, 1997); (e) family roles (Gonzales-Figueroa & Young, 2005); (f) career paths (VanDerLinden, 2004); and (g) feminine and Hispanic leadership (Jackson, 2003). Collectively, these sections illustrate the need for further research on Hispanic women leaders in higher education.

### **Overview**

Women are and will continue to be a major component in the United States workforce. This statement is supported by the literature (Jackson, 2003), as well as the personal observations of each of us by watching our grandmothers, mothers, and sisters become gainfully employed throughout the years. In one way or another, we have all been witnesses to the increasing number of females in the workforce. The focus of this study was on the characteristics of Hispanic women in leadership higher education positions; however, the literature provides an overview of the influences and barriers all women encounter in their career advancements. The literature suggests that the push for gender equity in the

United States has not been an easy one (VanDerLinden, 2004). Without the wide assortment of federal, state, local legislative, administrative and judicial mandates, the changes in promoting nondiscrimination equity and advancement for women would not have been made possible (Jackson, 2003; Rhode, 1990; Touchton & Davis, 1991).

Today's women are continuing to strive for professional development and are employed at more upper-level administrative positions in academia than a few decades ago (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1998; Reason, Walker, & Robinson, 2002). As a result, women have increased visibility in employment positions and are working in positions that, in the past, were primarily occupied by men.

### **Gender Barriers**

Women appear to encounter more barriers than contributors to advancement than men. The addition of racial or ethnic minority identification only serves to compound existing barriers for women (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Flores, 1992; Mattis, 1994). Women in higher education also frequently experience: isolation (Dunn, 1997; Flores, 1992; Garza, 1993), stress and lack of power (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Martinez, 1998), experiences often attributed to barriers such as lack of training (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Dunn, 1997; Martinez, 1998), institutions themselves (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1998; Bronstein, Rothblum, & Solomon, 1993; Gillett-Karam et al., 1991), and lack of female role models (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1998; Dunn, 1997; Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005; Martinez, 1998).

Women are challenged by attempting to balance career, marriage, and family (Caldas & Bankston, 1997; Fordman, 1996; Mattis, 1994; Nieves-Squires, 1991; Rendón & Valdaex,

1994; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito F., Torres, & Talbot, 2000). Additional factors discussed in the literature that serve as barriers to the advancement of all women include: gender-stereotyped patterns of differential treatment (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1998; Reason et al., 2002), issues of equity (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1998; Gillett-Karam et al., 1991; Jackson, 2003; Reason et al., 2002; Zichy, 2000), lack of power (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Reason et al., 2002; Zichy, 2000), social development differences (Dunn, 1997; Villalpando, 2002; Zichy, 2000), lack of self confidence (Arminio et al., 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2000), perceptions of leadership traits and differential leadership strategies (Braddock & McParland, 1986; Bronstein et al., 1993; Dunn, 1997; Flores, 1992; Jackson, 2004; Reason et al., 2002; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Zichy, 2000).

A review of the status of working women regarding gender equality and employment equity reveals the positive impact of legislative, administrative, and judicial mandates on equality regarding informal treatment based on gender (Rhode, 1990). Although legislation has partially enabled breaking barriers for entry into nontraditional jobs, many occupations still remain highly segregated or stratified by gender (Dunn, 1997; Rhode, 1990). There still appears to be a continued disparity in actual status. Barriers broken down over the last three decades, as a result of the enacted legislation, have been primarily at the entry level of nontraditional employment. Although equal pay for equal work has been mandated, relatively few men and women do the same work. If domestic and labor are combined, the average woman works longer hours and receives substantially less pay than men (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1998; Dunn, 1997; Reason et al., 2002; Rhode, 1990).

### **Barriers for Hispanic women**

Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority group in the United States today (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). More than one in eight people in the United States are of Hispanic origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). In 2002, there were 37.4 million Latinos in the United States, representing 13.3% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Hispanics are projected to contribute two-thirds to the growth in the size of the high-school-age population over the next decade. By 2010, Hispanics are projected to be the largest minority group (Reason et al., 2002; Vernez & Mizell, 2001). Hispanics will comprise one out of every five young people of high school age, compared with one in ten in 1990 (Vernez & Mizell, 2001). However, more than two in five Hispanics aged 25 and older have not graduated from high school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). In addition, there are significantly lower numbers of Hispanics enrolled in colleges and universities than their population proportion would suggest (Flores, 1992; Jackson, 2003; Reason et al., 2002). One of the reasons for the low enrollment is the stress factor that Hispanic students face when enrolling in predominantly white colleges.

A review of the literature review has revealed the history of the challenges Hispanic women have faced in gaining equality in the workplace. Braddock and McParland (1986) researched the labor market and institutional barriers, and reported that racism is a problem in attaining equal employment opportunities for Chicano and Latino professors in the United States. In particular, Latinas are confronted with barriers related to their race because of their ancestry, and sexism because of their gender (Flores, 1992).

With racism, comes isolation. Many Latino(a) faculty express a sense of isolation and insulation they have experienced (Flores, 1992). Studies by Flores (1992) and Garza

(1993) identified that many such faculty are isolated by their discipline because they tend to be clustered in the ethnic studies, bilingual education or some other minority/language discipline. Latino(a) faculty are also isolated from their peers because they are often the only one or one of few minority members in their department. “There is no question that Chicanos/Latinos tend to be heavily concentrated in only certain departments, and typically in the lower sectors of those departments” (Garza, 1992, p. 13). Finally, they tend to be isolated socially because they lack cohesive support groups for other Chicano faculty across disciplines (Flores, 1992).

Research by Garza (1993) revealed minority faculty members tend to participate in committees of limited scope such as those dealing with cultural matters, study abroad, and student recruitment. “In this way, universities create and maintain affirmative action ‘dumping grounds,’ university enclaves with little connection to the university’s mainstream curriculum and scholarly life” (Garza, 1993, p. 36). This racial and ethnic separation contributes to the formation of separate by equal racial/ethnic division, or in a sense, a “barrioization” of Chicano/Latino faculty. The term *barrio* is defined as a Latino neighborhood (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In essence, Garza (1993) described the Latino(a) faculty as creating their own neighborhood within the educational system.

Other barriers include lack of role models and mentors for female and ethnic minority students (Rendón, 1991). “No one is encouraging and guiding them toward academic careers, and no one is showing them how it is done” (Bronstein et al., 1993, p. 21). “For women and people of color, however, paths that may lead to academia may not even be perceived, because of the messages embedded in the educational process from the time they enter school” (Bronstein et al., 1993, p. 18).

### **Advancements for Women**

Studies in the literature suggest acquiring a terminal degree as a major contributor to the advancement for women in higher education (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1998; Arminio et al., 2000; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Dunn, 1997; Gillett-Karam et al., 1991; Jackson, 2004, 2005). Doctorates awarded to all women and minorities increased in the 1990s, with a slight increase for minority women (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Jackson, 2004). There was a continued under-representation of women in the tenured ranks, women concentrated in the lower academic ranks, and women receiving lower salaries than men (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Gillett-Karam et al., 1991; Jackson, 2004; Reason et al., 2002).

Other factors identified in the literature as contributing to the advancement of women in higher education include: commitment to career goals (Dunn, 1997); increased job satisfaction (Blackhurst, 2000); increased administrative status (Jackson, 2005; Reason et al., 2002); empowerment (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Zichy, 2000); increased development of skills and strategies (Zichy, 2000); networking (Rosener, 1994); commitment to excellence (Zichy, 2000); and mentoring (Arminio et al., 2000). Emerging trends within higher education suggest that: leadership development programs (Ebbers, Coyan, & Kelly, 1992); improved career opportunities (Gillett-Kara et al., 1991); development of supportive institutional environments (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1998); and the establishment of women's centers (Jackson, 2003; Rendón, 1991).

### **Advancements for Hispanic women**

Studies about Hispanics have identified factors positively influencing advancement: professional training (Zichy, 2000); academic preparation (Arminio et al., 2000; Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Jackson, 2005); social origins (Dunn, 1997); networking (Nieves-Squires, 1991; Rosener, 1994; Tushnet Bagenstos, 1987); Spanish speaking ability (Schmidt, 2003); family support (Caldas & Bankston, 1997; Fordman, 1996); knowledge of institutional process for advancement (Garza, 1993); and mentoring (Arminio et al., 2000; Bronstein et al., 1993; Rendón, 1991). Some of the factors that can positively influence advancement for Hispanics, excluding those related to language (Schmidt, 2003) and ethnicity, are similar to those that can positively influence advancement for all women.

Although recognition, acceptance and advancement have been difficult for Hispanics in the workforce, there is increasing visibility in some areas. In their book, *“Let my spirit soar! Narratives of diverse women in school leadership,”* Maenett Ah Nee-Benham and Joanne Cooper (1998) provided the analogy of a crane to Hispanic women leaders in higher education.

This crane is a symbol of our hope for women and minorities in education. Somehow, we are often hopelessly out of place in the gun-metal gray institutions of education in America. Gritty, dull, and sterile, they carry our presence like the sill carries the crane. Often, we make no sense to our surroundings, and yet we hang on, day after day, shining in our corners, miraculously surviving. Like the origami crane, a diversity of women leaders can contribute in new and surprising ways to the institutions they live and work in. They can be unexpected gifts to the world of schools, bring color, joy, and hope to everyone who passes. They can, if they are allowed to survive. Yet it is more than being allowed. There is a stubborn persistence in the survival of that crane, something that refuses to die, despite the delicate appearance and tiny size against the massive stone building. (p. xvii)

## Mentoring

A mentoring relationship is a long-term, professionally centered relationship between an individual and another person in which the more experienced person provides career guidance to the person of less experience (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). Mentoring can be used as a strategy to promote success among underrepresented individuals in higher ranks (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005). Valverde (1976) and Ortiz (1980) concurred that the lack of role models for minorities in administrative positions contributes to their negative perceptions of pursuing careers in educational administration. They also agreed that many minorities lack role models in their early years; they need more support—psychological as well as financial—to maintain aspirations, when in actuality they receive less.

Albino (1992) stated that, in order to succeed in a male-dominated career environment, women must develop compensatory strategies. Women leaders in institutions of higher education concur that women must have a strong sense of self, insofar as projecting self-confidence and refusing to take criticism personally. Laura Rendón is a first-generation Mexican American who journeyed as a community college student and is now the Department Chair of the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program at Iowa State University. In her personal story, "*From the Barrio to the academy: Revelations of a Mexican American 'scholarship girl,'*" Rendón (1991) discussed what she perceives it takes to be successful in academia. According to Rendón, "To become academic success stories we must endure humiliation, reject old values and traditions, mistrust our experience, and disconnect with our past. Ironically, the academy preaches freedom of thought and expression but demands submission and loyalty" (p. 62). Albino (1992) also identified women as having naturally strong interpersonal skills that they must learn to establish



mentoring relationships. Women must also learn to set priorities and be prepared to take on responsibility in unfamiliar areas.

Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) considered the role of mentoring when researching the career paths for community college leaders. Their respondents were comprised of 1,200 randomly selected community college administrators across 14 administrative positions drawn from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) databank to provide a representation by geographic location—urban and rural—and by single or multi-campus sites. The data collected yielded a 54% usable survey response rate. One component of the survey asked the respondents to identify experience with mentoring relationships. More than 51% of male and 63% of female administrators indicated they had mentors. Approximately 55% of male and 63% of female administrators were currently mentoring others; 45% more than one person, and 18% one person. Forty percent were not currently mentoring others. Mentoring also appeared to have a positive effect on obtaining employment; approximately 30% of male and 42% of female administrators stated that a mentor assisted them in obtaining their current position (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002).

Gonzalez-Figueroa and Young (2005) examined the attitudes toward mentoring others and the receiver of the mentoring relationship, with aspects of ethnic identity, gender roles and perceptions of professional success among professional Latina women. The findings implied that ethnic identity, itself, has some relationship to the preference of a mentor of similar ethnicity as well as the nature of the mentoring experience desired. Ethnic identity was used interchangeably with aspects of acculturation, and acculturation has been used interchangeably with assimilation. Gonzalez-Figueroa and Young defined acculturation as a social process comprised of changes in cultural patterns after people of different cultural

backgrounds come into repeated contact with each other. Acculturation implies a weakening of ethnic identity, whereas assimilation implies a complete loss of ethnic identity and a potential acceptance of the majority (Gonzales-Figueroa & Young). The study participants did not lose their Latina ethnic identity. The purposeful sample of the study was comprised of 103 Latina women in professional occupations in areas of business, academia, policy, and politics. The majority of the women were U.S.-born, reported English as their second language, and had a balanced sense of ethnic identity. Gonzales-Figueroa and Young inferred in their findings that the women endured the challenges in the U.S. mainstream while sustaining their cultural ties.

Gonzales-Figueroa and Young (2005) also revealed in their findings that some of the women were mentored at varying levels in their careers by mentors of different ethnicities; however, they preferred mentors of similar ethnicities. Their findings reinforce that having mentors of similar ethnicity helps to preserve cultural and ethnic identity, and the “unspoken understanding of similarities in the challenges encountered by Latina women in the professional workforce” (Gonzales-Figueroa & Young, p. 220). The fact that the mentor understands the challenges and experiences is an additional benefit that is appealing to potential protégés. Their findings also revealed cases where Latina women were not mentored. Those who were mentored tended to be informal and the mentoring was not necessarily related to career, implying “that those women have gotten into those roles on their own and have been able to sustain those roles” (p. 223). Their study also showed a negative relationship between professional success and preference for a mentor of similar ethnicity, inferring that the higher the rank, the more income received, and the less likely the mentoring is needed.

Gonzalez-Figueroa and Young (2005) concluded by recommending further research to identify contributing factors regarding formal and informal mentoring among Latina women. They recommend expanding the study to focus on specific, selected industries. It will be necessary to identify variables similar to those attempted in this study, such as willingness to mentor and/or be mentored, as well as disclosing the participants' self-reported ethnic identity (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young).

### **Networking**

“Women have power of which they are not aware: hence, they are unaware when they give away their power. Women are now learning that their power is increased through networking, intuition, and providing leadership” (Gillett-Karam et al., 1991, p. 64). Networking is defined as the systematic process of developing helpful contacts, linking people for assisting, supporting and helping each other find needed feedback (Loden, 1985). For many faculty members and administrators, networking is critical for professional advancement, as it is through these informal conversations and professional relationships that one often learns about departmental and institutional politics, professional opportunities, and other matters of importance. Stereotypes, as well as cultural and gender barriers, often deprive many Hispanic women of the networking and informal mentoring that are critical to their professional advancement (Nieves-Squires, 1991).

Minority women are less likely to be in networks than are minority men, although neither is highly represented in powerful groups (Dunn, 1997). Minority women are also excluded from a second path to administrative positions more than are minority men, being

less likely to be mentored by a well-connected professor of educational administration (Dunn, 1997).

There is overwhelming support in the literature indicating that networks and mentors are significant sources of social support in the academy (VanDerLinden, 2004). It is important for institutions to help foster these relationships, and women can facilitate a more direct role in networking and mentoring. Formal or institutionally mandated programs might not be necessary due to the varied nature of mentoring relationships (VanDerLinden). Nevertheless, “women who are currently community college leaders, presidents, or in other top-ranking administrative positions have the opportunity to help shape the organizational culture and create an inclusive environment for women administrators” (VanDerLinden, p. 10).

In an effort to get more Latinas moving into leadership positions within higher education, a group of women at Southwestern College, San Diego, CA met to form what came to be known as the Latina Leadership Network (LLN) (retrieved March 28, 2006, from <http://www.latina-leadership-network.org/index.php>). The LLN has five goals: (1) develop a statewide network and develop and promote Latina leadership in the California community college system; (2) dismantle systematic and institutional impediments to access and success of Latinas in the California community colleges; (3) develop and promote Latina leadership in the California community colleges; (4) celebrate the diverse cultural, social and linguistic heritage of Latinas; and (5) develop supportive networks beyond community colleges (retrieved March 28, 2006, from <http://www.latina-leadership-network.org/goals.php>). “We are the best-kept secret across the State and our potential is great!” stated Glenda Moscoso, president of the LLN (retrieved March 28, 2006, from

network.org/presmessage.php). President Moscos believes that Latinas in the state of California must continue to see an increase in Latinas serving in leadership roles, in the community as well as the community college. The organization host annual conferences where Latinas are willing to open up and share their life stories allowing others to glimpse into their everyday lives (retrieved March 28, 2006, from <http://www.latina-leadership-network.org/presmessage.php>).

### **Family Roles**

Having a family and an academic career is not simple matter (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005). Parental involvement is effective in obtaining educational achievement. Students from all socio-economic status (SES) levels and from various ethnic backgrounds show positive gains with the involvement of their parents. Parents of minority and disadvantaged children can make contributions to their children's achievement or lack of achievement in school (Fordman, 1996).

Parental expectations and SES are two important factors that are predictors of success for at-risk learners. Higher incomes in at-risk learners' households increase the predictability of academic achievement. Parental education can also be used to predict a learner's success in academic achievement when parents have at least some college (Caldas & Bankston, 1997), but Hispanic children are less likely than White children to have a parent attending college (Schmidt, 2003). Regardless of their parents' expectations nine out of ten Hispanic parents expect their children to attend college, which is close to expectations by White and Black parents (Schmidt, 2003).

Schmidt (2003) identified the struggles Hispanic students have in education as developing in their early years. Hispanics receive little exposure to the English language and are more likely to be living in poverty than Whites, and just as likely as Blacks (Schmidt, 2003). Caldas and Bankston (1997) explained that higher SES students, regardless of race, could suffer academically in their peer environments, either due to behaving like the low-achiever stereotype associated with the majority of their peers (Blacks) or because of receiving a “*dumbed down*” curriculum with the rest of the student body. By the age of 17, Hispanic high-school students, on average, have the same reading and mathematics level as a White 13-year-old, and those who graduate from high school are less likely to have taken the college-preparatory courses such as Algebra II and Chemistry (Schmidt, 2003). If given the opportunity to pursue higher education, minorities as well as low SES sons and daughters are lured to community colleges due to the low tuition and close proximity to their homes (Rendón & Valdaex, 1994).

Rodriquez et al. (2000) investigated factors attributing to the educational achievement of Latinas. In their journal article, “*Latina college students: Issues and challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*,” they revealed educational achievement was influenced by numerous factors centered around the student’s background. One of the most important indicators they cited was the mother’s role in the home and her support of the educational goals of her daughter. In addition, Latinas working outside the home who exercised decision-making powers within the family instilled independence in their daughters.

Latinas also experience stress when family obligations and educational aspirations conflict with parental expectations and gender-role conflict. This stress is especially indicative of first-generation Latina women. “Some Hispanic women in college are likely to

have heavy domestic responsibilities, a spouse, and children. Some find that their families oppose the idea of them attending college and may be discouraged from venturing into the world of academe in the first place” (Nieves-Squires, 1991, p. 6).

Hispanic parents are typically very protective of their children and might not value independence or personal growth as much as many parents in the dominant culture. Daughters are typically discouraged to move out of the family home or to act on decisions without their parents’ approval (Nieves-Squires, 1991). “When I would call my mother and explain how busy I was, she would encourage me to come home and give up everything. ‘*Vente, hija*’ [come back daughter], she would say, ‘*ya deja todo eso*’ [and leave everything behind]. It was her motherly duty to protect her child from the unknown” (Rendón, 1991, p. 59).

### **Career Paths**

The notion of career paths implies that there are a series of progressive positions that may represent climbing a hierarchy, increased salaries, increased recognition and respect, or more freedom to pursue personal interests (Wessel & Keim, 1994). Mattis (1994) studied the interests of women in relationship to their careers, and reported that more women than ever before are committed to their careers. This increase in women’s commitment to their careers is bumping against the tenure system, which was designed in the United States for males with supportive wives who maintain the home front so their husbands can devote the necessary time and energy needed to advance in academia (Bronstein et al., 1993). For the most part, similar arrangements do not exist for women faculty. “It appears that the tendency for women to be connected in the lower ranks and in non-tenure-track, part-time position, is due

in part to the conflicting demands of career and family relationship” (Bronstein et al., 1993, p. 25).

