The 20th Year Anniversary of Critical Race Theory in Education:

Implications for Leading to Eliminate Racism

**Structured Abstract**

**Purpose:** Though the first published application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to education occurred 20 years ago, implications of CRT for educational leadership did not occur until Lopez (2003) conducted a CRT analysis of the politics of education literature. No publications explicitly identify the implications of CRT for leadership practice**. G**iven the gap in the literature, the research question that anchors this paper asks: How can CRT inform educational leadership to eliminate racism?

**Research Methods:** To address the research question, I conducted a literature analysis of CRT

in educational leadership, identified the CRT tenets that guided each publication and derived six

primary, interrelated CRT tenets from this analysis. I also extracted from the publications

explicit and implicit implications for leadership practice as these implications related directly to

each of the six CRT tenets.

**Findings/Implications:** I describe each of the CRT tenets and explain how each can inform

educational leadership practice. To close the paper, I propose a CRT Inventory for Leading to

Eliminate Racism. The Inventory suggests questions to guide leadership practice for each of the

CRT tenets. I also offer implications for future research.

**Five Descriptive Words/Phrases:** Critical race theory, leading to eliminate racism, critical

epistemologies, leadership, race

**Type of Paper:** Empirical/Conceptual

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Though the first published application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to education occurred 20 years ago (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), implications of CRT for educational leadership did not occur until Lopez (2003) conducted a CRT analysis of the politics of education literature. Since then, including Lopez’s work, few publications directly apply CRT to educational leadership as it relates to formal positions of authority (e.g., school principals or superintendents) and no publications identify implications for leadership practice guided explicitly by the CRT tenets**.**

At the same time, many studies address racial inequities in schools and entire volumes focus on suggestions for leadership practice (Foster & Tillman, 2009) or provide implications for leaders to address racial inequities as part of leadership for equity and diversity (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013). However, none of these studies and publications are guided by a clear and consistent framework to help leaders not only take action to eliminate racial inequities, but also know how to choose among the plethora of race initiatives and to sort through conflicting federal and state policies purported to aim toward these ends (Capper & Young, 2014). Other publications mention the importance of CRT for race work in educational leadership (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Lightfoot, 2009; Price, 2009), however these authors do not rely on CRT as a lens to thoroughly analyze their arguments or data. As Ladson-Billings (2013) admonishes, “ . . . . just because a scholar looks at race in her work does not make her a critical race theorist” (p. 36).

Importantly, Parker and Villalpando (2007) center the significance of practice within CRT when they position “A Commitment to Social Justice and Praxis” as one of the central CRT tenets (p. 520). They explain, “[CRT is] conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community” (p. 520). Stovall (2004) concurs with the importance of linking CRT to practice and argues:

For principals, teachers, and researchers with a social justice agenda, the question becomes `since we know this about racism, what do we do?’ In this sense CRT poses a call to work. It's one thing to know and analyze the functions of race. It is yet another to engage in the practice of developing and maintaining a school with an anti-oppressive, anti-racist agenda in an age of conservative educational policy. (p. 10)

As such, the purpose of this paper is to promulgate CRT as a framework to guide the practices of educational leaders to eliminate racial inequities in their leading of equitable, socially just schools. The research question that anchors this paper asks: How can CRT inform educational leadership to eliminate racism?

**Brief History of CRT**

Here, I offer a brief history of CRT. In each section of the paper where I define and describe the central tenets of CRT, I refer back to some of the key scholars in the historic formation of CRT. In defining and explaining CRT, like Solórzano (1998), I do not view CRT as “ . . .uniform and static . . .”(p. 123). Crenshaw (2011) agrees in her historical account of the formation of CRT:

. . . .CRT is not so much an intellectual unit filled with natural stuff—theories, themes, practices, and the like—but one that is dynamically constituted by a series of contestations and convergences pertaining to the ways that racial power is understood and articulated in the post-civil rights era. . . . . I want to suggest that shifting the frame of CRT toward a dynamic rather than static reference would be a productive means by which we can link CRT’s past to the contemporary moment. (p. 1261)

Tate (1997), who published one of the first papers to apply CRT to education, concurs with this multiple view of the history and formation of CRT:

. . . . I use the heading `One Historical Overview’ to indicate that my historical interpretation of the origins of critical race theory is subject to critique and debate. Moreover, the heading reflects my belief that it is possible to construct more than one history of this scholarly movement. (p. 237)

Given these caveats, I draw on Crenshaw’s (2011) history of CRT, substantiated by other histories of CRT referred to in the initial applications of CRT to education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker, 1998; ,Parker, Deyhle, Villenas, & Nebeker, 1998; Solórzano 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, 2001; Tate, 1994; 1997;) and earlier (Lopez, 2003) and later applications of CRT (Horsford, 2010a) to educational leadership.

Tate (1997) argues that “Although no identifiable date can be assigned to the conception of CRT, its foundation is linked to the development of African American thought in the post-civil rights era: the 1970s to the present (Bell, 1980a,b; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993)” (p. 206). Yet, as Solórzano and Yosso (2001) point out, it could be argued that “CRT’s roots go back as far as the turn of the last century with DuBois’ s (1903) work *The Souls of Black Folk*” (p. 474). Tate’s (1997) CRT history presents key scholars in the CRT movement such as Bell (1980b), Delgado (1990), and Crenshaw (1988) who in the early 1980’s identified the inadequacies of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) in addressing racism. According to Tate (1997), Crenshaw’s contribution to the movement began when she was a Harvard Law student who helped organize student protests over the lack of faculty of color and the lack of courses in their program related to race and other dimensions of difference. Crenshaw helped create the Alternative Course developed by students and scholars external to Harvard based primarily on the work of Bell (1992). These scholars and others gathered for the first CRT Workshop in Madison, Wisconsin in 1989. Crenshaw (1988) and other scholars critiqued not only neoliberal aspects of the law but also CLS for its perpetuation of racism. Though Tate (1997) presented this CRT history in part, centered on these three scholars, Solórzano and Yosso’s (2001) CRT history point out how “. . .these criticisms had their roots and are still being influenced by similar criticisms that were developing in ethnic studies, women’ s studies, cultural nationalist paradigms, Marxist and neo-Marxist frameworks, and internal colonial models” (p. 474).

As such, some histories of CRT in CLS chronicle the central role of critical theory in its development (Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), in response to laws, associated policies, and legal practices that perpetuated oppression. Solórzano (1997, 1998) relies on Matsuda (1991) to define critical race theory as :

. . . the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a

jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination. (1998, p. 1331)

Lopez (2003) further explains “CRT’s premise is to critically interrogate how the law reproduces, reifies, and normalizes racism in society in particular for individuals of lower social classes and persons of color” (p. 83).

From this CRT history in law, the applications of CRT to education and educational leadership can be aligned with six primary, interrelated CRT tenets as identified in the education and educational leadership literature (Horsford, 2010a; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Lopez, 2003). I briefly define these six tenets in Table 1 (Table 1 here) and in the Methods section, I describe how I derived these six tenets from the literature.

CRT scholars in education moved the research on race in education (Tate, 1997) and educational leadership (Lopez, 2003) from a racial deficit perspective to unearthing the prevalence and persistence of racism within society and reproduced in education and schools (*race is endemic to society*). CRT from law described how *whiteness is property* (Harris, 1993) and CRT education scholars identified how the white curriculum is defended as white property (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and as a result, leaders can expect white resistance when seeking to address race in the curriculum (Pollack & Zirkel, 2013). CRT in legal studies identified the critical importance of experience and minoritized voices which paved the way for mining *counterstories* in education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) and in educational leadership (Horsford, 2009, 2010a, b) and how these counter-narratives push back against *majoritarian stories*. CRT in legal studies argued how seeming legal advances only occurred when such advances also supported white interests at the same time and in so doing, negated racial progress (Bell, 1980a) (*interest convergence*). CRT scholars in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998) echoed the legal studies critique of Brown v. Board of education as a prime example of interest convergence while educational leadership scholars revealed interest convergence in policies such as in school finance (Aléman, 2007). In the same way that CRT scholars critiqued the critical discourse in Critical Legal Studies (Tate, 1997), CRT also provided a way to critique the liberal multicultural and diversity discourse in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and the leadership for social justice discourse in educational leadership (Lopez et al., 2003) in that these progressive discourses submerge, marginalize, and perpetuate racism (*critique of liberalism*). Amongst the CRT in education scholars, Solórzano (1998, 1997) presented the most explicit extrapolation of *intersectionality* to education from legal studies (Crenshaw, 1988), followed by Parker (1998) and Lopez (2003) in educational leadership with the importance of surfacing hidden oppression when examining the intersection of race with other identities.

