"Leadership is behaving and acting like a leader": A narrative exploration of the life stories of three Latino leaders in healthcare

Kevin L. Flores
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, kflores@stez.org

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/aglecdiss

Part of the Race and Ethnicity Commons, and the Sociology of Culture Commons

Flores, Kevin L., ""Leadership is behaving and acting like a leader": A narrative exploration of the life stories of three Latino leaders in healthcare" (2012). Theses, Dissertations, & Student Scholarship: Agricultural Leadership, Education & Communication Department. 92. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/aglecdiss/92

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Agricultural Leadership, Education & Communication Department at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, & Student Scholarship: Agricultural Leadership, Education & Communication Department by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
“LEADERSHIP IS BEHAVING AND ACTING LIKE A LEADER”:
A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE LIFE STORIES OF
THREE LATINO LEADERS IN HEALTHCARE

By

Kevin L. Flores

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Human Sciences (Leadership Studies)

Under the Supervision of Professor Gina S. Matkin

Lincoln, Nebraska
December, 2012
“LEADERSHIP IS BEHAVING AND ACTING LIKE A LEADER”:
A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE LIFE STORIES OF
THREE LATINO LEADERS IN HEALTHCARE

Kevin L. Flores, Ph.D.
University of Nebraska, 2012

Advisor: Gina S. Matkin

There is a dearth of Latino leaders holding executive positions in healthcare. The purpose of this study was to provide a privileged platform for the voice of Latino leaders in healthcare who, by definition, emanated from a marginalized population. This study began with the assumption that the stories of Latino leaders were different than leaders of the majority population due to their ethnicity. Latino critical theory asserts that concepts like leadership need to be viewed through an ethnic lens. The overarching question that guided this study was: What do the stories of three Latino leaders reveal about their development as leaders in the healthcare industry? Leaders were defined as those in vice president or chief executive officer positions. Homogeneous sampling was used to identify three Latino leaders located in the Midwest. One worked for a government hospital, one worked for an academic hospital, and one worked for a free-standing private hospital.

Narrative methodology was utilized to provide space for their stories through extensive interviewing. The participants were asked to share their stories guided by a general set of questions. This process allowed the participants to detail aspects of their lives they deemed significant. The process infused the participants lives with humanness
as they shared their stories replete with joy, sorrow, shame, hardship, love, discrimination, achievement, and ultimately, success.

Through the sharing of their stories, there were meanings common to all of the stories that allow one to conceptually transfer some of these ideas into themes. The broad themes that emerged were educación, familismo, “This White man’s world,” “Doing something more,” and “Make it happen.” Their stories illustrated how complex leadership is and the salience of ethnicity on this process. Their stories resonated with an ethnic pathos not experienced by the majority population.
DISSERTATION TITLE

"LEADERSHIP IS BEHAVING AND ACTING LIKE A LEADER": A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE LIFE STORIES OF THREE LATINO LEADERS IN HEALTHCARE

BY
Kevin L. Flores

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Approved

Gina Matkin
Typed Name

Richard Torraco
Typed Name

Mark Burbach
Typed Name

Amy Boren-Alpizar
Typed Name

Type Name Here
Typed Name

Type Name Here
Typed Name

Date
Nov 15, 2012

Nov 15, 2012

11-15-12

15 Nov 2012
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have finally come to the realization that this part of my journey is ending while I stand at the threshold of a new chapter. The gravity of the situation causes me to realize I cannot possibly capture five years of support in a few paragraphs. I trust those not mentioned by name will know their contribution, however small, was neither unnoticed nor unappreciated.

I am deeply in awe of my God who sustained me through five years of school, while simultaneously allowing me to attend to work, family, and church. I am also indebted to several people who supported me through this journey. First and foremost are the three incredible men who allowed me to step into their lives and share their stories. I will forever be grateful for their generosity and openness. I count it a privilege to be numbered among the greater Latino family as a result of spending time with them.

I also wish to thank my committee, especially Dr. Matkin, the chair of my committee, for her tireless oversight, consistently upbeat demeanor, and constant support through the entire process. In addition, I wish to thank the rest of my committee—Dr. Torraco, Dr. Burbach, and Dr. Boren-Alpizar—for their diligence and guidance. It was a privilege to work with educators who value the cause of higher education on such a personal level.

I want to thank the countless other professors and peers I met along the way who added to the richness of my educational experience. The community of scholars in the ALEC department is to be commended for their positive and supportive attitudes. In particular, Carmen Zafft and Heather Wherry, my dissertation peeps. Thanks for all your guidance and humorous perspectives, and most importantly, for your positive
encouragement. You were always there to motivate me to move forward when the road
became steep. I must also thank my employer and my boss, Jeanette, for allowing me a
flexible schedule to accommodate classes.

Lastly, but certainly not least, none of this would have been possible without the
love and support of my family, not only my immediate family, but my extended family. I
can clearly remember the day we had the *family meeting* where I shared this crazy idea of
going back to school. Each one of you suggested this was a path I should follow. You
lived with my neurotic behavior throughout the entire process and bore it with patience
and humor. Jared, Aaron, and Camerine, know that each one of you has been
individually gifted for a greater purpose. Always dream big and seek to fulfill your
purpose. Thank each of you for your love, support, and understanding. To the love of
my life, Stacy, you picked me up so many times along this journey; this degree belongs to
you as much as it does to me. You were my constant pillar of strength and optimism.
You complete me in all the areas I am deficient. Together we make a pretty good team. I
look forward to growing old together with you!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................1
  Focus of the Study .................................................................................................9
  Purpose of the Study ...........................................................................................13
  Research Questions .............................................................................................16
  Method ..................................................................................................................17
    Sample ...............................................................................................................18
    Data Collection Procedures ..............................................................................18
    Assumptions .......................................................................................................20
    Delimitations ......................................................................................................20
    Limitations of the Study ....................................................................................21
    Definition of Terms ...........................................................................................21
    Significance of the Study ..................................................................................25

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW** .................................................................28
  Critical Race Theory .............................................................................................31
  Historical Leadership Overview .........................................................................39
  Leadership from a Minority Perspective ..............................................................47
  Leadership in Healthcare .....................................................................................53

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY** ....................................................................58
  Narrative Research ..............................................................................................59
  Role of the Researcher .........................................................................................68
  Sampling ...............................................................................................................69
  Research Participants ..........................................................................................70
  Reciprocity ..........................................................................................................70
  Data Collection ....................................................................................................72
  Data Analysis .......................................................................................................76
  Verification of Data ..............................................................................................77
  Ethical Considerations .........................................................................................80

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE STORIES** ...........................................................................82
  Carlos’ Story .........................................................................................................82
    Introduction ........................................................................................................82
    First Impressions ...............................................................................................83
    From Mexico to the United States: Early Life in a New Country ....................86
    Gaining Awareness Through Grade School Years .......................................92
    Navigating the Vagaries of High School ..........................................................95
    Finding a Personal Calling Through the College Years ................................100
    Developing a Greater Sense of Self in the Workplace ..................................104
    Finding a Leadership Rhythm ........................................................................114
  Alberto’s Story .....................................................................................................123
    The Hospital ......................................................................................................123
    First Impressions ..............................................................................................124
| Alberto’s Formative Early Years                          | 126 |
| Trying to Find Meaning in High School                   | 134 |
| How the Military Changed My Perspective on Life         | 137 |
| Transitioning to the Civilian Sector                    | 143 |
| Navigating Society as an Ethnic Minority                | 148 |
| Developing a Leadership Philosophy                      | 156 |
| Luis’ Story                                            | 165 |
| The Hospital                                           | 165 |
| First Impressions                                      | 167 |
| Early Life in Puerto Rico                               | 169 |
| Surviving Alone in a New Land                           | 176 |
| Struggling to Make it Through College                   | 181 |
| Facing Challenges in the Workforce                      | 185 |
| Facing the Reality of Prejudice                         | 191 |
| The Many Facets of Leadership                           | 198 |

| CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION                                | 214 |
| Educación                                               | 218 |
| Education                                               | 218 |
| Challenges Encountered                                  | 221 |
| Personal Drive                                          | 224 |
| Parental Support                                        | 225 |
| Valuing of Education                                    | 226 |
| Summary                                                 | 229 |
| Familismo                                               | 229 |
| Family                                                  | 229 |
| Religious Grounding                                     | 235 |
| The Impact of Fathers                                    | 236 |
| The Impact of Mothers                                    | 238 |
| Extended Family                                         | 239 |
| Summary                                                 | 240 |
| “Doing Something More”                                   | 241 |
| Not Being Satisfied with Status Quo                      | 241 |
| Needing a New Challenge                                  | 247 |
| Creating Impact                                         | 249 |
| Summary                                                 | 250 |
| “This White Man’s World”                                | 250 |
| Encountering Societal Prejudices                        | 251 |
| Seeking Validation                                      | 255 |
| Acceptance                                              | 257 |
| Intrarace Conflict                                      | 259 |
| Summary                                                 | 260 |
| “Make it Happen”                                        | 261 |
| Confidence                                              | 262 |
| High Expectations                                       | 263 |
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of the Five Traditions in Qualitative Research ............217
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The problems signified by prejudice and racism in the United States are not new, not simple, and certainly not gone. Much is different . . . yet one thing remains constant: Race is a subject of emotional, volatile, vexing, and frustrating dimension in this society. It seems that no matter how much things change, the problem of race remains. –James M. Jones

With a history of ethnocentric politics and policies, it is clear that racism has shaped the landscape of society, and concomitantly, organizational cultures in the United States for centuries. Racism has existed since the first settlers stepped foot on this continent, prior to the importation of Africans, and suggested enslaving the natives to perform mundane tasks (Wilkins, 2004). Racial and ethnic minorities continue to struggle for equality as they face an uphill climb in this country based on long-held stereotypes as “racial injustice . . . is deeply entrenched in the very foundations—the everyday thought processes, practices, and institutions—of U.S. society” (Trevino, Harris, & Wallace, 2008, p. 7). It is an inescapable component of the nation we inhabit. As such, one scholar has advocated “that any analysis of the complex social relations in the United States must acknowledge the centrality of racism” (Gonzales, 2004, p. 140) and yet there has been scant attention paid in the field of leadership recognizing or addressing injustice from the perspective of race (Espinoza & Harris, 1997).

What is necessary is a reevaluation of the current social system from a different perspective. This reevaluation should examine the social structures based on race and ethnicity that serve to disempower some groups. By definition, this necessarily becomes a political agenda advocating for change—change that emanates from a collaborative process where those that are marginalized help craft the solution. This approach falls
within the scope of an advocacy worldview (Creswell, 2009). As will be articulated throughout this study, without changing inputs to the current system, outcomes are likely to remain unchanged. The issue of race must be directly addressed in leadership research to allow for a more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

Winant (2000) defined race “as a concept that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies” (p. 172). He articulated that although the distinction is made along observable physical characteristics, it is always driven by social and historical processes. “Race . . . is an ideological position one holds as well as a social position one occupies” (Guinier & Torres, 2002, p. 16). Although the conceptions of race may vary, they all have in common an inherent psychological hierarchy that places one group in a superior position and necessarily places others in inferior positions (Winant, 2000). The insidious nature of racism sustains these positions of power while simultaneously camouflaging these positions (Guinier & Torres, 2002). Human interaction is then guided by these phenotypical epistemologies as individuals form outlooks, or worldviews, based on these assumptions which impact interactions with others.

Leadership is enacted through the social interactions of individuals; therefore, exploring any aspect of leadership must take into account the social contextual factors in existence (Conger, 1998; Ospina, 2004). As Burns (1978) said, “We must see power—and leadership—as not things but as relationships” (p. 11). He clearly understood leadership was more than traits and attributes. Leadership from this viewpoint focuses on the unique humanity one brings to the relationship. Contained within this humanity are
biases, prejudices, and preconceived ideas of others based on how one categorizes others. The way people are categorized then impacts relationships.

Human characteristics can be divided into those attributes over which one has control and those which are beyond one’s control. Behaviors and thoughts are things that can be controlled. Salient characteristics over which individuals have no control (without major medical interventions) include race, ethnicity, and gender. As an inherent, immutable part of the person, the characteristics of race and ethnicity impact social interactions at the conscious and unconscious levels. Individuals cannot change the nature of their ethnic or racial backgrounds, although some may attempt to hide them, as these identities are inseparable from the person. Individuals then shoulder the stereotypes, both positive and negative, including the privileges and persecutions associated with certain cultural and physical characteristics. How leadership is perceived and enacted may necessarily be impacted by a person’s race or ethnicity.

Teagarden (2007) proposes the challenges of tomorrow will be more about cultural understanding than about technical aspects of leadership. This type of understanding moves beyond perceiving leadership as a quantitative rubric, or as “things” suggested by Burns (1978), that can be expressed as a linear equation. It compels individuals to consider unseen forces operant in social interactions. It also requires the suspension of prior biases, which can serve as discursive impediments to full appreciation of difference. This vein of leadership philosophy differs from historical perspectives.

Leadership as a concept has received attention as far back as the sixth century in the writings of Lao Tzu (Mitchell, 1988). Since then there has been extensive examination of the subject. The nature and focus of scholarly leadership research has
evolved through the years. Early research developed theories based on the “great man” paradigm (Carlyle, 1902; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), which postulated that leadership traits were dispositional in nature. However, leadership has proven to be more mercurial in complexion. Some of the more prominent scholarly avenues of research have focused on traits, skills, style, situations, and contingency theory (Northouse, 2007; Wren 1995). These paradigms were subsequently replaced by more integrative theories and emerging frameworks such as servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), leadership from a sense-making perspective (Weick, 1995), transformational leadership (Bass, 1996), authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), developmental theories of leadership (McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor, & Baker, 2006), holistic leadership (Quatro, Waldman, & Galvin, 2007), and emotional leadership (Riggio & Lee, 2007). All of these theories have ethical, moral, or reflective components that were lacking in early permutations of leadership theory.

Connoted in much of this historical research is an implicit assumption about the homogeneity of leaders. Many theories are predicated on a Western conception of leadership based on the historical White-male-as-leader construct (Antonakis, et al., 2004; Hofstede, 1993; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Other research sought to learn if there were commonalities among diffident societies. A large group of researchers conducted a comprehensive study of world societies under the auspices of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project, seeking to study the nuances of culture on leadership in different societies (Javidian, House, & Dorfman, 2004). Interestingly, they found the universality of certain leadership behaviors across cultures. Bass (1996) had also postulated that certain leadership attributes had universal
applications regardless of the culture. There did not appear to be space for consideration of leadership from a more granular racial or ethnic perspective. This view was reinforced by the overwhelming number of Whites in leadership positions and the lack of research challenging the dominant paradigm.

Current data illustrate the continued marginalization of minorities by highlighting the dearth of minorities in leadership positions in the United States workforce. Less than one in five leaders is a racial and ethnic minority, while this same cohort accounts for approximately one in three workers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). This disparity is more apparent as one examines the healthcare executive ranks. According to the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE, 2010), ethnic and racial minorities only account for 5.52% of all hospital chief executive officers (CEOs). Of this number only 2.82% are categorized as Latino. This is increasingly important as the number of individuals in the United States who identify themselves as Latino is growing rapidly. Projections from the United States census indicate that the Latino population will account for 17.7% of the total United States population by 2015 (U.S. Census, 2010). Currently this ethnic group accounts for one in every six people residing in the United States. By the year 2050 the White population is projected to account for only half the population with the Latino and Asian populations tripling, the Black population almost doubling, while the White population remains stable (Frey, 2004). For leadership in healthcare to be demographically and culturally representative of society, there must be a significant increase in the number of Latino leaders.

The lack of Latino leadership has been termed a leadership crisis by some (Gutierrez, Castaneda, & Katsinas, 2002; Nieto, 2006/2007), resulting from a multiplicity
of societal dynamics. The research on Latino leadership, although insufficient, does demonstrate the continued marginalized status of Latinos (Valverde, 2004). For example, Latinos suffer more workplace bullying than Whites (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). In researching the development of community college leaders, Gutierrez et al. (2002) discovered that Latinos are expected to pay their dues, something not required of White leaders, exposing differential treatment. The result of these belief systems is a much lower percentage of Latino administrators in the college hierarchy compared to White administrators (Fenelon, 2003; Leon & Nevarez, 2007). Latinos also were found to differ substantially from Blacks in their development of cultural and social capital while in college. Together Latinos and Blacks possess less social capital than Whites, impacting school performance (Strayhorn, 2010). In the healthcare setting, Nunez-Smith (2009) found that 20% of Latino physicians left at least one job because of workplace discrimination, compared to only 9% of White physicians.

Much of the historical research investigating leadership from a cultural perspective dichotomized race into a Black and White issue. There was no middle ground, and almost no recognition of other races and ethnicities. Blacks became the exemplar for all minorities and the uncontested basis for comparison. All races were treated as one homogenous group. It was not until later that more granular research, recognizing different racial and ethnic groups, emerged. However, this prior and ongoing research should not be discounted, as it is still instructive to analyze this research from the perspective of minorities as a homogenous group as it provides insight into how minorities as a group have fared in the area of leadership.
Despite some progress by racial and ethnic minorities, the White male is still perceived as the prototypical leader (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Craig & Feasel, 1998; Ensari & Murphy, 2003; Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). In instances where research produced contrary results to expectations, it is informative to hear how some researchers chose to explain the results. Craig and Rand (1998) rationalized that although Blacks were selected to be the leader more often than Whites, the results may be more indicative of social desirability. The implication was not that participants viewed Blacks as leaders, but that they were selected because it was believed to be the politically and socially correct choice. Another study found that Whites preferred Black school principals to be strong, but not too strong (Jones, 2002), hinting at inconsistent treatment and a double standard. This same study also found that White teachers and Black teachers viewed Black principals’ leadership differently. There appears to be a continued value judgment made about the abilities and competencies of leaders based on race and ethnicity.

One of the most pernicious barriers faced by racial and ethnic minorities is that of stereotyping. McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) found that Black principals tend to be placed in schools with predominantly Black student bodies, while White principals were placed in schools regardless of the racial and ethnic makeup of the students. The unspoken reasoning was a belief that Blacks were not capable of leading White students. To counteract this mindset, one author suggested that minorities must be intentional in dispelling myths about their capabilities (Alire, 2001). This suggests proactive intentionality rather than reactionary strategies to combat stereotypes.
Once stereotypes are established in society, it can be extremely difficult to change them, especially if the stereotypes have been reinforced for hundreds of years. Organizations become a reflection of these normative mindsets developed by the society in which they operate. These stereotypes then become embedded in the social fabric of organizations, becoming part of the culture. Organizations select individuals based on these accepted norms (stereotypes), making it problematic for individuals who are deemed different to be hired into leadership positions and subsequently promoted to higher positions (Giberson, Resick, & Dickson, 2005). While White males continue to dominate the leadership ranks, it becomes increasingly difficult for change in the number of racial and ethnic minorities to be considered. Breaking this cycle becomes very difficult and requires deliberate action as organizations develop cultures that perpetuate this self-fulfilling prophecy (Giberson et al., 2005).

Research focusing on barriers that have contributed to lower numbers of racial and ethnic minorities in leadership positions is fairly abundant. There has been research focusing on stereotyping and bias in the workplace (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Craig & Rand, 1998; Dixon & Rosenbaum, 2004; Duehr & Bono, 2006; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Rosette et al., 2008), while several studies also examined the perceptions of racial and ethnic minority leaders from the perspective of the followers (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Craig & Feasel, 1998; Cundiff & Komarraju, 2008; Ensari & Murphy, 2003). Other research had been conducted on the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities as they encountered racial barriers in various settings (Daniel, 2007; DeLany & Rogers, 2004; Gardner, 2005; Seago & Spetz, 2008).
Historical quantitative research design has not fully explored minority leadership. Re-envisioning research design that moves beyond historical structures which constrain changes within a paradigm to allow for new conceptions created by a new paradigm are needed (Argyris, 1976; Bartunek & Moch, 1987). The paradigm that best captures the research perspective missing in earlier leadership scholarship that will be used to frame this study is Latino critical studies (LaCrit), a research branch emanating from critical race theory (CRT).

CRT had its origins in the field of legal studies but has since evolved to encompass other disciplines (Aleman, 2009b; Bernal, 2002; Broido & Manning, 2002; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Guinier & Torres, 2002; Trevino et al., 2008). CRT is predicated on the assumption that all social interactions are permeated by worldviews that constrain and order individuals based on race (Trevino et al., 2008). “It directs attention to the ways in which structural arrangements inhibit and disadvantage some more than others in our society” (Trevino et al., 2008, p. 8). CRT also is aimed at empowering those impacted through constraining worldviews by providing space for their voices. Through the process of challenging the mainstream ideology, change that results in a more just society is the end goal. CRT then becomes a complementary strategy for a change-oriented advocacy worldview. Latino critical studies takes this a step further by concentrating on Latino ethnicity and its unique culture and experiences.

**Focus of the Study**

Race and ethnicity are factors that are often overlooked in leadership research, even though they contribute to marginalization of minorities. Workplaces still harbor
negative experiences for racial and ethnic minorities. The presence of racism and discrimination results in racial and ethnic minorities feeling more anxiety in the workplace than White workers (Razack, 2001) and experiencing a greater sense of distrust (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007). Seago and Spetz (2008), in studying Black nurses, determined that 12% had filed discrimination-based claims against their employers. Other researchers found Black leaders to be perceived as lacking social skills (Craig & Feasal, 1998), having less control of their work settings (Greenhaus et al., 1990), feeling more isolated in their workplaces (Daniel, 2007; Hoodless, 2004), and believed to have achieved their positions based on nonperformance issues (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002).

The existence of disparities in the distribution of racial and ethnic minorities in the healthcare workforce has been well documented (Dreachslin, Weech-Maldonado, & Dansky, 2004; Gathers, 2003; Iganski, Mason, Humphreys, & Watkins, 2001; Moore, 2004). This is especially true in the professional ranks, which are defined as clinical and managerial positions. Racial and ethnic minorities account for 30% of the total workforce in the United States, and yet they only account for 22.4% of registered nurses, 20.8% of physical therapists, 16.3% of emergency technicians, and 18.2% of management positions (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). This large discrepancy has ramifications for organizations trying to perform optimally in a multicultural world, as more diverse organizations enjoy better performance outcomes and are able to increase market share (Dreachslin et al., 2004; Latham, 2009; Mathis & Jackson, 2008; Page, 2007; Roberson & Park, 2007). Given the rapidly changing demographic landscape, organizations can no longer ignore the consequences of a demographically dynamic workforce.
Some consequences extend beyond the walls of the organization to the greater community and have significant societal ramifications. Healthcare disparities are one of the unintended consequences. The complex nature of healthcare disparities—such as those in treatment, access, and outcomes—is impacted by the lack of racial and ethnic representation at higher levels of employment within the healthcare sector (Dreachslin et al., 2004). The Institute of Medicine report, *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare* (2002), examined health disparities by removing all confounding factors such as socioeconomic status, insurance, and ability to pay. The report found that bias, prejudice, and racism impact the types and quality of care individuals receive from healthcare organizations. Whites receive one level of care while minorities receive a different and lesser level. This dichotomous delivery system has contributed in a significant way to the existing health disparities, with racial and ethnic minorities experiencing poorer health outcomes than Whites (Celik, Abma, Widdershoven, van Wijmen, & Klinge, 2008).

One of the ways to combat the unequal treatment of patients is to have the healthcare workforce mirror society at large. Providing staff that share cultural backgrounds with patients assists healthcare facilities to deliver culturally competent care (Dreachslin, 2007a; Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008; Dreachslin et al., 2004). A more diverse clinical staff contributes to healthcare delivery in four specific areas: effectiveness of care, timeliness, patient centeredness, and patient safety (Dreachslin, 2007a). Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, without demographic changes in leadership allowing the representation of racial and ethnic perspectives in higher levels in
healthcare, the dominant philosophy will continue to permeate all aspects of care delivery. History has exposed how unequal the outcomes of this system are.

From a management perspective, increasing minority representation in healthcare leadership positions creates opportunities to integrate alternative or contrary experiential insights (Ward-Johnson, 2007). It allows for marginalized groups to be incorporated into the decision-making process. Some would argue that increasing the number of racial and ethnic minority leaders is absolutely necessary to decrease healthcare disparities (Dreachslin, 2007b). This is because the leadership of an organization makes decisions about strategies and allocates resources. Ensuring that the leadership of healthcare organizations is demographically representative of those they serve is a means of providing a voice for marginalized and disenfranchised groups.

What is absent from prior research is the voice of the minority leader. Having first-person narratives can change how care is delivered by offering alternative perspectives. Narrative inquiry studies the lives of individuals by allowing them an outlet to provide stories about their lives (Creswell, 2009). It provides a platform from which participants’ stories or voices can be heard. “These stories are the result of a confluence of social influences on a person’s inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). Stories also play important roles as they connect the flow of power within society (Riessman, 2008). Stories help in understanding the plight of racial and ethnic minorities from their perspectives. There is no better way of understanding someone’s life than through the subjective narrative approach (Atkinson, 1998).
There is little research based on the experiences or stories of Latino leaders in healthcare, as the number of Latino leaders in healthcare organizations is small and the positions they hold tend to be lesser. Research has shown the higher in an organization one goes, the smaller the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities are present (Gathers, 2003; Greenhaus et al., 1990). Consequently, Latinos have not gained entry to the executive suites in healthcare in proportion to their population, and in a 5-year period from 1992 to 1997 showed no marked improvement in the percentage of top positions held (Gathers, 2003). About 30% of Latinos in healthcare reported that racial or ethnic discrimination had impacted them, compared to only 10% of White respondents (Gathers, 2003). Research that aims to change these statistics by addressing the underlying societal structures and processes is needed.

Purpose of the Study

There is a dearth of Latino administrators in healthcare. Because of their minority status they face the normative actions of a society that favors the dominant race, and yet some have found a way to be successful within this paradigm. Minority leaders face a multiplicity of issues in the workplace including bias, discrimination, and stereotyping based on their racial and ethnic background (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Duehr & Bono, 2006; Jones, 2002; McCray et al., 2007; Rosette et al., 2008). Each one of these successful leaders has a unique story to tell based on their personal experiences. These narratives can help in understanding how they developed into leaders, and more importantly, how these experiences shape their leadership views. Narratives help
researchers establish a participant’s place within the social order of society and describes the process that led to this fit (Atkinson, 1998).

A narrative life-story approach to leadership research can enhance the historical quantitative concentration on leadership styles (Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005; Turner & Mavin, 2007). Moving away from traits and behaviors and examining how one’s life-story contributes to one’s self-concept and, concurrently, his or her leadership worldview, allows for the exploration of contextual portraits not accessible with quantitative research (Waterhouse, 2007). In studying authentic leadership development, Shamir and Eilam (2005) found that life-story construction is a significant element in this process. Narrative research provides a platform for the voices of racial and ethnic minorities to be heard through the process of personal storytelling.

Although there has been extensive research into different aspects of leadership, there is a lack of qualitative work examining the experiences of minority leaders (Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Turner & Mavin, 2007). Although each individual’s journey is unique, the journey for racial and ethnic minorities is different than that of Whites. There is no way to experience growing up a minority in this country if one is not a minority. The goal of this research was to capture this difference in qualitative terms that allows one to live vicariously through the experiences of others, to experience the joys of success, and to deeply feel the pain of disappointment. In answering how individuals get from where they were to where they are, there is no better methodology than the exploration of life stories (Atkinson, 1998).

This study was an exploration of the stories of three successful Latino leaders in healthcare. I wanted to explore how individuals deal with the vicissitudes of everyday
life situations where variables (experiences) are not neatly controlled. The unpredictability of life is what creates the richness and depth of the stories I sought. What were the salient life experiences that led to epiphanies that shaped their stories? I wanted to give voice to the first-person narrative to determine what insights might be gained from these silenced voices. As the old adage says, you cannot possibly know what I feel until you have walked a mile in my shoes. This narrative exploration is that walk.

The purpose of this narrative study is to provide space for the story of three Latino leaders within the healthcare field. I purposefully identified three Latino hospital leaders, as Creswell (2007, 2008) suggests that narrative research should concentrate on one or a very limited number of participants. Another reason for limiting participation is tied to the goal of narrative research, which is to unmask penetrating understandings about how individuals interact (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Studying three individuals allowed for this singular focus.

Latino healthcare leaders with unique stories were selected based on information publicly available and a short interview with each of them to determine how their background may contribute to better understanding the phenomenon being studied. Given the uniqueness we all possess as individuals, every person has a story to offer. What is salient about this research is the coupling of narrative with CRT. Thus, this is not simply an exposé of individuals whose stories are rooted in the majoritarian worldview, it is the stories of individuals from a marginalized group. Any healthcare leader of Latino descent is, by definition, unique (Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008; Dreachslin, Jimpson, & Sprainer, 2001; Gathers, 2003). However, if the focus is in finding further
levels of uniqueness, the probability of unearthing a more resonant story increases with
deep searching. This leads to a narrower subset of potential participants, as the search
was further limited to individuals who had attained the position of hospital vice president
or chief executive officer (CEO). This returns the focus to the initial sentence in this
paragraph. Finding Latino hospital leaders who were salient even among the ranks of
other Latino leaders was the goal. Finding participants whose background stories created
a compelling interest that invited further investigation was my principal goal.

Purposeful sampling was used to identify possible participants. This process
yielded only one gender of participants being selected. There is an assumption that
gender may play a role in the experiential development of leaders and the personal story
of each individual. Gender has been shown to impact leadership styles, as men lead
differently than women (Eagly & Carli, 2004; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001;
Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Kruger, 2008). Gender also impacts
perceptions of leadership (Barbuto, Fritz, Matkin, & Marx, 2007; Morrison & Von
Glinow, 1995) and impacts sense-making (Grisoni & Beeby, 2007). Women leaders in
healthcare, similar to racial and ethnic minorities, continue to suffer from role prejudice
and stereotypes (Lantz, 2008). The gender of the participants would certainly impact the
stories they have to tell. Examining the stories of men and women may provide
additional comparative insights but is beyond the scope of this research.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question guiding this study was: What do the stories of
three Latino leaders reveal about their development as leaders in the healthcare industry?
The additional research subquestions were (a) What salient experiences had the greatest impact on their development as leaders? and (b) How did ethnicity impact this development?

**Method**

Whereas quantitative research seeks broad understanding in order to generalize, qualitative research seeks deep understanding through inquiry that allows for thick, rich descriptions (Creswell, 2009). I sought first-hand experiences and interpretations of these experiences from the viewpoint of the participants. Racial and ethnic minorities continue to face the marginalizing actions of society. Qualitative inquiry provides the foundation for a participative process by privileging the voices of marginalized groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities (Creswell, 2009).

One effective method of privileging these voices is through the use of counter-storytelling. Delgado (1989) conceptualized counter-storytelling as not only a method of conveying untold stories but also as a tool to critically examine and challenge the stories being told by those in power. The stories of the powerful represent the majority perspective, whose stories are a natural, and previously unchallenged, part of the dominant discourse (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). These counter-narratives allow analysis from a completely new perspective by incorporating alternative perspectives and realities, which may deviate from conventional thought. Providing the opportunity for discordant voices to be heard is important in a society that values the freedom of expression and ideas. The ability to integrate multiple social perspectives becomes necessary to avoid continued marginalization of the underrepresented. Extensive interviewing aimed at
exposing the personal narratives from the participants was used to develop themes. A narrative methodology provided the framework for creating meaning out of these stories.

**Sample**

Interviews were conducted with three Latino hospital leaders located in the Midwest at their offices. Purposeful sampling was used to identify three individuals who met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Since I work in the healthcare field, personal networks were used to develop a list of possible participants. I also used focused searches of public information on the Internet to identify possible participants. Initial contact with the participants was made via a phone call, during which time the purpose of the study was shared with them. The participants were not formally asked to participate until Internal Review Board approval had been granted. The participants could have been female or male hospital leaders who met the selection criteria. However, in the end, all the participants were male leaders, as no females who met the criteria were located.

**Data Collection Procedures**

After explaining the nature of the study to the participants, the participants were asked to sign a written permission form consenting to participate in the study. Consent was also obtained to electronically record the interview sessions. No organizational consent was necessary. Permission from the Internal Review Board of the university was obtained prior to beginning the actual research. The initial interviews lasted 2 hours and were based on a series of open-ended questions. Because narrative research is based on an iterative process, a second interview was conducted with the participants at their
worksite, and in one case a third interview was necessary. Additional follow-up was conducted via phone calls or electronically through the Internet.

To provide a framework from which to begin, an interview protocol was established. The interview protocol involved a set of questions to guide the interview. The first questions were designed to gather biographical and demographic information and set the participants at ease with the interview process. Such questions addressed the participant’s race and ethnicity, work background, and current position. The central question guided the remainder of the questions as they were designed to uncover the story of the participant. They were developed as a means of examining the central question for the study—how being an ethnic or racial minority impacts how one develops into a leader.

Once the initial interviews were conducted, I reflected upon the contents. This process evoked a second set of follow-up questions. Questions asked during the second interview were developed based on the findings from the initial interview as well as questions from the interview protocol. Observational data were also gathered at the offices of the participants to decipher physical clues that enhanced the study. The participants were shadowed to observe them in their day-to-day environment. Coworkers were also interviewed to triangulate findings. Subsequent contact was made based on the need to clarify certain information or tie up loose ends. The participants were also asked to journal their thoughts at least weekly and provide these thoughts to me as part of the data collection process. In addition, print media was searched to discover any written information concerning the participants. Creswell (2009) indicates that these are valid qualitative data collecting procedures that add depth and scope to the findings.
Validity of analysis is always an important topic in research. Creswell (2009) states “qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings” (p. 190). The following strategies were employed to increase validity as suggested by Creswell (2009): triangulation; member checking; rich, thick descriptions; and peer debriefing.

**Assumptions**

Leadership has been well studied historically. This study was predicated upon the assumption that understanding racial and minority leadership development through the process of narrative analysis will add another not fully explored piece of the leadership puzzle. It assumed there may be qualitative differences in experiences based on characteristics other than traits. It further assumed that understanding leadership development from a racial or ethnic perspective is a legitimate area of study with further implications for research and practice. To fully capture the essence of racial and ethnic minority leadership development, a narrative approach that allowed participants to share their stories was most appropriate (Byrd, 2009).

**Delimitations**

This study focused on giving voice to three racial or ethnic minority leaders in healthcare. Study participation was therefore necessarily limited to three Latino leaders working in the healthcare field. The participants were located in urban cities in the Midwest. It is recognized that certain findings may be gender-specific and not applicable to the other gender. Thus, having only male participants limited the ability to attribute the findings to female leaders. The generalities of their leadership development also may
not be applicable to other races or ethnicities. Furthermore, findings should be carefully considered as they emanated from three individuals. These were their stories, not the stories of anyone else. As each person’s story was different, the findings from each also may differ. As the participants were from one industry, caution should be exercised in applying the findings to other industries. Lastly, the geographic location may have played a role in their stories, as societal attitudes and customs encountered by ethnic leaders may be location-specific in shaping experiences.

**Limitations of the Study**

Using a narrative approach to qualitative research consequently requires limiting the number of participants (Creswell, 2009). Although this method allows for a deeper investigation, it also means the findings may be less generalizable to all racial and ethnic minorities. Therefore, the opinions shared by the participants may not be reflective of other Latino leaders or leaders of the other gender. They also may not reflect how other racial and ethnic minority leaders construct their leadership worldviews. As a narrative, the research was based on the stories that were shared. Each participant chose what and how to share. Interpretations, although based on the stories, reflect the shared reality of the participants and the researcher; others may find alternative interpretations.

**Definition of Terms**

Critical Race Theory: Posits that all human social interactions in the United States are ordered and constrained by the social construction of race, placing racial and ethnic minorities in a marginalized position based on hegemonic worldviews (Trevino, et al., 2008).
Critical Theory: Views society from a critical theory lens as a socially constructed paradigm that serves to oppress (Broido & Manning, 2002). Facts are seen as inextricably conjoined to values that, in turn, leads to a disproportionate distribution of power of certain groups over others (Broido & Manning, 2002). Historically, this distribution of power has favored the White race.

Discrimination: Generally conceived as destructive treatment predicated on prejudice regarding such things as race, ethnicity, and gender (Guimon, 2010). More specifically, prejudice is reflecting a negative bias towards a specific group of people (Allport, 1954/1979). As Jones (1997) articulated:

Discrimination consists of negative behavior toward a person based on negative attitudes one holds toward the group to which that person belongs, or, positive behavior toward a person based on positive attributes one holds toward the group to which that person belongs. (p. 11)

Latino: Although some have used the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably (Reyes, 2010), there are nuanced differences between the two terms (Wolfe, 2011). Wolfe (2011) explains that Latino refers to individuals who emanate from countries that were once under Roman rule. Thus, individuals from Spain and Brazil are considered Latinos. Hispanic refers to individuals who emanate from countries that were once under Spanish rule, such as Mexico, Central America, and most of South America. Latinos maintain a collective identity that reflects their intergroup uniqueness based on shared characteristics and is seen as a political phenomenon (Padilla, 1984). Both terms have been applied to broader categories of individuals through the years. For purposes of this study, the more generally recognized inclusive Latino term will be used for purposes of
consistency. However, the participants will be allowed to self-identify their racial or ethnic background.

Prejudice: Prejudice will be defined as a “preconceived opinion, harm or injury that results or may result from some action or judgment” that often leads to negative attitudes (Guimon, 2010, p. 20). The meaning of the term prejudice has evolved over time from a judgment based on previous conclusions and knowledge, to a judgment developed before due consideration of the reality of the situation, and finally to a negative or positive emotional state which accompanies unsubstantiated judgment (Allport, 1954/1979). Jones (1997) suggested that “prejudice is a positive or negative attitude, judgment, or feeling about a person that is generalized from the attitudes or beliefs held about the group to which the person belongs” (p. 10). A comprehensive definition of prejudice is “an aversive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group” (Allport, 1954/1979, p. 7). Allport also provided a more concise definition as follows, “thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant” (p. 6).

Racism: Racism is manifested through actions that are derived from a belief that there are qualitative differences between races, and that one’s own race is superior (Utsey, Ponterotto, & Porter, 2008). Racism results from the transformation of race prejudice into the exercises of power against a racial group perceived to be inferior by individuals and institutions, deliberately or unintentionally supported by community norms (Utsey et al., 2008). The core of racism can be seen as the exercise of power by the in-group, who perceive themselves superior, in order to subjugate the out-group
The distinction between prejudice and racism is that prejudice is mainly attributional in nature whereas racism extends negative attitudes to discriminatory behaviors to the inferior group (Utsey et al., 2008). Racism contains the following elements:

- Belief in racial superiority and inferiority
- Strong in-group preference and solidarity, as well as the rejection of people, ideas, and customs that diverge from those customs and beliefs
- A doctrine of a cultural or national system that conveys privilege or advantage to those in power
- Elements of human thought and behavior that follow from the abstract structures, social structures, and cultural mechanisms of racialism
- Systematic attempts to prove the rationality of beliefs about racial differences and the validity of policies that are based on them (Jones, 1997, pp. 12, 13)

Jones (1997) suggested that racism can be separated into three forms: individual, institutional, and cultural. He defined individual racism as one group discriminating against another group because of their believed superiority. Institutional racism occurs when social structures and organizations establish policies that result in inequities and disparities among racial groups. Cultural racism occurs when the normative practices of Whites are viewed as superior to other races and ethnicities.

Stereotype: The meaning of the word derives from the literal original application—a metal plate used to make duplicate copies of type—and has come to mean
an assumption that individuals from a group are similar (Jones, 1997). According to Jones (1997) a stereotype is:

A positive or negative set of beliefs held by an individual about the characteristics of a group of people. It varies in its accuracy, the extent to which it captures the degree to which the stereotyped group members possess these traits, and the extent to which the set of beliefs is shared by others. (p. 170)

Allport (1954/1979) posited that a stereotype, whether positive or negative, is an exaggerated belief conjoined to a particular group which functions to rationalize one’s behavior in relation to the group.

Thick, rich descriptions: Emphasizes the deeper complexities of what is being conveyed in any interaction by liberating the experiences and meaning discovered through the research process (Denzin, 1989). It is based on the symbolic nature of meaning which operates on multiple levels by joining “biography to lived experience” (Denzin, 1989, p. 32).

Triangulation: Confirmation of themes through multiple data sources. Creswell (2009) explains “if themes are established based on converging several sources of data of perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (p. 191).

Worldview: A general orientation or basic beliefs that guide action (Creswell, 2009). These beliefs have been referred to as paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), philosophical assumptions, and epistemologies (Crotty, 1998).

**Significance of the Study**

There is research to suggest that the life experiences of different racial and ethnic
groups, including racism and prejudice, vary by group (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Dixon & Rosenbaum, 2004; Jones, 1997). However, groups of individuals with shared cultural backgrounds tend to share outlooks on life (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The findings from this study will be applicable in various ways. Since much leadership research has approached leaders as a homogenous cohort, results from previous studies have been universally applied. Newer research is aimed at deconstructing leadership at the individual level. Implied in this approach is the belief that different cultural and environmental influences affect individuals’ experiences. Awareness of differences in experiences may inform interactions aimed at increasing the number of ethnic and racial minorities in healthcare and the greater workforce. This study also can serve as a foundation for the exploration of leadership development based on cultural nuances of Latinos and other racial and ethnic groups.

Changing the distribution of racial and ethnic minority leaders in healthcare necessitates rethinking how leaders are selected, trained, and supported. Organizations that continue to struggle with the distribution of racial and ethnic minorities in leadership positions can learn from a deeper investigation of leadership stories, thus benefiting not only the organization but also racial and ethnic minorities and the larger community and economy. As more racial and ethnic minorities move into leadership positions, they can move from being marginalized into meaningful contributors to society, having an active role in shaping how decisions are made.

This study also has implications for designing organizational environments that support the development of minority leaders by advocating for change where appropriate. Through a positive change process, existing political structures can be legitimately
challenged. Those racial and ethnic minorities looking to move into leadership positions can benefit from the findings as well. Leadership scholars also will have a new perspective that focuses on the process of becoming a leader from the viewpoints of minority leaders.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focused on how the participants, representatives of the Latino ethnic group, developed their leadership worldviews through an exploration of their personal stories. Although leadership constructs and theories abound, minimal attention has been paid to leadership development from the perspective of personal narratives, particularly for racial and ethnic minorities. These narratives, or stories, bring a contextual qualitative perspective that cannot be fully captured by statistical methods (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). By giving voice to this group of marginalized individuals, it was understood that their voices may represent counter-storytelling which radiated a contrariant view of leadership development. By appreciating the ethnorelative approach, this study embraced that individuals from distinct cultures may develop leadership worldviews differently than the majority population because of their unique experiences. The intent of this study was not to identify the “best” method of leadership development but to accept that differences do exist, and to understand more deeply how these differences might contribute to a more just society.

Sensitivity to other cultures and things perceived as different was not a naturally occurring phenomenon (Bennett, 1993). Sensitivity was more than tolerance; it was openness to alternative worldviews. Simply being in contact with others who were different did not automatically imbue one with sensitivity. As an example, consider the historical interactions between White Americans and other races. Whether it was in the South with Black housekeepers (Ruef & Fletcher, 2003), in the Midwest with Chinese rail laborers (Holland, 2007), or in the West with Mexican farm workers (Martin, 2002),
contact between groups has not necessarily fostered better understanding or appreciation between them. Contact between races was no guarantee that race relations would automatically improve. In actuality, contact with different groups creates pressure to change one’s worldview (Bennett, 2004), which may not be easily accepted. Wright and Tolan (2009), in commenting about the troubles experienced with school segregation, suggested that “simply putting people together in physical proximity does not necessarily lead to harmonious relationships” (p. 140). Contact theory was useful in explicating the reasons behind this phenomenon.

Gordon Allport (1954/1979) posited that contact between individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds can serve to disconfirm stereotypes only if certain preconditions exist. Researchers had confirmed a reduction in stereotypes about individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds after contact in such settings as school, work, and neighborhoods (Dixon & Rosenbaum, 2004; Seaman, Beightol, Shirilla, & Crawford, 2009; Wright & Tolan, 2009). Under the right conditions, contact between groups did seem to have positive outcomes relative to changing stereotypical belief systems. There appeared to be four prerequisites associated with contact that increased the likelihood of stereotype deconstruction. The four prerequisites include: group members must perceive that equal status exists among all members; interactions must involve meaningful cooperation in attaining goals; prevailing stereotypes must be disconfirmed through the opportunity to become friends; and group equality must be reinforced through the normative actions of those in authority (Allport, 1954/1979; Seaman et al., 2009; Wright & Tolan, 2009). Encapsulated within these prerequisites
was the need for dialogue that was unencumbered by formal hierarchies and the ability to engage in conversations freely (Wright & Tolan, 2009).

Dialogue, by definition, required the ability to entertain alternative perspectives. This approach urged individuals to “wonder not only about problematic situations but also about what is usually taken for granted, and to wander in alternative and as yet unexplored cognitive paths” (Papastephanou & Angeli, 2007, p. 616). One should question the stereotypes they hold through a process of thinking differently and being open to the unexpected (Burbules, 1995). These ideas are synthesized in critical thinking, which requires deeper analysis of complex situations such as race relations. This critical thinking required a suspension of prior beliefs shaped by past experiences, be they positive or negative (Papastephanou & Angeli, 2007; Paul & Elder, 2001; Van Gelder, 2005; West, Toplak, & Stanovich, 2008). Biases are an inherent part of our development. “To suspend these biases seems to run counterintuitive to how we are programmed to think, requiring a repudiation of the past, making this a formidable undertaking” (Flores, Matkin, Burbach, Quinn, & Harding, 2011, p. 5).

Personal narratives do not allow the reader to have first-person contact with participants, but they do provide alternative worldviews based on different realities for critical consideration. They allow one to vicariously examine life through the lens of someone else, if even momentarily (Atkinson, 1998, 2007). One may feel they know someone after hearing his/her story. The goal was to create engagement through this storytelling process to form a relationship by proxy with the participants, to hear not only words but to grasp the feelings carried by these words, to imbue them with a life of their own, and to create mindscapes based on the stories that are shared.
Critical Race Theory

Critical theory served as the broad base from which CRT evolved. Critical theory sought to generate change at the societal and individual level by understanding and deconstructing the oppressive components of society (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). “Critical theorists challenge the idea that the current structures of society are inevitable” (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 437) by eschewing the normative approach based on objectivism. This suggested moving beyond that which could be quantitatively measured and described. Broido and Manning (2002) suggested that the role of qualitative researchers was to “dismantle these oppressions by remaking research in an image of equitable power, jointly constructed knowledge, and respectful participation” (p. 437).

Critical theory offered an epistemological paradigm incongruent with positivist and post-positivist approaches by concentrating on the ontology of experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Research that divorced procedures from issues and outcomes tended to conceal the power relations operant in society (Grumley, 2005). Critical theory sought to address the issues of power (and its distribution), identity, representation, and social justice (Broido & Manning, 2002). This theoretical approach initially proliferated in the study of law (Aleman, 2009b; Bernal, 2002; Broido & Manning, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Guinier & Torres, 2002; Trevino et al., 2008). Although critical theorists developed a solid following, one of the criticisms of critical theory was its unwitting reification of the foundations of race through a Black/White dichotomous view of race (Espinoza & Harris, 1997). From this genesis a more focused paradigm emerged with concentration on the racial aspects of power within society. This paradigm evolved to become CRT.
It is interesting that although there was general global acceptance of the issues surrounding race and race relations, CRT was viewed as uniquely American (Peters, 2004; Trevino et al., 2008). Although racism is by no means a phenomenon singular to the United States, the United States had long struggled with how to adequately address the issue. For example, a United Nations proposal designed to outlaw racist messages was not supported by the United States, even though the world community easily passed the proposal (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Granted, the complexities surrounding the issue were abstruse, pitting the Fourteenth Amendment against the First Amendment. It did illustrate the internal struggle for racial equality the United States faced as it attempted to reconcile individual rights in the context of historical political agendas.

The earlier applications of CRT stemmed mostly from a Black/White paradigm also referred to as a Black/White binary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Trevino et al., 2008) where racial difference was encapsulated in the struggle for justice between these two racial groups. Early American radicals in this movement were exemplified by such individuals as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.D. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Current CRT research has blossomed to include other oppressed minorities such as Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, and even moving beyond race and ethnicity to include gays and women (Trevino et al., 2008). CRT has concerned itself with challenging hegemony regardless of the marginalized group. The ancient historian Thucydides (1954) recorded that hegemony bred arrogance and self-destruction. Systems of hegemony became “defensive, arrogant, and a defender of yesterday” (Drucker, 2002, p. 72.). It is these
majoritarian belief systems which were perpetuated within society that CRT sought to expose.

CRT sought the same redresses as its progenitor, critical theory, but in a more narrowly-defined racial space. Although progress continued to be made in the areas of racial equality and justice, the burden of centuries of racial oppression were not conquered (Winant, 2000). Racism demonstrated the ability to be persistent (Holland, 2005) and capable of adapting to new ideologies (Vaught & Castagno, 2008), making its complete elimination questionable. CRT sought to explain the world through a racial lens that questioned societal structures. “CRT is committed to advocating for justice for people who find themselves occupying positions on the margins—for those who hold ‘minority’ status” (Trevino et al., 2008, p. 8). Matsuda et al. (1993) identified six attributes that defined the early CRT movement:

- Racism was autochthonal to life in America.
- Dominant legal claims of neutrality, colorblindness, objectivity, and meritocracy were viewed with skepticism.
- Racism had shaped the current manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
- Experiential knowledge of people of color must be recognized in any analysis of law and society.
- CRT was interdisciplinary.
- CRT sought to end not only racial oppression but all forms of oppression operant in society.
Aleman (2009b) developed a similar list with the following key CRT principles:

- Race was endemic and ingrained in United States society.
- The civil right movement and subsequent laws needed to be critically reinterpreted.
- Concepts of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy need to be challenged.
- Providing spaces for voices of marginalized people was vital for social transformation.
- The construction of Whiteness as the ultimate property must be interrogated.
- A commitment to social justice and an interdisciplinary perspective to these tenets were required. (p. 296)

Within the field of legal studies, these two lists illustrated how the initial emphasis of CRT was operationalized (Aleman, 2009b; Bernal, 2002; Broido & Manning, 2002; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Guinier & Torres, 2002; Trevino et al., 2008). However, CRT was no longer limited to legal concerns as it had emerged as a way to address issues in other disciplines. There had been a sizable body of work in the field of education. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) developed a typology of five themes explaining CRT in the field of education: “the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, the challenge to dominant ideology, the commitment to social justice, the centrality of experiential knowledge, and the transdisciplinary perspective” (pp. 472-473). It was evident that Solorzano and Yosso built upon the work of earlier researchers in developing their themes.
A small sampling of the field of education demonstrated researchers had used CRT to study the politics of developing Latino students into leadership roles (Aleman, 2009b), to demonstrate how students of color were holders and creators of knowledge (Bernal, 2002), to examine how Latino educational leaders organize politically (Aleman, 2009a), to explore how social workers teach diversity (Ortiz & Jani, 2010), to explore teacher attitudes to race (Vaught & Castagno, 2008), and to examine racial and gender discrimination of Latino students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Bernal (2002) outlined the defining elements of CRT as they apply to educational research:

- The importance of transdisciplinary approaches.
- An emphasis on experiential knowledge.
- A challenge to dominant ideologies.
- The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination.
- A commitment to social justice. (pp. 109-110)

CRT theorists also were no longer limiting their perspective to the fields of law and education. Guinier and Torres (2002) posited a new approach to democracy by re-envisioning how society could make political decisions through a CRT lens.

