

## Anti-Racism in Higher Education: A Model for Change

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### **Abstract:**

Racism continues to persist in higher education and traditional diversity initiatives that focus only on support resources and tolerance training continue to fall short in making lasting change on college and university campuses. The purpose of this scholarly paper is to present a model for change within higher education that distributes leadership and institutional power across racial lines and enlightens the White community about systemic inequities.

### **Keywords:**

Racism, Anti-racism, Whiteness, Critical White Studies, Diversity Initiatives

## **Anti-Racism in Higher Education: A Model for Change**

Racism and white dominance have been a part of the United States higher educational system since its inception. The privileged mindset of white male founders who allowed Harvard College to admit only rich young White men continues to be pervasive today in both overt and covert forms. Despite attempts to attend to racial problems, United States higher education has not come very far in addressing systems of White dominance (Alvarez McHatton, Keller, Shircliffe, & Zalaquett, 2009; Dodge & Jarratt, 2013; Stage & Hammrick, 1994).

In the early American colonies, colleges and universities were never intended to educate people of color, though a number of campuses were built by the hands of Black slaves. Moreover, scholars have often silenced the voices and experiences of students of color in the re-telling of higher education history. During the early colonial era in particular, there was no indication of a desire or commitment to educate people of color (Thelin, 2004). In fact, the creation of universities was rooted in an anti-black ideology that benefitted from chattel slavery that built the early colleges in America (Wilder, 2013). However, later in this era, college presidents and board members abused education and misused Christian evangelism of converted Native Americans as a strategy to grow enrollment, increase funds, and to solicit donors in England (Thelin, 2004), revealing an early indication of what Critical Race Theory scholars would later refer to as interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In fact, one modern scholar argues, “The first five colleges in the British American colonies – Harvard... William and Mary... Yale... Codrington... and New Jersey—were instruments of Christian expansionism, weapons for the conquest of indigenous peoples, and major beneficiaries of the African slave trade and slavery” (Wilder, 2013, p. 17). Due to denied access to what we introduce as Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs), historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), though originally under-resourced, emerged during the post-Civil War Reconstruction era as a response to the demands to educate African Americans (Sissoko & Shiau, 2005). Centuries after the establishment of higher education institutions in the United States, a critical mass of students of color

were still not seen accessing, persisting, and graduating from TWI's until the 1960s (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014; NCES, 1995). Although access and persistence improved, "there has been a constant assault on the intellectual capacity of people of color" (Anderson, 2002, p. 4), which has resulted in policies and practices that have continued to limit full access to higher education to people of color. In addition to problems of access for students of color, other forms of racism have been embedded in the structures of higher education institutions and are regularly manifested through the campus climate.

### **RACISM AND RACIAL VIOLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Students of color report experiencing both outright racial macroaggressions as well as racial microaggressions on campus (Chang, 2000; Gossett, Cuyjet, & Cockriel, 1998; Hurtado, 1992; Lowe, Byron, Ferry, & Garcia, 2013; Marcus, Mullins, Brackett, Tang, Allen, & Pruett, 2003; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), therefore, college campuses are replete with stories of racialized bias incidents in the so-called post-racial American society. Fraternity members' overt racist actions (Moyer, 2015; Syrluga, 2015), racial epithets being written on campus property (Chan, 2015), acts of protest against people of color (Kolowich, 2017; Stripling, 2017) and deadly physical violence (Quintana, 2017; Yan, Simon & Graef, 2017) are a few examples of the racism that persists on college and university campuses. In fact, the prevalence of such overt and covert racial incidents is such that they cannot be adequately listed here. Suffice it to say, even the federal Department of Justice has reported that the third highest rate of race or ethnicity-related hate crimes occur in the educational system as a whole (Criminal Justice Information Service Division, 2018).

These events reveal a need for a deeper conversation on ways to address racial inequality within higher education. Research has historically addressed racial inequalities by focusing on support resources for students of color (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Paredes-Collins, 2013; Pyne & Means, 2013) and conducting tolerance training for higher education communities (Bennett, 2001). Recent scholarship has begun to address whiteness as an oppressive system

within higher education (Cabrera, 2012; Cabrera, 2017; Collins & Jun, 2017; Jun, Jones Jolivet, Ash, & Collins, 2018; Matias, 2013). However, studies have also shown that White higher education leaders remain caught in a cycle of deficit thinking (Ash, 2018; Risdon, 2019) in the midst of supporting students of color and encouraging the professional progression of leaders of color. They have failed to address within the White community systemic issues that result in racism.

