

2-22-2019


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Recommended Citation

Rodela, K., Rodriguez-Mojica, C., & Cochrun, A. (2019). ‘You guys are bilingual aren’t you?’ Latinx educational leadership pathways in the New Latinx Diaspora. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 0(0), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1566577>

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *International Journal of Leadership in Education* on Feb. 22, 2019, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13603124.2019.1566577>.

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**‘You guys are bilingual aren’t you?’ Latinx educational leadership pathways in the New
Latinx Diaspora**

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Abstract

Existing research suggests that Latinx educational leaders in the US positively impact Latinx student outcomes and home-school relationships. Yet, much of this research has been conducted in traditional US Latinx immigrant destinations. We know little about the Latinx leadership experiences in regions where Latinx communities are smaller, yet growing quickly such as the New Latinx Diaspora. Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory, this study analyzed in-depth interviews with five Latinx administrators in the US Pacific Northwest. Participants' counter-stories revealed three key findings: their bilingualism was an asset and liability in their early careers, they demonstrated deep persistence in the face of racism and sexism, and they often experienced isolation as either the one or one of a few leaders of color in their districts. Their counter-stories illustrate how changing demographic contexts such as those in the New Latinx Diaspora can impact teaching and leadership demands on bilingual Latinx leaders. Findings from this study suggest a need for the field to reconsider more critically race conscious, equity-focused leadership preparation programs and practices, which can support leaders of color to be prepared to face systemic racism and sexism in their careers.

Keywords: leadership preparation, Latino principals, bilingual education, New Latino Diaspora

Introduction

The New Latinx¹ Diaspora is described by Hamann, Wortham, and Murillo (2002) as regions where ‘increasingly numbers of Latinos (many immigrant, and some from elsewhere in the United States) are settling both temporarily and permanently in areas of the United States that have not traditionally been home to Latinos’ (p. 1), such as the Southeast and parts of the Midwest. An example of the New Latinx Diaspora is the Pacific Northwest region of the US. This area has experienced a boom in the Latinx population, more than tripling in size at the state level from 2000 to 2010 (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Guzmán, 2001) and more than quadrupling across K-12 schools (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction [OSPI], n.d., 2005; Oregon Department of Education [ODE], 2001, 2011).

In these regions, Latinx educational leaders may critically impact the reception of immigrant students and families. As bilingual and bicultural individuals, Latinx administrators are uniquely situated to address the needs of diversifying student populations in their districts. At the same time, Latinx administrators account for only 7% of principals in US public schools (Hill, Ottem, & DeRoche, 2016) and often encounter racism, sexism, and battle stereotypes about Latinx people and Latina women specifically (Martinez, Marquez, Cantu, & Rocha, 2016). In New Latinx Diaspora states, Latinx administrators navigate changing cultural and sociopolitical environments, yet there remains a dearth of research documenting the experiences of Latinx leaders in these regions. What are the experiences of Latinx educational leaders in US states that have not traditionally been home to Latinx? In this article, we use Latina/o Critical Race Theory

¹ We use Latinx as a gender-expansive version of Latina/o. It signifies immigrants or individuals with ancestral ties to Latin America. We also change the term New Latino Diaspora to New Latinx Diaspora to be inclusive of cisgender, transgender, and non-binary individuals within the broader Latinx community.

(LatCrit) to analyze the teaching and leadership trajectories of a group of five Latinx administrators in the US Pacific Northwest.

Latinx educational leadership

Recent scholarship has examined Latinx administrators' leadership trajectories in the US, and the unique characteristics they bring to schools. In this literature review, we outline three key themes as they relate to Latinx educational leadership pathways in the New Latinx Diaspora: (1) Latinx leaders' focus on culturally responsive leadership for social justice; (2) challenges Latinx leaders face on their pathways towards administration; and, (3) experiences of professional isolation and discrimination Latinx administrators face in New Latinx Diaspora regions.

Culturally responsive leadership for social justice

Schools have often neglected to meet Latinx students' needs, particularly those from mixed immigrant status families, low-income backgrounds, and who speak Spanish at home (Cuevas, 2016; Murakami, Hernandez, Méndez-Morse, & Byrne-Jiménez, 2016; Murakami, Valle, & Méndez-Morse, 2013). Given the disconnect between the diverse populations of students in K-12 schooling and often consistently homogeneous population of teachers (Murakami et al., 2016), researchers are becoming more interested in how culturally diverse leaders might impact the schooling experiences of all students. A number of studies have documented the ways Latinx administrators respond to diverse student cultures to promote inclusive school environments and equitable outcomes. Research suggests that Latinx leaders' unique culturally responsive form of leadership, informed from their own personal and educational backgrounds, allows them to better understand the diverse families they serve. As Martinez et al. (2016) explain: 'evidence suggests that principals who are of the same background as the students they serve might be more readily able to understand and address

inequities in student achievement’ (p. 13). Latinx leaders can simultaneously ‘understand the challenge Latinxs face in schools, while valuing their distinct cultural and linguistic attributes’ (p. 13). For example, they may ‘recognize the examples of resiliency among Latinos are manifested in confrontational attitudes and practices’ as students might be responding to ‘oppressive practices and attitudes’ they encounter from educators (Murakami et al., 2013, p. 149). Also, Murakami et al. (2013) suggest that Latinx leaders and educators may be ‘more equipped to intervene and reduce attrition rates among students due to their broader understanding of the reasons Latina/o students might drop out’ (p. 149).

Research has found that Latinx leaders adopt strengths-based perspectives in working with students and families, rejecting deficit perspectives about low-income, communities of color (Murakami et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2016; Hernandez, Murakami, & Quijada Cerecer, 2014). As many are bilingual themselves, they understand how to harness the power of the Spanish language to support bilingual student learning (Hernandez et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2016) or to increase the engagement of multilingual families in schools (Hernandez et al., 2014; Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jiménez, & Hernandez, 2015; Murakami et al., 2016; Pedroza & Méndez-Morse, 2016). Across the literature, Latinx administrators’ personal experiences impacted their desire to lead for social justice (Peterson and Vergara, 2016; Murakami et al., 2016; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Hernandez et al., 2014). Studying Latinx leader experiences across diverse regions in the US is vital to understanding their potential to impact change for all students, especially underserved Latinx students and families.