Nichols (1994) stated, “women must rely on themselves rather than on institutions to create careers. To be successful, women must carefully thread their way through a contradictory set of complex expectations, constantly balancing their own and others’ beliefs about what it means to be a manager” (p. xii). Research studies on the glass ceiling in academia have revealed minority women as getting a double barrier: one for being a woman, and two for being a minority (Dunn, 1997). This double whammy has had a negative effect on their mobility in academia. “The term glass ceiling was popularized in a 1986 Wall Street journal article describing the invisible barriers that women confront as they approach the top of the corporate ladder” (Dunn, 1997, p. 226). It has been difficult enough for women to begin developing their own career paths, but doubly difficult for Hispanic women. Nieves-Squires (1991) stated, “Often Hispanic women are torn by conflicting demands, especially when roles and behaviors acceptable in their background contradict those expected in an academic environment” (pp. 5-6).

Gomez and Fassinger (1995) conducted a qualitative study on the career paths of highly accomplished Latinas. They focused on the professional developmental experiences of 17 prominent United States Latinas across seven occupational fields. The women were selected by a panel of peers, and ranged from 34 to 60 years of age. The study explored the cultural, personal, and contextual variables in relation to the career development of the Latinas. It specifically explored the cultural identity and the work-family relationship. A special effort was made to interview Latinas whose heritage was from the Caribbean, Mexico, South America, and Central America. The participants lived in the cities of



Washington DC, New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, and Chicago. An attempt was made to interview at least two women who broadly represent the area in which they reside. The women had varied occupations: engineer, scientist, business owners, lobbyist, journalist, non-profit executives, public officials, and fine arts. Two of the women were also involved in education, in addition to their other professions.

Gomez and Fassinger (1995) were able to identify five areas of observation regarding the career paths of the women studied: (a) the career paths were not linear; (b) all but one of the participants spoke of a pivotal individual who had a positive influence in their lives and career self-efficacy; (c) those who had spouses or partners spoke highly of the support they were given; (d) being identified as a woman and Latina were core issues for the women; and (e) all expressed instances of discouragement, neglect, and prejudice from all areas of the educational system

When looking at career paths, it is also important to recognize the influence of job satisfaction. Blackhurst (2000) studied the career satisfaction and perception of gender discrimination among women professionals in student affairs positions. She developed the Career Satisfaction and Commitment Scale (CSCS) for the study. There were 307 women who responded to the questionnaire, ranging from 23 to 65 years of age. Less than one-third (29%) identified themselves as senior administrators, whereas slightly more than one-half (54%) were mid-level managers. Among those who indicated their ethnicity, 12% were White, 2% African American, 2% Hispanic American and, 1% Native American. Asian and Hispanic women perceived significantly more sex discrimination and reported lower levels of career satisfaction than White women. Satisfaction with the student affairs profession

appeared to be related to perceptions of sex discrimination. In addition, a substantial number of women in student affairs perceived themselves as victims of sex discrimination.

In another study of professional educators, Canada, Gaik Lim, and Tarver (1999) examined the relationship between job satisfaction and locus of control among student affairs administrators and academic administrators in higher education. Demographic variables of gender, age, ethnicity, and type of education were also examined to determine their relationship among the many variables. Three instruments of job satisfaction scales were used. The findings revealed the greatest satisfaction and internal locus of control orientation was among younger Caucasian males and females with or without doctoral degrees, whereas the least satisfaction was among minority females without doctoral degrees who worked as community college academic administrators.

Another factor attributed to job dissatisfaction is pay. As women gain more leadership positions they are frequently placed in positions of equal status as men. Unfortunately, equal status does not translate to equal pay. Reason, Walker, and Robinson (2002) utilized the 1999-2000 NASPA Salary Survey to examine the effects of gender, ethnicity, and highest degree earned to determine mean salaries of senior student affairs officers at public four-year institutions. They found that women and people of color were not represented proportionally at the Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) levels of administration. In addition, women and people of color did not reach their positions of SSAO at similar rates as Caucasian males. Women of color possessing a Master's degree earned the lowest salaries. Thus, they recommended that women secure terminal degrees as soon as possible to rise to senior-level positions. Ethnic background also affected the mean salary; SSAOs of color earned substantially more than Caucasian/non-Hispanic SSAOs. The

researchers suggested that qualitative methods of gathering data should be applied in future research to capture the “richness” of the SSAO’s individual stories. Such case studies could serve to compliment and enhance past research, and provide a clearer picture of ethnic and gender representation across administration levels as well as salary equity within the student affairs profession.

Career paths for community college leaders were studied by Amey and VanDerLinden (2002). The researchers perceived that leadership development should be an essential focus for community colleges, not only for the presidency but also for the range of career positions including administration, faculty, and staff. They studied career paths as well as the process used for advancing skills to acquire additional training and knowledge. The number of women in senior administrative positions has increased since the mid 1980s; however, it is still not proportionate to their faculty ranks. Women comprise approximately 46% of the administrative positions surveyed but still remain underrepresented in certain administrative offices such as president (27%) chief financial officer (CFO) (30%) and official responsible for all occupational and technical programs (OVE) (29%) (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002).

The study by Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) revealed few gender differences regarding the career paths for advancement of senior administrator positions. Although male and female administrators followed very similar career paths, there was a notable difference in the number of years worked in a position and the degree to which men and women were hired into their current position from their current institution or from other sectors. With the exception of OVEs, female administrators were in their current positions for fewer years than male administrators. In addition, excluding the positions of president and the official

responsible for developing partnerships with local business and industry (BIL), women were more likely than men to be promoted from within the same community college, with the largest difference occurring in the office of SSAO in which 75% of women and 55% of men were hired from within their current institutions (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). Although their research indicated an increase in women administrators, the representation of color has not increased substantially since the 1980s. The original study conducted by Moore et al. (1984, as cited in Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002) revealed that 90% of the survey respondents were white. In 2000, the ethnicity of administrators who responded were: approximately 84% white; 1% multiracial; 6% Black/African American; 1% Asian; 4% Hispanic; 1% Native American, and 2% did not respond. Because the difference in non-white, racial or ethnic categories was found to be minimal, a separate analysis of career paths and career issues was not conducted.

Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) recommended that search committees consider publicizing open positions in order to generate candidate pools that traditionally have been excluded in the administrative search process. Contracting executive search agencies is one example search committees should consider to fill other senior leadership positions other than that of the president (Amey & VanDerLinden).

A summary report by Jackson (2003) entitled, "Engagement, retention, and advancement for administrators of color in higher and postsecondary education," was designed to help policy makers, administrators, faculty, and researchers address the engagement, retention, and advancement (ERA) for administrators of color by providing empirical data on the status for people of color in college and university administration. Several findings were produced by Jackson's study. In an analysis of academic

administrative position attainment, female faculty were less likely than men to take on administrative duties but more likely to hold upper-level administrative positions. Among racial and ethnic groups, Asian faculty were most likely to become academic administrators and hold upper-level administrative positions. Asian faculty were also more likely than Whites to assume administrative positions, with African Americans being the less likely to fill academic administrative positions (Jackson, 2003).

Among the recommendations, Jackson (2003) indicated that higher education institutions developing programs with opportunities to help women and people of color should build critical forms of human capital (i.e., type of education, professional experiences, and mobility people hold and/or have access to). In addition, search committee members should be sensitized to value different forms of human capital. People of color and women should also be aware of the importance of building human capital, but the doing so in appropriate environments is more important. Last, great consideration should be given in the selection of search committee members and, more importantly, the person who chairs search committees.

### **Feminine and Hispanic Leadership**

Women are responding to the challenge of obtaining administrative positions but frequently lack the leadership skills and credentials necessary to succeed. Women and members of racial-ethnic minorities need to be represented and utilized in positions of leadership equivalent to their representation in the population (Gillett-Karam et al., 1991). Stansbury et al. (1984) found that the under-representation of women in positions of power and influence is tied directly to the division of labor between the sexes, where the woman is

seen as fundamentally responsible for the home. Over the past 20 years, this thought process has shifted and women are seen as equal players with men in the field of professional growth (Zichy, 2000).

In response to the desperate need for leadership training, new educational leadership programs are causing a paradigm shift (Robertson et al., 1995). This new style of leadership emphasizes inclusion concepts that promote a sense of cooperative and collective norms (Robertson et al.). The natural socialization of women assists in preparing them for this transformational style leadership (Robertson et al.). Shoya Zichy (2000) stated:

Clearly, the models of leadership have changed. Only twenty years ago most successful women dressed and acted like men. They wore pinstriped suits and silk bow ties and were described as forceful, competitive, logical, and task-oriented. More recently, as the upcoming profiles vividly demonstrate, they have been freed to exhibit a wider range of operating styles and goals. (p. 9)

The Leadership Institute for a New Century (LINC) was inaugurated in 1989, through the collaborative efforts of Iowa State University, the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees, and the Iowa Association of Community College Presidents (retrieved August 8, 2005, from <http://www.elps.hs.iastate.edu/hged/lincdes.php>). LINC is coordinated by Larry H. Ebbers, University Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) and Sharon Drake, Adjunct Assistant Professor of ELPS; both at Iowa State University. The purpose of the institute is to provide academic and internship opportunities to encourage the advancement of women and people of color into administrative leadership roles at Iowa community colleges.

In 1999, LINC began accepting men into the program. LINC participants learn from nationally recognized leaders. They also visit campuses and share ideas with community

college presidents and other national leaders. The institute is designed to prepare and encourage women, people of color, and men for leadership roles as well as personal growth. It also provides an excellent source of networking to increase diversity for the next century. Participants in LINC range from 25 to 60 years old, have a Bachelor's degree from various fields, are presently working in entry to mid-level positions in community colleges, and have been nominated by their respective community college president. More than 60% of the program's graduates have acquired job promotions since completing the program (retrieved August 8, 2005, from <http://www.elps.hs.iastate.edu/hged/lincdes.php>).

Ebbers, Coyan, and Kelly (1992) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of the LINC program. The total number of participants was 48 females, with only 3 being women of color—2 Blacks and 1 American Indian. Sixteen participants reported that they had received promotions since they participated in the program. Fifty percent believed that LINC was “very to somewhat instrumental” for their promotions. Of these individuals, 43% indicated the reason LINC was instrumental was because the program made them more visible on campus. Additional findings revealed by the participants were: 53% responded that LINC had helped them clarify their career goals; 45% wanted to be a vice president or president; 16% wanted to become a dean or department chair; 21% did not wish to change positions; and 18% were undecided (Ebbers et al., 1992).

Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) also examined leadership and professional development in a study of the career paths of community college leaders. They revealed that most of the administrators reported participating in professional development activities. More than 95% of the administrators indicated they had participated in: institutional task forces, specialized committees, or commissions. In addition, more than 90% participated in

staff development programs on their campus. Although 86% of the administrators stated they had taken part in a formal written review, only 43% stated that they had participated in a career review to plan ways to acquire additional skills, education, or training. Approximately 20% of the administrators indicated that career review planning was not available at their institution. The following percentage of participation was revealed in specialized leadership programs and internships: approximately 1% in the American Council on Education Fellowship/Internship; 3% in the W.K. Kellogg Leadership Program Fellowship; approximately 6% in the League for Innovation Executive Leadership Program; 9% in the Higher Education Management Institute; and 13% in other types of administrative fellowship or internship programs.

Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) recommended that institutions review their policies and practices related to professional development, and examine the financial support available for administrators to take advantage of activities at state, regional, or national levels. They also recommended that institutions consider how administrators find out about the available opportunities, and whether some of these professional opportunities are limited to only a select group of administrators.

Community colleges appear to be opening their doors to administrative leadership in new ways. But much work remains to be done in generating candidate pools for senior positions, in equipping younger generations of administrators with the skills and experiences that will help them win promotion, and in ensuring equity in promotion into the most senior positions. (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002, p. 15)

In addition to new leadership programs such as LINC, which are striving to provide opportunities for women and people of color to obtain leadership positions, Jackson (2004) asked the question, "To what extent have trends in hiring, retaining, and promoting people of



color in academic administrative positions been commensurate with trends in student enrollment?”(pp. 4-5). He utilized the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) surveys that were conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) during three academic years: 1989-1988, 1992-1993, and 1998-1999. Descriptive statistics were analyzed for academic administrators at all two-year postsecondary institutions—public and private. His analysis focused on two categories for administrators: (a) all academic administrators, and (b) executive-level administrators; and applied statistics to compare Whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians.

Jackson (2004) revealed startling inequities. In 1993, Hispanics were the third largest group, with 4.1% of the academic administrators and 10.0% of the student enrollment. In comparison, Whites constituted 8.3% of the academic positions and 71.2% of the student body. The representation of the Hispanic group was 0.41%, which was clearly an under-representation. In 1999, Hispanics increased slightly in their representation in this area, but experienced a greater increase in the student population, at 13.1%. Even with this increase, the Hispanic representation ratio still dropped to 0.37%.

In 1993, in the executive-level administrators, Hispanics had the lowest representation, 0.09%. This was due to Hispanics only holding 0.9% of the executive-level positions while constituting 10.0% of the student enrollment. In 1999, Whites experienced their second-highest representation, second to Asians, who represented 8.8% of all executive-level positions with 6.4% student body representation. Hispanics were last of the represented ethnic groups, as they experienced an increase representation ratio to 0.37%. This occurred due to the increase in executive-level positions to 4.8% and the student body increase to 13.1% (Jackson, 2004).

In 1984, the National Community College Hispanic Council (NCCHC) was founded in affiliation with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (The NCCHC Strategic Plan, July 2002-2004). The NCCHC was established to link and support Hispanic communication among Hispanic leaders, their institutions, and the communities they serve. The NCCHC vision provides leadership for Hispanics/Latinos(as) in community colleges. Its mission is “to provide access, success, and leadership development for Hispanics/Latinos(as)” (The NCCHC Strategic Plan July 2002-2004). “Since 1986, a primary focus for NCCHC has been leadership development—preparation of new community college administrators for future roles as presidents” (Martinez & Vallejo, 2004).

The NCCHC addresses the lack of Hispanic leaders in community colleges by sponsoring the “Leadership Fellows Program” to develop a pool of highly qualified Hispanics and assist them in attaining high-level positions in community colleges (The NCCHC Strategic Plan, July 2002-2004). The program consists of a year-long training with two seminars. Fellows also have the opportunity to prepare a strategic career plan, polish their resumes, and learn how to conduct a job search as well as practice public speaking and presentation skills. As a result of the support of NCCHC professional development and mentoring program, there have been more than 70 Hispanic community college chancellors, vice presidents, and campus provosts nationwide, which account for nearly 45 of the community college presidents nationwide (The NCCHC Strategic Plan, July 2002-2004).

### Summary

The review of literature has shown that, although affirmative action mandates have improved the condition of women in this country in many ways, equity is far from being achieved. Research on women's issues has increased over the past three decades, but it is still minimal compared to other areas of educational research. Women's leadership training programs have been developed in an effort to increase the number of women in educational leadership positions. LINC is an exemplary leadership program that has proven success. I have personally benefited from participating in LINC in 2004-2005. Since my participation in the program, I have joined the 60% of program graduates who have received promotions. LINC is one example of the efforts that are being made to create leadership programs for those who are underrepresented in leadership community college positions.

The NCCHC recognizes the lack of Hispanic leaders in American community colleges and has answered by developing a Leadership Fellows Program. Even with existing leadership programs, the proportion of males in the same positions still outnumbers the slight gains made by women, and research findings suggest that progress is slow at best. Mentoring has been shown to have a positive effect on the career mobility of women, but there is a lack of minority mentors available to nurture and guide Hispanic females. Hispanic women face several barriers regarding upward career mobility, including lack of mentoring opportunities, organizational culture barriers, and ethnic barriers. The types of positions that are typically held by Hispanic females are in the student services areas, and these positions are not in the traditional route to upper level educational positions.

A review of the literature on leadership in education of women, and Hispanic women in particular, has revealed the need for research studies that provide greater detail about the

process of gaining knowledge from experiences, both personal and professional, and journeys of successful Hispanic women leaders in education. The literature review has provided a foundation and guided the direction the current study has taken. The current study investigated the factors that may inhibit and enhance the mobility of Hispanic women in higher education administration. It is important to understand not only those barriers which exist so that strategies may be developed to overcome them, but also to examine variables found to be successful.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

### Overview

The purpose of this study was to capture through inquiring interviews some of the life events perceived by Hispanic women leader administrators in higher education, their perceptions of how they developed into leadership positions, and their experiences traveled. The research question that guided the study was: What are the educational, demographic, and socio-cultural characteristics Hispanic women leaders possess? This question was used to explore the experiences of the identified recipients through individual, personal, and face-to-face interviews.

I examined the backgrounds of the selected Hispanic women leaders, which included childhood and family experiences, and informal and formal academic preparation experiences, including institutions attended and degrees held. I also identified career paths the women traveled. The factors were also identified and described related to the promotion, upward mobility, and barriers that impede the administrative career paths of Hispanic women administrators in Texas institutions of higher education. In addition, an examination is provided of how these women developed in their careers and constructed themselves as leaders.

The focus of this study involved five major components for Hispanic women leaders in higher education: (a) identification of childhood experiences shared; (b) common career paths; (c) perceived barriers; (d) influential persons in their lives; and (e) common advice they would share to those aspiring to attain a leadership position in higher education. The methodology includes an overall description of the following: (a) theoretical framework

guiding the study; (b) description of participants; (c) data collection procedures; (d) data analysis procedures; (e) benefits; and (f) summary.

### **Theoretical Framework Guiding the Study**

This study was conducted to explore and uncover the nature of human behavior and the organizational experiences of Hispanic female higher education administrators. These human experiences are best uncovered through qualitative research. Qualitative research methodology involves gathering perceptions about phenomena through the experiences of the individuals involved. Discovery and exploration are inherent and encouraged in qualitative research. Thus, a qualitative research approach was selected to aid in this exploration of human behavior, and to help understand the human experiences of these women as they developed personally and professionally into leadership roles in higher education.

Recognizing the value of phenomenological interviews in qualitative research that answers the “why” and “how” of human behavior is essential to qualitative research. This study examined individual Hispanic women leaders from Texas to provide insights into their everyday lives. Desiring to know the “why’s” and “how’s” is at the heart of the study; as such, this research utilized the phenomenological inquiry method for acquiring data. “From phenomenology comes the idea that people interpret everyday experiences from the perspective of the meaning it has for them” (Merriam 2002, p 37). The phenomenological mode enables researchers to understand the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations. Phenomenologists attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of study participants in order to better comprehend how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The research focus was on women selected within the Hispanic culture. Hispanic females in a higher education administrative roles were the members in the sole culture desired for this research. This study produced a socio-cultural interpretation of the data, through my lens as a researcher. This study was designed to capture, through phenomenological interviewing, a wealth of beneficial data regarding qualities women Hispanic leaders bestow.

The pathways to leadership positions in higher education are seldom known, but there is a process of decision-making phases that one must make to achieve initial scholarly goals with the potential for advancement into administrative leadership positions (Jackson, 2004). Gottfredson's (1981) feminist theory describes the developmental process leading to the formation of occupational aspirations. This theory served as the foundation for studying Hispanic women leaders in academia. Feminist theory can be used to explain gender and class differences in career development, with a special focus on the barriers women face. More recently, Gottfredson added a new dimension that takes into account the vested power of individuals to make decisions about their occupational aspirations, called "Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation" (Gottfredson, 2002).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was also utilized throughout the study. CRT is an important tool for dismantling prevailing notions of educational fairness and neutrality in educational policy, practice, and research (Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999). "A central tenant of CRT methodology is to provide counter truths of racism and discrimination faced by African Americans, Latinos/as, and others, through racial storytelling and narratives"(Villenas et al. 1999, p. 33). "CRT theorists have built on everyday experiences perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a better

understanding of how Americans see race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) believed in the power of written stories and narratives. They stated that stories and narratives “begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding the readers of our common humanity” (p. 43).

### **Participants**

The concept behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants who will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2003). Purposeful sampling enabled a critical analysis of specific individuals’ experiences within a targeted context. Due to the small number of potential study participants meeting the characteristics of Hispanic women in higher education leadership positions, purposeful sampling was utilized for the study. The targeted participants for this study were four Texas college or university female Hispanic administrators.

The focus on the state of Texas occurred for the following reasons. First, Texas shares many demographic characteristics of other Southern states. Second, the likelihood of obtaining willing high profile Hispanic female administrator participants in higher education was greater in the state of Texas due to the state’s large Hispanic population. Third, I had a personal interest based on maternal relatives residing in the state of Texas.