The critical examination of the way embedded power relationships informed group interactions was soon seen to have broader applicability. A subtle, but not insignificant, change occurred as researchers began to move away from the Black/White paradigm of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Peters, 2004; Trevino et al., 2008). Race was no longer limited to Blacks as the exemplar for all races and ethnicities, as
other races and ethnicities became the lens through which CRT research took place, as evidenced by studies involving Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans (Trevino et al., 2008). CRT continued to develop as a more inclusive and pluralistic paradigm that included such diverse perspectives as queer studies, feminism, and White studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Trevino et al., 2008).

CRT developed into a social movement that continued to challenge the persistent power relationships in society, but was always aimed at positive transformation (Broido & Manning, 2002). Vaught and Castagno (2008) elucidated the need for what they termed structural transformation, which required the abdication of hegemonic structures within society in favor of designs based on distributive justice. This required moving beyond surface changes such as diversity training and awareness aimed at individual transformation, as racism was pernicious and had been shown to reify existing racist frameworks (Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

Building upon the previous definitions of CRT, Vaught and Castagno (2008) developed a more parsimonious list of CRT tenets stating “that racism is pervasive; that racism is permanent; and that racism must be challenged” (p. 96). They expounded on each of these points. Racism was systemic, encapsulated in the structures and relationships within society and not bound to individual pathology. Racism did not diminish or disappear over time; rather, it adapted by accommodating its expression. Scholarship that confronted social injustice must counter notions of colorblind equality in inquiry.

An increasingly powerful method of applying the CRT paradigm is through narrative stories (Broido & Manning, 2002). Scholars have turned to narrative inquiry as
not only a method of storytelling but as a method of “countering the metanarratives . . . propagated by the dominant culture of hegemonic Whiteness” (Trevino et al., 2008). Racial and ethnic minorities bring a unique perspective and voice not accessible to White people because of their historical interactions with oppression (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This was particularly relevant for Latinos as some scholars believed the previous discourse was inadequate (Aleman, 2009a). The Latino voice had not been fully represented, producing a significant gap in understanding.

Latinos have a long history of conveying information via stories about their mistreatment from generation to generation (Delgado, 1989). In the Southwest, some of these stories took the form of corridos or ballads (Delgado, 1989). Given the disconfirming nature of these stories, they became counternarratives or counter-stories. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) examined the work of Delgado (1989) and Lawson (1995) and concluded counter-stories served four purposes: they built community among those at the margins of society; they challenged majoritarian conventional wisdom by providing a context to understand and transform worldviews; they opened new windows for those at the margins by creating possibilities beyond their present realities; and through a synergistic combination of reality and story, a new, richer world could be created. These tenets served as the foundation for a further division of CRT that has become known as Latino critical studies (LaCrit).

LaCrit scholars suggested that the unique experiences of racial and ethnic minorities provided the foundation for counter-storytelling (Bernal, 2002; Broido & Manning, 2002). LaCrit studies were not meant to supplant CRT, but rather to complement its central tenets (Aleman, 2009b; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).
LaCrit theory “elucidated Latinas/Latinos’ multidimensional identities and could address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression” (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 312). LaCrit became a more reliable lens when considering the multifaceted identities of Latinos (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). This theory presupposed that experiences of Latinos were unique enough to require an intentional focus. Or viewed conversely, CRT did not adequately elucidate the unique Latino experience apart from other racial and ethnic minority groups as CRT scholars tended to view race as a binary consisting of Black and White (Espinoza & Harris, 1997). LaCrit recognized the inherent limitations of a Black/White binary epistemology. Jones (1997) had suggested that restricting critical race analysis to a Black/White binary created several barriers to understanding the complexity of race: failure to address the multiplicity of race relations, ignoring problems specific to other groups, failure to account for differential impact of policies on different racial and ethnic groups, consequential facets of racial politics may be ignored, and interethnic-interracial and intraethnic-interracial viewpoints may be overlooked. The traditional CRT approach missed an opportunity to more deeply understand the Latino population. LaCrit examined issues that were beyond the scope of CRT such as ethnicity, language, and phenotype (Villalpando, 2004).

This further division of race was important as Solorzano and Bernal (2001) suggested that LaCrit was concerned with the developing sense of Latino unification and the inability of CRT to address issues specific to this group. Applying this theory to leadership development created new perspectives from which to reengage the discourse. By adding a contextual layer to the analysis (race and/or ethnicity), counter-stories that
have been suppressed were provided a space for dialogic consideration. It was this combination of the experiential coupled with the theoretical that was the strength of LaCrit theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). In using the experiential as a lens for understanding leadership development, the issues surrounding race and ethnicity played a prominent role in exposing systems of marginalization. LaCrit moved beyond simplistic distinctions made based on skin color to examine how culture separates privileged groups from oppressed ones (Espinoza & Harris, 1997). LaCrit supported respect for culture that did not discriminate nor subordinate (Esperanza, 1997). Through a LaCrit worldview, individuals were not an amalgamation of independent pieces of identity; rather, ideas of race and personhood were viewed as adaptable, inseparable, and mutually dependent on each other (Esperanza, 1997). Applying the LaCrit lens to leadership research provides a novel method of understanding the stories of Latino leaders in healthcare. With the growing population of Latinos in the United States, it is critically important that different ways of exploring and understanding Latino identity and culture are pursued.

**Historical Leadership Overview**

Leadership is inextricably intertwined with the history of humans. Therefore, humans have desired to understand and codify leadership throughout the ages. Scholars have developed numerous theories and constructs explaining and defining different aspects of leadership throughout history. Some theories emerged and seemed to transcend time. Each added understanding to the field or, at a minimum, gave pause for critical analysis. This brief summary of leadership theories and constructs that follows is
intended as a means of illustrating the multitude of perspectives that have permeated the field.

Some of the earliest writings on leadership can be traced to Lao Tzu. Writing in the sixth century B.C., Lao Tzu espoused the idea that leaders exist to facilitate the process of enlightenment for others (Mitchell, 1988). To him, true leadership was achieved through serving others and being a selfless leader. Antonakis, Cianciolo, and Sternberg (2004) developed a typology of the history of leadership research. In their analysis, the following timeline encapsulates the major schools of thought over the last 100 years starting with the earliest perspectives and moving to the current perspectives: trait theories (a focus on exceptional individuals), behavioral theories (a focus on behaviors), contingency theories (a focus on decision-making style), relational theories (a focus on vertical dyad linkages), skeptics (questioned previous research), information processing theories (how are cognition and behavior related), new leadership theories (transformational leadership), and emergent theories (reconceptualizing leadership).

Wren (1995), in his overview of leadership, also provided historical insights on leadership through the ages. He captured the essence of historical leadership philosophy through the words of such famous leaders as Carlyle, Tolstoy, Plato, Machiavelli, Gandhi, and Du Bois. These viewpoints could all be subsumed under the heading of great man theories (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991) and aligned with Antonakis, Ciancolo et al.’s (2004) trait-based leadership.

Carlyle spoke of the Ablest Man. Tolstoy believed that leaders were the victims of circumstance and that they simply did what the situation dictates. Plato put his faith in the philosopher king. Machiavelli believed maintaining power at any cost was the
essence of leadership. Gandhi espoused passive resistance as the means of leading people to greater things, and Du Bois posited that leaders were the *talented tenth* that need to be identified early and educated to assume leadership. These perspectives were built on the leadership qualities of men who possess exceptional abilities (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991).

In the 1940s the field saw the development of dispositional theories of leadership. These models looked at innate attributes of people. The dispositional constructs were divided into two areas—motivation theories and personality constructs. It was Maslow (1943) who developed the motivational hierarchy, classifying needs into five levels, and who suggested that all people are driven by the search for meaning. Other motivation theorists followed and expanded, reinterpreted, or developed new models. McClelland (1966) examined the need for achievement, the need for affiliation, and the need for power. Herzberg (1968) posited certain extrinsic factors, termed *hygiene factors*, must be present for motivators intrinsic to the job to create motivation. The one component they all had in common was addressing motivation from the standpoint of personal needs. Motivation took place as one strived to meet a particular need at a particular time.

Stogdill (1948) discussed the idea of personality as a driving factor in leadership. Based on his compilation of contemporary studies, he found a link between certain personality traits and leaders, suggesting that leaders are different. This was reinforced by the work of Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), who said leaders were not like other people; they possessed the *right stuff* which others did not possess. Bowditch and Buono (1997) suggested personality developed over a lifetime and influenced perceptions and behaviors. Day and Silverman (1989) found a relationship between certain personality
variables and performance. Researchers who studied personality based leadership on which traits made for better leaders. In this line of reasoning, leaders were born and nurtured based on their personalities.

A different view of leadership emerged during the 1950s and 1960s. This new view had its roots in the research work conducted into leader behaviors at the Ohio State University and the University of Michigan (Yukl, 2002). This early research essentially categorized leadership behaviors into two dimensions. One dimension measured the extent to which the leader was task oriented, while the other dimension measured the extent to which the leader was relations oriented. These studies formed the foundation for behavioral theories of leadership. It was during this time that Blake and Mouton (1982) developed the Managerial Grid which declared that to maximize effectiveness in organizations all leaders should be high in concern for people and high in concern for production. The behavioralists saw leadership behaviors as universal in their application, regardless of the situation.

At the same time the behavioralists were espousing their theories, a group of researchers rose to challenge their thinking. Hersey and Blanchard (1979) described situational leadership as a “way of adapting leadership behaviors to features of the situation and the follower” (p. 20). These scholars formed contingency-based theories as they believed that there was no one best way to lead in all situations, rather the situation should dictate the most effective leadership style. Leadership effectiveness was derived from the interaction of leadership style (task versus relationship orientation) and the situation (Fiedler, 1971). At the core of contingency theory then, was the idea that effectiveness was contingent upon the specific situational variables (Yukl, 1998). There
were several contingency theories and models, and each one espoused different viewpoints on how to determine optimal behaviors in any given situation. For example, Kerr and Jermier (1978) developed a model that said two kinds of situational variables, substitutes and neutralizers, may take the place of leadership in certain situations (Yukl, 1998). Vroom (1974) posited a theory that determined appropriate leader behavior based on the amount of participation by the followers, which in turn was dependent on the situational variables. By comparison, Hersey and Blanchard (1979) developed a model based on the ability and willingness of the follower.

The idea of charismatic leadership had received much attention since its introduction and its impact on leadership had been far reaching. Hunt (1999) contended that the study of charismatic leadership left an enduring legacy by transforming the field of leadership. As is true with other taxonomies of leadership, not all theories of charismatic leadership are built upon the same precepts. Weber (1947) was the first to characterize the charismatic leader. According to Weber, several things must conspire for a charismatic leader to emerge. First, a crisis must exist. If a crisis exists, then one with a sense of moral purpose will be bestowed with almost magical qualities and called by a higher power to deliver a new revelation (Weber, 1947). As a result of the crisis, desperation and the need for systemic change caused followers to give undivided and unquestioning allegiance to the leader. Weber believed that charisma in this sense was not something that anyone could possess, and something that took place only rarely. Weber also explained that pure charismatic authority was fleeting, existing only in the emergence stage and must be routinized if it was to survive. He went on to explain that charisma could not be learned; it could only be awakened.
In contrast, Conger and Kanungo (1987) posited a theory of charismatic leadership based on a leader’s behaviors. As opposed to Weber’s (1947) viewpoint, this one was based on followers’ attributions to the leader because of what they observed. The model was based on three key behaviors: the ability to inspire confidence, the questioning of the status quo, and the ability to articulate a vision. This definition took charismatic leadership out of the realm of the extraordinary and placed it within reach of everyone. Anyone who displayed the three behaviors would have charisma attributed to them. Conger and Kanungo also believed that charismatic leadership was something that could be taught and not limited to a chosen few as was the case in Weber’s model. Gardner and Avolio (1998) suggested a dramaturgical perspective of charismatic leadership, where a leader could be seen as an actor portraying behaviors that led to attributions of charisma. These theories were based on the ability of the leader, through the dynamism of his/her personality, to have profound and extraordinary effects on followers (Conger & Kanungo, 1987).

The 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s saw many perspectives emerge. Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) explained that the vertical dyad linkage between a leader and a follower impacted performance. This became Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) theory whereby every leader/follower dyad developed in one of two ways. Those in the in-group received leadership and high LMX exchanges, while in contrast, those in the out-group received supervision and low LMX exchanges (Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993).

Starting in the 1980s, some researchers looked at leadership from the perspective of power and politics. Pfeffer (1981) talked about the political nature of organizations and how power was used to attain a desired end result and what role influence played.

Bass (1996) developed the full-range leadership model in the mid-1990s with transactional leadership on one end and transformational on the other end. Transactional leadership was based on exchanges between the leader and follower, and transformational leadership was based on helping the follower achieve more than they thought possible in pursuit of organizational goals (Howell & Avolio, 1993). This model furthered the construct developed by Burns (1978), who argued that a key component of transforming leadership was the idea that both the leader and follower were lifted to higher moral ground. Bass (1996) posited that certain leadership concepts and behaviors had universal application.

In the late 1980s and into 2000, leadership was viewed by researchers through the perspective of the follower. Gardner (1987) said a following must be earned, implying that without followers, leaders do not exist. Barbuto (2000) looked at how intervening variables interacted with influence triggers to predict outcomes for followers. Hollander (1992) suggested that leadership could not be understood apart from followership because the two function in unity.

In 1977 Greenleaf wrote the seminal piece on servant leadership in which he espoused that servant leaders led through serving first out of a desire of service over self-interest. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) suggested that servant leadership had its origins in
Spears (1995) developed a 10-item taxonomy of characteristics of the servant leader that included listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) added an additional dimension to the servant leader construct they termed *calling*.

Other veins of leadership research had delved into the study of antecedents (Avolio, 1994; Hofstede, 1993; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; Yukl, 1989), change theory (Argyris, 1976; Bartunek & Moch, 1987; Bedeian & Armenakis, 1989; Lewin, 1947; Moshman, 2002), and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Michie & Gooty, 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Weick (1995) espoused sensemaking as a way for individuals to maintain consistent, positive self-conceptions. Sternberg (2005) introduced the idea of effective leadership as the synthesis of wisdom, intelligence, and creativity. Quatro et al. (2007) called for a more holistic approach to leadership that incorporated analytical, conceptual, emotional, and spiritual components. Teagarden (2007) posited that the shrinking world required cross-cultural leadership.

The forgoing list of theories and constructs was not intended to be a comprehensive list. It was meant to demonstrate the depth and breadth of leadership research, while at the same time accentuating the deficiency relative to research based on racial and ethnic minority perspectives. With the exception of Du Bois (1995), who wrote specifically from a racial perspective, leadership studies have predominantly viewed leaders as a homogenous group.
Leadership from a Minority Perspective

Although extensive research of leadership has taken place through the years, one aspect of research had received limited attention—leadership from a racial or ethnic perspective. Previous research made little or no attempt to factor race or ethnicity as one of the variables. Race and ethnicity were essential to how individuals construed themselves and yet the leadership experiences of people of color were lacking (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Research seemed to have lost sight of the individual (Ford, 2010). Leadership research aimed at including race and ethnicity added a significant contextual variable as “culturally based stereotypes and expectations may influence the way that others react to men and women in leadership positions” (Chemers & Murphy, 1995, p. 165). If the context of culture comparison was neglected, there was the potential to become blind to the effects of intercultural interactions (Chemers, 1984). Rosen (1984) posited that leadership should be “understood in terms of the social and cultural context within which it is embedded and which shapes the particular form it takes in any society” (p. 39). In this line of thinking, the study of leadership must necessarily recognize the influences of culture, race, and ethnicity.

Ospina and Foldy (2009) developed a model of integrating race and ethnicity into leadership research based on concentric circles of progressive insights. In the inner circle, one was concerned with the effects of race and ethnicity on perceptions of leadership. In the next circle, one was concerned with how race and ethnicity impacts leadership. And lastly, in the outer circle one was concerned with the social realities of race and ethnicity. Historical leadership research has tended to operate from a color-
blind paradigm that did not recognize existing hegemonic forces (Collinson, 2005; DiTomaso & Hooijberg, 1996).

Because leadership was enacted within hegemonic discourses that were culturally bound, leaders were not homogenous and were not transcendental (Ford, 2010). Elliot and Smith (2004), in their study of workplace power relations, found that women and racial and ethnic minorities operated from a power deficit position relative to White males. They posited that homosocial reproduction may have contributed to the continued gap in power relationships. Kanter (1977) described homosocial reproduction as a phenomenon where most positions of power were filled by individuals similar to those already in power. She suggested that this was a result of the amount of discretion inherent in leadership positions. By controlling who was hired or promoted, one controlled the discretionary decisions as a method of maintaining status quo. Since White males dominated the managerial and executive ranks, racial and ethnic minorities had a difficult time attaining positions of power because of the unknown beliefs they held that may have run counter to the norm. A similar phenomenon introduced by Byrne (1971) was labeled the similarity-attraction construct which asserted individuals tended to associate with others most like them (as cited in Dreachslin et al., 2004). This aversion to things that were unfamiliar (different) could manifest itself in different negative ways such as denial, isolation, separation, denigration, feelings of superiority and universalism, or minimizing difference (Bennett, 1993, 2004).

McIlwain (2007) studied the relationship between race and perceptions of leadership by examining political leaders. He found that perceptions of leadership for Black candidates were largely a function of race, with White voters perceiving Black
candidates as weaker leaders. Personal and social identities also may play a role in intergroup interactions. Individuals develop two identities: a social identity that is constructed based on collective conceptualization of self, versus a personal identity based on one’s unique experiences and background (Randel & Jaussi, 2003). For racial and ethnic minorities, this can pose a barrier in the workplace. Personal identity was shown to negatively impact performance in cross-functional teams, while social identity produced positive results (Randel & Jaussi, 2003). Learning to function cohesively as a unified team required acceptance of all work groups. Racial awareness rather than one’s race was found to be a better predictor of openness to diversity (Buttner, Lowe, & Billings-Harris, 2006). Racial awareness was, therefore, not constrained or predicted by the color of one’s skin.

Racial and ethnic minorities have historically struggled with obtaining power due to their social positions (Lewis, 2008). Demographic cues were found to quickly trigger unfair job assignments, and once individuals were assigned to low status jobs, undoing them was extremely difficult (Sessa & Jackson, 1995). Related to the theme of positional power in organizations was the idea of who can manage whom. White males were seen as capable of managing all people regardless of their demographic profile, while minorities tended to manage others who were similar to themselves (Stainbeck & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2009). Power perceptions of males and females also differ, with society not only giving more power to males but also reinforcing this power (Groshev, 2002). A self-fulfilling prophecy was created where racial and ethnic minorities and women who suffered from a lack of power did not have equal access to power to change their conditions.
It appears that United States corporations lacked the structural supports necessary for the proper integration of racial and ethnic minorities into leadership roles once they entered the workforce (Waters, 1992). Organizations developed unique *personalities* which were reflections of the values held by top administrators (Giberson et al., 2005). “Organizations are not race-neutral entities. Race is and has been present in organizations, even if this idea has not been explicitly recognized” (Nkomo, 1992, p. 501). Applying the theory of homosocial reproduction (Kanter, 1977) led to organizations that continued to unwittingly reify the notion that White males served as the prototypical leader. These perceptions were slow to change. Duehr and Bono (2006) found that although stereotypes about women may be changing, in the workplace the progress made by racial and ethnic minorities may not be as great. They found that male students still clung to values exhibited by male managers 15 years ago. The circular nature of the current intersection of organizational cultures and perceived leader prototypes led to Whites receiving better evaluations and psychological support, which in turn led to better promotions (James, 2000; Rosette et al., 2008).

Embedded leadership prototypes made it extremely difficult for racial and ethnic managers to be considered leaders in the workplace. Chung-Herrera and Lankau (2005) measured managers’ perceptions of the attributes of successful leaders. They found that the White manager matched the most attributes, 56 of 84, while Latino managers scored the lowest of any minority matching only 45 of the 84 attributes, while differing on 39 attributes. With such a marked departure from the perceived norm, one can begin to understand why the number of Latino administrators in healthcare is so small.
In an ironic twist, system justification theory posited that minorities would favor leaders of the dominant group when society places a higher social value on the dominant group (Cundiff & Komarraju, 2008). Individuals who displayed negative attitudes against any disadvantaged group were also found to hold negative perceptions of racial and ethnic minorities (Cundiff & Komarraju, 2008). Positionality theory was found to explain why different groups interpreted leadership differently (Kezar, 2002). These studies called into question whether successful racial and ethnic minority leaders had to change their behaviors to fit the organizational norm. It also explained why minorities tended to shy away from positions of leadership and authority in environments where negative attitudes persist (Cundiff & Komarraju, 2008). Even when Latinos received praise, the tendency was to discount the praise and experience lower well-being because of the stigma associated with being Latino (Hoyt, Aguilar, Kaiser, Blascovich, & Lee, 2007).

Leon and Nevarez (2007) found that the career track of many Latinos contributed to the lower number of Latino university presidents. They suggested developing Latino leadership institutes as a targeted approach to developing more Latinos leaders. The work of Kilian, Hukai, and McCarty (2005) supported this conjecture, as they found that racial and ethnic minorities suffered from a lack of mentors, exclusion from informal networks, stereotyping, and lack of line experience. Was there perhaps a relationship between the career paths followed by Latinos in healthcare and career success? This relationship may be contributing to their lower numbers as administrators. Related to career track development were findings that indicated racial discrimination was not uniform across industries as job segments based on technique (specific and less
ambiguous requirements) saw less discrimination compared to the skills-oriented job segment (Kim & Tamborini, 2006). Leadership could be found in the skills-oriented job segment with its requirements for relational competence.

Minorities also may have struggled with staying true to the calling of their specific racial or ethnic group. If minority leaders believed certain cultural expectations required behaviors that were inconsistent with what they perceived to be normative leader behaviors, this could pose a psychological dilemma. For example, Latinos have indicated a strong desire for their leaders to possess compassion and be very involved in community service (Ramirez, 2005/2006). Lumby (2006), in examining how diversity is conceptualized in the workplace, determined that once an individual becomes a leader, there is pressure to perpetuate a “homogenized leadership practice” (p. 161). Latino leaders may have to sacrifice values or principles to be successful. Traditional leadership tools may need to be supplemented or replaced with determination, optimism, and perseverance in recognition of the journey many racial and ethnic minorities face (Sullivan, 2006). This approach recognized the need to overcome barriers associated with being a member of the out-group through new and creative approaches.

In addition to the benefits of a more diverse workforce, increasing minority representation had other organizational benefits. Researchers found that factors associated with Latino culture and the way Latinos approach work led to more job embeddedness which resulted in less turnover for Latinos (Mallol, Holton, & Lee, 2007). One group of researchers did find that organizational performance decreased with increases in diversity until a tipping point was reached; thereafter, increases in minority workers resulted in better performance (Roberson & Park, 2007). Research also
supported that perspectives represented when a group was more diverse led to better decision making and better organizational performance (Page, 2007).

**Leadership in Healthcare**

The well-known and respected management sage, Peter Drucker (2002), in speaking about current leadership challenges, articulated that healthcare facilities had evolved to the point where they were the most complex human organizations in history regardless of size, with even smaller facilities barely manageable. Healthcare has evolved into a national phenomenon that impacts the entire economy because of its sheer size. Although the impact can be measured in trillions of dollars, its impact is also felt at the individual level as evidenced in healthcare outcomes disparities. In 2011 the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (2011) indicated that national healthcare expenditures had reached the $2.5 trillion mark, accounting for 17.6% of the total gross domestic product. The healthcare industry is no different than any other industry seeking to be more efficient. Given the amount of resources consumed by healthcare, strong leadership is imperative. The need for strong leadership has not escaped the purview of the healthcare industry, which has long recognized the value of solid leadership (Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008; Garman, 2006; Garman, Butler, & Brinkmeyer, 2006; Graber & Kilpatrick, 2008; Lantz, 2008; Stelf, 2008).

The need for strong leadership led to the development of a professional organization, the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE). The mission of this organization of furthering the training and education of its membership stands as a testament to this leadership value orientation. Those wishing to advance to the highest
levels within the college must pass rigorous examinations that test knowledge in 10 areas: governance and organizational structure, human resources, finance, healthcare technology and information management, quality performance improvement, laws and regulations, professionalism and ethics, healthcare, management, and business (ACHE, 2011). By passing the examination, one becomes board certified in healthcare management. In addition, individuals are required to validate attendance at education sessions and involvement in community activities. In essence, members were expected to display leadership behaviors across all aspects of their professional roles.

Additional efforts were evident in the development of the Healthcare Leadership Alliance, which is a consortium of six major professional organizations that operated within the healthcare industry. The six organizations are the American College of Healthcare Executives, American College of Physician Executives, American Organization of Nurse Executives, Healthcare Financial Management Association, Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society, and Medical Group Management Association. The alliance, through collaboration with member associations, developed a typology of five competencies necessary for successful healthcare leadership: communication and relationship management, professionalism, leadership, knowledge of the healthcare system, and business skills and knowledge (Stelf, 2008).

In defining the attributes of the healthcare leadership competency, Garman et al. (2006) developed three themes: establishing a compelling vision, clearly defined goals, and developing a positive organizational climate. A focus on competencies had applicability beyond the current employed healthcare workforce. Robbins, Bradley, and Spicer (2001) developed an assessment tool to be used in graduate healthcare programs
based on 52 competencies that are captured in four domains: technical skills, industry knowledge, conceptual reasoning, and interpersonal and emotional intelligence. This assessment was developed in response to claims that students were not adequately prepared to engage in meaningful leadership required in complex healthcare settings once in the workforce (Mecklenburg, 2001; Robbins et al., 2001).

One method of addressing the complexities of healthcare management was leadership development programs. Leadership development programs have received more attention recently. Leadership development programs aim to imbue select individuals with the competencies necessary for successful healthcare leadership. McAlearney (2008) posited that healthcare leadership development programs not only developed better leaders but they improved efficiency and quality by providing more qualified leaders, increasing the efficiency of educational and development programs, reducing turnover, and increasing the focus on strategy. Healthcare leadership development programs could be targeted and made customizable to fit the needs of specific leaders (McAlearney, 2010). This customization created an option to address competencies from a racial or ethnic perspective. It is recognition that each leader is unique. This customization could be used effectively to develop programs that were targeted to minority populations, avoiding the pitfall of unwittingly promoting status quo with developmental programs that were universally applied to all groups (Sherman, 2005).

There are many who feel the current need for strong leadership in the healthcare industry requires moving away from traditional leadership models. Graber and Kilpatrick (2008) suggested that values-based leadership is called for in today’s environment.
Values-based leadership has four components which include recognizing personal and professional values, managing expectations and spheres of influence, incorporating values of other stakeholders, and a commitment to values-based leadership principles.

Coupled with the need to develop and retain high quality leaders in healthcare was the need to develop more diversity among the top leadership positions. This diversity was represented by both racial and ethnic minorities and women, both of whom are significantly underrepresented in executive ranks in healthcare (Dreachslin et al., 2001; Gathers, 2003). The recent literature surrounding racial and ethnic diversity in the healthcare industry could be categorized into four formidable leadership challenges: lack of racial and ethnic minorities in leadership, disparities in compensation between minorities and Whites, disparities in satisfaction rates between minorities and Whites, and disparities in health outcomes between minorities and Whites (Dreachslin, Sprainer, & Jimpson, 2002).

Disparities in career achievement exist for racial and ethnic minorities in the healthcare industry even after factors such as education and years of experience are taken into account (Dreachslin et al., 2001). This environment contributed to Latino managers feeling more pessimistic about the opportunity to advance their careers because of poorer workplace relationships (Dreachslin et al., 2001). The lack of racial and ethnic minorities in leadership positions had ramifications that reached beyond the walls of hospitals. Certainly experience had shown that leading a more diverse workforce requires specific competencies (Clapp, 2010; Dreachslin, 2007a; Dreachslin et al., 2004). Lack of diversity in healthcare may contribute to health disparities by limiting worldviews of what was necessary and possible (Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008; Dreachslin et al., 2004;
Rosenberg, 2008). Rosenberg (2008), in writing a commentary about the current state of affairs in behavioral health, posited that the lack of diversity in leadership had led to services that did not match the needs of the communities served, leading to health disparities. Concordance, mirroring the community demographics in the healthcare workforce, is one way to achieve better outcomes but has not been realized across the nation (Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008).

In summary, it is clear that race and ethnicity impact the disparities in the distribution of minority leaders within healthcare. Specifically, there are very few Latino hospital CEOs. It has been shown that these disparities in turn lead to other disparities such as those in health outcomes and organizational performance. Although leadership has been studied extensively, there remains a lack of qualitative research exploring the stories of racial and ethnic leadership. It was the goal of this research to extend the study of leadership through a qualitative examination of the stories of three Latino hospital administrators. The following chapter explains in detail the qualitative methodological approach to be employed with this study by explicating the advocacy worldview, critical race theory, and Latino critical theory.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The lack of Latino administrators in healthcare should be cause for concern as the numbers would indicate that there are inherent processes entrenched within the social construction of leadership that serve as barriers to racial and ethnic minorities. Although there is certainly a role for quantitative analysis, qualitative research allows one to experience those barriers through the journey of those facing them in their own voices. Qualitative inquiry allows space for these first-person narratives and counter-stories. Qualitative research also provides the structure to examine the experience of being a racial or ethnic minority leader.

Measuring and identifying the barriers is vastly different than the visceral experience of facing these barriers firsthand. By providing an outlet for suppressed voices to be heard, one can begin to comprehend the intricacies of leadership worldview development from a minority perspective. Qualitative research design allows for interpretations based on thoughtful, reflective analysis. Creswell (2009) describes scholarly qualitative research as progressing from the development of broad code categories to the more narrowly focused themes. Themes summarize findings into logical groupings.

The philosophical worldview that served as the foundation of this study was advocacy. Advocacy “focuses on the needs of groups of individuals in our society that may be marginalized or disenfranchised” (Creswell, 2009, p. 9). Racial and ethnic minorities aptly fit this description. Major elements of the advocacy worldview include a political focus, empowerment orientation, collaboration, and change orientation.
This approach is not static, as it seeks to serve as a platform from which change can emanate. Research aimed at producing results with significance should always be the goal of qualitative studies (Ely, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). There are four generalizations that can be made about the advocacy worldview: participatory action leads to an agenda for change, this form of inquiry focuses on helping individuals free themselves from societal constraints, it creates a political debate that helps free individuals from unjust structures, and participants are active collaborators in the process (Creswell, 2009). In the simplest of terms, advocacy is about championing change. It is about changing behaviors, practices, and epistemologies that make for a more just society.

Advocacy is a philosophical worldview as opposed to narrative inquiry which is a methodological approach. From this worldview, the theoretical lens that will be applied is critical race theory (CRT). A theoretical lens serves as the guiding ideology, providing a framework for advocating for a group (Creswell, 2009). The actual research process will follow a qualitative methodology. Therefore, to best explore the research questions posed in Chapter One, a narrative approach will be utilized.

**Narrative Research**

Leadership research is extremely complex given that it deals with multiple levels, dynamism, and social construction (Conger, 1998). The driving force behind using qualitative research methods in the healthcare field is the very complexity of the phenomena of leadership itself (Antonakis et al., 2004; Conger, 1998; Ospina, 2004; Richards & Morse, 2007). Quantitative methods may fall short of capturing the nuances
and interrelationships of human interaction with its focus on sanitary numbers (Conger, 1998; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Being able to understand the human experience by acknowledging that all voices need to be heard more fully leads to a more humane society (Josselson, 2007). Qualitative inquiry provides the foundation for a participative process by privileging the voices of marginalized groups not available to the quantitative researcher (Creswell, 2009). These silenced stories provide balance in the literature and create deeper cultural understanding (Atkinson, 1998).

The quantitative approach seeks that which is context free with universal application and potentially generalizable, while the qualitative approach differs by seeking that which is context sensitive and particular (Lyons, 2007). Qualitative research endeavors to understand social phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Ospina, 2004). There are five generally accepted methodologies, or traditions, of qualitative research: narrative (or biography), phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2007). Each tradition is guided by a different set of assumptions linked directly to intended outcomes. (Appendix A provides a comparative summary of the five traditions.) The salient features of narrative research are the exploration of the lives of individuals through interviews where stories are the primary data source that lead to a detailed representation of participants’ lives (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the method selected for this study is narrative, as it provides the best framework for allowing participant voices to be heard.

Surprising to some, narrative analysis has a longer tradition in social sciences than management studies (Czarniawska, 2007). Narrative research differs from other qualitative methods in that there is no automatic starting and stopping point, which has
led to disputes about exactly how narrative is defined (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) assert that narrative research has taken four turns, or changes, in thinking as it had evolved. The first turn is a change in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The researcher is no longer an objective observer but a cocreator of understanding. The second turn is the movement from numbers to words as data. Numbers are sterile representations of the world but may fail to capture the essence of experiences and relationships. The third turn is moving from the general to the particular, which recognizes the value of a salient experience at a specific time by a specific individual. Finally, appreciating that knowing is becoming more blurred. This is movement away from perceiving the world one way to understanding that there are many ways of perceiving and comprehending the human experience. Riessman (2008) provides additional clarity by identifying essential ingredients of narrative research as oral storytelling that sequentially connects events in a meaningful way for later action based on what the participant wants listeners to glean from the story. The quintessence of narrative research is data that is obtained through establishing a “deeply human, genuine, empathic, and respectful relationship to the participant about significant and meaningful aspects of the participant’s life” (Josselson, 2007, p. 539). Squire et al. (2008) describes the narrative process as providing “individual, internal representations of phenomena—events, thoughts and feelings—to which narrative gives external expression” (p. 5). Thus, narrative research is the study of lived experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Creswell (2007) elucidates the process of narrative research by outlining important structural components (see Appendix B). In many ways this methodology
follows the general structure of other research designs but deviates in important ways in how specific components manifest themselves in narrative research. This process begins with the introduction and an explanation of the research procedures, similar to other methodologies. This is followed by data collection. Here is where one begins to see differences as the focus is on very small numbers of participants who share their stories through interviews. Data analysis is accomplished by organizing the data into representative chunks through the process of coding. Embedded rhetorical structures can then be explored to situate the participants’ voices and the researcher’s voice. The findings are reported as objective experiences, their stories, followed by interpretations of their stories. Reflection allows for attaching meaning to the stories and providing guidance for the future.

Narrative research derives from experiences of life and concomitant stories (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). It is through told stories that we find meaning and build lives and community (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Stories of human experiences are visceral, exposing authenticity about human reality (Riessman, 2008). As Atkinson (2007) so eloquently expressed, “We are the storytelling species. Storytelling is in our blood. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story” (p. 224). Lewis (2011) has suggested that one’s story is so connected to understanding the experience of life that without a story, self ceases to exist.

The process of developing a leadership worldview is evolutionary and constructed upon lived stories. It is not something that happens at once. Each pertinent experience adds to the construction. The stories participants tell allow outsiders to examine how individual understanding of self evolves over time for the participants (Atkinson, 2007).
All stories are particular, but stories from individuals of marginalized groups bring a new perspective because of their unique personal experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Stories also serve a social role. A noteworthy aspect of narrative theory is how stories describe the flow of power in the wider context of society, highlighting differentials in the amount each group possesses (Riessman, 2008). Stories can capture the mundane, but it is in evoking emotional responses by exposing that which is hidden that they become more than spoken words. Personal narratives gain power because of their connection to an individual. Stories help in understanding how experiences contribute to individual development (Atkinson, 1998).

Narrative research also allows a unique perspective in dealing with cross-cultural issues. As Andrews (2007) posits, in order to fully understand the structures of meaning for others, there needs to be a willingness and ability to imagine a world that is different than the one with which we are familiar. As a narrative researcher, one must come to terms with and accept that narrative inquiry inherently allows aporetic wondering and consideration of alternative views (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This translates to an openness to perspectives and ideologies that may run counter to what society deems “normal” or “acceptable.” Stories allow participants to share the most important aspects of their experiences which they perceive to be the essence of who they are (Atkinson, 1998).

Ely (2007) developed a set of guidelines that provide ontologic guidance to narrative researchers:

1. There are ways of coming to know something, and even then knowing is partial.
2. There are numerous ways for us to report.

3. All our messages have agendas—personal, political, gendered, racial, ethnic.

4. Our language creates reality.

5. As researchers, we are deeply interrelated with what and who is being studied. Research is context-culture bound. So is writing.

6. Affect and cognition are inextricably united.

7. What we understand and report as social reality is multifaceted, sometimes clashing, and often in flux.

8. We cannot say that narrative reflects “the” reality. We can say that, with the help of the reader, narrative creates a version of reality.

(p. 571)

These guidelines speak to the very human nature of narrative research and the complexities inherent in trying to understand others. In the final analysis, it is through the use of words that the researcher seeks to create meaning. To the extent the researcher realizes the constraints embedded within narrative inquiry, the findings can be viewed as representing what the participant intended. As Bakhtin (1981) theorized:

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (p. 184)

It is imperative that not only the words, but the voice, the meaning, the essence of the participants is allowed to become the focal point of this research. I concentrated on more than just the words. Noting body language and gestures, voice inflections, cadence
and pauses added to the texture of the story. This information was captured through the
interview process. The interviews were digitally recorded and accompanied by
observation field notes. The interviews took place at the participants’ worksites. The
initial interview lasted 2 hours. A second interview was then scheduled to further probe
the participant’s story. This follow-up interview also lasted 2 hours. In one case, a third
interview of 1 hour was necessary to cover all the questions. In addition to the interview,
each of the participants was shadowed for 2 hours as they performed their normal daily
activities. Coworkers were also interviewed. These interviews lasted for 30 minutes
each. Nine coworkers took part in these interviews. Though interviews were the primary
data source, part of this process was conversational in nature. This involved listening for
meaning by focusing on the process of learning from conversation (Hollingsworth &
Dybdahl, 2007).

Interviews played a primary role in data collection. This aspect of the research
was approached with much forethought. Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (2007) developed a
set of eight key principles relative to meaningful conversations that served as a guide to
the interviews:

- Develop trust. Listen nonjudgmentally.
- Initially, scaffold or structure conversation and set norms, if necessary.
- Encourage talk about topics that are controversial and difficult.
- Allow emergent purposes for the conversation to develop.
- Value different discourse styles.
- Specifically articulate the learning that occurs in conversation.
- Examine assumptions.
- Pay attention to issues of power-in-relations. (p. 166)

This structure created a more emergent process that was not bound by strict adherence to a predetermined set of questions, thus allowing the researcher to follow the participants down their paths.

Creswell’s (2008) outline of the steps involved in narrative research was helpful in understanding how best to report the findings. After a phenomenon worthy of study has been identified and the story of the purposefully selected participant is collected, the story requires retelling. The writing of narrative findings is not guided by strict constraints as most narrative authorities are not willing to prescribe specific structures (Creswell, 2007, 2008). There are, however, certain architectural strategies that can enhance the reporting of findings. Reporting findings as a chronology of events is a widely accepted approach within the narrative research community (Creswell, 2007). Utilizing a chronological approach provides enough structure to help the reader synthesize the elements and broader themes of the participant’s story. Riessman (2008) lists six elements of a fully formed narrative: an abstract that speaks to the point of the story; an orientation to time, place, and situation; complicating action; a space for evaluation by the narrator; the outcome of the plot; and a coda to end the story and reposition it back to the present.

A chronological approach highlighting salient events in the lives of the participants was used. The goal was to arrange the information shared into a larger overall story that prompts the reader to consider the deeper meaning underlying the surface of the text (Riessman, 2008). The best way to share the story of the participants is through the use of ample quotes (Creswell, 2007). Although there is an interpretive
focus that is inherent to all scholarly research, the participants’ stories were the central focus. The more the words of the participants were allowed to take center stage, the more true to their stories the findings are.

The participants’ stories are followed by my interpretation of their stories. This generative process (Creswell, 2008) involved a thorough reflective examination of the participants’ stories to guide the development of themes. This process began with a broad analysis of the data that was continually refocused into smaller and smaller subsets of data. Themes will capture the essence of the story in a manner that brings meaning and understanding at a deeper level. The development of themes was accomplished by a careful evaluation of the transcribed interviews and segmenting the text in smaller segments. These segments were then analyzed and reduced to salient codes that concisely described the text segments. This produced a multitude of codes. These codes were then aggregated into major ideas that represented the participant’s story. This coding process yielded a limited number of themes that are reported in the findings section of the research report. Themes brought coherence to the participant’s story by attaching meaning.

The themes are followed by a conclusion that summarizes the research and offers suggestions for promoting positive change. There also is a reflective segment at the end of the paper that allowed me to share my thoughts about this research journey. Because narrative research is a process that changes both the participants and the researcher (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), I wanted to share how this research has changed me or my perspectives.
Role of the Researcher

In narrative research, the role of the researcher is one of cocreation (Atkinson, 1998). Whereas quantitative research emphasizes a detached hands-off approach, narrative researchers realize that the participant and researcher form a relationship with each other (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Stepping inside the personal world of a participant to discover larger worlds is a very invasive process, one predicated on trust (Atkinson, 2007). Understanding this aspect of narrative research helped to mitigate the bias inherent in interpreting others’ stories. This also illustrates the need for ethical behavior throughout the research process. Part of the ethical process in research involves recognizing how one’s biases may impact the research.

To address this issue with as much transparency as possible, it is important that readers know I am an ethnic minority who self-identifies as Hispanic. I function in a leadership role and have been employed by the healthcare industry for over 25 years. The experiences I have lived have colored my perceptions of how groups of racial and ethnic minorities, in particular Latinos, are treated by White individuals. I have experienced racism and prejudice first hand, both from the dominant culture and from other minorities, including my own ethnic group. I harbor certain biases and prejudices that I must continually check. I have spent much time reflecting on the world around me from my ethnic perspective. Acknowledging these preexisting belief systems allows me to be mindful of the need to suspend these biases during this study. Although the intent is to reflect what the participants wanted conveyed, the very act of retelling their stories is fraught with biases that we as humans cannot completely suspend. I have made every attempt to let the stories speak for themselves.
I was also concerned about the conversational nature of narrative interviewing. Thus, I made sure the focus remained on the story of the participant. When the conversation began to veer into my story, I explained that this research is not my story. I refrained from sharing my story to prevent my story from distorting the participant’s story. Once my research was concluded I did share my story with the participants to the extent they had questions.

**Sampling**

Narrative research employs purposeful sampling to select participants that best help in understanding the research questions (Creswell, 2008, 2009). Homogenous sampling further limits the participant pool to individuals from groups who share defined characteristics (Creswell, 2008). The focus of this study was on individuals who could provide insight into the phenomenon being explored. Participants were selected because of their potential to provide wisdom, knowledge, and insight into healthcare leadership from an ethnic minority leader perspective (Atkinson, 1998). Since this study was limited to the stories of three Latino leaders in healthcare, only individuals who were currently administrators in healthcare that are of Latin descent were asked to participate. The term administrator was used to describe any individual who held the position of chief executive officer or vice president in a hospital. Furthermore, I used my network of contacts within the healthcare industry to locate viable candidates. Once potential candidates were identified, they were contacted to explain the nature of the study and asked if they would consider participation. During this brief interview, the researcher determined if their stories would contribute to answering the research question. The
number of study participants was purposefully limited to three participants as narrative inquiry is concerned with deep exploration, not broad surface exploration (Creswell, 2008).

**Research Participants**

I traveled to the work locations of the three participants for the interviews. Since there were no individuals who met the sampling criteria near me, travel to nearby states was necessary. The participants were all located in Midwestern cities. The hospital systems the participants worked for were detailed. However, any identifying information such as hospital name and participant’s name was changed to protect the anonymity of the participants, as were the names of anybody else that was mentioned. Diligent efforts were used to protect confidentiality; however, given the salience of the participants, it may not be completely possible to ensure someone may not be able to ascertain the identity of the participants. The participants were informed of this potential dilemma prior to starting the study as part of full disclosure. Demographic information about the participant will also be shared. The goal will be to develop enough description so that readers will feel like they know the participants and can relate to them on some personal level.

**Reciprocity**

Qualitative research should be reciprocal in that the participants receive some benefit from their efforts (Creswell, 2009). Reciprocity in qualitative research recognizes that participants volunteer their time and share their information for the sake of research and should receive something of value in return (Creswell, 2007). The intent is not to
pay large sums of money for their assistance but rather to offer, as a gesture of gratitude, some small gratuity in return for their part in the research. Although this can sometimes be a small payment, it need not necessarily be a monetary reward that is offered. In my case, I was dealing with very high-ranking officials of large corporations who were well compensated. To offer a small payment could have been viewed as meaningless. Rather, I plan on providing a copy of the dissertation to the participants as I believe the greatest gift I can provide is the codification of the participant’s story.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) posit that narrative inquiry also can be a transforming and enriching experience for the participants. When participants reflect on their experiences through the stories they share, they can discover deeper meaning in their lives (Atkinson, 1998). In this respect, the participants are left feeling as though they have benefited from the research as well and do not view it as a one-way process that merely “uses” them. It is hoped that the participants found the process of discovery both a developmental and transforming experience (Atkinson, 1998; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Specific benefits associated with sharing one’s life story are greater meaning to one’s life gained from clearer perspectives of experiences, stronger self-image and increased self-knowledge, sharing meaningful insights and experiences with others, satisfaction and inner sense of peace from sharing one’s story, validation of personal experiences, creating community, providing catalyst for others to change, knowing the participants on a deeper level, and creating a clearer picture of how one wants his/her story to end (Atkinson, 2007).
Data Collection

Data were collected from November 1, 2011, through August 31, 2012. This included extensive interviewing of the participants at their worksites. Because the participants were located in different states, it required making trips to where they were located. This required some advance planning as it involved overnight stays. The following questions were asked of the participants during the first interview session. These initial questions dealt with demographic and biographic information:

- Briefly tell me about you.
- Briefly tell me about your career.
- Please describe your current position.
- How long have you worked in healthcare?
- How long have you been at your current job?

These first questions were aimed at collecting some necessary data, but also to put the participants at ease with the interviewing process. After the initial questions the following, more probing, questions were also asked of the participants to gain insight into the central question by exploring the participants’ stories:

- Tell me about your childhood.
- Tell me about important people in your life.
- What is the cultural or ethnic background of your parents?
- How would you describe your parents?
- Was there a noticeable cultural flavor to the home you grew up in?
- What are some early memories of cultural influences?
- What events stick out in your mind from that time?
- What would you say was the most significant event in your life up to age 12?
- Was your family different from other families in your neighborhood?
- What cultural values were passed on to you and by whom?
- Tell me about your high school years.
- What events stick out in your mind from that time?
- What would you say was the most significant event in your life during high school?
- Tell me about your college years.
- What events stick out in your mind from that time?
- What would you say was the most significant event in your life during college?
- What did you learn about yourself during these years?
- What have you learned about yourself since then?
- What has been your most important lesson in life, outside of the classroom?
- Tell me about times you felt different.
- Were there any times you felt different because of your ethnicity?
- How much of a factor in your life do you feel your cultural background has been?
- What social pressures have you experienced as an adult?
- What is your leadership philosophy?
- Have there been any mistakes in your life?
- What are some things you hope you never forget?
- When you think about the future, what gives you hope?
- Who had the greatest impact on your development as a leader?
● What advice do you have for Latino students considering healthcare as a career?
● What three things would you like said about your life when you die?
● Is there anything that we’ve left out of your life story?
● Do you feel you have given a fair picture of yourself?
● What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?

The initial interview was scheduled for 2 hours and was digitally recorded for playback later. As the interview unfolded, the researcher developed probing questions based on intriguing responses from the participants to explore interesting aspects of their stories. This emergent process generated different follow-up questions for each participant based on what they chose to share and allowed for deeper understanding. This initial interview was followed by a time to process and reflect upon the information shared. This was followed by a second interview, and another trip to the participant’s worksite to digitally record the conversation. The nature of qualitative research is that it is an iterative process that continually builds upon the known as it is unearthed.

Questions that arose subsequent to the second interview, or in one case the third, were handled by phone or by electronic mail. Since the interviews took place at their worksites, this allowed for observation. Field notes were taken to record the general impression of their workspace, interesting items on display in their offices, and how they interacted with others. In addition to this, I was allowed to shadow each participant for an additional 2 hours, observing his interactions with others. This process of interviewing and observation allowed me to chronicle my thoughts, feelings, and
experiences. This provided both a descriptive log of what took place and a reflexive component that embedded me into the process.

A narrative is the telling of individual stories. It is not the story as relayed by another party or interpreted by someone else. The individuals best suited to tell their story are the participants. However, there is value in confirming the stories told by comparing them to accounts provided by coworkers. I interviewed nine coworkers to determine if their impressions of the participants matched the stories that were related to me by the participants. Each interview was conducted over the phone and lasted approximately 30 minutes. An interview protocol was used to keep the interviews consistent (see Appendix F).

The participants were asked to journal their thoughts at least weekly and provide these thoughts to me as part of the data collection process. The consistency with which the participants supplied me this journaling varied by participant, from almost weekly to nothing. In addition, I conducted a search of documents available in the public domain. These documents added additional perspectives that will serve to provide a deeper, more comprehensive picture of the participants. It should be noted that although the participants were mentioned and/or chronicled in numerous articles, to protect their anonymity, none of these documents will be referenced in any specificity.

In addition to the data collected about the participants, I kept a journal about my thoughts and feelings as I pursued this research. Narrative research results in changes for both the participants and the researcher because of the close collaboration (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Reflecting on my thoughts allowed me to discern how the research has impacted and changed me and is included in the final write-up.
Data Analysis

Narrative interviewing “necessitates following participants down their trails” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24). Research design and data analysis in a narrative study naturally follows an emergent process subject to constant adjustments based on a continuous analysis of input received (Creswell, 2009). Narrative inquiry provides qualitative interpretations of information shared by participants through their stories that help situate emergent findings within broader meanings (Creswell, 2008).

