QUEER LATINA LEADERSHIP: AN INTERSECTIONAL STUDY ON PRACTICES, EXPERIENCES, AND NEGOTIATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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SIGNATURE PAGE

DISSERTATION: QUEER LATINA LEADERSHIP: AN INTERSECTIONAL STUDY ON PRACTICES, EXPERIENCES, AND NEGOTIATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative constructivist grounded theory study used an integrated intersectional lens and Chicana feminist epistemology to examine how nine queer Latina leaders in higher education experienced their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures, how this shaped the everyday experiences of their work, and how they negotiated their identities to persist and ultimately enact change within their institutional settings. Following the principle of intersectionality theory that the multiple identities of an individual influence the ways they experience and navigate the world (Crenshaw, 1989), and within the context of higher education institutions in this study, the emerging themes included (a) *identity negotiation*, (b) *fragmentation*, and (c) *heartbreak in leading,* and within the context of contesting power within these institutional contexts to enact change, the emerging themes included the (d) *alchemizing of wounds* and (e) *bending, shifting, recreating*. These emergent theoretical categories of this study illuminated the ways that the queer Latina body, as an archival site—often experiencing fragmentation and struggle—can lend powerful roadmaps of resistance, new ways of being, and healing. These phenomenological realities of navigating multiple power structures from the queer Latina leader standpoint provide rich insight into alternative ways of leading in higher education, especially in the face of institutional resistance within obstinate environments.

DEDICATION

To all the intersectional scholars that left this earth far too early.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> Marginality...much more than a site of deprivation...is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance...It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds. (hooks, 1989, p. 20)

Leaders of multiple marginalized identities hold a unique perspective as outsider/within (Collins, 1986). Navigating the world through multiple—and often contradictory—viewpoints and experiences from their sociopolitical locations, queer Latina leaders hold valuable epistemological insights into power relations and mechanisms of oppression, and thereby, possibilities for institutional change (Anzaldúa, 2015; Cruz, 2001; Hurtado, 2003; Wylie, 2003). Queer Latina educational leaders hold racialized, gendered, and queer subjectivities often excluded from conventional phenomenologies of educational leadership. Yet, because of their structural and theoretical exclusion, the recognition and study of queer Latina leaders is necessary. Therefore, this study centered and highlighted queer Latina leaders in higher education to explore their epistemological insights into leadership and institutional change.

Background to the Problem

As higher education leaders enter a post-Trumpian era that has further exposed a culture of persistent and growing racism, nativism, and homophobia, and a post-pandemic era that has highlighted existing institutional structures of exclusion, coupled with glaring educational inequities that continue to persist for marginalized students across many institutions of higher education (Espinosa et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2020), investigating how leadership is enacted differently from nondominant perspectives is urgent (Espino, 2018; Garcia et al., 2020; López, 2018). Disconnections between institutional commitments—diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts—and commensurate transformations are in part due to the organizational cultures of

institutions of higher education (Meyer & Bromley, 2013; Ray, 2019), which are significantly shaped by the attitudes, beliefs, training, and background of institutional leaders (Ray, 2019; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Thus, institutional leaders of higher education hold significant power to reify, reform, and transform campus culture, policies, and programming (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002; Capper, 2019; Kelly, 2018).

Institutional change models in higher education are typically rooted in dominant ideologies, often centered on leadership's capacity to *manage* change—top-down, deterministic, and epistemically derived from dominant positionalities (Buller, 2014; Kezar, 2001; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Shields, 2018). Such a scientific managerial approach to change through higher education leadership corresponds with a neoliberal and bureaucratic orientation that reduces leaders to gatekeepers rather than as agents capable of enacting and practicing change (Shields, 2018; Squire et al., 2019). As part of this study, centering and following the epistemologies of queer Latina leaders in higher education served as a movement away from traditional functionalist approaches to leadership and instead a humanistic approach within the critical tradition—a tradition that posits that individuals are agentic, can enact change, and are not merely subjects and resources to be managed or controlled (Griffin et al., 2015; Shields, 2018). Centering the experiences and reflections of individual actors, rather than a lens of cultural or institutional approaches to change, was at the core of this study.

While few empirical studies exist on Latinas in higher education leadership (Elenes, 2020; Espino, 2018), even fewer have examined how intersectionality beyond the axes of race and gender contribute to differential leadership development and conceptualizations (Rivera, 2019). For example, queer Latinas face not only the nexus of racism and sexism, but they also experience heterosexism. As such, the scope of Latina leadership in higher education is limited

to race and gender in its framing of intersectionality. Therefore, this study called upon a lens of intersectionality to understand how identity and power shape leadership for queer Latinas in higher education.

Purpose of Study

This study sought to understand how queer Latina identity informs higher educational leadership. Of specific interest was an examination of how queer Latina higher educational leaders experienced their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures, how this shaped the everyday experiences of their work, and how they negotiated their positionality as outsider/within (Collins, 1986) to persist and ultimately enact change within their institutional settings. Overall, this study explored how race, gender, and sexual orientation; institutional racism and heterosexism; and racial and queer consciousness influenced the experiences and practices of queer Latina leaders within higher education.

Ultimately, the findings of this research study expand upon Latinx/a/o educational leadership frameworks to inform a higher educational leadership curriculum that better supports and acknowledges the development of educational leaders and administrators who advance just, equitable, and inclusive education, especially those from minoritized and marginalized backgrounds. The wealth of knowledge and perspectives generated by leaders holding multiple marginalized identities can serve as best practice for leadership, as well as validation and guidance for aspiring leaders holding similar intersecting identities (Martinez & Welton, 2017).

Additionally, the findings of this project provide visibility to non-normative notions of leadership and challenge and disrupt leadership frameworks and conceptualizations that analyze only a single-axis or two-axes of identity. Reflecting on the social political realities and interactions with forms of discrimination that have shaped the lives and experiences of queer

Latina leaders, this study illuminated how identity is enacted in higher education leadership contexts, specifically from a queer Latina perspective.

Research Questions

This qualitative study answered the following research questions on the experiences and practices of queer Latina leaders in higher education:

1. How do queer Latinas experience higher education leadership?
2. How do queer Latina higher education leaders experience their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures?
3. How do queer Latina higher education leaders draw upon their identities and experiences to enact change?

Definition of Terms

Leadership: This study considered "leadership" as a wide range of decision-making and practices by individuals holding some level of positional power at an institution, specifically, within the context of higher education. While there are many types of educational leadership theories, this study prioritized educational leadership theories located within the critical tradition of transformational leadership (Santamaría, 2014; Shields, 2018), which center leadership for institutional change and equity.

Intersectionality: "Intersectionality" is an approach that views experiences of power, privilege, and oppression as a product of the dynamic interplay of multiple identities at the structural and political level—a view that identities are interdependent in the experiences produced by macro levels of marginalization (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1991; Harris & Patton, 2019). This is not to be confused with the common misuse of the term in higher education scholarship as a lens of micro-level experiences or identities as isolated and additive in experiences of oppression (Harris & Patton, 2019).

Latinx/a/o: The collective "Latinx/a/o" identity rejects the majoritarian terms, "Hispanic" and "Latin," and the gender-exclusive term, "Latino" as representing people of Latin American ancestry. This collective identity challenges patriarchy, cisgender normativity, and recognizes a cultural and ethnic identification that expands beyond race, geography, and language (Salinas & Lozano, 2017). Ultimately, the term attempts to address the erasure that results from the use of the aforementioned terms—to instead include gender nonconforming people, indigenous identity, and Black identity, to name a few (Salinas & Lozano, 2017; Trujillo-Pagán, 2018; Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018). The term "Latinx" specifically refers to people of Latin American ancestry that identify with a gender variation beyond the binary of male/female gender, such as gender nonconforming people (Trujillo-Pagán, 2018; Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018). This is not to be confused with the term, "LatinX," which is used to encompass a "gender-neutral" shorthand for "Latina/o" or "Latin@," which is viewed as reinforcing ahistoricism and erasing intersectional struggles (Trujillo-Pagán, 2018; Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018). "Latina" and "Latino" refer to people of Latin American ancestry that identify within the gender binary of either female and male, respectively, and may include both cisgender and transgender people (Salinas & Lozano, 2017).

Queer: The term "queer" indicates a broad identification of people who self-identify outside of a heterosexual orientation (Aguilar & Johnson, 2017), including marginalized sexual orientations, such as lesbian, gay, pansexual, and bisexual identities. The term is a reclamation of a historical slur used against sexual minorities (Ahmed, 2019), and the use of the term is subsequently not one that is universally adopted; it has been recently adopted by scholars as either a term of resistance politic and/or an umbrella term with fluidity, in contrast to the more restrictive, institutional term "LGBTQ."

Minoritized: "Minoritized" is used in direct opposition to the term "minority," which obfuscates the active role institutions have played in the subordination and underrepresentation of "minority" groups. The term "minoritized" instead acknowledges the historical social construction of underrepresentation of marginalized groups and the subsequent overrepresentation of whiteness in institutions, such as higher education (Benitez, 2010; Harper, 2012).

Assumptions

Previous studies have analyzed the site and space of higher education institutions as inherently racialized and racializing (Ray, 2019), gendered (Cannella & Perez, 2012), and heterogendered (Preston & Hoffman, 2015; Pryor & Hoffman, 2020). This project operated under the assumption that higher education institutions are inherently raced, gendered, and heteronormative, and that notions of leadership within such institutions are conventionally associated with their proximity to whiteness, masculinity/patriarchy, and heteronormative performances. Additionally, this study assumed that participants, queer Latina leaders in higher education, would address an awareness of and recognition of the phenomenological reality of higher education institutions as raced, gendered, and heteronormative, in contrast to their own intersectional identities. This study centered the interplay of institutional hegemony and queer Latina leaders' intersectional identity.

Significance of Study

The primary significance of this study was to center queer Latinas, who are antithetically positioned, in dialectical tension, to the dominant logics of higher education institutions and hegemonic notions of leadership. Through the intentional centering of identities of multiple marginalization, this study developed an understanding of the phenomenological realities of navigating multiple power structures from the queer Latina standpoint. As such, and as part of

intersectional research, this study (a) revealed how queer Latinas experienced multiple intersectional forms of oppression within higher education leadership contexts, (b) provided alternatives to dominant notions of higher educational leadership, and (c) disrupted conventional representations of Latinas in leadership. Ultimately, the goal of this study was to develop an emergent theoretical framework, through the grounded theory methodology, of queer Latina leadership.

Within the institution of higher education, scholars have theorized the ways its organizational structure has been built to center dominant social identities—heteronormativity, cisnormativity, patriarchy, able-bodied normativity, and whiteness—so as to center the ways of knowing and bodies of cisgender white, able-bodied, heterosexual men, and to otherize identities outside of the dominant (Puwar, 2004). Subsequently, institutional scholars (e.g., Acker, 2006; Bhatt, 2013; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014) have empirically highlighted the ways in which race, gender, and sexual orientation stigmatization often serve as challenges to women of color and queer women leaders. This study contributes to the existing literature related to how experiences of institutional racism and heterosexism, the epistemology of racialized and hetero/gendered identities, and a resulting critical consciousness may influence the practices of multiply-marginalized leaders within higher education leadership.

Summary and Organization of Study

This study began by bringing attention to the need and scarcity of research on the experiences of leaders holding multiple marginalized identities within higher education, especially intersectional Latina identities. Rather than approach the critical study of institutions of higher education and leadership from one dimension of power, this project merged three axes of power together—race, gender, and sexual orientation—as part of an intersectional analysis

centering queer Latina leaders in higher education. In Chapter 2, I provide an exhaustive literature review of recent extant research on the experiences of women of color leading in higher education administration, a literature review of intersectionality theory and Chicana feminist epistemology as the guiding theoretical frameworks for this study, and a conceptual framework. In Chapter 3, I outline how a grounded theory methodology was utilized to develop a qualitative research design. Research findings, including a description of the participants and the emergent themes, are described in Chapter 4. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and future research directions in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The content of this grounded theory study on queer Latina higher education leaders drew upon literature that centers the higher education leadership experiences and practices of women of color, particularly on matters of negotiating identity and navigating multiple power structures to enact change. In this chapter, I first provide the theoretical traditions and concepts that will guide this study: intersectionality theory and Chicana feminist epistemology. Second, I review literature related to how institutional racism and heterosexism, racialized and hetero/gendered identities, and critical consciousness may influence the experiences and practices of queer Latina leaders within higher education administration by drawing upon the research on the experiences and practices of women of color leaders in higher education. Lastly, I provide a conceptual framework based on the combined theoretical frameworks and literature review.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study centered theories that provided a critical lens of power and identity in the context of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Intersectionality was utilized as a framework and heuristic to consider the structural oppression that queer Latina leaders may face, and a Chicana feminist epistemology guided my interpretation of understanding of how queer Latina leaders negotiate their positionality and how identity informed their decision-making as leaders. The following sections provide a brief review summarizing the key points, theoretical origins, contentions, and application of each theoretical framework within the field of educational research.

Intersectionality As Analytic Strategy

Given the multidimensional experiences of queer Latinas, this study centered intersectionality as a conceptual social identity framework. Intersectionality is an approach that

views experiences of power, privilege, and oppression as a product of the dynamic interplay of multiple identities at the structural and political level—a view that identities are interdependent in the experiences produced by macro levels of marginalization (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). The following subsections provide a brief overview of intersectionality as a theoretical framework, its theoretical origins, contentions, and its application within the field of educational research and queer women of color.

Overview

Intersectionality is defined by critical race theorists Delgado and Stefancic (1995/2017) as "the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation [and other categories] and how their combination plays out in various settings" (p. 58). Both a "methodological approach and epistemological stance" (Cho, 2013, p. 385; Strayhorn, 2017), intersectionality allows for the investigation of how structures of subordination interact to create conditions of marginalization that impact identities differently. Intersectionality's analytical power is in the utilization of a multiple-axes framework in viewing the complex, multiplicitous experiences of multiply-marginalized individuals—revealing the dynamic interaction of marginalized categories, of power and identity, that produce a unique magnitude of marginalization and oppression far more complex than those individual categorical oppressions or the addition of such categorical burdens (Crenshaw, 1989).

Types of Intersectional Scholarship

Drawing upon empirical research centering women of color, Dill and Zambrana (2009) constructed four theoretical interventions characteristic of intersectional analysis, as follows: (a) centering the experiences of "marginalized groups as a starting point for the development of theory," (p. 5), (b) in response to the reality that "variations within groups are often ignored and

essentialized" (p. 5) consider exploring the nuances of both individual identities and group identity, (c) "unveiling the ways interconnected domains of power organize and structure inequality and oppression," (p. 5), and (d) apply research and theory to practice as part of committing to institutional change. In this research design, I utilized theoretical interventions (a) and (b) as listed above.

Similarly, Collins (2015) identified six focal points of intersectional scholarship: (a) rethinking core constructs such as "work, family, identity, and the media" (p. 11) within the context of global capitalism; (b) expanding traditional categories of "race, class, and gender" (p. 12) to incorporate other categories such as sexuality, age, and nation; (c) its application to violence, including sexual and hate speech violence; (d) emphasizing identity with a focus on "studying how intersecting identities produce distinctive social experiences for specific individuals and social groups" (p. 12); (e) a critique of intersectional epistemology and its applications; and (f) its applicability to methodology. In this research design, I utilized focal points (b) and (d) as outlined above.

Sociologists like Choo and Ferree (2010), McCall (2005), and Windsong (2018) have outlined the ways intersectionality should be applied to social science research. Specifically, these scholars list three major approaches to intersectional research: (a) anticategorical complexity, (b) intracategorical complexity, and (c) intercategorical complexity. Anticategorical complexity focuses on analyzing, deconstructing, and problematizing modern dominant categories of identity, such as gender, and viewing the complexity and variability of identity categories often assumed as static and singular (McCall, 2005). Intracategorical complexity is utilized in single-group research that focuses on a specific social identity group with a "unified intersectional core" (McCall, 2005, p. 1787) that is understudied to highlight the "complexity of

lived experience within such groups'' (p. 1774) and their standpoints, unravel how each identity influences these experiences, and give voice to overlooked perspectives (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Finally, the intercategorical complexity approach is involved in comparative, multigroup studies focusing "on the complexity of relationships 'among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories' (McCall, 2005, p. 1786)" (Windsong, 2018, p. 138) to reveal how these social locations are formed with and impacted by relations of power. For this research design, I utilized approach (b), the intracategorical complexity approach. Choo and Ferree (2010) note that the intracategorical complexity tradition:

> emphasized locating distinctive standpoints that could reveal complicated and contested configurations of power. The woman of color perspective that was to be included was not necessarily formulated only by researchers who belonged to these marginalized groups, but it privileged a political and social standpoint that actively moved their experiences "from margin to center" of theorizing (Collins 1990; hooks 1984). (p. 132)

McCall (2005) highlights the importance that an intersectional study considers "the process by which they [categories] are produced, experienced, reproduced and resisted in everyday life (Fernandes 1997; Glenn 2002)" (p. 1783). Importantly, Choo and Ferree (2010) warn that only including an unstudied group at the intersection of multiple categories as "an object of study rather than reconceptualizing the power relations of the center and margins" (p. 147) may be insufficient to the purpose of interrogating power relations and may inadvertently reinforce hegemonic categories. Instead, McCall (2005) suggests that while a study may focus in depth on a particular social identity group, including comparisons with past studies focusing on more dominant intersections may allow for an analysis of "broader structural dynamics that are present in the lives of the subjects" (p. 1783). Additionally, Windsong (2018) offers a "relational

perspective" for research to incorporate both "privilege and oppression" together as relational dynamics (p. 137) rather than only focusing on oppression.

Ultimately, intersectionality is a form of critical inquiry and critical praxis (Collins & Bilge, 2016). For this grounded theory study on queer Latina leaders, intersectionality theory was utilized to center queer Latinas "as a starting point for the development of theory" (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 5) with the goal of "linking research and practice" (p. 5) by informing and altering overall conceptualizations of higher educational leadership and expanding traditional categories of "race, class, and gender" (Collins, 2015, p. 12) through the incorporation of sexuality as an identity category of analysis.

Theoretical Origins

The term intersectionality was first introduced to academia as a heuristic legal analytic framework in Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal 1989 article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Grounded in Black feminist theory and critical race theory, Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality as a corrective response to the undertheorizing of marginalization and oppression experienced by Black women under anti-discrimination law, within the knowledge production of academic disciplines, and within the agenda-setting politics of social justice movements (Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013). Crenshaw highlighted the experience of Black women as a starting point to demonstrate how two or more intersecting identities of marginalization may experience erasure and undertheorization within the structures of law and within political movements rooted in single, unipolar categories of marginalization—in this illustration, by either gender or race.

In “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” Crenshaw (1989) underlined how a one-dimensional analysis of identity and power distorts the multidimensional experiences of Back women—thereby obscuring the magnitude of their marginalization. As example, Crenshaw (1989) described how the court’s single-axis interpretation of anti-discrimination laws failed to consider the unique nature of violence that Black women experienced by only allowing Black women to claim discrimination on either race or gender, but not on both. Specifically, Black women did not experience one form of discrimination or the other, or one in addition to another, but that the experience involved an interlocking form of racism and sexism that uniquely shapes the lives, experiences, and realities of Black women. Thus, without the lens and framing of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) highlighted how the courts could not see the claims of discrimination that Black women were making.

Further elaborating on the analytical power of intersectionality as a framework, Crenshaw’s subsequent cornerstone article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” (1991) conceptualized the three characteristic dimensions of intersectionality, noting that intersecting oppression for Black women manifests in three different ways: structural intersectionality, representational intersectionality, and political intersectionality. Structurally, intersectionality appears through policies and practices that exist within our institutions that inherently marginalize those at the intersections of minority identities. Representationally, intersectionality reveals itself in discourse, societal framing, and language, or how cultures produce images and stereotypes that only serve to disproportionately marginalize groups and subsequently leads to severe consequences of how they experience their realities. Lastly, intersectionality manifests politically, such as in political movements that have purported to advance the needs of certain marginalized populations yet frequently overlook those who are

most minoritized within these marginalized groups, ultimately leading to their erasure in political agendas.

Crenshaw's intersectional intervention to the field of law and social political movements represents a juncture of intersectionality's naming and recognition, rather than its inception as a concept (Collins, 2015; Haynes et al., 2020). Intersectionality is deeply rooted in a longstanding tradition of Black feminism and women of color theorizing and knowledge production. Theoretical lineages include the early political critiques of both the abolitionist and women's suffrage movements, notably in Sojourner Truth's speech, "Ain't I a Woman?!" (1851) where she critiqued both movements for Black women erasure (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989) and Ida B. Wells's journalism (1909) critiquing race and gender discrimination hypocrisy within lynching law justifications (Collins, 2019). This intersectional lineage was further articulated into the 20th century civil rights era, from Beal's pamphlet writings (1969) on the double jeopardy of racism and sexism experienced by Black women to Patricia Hill Collins' (1986) conceptualization of the "outsider within" status of Black women. Further articulating intersectionality's multiple axes of analysis and as an analytical tool for the broader women of color experience, the Third World Women's Alliance newspaper, *Triple Jeopardy*, focused on interlocking systems of oppression to include race, gender, and class, as well as Angela Davis' (1971) scholarship in *Women, Race, and Class* (1983). Further, as a critique of heteronormativity, the Combahee River Collective's (1977) "Combahee Statement'' and the contemporary scholarship of Lorde (1984) in *Sister Outsider: Book of Essays and Speeches* utilize intersectionality to include the axes of heterosexism through heteronormative assumptions about Black women. Intersectionality, as the analytical concept outlined by Crenshaw (1989,

1991), contributes to this rich theoretical lineage by looking at all oppression as interlocking to create the multiple marginalization that some individuals face.

Contentions

Since Crenshaw's introduction of intersectionality into the academy, the theory has been applied to various fields of research, disciplines, and as analysis upon various apparatuses, power structures, and social identities (Carbado et al., 2013; Collins & Chepp, 2013). In "Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory" Carbado et al. (2013) emphasized "that the theory is never done, nor exhausted by its prior articulations or movements; it is always already an analysis-in-progress" (p. 304). As such, intersectionality is not confined or bounded by specific applications or contexts but rather is an ever-moving and ever-applied powerful concept. Nonetheless, intersectionality has been critiqued by some contemporary scholars as a theory that has expanded and traveled too far from its origins, leading to its misapplication, misuse, and theoretical erasure through citational malpractice (Harris & Patton, 2019), and that the theory should be reserved only to the application of the experiences of women of color or Black women specifically (Alexander-Floyd, 2012); and still, others have believed in refusing to utilize intersectionality completely and develop alternative stances to replace it with, such as deeming intersectionality unfit to address matters of sexuality for gay men of color (Hutchinson, 1999, 2004).

However, the vast majority of intersectionality scholars agree that the theory can and should be applied to other social identities and contend that what the theory can *do* is exceedingly more important than focusing on its theorizations—than what it should be bounded by in definition or scope (e.g. Carbado et al., 2013; Cho, 2013; Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 2011; Harris & Patton, 2019). Crenshaw (1989, 2011) has outlined that the theory has always

been incomplete and was intended to travel and be applied and mobilized toward various contexts to enable change. Importantly, studies utilizing intersectionality should engage in the proper citation practices of women of color scholarship and be applied appropriately. This is especially true within the field of educational research, where many scholars have critiqued and noted that the concept has and can be misused as a depoliticized buzzword and institutionalized as a neoliberal diversity management tool (Collins, 2015; Harris & Patton, 2019; Nash, 2017; Roland, 2018; Sibbett, 2020).

Movements away from intersectionality have briefly existed in the form of replacement theories, such as "cosynthesis" (Kwan, 1997) and "multidimensionality" (Hutchinson, 2001). This post-intersectionality sentiment at the time was driven by a skepticism that critical race theory and intersectionality could appropriately engage the experiences of sexuality and address heterosexism (Cho, 2013). Ultimately, such race-sexuality scholars incorrectly interpreted intersectionality as prioritizing the categories of race and gender, or excluding identities beyond race and gender (Hutchinson, 1999, 2001; Kwan, 1997, 2000). These skeptics overlooked the many women of color intersectionality scholars that addressed and engaged with sexuality and other categories despite the claim that the scholarship of intersectionality was heteronormative (Cho, 2013). Furthermore, prioritizing the most multiply-marginalized individuals, such as women of color, by "looking to the bottom" (Matsuda, 1987, p. 324), intersectionality functions as an inclusionary method—not one that is exclusionary (Cho, 2013).

Legal scholar Sumi Cho (2013) analyzed and deconstructed the arguments of post-intersectionality as reductive theorizing. Cho (2013) incisively concluded that "one must wonder why a theory centering Black women is automatically presumed to be too particular to be either universal or coalitional" (p. 393) and that if centering women of color creates a hierarchy, this

"point of departure is similarly reproduced by focusing instead on gay men of color as the new 'center'" (p. 391). Athena Mutua (2013) argued that post-intersectionality scholars, "gay men, men of color, and White women" (p. 367), partially privileged identities, felt that intersectionality did not speak to their experience, though theories like multidimensionality can be traced back to intersectionality. Most poignantly and bluntly, Cho (2013) condenses the issue in one statement: "Is the problem with intersectionality that it has become a 'pink ghetto,' overly populated by feminists (mostly of color)" (p. 399)?

Ultimately, intersectionality is an apt theory to apply to studies on queer women of color working within organizational leadership settings, such as the queer Latina higher education leaders in this study. As intersectionality scholars suggest, the key importance of applying intersectionality in research is to shift practices and challenge traditional categories of analysis to further expand on distinctive experiences for multiply-marginalized individuals and group identities (Collins, 2015).

Applications in Education Research

Within the field of educational research, intersectionality has been applied as a conceptual framework and as a methodological tool. Haynes et al. (2020) reviewed the past 30 years of educational research utilizing intersectionality theory to examine political, representational, and structural subordination of Black women in higher education, which revealed four strategies in applying intersectionality to educational research methodology: (a) centering the subject as producer of knowledge; (b) utilizing a critical lens to uncover micro level and macro level power relations such as through Collins' (1986) "outsiders within" perspective, hooks's (1994) scholarship on emancipatory teaching, and Patton and Ward's (2016) critical race feminism; (c) address how power shapes the research process through

researcher reflexivity and researcher proximity; and (d) bring complex identity markers to the fore by recognizing intra-intersectional lines, or identity performance negotiation, such as for other axes like sexual orientation.

Agosto and Roland (2018) reviewed the ways that educational researchers applied intersectionality to K-12 transformative leadership studies, specifically reviewing a sample of 15 articles challenging traditional notions of leadership through a grounded theory informed method of literature review. One of the main findings within this literature review was that studies utilizing intersectionality in combination with other critical epistemological frameworks were able to clearly discuss how leaders and leadership are contextualized within forms of consciousness and how identity informs actions and changemaking, such as using one's positionality of power and insights into the system, to promote more equitable educational settings. Additionally, such studies were able to contextualize and narrate the ways leaders with intersecting positionalities perceived and responded to discrimination in the workplace, while also maintaining a vision to be enactors of change and resisting such power structures of oppression. Lastly, Agosto and Roland (2018) share that the state of intersectionality's use in educational leadership research is nascent and emerging but that its power of analysis is at great risk if not used properly. The authors emphasized that educational leadership studies utilizing intersectionality must (a) clarify how intersectionality is defined within the study to generate conceptual clarity and strengthen analysis, (b) properly cite foundational works contributing to the concept of intersectionality, and (c) outline and implement a purposeful design where methodological choices can be traced back to theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of intersectionality.

Harris and Patton (2019) discuss ways to use concepts of intersectionality in higher education research through a systematic analysis of seven intentionally selected peer-reviewed higher education journals to then review 97 articles using the term "intersectionality." The review included a critique on research focusing on the lived experience of women of color students with findings that included a negotiation of identity but missed contextualizing these individual experiences "within mutually constitutive sociohistorical systems and structures of inequality (Bowleg, 2008; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991)" (Harris & Patton, 2019, p. 363). Harris and Patton (2019) share that this study would have afforded an analysis of "the institutional and societal policies, procedures, and programs that (re)create the inability…to account for participants' intersecting identities" (p. 363) with a special examination attending to how the history of such campus spaces shape the participants' experiences. With that said, such an analysis would have benefited from including at least one of the types of intersectionality outlined by Crenshaw (1991)— political, structural, and representational intersectionality—and by looking at micro and macro levels of power.

Strayhorn (2017) describes ways that intersectionality can be applied in higher education student affairs research through lessons learned in applying the methodology and epistemology to research practice. Regarding the design of questions and participant criteria, Strayhorn (2017) emphasizes the importance of considering who may "be missing or denied access to the study" (p. 64) based on commonly used categories that may otherwise not fit the experiences and lived experience of possible participants. There must be careful consideration in how we identify identity categories within our questions and recruitment criteria. However, Strayhorn also lists this as a challenge in utilizing intersectionality—that limiting the scope of participants recruited while also honoring the fluidness of identity categories can be a tricky act to balance.

Similarly, Duran and Jones (2019) outline the ways that intersectionality can inform the inquiry process of higher education student affairs research, particularly in studying college student identity development. This includes the consideration of conducting recruitment in ways that avoids a homogenous sample, similar to Strayhorn's (2017) recommendations in considering how we define and categorize identities. Regarding data collection, Duran and Jones (2019) share insights into ensuring that interview questions capture intragroup differences, asking questions of identity that allude to intersectional, rather than additive, experiences of interlocking systems of power, and considering other methods of capturing data from participants besides interviews, such as reflective journaling or providing interview questions beforehand. Important to this process is explicitly defining power within the interview questions at either/or the structural, representational, and political levels of power. Regarding data analysis, there are challenges with trustworthiness when considering utilizing a framework of intersectionality; findings reported may not reflect participant's point of view regarding structural inequalities. Lastly, at the core of an intersectional study is its ultimate goal of creating social change and benefitting the participants; such research should be distributed to a wide audience and aim to change practice and influence the field of higher education, specifically for higher education practitioners.