A selected Hispanic woman, Dr. Margot Perez-Greene, participated in the pilot study, which served as the capstone project for my Ph.D. program. The results of my capstone study about her are described in Chapter 4. The study of Margot led to the development of this research to include three additional Hispanic women who are presidents of colleges



and/or universities. Because Margot is well respected and known among leaders in higher education, the established contacts she has with fellow leaders also placed her in the role of a gatekeeper. She assisted in providing three contacts with Hispanic women leaders, each of whom resided in Texas and met the required characteristics for this study. Their names and their institutions were selected jointly with the cooperation of Margot, my POS committee members, and myself. After the study was approved, Margot personally called the three Hispanic women presidents and elicited their responses of interest in the study. Once they agreed, I made contact with each of their administrative assistants and my interviews were quickly scheduled.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection for the three women actually began at the time the initial contact was established with each of the presidents' administrative assistants. At this initial contact, I requested that each of the presidents e-mail me their vitae to enable me to have a greater comprehension of their education and career paths prior to our interviews. I was also able to conduct several internet web searches on each of the presidents which revealed journal and newspaper articles, providing an audit trail corresponding to their vitae. This previous research proved crucial when conducting the interviews, as I felt confident that I had a sound understanding of their major accomplishments and was able to focus the interview more on their personal experiences that may not be public knowledge.

Like most novice researchers, I desired to have a meaningful and successful interview. A successful interview is an exchange of truthful, honest questions and responses by both the interviewer and the interviewee. For this to occur it is imperative that the

presidents feel safe and at ease in the relationship with me, the interviewer. This study was conducted in a sound, trusting, and ethical manner. “A [good] qualitative study is one that has been conducted in an ethical manner. To an extent, the validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the researcher” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). Merriam (2002) continued by stating, “The question of trustworthiness has to do with issues of internal validity, reliability, and external validity or generalizability” (p. 31). Denzil and Lincoln (2002) stated, “Gaining trust is essential to the success of the interviews and, once gained, trust can still be very fragile” (p. 655).

Most of the presidents inquired about my ethnicity and interest in the topic of Hispanic leadership. If they did not inquire, I offered this information to them in order to gain trust in the interviewing relationship. Each of the recipients held doctoral degrees and had conducted dissertation research; as such, I already shared characteristics held by these presidents. Additional inquiries may determine whether they view me, the researcher, in the emic (insider, one like them) or etic (outsider, unlike them) perspective. This can influence the contentment of disclosing personal, privileged information to someone they may perceive different from themselves.

Interviews are increasingly seen as the active interactions between interviewer and responder. “For the researcher, the responsibility of engaging in a more personal relationship with those researched while collecting ethnographic and narrative data and writing the interpretative research text may be as difficult as it is joyful” (Bloom, 1998, pp. 1-2). The interview is seen as a negotiated accomplishment of both interviewers and respondents that is shaped by the contexts and situations in which it takes place (Bloom, 1998; Claire, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interview process utilized in this study was a linguistic

interaction in which the meanings of questions and responses were contextually grounded and jointly constructed by the respondent and myself.

Each interview was scheduled for 90 minutes. It was essential that I established rapport with the respondents to gain a better understanding and attempt to see the situation from their point of view (Bloom, 1998; Claire, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The first 10 to 15 minutes were used to establish rapport as well as create the atmosphere conducive to an informal interview. This time was used to: (a) explain the purpose of the study; (b) describe how the interview will proceed; (c) provide each participant with a consent form (Appendix A) which explained the research procedures, rights, risks, confidentiality, and names and phone numbers of the Major Professor and ISU Research Board (IRB); (d) advise participants they could voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time without penalty; (e) recognize that the interview will be audio and video recorded; (f) address any issues or concerns; and (g) collect the signed informed consent documents. Once the introduction and the overview of information and logistics were completed, the interviews proceeded. They were conducted in a semi-structured manner allowing me to ask the questions using an approach which seemed appropriate for the discussion and flow of the conversation and my research objectives.

Individual interviews were the best way to gather data regarding the Hispanic women in the study. Exploring the stories of the women revealed answers to the research question: How did these women become the leaders they are today? “Critical Race Theorists have built on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a better understanding of how Americans see race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 38). The interviews enabled the recipients to disclose their life histories

and tell their stories so that shared cultures can benefit and learn from them. The interviews were conducted using a participatory research dialogue. The interview questions were selected as a premise to discovering expanded, meaningful, in-depth responses. They can also be used as a questioning base for including multiple participants in further research studies to assist in developing codes, categories, and themes among all the women when analysis of data occurs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The use of video and audio tape recorders during the interviews verified the data collected. Dr. Margot Perez-Greene's interview was the only one which was conducted without a video recorder. Upon presenting my Capstone pilot study to my POS Committee, it was suggested to add the video recorder as they believed it would enrich the study by capturing the emotions and facial expressions exhibited by each woman. This recommendation proved to be valuable when analyzing the data. Every effort was made to make the participants feel comfortable with the presence of the video and tape recorders during the interviews. Notes were also taken during the interviews, which were helpful in transcribing and coding the data. Since the explanation of the purpose of the study and its confidentiality were reviewed before the beginning of each interview, the interview dialogue concluded upon completion by thanking each interviewee for participating.

### **Data Analysis**

The research questions guided the data collection and analysis procedures throughout the study. Qualitative responses were compiled. During this time, notes were taken on what was heard and read in order to begin developing tentative ideas about categories and relationships. The initial steps of the qualitative data analysis entailed listening to tapes prior

to transcription. The reading of transcripts, observational notes, and documents furthered the analysis of the data, as well as, reviewing the video tapes. The qualitative responses provided a wealth of in-depth information to the degree that it was possible to generate several categories and emergent themes. From these categories and emergent themes, families of codes were developed. Developing coding categories after the data have been collected is a crucial step in data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Miles & Hubberman, 1994).

Gottfredson's (2002) Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation takes into account the vested power of individuals to make decisions about their occupational aspirations. Member checking assured accuracy in the stories, as perceived by the women concerning their occupational successes and struggles. Member checking is a common strategy for ensuring validity in qualitative research (Merriam, 2002; Denzil & Lincoln, 2000). It is a strategy used to elicit feedback on the data and conclusion of the study from the participant (Merriam, 2002; Denzil & Lincoln, 2000). In this study, member checking occurred once the tapes were transcribed. The participants were able to read the transcription of their interview, thus ensuring that I heard each word exactly as the participants had said it. It is important to note that this form of feedback could be contrived in that the participant could change her wording or simply say what she thought I wanted to hear. Dr. Margot Perez-Greene had a few editorial comments after reviewing her transcripts, consisting of accurate spelling of institutions and mentors' names. However, none of the other women made changes or corrections to their transcripts. Therefore, the responses from member checking can be utilized as evidence regarding the validity of the data and conclusion.

The audit trails, which are the findings, interpretations, and recommendations from ideas, strengthen a study by verifying processes used (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The audit trail for this research included raw data from video recording, tape recording, field notes, observation formats, and coded analysis. According to Merriam (2002), the audit trail is dependent upon the researcher's journaling. Journaling is designed to capture reflections and thoughts about the researcher, data collection issues, and about the interpretation of the data. Merriam (2002) stated, "...the audit trail is a detailed account of how the study was conducted and how the data were analyzed" (pp. 28-29). "This audit trail or transparency of method is one strategy for enhancing the study's reliability" (p. 21).

Critical Race Theory addresses the additional complexity of the Latina culture as perceived by others of diverse ethnicities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As such, triangulation is particularly vital for increasing validity and reliability for this population. Triangulation occurred when comparing the data to various sources, such as field notes, documented articles, vitae, and interviews. The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure a significant understanding of the phenomena in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2002; Miles & Hubberman, 1994). While triangulation will not guarantee improved validity, it helped by determining the sources of error or bias that might exist. "Human beings are complex, and their lives are ever changing; the more methods we use to study them, the better our chances to gain some understanding of how they construct their lives and the stories they tell us about them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 668).

A narrative summary was used to display the respondents' comments to the open-ended questions. Rich, thick descriptive words were used to describe the correspondence.

“Providing *rich, thick description* is a major strategy to ensure for external validity or generalizability in the quality sense” (Merriam, 2002, p. 29). The matrix modeled developed by Miles and Hubberman (1994) was also utilized to display the summarized comments and categories in an easy-to-read format. The selection of data entered into the matrix were derived from the families of codes and emerging themes elicited from the interview sessions. The development involved in data collection and entry are critical issues in qualitative data analysis. “The conclusion drawn from a matrix can never be better than the quality of the data entered” (Miles & Hubberman, 1994, p. 241). As such, care was taken to enter data accurately into the matrix.

### **Benefits of the Study**

Although the participants agreed to participate in the study, there may be no direct material benefits to their participation. It is hopeful that the study provided the participants with an enriched opportunity for self-reflection, personal insight, and significant self-awareness. This re-awakening focused on an area that may have provided significant meaning for them as they advanced towards leadership positions in higher education. It also afforded them great depth into the meaning of who they have become and the life journey in which they have traveled.

Information gained in this study benefits society by providing valuable information to others about the characteristics shared by Hispanic women leaders in higher education. Study findings may also be utilized as a tool for others in their attempt to reach a similar level of educational leadership. The phenomenological inquiry method provides qualitative data to the areas of organizational leadership, gender, and Hispanic women studies.

## Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used to research the educational, demographic, and socio-cultural characteristics that Hispanic women leaders possess. The methodological framework guiding the study was a qualitative research design.

The theoretical framework guiding the study was Gottfredson's (2002) Feminist Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation. This theory emphasizes explaining gender and class differences in career development, with a special focus on the barriers women face. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was also utilized in the study as a tool in revealing intentions of educational fairness and neutrality in educational policy, practice, and research (Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999).

Purposeful sampling was used to select four Hispanic women administrators in higher education to enable the researcher to critically analyze the experiences the Hispanic women encountered. Ninety-minute interviews were scheduled. Data analysis procedures included compiling qualitative responses, developing codes, categories, and emergent themes, and member checking. It was important that the participants had a chance to review their transcripts to assure I captured what the respondent intended. This process also provided a means to increase reliability and validity.

A narrative summary of the interviews was developed that was comprised of detailed, descriptive accounts from the women. The matrix model developed by Miles and Hubberman (1994) was used to display summarized categories and comments in an easy-to-read format.

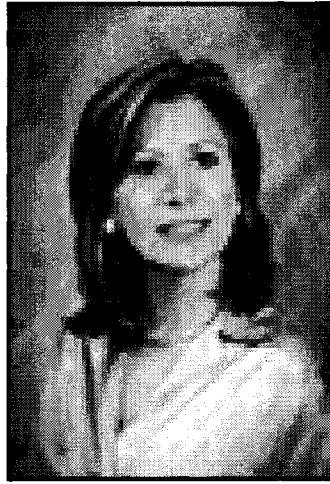
An audit trail and triangulation were methods used to enhance reliability and increase validity. The audit trail was essential in the study, and included raw data from video



recording, tape recording, field notes, observation formats, and coded analysis. Triangulation occurred when comparing the data to various sources, such as field notes, documented articles, vitae, and interviews.

Although there may be no direct monetary benefits to the participants, it was hoped that the study provided them with an enriched opportunity for self-reflect on deeper personal insight and increased self-awareness. The study may also afford them with a deep meaning of the journey they traveled and how they developed into the women they are today. This study will benefit society by providing valuable information that could be used as a tool for others in their attempt to reach similar levels of educational leadership.

Following are the chapters focusing on the intentions and personal stories of the four Hispanic women leaders in higher education. The women's stories are divided into chapters to allow each woman an opportunity to reflect on her own significant life journey and ascendance into her current educational leadership position: Dr. Margot Perez-Greene (Chapter 4); Dr. Cha Guzmán (Chapter 5); Dr. Juliet Garcia (Chapter 6); and Dr. Tessa Pollack (Chapter 7).

**CHAPTER 4. DR. MARGOT PEREZ-GREENE****Description of the Participant**

Dr. Margot Perez-Greene participated in the pilot study. Margot is a 52-year-old Texan Hispanic woman. She is a former Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Services (EMSS) at Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge, Iowa. Margot is currently employed with the University of Texas in Austin as the Director of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), and a lecturer of Educational Administration in the Community College Leadership Program.

I first met Dr. Margot Perez-Greene in April of 2003, while participating in LINC. As mentioned in Chapter 2, LINC is a leadership institute in which each community college president in Iowa nominates one or more person(s) from their college to participate in the institute. LINC members met the first Thursday and Friday of each month from September through April. Through LINC, the other participants and I were able to learn from listening and speaking to educational leaders throughout the nation. Our last session was held at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The president and vice president of

Kirkwood Community College spoke to our group on Thursday, and on Friday we had our certification of completion ceremony and were able to listen to one remaining speaker: Dr. Margot Perez-Greene.

Margot was the most dynamic and “real” speaker I had ever heard. She spoke the truth, and I instinctively knew that every statement she made was sincere and from her heart. I found myself hanging on her every word and in awe of her accomplishments. She was motivating and encouraging, and focused on the future. Margot did not boast of her accomplishments although they were easy to identify. One of the moments that drew me closer and instantly connected me to Margot was her sincerity about her mother, as she unknowingly displayed the pain she felt from her loss. Margot paused a moment to fight back tears as she spoke about her mother who had recently passed away. The majority of our group and I found ourselves fighting back tears, and I quickly wiped my eyes with a napkin provided for my beverage.

Margot’s strength showed as she quickly regained her composure and continued on with her speech. I fought the urge to leap out of my chair and hug her as I shared the same pain of the loss of my mother who had passed away in 1993. It was evident that Margot loved her mother very much. I wanted to hold her and say, “I know exactly how you feel and it hurts and leaves a hole in your heart that will forever be vacant.” From that time on, I wanted to know more about Margot—how she achieved the level of success in her education and career to be standing there before me that day.

After her speech our group was granted a quick break. At that time I was able to speak to Margot face-to-face. Her sincerity displayed itself as she handed me her business card and stated, if there was anything at all she could do to help me with my educational

journey, not to hesitate to contact her. I talked excitedly to my major advisor, Dr. Larry Ebbers who, along with Dr. Sharon Drake, directs LINC. Dr. Ebbers encouraged my enthusiasm and granted me approval to present my research idea to my committee. The committee members were in unanimous agreement as well. Dr. Margot Perez-Greene would become my pilot study participant. That capstone study served as the foundation for the current research and dissertation. The data collected in the pilot study enriched and enhanced the overall conclusion of this research.

### **Interview**

The first interview was conducted in the office of the president at Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge, Iowa, on April 28, 2005. It began at 8:30 a.m. and lasted until 10:15 a.m. It had been one year since the day that I last saw Margot. She had come back to speak again at LINC, and she was also invited to be the keynote speaker of the Iowa Community College Student Services Association (ICSSA).

Although I felt a connection with Margot from our previous meeting and various correspondences, it was still essential that I, the researcher, establish rapport with Margot, the respondent, to gain a better understanding and attempt to see the situation from her point of view (Bloom, 1998; Claire, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The first 10 to 15 minutes were used to establish rapport as well as create the atmosphere conducive to an informal interview. During this time I: (a) explained the purpose of the study; (b) described how the interview would proceed; (c) provided Margot with a consent form (Appendix A) which explained the research procedures, rights, risks, confidentiality, and names and numbers of the Major Professor and ISU Research Board; (d) advised Margot that she could voluntarily withdraw

from the study at any time without penalty; (e) recognized that the interview will be audio recorded; (f) addressed any issues or concerns; and (g) collected the signed informed consent documents.

After the introduction and the overview of information and logistics were completed, the interview began. This same procedure was used for each Hispanic women in the study, with the exception of adding a video recorder to the already existing audio recorder. This study and interview with Dr. Margot Perez-Greene served as a pilot study, lending itself toward the interviews with the three additional Hispanic women leaders in higher education who will be discussed in the following three chapters.

### **Childhood background**

Margot is the second to oldest girl among five daughters in her family. She was raised in Austin, Texas. Her parents were Hispanic and fluent in Spanish; nevertheless, English was the only language spoken in the home. Margot understood the trials that her parents faced financially to assure that she and her sisters were provided the best education possible.

Margot's parents both played significant roles in her decision to pursue higher education. Her mother had an 11<sup>th</sup> grade education and ultimately returned to school to earn a nurse's assistant certification, enabling her to work in the OB (obstetrics) department in a hospital. Her father had a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade education and was a chef. During the interview, it was at times difficult for Margot to discuss her mother as she has passed away two-years ago. Margot spoke with great passion about her mother. Her mother believed that Margot could do anything, and it was very evident that her mother was still a very strong force of what

Margot is today. Margot credits her personal attitude, sense of style, home environment, desire for family, and positive attitude as direct attributes from her mother. The following are excerpts from the discussion regarding her mother.

*I see her so much into what and who I am, and you know, I love that because I think it makes her continue living with me, in me. You know, she's alive. (pause), so I am... I am what I am, because of her.*

*So she is the strong force in me, and she taught me how to love people, and be positive about people and not gossip and, you know, she just had some very, very strong values that I am so thankful for...*

### **Educational experience and career path**

Margot attended public elementary and secondary schools in Texas, which were primarily white. She was one of the few Hispanics in the school district. Her parents had personal values, goals, and belief systems that were very strong and have molded Margot into the woman she is today. Her parents may have lacked a college education but they knew the importance it held and the opportunities it offered. Margot stated, “*It wasn't IF you go to college it's WHEN you go to college*”. This message was echoed to all of her siblings. As such, two sisters hold degrees from business colleges, while Margot and her older sister have PhD's. She recalled her first experience of selecting and visiting a college.

*Well, Mother and Daddy wanted me to go to UT, of course. But I saw this beautiful, beautiful building in the distance which was a private Catholic university. And they were like. Uhhh, ..O.K...I don't know if we can do this (laughing), and Mother said, well let's go and visit. And we went to visit and I think I told this story when I was in LINC [Leaders in the New Century Program]; and when we were walking up the steps to the appointment the sister came down and said, “well, you must be Mrs. Perez and you must be Margot?” My mother said, “Yes sister and I have \$50 in my pocket.” And I was like “why did you say that (laugh)?” And well, back then I think it was about \$185 an hour. And mother and daddy were like a...that...well, I got a job on campus, I got a grant, and mother and daddy paid... Well, I don't know how much they paid, Lyvier, but I had learned later that they were paying a lot of money every month. The second year, I got an academic*

*scholarship, the second, third, and fourth, and that's how I got through college.*

After Margot completed her Bachelor's degree in education, she worked in an elementary education setting. As a new teacher, Margot questioned her occupational selection as well as her teaching abilities. She wasn't fully equipped on differentiating between being a student's friend and becoming their educator. She learned quickly that she would either have to make some adjustments or she would fail as a teacher. She made a promise to herself and her parents that she would at least finish teaching the first year before selecting another occupation, which turned into a revolutionary decision for her.

*A great idea; I'm so glad I did, because once it was over,...it was kind of like childbirth...you (say)I think I can do this again, and I forgot all the pain. And I started paying more attention to what I was doing in the classroom, and realized that I could be a real force in modeling behavior, I really thought, you know, I'd do something else. And 17 years later, I had wonderful classrooms with wonderful children and great success.*

During her 17 years in the K-12 system, Margot was employed as a Counselor, Behavioral Disorder Classroom teacher, Pre-School teacher, and Coordinator of Special Services. Margot established confidence in her skills and concentrated more on developing traits for becoming an effective leader. Ultimately, she wanted to reach out to students in a greater capacity than working in the classroom has permitted her. Margot knew she would need an advanced degree. She received her Master's degree and worked as a High School Counselor for a short while. She enjoyed the difference she made in the lives of adolescences as a high school counselor but longed for a greater impact. She desired to work with adults in higher education. She was now better equipped to make a switch in educational settings. She explained, "*So that's when I made the switch to the community*

*college, and that's when I began recruitment and working with older students and teaching at the community college..."*

Margot worked in the community college for two months as a recruiter when she was approached by Dr. Roueche to pursue her doctorate degree at the University of Texas at Austin. *"I'm like, 'I don't have any community college experience whatsoever', and Dr. Roueche said, 'that's o.k. you'll get it'."* Included in her doctoral program was an internship. During her study, Margot had moved from the position of community college recruiter to full-time student, and interning as the assistant to the President at Brookhaven College in Farmers Branch, Texas. This was one of the key leadership positions in a predominately white environment. The internship lasted four months; however, she did an extraordinary job and was asked to continue for an additional four months. She accepted and was given the title of Executive Assistant to the President. This position gave Margot an opportunity to become an effective change agent and work with leaders in education. She took full advantage of the experience and developed long lasting mentoring and friendship relationships.