Educational leaders should seek a better solution to address the scourge of racism that has historically impacted students of color in higher educational institutions other than simply offering individualized support for injured students of color. Leaders ought to do more than merely teach communities about cultural appreciation for the purpose of being tolerant of one another. In this article we argue that to dismantle systemic and structural problems associated with racism in higher education, some White leaders will need remedial education that focuses on systems of whiteness, power, and oppression rather than training on embracing individual tolerance and inclusive excellence. Simply stated, an intentional and sustained anti-racist activism ought to drive the collective consciousness of leaders, and this shift in mindset ultimately ought to lead to a significant change in educational policy. Before reviewing higher education's past and current diversity efforts, we set forth the conceptual framework that undergirds and guides the argument of this paper: Critical Race Theory.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL RACE THEORY**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework developed by legal experts and scholars in the early 1970s to counter a "historical deficit" that people of color faced in the U.S. legal system and various professions that privileged Whites. CRT scholarship is undergirded by the principle that racism is at the root of this historical deficit for people of color because it is deeply embedded in much of the White Western thought and culture. The work of CRT scholars has researched and explored the presence of systemic racism at all levels of social structures (Collins & Jun, 2017; Delgado & Stefanic, 2012) and how such systemic racism strengthens and perpetuates the power

held by the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Sullivan, 2014). Since its original inception, CRT has been applied to various disciplines, including higher education (Brayboy, 2013; Brown & Jackson, 2013). CRT has seven tenets that give shape to the theory's framework, and of the seven, the permanence of racism, intersectionality, interest convergence, and whiteness as a property are of particular relevance to this study (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

## **PERMANENCE OF RACISM**

The first tenet of CRT is a foundational premise—that racism is ordinary, deeply ingrained, and a permanent part of Western society. Scholar, Bell (1992), described racism's permanence in his 1992 book *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*. In the book, he discounted the White liberal notion that racism can be eliminated, arguing “racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society” (p. ix). Bell did not propose that people of color acquiesce to racism, rather, empowerment is realized in the struggle to fight racism itself (Bell, 1992; Brown & Jackson, 2013). Racism and its effect on people of color have been the accepted norm for centuries, as White hegemony has evolved to the degree that it allows many forms of racism to go unacknowledged, unconscious in the minds of Whites, and largely invisible (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Because racism remains invisible, most Whites unconsciously perpetuate its permanence (Collins & Jun, 2017; Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Further, addressing overt racist acts by individuals allows Whites to believe they are addressing racism effectively, but these responses, while helpful, will never challenge the permanence of racism. Instead, such public responses lull the dominant White culture into thinking they are addressing the problem, thus, allowing the deeply rooted systemic racism to invisibly persist. Dominant White Institutions (DWIs), which prove hostile to people of color, display the permanence of racism in policies, procedures, pedagogy, climate, and culture (Gusa, 2010).

## **INTERSECTIONALITY**

Another important tenet of CRT, intersectionality, describes the multiple layers or dimensions of identities of historically marginalized peoples (Crenshaw, 1989; Nash, 2008). Intersectionality challenges the notion of arbitrary binaries placed on race and gender by exploring the complexity of race and gender identities and how such complexities shape people (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality allows a researcher to simultaneously consider a multitude of complex social processes that comprise the whole person, such as gender, race, sexual identity, and socioeconomic background (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nash, 2008). In the context of higher education, the theory of intersectionality is critical for leadership to utilize, as it considers the complexity of racial variation in students, faculty, and staff to avoid over-simplifying racial discourse or wrongly attempting to transcend difference at the expense of people's complex identities. Such attempts can have the effect of suppressing difference and asking people of color to assimilate into the dominant culture of whiteness.

## **INTEREST CONVERGENCE**

Interest convergence is a tenet of CRT and describes the concept that Whites in power will only accommodate racial equity for people of color when it converges with their own interests and is to the benefit of Whites (Bell, 1980; Brown & Jackson, 2013; Gillborn, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The founder of this concept, Bell (1980), contended that when pursuing equity becomes beneficial to Whites in power, then it becomes far more appealing, and there will be a greater willingness to pursue equity. However, when racial equity threatens White hegemony, support erodes. Whiteness can only be dismantled when Whites are aware of how their own actions might be perpetuating White hegemony and, thus, supporting the interests of the dominant culture. White leaders must move past considering the health and survival of an institution structured to perpetuate White dominance and oppress people of color, to working toward an institution that pairs concern for institutional health with an understanding

whiteness must be dismantled. For those Whites who currently hold positions of power in various higher education institutions, dismantling White hegemony and privilege will result in a profoundly different understanding of what it means to be White. In an institution where interest convergence is not preeminent, the interests of Whites as defined by whiteness are not always met. These interests are replaced by a new understanding of White identity in relationship to other racially constructed identities, in which a new normativity is mutually constructed by all to create a radical new community. (Risdon, 2019).

