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## Battling inertia in educational leadership: CRT Praxis for race conscious dialogue

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The purpose of this article is to illustrate how institutional racism is mediated by faculty negotiating power and privilege in the selection of Black (African American) women into an educational leadership preparation program. Critical race theory (CRT) praxis is used to analyze the faculty dynamics in the candidate selection process situated in a race neutral institutional culture. This reflective case study of an educational leadership department draws on qualitative data such as field notes from faculty conversations, experiential knowledge, memos, and quantitative data describing the disproportionate rejection of Black women applying to an educational leadership program in the US. Efforts to confront a race neutral process prompted by the higher rejection rate of Black women in comparison to their white counterparts prompted some faculty to engage in race conscious discourse. Faculty in departments of educational leadership who provoke race conscious dialogue on how they are implicated in institutional racism will likely face risks they will need to (em)brace for the battle against inertia.

**Keywords:** CRT praxis; applicant selection; Black/African American women; leadership preparation

### Introduction

In physics, inertia is generally understood to mean a tendency to do nothing or to remain unchanged. Used figuratively to describe people inertia can mean an unwillingness to take action. To describe a condition it can mean a situation in which little to no progress is made or actions are taken to ensure that little change occurs (MacMillan Dictionary 2013). In the context of higher education, Hargens and Long (2002) used the term *demographic inertia* to describe the demographic factors that contribute to the glacial pace with which women have advanced into high ranking faculty positions. In the context of educational leadership, research in international contexts indicates that issues associated with gender inequity in the US are not so different from those in other countries. Studies of women in educational

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leadership in Hong Kong, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the UK, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Costa Rica, and Nigeria highlight the cultural interpretations of the *glass ceiling* effect (Shakeshaft et al. 2007). Battling inertia in the advancement of women into top educational leadership positions involves challenging that which impedes their admission and progression through the pipeline.

Educational leadership preparation programs are a point of entry into the leadership pipeline that factors into the production of a diverse leadership profile. They can also be a point of leakage contributing to inertia in the advancement of women into administrative positions of leadership. For instance, education policies that are crafted and implemented as neutral in issues of social inequity help to maintain the status quo (inertia) rather than provoke more just conditions. In this article we focus on some of the forces affecting the entry of Black women into an educational leadership program: rate of rejection, consistency (inertia) of this rate, and the forces that impede the change needed to increase their rate of acceptance and representation across the ranks of educational leadership. We discuss faculty (dynamics) affecting the rejection and selection of applicants across a diversity of racial groups and describe a cacophony of racialized and gendered discourses that occurred in a department of educational leadership confronting the potential for a race-conscious approach toward institutional change. Race-conscious discourse has the power to promote transparency and disrupt the power of whiteness (Iverson 2007). The purposes of this reflective case-study account are to: (1) illustrate how faculty attempted to challenge institutional structures and culture that impeded Black women from entering an educational leadership preparation program provoking a more equitable candidate selection process; and (2) describe how efforts to promote a race-conscious policy was impeded by inertia related supported by faculty's unwillingness and/or skill to engage in extended critical dialogues involving race and gender.

Using critical race theory (CRT) perspectives, we analyze and discuss an evolving applicant selection process in order to illustrate how institutional racism was supported by a racialized discourse (i.e., policy, practices, conversations) constrained at the intersection of race and gender (Rusch 2004). We discuss institutional racism as a convergence of individual and institutional interests that is more subtle than individual racism for it originates in the operation of established and respected forces in society and its culture (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967; Gooden and Dantley 2012). This reflective case-study responds to the need for social justice leadership praxis among faculty that provokes deliberate dialogues to intervene in (race-, gender-, etc.) neutral discourse (policy, practices, ideologies, dialogues). It adds to the scholarship that uses CRT in the study of educational leadership (e.g., Alemán and Alemán 2010; López 2003; Stovall 2004; Taylor 2000) as well as diversity policies and practices in US institutions of higher education

(hooks 1989; Iverson 2007). Thus it offers a unique contribution to the field of educational leadership in that it provides an emic perspective on institutional racism from faculty participating in the selection process and writing from the standpoint that as faculty we are implicated in the structures we critique.

### **Theoretical framework**

The pedagogical reflections, theories, data, and efforts we enlisted to implement a more equitable process illustrate the socio-cultural and political terrain we negotiated as two women who are assistant professors (one woman of color, one white) attempting to enact social justice leadership informed by CRT *praxis*. With the etymological roots of *praxis* in mind (as deeds, acts, and practice), we engage the following elements that form the basic assumptions, perspectives, and pedagogies of CRT: A focus on: (1) race and racism; (2) social justice and social justice practice; (3) historical context; (4) the contestation of dominant ideology (i.e., White supremacy); and (5) the recognition of experiential knowledge (Villalpando 2004). CRT is recommended as an approach to be used in educational leadership preparation to center race (Gooden and Dantley 2012). ‘In short, when issues of race and racism are placed at the center of analysis, it opens up new possibilities for understanding leadership and organizational life, while disrupting our taken for granted assumptions of the apparent apoliticality of the field’ (Young and López 2005, 349). Other central constructs through which we frame the analysis are interest convergence, racial battle fatigue, and race neutral discourse in relation to individual and institutional racism.

### ***Interest convergence and the farce of (race) neutrality***

The concept of interest convergence derives from CRT scholarship in law and is useful for discussing the negotiations that occur in legal cases as well as in the self-case study we describe here. The principle of interest convergence holds that the interests of Blacks (in achieving racial equality) will be accommodated only when they converge with the interests of Whites (Bell 1980, 1992a). To illustrate this principle, Bell (1980) pointed to the post-Brown trend in the judicial system to side with traditions of local power rather than with the value of racial equality when interests competed or values conflicted. Bell (1992b) critiqued incremental structural change (that results in gains and losses) rather than transformational structural change and bemoaned the move of CRT informed scholarship away from the materiality of racism (racial realism) toward a focus on discursive racism.

