

ABSTRACT

Nicole A. Pierce-Davis. VOICES OF RESISTANCE: HOW WOMEN ANTIRACIST EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ADDRESS THE TENSIONS OF LEADING FOR RACIAL EQUITY (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello), Department of Educational Leadership, May 2023.

The doctoral participatory action research study explored what we can learn from women who combine their female ontologies and epistemologies with the lived experiences of themselves and others toward improving racial equity outcomes in their educational communities. Women in leadership share stereotypically socialized characteristics with antiracist pedagogies as they focus on transformative, collectivist, and collaborative approaches. In this study, five American women school district leaders who identify as being or becoming antiracist leaders engaged in modified cycles of participatory action research and critical feminist ethnography. The study was designed to protect and amplify women's voice in the conversation about how to transform schools and districts for racial equity. The four findings are: Collective processes require power sharing; critical conditions for engagement and learning are ever-changing; women lead *through* gendered marginalization, and dynamic interplay is a necessary condition for equity. The findings better inform how we can support, validate, and learn from women educational antiracist leaders who draw on their lived experiences with equity to promote positive, antiracist social change.

VOICES OF RESISTANCE: HOW WOMEN ANTIRACIST EDUCATIONAL LEADERS
ADDRESS THE TENSIONS OF LEADING FOR RACIAL EQUITY

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to those I love.

To the brave phenomenal women in this study who engage in antiracist, equity work daily.

To my ECU teachers, mentors, and colleagues. If we want our children to cite research that represents a more inclusive, multicultural lens. We have to be courageous enough to study it and write it. Thank you for inspiring this courage and providing the avenues to pursue it.

To my family who connects me in time and space to ancestries, aspirations, and the soul within.

To my son, you deserve the world I imagine for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE.....	i
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
CHAPTER 1: NAMING AND FRAMING FOCUS OF PRACTICE.....	1
Focus of Practice.....	3
Rationale.....	4
Key Definitions.....	6
Analysis of Assets and Challenges.....	8
Micro Assets and Challenges.....	9
Meso Assets and Challenges.....	12
Macro Assets and Challenges.....	14
Significance of Focus of Practice (FoP).....	15
Context.....	15
Practice.....	17
Policy.....	17
Research.....	18
Connection to Equity.....	18
Philosophical Framework.....	18
Psychological Framework.....	19

Sociological Framework.....	20
Participatory Research Design.....	21
Purpose Statement and Research Questions.....	21
Theory of Action.....	22
FoP Description.....	22
Proposed Project Activities.....	22
Summary.....	24
Connections to Key Principles.....	25
Overview of Study and Chapters.....	26
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	27
Female Voice as the Voice of Resistance.....	27
Women’s Ways of Leading.....	35
Women in Educational Leadership: Intersectionality of Knowing.....	38
Increased Intersectionality of Black Women.....	46
Unification Against Oppression.....	47
The Three Cs: Frames for Antiracist Leadership.....	48
Collectivist Approach.....	48
Conditions for Engagement.....	54
Centering of Marginalized Voices.....	57
Woman Antiracist Educational Leader (Wael)	60
Conclusion.....	60
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN.....	64
Qualitative Research Process.....	65

Participatory Action Research.....	66
Participatory Activist Research.....	67
Critical “Feminist” Ethnography.....	67
Culture of Change & Role of Praxis.....	69
Statement of Positionality.....	72
Research Questions.....	73
Action Research.....	74
Context.....	77
Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis.....	78
Participants.....	78
Context.....	78
Co-Practitioner Researcher Group.....	82
Data Collection.....	82
Community Learning Exchange.....	82
Co-Practitioner Researcher Meetings.....	87
Participant Journals & Memos (Analytic and Reflective).....	87
Fieldnotes.....	88
Data Analysis.....	88
Study Considerations.....	90
Internal Validity.....	91
External Validity.....	92
Confidentiality and Ethics.....	93
Conclusion.....	93

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRE-CYCLE.....	95
PAR Pre-Cycle Process.....	95
Activities.....	96
Coding.....	96
Emerging Categories.....	98
Gendered Professional Dynamics.....	99
Attention to Interpersonal Relationships.....	102
Desire to Share and Problem Solve Equity Decision	103
Response to Micro/Macro Aggressions.....	104
Connecting Personal Experience to Professional Equity Work.....	105
Equity Tools.....	105
Reflection and Planning.....	106
Reflection on Leadership.....	106
Planning for PAR Cycles and CLEs.....	107
Conclusion.....	108
CHAPTER 5: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES & FINDINGS	109
PAR Process.....	110
Reflective Memos.....	117
Coding.....	117
Praxis Facilitator.....	119
Findings.....	124
Finding 1: Collective Processes Require Power Sharing.....	124
Active, Not Passive: Interpersonal Approach and Inquiry Mindset.....	129

Authenticity of Mind and Process.....	135
Finding 2: Critical Conditions for Engagement and Learning are Ever-Changing.....	138
Confidentiality and Relational Trust.....	139
Students First: Equity-Minded Co-Conspirators.....	142
Finding 3: Women Lead through Gendered Marginalization.....	145
Double Standards.....	147
Disrupting Silent Subordination and Socially Limiting Gender Stereotypes via Affinity Spaces.....	151
Finding 4: Dynamic Interplay as a Necessary Condition for Equity.....	154
Conclusion.....	157
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	159
Discussion of Findings.....	162
Working in Concert to Sharing Power.....	162
Leading <i>Through</i> Marginalization.....	167
Leadership “Third Space”	172
Implications.....	174
Practice.....	176
Policy.....	179
Local Policy.....	179
State and National Policy.....	180
Research.....	181
Limitations.....	183
Leadership Development.....	184

Conclusion.....	185
REFERENCES.....	187
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	202
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM: ADULTS.....	203
APPENDIX C: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT: COMMUNITY LEARNING EXCHANGE.....	207
APPENDIX D: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT: PARTICIPANT JOURNALING.....	208
APPENDIX E: SHARED RESOURCE: WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE.....	209

LIST OF TABLES

1. Overview of PAR Timeline.....	76
2. CPR Group.....	81
3. Research Questions and Data Sources.....	83
4. Examples of CLE Pedagogies	86
5. Emerging Categories from PAR Pre-cycle.....	100
6. PAR Activities.....	111
7. Collective Processes Require Power Sharing.....	126
8. Critical Conditions for Engagement and Learning are Ever-changing.....	140
9. Women Leading through Marginalization.....	146
10. Dynamic Interplay is a Necessary Condition for Equity.....	158

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Fishbone diagram: Analysis of assets and challenges of FoP.....	10
2. Venn diagram of context in which women antiracist educational leaders work.....	16
3. Timeline and signposts related to PAR.....	23
4. Cycle of patriarchy.....	31
5. Human voice scale represents the importance of uplifting female voices to counterbalance inequities perpetuated by the patriarchy.....	33
6. Cycle of racism.....	44
7. Three Cs framework for antiracist leadership.....	49
8. Shared stereotypical characteristics of women leaders with antiracist pedagogy.....	61
9. Emergent conceptual framework.....	63
10. Overview of research methodology.....	71
11. Layered overview of research methodology.....	75
12. PAR categories grouped by emerging finding.....	120
13. Dynamic interplay among the three findings determine how WAELs “show up” as equity leaders.....	125
14. Transformed conceptual framework of antiracist leadership.....	175
15. Summary of what all antiracist leaders can learn from WAELs in this study.....	178

CHAPTER 1: NAMING AND FRAMING FOCUS OF PRACTICE

I'm speaking.
(Harris, 2020)

Finally, a chance to hear the issues. After an embarrassing first presidential debate in 2020, the Vice Presidential (VP) debate between Kamala Harris and incumbent Mike Pence had the second largest audience in VP debate history (García-Hodges, 2020). Whether watching to hear more about the economy, racial justice, climate change, or the global pandemic, the American public anticipated hearing about the issues that mattered to them. Beyond the issues, the audience received a firsthand look at one of the challenges encountered by many women in leadership – the need to thread the needle of navigating gender norms and stereotypes that often subordinate them, while simultaneously conveying strength, intelligence, and competence.