Interviews were the primary source of data. The researcher personally transcribed interviews verbatim rather than employ an independent third party. This was done because transcription is more than technical work in a narrative study; it is a process that cannot be separated from language theory, as it is profoundly interpretive (Riessman, 2008). Once transcribed, interviews were read to develop an overall sense of their meaning, as qualitative data analysis consists mainly of analyzing text (Creswell, 2008). The transcripts were read a second time with the goal of segmenting and labeling text groupings into codes. Lean coding was used during this first coding attempt to reduce the number of codes and concentrate on broad themes (Creswell, 2008). This coding was completed by hand, an acceptable procedure for qualitative research (Creswell, 2008). Data was then repeatedly reread and categorized chronologically in a process of continual coding.

This process yielded a large set of codes initially, which were further reduced into subthemes according to a process outlined by Creswell (2007). These subthemes were then grouped into five themes. Each theme was explained in the findings section of this study. The researcher also sought to discover in vivo codes that express the participant’s
viewpoints through his words. These in vivo codes, when applicable, became the headings for each theme section.

In addition to the analysis of transcribed interviews, other data collection methods were used. The use of documents and observations provided valid sources of qualitative information (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the physical surroundings of the participant’s workspace was closely observed by the researcher as a nonparticipant. Shadowing allowed me to observe how each participant interacted with others and gave me a sense of his leadership style. A search was performed to find any qualitative documents that may have been written about the participants. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative documents to include such things as newspaper reports, magazine articles, and personal journals. One of the participants provided regular thoughts throughout the process but the other two were not able to add this activity into their schedules during the research phase. All of these document sources were analyzed for findings that relate to the research questions.

**Verification of Data**

Scholarly research requires a rigorous and well-defined approach. Developing a research design that incorporates measures to address validity and reliability fortifies the findings. Methodological congruence (Richards & Morse, 2007) requires that the researcher develop congruent ways of thinking. As a researcher, I tried to operate from a mindset encapsulated in viewing the world from a narrative perspective. I employed several procedures to increase reliability as suggested by Gibbs (2007). These procedures included verifying the accuracy of transcripts to prevent drift in the definition
of codes and by cross-checking codes. Transcripts were inspected carefully to insure they did not contain mistakes made during the transcription process. Coding drift was addressed by constantly comparing codes to data. Attention will be paid to the participants’ actual accounts, including negative data and alternative interpretations to increase persuasiveness (Riessman, 2008).

Creswell (2009) also identified several methods of increasing validity of qualitative research: triangulation; member checking; rich, thick data; clarifying researcher bias; and negative information. Triangulation involves relying on multiple sources of information to support findings (Creswell, 2009). In addition to the participant interviews, coworkers were also interviewed. In all cases, the description of the participators matched the descriptions provided by the participants of themselves. In shadowing the participants, I was able to observe them in their natural work setting. The observations added another level of confirming data. I also was able to find multiple stories from publicly available information sources like the Internet and hospital-specific sources, like internal newsletters. Each of these pieces of information provided some small glimpse into the participants as well. There were 35 pieces of this type of information collected. Unfortunately, in order to honor the confidentiality, none of these sources can be cited as they would compromise anonymity.

Member checking involves having participants review segments of their stories (Creswell, 2009). Each participant was provided a complete copy of their story for review. Each participant agreed that the stories were accurate representations of what they had shared. Participants were also provided a copy of the themes, and each agreed they were in keeping with his story. I also had a peer researcher read through the
interview transcripts and then read the stories I had developed to insure I was keeping true to their stories.

Writing with rich, thick descriptions involves writing in such a way as to convey the reader to the world of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Detailed descriptions provided a clear picture of what was taking place and made the participants take on humanness. By sharing information in a manner that gave life to their stories, it was hoped the reader would be engaged as well as informed.

Reflexivity in the research process allowed for the explanation of preexisting biases so the stories and findings could resonate as honest (Creswell, 2009). Peer evaluation has been an important part of the validity process. There was a group of three individuals that met every 2 weeks to discuss the progress of each person’s research. This process allowed for this research project to be examined closely and created opportunities for ongoing constructive criticism. Within this space the tough questions were asked, with the intent of creating a better research project. I also have reviewed my research with experts who specialize in qualitative research, who in turn have offered helpful guidance.

Discussing negative information provides a fuller picture and adds to the overall quality of the research (Creswell, 2009). I have attempted to provide an unbiased look at the lives of the participants without editing or slanting the story in any direction. The intent was to let the stories speak for themselves.

In total there were 13 hours of interviews with the participants, 4 1/2 hours of interviews with coworkers, 6 hours shadowing, and 35 pieces of written material that were studied.
Ethical Considerations

The nature of narrative research is such that a high level of trust is required between the researcher and the participants. Although the researcher provides meaning through findings that are interpretations of the stories shared by the participants, it is still imperative that the voice of the participants become the center of the research. It is the researcher’s responsibility to ensure that the voices are accurate and as free from distortion and bias as possible.

Institutional Review Board permission was sought prior to engaging the participants in the study. The study was thoroughly explained to the participants, and they had an opportunity to ask any questions. The participants were asked to sign an informed consent form, approved by the Institutional Review Board, after terms of participation had been explained. The participants were made aware that they could leave the study at any time. All identifying information was removed from the final report, and all names were changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Materials were kept by the researcher on a secure computer, and material was only shared with individuals involved in the research process with me. The computer was housed in a locked room. These parameters met the requirements of the Institutional Review Board while still allowing the researcher the ability to conduct meaningful research without having to continually request Institutional Review Board approval (Josselson, 2007).

It also is hoped that, being healthcare leaders, the participants found value in the contributions this research makes to the field of leadership. Narrative inquiry has to produce work that contributes to scholarship by distinctly standing for something (Ely,
2007). Moving this research from the realm of a collection of good stories to advocating for change is the driving force behind this study.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE STORIES

This chapter contains the stories as related by each of the participants. Each one has traveled a unique path and achieved extraordinary success in the healthcare field. Extensive quotes have been used to more fully give voice to each of their stories. I have tried to synthesize everything they shared with me into a cohesive whole without steering their stories in any particular direction. Although my voice is present, it is used to create connections and help the story flow. The stories should speak for themselves.

Carlos’ Story

Introduction

Carlos (a pseudonym) is 65 years old and has been in healthcare all his life. He self-identifies as Mexican American although he speaks with no accent. His parents emigrated from Mexico, making him a second-generation American. Carlos says of his current position:

I am project executive. I have responsibilities for the design and construction of the $406 million expansion project of the hospital. The position doesn’t stop there; there are other projects that we’re working on also that I have administrative or executive responsibility for. Anything related, really, to construction or renovation.

The hospital he works for is a state university affiliated hospital operating over 400 beds. In his role, he is responsible for overseeing the construction and is deeply involved in building design. Within the scope of this expansion project are multiple structures at various stages of construction. He has responsibility for other smaller
projects as well. In addition to construction projects, he is accountable for space planning, safety, building maintenance, and upkeep of the campus.

The hospital where he works serves as a training laboratory for medical professionals; as such, it not only functions as a traditional hospital but, just as importantly, serves an academic purpose. This dual role involves complexities not associated with operating a traditional general acute care hospital. The hospital sits on the outskirts of a metropolitan district of a Midwestern city. Even though this piece of land was originally located outside the din and congestion of the inner city, the city has expanded and now engulfs the campus on all sides. The city boasts a large minority population composed primarily of Latinos but has representatives from the African American, Asian, and Native American peoples as well. As a teaching facility, the hospital draws not only from the immediate community but from quite some distance across a wide geographic region.

**First Impressions**

I met Carlos at his office for the first interview. Upon arriving at the hospital campus, parking was confusing because of the extensive construction taking place. The construction is not limited to a single building as multiple projects seem to be in various stages of completion. Upon entering the building where Carlos’ office is located, I was greeted by an open entry space that did not make me feel like I was in a hospital. There was no reception area, and only a few chairs were scattered throughout the spacious room. Upon closer inspection of the legend attached to the wall, I became aware that clinical services could be accessed via the elevator system or through various corridors.
The building had 10 floors, and the executive offices were located on the 10th floor. I was welcomed by a pleasant receptionist who signaled my arrival to Carlos via the telephone. Carlos came out himself to greet me and walked me back to his office. Carlos was of average stature with jet black hair interlaced with strands of white that stand out in stark contrast. He had dark eyes and a warm smile.

There was nothing ostentatious about the space occupied by the executive offices. I observed cubicles in the center core with offices ringing the perimeter. Carlos’ office was located in the corner of the building. The office had windows on two sides, which allowed a substantial overview of not only the campus but the surrounding city landscape. His office was moderately sized, with just enough space for a small circular desk and four chairs in addition to his desk and work space. There was the standard unremarkable office art print hanging on one wall. The other wall was dominated by a large bookcase that sat on an equally large credenza. The shelves contained an eclectic mix of items including photos of family, awards, and books. The other thing that was very noticeable was the ubiquitous nature of blueprints strewn around the office. They were covering various work surfaces as well as contained within a holder on the floor. The office was orderly but not overly neat as it bore the signs of someone actively working on multiple projects. It had a lived-in feeling that put me at ease. Although I had observed larger offices for people of lesser standing with their respective organization, Carlos’ office was strictly utilitarian in purpose with no wasted space. The other thing that caught my eye was a geranium plant on the corner of his desk. The plant seemed slightly out of place for a couple of reasons. Typically, live plants are located in public space for the enjoyment of others and are usually cared for by staff assigned that
function. I assumed the plant was cared for by Carlos. The plant was not in a decorative container, but was in a simple terra cotta pot. The other thing that was different was the choice of plant. It was a geranium with bright red flowers, not the typical office variety of non-flowering tropical plant. I made a mental note that this lone symbol may have deeper meaning as I came to understand Carlos’ story.

Carlos had me sit across from him at the round table, which was one of the few places not covered with blueprints. Carlos was deliberate in his answers and yet, as he spoke, he continually processed thoughts very quickly. During the interview he very often started to answer a question, and quickly took detours as new thoughts popped into his head. Moving effortlessly from thought to thought, Carlos spoke with the wisdom of one who has seen and experienced many things. He gave off the air that he was comfortable with who he was at that point in his life. He was also not afraid to find humor in the stories he related to me.

It must be noted that during my second visit Carlos walked me back to a different office and explained that the hospital had recently merged with two other area hospitals increasing their size from 4,000 employees to 12,000 employees, resulting in the largest healthcare system in the region. His new office was still on the 10th floor but it was smaller and no longer overlooked the construction site, something he made note of missing. As a result of the merger, new reporting relationships were created, and he reported to a new boss. He appeared to be adjusting to the changes without much stress, or at least this was my impression.
From Mexico to the United States: Early Life in a New Country

The story of Carlos’ journey actually began in Mexico in the early 20th century. It was not uncommon for individuals living in Mexico looking for a way to make money to migrate north to the United States for seasonal work in the fields. Much of this work took place in neighboring produce states like California; however, as farming is not limited to California, migrant workers made the journey to wherever there was a need for their services. For Carlos’ parents, this meant trekking to the northern region of the United States for work, miles and a culture apart from their home towns.

Working in the fields is backbreaking work requiring not only physical stamina but strength of character to come back day after day for little pay and rueful working conditions. In these earlier years migrant workers had few, if any, rights and were, by and large, poorly treated. Yet to some, this represented the American dream, or at least a road to that dream, a chance to better their situation. It was against this backdrop that Carlos’ parents’ paths crossed.

The people who were to be Carlos’ father and mother met while working the fields. Carlos remembers with a hint of emotional pain the obstacles his parents faced early on:

It was a very close family and . . . my parents came from very [pause] they were [pause] their families [struggling to form his thoughts] and they lived somewhat in poverty when they first came here because they would come to the United States and they would work in the fields, and that’s where my parents met and then they married.

Carlos declared to me, “My parents are both from Mexico—they are both migrant workers. My mom, her family, is from Mexico City, and my dad is from Aguascalientes and they came here many, many years ago. Unfortunately, they are both deceased now.”
She was 16 and he was 26 when they married, a marriage that would span some six
decades. Carlos used the following terminology when describing his father, “My father
was a bigger person. My dad was probably five-ten, five-eleven and stocky.” He also
described his mother, “My mom was, I don’t think she was even five foot, [laughing] she
was very small, very petite.” He continued to talk about qualities that helped bring them
to life for me:

My mom was very light complected and if you saw her you wouldn’t
immediately think of her as being Mexican or Hispanic, whereas my dad
was just the opposite. My dad was, you would look and think, “Oh, this
guy is from Mexico or South America.” They both had no more than a
grade school education and when they came to the states my dad
[changing thoughts] there were other Hispanics, a small number in our
community, so it was small group of people. I tell folks that his English,
when he died, if you were to listen to him speak English, you’d think he
just swam the river. [laughs] His English was still at that level. My mom,
on the other hand, when she spoke to you in Spanish you would think this
lady is schooled in Mexico. When she spoke to you in English, you would
think she was schooled in the United States. She did not have that Spanish
accent when she spoke English, and she didn’t have the English accent
when she spoke Spanish.

Carlos continued characterizing his father, providing a better appreciation of who he was:

My dad was more carefree; hard worker, actually both of them were hard
workers; played more of a back role in raising, more of a secondary role in
raising us; he had lots of friends; was too giving, that was one of the
things my mom complained about was that if people needed help he was
always the first one at the door when he had such a large family that he
could have been helping more; liked to eat [laughs] unfortunately, that was
his downfall. It was the wrong types of foods.

He added the following about his mother, saying she was a “disciplinarian; happy, a
happy person; small; firm, very firm, not in stature but in what her expectations were,
[she] liked challenges.”
After marriage Carlos’ parents settled in the small town where they were working.

Carlos describes the environment into which he was born:

I grew up in a small town not far from [a large city]. It was about 16,000 people there, and we never were lacking for things to do because with a family as large as ours was, there was always someone you could spend time with, so it wasn’t like you were the only child. School was important to my parents in addition to being disciplined and giving things as much as you could but . . . it was a town that still hadn’t acclimated to minorities. And so, even though it was a small town, there were still the areas where the Hispanic community was expected to live and the Black community was expected to live and then the rest of the town, the rest of the town was Anglo.

Carlos and his family, as did other Latinos, lived in an area of town where other minorities lived as there were unwritten, but clearly understood, societal rules about where people of various races and ethnicities could live. Carlos and his family lived in the Latino section of town. In this segregated beginning, his parents worked hard to make ends meet, which became increasingly difficult as the number of mouths to feed increased with the passing years. Carlos is the 13th child of 15 children in all. A strong commitment to work permeated the household, and Carlos and the other siblings saw the toll it took on their father. Carlos talked about his father’s work ethic and the results of his efforts:

My dad continued doing that [working in the fields] for a while until he became more settled and then was able to get, you know, work in a foundry which is where he worked most of his life but they were frugal because, after all, they were able to buy a house and an automobile and raise the kids and to move into, what was for them, better than what they had, and that was their whole goal, was to make it better for themselves and for their family.

Carlos made it clear his father did not like the work but it provided a steady income, and he worked hard at it without complaining. His mother made do with the income provided
as she never sought nor accepted charity. Carlos made sure I knew they never relied on
government assistance even though their existence may have been meager at times. Both
parents believed that things were acquired through hard work. Saving enough to
purchase a home and a car and raise all 15 children is an accomplishment Carlos
remembered with fondness and pride.

Carlos’ mom had a full-time job running the household which involved raising 15
children. As she did not work outside the home, the children had plenty of time to
regularly interact with her. With his father spending most of the time working, his
mother became, out of necessity, the disciplinarian as well as providing maternal
guidance. One of the things that all the children recalled from these early years was the
constant smile their mother displayed. Carlos said in a heartfelt moment:

I remember when my mother passed away I was asked to do the eulogy, and I spoke with my brothers and sisters about what they wanted me to say and the two things that really stuck out, because they came across from almost all of them, was that my mom always had a smile on her face and I think we have all kind of picked up on that because she was always very happy.

The siblings made a point of ensuring that Carlos made mention of this during her
funeral. The smile she constantly wore served as an outward expression of her
satisfaction with her situation regardless of the circumstances surrounding her. Although
she would have enjoyed more comforts afforded by money, she never gave an indication
that she was deprived—as her family was the source of her joy. Carlos said:

She never felt that she was missing anything in life even though she didn’t travel, she didn’t drive, she liked to stay home, she had a green thumb like you wouldn’t believe—roses and begonias and African violets—that was her love, that and her children and grandchildren.
One can sense the love Carlos had for his mother by listening to how he spoke about her.

Through his words, he was verbalizing that the value of people should not be determined based on one’s level of education:

She taught herself to read because her interests were, I mentioned earlier, were flowers. The three things that she really developed, she was an excellent seamstress, crochet, needlepoint, cross-stitching, you name it, she did all that. She loved working with flowers and she had the most beautiful African violets, tuberous begonias, and roses that you would ever see, and then she was a great cook. And like the old story, she didn’t pull out the measuring cup or teaspoons or anything. She just threw stuff in there and it just came out perfectly. She was the one who learned to read and even to her dying day she would, when she was reading things about her flowers she would ask us, “What’s this word?” Because it would be a word she didn’t recognize and we would tell her and then we would have to look it up in the dictionary if we didn’t know and we would tell her what is was.

As recorded earlier, Carlos’ father never mastered the English language, and in fact, was content to speak a barely intelligible version. His mother was the exact opposite. She was truly bilingual. Despite the fact that both of his parents spoke Spanish fluently, they emphasized the need to learn English because they were in the United States now. Carlos and his siblings became the unfortunate casualties of assimilation with the loss of their native language, something not uncommon for many minorities who immigrated here. Carlos said somewhat tongue in cheek:

This one I can blame on my parents, is that when we moved here I remember them telling us, “We’re in the states now. We need to learn to speak English.” And so I have one brother . . . he studies Mexican history and he speaks Spanish fluently and I mean he’s one of those guys who’s out there marching with Cesar Chavez, [laughing] and he’ll never change . . . He’s the only one who really speaks Spanish well.

Very few of his siblings learned to speak Spanish with fluency. Carlos speaks well enough to get by, but is constantly trying to learn how to speak more conversationally. In
retrospect, he wishes he would have been taught Spanish while he was a child; however, he appreciated why his parents adopted this particular approach to language acquisition.

Such a large family provides ample activity to find things to occupy one’s time. Carlos spent much of his youth engaging his brothers and sisters in games and other activities, as well as helping around the house and in the garden, watching and learning from his mother who excelled at all facets of domestic life. The house was permeated by love, discipline, religion, and good food. The house was always spotless, no small feat with a family of this size. Not only the house, but clothes were always clean and pressed, even if they were not always new. Carlos commented that this was a distinguishing characteristic separating his family from others. The object lesson being enacted was that lack of money and material possessions should not affect one’s respect for things or the dignity inherent in each person.

The smells one encountered upon entering the home were distinctly Mexican in origin. No matter the time of day, one could always find hand-made tortillas, beans, and *chile* on the table. As Carlos described the scene, I could almost smell each item. Carlos’ mother was a gifted gardener who was blessed with a green thumb as gardening came naturally to her. One of her favorite activities was perusing flower magazines gaining insight to perfect her avocation. Her house and yard were filled side to side with plants and flowers. Carlos automatically smiles as he remembered his mother’s penchant for roses:

> We lived in a house and we were next to a scrap yard, and there were three houses and one was torn down so there were two houses and there was a driveway and a gas station. So my mom had her roses in the backyard, and people would see the rose garden and come from the gas station to see her roses and walk through the roses. My brother built a gazebo but it
wasn’t a fancy gazebo. It was just some four by fours and three walls and a roof that was that lath material so the sun could get through, and that is where she had her begonias. They were just beautiful. People would come over and just be amazed. When my mom was working outside, as soon as she saw someone walking in her direction she would go in the house because she didn’t feel comfortable talking to people. But people would just come over from the gas station and just walk through and look at her roses. She had [pause] it had to be a couple hundred, 300 roses when she was at her peak. It was pretty nice. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine from here, I can’t remember how it came up, but I was telling him about them and he didn’t believe me. This was when I was in the military and so he went back there with me, because he lived in [the same home town] also. “Where are all those roses you talk about?” So I took him around back and he couldn’t believe it. “Oh my God, you weren’t lying!” “No, I wasn’t lying. Why would I lie about this?” [laughing]

The roses and other plants were grown for her enjoyment and a sense of personal pride, not to garner public attention. Thus, the geranium on Carlos’ desk is more than ornamentation; it is a link to his mother.

His mother also provided guidance and support. She challenged her children to excel at whatever they put their hands and minds to. “She was the one who nurtured us to do our best regardless of what we decided to do. Do your best in that particular area.”

His mother instilled values like respect and common courtesies as it was just as important to her to be a good person as it was to be successful.

**Gaining Awareness Through Grade School Years**

School was important to Carlos’ parents because they saw this as a means to a better life for their children. From an early age, Carlos excelled at school. Carlos attended elementary school within the same racialized environment that he would later describe as struggling to reconcile racial differences. However, at that time in his life he was largely ignorant of societal prejudices. Although he was careful to not defame the
town in recollecting its qualities, it did not diminish that accepted racial stereotypes and
prejudices were operant. These obstacles did not deter him from pursuing excellence.
Evidence of his intellectual prowess was being selected to be one of the patrol boys in
elementary school, an honor reserved for those with good grades. Carlos related the
following story:

I did well in grade school. I learned [laughing] this is going to sound
crazy now that I think about it . . . . Remember the patrol boys? I don’t
know if you had those. [laughing] So what it was, when you were in the
fifth and sixth grade if you did well academically you could become a
patrol boy and these are the people who would leave class a little bit early
in the morning . . . and early in the night because you were at the corners
of the school and you were directing kids and telling them when they
could go and when they could walk across the street and when they
couldn’t. We had patrol boys whereas now they have the adults who are
volunteers doing that. Because I had done well academically the first
semester, because you didn’t become a patrol boy until the second
semester of the fifth grade, if I remember correctly, anyhow I was made
captain. They had a captain and a lieutenant and a sergeant. Well, the
captain’s job was to ride his bicycle around to make sure everyone was
doing their job. Okay two things, first I didn’t have a bicycle, and second
I didn’t know how to ride a bicycle. [laughing] I was given my little blue
badge because that was what you got when you were captain. And so I
remember my parents they helped me get this old bike, which we painted,
and then the next thing was learning how to ride it. It was a crazy thing
but it was something I remember during fifth and sixth grade.

Despite earning good grades in elementary school, Carlos was not successful at
everything he attempted during these years. For example, all the kids had the opportunity
to participate in the school choir and the vast majority of kids ended up in the choir.
Students were screened for the basic ability to stay on key. He laughingly related how he
was unceremoniously relieved from performing in the school choir:

The only one is, I can’t sing. I remember when the choir, this was the
sixth grade choir, there were three or four of us who were told we didn’t
have to go to choir, so we had study hall because we didn’t pass the choir
test. [laughing] Grade school was good, I enjoyed it.
Looking back, he then realized this was the school’s way of minimizing rejection. Rather than singling out Carlos, he was simply and quietly assigned to study hall and in so doing preserved his pride and the quality of the choir. By his comments I could see that this experience did not diminish his overall satisfaction with grade school.

It was during these earlier years that Carlos first became aware that being a minority resulted in differential treatment. Listen as Carlos shares a memory from this time in his life:

My older brothers, one brother in particular who liked to have fun and kick his heels up occasionally, and I can remember a couple of times he would intentionally try to go into some of the establishments that were more Anglo-focused and [laughs] he would come back telling stories about it—people would throw him out the door, or whatever, things like that. I was much younger then so I don’t remember that as much but I know it happened.

Although Carlos may not have fully understood the deep-seated prejudices at work, he did comprehend on some level that he and his family were different in ways that caused them to not be completely accepted by their adopted community.

From an early age he observed his parents working hard. Excellence was pursued as the goal. Success was not the ultimate prize to be won, rather giving complete effort, which allowed Carlos to hold his head high. His parents never told him what he had to become or even what path to follow in life; they simply instilled the desire to perform better than others. In this passage he related his mother’s instruction:

She was the person that we did more speaking with and talking to, and she was the one who encouraged us more than my dad did because he was a laborer and worked a lot of extra hours to make ends meet. I can remember the one thing that my siblings also mentioned, was that she never said you need to do this or you need to do that as far as a career. Her only request was that we would stay out of trouble, that we would get
a good job, and that we would give it 100%. She never said you need to

do this . . . she never said you need to go to college or you need to be a
doctor, because I had expressed interest. She just said “Hijo, I want you to
pick what makes you happy but you’ve got to do your best, you’ve got to
give it 100%.”

This parental direction emanated from a sincere desire to prevent their children from
having to endure the hardships they endured as they believed that being a minority placed
them at a disadvantage, one that could be overcome by outperforming others. In this
passage Carlos shared his perspective by looking deeper into the meaning behind the
words of encouragement:

My parents always emphasized the need for my siblings and me to excel
in whatever we do. As a student, I remember them telling us we had to
work harder to prove we were as good as or better than others we went to
school with, others we worked with, or others in the community in
general. And while they never emphasized this was because we were
Mexican and a noticeable minority in the community, I know this was a
significant part of their urging.

Navigating the Vagaries of High School

Carlos entered high school weighted by the need to succeed pressing with even
greater force upon his consciousness. Despite the prevailing norms of who would most
likely succeed at school coupled with the low expectations for minorities, Carlos
continued to excel in high school. As the best student of all his siblings, he felt the need
to not let people, including himself, down. As he matured, Carlos became increasingly
aware of racism and prejudice in his social interactions and the interactions of others he
observed. It was during these years that he became acutely aware of his minority status:

In fact, when I graduated from high school [pause] these numbers are not
going to be exact but there were 260, 270 graduates and I think there were
maybe 10 or 12 African American students and maybe six to eight
Hispanic students. And so the majority of the school was Anglo and so at
times that was difficult because I definitely felt left out in some of the
circles, especially as I got into senior high school. Senior high school was
grades 9 through 12. I still had a lot of Anglo friends I became very close
with. It was something I noticed at the time but I kind of worked around it.

As a salient numerical minority, there was no ability to hide the fact that he was
physically different from the majority of students. His comment that he “worked around
it” seems to place the burden of diverging from the norm on his shoulders. He would
have to accommodate the majority, not vice versa. Being a minority in a predominantly
White town also reared its head in unusual ways through the normal course of daily life.
Carlos remembers how he never looked forward to summer break because it would bring
the inevitable questions about what he was planning for the summer:

As a child growing up, we knew during the summer months we weren’t
going to be taking a vacation because I remember at the end of school kids
were always talking about where they were going, what they were going
to do . . . “What did you do this summer?” “Oh, we went to Disney
World,” or Disneyland at the time, . . . or “We went to Canada,” and I was
just hoping no one would ask me. [laughing] Because [laughing] well
[pause] do you really want to know? [laughing] Because we would work.
We would be in the fields during the summer months. But you know
what? It didn’t hurt us at all, but at the time it was sensitive, something
that I just wanted to just go [pause] “I don’t know if I want to tell them
this.”

For children of migrant workers, the summer represented the busiest time of the year for
their parents. No, there would be no trip to Disneyland or neighboring states for him.
The summer was for work. Carlos related how he felt almost ashamed about telling the
other kids that his family was not taking a vacation as this would be just another way for
others to think less of his family.

The juxtaposition of the few minorities against a sea of White at school could not
be ignored. From a visual perspective, it was obvious Carlos was a minority; however,
being a minority is something numbers alone cannot fully capture. It was at this time that Carlos became personally aware that some individuals were treating him differently than his White friends. It was not only differently, but intentional discrimination against him.

He vividly recalls how he felt discriminated against by a certain group of individuals:

Now this was my impression, I am not sure if this was real or not, but this is something I remember to this day. There were a couple of students who would, again in my opinion, would always invite people to parties when I was around but I was never one who was invited. That was the one thing I remember discussing with my sister. Something I’ve never forgotten and this is going to sound terrible but when I go back to my high school reunion and I see those two young ladies, I never say anything to them but I am sure to let them know I am around and that I am doing well. [laughs] And maybe I shouldn’t be doing that but [pause] I’m sorry.

Notice how carefully Carlos’ introduction to the problem was worded. This seemingly innocuous beginning contradicted his great emotional investment in the situation. The scars inflicted during youth had remained with Carlos a lifetime. Those events made an indelible impression on him. Almost five decades later he recalled the treatment received as a major emotional event during this time of his life. After graduation he continued to struggle to make sense of the treatment he received as his emotions responded to the sting of rejection years later. He allowed those events to guide his thoughts and behavior:

This is going to sound terrible but there’s still some of this, I mentioned it earlier. Having grown up in the town where I did and seeing some of the issues where the minorities—whether they be African American or Mexican—were treated differently, or at least my perception. I just made my mind up I was going to show them! [laughing] It’s terrible but the first class reunion I went to was a 10-year reunion. I had done the army and I had my master’s degree and I was in a director position back in [home town] and I went because I wanted to show them. Because getting back to this group, two girls and their friends who I thought were intentionally scheduling parties and things like—invite everyone around but not me and I wanted show them, “See, I made it!” I was pleasantly surprised because when I went to that 10-year reunion I didn’t see all of that petty stuff that I had seen 10 years earlier. In one respect I was disappointed because I
couldn’t walk with my chest puffed up. I didn’t have to. On the other hand, more importantly, I was happy to see it was gone.

Carlos was seeking closure years later. Although the closure did not occur as he had envisioned, it was a positive ending nonetheless. His mother also inhibited interactions with his classmates as he was never allowed to sleep over at someone else’s home, and likewise, his friends were never invited to stay overnight at his house. This could be attributed to cultural beliefs or just as easily the protectionism of a caring parent. Other things were more easily identified with cultural beliefs. Carlos described how, although there was no overt attempt to create a Mexican household, there was no doubt one was entering a household influenced by generations of Mexicans:

It always smelled good because my mom, with a family of that size, was always cooking something. We didn’t have a lot of the Mexican art or things like that. But when you came in you just always knew, just from mainly the smell and who was there it was very family-oriented and very Hispanic and very Mexican.

High school also presented Carlos with life lessons gained from not always being the best. He talked about a grade that silently mocked him each term that grades were sent home for the entire year:

[In] high school the pressure was on to maintain the grades and I, for some reason, instead of taking Spanish, I decided to take a Latin class. Our grade cards were a strip of paper like this [shows a long narrow piece of paper] and every 6 weeks, no every 9 weeks, we got a grade. So I took Latin in the eighth and ninth grade. They showed you your 9-week grade, then your exam, the first semester exam. I got an F on the Latin exam and that was on that sheet [laughing] for the rest of the year. Every time for the next three 9-week terms, that grade, that F, was still on that sheet of paper.

He was not overly active in extracurricular activities, although he participated in one organized sport. Carlos joined the track team but was not a standout. On some occasions
he would suit up but not be allowed to run as he was not among the more accomplished runners. He also was not comfortable with all social interactions and although he did not use the term, one could speculate he suffered from shyness:

I didn’t go to either of the proms, which my sisters asked “Why aren’t you going to the prom?” “I just don’t want to go.” I just didn’t feel comfortable doing it, so I didn’t go but I got along well. I had close friends both male and female. There was just no one there who really attracted me.

Statistically, Carlos and his siblings were at high risk for not completing high school. Unfortunately, several did become part of the statistical norm. Of the eight boys in his family, he was the only one to graduate from high school as a regular, full-time student:

I’m the only male out of the eight males in the family who graduated from high school. The others ended up getting their GEDs, and several of them didn’t even finish high school. And my sisters, they all graduated but they didn’t like school. So I was the only one who really showed an interest in school and did well academically.

In this respect, his family served as a microcosm that mirrored what was taking place in society at large. Many minorities were either not finishing high school or were content with high school diplomas. This does not mean his siblings did not become productive members of society; simply that education was not a high priority for them.

One of the values that was passed along from his parents was adherence to societal regulations and authority figures. In this respect Carlos viewed his family as differing from families around them:

And I think the closeness of the family, because we all kind of watched over one another. And some of the other families, everybody was off doing their own thing and getting into trouble and things like that. Not to say we didn’t, but it wasn’t the level or the type of trouble . . . that you would read about in the newspapers.
Carlos and his siblings never got into serious trouble with breaking the law or disrupting society. Carlos attributed this to the support of family.

**Finding a Personal Calling Through the College Years**

In selecting a major to pursue in college, Carlos felt he was somewhat limited in his choices based on finances. Given his keen interest in medicine from his youth, it was conceivable he may have become a physician. Because of the cost associated with medical school, he understood this was never really an option for him. Carlos would subsequently relate that:

My older brothers and sisters were there encouraging me to go to college and one of them even made the comment, “If you want to go, don’t worry about the money. We will all do what we need to do to help you.”

Despite the offer of his siblings, Carlos did not apply to medical school. Just as his siblings unselfishly offered from what little they had, he in turn would not create a burden for them by accepting their offer. He was content to pursue a degree in the field of radiographic technology. He told me that, on a visit to see his father, he was asked to sit down because his father had something to say:

I can remember my dad, I mentioned earlier that he didn’t spend a lot of time with us, but I can remember, and this is something I won’t ever forget either, when he was in his late 80s and he had diabetes so both of his legs had been amputated so he was confined to bed. And I came home and went to see him and often, at that time in his life, he was usually in bed or sitting up and he was just watching TV or just sleeping in his chair. And I remember going in and talking with him because I lived in [his current location] then and out of the clear blue he asked me to sit down because he wanted to tell me something, and then he started telling me how proud he was of me and then he started tearing up because he wanted to apologize to me for not being able to do more towards helping me go to school. I thought that was pretty neat.
This story served as a vivid reminder of the love his parents had for him, the hardships they faced, and how these hardships impacted his life. His father’s comments about not being able to do more captured the realities of their socioeconomic existence. Love and support would develop Carlos into the person he became, but it did not cover the cost of tuition to medical school. When I asked Carlos if he would change anything in his life, he replied that he wished he could have gone to medical school.

Carlos wasted no time in pursuing training as an x-ray technologist. The month after he graduated from high school he started the training program. The program combined instruction at the university and 40 hours of practical work at the hospital. This program provided his entrance to a field within the medical arena and was subsidized substantially by the hospital, resulting in very little out-of-pocket costs for Carlos.

During these college years, he was not free from the implications of being an ethnic minority. Prior to entering the x-ray technologist program, he wondered to himself if his ethnic background would be a detriment to his application. Whereas White students only concerned themselves with grade point average and other statistical metrics, Carlos was weighted by thoughts of prejudice in the selection process. Luckily, his ethnicity proved to not be a barrier and his decision to pursue this particular program was reinforced as a good choice when, upon arrival, he quickly took note that the majority of the interns were Asian. He determined that things would be okay. Unfortunately, he later discovered that one diversified hospital program was not indicative of society at large. When he attended the conferences for radiologic professionals, he was one of a
handful of minorities who attended, once again being acutely aware of his minority status:

I would go to conferences, and I would be one of only a couple minorities in the whole group. I would really notice it there. Beyond that, I just made up my mind I was not going to see myself as being different. Even though my skin may be darker and my parents are from Mexico, I’m not any different than you and don’t treat me any differently.

It was also at this hospital, early in his career, where his leadership was challenged on a racial basis by one of his direct reports. He deftly handled the situation in his straightforward manner. This incident served as another reminder of the influence of prejudice and bias that existed in the environment around him.

Being a minority had some advantages. The hospital where Carlos worked served a large number of Spanish-speaking patients and their families because of the large migrant workforce. Being able to communicate with them in their native language was quite helpful and valued by the organization.

Carlos surmised that the field of x-ray technology, as much as he liked it, held limited opportunities for him. Thus, after completing radiographic technology school he decided to pursue a degree in organizational development. Carlos viewed college as a means to an end. He was not there for the experience; he was there to obtain his degree and move on with his career. He attended college as a nontraditional student, pursuing his education at night as a full-time job consumed his daylight hours. It was there—in the academic environment where students are encouraged to learn how to think—that he developed a stronger sense of who he was. He became more vocal and more participative, and he was more inclined to share his thoughts with others even if they were contradictory. In his earlier years, when confronted with prejudice his natural
response was to refrain from confronting the situation. This view changed in college as his matriculation was contemporary with such civil activists as Cesar Chavez and his struggle for migrant worker rights. Upon introspection, he deduced he could no longer keep silent on issues of race. He certainly could not be classified as a radical, but he no longer shied away from telling people about his ethnic heritage. The story of his humble beginning no longer gave him pause in public:

In junior high school and in early years in high school, seeing how people responded to the minorities, I kind of just backed off and was more low key, but when I got into college, that was when we started with Cesar Chavez and some of the other different issues that were being raised by the minorities. Wait a minute, why am I sitting back doing nothing? So that’s why I became more sensitive and more proud of telling people about my parents and what they were able to achieve from very humble beginnings, and was more proud—not more proud but more vocal—about expressing my pride in my heritage and in my culture and the fact that I was a Mexican, and I didn’t go to Disneyland. [laughs]

It was during these years that he met the woman who would become his wife. They soon married and, with the added responsibility of a wife, he had even less time to involve himself with school activities. He got to know some of the students a little better as their cohort progressed through the program at roughly the same pace, but did not spend time with them apart from classes and school projects.

The bachelor’s degree, which was a milestone and major accomplishment itself, was also perceived by Carlos to limit his future. He determined he needed a graduate degree to achieve the things he wanted to accomplish. He simply stated, “I just decided I wanted to do more than that”—a statement that gives insight into the psyche of Carlos indicating his need to be challenged at a higher level. Even at this early stage in his career, he had a greater sense of what he could accomplish. He enrolled at the local
university in their MBA program. When asked what he learned during this time he said, “I had to work hard to get to where I wanted to be.” Things were not handed to him; he earned every good grade, every positive affirmation, and every accolade that came his way. A strong work ethic, inherited from his parents, permeated his being from a very early age and, when combined with his personal drive, resulted in continued success during his college years.

**Developing a Greater Sense of Self in the Workforce**

After achieving some level of success at the hospital where he trained to be a technologist, he made a calculated move into a completely different functional area and became part of the engineering department:

> While I was doing those graduate studies, I moved from a position of chief technologist in the department to a position of analyst within the engineering department. It was a step back in terms of salary, but I felt that it was something I needed to do in order to get exposure in other parts of the hospital and for people to know me other than as the chief technologist in the x-ray department. So I did that for a few years and then . . . I was promoted to director of personnel in the human resources department, and I managed primarily the labor relations piece of the hospital.

Not to be lost in his easy telling of the story is the risk and foresight involved in the decision to change careers. I don’t believe failure was something Carlos considered when weighing options. He functioned in this role until an opportunity arose that would allow him to become director of imaging services by moving back to the city where his wife was from. He made the change, and his performance soon led to another promotion to the vice president of support services. In this position, the scope and impact of his decisions grew proportional to his increased responsibility. Again, he performed well in
that position. After serving in that capacity for several years, he was approached by business acquaintances who offered him a role in their new consulting firm. Carlos left his position as vice president and pursued consulting for a short period of time before being conscious that his need for constant activity was not being met through the vagaries of building a consulting practice. At the same time he reached this conclusion, a position opened at the nearby teaching hospital. He applied for, and was offered, the vice president of operations position. He accepted and held that title and position until recently when he was asked to oversee the major building project. He surmised he needed to make changes in his responsibilities to be effective in his new role:

Just recently when we started this new project, which was about a year and a half ago, and at that time I shared with the president of the hospital, who I report to, that I really wasn’t going to be able to take on this project and continue in my other role as vice president of operations. So we agreed to change my title to Project Executive. Another person was hired to take on the operations responsibilities and so I’m focusing now my full time on the project.

Within these comments, I saw a pragmatic leader who understood his limitations and was more concerned with performance than with stature.

Carlos was happy to contribute to organizational performance any way he could. With his tenure of more than 17 years, Carlos served as the unofficial hospital historian. Individuals were constantly calling him about historical facts that others had either forgotten or taken with them as they had moved to different employers. He possessed a significant mental database of facts accumulated over his 17 years and delighted in being able to share that arcane information with others.

Carlos credited his desire to enter the healthcare field to his interest in medicine as a youngster. When queried as to why he remains in healthcare, Carlos said:
I, and this is going to sound very much like a canned response, but I truly enjoy meeting people and working with people and assisting people wherever I can. And when I say people it’s not just the patients but it’s also employees. One of the things that I like most about my job is spending time with the entry-level employees. I know a lot of people when they get into a VP position, or even a director position, they like to spend time visiting and having lunch with their peers or with the physicians and, while I enjoy doing that, I more enjoy spending time with the housekeepers and people who work in food services or the lab techs or the nurses because they’re the people who really know, as far as I am concerned, who really know what’s going on in the hospital. They are so appreciative of the fact that you recognize them. My nickname here is Mr. Carlos. [laughing] Whenever I walk through and I see the people, like the housekeepers, or food service, or the techs, [pause] I feel good about that. I didn’t want to be called Mr. ______. [laughter] I prefer they just call me Carlos. I have always enjoyed doing that. I can help these folks in some ways because they help me. The patients, getting back to the patients, I’ve really always enjoyed interacting with patients and seeing what we can do to make things better for them.

A career in the administrative side of healthcare was new territory for a young Latino professional. Carlos commented that he believed he was the only Latino x-ray technologist with an MBA. He was cognizant of being an anomaly then and shared that this had not changed much in his industry:

I would love to see more of them [Latinos] make that entry. The one thing that I would really like to see is more Latinos in areas outside of entry-level jobs. In this organization the majority of the Latinos that I see are in housekeeping, the laundry, or in environmental services, and they all do an excellent job there. I would love to see the same percentage, well probably not, our percentage is probably 80 to 85% of our housekeepers and food service workers are Hispanic or some other minority. I would like to see more in the executive ranks but even if not there, more nurses, more respiratory therapists, x-ray technologists, who can then move into supervisor, manager, or director positions.

Carlos knew through experience how liberating achieving career goals could be.

The unsettled emotions within Carlos relative to his ethnic background were finally
resolved when the success he had achieved in his professional life allowed him to reconcile a past somewhat shrouded in shame:

Now I am proud of telling people about my cultural background and about my family and how they showed up here. I’m no longer embarrassed to say we worked in the fields in the summertime when other people were on vacation. And it’s been awhile now.

When asked what prompted the change in outlook, Carlos responds as follows:

It was when I completed work on my master’s degree and I had a good job and I was providing well for myself and my family and I was living the American dream so to speak. I don’t need to hide that stuff! I should be proud of the fact that I was able go from . . . this point to this point. That was really it.

Success was the indicator he sought to legitimize his claim as an equal member of society. No longer would he hide or be ashamed of his past or his roots. His journey, and that of his parents, became his badge of pride.

In an ironic twist, Carlos also related how his own culture created tension within his family. One of the stories related by Carlos had to do with the ritual surrounding meals at large family gatherings. The woman Carlos married was of Irish and German descent and not used to certain Latino customs. He talked about her reaction to one of the family customs: “One thing that used to bother my wife, [laughing] whenever we had a large group together for dinner, the men ate first, the children ate second, and the ladies ate third. [laughing] She was not used to that at all.” Having been raised in this environment, there were no cries of injustice from Carlos or his siblings. The hierarchy was accepted as the only normal they knew. It was only those for whom this ritual was foreign that it produced a negative reaction. What was perceived as perfectly normal to Carlos was seen as archaic by his wife.
Family remained a top priority for Carlos, not just immediate family but the larger Latino family. During the research period, he received a call from a friend whose niece’s daughter had committed suicide. It should be noted that the friend’s niece was a Latina. He was proud to share the details of what transpired:

One thing that really hit home with me was the support this young girl’s family received from the Mexican community in her neighborhood and school. It was exactly what I remembered when members of my family died. The Mexican community is there to help you in this terrible time of loss. The girl’s funeral mass was attended by 300-350 and the reception that followed was attended by at least the same number. Like many others, I offered to help with the food. I brought the fried chicken from a local supermarket and [the friend] made arrangements with her friends to bring side dishes. She and I became very concerned when we saw the number of people at the funeral mass. We left early to set things up at the reception hall and discussed how I would probably need to run out for more food. Boy, were we wrong. Just as I remember during the reception following my parents’ funeral mass, more and more food showed up as people began to arrive. As I left, [my friend] and her family were still wondering what they were going to do with all of the remaining food. In addition to food, there were the financial donations to the girl’s mother and father. They are a young couple, and everyone knew they need financial support as much as they need spiritual support. This is an aspect of the Mexican culture that I am very proud of. We have many characteristics that we cannot be proud of; however, in a situation like this, we are there to help in whatever ways we can. We can and should be very proud of this. I was!

Carlos believed that family was not limited to immediate family but included the greater Latino community, a value embedded within Latino culture. In his previous comments, I observed how he responded to someone he was not even related to, but felt compelled to help. Even with certain positive characteristics associated with the Latino culture, Carlos was asked if he was driven by a need to change the injustices he observed around him. He said:

Maybe not change things for the Mexican community, but change things for me. Because I’ve not been one to go out and to march and go to
demonstrations and things like that, but I also made up my mind I didn’t want to stay in a town of 16,000 people because I was reading about Paris, and reading about Mexico City, and Australia and whatever, and I said I just want to see some of that. And my family, they are very happy staying in that small town and just spending time with one another.

These comments about wanting more out of life were a frequent refrain in his story.

Carlos addressed the same concerns again:

And for me it was just, I was very interested in doing something more than working in the foundry or working on an assembly line. I just needed to do something different and they were supportive of that, very supportive of that.

Carlos credited his parents with instilling within him the values that drove him.

His mother provided a strong religious grounding in the Catholic faith. Expectations were clear from an early age that Carlos would progress through the rituals as designated by the church. Carlos talked about the values instilled by his parents in this passage:

One is religion and the second is family cohesiveness. My mom more than my dad, [laughing] although he was also, but she was the religious of the two, she was more religious than my dad was. It was really important for us to go to church. We were raised Catholic, you were baptized, you get to make your first communion, you make your confirmation, you get married, you don’t get divorced, and you live together forever [laughing] and you go to church every Sunday. That was a real important part for her, very important. And then the other part is family, and how important family is.

This religious orientation stayed with Carlos throughout his adult life as he described himself as an active practicing Catholic. In the Catholic faith, individuals commit for a lifetime as divorce was frowned upon. His parents were married for some 67 years. He shared with some regret that one tenet of his faith that he violated was divorce. He and his wife did divorce and, although Carlos has not remarried, it remained
as another reminder of his humanness despite his success. Carlos and his ex-wife remain cordial acquaintances and are jointly committed to their two children.

In addition to his parents, there were three individuals Carlos admired for their professional guidance. All three were administrators in hospitals where he worked. Two were men and one was a woman. He described these people as providing opportunity, support, vision, and modeling perseverance. He felt fortunate to have been mentored by each, as few people get this chance. He clarified that getting to work with these extraordinary leaders was special, not because he was a minority, but because only a limited number of individuals ever get this chance, regardless of their racial backgrounds.

Carlos did not let stereotypes and prejudice deter him from being the person he felt he needed to be. He continued to encounter individuals who made assumptions about him based on phenotype qualities or the spelling of his name. Some would immediately launch into Spanish upon meeting him. He complied to the extent he could keep up with the conversation. If things became too complicated, he called in professional interpreters as his ability to speak Spanish was somewhat limited.

The journey of each person through life is distinct. As Carlos reflected back on where he had come from, he realized his journey had created a different reality for him than his siblings. His siblings were content to remain in the town of their birth and have seldom ventured from its familiar surroundings:

And I think part of it is they all still live in this small town back in [the state he grew up in] where they are happy with getting an undergraduate degree because they can get a job there. They stay there with their family with their parents and siblings, and that’s all they need. I think the part that is the culture is they want to stay close to family. They are very hesitant to branch out and to start a new life 1,000 miles away or 500
miles away because they want to be close to mom and dad and their siblings.

Carlos visited his family from time to time but the act was rarely reciprocated, and his parents never made it out to see him before they passed. When Carlos did visit, he found the encounters to be uncomfortable at times. The issues his brothers and their friends discussed were things he could not relate to:

When I go back to my home town where my family lives, there is always a little bit of discomfort because when I go out with my brothers to visit with their friends, they’re talking about things that I have no interest in whatsoever or that I know anything about. They’re talking about fixing trucks and about this guy and what happened at this bar last night. [laughs] I don’t know how to replace a carburetor or they are talking about laying brick. So I’m just sitting there drinking a beer just listening and every once in a while I will nod my head yes.

The things they found amusing did not really interest him. He had chosen a different path, one that had at times seemed contrary to Latino cultural norms. Reflecting on why his path was different, he mused:

For me it was not being okay with the status quo, and the status quo was growing up, graduating or not graduating from high school, going into the military, coming home, getting married, have a family, work a 40-hour week, and survive and have a comfortable life. I was more interested in getting out and seeing what’s going on in the world and doing something more than working in an assembly line or in a foundry 40 hours a week. Seeing what else is out there.

The career choices of the siblings were respected, and their work was admired because of their technical prowess. There was the sense that they could have excelled in professional careers had they so chosen, which leads to an unspoken feeling of loss—loss of things that might have been. Carlos understood that individuals must be intentional in choosing to follow a different path; they cannot be coerced. Carlos shared a personal story about his nephew to illustrate how this value played out in real life:
My nephew came to live with us, with me. He’s from [my home town]. He’s 19 years old, smart kid, did really well in school, graduated from high school, was interested in going to medical school to be a pediatrician and came out here . . . However, there the closest school was in [a nearby city] and he needed to get out of that area, because what he told me was that he would sit down to study and get a phone call and someone would say, “Hey, let’s go here, let’s go there,” and he would go. So he wanted to get out of the environment where he had so many people calling him and asking him to go out and have fun instead of him studying. So he came out here. He lived with me for about a month, then he moved in with my daughter and her husband and their two children . . . We helped him get enrolled in the community college. Tried to make him as comfortable as we could.

Get a call one Sunday morning from his mom . . . She had been called by the emergency department at [local] hospital here. He was there. He had gotten drunk with these kids and he had gotten rowdy at the 7-Eleven and they called the police and the police saw that he was intoxicated, so they took him to the hospital . . . We went and picked him up and got his car . . . he’s now back in [his home town] . . . And I’m thinking how do you change that? Because I tried, giving him everything I thought he needed. Maybe overcompensated by giving too much. I don’t know, but that’s a personal one. [He] just told us he was moving in with this girl and had his bags already packed and got in the car and left.