Upon completion of her appointment at Brookhaven she was invited to apply for the position of Vice President at Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge, Iowa, and subsequently assumed the position of Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Services. The position encompassed many responsibilities and duties, including: Athletics, Residence Halls, Student Health, and Public Information. Margot, recognized this as a wonderful challenge as well as an opportunity. She stated, *"You know, somebody gave me an opportunity."*



Margot left Iowa to return to Texas where she and her family are deeply rooted. She is currently the Director of NISOD (National Institute for Staff & Organizational Development), and is also a lecturer in Educational Administration at the University of Texas at Austin where she is a full partner in faculty activities. She also serves on several dissertation committees for students in the Community College Leadership Program. Margot absolutely loves her job. She wholeheartedly recognizes the wonderful opportunities that she has been granted and has genuinely appreciated every opportunity she has received.

*... I can really take advantages of the opportunities. I mean we're on a national stage! I mean it's just a great place to be! And so you take it seriously and yet you wonder, what the heck am I doing here? And you just remember where you've come from and you keep your support system in place, you keep a positive attitude, and you continue growing because you can not rest on the moral of (past places of employment) or of graduation. Those have all been stepping stones and you continue to grow in the position that your in and improve. Improve yourself personally, professionally, and in your relationships with people and all of that just makes life very meaningful.*

Margot is very cognizant of the value education and holds a unique perspective on the subject. She believes that education provides opportunities but one does not need to be an educated person to have personal goals and values, and a strong foundation and belief system. Margot stated, *“Knowledge is power, and knowledge does educate you and you have more of an opportunity to have an open-mind around those things to bring you a better understanding.”*

Margot now possessed the knowledge, experience, and the advanced degrees needed to be a respected, well-known leader in higher education. These accomplishments have not come without paying a personal price along the way; Margot faced many difficult decisions throughout her life in order to advance in her career. The hardest decisions for her were

leaving family, but she also expressed having difficulty leaving relationships in which she was mentored.

*The hardest decisions about my career had to do with family. Leaving family; I mean those were some really tough decisions. ... I'll talk about the administrator role because that's just been the toughest for me, you know, my husband had a church in Dallas, [he is a minister] I had to leave him in Dallas and come here. He came a year later. Then I went back to Texas and he had a church here in Fort Dodge and, again, he came a year later. You know those were very hard decisions to make, but I think it all goes back to, you know, being in the first grade and having a teacher that made me so excited about learning, you know, I wanted to move onto the next thing. But I also knew that I had great support with my husband and my family. So you know, when I left here, when I left Dallas, you know leaving Walter [Bumphus], he said, (chuckle) "where are you going? We were going to do great things together." It was hard for me to do, but you know, I have no regrets about that, I can't look back. The same with Bob [Paxton] and I think I'm not talking out of turn here when I say we literally did not talk to each other for the last two weeks that I was here because it was so difficult. It was very difficult to separate myself from him because he taught me a lot. And we did a lot together here. So those sacrifices, and I miss Bob tremendously, I think those are the sacrifices you make; the people. You leave people behind, but what you don't want to do is leave people dead along the way.*

### **Role models and mentors**

Role models were special people Margot was blessed to have throughout her entire life, beginning with her parents. They were great models of honesty, integrity, hard work, and high expectations. They provided her and her siblings with the necessary support system that sustained them.

*They loved us, they cared for us, they got up, they went to work, they were there when we got home, um they paid attention to us, um they put us in situations that I NOW know were very difficult a money wise, you know like schooling. You know all of those things I see now were opportunities that they provided and so what that has done for me is; I have seen what those opportunities can do and it gives you a real sense of "I want to do this for somebody else; I want to push them out," because you know it's enriched my life. You know, it's those foundations and you know it's the support, I feel that*

*anything I can share with someone that can get them there can enrich and enhance someone else's life. Those are the foundations that they gave me.*

Margot discussed leaving Walter Bumphus, President of Brookhaven College in Farmers Branch Texas, and Bob Paxton, President of Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge Iowa, in a previous excerpt. She was mentored by them, and still cares deeply for them now. Margot's passion for all people is strong and is evidenced by the personal relationships she has maintained with those whom she mentored as well as those who mentored her.

Margot also made reference, in her previous excerpt, to her first grade teacher, Nell, who was instrumental in formulating her desire to become a teacher. She admired her so much as a teacher that Margot wanted to emulate her: *"So in first grade I was saying, I want to be a teacher, and my decision was made in the first grade and it never changed ...I loved her SO much that I wanted to be like her..."* Nell was a mentor and is still one of her very best friends; they have a mutually fulfilling relationship and she attends many of Margot's professional meetings in Austin as well as NISOD. Margot stated, *"She's [Nell's] just a wonderful human being."*

Ethnicity was not a factor for Margot in her mentoring relationships as the following excerpt describes.

*I mean these are people who cared; who wanted to be a mentor; who wanted to be a stepping stone; you know, to help me. She was a black woman, and so, it's not about race, it's not about color, it's about caring. It's about loving what you do and caring so much about other people. It wasn't ah, and don't get me wrong Lyvier, I think it's important to have Hispanics where they are, and blacks where they are and people of color and whites where they are. But you know one of my greatest mentors is Bob Paxton and he's a white male. John Roueche, he's a white male. These are people that take an interest and they love what they do so much that you just say, I want some of that, I want to*

*be like that, I want to have that much excitement about my work. I mean these are great models.*

Mentoring relationships are very meaningful and personal for Margot; they don't end with her professional development, but are forever life-lasting. Along with her first grade teacher, Margot also has very close relationships with two other women with whom she was in mentoring relationships. She discussed these women in the following excerpt.

*Nicole is one [whom she has mentored], she's living in Iowa now. She and I remain great friends. My best friend, you know, we switch off, you know, you're the wind beneath my wings, you're my hero, I'm your hero. The other one, she's a Nun actually and she's taking her final vows in July. And Meg, I hired Meg, we were doing Pre-school together in Arizona and we hired her right out of college and we've been very, very good friends since and that was back in the 70's. And so, we switch off with the mentoring thing because I was her mentor in the beginning but she has just been so instrumental in my spiritual growth and has probably, like my mother, who had a great sense of humor. Meg probably has the best sense of humor that I've ever known anyone to have, so I think that's why I liked her so much. So now we're growing old together and it's a great, great, journey. I love the mentoring relationship that each of us has built around our relationship.*

### **Barriers and risks**

Margot was full of energy and has always looked for positive attributes in others, never focusing on the negative. *“People will try to throw barriers in front of you all the time...”* Barriers, however, aren't always physical; they are often silent and built in other's belief systems. With that, Margot stated, *“You have to have a healthy respect for ignorance. Some people just don't know...”*

Along with ignorance, the negative attitudes of other people are also barriers Margot has encountered over her professional years. *“Attitudes of, I'm not going to listen to a Hispanic woman... Just that kind of attitude; very closed, just mostly attitude.”* Critical Race Theory (CRT) holds true in Margot's life story. Addressing the racial and minority barriers

that Hispanic women may have encountered is important. “A central methodology in CRT is to provide counter truths of racism and discrimination faced by African American, Latinos/as, and others, through racial storytelling and narratives” (Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999). Margot painted a clear picture of how others view Hispanic women and what she has experienced as one.

Being a woman and of ethnic minority is often perceived as a double barrier. Again, Margot looked towards the positive, and used her gender and ethnicity to her advantage. Minorities have the ability to teach others, which is a gift that should be implemented and utilized to push forward. “*You know our time here is very short. So take advantage. If you want to go live in the negative hole, fine, I can’t, I won’t.*” Margot describes her heritage as a gift, and recognizes that she is one of very few Hispanic women leaders. Gender and race should be considered benefits not hindrances.

*I think that is also an advantage to begin a Hispanic woman. We have had a lot of opportunities. ... and I think all of those opportunities came because I was Hispanic too. You know there were so few that they had to choose from. I was thinking, rich, thank-you, man I wouldn’t change this body for anything in the world because it has just provided a lot of unique opportunities where I may not have had them otherwise, I may not, I don’t know.*

Margot is very proud of her heritage and is comfortable with whom she is as a person and professional. “Gottfredson’s (2002) Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation” described the development process leading to the formation of occupational aspirations. Gottfredson’s theory emphasized women as having the power and self drive to lead and take control of their own occupational desires. Margot’s empowerment in taking control of her career and professional success directly correlates to Gottfredson’s theory.

*The last thing that I need is to be on this militant road; this militant road, fighting for my rights as a Hispanic. You know, I’m going to fight for rights*

*as a professional person. I know there are attitudes out there, I know there are people who don't have very good attitudes about Hispanic people, number one, or Hispanic women, number two; we have a double whammy here. And you know, in my book, it's all about them and it's not about me. And so I refuse to look; if I don't do a good job, it's not because I'm a Hispanic woman; it's because I haven't done my homework, and so, yeah, there are people out there that have bad attitudes. The only thing that I can do about that is to place myself in Iowa, and do the best that I can; and say that we can thrive without a chip on our shoulder. And the other thing that I can do is teach other people of color that we have a place and you know that I am Hispanic, and that is a gift and I have to use it and see it as such.*

Margot stated that the environment in which a person lives can also serve as a possible barrier they may need to overcome. In Margot's situation, her environment was also a risk. Moving to Iowa was a risk for her, as Fort Dodge was a community that was primarily white. Margot risked feelings of isolation and backlash due to becoming a woman in administration at a community college when there were none. Becoming a woman administrator, coupled with her Hispanic ethnicity provided a huge risk, *"You know that whole cultural thing was a big risk."*

In her climb towards occupational success Margot placed risks within her marriage. She stated that the merely thinking about entering a PhD program places couples in an increased vulnerable position for divorce. *"You know you hear it but I never believed it, I never believed that Ken or I was there. We certainly have risked his ability to get a position."* Her husband Ken is a Pastor. His occupation does not allow for immediate mobility. She is thankful that Ken has always followed her in her career moves: *"He's seemed to always end up at the bottom of the rung as far as which church he gets, but he's totally O.K. with that."* Margot acknowledged that, although she left her husband for a year due to her career advancement, they were very cognizant of their marriage and made every

effort to keep it strong and healthy, which included many flights between Iowa and Texas within that timeframe.

## **Leadership**

Margot has developed a strong leadership style that is convictive, effective, and intriguing. When she speaks, such as at LINC (Leadership Institute for a New Century), people listen [especially me]. Leadership was envisioned at an early age for Margot. During her teaching years, Margot recalled attending staff development workshops and reflected on these experiences in the following statement.

*I want to be the one, you know, doing the workshops. I want to know so much that I can be the one doing the workshops, and I think in my head I always wanted to be an administrator. But having been in the classroom, I think gave me that motivation. Because I knew in the leadership role I could have more of an impact on what happens in the classroom. And I worked hard at it, at what I did in my classroom, and I knew I was effective there but I wanted to, you know, I wanted to be Billy Graham, I want to hit bigger, I want to pass the bigger net, I always wanted to so I think that's what spurred me onto getting my Masters degree, because I knew I would have more of an administrative role, consulting mostly; and knew that I wanted to get a PhD.*

To Margot, leadership is gender and race neutral; it is looking past the physical and into the internal, innate qualities a person holds. Margot strongly believes that Hispanic women can be in educational leadership positions and be successful. “*We can thrive and not just survive.*” She states that the key ingredients have nothing to do with race, color, or creed, but everything to do with “*what's in your gut...you have to have it in here* [tapped her chest with her index finger].” Margot believes it is not only important to take career advancement opportunities seriously, but to also never forget your support systems, your values, and your morals: “*And you just remember where you've come from*”. We come from previous experiences that are steppingstones for each of us for continual growth and

improvement. Margot states it is essential to improve ourselves personally, professionally, and in our relationships with other people, as this is what provides meaning to our lives.

Margot recognizes and described skills that are essential for becoming an effective leader. Those skills include being alert, aware, observing, and desiring to grow. Margot believes the passions for learning and for improving are essential. and are what makes people alert and aware.

### **Advice to aspiring Hispanic women leaders**

Margot gives very direct, sound, advice for Hispanic women aspiring to become leaders in education. A person needs to become extremely comfortable with whom they are and the skin they wear. She shares that one needs to be awake, alert, and ready for a challenge. Doors will open and close before your very eyes and it is up to you if you are willing to take a chance. We all play important roles with whatever our occupations provide so it is essential to show confidence in our duties. She goes on to describe:

*You have to have a wonderful set of coping skills. You have to have a great support system. You must understand how you fit within a body. You must understand your values. You've got to know that. You need to understand the whole leadership aspect of inviting talent to be with you and around you because it is very important to be able to learn from others no matter what color they are, no matter what gender they are. I think Hispanic women think that we have to work extra hard, and I think we do, but we also have to remember that we can bring people around us and not be afraid of that. And I think you have to be ready to be called upon. Because you're going to be, sometimes, the lone ranger and you have to be o.k. with that.*

Margot states that we all have choices in our lives, and she believes that most Hispanic people have the innate desire to learn, please, and be successful. The journey along the way is where some people will have their feelings hurt and their heads turned, “*and that's*



*why you have to be so cognizant of moving forward and choosing the right people to be around; because you can get around the wrong people.”*

### **Personal Reflection**

The time I spent with Margot has impacted me significantly and validated who I am, as well as who I aspire to become. Initially, I was very nervous when meeting Margot, and I was fearful my excitement and nervousness would interfere with my goal of obtaining an informative interview. However, Margot’s presence provided a sense of calmness, almost as if her body language recognized my nerves and told me “relax; it’s going to be alright.” The curve of her smile and the sincere look of her eyes had a calming effect on me. Although I barely knew Margot prior to that day, as we spent our time together I felt as though I had known her all of my life. An instant connection was made that was reciprocated by Margot.

Although we differ in age and she has journeyed farther in her career, I felt as though I was somehow looking into the mirror of my past, present, and future self. I was touched in more ways than can be described by the heartfelt emotion Margot displayed when talking about her mother. At the time of our interviews she did not know that the reason I was there that day and currently pursuing my PhD was in fulfillment of the promise that I made to my mother. My mother had also passed away, but still remains the driving force in “who I am”, much as Margot’s mother is to her. (I later shared this with Margot and decided to make this disclosure a part of the subsequent interviews with the other Hispanic women). Although our mothers are both gone, they are still very much alive inside our hearts and souls, and help us make decisions on a daily basis and accomplish goals in a subconscious way. Margot’s mother will continue to live on in her, just as my mother still lives within me. The

connection is strong and the traits are deeply rooted into who we were, who we have become, and who we will be.

As a result of my interaction with Margot, I recommend that she continue to be herself and to also share her story with others. She is a leader because of her academic and professional success, but more so because of “who she is as a person and the journey she has traveled.” Although Margot is currently serving as a lecturer in the educational leadership domain and is the Director of NISOD, I believe her story has so much more meaning than the four walls of an academic setting provides. With rapidly growing Hispanic communities, many young females are making lifetime decisions while they are still in school or in their homes. I am confident Margot would touch their hearts and make a positive impact on young Hispanic females. Speaking in high schools and Hispanic communities and sharing her personal story is something that I hope she will consider doing more of in the future.

The impact Margot has had on me has been life changing, and an encouragement for me to continue to strive for professional and personal growth. Margot’s successful career has made me believe in myself as an aspiring leader. The roads we have traveled thus far and the families who reared us are more similar than they are different.

**CHAPTER 5. DR. ANA “CHA” GUZMÁN****Description of the Participant**

Dr. Ana “Cha” Guzmán is a 58-year-old Cuban woman and is the current president of Palo Alto College in San Antonio, Texas. Cha has been the President at Palo Alto College since 2001, and has worked in education her entire career. Cha began her educational career in the classroom as a Kindergarten teacher and has continued to climb the educational career ladder. Prior to presidency, Cha worked as the Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Education, and she also chaired the Presidential Commission on Excellence in Education for Hispanic Americans. Cha’s personal accomplishments are also career driven—helping others achieve their personal educational best is the heart of her mission.

**Interview**

I arrived at Palo Alto College approximately 15 minutes ahead of schedule and was able to find the campus with great ease. I was greeted warmly by Ms. Sabrina Kari, Dr. Guzmán’s administrative assistant. It was refreshing to finally put a face with the voice of

this supportive person who helped me so much to access important information prior to the interview. I quickly realized that, although Margot was the gatekeeper for the initial contact; each of the three presidents has her own gatekeepers with whom I need to collaborate in order to gain entry. The gatekeepers had names and titles that placed them in charge of their presidents' schedules. Their capabilities of controlling their president's schedules automatically placed them in a position of power within their institutions. I felt they had the power to cancel my appointments or withhold information until the very moment of my interviews.

All of these fears were unfounded, but when one travels so far, a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability somehow takes over—you feel like your whole life is on hold for three interviews. That was exactly what was happening to me, which explained how I became very ill the day I awakened for my first interview. I called Margot the morning of my first interview to tell her that I arrived safely in San Antonio and, after hearing my voice, her first words were, "*Oh, no, Lyvier, what happened to you?*" I wasn't sure how to answer that question; all I knew was that I had literally lost my voice. The more I talked, the rougher and lower my voice became. I tried to save my voice for the rest of the day, so I'd hopefully be better when I arrived at Palo Alto College.

I was very nervous about how Dr. Guzmán would react to my low raspy voice. I didn't know if she would want to avoid contact with me and reschedule, or simply understand the circumstance that I presented to her regarding my predicament. This additional fear of unknowing only compounded my anxiety and illness. While I patiently sat in the secretarial waiting area, Sabrina offered me a glass of water. Sabrina was so thoughtful and shared that she was currently pursuing her Master's degree and frequently

gets sick on test dates. “Hmmm, [I thought] ... an important note to myself; her administrative assistant is working on her Master’s degree ... interesting!”

Suddenly a beautiful woman with a flawless smile entered the room, looked directly at me and said, “*You must be [from] Iowa. Hi, I’m Cha*”! We exchanged a few words as I profusely apologized for my voice or, rather, lack of voice. Cha didn’t mind at all, and just needed a few minutes in her office before we began.

The interview was conducted in her office. It began at 1:30 p.m. and lasted until 3:00 p.m. Cha’s office was a bright, beautiful corner office that was elegant and yet comfortable. I finally felt at ease and was pleased to see that she had a conference table in her office, which was where the interview took place.

### **Childhood background**

Cha came to the United States from Cuba at the young age of 13, with her parents and 9-year-old sister. She stated that leaving her country was very traumatic. She and her family lived in Milwaukee, WI, where she completed high school and then graduated from Stout State University, WI, with a B.S. in Education – Early Childhood. She remarked that the years from age 13 through 20 were psychologically rough on her. During this timeframe she emerged into a new country, and faced learning the differences in cultural values and belief systems of United States citizens.

Her parents are still alive and live in Miami, which is where they entered the United States approximately 45 years ago. Cha visits her parents every Christmas as well as every other month as her mother’s health is failing. Her sister currently lives in Colorado.

Cha is very close to her mother who is an educated woman with degrees in teaching and home economics. The teaching profession fit her mother's nurturing personality. Cha mentioned that, in Cuba, teaching is viewed as a very acceptable career for a woman because it is very nurturing. Cha's maternal grandmother was a very strong and driven woman. She mentioned that she has the combined characteristics of both her mother and grandmother. However, Cha also has many characteristics of her father, specifically, determination and confidence. When asked if she feels her success is derived more from her mother or her father, she answered:

*I think my father. He's always pushed. Yeah, driven and the way I solve problems and the way I look at things are very much like my father. I think I've been able to be more successful because I'm softer like my mother.*

She attributes her ability to work well with men as a direct correlation of being around her father as a child.

*...my father had a temper so we always had to be sure that we didn't get him upset or anything like that, which was a great lesson for me. When people say how do you get along so well with men? I go, you should meet my daddy [laughs].*

### **Educational experience and career path**

Moving to a new country and not being able to speak the language would be challenging for anyone. Despite the language and financial challenges faced by Cha and her family, Cha did very well in school and was able to skip several grades due to her high academic achievement. However, Cha was modest about her educational strengths and stated that she was not a good student.