During the debate, Pence interrupted Harris ten times. Repeatedly, Senator Harris responded with the gentle, yet demanding phrase, “I’m speaking.” Overnight, the expression became a viral slogan for women tired of being interrupted by men and underestimated by the public. For many women, the interaction felt all too familiar, as they recognized that beneath Harris’s sternly polite demeanor existed a more complex significance. Interpreted through a feminist analysis lens, Harris’s response communicated the following: *I am intelligent. I am informed. I am worthy of being heard. I also know enough about gender and race norms not push too hard and risk being negatively perceived in stereotypical ways as bossy, aggressive, or rude.* As a woman, moreover a Black woman, Senator Harris seemed to express an understanding that there are different, gendered rules for what constitutes socially acceptable behavior and that those rules are enforced through both explicit and implicit bias. Through her performance, she demonstrated this understanding and the astute metacognitive awareness such understanding requires. In that historical moment, while being watched by an estimated 58

million people, Senator Harris adeptly navigated the gendered and racial psychological and social behavioral norms internalized by her audience and herself.

The phrase “I’m speaking,” neutralized her opponent’s debate strategy and allowed her to reclaim allotted debate time without offending the public by acting in ways that are socially reserved for males. According to Medelberg, the author of *The Silent Sex: Gender, Deliberation, and Institutions*, “Men are often socialized to display dominance in competitive public settings like debates, and interrupting is a power move.... When Pence interrupted, he created power for himself at the expense of Harris” (Lang, 2020). However, when women attempt the same type of behavior, they are not perceived as making a power move; instead, they are negatively perceived (Maderer, 2020). Hence, Harris did not mimic then-Presidential nominee Biden’s response to then-President Trump’s numerous interruptions in their presidential debate just weeks earlier, when Biden told Trump to “Shut up, man.” Instead, Harris opted for a more measured response. She smiled knowingly, almost maternally, and reminded Pence of a simple elementary courtesy – I’m here, and I’m speaking.

Later in her Vice President-elect acceptance speech, Harris reminded us that awareness does not equate with acceptance. She affirmed:

All the women who worked to secure and protect the right to vote for over a century: 100 years ago with the 19th Amendment, 55 years ago with the Voting Rights Act, and now, in 2020, with a new generation of women in our country who cast their ballots and continued the fight for their fundamental right to vote and be heard. Tonight, I reflect on their struggle, their determination, and the strength of their vision to see what can be unburdened by what has been; I stand on their shoulders. (Stevens, 2020)

She also spoke directly to the next generation:

And to the children of our country, regardless of your gender, our country has sent you a clear message: Dream with ambition, lead with conviction, and see yourself in a way that others might not see you, simply because they've never seen it before. (Stevens, 2020)

Just as then-Senator Harris had to navigate the inequitable and unjust landscape of gendered stereotypes that serve to limit women's political behavior and possibilities, schools in the United States contain their own biases, inequities, and injustices. If we pay close attention, data from our education system is sending us critical messages. Academic measures such as graduation rates, standardized testing results, and discipline data tell a now familiar story of enduring racial inequity for students of color (National Center for Education Statistics 2020; Center for Educational Policy Analysis, n.d.), but other less familiar stories about how women respond to these inequities and injustices are needed. One of the stories is about gendered ontological and epistemological representation in educational leadership, and another is about how women leaders can play a unique role in fighting racial inequity and injustices in schools. And if our female education leaders are speaking, let's do something revolutionary. Let's listen.

Focus of Practice

The dissertation documents a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study in which I analyze how women leaders address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders. I designed the study to lead, engage, and empower a Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team in a participatory, emancipatory, and iterative process of exploration, inquiry, and analyses in order to discover key ideas, approaches, and strategies that female educational leaders use to create more racially equitable educational environments in their communities. As a result of the work, I offer a new perspective on racial justice in education by focusing on the unique assets and

challenges of women who actively engage in this work through methods that privilege the voices of the women who are participating as Co-practitioner Researchers in this research.

Next, I outline the rationale for this study, key definitions and concepts, assets and challenges related to the focus of practice (FoP), the significance this research may have to educational practice, policy, and research, and a brief description of the study's Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach and design.

Rationale

Racially disproportionate student outcomes continue to plague America. According to the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), there were no changes in the 8th grade White-Black “achievement gap” (opportunity gap) in Reading (25 points in 1992 and 2017) or Mathematics (32 points in 1990 and 2017). Although progress was made to reduce the noticeable gap in 4th grade, in Reading, the gap 32 points in 1992 reduced to 26 points in 2017, and in Mathematics, the gap of 32 points in 1990 reduced to 25 points in 2017. However, outcome gaps persisted. While this data presents a small window into the larger educational landscape, practitioners in the field corroborate racial disparity in student education outcomes across a wide range of traditional engagement indicators, including standardized academic achievement, attendance, and discipline. In attempting to reverse this trend, antiracist educational leaders work to provide access for students of color to the tools to be successful within a traditionally White-dominated social structure without succumbing to assimilationist schooling practices that reproduce the status quo and the insistence to uphold the current institution of school (Delpit, 1988). To navigate this complex terrain, antiracist educators need to affirm students' existing sociocultural funds of knowledge while recognizing and identifying the sociopolitical systems that work to maintain the oppression of racially

marginalized people. In doing so, they provide the knowledge and tools for students to navigate, and ideally change, the oppressive systems that place racially marginalized students at a disadvantage.

While not yet proportional, women in district educational leadership roles have increased nationally. Although only 24% of school superintendents are female (Ramaswamy, 2020), the number has tripled since the 1990s (Glass, 2010), and female school leaders now outnumber their male colleagues (IES:NCES, 2020). Assuming the trend continues, we need to understand how women educational leaders reverse racial inequity in the communities they serve.

Despite increased representation, many women leaders in the field report that society continues to favor stereotypically male approaches of leadership, approaches that have not disrupted the disproportionality experienced by students of color in education. Just like Kamala Harris in the introduction of this chapter, women often report having to “toe the line” and choose between their authentic leadership selves and how they know they will be perceived by others if they do not conform to gendered social stereotypes and expectations. Furthermore, the higher the level of perceived leadership, the more women report this phenomenon.