CRT centers race at the intersection of other social identities (Crenshaw 1991) that are discursively constructed and materially subjected, and reveals how claims of ‘color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity’ are

‘camouflaged for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups’ (Villalpando 2003, 623). The interest convergence principle is based on self and systemic interests and a loss-gain binary whereby ‘people in power are sometimes, in theory, supportive of policies and practices that do not oppress and discriminate against others as long as they... in power – do not have to alter their own ways and systems, statuses, and privileges of experiencing life’ (Milner 2008, 334). Those who benefit from existing inequities risk loss with the advent of more equitable policies and practices. Losses can include ‘power, privilege, esteem, social status, linguistic status, and their ability to reproduce these benefits and interests to their children or future generations’, and as a result convergence and change are often ‘... *purposefully* and *skillfully* slow and at the will and design of those in power’ (334). As an analytical tool, the principle of interest convergence can be used to ‘analyze, explain, and conceptualize policies and practices...’ for how they reflect the realism of race and power in discursive and material structures (332).

Racialized discourses are reflected in the discursive moves and semantic strategies that people use to avoid dialogue related to race or to avoid appearing racist (Bonilla and Forman 2000). Bonilla-Silva (2006) describes this phenomenon as racism without racists (i.e., color-blindness, race neutrality). The term color-blindness is a figurative way of claiming an inability or refusal to talk about race or its implications (Brayboy, Castagno, and Maughan 2007). When deployed by White people, color-blindness is a hegemonic practice that operates as a mask to preserve the investment that people who are White have in racism (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997; Leonardo and Porter 2010). Only those who can afford to ignore or refuse to acknowledge how race matters differentially are those whose escape from race-conscious dialogues is paved by systems of privilege.

According to Shields (2004), when educators profess color-blindness (usually to indicate they are tolerant or provide equal treatment) they deny the reason for the statement in the first place and are engaging in the pathology of silence that is a misguided attempt to act justly, empathetically, or create democratic educational communities by ignoring or essentializing difference (related to ethnicity, race, or culture). Shields (2004) argues that as educators we cannot remain silent. Sustaining race-conscious dialogue is difficult as it can betray racialized discourses and the racist ideologies that undergird them. As Cambron-McCabe and Cunningham (2002) have noted, there is a lack of activism modeled by academics in educational leadership and reflecting discontinuity between the ideas and action of educational leaders. They claim that although educational leadership scholars voice a commitment to social justice there are few professors who enact the social justice education they advocate, especially since advocacy and activism do not fit well within ‘the publish or perish’ mind-set governing higher education: ‘Newcomers who shift their focus from the traditional academic ladder

do so at some risk' (296). Still they 'urge faculty and program graduates to assume an activist role to lead change in preparation programs and in schools' despite the risks (290).

Risks to faculty who attempt to intervene in institutional racism can include the experience of racial battle fatigue: a condition characterized by social psychological stress responses to racial prejudice or discrimination (e.g., frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, non-verbally, or physically fighting back; coping strategies) (Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano 2007). Typically racial battle fatigue is understood as a response that people from racial minority groups experience. We extend the concept to indicate the social psychological stress responses of faculty who are aligned ideologically with anti-oppressive (anti-racist)/social justice leadership praxis and attempt to combat racial prejudice or discrimination.

### **Literature review**

This study is situated in the extant literature that links anti-oppressive social justice leadership, diversity, disproportionality in the representation of Black women in educational leadership, and the student selection processes of leadership preparation programs. Two assertions within these strands of literature help to further situate this study. The first, informed by a review of diversity discourses in educational leadership conducted by Wilkinson (2008), is that scholarship in the field of educational administration frequently overlooks the implications of diversity in regard to leadership composition and practice. Dispositions and values that reflect an appreciation and understanding of diversity are markers of social justice leaders in education (Theoharis 2007). The second assertion comes from Young and Laible (2000) who, based on their experience and review of literature, state that racism is not being adequately addressed in most educational leadership preparation programs. They advocate for more attention to racial oppression with the intent to prepare students who will perform as anti-racist administrators.

### ***Diversity in educational leadership***

Literature on social justice leadership preparation in the US has noted the importance of diversity in educational leadership preparation concerned with social justice (Capper et al. 2006; Hernandez and McKenzie 2010; López et al. 2006; McKenzie et al. 2008; McKinney and Capper 2010). Yet, in 2000, US superintendents consisted primarily (95%) of white (86%) males (Glass, Bork, and Brunner 2000). Among principals, those who are White (non-Hispanic) comprised approximately 80% of principals while Black/African American (non-Hispanic) principals comprised 10.6% of the



national pool during 2007–2008 (US Department of Education 2007–2008). Data on both race and gender reveal that with slower progress than anticipated for women moving into leadership, most principals and superintendents continue to be White men (Blackmore 2009; Hoachlander, Alt, and Beltranena 2001).

As noted by Shakeshaft et al. (2007), it is difficult to document the representation of women and women of color in formal school leadership positions from year to year due to the absence of reliable and comparable data within or across states. In their examination of the literature on gender and school administration representation they turned to educational programs to consider the issue of gender equity in the pool from which administrators are selected (those attaining certification and/or master's and doctoral degrees) and found data that indicate that both White and women of color are under-represented in school administration. What is not addressed in their review is what occurs earlier in the educational leadership pipeline to affect the opportunity to enter certification and/or degree granting programs that provide the credentials typically required for those being hired into school administrator positions. Witaker and Vogel (2005) recommend that educational leadership programs take action to increase the numbers of minority candidates in principal preparation programs and positions by devising mechanisms to increase diversity. Programs or courses that aim to promote diversity-responsive and race conscious leadership preparation in for example the US (Gooden and Dantley 2012) and Britain (Johnson and Campbell-Stephens 2010) are responses to the problem of under-representation of groups (i.e., ethnic minority, global majority).

