

## **“I Wonder If They Had Ever Seen a Black Man Before?” Grappling with Issues of Race and Racism in Our Own Backyard**

Christa A. Boske  
*Kent State University*

*This article investigates the experiences of aspiring school leaders, predominantly Students of Color, within a predominantly White, male, upper class, Texas university educational leadership program. Based in the tradition of narrative inquiry, written reflections, semi-structured interviews, course documents, and field notes provided data for this qualitative study. Findings suggest aspiring administrators were not afforded opportunities to address issues of race and racism throughout their program of study. The author encourages faculty to join the conversation on issues of race, take seriously the call to work in support of Students of Color, and confront programmatic failures in preparing aspiring practitioners for effective school leadership.*

The experiences of People of Color in administrative preparation is one of the most contentious and misunderstood areas of inquiry in research (e.g., Allen & Solórzano, 2001; Parker & Shapiro, 1992; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Overt racial acts and covert racism impede the progress of Students of Color within America's higher educational institutions. Providing supportive environments that encourage Students of Color to reach their fullest intellectual potential is central to overcoming institutionalized behaviors of exclusion (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991). Unfortunately, such issues are not new concerns. Students of Color often express futility in discussing their lived experiences. They describe faculty as “not really hearing them”

(Delpit, 1995, p. 22) and, henceforth, feel erased from the discourse<sup>1</sup> (Rapp, 2001; Rusch & Marshall, 1996). Unfortunately, faculty continue to turn a blind eye to racism, as if discriminatory practices could not possibly exist among the liberal intellectual elite.

National leadership standard rhetoric suggests progress has been made to address issues of race and racism; however, faculty still maintain *traditional* approaches to preparing school leaders (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Herrity & Glassman, 1999). Discussions of discourse about race and other forms of difference are not central in developing school leaders in the United States (Brown, 2004; Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Marshall, 1993; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; McKenzie et al., 2008). Faculty perceive race-

conscious practices as burdensome due to the fact they have to change in teaching approach (Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Bowman & Smith, 2002). Those who demonstrate an unwillingness to consider the impact of racism face chronic challenges in preparing school leaders to promote equity and social justice work<sup>2</sup> in public schools (Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). Promoting issues of race and racism are daunting when considering the homogenous racial identity of faculty and aspiring practitioners (Capper et al., 2006; Hoff, Yoder, & Hoff, 2006). Many have limited opportunities to cross school boundaries and build bridges with surrounding communities (Furman, 2002). However, leadership preparation programs must seek to create programmatic curricula changes that encompass multiple perspectives to broaden experiences beyond what is most familiar (Hafner, 2010). Bogotch (2005) reminds faculty to consciously and continuously refocus on deepening their understanding and focusing on steps needed to become more socially just.

This study explores how 12 aspiring school leaders understood and responded to overt and covert forms of racism at one educational leadership program in Texas<sup>3</sup>. The article begins with a literature review. Next, I describe the methodology based in the tradition of narrative inquiry. Lastly, I conclude with recommendations for faculty to consider when addressing unjust conditions and oppressive practices experienced by Students of Color.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review begins with a brief overview regarding to what extent school leadership programs address issues of race and racism. Next, I discuss the significance of racial identification followed by the significance of considering the relevance of cultural and social capital for Students of Color. Finally, I conclude with an examination of the intersections of cultural capital and Critical Race Theory (CRT).

### **Addressing Issues of Race and Racism in School Leadership Preparation**

Despite efforts made by the National Association for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Educational Leadership Constituents Council (ELCC) to develop standards that promote inclusive school leadership practices, most educational leadership programs do not address the discourse of race (Scheurich, 2002), racial identity, cultural responsiveness or critical pedagogy (Brown, 2004; Laible, 2000). Connecting national standards to practice or to assessing the extent to which school leaders address issues of social justice and equity is limited (Brown, 2006; Capper et al., 2006; Marshall & Oliva, 2010). Critical dialogue around issues of power, dominance, and social justice tend not to permeate curricular activities. This is due in part because faculty rarely make references to issues of equity and race (Rusch, 2004). They tend to perpetuate an ideology that is primarily *hegemonic*<sup>4</sup> (Marshall & Rusch, 1995; Starratt, 2004).

Teachers and administrators extend their own hegemony over American schools as a whole, while frequently holding structural inequality blameless. Often, blame for student failure is squarely placed on the shoulder of Students of Color. Communities of Color are often identified as uncaring, unable, and unwilling to put forth the effort necessary to get what is best for their children. And in the case of non-English speakers, academic struggles are identified as a community's inability or unwillingness to learn English.

Adhering to such beliefs is termed deficit thinking. Deficit thinking accounts for students' academic and social struggles at school by pointing out those "desirable" attributes a student or student's family lack (Valencia, 1997). Deficit thinking leads to policies designed to instill those desirable hegemonic traits and behaviors in students or in students' parents. But people who practice deficit thinking often fail to pay attention to those aspects of the student's life experience and family that make him or her unique and resilient. In the language of deficit thinking, Students of Color fail because *they lack so much*, not because structures fail to consider the significance of race and racism.

### **Racial Identification**

The process of conceptualizing inherent strengths and values influences how Students of Color understand the significance of racial identification. Developing racial identity provides significance and social meaning to People of Color because they belong to a particular racial group (Tatum, 1997).