With reflection and interpersonal and sociopolitical awareness, women can draw connections with other forms of oppressive social systems, such as racism. As Lorde (1984) stated, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (p. 138). The integration of knowledge about oppression through critical reflection and self-examination should morally obligate the joining of efforts to end the oppressive *-isms* that impede the creation of a more equitable and just society (Cooper, 1894; Davis, 1981; Davis, 1981; Freire, 1970; hooks, 2013; Lorde & Gay, 2020). hooks (2013) called this system “*imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*” to intentionally draw attention to the

interlocking systems that reinforce each other but are no more harmful than the next (p. 4). hooks (2013) clarified that to overcome these systems, women must work together in solidarity:

Given the patriarchal white supremacist anti-feminist backlash, it is crucial that we turn our attention once again to the ways women relate along the issues of race... [and explicitly link] struggles for female advancement with a maintenance [or destruction] of white supremacy (p. 40).

Toward this end, this study centers on women in district leadership positions in an effort to understand the unique assets and challenges of raising and sustaining female antiracist educational leaders.

Key Definitions

I intentionally define and clarify terms, but I was careful to do this in collaboration with study participants. In being careful about how I yielded the power of authorship, I believe I enacted the values that are being uplifted by the work: I left open possibilities for those closest to the localized context to uplift their own truths and remained in alignment with the feminist approach of acknowledging that definitions are themselves social constructs, which should be consistently examined and may shift over time (Singleton, 2016).

For the purposes of this dissertation a *female* or *woman* refers to any person that self-identifies as such. Female *ontology* refers to the nature and relations of being a woman in a social setting while female *epistemology* refers to the study or theory of knowledge that is derived from being a woman in a social setting (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

An *educational leader* logistically refers to a school principal, administrator, or district leadership staff. However, within the context of this study, I focused on district-level positions,

such as superintendents, assistant or deputy superintendents, and executive directors. I did not include school-site principals or administrators as study participants.

The term *racist* is referring to a person, policy, or idea that promotes the belief that racial differences produce an inherent and biological superiority of a particular race by reinforcing or maintaining sociological racial inequity, either through discriminatory action and/or inaction (Hauser, 2020; Kendi, 2019; Merriam-Webster, 2020). Contrarily, *antiracist* refers to a person, policy, or idea that reinforces that racial groups are inherently and biologically equal by actively working to correct sociological racial inequity in all its forms (Kendi, 2019). In academia, *educational racial inequities* refer to evidence or data within a school, district, or educational setting that indicates statistically disproportional outcomes for students of color on academic and engagement measures, such as standardized test scores, enrollment in advanced placement courses, or suspension data (CEPA, n.d.).

In order for education leaders to be antiracist, they must actively address the racial inequities that are reinforced by institutional school models – models that maintain societal status quo by promoting egalitarian values while producing disproportionately negative outcomes for students of color and continued success for privileged (often White) students (Eubanks et al., 1997; Kendi, 2019). The gap in academic performance is known as the *opportunity gap*, formerly known as the *achievement gap* (Carter & Welner, 2013). The shift in nomenclature honors the differential treatment (e.g., underfunding of schools with high populations of students of color, generational social capital, etc.) without placing blame on individual students for not overcoming the challenges presented by our current, often racist, school structures (Kendi, 2019). Although the racial opportunity gap in aggregate across the United States has declined over the past two decades, in some states the gap has increased, and nationally the gap remains

statistically significant (CEPA, n.d.). Thus, education leaders who seek to reduce educational racial inequities must deviate from mainstream measures that focus on inclusivity alone, such as programs that teach for tolerance or offer diversity training. They must be actively antiracist.

An antiracist educational leader refers to a school and/or district leader who advocates, leads, and keeps issues of racial equity at the center of their practice and vision. They are leaders who actively support and enact antiracist ideas and policies in efforts towards eliminating disproportional racialized student outcomes related to historical, systemic, and structural opportunity gaps in the United States (Kendi, 2019; Theoharis, 2010).

Analysis of Assets and Challenges

The focus of the study was to understand how female leaders surface and address the tensions of racial inequities in their school and/or district communities. Educational leadership is challenging and complex work, and, given the historical organizational and societal gender biases and constraints experienced by women in education, the challenges and complexities are multiplied. Female education leaders have an abundance of unique assets located in and emerging from their distinct positionality in both society and schools. An analysis of the challenges and assets inherent in being a female antiracist educational leader at the micro, meso, and macro levels informed an understanding of the study's Focus of Practice (FoP) as well as the particular design of the Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Within the context of this study, the micro level consisted of individual school sites, including students, teachers, and support staff. The meso level consisted of the district leadership, including the office of the superintendent, district office employees and the collection of school sites that they support. Finally, the macro level consisted of state and national educational influences, which include both state and federal policies as well as broad American

cultural influences. In each of these categories, I considered the assets and challenges for women in educational leadership as well as the impacts on school-based racial equity work. In order to consider these assets and challenges, I first identified, compiled, and analyzed data collected from a number of sources and processes: site visits, learning walks, community learning exchanges (CLEs), individual conversations, and anecdotal records (see Figure 1). Through this process, I identified a central theme for practitioners in this work: The effects of social gender norms and biases have a significant impact on women in leadership.

Micro Assets and Challenges

At the same time that more women are entering the position of school-based leadership, the role of principal continues to expand from a building manager to additional roles including instructional leadership, community organizing, counseling, team building, institutional visioning, and more (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Within this site leadership context, practitioners reported that utilizing skills, approaches, and frameworks often associated with traditionally female social behavior enhances their contemporary site-based leadership capacity in ways that are often divergent from their male counterparts, but that these approaches are not always considered valid. Practitioners linked the behavioral differences in part to differences in the roles women play in their lives outside of work. For example, one practitioner reported that the same skills she employs in being the primary caretaker at home (i.e. collaboration, multitasking, caretaking, project management, conflict mediation, steadfastness, and the reliance on relationships to influence behavior) play major parts in her school management style. In this same conversation, another practitioner uttered the maxim, “Men are the head of the household, and women are the neck that moves the head,” implying that stereotypically gendered home