*I was not a good student; at first I thought it was because I didn't know English, but it's because I really didn't focus. School has kind of bored me*

*always; they kept me skipping grades. “Oh, she’s so smart;” and so it’s been interesting. I didn’t do well in college until after I got married [laughs].*

Cha married when she was 19 years old. Prior to marrying, she received average grades; but after marrying she became a straight “A” college student. Cha always knew that she would obtain a college education. Higher education was an expectation her father had for her and her sister. The message she and her sister received was they would always have nice things and not go without,

*I was part of the haves there [in Cuba] and so, what do the haves do here [in the United States]; and so I thought, well I’m going to college and my dad said, “there’s no option, you’re going to college, that’s what you do in the United States.” So then I went to college.*

Cha described her father as a high achiever and believed that, because he didn’t have a son from which to demand success, he placed all of his expectations on his daughters.

Cha came from an educated family: one grandfather was an attorney in the field of law; the other grandfather was a banker; her aunt was a pharmacist; and her grandmother was an entrepreneur, managing her husband who practiced law, as well as managing a sugar cane plantation. As such, Cha always knew that she would do well as an adult. She went on to explain:

*Now in Cuba doing well as an adult woman was to marry a Cuban that had gone to college or that was wealthy. Cuban women are the least educated Hispanic women, yet and Cuban men earn the most money than all the others so there is a real difference between men and women in the Cuban society.*

Cha wasn’t the only one in her immediate family who developed into a successful professional adult – her sister is a Psychologist. Having two sisters in a Cuban family with doctorates is very unusual. Cha remarked that Cuban women are the least educated of the Hispanic countries.

Cha stated that, when she went to college in 1964, young women were asked if they wanted to become nurses or teachers. Those were the only two options that she recalls, and her thoughts were:

*...well can you be in charge if you're a nurse [laughs]? No? Doctors are in charge...oh, I'll go into teaching, I think there I will do better... I liked being in charge and then I taught in the Head Start program, I loved it. I love children, I love teaching. You know when I was a kindergarten student I was in love with my kindergarten teacher, and I said I want to be a kindergarten teacher; and that's what I became, a kindergarten teacher.*

### **Role models and mentors**

Cha's first role model was her kindergarten teacher. Her teacher influenced her so positively that she also wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. There were other women who also served Cha as role models and mentors. One of them was Martha Freddie, a psychologist, who was the first woman PhD that she had ever met. Martha has four daughters, is married, and is very family-oriented. Before she met Martha, Cha believed that she had to choose between having a family or a career, but Martha showed her that you could have it all. Cha stated:

*I think she [Martha] made a huge difference, she was a Psychologist so she listened and she fell in love, we just...I just love her so much, I'm like her 5<sup>th</sup> daughter and so she just so mentored me. It was just so wonderful to see a woman that was so good at so many things that I thought; well you know that I can do this too. Martha showed me. She was very feminine and a very good mother, a very good wife, and a very good boss. She was my boss and so that really kind of made me believe that I could do this.*

Cha called Martha her American mother. She stated that she considered herself blessed with three mothers: a Cuban mother, an American mother, and a Mexican mother. Her Mexican mother, Nilda, doesn't have a doctorate but is very much a leader in bilingual education. Nilda is from "the valley" (Rio Grande area in Texas) and has six children. Cha



feels she resembles Nilda more than she does her own mother. At any celebration or gathering that Cha has, she invites all three women. She remarked, “*You know we take pictures of my mother, my Anglo mother, and my Mexican mother and me... I love them all, and they all love me.*” Cha even calls all of them on Mothers Day.

Cha has realized that mentoring others is hard work and makes a strong commitment. She makes a conscious effort to do so as she acknowledges the high shortage of Hispanic women mentors. She explained:

*...women before me the very, very few that were there were just so exhausted from having to deal with all of this that they didn't have as much time...I'm a teacher so I'm a natural nurturer, so I've always felt that it was really important, and then I didn't have any daughters, I had sons so I've just always mentored women, Hispanic women.*

At one point in Cha's career she worked as a Bilingual Director at Goose Creek Independent School District in Baytown, Texas. She was proud of the fact that she hired all the Hispanic teachers. Two of those teachers went on to become principals. Cha recognizes talent and encourages others to pursue advanced degrees. As president, Cha has enormous responsibilities but still continues to mentor others. She mentors women and men, Blacks, whites, and Hispanics. Cha has raised the bar for all who know her and work with her.

*There are more faculty getting their doctorates since I got here, there is the Dean of our Arts and Humanities getting her doctorate because I pushed her; one of the faculty is getting her doctorate because I pushed her; one of the staff is going to get her master's because I pushed her [Sabrina her Administrative Assistant] and....absolutely, education made such a difference in my life and I see these young people with real potential for leadership and I know that if they don't get their master's and doctorates they won't have the opportunity so I push, you talk, I push for doctorates here.*

Although, Cha mentors others, she doesn't utilize mentors in her professional career as much as she used to. Cha laughed and stated:

*Well I think I've gotten old enough that my mentors are retired [laughs] or are no longer. I used to have mentors that would call me like the chancellor in Dallas. He always wanted me to be president in the Dallas community college system so anytime there was a presidency, he'd have his vice chancellor call me... and so it's my responsibility to mentor. There are enough powerful people who know me that care about me that if opportunities open they will find a way to let me know.*

### **Barriers and risks**

Moving to the United States, acclimating to a new culture, and learning a new language were all barriers that Cha conquered. Her failing marriage was yet another barrier. Cha recognized the signs of an unhealthy relationship early, and realized that she needed to be strong and utilize the characteristics her grandmother instilled upon her.

*I kind of knew that my marriage may not last because it was not a good marriage and I had two sons that I thought, oh boy, I'm going to have to support these children. So I got my Master's and then when I finished my Master's it was in 1975.*

Cha received an HEW Bilingual Fellowship that paid her to pursue her doctoral degree. We talked about the difficulties of going to college and being a mother. Her oldest son, Shawn, was four and youngest, Ryan, was born the August she started her Master's program. Ryan was in Kindergarten when Cha finished her doctorate. It was cute for her to recall Ryan's kindergarten experience. *"He [Ryan] says to other kids, 'so where does your mamma go to school?' because he thought all mamas went to school!"* She finished her doctorate when Ryan finished kindergarten.

When Cha graduated with her doctoral degree her marriage ended in divorce. She knew ending a bad marriage was something she not only had to do for herself but also for the best interests of her two young sons. There were other barriers outside of her marriage that Cha also encountered. When asked which barriers she has had to encounter or overcome,

without hesitation the word “prejudice” was spoken. Cha stated, “*Prejudice is loud, I mean prejudism is real, it’s very real, and prejudism against women and Hispanics.*”

Cha described herself as a risk taker, and stated she took risks with every job change. Some of the positions she accepted required her to relocate, placing an additional risk on her marriage. After she divorced, Cha remained single for 11 years while raising her sons. She is currently in her 16<sup>th</sup> year of marriage to her second husband. Her husband (age 52) lives in Austin and owns a printing company, and he also works as a political consultant for Cucacas. He comes to San Antonio on Tuesday and Thursday nights as well as most weekends. However, she sometimes travels to Austin as they have a home on the lake which is a relaxing change of pace. Their marriage is no stranger to dual locations, as they have lived apart while she was working at College Station, too. Cha remarked that a healthy, trusting marriage has enabled her to pursue her professional dreams.

### **Leadership**

In becoming a Hispanic president, Cha has gained a greater understanding on how to deal with tough problems, as well as handle difficult situations tactfully. Cha emphasized the importance of performing your best and being proud of your work accomplishments. In being a leader Cha realized that some people will be negative and pessimistic, regardless, as it is their nature. Cha described how she responds to those challenging attitudes:

*... I just don’t worry about it... people will talk and people will say things... there’s always going to be good things and bad things, and if you focus on the bad things they’ll get you down.... You do what you need to do; and you go on, and then you focus on the good things.*

Cha beams confidence in every movement and word. Her very presence brings a sense of confidence and trust. She has a strong voice that can change from serious tones to

pitches of laughter within the same sentence. Cha's sincerity is evident and her positive outlook on life is obvious. This positive attitude and outlook on life is also recognized by all who know her.

*...You know people say that they're surprised that I'm always so happy [laughs] ... they go, how to do you continue with your enthusiasm and I just know how many things you have to deal [with as a college president]. You know you get sued as a president, the faculty senate, ... it's unending..., that's part of being a president. What do you expect? And so you just kind of say that's part of it, but I'm going to enjoy this and so faculty really like being with me, because I enjoy being president of this college; I love it.*

### **Advice to aspiring Hispanic women leaders**

Cha has the gift of being able to take her personal experiences and provide strong, sound advice for other minority women. Some of the words of advice that Cha has provided are: *"I think that particularly for minorities and women you have to take risks. You know, they should be measured, they should be good risks. But you have to take risks and you weigh [them out]."*

Cha acknowledges the differences in culture and familiar expectations. Breaking the traditional familiar cycle can be difficult. She sees that, even today, young Hispanic women want to be mothers at young ages. This is typically discouraged by the American population, but not so for Hispanic women. Thinking differently and thinking outside of what is expected can be difficult but definitely achievable. Cha explains:

*It's tougher for women, particularly for Hispanic women because we have that inherent belief that our family is what's most important. I think that in order to be a good Hispanic woman who is successful, you have to be lucky enough to have a good constitution to have tremendous amount of energy to be able to be able to first fulfill what we believe is what's most important which is at home and then have all that additional energy to become successful at work. I don't think that the same quite, cultural expectations are present for Anglos or African American women.*

Another strong piece of advice Cha provided was to rise above gossip. She remarked, *“So many people think that if a woman is in a position of leadership that they are there because they must have slept with a man to be there. Rise above that and don’t let gossip stop you!”*

In consideration of the Hispanic culture and familiar expectations, more and more women will be able, as Cha would describe—to have it all, family and career. It is more likely to be achievable if one has a successful spouse and a strong marriage. Cha offered some advice about the characteristics of a potential spouse.

*I think one thing... [that is] very important to smart women is to marry a smart man, I mean clearly that is really important, I think for you [to] marry someone that is not as quick as you are; I think that damages a relationship, I really do.*

#### “Cha”

The name Cha is unique. Towards the later part of our interview I asked her to tell me about her name. She mentioned that when she to the Catholic high school in Milwaukee, WI, nobody could pronounce her name Margarita *“... so they’d say... we’ll call you Annie....okay, we’ll call you Maggie.”* One thing that is very common with refugees, according to Cha, is that their names are almost always changed once they enter United States. Ironically, she taught a gentlemen how to dance the Cha Cha, *“and they said what about Cha Cha, ... and so that’s the nickname they gave me.”* She is still amazed that her nickname has stayed with her all of these years, even as she achieved her doctorate degree.

She described that everybody is very respectful of her presidential position, *“They don’t call me Cha at the college, it’s Dr. Guzmán, or President Guzmán. The faculty, the*

*staff, nobody calls me Cha you know, except some people have said Dr. Cha and some people have said President Cha [laughs]. I thought that was so funny [laughing], President Cha, I thought that is the ultimate, President Cha!"*

### **Personal Reflection**

Cha is a strikingly beautiful woman. I'm sure she noticed my eyes widen with surprise when I saw her for the first time. She literally took my breath away; not because of her beauty, but because of the physical similarities that she had to my mother. Because of these strong similarities, when we greeted I was tempted to hug her but, instead, offered her my hand. I felt instantly close to her. I didn't know if it was because of her or because she reminded me so much of the mother I miss so dearly. Cha's accent was elegant but not as strong as my mother's, which was no doubt evident because of the different career path Cha has journeyed. Even her age was close, as Cha is 58 and my mother passed away at the age of 57. Cha's hairstyle was also like my mother's. Although, my mother's hair was naturally black, like mine; she colored it to a beautiful reddish brown, which was the same exact shade as Cha's. The color was uncommonly beautiful. I also noticed the resemblances in her stature and body language; both very similar to that of my mother.

At times, I found myself fixated on Cha's physical appearance, and I had to make a conscious effort to emotionally pull back and remind myself of the research data I was there to collect. When Cha spoke, each word was spoken with confidence. There was never any hesitation or doubt in her voice. Confidence, self pride, passion, and humor were all characteristics I noted within our first minutes together.

I knew Cha sensed my concern about my voice, and she made a point to tell me that it was all right, and not to worry. Much like Margot, she had a way of bringing calmness into our interview. She wished me well in my studies and, with the deepest sincerity, I knew she meant it. After all, helping others achieve their highest educational goals was rewarding to Cha.

She was blessed with sons, but I can't help but wonder if she would echo the same statements to them if they were daughters. The statements my mother told me countless times and so many years ago: "Don't count on a man for anything, and don't have anymore babies than you can afford to raise on your own." Cha's personal journey and past marriage seemed very similar to my mother's. She was also an extremely strong advocate for encouraging women, especially Hispanic women, to obtain a higher education. Cha and I both experienced raising two small children alone. Without our education, I'm not sure if I would be doing this research and writing this chapter, or if Cha would be in her position as president. Education has made the difference. As Cha stated, "*absolutely, education made such a difference in my life.*"

I feel confident in the fact that Cha knew she was contributing an essential component to my doctoral study, which was gratifying for her. Cha is known to frequently push and encourage others whom she knows, much like my own mother pushed and encouraged me. I find irony in the fact that I, a doctoral student from Iowa, sought her out to complete my goal of obtaining my PhD. For I know that if I worked with her, or were nearer to her, she would be pushing me and encouraging me as she does so many others.

**CHAPTER 6. DR. JULIET GARCIA****Description of the Participant**

Dr. Juliet Garcia is a 55-year-old Hispanic woman who is the president of both the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) and Texas Southmost College (TSC). She will forever go down in history as being the first Hispanic woman to become president of a United States college or university (Garcia, 2004). In 1986, she became president of Texas Southmost College (TSC), then a junior college but currently a community college. TSC offers vocational, technical, and associate degrees as well as continuing education classes. By 1991, TSC had merged with the University of Texas to offer Bachelor, Master's, and Doctoral degrees. The joining of the two institutions not only enabled the expansion of programs offered, but it also created an expansion of physical size, as UTB/TSC grew from 47 acres to more than 382 acres. In 1992, Dr. Garcia was appointed president of the University of Texas at Brownsville, (UTB), as she was instrumental in forging this unique partnership between the two institutions.



Dr. Juliet Garcia has worked her entire professional career in the field of education. She has served as chair of the American Council on Education and as a commissioner on the White House Advisory Commission on Education Excellence for Hispanic Americans. I felt honored that Dr. Garcia accepted the invitation to participate in this study.

### **Interview**

Finding the UTB/TSC campus was relatively easy as I had driven by it many times as a child on the way to the Mexican/American border. The campus is merely one block away from the bridge that crosses the Rio Grande River, which separates the U.S. from Mexico.

Hector Castillo, VP and Assistant to the President, was the welcoming contact person (gatekeeper) who helped make this day, December 6, 2005, possible. I spoke to him on the phone as he helped me navigate my way through the winding campus road. Once I was closer to the location he hung up the phone to greet me outside the building, near the road. The directions he provided were precise and I was able to park directly in front of the administrative building. I soon realized that Hector's courtesy was a reflection of the same politeness others modeled on campus as well.

The administrative building was dark in color and had a large wrap-around porch, utilizing deck boards to provide a wooden sidewalk. The wooden floor created a distinguished clicking, almost echoing, sound from the heels of my shoes as I walked and talked with Hector. The building took on a character of its own, and gave the feeling that if it could talk, it would have its own very significant story to share. The inside of the building was comfortably decorated, and I was warmly greeted by the rest of the administrative staff. Hector explained that Dr. Garcia had an unexpected meeting arise and, due to that, she would

be running a little late for our interview. He was cordial enough to invite me up the winding stairs into his office, where I was able to learn more about Dr. Garcia and the history of the college.

When Dr. Juliet Garcia arrived, she was extremely polite and spoke in a low soothing tone. The tone of her voice was unique; the words rolled off her tongue like silk making anyone within ear's shot want to listen to whatever it was she was saying. I learned she is highly sought after for public speaking due to her extreme intelligence on educational issues as well as her speech delivery. I also learned later that she had majored in speech, which I found very fitting.

Dr. Juliet Garcia was a tall woman who was beautifully dressed in slacks and a blouse; and she wore her black hair pulled neatly back in a bun, making it difficult to judge its length. Her dark black hair had hints of silver which made a beautiful contrast to her soft white skin, giving her a "Snow White" appearance of beauty.

Knowing the hectic schedule that Dr. Garcia had that day, I'm sure the last thing on her mind was taking time to be interviewed by a doctoral student from Iowa. I was worried that she might not have time to meet with me and would need to reschedule. However, the minute she walked in the building everybody became animated, almost as if someone had shouted, "Action!" Suddenly everybody had something very important to either ask or tell her. It was that moment that I became very aware that I was in the presence of a very important person, and my nervousness once again began to overcome my body. As we were walking into her office she continued speaking to her administrative assistant. Dr. Garcia's last directive given was to call the faculty member who was scheduled to meet with her at 3:00 p.m., to see if he could come in at either 3:30 p.m. or reschedule.

Once the door to her office closed behind us, all the busy sounds of the secretarial lobby were quieted and the air felt calm again. Dr. Garcia's office appeared rectangular in shape and had three exterior walls which provided ample light, brightening up the dark woodwork which encased her office. She also had a board table inside her office, which is where the interview took place.

Knowing that we had some flexibility with our time lessened my stress, but my nerves were still uncontrolled. As I began to speak, I placed my quivering hands on the table. Seeing my trembling hands, Dr. Garcia instantly realized my state of nervousness and began speaking to me in a calm, therapeutic voice, and she said "*Don't be nervous, it'll be all right.*" When she spoke those words my first thoughts were, "*Oh, she would be a wonderful therapist.*"

As the Director of Counseling Services at Indian Hills Community College, I assist students with academic goals. I am also a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) providing psychological evaluations for Ottumwa Regional Health Center. My training has forged me with the ability to recognize my clients' comfort levels by watching for their nonverbal communication cues. I find ways to de-stress clients so that we can get the most out of our session together.

Suddenly, I felt that now the tables were turned, so to speak, and I reflected on how my clients and students must feel when I try to get them to relax for a session. The technique that I use with clients was the same that Dr. Garcia was using with me. She proceeded to ask me to share a little bit about myself, as she was hopeful that this method would calm my nerves; and, in fact, it did. I was so thankful that she was cognizant of my emotions, another great skill she unknowingly had.

She was very kind and allowed me to conduct the interview for its entire length. We began at approximately 1:50 p.m., and the interview ended at 3:20 p.m.

### **Childhood background**

Dr. Garcia lives in Brownsville, Texas, where she was born and raised. Her mother and father were both Mexican-Americans. Her father was born in Monterey, Mexico and immigrated with his family to Brownsville, Texas during the Mexican Revolution. Juliet's mother was from the Valley but was of Mexican descent. The Valley is the term used when referring to the South most towns in Texas, near the Rio Grande River valley, such as Brownsville and Harlingen, Texas. Her mother passed away at the age of 40, when Juliet was only 9 years-old. Her father raised her and her two brothers.

Her father maintained his Mexican citizenship as well as a legal resident of the United States. He felt uplifted as a legal U.S. resident, and would proudly show his green card to others. Her mother was an American citizen, and fluent in both the English and Spanish languages. Juliet and her brothers had dual citizenship until they were 18 years old. *"We traveled in Mexico as Mexicans and in the United States as Americans. The two languages were equally valued as well."* Juliet was raised speaking both languages in her home; however, Spanish was spoken primarily with her father and English with her mother. Juliet provides the same bilingual environment in her own home for her children and grandchildren. She stresses the importance of speaking Spanish in the home to young children, stating that English is what will be taught in the schools.

Dr. Garcia was raised not only with two languages, but also with two religions. Her father was Catholic and her mother was Presbyterian. Being raised in a home with two

religions could have been very confusing but that simply was not the case. As Juliet stated, *“God probably didn’t invent those labels [laughs] ... as long as you were good people it didn’t matter what the label you put on your religion.”*

Dr. Juliet Garcia reflected growing up in a very liberal home environment at a time when the Valley community was conservative and traditional, which empowered her. Treating children differently because of their gender was very common then and still is today. Boys are typically raised with the expectations of being the breadwinner, whereas girls are typically raised with the expectations of being good wives and mothers. Juliet was thankful that there were no differences for her in her home as a child. All of her siblings were expected to get an education; it was valued equally regardless of gender.