### **WHITENESS AS PROPERTY**

Another tenet of CRT that is critical to this study is the property characteristics of whiteness and how its establishment in the court of law set the stage for White hegemony. Dominant White culture has historically struggled to define whiteness through a specific set of physical traits or a particular culture lineage. Whiteness is a racialized system of definitions and dominant thinking derived from ideological beliefs that attempt to give parameters to the exclusivity of whiteness (Donnor, 2013; Lopez, 2003). The concept of whiteness rests on the objectification of African Americans, particularly as a subordinate racial class. Whiteness is an abstract and artificial construct, but interestingly, a construct legally recognized as something one can have or own (Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2009). As it made its way through the legal system, the property of whiteness began to inform the ratification of laws, policies, and procedures. This ratification established whiteness and its way of viewing the world as the cultural norm within the United States.

As legally recognized and sanctioned slavery of African Americans in the United States declined and retreated from public view, the concept of whiteness as property replaced it. Within the legal system, whiteness became a concept and legal means to allocate particular benefits in society exclusively to Whites. Laws were ratified and enforced that gave whiteness a unique status with privilege others were excluded from obtaining. Empowered by a legal system that recognizes its validity, whiteness as

property continues to overtly and subtly allow the demarcation between those who are White and all others. Only Whites were empowered to determine if persons deemed as “other” might hop on board the White compartment on a train (Bell, Higgins, & Suh, 1990; Donnor, 2013; Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2009; Lopez, 2003).

Central to CRT is the idea that power structures must shift and change to create more equitable environments within society as a whole. However, efforts to enact racial diversity have been lacking within the higher educational system. In what follows, we discuss the need to shift our current diversity efforts from a tolerance-based system to educating about whiteness and dismantling racial inequities.

## **LITERATURE: WHITENESS, DIVERSITY INITIATIVES, AND POWER SHARING**

### **WHITENESS AND POWER**

Much can be cited about the prevalence of a culture of whiteness that dominates the spaces of colleges and universities across the country. In our discussion of whiteness, we use the framework of Critical White Studies (CWS), which is a tenant of CRT and a body of scholarship that addresses the role that whiteness has played within society to reify white dominance and supremacy at the expense of other races (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Collins and Jun (2017) have recently redefined the power and dominance of whiteness on a college campus by referring to Dominant White Institutions (DWIs) rather than the more commonly used term, predominantly White institutions (PWIs). In doing so, they highlight the role of power and downplay the compositional diversity that so many neoliberal educators use to measure and celebrate progress. Policies and procedures at DWIs reveal much about the White architecture of the mind (Collins & Jun, 2017) that drive most decision-making by White leaders in higher education. For the purposes of this paper, we have already referenced the term Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) to denote those institutions that were



traditionally White at the time of the development of HBCUs. This term continues to apply to institutions that have a predominance of whiteness in its history. Additionally, we use the term Dominant White Institutions (DWIs) as described by Collins and Jun (2017). These scholars proposed that the term DWI highlights the dynamic role of power held within the institution by Whites. Hughey (2010) describes “hegemonic whiteness” (p. 1289) as an identity that both produces and maintains domination by the positionality of those marked White as superiors with power and privilege. Whiteness is internalized as normal and natural, in turn, marking non-Whites as abnormal and unnatural. Hegemony is “cultural power, including the dominant cultural patterns that achieve and sustain their dominance by encouraging—but not forcing—people to believe in them” (Parker, 2012, p. 867). Dominance and subordination, thus, are sustained, not necessarily by force, but through social practices, systems, and norms (McClaren 2009); the kind of practices, systems, and norms that are found in institutions of higher education. Systems of oppression are maintained because educational leaders do not challenge the validity of these norms and attitudes that perpetuate systems of domination and subordination because they are viewed as normal. The majority White culture that permeates DWIs and university campuses supply and secure the symbols, attitudes, and norms that embed a hegemonic frame.

White normativity is effective and pervasive in that the underlying systemic beliefs often unconsciously define whiteness as separate and superior to all that is “not-White”. When campus diversity initiatives seek to address the challenges that confront White dominant narratives without educating the community about the realities of systemic racism and histories of White supremacy, those in the White community may describe themselves as the newly oppressed and demonstrate processes of White fragility (Hughey, 2010; DiAngelo, 2011; Twine & Gallagher, 2008), “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54). Thus, those in the White community subconsciously rely on long-standing, flawed White hegemonic beliefs rooted deep within their psyches to perpetuate oppressive structures in higher educational institutions, a reality that Collins and Jun (2017) describe as the White architecture of the mind,

Peggy McIntosh (2003) in her seminal piece on the pervasiveness of whiteness described privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious” (p. 148). On college and university campuses, dominant group members are granted unearned privileges based upon the perception that membership belongs to those who possess certain characteristics and values related to that particular social group (Edwards, 2006; Lechuga, Clerc, & Howell, 2009). Although McIntosh’s contributions to the understanding of White privilege have been critical in discussions on whiteness, we also highlight Cabrera’s (2017) critique of McIntosh (2003) and his proposition that “White immunity” (Cabrera, 2017, p. 82) is a more accurate term than White privilege. Cabrera defines White immunity this way: “White immunity means that People of Color have not historically, and are not contemporarily, guaranteed their rights, justice, and equitable social treatment; however, White people are because they have protection from this disparate treatment” (p. 82). Although privilege and immunity focus on different aspects of whiteness (privilege emphasizes unearned gains and immunity describes a lack of unjust treatment), both underscore the need to include whiteness in discussions and initiatives of diversity in higher education.