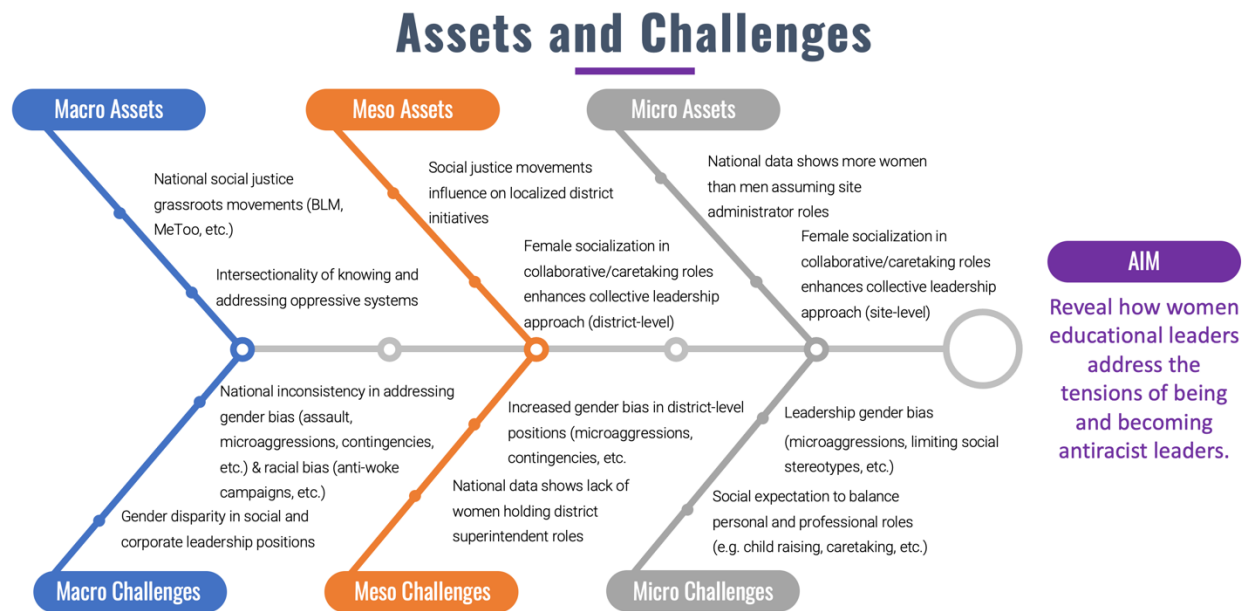


Figure 1. Fishbone diagram: Analysis of assets and challenges of FoP.

dynamics (involving men in forward facing lead roles with women providing critical guiding support from the background) often surfaced in professional settings. Connecting and applying this idea further, a third practitioner juxtaposed the tendency for women in leadership to focus on pushing concepts and ideas forward, while she perceived men tending to be more interested in self-promotion and personal legacy, using ideas as vehicles for personal advancement. In outlining these characteristics, practitioners expressed pride in their abilities to balance a wide array of tasks while nurturing the advancement of shared goals.

In contrast, the positive feelings associated with this type of collaborative leadership turned negative when this leadership approach felt limiting and restrictive. In times of urgency, uncertainty, and controversy, good leaders must sometimes make decisions on behalf of their organizations and/or use organizational values to hold members accountable to a shared vision. However, multiple female practitioners noted that when their professional duties demand timely and autonomous decision-making, constituents commonly respond negatively when the leader is a woman, yet favorably when the leader is a man. Even when decisions are fully communicated, female participants reported name-calling, microaggressions, and avoidance as common responses to women leading in stereotypically male ways, which ultimately interfered with their ability to lead sites effectively. For instance, practitioners reported being called names such as “bossy, insensitive, or selfish” when communicating contractual evaluation deadlines or direct performance feedback. Conversely, male colleagues who engaged in similar conversations were characterized as clear and decisive.

Furthermore, the tension of balancing the traditional gender role of child bearer and family caretaker also surfaced as a challenge for female practitioners. “Work-life balance” may be common millennial buzzwords, but practitioners in a pre-study convening agreed that the

demands of being a site administrator often make this goal seemingly unattainable, especially with children. Again, practitioners noted that, even with supportive partners, social norms and biological birthing realities dictate that women are disproportionately affected once they decide to have children. Practitioners revealed that the decision to remain in a job as demanding as a site or district leader often leads to internal feelings of guilt since the social burden of child-raising traditionally falls more on the family member who identifies as the mother, regardless of whether the child is being raised in a single or two-or-more parent household.

Meso Assets and Challenges

At the district meso level, practitioners reported that many of the micro level tensions remain present, with the addition of some important differences. First, practitioners repeated favorable traits related to their socialization as females that seemed to improve job performance. For instance, women noted that they tend to “care for the collective” more than their male colleagues (Cullinan, 2018). Practitioners noted that the inclination improves their abilities to establish and implement collaborative decision-making structures that are inclusive of multiple perspectives. In fact, one practitioner reported gaining more pleasure from creating organizational synergy than receiving individual credit when working on long-term projects.

However, at this level, practitioners observed fewer females are superintendents than males. Practitioners stated that the lack of representation contributes to a male-dominated culture that without concerted and conscious effort leads to women in these roles accommodating unreasonable requests that seem initially feasible but may become unreasonable over time. For instance, district leaders felt pressure to answer non-crisis phone calls late at night or use passive voice to soften the roll-out of new directives. Furthermore, both site and district women leaders noted that they often filled gaps in service that were unrelated to their job’s roles and

responsibilities, but necessary to the overall health of the school or district. Examples included support on master schedule, budget, facilities, and initiatives that did not fit clearly in a single department but required a lead to move the work forward. Practitioners agreed that although their male colleagues also filled gaps, the expectation to provide more involved and sustained support was analogous to that of the role of a caregiver. One noted, “Dad hollered at me to get my homework done, but Mom sat next to me and walked me through it.”

In terms of racial equity efforts, the popularization of recent racial justice movements, especially after the killing of George Floyd in police custody, has drawn attention to antiracist initiatives, including those related to the FoP. Black Lives Matter (BLM), a global organization co-founded by three women (Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi) and other grassroots efforts have mobilized a critical mass of protesters in some areas that seem to make space for racial equity policy and reform. The recent wave of increased awareness of anti-Black racism has impacted schools and school districts, many of which have now begun to address racism in their policies, structures, and practices with revitalized energy.

For example, in California, Oakland Unified School District’s school board voted to eliminate its school-based police department in December of 2020. Called the “George Floyd Resolution to Eliminate the Oakland Schools Police,” this initiative sought to reallocate funds to increase counseling staff and hire culture and climate ambassadors who are located directly on sites and are trained to build relationships with students, deescalate volatile racial situations and tensions, and work with site staff to proactively promote positive school environments (Oakland Unified School District: Board of Education, 2020). Nearby, Newark Unified School District crafted a Black Lives Matter resolution that includes implicit bias training for teachers and staff (Newark Unified School District, 2020). In southern California, Fullerton School District board

of trustees passed a “Resolution Supporting Our Black Community and Standing Against Racial Injustice,” which encourages schools to enrich academic curriculum by more accurately portraying the cultural and racial diversity within their community (La Tour, 2020). Despite meso level changes and reforms, practitioners noted that the daily interpersonal challenges of enacting, reinforcing, and implementing policy on the micro level remain significant. For example, some practitioners expressed pessimism about the impact of training educators on culturally responsive pedagogy, saying that such training does not mean that any given teacher will have the capacity to implement it with skill or will.

Macro Assets and Challenges

As they did at the meso level, practitioners felt that Black Lives Matter (BLM) and other national grassroots antiracist movements seem to have had noteworthy impact on macro assets and challenges. Here, too, practitioners made observations affirming that the more public discourse uplifts issues of racial justice, the easier it is for them to take on the monumental task of leading change efforts to reduce disproportionate racial outcomes. However, the influence has been mitigated by retaliatory “anti-woke” political campaigns designed by conservative national parties which seek to sow doubt in the national and local efficacy of initiatives related to antiracist efforts and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in general. The result is that teachers, principals, and school boards who may otherwise implement DEI work are less likely to do so when deemed controversial. Moreover, these practicing school and district leaders shared that the continuing educationalizing of social problems, such as the reliance on schools to uphold often contradictory American values such as private and public interest or utility and individualism without sufficient structures or funding, presents challenges to their individual roles and work and strains the education system as a whole (Labaree, 2008).