Black principals specifically lead on the basis of same-race/cultural affiliation and desire to positively affect the lives of Black students. Why they chose school leadership versus other careers is closely linked to their racial identity (Tillman, 2004). Latino/a principals also conceptualize racial identity in similar ways. They perceive their same-race identity as a call to function as role models in an effort to build bridges between schools and Latino/a families (Fisher, 1998). Black and Latino/a school leaders demonstrate deep empathic responses for marginalized school communities, promoting connectedness and caring (Magdaleno, 2006; Reitzug & Patterson, 1998). Their inherent diversity and humanistic values create a culturally accessible and compassionate culture that values people and community above material wealth and individual advancement. Both Black and Latino/a principals respond to their calling to serve as culturally responsive leaders, curriculum innovators, and social activists to address issues of race and racism in public school (Foster & Tillman, 2009).

### **Cultural and Social Capital**

Cultural capital includes investigating the ways in which knowledge of high culture is attained (DiMaggio & Useem, 1982), understanding educational attainment (Robinson & Garnier, 1985), and recognizing curricular practices of the elite (Cookson & Persell, 1985). Parents provide their children with cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the

current educational system. Such knowledge, skills, and privileges give people a higher status in society.

Bourdieu's original work presents cultural capital as an institutionalized form of educational qualifications. Knowledge maintained by upper and middle classes is considered valuable (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). For example, if a child is born into a family whose knowledge is already deemed valuable by society, the child accesses this specific knowledge, which potentially moves the child upward in social mobility through formal schooling. Being born into a more elite class is in and of itself access to elite knowledge. These are the students whose schools are not only most likely to continue to provide access to elite knowledge, but also greatly ease their potential to rise to even higher heights.

Social capital lends itself to multiple definitions, interpretations, and practical uses. Bourdieu's work tends to show how social capital can produce or reproduce inequality, suggesting people gain access to powerful positions through the direct and indirect employment of social connections. Therefore, social capital is often linked with connections within and between social networks. There may be a set of unspoken assumptions and actions that typify successful people in the mainstream. These might include things as complicated as knowing how to apply to colleges and universities—from standardized tests to the standard application—to things as simple as knowing how to prepare a prekindergarten child for basic

preparation for learning to read English. Families that possess large amounts of social capital have access to other people who possess information, assistance, and other resources. In concrete terms this can range from friends who work in hospitals, social services or education, all of whom have information and can offer informal assistance.

Social relationships entitle individuals to credentials that establish economic as well as social spaces. The volume of social spaces is dependent on the size of the network connections. The end result is a product often wrongly described as a rite of passage, which tends to perpetuate and secure material or symbolic profits (Bourdieu, 1988). The network of such relationships reproduces social relationships, which are sometimes perceived as institutionally guaranteed. By the same token, these same networks may limit groups: the amount of social capital possessed may be directly related to the quality of that information, assistance, and resources. For example, Mexican-American children and their families may exist in communities surrounded by people who possess information and have the ability to offer assistance and resources, but those people may not possess the cultural capital necessary to make *that* social capital worth much within the context of school.

Bourdieu's theoretical insight tends to be interpreted as a way to explain academic and social disparities between People of Color and Whites. This theoretical assumption is deficit laden, suggesting People of Color do not possess the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. Lamont and

Lareau (1988) contend Bourdieu's work does not address cultural and capital exclusion. They identify three areas of concern: (1) assessing the relevance of legitimate culture in the United States; (2) documenting the repertoire of high status cultural signals, and (3) analyzing how cultural capital is turned into profits (p. 164). They contend that examining social selection processes and investment practices provides a more dynamic model of social reality.

### **The Intersections of Cultural Capital and CRT**

Investigating the social realities of disenfranchised groups would be dismissed without examining the intersections of race and racism when conceptualizing cultural capital because full acceptance into this society is still restricted on the basis of racial identity and other forms of social difference. CRT has gained increasing scholarly interest as a tool to help understand how race and racism shape educational experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006). CRT also provides methodological tools that honor the experiences of Students of Color and document how they respond to and resist the racism pervading their educational experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Racism, as well as other intersections of cultural difference, shapes the experiences of People of Color differently than their White counterparts (Solórzano, 1997, 1998). The CRT movement considers issues of race in broad perspectives including economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious (Delgado & Stefancic,

2001). These broad perspectives provide a framework to examine the struggles and social injustices that create a culture of silence for People of Color.

Solórzano's (1997, 1998) five tenets of CRT inform theory and research in the field of school leadership: (1) intercentricity of race and racism<sup>5</sup>, (2) challenging dominant ideology, (3) committing to social justice, (4) centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) utilizing interdisciplinary approaches. The first tenet, the intercentricity of race, suggests the existence of extricable layers of racism that are central to the racialized subordination experienced by People of Color in the United States (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). The second tenet, to challenge to dominant ideology, debates whether or not the influence of privilege and the notion of neutral and objective research ignores and silences People of Color (Delgado Bernal, 1998). The third tenet, the commitment to social justice, offers a liberating research agenda that responds to the myriad of oppressed populations as a means to empower People of Color and other marginalized populations (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The fourth tenet, the centrality of experiential knowledge, honors and validates the life experiences of People of Color as a critical component to understanding, examining, and learning from individuals who have experienced racial subordination (Bell, 1992). The fifth tenet, the transdisciplinary perspective, extends the disciplinary boundaries to critically analyze race and racism. This perspective includes contemporary

contexts such as media, racial/ethnic studies, psychology, sociology, law, and women's studies. These themes collectively represent the theoretical and analytical framework for constructing meaning that challenges the way in which race and racism influence social, economic, political, and cultural contexts.