Table 1

*Tenets of Critical Race Theory* (adapted from Horsford, 2010a)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| CRT Tenet | Definition | Source |
| Permanence of racism | Racism, both conscious and unconscious is a permanent component of American life | Bell (1992); Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995); Tate (1997); Ladson-Billings (1998) |
| Whiteness as property | Because of the history of race and racism in the U.S. and the role U.S. jurisprudence has played in reifying conceptions of race, the notion of whiteness can be considered a property interest | Harris (1995), Ladson-Billings (1998), Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) |
| Counter storytelling and majoritarian narratives | A method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted  premises or myths especially ones held by the majority; majoritarian narratives are also recognized as stories, and not assumed to be facts or the truth | Matsuda (1995); Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995); Tate (1997); Delgado (1995); Ladson-Billings (1998); Solórzano & Yosso (2001) |
| Interest convergence | Significant progress for Blacks is achieved only when the goals of Blacks are consistent with the needs of Whites | Bell (1980a, 2004); Ladson-Billings (1998) |
| Critique of liberalism | Critique of basic notions embraced by liberal ideology to include colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality of the law | Crenshaw (1988), Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995); Tate (1997); Ladson-Billings (1998) |
| Intersectionality | Considers race across races and the intersection of race with other identities and differences | Crenshaw (1991) |

**Method**

To address the research question, I first identified publications that apply CRT to

educational leadership. To do so, I relied on the search terms critical race theory or CRT combined with education, leadership, educational leadership, principal, and superintendent using the search engines of Google Scholar, ERIC, Academic Search, and Education Full Text from as far back as each search engine began through November 8, 2014. To limit the scope of this work due to article length limitations, I searched only for published articles and book chapters, excluding dissertations and conference papers. I relied on two criteria for publication selection.

First, the publication focused on pre-K-12 leadership specific to formal positions of leadership such as school principals or superintendents which meant I excluded publications that focused on higher/post-secondary education, leadership preparation, teacher education, teacher leadership, or pre-K-12 education in general. Second, the publication identified CRT as one of its frameworks. These criteria meant I excluded studies that were guided by CRT but not specific to K-12 principals and superintendents linked to practice. For example, I excluded a study that included a few school administrators but data were not analyzed specific to school leadership (Alemán, 2009a). I also excluded publications that were guided by feminist or womanist theory and CRT though the discussions were not specifically analyzed via CRT or its tenets (Blackmore, 2010; Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). With each publication I located, I also analyzed the reference list to find additional references that met these criteria. With this search method, I found 24 studies that met the criteria.

With each publication that met the two criteria, I engaged in a three step process: 1) list the CRT tenets the author identified to explain CRT, 2) identify the specific CRT tenets the author used to frame the article (see Appendix B), and 3) list the implications for practice the author discussed or indirectly implied. Some authors did not discuss the CRT tenets in their analysis and discussion they had said would guide their work at the beginning of the publication. Other authors surfaced other CRT tenets beyond the ones they articulated would frame their analysis. When deciding how to indicate which CRT tenets the authors employed, I identified the CRT tenets the authors wrote that they used regardless of the degree in which they actually used them.

To derive the six CRT tenets that I focus on in this article, I listed the CRT tenets identified in the framework for each article and conducted a frequency count of these tenets. The tenets that were most frequently cited and confirmed in the CRT in education literature were the six I address in this article with the exception of the tenet of social justice. Rather than a separate tenet, the CRT tenet of social justice and social justice practice conceptually anchors the entire article in its quest to apply CRT in ways to eliminate racism in leadership practice (insert Figure 1 here).

Figure 1: Critical Race Theory Tenets and Educational Leadership

When defining and describing each CRT tenet in each subsection, I rely not only on the CRT in educational leadership publications but I also draw from CRT in legal studies and education. When describing the implications for leadership practice for each CRT tenet, I relied first on the CRT in educational leadership publications. Many of the publications, however, did not include implicit or explicit implications for practice, thus I also relied on related literature on CRT in education or law and my own analysis to derive implications for practice explicitly linked to each tenet.

Moreover, though LatCrit, Asian Crit, and TribalCrit evolved out of CRT (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005), some of the tenets of each of these theories are drawn from CRT, and a few studies in educational leadership have relied on LatCrit in combination with CRT for the conceptual framework (Alemán, 2007, 2009b), I did not include these theoretical perspectives for several reasons. First, no journal or chapter publications to date have applied Tribal Critical Theory or Asian Crit to educational leadership as defined in this paper, thus these theories do not address the research question for this paper. Second, educational leadership publications as defined in this paper that rely on LatCrit theory, do so in combination with CRT (Alemán 2007, 2009b) and I included these publications in my analysis. Third, though LatCrit, Asian Crit, and Tribal Crit do share some tenets with CRT, they each also embody unique tenets distinct from CRT (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Capper 2015). Solórzano (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) combined CRT with LatCrit Theory, yet Solórzano and Bernal (2001) explain, “LatCrit theory is similar to CRT. However, LatCrit is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity and addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality . . .” (p. 311). Similarly, within TribalCrit theory, while the primary tenet of CRT acknowledges that racism is endemic in society, the primary tenet of TribalCrit theory focuses on the fact that “ . . . colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). In addition to this tenet, Brayboy identifies eight other tenets of TribalCrit theory of which six are unique to the Native American experience and distinct from CRT tenets (Capper, 2015). Moreover, LatCrit theories have evolved to include related theories such as racist nativism (Huber, 2010) and Tribal Crit theories have evolved to include Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009), critical indigenous pedagogy (CIP) (Garcia & Shirley, 2012) and tribal nation building (Brayboy, Castagno & Solyom, 2014). Space limitations prevent a thorough discussion and analysis of these tenets and this literature. .

Across these CRT in educational leadership publications, most scholars articulated similar CRT tenets, though they all chose to emphasize different tenets in their data analyses. Nearly all the publications viewed the data through the CRT lens of the endemic nature of racism (16) and counterstories (16), while critique of liberalism (11), interest convergence (9), and whiteness as property (9) were nearly equally addressed. Only four articles identified intersectionality as a CRT tenet to be considered. None of the publications comprehensively traced the CRT pedigree in educational leadership in their reviews of literature.

To structure the findings, I define and describe each of the CRT tenets and I explain how each can inform educational leadership to eliminate racism. To close the paper, I propose a CRT Inventory for Leading to Eliminate Racism that can inform leadership practice, leadership preparation, and scholarship and I also offer specific implications for future research.

Though in this paper I focus on race, educational leaders must address the full range of identity and differences (e.g., language, ability, gender, social class, sexuality, gender identity) and their intersections in their schools (Capper & Young, 2014). Since the inception of CRT (Crenshaw, 1988) some scholars have identified intersectionality as a CRT tenet (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Intersectionality moves beyond racial essentialism and a black/white racial binary to considerations of race across races, and also considers how race intersects with other identities such as language, ability, gender, social class, gender identity, and sexuality. I discuss intersectionality more fully as a CRT tenet and its implications for leadership practice later in the paper.

Further, thus far, most of the empirical studies in educational leadership conceptually framed with CRT that address leadership practice, took place in majority white yet racially diverse schools, and have not addressed schools comprised of nearly all students of color. Thus, the examples I provide draw primarily from the former, but where possible, I also add examples relevant to schools that are enroll mostly students of color.

**CRT Tenets and Implications for Leadership Practice**

Next, I define and describe each of the six interrelated CRT tenets I apply to educational leadership. Within each tenet, I draw from the CRT in educational leadership literature, supported by related literature and my own analysis explicitly linked to the tenet to explicate implications for leadership practice to eliminate racism.

**Permanence of Racism**

Lopez (2003) contends many people perceive racism “ . . . . as an individual and irrational act in a world that is otherwise neutral, rational, and just” (p. 69). Further, according to Lopez (2003), “ . . . . . most people view racism. . . as the enactment of overt racial acts—for example, name calling, burning crosses, hate crimes, and so forth—while ignoring the deeper, often invisible, and more insidious forms of racism that occur on a daily basis” (Lopez, 2003, p. 81-82)*.*

Thus, rather than viewing racism as random, infrequent, isolated, out-of-the ordinary events,CRT posits racism always has been and always will be endemic and pervasive in society (Tate, 1997). Mentioned in sixteen of the CRT in educational leadership publications, from this perspective, racism is understood to be normal (Lopez, 2003), happening all the time, everywhere, at the individual, institutional, societal, and epistemological levels (Tate, 1997). CRT points to the importance of understanding the enormity and pervasiveness of the structural, political, economic embeddedness of racism throughout the history of and currently within the U.S. (Horsford, 2010a). As such, a challenge to ahistoricism is threaded throughout all CRT six tenets—a separate tenet identified by Tate (1997) and amplified throughout applications to education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and educational leadership (Horsford, 2010a).

The pervasiveness of societal racism remains true even with seeming societal racial gains and persons of color occupying positions of power and prestige in U.S. society. These facts do not mean we now live in a “post-racial” society with racism in the past and not relevant today as these gains most often prop up white privilege, perpetuate racism on other levels, and remain in stark contrast to the massive racial inequities that continue in society (Ladson-Billings, 2011). That is, that “ . . . . race [still] matters. .” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 8), and will always matter.