Chicana/Latina Intersectional Theorizing

Zinn and Zambrana (2019) reviewed the literature of emerging studies from the 1970s to present on interconnected oppressions by Mexican women feminists to examine how intersectionality theory can be informed by the knowledge production of Latinas. Zinn and Zambrana (2019) note Chela Sandoval's (2000) *Methodology of the Oppressed* as a form of oppositional consciousness in reaction to the women's movement and the Chicano movement

lacking the inclusion of Chicanas political agendas and academic theorizing. Additionally, Zinn and Zambrana (2019) note the works of Chicana lesbians, Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981/2015) and Pérez (1999), as discussing multiple intersecting forms of oppression to include race, gender, class, and sexuality, though not labeled or identified as intersectional by the authors. In an attempt to expand upon intersectionality theory, Zinn and Zambrana (2019) share the following thematic findings from their larger literature review on Chicana intersectionality that contribute to unique dimensions for intersectionality studies to examine beyond race, gender, class, and sexuality: "migration, language, nation, class, and citizenship as they vary in different local and global contexts" (p. 693). Namely, the Anzaldúan concept of borderlands is a prominent and powerful lens that Zinn and Zambrano (2019) outline as informative to intersectionality studies in its conceptualization of how identities can intersect, clash, and cohabitate in space, place, and time. In the following section, Chicana feminist epistemology will be introduced and further elaborated upon with a special focus on cultural intuition and epistemology of a brown body.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology as Standpoint

Chicana feminist epistemology is foundationally anchored in the works of women of color feminists, notably drawing from Chicana feminist scholars Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga. First introduced in educational research as a framework by Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998), she sought to disrupt the dominant ways of knowing within educational research and feminist studies by paving a pathway for education research scholars to employ their own ways of knowing and knowledge systems into their research, particularly by centering the voices of Chicanas. For Delgado Bernal (1998), conceptualizing Chicana feminist epistemology for use in educational research was a "means to resist epistemological racism" (p. 556). The following sections cover Delgado Bernal's (1998) cultural intuition as a tool to implementing Chicana

feminist epistemology in educational research, as well as Cindy Cruz's (2001) epistemology of a brown body in education research that emphasizes theorizations of the flesh—the body's roadmaps of change and resistance—through a broadened intersectional lens of sexual orientation.

Cultural Intuition

Delgado Bernal (1998) outlines that Chicana/o/x education researchers bring a unique experiential perspective and sensitivity to the research process. This embodied knowledge, or cultural intuition, serves as a foundation of Chicana feminist epistemology applied in education research (Calderón et al., 2012). There are four major sources of cultural intuition: personal experience, academic experience, professional experience, and the analytical research process. Through personal experience, the researcher uses the strengths of their background experiences and personal history to guide their decision-making and interpretations of data throughout the research process. Second, within the source of academic experience, the researcher is informed by existing literature. Third, experiential knowledge drawn from the researcher's professional practitioner experience can also provide insight throughout the research process. Lastly, the analytical research process itself is a source of cultural intuition by how we make meaning of our research to be part of larger changemaking projects.

Throughout this research project, I utilized cultural intuition by drawing from my own personal experiences and professional experiences as a queer Latina leader in higher education coupled with my academic experience to locate gaps within the literature of higher education leadership and make sense of the data—the experiences of participants—from multiple angles within the complex contradictions of identity and power in higher education. In addition to my

cultural intuition, I included my body as a location within my epistemic lens, further outlined in the next section, epistemology of the brown body.

Epistemology of A Brown Body

Cindy Cruz (2001) offers an epistemology of a brown body as part of Chicana feminist epistemological theorizing within education research. Differing from Delgado Bernal's (1998) cultural intuition, as a way of knowing through identity and experience, Cruz (2001) distinctly emphasizes the body, the flesh, as a site of negotiation that produces new knowledge. Specifically, Cruz (2001) theorizes on the ways that the brown lesbian body, as an archival site—often of fragmentation, wounds, and struggle—can equally transform such harms into powerful roadmaps of resistance, new ways of being, and healing.

For Cruz (2001) the brown and lesbian body is in dialectical tension—one where change and the forging of new ways of being are constant, urgent, shifting, and inevitable to survival. Building upon Anzaldúa's (1987) mestiza consciousness and epistemology of borderlands and Morraga's (1993) narrative on the reclamation of the fragmented body, Cruz (2001) describes the lesbian brown body as a site that experiences wounds, struggle, and history, but in response, is a site that also evokes change, new ways of being, resistance, and agency to mitigate such harms. Through this theorization, Cruz (2001) challenges educational research to move away from discrete categories and embrace "messy text" in research design and to consider the knowledges of lesbian Chicanas as pathways and roadmaps for change and resistance that can inform solutions to educational practice.

Cruz's (2001) epistemology of the brown body contributes and expands upon Chicana feminist epistemology by widening the intersectional scope of Chicana feminist knowledge production through the axis of sexual orientation. The axis of sexual orientation not only informs

the research process by challenging and complicating binary categories, but also theorizes into the ways that intersectional embodied knowledges can inform practice. In this study, I utilized the epistemology of my queer Latina body through the lens of intersectionality to challenge and review data outside of binary categorizations, as well as centering the knowledge of participants as theoretically influential in the development of leadership frameworks. By centering my own knowledge as researcher, as well as reframing the knowledge of participants as central to leadership theorization, I employed a Chicana feminist epistemology as a guiding framework in this project. The next section will outline the literature on women of color navigating higher education leadership.

Literature Review

In the following sections, I review studies that demonstrate the ways in which women of color, as racialized and hetero/gendered subjects, navigate their positionality within the power structures of higher education. First, I review the oppressive experiences of racialized and hetero/gendered leaders through (a) a brief overview of theorizing around inequality regimes within organizations and (b) a review of empirical studies centering the constraints women of color higher education leaders face. Second, I review the ways in which the outsider within perspective of racialized and hetero/gendered leaders hold the template for institutional change through (a) a brief overview of the theorizing around ways that leaders disrupt institutional norms and (b) a review of empirical studies exploring how women of color leaders in higher education leverage their identity as outsider within as personal resource, power, and agency to resist and counter both the oppression they experienced directly, as well as in advocating for institutional reform on behalf of marginalized populations.

Women of Color Navigating Higher Education Leadership

In this section, I review the extant research on both a) the leadership constraints and b) leadership agency that women of color experience navigating higher education as leaders. Structural intersectionality experienced by such leaders creates conditions for discrimination and oppression, and in response to survive in these institutional conditions, epistemic advantages to navigate and resist these conditions–a roadmap–can arise as embodied knowledge from these experiences. In the next section, I review literature on the experiences of women of color leaders with racism and heterosexism in higher education institutional settings (see Appendix A for an overview table of the themes, subthemes and authors explored within this section).

Leadership Constraints: Racism, Sexism, and Hetero/sexism

From a sociological perspective, institutions are presumed sites of cultural reproduction that structurally reflect and rearticulate social inequities and discriminatory ideology from the societies they are embedded within—and built in the interest of the dominant group (Collins, 1990; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Ocasio et al., 2016; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Specifically, racial stratification (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Omni & Winant, 1986/2015; Ray, 2019; Wooten & Couloute, 2015), gendered stratification (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000; Risman, 2004), and heterogendered stratification (Ingraham, 1994; Pringle, 2008) have been theorized as recurring structures expressed as differential power and recognition in leadership roles (Amis et al., 2018).

Racial stratification in organizations is typically articulated in the concentration of people of color in lower-ranking roles through white normative organizational mechanisms, such as credentialing and norms of interaction (Ray, 2019; Wingfield & Chavez, 2020). For the few people of color that do reach higher roles, they often experience racial discrimination, limits to their emotional expression, and pressures to conform to white normative behaviors (Ioanide,

2015; Thornhill, 2015; Wingfield & Alston, 2014; Wingfield & Chavez, 2020). Harris (1993) conceptualized whiteness as a form of property, where proximity to whiteness, such as passing for white in appearance and in behaviors, becomes a credential that can expand an individual's personal agency within an organization. Specifically, in higher education organizations, scholars have related the concept of whiteness as property to equate with higher education administration (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015).

Heterogendered structures within institutions reveal themselves as heteronormative practices. While gendered structures and heterogendered structures are separate types of stratification, studies have demonstrated that queer women that experience heterosexism also experience sexism as an enmeshed, interstitial experience[1] (McLaughlin et al., 2012; Pringle, 2008; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014). When women, queer and straight, move into higher level leadership positions, a paradox arises—being at an increased risk of sexual harassment while also holding the power of authority and discipline (McLaughlin et al., 2012). As such, despite formal roles of power through rank, women continue to experience harassment and at an increased level, indicating the ways in which gender inequality rearticulates itself within the institution through actions that reflect a view of illegitimacy or undermining of women in power. Within higher education organizations, scholars have outlined the ways in which violence and

[1] *Nonheterosexuality* has been deemed by legal scholars as a perceived form of gender nonconformity (McLaughlin et al., 2012). Ingraham (1994) explores viewing gender as heterogender when looking at discrimination and asymmetrical stratification for nonheterosexual persons. Rabelo and Cortina (2014) conducted a cross-sectional quantitative study on queer employees in higher education settings located in White, rural, conservative states. The analysis reviewed the co-occurrence of sexist harassment and heterosexist harassment in the workplace. Findings indicated that heterosexist harassment almost always co-occurred with sexist harassment. Subsequently, for the purpose of this study, this literature review will not separate sexism and heterosexism, nor gendered and heterogendered stratification, as separate and individual constraints, and instead, will assume heterosexism includes sexism in the case of queer Latinas and queer women of color. Throughout the literature review, this will be labeled as hetero/gendered to indicate and/or in the specific case of queer/women of color positionality specifically.

patriarchy are reproduced within universities both for women administrators and faculty regarding tenure and advancement outcomes (Cannella & Perez, 2012; Dlamini & Adams, 2014; Gomez, 2020; Mihăilă, 2018; Moore, 2017).

Within the institution of higher education specifically, scholars have theorized the ways the organizational structure is built to center dominant social identities—heteronormativity, cisnormativity, patriarchy, able-bodied normativity, and whiteness—so as to center the ways of knowing and bodies of cisgender, heterosexual able-bodied white men and otherize those outside of the dominant (Puwar, 2004). Subsequently, institutional scholars (e.g., Acker, 2006; Bhatt, 2013; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014) have empirically highlighted the ways in which race, gender, and sexual orientation stigmatization often disadvantages women of color and queer women leaders. Ultimately, social constructions of hetero/gender and proximity to whiteness are constraints that queer Latinas, as queer women of color, must navigate. The following sections review the constraints experienced by women of color in the categories of being overlooked, overworked, and scrutinized, and in stereotype threat and microaggressions. While queer women of color were only represented in empirical literature within the realm of graduate student experience within the university, rather than in administrative leadership roles, one peer-reviewed study (Glover, 2017) is briefly noted to indicate possible intersectional dynamics within the university context. Further, while no empirical research exists regarding queer Latina leaders in higher education, one dissertation (Rivera, 2019) that illuminates this intersection is also briefly discussed.

Recent extant research on women of color leading in higher education administration reveal a thematic pattern of being overlooked, overworked, and highly scrutinized in their roles, as well as challenging, frequent experiences of stereotype threat and microaggressions, based on

race and gender, experienced in the workplace. Additionally, women of color often experience the constraints of work-life balance challenges.

Hannum et al. (2015) conducted a mixed methods study on the leadership journeys and experiences of 35 senior-level women administrators in higher education and included a statistical comparison between white women and women of color. Of the 35 participants, 15 were women of color (nine Black, one Latina, two Native American, three Mixed Race or Other Race) representing a wide variety of higher education institutions—public and private universities, two-year colleges, Tribal colleges, and Board of Regents, of varying student enrollment sizes. The study revealed that 60% of all participants identified experiencing different expectations of them as women, compared to men, as a top barrier to leadership success. Of the women of color in the study, 67% shared having experienced greater scrutiny and criticism compared to their white male counterparts, and 75% experienced not being offered opportunities, both findings statistically significant difference compared to white women's self-reported barriers in the study. Ultimately, while all women in senior-level leadership tend to experience the barrier of unfair gendered expectations compared to male counterparts, women of color experience even greater leadership barriers, such as not being offered leadership opportunities as often as white counterparts and are more likely to experience even further scrutiny and criticism within their roles.

Further illuminating these statistically significant findings in Hannum et al. (2015), Townsend (2021) explored the negative career experiences of five Black women director-level administrators at predominantly white institutions of higher education through a phenomenological counter-narrative methodology. In this study, participants experienced three overarching themes: (a) being overworked as de facto advocates for students of color, "fixers" of

campus issues of racism, and serving on diversity committees—work not expected from their white colleagues; (b) experiencing heightened scrutiny regarding how they presented themselves, such as how they spoke and their aesthetic presentation; and (c) the pervasive experience of racial microaggressions, including unwarranted scrutiny and being overlooked for promotions or unacknowledged for their work.

In that same vein, Lewis (2016) conducted a quantitative study of 349 mid-level and senior-level Black higher education administrators. Black women experienced higher workloads due to expectations of diversity work, and they experienced far more racial microaggressions than Black men, given their racial and gender visibility. Similarly, Davis and Maldonado's (2015) qualitative phenomenological study of the lived experiences of five Black women senior-level leaders at two-year and four-year colleges documented the ways in which race and gender—from an intersectional perspective—influence leadership development, identity, and career progress. These participants shared feeling voiceless, undermined, and challenged, and a deep sense of isolation in their roles. Further, participants cited both race and gender discrimination negatively affected their career trajectories.

Breeden (2021) conducted a narrative inquiry study of seven Black women in senior-level higher education administration at predominantly white institutions. In this study, participants shared that they took on higher workloads than their white colleagues, shared a burden to advocate on behalf of students of color, and demonstrated characteristics of the "superwoman syndrome"—out of fear of needing to prove oneself and maintain one's position due to heightened scrutiny. As a result, participants felt that they often burned out and were exhausted.

Black women student affairs professionals employed at predominantly white institutions were interviewed in West (2015) to describe experiences of marginalization and success. In this study, participants were from a variety of age groups, roles, and institution types. Similar to the findings of Townsend (2021) and Davis and Maldonado (2015), West (2015) found that Black women leaders face pressure to perform perfectly to avoid expected scrutiny on behalf of Black women as an identity group. In addition to heightened scrutiny, these women were often dismissed for their ideas and had limited access to decision-making. Ultimately, these participants harbored self-doubt as a result of these negative experiences.

Also corroborating the statistically significant findings on women of color leaders in Hannum et al. (2015), Pierce (2020) conducted a *testimonio*[2] study of narratives from seven Latina higher education leaders serving at public higher education institutions in California, ranging from community colleges and four-year public universities. These narratives include the experiences and strategies of these leaders throughout their education leadership journey. One participant outlined having a sense of urgency for constant perfectionism on the job for fear of heightened scrutiny and stereotype threat, feeling the weight of representing a Latinas as a social identity group. Another participant outlined the importance of making yourself indispensable through continuously learning skills and being the best at it. Similarly, personal testimonio

[2] *Testimonio* as a methodology in education research originates from a narrative genre of storytelling in Latin America used to document human rights struggles and the experiences of the oppressed (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Huber, 2008; Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). Within the last two decades, the tradition has developed into a research methodology guided by critical race theory (CRT), LatCrit, and Chicana feminist epistemology frameworks to illuminate critical, reflexive Latinx narratives that voice oppressive experiences in education settings (Jupp et al., 2018; Huber, 2008; Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). While the technique of *testimonio* as a type of qualitative inquiry is not singly defined (Jupp et al., 2018; Huber, 2008), the consensus is that it is a form of counter-storytelling used to conduct CRT-informed qualitative research that highlights a point of view not normally captured through mainstream methods of inquiry (Huber, 2008). While similar in nature to other qualitative research methods, such as narrative, autoethnography, autobiography, or in-depth interviewing (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Jupp et al., 2018), the unique nature of *testimonio* is its "critical reflection of…personal experience within particular sociopolitical realities" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 364), connecting the individual experience of "marginalization, oppression, and resistance" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 367) with a collective experience (Brabeck, 2003; Huber, 2008; Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012).

studies by Garcia (2020) and Flores Carmona and Rosenberg (2021) illuminate the challenges of being an authentic leader due to internalized messages of how one should aesthetically present oneself and behave in proximity to whiteness and gender roles and "being bullied, misrepresented, gaslighted, threatened, and retaliated against" (Flores Carmona & Rosenberg, 2021, p. 35).

While many of the above studies demonstrate a clear experience of microaggressions, stereotype threat, heightened scrutiny, being dismissed, and overworked as factors of constraint for women of color leaders in higher education, other studies have also delineated the ways in which work-life balance also takes a toll. In Gamble and Turner (2015), 10 semi-structured interviews with Black higher education leaders in Georgia highlighted a common experience of facing challenges with work-life balance. Some participants shared that throughout their careers, at times, they experienced negative consequences to not staying "in line" with gender-related expectations within their leadership roles.

Similarly, Garcia (2020) provides her personal experience as a narrative portrait weaved within a literature review of mid-level Latina leadership. She shares how culturally, some barriers to leadership may include Latinx cultural challenges to prioritizing work over family—potentially contributing to the detriment of advancement. This was similarly true in Elenes (2020)'s testimonio study of two Latina community college executive leaders' pathways and practices of support for Latinx students. In this study, the participants revealed that there was a tension between balancing family and work, labeled as gender-related challenges. In Menchaca et al. (2016), a testimonio study of two Latinas in leadership also highlighted findings of having to choose work over family and challenges with personal cultural expectations.

Additionally, Garcia (2020) noted that being humble with one's accomplishments, often a cultural characteristic and expectation of Latinas within the Latina/o/x community—also could contribute to barriers of advancement for Latina leaders. While Garcia (2020) and perhaps other Latina mid- to senior-level leaders may cite this as a barrier to advancement, other literature shares a different story of advancement challenges—that regardless of being outspoken or showing up a certain way, many Latina leaders in recent studies like Sánchez et al. (2020) demonstrate experiences of being ignored and dismissed nonetheless due to structures and cultures within institutions rather than internalized cultural norms and practices of these leaders themselves. In this qualitative study of the lived experiences of Latina early-career higher education administrators at institutions throughout the United States, Sánchez et al. (2020) found that early-career Latinas experienced pressure to decenter their racial identity in the forms of not expressing their opinions on topics of race, as well as moving toward whiteness in behavior. Additionally, many of the participants felt overlooked, including being confused for non-professional staff and having to constantly re-introduce themselves as part of their division.

Oikelome (2017) conducted a phenomenological study of African American and white women college presidents on the impact of race, gender, and other intersecting identities on their journey to college presidency. African American women underlined the ways in which they faced greater scrutiny and higher standards of performance expected of them when compared to their white counterparts. For the white women in the study, with many identified as queer, did not share much obstacle with their gender nor sexual orientation in comparison to the way in which gender played a more salient role in the experiences of the African American women college presidents. This may indicate a need to view the ways in which race, combined with other identities, forms an interlocking system of oppression. While being white, women, and/or

queer may not have much of an effect, being a woman of color and/or queer may very well have its own unique effect.

Nixon (2017) conducted a qualitative study on five women of color chief diversity officers (two Latina, three Black) through a critical race theory and critical race feminism lens, specifically looking at the way in which race and gender impacted the ways they experienced their roles. The major findings included the challenges of navigating microaggressions and stereotypes, negotiating identity and role, and how the outsider perspective of these women brought important insight and value to their role. Specifically, these chief diversity officers shared that pushing against stereotypes and microaggressions at times led to negative professional consequences, where they would have to strategically weigh costs and benefits whether to address them or not. This type of negotiating at times weighed down as experiences of stress and isolation within their roles.

Mena (2016) conducted an intersectional critical ethnography study on the career trajectory narratives of women of color leaders within higher education. The study included the semi-structured interviewing and participant group observations of both faculty and staff working at a predominantly white institution in the Northeast (10 Black women, two Asian women, and one Latina; two identified as lesbian; and 10 identified as staff, three identified as faculty). Findings included the participants' experiences of having their credibility and competence questioned and feelings of alienation and marginalization. Mena (2016) suggested that future research on women of color leaders in higher education should include other marginalized identities, including sexual orientation, and through the theoretical lens of intersectionality.

Lastly, Rivera and Frias (2021) are the only extant empirical study on the leadership experiences of queer women of color in higher education administration. Rivera and Frias (2021) conducted a plática study between themselves, as researcher-participants and as two queer Latinas in early-career level higher education administration. This plática was conducted through the lens of conocimiento toward a Coyolxauhqui consciousness. Namely, this piece explores aspects of healing from painful experiences of working within the institution of higher education as queer Latinas—the pain from being the only queer Latina administrator and the tokenism of being made to feel like they were the only ones that could do certain job duties, and thereby, were given high workloads that were isolating and taxing; oftentimes, they were disrespected and taken advantage of in their work. They also felt a strong requirement to be strong and "tough" on behalf of themselves and their queer and Latina/o/x communities. Importantly, there was a common experience in not feeling like they could bring their whole selves forward and that they experienced a fragmented identity.

While there are no other empirical studies on the leadership constraints of queer women of color administrators in higher education leadership, insight into the dynamics of this positionality in higher education can additionally be approximated through the lens of faculty and graduate student experience. In a peer-reviewed autoethnographic study, Glover (2017) shares her personal narrative as a Black lesbian graduate student at a predominantly white institution. For Glover (2017), existing within "layered oppression, navigating power dynamics, belonging, labor, and survival while maintaining the integrity of her Black queer feminist politics is, and was, indeed, impossible" (p. 161). In this narrative, Glover (2017) shares the ways in which no matter how she responded to microaggressions—through silence, through speaking up—she was always dismissed, no matter the way in which she presented herself and delivered

these responses. Additionally, the toxic environment experienced in this graduate study environment involved physical health conditions and anxiety. The experience of silencing, microaggressions, and isolation are common themes revealed by studies on the experiences of women of color leaders in higher education, but it is possible that an even greater magnitude of such experiences exists within the compounding effect of sexual orientation. Corroborating this experience, Bailey and Miller (2016) shared their experiences as graduate student teaching assistants and within their academic apartment, revealing an extremely isolating experience, where they were deracialized, othered, and silenced. Similarly, but from a different position of power, in a peer-reviewed autoethnographic conversation between two lesbian Black faculty serving as department chairs, Lewis and Miller (2018) share the ways in which, despite having a position of ranking with power, there were many occasions in which their roles were undermined—from white women and non-queer Black colleagues alike.

To add, while not empirically reviewed, Rivera's (2019) dissertation study provides the first extensive exploration of queer Latina leadership in higher education administration. Rivera (2019) conducted a dissertation testimonio study following seven queer Latina leaders at higher education institutions in the western and western mountain regions of the United States. Participants revealed a common experience of feeling fragmented by the oppression upon all their intersecting identities, leaving them with feelings of isolation and voicelessness. Similar to the aforementioned studies on women of color, the rarity of being present in these roles lead to heightened visibility and thereby scrutiny of their work. Too often, these queer Latina leaders navigated these institutions alone, from a standpoint of identity representation. Also corroborating the previously mentioned studies, Rivera (2019) highlights that these participants were often scrutinized and surveilled for how they appeared and behaved—often, supervisors

enforcing how they could dress, what professionalism was, and what they were and weren't allowed to say or advocate for. Worse, these leaders faced so much hostility and toxicity in their work environments that they often had to change where they worked, and the consequences of such environments included experiences of depression and anxiety.

In summary, women of color leaders face heightened scrutiny, stereotype threat, microaggressions, higher workloads, being dismissed and overlooked, and challenging aspects of work-life balance. However, many of these women of color also shared their desires to resist microaggressions and stereotypes, negotiate their identities, and strategically push back within their roles toward institutional change, especially given their valuable outsider perspectives. The next section further explores the literature on forms of resistance, counterspaces, and personal identity as strength in the leadership experiences of women of color.

Leadership Agency: Epistemic Advantage

The following section reviews empirical research exploring how women of color leaders find personal resource, power, and agency to resist and counter both the oppression they experienced directly, as well as in advocating for institutional reform on behalf of marginalized populations. This section highlights the possibilities of change that women of color employ. Through their sense of responsibility, commitment, and approach to enacting authentic, ethical leadership, women of color in higher education have employed microlevel institutional changes through agenda-setting in policy and program development that centers marginalized identities, engaging in strategic moves to remain at the center of decision-making, including maneuvering risky organization situations and contexts, and reticulating subaltern networks of support.

Patton and Haynes (2018) theorize what they term as "black women as possibility models'' (p.12) toward a paradigmatic shift in institutional change. Citing Lorde (1984)

regarding the use of the "master's tools," Patton and Haynes (2018) elaborate that when the logics of change are created by the dominant group, institutional change will only result in what serves the interest of the dominant group. Instead, the authors call for educational leaders and researchers to look outside of the dominant paradigms and seek knowledge regarding transformation through those that have been historically pushed to the margins and decentered—mainly, those holding intersectional identities. In this piece, Patton and Haynes (2018) specifically outline the ways in which Black women, as example and exemplar, hold a wealth of knowledge toward institutional change. Specifically, the scholars outline four lessons derived from Black women's transformative leadership, and for all institutional leaders to consider: (a) to approach leadership through an intersectional lens, or multiple angles of reflection and refraction; (b) institutional transformation occurs through the enactment of "authentic, honest, and urgent leadership" (p.13) rather than the prioritization of ego or through the safety of utilizing old strategies; (c) meaningfully center voices at the margins by inviting them to participate in transformation efforts; and (d) investigate your institution's ties to past histories of exclusion and make subsequent amends. The implications of these recommendations include the ways in which educational leader preparation programs can be transformed in general to better equip and ground social justice leadership teachings, as well as ways to consider centering and reflecting Black women leadership and other intersecting identities within the curriculum of such programs to attract, retain, and nurture those student identities as part of leadership pipeline efforts.

Nixon (2017) conducted a qualitative study on five women of color chief diversity officers (two Latina, three Black) through a critical race theory and critical race feminism lens, specifically looking at the way in which race and gender impacted the ways they experienced

their roles. One major finding included how these chief diversity officers used their personal experiences, situating their experiences of marginalization, as motivation and foundation for creating institutional change.

Additionally, Gomez et al. (2015) highlighted the ways in which administrators of color are often key agents that bring attention to issues of inequity and marginalization facing students of color, but often do so at a cost either personally or professionally. In this study, the life histories of 15 staff members of color—Latinas, African American women, and South Asian women—at a predominantly white institution are explored in multi-hour interviews to understand how their journeys influenced their current contemporary leadership roles in higher education. Focusing on two life histories, one South Asian woman and one African American woman, Gomez et al. (2015) weave a narrative to demonstrate the ways in which they negotiate campus culture and bring inequities and practices into question. Metaphors of the "battlefield," "playing the game," and "lifting others up" are poignant representations of the intentional ways in which women of color leaders in higher education engage in decision-making.

Davis and Maldonado's (2015) qualitative phenomenological study documents the lived experiences of five African American women higher education leaders. The study outlines the ways in which race and gender—from an intersectional perspective—influence leadership development, identity, and career progress. Many of these women noted the vantage point of holding a multiple marginality—that such a perspective allowed for their possibility to decipher organizational bureaucracy in intricate ways, and to therefore become politically savvy and navigate and negotiate through seemingly risky organizational situations. Most importantly, such leaders found that being ethical leaders and maintaining their integrity was critical to fulfilling

their roles. Ultimately, the implication of this study is its empirical contribution to theorizations like that of Patton and Haynes (2018).

For many Latina leaders, experiences with resisting microaggressions are considered points of learning that define and inform their leadership development. In Elenes (2020), the narratives of two Latinas in higher education leadership are followed and describe leveraging their experiences to apply these experiences to their own leadership conceptualizations. Similarly, in a personal narrative testimonio, Espino (2018) discusses aspects of Latinx positionality in the context of leadership—as a tool of connection and as an analytic tool that provides insight to practitioner strategies.

Similarly, Venegas-Garcia (2013) conducted a critical grounded theory study to explore the ways in which lived experience—at the axes of race, gender, and class—shape the ways in which Latina/Chicana educators across the K-16 pipeline engage and enact leadership as agents of change. The seven participants represented high schools, community colleges, and universities located within San Diego County, and all were identified and recognized as activists or educators with a track record as change agents. The research findings included personal experiences of exclusion, discrimination, and absence of advocate educational leaders, and all were influential factors in how they showed up as educators and how they led; personal educational experiences strengthened the drives and motivation of these leaders to hold a social responsibility within their positions as activist leaders. The implication of this study includes learning from the knowledge of everyday leadership practice of Latina/Chicanas as activist leaders, contributing as part of a model of leadership centering social justice and racially minoritized student success.

The only empirical study discussing the queer Latina higher education practitioner identity is Rivera and Frias (2021). Rivera and Frias (2021) conducted a plática study on their

personal experiences of healing from the institutional harm that results at the intersections of heterosexism and racism. The participant-researchers outline that institution and one's own knowledge wrought from positionality is "a powerful knowledge source that guides us toward decision-making" (Rivera & Frias, 2021, p.20).

Finally, while the following two studies are not specifically on queer women of color administrators in higher education leadership, they are proximate through the academic experiences of graduate student/administrator and faculty to provide additional empirical insight on queer women of color in higher education. Glover's (2017) peer-reviewed autoethnographic study illuminates that as a Black lesbian woman, existing is "about being able to shift between and among modes of political decolonial oppositional stances based on the situation for the sake of your goal—something queer, Black, women of color, and indigenous feminists have been doing forever" (p. 171). Here, Glover shares how power is found within identity, and that the ability to "shift" is part of survival and success. Additionally, in a peer-reviewed autoethnographic conversation between two lesbian Black faculty serving as department chairs, Lewis and Miller (2018) share the ways in which they "actively pursue our liberation and the liberation of our communities, knowing that we must be agents of transformation and liberatory praxis" (p. 88). Lewis and Miller (2018) emphasize the ways in which they sustain their joy through community and the importance of viewing their leadership as "a reticulation of power, a structural intervention" (p.88).

While not empirically reviewed, Valentine's (2020) dissertation study provides insight into the topic of intersectional queer leadership in higher education administration. Valentine (2020) conducted an intersectional qualitative interview dissertation study with 12 LGBTQ current or former college presidents of various institution types across the United States. The

study included two Black women, one multiracial woman, one Chicana woman, two white women, two Black men, one Latino, one multiracial man, and two white men. This study determined that many participants saw themselves as agents that bridged communities and identities together on their campuses—that they are a conduit between individuals and campus communities of varying identity backgrounds. Additionally, participants described having a sensitivity to the occurrence of "otherizing" and marginalization across multiple identities—meaning, advocating for students of marginalized identities was an important and central part of their leadership philosophy. Similarly, they described themselves as having presence in leading campus conflicts, where they were resilient in the face of challenge, strategic, and demonstrating strong cultural competence to lead. For example, one participant described responding to a campus hate vandalism as not only to highlight the campus' commitment to inclusion, but to have direct, difficult, and blunt condemnation of the event. Rather than seeking an image of neutrality, these leaders took direct stances, where marginalized members of the campus community felt supported by such messages, whereas not having felt like that prior. In another example, a participant described pushing the institution in not simply reacting to incidents in piecemeal and reactive ways, but to talk about issues year-round, to discuss the intersections of identities, and to make these marginalized identities front and center rather than delegated to the margins or to only be window dressed. Ultimately, the implication of this study is that leaders from marginalized backgrounds, particularly intersecting LGBTQ identities, play a critical role in creating more inclusive campus climates by advocating for students, staff, and faculty of marginalized backgrounds. Their identities position them to have special insight into viewing mechanisms of oppression and developing ways to address these mechanisms and enact change.