Furthermore, practitioners unanimously agreed that gender and racial biases are clearly present on a national level. One practitioner stated, “We expect better of our children than we do our own president!” Further conversation revealed beliefs that disrespectful words and actions regarding women and minority populations demonstrated by former President Trump was indicative of a pervasive sexist and racist national culture that continues to have subversive impacts on the legitimacy of female leadership. In fact, Wilkerson (2020) went so far as to write that these biases are actually manifestations of an ongoing national caste system that uses race and gender as markers of social status. Using the metaphor of an inherited house, she followed with a clear call to action, “We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now. And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands” (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 16).

Significance of Focus of Practice (FoP)

Women need models of leadership that highlight the unique assets and challenges that they experience in the work because female educational leaders in K-12 schools and districts are increasing in number and have a growing awareness regarding unacceptable inequitable racial outcomes. Women leaders have a distinctive role to play in engaging in antiracist efforts (see Figure 2). Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to explore how female leaders addressed the tensions of racial inequities in their district communities, we identified characteristics, traits, and approaches that lead to success. As a result, the leaders were more active and explicit about teaching and developing our current and future leaders (both male and female) and developing their antiracist leadership capacity.

Context

The PAR project exploring how women leaders address the tensions of racial inequities

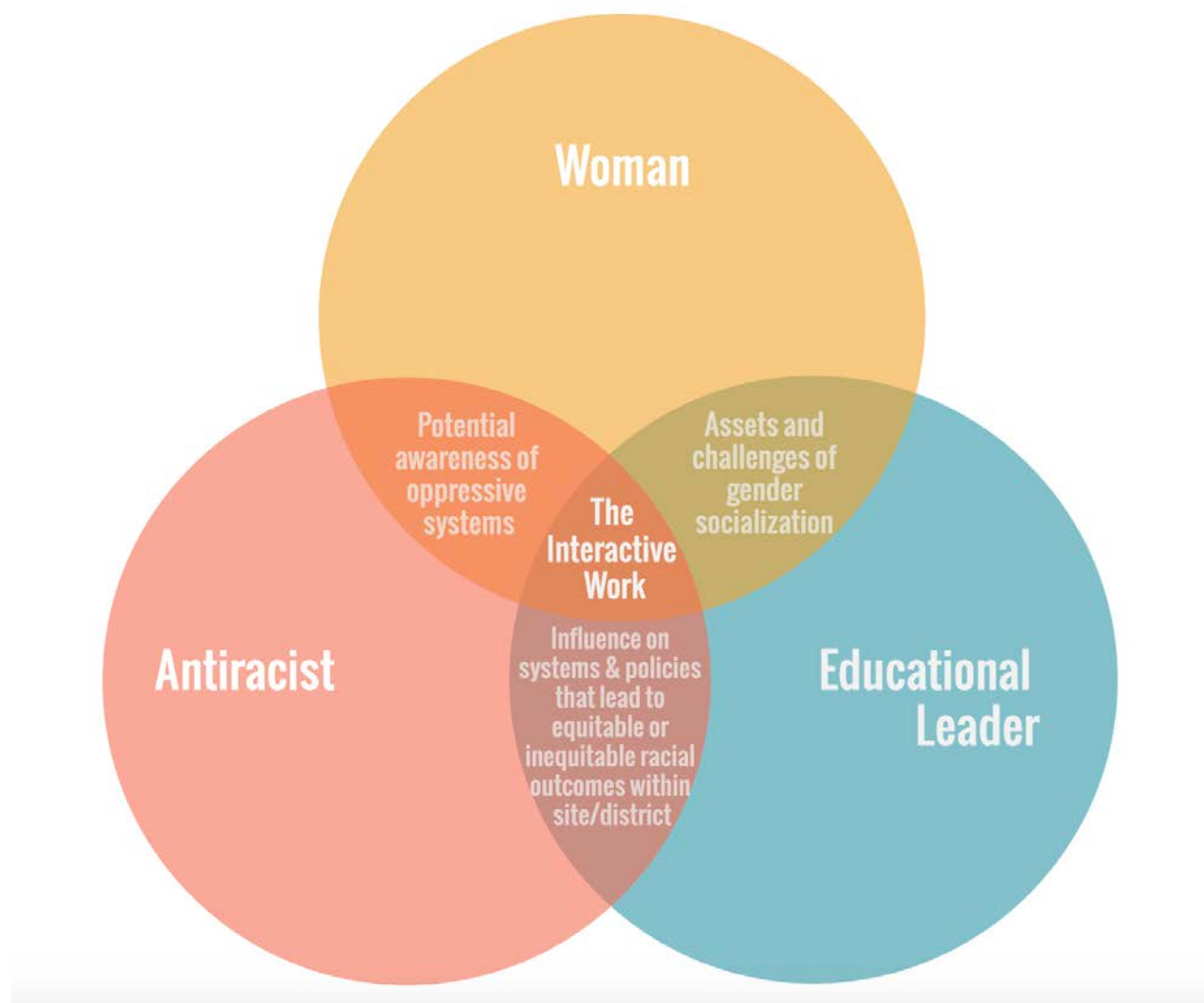


Figure 2. Venn diagram of context in which women antiracist educational leaders work.

in their school and/or district communities is significant to my context; I am a Black biracial woman educational leader seeking to reduce racial inequities in education. As such, I have an invested interest in learning about how women in similar positions identify and address the challenges of antiracist education leadership. Toward these efforts, I assembled a group of five women to act as Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team members. All five women served in district-level leadership positions and identified as being or wanting to become antiracist educational leaders.

Practice

How women leaders address the tensions of racial inequities in their school and/or district communities is significant to practice in three primary ways. First, as female district leadership continues to increase and public perception of equity evolves, the information that stems from the PAR investigation has relevant and immediate implications for the CPR team members' reflection and enacted practices. Second, the inquiry provides a liberating framework and model for sharing the leadership power of addressing and shifting inequitable outcomes within educational communities. Finally, through the PAR process, we built and reinforced our practitioner muscles of regularly engaging in interactive inquiry towards internal organizational change.

Policy

We wanted to use the results of the PAR investigation to inform racial equity initiatives at schools and districts impacted by our CPR team, but we intended to share the results with neighboring and collaborating schools and districts. Thus, elements of the research may be used to inform antiracist measures, policies, and organizational structures of those who are seeking racial equity within their learning communities. Rooted in practice, we anticipated that any

policies that directly or indirectly stem from this work would be practically situated in real-world contexts and thereby more efficacious than those rooted in theory alone.

Research

Although there is research regarding diverse women in educational leadership, a PAR investigation of how female leaders address the tensions of racial inequities in their district communities that utilizes Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) teams and emphasizes close proximity to participant voice surfaces a unique approach to this work. Moreover, considering how women approach antiracist leadership added a layer of understanding to the recent wave of educational research regarding the active role of leaders in creating more antiracist educational institutions (Burton et al., 2020; Diem & Welton Anjalé, 2021; Irby, 2021; Khalifa, 2020; Peters & Nash, 2021; Radd et al., 2021). Research that uplifts quality educational practices that minimize social stereotypes and biases can legitimize approaches that stem from leaders' authentic selves and serve the broader community at large.

Connection to Equity

Before addressing the PAR design more thoroughly, the FoP - how women leaders address the tensions of racial inequities in their school and/or district communities - is deeply rooted in equity. To explore this connection further, I outline the philosophical, psychological, and sociological frameworks that guided this FoP.