Challenges on the pathways towards administration

While Latinx administrators have positive impacts on Latinx students, their pathways towards administrative positions are often fraught with challenges and experiences of

discrimination, similar to other leaders of color (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Santamaría, 2014). These specific challenges appear to face many Latinx leaders: lack of formal mentorship, lack of networking opportunities, and direct experiences of racism and sexism.

A lack of formal, professional mentorship is a frequent barrier for Latinx leaders, and Latina leaders in particular (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Hernandez et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2016; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Rodriguez, 2016). One aspect of initial mentorship towards leadership may include being ‘tapped on the shoulder’ by principals or other administrators. The figurative ‘tap on the shoulder’ has been documented as a potentially critical entry-point into leadership positions (Marshall & Kasten, 1994). It has been described as a motivating factor (Tooms, 2007) or an ‘external catalyst,’ which inspired potential leaders’ initial consideration of administrative leadership positions (McNair, 2014). A ‘tap on the shoulder’ has also been seen as a tool for recruitment (Normore, 2007) and form of professional endorsement (Young & McLeod, 2001). An underestimated aspect of being ‘tapped’ is the potential confidence it imbues within aspiring administrators. Examining women’s leadership career paths, Young and McLeod (2001) found that the ‘taps’ the women in [their] study received appeared to do much more than simply plant the idea of entering administration. The encouragement appeared to boost their confidence in their leadership ability’ (p. 485). Inversely, research participants who had not been tapped appeared to ‘show less certainty regarding a career shift’ (p. 485). While not all educational administrators have been ‘tapped’ and some self-select into leadership positions (Normore, 2007), clearly being tapped represents a powerful form of entrée into leadership. Yet, documentation of this ‘tapping’ of Latinx administrators in existing research is limited. Overwhelmingly research has found that Latinx leaders often do not have access to formal, professional mentors or sponsors on their leadership pathways.

Méndez-Morse et al.'s (2015) nationwide survey of over 350 Latinx leaders found that 20% of Latina leaders indicated that role models and mentors had no impact or little influence on their decision to pursue educational leadership. Méndez-Morse (2004) found that, in the absence of traditional mentors, the six Latina leaders in her study constructed their own mentors from sources they had available, and identified their own mothers as their first mentors. Similarly, the work of Martinez and colleagues (2016) demonstrates that the Latina leaders' own mothers were the ones who guided them towards leadership roles. These findings suggest that Latinx leaders might build from their own community cultural wealth and relationships (Yosso, 2005) to support their leadership trajectories, yet clearly the lack of formal, professional mentors impacts their administrative pipeline.

Related to a lack of mentoring was a lack of networking opportunities for Latinx leaders and especially Latina leaders who faced being doubly marginalized in a traditionally White, male-dominated field. Networking affords access to relationships and potential job opportunities, yet can often occur in informal social settings such as after-work happy hours or private parties. Lack of access to a mentor can impact not just access to these networking spaces, but also knowing how to engage in these spaces. Latinx leaders reported that a lack of knowledge about the unspoken rules of leadership put them at a disadvantage, and often led to feelings of isolation (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Martinez et al., 2016).

Not knowing the unspoken rules of leadership and engagement only exacerbates feelings of isolation, given that most Latinx leaders are few in number and often face racism and sexism on the job. In 2011-2012, Latinx leaders comprised approximately 7% of school principals in the United States (Hill et al., 2016). Even in areas with larger percentages of Latinx leaders such as Texas, California, and the Southwest, Latinx leaders have reported feelings of isolation (Avalos

& Salgado, 2016; Martinez et al., 2016). For example, a Latina leader in Martinez et al.'s (2016) study recalled: 'I remember if you would look at the directory you would see the Hispanic names in the foreign language department, the custodial staff, the cafeteria' (p. 20). Latinx leaders often reported a need to prove themselves by adopting a professional persona in all interactions (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Martinez et al., 2016; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami et al., 2016), fearing increased scrutiny given that they were one of few Latinx administrators (Hernandez et al., 2014). The fear of intensified scrutiny and stereotype threat is real for many Latinx leaders, who experience racism and discriminatory practices as educational leaders.

Latina leaders' experiences are often impacted by the 'dual burden' of gender and ethnic identity (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). In Martinez et al.'s (2016) study, Latina participants discussed the discriminatory experiences they had on the road to leadership including comments made about their appearance, age, or stature, push back on their use of Spanish in reaching Latinx families, and sexual harassment from other administrators. They also often had to contend with ethnic and class stereotypes about the low socioeconomic status of Mexican American women in the US (Avalos & Salgado, 2016). Despite these clear examples of racism and sexism, some Latinx leaders might not explicitly identify these forms of oppression as impacting them. In their survey of 350 Latinx leaders, Méndez-Morse et al. (2015) describe that many female participants shared incidences of clear gender discrimination, yet when asked if their gender impacted their job, 48% of women said it had no impact. Latinx and other leaders of color may require the space to develop a critical consciousness around racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression they might encounter. Martinez et al. (2016) identified understanding the racial and political aspects of the job as crucial for future Latina leaders, especially to allow these leaders of color to be better prepared to face potential racism or sexism once they are administrators.

Experiences of professional isolation and discrimination in the New Latinx Diaspora

Experiences of isolation and discrimination may only be exacerbated in states with smaller Latinx populations and fewer Latinx leaders and administrators of color. Although there is limited research on the experiences of Latinx administrators in the New Latinx Diaspora, three studies illuminate similar challenges Latinx educators face in these contexts. In a study of two Latina bilingual education teachers in the Pacific Northwest, Amos (2016) found that the teachers' bilingualism benefitted the school instructionally and financially; however, the benefits came at a cost to these teachers. They were unable to forge strong networks with colleagues because of heavy workloads and, as a result, felt marginalized and isolated.