## **FAILED DIVERSITY INITIATIVES**

The first significant initiative to diversify education racially was arguably the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision of the Supreme Court, which declared that segregating public schools based on race was unconstitutional. From 1954 to today, educational leaders have attempted to diversify schools based on race. However, this diversification effort was what Bell (1980) cited when he introduced the concept of interest convergence into CRT scholarship. He argued that this diversification only occurred because of the mutual benefit that enacting integration had on Whites. Furthermore, structurally diversifying schools did not result in a racial utopia. It was, in fact, quite the opposite. In other words, the underlying racist ideologies that were foundational in creating a segregated educational system did not disappear when laws

made school segregation illegal (Fine, 2004; Pickren, 2004). For example, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, private Christian education surged in growth because of the concern that White Christians had with racial integration (Yancey, 2010).

One result of these ongoing problems related to race and higher education was the adoption of diversity initiatives to assist in communities becoming racially sensitive and tolerant of one another across racial lines. However, many of these initiatives have failed to educate about the reality and prevalence of White dominance and supremacy on campuses and have focused on merely changing individuals rather than dismantling structural inequalities that perpetuate systemic racism in college (Bennett, 1986; Case, 2007; Castellanos, Gloria, Mayorga, & Salas, 2007; Watt, 2007). This approach has had the potential to engage the difficulties from a deficit mindset, which frames “students and their families of origin as lacking some of the academic and cultural resources necessary to success in what is presumed to be a fair and open society” (Smit, 2012, p. 369) and constructs “images of people of color as outsiders, at-risk victims, commodities, and change agents” (Iverson, 2007, p. 586). These deficit approaches to improving higher educational institutions along racial lines continue the “subordination of people of color” (Iverson, 2007, p. 587) and the reproduction of racial inequality.

## **DEFICIT THINKING**

Valencia (2010) explained that the deficit model has racist roots dating back to the early 1600s and is used to explain the academic failures of low socioeconomic students of color. He defined the deficit-thinking model as the following:

at its core, is an endogenous theory—positing that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, adherents allege, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior. (p. 6-7)

This idea removes the blame of academic failure from the education system and places it on the individual and/or subgroup (Clycq, Nouwen, & Vandenbroucke, 2014). Deficit thinking permeates education when individuals lower their expectations of students of

color due to their negative views and stereotypes (Ford & Grantham, 2003). In higher education, deficit thinking is represented by educators labeling students as at-risk, underprepared, and low socioeconomic status (Bruton & Robles-Piña, 2009). Based on this mindset, many diversity initiatives are intended to bring a solution to what is perceived as a problem when the root of the problem is actually systemic issues, policies, and procedures.

Deficit thinking is found in hiring practices when white administrators use the phrase “a lack of qualified candidates” when referring to people of color. Gasman, Abiola, and Travers (2015) conducted a study on the lack of diversity at eight Ivy League institutions that recalled an incident with the president of the University of Pennsylvania, being questioned about the lack of faculty of color represented at the university. The president’s response was a lack of qualified candidates. The authors noted that “the word ‘qualified’ is used as a euphemism, which allows people to ignore the need for diversity and thus to discriminate in hiring” (p. 1). Shifting the blame of hiring people of color away from the institution and placing it on people of color and their lack of being qualified is a clear example of deficit thinking.

Viewing emerging leaders of color through a deficit mentality continues to have a detrimental effect on any semblance of a developmental path for leaders of color in higher education institutions. This reality is especially true when those who hold such views continue to hold the seats of power at these institutions.

## **THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHIEF ABSOLUTION OFFICER**

The role of the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) has emerged in higher education to oversee the “services and programs offered to students, faculty, and staff that seek to ensure compliance with non-discrimination and related policy and law, and to affirm social membership group differences in curricular, co-curricular, and workplace contexts” (Clark, 2011, p. 57). CDOs are executive level administrators who typically report to presidents or provosts and who utilize their personal charisma and relationships to execute their agenda (Leon, 2014). These agendas include diversity initiatives,

programs and trainings to increase diversity, confront systemic issues, and celebrate differences (Patton, 2017; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Metzler, 2003). However, many of the existing diversity initiatives, specifically related to race, fail to address systemic issues (Metzler, 2003) while shifting the blame on people of color. This failure is evidence of what is fundamentally problematic with diversity initiatives that are undergirded by dominant white ideology.