This nephew was unable to grasp a different future even when virtually handed to him. Carlos learned you could not force someone to choose a different path. He talked about removing financial barriers for Latino students and creating networks that provide peer support to keep kids focused on their education. Even with these things in place, Carlos realized that ultimately it came down to personal commitment—one of the characteristics that separated him from his siblings.

Carlos believed the choices made by his older siblings were influenced by the environment in which they grew up. He acknowledged that discrimination was more prevalent during the time his older siblings were in school. The main goal was to get a job. The need to get a job was driven by the financial situation of the family. The older
children helped provide for the family. Under these circumstances, education was viewed more as a luxury than a necessity.

Carlos was very thoughtful about sharing what he felt were the most important life lessons he had learned. After a long pause, he said that thinking before he responds was an attribute he had worked on more as he gained wisdom. He was able to interact with all his siblings easily, not something the rest can claim. Part of the reason for this position was his unwillingness to engage in arguments with them. He was much more willing to overlook something he did not necessarily agree with to keep family unity, but even he has found himself saying things he wished he could retract. He once told one of his sisters that a certain politician was an idiot only to realize later that she was going to vote for him. He did not receive his birthday call from this sister that year. However, upon receiving a Christmas card from her he judged the feud to be over. This incident illustrated his penchant for speaking before considering the impact of his words on others in his earlier days. Carlos also viewed his role as the guardian of his ethnic ancestry, something to be passed on to his grandchildren. Carlos admonished his daughter to speak to them in Spanish, even if it means not speaking to them in English for a time:

I have two grandchildren—two grandsons—and what we try to emphasize with them is the importance of their culture. They both have, my oldest grandson’s father is from Oaxaca, Mexico, and my youngest grandson, his father is from and don’t remember which, it’s one of the border towns in Mexico. I try to really instill in them the importance of their cultural heritage. The one thing where we have done a poor job is encouraging them to learn their native language, and that’s something we really need to do.

He no longer carried the negative connotations of being an ethnic minority as a psychological burden. Even though he has struggled with his ethnicity at times, he could
look back and say, “I’ve never allowed it [being Latino] to be a barrier for me.” He spoke more defiantly, albeit in a positive fashion, about his sense of self:

I’m not going to use my Mexican background as a crutch, but rather use it in a positive way. I’m not going to let anyone treat me any differently than they would treat anyone else. I’ve found a couple of times where I challenged people about that. If I want to try something, then I’m going to go for it. Sometimes I succeed and sometimes I won’t. I just accept that.

**Finding a Leadership Rhythm**

Spending even a short amount of time with Carlos allowed me to sense the intensity with which he goes about his assigned duties and his attention to detail. As we were walking across campus to a meeting, he noticed a utility car parked on the sidewalk. He excused himself and walked over to ask the driver to move it as he wanted no obstructions blocking the sidewalk so pedestrians could pass unencumbered. He described himself as a taskmaster of sorts. He shared in a lighter moment how he acquired a less than flattering nickname:

I have very, very high expectations of people. My nickname, [laughs] I’ll tell you what my nickname is—“bastard.” I have a reputation for being very firm, that I can be difficult to work with but that I’m fair. I emphasize that I’m fair because I won’t be unfair to people. I don’t expect them to do what I do. I don’t expect them to work the hours that I work. But when they are here, I expect that they are going to give me 100%.

Fortunately, with me working with people on a project like this, working with the entry-level employee who doesn’t even have a high school education but he’s the guy who’s cleaning up after everyone, and then you’re working with the architect who also happens to have a Ph.D., they think that they know it all and they don’t.

Although he made no apologies for his approach, it was offset by his desire to be equitable:

Maybe I’m sometimes too black and white when it comes to performance but we’re paying employees, just as we’re paying contractors, a fair and in
some cases a very good salary to do their job. All I ask is you do your job, and I had a couple of people say, “Well, what do we need to do to make you happy?” All you need to do to make me happy is do your job.

His reply was simple yet profound. I suspected that Carlos valued results and respect more than being liked. Even when individuals did their jobs, he continually challenged them to perform better. The following quote perfectly illustrates this mindset:

The guys know this. When we finished this first building I said, “Guys, now we did a great job and we set some new records,” and we did, for the cost per square foot and also for the amount of time it took to put that building together. I said, “So you raised the bar to here. So the positive thing I’m going to tell you is you did a wonderful job, and I really appreciate all the work you did. Now the downside is, if you guys ever do another project with me, the bar is no longer here. It’s now up here,” and they remember that.

If he expects a lot of those who work for him, he expects even more of himself:

My expectation for everyone is very high and everyone knows that. The important thing is I will not ask anyone to do any more than I am willing to do myself. I have always shared that with people. I expect people to work overtime or extra hours when things need to be done, but I’m not going to leave at 4:30 or 5 o’clock either and they can expect to see me here longer hours than they are. . . . I’ll set an example, and I expect them to also set a positive example for people that report to them. Really excelling is really important as far as I am concerned in terms of people who work with me. The one thing that I probably do too much of is, people need to prove to me that they’re going to give 100%. I don’t want 110%. I just want 100%, [laughs] that’s plenty. Once I feel comfortable with that, then I let them go. If they don’t prove to me, then I’m going to watch them very closely to make sure that they are not going to do something that is going to jeopardize a project or the organization or even themselves, or me!

He moved easily in the milieu that was his work environment that may at one minute have him conversing with food service staff in his less than perfect Spanish and later that day telling an architect his design made no sense as it did not meet the needs of patients.
Even with his straightforwardness, there was a congenial quality to him. This apparent paradox might be explained by the way Carlos viewed conflict. He did not shy away from conflict, tough decisions, or uncomfortable confrontations. What did set him apart was his ability to compartmentalize these interactions and forget about them:

Once I have an encounter with someone that is negative, I forget it! I’m over it. Now they may not be but I am, so the next time I see them I’m going to treat them as I did before. I think that is why sometimes people say, “You’re schizophrenic.” I say, “Do you want me to hold a grudge?” Usually they will agree that what they did, the reason I brought it to their attention is because there was an issue. It’s not because I’m just going out there and not feeling good so I’m going to go out and give someone a hard time. I give them a hard time because they haven’t done their job or they didn’t do what they were supposed to do.

This quality seemed rooted in his ability to separate behaviors from the person. Thus, someone who could be quite rigid and intimidating could also be quite affable and took satisfaction in noticing the hourly workers, making a point of eating with them when he could, knowing that his peers preferred to eat with each other. He was well liked by the rank and file staff and they affectionately refer to him as “Mr. Carlos.” He still was not completely comfortable in social situations where he was expected to entertain dignitaries, but made a point of learning the names of the people who in his terms “did the work.” Likewise, Carlos had a continual focus on the patient experience. Decisions, especially design decisions, should always be made with the patient in mind. Carlos was adamant that form should follow function. Although his job is about the physical construction of space, he always approached from the perspective of the patient.

When asked to describe his leadership Carlos did not use scholarly terms, instead opting for a more colorful and telling moniker:
Some people would probably refer to my leadership style as being schizophrenic. When things are going well, I am [pause] I listen more when things are going well. My interactions with employees are more comfortable and not as direct. I give them an opportunity to talk, to tell me what’s going on. If I have questions, I’ll ask questions. This is not just at meetings, but when I’m meeting with people who report to me. If I see things starting to go wrong, my first impulse is to sit down with that person as an individual, as with the group, and say, “Okay guys, this is what I heard. Tell me if what I’m hearing is right or if it’s wrong.” Then they’ll respond to that. If I find out that, through blind luck or because if the CEO comes to me and says, “Carlos, I just heard that you’re $100,000 over budget. What’s going on?” Then I’m going to ask these guys, “What’s going on . . . I heard from the CEO we’re $100,000 over budget. Is this true?” And if they tell me it’s true, then I’m going to say, “Okay, why didn’t you tell me? Our agreement,” and I always remind them our agreement, “our agreement was that if anything changes you are supposed to come to me and let me know immediately so I don’t get blindsided by the boss. I don’t like it anymore than you’d like if you were in my situation.” And then my voice, I have to admit, it’s more like I’m talking to you right now with no smile on my face and expecting answers and not letting them out of the room until they’ve given me their response. “If you can’t give me an answer now, I need you by the end of the day or tomorrow,” depending on what the situation is. I’ve tried to be very participative and be the nice guy all the time, and I have learned that in certain situations it just doesn’t work.

Even those who worked to mediate his personality suffered from guilt by association. Carlos talked about an individual who reported to him that had the reputation as the softener between others and him. This go-between had been dubbed “little bastard” despite his efforts to assuage the feelings of others.

Carlos credited his experience in the military with shaping his initial leadership philosophy:

I think it started in the military, [laughing] it really did. I saw it there and when people were doing a job when everything was right, when you weren’t doing a good job, down and give me 20. . . I saw where there was sometimes you could be understanding and work with the person, but when it was fairly blatant or people were continuing to make the same mistake you had to take off the kid gloves and you had to take a more disciplinarian approach.
Carlos later admitted the 3 years in the military served as an epiphany for him and changed his outlook on life. It was during his military experience that he understood the nexus between performance and success:

I showed them just by working with patients and doctors. They recognized what my skills were and I was promoted fairly quickly from an E1 to an E3, E4, and E5 and given some additional responsibilities in the department and even had some of the doctors asking that they wanted me to work with them in particular. It really made me feel good, and I guess that’s kind of what made me know if you do well and excel and show people what you can do, you get recognized. That’s the first place where I was really recognized by someone other than my family.

The military environment was very transactional and deviations were dealt with swiftly in a punitive manner. He learned that doing one’s job well resulted in less hardship. He saw the need for leaders to be understanding and participative at times, but clearly understood the need to use a directive approach at other times.

He stressed personal performance and accountability as he clearly set expectations, both in terms of deliverables and timeframes. This was evident in observing how he interfaced with others in construction meetings. He made sure he understood the problem, determined who was responsible, and articulated a plan of action with specific tasks to be performed. Yet he possessed a good sense of humor. Even as he related a story about the laborers who were constructing one of the towers, his admiration for these individuals was apparent:

I usually sit with individuals who are really doing the work. I have to tell you a story that was really funny. This was a couple of weeks ago. If I had my camera I would have taken a picture. Someone wrote a sign and they use lasers to level like when they’re putting in the ceiling tile, and someone had put in there “laser in use” is what he wanted to write, but he had it spelled l-e-s-e-r, “in” was spelled correctly, instead of “use” he had u-s. So it was “leser in us,” [laughs] and someone had taken a big black
marker and drew a big circle around it and said, “This is why we work in construction.” [laughs] That was just classic.

It brought a smile and chuckle from Carlos as he remembered the story. He had a visceral tie to those performing manual labor. Perhaps growing up with a father who was a laborer provided him insight and appreciation that others at his level lack. For all the focus on results, Carlos was a people person. In a revealing answer to what do you hope you never forget, Carlos answered the people he had encountered along the way.

He was wise enough to realize that you cannot treat all people the same. Those entrusted with greater responsibility were expected to be better performers. The hourly craftsman was held to a different standard than the foreman or the director. His desire to have individuals perform at the highest level came from an authentic place—his desire to make the patient experience as positive as possible while being a good steward of the assets entrusted to him by the organization. One can make an honest mistake, but they had better learn from the experience and not make the same mistake twice:

I’m okay if people make a mistake once, just don’t make the same mistake twice. If you are professional and we hire you because you are an expert in your field, then I expect you to work like an expert in your field. Some of the things that I have done on this project, several members of the design team, I asked they be taken off the team because they weren’t doing what needed to be done and so they were removed. Obviously they will probably call me every name you can think of but I need to do what’s best for this organization. The piece that I tell everyone, they need to think of this project as their project and it’s being paid for with their money.

Entrenched within this philosophy was real organizational ownership. If individuals continued to underperform, he had no qualms about removing them from the project. He expected individuals to own their mistakes and would not tolerate what he felt were excuses rather than answers. He had come to the conclusion that being
participative was not always conducive to good results. Carlos shared how he approached getting people to work together:

I tried a lot of what I’ve learned to get people to work together or whatever the one thing that I have learned, however, is that we can’t always focus on the negative. We’ve got to be sure we remember the positive and towards that end, when you have a group of five or six, well, before long we’ll have a group of about 650 guys working on this project. I ensure that I walk through there and talk with the guys and we will have three times a year, we’ll provide a lunch or dinner for them, to thank them for what they do. We have t-shirts that we’ll give the guys at the end of the project and thank them for what they do, but I think the thing they most appreciate, cause many of them are Hispanic by the way, not sure if they’re all Mexican but Hispanic, many of them are Spanish speaking. When we have these lunches I’ll make a point of not sitting with the other supervisors or with the leadership of the project, but I’ll go and sit with the workers.

The symbolic breaking of bread resonated more than speeches and platitudes. He also personally thanked each of them at the end of the project, making sure they knew their contributions to the project were appreciated. He believed this action meant more to the workers than did the t-shirts that were provided.

When speaking about those individuals that he credits with his own leadership development and subsequent success, he does not share a list of well-known leaders; rather, he lists his mother and father. They provided examples of leadership in how they approached life. He also mentions the three individuals that he worked for over the years. From them he learned how important it is for leaders to create a vision. He also learned that maintaining a sense of humor is also an important component of good leadership. He sees planning for the future as a critical role for leaders:

I don’t think their role is to get into the nitty gritty of what’s happening in the individual departments. Obviously they need to know what’s happening in the organization, house wide, I expect that they are not going to be sitting in their office meeting with all their VPs and nothing more
than that. They’re going out there talking with the community and talking with the other CEOs around the country, talking with Washington, D.C. and saying, “Here is the issue, here are the problems with healthcare, here’s what we need to do to be successful.” I saw that with these three individuals. They spent very little time here in their office. I shouldn’t say very little. They’re primarily out there shaking the bushes and finding out what people out there needed and then coming back and seeing how we can make it work for them. If they’re here, they’re not doing their job in my opinion. [laughs]

He believed he was becoming more sensitive in his interactions with others. He provided an example of this change in the following comments:

I have become more sensitive to how I work with people, how I address people. Very much more sensitive to the fact if I see something when we’re walking the project . . . I say, “Okay now, you need to take care of this today. This is not the first time we have seen this. Why hasn’t it happened?” They have asked that instead of doing it there, because there are other people walking with us, that I take them off to the side. So I’m trying to do more of that, but at the same time I often forget it. [laughs] I can understand where they’re asking for . . . so I’ve become more sensitive to those kinds of things . . . .

Even as he talked about this intentional change, I sensed he was fighting his natural inclination to handle things as he would have earlier in his career. His leadership journey continued to evolve as he talked about being a continuous learner:

I don’t think I’m where I’m going to be because I am learning more and more because we have new people out there. I’m learning how to deal with their idiosyncrasies different than past projects . . . . I am taking to heart some of the things I’ve learned over the past projects, past years and continuing to hopefully do better with that. Even though I know my plan is to retire in a couple of years, but I think there is still opportunity for me to get stronger or better in certain areas and so I’m not done learning yet.

Every time he met someone for the first time it created the opportunity to learn something new. He indicated his leadership development had been shaped by the personal encounters with individuals he met along the way. In this respect, it had been an emergent process. His plans were to retire in a couple of years at the end of the building
project. Until then he realized he would continue to mature as a leader. When discussing how he continued to adjust his leadership approach, he made note of being less confrontational. He said, “It’s been a more comfortable role.” He intentionally reigned in his natural inclination to immediately challenge things he disagreed with. A recent situation tested his new resolve. Instead of lashing out, he had a measured, calm response. However, what was interesting was that he still made a point of letting others know the error they committed, albeit in a more collegial way. The new calmness did not allow him to overlook violated expectations. As he said:

Prior to the last few months I would have just jumped all over someone. [laughing] What’s going on here? I’ve also done the same thing in some of my dealings with some of the other situations that come up. So I think, that for me, this has been a really significant one. You know, I’m at the age where maybe it’s time to back off a little bit and not get so excited so easily.

This will not be an easy thing for such a driven individual. While he made this statement, he had also shared with me that he was on a mission to complete the building project sooner than the original deadline. Finishing the project early was just another challenge life has offered him. This was not a requirement of his boss, rather a self-imposed challenge he had identified for himself. His comment seems to contradict his earlier comment that he expects 100% effort from others. Struggling to complete a project ahead of schedule could indicate a desire to surpass 100% effort. I would submit that more than a contradiction, this may speak to his definition of 100% being extremely high. Remember that Carlos has indicated a need to hold himself to a higher standard. What Carlos may not realize is how constantly holding himself to a higher standard impacts others.
This past year Carlos decided to celebrate his milestone 65th birthday by running a marathon over the same hallowed ground that once bore the footsteps of Pheidippides, the fabled Greek soldier over two millennia ago. It was surprising to me that at his age he would have embarked on this challenge as he had nothing to prove to others. However, given his story, I could see how such a significant undertaking would have provided the personal challenge he desired. It supplied a challenge for the sake of challenge. This was simply another case of Carlos taking on the unknown because it was there. He completed the race, and I have no doubt he can conquer any challenge he chooses to overcome.

**Alberto’s Story**

**The Hospital**

Alberto (a pseudonym) worked as the CEO of a large government hospital located in a very large metropolitan city in the Midwest. The acute care tertiary hospital was capable of providing Level II trauma services in addition to the routine mix of acute care services. The hospital operated 200 licensed beds and provided over 8,000 inpatient visits per year. The hospital also had official relationships with two nearby universities, serving as a location for clinical education of medical students. In addition, there were four large community outpatient clinics affiliated with the healthcare system. Alberto noted that this system was one of the largest government systems of its kind in the nation.

The hospital sat in a part of the city that contained several healthcare facilities in very close proximity to each other. There were several interconnected buildings sprawled across the expansive campus. With space at a premium, there was a multistory
parking garage to accommodate patients and visitors that connected to the hospital via walkways. Upon entering the facility, I quickly noticed a general hustle and bustle permeating the air caused by the constant movement of people through the main entrance.

At the main reception area, I asked directions from the front desk attendant. The attendant then asked one of the nearby employees to escort me to Alberto’s office, which she graciously agreed to do. After taking me to the cafeteria for refreshments, we walked through a central corridor to get to the elevators that would take us up one level. On either side of this corridor there were offices and departments dedicated to various hospital services. Within each department there was a waiting area, and each of these areas was full of patients. The amount of people waiting for their name to be called and the arrangement of the chairs in these areas were reminiscent of a busy airport, and the flow of people traveling through the corridor reminded me of a shopping mall at Christmastime. Once we were on the second floor, heading to the administrator’s office, the din of the crowds could no longer be heard as these corridors, for the most part, were free of patients. The administrator’s office sat in a quiet corner of the building.

First Impressions

I arrived early to the executive suites, and I was seated in the space reserved for visitors. The office environment was neat but not pretentious. Alberto promptly came out to introduce himself at the appointed time. He was 49 years old and fit the Latino phenotype. He was of fairly typical height and sturdily built. He sported dark hair that was thinning on top and was combed straight back. He also had a goatee framing the
lower half of his round face. His suit jacket was proudly decorated with a lapel pin in the form of the U.S. flag. He was very warm and welcoming.

His office was large and laid out roughly in the shape of an L. As I entered, the first section of the office contained a large round table surrounded by four side chairs. Continuing forward, I encountered a small sofa along one wall. Continuing further in and to the left sat Alberto’s desk surrounded by a large bookcase and other office furniture. His desk was neat but not meticulous. A flat screen TV was mounted high up on one wall opposite his desk. The walls were home to a cache of memorabilia gathered throughout his career. Windows behind that desk helped illuminate the office. There were diplomas and awards adorning several walls. Many photographs were displayed throughout the office. Some of the photos were clearly of family, while others were related to his career. Much of the memorabilia bore a Naval theme. There were Naval flags adorning some of the walls, as well as small models and photos of various maritime vessels. There was even a nicely framed display of sailor’s knots high on one wall. The items displayed seemed to tell the story of Alberto’s life. I could deduce much about him by simply studying the artifacts on display. For instance, it was apparent that family and military life were important to Alberto, something confirmed throughout the interviews. Although large, the office felt very comfortable and inviting.

Speaking with Alberto made for a very engaging interview. He spoke with the power of emotion, and the cadence and inflection of his voice varied with the nature of his comments. He spoke passionately and at times used his hands to help deliver his message. He could deliver his answers with lightning speed or quietly, with purpose, after careful consideration. At times he searched for just the right word to articulate his
thoughts. He used Spanish phrases to more fully capture the essence of what he was trying to convey. He moved effortlessly between English and Spanish.

During my second visit, I met Alberto at another government facility located about 25 minutes from the first facility. He apologized for needing me to travel to that location. He then explained that he had been asked to oversee that facility, in addition to his other duties, until a suitable replacement could be found. This facility was significantly larger than the other facility and sprawled across a campus located on multiple acres of green space. Of note was the length of the main building, which seemed to be the longest building I had encountered. It was later confirmed that the building was one of the longest in the country.

**Alberto’s Formative Early Years**

Alberto was raised in a border town between Mexico and the United States. He grew up playing and interacting with other kids from similar Latino backgrounds. In fact, the majority of kids at his school were Latino. At this young age he was not aware of being different, so as Alberto articulated, discrimination was a foreign concept to him:

I didn’t recognize it all growing up because of the fact that most of the kids in school, even though there was that White population, if you will. Being raised in a border town, in [the southern U.S.] it wasn’t like we have a Mexican problem or we have a Black problem. It’s a big army town. Color of skin and gender and all of that wasn’t really an issue.

In this small corner of the U.S., Latinos were the numerical majority. This inverted ratio might explain why it appeared to Alberto that the tension typically displayed between Whites and Latinos was nonexistent. This location was the context for
his childhood recollections. The memories were primarily centered on family. Alberto was the oldest of five children. He had three younger sisters and one younger brother.

Although others in society may have viewed their existence as tough, he did not recall suffering from lack of necessities as a child. He said his family was not blessed with an abundance of material possessions, but they happily looked beyond the tangible, as Alberto said:

We didn’t grow up really wanting anything. We had three meals a day, four meals, five meals, the fridge was always stocked with ice cream and milk. Mom always had food on the table, we had all our meals, had a warm loving house.

In this comment Alberto identified that the quality of a home was not measured by the accumulations of material possessions. They were satisfied with what their parents could provide. Needs were cared for even if all wants were not. With their basic sustenance needs met, they were taught to be thankful for what they had. In addition to having needs satisfied, they were provided love and affection tempered with discipline and correction.

At the time, this combination may have seemed harsh, as Alberto said:

It was a great childhood. There were times when I detested my father and I hated my mother because they were very, what’s the word I’m looking for [pause] it was a constitutional monarchy. “You do as I say because I say so not because, and this is not a democracy; you’re going to do what I tell you.” My mom was domineering to a certain degree but looking back now, I recognize by virtue of her childhood, she ruled the roost but she did so with love. She was the disciplinarian in our family. Dad just had to look at you and you knew that he loved the woman and you’re going to do what mom says, don’t disrespect your mother, that kind of love. I guess there was more, I would say discipline but not to the point where it was physical. It was just more of, “You’re going to be personally accountable, we’re holding you accountable for your actions and your sayings and your words. When you do something you need to own it. You can sit here and blame everybody and their mother but at the end of the day this is you.”
To Alberto, some of the rules seemed arbitrary and capricious. At an early age he lacked the foresight to see the value of the discipline. However, later in life he had grown to value the stern guidance he received as a child. Mother and father reigned supreme in that environment. His mother served as the disciplinarian and meted out judgment based on love and concern but colored by her own upbringing. He later teased his mother about the spankings they received as children and how they could lead to jail in today’s society. They could both laugh at those events together, even though both would agree this discipline positively shaped each child. Through this discipline his parents taught the children personal accountability and ownership of their words and actions. All the parental direction was founded in a deep personal faith.

This faith, based on teachings of the Catholic church, permeated all aspects of his young life. In this passage, Alberto talked about the influence of religion upon his upbringing:

Very strong influences, not just with my mother, with my mother’s family, my father’s family, my grandmothers. Very Roman Catholic, very focused on our Lord Jesus Christ, our God. The belief in los santos and the fact that we wouldn’t have what we have if it wasn’t for the graces and the blessings and the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Very Roman Catholic. I remember [laughs] as a child being in church every Sunday, doing all the holy holidays. I remember Lent and no meat on Fridays and the tortillas and the frijoles, the corn with squash and the fish sticks. [laughs] I remember going through all of that.

This faith was not a one-day-a-week, Sunday-only observance, as it permeated the very being of his mother, and later in life, of his father. This was a value system handed down from generation to generation:

But to get back to your question, religion in our family was extremely strong, extremely relevant, extremely prevalent. My mother made it so. My grandmother made it so. My great grandmothers made it so. It wasn’t
in-your-face kind of religion, but you would hear the occasional phrases such as, “You need to make some prayers to Santo Nino or pray to Saint Christopher,” or whatever. Little things like that that would come out.

This religious grounding remained with Alberto even as he gained new perspectives on his religiosity as he stated:

When I started working on my bachelor’s degree, I sort of pulled away from the church for awhile because I had some philosophical differences. I didn’t necessarily agree with the way my mom and my grandmother perceived or understood their religion. Theirs was fundamentally faith and belief, not the written scripture, not trying to understand how we came to be there from a religious perspective. And so when I was working on my undergraduate degree it was at [a] Baptist University; and one of the requirements was that you had to complete an Old Testament course and you had to do a New Testament course. And you know, honestly for me, fundamentally for me, that was an eye-opening moment because I finally had taken some time to read a book that I never . . . when I thought of the Bible I thought of the Bible as I don’t know. I don’t know what I was thinking. I thought of it as a document that was just very verbose, very wordy, hard to understand. Didn’t understand the nuances of what this book meant. That it was a roadmap to history and it was a roadmap to your future, depending on how you wanted to interpret it, and that these were scriptures, writings of people that either lived it or were made aware of it and/or had their own beliefs about it.

Alberto developed a new, deeper understanding of how religion fit into his life. This was no longer his parents’ religion. It became what he believed because he had personally studied the scriptures.

In retrospect Alberto admired the work his parents put into developing their characters by making unpopular and tough decisions. The idea of personal accountability was one that still resonated with Alberto. He was taught early on that he, more than anyone else, controlled his destiny. To operationalize this philosophy, one had to look past the barriers and obstacles:

I remember with our studies, anything we did, dad would say, “I don’t care, yeah, you may be smaller than the other guy but if the other guy can
do it, so can you.” “Well, Dad, he’s like six foot tall.” “But you can go out there and give 100%.” And that’s the one thing it was always about, always about giving it your all. “Don’t allow yourself to fall short because of your own personal barriers, your own perceived barriers. Yeah, you may not be able to play basketball because you’re not as tall as the other guys but, you know what? Look at Spud Webb or some of these others.” I remember these types of conversations with my father. He would say, “You need to push yourself.”

Any time the kids faced an obstacle or a barrier, they were challenged to overcome the obstruction. It did not matter if it was trouble with school work or trying to make the basketball team. They were expected to give their best, to not be bound by mental barriers that serve to promote a sense of helplessness and inaction. Giving up was not an option advocated by his father. Failure was not in falling short of a goal; failure was in not giving your best.

Alberto described himself as a fourth-generation Mexican American who now identified as Latino while acknowledging the terminology had changed through the years. Here he talked about his family background:

Mom received her GED. She quit high school early. She had me. She was a family of, well, she came from a broken family. Her father, my grandfather, was a mason, carpenter, ranchero if you will. He was part of Roosevelt’s conservation corps. He was in World War I. And part of the conservation corps after, and helped actually build Elephant Butte dam in New Mexico. My grandmother, my mom’s mom, was from a huge family. Thirteen kids. Lot of longevity. I think there’s some Navajo blood from my mom’s mother. They were predominantly from the New Mexico area. My father was a pachuco. He didn’t have a father. His father passed young, so my dad was always hanging out with kids that were older than he was. Got himself into some trouble when he shouldn’t have. Knew better and basically was told, “You’re going to join the service or you’re going to go to jail.” So he joined the service and that was his life-changing moment.

His father started his family and worked two and three jobs to provide for his family, and always looked to improve his situation. With one particular employer, he
started as a lowly hired route man and rose through the ranks and became a regional executive. Alberto recalled with pride what his father accomplished through hard work and dedication:

He worked his way up from actually shoveling chicken poop to being on a milk delivery route, a milkman to being a regional guy in that business. Moved the family away, if you will, from some of that repression, but always a sense of family. It was always his kids, his kids first, taking care of the family, courtesy, respect, respect your mother, all the values that I, you know I look back and I think about. I mean, my dad had these dichedes and some of his sayings were very prophetic. I mean simple little things but they would just come from his heart. Some of the stuff like, “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you always got.” Simple little things. I would think back. My dad was one of the smartest men, if not the smartest one I know. My dad just had to look at you, I just had that reverence, that respect. He was a loving guy.

Both of his parents promoted the value of family before anything else. Growing up in this environment the kids learned respect, courtesy, responsibility, and how to treat people in a social setting. When talking about how smart his father was, he was speaking about wisdom that developed as a result of reflecting on his experiences over a period of time, not academic achievement, and the practice of passing this wisdom along to the next generation. Their parents showered them with love while instilling the values they carry today, developing very close familial bonds in the process. In talking about his mother, he said:

Mom is very focused on her family. She would do anything for her kids. And that’s how we grew up and even though there was a separation with my mom’s parents, mom and dad always focused in on family. That’s what it was always about, family.

Alberto’s use of the endearing terms “mom” and “dad,” rather than the more formal “mother” and “father,” illustrated this closeness. Alberto loved his mother but had a special fondness for his now deceased father, whom he revered and respected immensely.
They shared a special bond between father and son based on love and mutual respect.

This bond was palpable as Alberto described his relationship with his father. Alberto immediately listed his father first when recalling important people in his life:

There’s been a few of them but the one that is always near and dear to my heart is my dad [said with a sense of longing and reverence]. You know I lost my dad eight, nine years ago now. It’s interesting, I never saw my father getting old. He always had a twinkle in his eye, a smile on his face. Work hard, play hard, that was his mantra and I tell you, dad was a fireball but I could never see him getting old. Whereas my mother, and I love her dearly, I could see getting old, like my grandmother and great grandmother being that abuelita that everybody’s going to remember but I could never see my father getting old. I would say it’s my father, he was the driving force. My dad set the foundation, the drive and who I made sure I ultimately wanted to make sure I made happy and proud.

Alberto had four siblings, all of them younger than he. As the eldest, his father impressed upon Alberto at a very young age the need to set an example for his siblings:

I’ve got three sisters and a brother. I’m the oldest of those and again, I recall as a child being told by my father, “You are the oldest. Set the example.” As the oldest of five, I will be 50 this year. It’s just interesting how I still remember those conversations even as a 9 year old, 10 year old. I think coming from a Hispanic family, Mexican family, I remember dad’s work ethic, even when I was 12. I worked at my uncle’s barber shop shining shoes, sweeping hair and before I knew it, I was washing dishes in a restaurant because my dad was like, “You’ve got to work to appreciate the value of your efforts.”

Alberto remembered his house as maintaining a natural cultural flavor. In describing his home, he said:

Loud. [laughs] There was always a party, it was a fiesta. It was an empechongua, we’re going to have a good time. A couple of folks would get together, before you know it the frijoles were out, the tortillas and the chile and the cervesas, and people were having a good time. The kids played along. It was never a bad thing. You knew your place by virtue of just the way it was, just culturally, this is where the adults were, this is where the kids were. You kind of grew into those phases as you grew older, but yes I would say so. You know the canciones, the holidays, it was definitely all about that.
There was no rule book describing proper etiquette in social gatherings per se; it was codified cultural norms passed down from generation to generation that permeated the hierarchy of these events. In addition to extemporaneous gatherings, Alberto also fondly remembered the holidays and how special cultural practices were interwoven in the form of family, food, and music.

From a physical standpoint, life was hard for Alberto as a young child. In this passage he talked about the hardships he faced during these years:

I was quite sickly as a child. I had asthma. I had child asthma, adolescent asthma and hay fever. So I was constantly getting shots and so I remember my mother, as the oldest, I remember my mother [pauses] not protecting but, I’m trying to figure out how to phrase it. My mother, even though my father wanted me to be active in sports and other things and continue to push, my mother would shower me with a little bit more protection, if you will, by virtue of the fact that I was sickly. It just seemed to be five or six months at a time with the allergies and the asthma, and it didn’t allow me to do a lot of things that I wanted to, and the stuff I could do she would hold me back from. That was kind of me pushing back too, wanting to be active.

In addition to the chronic symptoms of asthma and hay fever, Alberto was involved in a serious accident as a child that proved to be traumatic for the family. He related what transpired that day:

I was hit by a car when I was 11, crossing a crosswalk. I was the one who had to watch the other ones. It was like the baby ducklings in front of me, and I remember crossing the crosswalk because the crossing guard said come across and as I was walking across I got hit. I remember that event, and it sticks with me because I remembered how my mother felt about trauma. I don’t recall being hurt, I don’t recall any of that pain. I do recall though how she shared her fear and grief, her concern. That’s always stuck with me, that potential loss for her and how I was chastised for crossing the crosswalk even though I was told to walk across it. Interesting how it came back to haunt me.
That event had been etched in Alberto’s mind as a poignant reminder of his mother’s love and concern.

**Trying to Find Meaning in High School**

Alberto performed well academically in high school, as he did in grade school, but for some reason high school seemed a distant past, somewhat obscured, with no real connections for him. He thought of that time of his life as not really important to him, almost as if he were putting in time waiting for his life to begin. Listen as he described that time in his life:

High school, again, as I think I mentioned earlier, I was, even though I was flexible and could adapt in regards to knowing a lot of people and a lot of people knowing me, I don’t recall having one particular friend. And I just had this conversation with my wife, I’m going through year books and I had a lot of folks sign my year books. I had a lot of male friends, I had a lot of female friends, but in particular I never had just one single male friend that stuck out, didn’t hang out with any groups. I did well in high school academically. I look back and I don’t see that time as really an important time in my life.

He described himself as a loner even though he had many friends and participated in school activities, revealing a deeper truth about his emotional state. For Alberto, physical proximity did not necessarily create relational closeness. Here he provided more details about the lack of emotional connection with high school:

I don’t even really remember classes. I remember I received good grades to go to college, I just don’t recall me finding who I was. I didn’t see it that way. It’s kind of like I was in limbo. I know I went through it and I had girlfriends and I did the whole prom thing and all that other stuff, went out hanging out with friends, the dating thing, cruising down the streets. I did all that stuff but that really doesn’t have a memory with me.

Alberto took part in all the rituals of high school and may have enjoyed them at the time, but they were not feeding his soul. He was searching for greater truths in life,
not necessarily what color shirt to wear on a date. He was engaged in school at a
superficial level, even if it did not provide meaning, as he was seeking significance in
life. He felt comfortable maneuvering among the different cliques in his school, even
though he was not drawn to groups as sources of identity. This ability demonstrated his
political astuteness with managing social interactions at an early age:

You know, it’s interesting because in high school I was pretty much a
loner, but not a loner. I had friends, I could pretty much assimilate into
any group but I didn’t hang out just with the jocks even though I wrestled
and I lettered. I didn’t hang out with just the pachucos or the cholos even
though a bunch of them were my friends or the whomever. I was always
to myself. I didn’t need to have a whole bunch of folks around to keep
myself occupied.

Again this comment added to his paradoxical existence at this time. He was in and out of
and around different groups, but was not dependent on them. They did not provide the
engagement he was seeking. He participated in normal school activities, and he
competed in team sports as a member of the wrestling team but was content to occupy
himself without needing to be in the company of others as he was not dependent upon
their acceptance. He participated in the normal activities of high school like attending
proms and dances, hanging out with friends, and cruising the local hot spots. He even
had relationships with the opposite sex that progressed to boyfriend/girlfriend status.
However, this time of his life was somewhat of a blur. As an adolescent searching for
meaning, high school did not provide any insights to Alberto, thus his complete lack of
significance attached to this period. Alberto summed it up succinctly by referring to this
time as being in a state of uncertainty, caught between childhood and being an adult.

Alberto was naturally drawn to students who were older than him, just as his
father was drawn to older kids when he was growing up. As a freshman, he fraternized
with kids who were juniors and seniors. Peers his age may have not provided the maturity Alberto was subconsciously seeking. Alberto progressed through school so well he had enough credits to graduate early, which he did at the age of 16. He was now faced with the decision of what to do with the rest of his life. College, the normal and somewhat expected route, was not the automatic choice for him as he sensed he lacked the discipline necessary to be successful. With his parents’ blessings, he made the decision to follow in the footsteps of previous generations and join the military after high school. Although they agreed to sign him in to the military and they felt in their hearts it was the right thing to do, it did not come without emotion. Here Alberto talked about the impact on his father:

I didn’t recognize what an impact I had on my father, and maybe I did mention but the day I had left for the service was the first time I saw my father cry and the first time, not that my dad never hugged me or never kissed me, but I received more hugs and kisses from my father as a young man and as an adult going forward than I recall as a child.

Apart from school, his memories of these years centered on his family. He commented that his mother’s protection or overprotection, depending on one’s point of view, made an impression on him. Because they were such a tight-knit family, his memories of those interactions during these years seem to carry more weight than school. The one consistent thing in Alberto’s life continued to be his family. The constant parental encouragement was a consistent reminder of expectations. His parents wanted a better life for their children:

My dad didn’t want me to be working a route. My dad didn’t want me to be digging ditches. Even though my father said, “Whatever you do, I want you to be happy doing and give it your best.” My father didn’t want me to go through what he went through when he got out of the service.
They were trying to push him to better his lot in life. College or the military, it made no difference; the expectation was still to excel. Here he talked about more parental direction he received:

It was definitely something my mother and father impressed upon us. My mother—“I don’t want you to get a GED, you’re going to finish high school. You’re going to join the service and you’re going to give it the best that you can give it and you get something from it.”

Alberto managed his way through high school with ease and chose to enter the military as an underage volunteer. This choice would shape the rest of his life in profound ways.

**How the Military Changed My Perspective on Life**

The theme of service to this country was one that was intertwined with Alberto’s life. His decision to join the military was not a knee-jerk reaction, as he had many examples of family who served before him. The example to serve one’s country was set by previous members of Alberto’s immediate and extended family, and these examples made an impression on him:

I grew up in a family where my father served, uncle and aunts served, my grandfather, great uncles, so I guess you could say I had a lineage of those that have served this nation. And we know that Hispanics, Latinos have been, I don’t want to say that they haven’t been active participants in our armed services, they just have been underrepresented and acknowledged, for whatever reason. We had a lot of Hispanics, Latinos, *mexicanos* that have served this nation proudly, admirably since the days of the Civil War, if not before. I mean, Admiral Farragut was a Latino and most folks don’t recognize that. I was one of those guys who hung out with guys that were older than my peer group. I was hanging out with guys, when I was a freshman, I was hanging out with guys that were juniors and seniors. I actually graduated high school early and though I had the opportunity to go to college, I didn’t feel like I was disciplined enough for that.
Upon graduation he enlisted in the Air Force. Alberto could recall, as if it were yesterday, the details of the day he voluntarily joined the ranks of those serving in the military. He took a long pause before reliving the details of that day:

I can remember vividly the day that I [long pause] the day that I was dropped off at the airport by my dad and mom. It was my first plane ride to [the state where boot camp was located], picked up at the airport by the TI, the technical instructor, those in uniforms, busing us to the base. And that’s where I remember growing up.

Alberto was convinced that joining the military served as an epiphany for him. It was the one life-changing event that had been missing from his life up to this point. The simple act of boarding the plane that day would result in a changed person. As he articulated, he became a man from that day forward. It was at this point that Alberto insists he started maturing psychologically. His family confirmed this belief when, upon completion of boot camp, he visited them during leave. Both his father and grandfather shared with him that joining the military was the most adult decision he had made and were impressed by the discipline he displayed.

Once out of boot camp, he was again faced with a decision as to what to do next. The military offered general options such as military police and aviation mechanic. All of the jobs would have served him well in the military, yet Alberto was looking to the future even at this young age. Thus, initially he chose to become a pharmacy tech, thinking it could translate to a job once his career in the military was over. After completing this program, he was stationed at a base stateside. After a couple of years of progressing through his technical specialty, he was informed he would need to return to school to receive advanced training as a pharmacy tech. He complied and returned for the advanced training. While at the school for advanced training, he had a conversation
with the superintendent of the pharmacy program. The superintendent asked Alberto if he had ever considered being an instructor. This conversation led to Alberto being assigned as an instructor after completing the advanced training, which he later learned was a prestigious position. One of the things he quickly noticed among his instructor peers was their pursuit of higher education, since advanced degrees were synonymous with commissions as officers. This posed a dilemma for Alberto as his plan was to complete the required enlistment of 4 years of service, disengage from the military, and move on with his life. He recognized that pursuing a degree and a commission would increase this timeline.

During the first few years of military service, Alberto was married at the age of 19 to his high school sweetheart. He and his wife had three children in a span of 4 years. This marriage lasted 12 years before ending in divorce. He made the decision to pursue his bachelor’s degree. Once completed, he applied for a commission in the medical service corps. His first application was denied because the requirements had changed and a master’s degree was now required. This change again altered Alberto’s plans as he was not planning on more school and he pondered how to proceed, wondering if he should pursue his master’s. Alberto was discouraged at the turn of events, but his father provided the motivation he needed:

I remember my father telling me in no uncertain terms in Spanish, “You’re so smart, you’re stupid.” He said, “Alberto, number one, this is 1986 and there are very few getting master’s degrees and you’re the first in this family not only to get a degree, but to get a master’s degree.”

Alberto revealed that he had become so intent on getting his commission he had lost sight of the intrinsic value of education. He refocused his efforts, heeded his father’s advice
and completed his degree, reapplied, and was successful in his application, receiving a commission from the Navy.

From the uneventful beginning, entering the service as an enlisted member of the military, he was able to conclude his career 22 years later as an officer. Knowledge of the inner workings of the military led me to recognize the perseverance required to make the transition from enlisted to officer. The intervening years had ups and downs, but Alberto would have it no other way. He viewed these years as providing wonderful opportunities and ultimately as a privilege to serve this country:

Acquiring the post graduate degree and accepting the commission in the Navy and basically providing the opportunity to have a variety of leadership roles, leadership positions within the military healthcare arena, [pause] I started seeing this as where I’m going to be. Looking back after 30 years, again it pretty much led me, I didn’t really lead it. Basic focus was on performance and also promotion, promotion, promotion, not recognizing that number one, I was building a very strong portfolio of what I had done by accomplishments, while on active duty I was a comptroller, CFO, logistician, supply officer, contracting, HR, and healthcare administration. I fundamentally had a very strong understanding of all the operational dynamics. I just didn’t know that at the time.

For Alberto, joining the military was an epiphany for him and profoundly changed his outlook on life. He said with a voice laden with emotion:

I found that when I put the uniform on it felt like there was something greater, man how my voice, I found my voice. I recognized when I worked hard and I pushed myself, what I was able to achieve.

The military provided wonderful life experiences and opportunities to develop leadership skills. These in turn bolstered his confidence. He reveled in the memories as he thought back to his days in the military:

Ah, man, I look back, 22 years on active duty was a roller coaster [pause] but I truly am blessed to have served this country and had the opportunity
to do the things I have done. Wearing the uniform, I can’t tell you how proud I felt wearing the uniform. Whether it was enlisted, as a young enlisted member or as an officer serving this nation knowing that, again, what we put into it is what we get out of it. Knowing that the things that we believe in, we have an opportunity to be a part of. Serving, not serving. I made a choice. I recognize that, and there are a lot of folks such as yourself that haven’t served but sit back; they recognize and have said, “I didn’t serve but, you know, Alberto, what I recognize that my freedoms and what I have, have been borne on the shoulders of those that have, and for that I have utmost respect.” I have always said everybody should do at least a tour. Do 2 years then you’re done. And for those that just sit back and chastise the military and/or this country, it’s your right and that right has been given to you because those who wore the uniform allowed you to because of the sacrifices they made, and not just now, the vets in Vietnam, regardless of whether it was a war we should have fought or not, Korea, World War I, World War II, 1812, go on and on. This is what we’re about. This country couldn’t have been built on anything other than the blood, sweat, and tears of those that made this country what it is today. And sometimes that’s somewhat disappointing to me, but I recognize that we are a country that there is a certain sense of entitlement. We’re still one of the best countries, if not the best country, in the world.

He did not get caught up in the politics of war, choosing rather to honor the individuals who wore the uniform, regardless of the war or military conflict, to provide the freedoms enjoyed by the masses today.

During his tenure in the service, Alberto had built an impressive work history based on experiences from the various jobs he held, providing an understanding of organizational dynamics that would serve him well later in his career. During this time, he experienced one promotion after another but he still felt his career was more or less evolving; it was not a planned progression. He was astute enough to realize the value of joining a professional organization and had become a member of the American College of Healthcare Executives while in the Navy. As he progressed through the college, from Diplomate to Certified Healthcare Executive as a Fellow, he began to sense healthcare was his calling in life.
Alberto’s first marriage lasted 12 years. He met his second wife while on active duty soon after the divorce. She was a nurse on a Navy vessel. They were married shortly thereafter. This marriage produced three additional children. He also has seven grandchildren from the children of his first marriage. Although separated by a divorce, the family was nurtured as one unit.

Alberto remembered key moments during his 22 years of service: boot camp, tech school, his first duty station, the birth of his children, obtaining his degrees, his commission, and officer indoctrination school. All the events were part of the tapestry that was his service to this country. As he pondered his military service, he realized his perception of time had changed with maturity. The years seemed to add up more quickly as he matured. He knew the experiences he had in the military, including the mistakes, provided direction for his life and allowed him to become the person he was. He stated what he learned in the military:

Independence, that even though I want to be independent and depend upon myself you really need others. As much as that may be difficult to one that is an overachiever or has this internal self drive and focus, that you really can’t do this by yourself. [pause] The charisma, learning how to get folks to understand the constancy of purpose, building that constancy of purpose. Creating that drive, worthwhile work, finding who I am and recognizing that it’s not just a stamp and say, “Here’s a leader,” and stamp it that way, I don’t see it with that perspective.

He came to the conclusion that leaders provided guidance through purpose and through the provision of worthwhile work. Leaders were not minted by merely stamping one with a title. Alberto believed that leadership came from an existential understanding of who one was and what was important to them. He was learning lessons in perseverance that helped mold his leadership:
You can do whatever it is you want to do as long as you believe in yourself and have faith. It’s not going to happen overnight. I learned quickly, early on in my military career, you can’t turn a carrier or a battleship on a dime but you can turn it. If you believe and you have the desire, and the fortitude and that drive to do so, it can happen. It may just take you a lot longer.

The military developed within Alberto a changed worldview. The experience left him a different man. As he thought about his time in the military, he said:

I sit back and I’m like, wow! Lot of great memories. I’ve met a lot of great people. I’ve had a lot of wonderful opportunities, and I like to believe that I took advantage of every one of those that I possibly could have. As I stated earlier, I made some mistakes in my life. I don’t know that any of us haven’t, and looking back and even thinking about those mistakes puts a smile on my face because it was a moment in my life that provided course direction. Had I not done what I had done or whatever that issue may have been, I wouldn’t be here today.

After retirement, Alberto wasted no time in translating his years of experience into a second career. He began applying the lessons learned in the military to the civilian work force.

**Transitioning to the Civilian Sector**

Alberto made the following comment in talking about how he arrived at his current position: “I’ve always said that I don’t know if I chose it [healthcare] so much as it chose me.” This was an interesting perspective, given his success. This sentiment was repeated several times through the interviews with only slight variations. Initially he may not have been clear on what he wanted out of life, but he was clear on what he wanted to avoid:

My dad didn’t want me to be working a route. My dad didn’t want me to be digging ditches. Even though my father said, “Whatever you do, I want you to be happy doing and give it your best,” my father didn’t want me to go through what he went through when he completed his tour.
After his active duty career, Alberto retired from the military and pursued a civilian career in healthcare based on his extensive naval work history. He had spent 22 years operating in a rigid, rules-based hierarchy where policies and procedures dictated all aspects of life. Historically, making the transition to the civilian sector was not an easy road to follow but this did not deter Alberto:

When I retired, you know, I kept hearing from a lot of the professional organizations, headhunters, and others that military have a very difficult time transitioning to the main sector. I was just too stubborn to have somebody tell me what I couldn’t do. So I answered an ad in a paper right before I retired with regards to looking for a CEO for this small town that had more cattle than it had people.

He was hired and his first foray into public employment was as the chief executive of a small rural critical access hospital, miles and miles from any urban area. Critical access hospitals were the sole community hospitals providing the only acute care for miles, and as such, were viewed as lifelines. He set the bar high initially as the first Latino hospital CEO in the state as he aggressively negotiated his salary structure. The hospital he inherited had posted seven straight years of losses. It took him only 1 year to return the facility to being profitable. He learned a lot during this process, including the need to lead differently and be cognizant of community relations:

I really needed to understand more of the governance structure. Coming from the military, it was a more formalized structure with not so much politics and bureaucracy but not in a sense of that civic, community type of relations where the governing board was comprised of the community. The politics were vastly different than what I was accustomed to. To turn my thought processes from actionable in some sort of impulsivity to some impulse control in regards to what I did. It wasn’t so much the John Wayne military stereotype perception that I reflected, albeit the perception was we [the hospital governing board] really want to have a military type of a leader to come in here, kick some butt, and turn this around. I intuitively recognized what they were saying was we needed to hardwire some accountability in this organization. We need to create ownership in
this organization. We need to create some constancy of purpose in the organization. Culturally, you look at the organization and understanding that I understood and recognized that there was some transformation that was required. I had to redirect my skills and behaviors, teaching myself about how to handle the people, the organization, and the community in a way that would foster the change. This wasn’t being in uniform and just saying, “I’m telling you what to do,” hearing a “Yes, sir,” and they trot off and go do it. This was, “I need to educate, I need to share, I need to build consensus and collaborative relationships,” not that I didn’t do that on active duty, there was just some variation, it just was a different sense of that. So I found myself changing in this.