This tenet of the permanence of racism can help white educational leaders acknowledge that they themselves are racist, that all leaders regardless of race are complicit in racism (Khalifa et al., 2014), and that all schools and districts embody and perpetuate racism throughout the culture, organization, policies, and practices, and will always do so. This pervasiveness of racism exists even though educational leaders may have addressed their own racist assumptions and beliefs, participated in diversity training (Evans, 2007), engage in meaningful work or relationships with persons of color, or made progress with their students of color in their schools. These leaders understand that working against racism is a life-long process personally, and is an ever evolving and continuing process of working against organizational racism in their schools (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

The endemic and pervasiveness of racism at all levels of schools and society and within ourselves, however, is not without hope that progress can be made or that persons of color are without agency. Bell (1992), considered one of the godfathers of CRT, discusses racial realism as part of CRT which is “a philosophy [that] requires us to acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status” which “enables us to avoid despair and frees us to imagine and implement racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph” (pp. 373-374). Bell believed by acknowledging racial realism, individuals would be motivated to move beyond incremental, status quo change that while addressing racial inequities in one form, spawns further racial inequities elsewhere. Ladson-Billings (1998) agrees, “Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it” (p. 22). As such, the CRT in educational leadership literature suggests four interrelated practices educational leaders can take to recognize and eliminate the pervasiveness of racism.

First, educational leaders should work toward developing an anti-racist identity (Gooden , 2012; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011), which evolves through a series of stages and is on-going through one’s life. To date, the educational leadership scholarship on anti-racist leadership has focused on leadership preparation (Lightfoot, 2009; Young & Laible, 2000) and more work needs to be conducted that examines how leaders can further develop an anti-racist identity for themselves and how to develop such an identity with their staff and students. Gooden (2012) offers suggestions for anti-racist identity development based on his analysis of African American principals, including future and practicing principals need to understand individual, societal, and institutional racism. In doing so, leaders can investigate their own racial histories by writing racial autobiographies, then analyze these autobiographies using racial identity development models. Horsford (2014) describes another model for developing an anti-racist identity, drawn in part on the CRT tenet of the pervasiveness of racism where leaders move through a series of stages: racial literacy, racial realism, racial reconstruction, and racial reconciliation.

Importantly, developing an anti-racist identity cannot happen as the result of attending one workshop or reading a few articles or books on white racism. Evans (2007) studied school leader perspectives on the demographic changes in their schools. She found that even with white leaders who had participated in diversity training and held authentic relationships with persons of color, they continued to hold deficit beliefs about students of color in their schools. In sum, an anti-racist identity occurs as a result of leaders being committed to life-long work on their own racist assumptions and beliefs via professional development, readings, media, authentic relationships with individuals of color, and other experiences.

Successful principals of students of color in a study by Theoharis & Haddix (2011) did not avoid racial issues, but talked about race with their staff “ . . . plainly and often” (p. 1340). Thus, as a second strategy to address the pervasiveness of racism, educational leaders need to engage in informal individual conversations and whole faculty conversations about race with their staff when issues arise at the school that are informed by race.

Educational leaders should be models of this process to facilitate the development of an anti-racist identity with their staff and students—a third way leaders can recognize the historical and current pervasiveness of racism and work toward eliminating racism (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). These leaders themselves may facilitate race work with their staff and students or hire trained facilitators to do so. When facilitating race work with staff, CRT scholars argue that leaders must ensure the work moves beyond diversity/multicultural training (Sherman, 2008: Stovall, 2004). According to Stovall (2004)

Unfortunately, many diversity and cultural sensitivity workshops sanitize race and attempt to promote false 'senses of unity. . . . Instead of confronting the difficult issues that race can present, some trainings amount to `we're a multicultural society and we should get along better.’ This is not enough. ( p. 11)

Instead, leaders can evaluate the quality and effectiveness of professional development on race based on the extent to which the CRT tenets represented in this article are addressed.

Conducting equity audits of their schools constitute a fourth way leaders can recognize and eliminate the pervasiveness of racism in their schools. Leaders can collect and analyze race data (Gooden 2012; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011), develop concrete goals and implementation plans to eradicate these inequities, design effective measures of progress, and make all of these data and strategies transparent and easily accessible to the community.

In sum, the CRT in educational leadership literature calls on leaders to acknowledge the pervasiveness of racism within ourselves and our schools accompanied by hope that change is possible. To that end, this literature suggests four leadership practices that grapple directly with and work against the endemic nature of racism.

**Whiteness as Property**

The CRT tenant of whiteness as property refers to U.S. history where property rights were and are more important than human rights (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). From the founding of the U.S., a person who owned property was able to participate in the governance of the Union, whereas, a person who did not own property could not participate. Starting with the take-over of Native American land, not only were whites the only people who could legally own property, African-Americans could not own property and they themselves became property who could be traded and sold. To be able to own property accorded the property owner with incredible power, privilege, status, and rights, based simply on skin color. Put simply, to be white meant something then, means something now, and will always mean something—an automatic affordance of rights and privileges—that whiteness *is* property.

According to Harris (1993), who penned the germinal scholarship on the concept whiteness as property in legal studies, the legal right to exclude forms the conceptual anchor for understanding whiteness as property. She explains: “In particular, whiteness and property share a common premise - a conceptual nucleus – of a right to exclude. This conceptual nucleus has proven to be a powerful center around which whiteness as property has taken shape” (p. 1707). Harris further explains,

The right to exclude was the central principle, too, of whiteness as identity, for mainly whiteness has been characterized, not by an inherent unifying characteristic, but by the exclusion of others deemed to be `not white.’ The possessors of whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness; whiteness became an exclusive club whose membership was closely and grudgingly guarded. (p. 1736)

In addition to the absolute right to exclude, legally, anyone who holds property holds “ . . . . rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, reputation and status property” (Harris, 1993, pp. 1731-1737).

In one of the earliest publications that applied CRT to education, Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) linked the whiteness as property tenet in a literal way to property values—that is, because public school finance is based on local property taxes, then wealthier communities are able to allocate more funding to education than economically poor communities. They explain, “ . . . . The quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the `property values’ of the school” (p. 54). Alemán (2007) illuminated this link between property and curriculum in his analysis of Texas school finance policy on majority-Mexican American school districts. He analyzed how Texas finance policy which was hailed as transformative and more equity oriented than previous finance policy, continued to marginalize Mexican majority school districts and perpetuate racism.

Thus, in public schools, aspects that uphold white privilege can be viewed as property that whites will fiercely protect for themselves. For example, the curriculum remains the most valued property in schools and whites will fiercely defend the property of the school curriculum in at least two interrelated ways. One, whites defend the entire system of advanced placement (AP), gifted, and honors programs (collectively considered the AP system) (Pollack & Zirkel, 2013) and the associated remedial, tracked, and special education system that upholds and reinforces the AP system. A second way whites uphold and defend the curriculum includes “. . . the distortions, omissions, and stereotypes of school curriculum content . . . . “ (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18) that ignores and erases the perspectives of people of color.

While Whiteness as property is defined or mentioned in nine of the CRT in educational leadership publications, only two of the publications provide an extensive analysis of race in educational leadership relying on this tenet. One of these two publications, Pollack and Zirkel (2013), provide the most extensive examination of whiteness as property within the curriculum in the field of educational leadership in their study of equity failure at one high school. The specific equity practice that failed focused on changing the time of science labs that took place before and after school, to during school time when more low income students and students of color could participate. Pollack and Zirkel explain that the property interests of AP students and their families “ . . . . include[] the entire AP system of material advantage—including a superior and more engaging curriculum, exclusivity, status, and a substantial competitive advantage in college admissions . . “ (p. 301). They further explain, “ . . . . we see that the AP students (and, by extension, their parents) clearly had a long-established, taken-for-granted hold on the rights of disposition, use and enjoyment, and status . . . [and] their absolute right to exclude” (p. 302).

In this case, Pollack and Zirkel (2013) identified the competing interests as parents of students who were not benefiting from the times that labs were currently offered (these were primarily parents of low income and students of color) and parents of students who were in advanced placement (AP) science who were currently benefitting (these were primarily middle and upper class white families). Within the school, the competing interests were teachers who believed that students of color had been systemically and historically disadvantaged at the school and thus change was needed, and teachers who believed such a change was “eroding standards” (p. 301). The science teachers identified with the latter group and these teachers would also lose extra pay they had been receiving for teaching the labs outside of standard school time.

Pollack and Zirkel believed that the leaders in this study understood these competing interests. However, as Pollack and Zirkel point out:

Unfortunately, merely identifying the competing interest groups and anticipating how they would be likely to respond to the change proposal was insufficient to prepare for the fierce resistance that ensued. What sets the groups apart are not simply different perspectives on educational processes and goals, but rather different underlying property interests and varying levels of power and privilege that can be exerted to protect those interests. We suggest, therefore, that it would have been far more helpful to first identify and address the specific property interests at issue. (p. 301)

Pollack and Zirkel seamlessly linked power, privilege, and property rights in their analysis of the situation. Though different power positions are clearly understood and visible such as power differences between teachers and leaders, privilege is less visible, and persons with the most privilege hold the strongest property concerns. Obviously, in this case, those who benefitted the most from the existing practices were the predominantly white and affluent students and families. Low income students of color not only benefitted least from times the before and after school labs, but the existing structure harmed these students.