Yosso (2006) challenges the original conceptual framework of cultural capital through a CRT lens. She shifts the discussion of cultural capital from a deficit laden view of Communities of Color to include cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, contacts, and community strengths possessed by disenfranchised groups. This perspective suggests People of Color utilize community strengths to address issues of social justice. Although Yosso's (2006) approach enriches educational experiences of Students of Color, it is often met with resistance by faculty members of the dominant culture (Tate, 1997). This in part is due to the difficulty in discussing issues of race and racism; thus, perpetuating a culture of silence for Students of Color.

## **Methodology**

### **Context for the Study**

The administrative program identified an internship as their capstone experience<sup>6</sup>. Twelve graduate students were purposely selected by the program coordinator for Section A. Students in this section were introduced to scholars such as Gerardo Lopez, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Christine Sleeter, Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda,

Catherine Marshall, Carolyn Shields, Richard Delgado, Celia Rousseau, and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. Examining research from these scholars, as well as other critical theorists, was not encouraged by program supervisors because it was not perceived as significant to student learning or presented to students in other internship cohorts. As an internship supervisor, I made the conscious decision to expose candidates to CRT, as well as other critical theorists, in an effort to encourage intellectual activity linked to broader social and cultural concerns. Such practices were noted as the greatest possibility for impacting reform in school leadership (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Larson & Murtadha, 2002).

### **Narrative Inquiry**

The research method employed was narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Narrative inquiry promoted a personal research method based on the view that educator knowledge is founded upon social and personal contexts (Bruner, 1987). Narrative inquiry is a human experience method approach that allows a researcher to develop interpersonal relationships within the context of the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). The use of narrative provides analytic themes and field note excerpts throughout the study (Creswell, 1998).

This in-depth analysis led to examining trends and patterns within the collected data sets from students (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquiry seeks to understand and interpret how the participants in this

study socially and personally construct the world around them (Glesne, 2006). The blending of students' reflective journals, open ended interviews, and field notes were reorganized to provide coherency to the narrative (Teran, 2002).

As a member of European descent, I struggled with the way in which to conduct and analyze the findings from this study, specifically for Students of Color (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Kershaw, 1992; Tillman, 2002). It was essential that my Whiteness be re-negotiated as a productive force in understanding difference (see Giroux, 1997a; 1997b). I shared with students where I was in my journey regarding social dominance<sup>7</sup>. We discussed the implications of self-transformation as well as the ability and will to address unjust social conditions for People of Color. My goal was to move toward a personal consciousness as a concerned White educator committed to social healing and systemic change<sup>7</sup>.

Limitations to this study include examining one group of students from a southern educational leadership program. I suggest researchers consider replicating this examination on other campuses, comparing findings to this study.

### Sample

Twelve students were enrolled in Section A (Appendix). The majority of students were employed in inner-city schools or expressed an interest in leading inner-city schools<sup>8</sup>. The students' racial identities included seven Black, two Latina, one multi-racial (Latino/Black/Asian), and two White students.

### Data Collection

Students submitted 16 anonymous written reflections (total of 192 written reflections) throughout the semester regarding issues of race in educational settings. In order to minimize the possibility of coercion and writing to please the instructor, I asked students to create a rubric for the reflective journals<sup>9</sup>. Candidates self-assessed written reflections, anonymously assessed peer reflections, and received feedback from the instructor.

Students also participated in three individual 45-minute interviews (conducted on their school campuses), three school visits, seven focus groups (facilitated by the instructor in class), and seven anonymous reflective exercises (conducted in class). Guided by CRT's tenets, I framed the questions for three 45 minute semi-structured campus interviews:

- a. (First interview) To what extent, if any, has race and racism played a role in your experiences within the educational leadership program?
- b. (Second Interview) To what extent, if any, does this institution meet or exceed the responsibility to enroll, retain, and graduate Students of Color?
- c. (Second interview) To what extent, if any, do faculty and students value experiential knowledge? To what extent, if any, have the faculty

communicated this to students?

- d. (Third Interview) To what extent, if any, do the educational leadership program's practices reflect an authentic commitment to social justice? To what extent, if any, is such a commitment implemented and integrated into the program's culture and decision-making processes?

### Modes of Analysis

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Field notes were compiled from interviews, campus visits, and focus groups. The data was summarized and categorized, which provided a systematic, replicable analysis for the study (Weber, 1990). This analysis enabled the researcher to filter large volumes of data in a systematic fashion, which is a useful technique for discovery and in-depth analysis of an individual, group, or institution (Glense, 2006). Trends and patterns emerged from the data (Glesne, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). To establish internal validity, all of the data was shared with the participants to check for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Findings

Students emphasized the social construction of race and its influence on their experiences within a predominantly White educational leadership program. The first theme—race *still* matters—centers on the racism experienced by Students of Color. The second theme—an uphill battle—

focuses on the influence of the program's dominant ideology as it widely permeated the curriculum. The third theme—embracing the call for social justice work—emphasizes the urgency Students of Color expressed to address social justice and equity work in American public schools. The fourth theme—whose lived experiences count?—stresses the call for preparation programs to recognize the realities of *all* marginalized populations, especially Students of Color.

### Race *Still* Matters

Students of Color stress the need for faculty and White students to understand the premise of race as prevalent, permanent, and deep-seated within American society. Their overt and covert experiences with racism were described. Felix, a Black male, emphasized how White students, specifically White women, responded to his presence on campus.