This first civilian job began transforming the military experiences into new expressions of leadership. He learned the value of collaboration and consensus building. He hardwired accountability into the system where it was lacking in the past. In the process, he also became more aware of his inherent cultural mannerisms:

But you know, one of the key drivers, I think, in all of this, even to, up until this point, Kevin, has been that I recognize culturally, culturally that there is still some acclimating, some assimilating for some generations of us Latinos. And why do I say that? Because I’m a very passionate individual and the intent of the passion viewed by the receiver may not always be understood. I recognize that I can be extremely animated with regard to discussions or conversations and to how I’m doing. I’m a very visual person, so I have to watch, again, and if I am not understanding it may become frustrating—there may be lots of rapid fire questions so I acknowledge this weakness and work diligently on that impulse control. I have to watch my mannerisms with regards to my hands. Knowing that you are on stage 24/7. This may or may not have bothered folks but again, I know that I’m being scrutinized. I believe culture, gender, ethnicity, religion can skew how one views you. It is normal to have biases and we all come to meetings, viewings, briefings, etc., and bring them with us. You look at African Americans, even in any profession, are looked at differently by their own culture. And I believe that even us as Hispanics, Latinos, that lot of times by virtue of our passion and how we might look at a certain topic, there may be that cultural flavor that we just don’t recognize as part of who we are. We have to take a step back and take note so we can internalize and prepare. Creating our own self-awareness so that when we communicate we can do so successfully or at least make every attempt to.
He believed that individuals from outside the mainstream demographic should assimilate with the majority population without losing their racial or ethnic identity. Even as he was trying to assimilate in a manner that would keep him whole culturally, he continued to find success by learning how to balance the demands of the job and society with his inherent value system.

With his first venture into civilian employment a triumph, he took a job in another state as the Chief Operating Officer overseeing a larger two-hospital system located in the inner city. He was once again successful in that position. After serving in this role for awhile, he was offered a CEO job at a hospital in yet another state where his command of the Spanish language and his ethnic background were actually assets that helped him secure the job. Each successive job provided greater responsibility, greater authority, and increased his sphere of influence. From here he moved to another facility in another state as the CEO for about five years. In the process, Alberto was making a name as one of the few Latino CEOs in healthcare. He was interviewed on the subject and even featured in a national healthcare magazine discussing the topic. Having his picture grace the cover of the magazine was a positive event for all Latinos. Despite the success, his entrepreneurial spirit was gnawing at his mind concerning the need to try his hand at consulting. He resigned his position as president and formed his own company. He consulted for a couple of years until the current position came open. He applied and was hired and now has moved full circle, back into a CEO job as a public servant within the government healthcare system.

Throughout this entire journey, family had always served as the anchor for Alberto. That love of family was instilled by his parents. The legacy of his upbringing
was an unabashed love of family. This love was for immediate family, but it extended to the greater Latino community:

I’m very, very much focused on my family. I’m very, very much focused on what we do as a core group, not just as a family but even as a culture. And it bothers me, yes, it bothers me when I see that you know there’s a group of those bad apples get lumped in with all Mexicanos, or Puerto Ricanos, Cubanos, or that this is a subset that all Latinos happen to be low wage earners. And there is some truth to it. I get it, but look at the hard work, look at the passion, look at the drive, look at the fact that families are very oriented to their families, the fact that they’re very driven from a religious perspective as well whether it be Catholico or Baptist or whatever. So there is some strong cultural characteristics that I believe have been hardwired into who I am, you, and all others out there. This is kind of where I am at. I truly believe in service. For lack of a better word, servitute, but servant leadership, taking care of others.

He continued on, providing vivid details about the values his parents imparted:

Love, passion, trust, respect, courteousness, integrity. I can’t remember that there was not a conversation about you need to have that, they [societal groups, people] can take all away from you, they can take your clothes but what do you have left? You have your name, you have your integrity, and I remember hearing that from my father. My mother supported that. My mother was about being honest, forthright, sticking to your guns, might makes right, if you believe in something hold to it, because others are doing something don’t let folks turn your thoughts because that’s the in thing to do. You have to ask yourself the question, “Inside of here, in your heart, your chest, is it the right thing to do?” We have always asked the questions of ourselves, “What would my mom and dad think?” And more importantly . . . “What is it I want said of me when I’m not here by my kids, or what would be the epitaph on that stone, what does it say now that Alberto’s gone?”

One of the values imparted to Alberto was accountability. Alberto’s fanatical allegiance to personal accountability was learned early in life, “My mom and dad, they were very focused in on being courteous, or being respectful and being personally accountable, that ownership piece, being responsible. So that was being driven at a very young age for us.” This personal accountability was a core value that impacted his entire worldview. I
saw it manifested in how he approached leadership, in how he coped with being a minority, and with how he lived his life.

What set Alberto apart was his disposition. He said succinctly, “It’s about attitude.” Contained within this attitude was the drive to do whatever it took to succeed:

If it’s something that you truly want, you find a way to make it happen. If it’s going to college, if it’s going to school, then you know. If you have to bust your backside and do three odd jobs to make it, you’re going to do whatever you need to make it happen. At the end of the day, guess who’s really going to own it and feel appreciative more than anybody else? It’s going to be you. Because you’re going to walk away knowing you did this, and you don’t owe anybody else but yourself.

Succeeding in an environment that boasts few Latino executives was no small feat. Although the journey for each was different, most would face the reality of their ethnicity at some point in their career. As Alberto said, the fact that you encountered prejudice was not important; it was how you responded that was.

Navigating Society as an Ethnic Minority

Earlier in his life, Alberto did not think much about his ethnicity. Evidence of this was provided via a story he related. He once dated a Latino girl whose last name was Vigil. Alberto pronounced her name as it is spelled, vij-uhl. His father had to point out the correct Spanish pronunciation, vee-heel. He then went on to explain to Alberto that whereas African Americans were easy to identify by the color of their skin, this was not necessarily so for Latinos. Some Mexicans bore Jewish, Asian, or German surnames and sported blue eyes and blonde hair. For these individuals, they were able to choose how to represent themselves. This was all by way of helping Alberto understand that he had to learn to assimilate into what his father termed “this White man’s world.” Prejudice and
racism were not things Alberto remembered about his childhood. It was not until he
joined the military that he recalled facing prejudice.

During his active duty enlistment, Alberto witnessed firsthand the negative side of
race relations. He related that his first encounter was while he was stationed at a base in
the South:

The first time I noticed it [prejudice] though it was wearing a uniform, was
when I was in town there in [the South] which was predominantly white,
and I remember being instructed during orientation that, number one, it
was strongly suggested to stay on base kind of thing. Number two, if you
happen to be in the military and wearing a uniform and you’re a person of
color, best thing to do is probably stay on base, because at the time I was
going through there, I think this was 1979, 1980, you still had a whole lot
of folks that lived in that area that [pause] just weren’t very open to other
cultures or races.

Wearing a uniform did not help overcome the embedded stereotypical worldviews
common to certain geographic regions. Luckily for Alberto, prejudice was not something
he experienced from his military peers. He was not blind to race issues within the
military; he just never experienced them first hand:

I remember my father having the conversation about acclimating and
assimilating . . . I never saw that. I don’t distinctly remember any one
part of my 22 years of active duty where I had any issues with regards to
someone coming to me and saying, “We are promoting you because you
are Hispanic,” or anyone using any type of negative derogatory comment
towards me because I was Hispanic. I never saw any of that. I know that
some of it went on in certain sects, but I didn’t see it. And I think a lot
had to do with the fact that I was pretty vocal about who I was. I wasn’t
asking for anybody to give me anything. I was all about performance. It
was all about integrity, the values, the character sets that I believe I grew
up with.

He explained that part of this phenomenon had to do with his comfort in sharing who he
was and not asking for things to be given to him, but earning everything he achieved
through hard work. He was not willing to play the victim or the martyr. He never saw
his ethnicity as a negative attribute. Likewise, he was not willing to use his ethnicity as a means of promoting entitlement.

Alberto’s foray into the military may have been the most significant reason why he was not the subject of more racial prejudice during his life. For 22 years he was somewhat shielded from the civilian world. The military, although far from being the best example, had been aggressive in addressing racial prejudices, prompting policies of equal opportunity. In such an insular organization, prescriptive behaviors may have received greater compliance given the control exercised by those in authority.

Alberto suggested his life had been relatively free of racial issues, from his perspective. It may also have been that he refused to give much thought to those who would constrain him based on his physical characteristics. He had a nonchalant attitude as he described the environment around the one military base where minorities were not appreciated in town. He was careful in how he described the offenders and used noninflammatory language. He obviously had faced racism before, but chose not to allow it to fester within him or to detract from his mission. He had never been one to give much credence to groupthink or to comply based on societal norms. His views indicated racial issues had power over you only if you ceded that power. He had not considered himself a victim of racism primarily because he never viewed himself as different:

I never looked at myself as being different than anybody else. I looked at it from the perspective of performance and your character traits, your values, that’s the way I looked at it. If you are performing, I don’t care if you are male or female, if you do your job. I don’t care whether you are black, white, or yellow, as long as you are doing your job. That’s what really matters.
To him, difference was not evidenced by discernible physical characteristics but rather by the quality of one’s character. Difference should only be attributed based on performance.

When pressed to talk about how his cultural understanding had changed with his maturity, he attempted to articulate that it may be society that was changing:

I would say more of how I am perceived by virtue of my culture, by virtue of my ethnicity, though I didn’t look at it that way when I was younger more so now—animated, uses his hand a lot, not to say that all Hispanic do that but I recognize that my passion drives me and I have to be careful that I can have the passion but the inflection of my voice, if I’m not careful can sound overbearing because of that passion. That can be intimidating to some when you hold folks accountable or you’re reacting a certain way. I would say yes. Being understood, not so much from a perspective of the articulation and the conversation, but being understood and ensuring you are removing whatever you perceive are barriers because I was active duty 22 years. For example, being looked at with this black and white Sergeant Rock stereotype, well, God, you have to be one of those military guys, charge the hill, kick butt and take no names, go get them type, so you’re autocratic with a domineering type of leadership style. Or you’re Hispanic and, yes, we recognize that you’re passionate, however, are you a heavy drinker or a landscaper; I just started to recognize some of this mislabeling.

He did not appreciate when people made assumptions about him. Interestingly his comments focused not on how others viewed Latinos, as he was more concerned with how Latinos interacted with each other. He ruminated about the way Latinos showed lack of support for other Latinos and saw that more of a problem than how Whites treat Latinos. He believed African Americans did a better job of being supportive of each other than did Latinos. He witnessed this first hand at a very high level as a founding member and past president of a prominent Latino healthcare association. He witnessed personal agendas that took precedence over the greater good of those they were supposed
to be representing. He humorously depicted the internal struggles of this group by relating one of his father’s sayings. He went on and said:

Let’s not disagree out there in front of the public only because, as my dad used to say, and I am sure you heard this *dicho*, you get a bunch of Mexicans together it’s like lobsters in a bucket. Somebody starts to get successful then everybody gets all *seloso* and they want to pull him down. They get jealous and they want to pull him down, they don’t let him go out, they don’t want him out. I have seen this. From very educated, articulate individuals, and I’m thinking why?

Alberto got more pointed in his criticism of Latinos and shared:

The one thing that I have learned about our culture is that we don’t do a very good job, whether you’re *Cubano, Puerto Rican, Mexican*, we don’t do a very good job supporting each other the way the African Americans do.

While Alberto was critical of Latinos, he also realized that all minorities are underrepresented in healthcare in leadership roles. If one analyzed what Alberto said and did, it became apparent that he was deeply concerned about the disparities in the field of healthcare when it came to career achievement for racial and ethnic minorities. One newspaper article talked about programs one of his hospitals supported to increase the number of racial and ethnic minorities in professional positions. As previously mentioned, he had also served as the president of a national Latino group dedicated to providing professional opportunities for Latinos.

Alberto explained how he was bothered when the actions of a few “bad apples” cast reproach on an entire ethnic group. It was regrettable that Latinos were perceived to be low wage earners, as he viewed them as hardworking, passionate, family oriented, and religiously grounded. He realized and accepted his position as a role model years earlier.
He saw himself as a role model to his children and grandchildren, but also to the larger Latino community.

There are other issues that had to do with race that were more subtle in their manifestation. Alberto had not been one to shy away from controversial minority issues. For instance, Alberto had been very vocal about the role of hospitals in regards to undocumented workers. In interviews with national magazines, he emphasized the need for hospitals to concentrate on delivering care, not to serve as clearing houses for immigration reform. Here he talked about his stance on providing care to the undocumented patients:

I have been one to actually correspond and address, write out and stand up and state that I don’t believe our hospitals are places that we should be using as portals to immigration control. We’re here to take care of the sick and the dying. We’re here to talk about education, prevention, and those kinds of things. And I believe for those of us that have to be in these roles that we have a responsibility to articulate these issues and their relevance. I also know that by virtue of who I am and where I’m at, I have a responsibility to be a good role model, not just for my kids or my grandkids, but others.

As undocumented individuals were predominantly racial or ethnic minorities, this became an issue with racial overtones. Alberto’s focus was not on the racial aspects of the policy; it was on the patient. He was constantly examining decisions in light of how they impacted patients.

A more complex issue was finding success as a racial or ethnic minority in healthcare, particularly at the executive level. Alberto believed in certain circumstances the costs were too high for him and involved violating his cultural value system. Alberto also understood that one could only control so much in life. He had learned that not all hospitals were created equally. There were marked differences based on ownership.
Each one came with its own unwritten rules for success, its own clique that controlled who was hired. He questioned whether the price for entry to these cliques was always worth the personal costs. Here he talked about a recent situation to illustrate his point:

So maybe this comes back to the other question that you asked earlier about seeing some of that cultural difference. What I’ve seen is for-profit corporate entities are very clique-ish, very good old boyish. That I see. And to break into that culture, that organizational culture, that corporate culture, that’s something even more different. I look at the guy from [a national corporation]. He was one of the first leading Latinos, I think he might be in this magazine [points to a magazine on the table]. I think his name was [Latino surname]. I have nothing bad to say against the guy, buts it’s apparent that there is a lot of assimilating aspects in his career track which creates questions about, well, how do you get that high so quickly? Good for him. I recognize this sounds like criticism. It’s really not. I’m just not willing to play that kind of game. I’m not willing to sit back and have someone dictate to me how it’s got to be played. I’m going to do what is right for me and, more importantly, what’s right, in this case, for the patient.

What he was articulating was that in some instances racial and ethnic minorities were accepted only to the extent they conformed to the unwritten majoritarian rules. The observable actions of this individual led Alberto to conclude he was disconnecting from his cultural roots. Also embedded within this philosophy was the idea that to reach prominence on a national level, Latinos may have to compromise cultural values.

As I probed Alberto about times he felt different, his response illustrated how discriminatory racial practices were not part of his normal processing. His description of difference had nothing to do with prejudice:

I recognize I’m not like anybody else. I think our dear Lord broke the mold when he made me, at least that’s what my wife would say. My mother would say it, too. I don’t know that I’ve felt different. I know there are times in my life, in my career, where I was unhappy with something or an outcome that I had done, and I’ve allowed that to fester and create a situation in my own self in not forgiving myself, that kind of
thing. That’s more of a philosophical thing, a behavioral thing that I have to work through but I don’t know that I have ever felt different.

Alberto had always been comfortable with his heritage, something he felt compelled to share with his children:

But there’s still this sense of family, the meals, and all that stuff. So it’s just the idea of time. I think we have done a fairly good job tying the cultures together. I think that’s an important responsibility of the parents as well. I tell my kids my dad said, “You can never forget where you came from. You should always remember. You have to remember your past. How are you going to know where to go if you don’t know where you came from?”

In a follow-up question, I asked what social pressures Alberto experienced. Here was his response:

I’ve not seen any social pressures or had social pressure issues like that. I’ve never been one to allow myself to be put in a position where, because the group is doing it, I have to do it. A lot of it is my upbringing. I was raised to know the decisions I made were my own and not anybody else’s.

Alberto’s strong sense of self allowed him to avoid following societal patterns, including those that may set up racial-based schisms. Just as Alberto would not allow his ethnicity to be used against him, he was just as adamant that minorities did not use their status as crutches. He passionately talked about the negative side of an entitlement philosophy he believed permeated American culture:

What about your own personal accountability, your ownership, how can you influence this? But then again, that’s part of who we are as Americans, that’s systemic within our own society. Culturally speaking as Americans, there’s that certain sense of entitlement. I need to benefit somehow from it. I believe there are those areas. What are we doing for the good of the whole, not the good of the one? The one is important, don’t get me wrong, but are we doing all the right things? . . . Where is your ownership about this? You can say because I’m Mexican, I’m not getting mine. Who says that you’re entitled to mine? But it goes right back to that thought process. This is what we believe because it has been ingrained in our mind all these years. Social Security, Medicare, welfare,
unemployment, these are the things we have done to ourselves. Okay, but how do we influence that to make it better, or is there an opportunity to make it better? Is there something we can create that’s going to be better for most of us or all of us? I don’t know, I don’t have the answers but I’m also not too concerned about rolling up my sleeves and getting dirty to get the job done.

**Developing a Leadership Philosophy**

Leadership, for Alberto, had been an incremental process. Each experience built upon the previous experiences, continually shaping his leadership. Alberto articulated leadership based on authenticity. Here he went into detail about his leadership philosophy:

I like to look at the fact that when you’re leading an organization or leading people, the only way you can do so is by being open, forthright, and having the values, the integrity, that you more than likely expect from those you are leading. I am what I am. Sometimes I wear my heart on my sleeve, but this is who I am. I recognize that not everybody is going to be happy with me. I recognize that there are times I want to make decisions that people are not going to be pleased with, but that’s why I’m doing what I’m doing. I do my best to try to develop consensus and collaboration, collaborative efforts if you will, but there are times it’s just not going to happen and you’ve got to be comfortable with that. You’ve got to be comfortable knowing that you made a decision that’s going to impact jobs or a person.

I think the things that are key to me are honesty, having that integrity, knowing that I don’t know it all. I learned very early on that I was a much smarter person to have all the brainiacs around the table that knew more about what was going on than I. Looking at the folks that I’ve had as leaders and/or in senior executive jobs, I paid attention to recognizing that there is no such thing as a perfect leader. That every one of us has our shortfalls. I think in order to find that perfection it’s knowing where your strengths and weaknesses lie and what you do to overcome those weaknesses in order to move the organization forward. I think that’s key. Being able to determine your own abilities I think is key. So having some sense of who you are. Being comfortable in your own skin. If you’re not comfortable in your own skin, then you’re going to have a difficult time getting people to believe in you. Being able to articulate a purpose. You can throw all those things out there, all those adjectives—facilitator, motivator, all those things, yes, collaborator,
instigator—but it really does come down to being able to have a conversation and communicate with people. Can you meet with them at that level and have that conversation? Understanding what makes you tick and what makes them tick, and can you find that? Do you have that authentic connection or that emotional intelligence as they say and say, I’ve connected, I have an understanding with these folks. And even then, knowing that there’s somebody out there that’s going to criticize you and pick on you because they just don’t like the way you look, or what you say, or are reticent towards you for whatever reason.

As he said, “I am what I am,” inferring there were certain inherent characteristics that he could not change. Despite attempting to create collaboration and consensus, he realized that he could not please everybody and sometimes tough decisions had to be made. He did not try to fit others’ preconceived ideas of the type of leader he should be. Leadership flowed from his authenticity. Conflict was not only a constant; it could be turned into a positive. Avoiding conflict only led to more problems. Making these tough decisions and being comfortable with those decisions was part of the drive for Alberto, constantly measuring them against honesty and integrity and the knowledge that he did not possess all the answers. In a true moment of vulnerability, Alberto shared the following thoughts:

You know, I used to say that my skin was thicker than I thought it was, because this is a very lonely job. And then I recognized my skin is not that thick—it’s not! I bleed just like you bleed, and I hurt just like you hurt and when somebody says something mean, yeah, it hurts. I recognize that when people talk about me, there are going to be people that don’t like me for whatever reason. My color of hair, color of eyes, the cologne that I wear, the fact that I’m Hispanic, or whatever it may be. I recognize that there are going to be people that don’t like you, that’s life. That’s life! Look how perfect Jesus was and look at the number of people that didn’t like Him. It’s kind of trying to find that relational balance and then recognizing that [pause] that there’s something greater out there and how do I fit into that.
Just because CEOs were powerful and decisive did not make them immune from feeling the sting of rejection or dislike. As CEO, all decisions stopped at his desk. Ultimately he answered for all positive and negative associated with decisions. Since it was impossible to always please everybody, confidence was a necessary attribute of a leader. Leading was being comfortable with who one was so that others could also believe in you. Alberto believed leadership began the moment one accepted who they were. This was what he said about leading:

Finding myself and me being comfortable in my skin. Me looking at me and saying, “I’m happy with who I am and what I’ve become.” And being able to forgive yourself for those moments where you took the wrong turn. Being open and transparent, I think, are keys to being an authentic leader as well, and knowing that there’s no such thing as perfection.

It was human nature to have made mistakes. Leaders were not immune from mistakes. In fact, the mistakes may have served a greater purpose. Alberto believed a good leader is not a perfect leader, but one who could learn from his or her mistakes:

It’s life that strengthens you. My dad used to say the reason you fall is to see how you are going to get up. And how you get up, and how you manage to get up, and what you say when you get up. It’s all about your attitude, it’s about your behaviors. Those things fundamentally I’ve learned over the years. It’s not been an easy journey. I’ve fallen, I’ve scraped my knees plenty of times. I’ve made some bad mistakes in my life but I look back and going back to the faith and religion, if it wasn’t for that and me having that faith in myself and people faith and belief in me and recognizing that, you know what? [laughs] There’s a lot of people in this world who have done a lot of bad things, a lot worse than you, and they’ve managed to work all through that. They learned from that. That was the thing.

As Alberto talked about leaders, he realized the lexicon typically associated with leadership had its place but took a less scholarly approach and distilled it down to being able to articulate a purpose through meeting people at their levels and communicating
and developing that authentic connection, creating an atmosphere where values were embedded organization-wide. As Alberto related, “I told the staff today, when we talk about the culture of the organization, the culture of the organization is what goes on when you’re not looking.” Creating the desired culture was accomplished through understanding others, knowing what made them who they were. At some level it was being a good judge of character and a willingness to take a calculated risk on others.

Alberto emphasized his leadership worldview had been created based on his experiences accumulated over the years. It had been an intentional emphasis on being the best leader by learning from others:

Twenty-two years of active duty and the last 10, 11 in my civilian roles, it’s been a work in progress, man, a work in progress! Experience, maturity, the learning, education, the seeing, the watching. I remember not just reading Colin Powell but seeing some of the things. Looking at others, even junior to me, and seeing what ties those people to that guy or that girl. And looking and trying to figure out why are they the informal ones. Why are people listening to them? The positive ones, the negative ones. Try to be astute enough to what’s going on around me and paying attention to the things that I thought were pretty strong characteristics of the individual and those that I didn’t, and then trying to figure out what does he or she have that I don’t that creates that.

Some of the leaders he emulated had been well-known personalities, and others carried no official title but commanded a following. He realized the need to carefully apply what he learned. Others had attached certain descriptors to Alberto, yet when he considered his style he did not see categories of attributes:

People will sit back and say . . . “You know how to manage your intensity you’re an inspirationalist, you’re very charismatic, you can connect with an audience,’’ but a lot of that is just me being me. And when I find myself trying to be someone other than who I am, that’s when you start to have issues, knowing that I’m going to some other place that I probably shouldn’t go. I’m trying to read a speech Obama read the way he read it when that’s not what I should do. I should say what I think he said, the
way [Alberto] thinks he said it or the way [Alberto] would say it, but that needs to be me.

He posited that it was when he tried to be someone other than who he was, was when he ran into trouble. In his self-deprecating style he talked about how he tried to lead authentically:

So I say I may not be the smartest person around this table, but I do believe it’s that connecting the people. It’s the understanding the people. It’s that attempt to understand folks. What makes you tick? What do you find as worthwhile work? How do I know that is what you are tied to? How do I know that is what your bosses are tied to? How do I know there is that personal accountability that I can see or sense in you? It’s using intuition, and then ensuring that you are not just blaming somebody else for your failure. At some point, it’s being a good judge of character. Not always are you going to get it right, but you have to go out and take a calculated risk. Servant leadership and authentic leadership are things that I espouse and try to be the best that I can at those.

Again, the issue of authentic leadership, coupled with servant leadership, was the foundation of his leadership style. He firmly believed individuals must understand who they were, as he said:

So as I was learning all that, I guess finding myself, finding who I am, what do you call it? Existentialism. Asking myself why am I here, what’s the meaning of all this? And I’ve asked myself that question throughout the years and recognized, as I stated to you earlier on, this kind of found me. I really didn’t choose it, and so by virtue of that, I’ve tried to take advantage of it and be the best that I can be while doing so. I’ve tried to lead from the heart . . . It comes from here [points to his heart]. It’s in your chest. Are we doing the right thing? Because you can’t go wrong if you’re doing the right thing. For example, a nurse walking off shift and a call light goes off as he/she walks by the room and they stop in to check on the patient. Somebody will say, “Well, you should have clocked in or you should have clocked off before you did this or that,” and the question that I would ask is, “Was the patient cared for? If you took care of the patient, I really don’t care when you clocked out, because you did the right thing and that’s what matters.” Now it’s our responsibility to ensure we take care of the staff member for making a difference. You talk about directives and policies and so on and everybody takes it and looks at it, black and white, black and white. Life is not black and white, life is not
black and white. It has a lot of gray areas and it gives us a lot of gray hair and or losing it. Our jobs are to lessen the frustrations so that our people can do their jobs and create worthwhile work, not more bureaucracy.

Part of understanding one’s self was recognizing and learning from the mistakes one had made. Alberto talked about the impact of mistakes and continued with comments on expectations of others:

They reinforce some of the weaknesses I have in character, or my perceived weaknesses of character, that I needed to work on. For example, I can easily become frustrated with regards to getting involved in the minutia. I’ve always been a proponent that if you’re going to come in here and share an issue or an area that we need to work on, my expectation is that you provide some recommendation, suggestion, and/or your plan of action. If you’re just looking for me to fix your problems, then the question I have to ask myself is, “Why do I need you?” And then I would ask you that question, “Why do I need you if you are going to just come in here and appear to download your problems on me, because that’s not the way this works.” And I go to further state and share that I want you to be successful. My job is for us to be successful as a healthcare organization, as a system. So how can I help you be successful if I’m fixing your problems, and you’re not fixing them? By allowing your poor behaviors, I’m reinforcing poor leadership by fixing your problems. No, not going to happen.

Alberto saw everything he encountered, especially obstacles, as a means of making him a better person. Each experience created a life-learning moment tailored especially for him. Part of this philosophy came from his religious perspective:

Every moment, every day that I go through, every moment that I go through, I recognize that I am learning something. Not to get too religious, but when I find something at my feet that I recognize I’m going to stumble over, or it’s something I have to cross over, something I have to jump over, I think to myself, “That wouldn’t have been put there if our dear Lord didn’t think I could handle it and make me strong enough to do so.” It’s being able to articulate that to myself then, if need be, to others, “This is what we need to do.” I guess that’s part of it. You learn about being that inspirationist. How do I fit into all of this? Again, going back to existentialism. Why am I doing what I’m doing? Because I’m meant to do it! This chose me because this is what I’m supposed to be doing.
That’s Alberto’s thought process. It may not be everybody else’s, that’s mine.

To him, a leader embraced these moments because that was what he or she was supposed to do, to create inspiration. To not do so would be a waste of a learning experience and object lesson to others. Focus should always be on understanding how one contributed to the problem and, more importantly, the solution. For Alberto, life was about making a positive contribution to those entrusted to his care:

And what did I do with my life? And what significance, and what kind of impact? So it’s a certain existentialism about why am I here, what have I done, and am I making good use of the time. And I found that by virtue of this role I play in healthcare, making an impact on the lives of others in not just the care and the quality of that care, but in their ability to care for others. Having the connection to people to me is more important a lot of times than policy and procedure. Not that that’s not important to me, because we have to have that structure, but I really want the people to know there’s somebody there that really does care, and it’s not being said because he’s sitting in a seat.

He related one of the valuable lessons he learned happened while in the Navy. He was asked by a commanding officer to deliver a message to his troops. The officer then asked him how he was going to deliver the message. Would he say this was what the commanding officer said or would he deliver it as his own? The epiphany was in understanding that the content of the message was the same in both cases, but the quality of the message was markedly different. He learned that people wanted to follow you because you believed in something, not because you were mouthing someone else’s words. If you had a problem with the message, it needed to be addressed with the commanding officer, not in front of your troops. At the time you delivered the message, it needed to be yours.
Alberto was very big on personal accountability. He was always willing to provide support when needed, but he did not want to create dependent relationships. He also was cognizant of needing to provide checks and balances for himself:

It’s having those conversations. It’s me having those conversations with myself and those individuals, not just executive coaches but those individuals, the peers, colleagues, close personal acquaintances that know me better than I know myself at times and they can say, “[Alberto] you’re full of shit,” and to be able to call me on it. And where I feel comfortable with, now that I said that out loud, it does sound bad. It’s having that, finding those close personal friends that you know and trust, and I do, I have a handful of those guys that I can pick up the phone and have a conversation with and know that they’re going to tell me the truth, knowing what I need to hear.

It was not only introspection but a small group of others that knew Alberto well who could, and did, provide advice and counsel. It was creating an atmosphere where these others could critically call Alberto on decisions he had made. They could challenge him without fear of reprisal. This then devolved back on Alberto’s shoulders as the acceptance of personal responsibility for his actions, good or bad.

Alberto could acknowledge that his path had been different than most others of his ethnic background, even though he did not completely see himself as an anomaly. He viewed his success a result of, “I’ve not been willing to have people tell me or dictate to me how they think it should be because this is the way it was for them.” He did not ascribe to progressing in formulaic fashion through his career:

And I’m here and I’m giving it the best I can because this is where I was led. What’s the next step? I don’t know what the next step is. I do know that when I come into work, the first thing that’s on my mind is are we doing the right thing by the [patient] and then I work around those things. It’s the idea of bringing people together. It’s the idea of creating not so much conformity, but of creating constancy of purpose . . . .
Alberto measured success in how well his hospital took care of patients. The ultimate score card was, “Did you do right by the patient?” He came to work every day contemplating how to make things better for his patients. He realized he could not accomplish this goal single-handedly. Organizational success became a group phenomenon. He was the leader, but his success depended on others doing their jobs.

When asked to identify values passed down from his parents, he thoughtfully answered “love, passion, trust, respect, courteousness, and integrity.” He continued to be guided by thoughts of what his parents would think of any action he took. He realized he was creating a legacy just as his parents did. He reflected on what legacy he was leaving for his children.

Family provided that constancy of purpose for Alberto. So his story returned to family, that constant defining element for Alberto. Time after time, he touched on the importance of family. When asked to list things he hopes he never forgets, he said:

Smiles on my kid’s faces. The smile on my wife’s face, the twinkle in her eyes. Those are the things that I think are more important to me. The fact that we have folks out there that have done an incredible job in sacrificing for this country, keeping first and foremost the thought that we have a responsibility to take care of them. The fact that we have a huge homeless population that we need to look at. There are those out there that are struggling because they don’t have the same [pause] they are not blessed the same way.

Just as he reveled in his family he realized there are marginalized people without the same support system and this bothered him. And to the question of what was most important to him, Alberto unhesitatingly responded:

Love of family. My family is extremely important to me. It’s interesting, first starting out you get, for me, a focus on having kids early, being a youngster having kids, growing up with children, this overachiever mentality, losing sight of this, and focused about promotions and so forth.
You think about in the back of your mind, “I’m doing this for my family,” but you get so caught up in the minutia that you lose sight of what was there. It takes a very strong person, like my father, to pull back and say, “What’s important here? Is it important for you to create visibility for yourself and all this other stuff? What good is all that if you don’t have your family? What good is all that if you don’t know who you are and you don’t have a sense of yourself?”

Alberto had a very positive outlook on life due mainly to his faith and his belief in his ability to control his future. His hope for the future was once again reflected through his family:

Personally, it’s my belief in my family, stems back to what we were just talking about, my faith and my belief in what we have built together, my wife and I. I look at my older children, I look at my grandchildren, and I see in them belief and wonder, and I see in them the hunger to want. And I don’t mean wanting from a materialistic standpoint, but the desire to get out and be a part of something bigger.

As long as Alberto has his family, he can be at peace with the world.

Luis’ Story

The Hospital

Luis (a pseudonym) worked for an independent free-standing acute care hospital located in a major Midwestern city. The hospital had a unique and longstanding history that he explained in this passage:

My understanding is that this hospital was founded back in 1894, at the time it was primarily Norwegians actually that resided in the immediate community. Today we serve a population that is totally different than the original population when the hospital was established in 1894. Right now we serve largely Latinos and then some Blacks. The Latinos are kind of mixed. They are Puerto Ricans and Mexicans primarily.

The hospital was located in the larger metropolitan district just outside the skyscraper-filled downtown area. Driving to the hospital, I noticed the signs of a community
operating on the lower socioeconomic ladder of society. There were no rambling estates with large, well-groomed lawns. Houses and businesses were tightly squeezed together in mostly older buildings. The hospital sat right in the middle of an older, nondescript residential district. As I was driving, the hospital suddenly appeared as if from nowhere, as there were no large signs guiding one to the front door and it did not possess the requisite tower piercing the skyline announcing its presence. If the hospital once occupied the outskirts, it was now completely encompassed by houses that formed the neighborhood which surrounded the campus.

The hospital had an unassuming entrance built for functionality. It looked as if you were simply entering a building that could house any number of different types of businesses. On that particular day there was much activity taking place in the entrance. Once inside the hospital, I veered to the left to find the information desk. The administrative offices sat in close proximity to the information desk in what can only be described as unassuming space. There was no pretense associated with the physical space occupied by the executive offices. The equipment and personnel located in this area seemed to have been compressed into the available space. The furniture was functional and tidy. These offices were separated from the noise and regular flow of activity by a long row of windows that ran from waist level to the ceiling. There were no coverings on the windows, so I could see the constant flow of people as they paraded past in the hallway outside the offices. The overall impression was one of well-used space. The building showed signs of wear, but was clean. This main reception area was very busy with staff, physicians, patients, and family members all navigating their way through the various hallways.
The hospital offered a variety of services through its 200-bed, acute care campus, including emergency services, inpatient and same-day surgery, radiology, outpatient pharmacy, pediatric programs, cardiology, corporate health, intensive care unit, telemetry unit, and a comprehensive array of women's health care with an incorporated midwife program. Two primary care clinics located in the community were also operated by the hospital. The hospital had a profound commitment to the community and ranked fourth out of 59 area hospitals in providing charitable care. The mission of the hospital was delivering high quality care in a compassionate manner. The hospital also served as a safety net hospital for the area meaning it provided services to those individuals unable to afford care.

**First Impressions**

Upon my arrival, Luis was preoccupied with addressing physician concerns (something he shared during the interview), causing our meeting to start late. However, once inside his office he apologized and provided his undivided attention to the interview. Luis was well dressed and wore a long-sleeved dress shirt with cuff links. His salt and pepper hair was thinning slightly and combed straight back. He sported a closely cropped and well-manicured beard. He was slightly built, and his darker complexion contributed to his swarthy appearance. Luis was the president and CEO of the hospital, and his office was small in comparison to offices of other CEOs. The office, shaped like a narrow rectangle, had just enough room to accommodate a small round table with four side chairs in addition to his desk, but there was no unused space. There was one small window that overlooked a street and hospital parking lots. This window was located
higher than normal and created a unique view of people walking by on the sidewalk outside. All I could see were the tops of people’s heads bobbing up and down as they walked by. There was a flat screen TV mounted on the wall opposite his desk. Multiple awards and commendations adorned the walls of his office. His overcoat hung on a hook connected to the back of the door. The entire office was neat and tidy, but not austere.

Luis was seated across from me at his small round table while a few scattered papers covered part of the work surface. Before we started, his assistant brought him a cup of coffee. Luis was 58 years old and had been in his current position for over a year. He identified himself as Latino but, more importantly, as Puerto Rican. His presence hailed a watershed moment for the larger metropolitan district and the state, as he was the first hospital CEO of Latin descent, a fact hailed by several of the local newspapers and organizations. He had quickly established himself firmly in the fabric of local healthcare politics by being elected as a trustee to the state hospital association. He was also appointed by the governor to serve on a select panel of experts that would address the public health of the state, working closely with the governor’s office.

I discerned that English was not Luis’ first language. Luis spoke with a noticeable Spanish accent, and sentences were not always composed in a grammatically correct fashion but this should not be interpreted as a lack of intelligence. Luis was a bright individual who was easily understood. He answered questions with contemplative discernment and spoke unhurriedly with a sense of purpose. He paused to make sure of what he was going to say before opening his mouth. He had a natural conversational style that quickly put me at ease as he exuded a calm demeanor that projected confidence and control.
Luis had made tremendous personal sacrifices to land his current position. He left a very lucrative and powerful job in another state for this job. His wife—a high-ranking cabinet member in that state—had remained behind, along with their daughter, to pursue her career.

**Early Life in Puerto Rico**

Luis was born and raised on the island of Puerto Rico. Citizens of this American territory, although not enjoying the full rights of its brethren to the north, are considered U.S. citizens. The island has a unique history with deep roots tracing back to Spain. As such, the official languages are both Spanish and English. Luis provided general details of life on the island as he shared that he came from a large family:

I come from a very large family. My father remarried several times. He married seven times. We are 21 kids. I am part of a second to last marriage that he had; we are five within this family. In my early years I lived with both parents, with my father and my mother. My father was a businessman. My mother was a housewife, but my mother was a great believer in education so all of us went to good parochial schools. I went to [a parochial] academy when I was growing up. I always attribute that foundation to having respect for people, being ethical. The things that they taught you in those early years.

Luis performed well academically during this period of his life, but it was not without personal hardships. In the next passage he talked about the negative aspects of his early childhood and how they impacted his school experience:

The only thing that I didn’t like during the period when I was going to [grade] school is that I wished I could have had, is for my parents to give me the opportunity to be much more involved in school activities, which I never did because my father owned a business and as soon as I finished school I had to help him out. So I couldn’t participate in baseball, basketball, different activities in the school. I didn’t do that. I always felt bad about that because a lot of the kids had parents who were very well off financially had the opportunity to do all kinds of stuff and they did a lot of
traveling. There were exchanges between the different islands in the Caribbean for playing baseball, basketball, and things like that. I was never part of that. So I was kind of traumatized by the fact that I couldn’t keep up with my friends at that time and other students. I used to be very competitive. In fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade and ninth, I was kind of like an excellent student so I always strived to be the best. I received several medals for math, biology, and other things but I was always competing because there were other kids that were on top of me. They were getting better grades than I was. I wanted to get more medals than they did or recognition for the work. I was always very competitive, at least in trying to get better grades. There were several students who were smarter than I was and they were getting better grades and they were getting more medals and more recognition. . . . I was sort of like in the middle. Always wanted to do better but never reached the top.

I learned that although Luis’ family was not poor, work was a part of his daily routine.

The other thing I noticed was his need to excel and outperform others at a very early age.

This competitive spirit remained with him later in life.

The school he attended was run by the Catholic denomination. It was selected because of the quality of the education but also because Luis’ mother was a strong Catholic. Thus, for Luis, religion was woven into everyday life as what was taught at home was reinforced at school starting in the first grade. As he said when talking about the influence of religion:

Oh man, I mean it was very important because my whole family was Catholic. Part of the requirement of the school was that you go to church on Sunday, that you will participate in holy week and all the activities that you went through all of the requirements of a good Catholic such as having your first communion. All of that was like a big deal in the family, and it was very elaborate. Religion was important. There was a belief that there was a God and that we were created by God and the good things you do will be rewarded later on. But it played a big role to the point that whatever the priest [pause] at [the parochial school], what they had was brothers. There is a distinction between brothers and the priests. So they had brothers and the brothers were much more [pause] my parents believed them more than me because they signified a sense of purity and goodness to society. There was conflict because I felt like sometimes
some of them were not that fair with me and there was absolutely no discussion. I have to believe him and that’s the way it was.

For Luis’ family, religion and culture were intertwined and inseparable. The rhythm of life reverberated to the merging of culture and religion. Both of these factors had a profound influence on Luis as he matured.

Stability was provided to Luis and his siblings by his parents as they established order and provided guidance. Luis’ father’s parenting style may have been impacted by his own childhood. Luis’ father struck out on his own during his youth. He did not pursue a college degree, as a formal education was not important to him, but believed in the axiom that hard work was the path to success. Luis had vivid recollections of his father that he shared in this passage:

My father actually had a very interesting career as a young man. He actually left his family when he was very young too. He was a businessman but also was involved in politics, so he had various positions in some of the political parties on the island while he was working. Extremely hard-working man. I have no recollection that he was ever unemployed. He got up every day early in the morning to go to work. I saw that continuously. Work to him was important, and he was also kind of a really daring businessman. Failure never stopped him. He would start a new business and fail and he would start another one, and he would fail and start another one. Some of the businesses did very, very well prior to my going [the mainland]. He had a small grocery store, he got a bigger grocery store and after that one, I left to go to [the mainland], he already had a warehouse that he was actually selling to other stores. He had no MBA, no college, he was visionary in the things he wanted.

His father displayed a certain fearlessness in how he approached life, coupled with a strong work ethic. This work ethic made a strong impression on Luis. This was reinforced by the requirement that all the kids needed to be involved in some type of work, either around the house, at one of the businesses, or both. Here Luis talked about the impact of having to work from a young age:
What sticks out is the fact that I always think about that I have always worked extremely hard to be successful. I think the price that I have paid is that I have deprived myself of the things that could be fun because I love to work, and I think it actually comes from the demands that my father imposed—you finish with school, you have to come to the business, and you have to come here and help me out. It was always that. He put me to work doing things I felt were kind of shameful to some extent that I didn’t want people to see me doing it. Which today, at that time I felt that way but today it was honorable to do it. Such as, he used to brand his own water. He used to send me to stores to get bottles so that he could use them to brand his water. I would have to go with a little cart getting these bottles, and glass jars that would hold about a pound. I used to go and do that. That I always remember, that he made me do that. That was the worst job that you could do. Going from store to store, especially from grocery store to grocery store. Going and asking if they have bottles, jars and then I would come home with these bottles in a cart. Like the people you see in the street today picking up bottles. [laughs]

The other one was he used to sell, and I still remember, there are things that happened so long ago and you still remember because it created an impact on your life. He used to sell in his business something that is called mavi. It’s like a refreshing drink that is made from pineapple. My job was to make 10 cases of 24 bottles every day after school. In the business he had a big wooden barrel full of pineapple and water. You would take the liquid every day and put water into it, and it fermented and it has a very refreshing taste. You would make it sweet with raw sugar. So I used to take this water, which I needed to filter because the pieces of pineapple would come in, and then put eight pounds of raw sugar and then after that wash all the 10 cases of 24 bottles and then fill them one by one. I would be working after school three and a half to four hours just doing that. I always remember that because that was one of the things I hated the most—picking up the bottles and doing that. It was every day.

Work was part of the daily routine and was presented as a necessary task. For a young child who would rather have played after school, this was quite a sacrifice. The work did not stop once he left the business, as there was also work at home that occasionally required his attention. Some of these tasks were dreadful for Luis:

My father was also the representative for a company called Purina. They used to make food for pets as well as chickens, things like that. So he had the representation, with the representation he also had little chickens that we would keep in the business that would be sold to people and they would take them home and they would raise them. We used to have
hundreds of those little chickens. There were times when he would say, “I want you to clean the trays.” Cleaning the trays was a metal net. There was a tray here. All of the chickens were there, they would poop in there, it would drop in the tray, and I had to take it out and clean that goddamn thing! Which was really awful.

At the time, those jobs evoked a strong negative response. Over time Luis’ perspective had changed. In retrospect, Luis was more contemplative of the value of this upbringing and believed it helped mold him into the successful person he became, despite his emotional reaction at the time as he said:

But you know, I see it differently today. I think it taught me how to [pause] if there was one thing he left behind when I was a child that I felt that my father left [pause] it was always a sense of being productive and working. He left his legacy... with me that you have to work. I have to tell you, I have worked since I was like in fifth, sixth grade, all the way until today. I have never been unemployed, ever in my career! Even when I was going to school, I always worked part time. I was going to college, I worked part time. When I went to graduate school, I actually went full time to school, from Monday through Friday, on Friday afternoon. I worked Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday, and then I would repeat the cycle. I have always been very productive and I see those values, hard work, and the structure that was created actually made me into what I am today.

In this sense work was viewed as necessary, honorable, and capable of building character. This work ethic later permeated all aspects of Luis’ leadership style. Luis’ father also stressed the importance of family. Here he talked about how important family was to his father:

He was also very family oriented. Every weekend the family would go and eat at a restaurant. He was also a member of the association of grocery stores, so they used to have events so the whole family used to go, my mother, the five of us, and him. There was a family value in that. There was a period of time that we all ate together at noon time. Over there you close the store, you go home, and you sleep the siesta. Now some of those traditions really don’t exist anymore, but my father used to come home at noon time. We would all sit at the table and we all ate together and some people would go to sleep for a little while or outside to
play but it was expected that we would all be together. He was also very family oriented. He had brothers and sisters, and he always took care of his brothers and sisters. There was kind of a revolving door at my house, an aunt was there, an uncle was there. Since he was the most financially successful of the whole family, he really settled business for the other siblings to help them out. I kind of followed that path, although I never planned for it. He helped his siblings get a start in small businesses. He gave them money, he established them.

The idea of family and how it was incumbent on each member to care for the whole was modeled consistently for Luis and his siblings by his father. This caring attitude was something Luis had inherited from his father. For all the good displayed by his father, life at this time was not without family tension, as Luis described the vices his father had that led to family disharmony:

My father used to like women so he married seven times. We are 20 something kids. He liked to drink and he liked to work. That was his life. I never saw anything negative in my environment except a little violence because when he used to drink he used to yell and scream. I think at one point, a couple of times he pushed my mother when I was a little older and I interjected, but besides that piece, which could also be very traumatic when you see your parents fighting with each other. There was nothing like knives or sticks. It was raising voices, maybe throwing something but it was not aggression aimed at hurting the individual physically. It was more to hurt the individual mentally.

Far from projecting a completely idyllic life, Luis was pragmatic about how his family functioned. Even though they had few financial concerns, he could not overlook the negative behaviors displayed by his father. He was traumatized by what he witnessed. As Luis related this story, I conjectured that this environment may have contributed to his early departure from the house.

Luis’ mother had her hands full with running the household, and as such, did not work outside the house. Contrary to his father, his mother was a staunch believer in education. She saw to it that all her children were enrolled in parochial schools. The
combination of a private school education coupled with values passed on from his parents laid the foundation for Luis’ personal value system. From these experiences he learned respect for others and how to behave ethically, values that have remained with him.

Although Luis’ father was a successful businessman, his mother also worked hard to see that all her family’s needs were met:

My mother was a very decent, dedicated mother to all her children. She worked hard to make sure we all got the things that we needed. She worked hard to make sure we had all of the basic things, that we lived in a decent home, we were clean, that we had clothes that were clean, that we go to school, that we had three meals every day, which she actually prepared with the help of someone else all the time, but not an educated woman. My mother didn’t even finish high school but believed in education and that was important.

It was in this structured family environment that Luis spent the early formative years of his life. Luis’ father worked hard and reaped the financial rewards to provide for his family, but in an ironic twist was careful to not spend on things he deemed not important. As Luis described the neighborhood he grew up in, he also provided insight into the psyche of his father:

We were different. There was not much of a relationship with the neighbors, though there was a sense of neighborhood, there was not much relationship. Although my father worked very hard and had businesses and was middle class, there were things that never appealed to him. Like it never appealed to him to live in the best neighborhood on the island. He could be in a working [class] neighborhood, where people work and everybody kind of struggles and everybody has a job. I grew up in that same neighborhood, but we were the most well off in the whole neighborhood. We were the kids that went to private school, we had a maid in the house, we had cars, we had things that most people in the neighborhood didn’t have because he had a lucrative business. Although he chose to stay there . . . my father was 20 years older than my mother. So the notion that he always had was, “I am not going to a rich neighborhood because if anything happens, your mother is going to enjoy what I have.” He always had that mentality and also I think it was kind of insecurity because he was 20 years older than my mother. He would say,
“I’m not going to buy a house in a nice neighborhood because I don’t want to leave it to her. That way she could just marry somebody else if I die.” That was the situation. And then he left, he left the family and put together another family. My mother never remarried and stayed by herself. She’s still alive, she’s 85 now. In terms of the neighborhood, we were like the highlight, we were called [los Rodriguez’]. Everybody knew about us. We were also kind of lighter [in complexion] than most of the people in the neighborhood.

Even with the success his father enjoyed, he was reticent to fully share this with his family as he feared they might enjoy it in his absence.

Surviving Alone in a New Land

Even with the privileges his lifestyle provided, Luis was a teen who found some of the rules of the house too constricting for him. In fact, Luis described himself as not being an easy kid to deal with at this stage of his upbringing. He acknowledged that at that point he did not get along well with his father. Luis indicated that he was an unsettled teen struggling to find his path, unwilling to accept the path laid out before him. Perhaps it was a need to experience more than what his then-current surroundings offered. Life on the island he would later come to adore did not offer the challenges a bright boy like him needed. This restlessness, the house rules, the relationship with his father, all intersected one fateful night. Luis, as he was in the habit of doing, came home very late where he encountered his father who chastised him for his failure to abide by the rules of the house:

In my teens I was not an easy kid, so I liked to go out and come home late at night. I couldn’t see eye to eye with my father, so on one of those late nights I came home and he says to me, “If you want to live here, you are going to have to obey my rules, then you can stay here. If you are a man enough to come here late at one o’clock in the morning, then you have to find a way to live, not here.” As a typical teenage rebel I said to him, “Well, I’m leaving the house.” That’s how I ended up in [the states].
left the house at 16 to go to [the states]. I went to live with an uncle who was his brother. They tried to negotiate that I stay on the island and I said, “No. I don’t want to stay here. I don’t want to live in the house any longer.” At that time our middle class began to really decline because he was a successful business person, but all of his relationships with all of his kids began to deplete the capital that he had. Things were getting kind of shaky, and I took off and went to [the states] and started my own life in [the states].

As a teenager of 16, Luis packed up his belongings and made the trip to one of the mainland states in what was to be the start of a new life for Luis. Keep in mind that Luis was not bilingual, and the educational system was not set up to support students who did not speak English. The fact that Puerto Ricans are American citizens was overshadowed by the stark differences in culture and language. Some of the simplest things others took for granted, like ordering lunch, became a chore for Luis:

I had to really struggle through, I had to learn. I mean I knew things, the little things—table, chair—things that they teach you. To have a conversation, it was not there. I couldn’t speak to anyone. I also joked around with everyone because when I first arrived there, I ate the same thing every day because it was the only thing that I could say in English. I ate pizza and coke, because I could get in line in the pizzeria and I ask, “Can I have a slice and a coke?” That’s all I could say. I ate the same thing over and over all the time because I couldn’t deviate from that safe environment.