More specifically to queer Latinas, while not empirically reviewed, Rivera's (2019) dissertation study provides the first extensive exploration of queer Latina leadership in higher education administration. Rivera (2019) conducted a testimonio study following seven queer Latina leaders, where participants' process of transformational resistance[3] was a "making and remaking cycle" (p. 126). Participants shared that because they existed in between spaces, never quite fitting in, they were able to reflect on their positions of power and oppressed identities to avoid replicating oppression through their leadership roles. This reflection was continual and regular, shaped and reshaped throughout their roles. Their own experiences and perspectives wrought from oppression allowed them, as exceptional leaders, to resist the urge to collude with oppressive systems, and to actively resist and challenge oppressive environments.

In response to the scarcity of women of color in leadership positions in higher education, as well as being understudied in education research, many women of color leaders have carved out their own counterspaces, such as through social media connections (Rivera & Frias, 2021; West, 2017), informal and formal networks (Breeden, 2021; West 2019a, 2019b), webinars (Rice et al., 2020), and publishing through other forms of scholarship, such as books chapters or conference presentations (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Muhs et al., 2012; Whitaker & Grollman, 2019).

[3] Transformational resistance is one of four forms of oppositional behavior displayed by students in educational institutions. Transformational resistance is characterized by both a critique of structural oppression and a commitment to social justice. Whereas conformist resistance includes a commitment to social justice without a critique of structural oppression; self-defeating resistance is characteristic of critiquing structural oppression while not being committed to or believing in social justice; and reactionary resistance neither includes a critique of structural oppression and nor is committed to social justice—where defiance and acting out is not. Transformational resistance can include internal resistance and external resistance. In internal transformational resistance, while a student may appear to conform to dominant structures, they are consciously aware of and engaging in critiquing structures of oppression, such as in the types of roles pursued to create change from within the system. In external transformational resistance, resistance is more outwardly manifested, such as in protests as part of generating change from outside the system and directly placing pressure on it (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). While the classical example of transformational resistance is typified for students within education institutions, this concept can be applied to professionals working within educational institutions as well, though usually taking place in the form of internal transformational resistance.

For African American student affairs leaders, networks and support systems have developed through counter spaces within professional networks, such as pre-conference spaces that involve informal identity-based networking and workshops. West (2019a) interviewed seven African American student affairs professionals that attended NASPA's African American Women's Summit (AAWS) to understand the impacts of the summit on their wellbeing. Such counter spaces were reported to provide affirmation, empowerment, and a place of networking on job-related advice. In West (2017), over 300 African American student affairs professionals that attended the AAWS over the span of a decade were surveyed on their experiences with the summit. Findings indicated that these spaces provided a safe opportunity to air out the concerns and experiences in their workplaces that they otherwise may feel unsafe to share in other spaces. However, one major limitation outlined about such counterspaces was a lack of intersectionality and inclusion for other intersecting identities—namely, for lesbian, bisexual, and trans African Americans.

West (2015) interviewed seven Black student affairs professionals—from a variety of age groups, types of positions, and types of institutions—where notions of success were described as being able to enact institutional change and help other Black women as important intrinsic motivators in satisfaction of the work they did. Similarly, in Gamble and Turner (2015), 10 semi-structured interviews of African American higher education leaders in Georgia revealed that for the participants, acting ethically and leaving a powerful legacy and impact for future change makers was critical to their positive view of their leadership positionality.

Additionally, in an intersectional phenomenological study on Black women senior-level leaders in education, Johnson and Fournillier (2021) explored how race and gender impact the participants' leadership. Through the lens of social justice leadership theory, Johnson and

Fournillier (2021) analyzed the narratives of four Black women representing senior-level leadership positions—as agents of change—in K-12, higher education, and private organization education settings. The study elucidated how resilience was an important factor in the face of institutional barriers and inequitable cultures within education organizations, and that their motivation to be in these leadership positions was due to a gap needing to be filled—the uniqueness of their roles as Black women, a call to leadership to serve.

In Montas-Hunter (2012), eight Latina leaders in higher education were interviewed regarding how their identity influenced their leadership, as well as how self-efficacy played a role in their leadership trajectories. Participants stated that while racist and sexist microaggressions were major challenges experienced within their leadership roles, these experiences were used as motivation to continue in their role and succeed in their shared responsibility on behalf of Latinas. Similarly, Pierce (2020) conducted a testimonio study of narratives from seven Latina higher education leaders ranging from community colleges and four-year public universities in California. Participants shared that not assimilating to dominate culture, and to be authentic, was important to leadership.

Hannum et al. (2015) conducted a mixed methods study on the leadership journeys and experiences of 35 senior-level women administrators in higher education and included a statistical comparison between white women and women of color. Of the 35 participants, 15 were women of color (nine African American, one Latina, two Native American, three Mixed Race or Other Race) representing a wide variety of higher education institutions—public and private universities, community colleges, Tribal colleges, and Board of Regents, of varying student enrollment sizes. Importantly, women of color consider positive aspects of their job in statistically different ways than white women. Women of color are more likely (80%) to cite

having an influence as their top positive aspect of their role, whereas white women noted that having a broad scope of their job was the most positive aspect of their role. Hannum et al. (2015) concluded that women of color leaders' role in influencing and shaping policy, drawing from positive aspects of leadership, should be further explored toward new approaches for leadership development. Such paradigmatic shifts could, according to the authors, illuminate a range of different ways of leading, succeeding, and navigating leadership roles as women of color, and thereby encourage women of color in the leadership pipeline.

Conceptual Framework

This study centered queer Latinas "as a starting point for the development of theory" (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 5) with the goal of "linking research and practice" (p. 5) by informing and altering overall conceptualizations of higher educational leadership and expanding traditional categories of "race, class, and gender" (Collins, 2015, p. 12) through the incorporation of sexuality as an identity category of analysis. Intersectionality theory was utilized in this study by (a) framing, centering the lived experiences of queer Latina leaders as a starting point of theory development (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Dill & Zambrano, 2009), moving them "from margin to center" (hooks, 1984); (b) methodologically, by shaping data collection and data analysis by considering both microlevels and macro levels of power, individual identities and group identities, and variations within (Collins, 2015; Dill & Zambrano, 2009; Harris & Patton, 2019), including dynamics of privilege and oppression (Windsong, 2018); (c) conceptually, by challenging traditional categories of identity to incorporate those beyond race, gender, and class (Collins, 2015)–in this case, sexual orientation; and (d) praxis, with the goal of enacting change in educational leadership conceptualizations within higher education.

Through a Chicana feminist epistemological research lens, I utilized my own knowledge production from my social location as a queer Latina throughout the research process. Utilizing Cruz's (2001) approach of the epistemology of the brown body and Delgado-Bernal's (1998) cultural intuition, my personal experiences as a queer Latina within and outside the academy, my practitioner experiences in higher education administration, and my academic training and extensive literature review conducted in this study, guided my interpretations of the data throughout the research process.

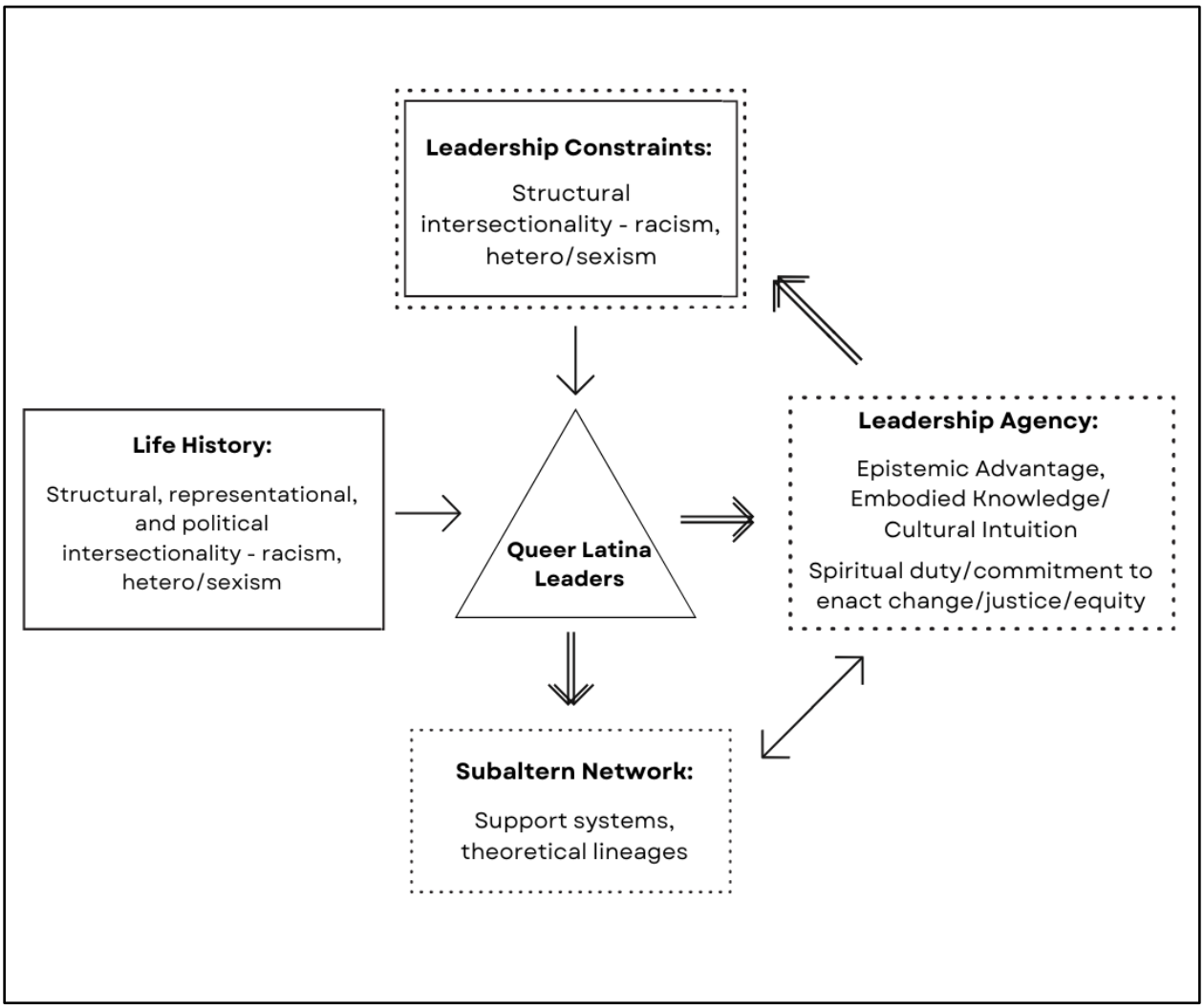
In addition to my research lens, a Chicana feminist epistemology was analytically utilized to complement intersectional analyses through Anzaldúa's (1987, 2015) borderlands concept as an intersectional analytical lens (Zinn & Zambrano, 2019), which aptly describes how holding multiple marginalized identities, as a lesbian Chicana, one's identities cohabitate, blend, and clash all at once, in different places and times. Complementing Anzaldúa, I also utilized Cruz's (2001) application of Anzaldúan theorizing to consider the ways that these clashes of identity, dialectical tensions, within an intersectional subjectivity, create embodied knowledges that can inform equitable policy and practices within educational settings when centered in educational research.

The conceptual framework below (see Figure 2.1) maps the aforementioned theoretical frameworks and literature review on queer women of color in higher education to generate a conceptual map of how queer Latina leaders in higher education experience leadership amid institutional constraints and how this informs their leadership and survival within these contexts to ultimately resist and disrupt such institutional structures. This model summarizes how identity, power, and privilege interact to generate a raced and heterogendered experience—both in an accumulated life history and ongoingly as an institutional leader—that forces survival in the

forms of finding support in subaltern networks and in epistemological decision making. These subaltern networks, as well as ever-developing epistemological roadmaps of resistance, not only influence the decision making and practices of queer Latina leaders, but ultimately can influence institutional change.

Figure 2.1

Conceptual Map of Queer Latina Leadership



Summary

The literature on the experiences of women of color leading in higher education demonstrates a story of both constraint and agency—how negative experiences of institutional racism and heterosexism can be debilitating, dehumanizing, and exhausting, while at the same time, this intersectional positionality holds significant power, knowledge, and resilience and resistance to the established institution and thereby institutional change and transformation. There is a clear need for more intersectional analyses on higher educational leadership, specifically on how queer identity further compounds the interstitial marginalization of race and gender, and overall, more studies specifically exploring Latina leadership development. The topic of queer Latina leadership in higher education administration has been recently paved by one empirical testimonio article by Rivera and Frias (2021) outlining the authors' experiences of healing from painful experiences, as well as Rivera's (2019) dissertation study illuminating the testimonios of queer Latina higher education administration. However, these studies on queer Latina leaders, while a beginning foundation, have yet to develop a framework and theorization of queer Latina leadership in higher education, particularly through a grounded theory methodology. Consequently, this study is uniquely positioned to address a queer Latina leadership framework. To accomplish these objectives, I employed a constructivist grounded theory approach guided by Chicana feminist epistemology and intersectionality theory, as outlined in the following Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This project highlighted how queer Latina identity informs higher educational leadership, specifically through the understanding of how queer Latina higher educational leaders experienced their racial and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures and how such experiences shaped their everyday work practices. As noted previously in Chapter 2, this study is epistemologically guided by the frameworks of intersectionality and Chicana feminism, which will inform the research design throughout. Methodologically, a constructivist grounded theory approach will be utilized in this study, given the limited existing research on this topic. Grounded theory allows for the understanding of the "nature and meaning of an experience for a particular group of people in a particular setting (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 4), is methodologically interdisciplinary and flexible, follows a building of ideas through organic processes, and provides an avenue to construct theories on very specific topics (Charmaz, 2014; Marshall et al., 2022).

The following sections elaborate on the research design of this project by describing the methodology and methods that informed this study. This chapter conveys the compatibility of these frameworks and how they were operationalized in the design of the interview questions and coding of data, the overall fit of methodology to this study, and how I ensured trustworthiness through researcher reflexivity, participant member checking, and triangulation of data through the constant comparative concept.

Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology

There are a variety of methodological approaches to a qualitative grounded theory study. Within educational research, the most frequently applied approach is the Straussian approach, followed by Charmaz's constructivist approach (Stough & Lee, 2021). In this study, I utilized the

constructivist approach to grounded theory methodology. The following sections provide an overview of grounded theory methodology and its constructivist revision, the rationale for utilizing grounded theory for this qualitative study, and the compatibility of constructivist grounded theory with critical inquiry, specifically, with intersectionality as an analytical tool and a Chicana feminist epistemological standpoint guiding my research decision-making practices.

Origins and Revisions

A hallmark of a grounded theory method is the way in which data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously and iteratively, where both processes progressively inform and shape the other and refine the study (Charmaz, 2012; 2019). Grounded theory characteristically "involves using multiple stages of data collection" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 51) where concurrent analysis of already collected data informs future data collection. Such theoretical sampling allows for the refinement of the research design and/or research questions, eventually leading to greater clarity around how data is interrelated into cohesive categories (Charmaz, 2014). These categories and concepts, derived from the data, are then eventually used to construct theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Given the nature of grounded theory, data analysis procedures are highly flexible and contingent upon the study at hand and initial data collected.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) first described grounded theory as a form of qualitative inquiry that emphasizes the use of collected data to inform theory development, rather than the traditional theory-driven hypothesis that informs data collection—thus, theory construction is grounded in the qualitative data of a grounded theory study (Marshall et al., 2022). Since then, the theory has been reconstructed and reformed to a variety of traditions and paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The most pronounced shift regards the researcher's preconceptions—a critique of grounded theory's original assumptions of researcher objectivity. Notably, Charmaz

(2014) revised grounded theory methodology by developing the concept of constructivist grounded theory, which acknowledges that data and phenomena are interpreted and constructed—not discovered or found (Marshall et al., 2022). Thus, constructivist grounded theory methodology "acknowledges the researcher's active role in shaping the data and analysis" (Charmaz, 2012, p. 293).

Constructivist grounded theorists believe that a literature review can and should be engaged within the initial research design, provided that the researcher maintains a critical and reflexive view of their engagement with the research (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg, 2011). While classical objectivist assumptions of grounded theory methodology have emphasized the importance of reserving the literature review until after data analysis so as to not influence theory development and instead enter research with minimal predetermined expectations (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), many modern constructivist grounded theory methodologists refute the impossibility of a researcher's objectivity or pure induction (Chalmers, 1999; Charmaz, 2005; Kelle, 2014; Thornberg, 2011). Similarly, a related belief of objectivist grounded theorists is that a grounded theory study should not employ theoretical frameworks to guide research design (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). However, constructivist grounded theorists contend that the use of theoretical frameworks is important, particularly for work that centers social justice inquiry and critical inquiry, such as in excavating aspects of power, privilege, and identity (Charmaz, 2012, 2020; Malagon et al., 2009; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Ultimately, when data is not contextualized within larger societal structures, as would be in an objectivist grounded theory study, "opportunities to create theoretical complexity" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 243) can be diminished and result in a data analysis that may lack richness and depth. Furthermore, how a topic is chosen and how the research questions are

initially developed cannot be justified without first reviewing the extant literature (Dunne, 2011; Timonen et al., 2018). In sum, while the concepts that eventually serve as the basis of theory construction are not decided prior to conducting a grounded theory study but, rather, derived from the data collected and analyzed, constructivist grounded theory methodologists agree that the initial study design can and should be guided by an informed literature review coupled with a critical and reflexive researcher stance (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg, 2011).

Rationale

Queer Latina higher education leadership is an understudied research topic, and therefore, the use of a grounded theory methodology was suitable given its flexibility in research design, data collection, and analysis methods and, namely, its exploratory nature within the data collection and analysis processes to shape and reshape the research design to form cohesive categories in the absence of information on this topic. The methodological eclecticism of grounded theory methodology allows for a variety of data collection and analysis choices based on the topic at hand. Beyond allowing for the exploration of an understudied topic with intent to generate emergent theory, a grounded theory methodology is also highly useful for studies of critical inquiry.

Traditional research methodologies in education research can inadvertently uplift notions of objectivity in ways that ignore the realities of power structures (Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012). In the case of a constructivist grounded theory methodology, the researcher critically acknowledges their position in shaping the study (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, a constructivist grounded theory methodology can allow for the revealing and matching of how policy and practice translate in implementation upon the everyday life of individuals, in which questions are asked to

reveal how individuals may support, contest, and resist policies and practices within institutions (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz, 2020; Denzin, 2019).

Charmaz (2012, 2014) outlines the ways that grounded theory can be utilized in critical inquiry; it can equip social justice researchers to define implicit meanings within the data and to construct theory with a complexity "that challenges conventional explanations of the studied phenomenon" (2012, p. 296) and "to move social justice studies beyond description, while keeping them anchored in their respective empirical worlds'' (2014, p. 326). Beyond just theory construction alone, grounded theory can be utilized to sharpen thematic analysis within social justice inquiry, explore new research areas or topics without necessarily constructing theory, and to illuminate implications of practice rather than theory construction alone (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Song & de Jong, 2013; Yakushko, 2010). Operationally, Corbin and Strauss (2015) describe that through a grounded theory methodology, what is learned throughout the process allows the flexibility to respond to complex situations and revise and update research design as new knowledge is acquired, which is fitting for complex, intersectional projects.

Compatibility with Theoretical Frameworks

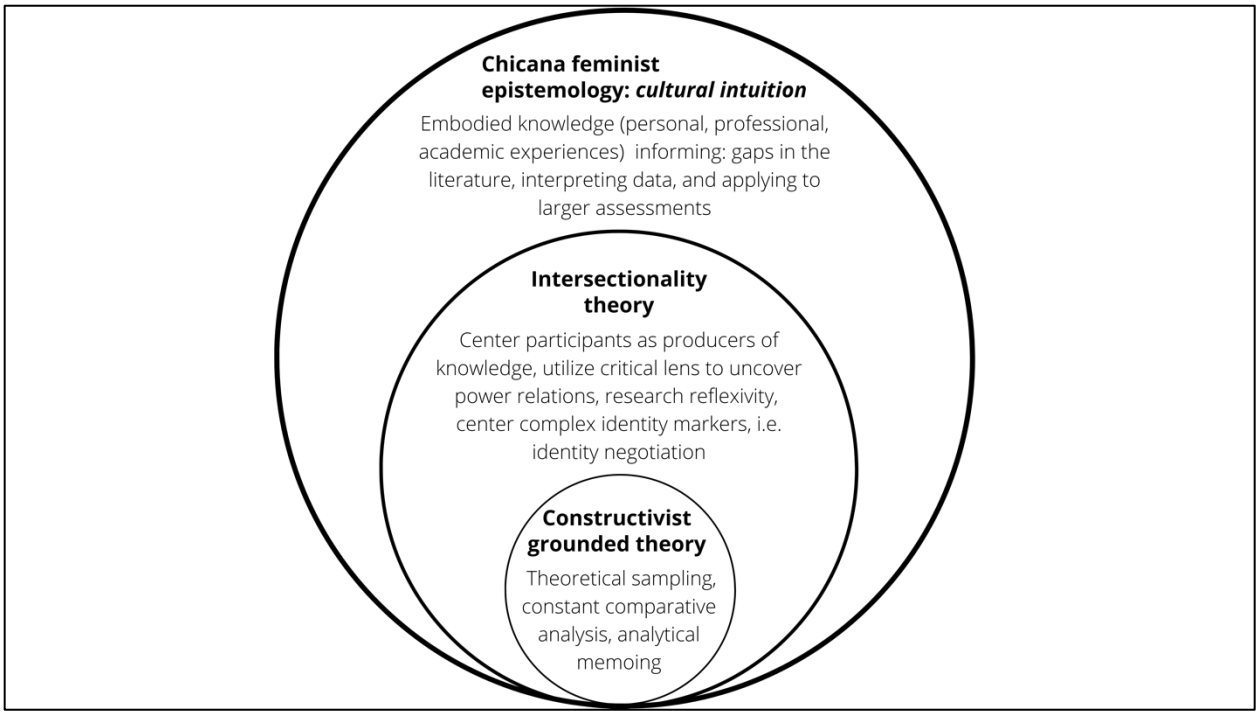
This study operationalized the cultural intuition of a Chicana feminist epistemological standpoint and intersectionality theory as a lens of analysis with grounded theory as methodology. Constructivist grounded theory methodology is compatible with critical inquiry, in which intersectionality as an analytical tool and Chicana feminist epistemology as a standpoint are components of critical inquiry. As such, this intersectional study utilized a Chicana feminist epistemology to critically inquire about leadership knowledge from a nondominant point of view, is highly compatible with a constructivist grounded theory methodology. Unlike other grounded theory applications that strictly utilize an inductive approach, which is to only build

theory from the data, constructivist and critical grounded theory approaches emphasize the appropriateness of an abductive approach, where data is used to build theory but also noted is the importance of considering how "larger structural, personal, and interpersonal processes" (Malagon et al., 2009, p. 262) shape data, social phenomena, through the consideration of prior theories that help explain these processes, such as intersectional theory (Charmaz, 2017a, 2017b).

In Figure 3.1 below, I outline how these two theoretical frameworks were integrated with the constructivist grounded theory methodology approach utilized in this study. As researcher, my Chicana feminist epistemology guided how I designed this study, from identifying gaps in the literature to interpreting data and applying these findings to larger institutional assessments. Additionally, at the heart of Chicana feminist epistemology is the philosophy of centering marginalized identities as holders of knowledge and theorization, which is at the center of my study: The knowledge of participants weaved the threads of theorization. Within my overarching approach of Chicana feminist epistemology, intersectionality theory similarly was enmeshed in a philosophy of centering participants as producers of knowledge and theorization. In addition to viewing the data as theory-worthy, intersectionality theory influenced how I developed research questions and analyzed data with respect to complex identity negotiation and institutional power dynamics.

Figure 3.1

Methodology Integrated with Theoretical Frameworks



Kassam et al. (2020) conducted a health research study with the aim of demonstrating how intersectionality can be applied to a constructivist grounded theory methodology. Specifically, Kassam et al. (2020) outline four domains of intersectional analysis within a grounded theory methodology as "reflexivity, complexity, social justice, and variability" (p. 2). Through the domain of reflexivity, Kassam et al. (2020) demonstrated that through the constructivist grounded theory practice of the researcher to continuously reflect on their epistemological influence, intersectionality can compatibly guide such reflexivity toward varying levels of power–to consider how different levels of power, social locations, and "broader processes embedded within researcher assumptions and ideas" (p. 6) that may influence decision-making throughout the research process. The domain of complexity in constructivist grounded theory methodology is embraced by analyzing data as complex in its interactions and processes, whereas intersectionality can guide this complex analysis to specifically view the data

within broader structural processes. Variability is a domain that reflects considering collecting data through interview questions that view changes and shifts over time. Lastly, social justice as a domain includes the importance of constructivist grounded theory to privilege the words and interpretations of the participants and to complicate theory and practice through a multidimensional lens of intersectionality.

Grounded Theory in Education Research

Provided that constructivist grounded theory methodology is compatible with critical inquiry approaches, the methodology has been widely adopted within the field of education research (Denzin, 2019; Stough & Lee, 2021). Stough and Lee (2021) conducted an analysis of grounded theory methodology utilized in education research for the past 18 years. While objectivist grounded theory methodologies were mainly utilized, by 2005, constructivist grounded theory methodology was utilized more frequently given the rise in constructivism paradigms in qualitative research.

Specifically, Malagon et al. (2009) identified strategies for a critical grounded theory methodology in education research utilizing a critical race theory analytical lens and informed by a Chicana feminist epistemology. Malagon et al. (2009) outline the way a researcher's epistemological stance–in this case, a Chicana feminist epistemology–assists in framing and reframing research questions and reviewing literature critically. Specifically, the cultural intuition of a researcher—personal, academic, and professional experiences that bring a sensitivity to the researcher—serves as a strength in analyzing the data for emerging themes and engaging in reflexivity through the data collection and analysis processes (Malagon, 2009). Malagon et al. (2009) cite that grounded theory is compatible with critical theory given its "systematic yet flexible qualitative approach that facilitates theory development 'grounded' in

the data itself" (p. 264). The authors note and describe three strategies common in grounded theory that are conducive and applicable to a critical race grounded theory methodology: theoretical sampling, using a conditional matrix in analysis, and data collaboration process. Notably, the condition matrix in data analysis can be a useful coding device to visually map out connections between "intersections of micro and macro conditions with actions" (p. 268). While this was emphasized for critical race grounded theory methodology, it can be equally as useful to consider a condition matrix in analysis for this intersectional grounded theory study.

Higher education research studies utilizing a constructivist grounded theory methodology to examine queer women of color intersectional populations include empirical identity formation studies on queer students of color (Duran, 2021; Duran & Garcia, 2020; Duran & Garcia, 2021; Duran & Jones, 2020) and identity-informed leadership of queer of color student affairs professionals (Kanagala & Oliver, 2019). While these past studies have attempted to address the gap of queer of color intersectionality studies in the literature, these studies do not focus on a specific gender identity or racial/ethnic identity in queer of color leadership. Consequently, this study is uniquely positioned to address a queer woman of color leadership framework, specifically, for queer Latina leaders. To accomplish these objectives, I will employ a constructivist grounded theory approach guided by Chicana feminist epistemology and intersectionality theory.

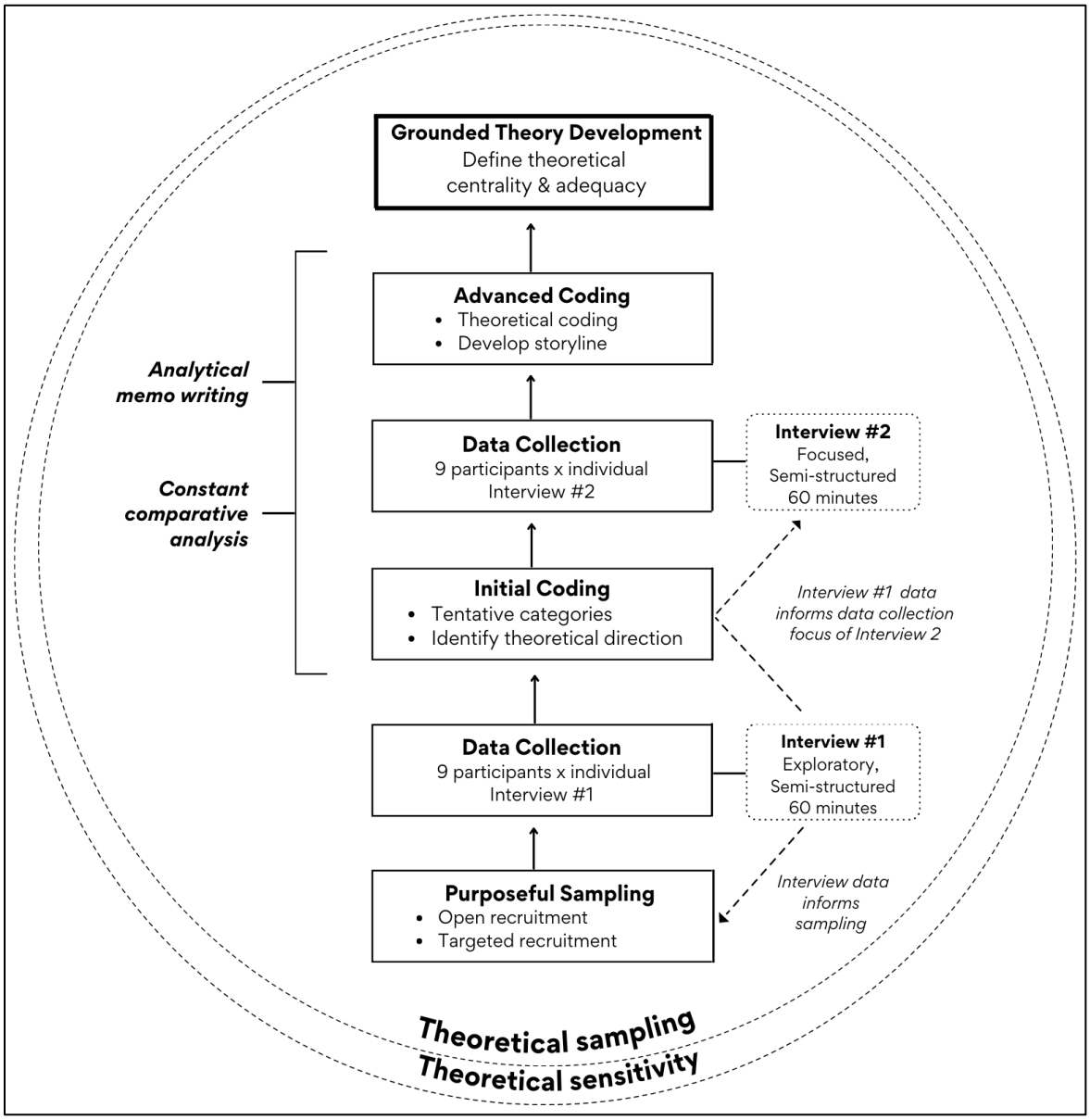
Methods

The following section covers a summary and description of methods, the sampling criteria for participants selection, the data collection and data analysis processes, and how trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability were ensured. Throughout these sections, I outline

the ways that intersectionality theory and Chicana feminist epistemology was incorporated within these methods. Figure 3.2 below displays the overall research design of this study.