Racial discrimination and isolation is also common. Hernandez & Murakami (2016), in their study with an educational leader in Minnesota, found that the Latina leader's move from El Paso, Texas to the upper Midwest where Latinx are still a minority, marked a drastic shift in how people perceived her. She noted that when she and her husband would walk in public, White people would simply stare at them, and she often found herself in situations where she was the only non-White person at the table. In Peterson and Vergara's (2016) study of 10 Latinx leaders in the Pacific Northwest, almost all respondents experienced either micro-aggressions or overt racism on the job (including stereotypical comments and racist jokes), yet participants often said that they told no one about these experiences. The only school leader in their study who did report his experience with racism recounted feeling that there were retaliatory actions based on his report. Moreover, these Pacific Northwest leaders spoke directly about the systemic barriers they faced in their pathways to leadership. They felt the system was not designed to allow them to succeed, and they talked about White administrators doing almost all the hiring, and the implicit biases directed towards all Latinx leaders, and Latina leaders more so. They also wished

their principal preparation programs had warned them about the racism they would face on the job and had given them the tools to deal with it.

The increased emphasis on racism and isolation was unique to studies conducted outside of predominantly Latinx communities, which suggests that leaders in the New Latinx Diaspora might have different experiences worth further exploration. There remains a need for scholarship about the experiences of Latinx leaders in US states where Latinx communities are smaller, yet growing exponentially such as Oregon and Washington. This study addresses this gap.

Theoretical framework

We use Critical Race Theory, and specifically Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), as a framework to examine the experiences of Latinx educational leaders in the New Latinx Diaspora. Critical Race Theory focuses on race and racism, values the lived experiences of people of color as legitimate knowledge, challenges dominant discourses, uses interdisciplinary approaches, and works towards social justice (Fernández, 2002; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). Rooted in Critical Race Theory, LatCrit expands to issues of race, gender, class, immigration status, and language that can result in subordination outside and within the Latinx community (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Pérez-Huber, 2008; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) outline five tenets of Critical Race Theory and LatCrit. We outline these tenets in Table 1 and describe how we operationalize them in our analysis of Latinx leader experiences.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

It is important to highlight three key concepts mentioned in Table 1 from LatCrit that inform our analysis: counter-story, majoritarian story, and cultural intuition. Central to our analysis are the counter-stories of our research participants. As a historically silenced and

marginalized group in educational leadership, Latinx leaders' experiences counter 'majoritarian stories' told in the field about how one becomes a school leader and what that leadership looks like in practice. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) describe a majoritarian story as 'one that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference' (p. 28). A majoritarian story is seen as 'natural' and 'distorts and silences the experiences of people of color' (p. 29). For example, although there has been a steady increase in the number of women becoming public school principals in the US over time (reaching 52% of all public school principals in 2011-2012), an overwhelming majority of school principals are White (80% in 2011-2012) (Hill et al., 2016, p. 5-6). Being a majority in number certainly impacts the amount of research on White principals and their experiences, yet often the racial and cultural identities of these principals go unnamed and unless authors center race, it is assumed the principals are White.

A majoritarian story about what leadership is and how it should be developed reifies a normative vision of leadership practice and pathways. We contend that much of what we know about the principal pipeline in the US is a majoritarian story. We describe it here as a sequence of steps. To become a principal in the US, one must: (1) teach for at least five years to gain different leadership experiences, including coaching or teacher leadership; (2) be 'tapped on the shoulder' by a school principal who notices 'leadership potential'; (3) enter an administrative credential program and engage in an internship aligned with state and national standards; (4) enter an assistant principal position if not directly into a principalship, often with formal and informal mentor support. Applying a LatCrit and Critical Race Theory lens to these 'natural' steps allows us to see how this narrative functions as a majoritarian story. It erases the complex journeys all educators and especially minoritized persons must traverse to enter formal

administrative positions. In effect, the majoritarian principalship narrative ‘others’ experiences where aspiring administrators might struggle, lack mentorship, or face racism, sexism, or other forms of oppression. By focusing on the narratives of the Latinx leaders in our study, we challenge dominant assumptions about the educational leadership pipeline.

In addition to counter-story and majoritarian story, the notion of ‘cultural intuition’ is important to how we approached our data collection and analysis processes. Drawing from LatCrit and Chicana Feminist Epistemology, Delgado Bernal (1998) describes cultural intuition as a process by which Latina researchers draw on diverse sources of knowledge to examine the data. She likens it to Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) ‘theoretical sensitivity—a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data’ (p. 563). Delgado Bernal (1998) outlines four sources of cultural intuition, which help researchers understand the lived experiences of their participants. We list these sources here along with examples within our own study and approach in parenthesis: (1) personal experience (e.g. Author 1 and Author 2’s lived experiences as bilingual Latina women); (2) existing literature (e.g. research on Latinx educational leaders); (3) professional experience (e.g. all three authors were teachers and have an ‘insider view of how things work in that field,’ p. 566); and, (4) analytical research process (e.g. our data analysis and coding procedures). In the next section, we describe our methodological approach and provide more information on how we sought to bring forward their counter-stories and attend to our own positionalities in data collection and analysis.

Methodology

In this article, we analyze in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five Latinx administrators in the Pacific Northwest. Here, we provide information about the leaders, data

collection, and analysis methods. All names of persons, schools, and districts are pseudonyms to protect the identities of our research participants.

Research context

The research context illustrates the unique cultural and social landscapes Latinx administrators in our study navigated in their work. US Census (2017) estimates Latinx persons make up approximately 12.8% of Oregon's and 12.4% of Washington's populations, more than tripling since the 1990s (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Guzmán, 2001). The Latinx population's growth has been more dramatic in public schools, more than quadrupling in both states.

Table 2 provides the percentages of White and Latinx students, teachers, and administrators from the 2015-2016 school year for both states. Despite growth in the percentage of Latinx students and students of color overall, the percentages of teachers and administrators of color, specifically Latinx remain low. As is evident from the table, the overwhelming majority of teachers and principals in both states are White. This reality highlights the critical need to understand the experiences of Latinx educators who have become administrators in contexts where the pace of student diversification has not been met with parallel diversification among teaching staffs.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Participants

Our participants identified as Latino/a or Hispanic and had diverse Latinx cultural backgrounds. Three had Mexican-origin backgrounds, one was from Central America, and another was from South America. All five leaders were the first in their families to graduate from college and pursue a professional career. The majority of our participants worked in districts that

experienced demographic changes since the early 2000's. Table 3 provides details about leaders' positions and years of teaching and administrative experience.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

As one can see, their teaching experiences ranged from 4 to 18 years, and they had a range of experience as administrators.