When white families fiercely protect their property interests of the AP system, these actions also further prop up and maintain the remedial, tracked, special education system that serves to protect the AP system. The white AP system is protected when students of color are over-represented in special education and in response to intervention (RtI) programs (Orosco & Klinger, 2010), when students who are bilingual are segregated in particular classrooms or schools, and students of color are pulled out of the classroom and segregated for these separate programs, all under the well-intentioned but mythical guise of helping students succeed. When educators pull students of color out of classrooms and segregate them away from their white peers and from the core curriculum in these ways, whites exercise their “absolute right to exclude” (Harris, 1993, p. 1731) and further protect the general education classroom as property for white interests.

In addition to the AP system as property fiercely protected by whites, the typical white public school curriculum itself can be viewed as property for whites when perspectives of people of color are silenced. Ladson-Billings (1998) explains:

Critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact

designed to maintain a White supremacist master script . . . .This master scripting means

stories of African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture

authority and power. (p. 17)

As one solution to a white curriculum and school culture, some schools engage in work on cultural diversity, multicultural, and culturally responsible teaching initiatives. Unless these initiatives directly address power, privilege, and the embeddedness of racism as explicated across all six CRT tenets, these initiatives serve as a distraction to white racism and further preserve and protect the curriculum for whites. Ladson-Billings (1998, 1999a) agrees that initiatives such as celebrating diversity and multi-culturalism not only mute and sanitize the history of African Americans in this country, but further protect the white curriculum from change.

White families may rally against multi-cultural and social justice initiatives in their schools as they perceive these initiatives as threats to their white curriculum property. One high school in Evan’s (2007) CRT in educational leadership study held an annual Black history assembly in which students were not required to attend, and over time an increasing number of white parents excused their children from attending the event. When the school board then canceled the program, Evans explained, “ . . . this occurrence illustrates the ways in which school curriculum and events, as intellectual property, serve as established property interests to be preserved and protected by those in power . . .” (p. 174-175).

Marx and Larson (2012)’s CRT in educational leadership study discussed in detail how whiteness as property worked in principal Larson’s middle school where Larson implemented curriculum improvements for Latino students:

. . . . culturally relevant teaching, bilingual education, and Spanish for native speakers classes can be perceived as threatening to the White-dominant school culture and curriculum. . . Strategies for improving schooling for Latina/o students that required embrace of their culture(s) and language(s) were resisted as unnecessary by [by the Middle school].These are examples of Whiteness as a property right that was protected and maintained . . . even as it sought to better address the needs of its Latina/o students . . . . That is, the White students in the school (who composed the majority of the student body population) were not perceived as needing or benefiting from these changes in curriculum and teaching. (p. 294)

Given this definition and description of whiteness as property across legal studies, education, and educational leadership, the CRT whiteness as property tenet can suggest at least one implication for leadership practice. That is, many educational leaders may approach the elimination of inequities in their school from a place of naïve goodness. Leaders may assume that if they provide clear data and evidence that expose racial inequities, then all staff and community members also out of a sense of goodness and justice will fully support work to eliminate those inequities. Leaders may especially hold these community assumptions when the school is located in a liberal community, as were the schools in the studies by Pollack and Zirkel (2013) and Knaus (2014). However, this assumption does not consider the property interests at stake. Understanding the CRT whiteness as property tenet can help leaders anticipate, understand, and respond to the fierce backlash they will experience from white middle/upper class families—including liberal families (Brantlinger, Majd Jabbari, Gusin, 1996) protecting their property interests when leading equity work.

Toward this end, Pollack and Zirkel (2013) pose two questions for school leaders to consider prior to implementing equity change: “What forms of `property’ are at stake in this area in which we believe change is needed? Whose material interests are likely to be adversely affected?” (p. 300). Pollack and Zirkel argue that leaders should identify the property interests of the upper class white students and families from the beginning of equity change. That is, for example, that these students and their families will strongly defend their property of the AP system that affords them enormous rights and privileges that will extend far beyond high school. The leaders should then anticipate that these students and families will also

. . . . use their considerable resources, access to media and social networks, and ‘cultural capital’ . . . . to frame the debate in ways that serve their interests . . . .By anticipating this reaction, educational leaders [can play] a more central role in framing the narratives that defined the debate right from the start. (p. 302)

To help leaders learn how to frame narratives working toward equity ends, leaders can learn from the CRT tenet of counternarratives, which I discuss in the next section.

In sum, the CRT tenet whiteness as property views the entire AP system along with the typical public school curriculum with the perspectives of people of color silenced as white property fiercely protected by whites, while the school remedial system upholds and sustains that property. To lead toward the elimination of racism, leaders should identify the property interests at stake and anticipate the resistance from white families to this work.

**Counternarratives and Acknowledgment of Majoritarian Narratives**

A third key tenet of CRT addresses the importance of personal experience shared via narratives of people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). These narratives are positioned as counter-stories to the white norm at the individual, institutional, societal, and epistemological levels (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Tate, 1997), and make visible the daily micro aggressions and societal and institutional racism that people of color experience.

Solórzano and Yosso (2001, 2002) were among the first CRT in education scholars to develop counter-storytelling as a research method and further legitimize counter-stories as justifiable data and valid (Ladson-Billings, 1998) that “ . . . can be used as theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tools to challenge racism, sexism, and classism and work toward social justice” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23). Delgado (1993) explains further, “Majoritarians tell stories too. But the ones they tell—about merit, causation, blame, responsibility, and social justice—do not seem to them like stories at all, but the truth” (p. 666). Smith, Yosso, Solórzano (2007) agree and argue, “Counterstories challenge this facade of truth by revealing the perspectives of racialized power and privilege behind it” (p. 565).

While most CRT scholars in educational leadership emphasize the importance of legitimizing counterstories of people of color, other scholars take up the converse idea of majoritarian stories that Delgado (1993) identifies as it applies to equity work. For example, Pollack and Zirkel (2013) explain how majoritarian narratives “ . . . help preserve the property rights of privilege and whiteness . . .” (p. 297). In their study, privileged, white upper class families relied on majoritarian narratives to uphold and maintain their property rights. Understanding this linkage can help leaders understand why equity oriented reforms are often subverted as they attempt to lead successful equity focused changes in their schools.

Counternarratives along with the permanence of racism were mentioned, defined, or relied on as a research method in the CRT in educational leadership articles more frequently than the other CRT tenets. This literature features counternarratives of African American superintendents about school segregation (Horsford & McKenzie, 2008; Horsford, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), African American teacher experiences in “equity” schools (Knaus, 2014), an African American principal turning around a school (Brown, Beckett, & Beckett, 2006; African American and Latino mothers across social classes and school choice (André-Bechely, 2005), and Latino superintendents as they grappled with state finance policy (Aléman, 2006, 2007), though none of this literature offered implications for leadership practice.

In this literature, Pollack and Zirkel (2013) offer the most nuanced and detailed explanation of how counter and majoritarian stories operate when educational leaders are engaged in equity work, and given the purpose of this paper that focuses on implications of CRT for leadership practice, I review their study in detail. Pollack and Zirkel explain that whites use majoritarian narratives to “ . . . . justify, legitimate, and help to maintain the status quo of racial inequities . . . (p. 298). Whites use these narratives to explain racial inequities—narratives that are “embedded with racialized omissions, distortions, and stereotypes” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18), deficit thinking, and blame the victim. For example, some whites may explain racial inequities exist because “African American and Latina/o students `do not value education,’ or based on ‘cultural differences’ or ‘deficiencies’” (Pollack & Zirkel, p. 298). These deficit based explanations “ . . . fail to account for patterns of accumulation and disaccumulation of economic, social, and symbolic capital” (Pollack & Zirkel, p.298) that produce and perpetuate the pervasiveness of racism. Pollack and Zirkel add,

. . . . white people tend to view these narratives not as reflecting a particular

perspective (theirs), but rather as uncontestable reality—simply the ‘way things are’ . . .

Narratives about who is `deserving’ predominate—deserving of access to the ‘best’

curriculum or access to the ‘best’ colleges. ‘Deserving’ in all these instances is defined in

circumscribed ways that lead back to the most privileged people having the greatest ‘right’to additional privileges. ( p. 298-299).

Pollack and Zirkel suggest two questions from the CRT tenet of counter/majoritarian

narratives to guide leaders attempting to make equity oriented changes: “What are the narratives we might use to frame public debate? What are other narratives that might surface in response and how can we anticipate them?” (p. 300).