Figure 3.2

Overview of Research Design



Sampling Criteria

As part of developing an empirical model of queer Latina leadership, this study employed a constructivist grounded theory methodology to guide the research design. In a constructivist grounded theory study, participants should "have first-hand experience" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56) regarding the research topic. To recruit a unique sample of queer identified Latinas holding leadership roles within institutions of higher education, I employed initial criteria where participants met the following:

1. Participants must identify under the umbrella of queer, which may include but is not limited to queer, lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual;
2. Participants must identify as Latina/Chicana; and
3. Participants must currently hold a leadership role (administrative leadership, departmental leadership, committee leadership) position at an institution of higher education.

In the first, second, and third criteria, I outlined the participant identity characteristics necessary to answer the research questions. It was important that participants were grounded in their identity as they were asked to relate how their identity influenced their lens as leaders and their everyday work experiences; participants had to be willing and ready to share about their identities in the context of leadership. In the fourth criterion, the understanding of leadership roles in higher education was not narrowly defined for the purpose of exploration and initial sampling within this grounded theory study. Similarly, the number of years spent in leadership, type of institution, and region/location were not narrowed to allow for the initial sampling process.

Participant Recruitment

This study engaged in a criterion and snowball sampling strategy, as well as theoretical sampling, using the above criteria to better understand and answer the research questions of this study. Criterion sampling involves purposefully recruiting participants that fit a predetermined criteria to strategically gather information that cannot be collected from a random sample or other criteria choices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Snowball sampling involves recruiting a few early participants based on the criteria and asking these participants for references to recruit as future participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Theoretical sampling is specifically related to grounded theory methods of analyzing data as it is collected, where such data influences what future data is collected and which participants to interview next, possibly resulting in the narrowing or widening of criteria and refinement of interview question topics (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The a priori sample size goal was to purposefully recruit eight participants for two rounds of individual semi-structured interviews. First, participants were recruited through open recruitment to diversify the potential participant sample; this was achieved through online and public platforms via postings on social media and in the newsletters of professional organizations, including the National Association of Student Personnel (NASPA) affiliate division, Gender and Sexuality Knowledge Community (GSKC). Second, I conducted targeted recruitment by reviewing the professional websites of institutions of higher education or professional organizations that publicly highlight queer Latina leaders in higher education, as well as through recommendations and references within academic and professional networks.

Upon developing a list of potential participants, a recruitment email was sent out to those who met the criteria of the study (see Appendix B). While the anticipated a priori sample size

was eight participants, saturation and theoretical sampling was reached with nine participants—when no new emerging concepts arose in data collection and analysis and when concepts were able to be fully developed and confirmable by participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Ultimately, a grounded theory study must embark upon data analysis first before knowing how much more approximate data must be collected to reach saturation (Charmaz, 2014). Through two semi-structured interviews and member checks with nine participants, saturation was reached, and theoretical sampling was possible. This corresponds to Charmaz's (2014) note that with the guidance of theoretical frameworks to sensitize concepts and more narrowed topic area, the fewer interviews are generally required for a grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2014). On average, for a heterogeneous and diffuse topic area, the number of estimated interviews for a grounded theory study is 12 individual interviews for 12 participants (Charmaz, 2014; Guest et al., 2006); in the case of this narrower topic of study, a total of 18 individual interviews were conducted for nine participants, collecting rich data of a narrowly specific identity group.

Data Collection

Participant data were collected through two rounds of semi-structured intensive interviewing conducted over Zoom, as well as through member-checking with participants over email (see Appendix C for informed consent). Each interview lasted for approximately 60 minutes, amounting to a total of 120 minutes for each participant. Only the audio of interviews was digitally recorded; the use of Zoom, a video communications software, was for the sole purpose of simulating the environment of a face-to-face, in-person interview. Notes were taken during interviews for the purpose of developing responsive follow-up questions during the interview. The recorded audio was uploaded to Otter. Ai transcription services. The transcripts were cleaned within four days of data collection. While cleaning the transcripts of the first

interviews, I concurrently developed memos to reflect, interpret, and initially analyze data for the refinement of questions for the second follow-up interviews. **Error! Reference source not found.** below provides an overview of the data collection processes of this study.

Table 3. 1

Data Collection Overview

Data Source	Frequency	Goal(s)	Collection Tool	Member Checks	Date of Completion
Individual Interview #1 Initial Semi-structured	60 minutes each	Exploratory Answer R1: How do queer Latinas experience higher education leadership?	Video conferencing Audio-recorded Transcribed within 4 days	Email on emergent findings	August 2022
Analytic Memo #1 Unstructured Based on Interview 1	One memo each	Observational notes during Interview 1	Journal	Email on emergent findings	August 2022
Individual Interview #2 Follow-up Semi-structured	60 minutes each	Focused Follow up on previously data collected in Interview 1 Answer R2: How do queer Latina higher education leaders experience their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures? R3: How do queer Latina higher education leaders draw upon their identities and experiences to enact change?	Video conferencing Audio-recorded Transcribed within 4 days	Email on emergent findings	August 2022
Analytic Memo #2 Unstructured Based on Interview 2	One memo each	Observational notes during Interview 2	Journal	Email on emergent findings	August 2022
Analytic Memo #3 Semi-Structured Based on Interviews 1 and 2	One memo each	Cross analysis Compile categories from Interviews 1 and 2 for each participant.	Journal	N/A	September 2022
Analytic Memo #4 Structured Based on 18 interviews	One summative memo	Cross analysis Shared categories of all participants Constant comparative analysis between participants and with concepts in the literature	Journal	N/A	October 2022

A semi-structured interview protocol involves less rigidity than a structured interview, where instead, questions are flexibly worded, and the order of questions is not predetermined to allow for a list of issues or topics to be explored in a responsive manner that ascertains full responses from participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While not as exploratory as an unstructured interview, a semi-structured interview does provide enough structure and guidance to reach data saturation in a timely manner while still maintaining an exploratory and flexible nature required of grounded theory. Data saturation occurs when additional interviews do not provide any new information for the phenomenon of study (Glaser, 1978). Ultimately, a semi-structured interview fits well with the common grounded theory strategy to conduct interviews in a manner that is focused but also open to shifting based on the participants' answers and conversations in which they engage in (Charmaz, 2014).

A grounded theory method calls for questions to be refined after the first interview (Timonen et al., 2018). In the initial semi-structured interview, the goal was to allow for flexibility in interviewing to explore the experiences of participants in depth. Accordingly, I employed an interview protocol (see Appendix D) that included a range of specific and broad open-ended questions. I included questions derived from my integrated conceptual framework, grounded theory methods, and women of color and queer leadership literatures. The initial questions were conducted in a conversation manner to collect background information. While background information, such as demographics, are often collected through a pre-interview form/questionnaire or requested curriculum vitae, this information was collected at the beginning of the first interview to better get to know the participant, as well as situating the interview for the questions that followed. By prompting and starting off the first interview with a few demographic questions, I was able to build rapport and situate the study. These questions

collected demographic information and a biographical sketch of the participant's leadership role—to gain perspective on their personal and professional identities (see Appendix D. The intermediate interview questions focused on identity and leadership, specifically on the participant's journey into higher education and leadership, how their identities shaped and influenced their leadership, and to describe an instance of leadership informed by identity to theoretically sample for the crafting of the second follow-up interview questions (see Appendix D). These interview questions assisted in answering the first research question: How do queer Latinas experience higher education leadership? (see Appendix D).

The two interviews for each participant were intentionally designed one to two weeks apart to allow participants to reflect on the initial interview, as well as to allow for member checks prior to the second interview. Between the first interview and the second follow-up interview, I conducted member checks on participants' understanding of, and agreement with, the emergent findings from the initial interview. The second interview protocol questions were refined upon analyzing the first round of data from the initial interview and analytical memoing.

In the second interview, a quick recap was provided about what was discussed in the previous interview, in which participants were asked if there was any follow-up they wanted to share. The second round of interviews were guided by the emergent data gathered and analyzed from the first round of interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Subsequently, the second interviews were more focused and structured, based on theoretical categories gathered in the first interviews. The second interview questions mainly answer the second and third research questions: How do queer Latina higher education leaders experience their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures; and how do queer Latina higher education leaders draw upon their identities and experiences to enact change? (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

After conducting each interview, the audio-recording was transcribed within four days using Otter. Ai, a cloud-based transcription services software. Analysis of the raw data began by reading and listening to the transcripts. Intimately moving through the raw data, in addition to engaging in interviewing, was critical in developing and creating codes and categories within each participant's narrative toward generating emerging themes; this prolonged involvement with the raw data allowed for reflection and digestion that was necessary prior to conducting initial coding (Clarke, 2005). In addition to recording and transcribing interviews, I wrote observation notes during interviews and analytical memos throughout data collection and data analysis. As themes emerged, I conducted member checking via email (Creswell, 2018). Member checking may be utilized in a grounded theory study for two purposes: a) to confirm the viability of major categories by viewing the extent to which these major categories mirror the experiences of participants and b) to gather more information and expand upon aspects of these categories by engaging in discussion with participants (Albas & Albas, 1988).

The focus of my analysis was guided by some sensitizing concepts, but ultimately required theoretical sampling and emerging data categories to guide the focus of the analysis. Sensitizing concepts, such as expected themes or patterns derived from the literature, are utilized initially to guide coding, though they do not steer the analysis (Charmaz, 2005). Sensitizing concepts related to intersectionality were utilized in developing my initial and follow-up interview questions and in initial coding, which included a review for critical incidents and points of identity negotiation. Ultimately, the process of coding and categorizing data occurs reiteratively as data is collected, which in turn, influences how future data is collected (Charmaz, 2014). As suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015), I developed a codebook utilizing the data

from the first three semi-structured interviews. The codebook contained a list of codes, subcodes, and patterns, as well as direct representative quotes. While existing literature was utilized to understand the data in higher level analysis, it was not utilized to create the codebook which instead was informed by the participant data. Coding utilized direct participant language and labels to represent analytical meanings of the data.

I engaged in initial coding by reading and analyzing the transcripts line-by-line and then paragraph-by-paragraph to determine codes and themes (Glaser, 1978). Initial coding allows for the researcher to conduct a broad-level review of lower-level concepts in an open-ended manner (Saldaña, 2016). These codes are tentative and provisional, subject to being refined as more data is collected and analyzed (Saldaña, 2016). The lower-level concepts derived from initial coding then eventually allows for categorical matching toward identifying larger emergent themes within the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Ultimately, the importance of initial coding is to allow the researcher to reflect upon the data and ultimately help form and move the direction of the study (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Specifically, I operationalized initial coding by reviewing the data line-by-line, utilizing process coding, values coding, and In Vivo coding. Process coding involves words or phrases related to actions, especially gerunds (Saldaña, 2016). Values coding focuses on "a participant's integrated value, attitude, and belief systems" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 124), which was particularly useful for this study's focus on leadership, identity, and institutional change. In Vivo coding includes selecting small words or phrases directly drawn from participants, in which phrases are utilized as codes (Saldaña, 2016). Through analytic memoing, reflections, decision-making, and descriptions of these initial coding processes were documented (Bryant, 2017; Mruck & Mey, 2019).

After initial coding and memoing, I further engaged the data in focused coding. Focused coding involves comparing initial codes and seeing which ideas have the most "analytical power" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 140). In focused coding, these initial codes that have similar properties are condensed into larger categorical and thematic codes (Saldaña, 2016). Furthermore, focused coding allows for codes to be reviewed and analyzed across participant data sets to "assess comparability and transferability" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 243). Subsequently, I wrote analytical memos to facilitate the identification of which initial codes contained the most analytical power. These analytical memos were guided by Charmaz's (2008) suggestion that in addition to Glaser's (1978) suggestion to ask *what* pattern is happening in the data, the researcher should also consider *why* the pattern in the data is happening. Through these inquiries in data analysis and analytical memo writing, the researcher can then consider the connections, relationships, contexts, and causes (Hadley, 2019).

Finally, I used theoretical coding to thread the properties of different categories into a cohesive storyline (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After comparing initial and focused codes, I engaged the literature and my conceptual framework as sensitizing concepts to guide my review for theoretical coding. As part of the constant comparisons concept, data were not only compared to data within a study, but "concepts derived from the literature can provide a source for making comparisons within and between data as long as the comparisons are made along conceptual lines.…If a concept derived from data seems similar or opposite to one recalled from the literature, then a researcher can examine both concepts for similarities and differences" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, pp. 49-50). As such, I compared the data within the study among participants, as well as concepts within the literature.

Trustworthiness

Through prolonged engagement with participants and the use of member checking with participants to review the emerging codes, credibility and trustworthiness were engaged. Inclusion of research participants in data analysis is considered critical to a Chicana feminist epistemology (Malagon et al., 2009). Furthermore, I utilized direct participant quotes and descriptions in the results to ensure transferability for future readers. Lastly, I kept an audit trail of transcripts and a log of decision-making using analytic memos to ensure dependability and confirmability of the research design, methods, and findings.

Additionally, throughout the entire research process, I reflected upon how my positionality as a researcher influenced my decision-making in the analytic memos (Jones et al., 2014). Similarly, I ensured that there was congruence with theoretical connections, particularly to intersectionality, throughout the research process. As part of the constant comparative method, I not only compared the data among participants, but I ensured triangulation through observing how data matches with other past data and theorizations in the literature.

Researcher Statement

As part of the constructivist grounded theory methodology, it was important that I, the researcher, was aware of how my social positions, particularly those of power, may have influenced my decision-making throughout the research process, particularly in how I interpreted the data (Charmaz, 2014; Mruck & Mey, 2019). My assumptions were informed by my lived experience as a cisgender, queer Latina, as a doctoral student, and as a higher education practitioner. I identified my assumptions prior to data analysis and ongoingly throughout the research process, particularly through analytical memoing prior to engaging in direct data analysis.

Limitations

Expected limitations of this study included the range of representativeness in queer Latina leader participants, particularly in regional and institution-type representation, as well as leadership role, due to the relatively small number of participants expected to participate in this study from an already limited population. Another limitation relates to the specific identity focus on sexuality, race and ethnicity, and gender, rather than other marginalizations that may have significant influences for participants. Additionally, due to the dynamic nature of leadership and identity formation over time, it is challenging to fully capture the essence of leadership and identity; to counteract this, I reduced singular, time-bounded responses through interview questions that included reflections of past, present, and future, to ascertain a more holistic view of leadership.

Summary

In this study, I utilized a constructivist grounded theory methodology through an intersectional analytic lens and Chicana feminist epistemological standpoint. Given its methodological flexibility, eclecticism, and exploratory nature, as well as compatibility with critical inquiry and intersectionality theory, a constructivist grounded theory methodology was apt for exploring the understudied topic of queer Latina leadership with the intent to generate emerging theory. While past higher education research studies have utilized a constructivist grounded theory methodology and intersectional analysis to study queer of color students and leaders, such studies have only provided a beginning overview of identity and leadership. As such, this study sought to bridge the gap of queer women of color leadership, specifically focusing on queer Latina leaders.

The research design of this study on queer Latina leaders in higher education included a purposeful sampling of nine participants that met the criteria. Participant data was collected through two rounds of semi-structured interviewing, as well as through member-checking with participants. Data analysis involved analytical memo writing and initial coding through line-by-line coding that utilized process codes, in Vivo codes, and values codes, and subsequently, intermediate focused coding, where identification of analytically powerful initial codes was identified to later form higher level theoretical coding. As part of the constant comparison concept in grounded theory methodology, I compared the data within the study among participants, as well as concepts within the literature, to form theoretical through lines among concepts. In the following section, Chapter 4, I outline these findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study of nine queer Latina higher education leaders was to better understand how queer Latina leaders in higher education experience power within their institutional roles, as well as how they navigate this power, particularly in the ways that their identity—a theorizing of the flesh—informs and is tied to contesting power and ultimately enacting change. All participants worked within higher education and identified as institutional leaders, whether in academic or administrative capacities. The research questions included:

1. How do queer Latinas experience higher education leadership?
2. How do queer Latina higher education leaders experience their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures?
3. How do queer Latina higher education leaders draw upon their identities and experiences to enact change?

Through a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) and an intersectional and Chicana feminist lens, I sought to answer these questions and develop an emerging grounded theory on queer Latina leadership in higher education. The method encompassed two in-depth interviews for a total of nine participants. During data analysis, I engaged in an open coding process and then engaged in focused coding utilizing sensitizing concepts located within the frameworks of intersectionality and Chicana feminist epistemology—specifically, power, identity, marginality, cultural intuition, and resistance. The theoretical categories that emerged included: (a) *identity performance*, (b) *fragmentation*, (c) *heartbreak in leading*, (d) *alchemizing wounds*, and (e) *bending, shifting, recreating*. These

theoretical categories developed from the data then informed my emerging grounded theory, outlined further in this chapter.

In Table 4.1 below, I demonstrate how the emerging themes explored in detail within this chapter align with the extant literature on experiences of women of color and queer of color leaders in higher education. This study contributes to the corresponding bodies of literature listed below.

Table 4.1

Alignment of Themes with Literature

Themes		Related Literature
Identity negotiation	*As fragmenting - burnout, tipping points*	**Women of color higher education leaders**: Breeden (2021); Davis & Maldonado (2015); Flores Carmona & Rosenberg (2021); Gamble & Turner (2015); Garcia (2020); Hannum et al. (2015); Lewis (2016); Mena (2016); Nixon (2017); Oikelome (2017); Pierce (2020); Sánchez et al. (2020); Townsend (2020); West (2015) **Queer of color higher education leaders**: Bailey & Miller (2016); Gorski (2019); Glover (2017); Lewis & Miller (2018); Rivera & Frias (2021)
	As strategy - going underground	**Queer of color student leaders in higher education**: Duran & Garcia (2021); Ford (2015); Ghabrial (2019); Peña-Talamantes (2013)
Heartbreak in leading		**Queer women of color higher education leaders**: Glover (2017); Lewis & Miller (2018)
Alchemizing wounds		**Women of color higher education leaders**: Davis & Maldonado (2015); Elenes (2020); Espino (2018); Gomez et al. (2015); Nixon (2017); Patton & Haynes (2018); Venegas-Garcia (2013) **Queer women of color in higher education leaders**: Glover (2017); Lewis & Miller (2018); Rivera & Frias (2021)
Bending, shifting, recreating		**Latina higher education leaders**: Elenes (2020); Espino (2018); Montas-Hunter (2012); Rivera & Frias (2021); Venegas-Garcia (2013)

How queer Latina leaders negotiate their identities within the pressures of their organizational contexts and their own personal values and viewpoints regarding their identities can often lead to a misalignment between self and the organization. How these leaders enacted management strategies around their identities within the organizational context often led to compliance or compromise, resistance, or contestation, and/or subversion (see **Error! Reference source not found.** above). In this vein, participants often responded with either compromise (in the form of identity negotiation) or resistance, in which both often led to fragmentation in the form of burnout and/or leaving their positions. In addition to this fragmentation, participants also experienced betrayals, or heartbreak in leading, which often resulted from other leaders experiencing their own misalignment and oppression that then translated into oppressing others such as the queer Latina leaders of this study. Finally, as part of the response to power, the third, subversion was salient, which involves alchemizing their own wounds and bending, shifting, and recreating the rules. The following **Error! Reference source not found.** outlines the type of responses to this misalignment and some of the result experiences that correspond.

Table 4.2

Misalignment of Identity and the Organization

Responses to Misalignment	Corresponding Experiences
Compromise/Comply (Identity negotiation)	Burnout; tipping points; intragroup oppression (heartbreak in leading)
Resistance/Contest	Burnout; tipping points; intragroup oppression (heartbreak in leading)
Third Way/Subvert	Alchemize wounds; Bending, shifting, recreating

This chapter will present the findings of this study as themes emerging from the interview data. First, I provide an overview of the participants in this study, outlining self-identified

demographic information, education background, leadership role, and institution type and location. Second, I outline the themes included within the emerging theory: identity negotiation, fragmentation, heartbreak in leading, alchemizing wounds, and bending, shifting, recreating.

Participants

Due to the relatively small number of queer Latina leaders in higher education leadership and the highly personal and sensitive nature of the experiences participants shared, such as microaggressions—subtle insults, slights, and put downs that relay prejudice and invalidation to marginalized identities, whether verbally, nonverbally, or visually communicated (Solórzano et al., 2000)—and institutional harms in the forms of being pushed out, quitting, and reporting discrimination and harassment, honoring and safeguarding the privacy of the participants in my study was critical. As such, I ensured their anonymity by using pseudonyms for all nine participants (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). The following table serves as a guide outlining participant information shared during the first interview, but which does not offer a complete representation of their identities and experiences.

Table 4.3

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Self-Identification	Primary Leadership Area	Institution Type	Institution Region	Highest Degree Earned
Stella	queer, Latina, Puerto Rican	Student Affairs	PWI, R2, private	Northeast	BA
Laura	queer, Latina, Mexican	Academic	PWI, R2, private	Pacific	MS
Rosemary	queer, Chicana, Mexican	Academic	PWI, R1, public	Mountain West	MS
Isabela	queer, Latina, Mexican	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	PWI, R1, public	Mountain West	MS
Victoria	queer, Latina, Mexican American	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	PWI, R1, public	Mountain West	PhD
Pilar	queer, Latina, Chicana, Mexican	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	PWI, R1, private	Pacific	MS
Valeria	queer, Latina, Mexican American	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	PWI, R1, public	Mountain West	PhD
Analí	queer, Puerto Rican	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	HSI, public	Northeast	PhD
Xiomara	queer, Mexican	Student Affairs	PWI, R1, public	Mountain West	MS

Overall, five participants were currently involved in a faculty role and seven participants were involved in a higher-level administrative role. This ranged from participants presently leading solely within an academic setting as faculty (two participants), solely within an administrative setting (four participants), and some leading both within academic and administrative settings as faculty and administrator (three participants). In their historical career

trajectory, some participants had shifted from a faculty role to an administrative role, while others conversely shifted from a previous administrative role to a faculty role, and still others maintained both roles simultaneously. For the three participants that held both academic and administrative positions, they shared that in the classroom they found refuge from the high scrutiny and microaggressions experienced within the hierarchy of the institution, which were ever-present in their administrative roles. For the four participants solely working in administration, many shared that they were experiencing the most difficult time of their administrative career in the current institutional political climate. Overall, it was conveyed that both higher education administration and the classroom were becoming increasingly challenging in the current political climate, but that being in administration was relatively worsening.

Participants ranged in the stages of their career. Four participants had a decade or more of experience working in higher education, four participants had a mid-level experience in their career at around five to seven years of experience, and one participant was recently entering the field and had two years of experience. Overall, participants represented entry level administrators (one participant), mid-level administrators (four participants), and senior level administrators (two participants), as well as early career faculty (four participants) and tenured faculty (one participant). Three participants held a PhD, five held a Master's degree, and one participant held a Bachelor of Arts degree; four participants were in the process of obtaining their PhD or Master's.

Participants ranged from work that covered the functional areas of student affairs, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and academic/faculty roles. They lead from a range of institution locations and types as well. Regionally, participant institutions represented the Mountain West (five participants), Pacific West (two participants), and Northeast (two participants); notably

missing was representation from the Midwest, South, and Southwest. Regarding institution type, almost all participants worked at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), except for one participant that worked at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HIS). Three participants worked at private institutions, whereas six participants worked at public institutions. Notably, very high research activity doctoral (R1) universities and high research activity doctoral (R2) universities institutions were heavily represented with six participants working at R1 universities and two participants working at R2 universities.

Regarding identity, seven participants identified racially or ethnically as Chicana, Mexican, Mexican American, and two participants identified as Puerto Rican and Afro-Latina. In terms of gender and gender expression, all participants identified as cisgendered, five participants identified as femme/hetero-passing, whereas two participants identified as butch/visibly queer. Regarding sexual orientation, all nine participants identified as queer, with two participants also identifying as bisexual/queer and one participant also identifying as pansexual/queer. While not included in the table for purposes of confidentiality, three participants identified as mothers, one participant identified as previously undocumented, and one participant identified as neuro diverse.

Emergent Themes

Utilizing the constructivist grounded theory methodology with the sensitizing concepts of power, identity, marginality, cultural intuition, and resistance applied from intersectionality theory and Chicana feminist epistemologies, the data collected and analyzed from the two-part interviews by nine participants portrayed how Latina leaders in higher education experience, navigate, and contest power within the institution to ultimately create change. Following the principle of intersectionality theory that the multiple identities of an individual influence the

ways they experience and navigate the world (Crenshaw, 1989), and within the context of higher education institutions in this study, the emerging themes included (a) *identity negotiation*, (b) *fragmentation*, and (c) *heartbreak in leading,* and within the context of contesting power within these institutional contexts to enact change, the emerging themes included the (d) *alchemizing of wounds* and (e) *bending, shifting, recreating*.

Table 4.4

Overview of Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

RQ1. How do queer Latinas experience higher education leadership?	**RQ2.** How do queer Latina higher education leaders experience their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures?	**RQ3.** How do they draw upon their identities and knowledges to enact change?
Identity Negotiation (Over negotiations)	Identity Negotiation (Going underground)	Bending, Shifting, Recreating
Fragmentation - Burnout - Tipping Points	Alchemizing Wounds	
Heartbreak in leading		

Identity Negotiation

One of the main ways that participants experienced higher education leadership as queer Latinas was through articulations of queer, gender, and racial prejudices; repeated devaluation, exclusion from opportunities, and role displacement were ways in which these leaders experienced an inequitable structure of power and exclusion. As one participant, Analí noted, queer Latina leaders must either accept displacing themselves or expect the institution to effectively displace them,

> I've experienced a lot of displacement…it's displacement that's been placed upon me in varying ways, whether it's to effectively treat me like an outsider, or whether it's me trying to adapt to the environment and kind of displacing myself and what I might need.

This looming threat of displacement challenged participants' ability to access and retain decision-making power, and therefore, ultimately threatened their goals to institute change in the form of equitable programming and policy. This threat of displacement moved participants into negotiating their political environments at their institutions. These negotiations typically involved "working their identity" in strategic and intentional ways.

Carbado and Gulati (2013b) describe this working identity phenomenon as part of identity performance. When intra-racial, or intra-intersectional, distinctions occur within the same racial groups—that in a hypothetical scenario where the law is sympathetic to a larger marginalized identity group, such as to women of color—those holding a sub-group status within this larger identity group, such as queer women of color, could still experience discrimination based on how they express or perform identity-associated ways of being, such as with their race or gender. As such, individuals may perform and negotiate their identities in ways to avoid stereotype threat, such as acting "less Black," "less Latinx," or "less queer," coined by Carbado and Gulati (2000) as the "working identity" phenomenon. Here, the "negotiation is between the employee's sense of self and [their] sense of the institutional values" (p. 225). In this section, I highlight the ways that participants negotiated their identities by performing or working their

identities in response to identity double-binds,[4] such as through code-switching[5] or downplaying aspects of their identities in response to their institutional environments.

Seven participants shared their experiences with intersectional identity negotiation through work-related decision-making; they feared invoking stereotypes that could effectively reduce their power to enact change in the future whether by being passed over in decision-making processes, having resources and information withheld from them, and/or being dismissed when bringing attention to issues. Mainly, they were careful to avoid certain language, behaviors, and actions that could potentially be interpreted through negative stereotypes about their queer Latina identity, including being labeled as aggressive, angry, hostile, and dangerous (Caputi & Sagle, 2004; Freedman, 1996; Hart, 1994). These stereotypes, part of representational intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1993), are a combined intersection of stereotypes ascribed to women of color and queer women (Freedman, 1996). These shared experiences of intersectional identity negotiation for the six participants were not endemic to institutional environments located in a particular region or local politics. Participants were in different geographic regions and within both blue states and red states, though, the degree of hostility toward the identities of participants was especially high in institutional environments positioned within a local politic undergirded by white nationalist conspiracies; this political context did affect the level of pressure on participants' identity negotiation.

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[4] Identity double-binds are when stereotypes of identity and, in this case, stereotypes of leadership or a role, create two or more conflicting messages, in which either scenario is damning. For example, women are expected to be "kind" and "humble" but leaders are expected to be "assertive" and "ambitious"; when women are in leadership, if they are seen as kind, they will also be viewed as weak, and when they are seen as competent, they will also be viewed as unlikeable. Women in leadership, ultimately, will not be found as likable and competent within the scope of double-binds (Carbado & Gulati, 2013a).

[5] Code-switching occurs as a behavioral adjustment of one's verbal and nonverbal speech, expression, appearance, and other behaviors to align to the norms of an environment in order to achieve advantageous social standing within that environment. For example, a Black employee may generally speak in standard English at work but subsequently speak African-American Vernacular English with other Black coworkers (Carbado & Gulati, 2013a; Roberts, 2005)

For Victoria, working in higher education administration within a red state was exceedingly challenging; recent administrative shifts within her institution, as well as activist students and organizations affiliated with far-right ideals, had created an unprecedented and precarious work environment. Deeply aware that her identity as a queer Latina committed to equity would inevitably invoke heightened scrutiny to her work—namely, in the form of hyper surveillance for interpretations of radical, political malfeasance—Victoria shared the importance of strategizing with her leadership team daily, mainly through the continual reframing of her work and creating levels of protection from scrutiny,

> I'm in a moment right now where I have to reframe all of my work for a larger audience that is living in a moment of white replacement theory…I could walk away, but whoever steps in my position, they're gonna be faced with the same thing… Public higher education institutions in red states—we're threading a very thin, small needle… I don't want to put my division in any harm's way. We've already been trolled by…conservative media outlets. So I have to be very careful when they're trolling us and trying to get us in a "gotcha" moment, where I'm not putting us at risk with our legislative body…That's a challenge for those of us who live in red states [that] is not going to go away anytime soon…You just never know—in terms of what I say publicly, where I am, even if somebody honks at me at a stoplight. We [division] have to be thoughtful and strategic…I have to remind my team, email is not a form of communication; email is a form of information because at any time our email is subject to—it's just heightened…I always have to remind my team: We have to create levels of protection in this moment to not make ourselves vulnerable because we are already under high scrutiny, whether we know it or not.