Table 4 provides demographic information about each of their districts and schools. Their districts ranged in size from a smaller district of 2,000 students to upwards of 26,000. For the school level administrators in our study, it is important to compare the demographics of their districts to their schools. In all four cases, they had a higher percentage of Latinx students in their schools than the district average (and higher than both Oregon and Washington's averages of Latinx students as noted in Table 2). Also, three of our research participants led at schools with higher percentages of students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch services (i.e. higher number of students from lower income backgrounds) compared to their districts. These demographic data help frame the context of their leadership experiences.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Data sources and analysis

Data sources for our study included interview transcripts from five semi-structured, in-depth interviews, field notes from approximately 10 observations of leaders in school and community meetings, and information about district and regional contexts collected from local media and district public records. We employed purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2005) to target individuals holding administrative positions in K-12 schools in the Pacific Northwest, and who identified as Hispanic, Latina/o, or another related identity. Four of the five participants were previously known to Author 1 through other studies of equity leadership and local community

events. One of the research participants was recommended by another person in the study. We interviewed each participant once and each interview was approximately 90 to 120 minutes.

We use counter-storytelling as a method to share the experiences of the Latinx educational leaders in our study. As Author 1 interviewed the leaders, they reflected on their personal experiences and shared their stories. We designed the interviews to allow the leaders to share their stories in their ways. As such, we used a conversation guide that asked about: personal, educational, and professional histories; current administrative work; and issues impacting their districts and Latinx students and communities.

Research positionality

Guided by our LatCrit theoretical framework, it is important to discuss the role of our own positionalities as authors. Author 1 and Author 2 are both bilingual Latina assistant professors. Author 3 is a female White graduate student in an administrative preparation program. All authors have experience as teachers in K-12 schools, though have not served in formal administrative roles.

Author 1 conducted all interviews and participant observations. While engaged in another research project, Author 1 was approached by two research participants about connecting with other Latinx administrators and learning about their experiences. They were especially eager to share their experiences with Author 1, as she was one of only a few Latina professors on her campus as well as one of only a handful of educational leadership professors of color in the region. Because of this and previous interactions, there was ‘an increased level of confianza [trust] and understanding’ between Author 1 and the interviewees (Martinez et al., 2016, p. 16). There are moments in our interview transcripts where interviewees cried, transitioned to Spanish

when discussing something particularly difficult, or made comments like ‘you know’ when discussing racialized experiences.

As discussed in the theoretical framework section of this article, ‘cultural intuition’ (Delgado Bernal, 1998) formed an important part of our analytical lens. At the same time, we also heed Delgado Bernal’s (1998) caution that ‘researchers must be careful to not let any of the four sources [of cultural intuition] block them from seeing the obvious or assume everyone’s personal and professional experiences are equal to theirs’ (p. 566). Practicing reflexivity around the role our positionalities and cultural intuition play in our methods, as well as attending closely to the data itself, were integral to our process of ensuring research participants’ stories were told on their terms and in their ways.

Data analysis

We began data analysis by transcribing and de-identifying all interviews. Following transcription, we divided the transcripts between Authors 1 and 2 for the first round of coding. Each fully read their assigned transcript, then coded the transcripts’ emergent themes within and across participants. While we were guided in part by ‘cultural intuition’ including the ways our research participants’ stories contrasted with majoritarian representations of administrative trajectories, we coded initially without prescribed codes. We switched interviews, blinding the other author’s codes, so that each interview was coded independently by both authors. After this first round of coding, we un-blinded the codes to find where themes overlapped. We wrote analytical memos for each participant, highlighting the major themes within each interview. Next, we discussed each participant in detail, generating major themes across all participants. As we generated major themes, the authors revisited the literature and drew on their own professional and personal experiences living in the Pacific Northwest and California. In this way,

we follow Solorzano and Yosso (2001) and Delgado Bernal's (1998) notion of cultural intuition to understand our leaders' stories.

Findings

The Latinx leaders' counter-stories reveal key elements in the experiences of Latinx administrators in the New Latinx Diaspora. Three themes emerged across their educational leadership pathways: (1) bilingualism as an asset and a liability; (2) persistence to achieve leadership positions; (3) and experiences of isolation and difference in leadership.

Bilingualism as asset and liability

Most of our research participants were explicitly recruited to work with the growing Spanish-English bilingual population in their districts and their first teaching jobs were working primarily with English language learners or Latinx students. While they all viewed their bilingualism as an asset, several remarked on how their bilingualism limited perceptions of their teaching abilities or expertise.

Recruitment into jobs

In his first year of community college, Santiago attended a career fair with his brother where he was recruited because he is bilingual. He recalled seeing someone he knew: 'she ended up stopping us and said 'hey, how about working with the Oakdale School District, you guys are bilingual aren't you?' Like Santiago, many of our research participants were explicitly and directly recruited because they are bilingual. Santiago and Ximena most directly attributed their recruitment to bilingualism.

Santiago worked in his home school district while in community college and transferred to a nearby 4-year university to earn a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education with an endorsement in bilingual education. Santiago saw his recruitment as an opportunity. He

described his first teaching position as working mostly with English language learners and teaching fourth grade bilingual reading and writing. At the time, there were over 50% Latinx students and over 30% English language learners in Santiago's district. In contrast, Latinx students made up 9% and English language learners made up 5% of the state's student population.

Ximena taught 7th grade mathematics in her first teaching position. She described, 'I was hired because I was bilingual. I think that helped me because it was the ELL School at the time'. When asked what she meant by 'ELL School' Ximena explained that in the mid-1990s, the district 'would put all the ELL kids in one school at each level'. While scholars have since critiqued the practice of isolating English language learners in what have been called 'ESL [English as a Second Language] ghettos' (Valdés, 1998), the district thought it was beneficial to serve students in this manner. She recalled using Spanish in her instruction: 'I actually taught math in Spanish as well as in English. Not by design, but I did it because my Spanish kiddos didn't understand my English, and I actually was much more comfortable teaching math in Spanish anyways'.