Pollack and Zirkel (2013) identified four majoritarian narratives of privilege in their case example: (a) to be fair means to not notice race, to be color-blind, nor do anything different for/with students of color, to treat all students the same. (b) a belief that difference in intelligence or ability are genetically determined, and thus “ . . . normal, expected, and to be accepted” (p. 303) and further, that the racial inequities prevalent across the country in every school confirm this fact, (c) student achievement differences are due to talent and effort thus some students are more worthy than others, and it is best to invest resources into students who are worthy, rather than low performing students of color, and (d) if equity efforts aim to increase the achievement of students of color, then these efforts are unfair to students who are already successful and thus we are rewarding students who are unworthy and punishing students who work hard. These majoritarian narratives then make racial achievement inequities and racial segregation and stratification in schools via special education, remedial education, tracking, and response to intervention programs, normal, acceptable, and in no need of change. These four narratives--centered on which students are deserving and which students are not--serve as a distraction to the central issue of privileged white families and students protecting their property rights of the Advanced Placement system.

These four majoritarian narratives also explain why simply sharing racial equity audit data with staff, families, and community members may not motivate these individuals to want to correct these inequities. In fact, the racial equity data can serve to reinforce stereotypes and deficit views of students of color and the four majoritarian narratives that Pollack and Zirkel (2013) describe. When school staff have not historically taken responsibility for low achievement for students of color, and instead, hold deficit perspectives about students and their families, then equity audit data that shows racial inequities may result in school staff feeling blamed about the inequities and react defensively, and blame the inequities on students of color for reasons that reinforce negative stereotypes and deficit thinking about students of color.

To counter the eruption and strengthening of these majoritarian narratives, the CRT tenet of counternarratives suggests that leaders working to eliminate racism need to ensure that individuals and communities of color are authentically included in democratic decision-making about strategies and plans to eliminate racial inequities. At the beginning of equity work, leaders must seek the perspectives of students, families, and communities of color and make public their stories, views, and examples of how the current system is not working for them (Knaus, 2014). Seeking these perspectives must occur at the school and district level in multi-layered ways. For example, Horsford (2010a) suggests that “ . . . . practicing and aspiring educational leaders . . . study the historical, political, economic, and social contexts of the school communities they serve to include informal interviews that capture the experiential knowledge of people who have been marginalized, underserved, or silenced in a particular community” (p. 313). The African American superintendents in her study offered counternarratives of integrated schooling including the strengths of African American schools pre-Brown. Thus, Horsford argues for the critical importance of deeply engaging with the history of marginalized individuals in the school community. Horsford also suggests:

Exposing aspiring educational leaders to multiple perspectives of knowing and

understanding, as uniquely experienced by veteran educational leaders of color, has

educative value not only through the sharing of lived professional experiences but also

through exposure to diverse leadership philosophies, styles, and practices that have proved effective in school communities of color. (p. 313)

Additional examples of ways to include the counterstories of students of color include conducting focus groups with students of color and involving students of color in demographically proportional ways in school decision-making teams that include students. At the district level, district administration can conduct focus groups of community members at each school site and ensure these focus groups are demographically representative of the school student population. Depending on the community context, district and school leaders may wish to solicit community family and school input particular to specific races/ethnicities, for example, hosting sessions with African American or Latino families and community members.

In addition to seeking the perspectives of educators and individuals of color in the school community, CRT scholars in educational leadership call for deep engagement with the community (Khalifa et al., 2014; Khalifa, Dunbar, &Douglas, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Sherman, 2008: Stovall, 2004) and with families of color (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) as critical to racial equity. Stovall explains how this community engagement can lead to the development and use of community resource guides and positioning the schools as community centers.

This CRT tenet of counternararatives in the educational leadership literature reiterates the importance of hiring educators of color and creating working conditions for these educators to thrive and genuinely mentored into leadership positions (Knauss, 2014; McCray, Wright, & Beachum 2007). Related, leaders must aggressively ensure district and school decision-making teams are racially representative of the school community. Of course, these staff of color cannot speak for all of their race or community, however, they offer important counternarratives that are critical to equity decisions. Marx and Larson (2012) discuss how equity changes for Latino students at principal Larson’s middle school were limited because all the individuals involved to bring about change were white. To this end, McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) analyzed the hiring of African American secondary principals in one southeastern state, post-Brown. They found that African American principals are most likely to be hired in majority African American schools (which often are under-resourced), while white principals are hired for majority African American, diverse, and majority white schools. While African American leadership role models are important in majority black schools, at the same time, leaders of color should be given the opportunity to lead diverse and white majority schools. Santamaría’s (2014) study of diverse leaders in higher education and K-12 also confirms the importance of the leadership of individuals with differences across identity (race, class, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual identity), and how their identity can have a positive impact on their leadership practice toward equity.

At least two interrelated factors converge for equity leaders to consider when inviting and integrating counterstories from individual and communities of color in their equity work: a) the ways white privilege and majoritarian narratives act on and socialize individual and communities of color (Aléman, 2009b; Gooden & Dantley, 2010; Khalifa, et al, 2014), and b) racial essentialism. Related to the first CRT tenet of the endemic nature of racism, all individuals have been subjected to and socialized with white, privileged majoritarian narratives about schools and education (Aléman, 2009b, Gooden & Dantley, 2010, Khalifa, et al. 2014). For example, students, families and communities of all races may accept that the over-representation of students of color in special education, tracked into lower level courses and classes, or the over-representation of students of color in remedial efforts like response to intervention programs are not only acceptable and immutable, but are in fact, the most effective ways to support and educate students of color. Related, educators, families, and communities of all races may accept that the most effective way to educate students who are bilingual is within segregated classrooms. As Khalifia (et al., 2014) explain in their study of the closure of a majority black high school: “ . . . postracial, technical-rational administrative behaviors were enacted in the move to close [the high school] despite the fact that the superintendent was Latino and the principal was African American. This is another reminder that even minoritized school leaders can knowingly or unknowingly enact, reproduce, and reinforce systems of racial marginalization” (p. 168). Thus, leaders must analyze and anticipate how students, families, and community members of color may react against equity work, and leaders may need to educate students, families, and community members in ways to undo the dominant majoritarian narratives these individuals have believed and bought into (Aléman, 2009b; Gooden & Dantley, 2010; Khalifa et al, 2014)

Leaders also should not essentialize the perspectives of particular racial groups or identities. That is, for example, not all Latino families will respond in the same way when leaders wish to integrate students who are bilingual throughout the school rather than segregated into particular classrooms. In these two ways, then, leaders for equity cannot assume that when aggressively soliciting counternarratives in the process of equity change, that these counternarratives from families and students of color will unilaterally support these efforts, and in fact, these families and community members may join with the majoritarian narratives and rally to work against the leaders and equity work.

In sum, the CRT tenet of counternarratives/majoritarian narratives refers to the importance of soliciting and listening to the perspectives and stories of students, families, and communities of color as integral to anti-racist leadership via community relationships and hiring and supporting staff of color. In so doing, these counterstories work against majoritarian stories by whites that mask as the only truth in opposition to equity work.

**Interest Convergence**

A fourth tenet of CRT addresses interest convergence, meaning that any gains toward racial equality have only happened and can only happen when whites also benefit (Horsford, 2010a; Lopez, 2003). CRT scholars critique seeming gains for racial equality, such as the Brown vs. Board of Education of education decision because that legal decision benefitted whites by increasing the positive stature of the U.S. with the rest of the world during the Cold War (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). From a CRT perspective, the decision was also made to quell another potential African American uprising in the U.S. and the potential harm to whites in the U.S. should this happen (Lopez, 2003). Further, this decision eroded black education and resulted in the widespread dismissal of black teachers and administrators across the south (Horsford, 2010a; Tillman, 2004). Thus, the Brown v. Board of Education decision is one example of how seeming progress for people of color is made only when it meets the needs and interests of whites, and further, that liberal racial reform such as Brown exacerbates racial inequities.

Across the CRT in educational leadership publications through the lens of interest convergence, Khalifa, Dunbar, and Douglas (2013) detail how neoliberal reforms and high stakes testing though touted as ways to increase achievement for students of color benefit whites and businesses more. Gooden (2012) points out why whites admire tough black principals like Joe Clark as it converges with their own interests to alleviate themselves of racial guilt.

Marx and Larson (2012) explain how principal Larson’s school implemented literacy and math classes for low achieving white students and students who linguistically diverse and how these classes served as an example of interest convergence. In these classes, white students benefitted as well, thus the interests of white and Latino parents converged. However, these same families and educators impeded substantial changes for Latino students such as culturally relevant teaching, Spanish for native speakers classes and bilingual education because these changes threatened the core school curriculum and worked against the unconscious or conscious assimilationist agenda of the school to maintain white cultural norms. Educators and families may reject these deeper changes by claiming they do not benefit all students in the school, especially when white families believe the school is working well for most students. In this example, these changes for Latino students do not converge with white interests. Thus, the interest/convergence tenet suggests that if leaders expect their equity efforts to be successful, their work must be framed in such a way that middle and upper class whites in the community will also benefit, otherwise, white families will believe the racial equity work is not worth doing.