They just can't see past my Black skin. I can't stand when White people say they're color blind. Really? I walk down to class and White women make sure to walk on the farthest side from me or move their purses like I'm gonna snatch them up. I am reminded every day I step foot on this campus that I am a Black man and White women fear me.

The prevalence of race and racism was also noted. Students' skin color influenced faculty's academic expectations, assessment, and bias in



curricular activities. Faculty often made derogatory remarks concerning students' ability to "pass state competency tests" as well as their intellectual ability to understand curriculum content in K-12 public schools." Reginald, a Black male, shared his experience with a White male professor.

I was told I wasn't smart enough to make it as a principal. I overheard Dr. Gavin say the only thing that might get me a job was if they needed to hire a Black man so they could say they had 'one of those' people.

Students shared concerns regarding their White counterparts' tendency to adhere to a deficit laden perspective about Children of Color. They urged faculty to discuss how issues of race and racism influence how Children of Color are perceived as "less than" and substandard to their White counterparts. Charlotte and Lucy, two White female students, blamed Black and Latino/a students for "bringing down" standardized test scores.

Students of Color were identified as "lazy and incompetent" and Latino/a children as "illegal Mexican immigrants" in need of learning America's perceived national language (English). White students often criticized Black and Latino/a families because they did not demonstrate caring for children in the same manner as White families. *Caring* was defined by Charlotte and Lucy as attending school functions (e.g. parent-teacher

conferences, parent committees, and curriculum family events).

Students of Color described ways in which they countered race and racism within the administrative program. They promoted class discussions around the intersections of race, including the examination of social, political, economic, and linguistic implications for historically marginalized populations in schools. White students were encouraged to reconsider the correlation between race, third grade reading scores for Children of Color, and building prisons.

Frustration was expressed regarding the trend for American schools to be more racially segregated than during *Brown v. Board*. Margarita, a Latina female, expressed her concern for the potential to eliminate racism.

You can pass all the laws you want, but you cannot make people love our children. No matter what, White people only see me as a Mexican, an illegal...as a problem.

Students of Color asserted limited discussions about race and racism throughout their coursework. They experienced faculty perpetuating racial stereotypes by avoiding race and publicly displaying racial stereotypes. Richard, a Black male, shared his experience with a faculty member who publicly shared her views of Black teenage girls by informing the class that "Black teens have babies out of wedlock, stay on welfare, and drop out of school." Monica and Charlotte, two White female students in the study,

were not aware of negative stereotypes being shared in class. Both students noted they had not been asked to consider the existence or influence of race and racism in school leadership. Charlotte charged that “racism is simply exaggerated.” Monica asserted, “I don’t know what all the fuss is about regarding this racial stuff.”

### **An Uphill Battle**

Race influenced how faculty perceived their intellectual ideas as well as significance to promoting issues of race and racism throughout curricular activities. Students contend racism widely permeates the culture of the leadership program. Racist behaviors were perceived as maintained and supported because such practices were aligned with the program’s “real” values and beliefs. Students of Color perceived the administrative program as a vehicle to promote the interests White, conservative, English speaking people to remain in power. Students of Color shared experiences in which their beliefs, values, and practices conflicted with the dominant ideologies expressed by faculty members were apparent through coursework, classroom activities, and required texts and articles. They argued that White educators promoted pedagogical practices and curricular materials that supported the status quo. Monica, a Black female, claimed, “Despite the city’s shift from White majority to White minority, they just continue to act like they don’t have to present material any differently.” Students of Color emphasized such practices were intentional, predictable, and based on

specifically on race. Harlene, a Black female, said, “The same educational system that acknowledges White children as achievers is the same system that attempts to crush the spirit of our Black children.”

Students of Color identified conflicting ideology as feelings of *otherness*. They sought to illuminate everyday experiences of racism that reinforce hostile racial climates. Aliesha, a Latina female student, stressed, “White professors and students just don’t understand what it is like to always be considered other and less than.” Their experiences centered on the faculty’s consistent label of Black and Latino/a students as *subpops*<sup>10</sup> who were identified as “problems” rather than “people.”

Students of Color emphasized the need to challenge dominant ideology by building a community of People of Color. Morris, a multiracial male, said, “If we had more people like us, then issues of race and racism would be discussed in class. We would no longer be invisible.” Students of Color expressed “relief” when they were afforded opportunities to interact with “people who looked like them” and “understood what it meant to be other” during the internship course. All of the students recognized the composition of Section A provided a space to discuss the “inevitable”—race and racism. Students of Color perceived the racial composition of Section A as an opportunity to move beyond traditional hegemonic ideologies and examine the intersections of race and racism in America’s economic, cultural, political, and social contexts.

Students of Color recognized NCATE and ISLCC standards as rhetoric. Shequeta, a Black female, noted, the interrogation of policies and procedures shaping curricular activities was limited due to the “uphill battle of challenging a White racist institution.”

### **Embracing the Call for Social Justice Work**

The need for a new generation of school leaders was stressed. Students of Color responded to the call for social justice and equity work in public schools. They understood their role as school leaders differently. White students emphasized the need to “raise standardized test scores” for student *subpops*; Students of Color made connections between their racial identity and commitment to address inequities in schools. Their decision to become school leaders was embedded in their racial identity. Students of Color were compelled to apply for school leadership positions within inner-city schools serving predominantly Black and Latino/a students, English Language Learners, and children living in poverty. The call toward social justice work began as a spiritual journey. Each of them described their intentions as “giving back to their communities.” Their spiritual calling emphasized the need to alleviate racism in an attempt to improve the lived experiences of all children, specifically Children of Color.