Continued work with English language learners and Latinx students

In their first years of teaching, all of our participants worked in schools with higher concentrations of Latinx and low-income students, compared to their districts and the state. Several were targeted to teach English language learners despite not having endorsements or specific English language learner teaching appointments.

Hilaria and Gloria discussed the specific contexts in which they taught and the ways their initial teaching experiences differed from the typical experiences of other first-year teachers. Gloria explains:

When I was a teacher, I would always get all the ELL students, which was fine, but I didn't speak Korean. You know? I'm sorry. [...] Even though I spoke another language, they thought, 'You'd be great for that', which is fine. I knew ELL techniques and so forth, but it wasn't only my responsibility in that grade level to work with ELLs. There were teachers who were veterans for years and they seemed fine to push them over to me.

Although she had some preparation to teach English language learners, Gloria was a novice fourth and fifth grade teacher with no official charge or support to teach English language learners. Still, she was assigned English language learners from multiple language backgrounds, because she spoke Spanish. In sharing these experiences, Gloria emphasized that as an administrator 'you can't do that' and shook her head remembering the experience. After five years in one district, Gloria was recruited by a director of English language learners programs to teach in another district as an English language learner teacher. She worked at this school for five years. Unlike her first district, she felt that her abilities to teach bilingual students were valued with a formal English language learner teaching position.

Hilaria entered education because of a university-sponsored program focused on recruiting teachers of color. Although Hilaria's path to becoming a teacher took seven years and contained stops and starts because of family responsibilities, she earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in education. A majority of her teaching experience centered around working with Latinx bilingual students, although the percentage of Latinx students in the district was small. For example, in her first year of teaching, Hilaria worked at a school where 90% of the students were Latino/Hispanic; only 23% of the district students were Latino/Hispanic. After her first year, Hilaria transitioned to another district and began her work as a bilingual teacher. She was

recruited by Gloria (a participant in our study), who at the time had started a dual language immersion program as a principal.

‘But I just kept on going’ Latinx leaders’ persistence towards leadership

None of the leaders in our study were explicitly ‘tapped on the shoulder’ by principals or other administrators; instead they found leadership within themselves and were encouraged by informal mentors, colleagues, and friends. Our research participants persisted, being called to leadership by a deep desire to serve students and challenge themselves professionally.

While their intrinsic motivation guided them into leadership paths, the Latinx leaders in our study experienced a range of support in their administrative credential programs and initial years as administrators. Ximena, Oliver, and Santiago felt supported within their administrative credential programs and within the districts where they conducted their internships. Hilaria and Gloria, however, had drastically different experiences and had to push through resistance to their leadership.

Support towards administrative positions: Ximena, Oliver, and Santiago

Ximena, Oliver, and Santiago were supported by encouraging colleagues and professors that served as mentors and sponsors. Originally, Ximena entered an administrative program because she wanted to pursue a Master’s degree in the US. After two years in her program, she was offered a job as an assistant planning principal for a new high school in the same district she began her teaching career. This opportunity positioned her to learn about administration and stay connected and visible to district administrators.

Oliver was called to leadership by a sense of challenge. Although Oliver enjoyed his work as a teacher and coach, he realized he wanted to do more within the school. After six years, he realized he did not want to teach and coach for the rest of his career. Oliver then became

involved in school improvement efforts and became more active in the teachers' union.

Approximately five years later, he sought his administrative credential and began work as a high school assistant principal.

Out of the other leaders in our study, Santiago had the most teaching experience. Before starting his first job as an assistant principal in his home school district, Santiago taught for over 18 years at all elementary grade levels. Santiago recalled how fellow teachers often told him and his brother:

'you guys will be great administrators'. It's not a thing you had to believe in yourself that you couldn't, I was never—I didn't think that way. I [thought] it was possible, but I enjoyed teaching and I said how 'it will happen later'. And, I think it just came into that moment that you just felt it was time that you were ready. I think I was ready.

The time aligned with an opportunity he received to be trained in a biliteracy program for bilingual students. He became a district literacy coach first and then transitioned to an assistant principal position. Santiago's cautiousness reflects his drive to experience different educational environments, but also a need to make sure he was ready for administration. When asked about transitioning to a principalship, he re-emphasized his desire to be prepared and to 'get it right' before becoming a principal. In this way, he communicated feeling he still had much to learn and wanted to be prepared to do a good job.

Leadership through coraje: Gloria and Hilaria

Gloria and Hilaria faced direct challenges to their leadership on their pathways to administration. These challenges raised a deep sense of injustice and anger; we describe this as 'coraje'. Coraje is Spanish for a deep outrage. They both felt they had something to prove to

individuals who dismissed their leadership and abilities, and were motivated by their own desire to serve students like themselves.

Gloria experienced racism when criticized by a professor for her culturally responsive leadership style, which differed from her mostly White, middle-class peers. Unlike others in our study, Gloria knew early on that she wanted to be an administrator. In her second year of teaching, she realized the amount of power the principal holds over the school's philosophy and vision. After eight years of teaching, she entered her administrative credential program. Gloria experienced challenges while in her program and felt isolated as the only Latinx and person of color.

When asked if there were other people of color in her program, she replied 'No. It was hard. I was also told that maybe that this wasn't the program for me. Yeah. But I just kept on going. You know, if you want something, you gotta do it'. Gloria revealed that it was a professor in her preparation program who told her that maybe this path was not for her. It upset her, but she pushed through. When asked what sustained her during this time she said:

I know that, because back then also, there were hardly any Latinos compared to even now. So you just have to do everything on your own and you have to be fine. And you find different relationships, and you just do it. Somebody's gotta do it, gotta be the first one.

She knew she was one among few educational leaders of color in the region, and it was important for her to persevere. Gloria also wanted to discredit the deficit perspective she faced:

I just wanted to prove people wrong. [...] And if you tell me I can't do it, then I'm gonna show you that I can and I'm gonna come out on top. Really, I mean, that's what sustained

me and it's like you have to be comfortable being the only one and if somebody says anything that you can't do it, then, I guess, you work harder to prove them wrong.