Philosophical Framework

Pateman (1988) reframed mainstream social contract theories by claiming that the sexual contract within political theories is often ignored and patriarchal domination is either explicitly reinforced and/or implicitly assumed. Without challenge, social agreements stemming from this premise in turn reinforce patriarchal domination. For example, individual property ownership is a

patriarchal concept that feminist movements have internalized over time. When feminists fight for ownership of the female person (i.e., women's rights to their own bodies, abortion laws, free the nipple campaigns, etc.), they are doing so in relationship to that of men's bodies. However, if we remove the sexual contract, women should have inherent "civil freedom as women, not as pale reflections of men" (Pateman, 1988, p. 14).

Building on Pateman's analysis of the sexual contract, Mills (1997) introduced the racial contract, the agreement to maintain racial hierarchy tacitly or explicitly, as another reframe. He asserted the contract is political, moral, and epistemological and persists through an ongoing agreement to use race as a marker of social status (Mills, 1997). The purpose of the racial contract "is always the differential privileging of the whites as a group with respect to the nonwhites as a group, the exploitation of their bodies, land, and resources, and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities to them" (Mills, 1997, p. 11).

To avoid being "signatories" to oppressive caste systems, people must take active steps to be in praxis "with reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (Freire, 1970, p. 126). By constructing a Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team with exclusively female participants who are seeking to enact antiracist leadership, the FoP elevates and protects the voices of practitioners that are aware of the philosophical intersection of these social contract theories. I will discuss the process of diagnosis and design in efforts to transform racist and/or sexist ideologies, policies, and structures within educational settings further in Chapter 2 and 3.

Psychological Framework

Regardless of their racial identities, female school leaders must psychologically and metacognitively recognize the tensions of being antiracist leaders within the schools or districts they lead. Steele's (2010) research on stereotype threat indicated that when confronted with the

pressure of fulfilling a negative stereotype (including environmental cues that reinforce stereotypes called contingencies), people's natural abilities are disrupted. The charge of antiracism within the context of female leadership amplifies the idea that the more one's identity intersects with oppressed classes (women, people of color, etc.), the more one experiences this threat more often than their (White, male, etc.) counterparts.

Given the gendered social contingencies and biases that exist within our current education system (as outlined in the previous micro, meso, and macro assets and challenges section), female education leaders function under gendered stereotype threat themselves. Thus, women antiracist education leaders navigate this added pressure while simultaneously attempting to reduce the racial stereotype threat that their students of color (and themselves if applicable) experience. The methods female educational leaders use to integrate these experiences into their antiracist work is integral in expanding the individual and collective capacity of women in these roles.

Sociological Framework

Finally, by understanding our roles in the racist systems in which we function, including the contingencies that reinforce them, school leaders can better understand how to promote antiracist policies, approaches, and reforms. For women in educational leadership, this path starts with self and interpersonal relationships and moves toward institutional and cultural change (Bivens, 2005). By examining self and developing the ability to engage others in conversation about their stories of self, one can uplift a collective narrative that includes all school constituents - students, teachers, families, support providers, community nonprofit partners, etc. The interaction with self within the context of others creates space for change. Benham (2002) extended this idea by pushing us to consider constructivist-based, naturalistic inquiry that

repositions leadership toward the distinct truths of those participating. Part of this work includes integrating school and district structures as an underlying cause of the opportunity gap (Ganz, 2011; Rigby & Tredway, 2015, p. 332). Another part of this work includes bringing in and collaborating with racial equity *co-conspirators* who are actively antiracist, willing to cede power and recognize privilege, and dedicated to partnering equitably with people of color towards change efforts (Love, 2019). In seeking to be antiracist, women educational leaders frequently experience the challenge of navigating complex interactions and relationships; therefore, their experiences tell a story that can yield invaluable information for us all.

Participatory Research Design

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research methodology that engages expert practitioners from the field of study to take an active role in cycles of inquiry to address common community and/or organizational concerns (Herr & Anderson, 2014; hunter et al., 2013).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of the PAR is to discover how female educational leaders address the tensions of racial inequities in their school and/or district communities. I engaged a Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team consisting of five women educational district leaders who self-identify as being and/or becoming antiracist leaders to conduct the participatory action research. PAR methodology integrated critical ethnography and feminist research to ensure alignment between research objectives and methodology. More details about methodology can be found in Chapter 3.

The overarching research question is: *How do women educational leaders address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders?* This includes the following sub-questions:

- What frameworks (knowledge, skills, tools, and dispositions) do women antiracist leaders employ that can add to the current body of educational literature to guide future generations of anti-racist leaders?
- To what extent do participants use their ontological and epistemological lens to address the tensions that surface when leading for racial equity?
- To what extent do I as an educational leader develop antiracist identity as a researcher practitioner in order to engage other women educational leaders as co-conspirators?

Theory of Action

If we can enact PAR that involves educational leaders closest to the FoP, (how women leaders address the tensions of racial inequities in their school and/or district communities) and engage them in examining the assets and challenges of being female social justice leaders working on behalf of racial equity, then we can develop constructivist models and tools for other educational leaders who similarly seek to disrupt racialized inequities in their school and district communities, thereby adding to the collective efficacy of those engaged in antiracist work.

FoP Description

The FoP centered on the unique assets and challenges of women in educational leadership as they addressed racial inequities within their school district organizations.

Proposed Project Activities

In order to address the FoP, I followed a timeline for ongoing PAR inquiry (see Figure 3). This included a literature review centering on the FoP, the assembly of a Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team, sustained cycles of inquiry through Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs), participant journaling and interpersonal messaging, and finally an analysis of the empirical evidence collected.

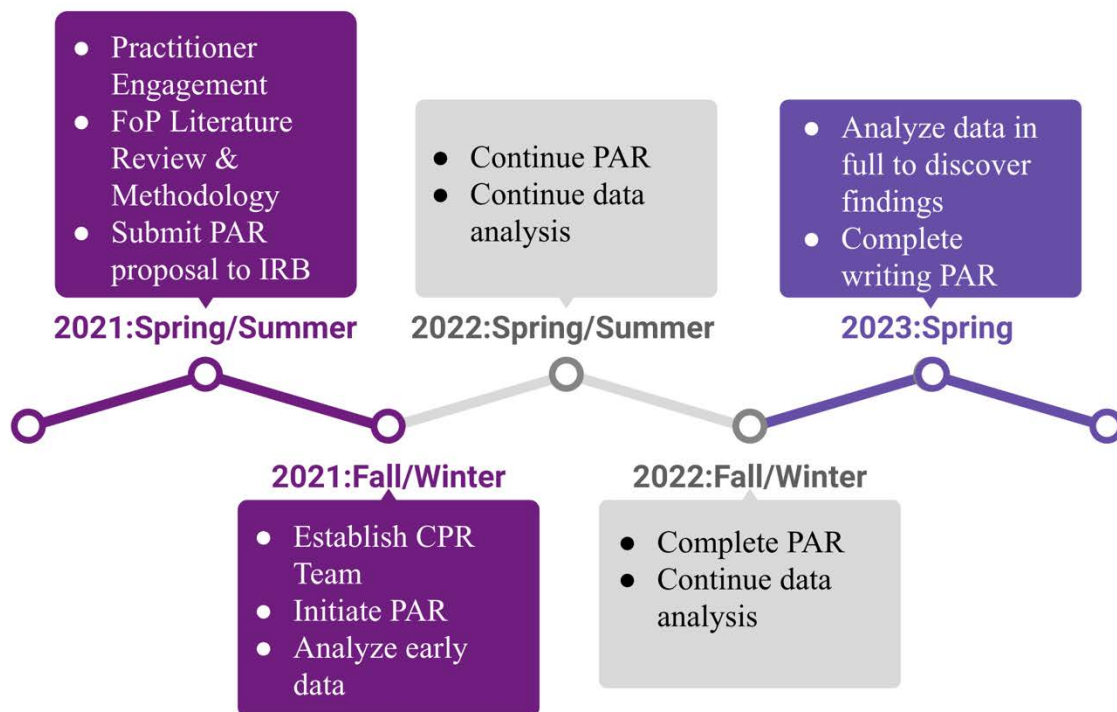


Figure 3. Timeline and signposts related to PAR.