Students of Color urged faculty to reconsider the moral purpose of education in an effort to eliminate oppressive school practices and promote humanity in schools. They referenced their efforts to promote

vigorous conversations regarding the impact of race for White educators to consider how public schools perpetuate social, political, economic, and educational inequities. They invited inner-city school leaders to discuss *real* issues facing contemporary school leaders<sup>11</sup>. Students of Color recalled significant differences in the way White candidates communicated with White school leader panelists versus school leaders who identified as People of Color. Students of Color emphasized their frustrations when White school leaders identified Children of Color as *subpops*. Shemeka, a Black female, recalled how White school leader panelists and candidates indicated “White children were *smarter* than Blacks and Hispanics.” Reginald, a Black male, asserted, “The rationale for calling us *subpops* was because we’re perceived as less than Whites and have limited intelligence.” During a panel presentation, White school leaders identified *subpops* as “prohibiting traditionally high ranking suburban schools from meeting state standards” and “being recognized for the good work they do in schools.” Harlene, a Black female, was “outraged” by the racist terminology that perpetuated deficit thinking and “dehumanized” their children and families.

Students created a panel presentation to discuss a school leader’s responsibility to eliminate deficit-laden language and practices that perpetuated the achievement gap between mainstream children and Children of Color. They initiated dialogue regarding social justice and equity work on their school campuses. Students recall White

educators' expressing frustration when being "mandated" to teach *those* children<sup>12</sup>.

Students of Color encouraged the two White students in Section A to form an alliance to address issues of race and racism. Charlotte and Lucy declined the invitation. Monica said, "You just don't understand what it's like for us. No one wants to talk about race. Just work hard. We made it." Students of Color emphasized the need to form alliances across racial boundaries in order to respond to the call to promote for social justice work in schools.

#### **Whose Lived Experiences Count?**

Students of Color suggested deficit laden perspectives influenced *whose* lived realities mattered most in preparing school leaders to serve public schools. Although students observed disparities in the number of Black boys assigned to special education programs, discussions of such concerns did not occur in their special education course. Latina students emphasized how often recent immigrants were assumed to be "uneducable" by professors and White educators. Conversations centered on improving standardized test scores rather than addressing the influence of race and racism in curriculum decision-making. Students of Color emphasized the influence of race and racism in determining how issues of race and racism were dealt with in schools. Margarita, a Latina female, noted, "White teachers say they are afraid to hold *that* child's hand because of poor hygiene" or "visit *that* family because they might get mugged or raped." Such experiences reminded Jasmin, a Black

female, "We don't have a place at the table."

Felix, a Black male, expressed his concerns regarding professors' and educators' limited exposure, knowledge, and awareness of People of Color.

I don't think these White people have ever seen a Black man before. When we brought school leaders who look like us and work in our world, White people just sat there with their arms folded. When we gave them the opportunity to speak to these school leaders, they remained in their chairs. I think White people don't think they have to deal with people like us because they choose to work in all-White areas. They have a rude awakening on their hands.

Black and Latino/a students noted their frustration with White students regarding a critical examination of race and racism on student learning. They asserted the administrative program was not ready to "face the truth" about their racist practices. Morris, a multi-racial male, said, "*They* don't care about being racist, because *they* don't have to. That's what privilege is all about."

Some students expressed concerns regarding conversations about *whose* lived experiences count. They feared being "pushed out" of the preparation program for "making waves." Several students were harassed by White professors for "rocking the boat." Higher educational administrators were perceived as

powerful entities who determined who would and who would not successfully graduate. White students' insights were valued by professors.

### Changing Practices and Policies

Students of Color expressed the need to approach systemic change by looking within—emphasizing the need for faculty to examine the educational leadership program and aspiring school leaders to examine the influence of beliefs and attitudes in leading increasingly diverse public schools. Black and Latino/a students were asked by their campus supervisors “not to make a big deal out of lived experiences” because “these discussions just create tension.” Jasmin, a Black female, argued, “Until this program takes a good look in the mirror and thinks about how they contribute to racist practices, nothing will ever change.”

Margarita, a Latina female, expressed the need to “protect her babies” in predominantly White schools. She said, “I sold my soul” for the opportunity to be accepted by White educators. She shared her inspiration to promote social justice and equity work in schools for Children of Color after being in Section A and “learning with people who looked and thought like her.”

I am a first generation Latina American and college graduate. I sat here class after class realizing my life's struggles were not in vain. I have not felt this empowered and capable of

making change since the first day I set foot in a classroom.

Students of Color emphasized the need for “solidarity” within the educational leadership program. Reginald, a Black male, expressed his “deep commitment to hold out his hands to his brothers and sisters in an effort to promote social justice and equity issues in public schools.” Students of Color defined their school leadership as a moral responsibility for future generations.

Students perceived the administrative internship course as a space to define themselves as school leaders. Students of Color identified the course as a place to examine the implications of race and racism. Jasmin, a Black female, described the internship course as a “prime opportunity to examine current educational practices” and “shift people's thinking by *being* the change they sought in public schools.”

During campus visits, I observed Students of Color addressing the needs of their school communities. Their efforts included: (a) the creation of a school-wide food pantry, (b) community partnerships with local community leaders to facilitate before/after school programs, (c) weekly home visits, (d) off-campus tutoring programs housed in local apartment complexes, (e) revisiting homework policies to incorporate experiential knowledge and family knowledge, and (f) restructuring academic programs to provide students and families with extensive services for first-generation middle school and high school graduates.