In this quote, Victoria emphasized that engaging in identity negotiation through vigilance and compromise of how she and her team are presenting themselves is a strategy of survival. To maintain positional power within the institution, Victoria makes short-term compromises as part of a long-term strategy to sustainably have the capacity to enact institutional change. Furthermore, Victoria noted that while she could leave the institution rather than compromise her own identities, she believes that this would not change anything, as someone will be in her position whether or not it is her.

Further elaborating on managing how she is perceived as a leader, Victoria shared how these identity negotiations are challenging and is self-reflective of whether she over compromises in certain instances,

> I don't think people know what to do with me…people are still trying to contain me…I gotta pick my moments so they're not surprised. How many times have you been in a room where you're like, "Okay, do I bring the angry Brown woman? Do I bring the angry Brown queer? Do I bring the Latina on the edge? Which one, like which persona?" I mean, this is in every space that we're in…the way mine [soul] doesn't get locked away, is that I have to remind myself, I serve students, I serve faculty, staff…That is my mission. My mission isn't the individual who could potentially fire me or not fire me. If I live in that, I live in absolute fear. I'm not gonna let my soul die…I still have a choice—when do I say, what do I say, should I say something more often. I grapple with this all the time. I wake up in the middle of night thinking about a conversation, "Did I let them off the hook? Is it my job to put them on the hook?"

In this quote, Victoria elaborated that she negotiates her identity in the first place as part of a larger commitment to equity. However, she also stated that she reflects on whether she

compromises too much in some instances and is deeply aware that the balancing act of identity negotiation can be internally challenging. In the following quote, Victoria shared an example how she compromises in the short-term with the long-term goal in mind, specifically within the context of recent federal rulings and campus responses,

> I'm being criticized by a number of people right now for not making a statement [on the overruling of *Roe v. Wade*]. I make a statement, I put this division at risk. This division has some greater good. I wasn't going to save *Roe v. Wade*. The institution cannot make a position. We, however, can take actions on the ground. So, our job is to serve students, to serve faculty and staff, to ensure that we're listening in those spaces.

Here, Victoria outlined how she makes negotiations in the short-term with the long-term in mind, outweighing the political impacts and costs in her decision-making. She notes that while on a more symbolic and political level, she may demonstrate compromise, that her power lies in her ability to retain her position of power to enact programmatic changes on the ground and make strategic differences on the microlevel at her campus.

Similar to Victoria's institutional setting, Xiomara faced her own set of challenges working within a higher education institution located in a red state, as well as accompanying administrative shifts within her institution. For Xiomara, facing administrative leadership when advocating on behalf of students had become increasingly difficult due to the shifting political environment both within and outside of the institution,

> The voices of our cultural centers have been silenced by leadership. The ways that we speak out about issues that impact our students—when it relates to national issues, when a report comes out about athletics that our students are being sexually assaulted—we try and speak out on behalf of or in support of the students, but we've experienced a lot of

> silencing, underlying threats…things like shutting our website down…So it went from a place where we [previously] felt like we could speak out on behalf of students on issues that were impacting them, [to now having] an [leadership] shift, and it's very much shifted to…silencing and respectability politics. If they don't like how you talk, if they don't like how you speak, you get reprimanded afterward.

Similar to Victoria's experience, shifts in Xiomara's institutional environment have created a scenario where she must carefully strategize her position as a leader. For Xiomara, strategizing as a leader in response to the shifting institutional environment has forced her to weigh short term compromises with long term consequences around resource allocation and decision-making power. Xiomara shared an example of engaging in short term symbolic compromises to protect herself, her staff, and the resources of her center for future students in the long run,

> When the *Roe v Wade* decision came out, I was in a meeting with my staff, and they were like, "We have to say something about this." I was very much feeling like, "I don't know if we can. I know we're gonna have to get permission. I know that shit is gonna get watered down in a way that is going to be infuriating to us. I don't think they're going to let us." I have been really conscious about my positionality right now because I know they [administrative leadership] find me intimidating. I don't want that to be a detriment to the resources that our center gets and our students get access to. It's like having to sometimes play respectability politics in ways that feel shitty to my core, because I know that [if I don't] it might then cost me and then cost the center and the students later on down the road…even though I know it's the right thing for us to do...And I don't like that I'm having to compromise my values and principles and identities in those moments. And sometimes I'm also having to think long-term—what is this going to cost us, cost me—

> and make a decision about it in the moment. I don't love that I made that decision, but that's what I felt needed to happen at the moment.

In this quote, Xiomara detailed her awareness of the ways she is read by the institution through her identities as a queer Latina, and how she must carefully present herself in ways that will not be interpreted as hostile and radical. Here, Xiomara shared that the consequences associated with refusing to negotiate her identity not only include the possibility of losing her job, but that the center itself and the available resources for current and future students could be placed in jeopardy as well. Ultimately, Xiomara chose short-term compromises in exchange for long-term stability on behalf of her team and the students she serves.

Like Victoria and Xiomara, Isabela worked at a higher education institution located within a red state. For Isabela, downplaying certain aspects of her identity in response to the political contexts of the microenvironments within her institution was a practice of self-preservation. Isabela shared that due to the varying degrees of hostility to different parts of her identity within these microclimates on campus, she was constantly on guard to gauge the safety of her environments and how to correspondingly work her identity,

> It's really complex. When I'm in Latino spaces, I feel welcomed because of my racial identity…but as folks learn about my sexuality, there's this tension...so when I enter predominantly Latino spaces, I feel like I am always watching or just on guard until I really know what the space is like. Then in queer white spaces, I feel like my queerness is accepted and not necessarily my racial identity. And so, there's always this moving in between spaces and kind of just being on alert of what's happening…There are spaces where I intentionally say, "This is my identity" because I want it to be known for students, for other staff, or other faculty—[to signal] that they matter, that we're here,

> they're not alone. So, I'm really intentional about talking about who I am as I enter a space. Then there are spaces where I don't talk about my sexuality, or it's not something that I will bring up. I used to work with donors, for example, and that was a space I would never talk about any of that because it's very political. I think sexuality and race, they're both politicized…And so there are definitely spaces that I've had to show up differently.

In this quote, Isabela elaborated that navigating campus within a state of vigilance and having to shift her identity from one space to another was necessary to her survival. In the following quote, Isabela shared an example of a challenging moment when she chose self-preservation over her desire to be represented in an authentic way,

> My [former] supervisor and I wrote an article together that was very controversial…providing a critical perspective on the difference around equality and equity…I asked him to be the first author, even though I had done a lot of work on the article, because I was extremely worried about what would happen to me, how people would respond. So, I think that there have been a lot of obstacles, particularly when I've had to make decisions—not necessarily the decisions that I feel I should have had to make—because of my identities…Sometimes I think, "Am I making this decision because I am afraid or unwilling to take a stand, or is it for self-preservation?" And I feel like that's a fine line to walk. Because I don't want to be a sellout…Now I'm having to navigate all of that and understanding how hard it is to do all of that, especially because I do believe sometimes, I feel really disillusioned with higher ed. But I still to my core feel like I can create change through this system…I ebb and flow on that continuum, but I'm

still here. And I know that I have to try to somehow maintain relationships with folks to create that change.

Isabela is hyper aware of the way that her identity as a queer Latina committed to matters of equity in higher education would be interpreted with bias in the form of anger and protest by other campus constituencies. Isabela sacrificed her rightful first authorship on the article to preserve her job security, her emotional and physical safety from protesting groups, and the credibility of the message within the article. Additionally, Isabela shared her self-reflection on whether the level of short-term compromise she engages in is worth the benefits in the long run; she questioned whether she is "selling out," or losing vision of the reason why she chose to compromise in the first place. Here, Isabela shared the same self-reflective concerns around identity negotiation as Victoria and Xiomara. She also shared that these compromises led to moments of disillusionment, which she described herself as moving along a continuum of "ebb and flow" between hope and disillusionment but deeply anchored in hope.

Valeria, also working at a higher education institution within a red state, described her strategic identity performance performed through finessing language and ideas depending on the context of the space. Her performance within a space was informed by the likelihood of being able to change minds—performing a type of risk analysis,

> What is it that I want to accomplish in this room?..Does my goal require that I move in an incremental sense, with a message that feels acceptable?..Am I trying to get them to agree to something? [If so,] then I probably can't be radical, I have to be incrementalist… [If I'm] a tiny voice in that room, am I going to change the direction? [If not] in any significant ways…then I can just say whatever the hell I want because they're not going to really do what I say anyway, but at least I can maybe get them to think. When I'm

> bringing a policy forward or a new practice forward, then I have to be more careful. And probably make the argument that this is about the college's best interest, as opposed to the argument that is framed around white supremacy…So it's really picking how much, what kind of influence I can have, and what that means in terms of the design of how I navigate the room.

In this quote, Valeria shared not only when it's important to be careful and compromise, particularly in enacting policy and practice, but that in some spaces of low stakes and/or low impact, that it may very well be fine to be uncompromising and speak truth to power, particularly in administrative academic spaces. This strategy, in part, is how Valeria found balance in compromising and negotiating her identity in a way that felt both strategic and authentic.

Pilar worked at a higher education institution located within a blue state but that nonetheless expressed characteristics of a hostile political environment; the institutional environment reified white supremacy through its coded culture of legacy, wealth, and donors. Pilar felt that she could not fully show up to work with all her identities and therefore could not fully engage in the diversity and inclusion work she was hired to do. For example, she shared how she engaged in self-corrective behavior by no longer sharing her personal stories about her identities in diversity and inclusion trainings; she noted that she was fearful to continue doing so due to both being embedded within a national hostile political climate toward marginalized identities and for receiving frequent negative evaluations from participants around her identity, describing her shared identity as biased and uncalled for,

> Yesterday, I read that in some states, teachers are going to be asked to "out" [students]…They're [warning] queer people with pictures of their partners to take those pictures down. People can't wear queer flags to school. That kind of stuff is freaking me

> out now. I did an LGBTQ training last week. I'm putting myself out there a lot, and in my evaluations, I have seen some biased responses for my trainings, and it's not about the material, it's about me. And I remember it was getting to be a lot for me…And I told my boss, "I know I share a lot of personal stories in my trainings, but I'm going to actually hold back because it's becoming [harmful] for my wellbeing. I'm sharing my personal stories that are about my identities, and then they are being weaponized in my evaluations." In my trainings, I share my stories to have people reflect on their own stories. If I'm asking for vulnerability, in reflecting on how these systems have impacted you professionally and personally, I feel like I also have to share that vulnerability. But I've had to at times pull back because again, biased evaluations.

Pilar demonstrated that even though she works in a blue state, her institution is still under the influence of a national white supremacist rhetoric that has permeated throughout the nation's institutions of higher education (Gavin, 2021; Lyons, 2022). While the presence of this right-winged scrutiny may be less overtly visible in blue states when compared to red states, the residual effect of white supremacist rhetoric is nonetheless an ever-present threat to those with multiple marginalized identities at all institutions, and leaders like Pilar—queer Latinas—will continue to face pushback.

Analí also worked at an institution located within a blue state, where she, too, experienced institutional pressures to compromise her identity, to continually shift herself as she entered different spaces on campus, amid the backdrop of white supremacist ideologies and practices,

> When you get told that you're intimidating and unapproachable, when you've been nothing but kind to everyone…those microaggressive…interactions, make it really

> challenging to be collaborative…The ideologies in the space, the practices—they make me feel like I should shift myself when I've already done so much shifting…It's like you're always morphing into something…That used to be really hard for me—to go to a meeting where I'm advocating against some bullshit, or be in a space where I'm experiencing hostile and microaggressive and passive aggressive treatment, and then have to go back to interact with students like everything is fine because I'm here to be supportive of them...And that used to be psychologically a lot.

Analí elaborated how having to constantly shift and morph her identity from space to space was psychologically exhausting and made fulfilling her role in supporting students challenging. Despite working at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) located within a blue state, and prior when working at an institution located within a red state, Analí shared the ways in which she was required to continually reshape the performance of her identity throughout her administrative career. Analí further elaborated on her experiences with identity negotiation,

> I've definitely encountered that challenge of being perceived as hostile, or combative. The standards of professionalism are obviously steeped in standards set by white men because they're the ones who occupied formal workspaces for a period of time…put in place to keep people largely out of those spaces, or at least keep them in check when engaging in those spaces. And so, things like emotions are largely seen as unprofessional. Even if it's authentic to self, it is something I often feel like I can't engage in. I have to be particularly careful of not just how I'm saying what I'm saying, but what exactly I'm saying so that it's not going to come off in a particular kind of way…I would spend five minutes, seven minutes, just feeling the physical stress of that, and then figuring out how to actually say what I want to say, so that I can be authentic to my perspective and who I

> am, in a way where now I'm also not going to be excluded and demonized for it. Even if someone is saying, "We're all about equity and inclusion and we want you to do this work," it was more like, "We want you to do this, but make us look good. Not actually hold us accountable."

Analí shared that this morphing, this shifting of self, was not merely in spaces that were outright resistant to change and more equitable practices but was required even in spaces that were—at least nominally—deemed as progressive and committed to equity and inclusion. The psychological preparation required to straddle her identity within these hostile and performative environments required a tremendous level of labor and skill.

These perspectives from higher education administrators were not far off from the experiences of those working as faculty. From the perspective of teaching, Laura shared the way that different aspects of her identity were viewed by students and administrators through a deficit lens and the challenge of having to battle these stereotype threats through overperforming acceptable aspects of her identity and underperforming those deemed invalid or hostile,

> I've been in environments where if some students knew I was queer, or if I outed myself with certain tastes or sensibilities or affinities, I would immediately be assumed to either be not an intelligent person or not be professional, or not be a thinker, be too emotional…In many spaces, I've been not just the only queer Latina, [but also] the only woman or person of color. And so, I understand that to be in those spaces, I have to outperform whiteness [over] these other white people. I know that I have to uphold a level of whiteness…in order for me to signal, I belong here… I have to show up that way, I cannot show up with the true anger that I have. And it's not to say that I am lying. It's

> because they're lying to me, too. It's not to say they're open to diversity and equity—they're lying. But it's not to say that I refuse myself, [either].

In this quote, Laura shared that she had to perform an intellectualism coded in whiteness to battle the stereotype threats associated with her queerness, gender, and race, in which she noted that she would otherwise be automatically deemed as emotional, unintelligent, and incompetent. She shared that she had to hold back her anger, her criticisms of the institution, given that such expressions would either deem her as not credible or have her fired—ultimately not effecting change. For Laura, this type of experience was present for her when working within institutional environments located in both red states and blue states.

As part of negotiating their intersectional identity and compromising their values within these hostile institutional settings, these seven participants—six administrators and one faculty—expressed intersectional identity negotiation in a manner akin to flying under the radar, hibernating, and making strategic compromises that ensured that attention was not brought to their role or to their team, which I term as *going underground*. While going underground did involve engaging in inaction at times, such as not speaking up around certain issues, it also involved a significant amount of time and labor dedicated to building defenses—all to essentially keep doing some amount of equity work without being overtly identifiable. Going underground was a strategic, intentional decision that participants made in response to their current campus climate.

While six participants shared their experiences of negotiating their intersectional identities in response to institutional power, the other two participants in this study did share their experiences with identity negotiation from a singular axis, mainly from the axis of race, but these experiences were not included in this section for the purpose of highlighting an

intersectional perspective. This thematic section outlined instances of intersectional identity negotiation in response to identity-based prejudices that would inevitably limit their power as leaders. In the next section, I outline how five participants responded to inequitable institutional practices with relentless resistance, rather than the strategy of intersectional identity negotiation, at different moments in their career, but that ultimately led to their fragmentation of self in the form of burnout and eventual tipping points of resignation.

Fragmentation

Whether leaders holding intersectional identities engage in over negotiating their identity or over resisting compromise, the fragmentation of self can result from the tensions of such internal and external conflict (Clair et al., 2005; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). From an Anzaldúan perspective, the impossibility for intersectional identities to be separated, in the context of environments that constantly seek to separate them, creates a scenario where leaders are "torn to pieces" and a painful process of reassembling oneself commences (Anzaldúa, 2015). In this study, regardless of whether participants responded with compromise or resistance to pressures of containment, all participants experienced some level of exhaustion that resulted either from internal pressures or external pressures of misalignment, respectively. The resulting fragmentation experienced by participants frequently manifested as burnout and, at times, self-removal from their environments.

Seven participants shared moments in their career when they experienced fragmentation; four participants explicitly shared moments of burnout, and four participants shared tipping points (Ahmed, 2019) that led to their self-removal through resignations. Two of the seven participants shared their comparative insights from responding to institutional inequities with over resistance at one point and then with strategic compromise at another point, and what they

gleaned from both types of experiences. The following subsections are divided into experiences of burnout and experiences of tipping points.

Burnout

Racial battle fatigue describes the state of physiological and psychological stress and malaise that accompanies repeated exposure to racism and racial microaggressions (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2007). Beyond racial battle fatigue, intersectional identities can experience *intersectional battle fatigue* based on their other intersecting marginalized identities. For example, numerous studies have outlined the unique *racial battle fatigue* that Black women experience when compounding racial and gendered microaggressions (e.g., Allen, 2021; Corbin et al., 2018), as well as *queer battle fatigue* experienced by LGBTQ identities (e.g., Robinson, 2022). Recent studies have linked the ways that activists holding marginalized identities are exceedingly exposed and vulnerable to intersectional battle fatigue (Danquah et al., 2021)—including activists within higher education settings (Gorski, 2019)—ultimately leading to burnout. Burnout, specifically, can be expressed as disengagement from activist work due to a depreciated emotional and physical wellbeing from the accumulated stressors surrounding battle fatigue (Gorski, 2019; Rettig, 2006).

In this study, when participants rejected engaging in identity performance within the backdrop of working within hostile institutional environments, and instead faced the institution head on with resistance, participants experienced attempts, both symbolic and literal, to be contained. Four participants reflected on moments of exhaustion and burnout from resisting and fighting institutional inequities amid pressures to compromise their identities. Analí shared the exhaustion that comes with enduring the constant pressure to compromise; she shared that to successfully remain in these roles without burning out, one must "accept disrespect." While

Analí did not share experiences of significant compromises to her identity at work, she shared her frustration of feeling stuck within and tolerating her work environment; she shared that regardless of what she did or did not do, existing within these institutional environments felt like a dead-end,

> It feels like I'm just learning the same lesson over and over and over. And that's so exhausting. It's like, "Be careful with this person over here and how they feel, this person over here, they don't really care." It's just the same thing over and over and over. At this point, I'm not sure I'm learning anything that I don't already know, outside of how persistent and resilient [I am] and how much I can endure, is what it feels like. It's like, "Oh, God, I don't think I'll be able to go to work and deal with that today," but here I am. This really feels like the only lesson I'm gaining all the time.

In this quote, Analí shared her frustration with wanting to enact change for equity, but that she often found herself stuck in this stalemate of inaction and mere tolerance of working in an institutional environment that was not going to change and where she was not going to change, either. This experience for Analí was frustrating and demoralizing.

Stella also shared the dilemma of her work demanding she negotiate her identity performance as a professional—meaning, not enacting her queer Latina identity—but also contradictorily required that she enact her identity to be a successful leader in her role within student affairs. This identity double-bind[6] that Stella was faced with became exhausting for her,

[6] Identity double-binds are when stereotypes of identity and, in this case, stereotypes of leadership or a role, create two or more conflicting messages, in which either scenario is damning. For example, women are expected to be "kind" and "humble" but leaders are expected to be "assertive" and "ambitious"; when women are in leadership, if they are seen as kind, they will also be viewed as weak, and when they are seen as competent, they will also be viewed as unlikeable. Women in leadership, ultimately, will not be found as likable and competent within the scope of double-binds (Carbado & Gulati, 2013a).

> Let's say there's eight people in my position…it's not a surprise that the two women of color…we had to be in therapy, we had to have so many more emotional check ins, and there's times where maybe we'd be taking off from doing certain responsibilities…I cannot separate who I am from my job…You do try and separate yourself because you're an authority, you're a leader. And yet, when you're having so many relational interactions with everyone around you, your identity is going to be part of that…it is the reason why I am so good at the things I'm good at and it also contributes to my weaknesses [burning out] as well. And so, when I'm put in a space where I'm being told you have to put on a certain face, professionalism…how can I be fully authentically me, a loud, queer Latina leader, and not feel like I have to subdue any of that?

In Stella's situation, when she showed up to work in her full identities, she would excel at her work and demonstrate competency, but she would also be labeled as unprofessional. For Stella, whether she chose to show up "professionally" or with her identity, she faced scrutiny for her leadership style.

While Analí and Stella shared a sense of being stuck in a stalemate between fully expressing their identities and institutional pressures to compromise their values and identities—a combination of navigating double-binds and tolerating institutional environments that resisted change—two other participants shared their stories of directly resisting and fighting the institution. Such direct resistance ultimately led these two participants to severely burnout. Rosemary shared the exhaustion and fatigue that eventually resulted from directly resisting institutional inequities, never compromising,

> I was just in a place where I was like, "No, I'm fighting every fight. I'm not going to compromise who I am." And if the result was, I was tired, I don't think I even realized

> how tired I was…I was working so much that every day was another grind…a constant negotiation of how you're going to show up. And I think part of why I ended up being so tired was because I was like, "No, I'm going to fight every fight." And that's just not realistic. And that's not anything that I would advise anyone to do. Because I pissed off a lot of people. I burned bridges for folks who I was trying to be a bridge maker for.

In this quote, Rosemary shared that by never compromising to accept aspects of the institution that she didn't agree with, where her leadership identity began to form in opposition to the institution, she reached a point of implosion; from within, she was burning herself out, and from without, she was burning everyone around her including those she intended to fight for in the first place. Yet, Rosemary felt that while this experience informed her on how unsustainable constant resistance could be, it did not seem to provide enough insight into knowing what balance between opposition and conformity could look like for leaders like herself in higher education administration. Similar to Analí's thoughts around not really learning anything by being in these unforgiving, unchanging environments, and merely only weathering the institutional pressures, whether you actively fight them or not, Rosemary shared,

> How can I manage, you know, these pressures or these things when the work environment is not aligning with who I am? How can I manage that—to still show up as the person I want to be, or as close to the person that I hope to be— for the folks that I'm supervising or for my peer colleagues? I think that's the lesson learned—I haven't learned how to do that. I'm also just somebody who's really tired of waiting…I've yet to navigate something [institutional inequities] in a graceful manner, it's usually very upsetting. So, I think my lesson learned is just how to be able to do that, and how to stay true to myself, while being in these institutions that [just] don't care.

In this quote, Rosemary elaborated that while fighting the institution only led to detrimental effects to her mental and physical health, remaining in the institution when values are not aligning is also challenging, given that making significant compromises will also wield unhealthy outcomes. She shared that she had not yet learned what it looked like to exist within these institutions without burning out as a queer Latina in leadership.

Laura reflected on the dilemma between opposing and resisting institutional equities head-on, which frequently led to battle fatigue, and then compromising with institutional politics, which also led to an exhausting internal misalignment. She noted that finding a balance between resistance and compromise is critical to sustained leadership,

> There are times that younger me, pre-mental breakdown and COVID, thought, "Fight, fight, fight, fight…I have the will, the stamina, the heart, no one can outweigh this…come at me." Post-mental breakdown, it's like, no, being a leader—it's so much more complicated. There's so many more scales that need to be balanced. And I need to be preserved because I'm not only the most valuable tool, but how well I take care of my vessel [body and mind] determines how long I live. I have to value myself outside of battle. I'm not just here to battle; I'm here to experience joy and love….And if I allow my identity to be dictated by my opposition to the academy…they get me, they win…I was so committed to pushing the institution, I didn't realize how it consumed me. I let my anger dictate everything that I was…And so now as I think about leadership, what it means to me now, it means being able to balance so many scales at the same time. And leadership for me means that those values and commitments to justice, equity, humanity and in a broader, more divine way—they're always going to be expressed, but I'm not

> going to express them with anger. Anger is not the only emotion that I can use to express my resistance.

In this quote, Laura reflected that defining herself in direct opposition to the institution and only by anger was unsustainable to her wellbeing and therefore any sustained progress she could make in enacting institutional change. For Laura, finding another way, a third way, a balance between opposition and conformity–a different type of resistance that shifts between the two extremes–is key to taking care of oneself. Descriptions of what it means to exist in balance between these extremes is further elaborated upon in later themes throughout this chapter.

The four participants that shared their experiences with burnout found themselves in either an impasse, where neither they nor the institution were going to change, or in direct battle and confrontation with the institution; exhaustion and severe burnout followed, and eventual fragmentation of the body and soul resulted. In these situations, the participants did not feel that they gained traction in making progress or that true lessons were learned, other than identifying that finding balance between compromise and opposition was necessary. In some cases, the exhaustion and burnout that participants experienced led to tipping points and eventual resignations and departures from their institutions. The following section outlines these tipping point experiences.

Tipping Points

Tipping points are what Ahmed (2019) explained as "those moments when you cannot take it anymore, and you can no longer put up with what you previously endured. Something breaks, shatters" (p. 227). These tipping points can lead to refusals in the form of resignations. As Ahmed (2019) reflected on her own experiences as a queer woman of color in higher education diversity work, she poignantly elaborated,

> Resignation is another way of saying *no* to the system; you withdraw your labor, your body, yourself. The word resignation can seem to suggest giving up, reconciling yourself to your fate…But resignation can also be how you refuse to resign yourself to a situation. Perhaps you are giving up on something, a belief that you can do the work *here*, but you are holding onto something, a belief in doing the work. What appears to be giving up can be a refusal to give in. (p. 214)

In this study, four participants shared their experiences with tipping points at some point in their career, in which they had to leave their institutional environment or were planning to do so in the near future. These moments of self-removal were intentional, strategic decisions to refuse to negotiate one's identity any longer. This occurred in cases where the saturation of compromise was no longer successfully making an impact in the participants' work and to their wellbeing. Oftentimes, tipping points arrived after participants had experienced a period of burnout in their roles, as described in the previous section.

Isabela shared having experienced hostility toward her identity as a queer Latina in a previous role, which ultimately led to her resignation from that role and institution,

> I left an institution because of really homophobic working conditions...This person that I worked with didn't like that I was talking to students I supervised about my queerness…My supervisor at the time [had] no awareness around queerness, sexuality, and gender, and so it was mishandled…It led to other things, like white students who I supervised, who then anytime that we're having a conversation about social justice, it was like, I am racist because now I'm holding them accountable…it [being challenged for being openly queer] opened the door for an attack across multiple identities. It gave permission to people to critique me…I think for them knowing that this person in our

> office was there that didn't like me, it just created this culture around, who you are and what you represent, isn't what we want...That led me to pursue another role. I think that was one of the most latent experiences of resistance, a personal attack on who I was as a person and as a leader in that institution, that I just had to get out.

In this quote, Isabela's experiences reflect a climate of hostility to those holding marginalized identities in an era of a far right/white nationalist revival movement in higher education institutions (Flaherty, 2021; Lyons, 2022), in which those exercising leadership informed by their intersectional identities are viewed as subjects to be contained by the dominant power structures, whether by students or administrators. For Isabela, all aspects of her queer Latina identity were questioned and judged with scrutiny and conspiracy to her leadership. For Isabela, leaving this hostile institutional environment was important in protecting her personal wellbeing, maintaining hope in her commitment to enacting change in higher education, and to ensure that her knowledge and skillsets as a leader were not underutilized and applied more effectively in a different institutional environment.

The hostile institutional environment that Xiomara had experienced—mired in far-right politics in opposition to her identities—led to her exhaustion and eventual resignation from that institution,

> I had gotten to a point where I was like, "I can't keep, I can't—this is not good for me anymore." And I think that there's a narrative in higher ed that gets perpetuated about how long you have to spend in positions...I got to the point where I knew that it was no longer healthy for me to be at that institution [and] to live in a place like [that]. I wasn't able to find any kind of space of joy that allowed me to fill up when I was facing so much stuff on campus…I definitely had hit an unsustainable point of exhaustion.

In this quote, Xiomara shared the importance of staying whole and finding joy to keep doing the important work she believed in. Like Isabela, Xiomara refused to remain in a toxic work environment to protect her wellbeing and to continue doing the work she believed in in another environment with fewer personal costs.

When speaking upon entering diversity, equity, and inclusion work, Valeria shared that the work was dehumanizing; her voice was not considered, and she was silenced and reduced to tokenism. These experiences prompted her desire to return solely to academia and no longer continue this administrative role,

> It's completely dehumanizing…And more about being a token than about being a thought leader. Being expected to sit in rooms, often as a token, lots of committees, lots of high profile things, but nowhere that they were asking me, the person–they were asking me, the body…To want to sit in a room for sometimes 10 hours a month, only to have everything I say discounted…I have no interest in continuing to be the university pawn in these ways. As a scholar, I retain all of my humanity, and all of my integrity. As a token administrator, I had nothing.

Valeria's desire to divest from administration back to academia was a sentiment shared among four other participants. In Valeria's case, she was dually in higher education administration and academia, but planned to dedicate all her time back to academia. For another participant, they had recently shifted from a decade of working in higher education administration to now dedicating their time to the professoriate. Three other participants held dual positions in administration and the academy like Valeria, and while they did not have plans to leave administration as she did, they shared that their preferred role was as a faculty in the classroom. Albeit not perfect nor divorced from the issues pervasive in higher education administration,

these four participants shared a common sentiment that working in academia provided more emotional and intellectual safety and dignity than at times when working in administration.

Rosemary shared that her decision to leave administration to the academy was due to the burnout she experienced in administration,

> I really had to just make the decision to take a leap [into academia] and hope it works out.…There were literally times [when working in higher education administration] where I was like, I don't know if I'm going to literally be alive, like just the amount of stress that I had was unparalleled in the year [prior] than any other time in my life. And it was really just about those interpersonal work dynamics that had to do with just holding on to power…and to see someone struggle right in front of you, to have half a million dollars sit there and not be able to be used…It was tough to see people struggle.

In this quote, Rosemary described that not only was it stressful and exhausting to fight and resist within the administration of institutions when advocating on behalf of students, but witnessing the pain and struggle of others, and not being able to do anything about it, took a psychic toll on her. For Rosemary, to deeply care about marginalized groups and not have the power to enact change on their behalf despite representing the hope and possibility to do so was an unacceptable position for her to be in. In this case as an administrator, Rosemary reached an unsustainable point of exhaustion and burnout within a power structure that she was deeply misaligned with, thus leading to her tipping point to exit higher education administration altogether and move into the academy instead.