Unlike the other CRT in educational leadership literature, Knaus (2014) offers a nuanced analysis of interest convergence in his study of “equity” principals. These principals identified an African American teacher in each of their schools as “most promising” for leadership potential yet failed to support and promote these teachers to leadership positions in the same way they did white promising teachers.. Knaus explains, “This research suggests that considering African American teachers as ‘most promising’ was in the interests of the principals because they could then claim to support equity-focused culturally responsive approaches (without even knowing what that meant)” (p. 440).

When applying interest convergence to leadership practice, Pollack and Zirkel (2013) argue that leaders must appeal to the concerns of parents across race, culture, and class to garner change support. They also suggest that leaders be specific about how current practices are harming students of color. Pollack and Zirkel pose two questions for leadership practice guided by interest convergence: “What commonalities of interests might exist? Can we identify and articulate areas of potential agreement among affected parties?” (p. 300). As such, educational leaders can strategically employ interest convergence as a tool for equity change.

At the same time, scholars caution about the limits of interest convergence, in that the change that results will typically be

. . . . limited, weak, and/or short-lived . . . . . perhaps interest convergence is best seen as one strategy in the arsenal, and a beginning rather than an end. Interest convergence can get change moving—but we need to be ever vigilant if those changes are to remain. (Pollack & Zirkel, p. 300)

Alemán and Alemán (2010) also articulate the limits of interest-convergence for equity change and argue, instead, that using interest-convergence as a political strategy can perpetuate racism. They conclude that relying on interest-convergence as an equity practice to foster racial inequity is limited yet they offer three suggestions to curb these limitations. One, relying on interest-convergence as a change strategy can result in leaders being resistant to discussions about race and racism and being resistant to “ . . . strategies that focus centrally on the elimination of racism” (p. 15). To counter this limitation of interest-convergence, Alemán and Alemán argue that “ . . . discussions of race and racism and their implications for public policy and social life are central, regardless of how unpleasant these conversations may be perceived to be. . . . . [these] discussions are foundational to CRT praxis” (p. 15).

Two, an interest-convergence perspective can also foster an acceptance of slow, incremental equity gains and these gains in racial equity rely on “ . . . . notions of meritocracy, colorblindness, and `fair play’ within a democratic system, all without critiquing the power differentials that remain intact” (Alemán & Alemán, 2010, p. 16). While Alemán and Alemán acknowledge that racial gains have been made, they point to the persistent and pervasive educational racial inequities as just one example of evidence of the limitations of federal law and policies designed to purportedly eliminate these inequities. They explain further, “ . . . our critique with [the incremental change] approach is when community leaders present it as the ***sole*** (emphasis in the original) strategy in the struggle for change. . . . . [the] interest-convergence principle should not be utilized as a justification for an incrementalist strategy of change” (p. 16).

Three, taking an interest-convergence approach can also lead to educators blaming racial inequities on individuals rather than on the “ . . . institutional and systemic racism that exists” (p. 15). Thus, Alemán and Alemán insist that educators “ . . . attack society’s embedded racist structures, shifting blame and responsibility away from individuals” (p. 16).

In sum, educational leaders must address equity changes by considering how all students could benefit and how students of color are harmed by current practices. However, at the same time, leaders must keep race and the elimination of racism central to the equity work and not back down from the difficult racial conversations as a result of this work, ensure race discussions focus on eliminating structures and systems of racism rather than become mired in blaming individuals, and understand that interest-convergence is just one strategy among a plethora of strategies for eradicating racism.

**Critique of Liberalism**: **Colorblindness and Critique of Equity Policies and Practices**

CRT also critiques liberalism -- a fifth CRT tenet applied to education. In this section, I focus specifically on concepts related to liberal ideas of color-blindness and the ways liberal equity policies and practices can perpetuate racial oppression.

Scholars in educational leadership who rely on CRT often refer to the problem of color-blindness in race equity work (Horsford, 2010a; Lopez, 2003; Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglas, 2013; Khalifa, et al. 2014; Valles & Miller, 2010). The concept of color-blindness can be manifested in two ways: one, when educators claim to not see a student’s color or claim that race does not matter and two, when educators do not realize the ways their school is not race neutral and reflects white culture and in turn, when they expect students of color to assimilate to and blend into the existing white school culture.

Across the CRT in educational leadership literature, five publications analyzed how color-blindness perpetuates racism initiated by Lopez (2003) who illuminated the color-blindness of traditional political theory. Other studies examined how school leaders took a color-blind approach to issues such as demographic change (Evans, 2007) and closing a majority African American high school (Khalifa et al., 2014). Leaders in both studies downplayed race and approached these challenges from a supposedly neutral perspective and denied that race mattered. In Khalifa et al’s study, the leaders relied on policies and data to avoid race. Yet leaders in both studies relied on race to perpetuate a deficit perspective of African American students and families. Kahlifa, Dunbar, and Douglas (2013) also analyzed how high stakes testing and neoliberal reforms reflect color-blindness in insisting that school reforms are in the best interest of all students.

Phrases educators may say related to the first example of color blindness include “I do not see a student’s color.” “I treat all students the same.” “I hold the same high standard for all my students.” “A student’s race does not matter to me.” Marx and Larson (2012) explain that the majority of educators believe their “color-blind glasses” “. . . prevent them from seeing any differences among children of varying racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds” (p. 298). Marx and Larson explained how principal Larson as a white principal initially denied that race mattered, and claimed he was color blind. Indeed, principal Larson believed, as do many white educators, that claiming to be color-blind is the right thing to do, and to intentionally attend to and to respond to racial differences reflects racist beliefs and practices.

However, to claim colorblindness, or that race does not matter, or that educators need to treat all students the same and not differently, denies the atrocity of racial inequities in the past and the pervasive racial microagressions, societal racism, and systemic racism that individuals of color experience on a daily basis and the way racism permeates all aspects of schools (Evans, 2007).

Educators also manifest colorblindness when they remain unconscious or deny the ways their school reflects white culture. Marx and Larson (2012) explain how the majority of U.S. educators are “ . . . not cognizant of their Whiteness, nor that of the curriculum and schools within which they work. Rather than recognizing that they work in a cultural/racial/linguistic milieu, many educators believe their own school settings are culture free . . . “.(p. 293). As a result, educators expect students of color to “ . . . . blend into the dominant White, English-speaking culture reflected in the school” (p. 293). Thus, when educators in principal Larson’s school were asked to implement culturally responsive practices that address the needs of Latino students, principal Larson and his staff experienced these expectation as “ . . . . vague, hard to achieve” “radical, inappropriate . . . a threat to the core curriculum” “and contrary to the assimilationist climate of the school”(p. 293).

In sum, many educators claim color-blindness, that they do not see a student’s color and are unconscious about the ways schools are not racially neutral but reflect white culture. In Marx and Larson’s (2012) study, principal Larson’s perspective shifted and “Rather than ignoring or denying the presence of the Latino students . . . and their cultural and racial group in a colorblind manner,” [principal] Larson sought to get to know the students and their families better. The principal took off his color-blind glasses and “ . . . . recognize[ed] children for who they are: diverse people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, strengths, and weaknesses, qualities that can be built on only when they are recognized” (p. 298).

Thus, to counter a colorblind perspective, leaders need to know that “not seeing race” or being “colorblind” rather than neutral or positive reflect racist assumptions and beliefs. Leaders need to recognize the races and cultures in their school communities and reach out to families and students and recognize their assets and value to the school and their unique needs. Leaders also need to help staff recognize the ways the school, its culture and practices are not race neutral and reflect white culture (Valles & Miller, 2010), and the ways they expect students of color to assimilate and blend into the school. Instead, leaders must ensure that all aspects of the school: the curriculum, culture, structure, and policies not only reflect the racial diversity in the school but challenge and eliminate racist assumptions.

In addition to addressing color-blindness, the CRT tenet critique of liberalism also suggests that educational leaders be critical and discerning about equity policies and practices to ensure that these policies and practices do not perpetuate racial inequities (Valles & Miller, 2010). Scholars of CRT in educational leadership literature have demonstrated how Texas “equitable” school finance policy perpetuated inequities (Aléman, 2007), and how desegregation policies and practices aimed toward equitable ends can perpetuate inequities (André-Bechely, 2005; Horsford, 2010a). André-Bechely suggests that leaders for equity must examine how “. . . the rules and processes that districts institutionalize to bring about access, equity, and equality may serve to hide the very real ways that race and class still support exclusion in our schools. . . . . (p. 302). Horsford (2010a) also cautions that

inclusion programs and initiatives that fail to recognize how race and racism work to maintain hierarchies, allocate resources, and distribute power will not do much to address gaps in student achievement, low school performance, and distrusting school communities. (p. 311-312)

Further, even effective practices such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1999b), if not fully understood or implemented properly can fall far short of addressing racism. Ladson-Billings (2014) disappointingly notes,

What state departments, school districts and individual teachers are now calling `culturally relevant pedagogy’ is often a distortion and corruption of the central ideas I attempted to promulgate. The idea that adding some books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanza celebration, or posting `diverse’ images makes one `culturally relevant’ seem to be what the pedagogy has been reduced to. (p. 82)

In the last section of this paper, I discuss curriculum practices that purport to promote equity such as Universal Design for Learning and the social justice discourse in educational leadership as additional equity examples that can perpetuate racism.