In the middle of this cultural transition, Luis continued to focus on the one thing he felt would solve his problems—education. The challenges of adapting to a new country and culture while learning a new language did not dissuade him from his singular mission to get an education. Therefore, he lost no time in addressing his educational needs:

I enrolled myself in high school. I worked part time in a supermarket. I supported myself, and I went to school every day. I finished high school and enrolled myself in college. I did all my schooling, nobody had to tell
me what to do. I just did it on my own. I was motivated to have an education.

At this early stage in his development, Luis had already established education as his driving force. He only lasted a few months with the uncle before moving out with a friend. Again, there was more to the story than the unassuming comment made by Luis during the interview about staying with his uncle. He later related that life with his uncle was unbearable. Luis talked about how tough it was living under his uncle’s roof. In this passage, I could feel his pain:

When I lived with my uncle in the beginning they watched the food in the refrigerator, and there were days that I was dying to have a glass of milk but I couldn’t have it, so I used to take a glass of milk, drink it, put water back in the container, that way when they came back they would see it was at the same level. These are the things that I went through. I didn’t have anything.

Luis and a friend managed to rent an apartment for a time. For the next few years, Luis traveled from house to house, including relatives, but never had a permanent residence. Not only did he lack the physical stability of a traditional family home, he lacked the emotional support a nuclear family provided. Luis referred to this period in his life as “rocky.”

The entire process of finding his place in a new culture was not an easy transition for Luis. He shared how his early childhood environment, including family and school, provided the foundation to endure independently. School remained his primary focus, and it was here that the greatest initial disparities became evident to him. Here he reflected on the differences between education in Puerto Rico and the United States:

High school was kind of traumatic to me to some extent because relocating to [the states], it was a different educational system. I was used to going to school with uniforms; here they do not use uniforms. The
relationship between students and teachers in [the states] was different than the relationships I had on the island. I felt that there was more order, more demands, more respect on the island when I went to school than when I went to [the states]. Cutting classes was like a natural thing. Wearing whatever clothes you wanted to wear. People could just wear whatever they wanted to. Then I also struggled a little bit with the, although I knew a little bit of English, I was not really proficient and I really struggled with some of the classes. Some of my grades actually hitting the lowest they could be because I couldn’t understand the way teachers were teaching and I didn’t fully understand the language. If I didn’t have the will and was not strong enough, I could have just dropped out of school. I remember, it was a combination of a couple of things, the language was one but also I needed to work to support myself.

Although he directed some of his comments to the difference in physical garb, those comments were probably more indicative of the difference in philosophies, with clothes serving as visible manifestations of that difference. I began to sense the depth of emotional stress Luis operated under as he continued to share his story.

Throughout this period, his school work suffered as the pressures of being self-sufficient took its toll. These failures, coupled with all the hours he was working, exacted an emotional price from Luis. He was faced with problems the ordinary teenager in the United States did not have to deal with, and there were many influences working against him completing his education. If not for his tenacity, he would have become another dropout statistic. Here he talked about some of those issues:

So I always needed to make a choice whether I would work a couple more hours for me to eat or do my homework and study. I remember out of 100 getting a 10 or 15 on an exam. It was crazy for me because I wasn’t used to doing that. And then it became an issue of self-examination. “Am I really bright or am I stupid? Jesus, this is shameful. How could I get such bad grades?” But I stayed. I didn’t get discouraged. I got discouraged for a few minutes and I kept doing that. That I remember in high school. I could have easily slipped off the track because now I’m in America, I’m in a school that is totally different, there is a lot more flexibility and more room to do whatever you want to do. You get friends that are not on the right track. They go to school but basically they hang out, they don’t go to
class. So I got a few of those friends, and I would hang out with some of them but then I would always remind myself that I was by myself and that I couldn’t afford to do the things those kids were doing because those kids have parents that were with them. I was in [the states] by myself, and I needed to take responsibility for taking care of myself. I needed to eat, I needed to have a place to eat so I couldn’t afford to do what they were doing. But through peer pressure, you could have easily got off the track.

Academic failure caused Luis to question who he was. It was interesting to note that Luis never mentioned returning home as an option during this time. I believe he was so committed to making it in the United States that his choices were limited to those that kept him in school where he was. Transitioning to the culture of the United States continued to challenge Luis’ values and principles. Luis talked about the competing pressures of remaining true to his ethnic identity or developing a new American identity. Although values were instilled in Luis from an early age, moving to what amounted to a new country caused him to question his identity:

The cultural values were basically that you have to be proud of who you are, proud of your culture, you have to be proud of your own ethnicity, and there wasn’t a sense of wanting to be an American on the island. It was a sense of wanting to be Puerto Rican. A Puerto Rican has his own traditions, his own culture, his own belief in things. There was a sense of being a nationalist and being proud of who you were. I acquired that from both parents. Although when I went to [mainland], I actually changed. When I got to [the states] because of the peer pressure, because of the culture in [the states], because being an American was a good thing and America was good, that confused me enormously and I got to the point that I actually changed my name from [Luis] to [Louis]. “Hi, how are you? I’m [Louis].” That kind of thing. Everybody started to call me [Louis] so I was beginning to integrate.

Within those comments was the ideology that maintaining ethnic identity and becoming a member of the United States were incongruent. Luis was vexed, as he did not want to walk away from his culture. He believed one would need to be sacrificed for
the sake of the other. It was soon thereafter that Luis had a personal epiphany that caused him to rethink his approach to integration. Here he spoke about that awareness:

There was the realization that I was never going to be an American. And then I got out of that [mindset] and today I even feel much more strongly about the sense of being who I am, of being different, because remember America is very prejudiced. If you are Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, being from those countries is not associated with a good image. At least the perception that I had. But if you come from Europe, you were French, English, you were okay, you were fine. I was not any of those. I went back to my culture . . .

It was in that epiphany that Luis experienced emotional and psychological freedom. It did not change his circumstances, but it did allow him to change his attitude and outlook. As he accepted that which he could not change, he developed a sense of peace.

This new ethnic pride led him to be more vocal in support of causes. During this time of developing a fuller understanding of who he was, he also developed a social consciousness for, what some would term, radical causes:

Back in 1971 when Allende became president of Chile, I was involved in the social aspect of meeting . . . at different homes with kids who had a social consciousness. I was just about ready to go to Chile to work for the revolution, but I couldn’t leave the country because I didn’t have permission from my parents. I had to stay in [the United States].

His foray into international social causes was abruptly cut short for lack of a signature. He went on to complete high school and then set his sights on college. There was never any doubt in his mind that college was the next step in his development.

**Struggling to Make it Through College**

After he completed high school, Luis enrolled at the local college. Initially, Luis wanted to be an architect. He pursued this course of study for a short time before he realized that he was not cut out to be an architect. Some dreams die hard, and Luis
actually made a second attempt at architecture some years later before letting go of that idea for good. He decided upon psychology. School continued to be a struggle for Luis, but he completed the course work with adequate grades while his mastery of English continued to improve. Undergraduate years seemed to pass without any major epiphanies. It was upon graduation, with a bachelor’s in psychology, that a pivotal event took place. Here was how Luis told the story:

When I was finishing up my BA at [the local] college, there was a Jewish Ph.D. historian who says to me, “You know, you graduated this year. What are you going to do with your life?” I didn’t know exactly what I was going to do with my life at that time. All I knew was that I just wanted to get an education, I want to be educated and then I said, “Professor, why are you asking the question?” He said, “Well, because you are Puerto Rican, you are Latino, and I think you will be a great social worker.” At that time, which was back in 1977, being a social worker was associated with taking kids away from family members, making home visits, and it was just breaking up families, so I told him I was not interested in that. Given that, I waited a couple of months and I went back to him and I said, “Listen, what do you have to offer?” And then he said, “Well, you know, my wife is an associate dean at [a university] in the school of social work, and I can get you an appointment.”

As a result of that conversation, an interview was scheduled with the associate dean of the school of social work, the wife of the professor. This program was located on the campus of a different university than where Luis earned his bachelor’s degree. Upon stepping onto the grounds of the university, Luis immediately felt out of place:

At [the previous college] I felt at home because there were a lot of Puerto Ricans, a lot of Blacks, a lot of minorities, and I felt connected there. When I took the trip to [the university] with [Ana], who is my wife, at that time was my girlfriend, as soon as I arrived at the school I said, “I don’t belong here.” There were no people who looked like me, they didn’t sound like me, and they were all Jewish ladies who actually had a second career.

Luis was used to the familiar confines of the integrated college from which he had just
graduated. He went through with the interview despite his misgivings. As a result of that interview with the dean, who was a White female of Jewish descent, he was persuaded to enroll.

Once classes began, he crossed paths with the lone Latino professor at the school. They formed a fast friendship and this professor became his emotional support system in the school:

Then there was one Latino professor who was Puerto Rican in the whole school of social work, and that was my connection. I was able to connect to this guy, and he had a pride about trying to support Latino students. So who shaped my career was this unknown Jewish professor . . . and then actually it was really supported by this professor who actually, I became, he became my protector in the school.

It was not only support, but encouragement, this professor offered as he pushed Luis into school politics:

“You know, there is going to be an election of the student association. Why don’t you run for something?” I said, “You know, who’s going to vote for me?” “No, you should go for it.” Anyway, I did, and I actually ran for the first time and I lost, and then the second time I ran, I won, and then I became president of [a Latino organization] in the school. And then he was able to get me exposure. He was able to get me on a couple of panels around the country where he was able to get the school to pay for it. He did that. He exposed me to another world I didn’t know. That was kind of scary.

The professor helped with small things that were part of adjusting to college life but as I observed, the relationship developed into things of greater consequence as they talked about transitioning into the mainstream as a Latino:

“Let’s talk about your transition as a Latino in [previous city]. What are some of the crosscultural issues you identified? What were some of the ethnic issues that you that you came across? What are those barriers? What are those things that made a difference to you, and how do you navigate that system?” So it became really an opportunity, both getting my education but also was for professional growth. But that has to do
with someone who believes in you, someone who takes you as a mentor and mentors you to do something, and then people open doors for you but it’s up to you how you’re going to keep the doors open. So for me, it was like they opened the door for me but I have really been able to continue to open the door more and more and more for several years.

It was not just educational guidance that was offered; it was conversations about professional growth and development as well. The relationship with this mentor survived as they had occasionally found time to reconnect through the years.

In recalling those stories, Luis viewed this type of individualized support as key to his success. These two professors saw something in Luis that he was not cognizant of at the time. They encouraged him to follow a path he had not considered. They opened the doors for him and he subsequently did his part by working as hard as he could to be the best student he could be. This was not an easy task given his living situation. Luis continued to struggle through his college years, trying to balance his need to be an overachiever with the realities of supporting himself:

These years were undecided, confused, the harsh years of my, of trying to balance an education with your own personal responsibilities of supporting yourself and being able to have something to eat and have shelter so you can go to sleep at night. That was really hard. Measuring every dollar you have to make sure you do the right thing. After I finished high school, it was integrating more into the mainstream of college campus with students who were born and raised in this country. You are totally different than they are. They look different, they speak differently, they have different values, and here I am having no support system and navigating that environment which became very challenging. I went to a public college, I went to a city university. I found the same consistency that I saw in high school, that the minorities, the Blacks, the Latinos would all congregate together in one area. It was the smoking pot, the drinking beer, it was all of these things. Cutting class, when the days were warmer you didn’t go to class. Everyone was sitting outside planning where the next party would be, that kind of stuff. I saw the same pattern. The White kids were in school, were in the classroom. I would like to do the same thing that they do, but there was the other reality, . . . I cannot afford to do
that otherwise I will be on the street because I don’t have anyone. And not knowing what I really wanted to do.

Luis had always been motivated by the intrinsic value of school. Even as he doubted where education would lead, he never lost hope in the educational system. He remained in school, content to let his future evolve:

I didn’t plan my career, it was always unplanned. . . . There were two things that I was clear. One is I wanted to get an education. So for me, I was motivated to do that, to me it was key. I was not interested in work, I was not interested in making money. I wanted to get a couple of degrees and so for me, as long as I have money to eat and have a pair of jeans and a pair of boots and sneakers, that’s all I needed until I finished. I was motivated by that. And then the other thing was working hard. I feel the traditional way of working hard and being the best that you can be. Those two things were critical for me, the education and being the best that I could be in whatever position I end up.

He was willing to sacrifice the usual trappings and distractions associated with college life because of his singular purpose. He believed that future success was dependent upon a solid educational foundation—something he lacked but was acquiring—and hard work—something he had performed all his life. This time was very instructional for Luis. When asked what he learned about himself during this time, he said:

That I was very resilient. That I had a will and power to do what I wanted to do. That I don’t give up easy. That I’m very determined to get what I want. That I can stay focused. That’s what I learned. That’s who I am.

**Facing Challenges in the Workforce**

Up to this point in Luis’ life, very little had been planned. Life had more or less evolved and morphed into his becoming a social worker with a master’s degree in hand. He had bought into social work as a career because of the ability to make a difference in people’s lives. He utilized his training by engaging as a social worker. Initially, he was
assigned to several schools, seeing troubled youth as he made the rounds. These schools were located in tough neighborhoods that contributed to the problems experienced by some of the students. He soon realized that making inroads one person at a time was not satisfying enough for him. He wanted to institute change on a larger scale, and he felt he had the managerial skills that would aid him in this endeavor. He explained that he became aware of a pilot project with the local mental health department:

Now the only area that I really planned well was—my early years from graduation, I basically was just doing social work like individual therapy, group therapy, making home visits. I had several schools that were assigned to me, and I went to see troubled kids and then I felt that I didn’t want to do that. What I wanted to do, I wanted to get into management because I felt that I had the ability to manage things. I ended up actually planning that. There was a managerial position at a pilot project at [former city] where the department of mental health took the [neighborhoods] of the city and developed, at the troubled schools, an on-site mental health program. There were like 19 programs throughout the whole city. I ended up actually running one of them. As a social worker, I was making a lot more money than taking this managerial position so what I did is I resigned . . . and took a cut in salary, and I took that position because I think that is what I wanted to do. So that, I planned. I wanted to go beyond, I wanted to be more involved in a macro system level for creating greater impact on people’s lives and the communities than actually being in a room with five or six kids or having a one-on-one discussion with kids who were troubled because the impact for me was always going to be small. Not that it undermined the fact this didn’t make a difference in some people’s lives, but I felt that now I was getting much more involved and I wanted to get much more involved in policymaking and policy decisions to create a bigger impact in whatever I do.

He saw this position as a way to gain credibility within the field that would ultimately provide opportunities to move into positions that allowed more room for discretionary decision making. He was after change on a more encompassing scale. In his new position, he was responsible for a small staff: a psychologist, a secretary, and three social
workers. In the 2 years he served in this role, he was able to demonstrate good outcomes but he once again became restless, in need of another challenge.

The pilot project operated under the auspices of one of the local hospitals. Once Luis reached the point where he needed a bigger professional challenge, he was no longer satisfied to remain in his current position:

I approached the management of the hospital and told them that I was looking to move on, they said, “Well, we don’t want you to leave. We want you to stay here.” Then the department of psychiatry was very large, so they offered me a position to be the chief of administrative services for the whole department of psychiatry, and then I really got into management. I learned a great deal because the person that I worked with—I didn’t like him, but I think he was brilliant—and he was a good manager because he kept things focused, he tracked them, he looked for outcomes. I stayed there for awhile. I moved on to the level that in the department of psychiatry that the people who hired me to run the on-site school mental health program, I became their bosses.

This position allowed Luis to continue to hone his management skills. He worked for an individual he did not like, but respected. He observed, somewhat quizzically, that the people he had previously worked with were still there in their old jobs doing the same things while he was now the deputy of the entire hospital. He remained with that organization for a number of years until, as he put it, he received his big break.

Years earlier, Luis became involved in the politics of healthcare as one of the members of a Latino healthcare organization which had, as guiding principles, the identification and support of aspiring Latinos within the field. This group became very influential in local politics and was soon able to establish a commissioner of mental health position. This was followed by creating additional positions for associate commissioners. With each new position, the group was creating a professional infrastructure which advocated for Latinos. This organization also was instrumental in
developing the first bilingual, bicultural mental health unit in the area. It was not long thereafter that a prominent Latino, with a strong background in mental health, was named to the commissioner position. It was this individual who asked Luis to become his chief of staff:

When I say I got my big break it was because, since we were part of the group, when he became commissioner he asked me to be his chief of staff and then I got a break. To be the chief of staff means that now I’m the chief of staff of a city-wide agency and that really gave me a lot of exposure, a lot of interfacing with the state, interfacing with other city agencies, and it was the job I hated the most because when you are the chief of staff, you have no job. You just put your hands in everything, but you don’t have anything that is yours. So I basically hated it. I remember when at one point he says, “Luis, I know you hate this job,” and I said, “Yeah, I hate it and I don’t like it,” and [he] used to say, “Well, I think this is good for you.” So even when I say I hated it, he had the foresight to tell me continuously, “This is good for you and this is going to help.” And if I look back, that job was the most important job in my career to be what I am because it gave me the opportunity to branch out into different areas and interconnect and interface with different agencies, with different groups of people. I was able to get my name there and that really turned around my whole career and that only lasted a year.

Luis accepted the job knowing that the commissioner was an appointed position and that his tenure was tied to the political party in office, making it a risky endeavor. With only 1 year remaining on the current mayor’s term, it could end up as a very short assignment. To compound the problems inherent in accepting the position, Luis was married at this point and had a small child, so there was the added pressure of providing a stable financial foundation for his family looming over his head as well.

For someone used to controlling their own performance and results, this position was disheartening. The job offered him the invaluable experience of interacting with other state and city agencies, developing important political connections in the process.
Unfortunately, the premonitions Luis had came true as the mayor lost the election the following year, and he found himself unemployed.

Soon after the election, Luis received a call from a very high-ranking public official asking him about his future prospects. Luis informed the caller that, although he felt he possessed marketable skills, he did not have any immediate employment opportunities. This individual informed Luis that he had two jobs to offer him and explained each of them to him. One was at a smaller psychiatric hospital as the second in charge, the other was at a large psychiatric hospital as the CEO. This is the offer that was made to Luis:

“Which one do you prefer, do you want to have?” He said, “Think about it.” So I called him back and I said, “You know [Anthony], when I had the conversation with you it was clear that you wanted me to take the [large] psychiatric center, but I went to visit the center and I cannot really be confined to an area. You cross the bridge, you go down, it’s on a little island where the psychiatric hospital is, this will drive me off the wall.” And I said, “If I will serve you well there and you think that I can be helpful to you, I’ll take it but you know that eventually you’re going to have to move me out of there.” I said, “I just want to be helpful to you.” So he said, “Okay, let me consider that.” . . . He called me back and said, “I need you to take [the job at the large hospital].” I said, “Okay, but I will tell you I will take it with one condition—that when there will be another job opportunity available, that you move me to another area because I will do it really for you and I will put my heart into it and the hospital will be the best hospital you’re going to have. But that’s not really what I wanted to do, not in that setting.” “Okay, okay, Luis, fine. Thank you,” and he hung up. Like a day later, [Anthony] called me and said, “Hey, Luis, listen, I’ve been thinking about it and I want you to be successful. Go to [the smaller] psychiatric hospital as number two instead of number one at [the large hospital].” I said, “Okay, fine.”

In accepting this position, Luis once again returned to a facility that he had previously worked at as a social worker. Here he talked about the nuances of his new role:
The state was into decertifying beds so they wanted to send all these patients out into the community, and I created the model that worked very well . . . . That transition worked because it didn’t go automatically from the inpatient to the outside world. It went from the inpatient and people made some changes, but anyway, I became very successful. Six months later I became the CEO of the hospital. [pause] Why did I become the CEO? Several things. I created a different model of treating this population that they will be able to adjust in the community in a better setting, and then I was able to close a lot of beds, which is exactly what the state wanted to do, through that model. . . . I created a relationship with the hospitals there and I made a deal, “You don’t have to take them, send them back to me.” And for them it was helpful . . . [because] these are people that are mentally ill, and all of these variables and all of these changes are not good for them.

Luis was able to create this program because of his deep understanding of the needs of those struggling to cope with mental issues. Unfortunately, this job also came to an abrupt end as it was an appointed position of the governor, who lost the next election. The same individual who contacted Luis the last time he was unemployed contacted him again. This individual had risen in the ranks and was now responsible for all the state hospitals. He shared that there was a CEO opening at a small hospital located in a predominantly Latino community. Luis explained that there was one caveat tied to getting the job:

So here I am, I have no place to go again. The commissioner, who was the commissioner for the department of mental health, that I was his chief of staff, then became president of all of the hospitals in [former state] at that time. He called me, I saw him and said, “[Anthony], I am unemployed. I don’t have a job. What am I going to do?” He said, “I have a CEO position at a hospital which I think will fit you perfectly. It’s a very small hospital, it’s in a Latino community, and I think you can have it except that you need to find a godfather that is politically connected to the mayor of the city. Once you find that, then you call me and we’ll get you through.” I found a godfather, I found someone who connected me with the mayor, who I didn’t know. I met him through someone else. We had a meeting. He looked at my credentials, my responsibilities, and then I got my first break to be the CEO of a general hospital.
This was another significant event in his career, as it represented his move from mental health facilities management to management of a general acute facility. This subtle change represented a material change in how Luis would be viewed by the healthcare industry. He had moved from management within a specialized industry to management in mainstream healthcare. This position offered Luis the stability his earlier career had lacked. He remained in this system for quite some time, while he gained increased responsibility. He was responsible for approximately one-third of the entire public health system upon his departure.

Although wildly successful, Luis once again found himself professionally unfulfilled after a number of years in this position. He became obsessed with running a private, nongovernment hospital. The process of finding that position was arduous, disheartening, and enlightening. It brought Luis in contact with deep-seated prejudices and biases. In the end, he did find a CEO position at a private acute care hospital but he would have to move to another state, leaving his family behind. The position he accepted was the one he held at the time of the interview.

**Facing the Reality of Prejudice**

Luis had experienced both positive and negative outcomes related to his ethnicity. His story was one of consistent support from the Latino community, while paradoxically he complained about of the lack of support from the greater Latino community for Latinos. Offsetting this was his perception of mainstream society. He was critical of those who controlled healthcare at the highest level, those who made decisions on which person was hired for CEO positions—the hospital boards of directors. He believed that
healthcare run by private organizations was much more biased against racial and ethnic minorities than public healthcare. In the state where he spent the majority of his career, he indicated that only one Latino was CEO of a private hospital:

Government seems to be much more flexible in creating opportunities for minorities, but the private sector does not. If you take, for example, out of 170 hospitals in [former state], there is only one [Latino] president who is a CEO of a voluntary hospital. What I was, was the public sector. So I got an opportunity, but that sector [private] is the most difficult sector to get in for a number of reasons. One is, if you have one or two of your own kind in a position like that, they disconnect from the rest of the community. So there is not a commitment to create and bring someone else that you could even mentor to reach that level because it’s very protective. The others who are nonminorities, the White Anglos that actually control the healthcare industry in [former state] and the Jewish community, that is very protective, they don’t allow you, they don’t give you an opportunity for you to come in. They don’t want a Luis who speaks with an accent to be running one of those hospitals in [former state]. Which led me to, after 16 years, venture outside [former state].

To illustrate his point, he reminded me that the success he experienced to that point in his life had all taken place in the public sector. Even though he was quite successful, he was not content. He felt led on a personal mission to break into private healthcare:

My dream was always to run, no matter how small it is, I wanted to run a voluntary private hospital because from the private to the public sector, to the voluntary sector, it’s hard to cross over because you don’t have leadership that supports minorities, and every board at those institutions are primarily dominated by White, Anglo, or Jewish people. There are not really a lot of minorities in those hospital boards, so no one pushed to give an opportunity to someone like you and I. If I would have found a job in [former state], I would have remained in [former state]. I would have never come to [current state], but I want to close that loop. For me, the most important thing was to close the loop in my career.

He responded to several CEO opportunities within private healthcare across the country. Each time he was not selected, he became more untrusting of the system. He found it
hard to believe that others who applied had more experience, could point to better outcomes, and were more qualified than he. As a result, he was convinced that selection at this highest level of healthcare leadership was not about one’s work history or how hard one worked, but more about observable phenotype characteristics like the color of one’s skin, one’s physical stature, and whether or not one spoke with an accent.

Luis was harsh in his criticism of private boards that wielded the decision-making authority on executive positions. He had found the majority of private boards to be dominated by Whites. He did not believe most of them were open to supporting racial and ethnic minorities. He was convinced the reason he had to relocate several states over was because the private boards in his previous state would not accept a Puerto Rican-born CEO. His call for creating more opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities was to revamp the boards by interjecting more racial and ethnic minorities in them. Once that change took place, it would be easier for those with appropriate qualifications and experience to be given a fair chance.

His search led him to his current position where he was the CEO at a private, free-standing acute care hospital in a Midwestern state. It was interesting to note that although he had achieved one of his goals, the hospital where he worked catered to a primarily Latino population:

I went to several interviews. I got close, but not close enough. When I went to every board, as soon as I stepped into the board that was interviewing and I looked at the landscape I said, “I am not going to get this job, but I’m going to try and do my best.” And I was right. I never got those jobs. I came here because the board had several Latino members on the board. . . . it’s the Puerto Rican hospital for this community. So I fit, I met all the requirements because I was Puerto Rican at a Puerto Rican hospital.
Thus, not only did his ethnic background not hurt him, it actually proved to be an asset.

He believed this same ethnic background was viewed as a negative at the other places he interviewed:

My skill set and my experience is applicable to just about everywhere but people, I’m going to tell you the things I was disqualified for jobs. [pauses] My piece of [former state] was bigger than every place that I went where they were considering me for a position, which they never gave me. I had three hospitals, 34 clinics in [former state]. I had 8,000 people under my responsibility. My operating budget was $1.1 billion a year, and I did that for 16 years. I go to hospitals in Seattle, Philadelphia—which are 300-bed hospitals with 1,800 people with a small budget—and I never got the job. I guarantee you that none of the people who got those jobs got them because they had the extensive experience they were looking for, but it was related to what is your racial profile, what is the ethnicity of the population you are serving, and what is the board composition of those organizations. So for me, when I look back, a major transformation—at least for us as Latino CEOs to move ahead—is how can we get boards to be more diversified ethnically if you want to create opportunities for others. Not until that happens will it change because the boards will make the ultimate decisions on who they select. That’s what I learned. No one was going to give me an opportunity in [former state]. No matter how well known I was, no matter how hard I worked, how my system was larger than all of those hospitals, how I had a track record, how I knew more about healthcare than anybody who was sitting in those interviews, but I’m the wrong ethnicity. I am not tall, I have a Spanish accent, so automatically you are disqualified for some reasons. If you look around the country, how many CEOs are Latinos? Very, very few. So for me, here my legacy is to mentor someone to take over.

Luis articulated that changes in the distribution of racial and ethnic minorities in executive healthcare jobs was unlikely to take place unless systemic changes occurred within healthcare. Board composition, an often overlooked factor, stood as the main reason there were not more racial and ethnic minority CEOs in healthcare, according to Luis.
Moving and accepting the new position was very important to Luis. He knew it was about more than being the CEO of a 200-bed hospital. It represented a powerful new social message—Latinos were capable of running organizations. As such, Luis was very cognizant of the implications conjoined to his tenure, particularly if it ended in failure:

I feel a lot of pressure in this position, and I am not talking about the day-to-day operations. I am not talking about the finances of the hospital. I’m going to tell you what my pressure is. My pressure is a professional pressure because I am the only Puerto Rican Latino CEO in the whole state. My failure will send a message to go back to others. I got to make this thing work! By hook or by crook, otherwise we are screwed if I don’t make this happen! So to me, that pressure is a lot more than I deal with in this hospital every single day, a lot more. A lot more! I can deal with the finances. I can deal with the doctors here every day. I can deal with the community. I can deal with patient safety issues, with quality issues, with the perception of the hospital in the community. I can deal with all of that stuff, but the pressure of being in this position to be the only one in the state of [current state] is tremendous personal pressure for me, more than anything else.

The ramifications associated with failure would signal to the White community that their embedded prejudicial worldviews were valid. Luis believed this would reinforce that Latinos were not capable of running private hospitals. Although Luis was certainly concerned about the day-to-day operations of the hospital, he realized he was on a much bigger stage, where he was being judged by all of society. Luis could deal with personal failure; it was the thought of professional failure that kept him up at night. He bore the weight of the entire Latino community on his back, not something a White CEO had to take into consideration. Yet, almost counterintuitively, he considered this a “privileged burden.”

Luis was deeply reflective when he spoke about the apparent conundrum faced by racial and ethnic leaders in healthcare. He fully realized the value of having racial and
ethnic minorities established in the executive hierarchy to mentor and support other racial and ethnic minorities through the process of career progression. However, he was disturbed by what he had observed of successful Latino leaders in healthcare. He saw that when these individuals became successful, they tended to disconnect from the ethnic community of their heritage. Since he believed the healthcare community was controlled by Whites in the state he left, having other racial and ethnic minorities support each other becomes imperative. However, if they would not serve in this role, the outlook became bleak. In Luis’ case, he was forced to leave a good situation to pursue his dream.

Despite the enormous success Luis had experienced, he was still bothered by what he felt was a double standard. He perceived that White society would never accept him as an equal. In some of the most revealing comments of the interviews, Luis said:

I’m going to tell you one thing. [pauses] At the end of the day we are never going to be Americans. At the end of the day I am not going to be accepted into the fabric of this society. I am always going to be different, and I am not going to spend my energy trying to integrate into a society that will be rejecting us continually, that will never accept us. So my journey, and our journey, has been—you have to accept who we are, and this is who we are, and you got to take us that way. The same way I accept who you are is fine but I don’t want to be part of you. I don’t want to be White. I don’t want to be assimilated to that culture. I want to be a Latino man who has his roots in a small island and has several values that exist in that. I don’t want to be part of that. I am very clear on that.

What the written words were unable to convey was the tone of his comments. He relayed this message without the slightest bit of malice. It was simply shared as a statement of fact. In clarifying who he was, and in coming to terms with the state of race relations, he had lost hope in being treated like a true equal, but had found solace in recognizing this was where he stood. Rather than shrink from this epiphany, he found strength in accepting who he was.
Facing the prejudice and pressures brought on by being an ethnic minority had not dimmed his cultural pride. Luis had always been closely aligned with his culture, and this had not diminished with his success:

We don’t lose our identity to the point that even our daughter didn’t learn English until she went to kindergarten. She was taken care of by her grandmother. My daughter was Spanish speaking only, monolingual when she went to school. We took a call. They said, “She doesn’t understand anything.” I said, “She will get it.” We speak Spanish at home continuously. We like Spanish food. We like Spanish music. All of our music is primarily, 90% of our music in our house is Spanish from Puerto Rican, Mexican, from different parts of the world. We are very Latino in our sense of pride, in being Latino. We like to say who we are as individuals because we have been very successful, and when I tell everybody that there are Latinos that are successful, that the stereotype of the person that lives in the ghetto and they don’t have any education and they are not middle class, we try to erase all of that.

Luis’ comments illustrated that inculcating culture could be something as simple as listening to Spanish music or as complex as not teaching their daughter to speak English until she attended kindergarten. He took pride in his Latino heritage and was even more proud of the success he had achieved given his ethnic background. He had physically moved away from the island where he was born and, although he maintained a residence there, his trips to Puerto Rico were infrequent. He longingly thought of retirement as his opportunity to return permanently to the place of his birth.

A final cultural aspect that was played out in Luis’ life had been family. Luis remained close to all his siblings. To him, there was no difference attached to siblings of different mothers. He viewed himself as the self-appointed caretaker, a role he grew into naturally:

I’m close to everybody. I’m the only one of the 21 kids, or 20, 21? I can never keep track. [laughs] I’m the one who always looks out for everybody. You know, I always contact everyone and find out how
people are doing. I enjoy that they are my family regardless of what happens . . . I have a house in Puerto Rico now, and one of my half siblings lives in it. I enjoy looking out for them, but I think I have been a real role model for the rest of them, and I keep in touch with them. We don’t look the same, you know, we all look different. My father married all kinds of women with different color, different skin color, different things. You put all of us together, you would never say we are all related to each other.

Again, there was more to the story involving his half brother and the house in Puerto Rico that was revealed at a later interview:

I have a brother in Puerto Rico who was the most arrogant brother I ever had, who had a lot of money. I always felt like he rejected me. Every time I went to Puerto Rico I called him, tried to get together with him, he wouldn’t be able to. He owned three stores that sold men’s clothing. He used to gross more than a million per year and what he used to net allowed him to have a very lavish home there, nice car, all of his kids were beautiful blondes with green eyes. His business went south, he lost all the money. He called me up one day and says, “I’m getting divorced, and we haven’t paid rent on the apartment and the bank is just about to take it over. Will you buy it from me at the market value?” I said, “I will take a look at it,” and I bought it. I solved the problem. Then I said, “What are you going to do to live?” He said, “I don’t have any place to live.” Now he lives in my house in Puerto Rico.

To Luis, family included the greater extended family. Luis also had supported several members of his extended family in transitioning from Puerto Rico to the United States, including letting them stay with him and helping to pay for their education. At other times, he had served as the conduit for matching them with jobs within healthcare. It seemed Luis was only a phone call away from any family member needing assistance. He did this with no thought of repayment. To Luis, this was how family behaved.

**The Many Facets of Leadership**

Luis never intended to be in healthcare when he first enrolled in college. His initial career aspirations centered on architecture. He even attempted classwork in this
area before he stumbled upon a psychology course that involved volunteering at a psychiatric hospital. He found taking care of the mentally ill and mentally disabled to be eminently rewarding. At the same time, he was not performing well in the architecture curriculum. He realized a need to pursue a different field of study and changed his career path, earning a bachelor’s in psychology.

Regardless of the concentration of study, the internal mechanism pushing Luis was his need to be the best at anything he attempted. This need was closely aligned with a defining character trait, hard work:

I have always been kind of ambitious in my career. I always wanted to be the best that I could be in any position that I take. And I feel that by having work ethics and really working hard you can accomplish part of what you want to do in life, or at least that kind of opened the door for the things you want to do, and for me it was basically that when I was in behavioral health I wanted to be the best administrator. I started out doing individual therapy, group therapy, working with children. I’m working in [former city] in tough neighborhoods . . . . I was able to move always upward in every position that was basically given to me. So I actually did the best that I could be, was always identified as a leader.

Luis was a lifelong proponent of hard work. In this passage he gave an example of what this hard work looked like in his professional career:

When I first arrived here, this hospital had a condition on accreditation by the Joint Commission. I instituted working every Saturday for all of the managers here. They hated it, they hated me, but every Saturday I was the first one here, and every Saturday I was the last one to leave the hospital. Leadership is behaving and acting like a leader. You should not ask people to do something you wouldn’t do. I did everything that I asked them to do.

He believed his success was a result of making the most of opportunities by employing maximum effort. He elucidated what he meant by maximum effort. It certainly entailed doing the things one was responsible for to the best of one’s
capabilities, but for Luis it did not stop at that point. He had always viewed his job as more than the hours he spent in the office. Thus, he had been very active on community boards and with professional organizations and associations, profiting from the visibility and exposure these endeavors offered. He clearly understood the value of political connections. His early success was based, in part, on a series of political connections. Even as he skillfully navigated interpersonal relationships, he was aware of his political limits:

I also made a decision not to be involved in politics even though you got to be involved in politics. But the politics have to be balanced. My politics were, I have to go to every fundraiser that those guys and gals are having, I got to give them a check, I got to talk to them on the phone, I got to give them the respect of elected officials. But at the same time, I need to stay in my lane and my lane was always—my core business is healthcare and I need to create programs that are effective and efficient for the community that I serve, and I stayed on that course.

He differentiated being politically savvy from being in politics. The latter was something he had been intentional in avoiding; the former was something at which he excelled. In contrast, he was quick to champion causes or people that touched him. Most of this work was performed away from the limelight. He had an affinity for helping people:

Part of my success is that I just keep working, and part of my success is that I have a weakness for helping people. I get involved in things that I shouldn’t get involved with. Like yesterday, I got invited to talk about work and job opportunities. I don’t know what the hell that is but I went because I said to myself, “I have over a thousand people here. There are opportunities in the community. Let me talk to them about the things we need.” What came out of this, first of all, we are going to do a session with kids that will come here and we will show them the different fields in healthcare, nursing, doctors, radiologists, and help them to have a sense of what healthcare is so that maybe they can be helped.
He continued and shared a few anecdotes about his penchant for helping individuals directly:

I remember my secretary, not this one, when I was in [my former state], I walked in and she is sort of sad and crying. I say, “[Alice], what’s going on with you? You don’t look happy today.” [Alice] says to me, “Luis, I have a lot of problems.” I say, “Like what?” She said, “My daughter is starting college. It’s a lot of money for books, and I don’t have the money unless I don’t pay the rent.” I said, “[Alice], do you have a credit card? Charge all her books; I will give you the money.” I would be in my room watching TV, getting dressed in the morning, and there would be stories about people who were killed, people that didn’t have money for burial, kids with cancer. I would make a note, go to the office and say, “[Alice], get me this information. Here is a check, send it there.” It is what it is, man, and I didn’t have any of that stuff. That’s personality, that’s who I am.

Luis knew that success had allowed him to do things others could not do. He had not only the desire to help, he also possessed the means to help. The need to share was imprinted on him early in life. He never viewed what he had—money, influence, power—to be used solely for his gain. When recounting the things that led to success, he continued to return to the same attributes: hard work, networking, and getting breaks.

He explained how they were all interrelated:

One is, you have to work hard—work ethics. Two, you need to establish a good network of individuals that you work with. It doesn’t have to be extensive. It has to be a few individuals that you keep within the circle. Three, someone has to give you a break to get in. I got a break to be the chief of staff. I got a break to go on to [a] psychiatric center. I got a break to run [a hospital] which was my first hospital. But all of these things are really related to who are the people on top and what kind of commitment do they have, because you know [this doctor] was always interested in opening doors for minorities. He’s in a position of power and in a position of influence. He wanted to open the door for Mr. Flores. He wanted to look at you and say, “What do you have to offer? Who are you and what are you made out of?” And he will give you a break. I learned that in this field you have to find a group of individuals who you can work with and who will support you and are willing to give you an opportunity.
Once given the break, one had to excel in his or her job. One should be prepared to capitalize on any opportunity by exceeding expectations through hard work.

Luis was not successful by accident. As he related how he attacked various problems along the way, I better understood his approach to leadership. He spent time making sure he understood the problem from the perspective of all those impacted. As he said, developing programs that the community would not support did not benefit anybody. He described the process as due diligence. Once a problem had been thoroughly examined, he developed a plan of action.

While considering how to respond to relocating a certain hospital service that became a hot topic, he invited me to walk over to inspect the space with him. He met a couple of employees there and then asked for a lot of information. He wanted to be sure he understood all the implications. He then provided instruction to his staff. He allowed others to flourish by granting them latitude and flexibility in accomplishing their assigned duties. His philosophy was to hire the best talent—talent more knowledgeable in their area of expertise than him—and then support and motivate them.

When asked about his leadership philosophy, he offered the following insights after careful consideration:

I tried to create common ground and say we are all being affected by the same things compelling us together and speak with one mind and behave the same way. It’s about inclusiveness. It’s about listening. It’s about creating an environment of opportunity for others. It is not discounting anything, no matter how small it is. I see these principles related to leadership. It’s giving credit to everyone for what they do. I always make a point here at the hospital, when reporting things that were done here that were good, I always say, “I want to thank my staff for the great work that they are doing because they are the ones that make it happen.” When I go into the community and people say, “[your hospital] is doing better, the care is better,” I say, “Thank you very much. People are doing a great job
at the hospital. My staff are really dedicated to that.” You have to validate the value of contributions of others. I cannot do this job by myself, and I don’t need to take all the glory of what happens here. It belongs to everybody. This is a team, we work together.

The focus was on others, not on self but on others. Luis felt that in order to respond appropriately to the needs of others, leaders must be able to discern those needs. He gave credit to others who shaped his approach, as he had been a keen observer of others, meticulously examining every action and behavior. He had always been fully professionally committed to insuring his bosses were successful. This was particularly evident as he shared his philosophy about the relationship between his bosses and him. If his track record spoke to his success, this technique had served him well. He continued to talk about how studying others paid off:

I had a boss at [a previous] hospital in the 80s. He was a brilliant guy, but he had a personality that really sucked. Yelling and screaming and all of that. But he had one thing that was good—he was so oriented to details. When we would give reports every month with him sitting at the head, he questioned everything. Everyone needed to be precise with information. You would never go into his meeting and say, “They told me that.” He would say, “Who? Tell me specifically who!” “We received several calls regarding this issue.” “How many calls did you get? Don’t tell me several. I need to understand what you are telling me is the problem. Is it one call or 10 calls? One call is not an issue; 10 calls is a serious issue.” He was a real son of a bitch, but very detail oriented. I had another boss who took a lot of time to teach people. “Let’s talk about how you can solve this.” I have been exposed to a lot of people, and I have taken a piece of all of them. It helps you to learn.

Luis believed that being exposed to leaders who exhibited positive attributes helped one be a better leader. Even what could be construed as a bad situation, with the boss he disliked, lent itself to learning. Luis actually credited this individual with having the greatest impact on his development as a leader. I appreciated Luis’ ability to glean positive aspects by focusing on the good qualities of others:
For me, he has been the most effective person that impacted me the most in my career. What I don’t have are the things that I hated about him, which was the yelling, the screaming, the undermining, which he loved. When you saw him in a meeting, it was like he was on a stage performing.

Even though he had attempted to model his leadership after what he considers the best practices of others, he had struggled with leadership earlier in his career. He did not exude the confidence and presence he later came to possess. Here he talked about what happened when he took the job with the mental health pilot program:

The mistakes that I made were, number one, I took the job because I wanted to be an administrator but I didn’t take any formal training. I didn’t get any supervision. I was not working in an area and then got promoted, and I went from being a clinician to being the administrator of a clinic and that didn’t work. I made mistakes in that I was not assertive enough in the beginning. I never valued the role I had nor did I act on the role. I tried to be much more inclusive. I am still inclusive, but I make the decision. The mistake I made was becoming one of them, one of the group, but I never exerted any leadership in terms of making decisions. Everything was a discussion around the table with everyone, and things were not really going well.

I used to get supervision from my supervisor once a week. She always said, “You are very good in relating to everyone, but you need to take authority to the extent you are responsible for this thing and you have to set the direction, and you have to give instructions, and you have to show that you are a very assertive leader.” It got a lot more complicated for me because one of the people we hired was much more senior than I was and that actually created conflict. Even when he left, he told me he was better than I was. He told me he could do my job better than I did. That was the lack of experience. And when you don’t have experience, you make mistakes. What I learned from that is you have to be the boss. When it comes to work, you can relate socially. You can be in a setting where you get along with everyone and you respect everyone and you value everyone, but your behaviors need to show that you are the boss and you are in charge and that they are not. That’s what I learned from that experience.

With all the turmoil he had experienced in his professional life, it begged the question why he stayed in healthcare. When asked why he remained in healthcare, Luis said:
[It’s] a noble profession. I think that at the end of the day you feel like you have made a contribution to something, to society in general. You take, for example, this community here where they suffer from all kinds of health disparities. Every day is always, “What can I do better? How can I improve the health status of the community?” That is something that just keeps me going, although it’s a very tough field to be in.

He saw and lived with health disparities in his community every day, and they had a lasting impact on him. Running a hospital in this environment was an emotionally taxing endeavor. Unlike other industries, in a hospital when things do not go right, people could suffer injury or death. Add to this a continuously eroding reimbursement base and balancing the needs of the workforce, the physician communities, the patient needs, and the government, and one is left with a very challenging job. Luis shared in his own words what it feels like:

If you run a hospital today, it’s sort of like running a thousand miles an hour blind, not knowing where the road is ahead of you. You take an economy that is in shambles, that has not been able to get off the ground, that hasn’t been able to get off the ground. You have healthcare reform that is undefined. We don’t even know all of the details. You have Republicans and Democrats against the Affordable Care Act, you have competition, you have the lack of capital dollars to buy the new state-of-the-art equipment. There isn’t anybody who is an expert. So my pressure is, I don’t know what, where we are going in this country in healthcare. I don’t know what’s going to happen at the end of the day. Even if Obama wins, are we going to implement the reform? If he doesn’t win, what will happen to what has already been accomplished? So that’s at the national level. When you look at the state level, all of the states, especially this one, are struggling with their finances. So you are being impacted at the national level, but you are also being impacted at the local level. How do I adapt to new policies? . . . These are the challenges of running a hospital. The biggest problem is whether your workforce understands they need to change. The cultural transformation that the organization has to go through to adapt and stay in business. Are doctors and nurses ready for that? You have all of the financial issues, the policy issues, you have the workforce issues. These are the biggest challenges today and the fact that there are no experts. That’s the pressure you find trying to run an organization like this.
Ironically, Luis did not let those obstacles chase him from that position. He viewed every obstacle as possessing a positive side, one not always obvious. Luis did not concern himself with problems of the future, over which he had exercised no control, because he lived day to day. His life had been one of reacting to what life threw at him. He was very truthful in admitting that he did not know what he would be doing in 5 years. In his words and his delivery, I interpreted that the journey was important to Luis, as the destination was constantly changing. As unscripted as his journey had been, he would not have it any other way:

The point is, I never know where I am going. I have defined my work the same way I have defined my life which is I just keep going. I never thought I would ever be in [this city]. They called me; I saw the opportunity. I was attracted by the challenge, and it was at the right time in my career and the right time in my life . . . The point is, I am very adaptable, very pragmatic, and things don’t have to be one way; they can be this way, they could be any other way. In the beginning, I would come in every day and look at the finances and the quality and would say, “Jesus Christ, what the hell did I do? I left my prestigious position in [the former state] to come here.” I have a passion for what I do, that’s the other part of it. I like this work, and I like the challenges, and nothing scares me; there is no fear. I always think about, before I came here, a lot of things went through my mind. I have been in [the former state] for 40 years, I came out of nowhere, I ran one third of the public healthcare system for 15 years, was very successful, everybody knew who I was, I had a good reputation, and I used to ask myself, “Why am I going to leave this?” And I decided to come this way. It was a decision I made quickly [snaps his fingers], and it reminded me of what I did when I was on the island when I left my parents. I left the comfort of my environment but I felt comfortable and I took off and went to [the states]. Forty years later, I did the same thing. Picked up, left everything behind, and came this way and here I am. And I don’t know what is going to happen next. Success may be measured by taking risks, for being pragmatic, for having the foresight to take advantage of what you have and continue to look at your past as a strength because I don’t regret, I have to tell you one thing, if I would come back to life, I would like to come back exactly the way I had it.
With all the tough times Luis had faced throughout his life, he was not willing to erase those burdens. He believed those burdens and obstacles made him the person he was. In the end, he was satisfied with who he became.

This approach to life has caused him to be fearless when faced with big decisions. In a strange sort of way, it also seemed to create a sense of calm for Luis in how he approached life. In this humorous anecdote, Luis let us see how this nonchalant attitude played out in practice:

In 1984, two weeks before my wedding, I didn’t have a place to live. My wife’s family was asking if we were going to move in with them or what we were going to do. I said, “Don’t worry about it. Let me dictate what I want to do.” So I used to buy the [local newspaper] every Sunday looking for an apartment, but not to rent, to buy, but I didn’t have any money at that time. And people would ask, “Where are you going to find money for the down payment?” And I would say, “Don’t worry about it. I’m going to find an apartment that will be cheap enough that I would be able to buy.” Two weeks before the wedding there was a big ad in the [local newspaper] that said, “Co-op apartment, first offering.” I drove over there with my wife. I look at the neighborhood and I said, “I think I found the place to want to live.” I go to the sales office and say, “Give me keys to a couple of the apartments, that way I can go and see them and then I will return them.” They gave me two keys, and I saw two apartments. I walked into one and I said, “This is it.” I go downstairs and ask him, “How much is it?” He says, “$29,000.” I ask him, “What is the down payment?” He said, “10%.” That’s twenty-nine hundred bucks. So I took a check and I gave it to him and said, “I am getting married in 2 weeks; see if the co-op will approve me.” And I got it and moved in there. Nothing is scary to me.

If Luis did not fear the future, then life was just one adventure after another. In recounting what he has learned from his journey, Luis was quick to tie everything to success:

I relate everything to successes. I always talk about principles in my life. One is that I have to work hard, I have to be ethical, and that I never wished for my boss’s job. You can trust me. If you say, “I’m going to hire you, Luis,” I am going to work so hard that you will be the best in
your area by supporting you. I will never say I want your job. I never think that way. So the most important lesson is that you have to be honest, you have to be truthful, you have to have a personality that people will trust. You have to have values. Never hurt anybody. My best lessons are based on my successes. You have to work hard. I learned that the shortest distance between poverty, success, and prosperity is to have an education. I put a lot of value in having an education because I wouldn’t be what I am today if I didn’t have a couple of degrees. No way! My success was really related to the education I was able to get. The other component you have are attributes you have as a person. If we would put the same emphasis for minorities across this country, giving people an opportunity to get an education, things would be better.

Even as he spoke of success, he once again returned to the value of education.

Luis continued and talked about what leaders needed to understand. He became deeply reflective as he articulated his need to relate to individuals:

To keep the pulse of your organization is the most critical thing. You need to know the dynamics that are driving your organization. You need to know your workforce. How are they responding to the services you are providing? You need to know the perception of the community. You need to know how you are perceived by the local elected officials that represent your community. You need to keep the pulse to see how things are functioning. You need to be fully engaged in every aspect of the organization. Delegating is important because it frees you up, but delegation has its limits. I cannot have [Mark] be my CFO without having a relationship with his department. So I will tell [Mark], “Why don’t we have a meeting with your staff so I can tell them what’s going on in the hospital?” I will tell [Josie], “I want to have a roundtable with your nurses so they know what my expectations are and I can tell them how much I value the work they do here.”

This singular focus on people was best articulated through statements Luis made when speaking about what he hoped he never forgot:

This system is driven by people. If you think about what is a hospital conceptually, it is made out of the workforce that has different skill sets to provide care to our patients. Never forget that the people that are delivering services are human beings. Depending on how motivated they are, they will respond to the needs of the patients. Let me step back. A hospital is just a building, but the building without the human parts is not a hospital. You need doctors and nurses and staff, you need patients. You
should not forget what the institution is and what is the core business of your organization. Our core business is to provide healthcare. We are a service delivery organization, and it’s all about service. But it’s also about trying to bring the best people that you can find to work with you to make this a better organization. What any leader should never forget is that what happens in your organization is actually done by human beings. That they are people that are working there and that it is a priority for you to value your workforce and to continue to help them improve their skill set and to develop an organization that values their work and gives them opportunities for professional growth.