### ***Black women in educational leadership preparation***

The possibility of leadership for Black women is challenged by the obstacles they face when motivated to seek positions from which to challenge educational inequity. Research studies on the leadership practice of Black/African American women inform the field of their experiences with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and equity (Alston 2005; Bloom and Erlandson 2003; Brunner 2008; Dillard 1995; Doughty 1980; Johnson 2006). Some researchers have excavated the marginalized experiences of individual educational leaders of color who are concerned about equity in education (e.g., Johnson 2006; Karpinski and Lugg 2006; Murtadha and Watts 2005; Siddle Walker 2003) while others have centered inquiry on the gendered experiences of leaders and their indigenous, ethnic, and racial perspectives to critique the field and its constructs. Blackmore (2009) and Ah Nee-Benham and Napier (2002) considered indigenous and ethnic perspectives of leadership within patriarchal structures. Similarly, Dillard (1995) drew on the scholarship of critical race theorists Derrick Bell and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) to critique reigning racialized and gendered notions of



so-called effective leadership through a case study of an African American woman who was a high school principal.

Another strand of literature on Black women in positions of educational leadership focuses on how they persist and use their experience as a catalyst for change to intervene in oppressive structures. In a study of Black women principals, Witherspoon and Taylor (2010) used life history methods and womanist theory to examine the intersectionality of race, gender and religio-spirituality of four Black principals and their *spiritual weapons*: proactive and defensive strategies. WEAPONS is an acronym signifying: Word, Wisdom and Witness; Ethic of Religio-spirituality; Naming; and Spiritual Fruit. The themes of spirituality and strategies were noted by Alston (2005) in a case study of a Black/African American superintendent who demonstrated servant leadership and persistence. Previously, Alston (1999) suggested that Black women are raised to lead and bring with them different perspectives that add to the experiential diversity of the leadership pool: ‘because of Black women’s work, family experience, and grounding in African-American culture.... Black women as a group experience a world different from those who are not Black or female’ (80). Studying educational leadership enacted by racial and ethnic minority groups also provides information about the political and policy efforts they undertake once they enter schools, universities, or districts (Alemán 2009; Agosto and Karanxha 2012). Despite the research on women in leadership who identify as Black, and/or Black and ethnically African American, there continues to be a paucity of research at the intersection of race (Black), racism, and gender (women) related to educational leadership preparation. Research on institutions of higher education provides some understanding of the gate keeping role faculty have in shaping professional and institutional cultures in which they are invested, namely through decision-making about who enters the leadership pipeline at the entry point of master’s level programs.

### ***Selection of candidates into educational leadership***

The importance of selection for leadership programs has been raised in the literature on educational leadership (Browne-Ferrigno and Shoho 2004; Capper et al. 2006; Hernandez and McKenzie 2010; López et al. 2006; McKenzie et al. 2008). There is some agreement in the field on the need to increase diversity among students through aggressive recruitment and selection (McKinney and Capper 2010). Programs committed to social justice preparation of professionals in education whether as counselors (McKinney and Capper 2010; Shin 2008), teachers (Bennett 2002), leaders, or some combination (Hernandez and McKenzie 2010) have been successful in recruiting students from diverse cultural/racial backgrounds, even in regions where racial diversity is minimal (McKinney and Capper 2010). Despite the noted importance of student selection in leadership preparation programs

with a social justice framework (e.g., Hernandez and McKenzie 2010; McKinney and Capper 2010; Rodríguez et al. 2010) there is little research that specifically and deliberately examining selection as an institutional process affecting the movement of students from racial/ethnic minority groups into the educational leadership pipeline.

### Local context

The purpose of the department of educational leadership and policy studies housing the program under study is to prepare ethical, compassionate, public intellectuals to become critical and transformative leaders committed to social justice in America's schools. Many of its applicants are from among teachers in the local district. However, the diversity of the district's student population is not mirrored in the demographic profile of its teachers (See Tables 1 and 2) or nationally (Feistritz 2011). For instance, in 2011, women teachers who are Black comprised approximately 11.1% of teachers in the local district while women teachers who are White comprised approximately 65.4% (Conditions Education Report 2010).

Prior to the selection cycle (fall 2009), we (the authors) were concerned about the under-representation of students of color in the program and therefore their limited opportunities for engagement across racial and ethnic diversity as aspiring educational leaders. The fall of 2009 marked the first time the educational leadership department's selection process was conducted apart from the other campuses, allowing us to begin identifying trends for the program under study. Before all campuses were granted autonomy and assumed control over the selection process, the academic advisor at our campus accepted students for all campuses on a rolling basis and/or until capacity was met. For each of the previous five years (2004–2009), relative to the number of applicants, Black women were rejected at higher rates than White women across all three campuses, and in three out of five years the rate of rejection for Black women was more than double the rejection rate for White women (see Table 3).

The first semester (2009) that faculty assumed the responsibility of selecting applicants into the program on our campus (one of three) provided the committee an opportunity to structure diversity responsive policy and practices and social justice leadership praxis concerning student selection.

Table 1. Total and minority student membership in local district, fall 2009.

District	Total student membership	Minority students	
		number	percent
Local District	193,239	113,290	58.63%

Student data source: EIAS Data Report, Membership in Florida's Public Schools, fall 2009.

Table 2. Total and minority teacher membership in local school districts, fall 2009.

District	Total teachers	Minority teachers	
		number	percent
Local District	13,146	3204	24.37%

Student data source: EIAS Data Report, Membership in Florida's Public Schools, fall 2009.

Table 3. Rejection by gender and race on three campuses (2004–2009).