The CPR team included female educational district leaders who self-identified as being and/or becoming leaders for racial equity. “By working through organized networks, the likelihood increases that ideas [and dialogical learning] may surface, be systematically examined, and if promising, moved rapidly into testing and refinement” (Byrk, 2015, p. 11). Byrk et al. (2015) introduced the topic of NICs to address the complexity of navigating sociopolitical qualitative research that can be challenging to organize scientifically: “A NIC (networked improvement communities) unites the conceptual and analytic discipline of improvement science with the power of networked communities to innovate and learn together” (p. 7). For the purposes of this study, the CPR team functioned as a NIC engaged in critical ethnography through a feminist lens.

I utilized CLEs, as a unique PAR method, with the CPR team to collaborate and engage in reciprocal learning about the FoP. CLEs break the isolation that people working on social change efforts often experience. They provide time and space for deep conversations that are less possible in the business of daily schedules. Participants experienced safety and trust in a space in where they can open up and deepen their relationships with others, which in turn enhances collective learning and creates the potential for improvement to be achieved (Guajardo et al., 2016). I review CLEs in more detail in Chapter 3.

Summary

Female educational leadership is impacted by the gender stereotypes constructed within their local, national, and even global environments. On one hand, stereotyped socialization has created space for women to develop collaborative and synergetic characteristics that are primed to address the changing contemporary needs of the sites and districts they serve, especially as it relates to disrupting cycles of oppression. Conversely, societal norms stemming from gender

stereotypes contribute to generalizations that create double standards and stereotype threats that obtrude progress for women in leadership.

Despite these challenges, women antiracist educational leaders are tasked with reimagining school systems that advance a multicultural, inclusive system – a system in which we strive to remove negative race-based contingencies, produce racially proportional student outcomes, and establish a learning organizational culture that integrates the community members they serve (Eubanks et al., 1997; Kendi, 2019; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Steele, 2010).

“Anything less leaves America behind in a world where intellect is the medium of exchange and power” (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 164).

Connections to Key Principles

Towards this goal, the PAR is rooted in key principles designed to support organizational and community-based reform. By working through strategic processes that push leaders to look beyond organizations and organizational practices to see the interactions they manufacture, they can use new reflection, understanding, experience, and collaborative tools to surface and design new organizational structures with an end goal of promoting interactions more likely to lead to positive change (Byrk et al., 2015; Guajardo et al., 2016; Spillane, 2013). As Spillane (2013) states explicitly, “We cannot design practice; we can design *for* practice” (p. 40). Thus, the goal of the dissertation was to learn with female antiracist educational leaders about how to improve our work, so that we may share the learning with the larger educational community and make progress toward a more racially equitable and just educational experience for the students we serve and the leaders we task with this charge.

Overview of Study and Chapters

In Chapter 2, I provide a comprehensive review of the theoretical, normative, and empirical literature surrounding the FoP, including female ontologies and epistemologies and their historical representations, trends in female leadership traits, a review of antiracist pedagogy, and a mapping of shared characteristics between stereotypically feminine leadership qualities and antiracist pedagogy. In Chapter 3, I outline the research design, inquiry process, data collection, and analysis methodology. Chapter 4 details PAR inquiry processes, and in Chapter 5, I summarize the data and present findings. In Chapter 6, I analyze the findings and present implications that emerged from the study. Finally, because this action research occurred within the context of ongoing work in school and district environments, the focus of inquiry will continue beyond this dissertation timeline in ongoing efforts toward continual improvement and racial equity.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

What women must do, what feminists are now doing is to point to [the] stage, its sets, its props, its director, and its scriptwriter, as did the child in the fairy tale who discovered that the emperor was naked, and say, the basic inequality between us lies within this framework. And then they must tear it down. What will the writing of history be like, when the definition is shared equally by men and women? Will we devalue the past, overthrow the categories, supplant order with chaos? No – we simply step out under the free sky. We will observe how it changes, how the stars rise and the moon circles, and we will describe the earth and its working in male and female voices . . . We now know that man is not the measure of that which is human, but men and women are. This insight will transform consciousness as decisively as Copernicus' discovery that the earth is not the center of the universe.
(Gerda Lerner, 1986, p. 13)

As discussed briefly in the philosophical framework section of Chapter 1, society is rooted in an implicit contract that reinforces patriarchal domination and subordinates women (Pateman, 1988). However, if we are courageous enough to apply alternative theories, ones that uplift female ontology and epistemology, we may reveal alternative ways of knowing, understanding, and eventually addressing issues such as racial inequity within our current systems, including education.

In this chapter, I review literature that reframes social theories with a feminist perspective and explores how female ontology and epistemology influences women in educational leadership who are facing racial equity.

Female Voice as the Voice of Resistance

To begin this section, I return to the work of Pateman (1988), who challenged mainstream social contract theories by revealing their assumptive acceptance of society's historical patriarchy and its role in reinforcing and establishing our modern patriarchy, which privileges men and subordinates women. Because these social contracts influence our current ways of knowing, we have come to accept the male-oriented conceptions of almost everything

we do, which in turn reinforces the political power of men over women. For example, in the United States, modern day conceptions of employment are based upon capitalist social contracts that have been inextricably tied to the sexual contract. Just as slaves became the property of their masters, so have women historically become the property of their husbands. Innumerable historical examples substantiate this relationship. For example, feudal marriages allowed husbands to buy and sell their wives and matches often indicated the socioeconomic status of the families involved. Women have had to fight politically to earn legal rights of personhood, such as rights to own property, work outside of the home, and vote, which meant that marriage to men was one of few means by which women could participate in civil society. Still today, housewives (the title of which reinforces restrictions on both place and gender, while the term “househusbands” still draw uncomfortable, comedic discomfort from many American citizens) receive no wages for their labor, thereby forcing housewives to rely on their husbands for financial freedom which likens their status in the home to that of a servant.

Although Americans continue to cite biological, environmental, and social factors (or a combination thereof) for socially constructed gender differences, these assertions do not explain the hierarchical valuing that continues to be reinforced by the original sexual contract (Parker et al., 2017). For example, women are more likely to have the physiological capacity to give birth and nurse children, a function those with male anatomy cannot accomplish biologically.