Students debated to what extent, if any, faculty were prepared to examine

the ramifications of perpetuating race and racism. Harlene, a Black female, noted, "I don't believe faculty members are ready to look themselves in the mirror and apologize for the wrongs committed against us [People of Color]." Some students believed discussions centered on race were significant to school leadership identity. Other students expressed the need for faculty to look within before such changes could be made. Margarita, noted, "Talk about race will never take place outside of *this* class because professors are as racist as they come."

Students identified ways to discuss issues of race and racism in order to reconsider the promotion of social justice and equity work in schools. Plans of action included the following: (a) investigate pedagogical practices to assess how historically disenfranchised groups are recognized, served, and assessed, (b) analyze disparities within discipline referral procedures as well as disciplinary practices, (c) examine the process for identifying students in need of special education services as well as the status of children in the system, and (d) review and address school policies that reinforce oppressive school practices for historically disenfranchised populations. Students of Color stressed the need for faculty members within the educational leadership program to provide students with spaces to understand how policy, pedagogy, and beliefs influence the promotion of social justice and equity work in American public schools.

## Discussion

The legacy of race-conscious discrimination within the administrative program remained largely hidden under the discourse of color blindness (e.g., Allen & Solórzano, 2001; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006; Solórzano et al., 2000). Students of Color persistently addressed issues of race and racism; however, they often failed because faculty were unwilling to examine the root causes of underachievement for Students of Color. Faculty tended to locate the problem within Communities of Color, which was embedded throughout the curriculum and pedagogical programmatic practices. Not surprisingly, Students of Color confirmed their academic experiences intensified with the frequency of racist comments and racial stereotypes they encountered (Delgado, 1995). Students of Color described their presence as a burden. They stressed the need for faculty to acknowledge the lived experiences of *all* disenfranchised populations, especially People of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Bowman & Smith, 2002). Despite the program's rhetoric to promote national standards (NCATE and ELCC), students acknowledged limited discussions of race and racism as an injustice (Brown, 2006; Capper et al., 2006; Marshall & Oliva, 2010).

Issues of race and disregard for cultural and social capital were evident throughout the findings. Students of Color identified faculty who (a) implemented dominant ideology through curricular practices (Cookson & Persell, 1985), (b) identified specific school practices more meaningful than

others (DiMaggio & Useem, 1982), (c) deemed culturally-sensitive policies, procedures, and dispositions as insignificant to earning an administrative certificate (Robinson & Garnier, 1985), and (d) supported experiential knowledge for White students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Students expressed their frustration in creating dialogue in which People of Color were acknowledged and valued. Students' cultural knowledge, skills, and community strengths were significant to their school leadership identity (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977; Yosso, 2006). However, those who promoted their cultural and community capital were often met with resistance by faculty (Giroux, 1997b).

The extricable layers of racism were central to the racialized subordination of Students of Color (Bell, 1992; Russell, 1992; Solórzano, 1997). They did not consider themselves fully integrated into the administrative program. White faculty attempted to silence them. Such actions contradict the promotion of national leadership standards that root practices in the values of equity and justice. Faculty perpetuated abuses of power. They avoided examining hostile conditions facing Students of Color. As a result, the students' efforts to counter racism diverted their personal energy. Students redirected their focus on professional and academic aspirations to confronting feelings of otherness.

The impact of racial discourse significantly influenced how students understood the implications of race in schools (Rusch, 2004). The need to establish the development of an anti-

racist learning environment was evident throughout the findings. Skin color created tension between White professors (e.g. student advising and deficit thinking) and Students of Color. White students were afforded resources (e.g. study sessions for state competency tests and networking) not provided to Students of Color. Faculty should reconsider the implications of curriculum, research, and educational activities as significant components of their program's mission (Scheurich & Young, 2002). How people think, feel, and interact with race and racism in order to develop the skills necessary to promote culturally responsive leadership will play a significant role in creating safe climate for Students of Color. If a reexamination of current practices is not considered, deficit thinking will continue, perpetuating unjust practices (Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

The challenge to address dominant ideology raised concerns for Students of Color. Faculty ignored the influence of White privilege (Solórzano, 1997; Lopez, 2003). They attempted to silence student voices rather than support and nurture their intellectual potential (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991). Students often felt the need to hide feelings of difference in order to achieve academic *success* (Marshall, 1993). Students continued to encounter road blocks when they attempted to engage faculty in conversations about race and racism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Their commitment to empower Communities of Color was critical to their administrative preparation. Extensive

efforts were made to seek emotional and social support through networking. Students of Color identified social and cultural capital as essential to their survival and success within the program (Delgado, 1995).

Students' commitment to social justice was also critical to empowering historically disenfranchised children and families (Matsuda, 1991; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The challenge centered on encouraging White faculty and students to reconsider how race influences the way school leaders think, act, and interpret the world. The critical examination of hiring practices, curriculum and pedagogy, and disciplining students were paramount to addressing issues of race and racism in schools.