Year	Rejection of Black women	Rejection of Whitewomen
2004–2005	38% (n=9)	15% (n=23)
2005–2006	27% (n=4)	18% (n=23)
2006–2007	35% (n=9)	15% (n=28)
2007–2008	42% (n=20)	15% (n=31)
2008–2009	36% (n=11)	22% (n=40)

## Methods

We use a reflective self/case-study method called self-assessment for equity (SAFE) which draws from the literature on self-study in institutions of higher education as internal evaluation and self-study approaches used in teacher education to understand practice and praxis (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001; Karanxha et al. 2013a). In addition to accreditation, self-study can serve several person-centered and institutional-centered purposes. An institutional purpose of this case was the assessment of the extent to which the department was meeting the stated standards of the agency (Kells 1980). In other words, our inquiry was driven by an interest in the congruence and consistency between the mission statement and the practices and policy related to student selection. Self-case studies typically begin with an outline for departmental-study that includes headings such as *Philosophy of the Department* which asks about the basic purposes and educational objectives of the department, points of view on the role of the department, and consensus in the department concerning the goals and tasks it faces (Dressel and Deitrich 1967). Furthermore, Tierney's (1991) framework for analyzing institutional culture through the categories of environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership provides pertinent questions for us: How is the mission of the program articulated? Is it used as a basis for decisions? What constitutes information and who has it? How are decisions arrived at and who makes them?

CRT praxis centers race into the analysis of institutional culture to expose how the answers to these questions shift to serve dominant interests and as an advocacy approach it reflects the transformative paradigm in the process of inclusive evaluation. An evaluator working within a transformative paradigm 'consciously analyzes asymmetric power relationships, seeks

ways to link the results of social inquiry to action, and links the results of the inquiry to wider questions of social inequity and social justice' (Mertens 1999, 4). The issue of under-representation, as the impetus for discussion and data gathering, reflects the issue approach to responsive program evaluation (Stake 2002).

### ***Data sources and analysis***

The qualitative data for this study are the master's committee members' field notes, narratives from conversations, experiential knowledge, and memos that illustrate the actions, outcomes, and negotiations among faculty participating in the process. Additionally, to describe disproportionality in the rejection of applicants we use descriptive statistics (percentages and ratios) as used in the equity audit, as described by Skrla et al. (2004). The equity audit is a tool based on a history of auditing in civil rights, curriculum auditing, and state accountability policy systems and its areas of concern for evaluation include: teacher quality equity, programmatic equity, and achievement equity with each of the areas consisting of several indicators. Although equity audits typically focus on K-12 schools or districts, McKinney and Capper (2010) utilized equity audits when conducting a case study of a graduate counseling education program's preparation which included its student selection process. We find the equity audit to be a useful tool in examining issues of equity in higher education. As the point of inquiry, we use programmatic equity as it concerns the denial of access to quality programs (Skrla et al. 2004) (see Appendix A for equity audit questions concerning the student selection process in higher education). Qualitative data help to tell stories related to the numbers (of students the committee rejected) and the negotiations among faculty to consider diversity.

Stake (2002) calls for methods to report findings of evaluations that help to articulate the issues to a broader audience and reflect the experiences of those invested in the issue in all of its complexity. His recommendation for the use of storytelling to share direct and vicarious experiences is consonant with the use of narrative methods in self-study research and counter-narratives in CRT. Analysis of the data through CRT and its tenets involved mining the data for the presence of racial ideologies, racial discrimination related to bias, power differentials reflecting in privilege, experiential knowledge, counter-narratives, differential effects (in access, outcomes, and distribution of goods and services), relationships, and race at the intersection with gender. 'Since the academy is a workplace that has historically favored white males, stories behind the statistical reality today are particularly telling' (Washington 1997, 272). Intentional preparation and research on the experience of Black/African American women in leadership contributes to social justice education as they are typically Outsiders in the academy (Collins 1986) whose stories go untold in the field of educational

leadership. The narratives of this evolving process of applicant selection coupled with institutional efforts to foster parity in educational leadership is as much about our discursive and material negotiation of the context as it is about whether o/Other(ed) women pursuing positions in educational leadership will have the opportunity to enter and remain in the educational leadership pipeline. With IRB approval, we accessed the department's database on the applications and decisions for two selection cycles that occurred during the years 2009 and 2010 as well as the previous five years (as described earlier). To the question of what would we consider to be a more equitable outcome we respond with the following: (1) A rejection rate across various groups in proportion to the number of applicants; (2) Inconsistency in the groups most rejected across semesters; and/or (3) A higher rejection rate for those most privileged by educational structures historically and currently.

### Findings

In the fall of 2009 (Selection Cycle 1), 80 candidates sought admission. In the spring of 2010 (Selection Cycle 2), 39 candidates sought admission into one of two cohorts (see Table 4). For Selection Cycle 1 we examined each faculty's decision sheets (votes to reject) on all the candidates that applied for admission. Four of the faculty examined the full set of 80 candidates' application packages while a fifth faculty member looked into only 16 applicants who were tied at two *yes* and two *no* votes. For Selection Cycle 2 we examined the decisions of six faculty decisions to accept or reject candidates (n=39) in the master's degree program (see Table 5). A sixth faculty member, who was not on the master's committee, also voted on who to reject.

#### *Selection cycle 1/fall 2009*

Of the 80 applicants who sought admission into the Educational Leadership master's degree program, the majority n=59 (73.75%) identified as White, while 17 candidates (21.25%) identified as either Black (n=9), Hispanic (n=5), Asian (n=2), Native American (n=0), or Other (n=1). Four (5%) students identified as 'Undecided.' Four out of five tenured and tenure earning faculty members (three white women and one white man) began the process of selecting 33 candidates for rejection without collective discussion and agreement on the basis for rejection (other than failing to meet the minimum requirements or submitting an incomplete application packet). The minimum criteria required candidates to: (1) Hold a valid State Professional Educator's Certificate (provide a copy clearly showing border and seal); (2) Submit three letters of recommendation (professional references only); (3)

Table 4. Cycle 1 demographic breakdown of applicant decisions for women by race/ethnicity.