Metzler (2003) examined reasons why diversity initiatives fail and found that organizations neglect to address why groups and individuals are systemically oppressed and marginalized. He argued that when discriminatory behaviors are exposed, it reveals oppressive practices and the need to change the organizational culture (Metzler, 2003). A shift in organizational culture requires an overhaul of practices, policies, and procedures. On the surface, organizations with dedicated diversity initiatives may begin to be visibly diverse but continue to marginalize people of color if power dynamics and organizational structures are not examined and changed (Metzler, 2003). This marginalization can occur in several ways, one being the reification of a deficit mindset with regard to people of color when approaching the racial challenges within higher education. As for the CDOs, their roles are often relegated to serving as nothing more than *Chief Absolution Officers*. Ahmed (2012) argues that the work of the CDO can be understood as the “means by which organizations establish and maintain good will” (p. 142). They may be expected to become that senior administrator of color that university presidents often called upon or reference to clear racist policies or actions on behalf of all people of color. In this context, the CDO is more of a public relations employee rather than a diversity professional who is seeking to find solutions to complex problems within the institution (Ahmed, 2012). This expectation—that CDOs will assuage the guilt of their leaders’ conscious or unconscious racist mindset and actions and serve as a key public relations representative for the school by navigating a tightrope of diplomacy and advocacy due to the political structures of higher education—is part of the problem of White supremacy in higher education (Ahmed, 2012). When CDOs find themselves in this position, they may experience the expectation to become complicit in perpetuating the system of dominance. However, when CDOs challenge White

supremacy by not falling into the trap of what we refer to as a *Chief Absolution Officer*, they hold presidents accountable for their racist mindsets and actions.

Institutions hire CDOs to implement diversity strategies that will help to absolve issues surrounding diversity but fail to provide adequate resources. In a study conducted by Williams and Wade-Golden (2007), they interviewed 110 CDOs and collected data from over 700 CDOs. They noted that some of the challenges CDOs face are the ambiguity of their role, lack of support staff, resources, and support to fulfill the demands of their responsibilities (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2007). No single individual can make the necessary changes for an institution to achieve their diversity goals.

## **LACK OF SHARED POWER**

Although recent studies show minor improvements in the number of leaders of color in higher education, Whites hold the overwhelming majority of leadership and regular faculty positions in higher education institutions nationally. Several studies reveal that, though there has been a steady increase in diversity among administration in higher education, the most senior level leadership is dominated by White people. A 2009 study reported that people of color collectively held less than one-fifth of the full-time administrative positions in higher education compared to Whites, which held close to 83% of the administrative positions (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). A more recent study that focused on the positions of president and chief academic officer (CAO) noted a troubling decline in people of color holding these positions at predominantly White institutions. Between 2008 and 2013, African Americans in the CAO position declined from 3.7 percent to 2.3 percent. Similar trends were noted for Asian-American CAO, 3.7 percent to 2.4 percent, and Hispanics, 1.5 percent to 0.8 percent (King & Gomez, 2013; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009).

For the purposes of this paper, we collected data from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) on workforce demographics in higher education for 2015 to 2016. Table

1 displays staff national demographics for racial diversity among full-time employees, part-time employees, and graduate assistants at higher education institutions. Table 1 indicates that Whites dominate staff positions in higher education holding 67.2 percent of the positions. Among people of color, African Americans hold the largest percentage at 10.6 percent, followed by Hispanic/Latinos at 8.5 percent, and Asian American and Pacific Islanders at 7 percent. It is important to note that this collection includes historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). When looking at DWIs alone, the numbers shift to show an increase in White staff and slight decreases to each people of color group (Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009).

Table 1

*Statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) on Workforce Demographics in Higher Education for 2015 to 2016*

Racial Categories	Full-time	Part-time	Graduate Assistants	Grand Total
Nonresident alien	63,664	17,030	108,144	188,838
American Indian or Alaskan Native	14,604	5,945	1,035	21,584
Asian	165,404	51,029	24,725	241,158
Black or African American	267,507	108,434	14,753	390,694
Hispanic or Latino	215,533	83,380	18,786	317,699
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	6,424	3,121	371	9,916
White	1,693,483	790,627	175,120	2,659,230
Two or more races	26,102	11,190	6,108	43,400
Race/ethnicity unknown	68,575	71,014	21,778	161,367