While Gloria experienced a lack of support within her administrative credential program, her mentor principal was very supportive. Gloria went on to successfully complete her program, but was met with disappointment when she was not called for an interview in her home district. She was told that she had to be more 'demonstrative' in her leadership, which she interpreted to mean 'sound and act more like White middle-class administrators'. Gloria felt that was counter to her culturally responsive leadership style and ability to connect to diverse families and students. Ultimately, Gloria obtained a position as an assistant principal in a bilingual school in another district. One year later, she was recruited to her original district to be an assistant principal at a dual immersion school.

Hilaria experienced an overt form of sexism as an educator, facing sexual harassment in her first teaching position. She identified a drive within built from the hardships and struggles she endured as a Latina and single mother. She shared:

It was my very first year fresh out of college and I started there and [the principal] was making a lot of passes to me and he was like a married man, and it was not okay. All of a sudden, he was micromanaging me and making my life horrible, because I turned him down. My colleagues would tell me, 'Don't worry about it, you're the flavor of the year, he does that all the time. Just get over it, next year there will be another female and he'll focus on her'.

Hilaria disagreed with her colleagues.

Me, I'm like, 'What? Don't worry about it? That is not okay'. [They said] 'All right, Hilaria, shh'. I'm like, 'No, I am not going to be quiet, there is an injustice going on and

that needs to stop'. First year, I went all the way to the school board and I lost four to three, I almost lost my career for it.

Hilaria took a major risk, and ultimately was not supported by the school board, despite being supported by the teachers' union. She felt shunned and pushed aside, and decided to leave the district. The following year, she was hired in another district.

Hilaria identified two motivations to become an administrator: (1) a drive to be an advocate for young people who grew up facing economic hardships and racism; (2) and the desire to support her two children. She said, 'I have to be in leadership because that's the only logical step. If I want to make more money from being a teacher in education, it's the next logical step. [Also] if I want to have more of a voice instead of just my classroom'. Hilaria was encouraged to take on leadership roles within a local bilingual education organization, and decided her next step was an administrative program. However, in her third year of teaching, she was counselled against entering an administrative program so early in her teaching career by Gloria. Hilaria explained:

'I told Gloria, 'I want to be a principal'. She's like, 'What?' 'Yeah, I think I'm going to do it'. She's like, 'Okay, let me know when you're interested'. She thought it was like a year process and so like two weeks later I was enrolled in the program, applying for the internship, going on the interview for the internship. She's like, 'You're not ready'. I'm like, 'Why not?' She's like, 'You're not ready for it, Hil'. I was like, 'Yes I am'. I went and I interviewed for the internship at [the district] and I didn't get it and then I was really bummed and then deflated and she's like, 'I told you, you weren't ready'. I was like, 'Well, okay, make me ready'. It's like, 'Okay'. Then that following year it was all about [that].

When asked why Gloria said that to her, Hilaria explained, ‘what she meant by that was she didn't have enough time to throw my name in, she didn't have enough time to network me into the world of politics’. Gloria knew there was a politics to the process and she wanted to support Hilaria’s pathway towards leadership, unlike her own experience. Hilaria was later grateful for Gloria’s mentorship. After graduating from her administrative credential program, she received her first position as an assistant principal.

Experiences of isolation and difference in leadership

Our research participants experienced various forms of isolation and difference as Latinx administrators, both in their current positions and in their pathways towards leadership. When comparing their experiences to White, monolingual administrative colleagues, they described their experiences in a range from being just different to feeling explicitly isolated.

When compared to the other Latinas in our study, Ximena described her experiences as overwhelmingly positive. At the same time, it was clear that being bilingual and speaking English with an accent impacted her leadership experiences. Ximena mentioned that she knew students and families reacted to her accent when she spoke English, but she felt it just intrigued them and made them better listen to her. She also described additional burdens that her White, monolingual superintendent peers would not experience. For example, she recalled how she would often be called upon by principals or counselors to interpret for the two or three Spanish-speaking families in the district.

Gloria and Santiago explicitly shared experiences of isolation. Beginning with her administrative program, Gloria recalled feeling isolated. When asked about her peers in the administrative preparation program, Gloria said:

They were all kind and supportive. I mean, it was a nice group of people. They were all very nice. I just don't, you know, when you have different backgrounds, I mean, they weren't like my best friends or anything, and I know some of them were friends, you know, still with the principals here they're friends and so forth and they're all very nice with me and to me and I'm polite with them but we don't have friendships. Like I don't go to their house or anything like that. And I'm sure a lot of them do have that. But it's a different world. I mean, I live in a different world, too, at times. I just went in, did my work, and that's it.

Gloria described how she lived 'in a different world' than her peers in the program and the informal network and friendships they all had with each other that she was left out of. When Gloria received her first administrator position in her current district, she recalled being the only Latinx administrator in the district and highlighted feelings of isolation from not being a part of the network of 'friendships' among administrative colleagues.

After her two years as an assistant principal in the district, Gloria was hired to start a dual immersion program in another elementary school. At the time, she had also just given birth to her second child. Gloria recognized that she was extremely busy in her new role and the toil her isolation took on her leadership:

You know, my principalship was harder [...] and I think it was because everything comes down to you. And I think that because I don't have those close relationships and ties to other principals, sometimes that does hurt me, you know? I don't know what's happening around the district. I'm the last ... If you want to hear about gossip, I'm the last one to know. I'm like, 'When did that happen?'. 'Eight months ago'. I'm like, 'Oh'. You know? But they're all friends and they talk and so sometimes that's not good either. I don't know

what's going on around. Where other people here are like, 'Did you hear this, did you hear that?' You use it to your benefit. I don't know'.

At the time of the study, Gloria mentioned that there were only two other Latinx administrators in the district beside herself. Also, there were only two dual immersion Spanish-English schools in her district, Gloria was an assistant principal at one, then started the second program as a principal. Her position and role was different than positions her colleagues and former classmates held. Her demanding leadership positions, identity, and responsibilities as a Latina mother, and the informal relationships and interactions occurring outside of work (e.g. happy hours, gatherings at colleagues' homes) only exacerbated the distance to her peer administrators, who were mostly White and male.