	<b>Total applicants</b>	<b>Accepted outright</b>	<b>Rejected outright</b>	<b>Total tied</b>	<b>Tie-breaker acceptance</b>	<b>Total accepted</b>	<b>Total rejected</b>
Total	64	35	16	13	8	43	21
Asian	2 (3.1)	0 (0.0)	1 (6.25)	1 (7.7)	1 (12.5)	1 (2.3)	1 (4.8)
Black	7 (11)	3 (8.6)	2 (12.5)	2 (15.4)	2 (25)	5 (11.6)	2 (9.5)
Hispanic	5 (7.8)	3 (8.6)	0 (0.0)	2 (15.4)	2 (25)	5 (11.6)	0 (0.0)
O	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
U	4 (6.25)	3 (8.6)	1 (6.25)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (7)	1 (4.8)
White	46 (71.9)	26 (74.3)	12 (75)	8 (61.5)	3* (37.5)	28 (65.11)	18 (85.7)

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis denote column percents.

\* refers to a student who was accepted but cohort of preference not available, therefore student was ultimately rejected. Due to rounding, percentages may not equal 100.

Table 5. Cycle 2 demographic breakdown of decisions for women by race/ethnicity.

	<b>Total applicants</b> <b>31</b>	<b>Accepted outright</b> <b>24</b>	<b>Rejected outright</b> <b>5</b>	<b>Total tied</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Tie-breaker acceptance</b> <b>1</b>	<b>Total accepted</b> <b>25</b>	<b>Total rejected</b> <b>6*</b>
Asian	1 (3.2)	1 (4.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.0)	0 (0.0)
Black	2 (6.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (100)	1 (100)	1 (4.0)	1* (17)
Hispanic	4 (12.9)	4 (17)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (16)	0 (0.0)
O	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
U	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
White	24 (77.4)	19 (79.2)	5 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	19 (76)	5 (83.3)

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis denote column percents.

\* refers to a student who was accepted but cohort of preference not available, therefore student was ultimately rejected. Due to rounding, percentages may not equal 100.



Submit a letter of intent (brief statement outlining experience and goals for the degree); (4) Have taught under a full contract for a minimum of 2 years; and (5) Have earned a minimum 3.00 GPA in an undergraduate program (upper-level coursework). The rejection rate for Black women (two rejected and two tied) was 57% compared to the 43% rejection rate for White (women) applicants. A tie-breaking vote made by a woman of color faculty reduced the rejection rate for women who are Black to 29% and rejection rate for women who are White to 37%, a -28% change for Black women and -6% change for White women.

Upon closer examination of the applications submitted by Black women who were not outright accepted, we noticed that one (#1) had five years teaching experience and a 3.46 GPA, #2 had three years teaching experience and a GPA of 3.32, and #3 had nine years teaching experience with a GPA of 3.17. Only one (#4) had a GPA under the 3.0 minimum required. Two self-identified Hispanic women were also on the tied list: one with six years teaching experience and a GPA of 3.77, the other with two years teaching experience and a GPA of 3.67. On the other hand, there were four White women who did not meet the 3.0 GPA requirement yet still received one or two yes votes resulting in two of them being placed in the tied category to vie for the remaining eight seats. However, the second Asian woman who received three no votes (thus excluding her from being considered as a candidate in the tied category) had a Graduate Record Exam (GRE) score (just under our required minimum of 1000) that was higher than the equivalent GPAs of the White women. The haphazardness by which the committee proceeded during that first opportunity to select applicants for recommendation into the program coupled with the tendency to cast 'no' votes for applicants of color (even those who had met the formal criteria we had established), suggested that dialogue and change were needed in order to secure policies and practices that would be more transparent and better aligned with the mission statement.

After the first selection cycle ensued, faculty advocated for more transparent practices and policies. As a result, the master's degree committee developed a prompt and a rubric to assist in the evaluation of candidates' application package materials. The prompt requested that applicants submit a written statement of interest in which they were to describe their leadership experience related to aspects of the mission statement, interest in the program, and goals. In addition, the committee developed a rubric which consists of statements that would help in interpreting or deciphering applicants' application materials (statement of interest, letters of recommendation) for diverse knowledge, skills, and dispositions thought valuable to the field and to the program's learning environment. The rubric allowed faculty to record their impressions of candidates' qualities gleaned through the documents submitted.

Research ‘suggests that broadening the admissions criteria reduces the cultural and gender bias of traditional standardized assessments such as the GRE (Hedlund et al. 2006; Henderson 1994; Sternberg 2004)’ (McKenzie et al. 2008, 120). Following the advice of McKenzie et al. (2008) ‘[t]he faculty selecting the students need to ensure, though, that they are generally looking for the same qualities in the prospective students and that there is some faculty work on interrater reliability’ (121), the master’s degree committee reached inter-rater reliability agreement on 90% of all items on two candidates who identified as White women as these were the first two applications submitted. The Committee reached interrater reliability on the rubric, with a consensus vote to reject both White (women) applicants. In theory, interrater reliability suggests consistency in thought and implies that consistent action will follow (reject/select votes). The committee proceeded into the next selection cycle seemingly in agreement on the use of the rubric to interpret the statements.

### *Selection cycle 2/spring 2010*

A total of 39 applicants (31 women and eight men) sought admission under the new application criteria. The majority of applicants (77%) identified themselves as white. The remaining 9 applicants identified as Hispanic (six), Black (two), and Asian (one). The eight men applicants identified themselves racially and ethnically as White (non-Hispanic) (six) and Hispanic (White) (two). Table 5 shows a complete breakdown of the applicant pool of women for the second selection cycle. This cycle had fewer applications than open seats. However, faculty still initiated a candidate review to ensure that all applicants met the newly set criteria that included response to the prompt and evaluation of the candidates using the newly developed rubric.