One traditional pipeline for senior leadership in higher education has been faculty positions. An examination specifically of faculty positions within degree-granting institutions in a 2013 study revealed that 78 percent were White, 6 percent were African American, 4 percent were Hispanic, 10 percent were Asian American/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent were Native American/American Indian (Kena, et al., 2016). Additionally, a 2016 study by the American Council on Education (ACE) revealed 85 percent of the college presidents in the United States had been working in higher education prior to

taking the position of presidency. With 85 percent of college presidents being internal hires and the vast majority of current lower level staff positions still being held by Whites, any shift in composition diversity in senior leadership positions seems a long way off if we continue to rely on the “pipeline”. Here is how author and speaker Jeff Chang (2018) described this same pipeline as POC experience it:

The pipeline, that’s what people of color get reduced to...to be dropped into the pipeline and sent across the U.S., right? And sometimes be in danger of leaking out and polluting things. And then you get to the other side of the country to be put in a barrel and then sent off somewhere only to be ending up in somebody’s car getting burnt up. That’s the pipeline. The question I always have for folks in the universities and arts world is, What have 25 years of pipelines done for us? It’s got a lot of us burnt out and running fleeing from the system. And so, this is important, it’s important for us to be able to change the culture in all of these different kinds of ways including the ways in which we completely think about what it means to be in these institutions. How do we create ecosystems, instead, that feed each other? That create support for each other, that help to foster more growth. Creating ecosystems as opposed to creating pipelines, might be the beginning of a way of actually achieving not just equity, but moving towards justice and an actual shift in the universities, so that 25 years from now, in 2043, we aren’t having the same conversation.

The promise of pipelines to positions of power has been touted by current leadership in higher education as a way to promote emerging leaders of color, yet the changes in the racial landscape have barely improved. It is unacceptable that so little progress has been made in regard to the diversification of higher education leadership. Chang was relatively gentle in his critique of higher education’s pipelines. However, if we consider his critique in looking at higher education systems, many Whites, across the political and social spectrum, are invested in holding tightly to their power and privilege. When Whites control the pipeline, they control the resource and how it is used. Power rests in the hands of those who control the pipelines. Those who control the pipeline commodify POC, often focusing on process over people, and in doing so, threaten to reduce or remove the humanity of those they are purporting to serve (Risdon, 2019). Whether the



focus is on faculty, staff, or senior leadership, the small percentages in ethnic-racial diversity within higher education is bleak, especially when compared to increases in racial-ethnic diversity among students. If educators and researchers have postulated that a pipeline to senior leadership for people of color has existed via staff or faculty positions, the data above seems to imply that this pipeline is either broken or perhaps never existed in the first place. It is time for a new model.

There is considerable literature on the pervasiveness of whiteness within higher education in the United States. To date, the term DWI has been used to describe higher education institutions where this pervasiveness exists. Gains in racial diversity within higher education should be celebrated, but such celebrations ignore the systems that favor and support hegemonic whiteness. Such hegemony is prevalent among higher education institutions (Hughey, 2009) sustaining power and privilege for Whites, while making it a hostile environment for staff and faculty of color (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009). The prevalent White hegemony has shaped and sharpened paths and pipelines that lead toward leadership within the institution to the advantage of Whites. Subsequently, people of color have been offered limited options within institutions. Many DWIs keep a firm grasp on power by offering “revolving door” positions to people of color, where a person of color previously held the position. Such hiring practices might satisfy racial diversity requirements for the institution but will ultimately undermine attempts to truly diversify the faculty with respect to race and ethnicity (Weinberg, 2008) keeping White privilege and power securely in place.

### **MOVING FORWARD: A MODEL FOR CHANGE**

For institutions to address problems of race, they must distribute power across racial lines and encourage a growth in the awareness of and engagement in addressing systems of injustice. We acknowledge that past efforts to address racial inequities in higher education—such as increasing support resources for students of color and increasing cultural awareness—remain important factors for scholars to study and educational

leaders to redress. However, educational leaders have incorrectly assumed that these initiatives are the primary solutions to problems that exist along racial lines within the higher educational system. An ideology that purports the answer to race-based problems in higher education to be found solely in providing additional support to students of color and cultural awareness training is an ideology that fails to understand the historical reality of systemic racism that has caused the very inequities that remain palpable today. Without addressing the more fundamental problems of systemic racism within higher education (i.e., a White racial hegemony within higher educational leadership and a lack of education about the historical realities of racism), the support resources will continue to be poured into a broken system that cannot support the very assistance being offered to it. Institutions must find new ways to achieve their stated goals and strategies. We conclude this paper with suggestions for sharing power across racial lines and educating the White community about issues of race and justice.

## **SHARING POWER**

It is not surprising that White people have permeated higher educational leadership given the historical foundations of access to college in the United States based on race. For example, Black people who graduated from higher education institutions before the Civil War numbered less than 30 (Ringenberg, 2006). With this racist foundation of the American higher educational system, today White people continue to hold the majority of leadership positions and White racial dominance is even greater among the highest levels of leadership (American Council on Education, 2012; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009), even though racial diversity in the workplace overall has steadily increased over the past 20 years in the United States (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). For example, a 2012 study revealed that at predominantly White institutions, only nine percent of college and university presidents were people of color (American Council on Education, 2012).