Santiago also highlighted feelings of isolation in his current district. Having moved from a district with a large Latinx population to a district with a smaller, but growing Latinx population, Santiago recalled his surprise to learn he was among a handful of administrators of color:

I think it was more the cultural shock because when I went to [the district office], they had the first meeting of administrators, I saw that there were some huge differences, huge difference... If it wasn't just the little here and there, everybody else is Caucasian and even to say when you want something to be successful in a certain place, you need to go back and look at it and it's good, like for example at [Gloria's school, she] is there and that makes it, you know what I mean? It makes it all great, there's something that's supportive, she knows Spanish, that's important for building parents' and kids' support. Someone here, that's me. That's a start but if I know correctly, Gloria has been here for the longest time and she has been the only one Hispanic.

Santiago highlights that he only knew of one other Latinx administrator (Gloria in our study) in his district. He also emphasized that there were no Latinx administrators at the district level. He connected the presence of Latinx administrators to creating better connections with families and students, particularly those who speak Spanish.

Discussion

The counter-stories of the Latinx leaders in our study support the existing literature showing that Latinx educators experience racism and isolation (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Martinez et al., 2016; Peterson & Vergara, 2016). Their experiences expand our understanding of the ways changing demographic contexts such as those in the New Latinx Diaspora can impact teaching and leadership demands on bilingual Latinx leaders. Using a LatCrit lens reveals several insights about the ways in which Latinx leaders' pathways represent a critical departure from the majoritarian administrative pathway in the US.

There are three key ways the counter-stories of the five Latinx leaders in our study deviate from the majoritarian administrative pathway narrative: (1) in their initial teaching assignments, they served more students of color, low-income students, and English language learners compared to district and state averages; (2) they experienced lukewarm support in their initial move towards leadership; and (3) despite feeling 'different' and potentially isolated as one of the only bilingual and Latinx leaders in their districts, they built on their cultural and linguistic differences as strengths to serve all students and families. In this discussion section, we examine these experiences to deepen our understanding of the counter-stories and strengths of Latinx leaders in the New Latinx Diaspora.

Served higher numbers of traditionally underserved students

First, their teaching experiences often differed in the average length and the kinds of teaching opportunities and supports they received. While the majoritarian principalship pathway begins with five or more years of teaching experience, the Latinx leaders in our study averaged about 9 years of teaching experience (with a range of 4 to 18 years) before pursuing their administrative credential. As bilingual and bicultural educators, they were positioned to serve the dramatically growing Latinx student population. All five Latinx leaders worked in schools with higher concentrations of Latinx and low-income students, compared to district and state averages. They were often charged with serving bilingual students and English language learners with limited school support or district infrastructure, particularly in the early years of dramatic Latinx student population growth. For example, Gloria's experience of serving 'all the ELL students' in a traditional teacher role exemplifies how, without support and formal recognition, she became the school's way to support English language learners. Administrators sought to provide English language learners services through bilingual Latinx leaders, often without formally assigning or compensating them for positions that adequately captured the additional services they provided.

Some might argue that administrators placed English language learners with bilingual Latinx teachers in an effort to support the students in the best way they could. This argument wrongly assumes that being bicultural and bilingual in any language is sufficient preparation to support students acquiring English as a second language. The United States Department of Education (2015) states that Local Educational Agencies 'must hire teachers qualified and certified to teach ELs, or support unqualified staff as they work towards obtaining the qualifications within a reasonable period of time (e.g., within two years)'. Literature on the preparation of teachers of English language learners recommend that teachers have a robust

understanding of language, bilingualism (Bunch, 2013; Fillmore & Snow, 2002; Palmer & Martínez, 2016), culture (Fillmore & Snow, 2002), and the sociopolitical discourse and language ideologies in classrooms (Palmer & Martínez, 2013, 2016). The states of Oregon and Washington each offer English language learner endorsements that include coursework on language, bilingualism, culture, and ideologies in addition to passing English language learner specific licensure exams. Assuming that having a bicultural and bilingual teacher is enough to support English language learners minimizes the additional preparation, knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of English language learners.

As Amos (2016) describes in her study of educators in the Pacific Northwest, hiring bilingual Latinx educators and capitalizing on their bilingualism, without compensation can isolate and marginalize bilingual teachers. This practice is not unique to the Pacific Northwest. Harklau and Colomer (2015) documented a similar lack of support in the New Latinx Diaspora state of Georgia. They found that Spanish foreign language teachers were tapped to serve as informal interpreters and to communicate with families, despite lack of preparation. Harklau and Colomer (2015) argue that districts abdicated their responsibility for providing more robust, institutionalized programs and policies by relying on makeshift and informal support strategies vis-à-vis these Spanish language teachers.

Through a LatCrit and Critical Race Theory lens, the systemic inequities that perpetuated this practice become even clearer. First, aligned with Solorzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) first tenet, the Latinx leaders' racialized identities were inextricably connected to their language as bilingual individuals. It is not possible to understand their experiences as Latinx administrators without seeing how their intersectional identities impacted them. Second, while not mentioned in Solorzano and Delgado's (2001) framework, the Critical Race Theory tenet of

interest convergence is clearly connected to our research participants' experiences. As Taylor (2016) explains, the tenet of interest convergence tells us that 'the interest of Blacks in gaining racial equality have been accommodated only when they have converged with the interests of Whites' (p. 4). This means that groups in power (e.g. White district and school administrators) will only concede to equitable changes for other people of color when those changes align with their own interests. The fact that most of our Latinx leaders described the impact their bilingualism and ethnic identity had on securing their first position accentuates the reality that they and their district, schools, and White administrators who hired them benefitted from them filling the position. Their interest in obtaining a position and the district's interest in hiring bilingual staff to meet the needs of their bilingual students converged. However, this came at a cost to the Latinx administrators in our study. We contend that using bilingual educators without formal recognition, support, or compensation serves as an erasure of their unique skills and strengths as bilingual, bicultural people of color. It unfairly burdens minoritized teachers and leaders—precisely those individuals seen as having potentially large impacts on equitable student achievement (Martinez et al., 2016).

Lukewarm, uneven support entering the leadership pipeline

The second way our research participants' leadership pathways differ from a majoritarian narrative around the leadership pipeline is the lukewarm, uneven support experienced by the group as they sought an administrative credential. None of them were 'tapped on the shoulder' by a formal administrator. While some, such as Santiago, had teacher colleagues mention that they would be great administrators, none of their supervisors or formal administrators in their districts said 'you should be a leader.' Instead, they found within themselves the desire to lead. Ximena, Santiago, and Oliver appeared to have relatively supportive preparation experiences

once they applied and were accepted into their programs; however, Gloria and Hilaria experienced resistance to their leadership by a professor and district leadership.