Juliet became engaged at the young age of 18, and married when she was 19 years old. She was a junior in college and married her older brother’s good friend. They have been married 37 years and have two children. Juliet stated that she was married when she achieved all of her degrees. Choosing between an education or a family wasn’t an option. Juliet wanted to have both and she did; even with her children 13 months apart in age.

As mentioned earlier, Juliet’s mother passed away when she was a young girl (age 9), leaving Juliet to grow up with three men: her father and two brothers. Juliet stated that it was very different than growing up with a woman’s influence, as she has learned the difference after having a daughter and granddaughters. Growing up with men taught her how to fight and how to make up. Once an argument or disagreement was over, life returned back to normal.

Growing up with three men has helped her throughout life as she frequently challenges and debates men at the political level on educational issues. Juliet stated that

women typically have more difficulty fighting and will often hold grudges that are unfortunate as well as unfair. She mentioned that she has known women to hold grudges for up to 20 years! Dr. Garcia stated, “*One shouldn’t go through life hating others forever and on every issue; it isn’t fair to anybody.*”

### **Educational experience and career path**

Juliet mentioned that she had very smart parents who didn’t go to college, simply because the opportunities were not available to them. Her mother was a salutatorian of her high school class, and her father was a straight “A” student and excelled in geometry. Nevertheless, they worked hard to ensure that Juliet and her two brothers were able to go to college. When they were born her father opened up a college savings account for each of the children, with the expectation that the money would be used only for college. Her parents felt that education was something that could never be taken away from anyone. Her parents lost money in the Mexican Revolution and later in the Great Depression. They learned that a person with education, though, could easily re-earn money. Education was viewed as a very valuable asset by her parents as it made a person independent.

Juliet’s brothers are both successfully employed professionals. One of her brothers was musically talented and gifted with the ability to play any instrument. He simply loved music and wanted to major in music at college. However, he ended up getting his degree in engineering because, at that time, music was not thought of as a reputable occupation. Her brother’s path may have influenced Juliet as she advocated to the Board of Regents the need for a Bachelor’s degree in music at UT Brownsville. This major was not a popular choice, as there was a music program at UT Pan-American but it only produced a small amount of

graduates each year. However, Juliet advocated and proved there was a unique need in the Valley for a music program. She convinced the board and ultimately approved adding the new program. Juliet's other brother is a Registered Nurse and currently oversees a Hospice company, providing loving care to folks who are in very difficult stages of their life.

There was never a question regarding college; Juliet knew that she would be going as it was expected of her. By attending college she achieved something very few Hispanic women have the opportunity to do. Selecting a major was difficult for her as she was unsure of what career she should select. Juliet's career choices were not broad, as she was a Hispanic woman. She stated, "*I was either to be a teacher or a nurse, that was kind of the push, or a pharmacist because there had been one.... I couldn't see dispensing pills my whole life.*"

There were other educated family members who Juliet discussed in our interview. An aunt on her mother's side was 81 years-old, and had achieved a pharmacy degree when she was young. The success of this aunt made pharmacy another career option for Juliet, along with teaching and nursing. Juliet acknowledged how phenomenal it was in those days to be a woman pharmacist, but her aunt did not consider herself a frontier leader in the women's work movement, when in reality she was.

The educator in her family was her maternal grandmother, who was a teacher. She stated that her father's side had come from a family with money in México; however, during the Mexican Revolution they left everything behind including the value of his parent's education in México, as it had no value in the US. "*They [her parents] came from good stock and educated folks but it just didn't happen under their generation so they meant to catch up with us.*"

Once she became active in the educational system Juliet knew that working in education was where she belonged. She obtained her B.A. and M.A. from the University of Houston, majoring in Speech and English. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin in Communications and Linguistics. As a result of the Mexican Revolution, Juliet's father pushed for his children to become educated and to select a career that was reliable. This may have been a factor in her brother's choice to major in engineering and not music, while her other brother entered the healthcare profession and Juliet entered education. All three careers are needed and provide steady incomes.

Juliet was in the debate club at the University of Houston where she majored in Speech and English. At that time there were men's and women's debate teams, and if it were a boy and girl team, they still had to debate in the men's division. She thought it was a silly rule, but it made her a stronger debater which has benefited her in life. Growing up with her father and two brothers gave her innate debating skills that she was able to put into practice on that team. As a college debater she was surrounded by men, and she earned their respect by learning how to *"look them in the eye, be articulate, be persuasive, be smart... You may not win the prize but at least you're going to give it a good fight."*

Learning how to argue tactfully and always taking the other side into perspective on any given issue is essential has served her well. Women, Dr. Garcia stated, need to upgrade their communication skills, as they often speak before they listen. She stressed that it is just as crucial to be a good listener as it is to be a good speaker. Over the years, it has become evident that Juliet has mastered the art of listening and speaking.



### **Role models and mentors**

Teachers were role models for Dr. Garcia. She had a sprinkling of both good and bad teachers, and was able to learn techniques from both. Juliet skipped the first grade, due to her high academic ability, and was advanced to the second grade. She was not alone in her advanced placement, as she was joined by another girl who also skipped the first grade. She recalls being placed into the second grade teacher's classroom which appeared to be already overflowing with students. Juliet feared that two more young students probably were more than the teacher wanted or needed. The teacher very easily could have created a negative experience for the two young girls; however, something special happened that year and Juliet recalled how that teacher proved to be an inspiration.

*instead she decided that because we were younger than anybody else we needed more care so she bought us community concert tickets. She told us how to dress for the concert, she taught us what the concert was going to be about. I saw my first opera in second and I knew what was going to happen in the opera, and she sat us in the front row and then talked us through the opera. We could've been traumatized by skipping and instead we were launched; and we were launched in a very, very positive way, with a great deal of confidence and actually probably more attention than her own second graders were getting. So she probably had the most effect in the sense of giving us a chance and an awful lot of confidence in teaching, real teaching.*

Juliet considered her second grade teacher a mentor and valued the time she had spent with her. One of Juliet's greatest regrets was that she has not been able to devote as much time to mentoring others as she would have liked. Juliet does not consider herself a mentor, however, she certainly provides mentoring opportunities for both students and faculty. Every year she sends a faculty member to the Harvard Summer Institute program, as well as the Harvard Institute of Educational Management.

Dr. Garcia is also giving back the type of mentoring that she was so graciously provided with by her second grade teacher. Students need mentoring regardless of their age, and Dr. Garcia recognized the importance of mentorship for the students of TSC and UTB, by implementing the STING project. STING (Students Together, Involving, Networking, and Guiding) is a mandatory program for entering developmental students. STING provides an introduction to college life, student development, campus resources, tutoring, and learning. Through STING, students are assigned a peer mentor with whom they meet weekly, individually, and as groups in labs. The peer mentors help students cope with the transition to college, and tracks the students' grades and attendance.

The STING program is a benefit to both mentor and mentee. The mentors complete training sessions that lead to certification by the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). In addition, students enhance their own communication and interpersonal experience. STING is a wonderful program that is helping students value the importance of mentoring others that will, hopefully, not end when they leave the doors of TSC and UTB.

Juliet recognizes the characteristics of a good mentor as an adult. After her second grade teacher, Juliet was fortunate enough to befriend two more mentors—both women. The characteristics of her mentors were: courageous, ethical, hard working, and risk takers. Both women, Jean and Mary, are members of her board. She stated that Jean would offer practical advice but always stresses to Juliet that she should not feel obligated to take it. When Juliet would see gray, Jean would see black or white: *“She wasn’t restraining me from making [decisions], she affected and guided, and I will forever be grateful for that.”*

Her other mentor, Mary, has completed 21 years of distinguished service on the board. Juliet feels confident that Mary is the reason she is president today. *“I’m convinced*

*because she was the chair of the committee that selected me at the community college; then she helped me forge this partnership that we created with UT system. I watched her for 21 years and she has been extraordinary, a model, a mentor, and a friend... so I've had them; [I've] been very fortunate."*

### **Barriers and risks**

Hispanic ethnicity is a barrier, not an asset, to being a leader in the Valley. Brownsville, TX is still considered a very conservative town in which gender barriers are also evident. As Juliet explained, it is not advantageous for a Hispanic woman to be president in a state that still holds prejudice against women in positions of authority. Other states have more liberal views towards gender and ethnicity. It is a battle for Hispanic women leaders in Texas to prove themselves worthy of leadership positions in education. Being a successful working woman in Brownsville comes with a price. *"Certainly when I was getting my job, the notion of something must be wrong with us [was there]. [She's] too educated and talks too pretty and too Anglicized."*

According to Juliet, the meaning of taking on Gringo characteristics, "Anglicized", is not a compliment. When Anglicization occurs, and a woman is working outside of the home, it is often viewed as a troubled marriage. This characteristic was not true for Juliet as she has had a strong and stable marriage of 37 years. Juliet is a trendsetter and a change agent. She didn't let other's opinions stop her dream of becoming a leader no matter how many harsh words were spoken or implied upon her or her family.

Juliet has chosen to remain in Brownsville, TX and, because her lack of mobility, she has taken herself out of the running for many out-of-state job opportunities. Even though she

has remained in Texas Juliet is very cognizant of worldwide educational issues. Juliet is on many national organizations and has worked in South Africa. Some of the boards she is currently on include the American Council on Education, USAID, and the Ford Foundation. These boards have sent her to places such as Vietnam and will take her to Egypt next year. Dr. Garcia can be classified as an international leader with Brownsville, TX roots.

### **Leadership**

Juliet's leadership is noticed by other women. They take pride in the fact that another Hispanic woman is accepting the challenge of presidency. When Juliet became president in 1986, she was called and congratulated by another Hispanic woman who said, "*You can open the doors for all of us.*" At that time there were no women in presidency positions, in education or industry, or anywhere in the Valley. Even now, 20 years later, according to Juliet, there are very few.

Juliet explained that her leadership drive became actualized due to the insight of her husband. She has been married to a man who saw more potential in her than she did in herself. He would say, "*You can do that job...why aren't you applying for it...you can do it, you're smarter than they are; you know that.*" The truth, as Juliet describes it, is you don't know it. It often takes someone else to identify the leadership potential in you, for you to be able to challenge yourself and step forward. With her husband's constant encouragement, Juliet started thinking that maybe she could do it, and she has been moving forward ever since.

### **Advice to aspiring Hispanic women leaders**

Juliet offers sound words of advice from which others can learn. She compared the struggles of work and career to the analogy of playing a game. She explained:

*You can't change the game by yourself, so what you have to learn is how to play the game and I say that not because I've given up trying to change it, you try to change it always, you try to better it, you try to change the rules, to be more advantageous to people like you or those you serve in this case our community. But finally one person is not likely to be able to change the whole system.*

Juliet emphasized the importance of working the system and learning from it. She learned this from her father. Juliet grew up in the 1960s, and considered herself a rebel as well as a change agent. Her father told her that, *"Honey you can either affect change by pounding and yelling from outside of the door or by sitting at the board table, but you have to decide which one you want to do."* Juliet pounded on the door for a while and then realized that, instead of yelling at the *man* in charge, she needed to find out how to be the *woman* in charge.

Another excellent piece of advice is to know your weaknesses. Knowing one's weaknesses is essential in surviving in a very political climate. *"You've got to learn it along the way so you've got to be smart enough to know what you don't know."* This is very important to understand. As Juliet explained, there will always be someone smarter than you, *"So there can't be an ego in this, because the moment you have to be the smartest one at the table, you've lost a tremendous amount of power."* A basic skill that we learn as children needs to be practiced as adults; that is respect. Be respectful of others and they will be respectful of you.

### Personal Reflection

I found UTB / TSC easily, as it is only a block from the border. I am no stranger to Brownsville, TX as this is the very town in which my mother was born and raised; and the town I visited every six months. As a child we drove by the college every time we crossed the Mexican border. Dad would occasionally go with us to Brownsville, walk down to the bridge, and sit on the bench with the other “snow birds”, watching the tourists cross back and forth across the border. It was a way for him to pass the time.

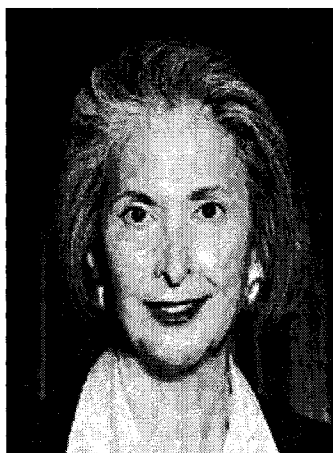
Just entering the town gave me flashbacks of my years as a child. I remember riding my bike from *mi abuelita's* [my Grandma's] house to the Pronto station down the street, and then back to the bakery across the street from *abuelita's*. The bakery was owned by my cousin, and she would always give me fresh *pan* [bread]. I drove by *abuelita's* house and found a rickety fenced-in yard and yellow paint chipping off the old house. Her home looked old, abandoned, and unkept, as *mi abuelita* had recently moved in with her younger sister. *Abuelita* is 96 years-old and is no longer able to take care of herself or her home.

Dr. Garcia shared with me that TSC and UTB recently purchased the old Amigoland Mall. The mall is currently being transformed to house TSC's technical programs. After driving around *mi abuelita's* neighborhood, I couldn't resist the opportunity to drive out to the mall. The Amigoland Mall was where mom and I would spend hours shopping—killing time trying on clothes and shoes. It was eerie to see the empty parking lot, but wonderful to envision that someday it would be full again with consumers of another kind—students. Instead of people shopping for clothes and goods, they will be buying an education. Students will learn new skills that will make them more employable; skills they would otherwise not

have. Instead of letting the old mall remain vacant, Dr. Garcia will bring it new life, providing another avenue for giving back to the community.

Dr. Garcia told me from the start of our interview that I would have no problem finishing my doctoral program. She said this with such calmness and belief; something I would not have expected from a perfect stranger. Later, as we ended our time together, she explained why she said this. *“The reason I mentioned to you that I thought that you would have no problems finishing your work is because you were compelled by something that is a strong force [your mother] and I think that is the key.”*

Dr. Garcia knew this as she is also compelled by a strong force, and that is to provide good to others. Her mother left her at a very young age, but her mother left Juliet something that is a large part of how she lives her life on a daily basis. Her mother would read many times from the Bible. Juliet paraphrased a message her mother instilled upon her brothers and her: *“If you have skills you’ve got to use them and you’ve got to use them not only for yourself but for the common good. [It was] a very clear message and so we knew it wasn’t only, you had to get a career; it was one that would somehow create value for others.”* Thus, in essence, Dr. Garcia and I are both fulfilling promises we gave to our mothers; it is a force stronger than ourselves that pushes us forward every day.

**CHAPTER 7. DR. TESSA MARTINEZ POLLACK****Description of the Participant**

Dr. Tessa Martinez Pollack is a 58-year-old Hispanic woman who is the president of Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, TX. Dr. Pollack became the 7<sup>th</sup> president of the 110-year-old university in the summer of 2002, and is the first Hispanic ever to head the institution. Our Lady of the Lake University has a total of six campuses, which are located in San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston. The university is a Catholic institution offering degree programs by the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Education and Clinical Studies, the School of Business, and the Worden School of Social Services.

Dr. Pollack's presidency experience began in 1988 at the Medical Center Campus at Miami-Dade Community College in Miami, Florida, where she served as president for approximately seven years. She continued as the president of Glendale Community College in Phoenix, AZ, where she served as president for an additional seven years.

Dr. Pollack has been named one of the Hispanic Business Magazine country's 2005 Elite Women. In addition, in 2003 the same magazine named her as one of the top "100



Influentials” in America. She also received the 2005 Latina Excellence Award in Education from Hispanic Magazine, and has been the recipient of numerous awards including the American Sunrise Award (2003), the MANA Award (2003), and the Arizona Woman Award (2001).

Dr. Pollack’s journey towards educational accomplishment began as an educator, teaching students at John F. Kennedy High School in San Antonio’s Edgewood Independent School District—one of the poorest districts in the state of Texas. Dr. Pollack has published extensively in her field, and has served as a participant subject in many dissertation studies. I am privileged to be added to the list of doctoral students who have had the opportunity to interview her.

### **Interview**

Our Lady of the Lake University is located directly in the heart of downtown San Antonio, TX. The university sits as if it was built first and the city of San Antonio was developed around it. The campus is beautifully landscaped and illuminates a prestigious presence. I arrived at Our Lady of the Lake University for my 2:00 p.m. interview appointment with Dr. Pollack without a minute to spare. Intending to arrive ahead of schedule, I had left my hotel approximately 30 minutes early, allowing [I thought] ample time for the short five-mile drive. Unfortunately, living in rural Iowa and then driving in downtown San Antonio gives new meaning to a five-mile drive. Before I knew it, I was driving down winding one-way streets, getting lost, and ending up by the Alamo.

With the clock ticking, I quickly called Dr. Pollack’s administrative assistant, Jennifer, for emergency directions. Jennifer had an outgoing personality and was wonderful

help. She navigated by landmarks, rather than signs, which is the way this Iowa girl drives. Once I entered the administrative building, Jennifer sent another staff member to meet and walk with me to her office. The hallway ceilings were very high and portrayed old architectural work. I greeted and thanked Jennifer again for her directions, and waited in the lobby for Dr. Pollack to arrive. In a few minutes Dr. Pollack presented herself and invited me into her office. She was a beautiful, tall, slender woman who was dressed in slacks and a blouse that flowed softly and comfortably as she walked across the room.

Dr. Pollack had an elegantly decorated corner office, with long windows reaching upwards towards the high ceiling. Under each window stood an old radiator, a subtle reminder of this historical building's age. The building appeared to be under construction as there were noises from an exterior wall of Dr. Pollack's office. The noises were intermediately loud and slightly vibrated the exterior wall. At one point a picture fell from a shelf near the wall. Aside from the construction noise, we had no interruptions and were able to conduct the interview within the designated one and a half hour timeframe. Her office was comfortable and, like Dr. Guzmán's and Dr. Garcia's, it also had a conference table which was where the interview took place.

### **Childhood background**

Dr. Pollack grew up in San Antonio, TX, just a few short blocks from Our Lady of the Lake University. She is of Mexican decent on both her maternal and paternal sides. When Dr. Pollack was a baby, her mother became very ill. Her mother moved in with her grandmother, who cared for her while Tessa lived with her father in México where he worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Tessa and her father moved back to San

Antonio as her mother neared death. Her mother passed away at the young age of 24, when Tessa was only 2 and her father was 25 years old. He returned to México three weeks after her death to resume his occupation, while Tessa remained in San Antonio to live with her grandmothers. Although Tessa's primary care came from her grandmothers, her relationship with her father remained close as they would fly back and forth two or three times per year to visit one another.

Growing up, Tessa was exposed to both the English and Spanish languages. English was learned at school whereas Spanish was spoken in the home. This changed slightly as she made her own home as an adult; both languages were still spoken, with English as the primary language. She stated that they would speak Spanish for the grandparents as well as *"Spanish when we wanted to be discrete about what we were talking about [laughs]."*

As previously stated, Tessa's father remained in México to work while she grew up in San Antonio, and they would only visit each other two or three times per year. On extended stays to see him, or for long summer visits, he would enroll her in school.

*So I was in schools in the summers; in schools where everything was Spanish and I'm probably one of the few Latinas around, Cha [Dr. Cha Guzmán] I think, probably, and Juliet [Dr. Juliet Garcia] probably one of the few Latinas [that] can speak, read, [and] write in Spanish.*

Dr. Pollack embraces the value of the Spanish language and is always looking for innovative ways to infuse Spanish into the curriculum at her university. *"San Antonio is a hub city, and three years ago [2002] there was a study that showed that San Antonio is losing its Spanish language at a faster rate than any other city of its comparable demographics."*

Tessa grew up with the loving care provided by her grandmothers and eventually started a life on her own. She married during her last semester of her undergraduate

program. Her marriage ended in divorce after 20 years, and she remained single for five more years. From this first marriage, Dr. Pollack has a daughter and two grandchildren. She then met and married her second husband, Bob, who simply swept her off her feet. Dr. Pollack showed her sense of humor as she described her first husband as Hispanic, her current husband as Jewish, “[and] *here I am at a Catholic university [Our Lady of the Lake University], go figure.*” Bob and Dr. Pollack lived in Arizona, when Bob was faced with a catastrophic diagnosis—a benign, but very dangerously located brain tumor.