The rejection rate for women who self-identified as White (non-Hispanic/Latina) was 21% while Hispanic women (each self-identified racially as White) were all outright accepted. The tied/rejection rate for two women candidates who self-identified as Black (Applicant #1, Applicant #2) was 100%. Applicant #1 had three years teaching experience and a GPA over 3.5, yet she received rejection votes by three members of the master’s degree committee resulting in a tied vote. Applicant #2 had twelve years of teaching experience but her GPA was older than 10 years so she was informed that new GRE scores required for admission were needed in order to complete her application packet. This information and a note was included in her file explaining to faculty on the selection committee that she had been informed and was preparing to retake the exam. Based on the other application materials submitted, the committee vote resulted in a tie. Despite the high rate (with agreement on 90% on all items) of inter-rater reliability on the rubric when the personal statements of two White women were assessed, the committee was divided in

its evaluation of the ‘leadership potential’ (committee member quote) of the two Black (women) applicants. Another faculty member vote (tie-breaker) resulted in admission to the program for applicant #1 and a recommendation of acceptance for applicant #2 (although the GRE results were still pending).

### *Cycle 1 and 2 combined*

We further combined the two cycles of selection for women applying for admission to the master’s degree program and compared each racial group’s rate of outright rejection, tied, and eventual rejection (see Figure 1). White (racial category) Hispanic (a pan-ethnic category) women had a rejection rate of 21%; the lowest percentage of those we did not outright accept (there were no Black Hispanic/Latina applicants), White women applicants had a rejection rate of 32% the second lowest percentage of those we did not accept outright, while Black and Asian women had the highest percentage of those who we did not outright accept at 66.7%. After the tie-breaker mechanism was implemented (rather than the three to three yes/no votes equals rejection option which was suggested initially), the rejection by race and gender appeared to be more evenly distributed at 33.3% for White, Black, and Asian women while all Hispanic women ultimately gained admission to the program.

Although equal, the rejection rates are not necessarily equitable for they do not contribute to a redistribution of educational leaders in the field given that the nationwide pool from which we draw (practicing teachers) is primarily composed of women who are White (Feistritzter 2011). Our data suggest that the race-neutral approach to the selection of candidates resulted in a disproportionate rejection of applicants of color. Findings in the form of

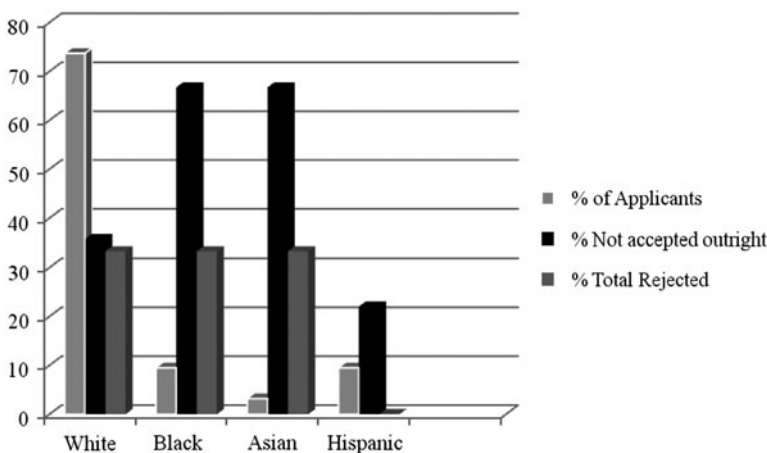


Figure 1. Rejection rates by race/ethnicity and gender before and after tie breaker.

narratives depicting the dynamics among faculty related to the selection process provide the stories behind the ‘statistical reality’ (Washington 1997, 272).

The post selection cycle 2 meeting was at the end of the semester and not all committee members attended. Therefore the discussion of how differently we perceived the candidates’ application materials was not possible. Instead, those in attendance agreed on procedural changes such as extending application deadlines, conducting interviews of those who had begun but did not complete the application process, and using the website to convey the program’s mission statement and student successes reflecting this mission. We discussed the need to recruit a more diverse group of candidates, establish relationships with administrators who advocate for social justice (i.e., allies), and introduce aspects of the mission statement during the orientation for incoming students in order to prepare them for the explorations of self in society – a practice they would be expected to demonstrate in courses. We considered how we might evaluate applicants and be more transparent about our criteria. However, more difficult dialogues on race and gender were averted with the absence of a few committee members. The findings raise questions related to the under-representation of racial/ethnic groups (of color), about the capacity of faculty members (tenure-earning faculty in particular) to work collaboratively across divergence (i.e., interests, power differentials, philosophical orientations), perceived indicators of value or worth in the application materials of prospective candidates of color, and create race-conscious policies and practices. While the productive space for engaging in race-conscious dialogue continued to elude us, its absence summoned us to ‘tell stories that simultaneously reduce alienation and build bridges across racial divides’ (Alemán and Alemán 2010, 8).

## Discussion

We expected that with a common social justice discourse around issues of concern to committee members (gender equity, language equity), an agreed upon mission statement, and past scholarship of faculty describing the areas of improvement needed in the program would provide the interest convergence sufficient to support changes to “the processes affecting” the admission and selection of candidates into the program. Instead, we encountered forms of resistance to developing a selection process that would reduce disproportionality in the rejection rates. Resistance to change only partially explains the dynamics and resulting fatigue, interest divergence helps to explain the source of resistance and the barriers impeding race conscious discourse and social justice leadership praxis.

Faculty discussions about racial diversity invoked racial ideologies (i.e., color-blind, *laissez-faire*). For instance, during a meeting focused on the use of indicators to: (1) assess applicants’ leadership experiences, knowledge,

skills, and commitment; and (2) aid us in recognizing and crediting a more diverse range of talents and abilities someone implied that the inclusion of students the talents and abilities under discussion (i.e., multilingual, travel/work abroad) would reduce the overall quality of students in the program. Interpreted through a CRT lens this combination of comments portending a decline in the quality of the program and advocating for racial segregation hailed the historical construction of race and racism as fashioned through notions of racial inferiority/superiority and race-based exclusionary practices. Although unsophisticated at times, those conversations reflected the permanence of race and racism (Bell 1992).