Adding to the experience of fragmentation for these queer Latina leaders, participants shared their experiences with deeply wounding moments of heartbreak. The following section outlines the heartbreaking leadership experiences of participants—intragroup oppression, the

loneliness and weight from being the "only one," and being set up for failure—experiences where they initially felt the hope, optimism, and promise of diversity but instead eventually found betrayal in unexpected locations.

Heartbreak in Leading

Institutional heartbreak (Avalos & Santander, 2023) is described as a state of righteous anger and disappointment, resulting in part from what Berlant (2011) outlines as a cruel optimism—that when we invest in something like the promises of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, that sometimes, it is the very thing that stands in our way, harming and disappointing us in ways that feel like a betrayal. For the participants of this study, experiencing leadership within far-right political institutional environments through an identity performance, whether by accepting or rejecting the pressures to compromise their values and identities, resulted in the fragmentation of the body—burnout caused by intersectional battle fatigue and tipping points that led to departures. To add to this, experiences with *heartbreak in leading* within institutions while holding the promises of diversity work and initiatives were also challenging: The loneliness of being the "only one," being set up for failure in their roles, and intragroup oppression further added to the challenges of staying whole as leaders.

Seven participants shared significant experiences of heartbreak in leading, which for many was akin to having a piece of their spirit damaged or murdered (Williams, 1991). *Spirit-murdering* is a concept coined by Patricia Williams (1991) that delineates the less material or tangible ways that racism harms—that beyond physical and material consequences, racism damages the psyche and the soul, taking away one's humanity and dignity. From an intersectional and education research viewpoint, Bettina Love (2019) highlights that spirit-murdering can occur in intersectional ways to those holding intersectional identities. Further,

spirit-murdering is not limited to being conducted by dominant identities; nondominant, marginalized identities can carry through with spirit murdering other marginalized identities through their own wounding, spirit-death, and oppression (Revilla, 2021). Anita Tijerina Revilla (2021) outlines the ways that spirit-murdering is reproduced and conducted from one marginalized identity to another due to unhealed wounds and their own experiences with their spirit being murdered. In this study, participants highlighted the ways that the heartbreak in leading they experienced led to painful spirit-wounding.

Pilar experienced deep heartbreak from moments where she showed up authentically as a leader, initially feeling safe and empowered, only to subsequently experience betrayal when colleagues, students, and faculty used her authenticity against her,

> Often, people say you should bring your authentic self to work, and I think that's nice. I also think you have to have conditions for you to actually allow that to happen. I used to put my whole, entire heart into my work…I still center love and joy in my work and how I approach people…[but] I have been hurt by students, I've been hurt by staff, I have been hurt by faculty. I have had to learn to give heart but not *all* my heart. I have learned to be more strategic…People have used the word "unprofessional" towards me...Now, I'm really cautious about who I invest my spirit in…When I leave this building, I have to have a harder mask on…I have to be able to not show my entire spirit because it has been used against me.

In this quote, Pilar reflected that she could not show up in her full authenticity and how much this defied her personal view of leadership. In this case, Pilar not only had to negotiate her identity, how she showed up as a leader, but she also experienced wounds of betrayal from those she expected otherwise from. Furthermore, Pilar shared the deep heartbreak of intragroup

oppression and betrayal, and the deeply emotional work of having to lift others up while also lifting herself up,

> My first month on this job, I was with another [person] of color, who does DEI on campus. And he said, verbatim, "You must have imposter syndrome being at such an elite university"...This was someone who was supposed to "get it." It's been in public spaces, and in one-on-one meetings, where people constantly work to remind us how dare we have the audacity to be in this space, or [that] we should be grateful that we're in this space. And so, for me, that has been the biggest barrier…constantly having to uplift myself, uplift others.

In another position, Pilar shared a similar encounter of intragroup oppression, where colleagues perpetuated and reproduced the same structures of oppression that they themselves had been subjected to,

> My last job, there was a woman of color my first year—and this is a hard one for me. This has been an experience of a lot of women of color staff at my last institution, where it was *gente*, it was people of color, who were the ones causing harm…I used to pour my spirit and my heart into my work. And then I had to learn to reel it back in only to show to certain folks. When you establish that trust, you can show your authentic full self. Until then, like the mask is going to be on because not everyone knows what to do with authenticity.

Pilar noted that to not internalize spirit murdering (Revilla, 2021) and avoid becoming a reproducing agent of oppression (Ahmed, 2019), she must reduce her exposure to heartbreak by limiting how much she exposes her spirit in the institution. Further, Pilar noted that the complexity of intragroup oppression is present among administration and students alike,

> Just because you're brown does not mean you're down. Just because you are a certain identity does not mean that you can't perpetuate anti-blackness. I think for me, the biggest barrier was, and I don't know if people are nervous to talk about this, but there was a lot of inter-identity tension. And I also saw that with students; there was constant tension. But I was like, "If we don't work together to talk, to dissolve and address white supremacy, homophobia, the 'isms,' you are doing the work for white supremacy. Like, white supremacy is sitting back eating his popcorn." So, I think that a really big barrier is identity politics.

Ultimately, Pilar shared that the unexpected betrayal from colleagues—particularly from colleagues with shared marginalized identities and roles in diversity, inclusion, and equity work—was deeply heartbreaking and disappointing. Amid all this heartbreak, and with no one to support her, Pilar found herself not only having to uplift others on campus through her role, but she had to uplift herself when experiencing oppression on campus. Additionally, she felt frustrated by the counterproductive nature of inter-identity conflict.

In addition to challenges of intragroup betrayal and oppression, Pilar described the heartbreak of being set up for failure in new diversity positions she took on,

> DEI in my last job, and in this job, I wasn't provided a budget. I had to oversee a cross cultural center, to do programming, to do graduations, to do training. I was given no budget. I had to, every single year, do a budget proposal to do my job. So, imagine just having the staff salary, your own salary, and then being asked to oversee one cross-cultural center for an entire university with no budget. So how are you setting people up for success? People say they want you to do magic, and they don't provide you with

> resources to actually do the work you have to do…how am I supposed to create these structural changes when there's these financial limitations?

Pilar elaborated in this quote that there is deep disappointment in what appeared to be tokenized attempts to support diversity and feeling little to no support in these efforts. For Pilar, entering these institutions committed to diversity efforts and taking on new roles in diversity proved to be heartbreaking and disappointing when being set up for failure in these positions. Additionally disappointing was when colleagues from marginalized identities reproduced oppressions rather than serving as spirit protectors and spirit restorers (Revilla, 2021), whom multiple marginalized identities like Pilar count on to survive the oppression, loneliness, and strain of doing unsupported diversity work.

For Xiomara, the heartbreak and loneliness of being "the only one" took an emotional toll on her, especially in moments where she needed support in challenging times,

> When the Pulse nightclub shooting happened, I was the *one* person—as the director of Latino student services that didn't have other staff and [where] all of the staff of the LGBTQ center were white. I had a really hard, personal time when that happened…There were conversations about putting out an institutional message. Folks looked to me, and I think that in that moment, I am literally the only one. And if I am in pain, how am I supposed to sit here and write something when I can't even show up to work right now, and then not even feeling like I had other colleagues that could understand, that could support [me] across the similar identities? And so really, just feeling alone in those moments and feeling like I had to kind of suck it up…I had to white knuckle my way through this to be able to support the institution in putting out an institutional message…These are challenging moments you're kind of forced into because you're the

> only one—even though you may not want to, you may not be ready, they certainly are tokenizing, and at the personal expense to my being. And I even remember, in leading up to the memorial [for Pulse victims], saying to some colleagues, "I'm not sure if I can make it through this, I don't know if I'll be able to do it. Can you help me?" And I had folks tell me, "I don't know, I don't think I can." It's really difficult for me to ever ask for help, but I'm literally asking for help, and in one of the hardest moments in my professional career, and you're telling me, "No." That was really hard to navigate—to not feel seen in my own humanity by my colleagues, not just the institution, was really difficult. To have to feel like I have to step up and there is no choice, like I have no choice here because it's me, literally the only person.

In this quote, Xiomara shared the heartbreak and disappointment that results from not being supported by others sharing similar marginalized identities as her, and an exacerbated feeling of loneliness and betrayal. Xiomara underscored the challenge of hyperinvisibility for intersectional identities like herself; when serious events or topics around intersectionality arose, such as the Pulse nightclub shooting,[7] colleagues holding shared identities, such as straight/cis Latina/o colleagues and queer white colleagues, did not reach out to her nor provide any assistance when she asked for it.

Laura described the heartbreak and struggle from being in an environment that doesn't recognize or acknowledge the work of queer Latinas,

> It's the atmosphere, it's the culture, it's the visceral feeling, it's the effect of being in an environment where the logics, the matrix of that environment, does not register queer

[7] The Pulse nightclub shooting was a 2016 mass shooting at an LGBTQ dance club hosting a popular Latin Night. Up until that time, it was the deadliest mass shooting in United States history; it is still the deadliest incident targeting the LGBTQ community in the United States (Ray, 2022). A majority of victims were queer Latina/o/xs (Sullivan & Hernández, 2016).

> women of color, does not register queer Latina brilliance, it just doesn't…It's only when there's something for the institution to benefit from that then there's this kind of like gesturing of something…that fake recognition…These spaces can be so demoralizing…How can you be a leader, if you're constantly in an environment that tells you that you're not valuable?

Here, Laura provided an incisive view of how challenging it is for queer Latinas to be sustained within environments that repeatedly signal that they should not be there, that they do not belong there, despite their value and potential to enact change. For Laura, it was insulting and heartbreaking to only be recognized in tokenizing ways. She noted that "there's a lot of loneliness and solitude because there are so few of us [queer Latinas]."

Analí shared the heartbreak of starting off with high hopes in her career in higher education administration, only to be repeatedly disappointed and heartbroken over time, mainly in the form of feeling like the only one in her role as an advocate,

> I think when you do this work for a little bit of time–and, you know, lots of credit to ancestors and antepasados and all those who have done so much in this space in thinking about justice and liberation and what that looks like–I think I was a lot more hopeful coming freshly out of college about what I could do and what I was capable of. And it's hard. It's hard to be in a space regularly, where you're the only one and the only voice and the only one who sees things from your perspective, like the squeaky wheel, the one who just doesn't shut up. And I think I've experienced a lot of displacement. And I don't even know how to best explain that. I think it's displacement that's been placed upon me in varying ways, whether it's to effectively treat me like an outsider, or whether it's me trying to adapt to the environment and kind of displacing myself and what I might need.

> Part of the difficulty of engaging in justice-based work is, specifically thinking about a college campus, is that you're always working to advocate. And sometimes it feels like I work so hard to advocate for others, that there isn't always a space to advocate for myself and like what I might need because I can't do both simultaneously, either because it feels too exhausting or too risky or it's just not possible.

In this quote, Analí outlined how the higher education institutional environment forced her to adapt and negotiate her identity at times or instead be pushed aside as an outsider. Additionally, Analí shared similar sentiments to Pilar and Xiomara regarding the sense of feeling alone as the only queer Latina and having to uplift others and lift herself up at the same time, with no one around to do the same for her. Analí further elaborated on the awakening and disappointment in higher education diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work when starting out in her career, particularly in what felt like a lack of support at a time of disillusionment,

> Even in trying to be intentional and be observant and enter that first position as, "I'm going to observe and then I'm going to see where I can insert my perspective and try to do that really intentionally"—I think once I felt like I was in a culture where I wasn't supported or embraced or cared for, especially being a new professional and in a new institution and new environment that was unfamiliar to me, I kind of withdrew a lot. And it was read as intimidating and unapproachable. Even though I had already engaged in a way that I felt was authentic and collaborative and was trying to bring people together and was very open. It's like, wow, now I'm being labeled as this. But I'm being labeled as this [intimidating and unapproachable] because I don't want to continue to be hurt by the system and by these interactions and give too much energy. And instead of people

> understanding that as me engaging in protection for myself, it was like, "Oh, well, you must just be a bitch." It didn't really feel like I was understood or cared for in any way.

In this quote, Analí shared the deep disappointment, loneliness, and wounding resulting from working in higher education administration; not only did she feel unsupported and demoralized by the workplace environment, but she was actively labeled as unapproachable and intimidating by colleagues to further ostracize her and render her as an outsider.

Valeria, a senior level leader in higher education, described navigating a very lonely career as the only queer Latina in her field, having to be self-taught due to being "the only one" in terms of holding an intersectional identity,

> It's been an incredibly lonely career. I had no queer women of color colleagues. I had very few feminist colleagues, very few critical race colleagues, up until maybe 10 years ago. So, I had to be mostly self-taught, I had to learn how to make do with. And I see in retrospect the loneliness.

For Valeria, this journey was one that she had to forge on her own, and with hopes of paving the road for others that will come after her. While she has been pivotal in creating pathways for other Latinas and queer Latinas in her field, she reflected on the heartbreak and strain that it took to enact such heavy lifting on her own.

Isabela shared the heartbreak of working with and being supervised by other women of color that did not have the capacity to mentor her. These colleagues served as gatekeepers and were unwilling to share roles, responsibilities, and information—effectively treating power as a scarce resource,

> The gatekeeping that happens both by supervisors and colleagues…I have witnessed this or experienced this in different ways…things like not being invited to certain spaces or

> holding information as [a form of] power…Women of color that I have been supervised by and my current supervisor now just don't, aren't able to, navigate the institution and share power in the same ways [those with other dominant identities can]...I don't know if this is because the people that I've reported most recently to are senior leaders. I think there's a lot of seriousness [in senior leadership]. And then we get so disconnected from the students that we're trying to serve, and I think there's joy missing. I feel like we [queer Latinas] have to create those moments of joy in different ways. So much work feels joyless sometimes.

Not being able to trust and be mentored by another woman of color in leadership not only created an isolating experience for Isabela, but an experience of disappointment and doubt through such a betrayal. This marked a betrayal because Isabela expected a leader with similar marginalized identities to engage in leadership through an attuned sensitivity and awareness to structures of oppression; to instead reproduce these structures was a heartbreaking experience. In this quote, Isabella acknowledges the reality that the conditions of institutional power prime such behavior in leaders, even in–or especially in—those holding marginalized identities. In response to that reality of power in relation to leadership and her negative experiences under oppressive leadership, Isabela shared that she is committed to not engaging in the same behavior, and that she instead wants to be a spirit restorer and healer that brings joy through her leadership (Revilla, 2021).

Rosemary similarly withstood heartbreak resulting from the way that other women of color supervisors treated her as a competitor for power,

> I feel like with other women of color [I have worked with], it's very much, "I am the only one, so I don't want to share my space because that means it's an automatic competition

> for scarcity of resources-type thing." And I think there are definitely times where I've also internalized that, "No, I don't want to share, or I don't want to talk about what I'm doing." And I'm like, "No, I can't allow [myself] to take on those [tendencies]" because I'm going to be miserable, because I know that I'm at my best when I'm collaborating or when I'm in community. But if I'm not willing to share, I'm not gonna be in community. Who's gonna be in community with someone who's a wall?…My supervisor was an equal opportunist of making sure everyone felt as [small] as possible. [She was] also a woman of color, which was really difficult [to experience]. I think a lot of people were excited to have her join the team and had a lot of high expectations of what that meant. And I think everyone, regardless of how folks identified racially, really felt purposefully and intentionally diminished [by her]. And I think a lot of that had to do with the scarcity of power, and when you have power, the fear of letting power go and relinquishing some of that.

In this quote, Rosemary shared how disappointing and heartbreaking it is to have high hopes for experiencing leadership from those with shared marginalized identities, only to be disappointed by their actions, including being spirit murdered and being treated as a threat rather than an asset and part of a larger community. Rosemary and her colleagues were hopeful that their supervisor, having multiple marginalized identities, would bring an awareness and sensitivity to leadership that would contest power and be mindful to not reproduce oppression. Instead, Rosemary heartbreakingly experienced an environment where her supervisor reproduced harmful structures of oppression. Rosemary noted that it was important for her to reflect on herself as a supervisor and not reproduce the same oppressive tendencies as have been done to her throughout her

higher education experience as a student and as staff. This included ensuring that her leadership centered care and valued marginalized voices.

In sum, the lonely journey that Valeria went through decades before—to pave a route for other queer Latinas—remains a lonely one. As demonstrated by the experiences of queer Latina leaders like Pilar, Xiomara, Laura, Analí, Isabela, and Rosemary, this route remains lonely and precarious. It is clear that there is still a long way to go before queer Latinas receive the representation and support they deserve in their higher education leadership journeys. Nonetheless, the brilliance of queer Latinas and the value they bring to leadership is critically important to changing institutional environments. The following section outlines how the participants engaged in alchemizing their wounds—transforming their experiences of fragmentation and heartbreak into knowledge and medicine, as part of the value they bring to their leadership roles.

Alchemizing Wounds

While the experiences of identity negotiation, fragmentation, and heartbreak in dangerous political environments were stressful and painful for all participants, six participants also shared experiences with healing that informed their positions as leaders in subsequent radical changemaking. These six participants shared how they were able to heal and alchemize such painful experiences with institutional power into a critical awareness and reflection upon their positional power—by avoiding the reproduction of harmful power structures, serving as a bridge for other marginalized groups, and holding a deep sense of responsibility to enact change. This process, *alchemizing wounds*, is akin to Anzaldúa's (2015) concepts of nepantla and conocimiento.

This experience of alchemizing deeply painful wounds, experiences, and struggles into special vantage points and knowledge to help others can best be described within the context of two of Anzaldúa's (2015) concepts for social change: nepantleras and conocimiento. *Nepantleras* are those that move through the liminal state of *nepantla*, a place of chaos, discomfort, and pain resulting from having to navigate the world through multiple identities and contradictions. Through this process of fissuring, the nepantlera utilizes their in-between perspectives to then serve as a bridge or conduit for others experiencing their own versions of pain and exclusion, all to build a better world (Anzaldúa, 2015). *Conocimiento* refers to how one applies the information gleaned from going inward into wounds to find healing and medicine, and to then enact this medicine out into the external world one navigates to create change. Self-reflection, empathy, and bridging are important aspects of this internal changemaking that is then applied to the external changemaking and sensemaking of a leader.

Isabela shared the importance of not reproducing systemic oppression through her own leadership, having previously been subjected to reproductions of oppression by other women of color supervisors. Isabela's own experience with heartbreak and betrayal from the leadership of others holding similar marginalized identities developed an important point of divergence in her leadership from that of others; rather than continuing the reproducing cycle of spirit murdering, Isabela was committed to spirit healing and restoring as a leader,

> I've done a lot of internal work because of my previous supervisory experiences that challenged me around how I uphold white supremacy, through my own supervision and my work. Sometimes, I think that because we're people of color, we think that we don't have to do that work. And this is just my assessment based on my previous supervisors, but those supervisors were some of the folks who upheld the systemic B.S., and all the

> "isms," even though they were women of color. And so I feel like I have been really committed to my own growth as a leader and as a supervisor, to not repeat those cycles of oppression.

Furthermore, Isabela shared the ways in which her intersectional identity allowed for her to make space and bridge for others, and the way that painful experiences of her own can translate to understanding and creating affirming spaces and change for students and colleagues with their own set of painful experiences of exclusion and marginalization,

> The way we are able to navigate spaces and make space for folks to feel like their authentic self is different [as queer Latinas]. Even though maybe we ourselves haven't had those [specific] experiences [of other marginalized identities], where you feel like you're torn apart, we can create affirming spaces for others because of our own experiences where we had to parse ourselves out.

Isabela described how her experiences of processing marginalization, especially through her intersectional identity, provides a pathway, a bridge, to help others process their own experiences with marginalization.

Analí similarly reflected on the ways she shows up as a leader and works intentionally to not reproduce oppressive relations in programmatic decision-making that impacts students by analyzing her own privileges and leveraging insight through her own intersectional identity as an entry point to voicing on behalf of marginalized students of varying identities,

> I think to a certain extent, all of my identities inform my approach to whatever this thing, leadership, is…As someone with some level of influence—I don't even know if it would be considered power, probably depends on the context and circumstance—I'm being sure that I am [not only] holding those in a space accountable, but also holding myself

> accountable…I'm thinking about how oppressive systems are interlocking and mutually reinforcing each other and how that leaves people who might be like me, or people who might experience other varying forms of oppression that are impacted in ways that are harmful to not just their material realities, but to their mental and emotional realities…Obviously, identity is an entry point to that. And so, me exploring my own identities—those…all inform and provide entry points for me to be able to explore a consciousness that would allow me to think about how I'm supporting students who are impacted by varying forms of oppression.

Analí further elaborated on the ways that her identities and experiences have shaped the bridging that she is able to do,

> Because of the experiences that I've had, the ways that I've been able to build relationships with others, even if we don't have the same kind of marginalized experience, my experience might give me a window into the possibility of what that looks like. I can build a relationship based on that connection and engage in that kind of solidarity, which would allow me to see outside of myself. And for me, that's a component of leadership—being able to see outside of yourself, and to be able to care about other people genuinely…The way that I live, the way that I lead, the way that I teach, the way that I conduct research, the way that I engage collaboratively with others, it's all blended together…which is in part shaped by identity, circumstance, and context. For me, it's based on engaging in that kind of awareness of self and awareness of others and doing that in complicated and complex ways.

In this quote, Analí expressed the ways that her own identity and life experiences provided her with a honed awareness to see outside of her own position. Being critically aware of how she

may be reproducing inequities and being aware of the experiences of other students, and doing so in a complex and nuanced manner, is what brings strength to her leadership.

Stella's experiences of marginalization and being the "only one," while painful, have influenced her vision as a leader and a changemaker. For example, Stella shared the way in which her queer Latina identity allows her to have a unique attunement in the identification and prioritization of issues affecting students with marginalized identities,

> We cannot separate our identities from who we are. And so, as we experience being the first and then wanting to create that change, we're at the forefront [of making that change]. Whereas for people with dominant identities…they've never been put in a position where they can't see themselves there. And so, they don't feel like these topics are as important, but they [these topics] should be at the forefront. And so, they might acknowledge it's something that needs to be addressed, but it might be number 10 on the list. And when things keep getting pushed back, because in higher ed, things are always coming up, things have to get pushed to the side—this [issues affecting marginalized identities] is what gets pushed to the side.

For Stella, her experiences of being "othered" influences her advocacy to bring those marginalized to the periphery at the center of campus programming and conversations. To add to this, Stella also shared the ways in which her own experiences of marginalization influenced the type of pathways she wants to create for other minoritized leaders,

> Navigating my own identity, and how I fit or do not fit in this space…It made me realize there's a lot of people like me who we don't feel like we fit in the space. So how can I help create little avenues within my own power? And as I gain more power within higher ed, I can have more power to create those avenues behind me.

Stella demonstrated that while experiencing marginalization, fragmentation, and heartbreak through her own journey as a student and a leader, she has gained insight from these experiences and determination to invoke change.

Similar to Isabela, Analí, and Stella, Pilar shared the ways her own intersectional identity influences her capacity to be both self-aware and externally aware of power relations, so that she can not only work to avoid perpetuate such harms but also become an advocate for others holding marginalized identities,

> I think that you lead with a certain awareness…we may be the first queers and queer Latinas that people see. I don't think a lot of people see queer Latinas in positions of power. And when people see that, and when we lead from an intersectional lens, and advocate from an intersectional lens, and show up in our "baddie" energy, I think that we inspire people to think differently, to think more empathetically, to lead with more heart, because I think that we do lead with so much heart and so much empathy because we have been told, at least I have been told, that I shouldn't exist…It [our identity] opens [space] because of who we are, it allows for people to trust us. I think that because of our intersection, people gravitate towards trust with us [differently]. Like, we hold a positionality that allows for the Borderlands, for people who may not fit [binary] boxes, to gravitate towards us and to build that trust.

In this quote, Pilar shared that her own experiences of exclusion through her identity gives others experiencing marginalization comfort in confiding in her. Pilar's own intersectional identity serves as a conduit, a node, for safe passage of others holding marginalized identities.

Similar to Pilar's note on being a conduit of refuge for others experiencing their own marginalization, Laura noted that because of her identity as a queer woman of color, a queer Latina, that she becomes a node in the pipeline of justice where students find refuge and courage,

> I think what happens is students see a queer woman of color, and because there's a certain advocacy work that's being done in the classes that I teach, they would come to me, so it's like a safe space is created even though that's not my primary intention. When [crises] happen [to students], the part of the process of creating, of finding, of pipelining justice—it moves through me. It [doesn't] move through other faculty, it [moves] through me…Because the institution can be so dystopian, as a byproduct, my environments and my little fugitive spaces become safe spaces for others for the activation of justice or equity to begin…the space of students coming in, breaking down…to accidentally have created a safe space where the activation and animation of justice and equity begins.

In this quote, Laura elaborated that through her ways of creating space, she is often at the forefront of where students seek justice and find refuge. On the topic of commitment to justice, Laura shared,

> We often try to fix, in the world, a wound that is innate to us...All of the injustices that I have felt, known for a fact that exist…to then being the motivator for why I cannot stand it whenever an injustice or a trespass materializes around me... It is a very deep feeling, of feeling a supremely painful wound of exclusion…and then somehow being moved to think, I don't want anyone else to feel that way. And in that way, we can clearly see how the political is personal.

In this quote, Laura shared the way that her own painful experiences of fragmentation and heartbreak shape the way she seeks to move in the world and in her role as a leader to shield other individuals with marginalized identities from experiencing injustices.

Laura additionally shared the way these personal experiences transform how she views mentoring students with marginalized identities, where she calls upon her own "internal archives" to mentor students and keep them in mind when designing her classes,

> I am fully aware of the logic of domination, the space of control that we're in…Recognizing that it [institutions of higher education] is an instantiation of power, and it is reproducing power and stratification…it means that I'm not going to wait for the students of color to reach out to me—I'm gonna reach out to them multiple times, and like right away... It means I can identify; I can call upon my own memory and feelings in my own internal archives of what it means to be in that position as an undergraduate with very little power and empowerment and moving through a maze that's meant to kick them out more than to retain them. It means that I am looking for opportunities for them, it means that I am including them in the design of my syllabus before I even meet them. It means that I show up as an authentic version of me, whatever that means.

Laura shares that her own experiences of disempowerment during her time as an undergraduate student are part of an internal archive of memories—experiences, feelings—that guide her approach to mentoring students and curriculum design.

Xiomara shared the importance of being a "possibility model" for other queer Latinas and other intersectional identities, which makes being the "only one" worth the challenge and heartbreak,

> [I] definitely didn't see myself and my identities reflected in my undergrad experiences. It wasn't 'till I hit graduate school that I even met another queer Latina. And I think about—like, that shouldn't have been in my mid-20s…That was too late for me to be meeting my possibility models. I should have had that [experience] earlier in my educational and personal experiences. So, I have intentionally chosen to work at predominantly white institutions, working in identity spaces, where I often sit at the intersections of being "the only"…And while my role is to lead from one lens, I am still intentionally making sure that I'm weaving in other lenses really clearly and really intentionally.

Specifically, Xiomara shared the ways she shows up as a "possibility model" to students,

> I have supervised lots of other queer folks of color who have talked about the value that my supervision of them has had on their lives. That they have never had a chance to be supervised by another queer person and….by another queer person of color…I'm much more open and transparent about my life…It allows for them to visually see a representation of a life that they maybe haven't always had…I lead in that way, because it matters to the students that we serve, to have them see themselves valued and seen.

As part of Xiomara's enactment of leadership from an intersectional identity perspective, she embodies a type of vulnerability and sensitivity with students so that she can serve as a conduit of possibility and hope for other queer Latina/o/xs in higher education.

Participants shared how their own experiences of marginalization and exclusion based on their multiple identities provided them with valuable insights and an "internal archive" to guide their role as leaders. As part of this process, previous fragmentation of the body and soul and heartbreak in leading become alchemized and reassembled into healing, medicine, and

changemaking for others. These shared perspectives exemplify the power and insight that reside within lived experiences through multiple, contending identities and power relations. In addition to this process of alchemizing of wounds, participants also shared the ways that practicing moving through so many obstacles in dangerous institutional environments led to a special knowledge and skillset of stealth and creativity to bend, shift, and recreate rules undetected. The following section outlines the ways that participants bent, shifted, and recreated their institutional environments.

Bending, Shifting, Recreating

In addition to the value and knowledge garnered in alchemizing and transforming wounding and fragmenting experiences, participants also shared the ways that having to negotiate their identities and navigate dangerous institutional landscapes provided them with the training, skills, and creativity to stealthily subvert the institution—to bend, shift, and recreate the rules in their environments through actions illegible to dominant structures. Through the new knowledges produced by their unique experiences as multiply marginalized people (Cruz, 2001), they were able to shift and move with stealth within the institution as *outsiders within* (Collins, 1986), reimagine and create alternatives outside of binaries (Cruz, 2001), negotiate their identities subversively as a form of disidentification (Muñoz, 1999), and to unite with others of similar experiences of marginality through what Ahmed (2019) cites as a *queer inheritance* and that Harney and Moten (2004) outline as being part of a *fugitive undercommons*, as part of enacting collective change with other dissenters and resisters within the institution. Six participants shared their theorizing of the ways in which they were able to bend, shift, and recreate the rules and structures within their institutional positioning, as well as develop and find refuge in subaltern networks.

Xiomara shared the importance of creating, forging, and defining third spaces and alternative routes within the university, such as in the way she supervises students,

> I don't want to be the person that's recreating shit. So, it's always like, "Here's the rules, and then how do we figure out how to bend and flex within all that?" Because all these rules weren't made for us…Let's find the third space within these institutional rules…I try to think about it most intentionally with the folks that I directly supervise, because I know that that then has a trickle-down impact on the students they supervise, and then how they will someday go on to be a supervisor themselves.

Xiomara is working as a transformative leader by developing a team and network of other leaders that will also resist reproducing systems of oppression within the institution.

Isabela shared the ways that she bent and shifted around rules to collectively engage in changing and shifting cultural work environments,

> The sense of urgency that exists in higher education, like, "Everything needs to be addressed, like right now, there needs to be a solution to that right now." I think that there are some things that were urgent, but really, nothing else we were doing was urgent. So, I think about shifting that for folks…talking together about timelines…more collective decision making, even thinking about policies around presence in the office…There were policies…[that] full time, student-facing roles have to be present on campus, but internally, we didn't do that. So, we had our own internal policies around remote work and hybrid work…Instituting different internal policies that just resist this white supremacy and culture, and a way of working in higher education that burned out a lot of people.