These comments illustrated Luis’ understanding of how leaders accomplished goals through the mobilization of others. To him, his workforce was more than mere full-time equivalents on a report; his staff was composed of individuals with their own wants and needs. It was important to achieve goals, but one must always remember that it was humans who accomplished the work that needed to be nurtured and supported.

Luis was also very cognizant that, as the leader of the hospital, he had a responsibility to ensure his behaviors matched what he espoused verbally. In other words, he had to walk the talk. As he related to me, it was not about him. Here was an example of this philosophy in action as he responded to a call for a possible job in the state he left:

I went to the board and told them that, in my contract, I have a 3-year contract, but in the second year the board would be evaluating my performance and they would make a decision as to whether they were going to keep me on or to buy me out. This coming October will be my 2 years. So I asked the chair of the board how it looked in terms of whether they were going to keep me on board and if they were pleased with the direction we were going, and if they were pleased with my performance because in that absence of this I would begin to entertain the new job. I want you to know because I don’t want to leave you hanging, but I also need to protect myself. She said to me, “Oh no, absolutely not, we want to keep you here. As a matter of fact, we want you to stay here longer than the 3 years you have.” She got into a panic because she thought I was leaving, and she called an executive session for the board and they had a discussion. They came up with a package for me to stay if I would sign
for another 2 years beyond the three. One of the incentives in the package was that I would immediately get a $50,000 check if I agreed to not talk to anyone and stay. I read it and I said I was not going to take the $50,000 and she asked my why. I said, “How does it look that I have not given my staff a salary increase for 2 years and you guys want to hand me a $50,000 check to stay and no talk to anybody when I am the highest paid staff member? That will send the wrong signal to the rest of the organization, and I don’t want it. This is not the right time for me to take it. Maybe there will be another opportunity to take it, but this is the wrong time to take it because what it will signal is that I am selfish and I only think about me.” When we talk about leadership, we need to think about how we behave.

Luis realized that everything he did was being observed by others. He also realized this was part of the job. As CEO he was under constant scrutiny; it did not stop once he left the hospital for the evening.

Despite the trials and tribulations he had faced and the pressures associated with running a safety net hospital, Luis was still very optimistic about the future. In a moment that shed light on Luis’ power to synthesize the past with the future, he talked about what gave him hope:

The past. You always have to do self-evaluation of what has transpired over the years that have passed and any experiences you have had and then you evaluate what is ahead of you. That gives you a sense of hope. For me this is always helpful looking to what the future is going to be, that is because I have had many successes. I don’t think the world is going to be a catastrophe and that gives me a sense of hope. We need to recognize that situations change all the time, and if you look at the evolution of the world you can see the transition that humanity has gone through. My hope is that I will be able to adapt as things begin to change. If I have set my mind on that, then that means I can be hopeful for what’s going to happen in the future.

Luis is acutely aware of the dearth of Latinos in leadership positions in healthcare. He felt compelled to try and impact the situation. He believes there are tremendous opportunities for Latino students considering healthcare as a career:
I would really like to see more Latinos involved in healthcare. This is really a growing field and that we are going to need the cultural background and understanding of the Latino community. It all depends on how you define Latino. I could be Latino but I don’t feel Latino. If I don’t feel like a Latino, then I’m not going to act like a Latino. I went to dinner with my friend the other day. He is Cuban. He said, “I never wanted to be a Cubano, a Cuban. I want to be an American.” So if you feel that you are really a Latino, then you have to feel it and you have to behave and act on it. Healthcare is a field of tremendous opportunities. With the Latino population growth in this country will continue to grow. . . . If we could create a pool of healthcare professionals that are Latino and they feel Latino, I think the health of the Latino community would improve significantly because part of the health disparities that exist among the Latino population is related to a number of things, primarily there is a disconnect about the full understanding about the culture of the Latino community. We talk about access and access may be related to not having bilingual, bicultural workers because America has gotten away by talking about sensitivity. We have gotten away with not demanding people be culturally competent. Not until we cross that line we are going to continue to see health disparities in our community. I believe that if we created a workforce of healthcare professionals that are Latino it will help us cross that road. Yes, there is tremendous opportunity but we need to redefine how we deliver care to the Latino population and have cultural competency and deliver care based on that.

In an interesting twist, Luis pointed out that being Latino was more than possessing a Spanish last name. Being Latino was tied to culture and values and belief systems. If one disconnected from these after achieving success, he believed they were not serving the Latino community.

He continued to talk about managing in such turbulent times, how he was responding to change. Not only did he show how adaptable he had been, he related how changes were also occurring with his worldview.

To be able to change and keep up with things that are right in your face when in the beginning you say, “I don’t know what to do with this.” I tell everyone the best thing to happen in my career was to come here because in [my former state] I had a level of comfort. I didn’t have to worry about anything. I had a great staff that worked for me for 16 years; they would take a bullet for me. I knew everyone; I was comfortable. I had a driver
that drove me everywhere. I didn’t have any hassles. I was a privileged citizen, very privileged. When I didn’t have a driver, I had an official car that I parked anywhere and just walked away. When I gave all that up, then I realized that I am a normal person like everybody else. The first time I went back to [my former state], my wife said she was going to meet me in the city, to take the train. I hadn’t taken the train in 20 years. “Take the train?” “Yeah,” she said, “walk over to the street,” she gave me directions, “then you take the train downtown and I meet you downtown.” I go over to the train station and I get my cell phone out and tell her I am in front of the machine. “What kind of ticket should I buy?” So I bought a ticket, got on the train, and saw a mass of people pushing and getting off. We’re driving into the city and in my head it clicked, “Okay, Luis, you are a normal citizen.”

Without realizing it, Luis had slipped into a world discontented from what the average hourly worker faced in his previous job. The reality of the new position had caused him to reevaluate who he had become. Although he was the CEO and very involved in state healthcare, he also realized, at some level, he was just like the rest of the people that worked for him. He was glad for the reality check and subsequent grounding.

When time came to close the final interview, I asked Luis what legacy he would like to leave behind. He gave what appears, at first glance, to be a very interesting answer. However, when I considered the time we spent together and the story he shared, it made perfect sense. This was what he said:

One of my fantasies has always been that my life will be written and that there will be a book about my experiences that others could learn from. I always thought that book could be translated into a movie because I think I have gone through anything in life that anybody could live through from extreme poverty with having a sense of no hope to being discriminated against to being discouraged, not to be valued and being able to transcend all those stages to be what I am. The message of the book should be that minorities in this country, especially Latinos, know that there is a sense of hope and that you can redirect your life in the areas that you think you can. That you can really gain control of your life and be successful. That book can be perceived as a book that serves as a role model for youngsters in this country that have come in the same situation or in worse situations, but there is an opportunity to change. There is a sense of hope. Writing a
book, a movie, and hopefully that I would be remembered as someone who made contributions to humanity.

Luis wanted to know his life made a difference and, more importantly, that it served as a ray of hope for those who were struggling in life. Even after his life was over, he wanted to continue helping those on the margins of society.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The participants were wonderfully diverse in their life stories. They were all Latino male leaders, and their stories had similarities while being completely unique at the same time. Participants ranged in age from 49 to 65. One was a first-generation American, one was a second-generation American, and the third was a fourth-generation American. One was of Puerto Rican descent while the other two traced their heritage to Mexico. Two were from very large families while one was from a smaller family. All three participants had spent their entire careers in healthcare, as each entered the field shortly after high school. In one case, this involved 22 years in the military. All three had achieved executive positions—one as a senior vice president, two as CEOs. One worked for a university hospital, one worked for a government hospital, and one worked for a private hospital. There was significant congruence between how the participants presented themselves and the way they were perceived by individuals who knew them best in the work setting.

The goal of utilizing narrative research was to provide a privileged platform for the lived experiences, as articulated through story form, of individuals from marginalized groups and the meanings attached to these experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Riessman, 2008; Squire et al., 2008). Narrative research is not designed to draw conclusions that can be generalized to the population at large, an approach rooted in inferential statistics. Although the narrative discipline was based on the uniqueness of each individual’s life journey, there was some greater social value associated with the deeper meaning of life stories than a mere recapitulation of one’s experiences. In
attaching meaning to the stories, one can critically assess how the interpretations of experiences can lead to a conceptual transfer of ideas.

Riessman (2008) expounded upon the need to reimagine how findings could be generalized by considering inference from a different perspective. She posited that “making conceptual inferences about a social process . . . is an equally ‘valid’ kind of inquiry” (p. 13). She went on to say that stories that moved the reader to see beyond the written word moved society to a broader criticism. As each participant was selected because he met the criteria for inclusion—including being of Latino descent—his story differed from mainstream hospital administrators, who are predominantly White (ACHE, 2010). Latino critical theory (LaCrit) provided a lens from which one could observe the participants’ stories replete with a cultural essence not accessible to members of the majority, causing their stories to resonate with struggles, fears, joy, accomplishment, anxiety, and self-reflection derived from a Latino worldview. Ultimately, their stories were about overcoming socially imposed stereotypes by achieving success at the highest organizational levels.

Although one came to know each participant as an individual, careful consideration of the stories offered by each of the participants revealed some overlapping thematic development arising from coding. From an ontological perspective, these themes provided meaning to the stories of each participant and the social processes they encountered. It was through these themes that one could attach meaning that may be conceptually considered, with applicability beyond the three participants. In this way, narrative research was called to advance scholarly research. The stories of the participants and the concomitant thematic analysis provided this contribution. This
chapter seeks to create a nexus between the very personal stories and everyday lives of the participants, to theory-based interpretations.

Previous research into the socially constructed lives of Latinos had consistently defined three ethnically-centered ideologies inherent in most families. *Familismo*, *respeto*, and *educación* were goals all Latino parents tried to instill in their children regardless of their country of origin (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). It was fascinating to observe all of those values surfacing and how they shaped the stories of each of the participants. These culturally derived ideologies permeated all aspects of their development and contributed to the themes that emerged from analysis of their stories. After all participant interviews were coded, the large number of codes was analyzed and collapsed into groupings with similar meanings. The essence of each group of codes was determined and assigned a word or short phrase describing the meaning. This smaller grouping of subthemes was used as the basis for overall theme development. Table 1 illustrates the smaller groups of subthemes and how they related to each theme. Once themes were identified, the initial codes were analyzed to find in vivo codes, when possible, that represented each theme. This process yielded the following themes: *educación*, *familismo*, “This White man’s world,” “Doing something more,” and “Make it happen.” These themes were present in all of the stories, though not necessarily in equal proportions. What follows is an explication of each theme.
Table 1

Development of Themes from Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educación</strong></td>
<td>“Doing something more”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familismo</strong></td>
<td>“This White man’s world”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Make it happen”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not being satisfied with status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>encountering societal prejudices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenges</td>
<td>religious grounding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>needing a new challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>seeking validation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encountered</td>
<td>the impact of fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>creating impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>being authentic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal drive</td>
<td>the impact of mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intrarace conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learning through observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parental support</td>
<td>Extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mentors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each participant spoke at length of the important role education had played in his upbringing and subsequent success. The theme of educación was supported by the following subthemes: education, challenges encountered, personal drive, parental support, and valuing education.

Education

Each participant matriculated through high school, undergraduate degree programs, and finally through graduate degree programs. Through grade school and high school, the process was very regimented, inflexible, and controlled by the government. The government dictated what had to be learned and by when. Until children reached the age where they could make decisions on whether or not to attend school sometime in their late teens, attendance at school was mandatory. This stood in contrast to a change in philosophy for those pursuing advanced degrees from colleges and universities. In the college setting, control was ceded back to the students. Students chose what they wanted to study, when they wanted to study, and where they wanted to study. Since education became voluntary at this point, personal discipline, more than any other factor, dictated the outcomes. This was the formal education process associated with the United States educational system.

In comparison, the Spanish term for education was educación, which also encompassed formal education. However, the Spanish term carried greater meaning than the English ideology of simply acquiring greater knowledge. For Latinos, it encompassed the social aspects of interpersonal relationships that would be encountered
along the way and the need for respect and morality (Chahin & Rodriguez, 2005; Halgunseth et al., 2006). In this respect, *educación* was not only teaching one academic facts, it was instilling values such as respect, courtesy, ethical behavior, and personal responsibility. It was teaching the children to be persons of character (Chahin & Rodriguez, 2005; Halgunseth et al., 2006). This broader concept of *educación* was prominent in the lives of each of the participants, where both aspects of the word were manifested through their stories. Each articulated a personal commitment to the value of formal education and to be respectful individuals. Thus, formal education alone did not make them into the leaders they were, per se, but in each instance it laid a foundation upon which a bigger future could be built by opening new doors and creating opportunities. In each story one could see the importance of formal education and the importance of good citizenship.

For the parents of the participants, school success was only part of the maturation process. All three sets of parents instilled the need to be good people as well as good students (*la educación*). They were not content for success at the expense of values like personal accountability and ethical behavior. These values were instilled through instruction based on mutual respect. Listening to the voices of the participants as they spoke with reverence about their parents, I began to sense the bonds they shared and how much they esteemed them and wanted to please them. This desire to be like their parents in character made them open to their leading. As a result, parents possessed significant influence in the lives of the participants (Dixon, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Halgunseth et al., 2006).
The participants made consistent references to citizenship behaviors throughout their stories. They all mentioned how important it was to their parents that they behaved in a respectful and appropriate manner. There was no shortage of discipline in any of the participants’ homes. Correction was swift and meted without negotiation. The participants came to believe the parental goal was not punishment as much as it was personal development. It was provided as a means of leading the participants to self-reflection that resulted in changed behaviors. Thus, discipline was used as a means of consistently shaping one’s character from a very early age (Dixon et al., 2008; Halgunseth et al., 2006).

As one listened to how each of the participants defined leadership, it was clear they valued the same character traits, esteemed by their parents, as they interacted with those who worked with them. The concept of educación had become part of who they were; in this respect, they were images of their parents. The participants in turn were then passing on this part of their culture to their children. They took time to have the same conversations with their children their parents had with them. If this philosophy could be summed up, it may be by saying they became educated individuals who were good people.

The product of parents who valued educación was represented in our participants who excelled in school becoming part of an elite group of Latinos who held master’s degrees. However, none of the parents would have been satisfied with success without strength of character. The moral education was just as important as the formal education. The participants learned these lessons well and retained a commitment to be good people who cared about those around them, who still operated on old fashion manners that were
handed down from their parents. In this respect, the participants were well educated, successful businessmen who acted ethically and with respect.

**Challenges Encountered**

Each participant faced many obstacles early in life, making their journey remarkable if one considered the ethnic background and the greater social environment in which the participant was raised. That they excelled despite the statistics that argued against their academic and professional success was a testament to their resolve and hardiness.

Although the value of education was ingrained in the Latino culture and espoused by the parents of the participants, social pressures paradoxically operated to offset this value orientation. All three participants earned good grades throughout most of their school years, and all were considered good students. Repetitive success in school not only created a sense of accomplishment, it also brought on more pressure to maintain the grades. Carlos talked about how failing the Latin exam bothered him for an entire year. Luis spoke about questioning his intelligence when his grades began to slide in high school. The participants felt they were performing not only for themselves, but for their families as well. Alberto received stern encouragement from his father when he questioned if a master’s degree was worth his trouble. His father pointed out, as the eldest, he was setting an example for the entire family.

Although the participants performed well, school was not necessarily fun for them, especially during their college years. Luis was the only participant to struggle with high school, but only after he moved to the mainland where school was taught in English.
School became a challenge for each participant. As the pressures of life mounted, all three participants had to balance life outside of school with the rigors of academic achievement. This was particularly evident during their college years. Luis faced the dilemma, at times, of choosing between working to buy food to eat or studying to increase his grade point average. Alberto had to manage a career in the military, a new family, and college at the same time. Likewise, Carlos attended college while working a full-time job and starting his family.

Even with a strong emphasis placed on education, the academic journey for Latinos was fraught with numerous obstacles serving to derail all but the most determined, resulting in abysmal graduation rates. Statistics were not readily available for high school dropout rates for Latinos during the year Carlos, the eldest participant, graduated. However, in the 1980s, some 20 years later, the dropout rate for Latinos was approximately 40%, for Blacks it was approximately 20%, and for Whites it was approximately 12% (Heckman & Lafontaine, 2010). Based on these statistics, all three were at significant risk of not completing high school, having a one in three chance of dropping out of high school based on their ethnicity. The statistics became more ominous when one considered the children of migrant workers separately from the general Latino population. The dropout rates for children of migrant workers was 43% higher than any other group, with estimates as high as 70% (Romanowski, 2003). The findings showed that one-half of these children never finished high school. Both Luis and Alberto were at high risk but Carlos was the highest risk of the three, as a child of immigrant workers. Carlos faced a one in two chance of not completing high school. With family support and/or self-determination, each of the participants completed high
school as academic overachievers, considering what each overcame. In contrast, several of the siblings did not finish high school and even fewer earned any college degrees. The participants, on the other hand, were not content to become part of the statistical average by dropping out of high school and determined to be better than their white counterparts.

One reason posited for the high dropout rate among Latinos was greater familial responsibilities for Latino children of immigrant parents that lead to disengagement with school (Holliday, 2008). Carlos spoke of this phenomenon when he theorized that some of his older siblings did not pursue higher education because they were busy helping take care of the family. Another issue impacting academic performance was ethnic identity. Altschul, Oyserman, and Bybee (2008) determined that racial and ethnic minorities who possessed a self-schema based on the need to overcome barriers by engaging in their environments enjoyed better academic success while still maintaining a sense of their cultural identity. This was evident in the participants who were grounded in their ethnic backgrounds and managed to succeed at school without losing their cultural identity.

Getting through high school was enough of a challenge for Latino students. College offered an even greater challenge. Even with some progress, the results had not improved much over the last few decades when examining college success of Latinos. A Wall Street Journal (Banchero, 2010) article highlighted the plight of Latinos relative to college graduation rates. The article reported that the percentage of Latinos holding a bachelor’s degree was approximately 13% compared to African Americans at 20%, Whites at 33%, and Asians at 52%. It is noteworthy that all three participants defied the odds by obtaining not only bachelor’s degrees, but master’s degrees as well.
Personal Drive

Despite all the obstacles the participants encountered, each successfully navigated secondary and college requirements to graduate with master’s degrees. What allowed them to complete their education was personal drive. Education became an almost consuming aspect of their development. Luis shared that one of his main goals in life was to get an education. All his resources and effort were devoted to securing an education. He even left his home to pursue education on the mainland away from immediate family to prove he could survive on his own. He articulated how he was obsessed with obtaining an education. Carlos equated education with the ability to accomplish more. When he determined a bachelor’s degree was not adequate, he continued his education and received his master’s. School was work for him as a nontraditional student, but he was driven to get advanced degrees. In contrast, Luis also related how difficult school was once he came to the United States. He detailed the thoughts he had of quitting and how they were overcome by his need to get an education. He also admitted how hard it was to succeed because of the language difference and teaching styles. Alberto did not value the social components of high school, although he performed well academically. Upon entering the military, he thoughtfully selected a field based on academics. Like the other participants, he quickly realized minimum levels of education would not allow him to achieve the goals he had set for himself, such as obtaining a commission.

Each participant encountered individuals who encouraged and supported them through school creating self-confidence. Often those individuals discerned abilities the participants were not fully cognizant of possessing. Some served as more direct mentors,
challenging and guiding them, while others provided indirect guidance through their actions. The participants linked their personal drive for education with support from others. Alberto related how officers recognized his leadership while in pharmacy school and gave him an opportunity to assume greater responsibility. Luis was first challenged to consider a different career and then guided through college while his mentor helped him understand how to transition to mainstream society. Those individuals provided support and encouragement, adding to the growing confidence of the participants.

Research indicated that developing a mentor relationship had positive effects for leadership development (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Davis, 2007; Patton, 2009). Each of the participants initially pursued bachelor’s degrees as the end product. It was only after completing these degrees that they came to believe they would need more education. For them, bachelor’s degrees became intermediate stepping stones to a new future as they were compelled to acquire more formal education. This drive to get an education was consistently present throughout all their schooling.

**Parental Support**

Education was a constant in the life of each participant, even if they took different paths. In every situation, at least one parent was a vocal proponent of education. In the case of Carlos and Alberto, both parents encouraged education. Luis’ mother was a staunch supporter of education as she ensured her children were enrolled in private school. It was only Luis’ father who did not openly encourage his education. Previous research had shown that parental support led to better academic achievement (Ceballo, 2004; Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008; Wong, 2008). The participants’ strong
parental support was translated into academic achievement as the study would have predicted. In a study of African American youth, Kerpelman et al. (2008) determined that maternal support was particularly key in developing an educational value orientation for their children. It was not surprising that each of the participants had a mother who was the primary vocal supporter of education in the household.

None of the parents pushed specific career choices; rather, they pushed the idea that the participants needed to perform their best. There appeared to be an instinctual, innate knowledge—or sense, or belief—which linked education with success in the minds of these parents. As none of the parents were college educated, there was no personal experience guiding this belief. Thus, this belief was either based on anecdotal evidence or faith in that which they had not experienced. Mothers provided consistent encouragement throughout their young lives. They also created an expectation to continue to pursue education beyond high school. What one observed in the three participants was early parental belief in formal education that was later adopted as part of their personal value systems. All three remained advocates of formal education, so much so that Carlos and Luis have funded education for relatives out of their own pockets, investing in the next generation. Carlos has even gone so far as to advise his nieces and nephews that they need to pursue master’s degrees and not stop once they have acquired a bachelor’s degree.

**Valuing of Education**

The participants not only were driven to get a good education, they quickly learned the value of education. Carlos learned in grade school that good things were
attached to good grades. Good grades also contributed to Carlos receiving support to attend college. Alberto learned early in his career that education was tied to better opportunities. The value of a college degree was in setting him up for a commission. For Luis, the value of education was allowing him to master knowledge that would prepare him for a good job.

Education served the participants well and, to a large extent, they equated their success to having that educational foundation. However, each participant used education as a means, not an end in itself, to provide competencies that would suit them for future success. They were not afraid of drastically changing course when they believed a change would result in a better outcome. Carlos switched from x-ray technology to organizational development, Luis from social work to management, and Alberto from pharmacy tech to management. All three participants started their careers in the clinical arts—radiology, pharmacy, and social work—but wound up in hospital management.

Carlos’ belief that bachelor’s degrees were not completely adequate to help individuals achieve higher levels of success was supported by research. In a paper presented to the Global Conference on Business and Finance Proceedings, Martelli and Ables (2011) presented information on the educational attainment of CEOs from the Fortune 500 firms. They found that 93.4% of CEOs of these companies had at least a bachelor’s degree, while 59.4% possessed a master’s degree. In a different but related study, 1,000 international leaders were examined to determine if there was a link between organizational economic growth and leader educational attainment (Besley, Montalvo, & Reynal-Querol, 2011). The findings showed that a leader’s educational level did impact
economic growth, with more highly educated leaders (master’s prepared or above) generating higher growth.

When educational attainment was examined within the healthcare industry, the numbers were even more telling. According to the American College of Healthcare Executives survey (ACHE, 2011); the percent of their membership who held a master’s degree was just shy of 83%. The survey population did not represent every individual involved in management positions so it may be slightly overstated. But even allowing for some inflation, the number was staggering and provided insight to possible antecedents of successful hospital leadership and the value of education.

In examining how education may have played into later success, it was helpful to consider the development of social power. Social power enabled leaders to accomplish goals through directing the work of others (French & Raven, 1959; Hughes et al., 1993). Research had further identified expert power as one of the social bases of power (French & Raven, 1959). Power was an essential element of the influence process that leaders used to accomplish goals. What was unique about expert power was that it was not predicated on other more subjective judgments. It was based on deep knowledge of a subject area—the kind of in-depth knowledge one gained through graduate education. One could argue that issues of race and ethnicity became mitigated or even nonexistent in the face of expert power. It could further be posited that each of the participants possessed expert power, which in turn supported their rise to higher positions, presenting a different facet to the value of education.
Summary

The participants placed a high value on education. Early parental support was instrumental in instilling the value of education. Their parents also made sure the participants were being raised with values and principles they deemed important. The combination of supporting formal education while instilling core values was evidence of educación. The participants also exhibited a strong personal drive in achieving success in school. Achieving master’s degrees made them part of a select group of Latinos who had achieved this distinction. The education they received was viewed as fundamentally necessary to their success, something they have attached significant value to in retrospect.

Familismo

There was a strong and consistent thread of family interspersed throughout the comments made by all the participants. It was obvious that family, or familismo, played a major role in the development of their value systems and something they still held very dear. Within this theme of familismo, the following subthemes were detected: family, religious grounding, the impact of fathers, the impact of mothers, and extended family.

Family

All three participants gave complex descriptions of their parents. Alberto talked about the discipline, which he now remembers with admiration. Carlos talked about his mother’s smile, which is so much more than a facial expression, and Luis talked about how important siesta time was for his father. The descriptions they provided brought their parents to life. One can sense the humanness they possessed as their virtues were extolled while some of the foibles were exposed.
The stories resonate with the unconditional love they openly received from their mothers. From these behaviors, they learned to love in turn. Although their fathers loved them, it was not always expressed openly. As members of the same family are not required to love each other, this was a behavior each person had to learn. There was no better example than that provided by their mothers. On the other hand, the fathers modeled how one operationalizes this love in action. The participants witnessed them helping other family members with housing, finances, careers, as well as ordinary tasks. They saw the long hours worked in physically taxing jobs by their fathers as they assumed the role of provider. Roles of fathers in Latino families extended beyond the immediate family, relieving them of some of the traditional roles in the nuclear family (Villarruel & Chahin, 1997-1998) without diminishing their influence.

Each of the participants developed a unique relationship with each parent. Alberto admittedly had a closer bond with his father, whom he revered, although he loved his mother dearly. Luis and Carlos, in contrast, were closer to their mothers. Carlos also talked about the self-revealing nature of a cohesive family built upon acceptance of each other—an innate sense which imbued the house itself with a certain character. This family unity provided structure and support that allowed them to function in less than inviting environments without getting into serious trouble. This encouragement allowed each the freedom to continue to pursue his dream.

Family as the center of all was a cultural worldview that was imparted from a very early age by words and role-modeling behaviors. The unconditional love lavished upon the participants did not go unheeded. The participants were acutely aware of how much they were loved, strengthening the familial bonds. Life lessons learned at an early
age have remained with the participants throughout their years. This ability to bond on a deeper level is apparent in how each participant talked about family. To the participants, their respective families were the emotional center of their universes. Family was the highest priority, and all decisions were made accounting for this hierarchy. I witnessed how this orientation was a struggle for Luis who had chosen a long-distance marriage in order to pursue his personal professional dream.

*Familismo* was another Spanish term that captured the meaning of family in a more comprehensive cultural sense and could be conceptualized as placing the highest regard for family as evidenced through close bonds and loyalty to family over individual needs (Holloway, Waldrip, & Ickes, 2009; Niemeyer, Wong, & Westerhaus, 2009; Rodriguez, 2008; Villarruel & Chahin, 1997-1998). In this regard *familismo* was not simply an explanation of social relationships, as it described an almost covenant relationship. Whereas family identified one’s position based on marriage and blood ties, *familismo* created social expectations and defined family as including the greater Latino community (Holloway et al., 2009; Niemeyer et al., 2009; Rodriguez, 2008; Villarruel & Chahin, 1997-1998). Related to this value orientation was a concept peculiar to Latino culture, *la Raza*. Literally translated “the race,” *la Raza* embodied the belief that family, for Latinos, included extended family and moved beyond to encompass all Latinos in a common brotherhood (Bordas, 2007). This collectivist worldview saw all Latinos as spiritual brothers and sisters.

The expectation that one would care for family permeated the experiences of all participants. *Familismo* operated as a self-schema that guided behaviors, values, and cultural interpretations (Holloway et al., 2009). They observed their parents caring for
their extended families, and they had internalized the same values. Carlos saw this in his father as he described him having a compulsion to help others in need, even as his own family was sometimes neglected. Luis saw his father consistently provide support to family members both with shelter and financial help. The participants bore these burdens gladly and without complaint. Each of the participants repeatedly commented on the importance of family as a core value that guided their behaviors. In one of the more conspicuous moments of each interview, each participant, in turn, answered without pause that family members were the most important people in their lives. What was difficult to convey in writing was the emotion contained in the responses. For these participants, family was the emotional center of their worlds.

This love of family came from an authentic place where acceptance was based on the familial tie, not the position one held, the amount of money one made, or the letters after one’s name. *Familismo* emanates from the culture of the family (Holloway et al., 2009) and was embedded in the Latino collectivist value system (Pegues & Cunningham, 2010). This interdependent outlook to society was derived from a “we” orientation (Bordas, 2007) that placed the needs of the individual secondary to the community.

Carlos also articulated a philosophy that family trumped all by explaining that the vicissitudes of life should not come between family members. Carlos was willing to sacrifice being right or making sure his voice was heard for the sake of family unity. He believed that life created a lot of situations that could easily drive a wedge between family members if one lost focus of the importance of family. Alberto had a similar outlook on life.
Life for our participants had not always been easy and for their parents it was even more difficult, yet the idea of *familismo* has never faltered and may have contributed in a significant way to their success. In some ways it might have acted like an adhesive that bonded family when faced with obstacles, such as immigrating to a new life on the mainland, living in an impoverished state, or facing discrimination. It is interesting in that each of the participant’s stories the contribution of mothers versus fathers was different. Taken together, the parental guidance formed a more complete example of the type of people the parents wished their children would become.

In an interesting intersection, research supported *familismo* as an important predictor of school success (Altschul et al., 2008). Whereas the participants valued *familismo*, they also all achieved success through school as evidenced by good grades. Not to be lost in their stories is the home situation each grew up in. In all the cases their mothers did not work outside the home. Many of the lessons they learned and the behaviors they observed were the result of having that maternal influence in front of them 24 hours a day. This constant and consistent interaction serves as a catalyst for the development of *familismo*.

The idea of strong family ties was not unusual for families trying to acculturate to the rhythms of a new country. Research supported that stronger family ties were most prominent in Latino families experiencing lower acculturation compared to families that were much more acculturated (Miranda, Estrada, & Firpo-Jimenez, 2000; Villarruel & Chahin, 1997-1998). Carlos’ parents were immigrants to this country, making his siblings and him second-generation Americans. Likewise, Luis transitioned to the U.S. mainland, making him a first-generation American (if one considers Puerto Ricans not
Alberto’s family had been established in the U.S. for a number of generations. As a fourth-generation American, he had deeper roots in the U.S. than the other participants and a more extensive family history of acculturation. One could conjecture the struggle through the early stages of acculturation contributed to our participants’ need to support each other. Stresses created by the desire to succeed in a new country, while still being faithful to one’s heritage, would create the optimal conditions for emotional binding to take place among family members (Miranda et al., 2000). Other research further suggested that the distrust of the majority culture increased the need for Latinos to find emotional support within the family (Falicov, 2005). The participants had shared how they encountered prejudice and racism throughout their lives. When faced with a society that viewed one as different, especially one that treated one as less than equal, family offered support not available from other sources. The challenges experienced in society tended to reinforce the bonds of family for Latinos.

Success for the participants had not been achieved without sacrifice. I noted how each participant, at some point in the interview process, made the comment that they wished they would have taken more time for the family. Even with the love of family as a core value, the drive to succeed was overpowering. Like familismo, simpatico was another self-schema relevant to this discussion. Simpatico emphasized the need for developing harmonious relationships (Holloway et al., 2009). This self-schema explained why Latinos tended to be perceived as warmer, creating environments that promoted harmony and respect (Holloway et al., 2009). Research suggested that Latinos are especially well suited for leadership positions where good socioemotional skills are a must (Holloway et al., 2009).
Religious Grounding

For all participants, an inherent part of their family life was religious grounding. Much of this direction was provided by their mothers. Each participant talked about how important religion was in his family. Specifically, Catholicism was the foundation of their faith and the religion they practiced. In this regard, they were typical examples of Latino families as 70% designated themselves as members of the Catholic church in one survey (Rodriquez, 2008). For Luis, religious immersion included Catholic school. To the participants and their families, religion was not compartmentalized; it was part of the essence of who they were. It was not something to be practiced only on Sundays and other holy days, as it permeated all aspects of their lives. This commitment to a unique set of religious beliefs was another component that immediate family members shared, creating deeper relationships. It also served as a link to the larger Latino community (Rodriquez, 2008).

The participants could not be described apart from their religion, as it was an embedded characteristic of their identity that contributed to their value systems. As Alberto articulated, this value system ran deep and could be traced back through multiple generations. Although the mothers were the main proponents of religion, fathers were supportive even if the support was tacit. Alberto’s father is an example of one who started with tacit approval but transformed later in life to be an outgoing proponent of his faith.

Some of the perspectives on religion held by the participants had changed, as Alberto talked about reaching his own religious understanding later in life after an epiphany in college. What had not changed was the impact of religion on the lives of
participants. The values that are an inherent part of the Catholic belief system continued to provide a benchmark from which all the participants measured their performance. Thus, love of family and fellow man permeated their approaches to life. Being truthful, respectful, and courteous had become part of who they were.

It could be speculated that religious grounding served as a buffer against the prejudice they encountered (Willis, 2006). Tying one’s worth to a greater being imbues one with confidence in the face of obstacles. The participants never acted out when confronted with prejudice. This nonresponse was not an uncommon method of coping with prejudice (Brondolo, ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009). Their faith could have allowed them to believe a greater force, God, was controlling their lives. One could also observe the fatalist approach to life as the participants described how they approached life. None of them was concerned about what tomorrow would bring. In particular, Alberto was fond of relating that everything he encountered was put in his path for a divine reason. Nothing occurred out of happenstance. The key was to learn and grow from the experience.

The Impact of Fathers

Each of the participant’s fathers was proud and respectful regardless of their station in life. Their self-worth came from their families and the hard work they put forth. To Latino fathers, being an honorable man was vested in respect and simpatico—getting along well with others (Villarruel & Chahin, 1997-1998). This was evident as the participants spoke about the respectful way immediate and extended family members were treated. Fathers continued to be sources of wisdom and guidance and the
perpetuators of traditions and customs to each of the participants (Villarruel & Chahin, 1997-1998). Alberto viewed his father as the “smartest man” he knew based on the wisdom he shared. This illustrated how his father approached life with wisdom in a down-to-earth manner rather than one grounded in academic knowledge. The word that best captured the feelings the participants had for fathers is respect. This respect was evident even when the participants disagreed with their fathers. Luis did not like the negative traits of his father, but he admired him for what he was able to accomplish. In the same vein, Alberto was critical of some of the rules as a child but never lost respect for his father and, in fact, continued to grow more respectful as he matured. Carlos also looked up to his father as provider and head of the household.

Some of the relationships were less than ideal earlier in life as Luis shared; some were limited by the amount of contact, in the case of Carlos because his father worked such long hours. However, all three look back with admiration on the hard work displayed by their fathers. They were providers who took responsibility for their families. It was clear to the participants that family was to be valued above all else. The fathers also displayed the less well-known components of machismo that often were overlooked, such as being nurturing, displaying care and concern, and providing protection (Mayo, 2008). The participants’ fathers were tough, hardworking men who ruled the household. This was counterbalanced by the aforementioned qualities. Alberto spoke at length of the guidance his father provided, another aspect of machismo (Mayo, 2008). Although fathers worked long hours, their influence on family affairs could not be ignored.
The Impact of Mothers

Mothers played a prominent role in the lives of each participant and were particularly instrumental in providing most of the direction and support through their formative years. Theirs was a life of constant service to their immediate and extended family. They seemed to find satisfaction in caring for their family. To say they lived for their children would be an understatement. This attitude and commitment was palpable to the children. In the process of running the household, their mothers became unwitting leadership role models (Chahin & Rodriguez, 2005). They were the emotional rocks of the family who kept everyone and everything together. When asked to tell about their childhoods, the participants immediately listed being a close family as one of the defining features of their childhood.

The relationship with mothers was accentuated by the amount of time the participants were able to spend with them and in some cases, with their grandmothers. None of the mothers worked outside the house, allowing the participants unlimited access to them. The mothers served as the primary disciplinarians in the family. They ruled over the domestic aspects of the household with vigilance and pride. Both Carlos and Luis spoke about how important it was for them to be seen in clean clothes and have a tidy house. The mothers must have all been great cooks if the somewhat biased opinions of their sons were any indicator.

Mothers also provided daily direction as issues would emerge. It was they who provided moral guidance when any of the children needed advice, a trait common to Latina women (Villenas, 2001). They also did everything in their power to provide a better life for their children and became strong proponents of education. They were
consistent in admonishing the participants to do well in school and continue their education. Beyond getting an education, they also instilled the values the participants adhered to later in life. They provided this instruction in the face of adversity, as did other Latina mothers (Villenas, 2001). Above all, mothers wanted the participants to do whatever they chose to do with maximum effort.

Extended Family

The participants all viewed themselves as members of the larger Latino community in keeping with the concept of *familismo* (Holloway et al. 2009; Niemeyer et al., 2009; Rodríguez, 2008; Villarruel & Chahin, 1997-1998). The participants, especially Carlos and Luis, gave numerous examples of how they responded to needs within the greater family. This cultural trait was learned primarily from their fathers. Luis had housed and financially supported members of his extensive extended family. Carlos had performed similar acts of generosity to extended family. The participants never requested any repayment. They viewed these acts as doing what was required of them, but they never performed solely out of obligation. They performed the acts because, to them, it was the right and necessary thing to do embedded in their cultural belief system (Holloway et al., 2009; Niemeyer et al., 2009; Rodríguez, 2008; Villarruel & Chahin, 1997-1998). The participants believed those with means should help take care of those with less.

There were great examples of going beyond what others would have considered adequate support. Illustrating how much Carlos cared about his extended family, he not only offered to house his nephew, he volunteered to pay for his education in addition.
Luis did the same thing for his nieces and nephews. In an anecdote that was not shared until the last interview, Luis related how he purchased his half brother’s house to help him out of a financial bind and then turned around and had him stay in the house as he had nowhere to go.

Alberto talked about being a representative of the Latino community and how important it was for him to be a good example. He specifically mentioned the need for Latinos to take time to build community. He lamented that some of the feel for community was being lost as people became too involved with trying to get ahead and yet, amid this rush for people to squeeze in one more phone call, was the story of community related by Carlos.

He received a call from a friend about a young Latino couple whose daughter had taken her life. The friend was calling people she knew to help with providing food at the funeral. Although Carlos did not know the family of the deceased girl, he did not hesitate to provide assistance. When he arrived and saw the size of the crowd, he was worried that there would not be enough food. However, by the time the funeral had ended, people from the Latino community had brought so much food they were now concerned with what to do with the leftovers. One could sense the pride Carlos felt as he said this was how the Latino community came together to support this young couple.

**Summary**

The earliest recollections of the participants centered around family. Immediate family was seen as the most important individuals in their lives, particularly mothers and fathers. Both provided direction based on values that had been shaped by Latino culture.
Of particular note was the role religion played in their upbringing. It was practiced by their parents and permeated all aspects of their lives. The participants’ parents instilled the core values, including religiosity, the participants had adopted as their own. Thus, the concept of *familismo* was evident as the participants placed the highest regard for family, including the extended family, extending to the Latino communality.

**“Doing Something More”**

One of the striking things that stood out through the research process was the personal drive exhibited by the participants. It is unlikely one would have predicted the participants would rise into senior executive positions given their ethnicity. Societal expectations, ingrained cultural patterns, and social obstacles would have argued for career paths that most closely mirrored that of their fathers. For Carlos and Alberto, this would have been manual labor. Young children may have found it difficult to imagine a future different than the one they experienced every day, one they were not familiar with, yet the participants were able to envision a bigger future, beyond the immediately observable one lived by their parents. All three participants were very clear on their need to accomplish more in life than their parents. Subthemes that supported this idea of “needing to do more” were: not being satisfied with status quo, needing a new challenge, and creating impact.

**Not Being Satisfied with Status Quo**

Both Carlos and Luis followed paths completely different from their parents and, even though joining the military was not unexpected, Alberto doing so at 16 was certainly highly unusual. Each one became dissatisfied with the path they were following
at an early age. Luis, a restless and unfulfilled teenager, left home to move to the mainland unaccompanied. Alberto, finding no meaning in high school, joined the military at 16, and Carlos, seeing the toll manual labor took on his family, was not content to work in the foundry after high school.

One could argue that to a certain extent society dictated the course and trajectory of one’s life path based on past events. Historically, much of this was dependent on socioeconomic status, which in turn was linked to racial and ethnic membership (Liu & Lu, 2009; Marks, 2006). None of the participants was bound by the proscriptions of society. Making life-changing decisions while very young, a pattern repeated throughout their lives, was evidence of their inner calling to fulfill a greater purpose. Carlos talked about moving from what appeared to be a good job as the chief radiological technologist with a good future, to a completely new functional area in management engineering. Alberto set up his own consulting firm after he established himself as a respected CEO in the healthcare field, and Luis moved to the United States without command of the English language to pursue his education.

Research supported that self-efficacy, the ability to believe one can achieve, was linked to career choices (Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer & Scanlan, 2006). Individuals must believe they can overcome barriers as they pursue career goals. All the participants had unwavering belief in their ability to perform and did not let the fear of failure deter them. The same study showed students who possessed a greater self-efficacy tended to have a clearer vision for the future and a better understanding of their selves. Individuals with a stronger sense of self-efficacy exerted more effort and displayed more persistence in pursuing goals (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). What was common to each participant was the
desire and the drive to achieve more than their current situation allowed. As Carlos articulated several times throughout his interviews, he was interested in doing more with his life. Alberto summed up his philosophy by indicating he was not willing to let society dictate what he should become. Luis captured his thoughts by describing the desire to find new and interesting things to accomplish.

Carlos may have been unable to articulate his definition of “more,” as he spoke about the desire to do more, but encapsulated within this need was dissatisfaction with the status quo. Carlos spoke about the need for his siblings to stay close to each other and to their parents in contrast to his need to change his situation. As he stated, he was not content with maintaining status quo in his life. For him, life was about the experience of venturing beyond the comfortable. One observed a similar outlook with Luis and Alberto. Luis enjoyed career success with each new job he accepted, but was constantly driven to new challenges with greater responsibility. Alberto went from entering the military as a pharmacy tech, to teaching at the pharmacy school, to getting a bachelor’s and master’s degree, to getting his commission, to moving to civilian hospital administration. Each could have been satisfied with good positions earlier in their careers, but chose to seek greater challenges. The participants were looking for greater fulfillment and understood it involved a not-yet-experienced future—one they intrinsically knew would be different from the norm accepted by the rest of their siblings. All the participants’ parents struggled to make life better for their children, some even working in jobs they did not like. All participants were very appreciative of the sacrifices made by their parents, but each was not content to be pigeonholed into boxes created by society.
From an early age, Carlos realized that following in the footsteps of his older siblings or his father would impose limitations he was not willing to accept. Right out of high school he entered the x-ray technologist program, but quickly decided he wanted to do more. This idea of wanting to do more was evident in all three participants throughout their careers. For example, after receiving a bachelor’s degree Carlos once again articulated the desire to do more with his life. This led to his obtaining his master’s degree and assuming vice president positions.

The journey each participant took was shaped by the experiences one encountered and how one attached meaning to them. Even those with common roots found their disparate journeys had changed them fundamentally as individuals, resulting in different worldviews than their siblings.

Choices made by the participants not only created geographic distance; they created psychological distance. The sense of needing to experience more than their provincial lives had to offer was greater in the participants than their family members. It could be surmised that each child in each family was provided the same opportunities and yet, only the participants rose to the top. This was not an indictment of the others; it was more a confirmation of the participants’ journeys. There appeared to be an innate ability of the participants to conceptualize a future different than that of their parents. Research into possible selves may have provided a theoretical link to their success.

Markus and Nurius (1986) introduced the concept of possible selves suggesting that possible selves were the model selves individuals desired to become. They stated that possible selves served as inducements for future action. Individuals possessed a conception of who he or she may become in the future; this future persona became his or
her possible self. Possible selves were represented by what “individuals could become, would like to become, or are afraid of becoming” (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992, p. 96). This possible self stood in contrast to the actual or realized self. As individuals progressed through different developmental stages, they desired to reduce the gap between the realized self and the possible self (Bybee & Wells, 2002). Individuals could either move closer to the possible self or lower their expectations, bringing the possible self closer to the realized self. The participants chose actions that would bring them closer to their possible selves.

There were factors that influenced one’s conception of his or her possible self. Two of these factors—thinking clearly about the future and thinking frequently about the future—were studied by McElwee and Haugh (2010). They found that thinking clearly about the future was linked to positive feelings and thought processes, while thinking frequently about the future was linked to greater negative feelings about the future. A life story interview cannot adequately address the issue of clarity and frequency of thought for each of the participants, but what was important was understanding the connection these factors had to conceptions of possible selves. One could conjecture that the participants both had a clearer vision of their futures and a clearer vision of what they did not want to become.

In her analysis of race and ethnicity, Kao (2000) suggested that possible selves could be defined into three categories: hoped-for selves, expected selves, and feared selves. Her study determined that young people based conceptions of possible selves on the achievement of those within the same race or ethnicity. Carlos and Alberto specifically did not want to do what their fathers did for a living. For Latino students, the
fear of becoming the feared self can drive them to avoid stereotypical careers (Kao, 2000). Research further indicated that rather than serve as an incentive, feared selves tended to engender avoidance behaviors (Yowell, 2002). As was voiced by a couple of the participants, they intentionally determined to not follow their fathers’ career paths. Carlos was determined to not work in a foundry, and Alberto did not want to have to dig ditches—his euphemism for manual labor. Luis was not willing to remain in Puerto Rico.

Bybee and Wells (2002) added to the dialogue by positing that students who did well academically possessed a greater capacity to imagine a bigger possible self, leading to greater opportunities for career advancement. All three participants excelled academically. Without ascertaining the effect of feared selves versus the effect of hoped-for selves, it was evident the participants possessed a greater sense of possible selves enabling them to make seemingly difficult choices—choices that provided the challenge they desired, but also kept them on the proper trajectory for their envisioned goals. The concept of possible selves may explain, to a degree, why the participants were able to envision a bigger future.

Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, and Hart-Johnson (2003) investigated the effect of self-regulatory strategies on academic achievement in light of possible selves for predominantly racial and ethnic students. Those students who were able to enact self-regulatory strategies, like working harder, performed better academically. This self-regulation was evident in all three participants who mentioned hard work as a precursor and sustainer of success, and which served them well in school and continued to contribute to their performance.
**Needing a New Challenge**

In addition to not being satisfied with status quo, the need to be challenged was evident in all the participants. What was apparent was the need of the participants to experience more or different things as young careerists. With so little experience to their names, they may have had an inchoate understanding of how they would fit into the future but they intuited that it involved more than the known. Whether it was Alberto purposefully choosing to enter the military at 16—or as simple as Luis stating, “I got bored and I was looking for [more challenging] work”—the participants were constantly searching for new opportunities.

Taking into account all the siblings represented by the families of each participant, none of them had achieved the professional distinction of the participants. Many of the siblings had been successful, but the participants are anomalies in that they all received master’s degrees, they all were willing to move to where the opportunities were, and they all ended up in executive positions within healthcare. The idea to do or be more was also closely aligned with the need to have a greater impact, increasing one’s sphere of influence. Luis was making a difference one individual at a time when he realized he wanted to have a greater impact. Making career decisions like these was risky. With every new challenge came a new set of risks. Another defining characteristic of the participants was their willingness to accept risk. Stable jobs did not always provide the challenge they sought. Choices were not always easy, and yet they repeatedly passed on the safe or easy choice for the opportunity to tackle a bigger challenge.
All the siblings have, or had, careers that were fulfilling to them. As Carlos said, his siblings were happy with their lives and they found fulfillment with their choices. What they did not experience were the challenges offered beyond status quo. It may be that some of the cultural characteristics, like *familismo*, of Latinos operated in opposition to American norms such as moving away to pursue a professional career. Carlos made an astute observation when he philosophized on why other family members did not make the same choices as he did stating that the siblings’ strong sense of family was manifested by maintaining status quo and not moving away. The need to remain within their comfort zone carried more weight than meeting new challenges.

Moving away created psychological as well as physical distance. It took them out of the known and thrust them into the unknown. Some individuals would rather dwell in the familiar and known. Although the participants were very committed to their families, their desire to experience more than their familiar surroundings drove them to explore opportunities the other siblings would not consider. In a sense, it was a sort of rebellion against the expected norm combined with a desire to experience new and different things. Luis even used the term “rebel” to describe his unsettled teen years.

Luis rebelled as a teenager and left the security of his home to invent his future in new surroundings, miles and a culture apart from what he grew up with. Carlos left the town he was raised in to pursue a career. Alberto chose an alternate path as a 16 year old when he chose to join the military. However, his youth belied a more thoughtful, long-term view of consequences tied to decisions made today. Most young adults entering the military right out of high school had no vision of what life would be like after their tour of duty. Being able to make the connection between challenges today and career success
were key in the development of the participants. In this respect, they were unique as most low-income minority children are not able to make the connection between current behaviors and an adult future (Oyserman et al., 2003).

**Creating Impact**

As the participants sought and faced new challenges, they were constantly looking for ways to create greater impact. They were not content to have their spheres of influence limited to a few select individuals because of the limitations of their jobs. Luis provided the perfect example. As a social worker, he was making a difference one individual at a time. He soon realized he would need to change jobs to be able to impact more people by influencing policy. He, like the other participants, understood that individuals at the higher levels of organizations had greater spheres of influence. To have a greater impact, they would need to be promoted into executive positions.

Alberto went to pharmacy school to become a technician with the ability to impact one patient at a time. As he changed paths to become a pharmacy instructor, he had the ability to impact all the students running through the program. The participants were not afraid to drastically change course in order to create a path that led to having greater impact. Carlos made the change from radiology services to management engineering for this reason. Luis made the change from social worker to management for the same reason. Alberto also made the change from pharmacy services to management. Interestingly, none of the participants initially pursued executive positions; rather, they pursued positions that allowed them to have greater impact. The rise to executive
positions came as a result of their performance. With each promotion, their performance led to more promotions. In this way, a self-repeating cycle was constantly at work.

As they achieved the highest levels within their organizations, they continued to be mindful of the influence they possess. All three believed in being a role model for expected behaviors. They all recognized that they were constantly being watched and judged. They were impacting the entire organization by establishing a culture and by how every action was interpreted. They were also cognizant of the positive impact they had on the Latino community. At the same time, Luis explained they carried the weight of the Latino community on their backs because of their salience.

Summary

The participants had an amazing need to experience more than the lives represented by their parents. They knew early in their lives that the status quo they experienced all around them would not satisfy this need. Status quo had been determined, to a large extent, by the expectations of society. They were interested in constantly finding new challenges and were not afraid to assume the risks associated with these challenges. They sought ways to create impact on a greater scale. This led them to jobs with increasing responsibility and scope.