Even though they were settled in Arizona, Dr. Pollack knew it was time to move back to San Antonio. “*I knew that my life was coming around full circle to come back to my old community...*” Bob is now disabled and has severely impaired short-term memory, which obscures the critical work he once performed as a developer of affordable housing. Dr. Pollack stated that her husband, an attorney by trade, was one of the largest developers of affordable housing and president of his own company. “*It’s a new life for us now; it’s different, but it’s still a good life.*”

### **Educational experience and career path**

Dr. Pollack’s mother died when she was two years old but she still understood the importance of education. As death grew closer, her mother made a pact with her grandmothers, sister, and father—Tessa would get a college education. Her mother had a high school education and was the first Hispanic ever to work for the telephone company in San Antonio, at the time when they were building long distance lines to México. The telephone company had hired her mother because she was bilingual.

Dr. Pollack's grandmothers kept their promise to Tessa's mother and discovered Our Lady of the Lake High School. The beauty of the campus still shines, and I could easily see why the high school was an honorable and prestigious institution. The high school is located on the same grounds as the university. Tessa described Our Lay of the Lake High School as a "*Finishing college preparatory school for daughters of very wealthy families from San Antonio and for daughters of very wealthy families from México or parts of Latin America, Central, and South America.*"

Tessa lived at that time in the 11<sup>th</sup> poorest neighborhood in the country, and her grandmothers had bartered their way into the high school as they could not afford the high tuition. One grandmother saved her social security check, while the other grandmother saved money from a small job that she had in a fabric shop, "*and the rest they bartered their way in here by doing odd kinds of little jobs for the nuns or asking for extended payments on tuition, real extended [laughs] payments on tuition.*" The high school education that Tessa received provided her with a solid foundation and personal experiences that proved valuable when it became time for her to enter college.

Dr. Pollack chose to begin her college endeavors at the local community college due to the affordable tuition. She told the story of registering for classes at the community college:

*...[I] didn't even make it through registration, I turned around, I came back in tears and said 'I can't go there, I can't do this'. I mean it was just overwhelming to me just to go through the registration process and so my grandmothers got my father on the phone and he said sorry you've gotta go back, you have no other choice. So the next day I marched myself back and... the ironies of life right?*

Dr. Pollack earned her Associate's of Arts degree in 1967 from San Antonio College. Upon completion of her degree she continued her studies at UT Austin where she also worked as a waitress, and on the nightshift for the IRS, just to make ends meet. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism. However, the degree didn't end Tessa's pursuit to further her education. She knew she needed to obtain her Masters degree, and she did, in Education and Business at UT San Antonio.

This period of time was an extremely challenging part of her life; she was separated from her husband and raising a 4 year-old daughter. Tessa described trying to hold down a job, go to school, and be a single mother as very difficult, however, she endured. She stated, *"So I thought I can do this, and I did."* The final piece of the educational puzzle was achieving her Ph.D. Tessa was offered a deanship position at the same time she was offered a fellowship. The decision was difficult as she didn't want to turn down either one; she rose to the challenge and described: *"Holding down an administrative job...in a full-time Ph.D. program and I had a small child, so it was a very trying time, but again, you know it was just one of those things that you, I have to do it, and do it."*

Tessa obtained her PhD in Educational Administration at UT Austin and was a pioneer in her family, as her mother and father had both obtained only high school degrees. Her grandmothers who raised her, had even less education as they were both from México; one went through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and the other through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Dr. Pollack's determination for an advanced degree was no accident. She described her career, however, as a fluke. She wanted to be a broadcast journalist but stated that, in 1969, the world of broadcast journalism was terribly closed to women and minorities. She described being treated extremely poorly in her first interview and remarked, *"I turned*

*around and I walked out of there and I thought, my gosh, I have just spent time and money that my family didn't have for a profession that's not open to me."* One of her friends was a teacher and explained how rewarding teaching was, so Tessa thought that she'd give it a try. *"I taught and it was the best thing that ever happened to me."* At 21 years old, she was not much older than the students she was teaching. She taught junior and senior composition and felt she *"could change the world."*

Dr. Pollack's value for education was passed on to her daughter, just as her mother had ensured it would be passed onto her. Her daughter received her degree in Global Business Management at Arizona State University (ASU), and is in the middle of finishing her Certification as a Public Accountant (CPA). *"She's doing it the way we all did it which was she's got two small children and she's finishing up her CPA programming, and she's going to sit for her CPA and she'll be extremely marketable with a degree in global business management and a CPA."*

### **Role models and mentors**

Dr. Pollack believed that the absence of role models, support systems, and not wanting to step out of one's comfort zone have been factors preventing Hispanic women's successes. However, she was fortunate enough to find a role model and support system that she needed at a critical part of her educational life.

*I walk into my first English class and who's my teacher but a woman who had been my mother's teacher in high school who had after my mother left high school, had developed a friendship with my mother and had stayed in touch with her for a few years that she was alive. After ...she recognized my name and I recognized her name and all of a sudden I had some sense of comfort and some sense of destiny in saying okay you can do this, here's this woman who was your mother's teacher and you have to understand at age two I had*

*no memory or recollection of my mother so meeting someone that had known my mother and who knew her, it was comforting.*

Dr. Pollack establishes meaningful connections with others and continues to build strong support systems which enhance her professional growth. Upon receiving her Ph.D., she was invited by Bob McCabe to serve as president of the Medical Center Campus at Miami-Dade Community College in Florida. She was also invited by Paul Ellsner, who was the president of Maricopa Community College, to be one of the campuses' presidents. She stated, *"I'm the only president in the country who's had really an extraordinary privilege of working with two of the most important icons that will ever go down in history, in my opinion, in Bob McCabe and Paul Ellsner."* However, she attributes her first break into administration to Max Castillo, president of the University of Houston – Downtown Campus.

Dr. Pollack's career path has been an exciting adventure, in which her mother and grandmothers would have been proud. However, along with her mother, her grandmothers have also passed away and, unfortunately, did not live to witness Tessa's outstanding career accomplishments. *"That's been very sad...my mother's mother, obviously with her own daughter dying at age 24, I became the favorite grandchild, and so [when] she died when I was 17 so she didn't see any of this happen;...but you know it's happened and it's guided."*

Dr. Pollack embraces a spiritual guidance provided by her mother and grandmother, *"Culturally it's there and spiritually it's there...that's part of our culture too and that's a very, very strong load-bearing part of our culture."*

The cohesiveness of the Latina culture should provide a positive experience for mentoring, however, Dr. Pollack described the exact opposite. She actually had a very disheartening encounter with a Latina woman who was in a leadership position. Dr. Pollack



admired this woman greatly and was anxious to learn more about her. She asked her, *“How did you get there? And here’s the position that I’m in now. How can I...? ...Give me some lessons; tell me what I need to do to get into that next position.”* Dr. Pollack was extremely disappointed as the woman’s response was *“I don’t know, I can’t tell you anything.”* It was such a negative experience that Tessa swore she would never turn her back on those who asked for her guidance. *“I want to make myself available, there are so few of us around [Hispanic women leaders], there’s so much that we’ve learned along the way that you need to be willing to share that.”*

### **Barriers and risks**

Dr. Pollack recalled her first barrier, experiencing the rejection from a career she so desired—journalism. She reflected back to her first interview at the television station and regretted not handling the encounter differently. She wished she would have confronted the situation and challenged their choices; but at the young age of 21 years old, she just wasn’t prepared to do so. Experience adds wisdom; often making us stronger and more adamant to overcoming barriers. Dr. Pollack remarked that we all face racial and gender barriers but are sometimes too embarrassed to discuss them with others, *“You’ve got to be a real problem solver, you’ve got to develop a real thick skin... you’ve got to be really smart on your feet when those things come along and I think that’s what I’m trying to do.”*

Dr. Pollack took a great personal risk and moved to Florida. Her family had agreed to the relocation, however, the night before their departure, her daughter, who was then a senior in high school, said she wasn’t moving. Dr. Pollack had no choice but to leave her behind.

*I already made the commitment to accept this job, my biggest concern was my child who I was leaving behind because she was a senior in high school and*

*really, for all practical purposes, had the rug pulled out from under her, because now mom was leaving, it was huge...it was huge.*

This transition was difficult for Tessa and her daughter but they endured the challenge and, as a result, this career move strengthened their relationship as mother and daughter. They are now able to have very open conversations about life issues, as well as education. They are very close and depend on each other for the emotional support needed while Bob's health and lifestyle have transformed.

To Dr. Pollack, switching jobs is a risk well worth taking. She has had three presidencies, with each averaging about seven years. Beginning as a president in a new institution is a very difficult task, as each time you move into a new position you have to work to establish new relationships. *"It is very political and you've got to set up, it's new learning that has to be done. So it's like a new start each time and it's been very challenging."*

## **Leadership**

Dr. Pollack believes individuals aspiring to work in educational leadership positions should possess personal goals and skills. These are skills that can be developed to help facilitate their preparation into advanced leadership positions. These include the ability to step out of one's comfort zone, as well as learning both hard and soft skills. Soft skills, she described, are *"what makes us really quite so effective in a work environment, but we're not always up to snuff on the hard skills...I think some of that comes as a consequence of experience."* She declared not all preparatory work has to be done in the workplace, as it's a constant battle we put ourselves through between balancing work and family. *"Culturally*

*our families are very important to us and the willingness to move out of our own geography is a big challenge for us.”*

Dr. Pollack recognized her weaknesses and acknowledged her strengths. She has two women and three men on her executive staff, which is an unintentional balancing of the sexes. Dr. Pollack and her staff recently took the Meyers-Briggs test to analyze the profiles of their executive team. Surprisingly, the group’s overall performance is strongly feminine. To provide balance to the team, Dr. Androgynous was created. Dr. Androgynous is a manikin created by a work-study student. The Dr. (Ph.D.) stays in Dr. Pollack’s office closet and is pulled out to sit at the conference table when the team needs to reflect upon the overall thinking style of the group. This activity illustrated to me that Dr. Pollack not only has a sense of humor, but is reflective and has a staff that shares these same traits. Recognizing and celebrating their differences, strengths, and weaknesses provides a much healthier working relationship between Dr. Pollack and her executive staff.

### **Advice to aspiring Hispanic women leaders**

Dr. Pollack’s advice to aspiring Hispanic women leaders is to build strong support systems and work toward motivating goals. Motivation is essential for enjoying the work you do and aspiring to learn new innovative ways to deliver the work more effectively. Dr. Pollack paraphrased the meaning of one of the poems written by Natasha Gisepowitz, the first woman ever to take a position in the Management Department at San Diego University: *“You’ve got to have three friends in your life: a shoulder to cry on, someone to go to for advice and someone who is going to give you a swift kick in the ass, and you need all three of those people in your life.”*

### Personal Reflections

Dr. Pollack's interview was my third and last meeting, which made me feel much more at ease and relaxed. I was once again healthy, with my normal voice strong and controlled. It also helped that Dr. Pollack's schedule for the day did not have unexpected changes in it that jeopardized our time together. Those two factors alone alleviated my stress tremendously. Dr. Pollack reminded me of someone I once knew, or maybe someone I wish I knew, as the more she spoke the more connected I became with her. I empathized with her for losing her mother at such a young age and being reared by her two grandmothers.

Dr. Pollack transformed from a tiny two-year-old toddler into a magnificent woman which would make any mother extremely proud. She beat the odds by becoming a Hispanic woman president of a university. However, what is even more amazing is she did it with the support of her grandmothers who had very little education. Maybe it was the promise they made to her mother so many years ago that this toddler would obtain a college education, for Tessa knew she was working towards the goal her deceased mother had set for her. That promise was a strong force, deeply embedded, as she struggled to overcome the barriers and obstacles she faced along the way.

Dr. Pollack spoke of the Latina culture's roots as being deep and strong. The culture, maybe, is where I felt connected the most. She stated, "*That's part of our cultural heritage to believe in the strength of family whether they're present or not.*" I shared with her that I could relate to her every word as it is hard for me to describe, but I feel very close to my mother, as much now as ever. My mother has been deceased for 13 years and she is still a strong force in me, in every way. As I spoke those words I surprised myself, as I was sharing such a personal part of my life to someone whom I just met and barely knew. Hearing her

tell me that it is, “*part of our cultural heritage to believe in the strength of family whether they’re present or not,*” was so rewarding to hear, as I must have the Latina culture deeply carved into my existence. It is not learned behavior; it’s my genetics, my blood, my soul, and my spirit. Although Dr. Pollack’s mother and grandmothers have passed on, they are, without a doubt, still very strong forces working within her.

## CHAPTER 8. TYING THEIR STORIES TOGETHER

### Introduction

This dissertation research was developed out of my own personal yearning for a deeper understanding of Hispanic women in educational leadership positions. This chapter includes a synthesis of Chapter 4 through 7, describing the four purposefully selected Hispanic women leaders: three presidents—Drs. Juliet Garcia, Cha Guzmán, and Tessa Pollack; and one director—Dr. Margot Perez-Greene (the Capstone participant). The study was based on face-to-face interviews, and revealed the personal and professional characteristics four Texas Hispanic woman leaders in higher education possess.

A matrix model of comparative analysis by Miles & Huberman (1994) is presented in Appendix B. The matrix provides categories for the emerging themes in a user-friendly format, providing an “at a glance” comparison expanding across all four Hispanic women. The study examined the women’s background, which included childhood and family experiences. It also included informal and formal academic preparation experiences, including institutions attended and degrees held. Finally, it identified career paths, obstacles, and perceived barriers as well as opportunities for their professional success.

Through individual, private, and informal interviews, the four participants shared their personal journeys with me. Although the same interview questions were asked of each participant, each encounter produced a unique style and fluency. The women emphasized areas of their lives they felt most comfortable disclosing. During this process they also answered several research questions that I had initially planned to ask.

Each interview blossomed into inquiring and reciprocating conversations. I reaffirmed with them that the interviews needed some structure for the sole purpose of providing comparative analysis, but wanted an informal flow so that they could share as little or as much as they felt comfortable. The fact that three women had Doctor of Philosophy degrees and one had a Doctor of Education degree, proved beneficial, as all four women had to complete their own dissertation research to earn their degrees.

As a result, the interviews were successful and reawakened pieces of their lives that were both very personal and private. During this process I also disclosed personal information regarding myself to each of the women. This was an effortless technique as the environments we created during the interviews were safe and confidential. Each woman had an opportunity to review her interview transcript to ensure the information captured was accurate. With the exception of Margot, none of the women made corrections to their transcripts. The results of this study are intended for use as a tool for others in their attempt to reach a similar level of educational leadership.

### **Summary of the Findings**

In analyzing these data, I focused on discovering common themes and patterns of responses. The focus of the analysis was based on five research questions: (1) What childhood or family background experiences and academic preparation did they have? (2) What career paths and patterns did they have? (3) Were there any perceived professional barriers? (4) Were there influential persons in their lives? and (5) What advice might they give to other Hispanic women wishing to become leaders in higher education?

### **Childhood experiences and academic preparation**

The three presidents involved in the study, Drs. Guzmán, Garcia, and Pollack, were all raised in Spanish speaking environments, with Spanish as their first-learned language. Schmidt (2003) identified Hispanic students who receive little exposure to the English language in the home as struggling academically. The opposite occurred for the participants. All excelled academically and two were placed in advanced elementary grade levels. All three read, write, and speak Spanish fluently. They also speak Spanish in their homes with their elders and grandchildren. Each embraces the Spanish language as part of her rich heritage (Appendix B).

The one non-president study participant, Dr. Margot Perez Greene, was raised in an English-speaking home, although her parents were both Mexican-Americans and declared Spanish as their primary language. Her parents knew English would be paramount for academic and occupational success, and made every attempt to expose Dr. Perez Greene and her sisters to the language, including enrolling her in an all white school.

My upbringing shadowed Dr. Perez-Greene, with the exception of my father being Caucasian. My siblings and I grew up speaking English, but we only spoke Spanish when we visited the maternal side of the family as they did not speak English. Margot and I both regret not being exposed more to the Spanish language as children but, in the same breath, understand that our parents believed they were preparing us for a better future.

All of the Hispanic women participants, including myself, knew at a very young age, that we would receive college educations. Achieving a college degree was an expectation our parents had for us, and not attending was never an option. This is consistent with the study by Schmidt (2003) that stated nine out of ten Hispanics parents expect their children to



attend college. Parental education is cited as a strong indicator influencing a child's education (Nieves-Squires, 1991; Rodriguez et al., 2000). However, parental education was not a factor for me or the participants in this study.

All of the women, including myself, married, had children, and entered the workforce before completing their advanced graduate degrees. This is unusual, as the literature supports that Latinas often experience stress when family obligation and educational aspiration conflict. Like the participants, many Hispanic women have heavy domestic responsibilities, a spouse, and children. As cited in the literature, frequently Latina spouses oppose the idea of their wives attending college and often discourage them from venturing into the world of academia in the first place (Nieves-Squires, 1991; Rodriguez et al., 2002). This study was not consistent with the literature, as all of the women, including myself, were supported in their academic endeavors.

### **Career paths and patterns**

Another central component of the study was career paths. The women were asked to list the positions they held prior to becoming administrators. The most common position held during the three president's careers was that of faculty member: all four women indicated holding a faculty or teaching position at some point during their career. Two out of the four women were once Deans and, interestingly, only two of the four of the women indicated they had held the position of Vice President.

Patterns among the women's careers and activities were also evident. All four Hispanic women hold either doctoral degrees in education and/or have worked in education their entire professional lives. The first jobs held by three of the four respondents after

completing their Bachelor's degrees were in the public school systems in Texas.

Professional and developmental activities held the strongest similarities among all of the women, with each having participated in activities such as networking, serving on community service boards, serving as board members or officers of a national, regional, or state organization, working as paid consultants, and directing major grants or projects, which have been identified as contributors to advancement. Networking and directing major projects (grants or otherwise) are the two activities that have the strongest relationship to advancement. Other activities having a strong relationship towards advancement include involvement in serving as a board member or officer of a national, regional, or state organization.

Job satisfaction was another emerging theme among the participants. Consistent with the literature (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Blackhurst, 2000; Canada, Gaikk Him, & Tarver, 1999; Gomez & Fassinger, 1995; Jackson, 2003; Reason, Walker, & Robinson, 2002), job satisfaction increased for the women, with increased responsibilities and increased administrative positions. Being in leadership positions, where they were able to initiate change, increased job satisfaction for all the women. Working in this capacity was more rewarding for the women than salary.

Gomez and Fassinger (1995) conducted a qualitative study in which the career paths of 17 high accomplished Latinas across seven occupational fields revealed the following observations regarding career paths that were consistent with this study: (1) the career paths of the women were not linear; (2) all but one of the participants spoke of a pivotal individual who had a positive influence in their lives and careers; (3) all women had supportive spouses; (4) being identified as woman and Latinas were core issues for them, and; (5) all of the

participants expressed instances of discouragement, neglect and prejudice from all areas of the educational system (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995).

### **Perceived professional barriers**

All of the women studied experienced professional barriers of sexism and prejudice. The negative attitudes of others were also common themes. Following are some direct quotes that the women shared on perceived professional barriers.

Dr. Margot Perez-Greene

*Attitudes of people; attitudes of, I'm not going to listen to a Hispanic woman. I'm not going to listen to anybody that comes from Texas. I'm not going to listen to some PhD hotshot that just came out of the program. Just that kind of attitude; very closed, just mostly attitude.*

Dr. Cha Guzmán

*Prejudice is loud, I mean prejudism is real, it's very real, and prejudism against women and Hispanics.*

Dr. Juliet Garcia

*I know there were gender barriers, there's no question...ethnicity I think also plays a factor depending on where you are and I think that is the difference, I don't think you can say it's good or bad but I think there in Texas is still not advantageous in many ways.*

Dr. Tessa Pollack

*I think my first barrier was rejection out of a field that was not open to me and so you say okay so what now, I think you have to be a problem solver. So you have to develop a real thick skin, I think those are some of the ways in which we deal with it and you've got to be really smart on your feet when those things come along and I think that's what I'm trying to do.*

Adapting to adversity is something all of the women had learned to do while climbing their professional career ladders. Each woman described barriers they encountered and conquered. They learned from those situations and turned negative experiences into positive

techniques, as well as good practical advice from which others can learn. Albino (1992) stated, to be successful in a male-dominated career environment, women must develop compensatory strategies. The four participants of this study concurred, each having a strong sense of self, insofar as projecting self-confidence and refusing to take criticism personally. Each also refused to participate in gossip. They used phrases such as “*rising above gossip*”. Each of the women frowned upon gossiping and gossipers, but also acknowledged that it does exist in institutions and is often a part of the campus culture. As leaders, they were often the subject of gossip. They described their character as stronger than any rumors that might generate negative conversations. Each emphasized that it is important to resist and walk away from gossip. They mentioned that, soon others will respect you for not contributing and, thus, “*rising above gossip.*”

The women were asked to indicate the greatest challenge they had encountered during their ascendancy. Consistent with the literature (Gonzales-Figueroa & Young, 2005; Nieves-Squires, 1991; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Schmidt, 2003), all of the women indicated that the balance of family and career was a major challenge. None of the women indicated lack of experience as an issue, also consistent with the literature (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Blackhurst, 2000; Canada, Gaik Lim, & Tarver, 1999). All of the women at one time or another had their credibility and experience questioned by their peers. As Nichols (1994) stated, “women must rely on themselves rather than on institutions to create careers. In order to be successful, women must carefully thread their way through a contradictory set of complex expectations, constantly balancing their own and others’ beliefs about what it means to be a manager” (Nichols, 2004, p. xii).