Isabela shared how her intersectional identity, as a queer Latina, inherently challenges notions of traditional leadership, and that a lifetime of experiences and reflection from not fitting into dominant structures has allowed her to consider ways to challenge power relations,

> Because of all the critical self-reflection that we've had to do about who we are as [intersectional] leaders, we innately challenge what it means to even be a leader…Disrupting power structures that keep us in this box of leadership, or how we should pull people up with us…When I have worked with a lot of queer Latina leaders, there's small things that we do, I think, that create larger impacts. So, the way that we build community together, the way that we think, when you walk into a meeting, give a head nod. There are all of these little moments that I can think of when I walk into spaces with other queer Latinas, that have created this shield, in a way. I don't know how to explain it, just together, we have a powerful network of folks that can really change systems.

Here, Isabela also shared the nuances of being part of a subaltern network of other multiple marginalized identities, namely, queer Latinas, in navigating the institution and creating third space, to collectively change systems in stealth.

Victoria shared that she strategized changemaking in the institution by identifying and cultivating her sphere of influence, her subaltern network of changemakers—for when she can no longer advocate effectively in certain instances due to being barred from the decision-making table, she can prepare other leaders to enter the center of the decision-making table and "whisper" to them and hold influence in ways not legible to the dominant structures, in stealth,

> Whoever sits in the seat has to be politically savvy enough to move people into that center because [if] I can't, might not be [able] to say it, I can move enough people in [the

> center] who then can say what they need to say. I don't need to be the person to say it all the time. I just have to make sure I've created those spaces where folks are seen and are leading, and are taking the action…My job is to make that possible…There's a moment in which the choice for any of us is if we do something in that moment, we're going to be marginalized…I've been having some individual conversations with some folks, "I need to be in conversation with you because you are influential in a way that I'm not anymore. I need to whisper to you, so that I know that that sphere of influence is affected and impacted by me [even] though I'm not in there." And that's the compromise for me. I can't fight to be in the inner circle, because I'm not going to be. There are powerful enough people now, that will keep me out of that inner circle. But I still have a responsibility to ensure that I'm not silent.

Laura shared the intimacy that exists within the undercommons, the fugitive subaltern, and that arriving there is not one of choice, but a necessity of survival that brought them there,

> There's this underlying logic that pipes us [the subaltern]. And by the time we arrive, we've already had so many shared experiences of grief, of being rejected, of the peripheral, of not fitting in…And so I think, living in that world and arriving to these questions of, "Why do I care so much..?" I feel like it's not even a choice. And I think it's the same for…everyone who can pipeline into this [under]commons, I feel that it's also not a choice for them, because we've just lived it every step of the way.

Further adding to this point, Laura detailed how being pipelined into this transformative leadership shows up specifically for women of color and queer Latinas working in higher education,

> I think that a lot of white spaces are ruptured by queer women of color who are operating with an internal accustoming to always resist that we don't always recognize that we're doing it. Because it is our world…it's our world to clash, to rupture heteronormative spaces. It's our world, our normal world to rupture the normativity of whiteness, to rupture the normativity of white patriarchy, or even brown patriarchy or black patriarchy. That is our life. So, I think that we're often the first to break into these spaces of homogeneity because we're just trying to be and trying to exist. And it might not always be like a chosen political act, or it might not register as an immediate political act, or sometimes it is a conscious political act, but I think that if you're constantly being excluded, that kind of gives you the freedom to just…break rules, period, and be like, "Well, fuck it, whatever."

For Laura, as a queer Latina, her own existence within spaces that do not recognize or exclude her identities has generated an organic, intuitive roadmap for resistance.

Like Laura, Isabela shared the ways that identity as a queer Latina make her a natural disruptor,

> My whole life has been about resisting…So in some ways, when there is resistance, it's kind of like, bring it on…[And] I think about the ways that I am able to disrupt spaces, just by my mere existence, by the perspectives that I'm bringing, by the questions that I'm asking, by the decisions that I'm making. In my previous role, I made a lot of decisions that were, I think, as an act of resistance against the hierarchy or the ways that we are socialized to operate in higher education around time, around the supervisory relationship, around the sense of urgency around everything…When I think about my leadership, the ways my identity has influenced…I am a natural disrupter. And I enjoy

> exposing inequities and problems, and not just exposing but also trying to think of different ways to solve things.

Isabela demonstrates that through her lived experiences of contending with her identity and institutional power relations, she is a natural disrupter—both in her motivation to resist and enact change on behalf of others and in her skillset to disrupt gained through her own surviving and thriving in hostile environments.

Laura shared that finding a third way to exist within the institution—not necessarily by defining herself in opposition to it nor by fully conforming to it, but by engaging somewhere in the middle and beyond those binaries—was part of engaging in the subaltern undercommons,

> If obedience is not performed, then there are severe consequences. And at the same time…there are these pockets where you're not completely rejecting the institution, you're not completely accepting the institution, but you're kind of figuring out these trickster clever ways to have a little bit more information than the university [bureaucracy] itself….Acquiring information from places that have been delegated as negative or bad or outside…how to dissent and how to network and how to operate in an institution, but also outside of it, or underneath it. That's what I mean by this kind of third way, and I think it's also fair to say that every institution, or bureaucratic higher ed, neoliberal structure also has its own third space. And I think that those who are part of the bureaucratic system are not aware of that. And I think for people who are these undercommoners, we recognize each other right away…It's like this kinship…a way in which disidentification brings us to a space of under commons and identifying other people who are rebellious, or outcast, or outsiders or just choose to not "drink the kool aid."

Laura also described the extreme precision that is required to survive and enact change within hostile institutional environments. She likened the experience within the classroom to being militarized, as a soldier within a battlefield of scrutiny and far-right hysteria, ready to protect herself from external organizations, the administrators within her department, and the students within her classroom, through thoroughly knowing the policies and laws,

> Knowing that at any time, what you say could be used against you, and be video recorded at any time, and to be teaching in an atmosphere like…it pushes you to be extremely stealthy and clever because you have…to know policies, to add a bunch of clauses…If I'm already teaching something that is semi-dangerous to a white institution and I'm in a PWI, then I have to be like militarized to be in that environment to be able to do the work, as I feel this righteous to do it. I have to know my legal rights, I have to know all the procedures of what is allowed, what is not allowed.

Pilar similarly shared the ways that being able to shift with stealth and precision was important to enacting change, particularly in the way that she collected and utilized data and metrics,

> Thinking about the Borderlands as a queer Latina has helped me to be very politically savvy…I'm supposed to be told if it's [my position] going to be renewed permanently…After every single workshop department training, school wide training that I lead, I have done qualitative and quantitative metrics to evaluate the work that I'm doing…I show, "These are the metrics, and this is how it's actually impacting people." And I think being queer and Latina, you have to be so strategic to survive, even to validate the work that you're doing, and to validate, then, your own presence there. I have to make sure that every single T is crossed, every single thing is connected to the

> university's strategic framework. You have to be a magician, constantly on your toes, because people are waiting to see that the magic does not work.

Laura shared that by moving in stealth, through her knowledge of policies, laws, and moving underground and under the radar in ways that are intelligible to marginalized folks and unintelligible to the institutional structure, she is able to balance her commitment to ensuring equity and justice-centered learning without being detected, which she labeled as the undercommons, and work that she labeled as "ghost labors,"

> To be able to add two courses that speak to critical race theory and queer of color critique—to be able to launch that type of project is such a radical act in the middle of the most CRT hysteria there has ever been and anti-intellectualism from the conservative right and also just a lot of suspicion in [me] being a faculty of color and a woman faculty and queer…There's the labor of actually knowing your stuff and compiling the syllabus and the curriculum, and there's the labor of couching it in the words and language that the institution will want to approve and will basically fly under the radar, so to speak, but create the course description in a way where students who want this type of class can identify based on the language choices.

Laura shared the way in which disrupting and shifting binaries and moving through identity negotiation can be done in powerful ways,

> [My identity is] what allows for me to process and move and think about whether ideologies or ways of protest or ways of engaging or ways of just maneuvering a really complicated mine field that is the academy…in ways that are gray, in ways that can go beyond binaries, in ways that it's not about being the perfect activist. And it's not about being an assimilated subject, but it's about something in the middle…It has to just

> sometimes oscillate, it has to just move along that spectrum to the middle ground. And you have to move back and forth, back and forth—to think about identity and practice as not fixed…We're operating somewhere in the middle to sustain long term, and in an undercover, insider position to get what is needed.

Valeria also shared the sentiment that Laura and Pilar identified with the way in which being excluded trains and informs those with multiple marginalized identities, queer Latinas, to develop a set of creative skills that are invaluable to leading in higher education, and trusting these third way alternative routes,

> As queer, a Latina…there is no safety. And hopefully, we also know that we've been trained to develop our creative skills; there is no navigating anything, except through creative ways. And so maybe the piece that I have taken a long time to come to is allowing myself to trust the creative routes, or to be willing to risk the creative routes and to interrupt the routine for creativity—not to completely [interrupt routines], as I think routines are necessary, but we have to build a different way of seeing the world…Folks are not always going to be able to see what we can see. That doesn't mean that we can't see what we see. And so, to be able to figure out the path and the pace through which we want to move toward what we think we can, what we know is possible, and just recognize that as a skill that we've had to build—it's a survival strategy. And then I guess the other piece in this is nonnormative kinship and community. Those are the routes through which we make the world different in our own small spaces.

Valeria notes that in the process of surviving, queer Latinas like herself are able to recognize creative and alternative routes to engender change, to think of different ways to solve problems.

Isabela shared similar sentiments to Valeria in the ways that not living within binaries and working hard to survive, lends to beautiful, creative possibilities,

> [My] identity has helped me reimagine things in ways that folks who have just been socialized and accepted into the norm, don't think about. So, I feel like I take a really radical approach to my work because of my [intersectional] queerness. I don't believe in like, things are set, or there's like binaries, and that is really uncomfortable for people. But that is where I thrive, that makes me excited to just dream and queer things and ask questions about why we do things the way that we do things.

Laura shared the beautiful creation that can be forged within institutions because of one's intersectional identity. By having to navigate what was not built for queer Latinas, she has learned to recreate and create pathways and networks,

> I think that those experiences of the subjects, the structures that create an identity, that inform an identity, that inform difference, and abjection—they have such a large role in giving us our position, my positionality, the space to transform in ways that are so beautiful. That I wouldn't want to have it any other way. Like, yeah, to be a leader in this body with these intersections, means a whole lot of trouble, a whole lot of struggle, a whole lot of sacrifice. But damn, I wouldn't have it any other way.

For Laura, and for all the participants of this study, moving through higher education institutions as queer Latina leaders was indeed "a whole lot of struggle, a whole lot of sacrifice," but one that was worth it—generative, beautiful, and transformative.

These participant reflections on why and how they strategized to survive and enact change within hostile institutional settings represent theory in the flesh (Hurtado, 2003)—why and how leaders with intersectional identities engage in risk-taking to enact change, and how

they do it, are formed, informed, and rooted in one's lived experience. Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981/2015) note that "the physical realities of our lives…all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (p. 23) and that educational research scholars note that institutions of education and the field of educational research (Cruz, 2001), and particularly higher education and the academy (Dillard, 2000; Hurtado, 2003), can be transformed through the *endarkened epistemologies* of leaders and scholars holding intersectional identities. Through the fragmentation, contradictions, and collisions that result from one's identity being in misalignment with dominant structures of power, epistemological knowledge and insights are developed where "power relations can be deconstructed" (Hurtado, 2003, p. 221) due to having "to learn to maneuver the different manifestations of oppression depending on the context" (p. 222). Therefore, as education researchers like Cruz (2001), Dillard (2000) and Hurtado (2003) theorize and argue, the knowledges from marginalized identities are key to developing more just and equitable educational institutions.

Summary

While transformative change within higher education institutions cannot rely on the leadership of one person, but rather through collective actions, this study on leadership highlighted individual stories, as part of a collective story, and one that showcases the strength, intelligence, and fearlessness of queer Latina leaders in higher education. In answering the research question on how queer Latinas experience higher education leadership, the participants in this study faced identity negotiation, fragmentation of their identity, and heartbreak in leading within a variety of institutional contexts, in which all environments were affected by national white supremacist rhetoric. Despite institutional pressures to over negotiate their identities and completely accept institutional inequities, participants strategically performed identity

negotiations in the short-term to ensure their power and capacity to enact change in the long-term. For participants that over resisted identity negotiation and institutional equities, fragmentation of their identity led to eventual burnout and at times resignation from these environments. To add to the exhaustion that couples with fragmentation of the body, as well as negotiating one's identity too often, participants experienced heartbreak in leading that resulted from betrayals, loneliness, and spirit murdering in spaces that were supposed to be supportive, hopeful, and safe.

Moving into the second research question on how queer Latina higher education leaders experience their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures, tied in with the third question of how they draw upon their identities and knowledges to enact change, the participants in this study demonstrated how existing within epistemological thresholds informed their uniquely advantageous view as leaders. Participants shared how they alchemized their wounds and transformed negative experiences into self-awareness of their positional power, serving as a bridge for marginalized identities, and a commitment to equity and justice. Second, participants shared that by navigating environments where they were constantly relegated as outsiders or met with hostility due to their identities, they had cultivated their ability to move with stealth and creativity within their environments, allowing them to bend, shift, and recreate rules and environments within their higher education institutions—intuitively forging new ways within places in between, where transformation and change is possible. I contextualize these findings within the extant literature, present a model for queer Latina leadership in higher education, and provide recommendations for practice in the following Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative constructivist grounded theory study was to understand how queer Latina identity informs higher education leadership. This was accomplished through the guidance of an integrated framework of intersectionality theory and a Chicana feminist epistemology to consider the influences of structural oppression in identity negotiation and in recognizing the marginalized body as a site of knowledge construction. This study was guided by three research questions:

1. How do queer Latinas experience higher education leadership?
2. How do queer Latina higher education leaders experience their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures?
3. How do queer Latina higher education leaders draw upon their identities and experiences to enact change?

The methods of constructivist grounded theory through interviewing and memoing were utilized to collect and analyze the data necessary to answer these questions through emerging categories and subsequent themes. This final and concluding chapter focuses on strategies of resistance, which include (a) the subtheme of identity negotiation, *going underground* and (b) the overarching theme, *bending, shifting, recreating*. I situate these findings within the literature and in answering the research questions. Based on these findings, I present a model for queer Latina leadership in higher education. Following, I discuss recommendations for practice, noting the importance of recognizing the threat that current institutional environments in a post-Trumpian era pose to queer Latina leaders and transformative leadership at large. Lastly, I conclude with directions for future research and note limitations of the study.

Discussion of Findings

The emergent theoretical categories of this study illuminated the ways that the queer Latina body, as an archival site—often experiencing fragmentation and struggle—can lend powerful roadmaps of resistance, new ways of being, and healing. These phenomenological realities of navigating multiple power structures from the queer Latina leader standpoint provide rich insight into alternative ways of leading in higher education, especially in the face of institutional resistance and obstinate environments. Specifically, the strategies of *going underground* through identity negotiation and *bending, shifting, recreating* as subversive acts wrought through the alchemizing of wounds are notable findings that illuminate insights into how to evade the institution while continuing to make impact in matters of social justice and equity.

In this section, I first discuss the thematic findings grouped into the category of painful experiences of queer Latina leaders in higher education navigating hostile institutional environments—the over negotiations of identity, heartbreak in leading, and fragmentation. Second, I discuss the ways in which these painful experiences can serve as a repository of wisdom—as powerful roadmaps of resistance, new ways of being, and healing—revealed in the findings as alchemizing wounds, going underground, and bending, shifting, and recreating. Overall, I describe how these findings fit within the existing literature, how they answer the research questions of this study, and their culmination in a framework for queer Latina leadership.

Painful Experiences

Extant research on women of color leaders in higher education administration reveal thematic patterns of leadership experiences that involved frequent experiences of stereotype

threat and microaggressions based on race and gender, including being overlooked, overworked, and highly scrutinized in their roles (Bailey & Miller, 2016; Breeden, 2021; Nixon, 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020; Townsend, 2020). While the findings of this study on queer Latina leaders in higher education align with these existing themes, this research contributes the intersectional perspective of queer Latinas in higher education leadership, adding the analytical axis of heterosexism. Furthermore, mapping these already challenging experiences within the unique temporal context of exceedingly hostile institutional environments within a post-Trump political climate has not yet been explored in extant research; this study provides a snapshot into how queer Latina leaders navigate epochs of increased identity-based hostility in higher education environments, specifically within a post-Trump era of heightened heterosexism, racism, and anti-immigrant sentiments.

In answering the first research question, the findings of this study reveal that queer Latinas experience higher education leadership as an ongoing navigation of hostile institutional environments, frequently marked by painful experiences. The most significant of these experiences, in response to these hostile environments, included binary expressions of identity negotiation, either by over negotiating identity or over resisting identity negotiation pressures; heartbreak in leading; and fragmentation in the form of burnout and tipping points.

Specifically, queer Latina leaders experienced their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures as binary expressions of identity negotiation, either by over negotiating identity or over resisting identity negotiation pressures, as common responses to navigating these hostile institutional environments. Whether as a strategy to reduce stereotype threat and occupationally survive, or to maintain alignment with self-identity and values to emotionally survive, either binary strategy resulted in painful consequences, often

resulting in burnout. These findings align with the literature regarding the ways that intersectional identities must constantly respond to pressures to negotiate their identities in a variety of contexts (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Townsend, 2021; West, 2015). In the case of queer Latinas, however, this pressure to negotiate gender and race is compounded by heterosexism. Existing as a symbol of defiance within politically hostile institutional environments, there is a significant level of identity negotiation that queer Latina leaders must face that their counterparts may not. Many participants were challenged with balancing these pressures of identity negotiation and felt that sustainable engagement with identity negotiation was elusive.

Having to constantly perform their identity in various negotiated ways as a response to their hostile institutional environments, the queer Latina leaders of this study at times experienced more harm than benefit from negotiating their identity, leading to eventual *fragmentation* in the forms of burnout and/or tipping points that eventually led to their resignation from these institutions. To add to this exhaustion, participants experienced heartbreak in leading that resulted from betrayals, loneliness, and spirit murdering in spaces that were supposed to be supportive, hopeful, and safe. This heartbreak in leading further exacerbated fragmentation, further compounding exhaustion into burnout and tipping points.

Numerous studies have outlined the unique *racial battle fatigue* that women of color experience when compounding racial and gendered microaggressions (e.g., Allen, 2021; Corbin et al., 2018), as well as *queer battle fatigue* experienced by LGBTQ identities (e.g., Robinson, 2022). Recent studies have linked the ways that higher education activists and leaders of marginalized identities are exceedingly exposed and vulnerable to intersectional battle fatigue that ultimately leads to burnout (Danquah et al., 2021; Gorski, 2019). What has not yet been

elaborated upon in the literature is the way that queer women of color, specifically, queer Latinas, as leaders in higher education, may experience a heavier burden of fragmentation, burnout, and tipping points that result from the accumulated stressors compounded by their multiple marginalization on the axes of race, gender, and sexual orientation. This study brings attention to this heightened fragmentation that queer Latinas face in higher education leadership.

While this fragmentation—and subsequent burnout and tipping points—is likely greater for queer Latinas than their non-queer counterparts due to the more complex intersectional identity negotiations required of them, the painful experiences do not end there. The additional unique experience of heartbreak in leading, often noted in the forms of betrayals and spirit murdering by other shared marginalized identities, leads to a heightened experience of burnout and tipping points. Avalos and Santander (2023) delineated their experiences with heartbreak in leading as queer Latinas in higher education—heartbreak that results from a betrayal(s) by the very institutional spaces and colleagues that one expected safety and refuge from. Avalos and Santander (2023) describe how this heartbreak in leading compounded existing burnout, diminished their investment as leaders, and ultimately prompted them to leave their hostile institutions. Similarly, Glover (2017) and Lewis and Miller (2018) shared the ways that, as queer Black women, they were uniquely positioned to an exposure of betrayals from their non-queer racialized peers and colleagues. This higher education leadership study on queer Latinas further elaborates and confirms these unique experiences of heartbreak in leading that queer women of color, specifically, queer Latinas, experience in addition to the already complex intersectional identity negotiations and microaggression they uniquely face. In sum, it is clear that queer Latina leaders are more frequently subjected and exposed to painful experiences of identity negotiation and heartbreak in leading than their non-queer and/or non-racialized counterparts, likely causing

for them to leave their institutions or the profession altogether at an alarming rate due to the painful fragmentation that this causes.

This study contributes to a more nuanced, intersectional understanding of the painful experiences of queer Latina leaders in higher education. Specifically, it brings attention to both a perennial experience (persistent racism, sexism, and heterosexism) and temporally heightened experience (post-Trump era, hostile institutional environments) of intersectional oppression in higher education leadership. Ultimately, the danger of such painful experiences is the resulting burnout and depletion of these critical leaders, leading to lower commitments or investment in the field, and most impactfully, their exiting from certain institutions or complete exiting from the profession of higher education leadership altogether. These findings highlight the importance of protecting and retaining queer Latina leaders in higher education, which I elaborate further in the implications. The following section discusses the subversive acts that queer Latina leaders of this study strategized and engaged in to sustainably survive and navigate their institutions.

Subversive Acts

The two thematic concepts of *going underground* and *bending, shifting, recreating* are the major strategies of enacting change within hostile institutional settings that queer Latina leaders in higher education in this study detailed. These queer Latina leaders experienced substantial pressure from hostile institutional environments—structures that were resistant to change, reluctant to equity policy and programming, and distrustful of critical leaders with intersectional identities. While these institutional contexts were strenuous and at times led to the pain of the aforementioned thematic concepts—*heartbreak in leading*, total compromise or total resistance to *identity negotiation*, and *fragmentation* that at times led to burnout and eventual exiting from institutions—the lifetime of experiences in navigating uncertain and precarious

contexts, both personal and institutional, in the lives of queer Latina leaders also provided insight. The participants of this study demonstrated how these wounds and struggles, while undoubtedly painful and harmful, could also serve as a corporeal and spiritual reservoir, a repository, of answers and solutions to their survival—a roadmap for resistance. By transforming their experiences, *alchemizing these wounds*, these leaders were able to reinforce their purpose in leading, strategize their roles with precision, and ultimately survive and thrive within their hostile institutional settings. Two salient strategies emerged in the data: *going underground*, a form of strategic identity negotiation, and *bending, shifting, and recreating*, clever acts of subversion. These two subversive acts, disidentificatory in nature, are further elaborated upon in the following section.

Going Underground

In this study, one of the significant ways that queer Latinas experienced higher education leadership was through identity negotiation. Having to constantly perform their identity in various negotiated ways as a response to their hostile institutional environments, these queer Latina leaders at times experienced more harm than benefit from negotiating their identity, leading to eventual *fragmentation* in the forms of burnout and/or tipping points to eventually led to their exit from these institutions. However, while fragmentation was a common result of navigating higher education leadership through the survival response of identity negotiation, another result of identity negotiation served as a protective factor, where more benefit than harm occurred. In these instances, participants described a unique balance of compromising their identities and values just enough to maintain their positional power and avoid unwanted attention. In this scenario, participants were able to maneuver and shift their level of compromise situationally, where they could still engage in changemaking in smaller scale ways. That way,

participants were able to hunker down and maintain their positional power within these hostile institutional environments while waiting out the political storm.

This intersectional identity negotiation, akin to flying under the radar, hibernating, and making strategic compromises that ensured that attention was not brought to their role or to their team, I labeled as *going underground*. While going underground did involve engaging in inaction at times, such as not speaking up around certain issues, it also involved a significant amount of time and labor dedicated to building defenses—all to essentially keep doing some amount of equity work without being overtly identifiable. Going underground was a strategic, intentional decision that participants made in response to their current campus climate.

Within the literature on identity negotiation, these findings contribute to a burgeoning emergence of queer of color studies in higher education research (Duran, 2021; Duran & Garcia, 2020; Duran & Garcia, 2021; Duran & Jones, 2020; Ford, 2015; Ghabrial, 2019; Peña-Talamantes, 2013) that seek to widen and challenge the notion of identity as fixed (Ethier & Deux, 1994) and the binary understanding of identity negotiation as inherently assimilationist or resistant. These studies mainly focus on the identity negotiations of queer of color students as agentic strategists, whereas this study contributes to the perspective of identity negotiation and strategy from the position of institutional leaders within higher education, adding complexity with dynamics of power. Within the literature of leadership in higher education, studies of intersectionality and identity negotiation focus on gender and race axes, depicting identity negotiation in binary ways. Alternatively, this study contributes to such educational leadership by adding a third axis of sexual orientation and the view of identity negotiation with greater elasticity. The identity negotiation of queer Latina leaders does not occupy a binary view of

assimilation/full negotiation or rejection/no negotiation and instead affords a window into identity negotiation as a strategy of disidentification and resistance in leadership (Muñoz, 1999).

Bending, Shifting, Recreating

Another way queer Latina leaders in this study experienced higher education leadership and their racialized and heterogendered positioning was through a transformative healing process, *alchemizing wounds*. Given their experiences with excessive identity negotiation, fragmentation, and heartbreak in leading, queer Latina leaders held a series of wounds in relation to higher education. While the interplay of intersectional identity within oppressive hegemonic structures generates these intersectional wounds, these wounds are the very location where healing and transformation could occur—*alchemizing wounds* into knowledge and insight. Within these embodied locations, queer Latina leaders were able to further ground their commitments to spearheading change and not reproducing oppressive structures. Additionally, these embodied locations served as an archive of information that provided a roadmap for new possibilities and change. These queer Latina leaders drew upon their identities and knowledges to enact change through what I term as *bending, shifting, and recreating*.

Bending, shifting, and recreating is a composite of stealthy subversive strategies, complementing the aforementioned subversive form of identity negotiation, *going underground*. When *going underground*, queer Latina leaders often engaged in a form of hibernation in regard to overt expressions of their identity and actions as leaders, building defenses long term and avoiding attention in hostile political climates in the short term in order to accomplish smaller scale equity work in stealth without compromising their position of power. In these cases, queer Latina leaders engaged in the subversive acts of *bending, shifting, and recreating*, a variety of subversive acts that promoted changemaking undetected. These subversive acts involved

strategically crafting critical programming and classes in coded language to avoid detection by the institution, engaging in underground subaltern networks for information and support, bending policies through interpretation by enacting modified practices, and utilizing institutional tactics back at the institution through knowing policies in detail and in collecting data and metrics as collateral. By *going underground* and subsequently engaging in strategic acts of *bending, shifting, and recreating*, queer Latinas were able to successfully navigate higher education leadership, survive through their heterogendered and racialized positioning, and ultimately enact change in the face of heightened hostile institutional environments.

Within the literature, Gomez et al. (2015) delineates metaphors of women of color leaders moving through a "battlefield" in navigating higher education leadership and having to "play the game" in decision-making processes, which alludes to similar concepts of strategic subversion as found in this study in the theme of bending, shifting, and recreating. However, literature specifically addressing epistemological insights into transformative change from the standpoint of Latina leadership in education is nascent (Elenes, 2020; Espino, 2018; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Venegas-Garcia, 2013; Rivera and Frias, 2021). From a queer positionality, Rivera and Frias (2021) provide the first study on queer Latinas in higher education leadership, where the authors engage in reflection with one another, weaving their experiences in connection to Anzaldúan concepts. This study adds to this literature by engaging a variety of queer Latina leaders from varying institutions, geographic locations, and leadership roles and through an intersectional lens. These findings of *bending, shifting, and recreating* fit within the larger women of color literature on epistemological insights into leadership but provide a queered lens not yet present in the current literature on educational leadership. From these epistemological insights, future queer Latina leaders can gain clarity and insight to inform their own leadership

navigation of hostile institutional environments, and thereby, contribute to a reduction of burnout and harm, and thereby, retention of leaders.

Summary

This study illuminated the elasticity of identity negotiation—in some cases, fragmentation-inducing, in other cases, a strategic and subversive act. I highlighted aspects of strategic identity negotiation that served as a subversive disidentificatory act, *going underground*. *Going underground* involved strategic compromises that ensured that attention was not brought to their role or to their team, allowing them to hunker down and maintain their positional power and resources within these hostile institutional environments while waiting out the political storm—and still engage in changemaking in smaller, less detectable scales. In addition to *going underground,* queer Latina leaders experienced their racialized and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures through a transformative healing process, *alchemizing wounds*.

Given their aforementioned experiences with excessive identity negotiation and the resulting fragmentation and heartbreak in leading, queer Latina leaders held a series of wounds in relation to higher education. While the interplay of intersectional identity within oppressive hegemonic structures generates these intersectional wounds, these wounds served as the very location where transformation and healing could occur—to alchemize wounds into information and insight. Within these embodied locations, queer Latina leaders gained clarity on their commitments to spearheading change and not reproducing oppressive structures. The participants in this study demonstrated how existing within epistemological thresholds informed their uniquely advantageous view as leaders. Participants shared how they alchemized their

wounds and transformed negative experiences into self-awareness of their positional power, serving as a bridge for marginalized identities, and a commitment to equity and justice.

Queer Latina leaders draw upon their identities and knowledges to enact change through *bending, shifting, and recreating*. Participants shared that by navigating environments where they were constantly relegated as outsiders or met with hostility due to their identities, they had cultivated their ability to move with stealth and creativity within their environments, allowing them to bend, shift, and recreate rules and environments within their higher education institutions—intuitively forging new ways within places in between, where transformation and change is possible. These embodied locations serve as an archive of information that provides a roadmap for new possibilities and change.

Queer Latina Leadership Framework

The grounded theory of this study is derived from the reflections of queer Latina leaders on how their identities informed their leadership, particularly within the context of institutional environments resistant to change and hostile to their identities, the tensions they faced in such contexts, and ultimately how they strategized and survived within these contexts. Particularly salient and specific within the context of this grounded theory is its historical location during a period of national and global political hostility toward marginalized identities, particularly in educational institutions; this grounded theory emerges during a period of resurging white supremacist ideology within the political sphere. Participants engaged in identity negotiations and maneuvering that allowed for the evasion and subversion of institutional logics—moving in stealth within the institution and/or creating a subversive underground network—that were antagonistic and exclusionary to their identities, viewing their identities/bodies as hostile, radical, political threats, needing to be contained.

Such maneuvering required sustained strategies to maintain power in their roles to ultimately induce change. These strategies involved the situational identity negotiation of *going underground* to fly under the radar and maintain one's positional power; partaking in underground subaltern networks; and on a cellular level, *moving in stealth* by bending policies in untraceable, illegible ways. While these conditions sometimes led to burnout, heartbreak, and at times tipping points to exit toxic institutional environments, participants also reflected on their tremendous capacity to alchemize these wounds, and through that internal process, to move externally and stay committed to enacting change and utilizing their embodied knowledge as a roadmap to subvert.