A form of resistance, withholding information, occurred during a meeting in which the committee deliberated on the outcomes of the Cycle 1 admissions' process. One of the faculty members spoke about the possibility of using 10% rule to accept candidates who did not meet the minimum criteria (Karanxha et al. 2013a). According to state statute, educational units (i.e., College of Education) can admit up to 10% of their candidates who are just shy of meeting the minimum requirements. This exception rule can be applied in the effort to create a more diverse pool of candidates. However, this very same faculty member rejected the recommendation made by another committee member (one of the authors) to use the rule during the Cycle 2 process when deliberating about the rejection of a Black woman (email communication). Instead, the committee member implied that the number of accepted students of color was somehow sufficient or ideal. The faculty/committee member wrote that we had admitted 'one student of East Indian descent and six Hispanic students to the cohort. We admitted one of three Black students who applied. That is eight ethnic minority students admitted into the cohort out of 25 or approximately one-third' (email communication). It needs to be noted that the Black student who was eventually accepted through a tie-breaking decision had met all of the criteria but had received votes of rejection (three yes and three no votes reported). The previous 'race neutral discourse' had devolved into the language of sorting and parsing (the number of students of color who were being accepted) to suggest that the diversity of the pool was sufficient, as if a quota or ceiling had been met.

In one committee meeting, discussions about racial diversity provoked some committee members to reflect aloud that in the past they had suggested the creation of racially segregated cohorts. That reflection led another faculty member to clarify that racially segregated cohorts was not what was being advocated (field notes). Another member asserted that it would be illegal to increase the representation of students from identified racial/ethnic groups because quotas are illegal based on affirmative action rulings – implying that a quota system was being advocated (field notes). Faculty recommendations for such extreme measures (racially segregate students, accept a predetermined number or percentage of people) were felt by us as deterrents.

After cycle 1 ended, a committee member (an author) volunteered to develop a rubric that the committee could use in the next admission cycle. When the semester resumed, another member expressed surprise that the assistant professor had dedicated a great amount of time developing the rubric and then suggested that the assistant professor tie each of the 14 criteria to research (Karaxha et al. 2013b). We saw this demand as a technique to overwhelm and deter the assistant professor. Field notes (captured in emails) also reflect how absence (and threat of absence) at key meetings worked to derail dialogue or hurry decision-making. The semester ended before the master's degree committee could collectively broach questions of whether or not our decision-making was informed by conceptions of leadership that are steeped in racist and sexist ideologies. During cycle 2 the examples of resistance intensified and bordered on unethical practice. Examples included providing inaccurate information (that is illegal; adding votes of faculty not on the committee), inaction (failure to perform role or duty), and silencing/muting (not including one committee member in voting totals or email). The 'constrained discourse' (Rusch 2004, 14) did not relax as we began to engage more sex/race-conscious/cognizant policies. The difficulty of sustaining race dialogue conscious of racism and centered on equity and justice was coupled with interest divergence.

Inertia resulted from the tug-of-war between convergent (i.e., program improvement, mission statement alignment, citation of related publications, NCATE accreditation) and divergent interests (i.e., meeting local needs for leaders who conform, perceptions that diversity is sufficient, statements that diversity of the program should mirror a narrow range of diversity in the local teaching force rather than broader range of diversity in the local student population). Our attempts to change the organizational structures that supported racial oppression were mired in a culture characterized, in part, as a complex web of veiled discourses and interests. Interests can be tied to deep seated values and epistemologies that provide the foundation for how we conduct ourselves across various roles, relationships, and contexts. The translation of the principle of interest convergence into a political strategy for change proved to be limited in this case as the possibilities for creating a productive space for deliberative democracy and alliance building across points of interest divergence/convergence were mediated and stymied by calculations of costs/benefits, exchanges of power across status (i.e., tenured/tenure earning, mentor/mentee).

Addressing the disproportionate rates of rejection for Black women entailed major efforts to notice, intervene, and advocate for equity. As tenure-earning faculty we were learning that battling inertia in the echelons of educational leadership requires a combination of risk-taking, stamina, persistence, alliance, and advocacy for diversity and justice. Battling the multiple forms of resistance required additional energy and time spent preparing, responding, and recuperating from acts of resistance. Our efforts to

negotiate across the interpersonal professional dynamics and seemingly varied investments in the issue and images of educational leaders (who they are, who they can become, and what they (ought to) do) left us having to cope with racial battle fatigue (Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano 2006). For instance, when one of us was marginalized (not included in either an email exchange that communicated the voting tally in the cycle 2 selection process or in the actual tally) whether purposeful or not, one of us felt muted and erased and both of us felt exhausted. However, our shared commitment and alliance supported our perseverance.

In a genuine attempt of some faculty to realize the social justice orientation in the mission statement of the program, the potential for diversity in the applicant pool may have been negatively affected by actions taken to streamline the admissions process. First, we reduced the application timeline by nearly five months which may have contributed to the reduced number of completed applications submitted by applicants of color (from 18 to nine students). Second, we requested three sealed or (e)mailed professional letters of reference to be sent directly to the admissions advisor rather than as part of the file each student used to submit which may have caused confusion for students about whether or not their applications were complete. Third, we added a writing prompt that asked applicants to write a personal statement of interest in which they reflected on their leadership experience and how it connected to the mission statement which may have deterred students whose teaching responsibilities were not providing opportunities to practice writing. These simultaneous changes might have caused some confusion about deadlines or discouraged some candidates from applying.