To keep them balanced and grounded, they were able to seek out mentors who provided the confidence and the guidance to help them face their greatest challenges. The mentoring relationships they built were life changing and career enhancing. All of the women had positive experiences and were offered guidance and support when they reached out for it. In agreement with the research conducted by Gillett-Karam et al. (1991), the Hispanic women in this study had also learned to increase their power through networking, intuition, and providing leadership.

### **Influential persons**

Three of the four women were inspired in grade school by their female elementary teachers. The teachers enriched their lives as role models and mentors. The only participant who made no reference to the influences of a particular elementary teacher was Dr. Guzmán who entered the United States at the age of 13.

All of the Hispanic women shared that mentoring was a valuable tool in helping them achieve upward mobility once they entered the workplace. They had no gender or ethnic preference towards mentoring others or receiving mentoring from others. This is in contrast to the study conducted by Gonzales-Figueroa and Young (2005) which revealed that women preferred mentors of similar ethnicities. Only one president sought out a Hispanic woman leader whom she aspired to emulate and have as a mentor. When she received a negative response, she considered it a life lesson as vowed she would always make herself available to those who sought her guidance.

All of the women stated the quality of the mentoring relationship superseded the race or gender of the mentor. They also learned self-confidence, self-discipline, and

determination either from an early mentoring relationship or through strong family support. These factors, compounded with noteworthy career achievements, facilitated their rise into leadership positions. Each of the four women described having one or more mentors in their professional careers. All of the women had professional and personal individuals who they described as mentors, and all of the women are also mentors to others. There were no distinguishing patterns noted as to the gender or race of the women's mentors. Each took into consideration the characteristics of the individuals, along with their knowledge and willingness to mentor as desired traits.

All of the women had very busy schedules, and all wished they were able to provide more mentoring towards other women and minorities. A common theme among them was time constraints. Giving back and providing opportunities for others was what they all strived for but frequently felt their professional duties limited their interactions in mentoring others. All of the women encouraged their staff and faculty to earn advanced degrees, and promoted them within their institutions when applicable. Once they move into retirement I can foresee the participants as being more proactive to expand their encouragement to others outside of academia.

### **Advice to other Hispanic women**

This question was offered last during our interviews, and produced the most immediate responses from the women, with no one needing time to ponder much in thought or reflection. For the best replies to this question, I selected actual quotes from the women themselves.

Dr. Margot Perez-Greene

*You need to understand the whole leadership aspect of inviting talent to be with you and around you because it is very important to be able to learn from others no matter what color they are, no matter what gender they are. I think Hispanic women think that we have to work extra hard, and I think we do, but we also have to remember that we can bring people around us and not be afraid of that. And I think you have to be ready to be called upon. Because you're going to be, sometimes, the lone ranger and you have to be o.k. with that.*

Dr. Cha Guzmán

*I think that particularly for minorities and women you have to take risks. You know, they should be measured, they should be good risks. But you have to take risks and you weigh (them out).*

Dr. Juliet Garcia

*You can't change the game by yourself, so what you have to learn is how to play the game and I say that not because I've given up trying to change it, you try to change it always, you try to better it, you try to change the rules, to be more advantageous to people like you or those you serve in this case our community., But finally one person is not likely to be able to change the whole system.*

Dr. Tessa Pollack

*You need to be constantly, revising your convictions, where can I fold and bend and where will I not fold and bend and I think those are very few and far between. We need to remain really flexible, but I just won't compromise on equal opportunity, I won't compromise on honest, I expect people to be honest and I will be honest with them.*

Common themes noted in this area also included having the ability to work well with men, developing professional networks, being ethical, being consistent, welcoming challenges, following through, and not letting the negativity of others be discouraging. They synthesized that other people can and will be negative, sexist, and racist; it's inevitable, but we have to be strong and strive forward. The innate ability to strive past the barriers put up by others is essential to thrust on towards upward mobility.

All of the participants acknowledge that there are differences in cultural and family expectations. Breaking the traditional familial cycles can be difficult, but not impossible. They emphasize the importance of understanding our strengths, our weaknesses, and inviting talented people to be around us. We also need to be reminded of the basic principle of respecting others so that they will respect us, too.

### **Applying Theory**

#### **Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation**

Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation (2002) was applicable to all the women in this study. As young women, they were each given career choices, including: teachers, nurses and, in two instances, pharmacist. This theory predicts that individuals will select work within their social space, even for less pay, rather than compromise their status or gender type of work. It also states that women have the power to push themselves toward careers and destinies of their choice despite societal expectations.

Following are some direct quotes offered by the women.

Dr. Margot Perez-Greene

*...you continue growing because you can not rest on the moral of [past places of employment] or of graduation. Those have all been stepping stones and you continue to grow in the position that your in and improve. Improve yourself personally, professionally, and in your relationships with people and all of that just makes life very meaningful.*

Dr. Cha Guzmán

*....well can you be in charge if you're a nurse (laughs)? No? Doctors are in charge...oh, I'll go into teaching, I think there I will do better....I liked being in charge..*



Dr. Juliet Garcia

*I was either to be a teacher or a nurse, that was kind of the push, or a pharmacist because there had been on...I couldn't see dispensing pills my whole life". As she matured and became more confident in her abilities she wanted to enhance education and make positive changes. She acted upon her father's advice as he told her, "You can either effect change by pounding and yelling from outside of the door or by sitting at the board table, but you have to decide which one you want to do.*

Dr. Tessa Pollack

*Holding down an administrative job...in a full-time PhD program and I had a small child, so it was a very trying time, but again, you know it was just one of those things that you, [say] I have to do it, and do it...so I thought I can do this, and I did.*

Dr. Pollack also provided the example of selecting her initial career in Journalism, which she described as very closed to women and minorities. In my opinion, she may have compromised her career and selected a different occupation more acceptable within her social space and gender type. Three of the four women became teachers in the K-12 system, with the exception of Dr. Garcia, who began her career as a teaching assistant for the University of Houston. All of these occupations were acceptable for their social status and gender type of work. However, as they matured, each became driven and controlled their occupational aspirations, broke away from the norm, and pushed for leadership positions that were not typical of their social space or gender type.

Occupational accessibility was limited for them by various factors including: labor market conditions, the availability of appropriate training, and many other factors in which they were powerless against. Accessibility to obtain their preferred careers increased for each woman as they advanced in age, education, and gained work experience. They felt confident seeking information, were more persistent and optimistic, and took steps that

increased their competitiveness for available opportunities. The challenges they faced minimized unnecessary compromise by optimizing *self-investment* (Gottfredson, 2002). They ultimately were able to appraise the accessibility of their preferred education, training, and employment, and promoted within by improving their own opportunities, qualifications, and support network.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory research (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Delgado-Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999) was utilized in the study to address the complexity of the Hispanic culture and how it is viewed by other ethnicities. All of the women had applicable examples of how they were viewed and judged differently because of their race and gender. Following are some direct quotes the women offered.

Dr. Margot Perez-Greene

*Attitudes of people. Attitudes of, I'm not going to listen to a Hispanic woman. I'm not going to listen to anybody that comes from Texas. I'm not going to listen to some PhD hotshot that just came out of the program. Just that kind of attitude; very closed, just mostly attitude.*

Dr. Cha Guzmán

*There's the belief that Anglo males have the greatest capacity, and have the greatest of rights, it's kind of an assumption ...*

Dr. Juliet Garcia

*...so ethnicity I think also plays a factor depending on where you are and I think that is the difference, ... in Texas it is still not advantageous in many ways...I think I could feel less of that if I were almost anywhere else but not Texas, I just feel very...I see friends from all over the country, they'll say, 'You're still in Texas, what are you doing?' And I know exactly what they're referring to. So there's still not a lot of Hispanic women in higher education nationally, and in Texas even less, so yes, you feel it along the way.*

Dr. Tessa Pollack

*Nobody told me that in 1969 the world of broadcast and journalism was terribly closed, extremely closed to women and minorities.”*

*“We’ve all faced racial and gender barriers and I think sometimes, I don’t know, that we’re embarrassed to talk about them or we don’t want to sound whiney talking about them, but they’re there....”*

The bright lines between black and white have blurred over the past few decades, and Hispanics are apt to feel more confident in offering their own unique contributions to educational leadership occupations. All of the women had several life experiences, providing rich examples of how Critical Race Theory has been integrated into their professional and personal lives.

### **Points to Ponder for Young Hispanic Women**

As I arrived at the conclusion of this dissertation study, it became essential to reiterate some of the points that are threaded throughout this study. Although, the study is focused on Hispanic women leaders in higher education, the following points to ponder should also be read and understood by young Hispanic males. Young Hispanic males create meaningful relationships with sisters, mothers, daughters, and wives, and can offer support and become actively engaged in assisting them reach their educational goals. The following are pieces of advice elicited from the participants of this study as well as my own personal and professional opinion. They are in no priority order.

- Understand your values and your culture (be comfortable in your own skin).
- Rise above gossip by not participating.
- Be willing to take risks.
- Get a terminal degree.

- If you choose to have a significant relationship, select a smart professional and don't stay in an unhealthy relationship.
- Be able to financially support yourself and your children (as my mother said, Don't count on a man for anything and don't have any more children than you can afford to raise on your own).
- Be mentored and mentor others (pass it on).
- Network and become active in meaningful organizations.
- Be confident in your role.
- Obtain a great support system.
- Invite talented people to be around you to learn from them.
- Be awake and ready to be called upon.
- Have an innate desire to learn, please, and be successful.

## **CHAPTER 9. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND FINAL THOUGHTS**

### **Recommendations**

There is an ongoing struggle for Hispanic women ascending into leadership positions. This dissertation research was conducted with four participants, each in one setting. It would be advantageous to conduct a parallel study to include other Hispanic women leaders in administrative positions in higher education. Interviewing the four women appeared to heighten their awareness about the significances of their leadership styles and experiences. They each provided examples for others to strive towards.

The findings of this research are significant, and will expand the current body of knowledge, contributing valuable information about four Hispanic female leaders. I recommend that further inquiries be considered in the following areas:

1. Similar studies of Hispanic women presidents, and leaders in four-year and two-year colleges and universities across the United States.
2. Similar studies, focusing on Hispanic women who are medical physicians and attorneys at law.
3. Comparative studies of Hispanic women occupying various administrative positions within the educational system, as well as in corporate business settings.
4. Comparative studies researching the methods used by educational institutions, as well as corporate business entities, to recruit Hispanic women students, staff, faculty, and administrators;

5. Research regarding the husband's career, religion, ethnicity, and social history should be studied in comparison to the Hispanic women's career toward upward occupational placement and mobility.

### **Final Thoughts**

My hopes are that the four Hispanic women who participated in this dissertation research will continue to be themselves and share their stories with others. They are all true leaders not only because of their academic and professional successes, but more so because of who they are as unique individuals and the journeys they have traveled. Although they are identified as expert public speakers in the educational scene, their stories have so much more meaning than what one receives from the professional seminar environment. The Hispanic population in the United States is growing, and communities have an abundance of young females who are making lifetime decisions while they are still in school or in their homes. I am confident that each of these magnificent women would touch their hearts and make a positive impression on young Hispanic females. Presenting in high schools and at Hispanic community forums, and sharing their personal stories are options that I hope they will consider doing in the future. The impact these women have had on me has been life changing, and an encouragement for me to continue to strive for professional and personal growth. In closing, I pray when my daughters are old enough to read and understand this dissertation research, they will embrace their Hispanic heritage and the strong cultural values it holds.

**APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND CONSENT FORM**

1. Tell me about your childhood or family background experiences.
2. Tell me about other women in your family. What levels of education did they achieve, and what careers did they choose?
3. Where did you receive your formal education, and what degrees do you hold? Which of your educational achievements and specific skills do you believe helped you the most?
4. Please describe any major factors that influenced your career selection.
5. Which specific person or people in your life do you view as a leader and role model to imitate?
6. What were the barriers, if any, that you faced in your career advancement? How did you resolve them?
7. What risks, if any, have you taken to achieve the success that you have?
8. What do you perceive to be the factors and obstacles that prevent Hispanic women's successes? What do you feel they should do to be successful?
9. Do you feel an obligation to devote time during your career to mentor other Hispanic women or other women in general?
10. What words of advice or encouragement would you share with other Hispanic women wishing to become leaders of tomorrow?

**INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

Title of Study: **Hispanic Women in Community College Presidency Positions**  
Investigators: **Lyvier L. Aschenbrenner, B.S. Psychology, Iowa State University**  
**M.S. Counseling, University of Houston**  
**Ph.D. candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Iowa State University**  
Major Professor: Dr. Larry Ebbers

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the characteristics shared by Texan Hispanic women who are leaders in higher education. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a Hispanic woman leader working in higher education in the state of Texas.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for 6 months. This involves an interview with the researcher. This interview may last approximately 1 ½ hours or more in duration. A follow-up interview may or may not be necessary.

During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed. You will be asked to complete an interview about your childhood and background experiences and academic preparation, career paths and patterns, perceived professional barriers, and possible advise you might share with other Latinas seeking to also become leaders in the field of higher education. If permissible by respondent, there is a possibility of interviewing others close to the participant, such as family members, close friends, and/or co-workers.

An audio and visual recorder will be used, but the tapes can be erased once the project is complete if requested so by the participant.

“You have the right not to answer any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.”

**RISKS**

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study.

**BENEFITS**

If you decide to participate in this study the benefits you may gain are self-reflection, personal insight, and significant self-awareness. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing valuable information to others about the characteristics Hispanic women leaders in higher education share, and also be utilized as a tool for others in their attempt to reach a similar level of educational leadership.

**COSTS AND COMPENSATION**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.



**PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutions Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. Subjects will be assigned a unique code and letter and that will be used on forms instead of their names. The record will be kept in a locked filing cabinet with access only available by the researcher. If the results are published, your identity can remain confidential if requested so by the participant.

**QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Lyvier L. Aschenbrenner at 641-933-9921 or Dr. Ebbers, Iowa State University. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact Ginny Austin-Eason, IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, austingr@iastate.edu, or Diane Ament, Research Compliance Officer (515) 294-3115, dament@iastate.edu.

\*\*\*\*\*

**SUBJECT SIGNATURE**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Subject's Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

**INVESTIGATORS' STATEMENT**

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of her questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits, and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Person Obtaining  
Informed Consent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## APPENDIX B. COMMON THEMES

<b>Social Background</b>	<b>Dr. Margot Perez-Greene</b>	<b>Dr. “Cha” Guzmán</b>	<b>Dr. Tessa Pollack</b>	<b>Dr. Juliet Garcia</b>
Raised by	Mother and Father	Mother and Father	Two Grandmothers ( <i>mother died</i> when she was 2)	Father ( <i>mother died</i> when she was 9)
Siblings	4 sisters	1 sister	0	2 brothers
Placed Raised	Austin, <i>Texas</i>	Cuba until age 13. Age 13 through Adult Wisconsin, then Texas	San Antonio, <i>Texas</i>	Brownsville, <i>Texas</i>
Age	<b>53</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Children</b>	<i>Yes</i> , 1 son (2 step-children)	<i>Yes</i> , 2 sons	<i>Yes</i> , 1 daughter	<i>Yes</i> , 1 daughter & 1 son
<b>Nationality</b>	<i>Mexican-American</i>	Cuban	<i>Mexican-American</i>	<i>Mexican-American</i>
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Dr. Margot Perez-Greene</b>	<b>Dr. “Cha” Guzmán</b>	<b>Dr. Tessa Pollack</b>	<b>Dr. Juliet Garcia</b>
Married	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Number of Marriages	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Number of Divorces	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
Widowed	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
Committed Spouse	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Husband’s ethnicity	Caucasian	Mexican-American	1 <sup>st</sup> marriage for 20 years to Hispanic man. 2 <sup>nd</sup> husband is Jewish	Mexican-American
Occupation	Pastor	Business Owner	Attorney	Business Owner

<b>Education</b>	<b>Dr. Margot Perez-Greene</b>	<b>Dr. "Cha" Guzmán</b>	<b>Dr. Tessa Pollack</b>	<b>Dr. Juliet Garcia</b>
Self	HS, Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D. Education	Skipped several elementary grades, Catholic HS, BS Early Childhood Education, MA Sociology, Ed.D Curriculum and Early Childhood Education, Several Post Doctoral Studies	Catholic HS, AA, BA Journalism, MA Education and Business, and Ph.D Educational Administration	Skipped 1 <sup>st</sup> grade HS, BA Speech, English MA Speech, English Ph.D Communications & Linguistics, Several Post Doctoral Studies
Parents	Mother 11 <sup>th</sup> grade, father 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	Mother had teaching degree	Both parents had high school degrees	Father did not graduate HS, Mother was Salutatorian
Grandparents	Elementary	Grandmother had none	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Elementary
Siblings	2 sisters Business Degrees, 1 sister Ph.D	Sister as PhD in Psychology	NA	RN and Engineer
<b>Careers</b>	<b>Dr. Margot Perez-Greene</b>	<b>Dr. "Cha" Guzmán</b>	<b>Dr. Tessa Pollack</b>	<b>Dr. Juliet Garcia</b>
Self	<i>Education entire career 17 years in public schools</i>	<i>Education entire career 15 years in public schools</i>	<i>Education entire career 3 years in public schools</i>	<i>Education entire career 0 years in public schools</i>
Parents	Mother nurses aid; Father salads chef	Mother stayed at home with children, Father was a business owner	Mother Bilingual telephone employee; Father US dept. of Agriculture	Mother stayed at home when Juliet then passed away. Father blue collar worker.
Grandparents	All were Farmers	One Grandfather lawyer his wife Managed a Sugar Plantation. The other Grandfather was a Banker	Grandmother worked in fabric store	Grandmother was a teacher
Aunt/Uncles		<i>Aunt, Pharmacist</i>		<i>Aunt, Pharmacist</i>

<b>Languages: Spanish and English</b>	<b>Dr. Margot Perez-Greene</b>	<b>Dr. “Cha” Guzmán</b>	<b>Dr. Tessa Pollack</b>	<b>Dr. Juliet Garcia</b>
Read	No	<i>Both</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Both</i>
Write	No	<i>Both</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Both</i>
Speak	No	<i>Both</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Both</i>
	Both parents were bilingual	All three Presidents were raised speaking Spanish in their homes, and were taught English at school. As adults they speak English in their homes and Spanish to their elders, children, and grandchildren to assure the language is not lost.		
Parents language	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Spanish</i>
<b>Presidencies</b>	<b>Dr. Margot Perez-Greene</b>	<b>Dr. “Cha” Guzmán</b>	<b>Dr. Tessa Pollack</b>	<b>Dr. Juliet Garcia</b>
Number of Presidencies	NA	1	3	2 current positions: she has been the President of TSC for 20 years and the President of UTB for 14 years
Years as President	NA	6	21 (7 years in each presidency)	20
Job title prior to Presidency	NA	Executive Vice President	<i>Dean</i>	<i>Dean</i>
<b>Mentor</b>	<b>Dr. Margot Perez-Greene</b>	<b>Dr. “Cha” Guzmán</b>	<b>Dr. Tessa Pollack</b>	<b>Dr. Juliet Garcia</b>
Teacher	1 <sup>st</sup> grade Teacher (Black woman)	Kindergarten Teacher (American woman)	College English Teacher (her mothers HS teacher)	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade Teacher
Professional Mentors	2 white males	2 white males	2 white males	2 white women

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