Institutional leaders must consider a change from White people filling the overwhelming majority of the highest positions of leadership to increasing the

percentage of people of color holding these leadership positions. Throughout this paper we explain this concept as “sharing power.” We acknowledge the limitations of this term and describe our reasons for using it. The idea of sharing power implies that currently, there is an owner of that power. In other words, proposing that power should be shared across racial lines implies that Whites own the power and should, therefore, benevolently open the leadership doors to allow people of color to enter. To share implies entitlement (i.e., I will graciously give you part of what is actually mine), which does not interrogate the prevailing assumptions of existing power. One could argue that using this term further accentuates and legitimizes the White historical ownership of power within higher education and keeps Whites in the ultimate place of power with regard to a willful surrender of it. However, even though this term has its limitations, we also understand the need to expose the unfortunate reality associated with its problems. For example, as discussed previously, CRT scholars have argued that Whites will not *share* power willingly because of their adherence to interest convergence (Bell, 1980). Therefore, we use the term *share* to highlight that the surrendering and sharing of power, though not a historical practice among Whites, is necessary for institutional equity and inclusivity. We submit that the term helps to highlight the current reality of a dominance of whiteness within higher education; not only a statistical dominance, but a White dominant mindset (Collins & Jun, 2017). We are hopeful that the concept of “sharing” will expose the term and problematize it by highlighting the White structural dominance and White dominant and supremacist mindset within higher education leadership. We acknowledge the need is not only to share power, but also to surrender the power that has been dominated by one racial group throughout the history of higher education in the United States.

It is difficult to suggest ways in which people of color should position *themselves* for leadership roles when they have been denied access by those historically in positions of power. In other words, the process of people of color moving to the upper right quadrant in Figure 1 is not the responsibility of people of color, but Whites. To state this process as such would be to suggest that people of color have yet another responsibility for fixing a system that is historically disadvantaged them. For years, people of color within institutions have gone above and beyond their job responsibilities to address

climate issues and to provide spaces for students of color to feel valued and loved. Further, there has been an unwritten expectation for people of color to sit on diversity committees or assist with implementing diversity initiatives simply based on the criteria that they are a person of color. No doubt, people of color have been participating in the higher education system, but they have not had access to the highest positions of power to change the systems themselves. People of color obtaining positional power must begin and be driven by White administrators sharing and surrendering their own power. No longer can our current institutional leaders expect diversification to magically occur by following the same practices. Neither can administrators use the lack of qualified people of color as an excuse not to fill roles of leadership. Qualified educated people of color do exist. White administrators who have the capacity to shift power must examine their institutional structures and values to assess if they are willing to be a part of the solution or continue to perpetuate the problem.

If the pipeline does not work for educational leaders of color, then a new metaphor and model should be strategically designed and implemented. Borrowing from Chang's (2019) call for creating new ecosystems, current leadership must be very intentional in creating an ecosystem in which emerging leaders' identities are recognized and celebrated. That these leaders are not asked to shed certain layers of their identity to better "fit in", but that they thrive and are supported for they are and are becoming.

One practical step is to ensure that a building block supports a path for educational leaders of color who are positioned to move into the highest places of leadership within higher education. This may begin within the educational system itself when undergraduate and graduate students study in environments where all students, faculty, and staff are educated about racism and seek to end it within their schools. In our current systems, we put the onus on POC to adapt and change. However, in a new ecosystem, the water has been changed so that everyone understands that they must grow and adapt because we are deeply dependent upon one another for all to thrive. So, where racism is redressed, all have a greater opportunity to achieve their highest potential. A new environment could result in a greater number of PhD candidates of color, resulting in an increase of faculty of color, then department chairs, then deans, then vice presidents, and presidents of color across the educational spectrum. As this leadership

shift occurs, policies will shift along with the power, and campus communities will begin to reflect not only racial diversity but also the kind of racial justice that has been long wanting on college campuses for centuries.

## **RE-EDUCATING WHITE LEADERS**

White leaders must practice self-examination to understand how they fit into the social construct of whiteness and how that whiteness consciously and unconsciously affects their leadership decisions. Too often Whites have not cultivated a deeper criticality to recognize the systemic nature of oppression, as neither their own lived experiences nor their public or private education effectively educated them on the realities of life for People of Color. They often, thus, avoid this critical stage of identity development both to their own detriment, but even more so to the detriment of those around them, particularly people of color (Gusa, 2010; Collins & Jun, 2017). The understanding of self shapes one's sense of identity (Collins & Jun, 2017; Torres, V., Jones, S. R., & Renn, K. A., 2009). Understanding whiteness in relation to self (Reason, R.D., Roosa Millar, E A., & Scales, T. C., 2005; Helms, 1990) and developing a "realistically positive view of what it means to identify as white" (Collins & Jun, 2017) informs White identity development. Whites in positions of influence or power must understand not only how whiteness has systemically privileged them, but also, they must develop an awareness of how whiteness has shaped their conscious and unconscious thinking processes related to race. Without this self-examination and exploration, Whites will not be able to be fully aware of systemic racism.