“This White Man’s World”

Growing up a racial or ethnic minority meant one would inevitably face prejudice, bias, and discrimination—overtly, covertly, or both. The younger one was, the harder it was to understand these psychological concepts as evidenced by Carlos’ laughing about his brother getting thrown out of certain establishments because of his ethnicity.
However, the sense that one was different and treated differently as a result was learned early in life. All participants were born into a period of unsettled race relations in the United States. Each one had experienced prejudice in different ways. The subthemes for “This White man’s world” were: encountering societal prejudices, seeking validation, acceptance, and intrarace conflict.

**Encountering Societal Prejudices**

Prejudice had manifested itself to the participants in such mundane and pedestrian ways as people assuming Carlos spoke Spanish because of his name, and provocatively with emotionally charged claims of racism in hiring practices by Luis. The participants’ parents were not immune from racism, but quietly endured those practices. Although progress had been made, prejudice and bias still existed for the participants.

Philosophies were enacted and shared by the participants’ parents to help guide them through life as an ethnic minority, as they were cognizant of the obstacles each participant would face. Carlos’ parents made a conscious decision to not teach him (or his siblings) Spanish because they believed he needed to speak English to be successful. In retrospect, it was easy to point out that learning both languages was an option. However, his parents, like many of the era, perceived only one option (Lopez, 2011). They also encouraged him to perform better than others, as did Alberto’s parents, as a way to overcome negative stereotypes held by society. Alberto had heartfelt conversations with his father about living in what his father termed “this White man’s world.” It was not only family, but members of the Latino community, that offered
support. Luis received mentoring on transitioning from school to a career as a Latino from a protective Latino professor.

The participants were careful to not use the word “racism” in describing the prejudice they encountered, which was interesting of its own merit. When Carlos talked about having to live in the Latino section of town that had not “acclimated to minorities,” his language was carefully crafted to not be offensive but the message of segregation and racism was unmistakable. When considering the salience of their minority status, Alberto and Carlos represent two opposing ends of the spectrum. Alberto lived in a town that bordered Mexico and attended high school in a district where Latinos were the majority. In contrast, Carlos attended a high school as a distinct minority based on his ethnicity, as one of a handful of minorities in a student body of several hundred, where his physical features highlighted his minority status. Carlos went on to describe how being a minority made him feel like an outcast at times in a predominantly White school, even when the situation involved no malicious intent. For example, he was ashamed of telling his classmates that he would not be going on vacation and therefore dreaded the end of school which was always accompanied by the question of where he was going for vacation. Not being included with the majority carried with it psychological and social isolation, feelings that were often overlooked by others. Not being included in peer groups was found to lead to psychological isolation (Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Shultz, 2008). One could feel this in Carlos’ comments. In contrast, Alberto could not recall incidents of prejudice during his school years.

When Carlos related the story of the girls who failed to invite him to parties, he was once again very careful to not employ any language that could be considered
inflammatory. One could almost hear the doubt in his voice even as he interpreted what he experienced with his continual reference to this being his perception, which he questioned by saying that it may or may not have been true. With his apologetic introduction to the subject, one sensed that rather than being the victim, he was concerned about being cast as the perpetrator for falsely accusing someone else of being discriminatory. Without a written or verbal espousal acknowledging one is prejudiced, claims of racism are based on conjecture and interpretation. Lacking hard evidence, the insidious nature of racism makes it hard to prove. In American society the burden of proof rests with the accuser (Davies, 2005; Simmons, 2006). It is critical to affirm the perceptions of those who feel discriminated against. Thus, what may appear to some as cursory interactions may have long-lasting effects. The depth of the psychological cut made by these interactions runs deep. To Carlos, the perceived act of exclusion was no fleeting memory to pass into oblivion. In fact, Carlos at two different times made mention of that specific story; both times he indicated he would never forget those experiences. It was important to Carlos, after achieving success, to plan to confront the individuals involved at a class reunion to show them that he had made something of himself.

The weight of being a racial or ethnic minority oftentimes did not require any overt action by anybody to initiate negative effects. Luis immediately felt the psychological pressure of being different because of observable physical characteristics when he stepped onto the university campus for the first time. Racial and ethnic minorities are acutely aware of their status (Kim-Ju & Liem, 2003). Nobody said or did anything; it was internal recognition of his minority status that caused him to remark that
he did not belong there. Not that he was not qualified to be there; rather, that he did not feel comfortable being in that environment. Similarly, Carlos’ minority status was accentuated when he attended meetings of the radiology profession. It became very apparent that he was a distinct minority as a Latino participant.

Luis was the most vocal about the impact of prejudice on his career. As he struggled to move into the private healthcare sector, he encountered many obstacles—most he believed were the result of prejudicial environments. He talked about being able to quickly assess his chances in job interviews based on the demographic profile of the organization. He believed he was not hired in certain situations because he did not meet the unstated demographic requirements, causing him to be disqualified for consideration based on his ethnicity. There is data to support his claim of bias in the workplace (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Craig & Rand, 1998; Dixon & Rosenbaum, 2004; Duehr & Bono, 2006; Giberson et al., 2005; Greenhaus et al., 1990; Rosette et al., 2008). Eagly and Chin (2010) posited that leaders were judged by stereotypes that operated at an unconscious level to cause perfectly qualified individuals to be removed from consideration for leadership positions because of the difference they represented. This correlated with Luis’ beliefs on the hiring processes for CEO positions in healthcare. Kanter’s (1977) homosocial reproduction addressed the need for those in power to maintain status quo by controlling discretionary decisions by determining who could make them. Hiring and promoting those who may think differently (racial and ethnic minorities) may cause uneasiness for those in control. What was most disturbing to Luis was the apparent disregard of his extensive work history and successful track record. These experiences have led Luis to conclude that Latinos will never be accepted as
Americans. This comment conveys deep meaning. To Luis, being American has little to do with where one was born or their citizenship. Being American is equated to being accepted on an equal basis by the White majority.

Luis’ journey has imbued his worldview with skepticism and led him to accept that his ethnicity will always keep him from being fully accepted by the controlling majority. Acceptance of his ethnic identity was expressed by each participant as each had encountered prejudice in different forms and to different degrees. Some experienced prejudice early in their lives, like Carlos whose family was relegated to the Latino section of town, and later as a teen when he was purposefully excluded from parties in high school. Alberto learned early in his enlistment to avoid going into town because of the prejudice that existed. And yet when describing the situation, Alberto said the reason was because the people of the town “weren’t very open to other cultures,” downplaying the existing prejudices without referring to them as racists.

Seeking Validation

All minorities faced challenges growing up related to their minority status. Each time this occurred, the individuals chose how to respond and how to make meaning of the situation. Carlos used the apparent mistreatment of his family and him as a positive force for change. Rather than dwell on the negative aspects, he was determined to succeed in those things he had some control over—his reactions and his behaviors. Luis and Alberto also operated from a performance orientation. They measured an individual’s worth by the results he or she produced. In this regard, education was seen as the great equalizer, the effects of which could not be bound by the color of one’s skin or where one’s parents
were born. It made sense that all the participants pursued higher education as a method to achieving success.

Each participant made a conscious decision to not allow prejudice and bias to drag him down or diminish his personhood. Admittedly, this was a philosophy they grew into as they matured. In their comments, one could intuit that at some level they each sought validation as they wrestled with their ethnic identity. For Carlos, professional success was an intrinsic part of his validation. Success was the end of the journey, but prior to success Carlos was less sure about himself, developing into a more vocal supporter of his ethnicity as he matured. This validation led him to reflexively consider what it meant to be a Latino in the United States. Success allowed him to accept his ethnic background and embrace his difference without the embarrassment of earlier years. He commented how success allowed him to be more forthcoming about his ethnic pride. For both Carlos and Luis, success was perceived as the ultimate rebuttal to prejudice. Luis sought the same validation as he endeavored to “close the loop” in his career by leading a nongovernment, private sector acute care hospital. With all the success Luis had enjoyed prior to his current job, he was driven to the private healthcare sector for personal validation. Prior acceptance of him in the public healthcare sector was appreciated, but not equated with acceptance by White society. That validation would only be achieved once he received a job in the private sector.

Alberto sought a different type of validation. He was cognizant of his minority status, but his need for validation seemed to stem more from a need to validate 22 years of military service. Thus, in the face of naysayers, he chose to move into private healthcare immediately after retiring from the military. To the participants, the virtues of
this approach was that it did not require them to actively direct attention to prejudice as success was self-evident. Alberto echoed this sentiment by indicating he is no respecter of skin color, only performance.

Acceptance

All participants had reached a point in their lives where they were comfortable with their ethnicity, and all had taken steps to instill this value in their children. Luis and his wife had created and maintained a very Latino household. Alberto was quick to remind his children of where they came from, keeping certain cultural traditions alive. Carlos was on a mission to make sure his grandchildren learned Spanish. What was striking was the attitude of the participants relative to their minority status. This could best be summed up by a phrase Alberto was fond of repeating, “It is what it is.” Luis also used the same phrase during his interview. This single phrase encompassed the ideology that had allowed them to flourish while facing prejudice. None of them condoned prejudice or racism. Luis, alone, still felt like he battled prejudice on an ongoing basis. What was unique about their approach was their sense of acceptance of the environment around them. From an “It is what it is” mentality, the participants recognize they live in a world where the color of one’s skin and one’s accent dictated how one may be treated. They accepted the society in which they lived. However, most noteworthy was how they had moved beyond a need to focus on racism. Rather, their focus was on performance and other factors over which they exercise some control, while exhibiting the value of caring for others regardless of their racial or ethnic background.
Prejudice was acknowledged as an obstacle, one they had overcome by not allowing themselves to be viewed as victims. It was evident they possessed a positive attitude. Carlos felt that individuals could use their race and ethnicity in nonproductive ways. He found more positive ways of dealing with prejudice and bias as he has matured and achieved acceptance of who he was. The participants clearly had a Latino identity that they found comfortable. Developing a racial identity has been found to influence how individuals react to racial incidents (Forsyth & Carter, 2012). This strong sense of ethnic identity may have mitigated the participants’ responses to racism. Another study found that faith in God was a key coping strategy for racial and ethnic minorities (Willis, 2006). All participants spoke of their deeply embedded faith. Yet another group of researchers posited that possible selves may also factor into how racial and ethnic minorities cope with racism (Brondolo et al., 2009). In this approach, individuals incorporate different aspects of group identities to develop multiple identities. The participants talked about interacting with different groups, and their coworkers spoke about their ability to maneuver seamlessly among the different groups. One could postulate that some or all of these factors helped the participants cope with the racism they faced.

All participants were extremely proud of their cultural heritage and the journey and sacrifices made by their parents. All three participants made comments about how they embraced their Latino heritage. Luis and Alberto have even worked through professional organizations and their own hospitals to develop and support Latinos in healthcare as a way of supporting the next generation of Latino leaders.
Acceptance of their ethnic identity also had allowed them to see how ethnicity could be used in negative ways. Carlos will not allow himself to become a victim, nor will he allow himself any advantage as a result of his ethnicity. Alberto also spoke about not conforming to the expectations of society, instead opting to follow his heart and his unwillingness to conform to society’s expectations. He bristles at the thought that he was given anything as a result of his ethnicity. He refuses to use his ethnicity as a crutch.

**Intrarace Conflict**

Success for Latinos may pose problems for their cultural value systems (Lumby, 2006). Two of the participants, Alberto and Luis, made pointed comments about others from their ethnic group they believed had sold out in exchange for success. They perceived these successful individuals as having achieved success at the cost of some of their cultural values. Alberto and Luis charged that these individuals had disconnected from his or her cultural roots. They saw these individuals as turning their backs on the greater Latino family, a violation of *familismo*. Some researchers (Lumby, 2006; Lumby & Morrison, 2010) found that minority leaders were cognizant of the perceived gap between White leaders and themselves and intentionally misdirected attention away from their ethnicity by foregrounding other identities. One could only speculate that this might be what the participants were observing when they criticized other Latinos who did not seem to represent the values they held. Even as Alberto said this, he was commenting on his need to control his natural cultural impulses. He believed ethnic groups were imbued with certain cultural characteristics that may need to be adjusted in organizations to not be perceived as a threat. For him, these were such things as using his hands and his tone
of voice. What was not subject to debate was the fact that ethnic leaders faced obstacles White leaders did not encounter. In essence, they were required to live a bicultural life that balanced leading in a manner consistent with White leadership while simultaneously being true to their cultural beliefs (Pegues & Cunningham, 2010).

Other interesting comments were also made by Alberto who talked about the lack of support, by Latinos for Latinos, for career success. His humorous, but pointed, anecdote passed on by his father about Latinos behaving like a bucket full of lobsters conveyed a powerful visual commentary on intragroup dynamics. This idea was repeated by Luis, who believed certain Latinos disconnected from the Latino community upon achieving high-ranking positions. Making assumptions about others’ motives was not uncommon among racial groups. In a study analyzing barriers encountered by racial and ethnic minority leaders, a surprise finding was intrarace conflict (Flores & Matkin, in press). Perhaps this phenomenon was what was also being observed, to a certain extent, with some of the participants. It had the effect of causing one to wonder what others in the Latino community thought of the participants.

**Summary**

As ethnic minorities, the participants belonged to a marginalized group, increasing their chances of encountering prejudice and bias. Each participant experienced prejudice based on their ethnicity, but not in equal proportions or equal intensity. The participants were able to overcome prejudice by accepting who they were. The participants were also driven by a need to find validation. For them, this validation needed to come from society. There was an unexpected finding of intrarace conflict.
The participants looked at those Latinos who had been promoted into the highest levels of healthcare with a skeptical eye, wondering if they had disconnected from the Latino community as a price for their success.

“Make It Happen”

The participants fashioned their leadership approaches based on their value systems. The participants were not guided by contemplating leadership theory; they acted out of authenticity to themselves. Actions and behaviors represented natural extensions of their personal guiding principles, principles they learned from their parents. Their current level of achievement was a testament to how well this approach to leadership had served them. What was fascinating, in speaking with the participants, was how they perceived leadership. They did not use academic terminology nor did they refer to models, constructs, or theories. The only mention of a leadership construct was Alberto speaking about servant leadership. To them, leadership was about making choices daily about how to behave. For them, leadership was not something that was performed; rather, it was who they were. Leadership development for them was an accretive process. Each experience built upon previous experiences, adding to the participant’s knowledge base. Each of the participants possessed an action orientation, as they were results driven—they were doers. Within this “Make it happen” theme, the following subthemes emerged: confidence, high expectations, being authentic, learning through observation, and mentors.
Confidence

The participants exuded confidence in how they approached life. They excelled at maintaining unwavering confidence in their ability to make tough choices and act accordingly. Not that they were immune from mistakes, as each owned mistakes he had made along the way. Even in how they owned mistakes, one saw confidence at work. This was reinforced by coworker comments about how each participant grew in their eyes as they openly admitted their mistakes.

Both Carlos and Alberto credit their time in the military as providing transforming experiences and inspiring confidence in them. As young men, this was their first real introduction to leadership. They both learned a directive, command and control style of leadership. However, as leaders they have both come to realize that this style is not always appropriate. It was a testament to their confidence that each could be participative when necessary.

Confidence was also evident in how they approached new opportunities. None of the participants feared what the future had in store. Confidence had been linked to successful leadership (McCaughey, 2004; Sashkin, 2004), and the participants had plenty. Carlos changed careers, Alberto jumped to the civilian sector, and Luis accepted jobs with short tenures and uncertain futures. Each of these moves required a significant amount of confidence as they embraced the change. They believed they had the skills necessary to be successful in new roles.

This confidence not only allowed them to face new challenges, it allowed them to inspire others to perform. Self-confidence was a characteristic seen in transformational leaders as they inspired others (Sashkin, 2004). Each of the participants spoke about the
need to hire good people and let them do their job. They viewed their job as supporting and directing others to perform to the best of their abilities. They accomplished this through such means as education, organizing work to increase performance, and through instilling self-confidence in followers, all of which had been shown to be key elements of effective leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**High Expectations**

Each of the participants had very high expectations of those who worked for them. Perhaps this was best illustrated by Carlos, as one of his coworkers described him as the ultimate perfectionist. The participants did not hold a one-sided worldview, as they held themselves to the same exacting standards. The participants made no secret about them expecting people to work hard to fulfill their work obligations. Hard work was a character trait each participant displayed and expected in others. The only caveat was a recognition that those who reported to them were not expected to work as hard as they did. They acted as an example for high expectations by logging long hours at work.

Part of what had made the participants successful, according to their coworkers, had been the exacting standards they imposed on individuals. They refused to accept mediocrity. This performance orientation had resulted in positive organizational outcomes throughout their careers. Individuals were not judged by their titles, or skin color, or degrees after their name; everything was about performance. Those who performed well were praised; those who did not were dealt with swiftly. Embedded within this performance expectation was the requirement that workers behave ethically and with integrity. Sacrificing principles valued by the participants was not allowed.
This performance orientation translated into perfectionism. Regardless of the task at hand, each participant strove to achieve the best possible outcome.

Individuals had to be held accountable. The participants were responsible for overseeing the efficient use of resources; allowing individuals to not perform was a cost to the entire organization. Everyone had to own his or her performance. Individuals were allowed to make mistakes, but the result had to be learning and better performance. Individuals were to take ownership of all their actions. Their job was to provide solutions, not problems. In this way, they were expected to support the participants rather than be a drag on their time and energy. Thus, high expectations were operationalized as using critical thinking to solve problems in order to understand all the ramifications of any decision. Simply performing a job was not necessarily acceptable. The participants appreciated those who completed tasks ahead of schedule with less direction and who were able to anticipate possible problems.

**Being Authentic**

The issue of personal accountability came across clearly in all of the participants’ interviews. Not only had they held others accountable, they held themselves accountable. Each also mentioned they would not ask others to do anything they themselves would be unwilling to undertake. Respect and acting ethically were also important to the participants, as each talked about these as defining qualities of themselves. This philosophy emanated from the desire to be transparent and the deep-seated values and convictions each held. As Alberto said, he led from the heart. How the participants led was not merely a dramatic series of choreographed actions designed for human
consumption; their actions were a natural outgrowth of who they had become. In this regard, one could liken their leadership style to the construct of authentic leadership. Authentic leadership has been conceptualized as including the following components: positive psychological capital, a positive moral perspective, self-awareness, and self-regulation (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio, Gardner, Walumba, Luthans, & May, 2004). One saw these components operating in the stories of the participants.

Positive psychological capital referred to the positive outlook possessed by the participants in such things as confidence, which they exuded; hope, which they all shared; and optimism and resiliency (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The participants were supremely confident in their abilities. Each participant shared that he had hope for the future. Although each based their hope on something different, they did not dread the future but looked forward to it with a sense of curiosity. They were constantly looking at the positive side of things. Even when they encountered obstacles, their focus was not on the negative; rather, it was on overcoming the obstacle. They all possessed a positive outlook on life. This also spoke to why they were so resilient and adaptable. Mistakes and setbacks provided object lessons for learning, not high emotional cliffs that could not be scaled.

A positive moral perspective was evident in each of the participants who spoke at length about the need to be of good character. They made a point of sharing how important it was to have values that guided one. This factor spoke to doing the right thing. Alberto talked about how caring for patients as the highest priority took precedence over policies and procedures. Integrity was another character trait espoused by each participant as well. Success needed to be achieved ethically.
The participants had a good grasp of who they were. Self-awareness, as defined by Avolio and Gardner (2005), is an “emerging process where one continually comes to understand his or her unique talents, strengths, sense of purpose, core values, beliefs and desires” (p. 324). In over 4 1/2 hours of interviewing coworkers, I was astounded at the congruence between their descriptions of the participants and the participants’ descriptions of themselves. This was an excellent example of self-awareness. Each of the participants had a deep understanding of who they were, including what their strengths and weaknesses were. They knew what principles and values guided their decisions. They also had a firm grasp of their identity and goals.

Self-regulation involves the display of self-control based on internal standards (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Alberto spoke about his need to curb inherent cultural mannerisms as he transitioned out of the military into the public sector. Carlos talked about his continual journey to improve himself, most recently making a concerted effort to be more sensitive to the needs of others. Luis was also mindful of making sure his actions matched his values, as he related the story about the recent proposal by his board offering him a bonus to stay.

**Learning Through Observation**

Carlos’ description of his schizophrenic leadership style refers to his ability to lead in different ways. He is comfortable in a directive role, but has learned to be more sensitive to the needs of others. Both Luis and Alberto talked about leading based on the situation and the individuals involved. The actual development of these leadership styles was an evolutionary process. Although evolutionary, the styles did not emerge by chance
as each participant developed tremendous powers of observation. Each one, in turn, credited their ability to learn from others by observation as a key to his leadership development. Studies had linked followers’ observations of leaders and their own managerial styles (Bass, 1990).

Early in life, this learning was based on the authority figures they knew best— their mothers and fathers. Chahin and Rodriguez (2005) argued that Latino leaders learned to lead from their mothers. They stated that mothers used wisdom to build capacity in their offspring through continual encouragement. The participants’ mothers did not see themselves as leaders, only as doing what was necessary for their children.

As the participants entered the workforce, they began to watch those they encountered along the way. They made the point of indicating that it was not solely designated leaders who they observed; they watched anyone who displayed leadership qualities. They commented about observing individuals they had no contact with such as public figures. What stood out about their ability was how they culled good traits from the bad, traits that fit with their value orientation, among all the traits being displayed. Luis gave the best example of this in action as he shared the story about the boss he simultaneously hated and admired. Luis’ attention to detail was a result of observing that individual. Alberto learned from superior officers how to own and deliver a message. The participants picked the best of what they observed, while steering clear of the behaviors they deemed unproductive. They commented about observing individuals they had no contact with but were public figures. This technique allowed them to incorporate the best leadership practices from each person they observed. Therefore, their leadership
does not neatly fit into one of the scholarly constructs, a finding supported by Gambrell and Fritz (2012). Their leadership was adaptive and constantly changing form.

**Mentors**

As Whiteness was closely linked to power and leadership (Lumby & Morrison, 2010), achieving positions of power in an industry dominated by White leaders placed the participants in rarified air, highlighting their salience. At the executive levels of hospitals there are few racial and ethnic minorities to interact with (Dreachslin et al., 2004; Gathers, 2003; Iganski et al., 2001; Moore, 2004). This did not deter the participants from finding mentors. Another attribute shared by all the participants was their development of mentor relationships. Others, willing to support each of them, seemed to have emerged at opportune times in the lives of each participant. Some of these individuals displayed support over very short intervals. The instructor who encouraged Alberto to go into teaching and the professor who challenged Luis to go into social work were indicative of this type of support.

Beyond this, there were instances of individuals serving as mentors who guided the participants through their careers. Carlos listed several individuals whom he credited with shaping him into a leader by providing direction and opportunities. These were individuals he reported to in his career. They offered support, advice, and direction in the work setting. Alberto talked about others, higher in rank, that offered leadership lessons as he matured into a leader. Luis talked about several mentors who supported him in his journey. The first individual that offered him a cabinet job, the same individual who made sure he had a job when the jobs he held tied to political regimes came to an end.
This was very tangible support. Prior to these instances, Luis remembered well the mentoring relationship he formed with the lone Latino professor at the university where he earned his master’s degree.

Mentoring relationships have been shown to increase self-esteem and facilitate advancement (Bass, 1990; McCauley & Douglas, 2004). Each of the participants related how mentors were a key element in their leadership development. The mentors they encountered were not always Latino, but they were always interested in helping the participants become better leaders.

It was also interesting that each of the participants maintained a core group of people that continued to keep them honest. They served as sounding boards, offering advice and criticism when warranted. This unofficial system of checks keeps the participants balanced and grounded.

**Summary**

The participants excelled at leadership, a leadership that grew out of their experiences and which had been tempered with wisdom into a whole philosophy over time. They were keen observers of human interaction, adopting behaviors other successful leaders had employed. Throughout their careers, each participant had come into contact with individuals who served as mentors. These mentors had provided guidance and opportunities, taking a personal interest in the welfare of the participants. These mentors were not always Latinos. The participants displayed supreme confidence in themselves. Although it could be interpreted as arrogance, it was more a complete sense of knowing they could handle any situation. Coupled with this confidence were
extremely high expectations of others. However, leadership was approached from an authentic worldview. The participants had a clear grasp of who they were, what they valued, and what they wanted to achieve.

**Conclusions**

The enactment of leadership is a very complex process. Ayman and Korabik (2010) commented on how issues of race and ethnicity impacted leadership enactment, thereby necessitating further research into the phenomenon. This issue was succinctly addressed by Gambrell and Fritz (2012) as they suggested, “To further leadership knowledge, scholars could consider including subcultures within their leadership studies to explore variances currently found within leadership theory” (p. 323). As ethnic leaders, the participants faced additional complexities related to their ethnicity. They had no choice in determining their ethnicity. Genetics decided that outcome. However, their ethnicity would have profound consequences on their development as leaders. From before they were born, the participants’ families’ socioeconomic status began shaping the social environment into which each was born. Their subsequent lives and career trajectories emerged as anomalies for individuals of their ethnic background. Each participant had achieved a level of success reserved for a very few individuals. They had reached the pinnacle of hospital administration.

This study sought to give voice to a select number of Latino leaders in the healthcare field. Because of their ethnicity, they were categorized as marginalized (Creswell, 2009). The narrative approach allowed one to live through the significant experiences that shaped the participants into the leaders they had become. What became very evident was the salience of ethnicity on this process. Their stories resonated with an
ethnic pathos that members of the majority population do not experience. By sharing these stories, this study created a platform for privileging the voices of the participants in a meaningful manner.

The stories were extraordinary and spoke of struggles to find personal and professional identity. The participants’ ethnicity seemed to impact both these identities. The participants had emerged as products of their childhood environments. The strong influence of their mothers and fathers was unmistakable. Even with the reality they faced as ethnic minorities, they were not content to pursue a course of status quo, to be pigeonholed into careers of society’s choosing. They ventured off into areas unknown to the generations before them. They chose the path less traveled by their predecessors.

There were multiple times when giving up on their dreams may have been the easiest option that lay before them. Each time, their resolve to be more and experience more willed them to move forward. The love and nurturing they experienced at home developed the confidence they would need to face these life events. Even if they did not know ultimately what to do with their degrees, they intrinsically knew education was the key to unlocking the door to a future different than their parents.

They walked through every open door, even when they were not sure of what lay on the other side. Their self-efficacy was what allowed them to be fearless. This self-efficacy was built on a supreme confidence in their abilities and the reliance on a greater being. They experienced success after success. Although there were mistakes along the way, there were no epic failures. They possessed characters that made them appear charismatic to their followers who respected them immensely.
By sharing their life stories, the participants have allowed the outside world of readers to vicariously experience growing up in the United States as a Latino. In their stories, prejudice and racism were evident but it may be surprising to learn they have accepted their ethnic identity, which in turn has allowed them to move past nonproductive behaviors and thoughts. As Luis and Alberto so eloquently put it, “It is what it is.” Their energy was directed by a performance orientation that focused on results, not phenotype characteristics.

Through their stories, readers have been allowed a glimpse into their personal lives, informing why they acted as they did. Only through qualitative study could these types of issues be addressed. Narrative research allowed the important experiences to be relived. Each participant indicated that they remain a work in progress. Perhaps this ideology helps to reconceptualize leadership not as static construct, but as a continuously evolving process that never reaches complete fulfillment.

**Significance**

Much of the prior research of leadership had categorized leaders as a homogenous cohort, applying findings universally to all leaders, regardless of race or ethnicity. In contrast to this approach, research had supported the idea that those from the same cultural background tended to share worldviews that guide how they interacted with others (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Importantly, the worldviews of racial and ethnic minorities may be different than those held by Whites. This study sought to provide an alternative worldview to the study of leadership by providing space for first-person narratives for Latino leaders.
Specifically, this study sought to discern what the stories of three Latino leaders revealed about their development into leaders within the healthcare industry. Further, the study sought to find those salient experiences that shaped their development while examining the effects of their ethnicity on the process. In addressing those research questions, this study has provided an ethnic perspective that had previously been absent from the research agenda. This ethnically derived picture of leadership development did bring a contextual layer previously missing, illuminating the unique journey the participants had taken to success.

The participants faced economic hardships, prejudice, and racism. Although not all of these factors are unique to racial and ethnic minorities, they highlighted the need to consider research that viewed the world through a Latino critical theory lens. Recognizing that there are embedded social processes that serve to marginalize certain populations provides a basis for alternative interpretations of leadership. It is incumbent on scholars to continue to explore new ways of understanding the human dimensions of leadership.

In this study, statistical inference was not used to draw conclusions; rather, thematic analysis allowed one to consider how these salient ideas could be conceptually transferred. Through this process one identified changes that could be advocated for in developing more Latino—and other racial and ethnic minority—leaders in the healthcare industry. If the number of racial and ethnic minority leaders in healthcare is increased, there are measurable benefits tied to this outcome: better organizational performance (Latham, 2009; Mathis & Jackson, 2008; Page, 2007; Roberson & Park, 2007), better
decision making (Page, 2007), and reductions in health disparities (Dreachslin et al., 2004; Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008).

**Recommendations**

For the participants, the actual process of leadership was predicated upon human interaction making it highly dynamic. In contemplating the themes that emerged from the participants’ stories, one can advocate for change. By conceptually considering what can be transferred, the stage is set for recommendations for practice.

**Mentors.** Mentoring relationships have proved to be very beneficial to those receiving mentoring (Bass, 1990; McCauley & Douglas, 2004). Mentoring should be considered throughout the career trajectory. Mentoring can be formal or informal, but it must be intentional. Research supports the difficult time racial and ethnic minorities have in finding mentors (Kilian et al., 2005). Specific mentoring should be targeted to Latinos. This can start as early as high school, but should definitely be considered during college. Once in the workforce, mentoring should be used as a way to retain and grow Latino leaders. Intentional programs aimed at Latinos create awareness and builds in accountability rather than leaving this to chance. Latinos need not be matched with a person of Latin descent, as the participants had several mentors who were not Latino and they managed to be successful. However, in previous studies research had indicated that support from individuals with the same cultural background offered richer guidance (Banks, Hogue, Timberlake, & Liddle, 1996; Holcomb-McCoy & Thomas-Moore, 2001). Individuals with the same cultural outlook are better able to understand the issues faced by others within the same group.
It will also be important for Latino leaders who reach executive positions of leadership within the healthcare industry to realize they have the ability, and some would argue the obligation, to support the next generation of Latino leaders. These individuals should be encouraged to give back by becoming mentors themselves. Reaching the executive level should not necessarily mean disconnecting from their cultural roots. By creating these relationships, organizations can create a self-sustaining cycle that supports Latino leaders.

**Education.** College degrees have become the commodity of job applicants. They often represent a minimum recruitment standard necessary for further consideration. Without a degree one is usually at a disadvantage, especially if one does not possess the requisite experience. The statistics speak to the need for college educated Latinos because of the low number of college graduates (Banchero, 2010). Furthermore, Latino students considering healthcare as a career should be encouraged to pursue master’s degrees. The ACHE data (2010) displays a clear connection between career success in healthcare and master’s degrees. Master’s degrees, as the name suggests, also impart a deeper knowledge base creating expertise.

Education is an expensive proposition. The cost of higher education serves as not only a perceived barrier (Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006; Grodsky & Jones, 2007), it is a real barrier for Latinos (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2007; Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2009). Research has shown that the college application process poses greater problems for Latino students than for other students (Nagaoka et al., 2009). Establishing programs aimed at supporting students through the technical and social processes will assist them in overcoming these barriers. Once accepted, the students may lack the financial
resources to attend the school of their choice. Healthcare organizations should work with colleges and Latino organizations to develop programs that offer financial support to Latinos seeking careers in healthcare. Developing a funding base will be key to providing continuing educational opportunities for Latino students.

**Board composition.** The boards of hospitals ultimately retain the authority and responsibility to hire and fire CEOs. Statistics indicate that hospital boards continue to be dominated by White individuals (Health Research & Educational Trust, 2012). In a recent survey the Health Research & Educational Trust (2012) determined that racial and ethnic minorities only accounted for 14% of all hospital board members, while racial and ethnic minorities accounted for 29% of all patients. Furthermore, the same study showed that Latinos lag behind all other races and ethnicities as a percent of board membership. Creating more diversity in hospital boards should trickle down to more diversity in the workforce. Studies have shown the positive effects of greater workforce diversity (Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008; Dreachslin et al., 2008; Latham, 2009; Mathis & Jackson, 2008; Page, 2007; Roberson & Park, 2007). However, homosocial reproduction (Kanter, 1977) and Byrne’s similarity-attraction theory (as cited in Dreachslin et al., 2004) support the difficulty of hiring Latinos into executive positions. Without changes to the composition of hospital boards, hiring more Latino CEOs will remain problematic. Efforts need to be intentional, targeting specific needs of the board and then seeking Latino individuals with those skill sets.

**Create diversity-sensitive organizations.** Organizations take on the personality of their leadership (Giberson et al., 2005). By incorporating more Latinos in the executive ranks, the personalities of organizations may begin to change over time, as
diverse experiential insights are shared by racial and ethnic minorities (Ward-Johnson, 2007). Increasing diversity programming can result in improved organizational performance (Richard, 2000). Even without Latinos in executive positions, hospitals should strive to create diversity-sensitive organizations. This realization is accomplished through “leaders who create an organizational context in which cultural competence is enabled, cultivated, and reinforced” (Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008, p. 8). This direction must come from top leadership, specifically the CEO (Gathers, 2003). With this type of support, policies and procedures that promote a diversity orientation can create the structural foundation necessary for future diversity programming (Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008).

**Possible selves.** The continual quest for individuals to reduce the discrepancy between their actual selves and their possible selves presents individuals with two paths (Bybee & Wells, 2002). One path leads to reigning in the possible self, and the other path leads to moving closer to the possible self. Choosing to reign in one’s possible self may lead to more satisfaction in the short term by remaining within a known environment. However, the participants demonstrated the value of striving to reach their possible selves. Creating dreams of future success should be nurtured during the formative years of children and reinforced once in the workforce. Encouraging individuals to work hard and offering positive reinforcement has been shown to increase their desire to achieve their possible selves (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). Young Latino children should be presented examples of other successful Latino administrators. As they see others like them who have succeeded, their ability to imagine themselves as being successful as well increases (Kao, 2000).
**Offer continual challenges.** As each of the participants shared, others saw something in them. Latino individuals who are targeted as high performers or high potentials should be supported in the work setting through internal programming. Job assignments may be one way to keep the high performer challenged while continually developing them (Chappelow, 2004; Ohlott, 2004). Job enlargement adds new responsibility by increasing the scope of the work assigned (Mathis & Jackson, 2008). Challenging job assignments that stretch the leader without overwhelming them have been found to be developmental (Ohlott, 2004). These assignments may include serving on committees and taskforces. These assignments should not be limited to internal opportunities. Many organizations are asked to provide individuals to serve on outside taskforces, committees, work groups, and boards. Job rotation allows the high performer to be rotated through various departments, increasing the breadth of their knowledge while keeping them engaged (London, 2002).

**Observation.** The value of observation was invaluable to the participants’ development into leaders. There are two facets to observation. One is developing individuals to be keen observers of human behavior. Teaching individuals to study others’ behaviors may pay dividends in more rounded leaders. As individuals develop their leadership philosophy, they can find traits displayed by other leaders they want to emulate in their lives. The other side of observation is realizing that, as a leader, followers will be watching how one leads since individuals tend to lead as they were led (Bass, 1990). Being mindful that one is serving as a role model may encourage more positive behaviors of leaders that also are developmental for the followers (McCauley &
Van Velsor, 2004). Individuals should seek opportunities to observe as many different leaders as possible and can be incorporated into an intentional organizational approach.

**Create self-awareness.** Self-awareness has been identified as a characteristic of authentic leaders, and authentic leaders have been found to be transformational (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2004). Leaders may not strive to become authentic leaders, but perhaps an outgrowth of self-awareness is the tendency to display authentic leadership qualities. Having individuals reflect on their identity and values should lead to self-awareness, which in turns leads to understanding one’s strengths and weaknesses (London & Maurer, 2004). Self-knowledge and self-control have been posited as the most important developmental factors for leaders (Ciulla, 2004). Leaders can also seek multiple sources of feedback to aid in their self-assessment (London, 2002).

**Future Research**

The application of critical race theory to leadership scholarship should continue. As newer more focused research agendas emerge from the shadow of critical race theory, they can add to the dissection of leadership. More research that incorporates the discipline of psychology in addressing race and ethnicity issues would help fill the existing research gap (Sue, 2009). Sue (2009) posits that without this understanding, we may not be able to fully appreciate the operant cognitive processes. Future research that applies psychological research to racial and ethnic leadership should prove informative. Likewise, researchers commented in the *American Psychologist*’s special issue on leadership in 2007, claiming the issue lacked any discussion on the interplay of diversity and leadership (Chin & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007; Eagly & Chin, 2010).
This study was limited to male leaders in healthcare. Research that targets Latina women in healthcare would add another contextual layer to leadership scholarship. Just as Latino critical theory argues that Latinos experience the world differently than Whites or others groups, new research can focus on the narrative exploration of different racial and ethnic leaders in healthcare. Viewing leadership through racially and ethnically colored lens should produce additional insight. Providing space for those narratives will add to the growing database exploring the human dimensions of leadership. Future studies can compare and contrast the findings from different racial and ethnic groups.

Studies that move outside of healthcare will add to a more comprehensive portrait of Latino leadership, particularly those industries with historically low rates of Latino leadership in the executive ranks. Research can explore if members of the Latino community with certain personality types are drawn to healthcare as opposed to other industries. Research aimed at industries with higher percentages of Latino leaders can be explored to compare their journeys with leaders from industries where Latinos are underrepresented.

**Limitations of Findings**

This study was limited in several regards. As a narrative, the goal was to provide a privileged platform for marginalized voices. By nature, narrative research is not designed to draw generalizable conclusions that apply to a greater population. Despite the fact that conceptual transference of ideas is a legitimate result, it would be wrong to generalize the findings as absolute to all Latino leaders. Further, as this study was limited to male leaders in healthcare who functioned in either a vice president or CEO
role, the findings for female leaders, nonhealthcare workers, and lower-level leaders may be different than those reported in this study.

The participants were all located in large Midwestern cities. Perhaps leaders in smaller cities, or those located in areas with a greater percentage of racial and ethnic minorities, experience different career trajectories or hold to different worldviews than the participants in this study. Certainly in some areas, racial and ethnic individuals may be the numerical majority, changing the social dynamics.

**Personal Reflection**

This journey has been one of discovery, setbacks, and triumphs. I can remember sending in my application to graduate school, waiting and hoping in a weird sort of way that it would be rejected, thus freeing me of having to make the decision to return to school after a 25-year hiatus. I look back now at the recently completed research process and realize I have been changed in profound and unanticipated ways.

Getting to the participants was quite a chore. I turned to various healthcare organizations, especially Latino organizations, but none would or could offer help. Through personal contacts, I was able to find the three participants. That they agreed to participate was amazing. As executives, their time is quite valuable and carefully guarded. As someone who works with and around executives in healthcare, I understand how hard it is to get a block of time several hours long for nonwork issues. Admittedly, the participants entered the research with cautiousness. They assumed this would be a high-level review of their lives, nothing more. One even shared that had I not been a Latino, they probably would have passed. When our time together drew to a close at the
last interview, they shared how impactful this had been for them. For the most part, they did not realize the amount of work involved. It made them think about feelings and events long hidden from consideration.

The participants were men of exceptional quality. In hearing their stories, I was struck with how important it was to share their stories, and then I was overwhelmed with feelings of not being able to do them justice. I felt a staggering need to ensure the stories were an accurate reflection of what they shared without biasing them one way or another. As I began to write, I had others compare the stories I was creating against the interview transcripts to validate they fairly represented the participants.

Their stories were amazing. All the stories had elements that were very familiar to me. In some of their descriptions, I could almost smell and taste the food or hear the music playing in the background as people enjoyed the party. At times I felt like crying because of the hardships they encountered. At other times, I became angry because of what they had to endure. I saw so much of my life in the stories, it was uncanny. I had a mother who did not work while we were young, I was not taught to speak Spanish, and I loved my parents but adored my mother, religion was very important, we were taught how to behave and be respectful, and I had earned my master’s as education was a value drilled into us children.

As I listened to the participants’ stories, I felt very inferior to them, given what they had achieved in their careers. I reflected on why I had not achieved the same level of success, and it made me feel like an underachiever. However, upon deeper reflection I came to the realization that we each have a different journey to travel, and although as Latinos we share many things, the individual choices we make serve to minutely change
our life trajectory. The cumulative effect of these minute changes over time can result in disparate outcomes. I, like the participants, would not want a redo on life.

Even with this being said, I am rethinking how I approach challenges. I find myself incorporating the thoughts and behaviors I learned from them that I feel will make me a better leader. In a sense, I have been inspired to not be satisfied with status quo even if it means stretching out of my comfort zone. It is unlikely they realize the impact they have had on me. My hope is that others who read this study will come away changed in some small way as well.

The participants started as research participants but ended up as colleagues. I have come to appreciate them as more than leaders, as friends. As Luis shared with me in his parting comments, he essentially considered me the same as family. I feel the same about each of the participants. We are all part of the greater Latino community bonded through familismo.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Comparative Analysis of the Five Traditions in Qualitative Research
## Comparative Analysis of the Five Traditions in Qualitative Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Grounded Theory</th>
<th>Ethnography</th>
<th>Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring the life of an individual</td>
<td>Understanding the essence of experience about a phenomenon</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline Origin</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Grounded Theory</th>
<th>Ethnography</th>
<th>Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>Exploring the life of an individual</td>
<td>Understanding the essence of experience about a phenomenon</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Grounded Theory</th>
<th>Ethnography</th>
<th>Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primarily interviews and other documents</td>
<td>Exploring the life of an individual</td>
<td>Understanding the essence of experience about a phenomenon</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long interviews with up to 10 people</td>
<td>Understanding the essence of experience about a phenomenon</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with 20-30 individuals to saturate categories and detail a theory</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily observations and interview with additional artifacts during extended time in the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple sources - documents, archival records, interviews, observation s, physical artifacts</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Grounded Theory</th>
<th>Ethnography</th>
<th>Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stories</td>
<td>Exploring the life of an individual</td>
<td>Understanding the essence of experience about a phenomenon</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epiphanies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Form</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Grounded Theory</th>
<th>Ethnography</th>
<th>Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detailed picture of an individual’s life</td>
<td>Exploring the life of an individual</td>
<td>Understanding the essence of experience about a phenomenon</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the essence of the experience</td>
<td>Understanding the essence of experience about a phenomenon</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of theoretical model</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Creswell, 2007
APPENDIX B

Methodology of Narrative Inquiry
Methodology of Narrative Inquiry

Introduction
Research procedures
Data collection
Single individual, accessible and distinct
Gain permission from individuals
Obtain access to information in the archives
Purposeful sampling strategies
Open-ended interviews, journaling, observation, documents, casual chatting
Notes, interview protocol
Data analysis
Create and organize fields for data
Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes
Describe objective set of experiences—chronology of life
Identify stories
Locate epiphanies
Identify contextual materials for life
Theorize toward developing patterns and meaning
Present narration focusing on processes, theories, and unique general features of the life
Embedded rhetorical structures
Extent of author interpretation
Extent of participant voice
Report of objective experiences
Individuals theorize about their lives
Narrative segments identified
Patterns of meaning identified
Summary
APPENDIX C

Invitation to Participate—Participants
Script for inviting participants to participate in the study

I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. I am following up to the earlier conversation I had with you. I have received permission from IRB to proceed with the research phase of my study. I have selected you to participate because I believe you have unique experiences that will contribute in a meaningful way to my research into the stories of Latino leaders in healthcare. As a participant you should be prepared to commit to approximately 14 hours over a two month period. The time will be allocated between two four-hour interviews, two additional hours of job shadowing, scheduled at your convenience, and weekly journaling that should take about one half hour per week, for an eight week period. Shadowing would be subject to your direction and should involve observing you in the normal course of your daily activities but should not include any issues you deem to sensitive or confidential. I would like to audio tape the interviews to capture your exact words. Interviews will take place at a location of your choosing. Journaling will involve having you write down things that you feel are important about you and your life and/or thoughts about the research process. Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. It should be noted that given the salience you possess within the healthcare field, it is possible, though not probable, that someone may make the connection between the research and you. I would also like to make sure you understand that your decision to participate is completely voluntary. Should you decide to participate, you will retain the option of removing yourself from this study at any point in the process without any repercussions.

At this point do you have any questions about participation that I can answer? Are you willing to be a participant in my study?
APPENDIX D

Invitation to Participate—Coworkers
Dear coworker of ______:

I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln conducting research for my dissertation project. I am seeking coworkers that have worked with the participant (_________) to be part of my study. The participant has agreed to take part in a research project with me about leadership. I would like to interview coworkers for approximately 20 minutes, asking a short series of questions about the participant. I would like to audio tape the interview to capture your exact words. Interviews will take place over the phone at a time that is convenient to you.

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you or the participant will be kept strictly confidential. I would also like to make sure you understand that your decision to participate is completely voluntary and in no way connected to your employment. You should not feel pressured to participate as the participant is not asking you to participate, he is merely sharing this information with you on my behalf. Should you decide to participate, you will retain the option of removing yourself from this study at any point in the process without any repercussions.

Neither ______ nor I will be contacting you. If you are willing to participate, or if you have questions, please contact me by August 24, 2012. At that point I will answer any questions about participation that you may have. Thank you for your consideration.

Here is my contact information:

Kevin Flores
Ph. 402 325-4610
Email: kflores@stez.org
APPENDIX E

Weekly Reminder
Week 1

Dear Participant:

This is your weekly reminder asking you to please complete and forward the thoughts you have entered in your journal this week to me. Remember, the idea of this journal is to capture the thoughts you deem important enough to share with me about your life and/or about your participation in this research project this past week. Should you have any questions, you can always call me at 402 219-7386 or contact me via e-mail at kflores@stez.org

Thank you for your continued support of this research project.
APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol for Coworkers
“LEADERSHIP IS BEHAVING AND ACTING LIKE A LEADER”:
A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE LIFE STORIES OF
THREE LATINO LEADERS IN HEALTHCARE

1. How long have you known the participant?
2. What is your title and reporting relationship?
3. How would you describe the participant?
4. How would you describe the participant’s leadership style?
5. What does the participant expect from people who work for him?
6. How does the participant interact with others?
7. How do others in the organization view the participant?
8. Tell me about a time when you observed the participant being a leader.
9. Why do you think the participant has been successful?
10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the participant?
APPENDIX G

IRB Approved Consent Letter—Participants
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Identification of Project:
A Narrative Story-Telling Approach to Leadership development: the Voices of Latino leaders in the Healthcare Field

Purpose of the Research:
This research project explores the stories of Latino healthcare administrators. We are interesting in how their stories may provide a qualitative perspective of leadership development for individuals from marginalized groups. You must be at least 19 years of age to participate. You were selected to participate because you are a member of the Latino community who serves as an administrator in a healthcare facility, who has a unique story that is believed to contribute to the understanding of leadership.

Procedures:
It is difficult to provide a firm estimate of the time required to participate in this study, however, it is estimated that it may take about twelve hours of your time over two months. Two one-on-one interviews will be conducted with you discussing your experiences as you developed into a leader. These should take approximately four hours each. Time will also be spent shadowing you. Shadowing would be subject to your direction and should involve observing you in the normal course of your daily activities but should not include any issues you deem to sensitive or confidential. I would like to shadow you for two one hour periods. Lastly, you will be asked to keep a weekly log of your thoughts that you will share with me as part of the data collection process. This journaling should take no more than 30 minutes each week. I would ask that you journal for a period of eight weeks. The interviews will be audio taped with your permission. Interviews will be held a location determined by you.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. In the event of problems resulting from participation in the study, psychological treatment is available on a sliding fee scale at the UNL Psychological Consultation Center, telephone (402) 472-2351.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to participation in this study, but I will share the results of my findings with you. The findings may also have practical applications as society continually looks for ways to increase the number of minority leaders.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored on the investigator's personal computer and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for five years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but no identifying data will be used. It should be noted that given the salience you possess within the healthcare field, it is possible, though not probable, that someone may make the connection between...
the research and you.

**Compensation:**
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:**
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to sign this consent. Or you may call the investigator at any time if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research. I can be reached at: office phone (402) 219-7386, or after hours (402) 488-4084. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 if you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant.

**Freedom to Withdraw:**
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or your institution.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

I grant permission be audio taped during the interviews.

I do NOT grant permission to be audio taped.

**Signature of Participant:**

____________________________________  __________________________________________
Signature of Research Participant Date

**Name and Phone number of investigator(s)**

Kevin L. Flores, MHA, Principal Investigator  Office: (402) 219-7386
Gina S. Matkin, PhD, Secondary Investigator  Office (402) 472-2807
APPENDIX H

IRB Approved Consent Letter—Coworkers
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Identification of Project:
A Narrative Story-Telling Approach to Leadership development: the Voices of Latino leaders in the Healthcare Field

Purpose of the Research:
This research project explores the stories of Latino healthcare administrators. We are interested in how their stories may provide a qualitative perspective of leadership development for individuals from marginalized groups. You must be at least 19 years of age to participate. The participant was selected to participate because he is a member of the Latino community who serves as an administrator in a healthcare facility, who has a unique story that is believed to contribute to the understanding of leadership.

Procedures:
Interviewing a select number of coworkers of the participant will be part of the data collection process. You have indicated a willingness to participate by contacting me. One phone interview will be scheduled at your convenience where I will ask you a short series of questions about the leadership of the participant. It is anticipated that the interview will last one-half hour. The conversation will be tape recorded.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. In the event of problems resulting from participation in the study, psychological treatment is available on a sliding fee scale at the UNL Psychological Consultation Center, telephone (402) 472-2351.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to participation in this study. The findings may also have practical applications as society continually looks for ways to increase the number of minority leaders.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study which could identify you or the participant will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored on the investigator's personal computer and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for five years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but no identifying data will be used.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to sign this consent. Or you may call the investigator at any time if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research. I can be reached at: office phone (402) 219-7386, or after hours (402) 488-4084. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 if you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or your institution.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

__________  I grant permission be audio taped during the interviews.
__________  I do NOT grant permission to be audio taped.

Signature of Participant:

__________________________________
___________________________
Signature of Research Participant  Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Kevin L. Flores, MHA, Principal Investigator   Office: (402) 219-7386
Gina S. Matkin, PhD, Secondary Investigator   Office (402) 472-2807