Valuing experiential knowledge was essential to Students of Color. Understanding, examining, and learning about the impact of racial subordination was central to their development as aspiring school leaders (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano, 1997). Differences in lived experiences between Students of Color and their White counterparts influenced how they understood race and racism in schools (Tatum, 1997). Members of disenfranchised groups routinely examined the influence of race and demands placed upon them. Students were encouraged to reconsider their ability and commitment to eliminate oppressive school practices. Students internalized their responses as a *spiritual calling* (Dantley, 2003). Their cultural capital provided self and communal transformation to move from *as is*

situations to *imaginative possibilities* for Communities of Color. Students drew meaning from lived experiences, were motivated by their actions, and encouraged one another to allow their lived experiences to inform the educational leadership discourse.

### Implications

The findings imply a need for faculty to look within and encourage opportunities for aspiring school leaders to critically think about the influence of race and leading schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Asher, 2007; Brown, 2004, 2006; Capper et al., 2006; Marshall & Oliva, 2010). The discourse must become permeable to the notion of critical reflection (Cherryholmes, 1988). Aspiring administrators need to consider the broader implications of their decisions and behaviors on disenfranchised populations (Giroux, 1997a; Tooms & English, 2009). However, several challenges remain. First, discovering ways to encourage educational leadership faculty to reexamine how they prepare to address the complexity of race and racism is no easy task (Allen, 2006). Second, aspiring school leaders need to develop a skill set to deepen their empathic responses with issues of social justice and equity. The hope of overcoming such challenges centers on developing mindful faculty and school leaders prepared to embark on a new social order (Allen, 2006; Hoff et al., 2006; Langer, 1989). If faculty and aspiring practitioners do not reflect on the impact of race and racism, institutional thinking will forever be embedded in the fabric American



educational institutions (Gerstl-Pepin, Killeen & Hasazi, 2006).

Preparation programs need to coordinate efforts to encourage critical dialogue and liberatory education that encourages effective school leadership development. Efforts made to increase the capacity to confront traditional notions of teaching, learning, and leading will improve a school leader's ability to pay closer attention to how issues of race and racism shape and influence the lived experiences of disenfranchised populations (Capper et al., 2006). Placing aspiring leaders in positions to address such concerns transcends traditional hegemonic personal, community, and school boundaries. Challenging such dominant ideologies prepares school leaders to become change agents (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002). Aspiring school leaders are encouraged to critically think about issues of race, racism, and equity within contemporary contexts (e.g. media, racial/ethnic studies, psychology, sociology, law, and women's studies) (Delgado, 1995; Solórzano, 1997; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The examination of race, its influence in developing a school leadership identity, and implications of uses and abuses of power within schools provides a framework to promote social justice and equity work in schools (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Dantley, 2003; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Foster, 1986; Larson & Murtadha, 2002).

The CRT's tenets and Yosso's (2005) emphasis on cultural community capital also offer a useful guide in creating a climate in which issues of race

and racism are placed in the forefront of preparing school leaders. Faculty must reconsider the implications of cultural contexts and emphasize the need to reconsider *whose experiences count* (Brown, 2004, 2006; Capper et al., 2006; Lopez, 2003; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Rusch, 2004). To undo or stop the damage of racism in administrative preparation is a daunting task. Faculty will need to move beyond traditional teaching practices to learn more about the lived experiences of *all* students. At a minimum, faculty acknowledge aspiring leaders' inherent strengths and place value in addressing issues of race and racism, especially for Students of Color.

Creating positive university climates is significant to supporting racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse populations (Herrity & Glassman, 1999; Parker & Hood, 1995; Parker & Shapiro, 1992). Preparation programs begin by critically examining curricular practices, pedagogical biases, and policies that examine issues of race and racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997, 2002). This prospective dares to ask difficult questions centered on the role preparation programs play in perpetuating oppressive practices based on race. Developing spaces for faculty and aspiring school leaders to grapple with such issues is pertinent to their personal and professional development (see Cross, Bazron, & Karl, & Mareasa, 1989; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Another implication from this study centers on the need to conduct further studies within educational leadership programs within and outside of the United States regarding how

issues of race and racism are addressed programmatically. My hope—the voices represented in this study are not in vein. Such issues are central to debates on administration preparation. It is time to urge faculty to join the conversation on issues of race and racism, to take seriously the call to work in support of Students of Color, and confront

programmatic failures in preparing aspiring practitioners for effective school leadership. I encourage faculty to find ways to listen and support Students of Color. It is a moral obligation to look within and commit to the elimination of hostile racial climates in an effort to create programs that value the lived experiences of *all* students.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Scholarly considerations of discourse fall within the umbrella of post-structuralism, which is a philosophical and intellectual stance that originated in France in the 1960's. Post structuralism emphasizes the deconstruction of traditional views about reality and truth (Cherryholmes, 1988). Discourse refers to the different ways in which we individually or collectively integrate language with other communicative elements when creating and interpreting a message (Tooms & English, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this study, social justice is work that leads toward (a) dismantling structures of inequality that perpetuate racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other forms of subordination, and (b) empowering historically underrepresented socially and racially marginalized groups (Marshall & Oliva, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>The names of all people, places, and schools described in this study have been changed to protect the identity of the students. The students played a critical role in assisting how they wanted to be identified in the study. They provided possible pseudonyms, demographic information, and noted this article should not be submitted for possible publication until students completed their graduate studies.

<sup>4</sup> The social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group and the subordination of another group.

<sup>5</sup>Intercentricity refers to the ways that critical race theory (CRT) in education centralizes race and racism, but also addresses the intersections of racism with other forms of subordination due to gender, class, sexuality, language, culture, immigration status, age, and ability. Intercentricity acknowledges the significance of focusing on race as it is experienced in the daily lives of women, men, working-to-upper class communities, immigrant communities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) communities.