Faculty did not see the applications of those who did not meet the minimum requirements so applicants who may have had a GPA just under 3.0 were not considered. Thus we may have missed students who were excellent writers and/or have had exceptional success as teacher leaders and could have been admitted under the 10% exception rule. Last, in hindsight, we realized that we had begun to *norm* the process by conducting a test of interrater reliability on statements submitted by White (women) applicants. A more race conscious approach would have been to use a statement of a Black (woman) applicant. CRT helps to challenge assumptions that White racial experience is and should serve as the normative standard for progress and success (Iverson 2007; Ladson-Billings 2000; López and Parker 2003). While the racism (i.e., racial disparities) of education policy and practices may not be coldly calculated, they are far from accidental (Gillborn 2005). This case demonstrates how gendered-racism can result through seemingly neutral practices.

Attending to the concept of racial realism, we have considered both the discursive and the material (structural) role of faculty in educational leadership who function as gate keepers who make decisions that lead to material effects that can be detrimental to the program and students who are



accepted (i.e., facing a lack of racial/ethnic diversity among women) or rejected (i.e., rejection rates for Black women). CRT praxis and its first lessons have begun to answer the fundamental questions that we as faculty struggle to answer: What are the qualities and commitments this educational leadership preparation program should seek in its candidates? How will we, as faculty, recognize these attributes when they confront us? We continue to broach these questions and what it means to model social justice leadership with regard to the preparation of Black women who have the audacity to dream of a position in educational leadership.

### **Pedagogical recommendations**

Intentional efforts are necessary to counteract the unintentional practices and policies that perpetuate oppressive structures (i.e., racial disparities) in higher education. We suggest that leaders prepare to engage in resistance through anti-oppressive strategies (i.e., appealing to ideological and political allies and mentors) to increase the representation of students under-represented in higher education and educational leadership. Strategies that reduce the barriers to creating more inclusive institutions of higher education should lead to institutional change that endures in case the now frail affirmative action policies are ruled unconstitutional (Taylor 2000). Based on the findings and relevant literature, we offer the following recommendations to build and sustain race conscious dialogue and policy formation related (but not exclusive) to the student selection process: values based recruitment, selection, and sponsorship; and modeling social justice leadership that includes strategic resistance and negotiation amid risk.

### ***Values based recruitment, selection, and sponsorship***

In a framework for the reform of initial certification and preparation of educational leaders Murphy, Moorman, and McCarthy (2008) suggest that programs recruit and select candidates through rigorous, values-based admissions and offer several recommendations based on their review of programs in 54 universities across six states undergoing reform efforts (1993–2005), including moving to mission or value-based recruitment and selection. Where social justice provides the anchor or seedbed, they assert that it ‘... would behoove the faculty to craft a half dozen ways to look for it and then engage in recruiting and selecting students who excel on these measures and who actually have a professional commitment to mastering practice in this way’ (2192).

Women and men in positions of power in educational systems must deliberately mentor more women and especially more women of color (Shakeshaft et al. 2007). Allen, Jacobson, and Lomotey (1995) recommend that university-based educational administration preparation programs

become more aggressive in their sponsorship of Black/African American women as students and graduates aspiring toward administrative positions which would include recruiting more Black/African American women faculty and students into their programs and thereby increase the pool of peer mentors and future sponsors. In our case we might have been more aggressive in our sponsorship of a Black/African American woman who perceived her work with youth in church as a demonstration of leadership when some faculty did not. For instance, we might have supported our sponsorship with research by Witherspoon and Taylor (2010) describing how Black/African American women as principals draw on religio-spirituality to lead effectively. We might also have included in the curriculum, examples of how ethnic minority women (i.e., Latinas/Hispanics), Black or not, ‘draw on various social and psychological “critical navigational skills” (Solórzano and Delgado 2001; Villalpando 2004) to maneuver through structures of inequality permeated by racism (see Pierce 1974, 1989, 1995)’ (Yosso 2005, 80).

The courage to take risks is a theme in the literature on anti-racist education (Cooper 2009). Leonardo and Porter (2010) recommend a ‘risk’ discourse rather than one framed as safety, for in safety discourse the violence of racism is consumed by fears such as being labeled a racist (141). Rusch and Horsford (2009) provide a detailed framework for eliciting open talk about race and racism in educational leadership that includes understanding the disproportionate risks that one encounters depending on how they are positioned in a socially stratified society. The push toward discomfort and risk rather than safety has been noted by critical race theorists (Bell 1992b; Delgado 2002) and others who suggest that scholars recall the Civil Rights Movement to ‘reengage with the foundational principles that critiqued the power and racial hierarchy, instigated conflict, and promoted discomfort among those entrenched in their White privilege’ (Alemán and Alemán 2010, 4). There is disproportionate risk to faculty engaging in race conscious dialogues and advocating for anti-racist leadership in educational leadership departments (Scheurich 1993). Institutional mechanisms (mission statements, prompts, rubrics) need to be paired with advocacy and deliberate discussions on the changes desired, risks to various groups and individuals, and the potential obstacles to social justice.

A color-dysconscious approach to leadership, research, or candidate selection is not demonstrative of educational leadership toward social justice for it ignores the legacy of racism that persists and contributes to the underrepresentation of students of color in higher education, educational administration, and educational leadership programs as faculty. Cambron-McCabe and Cunningham (2002) expressed concern about the lack of sustained dialogue confronting race and class in educational leadership programs and suggested that faculty learn ‘how to incorporate such a dimension throughout our preparation programs’ (295). However, without models and

institutionalized forms of support students, graduates, and tenure-earning faculty have little chance to assume and sustain activist roles. Preparation for praxis is necessary to foster social justice leadership that moves educational programs toward reflecting social justice more often than not. Faculty in educational leadership programs are in a position to model social justice leadership praxis that challenges institutionalized oppression.

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## Appendix A

Equity audit questions concerning the student selection process in higher education.

- (1) What are the department's efforts to produce policy and procedures to guide the application and selection for recommending (to the graduate school) a diverse pool of candidates for acceptance into a master's degree program of educational leadership?
- (2) What are student selection trends faculty produce as they engage in this process?
- (3) Is there disproportionality in the selection/rejection processes on the basis of race and gender?
- (4) What impeded the faculty from engaging in social justice praxis during student selection processes?