We propose that this kind of learning must begin with the boards of trustees and presidents of institutions. These leaders should incorporate into their annual work responsibilities the process of learning the racial history of whiteness, the way whiteness impacted the inception of their institutions, and personal work related to their own conscious and unconscious biases. This latter work should include an outside consultant meeting individually with each White board member and the president (if he or she is White) to provide an assessment of the present state of understanding and the growth

that is needed from each individual to move closer to a conscious understanding of racial biases to change behaviors and the processes of making institutional decisions. An important part of this exploration is discovering the moments that their ascendancy to a position of power was aided by invisible opportunities not afforded to people of color (McIntosh, 2012; Giroux, 1997). The president's cabinet and/or senior advisors who are White would then go through the same process followed by the White middle managers of the institution.

A common pitfall that many Whites face as they seek to build racial consciousness is coming to terms with their own racial fragility with regard to the fears of losing privilege and power. Researchers on White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011a) have found that often White people who serve as anti-racist allies have faced and worked on their own White fragility along the way. Since they rarely faced significant racial stress before engaging in racial justice advocacy, most Whites have not had the opportunity to construct cognitive and effective skills to develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement when facing difficult racial matters (DiAngelo, 2011a). Essentially, Whites need to develop the skills that people of color have long mastered for the sake of survival. Should Whites not engage in this way, when facing moments of racial stress, they may instinctively engage in attitudes and behaviors that attempt to reinstitute the equilibrium they are used to feeling. Whites must avoid this instinct if true progress is to be made toward racial consciousness.

Another trap that White administrators in positions of power must avoid is that of the White savior complex. Some Whites with power and privilege undergirding their efforts consider themselves moral agents who can cleanse themselves of the stain of privilege by helping others, namely people of color whom Whites have historically (Collins & Jun, 2017; Heron, 2007). Such a desire to help may seem appropriate but can also be an attempt to absolve White guilt. Due to a "white architecture of the mind" (Collins & Jun, 2017), Whites fail to decenter themselves, desiring for and often expecting acknowledgment of their desire to help by people of color. White savior mentality assumes that a good mentorship, good friendship, good sponsorship with people of color will solve the problems associated with racism. This mentality creates two critical issues: 1) Whites can continue to ignore the historical institutional,

economic, and legal causes of systemic racism that interpersonal relationships and saviors cannot solve, and 2) it perpetuates the belief by Whites that their interpersonal relationships and positive relationships are, in and of themselves, the solution. Such a belief lulls White people into believing that if they have strong relationships and work at reconciliation with people of color that the problem of racism will be solved. Although potentially beneficial, interpersonal relationships alone will not dismantle systemic racism and privilege (Sullivan, 2014). Emphasis put on interpersonal relationships between whites and people of color can also place pressure on people of color to instruct and encourage Whites on racism. Such work is ultimately exhausting and disheartening for people in that it also does little to dismantle systemic racism and, thus, needs to be repeated again and again by people of color.

## CONCLUSION

What would higher education look like with shared power across racial lines and all members enlightened to the awareness of systemic racism that has perpetuated systems that marginalize people groups based on race? Why is it important to educate the White community about systemic racism and to shatter the glass ceilings that have oppressed leaders of color within the higher educational institutions for so long?

Higher education continues to be a space where inequity and inequality collide. This discussion is an important contribution to the ongoing debate of racial diversity in higher education, which continues to be a contested space where conversations around diversity and whiteness are challenged daily. The call to dismantle systems of White supremacy in higher education is often met with accusations of reverse racism, challenges to free speech, academic freedom, and a general critique of an increasingly oversensitive faculty and student body. At the same time, race-based equity continues to be at the forefront of institutional initiatives, the focus in court cases surrounding admissions criteria, and federal incentives aimed at offering financial incentives for institutions that become a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Clearly, the racial diversification of college and university campuses remains a critical issue facing higher

education. As institutions engage in various methods to expand and explain diversity, our work focuses on the need for critical consciousness among those in dominant positions of higher educational institutions and the sharing of power across racial lines for the equity and empowerment of all campus community members. A radical yet achievable reconceptualization of consciousness and collective action is required. Only the intentional, albeit painful, steps toward power-sharing at the highest levels of higher education will lead to meaningful change that values, affirms, and empowers historically marginalized people in higher education.



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