<sup>6</sup> The university's demographics for the graduate school leadership program did not reflect the purposive sample in this study. The university is located at the southern city limits. Beyond the campus limits, a predominantly White, Christian, Republican suburban community publicly promotes English-only legislation. The educational leadership program enrolls over 500 graduate students. Eighty-five percent of the students are White, middle/upper class and work in suburban schools 15-30 miles outside a major metropolitan area. Forty-two professors (including over forty adjunct professors) are predominantly White, male, English speaking, middle/upper class with school leadership experience in suburban public schools. Four female professors were White and English-speaking. Three of four female professors were middle/upper class with suburban school leadership experience. One male professor was a Professor of Color raised in a middle/upper class family of educators in a southern state and worked in an inner-city school.

<sup>7</sup> When I walked into the internship class on the first day, Reginald, a Black male student said, "I see. They send the new White girl to our class to deal with us." I asked the students if they wanted to discuss the comment. We formed a circle and dialogued about their experiences within the educational leadership program. The Black and Latino/a students noted this was the first class in which they met other Students of Color. Two White students noted this was the first time they attended class with Black

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or Latino/a students. Shemeka, a Black female student, said, "It looks like the Dr. Peshlam dumped the Black folk and Mexicans on you." Several Black students identified Dr. Peshlam as the "man with the folded up white hood in his back pocket." I asked the students if they were referring to the Klu Klux Klan. All of the Black and Latino/a students nodded or verbally responded "yes." All of the Black and Latino/a students shared their experiences of feeling isolated and discriminated against by the professors in the educational leadership program.

<sup>8</sup> Ten out of twelve students in section one served higher percentages of Black and Latino/a and low-income student populations (over 90% for both populations). The students serving higher percentages of Students of Color and children receiving free/reduced lunch were Black, Latina, and multi-racial. The White students served lower percentages (less than 50%) of Black and Latino/a and predominantly middle-class student populations. At the time of the study, ten students were employed in inner-city schools and two students were employed in suburban school districts. Ten teachers were employed as teachers, one student was an assistant principal, and one student was promoted during the semester as principal of an alternative special education school.

<sup>9</sup> The criteria for the rubrics were aligned with the ELCC national leadership standards. Candidates identified three areas of "expertise" including: (a) Candidate made connections between internship experiences and ELCC leadership standards, (b) Candidate supported claims by referencing scholarly research using APA formatting, and (c) Candidate applied theory to practice noting implications for internship experiences and school leadership practices.

<sup>10</sup> The term *subpops* was created by White students and professors to identify Children of Color—children living in poverty, English Language Learners, and children receiving special education services. This term was used when referring to these specific populations and standardized testing.

<sup>11</sup> All program interns were required to attend monthly student-designed panel discussions for 100 candidates. Traditional seminars included a panel of "experts in the field" to lecture candidates for 120 minutes about "effective" school leadership practices. Students of Color noted the physical structure and setup for the room encouraged aspiring school leaders to acknowledge guests as "experts in the field." Section A created an alternative school leadership panel focusing on social justice and equity work with inner-city school leaders. Section A designed interactive activities for candidates to encourage dialogue and networking. Reginald recalled White candidates "frantically taking notes when White school leaders informed students of effective leadership practices." But when Black and Latino/a school leaders presented to 100 White interns, students in Section A observed White students conducting "side-bar conversations," "turning their backs to the panelists," and "not taking notes when Black and Latino/a school leaders presented."

<sup>12</sup> White educators on their campuses openly complained about working with Black and "Mexican" children." Students noted White teachers tended to lower their standards for Students of Color because they perceived them as "less capable" than White students.

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**Appendix**

Participants

<b>Participants Name and Background</b>	<b>Prior Teaching and/or Administrative Experience</b>	<b>School Demographics</b>	<b>Educational Leadership Aspirations</b>
Felix Black	Middle School Teacher	Inner-City School Setting Low Income Predominantly Black Student Population	Principal
Margarita Latina	Elementary School Administrator	Inner-City School Setting Low Income Predominantly Latino Student Population	Principal Counselor
Jasmin Black	Elementary School Teacher	Inner-City School Setting Low Income Predominantly Latino and Black Student Populations	Principal
Shemeka Black	Middle School Teacher	Suburban Setting Mixed-income Latino/a, White, and Black Student Populations	Principal
Morris Multiracial	High School Teacher	Inner-City School Setting Low Income Predominantly Black and Latino/a Student Populations	Assistant Principal Principal
Shequita Black	Elementary Teacher	Inner-City School Setting Low Income Predominantly Black Student Population	Teacher
Aliesha Latina	Elementary Teacher	Inner-City School Setting Low Income Predominantly Latino/a Student Population	Undecided
Reginald Black	High School Teacher	Inner-City School Setting Low Income Predominantly Black and Latino/a Student Populations	Assistant Principal
Charlotte White	Middle School Teacher	Suburban Setting Mixed-Income Predominantly White and Latino/a Student Populations	Assistant Principal
Harlene Black	Middle School Teacher	Inner-City School Setting Low Income Predominantly Black Student Population	Teacher
Monica Black	High School Teacher	Inner-City School Setting Low Income Predominantly Black/Latino/a Student	Assistant Principal and Politician

**Boske / I WONDER IF THEY HAD EVER SEEN A BLACK MAN BEFORE**

		Population	
Lucy White	Special Education School Administrator	Suburban Setting Low Income Predominantly Black and Latino/a Student Populations	Principal