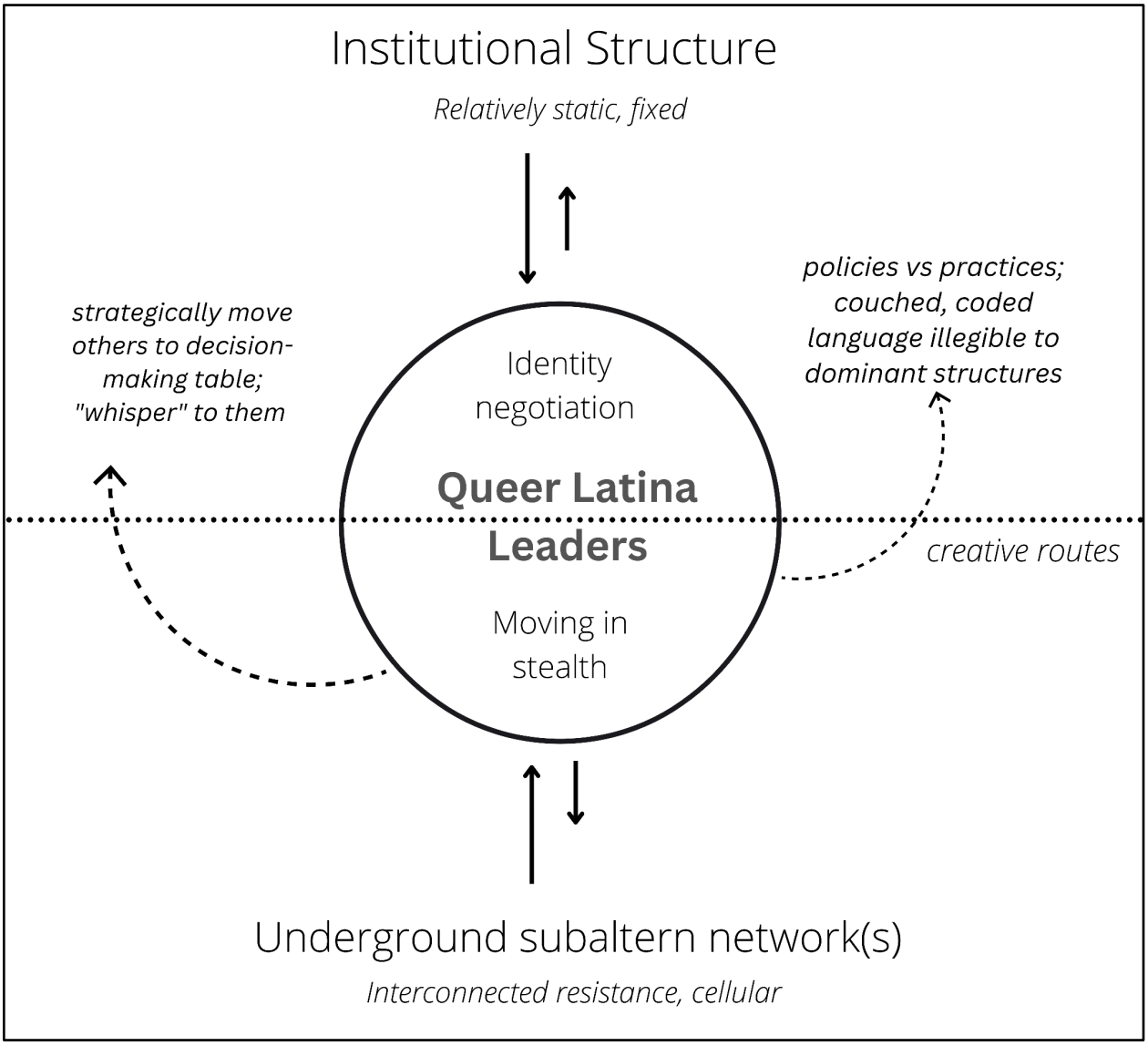
Important in the findings of this study is its challenge to the (mis)conceptions of identity as fixed (it can shift without breaking), as institutions impervious to change (subaltern networks and moving in stealth), and navigating systems in binary ways i.e., either opposition or assimilation (a third way is possible). Ultimately, this study provides a dynamic analysis of the relationship between agency and structure for actors within higher education. Figure 5.1 below models the framework Queer Latina Leadership in Higher Education. This model demonstrates the ways that queer Latina Leaders, as leaders with intersecting positionalities, perceived and responded to their hostile institutional environments, while also maintaining a vision to be enactors of change and resisting such power structures of oppression.

The first part of this model demonstrates *going underground*, a way in which identity negotiation can be performed and worked to strategically fly under the radar and maintain one's positional power, all while not breaking one's identity but merely shifting it temporarily. Second, the model includes the ways that changemaking and resisting can continue through both *underground subaltern networks* (that, which is illegible to the dominant) and on a cellular level,

by *moving in stealth* in the bending and shifting of policies and practices. Overall, this model exemplifies leadership outside of binary categories of oppositional or assimilationist.

Figure 5.1

Model of Queer Latina Leadership in Higher Education



Recommendations for Practice

One of the goals of this study was to reveal how queer Latinas experienced multiple intersectional forms of oppression within higher education leadership contexts. Through the reflections of participants in this study, the landscape of higher education leadership is revealed

as one that has become increasingly hostile to queer Latina leaders. For some of the participants, this increasingly hostile environment was cause for them to shift away from administrative leadership roles completely. Three participants that dually held an academic role and administrative role shared their frustration with administration and indicated their plan to shift entirely to academia. For other participants, they had experienced tipping points at some point in their career, in which they had to leave their institutional environment or were planning to do so in the near future largely due to fragmentation caused by environments that demanded too much compromise. Based on these findings of painful experiences, as well as findings on subversive acts serving as an alternative roadmap of survival for current and future leaders, the following sections describe recommendations for the larger profession of higher education administration, educational leadership program faculty, and aspiring and rising queer Latina leaders—graduate students, new professionals, mid-level professionals, and senior professionals—in the successful recruitment, preparation, and retention of queer Latina leaders in higher education.

Profession of Higher Education Administration

Professional associations of higher education leadership and practice are nodes of professional development, training, research, and mentorship for aspiring and current leaders. Historically, the field of higher education leadership and related training and programming have been framed within a structural functionalism and within proximity to whiteness (Alemán, 2009; Alemán & Alemán, 2010; Capper, 2019). While many of these national organizations[8] today have moved toward new programming, core professional competencies, and public

[8] These organizations include Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), formerly known as the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA); College Student Educators International (ACPA), formerly known as the American College Personnel Association (ACPA); and the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE)

acknowledgements around racial justice and equity, there is still much room for structural change within these associations.

Professional organizations must invest in preparing and supporting queer women of color leaders, including queer Latinas. I recommend that these organizations seek to center queer Latinas and queer women of color in their organization through dedicated resources—funding for programming and paid leadership positions—to the affinity groups that are doing the significant groundwork in already developing programming and leadership opportunities for marginalized identities. Through this investment in resources, the continual development of such programming is not only possible, but expandable and sustainable. The possibility for building a structured network of queer Latina leaders would be a critical institution that would allow for community building, advocacy, mentorship, and leadership development. Similarly, developing dedicated journals to queer women of color in higher education, special op-eds in other journals centering queer women of color and queer Latinas, and dedicated space within conference programming, would be possible with such resourcing. In sum, dedicated funding is how these associations can structurally build communities of support for queer women of color and queer Latinas.

As a secondary recommendation, institutions of higher learning should consider the creation of specified learning communities organized by and for queer Latinas and other queer women of color. In this way, functioning as a queer women of color commons, these institutional spaces may offer the place for cross departmental networking and for social systems of support to ground themselves. Further, it is recommended that institutions consider inter/cross-institutional collaboration to further bridge queer Latina and queer women of color collectives. It is possible queer Latinas and queer women of color leaders at neighboring and regional

institutions of higher education may face similar but also slightly different challenges. While sharing best practices would be another great outcome, the purpose of such inter/cross institutional collaboration would be to create a much larger commons and/or network of queer Latina and women of color collectives.

In this study, the importance of connecting to underground subaltern networks was critical to the survival of queer Latinas. Through the creation of more sustained national and regional networks and spaces dedicated to queer Latinas in higher education leadership, positive experiences through mentorship, advocacy, and support are made possible, as opposed to a journey that would otherwise be isolating, lonely, and confusing that ultimately results in burnout and disillusionment with higher education. In addition to structurally creating such a subaltern network, professional development workshops on strategies of persistence and resistance, particularly discussing the costs and benefits and strategies of identity negotiation—particularly, in ensuring that leaders are ready to face possible scenarios within hostile institutional environments and are aware of the aspects of fragmentation that can lead to burnout and challenges with mental, physical, and spiritual health. This is more realistic, as opposed to the singular narrative of overcoming and persisting within Latina leadership as a beginning and an end in wrestling with experiences of oppression.

Higher Education Administrators

In this study, queer Latina leaders shared negative experiences with higher education administrators. These experiences with higher education administrators were frequently described as hostile, unsupportive, discouraging, and even threatening. My first recommendation for higher education administrators is to engage in critical higher education leadership training

informed by critical university studies.[9] Further, another recommendation would be the distribution of reading materials that center critical topics such as queer of color critique within higher education spaces.

Second, I recommend that administrators work intentionally with staff holding multiple marginalized identities, such as queer Latinas. This includes intentional support on projects, creating an environment where creativity and input is fostered, and to ensure that critical projects that they are contributing to are in fact operationalized and folded into the programming, services, and culture of the university—that their energy and labors are not merely funneled into projects of performativity. Furthermore, ensuring that such projects are not merely delegated to one specific team, but instead dispersed and collaborated upon cross-departmentally and with different levels of leadership—a shared responsibility and shared labor for critical projects.

Educational Leadership Program Faculty

To address the issue of painful experiences that lead to burnout and attrition among queer Latina leaders in higher education, there are several interventions that educational leadership preparation programs can engage in. Part of recruiting and sustaining a pipeline of intersectional leaders, such as queer Latinas, will require educational leadership curriculum to institute scholarship centering the knowledges of these identities. Curriculum should draw on theoretical perspectives within the literature to illustrate connections between individual leaders' social identities and their approaches to leadership that are oriented toward social justice. By centering these identities and knowledges, recruitment, and retention in educational leadership programs, as well as entry into the career pathway of educational leadership, will be more successful. As students identify themselves within the curriculum of leadership, not only are they more likely to

[9] For example, the works of scholars Sara Ahmed (*On being included*, 2012; *Complaint!*, 2021) and Harney and Moten (*Fugitive planning and Black study*, 2004)

see themselves as leaders, but they will also have roadmaps of knowledge to guide and reinforce them in their journey through such scholarship.

In addition to including scholarship that centers the knowledges of queer women of color and queer Latinas in higher education leadership, connect aspiring leaders with mentors and faculty with similar identity backgrounds is critically important. In this study, participants noted the importance of connecting to underground subaltern networks. Educational leadership programs should consider ways to start connecting leaders in their programs to subaltern networks of other intersectional leaders, including hiring intersectional leaders as faculty and inviting guest lecturers. In this study, participants noted that their leadership journey was pronouncedly isolating, lonely, and they had to figure out things along the way that often lead to their burnout and disillusionment with higher education.

In addition to hiring intersectional faculty and garnering a network of such leaders to connect students to, educational leadership programs would benefit from including workshops on strategies of persistence and resistance. These workshops would ideally discuss the costs and benefits and strategies of identity negotiation—particularly, in ensuring that leaders are ready to face possible scenarios within hostile institutional environments and are aware of the aspects of fragmentation that can lead to burnout and challenges with mental, physical, and spiritual health. In that same vein, it would be helpful for such programs to ensure that students in these programs obtain a sponsor or mentor that can serve as champions to help address these unique scenarios of identity negotiation throughout critical moments of their career.

In this study, participants noted that their leadership journey was pronouncedly isolating, lonely, and they had to figure out things along the way that often lead to their burnout and disillusionment with higher education. Hiring faculty from intersectional identities, garnering a

network of such leaders to connect students to, incorporating intersectional identity scholarship within the curriculum, and including workshops on strategies of persistence and resistance is critical to the success of aspiring queer Latina leaders. Through these beginning interventions, educational leader preparation programs can be transformed to better equip queer Latina leaders and other queer women of color leaders.

Aspiring and Advancing Leaders

For aspiring leaders in graduate school and current leaders advancing in their careers, some of the questions arising from this study became: (a) What does sustainable leadership/integration/care/wellness look like for queer Latinas in higher education; (b) are Latinx networks and/or queer networks sufficient spaces of connection; and (c) do we need to create our own networks and spaces—and should that onus be on ourselves? Ultimately, these questions undergird important concerns: Where are the dedicated spaces of support for queer Latinas and queer women of color, and how can such spaces potentially assist queer Latinas higher education toward more sustainable leadership/integration/wellness?

I believe that these dedicated spaces or networks are necessary and critical to the mentorship and success of queer Latina leaders, both present and future. The more that queer Latina leaders can connect with one another, whether at the same career stage, different career stages for advice and for mentorship, or a larger generative and healing space to work through problems—find such safety and kinship will be critical. I call upon professional associations and educational leadership programs to consider ways that they can offer structural and financial support to ensure that this is possible. Oftentimes, placing the burden on individuals to create such networks adds to the burnout and exhaustion already experienced. Furthermore, developing such spaces and networks should be built in mind of not only being a place of comfort for those

already struggling and burned out, but to also be a proactive space that prevents that from happening in the first place through care, mentorship, and preparation.

Ultimately, queer Latina leaders in higher education need to support one another, actively connect, and ensure one another's success. I leave aspiring and advancing leaders with the following selected advice from participants. Many shared the importance of centering wellness, mental health, and protecting your energy and spirit through a variety of strategies—therapy, trusted inner circles of support, not letting your work be your identity, and being selective of your time and energy is being expended to others. Other participants shared the importance of knowing yourself well enough in order to know your limits—to be able to strategically assess which battles to pick and to discern which feedback is worth considering—in order to avoid negative self-talk or becoming engrossed in people's perceptions. On this ending note, Laura shared the following advice for other queer Latina leaders,

> Don't let them, don't even give them a little bit of space to conquer your mind, or your inner sense of self, or your self-definitions of who you are...Don't let them create doubt in you. Keep your mind, your psyche, your soul intact. Because that's where the real wounding happens. The rest, it hurts, and sometimes it stays, and obviously each circumstance is different, but it's the internal wounding that can hurt you severely, and you can lose yourself and become someone else and not even realize it...Remember that every single queer Latina is part of an inheritance, of a much larger kinship across history and crossing bloodlines—you have a superpower.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include participant recruitment. Queer Latina leaders that are open with their sexual orientation are likely more connected to related identity networks, and

therefore, individuals that may be more isolated or not out are narratives that are not included in this study. This study was also limited in terms of gender identity; no responses were received from participants explicitly identifying as transgender women. Transgender women, especially transgender women of color, such as transgender Latinas, experience a vastly different level of discrimination and violence. This study also limited the representation of identities outside the gender binary, such as gender nonconforming and Two Spirit people. Moreover, studies of bisexual women would posit a different experience, perhaps one of liminality within the queer community, as well as some aspects of assumed heterosexuality and the navigations of those granted privileges.

No scholarship can capture all the particularity of living as queer Latina. For these reasons, a study with more participants, and in particular, inclusion of more participants who identify as Afro-Latina, or as having a biracial Latina identity may be able to speak to dimensions of queer Latina and higher education life that my project can only gesture towards but not dive into. Aside from a move to further diversify my participants on the dimension of race and racial identification, this study would read differently if it centered matters of citizenship and ability. On matters of race, colorism within the Latina queer community and how white-passing or darker skinned Latinas make sense and navigate higher education leadership would also add more richness to a project like this one.

This project did not engage in mapping the ways in which sexuality and race come to inform and form one another and how participants navigate such racialized sexualities or racial identities that are sexualized. These intersections would have taken the project elsewhere but to a noteworthy and critical space, nonetheless. Due to the scope of this study and exploratory nature, other limitations include its lesser emphasis on how race and queer identities intersect in

leadership, especially within the realms of identity saliency and primary identity. Additionally, given that this study more narrowly focuses on one identity group, rather than queer women of color as a whole, there are limitations to applying and conceptualizing a more common phenomenon of identity and leadership, such as including Asian queer women, Black queer women, Native American queer women, and Multiracial queer women.

On a structural note, as is the case with most qualitative studies, this project could have benefited from additional interviews to further ground themes. Moreover, these interviews were conducted digitally through zoom and perhaps a face-to-face interview would have allowed for a different affective space to be created with participants.

Future Directions

Beyond the study of queer Latina leaders in the scope of this study, future studies should consider other intersections of identity, including but not limited to citizenship status, age, parental status. From the emerging categories of this study, ageism against younger queer Latina professionals was a significant pattern, but it was not included in the study as it was outside of the scope of this study; this topic is understudied and worth exploring given the profound effect and negative toll it has on the spirit of brilliant, talented emerging leaders holding intersectional identities. Additionally, the majority of participants in this study worked at R1 and R2 universities; it is important that future studies focus on the perspectives of leaders at public universities outside of R1 and R2 status, which serve a vast majority of marginalized and Latina/x/o students, are often under resourced, and therefore, may potentially pose a different leadership perspective and experience.

Lastly, while not included in this study, findings indicate a need for further studies around higher education leadership and gender expression. Beyond the scope of this study,

participants shared that gender expression was a pronounced factor in how they were perceived and therefore challenges in their leadership capacity. Interestingly, this was the case for both feminine presenting and masculine presenting participants alike; that through the lens of queerness, whether being feminine presenting or masculine presenting, prevented participants from a range of not being taken seriously, being deemed unintelligent, and feared and avoided altogether.

Beyond the study of queer Latina leaders in the scope of this study, future studies should consider other intersections of identity. From the emerging categories of this study, ageism against younger queer Latina professionals was a significant pattern, but it was not included in the study as it was outside of the scope of this study; this topic is understudied and worth exploring given the profound effect and negative toll it has on the spirit of brilliant, talented emerging leaders holding intersectional identities. Additionally, the majority of participants in this study worked at R1 and R2 universities; it is important that future studies focus on the perspectives of leaders at public universities outside of R1 and R2 status, which serve a vast majority of marginalized and Latina/x/o students, are often under resourced, and therefore, may potentially pose a different leadership perspective and experience.

Conclusion

The findings of this study illustrate the tensions queer Latina leaders faced in hostile institutional environments—structures that were resistant to change, reluctant to equity policy and programming, and distrustful of critical leaders with intersectional identities—and ultimately how they strategized and survived within these contexts. The two thematic concepts of *going underground* and *bending, shifting, recreating* were the major strategies of enacting change within hostile institutional settings detailed in this study, which provided the foundation for a

queer Latina leadership framework. I recommend that educational leadership programs engage in creating learning environments that not only reflect intersectional identities such as queer Latina leaders through scholarship in the curriculum, but to consider hiring intersectional faculty and connecting students to subaltern networks of intersectional leaders, and to engage students in workshops that involve preparation for the mental, spiritual, and physical challenges in identity negotiation when navigating leadership in hostile institutions. I recommend for future research to consider expanding upon the intersectional identity axes included in studies and institutional representation from non-R1 and non-R2 public universities, particularly at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs).

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APPENDIX A: OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Table A1

Overview of Literature Review on Women of Color Leaders in Higher Education

Major Themes	Subthemes	Article Author(s)
Racism, Sexism, & Heterosexism	Overworked/Work Life Balance Challenge	Breeden (2021); Gamble & Turner (2015); Garcia (2020); Rivera and Frias (2021); Townsend (2020)
	Stereotype Threat/Over Scrutinized	Breeden (2021); Davis & Maldonado (2015); Hannum et al. (2015); Lewis & Miller (2018); Mena (2016); Nixon (2017); Oikelome (2017); Pierce (2020); Sánchez et al. (2020); Townsend (2020); West (2015)
	Microaggressions/Ignored /Dismissed/Undermined	Bailey & Miller (2016); Flores Carmona & Rosenberg (2021); Glover (2017); Lewis (2016); Nixon (2017); Rivera & Frias (2021); Sánchez et al. (2020); Townsend (2020); West (2015)
	Isolation	Bailey & Miller (2016); Davis & Maldonado (2015); Glover (2017); Rivera & Frias (2021); Mena (2016); Nixon (2017)
Epistemic Strength	Change Agents/Calling to Question Inequities	Davis & Maldonado (2015); Glover (2017); Gomez et al. (2015); Lewis & Miller (2018); Nixon (2017); Patton & Haynes (2018); Rivera & Frias (2021); Venegas-Garcia (2013)
	Tool of Connection/Solidarity	Elenes (2020); Espino (2018); Rivera and Frias (2021)

Note. This table provides an overview of the major themes, subthemes, and associated authors in the exhaustive literature review in Chapter 2 on the experiences of women of color leaders in higher education. Authors identified with an underline are those that covered the experiences of queer women of color specifically.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Subject: Information about Study on Queer Latina Leaders in Higher Education

Hello:

My name is Monica Santander, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at California State Polytechnic University. This project seeks to understand how queer Latina identity informs higher educational leadership. Specifically of interest is how queer Latina higher educational leaders experience their racial and heterogendered positioning within higher education structures and how this shapes the everyday experiences of their work. Ultimately, this intersectional grounded theory project aims to challenge and disrupt leadership frameworks and conceptualizations that analyze only a single-axis or two-axes of identity. The goal of this study is to contribute nuance to the existing literature related to how experiences of institutional racism and heterosexism, the epistemology of racialized and hetero/gendered identities, and a resulting critical consciousness may influence the practices of multiply marginalized leaders within higher education administration.

All that is required of you would be participation in two one-on-one interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. It is my hope that this research influences how educational leadership programs teach educational leadership frameworks and support and prepare future queer Latina leaders.

Please note that in order to participate in this study, you must fit the following criteria:

- You must identify under the umbrella of queer, which may include but is not limited to queer, lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual
- You must identify as Latina or Chicana
- You must currently hold a leadership role (administrative leadership, departmental leadership, committee leadership) position at an institution of higher education
- You must be available for two 60-minute interviews

If you are interested in participating, please email Monica Santander at msantander@cpp.edu.

The Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved for conduct this research involving human subjects under protocol IRB 22-82.

Should you choose to take part in this project, you have the option to stop your participation at any time. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I have also listed the contact information of my advisor, Dr. José Aguilar-Hernández. Thank you in advance for your assistance with my research.

Monica Santander Doctoral Candidate Department of Educational Leadership California State Polytechnic University, Pomona msantander@cpp.edu	**Dr. José Aguilar-Hernández** Associate Professor Department of Educational Leadership California State Polytechnic University, Pomona jhernandez@cpp.edu

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Cal Poly Pomona University Consent to Participate in Research

You are being invited to participate in a research study, which the Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved for conduct by the investigators named here. This form is designed to provide you - as a human subject/participant - with information about this study. The investigator or his/her representative will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. You are entitled to an Experimental Research Subject's Bill of Rights and a copy of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject or participant, complaints about the informed consent process of this research study or experience an adverse event (something goes wrong), please contact the Research Compliance Office within Cal Poly Pomona's Office of Research at 909.869.4215. More information is available at the IRB website, http://www.cpp.edu/~research/irb/index.shtml

Queer Latina Leadership: An Intersectional Study on Practices, Experiences, and Negotiations in Higher Education

Primary Investigator: Monica Santander
Faculty Advisor: Dr. José Aguilar-Hernández
IRB protocol# 2282

Voluntary Status: You have met the requirements for enrollment as a volunteer in a research study conducted by the researchers listed above. You are now being invited to participate in this study. Before you can make your decision, you will need to know what the study is about, the possible risks and benefits of being in this study, and what you will have to do in this study. The research team will discuss with you the details, and they will provide you this consent form to read. You may also decide to discuss it with your family and/or friends. Some of the language may be difficult to understand and if this is the case, please ask the researcher and/or the research team for an explanation. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw any time without penalty and there will be no loss of any benefits to which you are entitled.

Purpose: The Primary Investigator states: "In my doctoral program at Cal Poly Pomona, I am conducting a study to understand how queer Latina identity informs higher educational leadership."

Procedures: You will be asked a few questions regarding demographic information and a biographical sketch of your leadership role to gain perspective on your personal and professional identities. You will also be asked interview questions that will focus on identity and leadership, specifically on your journey into higher education and leadership, how your identities may shape and influence leadership, and to describe an instance of leadership informed by your identity.
After the raw data has been collected, all names will be removed. Your name will be assigned a code number. Only the code number will be left as identifiers.

Commitment and Compensation: Your total participation in the study will take two interview sessions, which will each last approximately 60 minutes. You will not receive financial compensation for participation in the study.

Possible Risks and Benefits: It is expected that participation in this study will provide you with no more than minimal risk or discomfort, which means that you should not experience any more difficulty than what would occur in your normal daily life. However, there is always the chance of an unexpected risk. The foreseeable risks in this study include an accidental disclosure of your private information, or discomfort by answering questions that are embarrassing. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed, please tell the researcher and they will ask you whether you wish to continue. You can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
Direct benefits from participating in this study include having your voice represented and your leadership story heard. Additionally, your participation is intended to add to the knowledge about the hiring of and

valuing of higher education leaders of intersectional identities; how educational leadership programs are taught when both preparing all leaders within the curriculum, as well as specifically validating, affirming, attracting, and retaining leaders from multiple marginalized identities.

Confidentiality and Consent: The investigator involved with the study will not reveal the personal information which they collect about you. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study -- and that can be identified with you -- will remain private and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential by removing your name and all identifiers. Once the project is completed, all interview materials will be destroyed. Do be aware that the results, in either an anonymous or a summarized format, will likely be published or presented at conferences.

New Information: During the course of this study, the investigators may discover information that could be important to you. They will notify you as soon as possible when such information becomes available.

Consent to Participate: I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

_____

Printed name of participant Signature Date:

_____

Signature of primary investigator Date:

Consent to Audio Recording: I consent to be audio recorded during the interview. Signing here means that you agree to be audio or video recorded.

_____

Printed name of participant Signature Date:

_____

Signature of primary investigator Date:

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview 1

Length: 60 minutes

This interview will be a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. I will be audio recording this interview, as well as taking brief notes solely for better digestion of the information. Before we start, I want to note that we can always stop at any point. And, of course, if you need to take a break, we can briefly pause the interview and I will pause the recording. A little bit about me: [*share pronouns, how I identify, my background in higher education, and where I am located*]. Do you have any questions for me before we start? [*pause*]. I'm going to first start with two background questions to situate ourselves, which will take us about five minutes. If you would additionally like to send me a resume or CV after the interview, that is also welcome and encouraged, but certainly not required. Before we start, I want to confirm that you consent to an audio recording of this interview and note that we can always stop at any point.

<u>Biographical Sketch</u>

1. Can you tell me about your higher education leadership background?
    a. For example, current role(s), past previous roles, number of years, institution location, type of institution, involvement in professional organizations?
2. Given the nature of this study, you identify within the general category of queer Latina or Chicana. Is there anything else you would like to add, clarify, or share regarding your identities that you feel is important to note? Would you care to share specific identities? Is there any other way you self-identify?

The next section will involve how leadership and identity interact. This will last for approximately 45 minutes, involving a total of five major questions.

<u>Identity and Leadership</u>

1. Referring to the previous question, how have these identities influenced your work in colleges and universities?
    a. Which of these identities have been most prominent in defining you as a person and as a leader?
    b. How have they shown up for you in different spaces?
2. Circling back to what you shared with me about your leadership background/journey:
    a. What led you to your current position or higher education leadership in general? Who or what influenced your decision to pursue leadership?
    b. What obstacles/barriers have you encountered on your journey in relation to your identity?

3. How, if at all, would you say that your identity as a queer Latina/Chicana influences and informs your experience as a leader?

    a. How, if at all, does your identity inform your leadership style, philosophy, and approach? How would you describe your leadership style/philosophy/approach?

    b. Can you describe a time when these identities were a factor in your leadership? Do you have instances that exemplify leadership informed by your identity?

4. How, if at all, do you feel your leadership approach is different from dominant leadership approaches?

5. Are there any questions you believe I also should have asked, given the description of my study or your role on campus? Anything else you would like to add/ask?

This concludes our first interview. In the next interview we will dive deeper into your experiences navigating the institution and your leadership identity. The second interview will build upon this first interview accomplished here today. I will provide you with the transcription and my preliminary analysis to ensure my understanding reflects what you intend. Thank you for taking the time, and I look forward to our second interview.

Interview 2

Length: 60 minutes

This second interview will last for approximately 60 minutes, consisting of a total of eight major questions on your experiences navigating your institution(s). Before we start, I want to restate that we can always stop and/or pause at any point. Before we start, I want to confirm that you consent to an audio recording of this interview and note that we can always stop at any point. [*pause*].

In the previous Interview, you discussed…[*insert*]. Is there anything you would like to add from our previous conversation before we get started with Interview 2? [*pause*].

I will go ahead and start asking the interview questions if you are ready.

<u>Navigating the Institution</u>

1. Can you talk about any changes—policies, initiatives, programming, or practices—you have implemented in your current role or in a previous role?

2. Have there been any obstacles or barriers that you have encountered throughout your higher education leadership experience, either in relation to your identity and/or in enacting transformative leadership?
    a. If so, can you share any experiences?
        i. How did you respond to such barriers?
    b. Have there been any differences in your experience of obstacles when looking across roles you have held, i.e. up the ladder, or across institutions you have worked at?

    c. What about experiences of support?

3. When and where have you encountered the greatest resistance in your leadership experience?
    a. What are reasons for this resistance?
    b. What important lessons have you learned from these encounters with resistance?

4. Tell me about a time you felt the need to compromise your values, principles, or identities, if at all.
    a. Have you ever had an instance in which you were expected or felt compelled to separate or downplay aspects of your identity? Can you describe that?

5. When a member of a non-dominant/non normative group leads, such as a queer Latina, do you feel that changes anything in terms of hope for institutional change, such as in terms of power dynamics, climate, or inclusivity?

6. What do you think makes queer Latina leadership unique from, say, queer leadership, Latinx leadership, or women leadership, or other singular frames?
    a. What are, in your opinion, the contributions queer Latinas have to offer to the study of leadership in higher education?

7. What advice would you give to a queer Latina considering a leadership position in higher education?
    a. What leadership skills are needed to be a successful queer Latina higher education leader?
    b. What lessons would you offer to queer Latinas aspiring to higher education leadership?

8. Is there is anything you think I should know in understanding how a queer Latina identity informs leadership approaches?
    a. Is there anything else you would like to add?

This concludes our final interview. I will once again provide you with the transcription and my preliminary analysis to ensure my understanding reflects what you intend. If you have a preferred pseudonym/alias you would like, please let me know now or later via email. And of course, we will keep in touch, and I will let you know how the study progresses.