Gloria's and Hilaria's stories particularly demonstrate the ways in which broader systems of racism and sexism impact the leadership trajectories of female leaders of color (Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Martinez et al., 2016; Santamaría, 2014). As the first tenet of LatCrit describes, their experiences of racism were inextricably tied to their experiences of sexism (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Hilaria was sexually harassed by her first principal supervisor. Gloria was told her leadership style did not align with district expectations, which she believed reflected more White, male examples of directive and managerial leadership. Having these experiences placed them in precarious positions as they were criticized and dismissed by powerful individuals who had direct influence on their careers.

While some might argue that not being 'tapped on the shoulder' or initially encouraged into leadership by supervisors is a benign form of oppression, the second tenet of LatCrit helps us more critically analyze the majoritarian administrative pathway. As explained in our theoretical framework, the pathway towards the principalship is often described in colorblind terms and understood as a progression of 'logical' or 'natural' steps, including experiences as a classroom teacher, being 'tapped on the shoulder' and encouraged by a supervising administrator. As we explained in [Table 1](#), dominant ideology often makes claims of 'objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity' (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 313). Through a dominant ideological lens, one could argue that our research participants' experiences of not being tapped on the shoulder is an instance of not standing out among the other teaching staff at their schools, and—all things being equal—if they really showed their leadership skills their administrative supervisors would have noticed and

encouraged their leadership. Through a LatCrit lens, one can see how this interpretation of teacher-principal dynamics negates the reality of unconscious bias on relationships, particularly racialized interactions and understandings of what ‘good leadership’ looks like. In other words, interpreting their not being tapped on the shoulder as due to individual merits ignores systemic forms of racism, sexism, classism, and heteronormativity inherent in the ‘logical’ and ‘natural’ majoritarian administrative pathway.

Building on cultural difference and isolation as strength

The last major difference to the majoritarian administrative pipeline narrative in our research participants’ counter-stories was the dual experience of being one of the only Latinx leaders of color, and having their cultural difference enhance their leadership and work with diverse students and families. The leaders in our study recognized that being different meant their leadership work looked and sounded different than their White administrator peers. Sometimes this impacted specific tasks given, such as the requests made to Ximena to interpret for Spanish-speaking families as one of the only bilingual people working in her district. Also, it could influence the type of schools they were hired in as administrators. Gloria recalled how her principalship was harder as she started a dual immersion program in her first principalship. This reality coupled with Gloria’s sense that she came from a ‘different world’ than her administrative peers exacerbated her feeling out of the loop on key decisions being made across the district. While all the leaders in our study acutely felt their difference to White colleagues, their isolation also highlighted the ways systems of exclusion are maintained within district structures, especially for the principals and assistant principals of color. Lack of formal, equitable communication among administrators in a large district—such as those Hilaria, Santiago, and

Gloria worked in—meant that being left out of informal networking and relationships could have critical consequences to continued leadership advancement and opportunities.

Yet, both LatCrit and our research participants' own words speak to how their difference could be beneficial. The leaders in our study by and large perceived their impact and vision as deeply connected to the identities and backgrounds they shared with the students, families, and communities they served. Santiago described the impact of Gloria's presence in her school and highlighted that her ability to speak Spanish was 'important for building parents' and kids' support'. After explaining that 'everybody else is Caucasian', he asked 'you know what I mean?' meaning the qualitatively different feeling families and students might have when their principal looked and sounded like them, and understood the community on a deeper, personal, and cultural level like him and Gloria. The five Latinx leaders knew they were different from the majority of administrators in their districts. They knew these differences could be seen from a deficit perspective by other educators. However, as the fourth tenet of LatCrit emphasizes, their 'experiential knowledge' was central to countering dominant narratives (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) about what educational leadership could be. They recognized their cultural backgrounds from a community cultural wealth perspective (Yosso, 2005), seeing that precisely because of their languages, families, immigrant histories, and adversities they were strong leaders.

Implications for research and practice

There are increasing calls for the diversification of the educational leadership field, particularly for more principals of color or from other minoritized groups. The extant work on leadership preparation from an equity lens often focuses on preparing leaders to engage in social justice oriented practices (Furman, 2012; Jean-Marie, Norman, & Brooks, 2009; McKenzie et al.,

2008; O'Malley & Capper, 2014). Most of this literature focuses on the importance of developing the critical consciousness of aspiring administrators (Bertrand & Rodela, 2017). What is missing within our understanding as a field are the differences in experiences and pathways between White leaders and leaders of color, or from other minoritized groups. What should leadership preparation look like for leaders who come from minoritized backgrounds like the Latinx leaders in our study? How should they be prepared to encounter the intersecting forms of oppression or marginalization they may face? How do we account for regional differences in the demands on leaders of color, such as Latinx leaders in the New Latinx Diaspora?

The lukewarm and uneven form of initial mentorship experienced across the Latinx leaders in our study suggests a need to reconsider a more color-conscious or critically race conscious leadership preparation program. Peterson and Vergara (2016) discussed how their research participants wished their preparation programs would have better prepared them to encounter the racism they would face in their positions. Gloria emerged as a critical mentor in our study. After experiencing challenges on her path to leadership, Gloria decided to mentor and support other Latinx leaders such as Hilaria and Santiago. Both Hilaria and Santiago highlight Gloria's leadership as an example they strived to follow.

What would it look like for aspiring administrators to interrogate how their own sociocultural and racial positionality may impact their leadership practices? What are the roles of administrators of color in supporting and helping aspiring leaders of color on their leadership journeys? What would it look like for aspiring administrators to engage in critical reflection as people of color entering a White, cisgender male dominated field? How can a race conscious leadership preparation program be attentive to the local and regional differences in racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression? These questions need to be considered from a research

and practice perspective as leadership preparation programs seek to support and diversify the leadership pipeline. To not engage in a critical examination of the ways racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression impact educational leadership work is to support a majoritarian narrative around who gets to be leaders, how leaders should act, and who they should sound like.

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