In sum, the CRT tenet of the critique of liberalism requires leaders to understand how the concept of color-blindness reflects a racist perspective and denies historical racism and the current and pervasiveness of racism. Further, the critique of liberalism points out how school culture and practices are never race neutral and perpetuate and require students of color to assimilate into the white culture. This CRT tenet also calls on leaders to question and critique liberal and progressive equity work that does not directly address systemic and persistent racism.

**Intersectionality**

Relying on CRT history, I define intersectionality based on three considerations: one is the extent to which scholars address race across races (Solórzano, 1998). Moving beyond the black/white racial binary, Crenshaw (2011) describes how in the formation of CRT scholars addressed race across races. The first paper presented for the Alternative Course at the Harvard Law School I previously described cut across racial differences and examined “. . . a survey of U.S. courts’ treatment of Blacks, Native Americans and Asian Americans” (p. 1282). That is not to say that studies that only examine one race as most CRT studies in educational leadership do, are invalid nor needed. This consideration draws attention to analysis possibilities across races.

In the CRT educational leadership publications many address a singular race such as African American principals (Brown, Beckett, & Beckett,2006; Gooden, 2012), African American superintendents (Horsford & McKenzie 2008; Horsford, 2009, 2010a, b; McCray, Wright & Beachum, 2007), Latino students (Marx & Larson, 2012 ) or Latino superintendents and Latino communities (Aléman, 2006, 2007, 2009b). In contrast, other CRT scholars in educational leadership have examined the education of African American and Latino youth (Khalifia, Dunbar & Douglas, 2013) and have studied community responses to the closing of a predominantly black high school led by an African American principal in a majority Latino community school district with a Latino superintendent (Khalifa, et al., 2014).

Intersectionality also considers the extent to which scholars address the elimination of racism as a part of a larger project of addressing social justice across differences (Solórzano, 1998). In doing so, CRT scholars vary to the extent they identify the specific identities of this broader social justice work. For example, Tate (1997) documents the centrality of intersectionality at the inception of the CRT movement. He succinctly summarized across differences and argued, “A major goal of CRT is the elimination of racial oppression as part of the larger goal of eradicating all forms of oppression. . . . ” (cited in Tate, 1997, p. 234). When describing “A Commitment to Social Justice” (p. 7) as a CRT tenet, Solórzano (1997) explained, “In the critical race theorist’s struggle toward social justice, the abolition of racism or racial subordination is part of the broader goal of ending other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation” (p. 7). Thus, the first two intersectionality considerations are conceptual building blocks for intersectionality. That is, a CRT scholar cannot address the intersectionality of race with other identities if other identities in addition to race and across races are not acknowledged in the first place.

A third intersectionality consideration represents the typical definition of intersectionality which is the extent to which CRT scholars address race and its intersections with other identities such as social class, language, ability, sexuality, and gender identity/expression for the purpose of revealing oppressions that are hidden when examining just racial identity (Crenshaw, 1988). This intersectionality consideration arose from the beginnings of CRT with the emergence of Feminist Crit in CLS (Crenshaw, 2011). Crenshaw noted that considerations of gender formed the roots of CRT. Crenshaw also described how questions about the intersection of race with other identities and the development of LatCrit and QueerCrit were debated from the beginning of the CRT movement.

The CRT in educational leadership literature varies to the extent to which it considers other identities that intersect with race with some scholars addressing race and social class (Alemán, 2007; Pollack & Zirkel, 2013; Sherman, 2008; Stovall, 2004), race and gender (Knaus, 2014; Valles & Miller,2010), and race, class, and gender (André-Bechley, 2005;.Evans, 2007). Just three publications addressed intersectionality across race, class, gender, and sexual identity (Lopez 2003; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Santamaría, 2014) and in addition to these identities only one publication included disability (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

When considering the CRT tenet of intersectionality across legal studies, education, and educational leadership for practice, public school leaders cannot pick and choose which students they will lead in their schools or which typically marginalized students they will attend to (Dantley, Beachum, & McCray, 2009). While some leaders may hold more expertise in some aspects of identity and difference than others-- (e.g. a leader may have expertise in facilitating inclusive practices for students with disabilities but not be as knowledgeable about ways to integrate students who are bilingual)—to lead equitable schools and districts, leaders must continuously work toward such expertise across student differences and their intersections (Capper & Young, 2014).

As leaders and teachers of literally all students in their schools, school leaders also cannot responsibly delegate to or rely on others, or assume others will equitably lead typically marginalized students in their schools. For example, principals cannot necessarily rely on special education teachers or leaders to lead proactive, inclusive practices for students with disabilities because these individuals may be the most resistant to such practices (Capper & Frattura, 2008). Therefore, leaders need to be engaged in learning the knowledge and skills necessary to confidently lead across student differences and their intersections. As illustrated in the Marx and Larson (2012) study, principal Larson sought the assistance of Marx (a university researcher) to help him improve the educational experience of Latino students. Though he employed a bilingual teacher at his school and bilingual/ESL services were provided at the district level, he sought to strengthen his expertise in the education of Latino students and to take full responsibility for this effort rather than delegate that responsibility to the ESL personnel in his school or district.

School leaders must also attend to the intersections of identity within students which requires knowledge and expertise across identities and associated policies and practices. For example, in most schools, African-American males are over-represented in special education (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2008). Thus, leaders need to strengthen the core curriculum in rigorous culturally responsive ways to reduce special education referrals for African American students. Though research shows that Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) in schools help improve student attendance and achievement and decrease harassment (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer (2012), GSA’s are less effective for students of color who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) who may need different forms of support (Pritchard, 2013). Thus, in this case, leaders require knowledge about the benefits of policies and practices for LGBT youth and also knowledge about the unique needs of LGBT youth of color.

Leaders can address intersectionality a third way by ensuring equity policies and practices that may have originally been designed for specific student differences can benefit a range of student needs. For example, many scholars and educators recognize Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as an effective means for general education teachers to address the range of student learning needs in their classrooms, particularly for students with disabilities (Meyer, Rose, Gordon, 2014). UDL requires teachers to construct the curriculum and instruction for the range of student learner needs from inception, rather than modifying existing curriculum for various student needs. Similarly, designing a curriculum from the beginning for the entire range of learner needs in a classroom benefits a wide range of student needs in the classroom, not just students with disabilities. However, in general, the scholarship and application of UDL remains silent about addressing the needs of students of color (Garderen &Whittaker, 2006).

At the same time, scholars have developed culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy to meet the needs of students of color. Ladson-Billings (2014) points out that this pedagogy can and must also help students “ . . . in the mainstream to develop the kinds of skills that will allow them to critique the very basis of their privilege and advantage” (p. 83). Related to intersectionality, however, scholars and practitioners of culturally relevant pedagogy do not generally consider students with disabilities.

Related, Santamaría (2009) discusses how culturally responsive teaching fails to address the unique needs of students who are ELL. She examined how differentiated instruction could address the needs of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. However, she found in her study that teachers implemented differentiated instruction which attends to academic diversity without substantive attention to the cultural needs of the students, resulting in what she terms “colorblind pedagogy” (p. 240).

In sum, these examples illustrate how equity policies and practices that address only one aspect of identity (e.g., UDL for students with disabilities or culturally responsive teaching for students of color) ignore the fact that teachers must teach across student differences and their intersections in their classrooms. In these two examples, culturally responsive teaching may not address the academic and learning differences for students who are linguistically diverse or students with disabilities and UDL does not address the unique needs of students who are ELL or who are of color. Leaders and teachers are left with attempting how to merge and integrate these disparate equity practices across students. Further, CRT would suggest that when a practice such as UDL does not directly address culturally responsive practices or the tenets of CRT, then that practice perpetuates racism in schools. Leaders must seek out equity policies and practices that are effective across students with disabilities, students from low income homes, students who are linguistically diverse, students of color, and students who are LGBT and their intersections of differences and identities. At the same time, learning from the CRT tenet of interest convergence as previously discussed, leaders must guard against the ways that unifying policies and practices across student differences can reproduce racism.

**Conclusion and Future Directions for CRT and Educational Leadership Practice**

This analysis of CRT in educational leadership suggests a CRT Inventory for Leading the Eliminating of Racism (see Table 3). This inventory can help leaders to assess the legitimacy and effectiveness of racial policies, practices, initiatives, and equity change efforts to help ensure that these efforts do not perpetuate racial inequities and racism and to eliminate racism in public schools. While initially designed for practicing school leaders, faculty in leadership preparation program can also adopt the CRT Inventory as a means to interrogate their own practice and program. Further, many questions in the inventory are under-researched and can guide future research in the field.

Table 3

*CRT Inventory for Leading the Elimination of Racism*

Pervasiveness of Racism

1. Are we actively engaged in on-going work on our own racism and on-going work on developing an anti-racist identity?
2. Is the historical and current pervasiveness of racism in all of society, including schools, and within ourselves acknowledged and addressed?
3. Do we frequently engage in informal and formal conversations about race with our staff?
4. Are policies and practices in place to facilitate the on-going development of an anti-racist identity with staff, students, families, and community members?
5. Do we conduct equity audits that include disaggregation of race data and establish concrete measurable goals, action plans, effective measures of progress, and follow up as a result of the audit?
6. Is the primary focus and measure of effectiveness for all the race work academic achievement for students of color and developing critical consciousness with all students?

Whiteness as Property

1. Do we acknowledge that the curriculum itself and the AP/honors/gifted systems are white property, with all the rights and privileges afforded property including the right to enjoyment and the fundamental right to exclude, and that whites will fiercely defend this property?
2. Have we identified the property interests at stake and prepared for how we will respond to the defense of that property by whites?
3. Do we acknowledge that the entire remediation system including special education, remedial education, response to intervention, and other remediation practices, and the labeling of students for these programs, all purported to address racial achievement gaps perpetuate racial inequities? Do we acknowledge that this remediation system upholds, maintains, and reinforces the AP system of privilege, and thus the primary task toward equitable change includes policies and practices that result in a highly rigorous curriculum for all students via integration, heterogeneous classrooms, de-tracking, proportional representation, and inclusive schooling?
4. Do the equity efforts include a focus on the voices and perspectives of people of color in the curriculum, moving beyond diversity, and multiculturalism to culturally transformative practices?

Counternarratives/Majoritarian Narratives

1. What strategies, policies, and practices are in place to ensure the hiring of leaders of color, that school and district conditions support their leadership success, and that these leaders are not always assigned to majority of color schools?
2. How and in what ways are the perspectives and stories of students, family, and community members of color solicited, drawn upon, and presented at the beginning of the equity change to frame the work proactively, and not as a reactive response to majoritarian resistance?
3. Have we identified why and how students, staff, families, and community members of color may resist the equity change because of their own socialization by the majoritarian narratives, and we have determined how we will re-educate all about the harms of current practices and benefits of the equity work?
4. Have we ensured that school and district decision-making, planning, and other teams are racially representative of the community and that in these team meetings, all perspectives are heard and considered?
5. Have we identified what the majoritarian arguments will be against the equity change from staff, families, and community members, and how we will respond?

Interest Convergence

1. Have we identified the interests of the white privileged students, families, and communities and determined how the equity changes will benefit these students and families?
2. In identifying the interests of whites in the equity change, are we ensuring the work on the pervasiveness and structural embeddedness of racism historically and currently does not abate, and that racial equity remains the public goal of the equity work?
3. While we acknowledge positive results from incremental racial equity work, do we ensure that incremental change is not the only way for successful, enduring change to occur?

Critique of Liberalism

1. Have we acknowledged that claims of being color blind, treating all students the same, not seeing color, and not acknowledging race all reflect racist beliefs and assumptions?
2. Have we analyzed and critiqued the equity change or new policy or practice to determine if or how it could perpetuate racism in its implementation?

Intersectionality

1. Have we determined how the equity change will benefit all students of difference and not perpetuate the segregation and isolation of students based on their differences?
2. Are we working toward expertise across all student differences (ability, race, ethnicity, income, sexual identity, language and their intersections), while at the same time not diluting the pervasiveness and eradication of racism in our policies and practices?

Leaders and faculty who prepare them can rely on the Inventory at regular intervals throughout the year for critical self reflection of their own leadership practice in conjunction with using the Inventory with their leadership team and with their entire faculty as a means to critically interrogate their educational practices in schools and leadership preparation programs.

This discussion of the CRT tenets and how they can inform leadership practice also suggests four additional implications for future research in educational leadership. First, scholars who conduct research on race should consider relying on CRT alone or with other theories as a conceptual framework to guide the data collection and analysis. Since most CRT studies in educational leadership relied on the CRT tenets of the permanence of racism and counter-narratives, the field could benefit from further analyses of the CRT tenets of whiteness as property, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, and intersectionality in detailed ways with equity leadership practice. Doing so can help deepen race research in the field and increase the impact on leadership practice. Further, this scholarship should trace the CRT lineage in educational leadership in the literature review that frames the study to facilitate the development of CRT in the field and to promote the scholars who engage in this work and their scholarship.

Second, this CRT grounded race scholarship should include specific implications for leadership practice in schools and districts--direct, clear, and simple. As addressed in the introduction to this paper, some of the CRT studies in educational leadership did not include implications for practice at all, while for others the implications were indirect, or if included, were not clear and straightforward for educational leaders to understand and to use. Further, when providing implications for leadership preparation, scholars should consider how these same ideas can support K-12 leadership development.

Third, future scholarship on race in educational leadership must address the contradictory messages of calling for intersectionality in the field (Dantley, Beachum, & McCray, 2009), while also arguing for leadership preparation centered on one identity, such as race (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Further, educational leadership scholars must.take into account the intersections of race with other aspects of identity and consciously address intersectionality in the problem formation, research questions, and conduct of their studies. Considering race and how it intersects with other identities must extend beyond gender and social class to also include language, ability, and sexual/gender identity.

Fourth, and in sum, in the same way that Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) critiqued the diversity and multicultural discourse for marginalizing race, future scholarship on CRT and educational leadership must directly address and critique the current social justice discourse in the field and the ways the social justice discourse perpetuates racism (Knauss, 2014). As Knauss explains, “. . . it is in the interest of White educators to adopt social justice language instead of integrating anti-racism into the foundation” of academic programs (p. 422). One session at the 2003 University Council for Educational Administration Annual convention addressed the topic directly: "Justice or Just-us?: A critical conversation with scholars of color surrounding leadership for social justice” (Lopez, et al., 2003). Though Dantley and Gooden mention this critique of social justice in the educational leadership field (2012), they do not address the issue in detail. This silence reflects a gaping hole in educational leadership especially, as I previously explained, when CRT emerged out of a critique of radical, critical legal studies. In turn, the application of CRT to education was in part, a critique of the multicultural discourse at the time (Ladson-Billings & Take, 1995). As Crenshaw (2011) wrote about the emergence of CRT out of CLS “ . . . . it was difficult to imagine how to proceed with a conversation about race `out there’ without addressing race `in here’ (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1295). Scholars in educational leadership need to critique the “racism in here” that remains pervasive and unquestioned in the social justice discourse in the field.

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*Appendix*

CRT Tenets Addressed in Educational Leadership

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Publication | Permanence of racism | Whiteness as property | Counter and majoritarian narratives | Interest convergence | Critique of liberalism (colorblindness, meritocracy, democracy) | Intersectionality[[1]](#footnote-1) |
| Aléman (2006) | X |  | X |  |  | Latino superintendents |
| Aléman (2007) | X | X | X | X | X | Latino communities in Texas state finance policy |
| Aléman (2009b) | X | X |  |  |  | Mexican American educational leaders |
| André-Bechely (2005) |  |  | X |  | X | Race, class, and gender – African American, Latino mothers of low and upper income |
| Brown, Beckett, & Beckett (2006). |  | X | X | X |  | Race, African American principal |
| Evans (2007) | X | X |  |  | X | Race, class, and gender – White male/female leaders response to race/class |
| Gooden (2012) | X |  | X | X | X | African American principals |
| Horsford & McKenzie (2008) |  |  | X |  |  | African American superintendents |
| Horsford (2009) | X |  | X |  |  | African American superintendents |
| Horsford (2010a) | X | X | X | X | X | African American superintendents |
| Horsford (2010b) | X |  | X |  |  | African American superintendents |
| Khalifa, Jennings, Briscoe, Oleszweski, Abdi (2014) | X |  | X |  | X | Race – African American principal and Latino superintendent and an African American high school in a Latino community |
| Khalifia, Dunbar, and Douglas (2013) |  |  | X | X | X | African American and Latino youth |
| Knaus (2014) | X |  | X | X |  | Race |
| Lopez (2003) | X |  | X | X | X | Race, class, gender, ability, sexual identity, and their intersections |
| Marx and Larson (2012) |  | X |  | X |  | Latino students |
| McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) | X | X |  |  |  | African American principals |
| Parker & Villalpando (2007) | X |  |  |  |  | X  Race, class, gender, ability, sexual identity, and their intersections |
| Pollack and Zirkel (2013) |  | X | X | X |  | Race and social class |
| Santamaría (2014) | X |  | X |  | X | Race, class, gender, ability, sexual identity and their intersections |
| Sherman (2008) | X |  |  |  |  | X Race and social class |
| Stovall (2004) | X |  |  |  |  | X  Race and social class |
| Theoharis & Haddix (2011) |  | X | X |  | X | X  Race, class, ability, gender, sexual identity and their intersections |
| Valles & Miller (2010) |  |  |  |  | X | Race, gender |

1. An “X” in the box indicates that the article identified intersectionality as a CRT tenet. The text in the box indicates the identities addressed in the article and thus, to what extent the article referred to race as it intersects with other identities, or the degree of intersectionality in the article. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)