Although some argue that this natural function initiates a process of women becoming more nurturing and therefore justifies the socially constructed child raising roles that follow, others indicate social identity norms may be a much greater influence (Katz-Wise et al., 2010). Even if biological functions are considered, they are not sufficient to justify the subordination of women as demanded by the sexual contract. If the sexual contract ceased to exist, or the reverse was true,

and society empowered and elevated women for their biological functions, society might view the value of childbirth differently. Women may be provided with paid leave for social services such as birthing and nursing children. Women would be able to nurse in public without shame or rebuke. Women would be able to add mothering knowledge and skills to their resumes, which would enhance their professional careers, demonstrate transferable domestic leadership capabilities, and be recognized as assets in professional settings. However, in contemporary society as it exists under the sexual contract, the social roles assigned to women are often left unelevated, as secondary social supports, instead of critical and equal members of social systems (de Beauvoir, 1949; Lorde, 1984; Pateman, 1988).

Researchers and social theorists point to a variety of reasons for the differential, including socially constructed stereotypes that justify hierarchical gender roles (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Launius & Hassel, 2018; Parker et al., 2017; Wilkerson, 2020). In her seminal feminist work, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir stated, “For us woman is defined as a human being in search of values within a world of values, a world where it is indispensable to understand the economic and social structure...” (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 61). Today, our modern conceptions of employment remain deeply intertwined with the sexual contract, as evidenced by the continued gender-based wage gap. In the United States, women make 82 cents for every dollar that a man earns (AAUW, 2020). Not only are women less likely to be hired for a position because of existing biases, stereotypes, and social structures that limit the conceptions of women's work, women continue to take on the additional social work of bearing (and disproportionately raising) children without pay, often with financial consequences related to delayed employment advancement when taking time off of work to do this social service (AAUW, 2020). Thus, women have fewer opportunities to level the pay gap, and even when they are employed, they

continue to face bias that limits advancement. In essence, the cyclical nature of the sexual contract reinforces its very existence (see Figure 4).

However, if we strip our theories back to their origins and remove the patriarchal foundation, instead building on a foundation of gender equality, then we can begin to uncover an alternative way of knowing. Gilligan (1982) exemplified this work when she responded to Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Although she praised Kohlberg for not being satisfied with "ethical neutrality" or the sentiment that "values are culturally relative," she stated clearly that his work "concealed power and falsified knowledge" in that it neglected to include a study of women, thereby skewing a framework that would ultimately and unfairly be applied to women.

To elaborate further, Kohlberg, a male American psychologist, found six stages of moral reasoning development: (a) obedience to avoid punishment, (b) self-interest (obedience to earn reward), (c) interpersonal accord and conformity (obedience to get along with others and gain social approval), (d) authority and maintaining social order (believing that the social order created by rules is worth preserving), (e) social contract (recognizing that social contracts, rules, and laws exist for the greater good), and (f) universal ethical principles (discerning by individual consciousness that are less guided by rules and more guided by moral imperatives) (Sanders, 2020). When he applied his theory to women, although women were not included in his study, he reported that women almost never progressed beyond stage three: focusing on interpersonal relationships.

Gilligan (1977), on the other hand, studied primarily women and determined that women's moral development is rooted in an ethic of care (emphasis on interpersonal relationships and nonviolence) versus an ethic of justice (emphasis on equality of autonomous

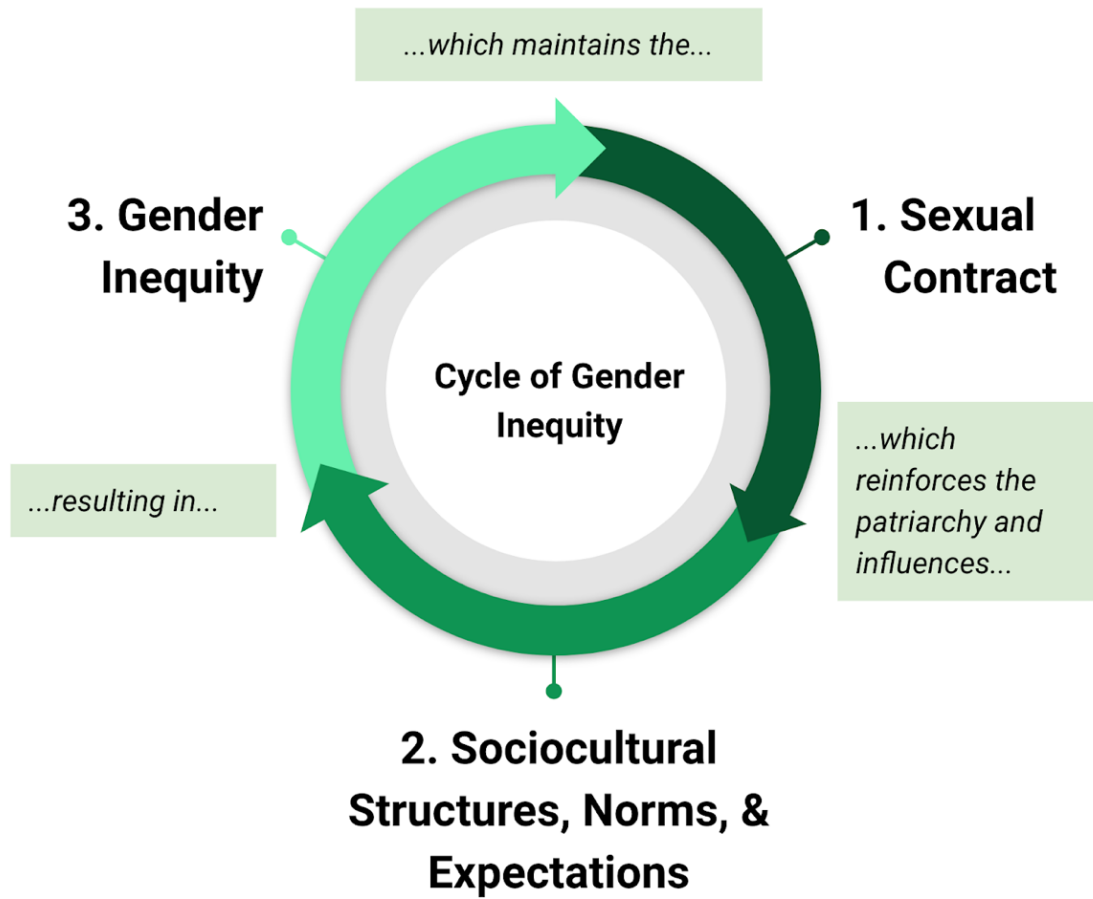


Figure 4. Cycle of patriarchy.

individuals who interact with each other). She identified three stages of moral development with transitions: (a) Orientation to Individual Survival, (transition) prioritize responsibility over selfishness, (b) goodness as self-sacrifice, (transition) consider own needs and desires as equally important to that of others, (c) morality of nonviolence (Gilligan, 1977; Nelson, 2014). In an interview, Gilligan admitted that what differentiated her voice from others of the time was that it connected thought with emotion, mind with the body, and the self with relationships; she called this the human voice and elaborated that given our current gender binary and existing patriarchy, the human voice must elevate females (see Figure 5). “In a patriarchal culture the human voice is the voice of resistance because it's an alternative to the violence and it breaks the silence that maintains the patriarchal order” (Mitchell, 2019).

Likewise, Belenky et al. (1986) challenged and then built upon the work of another male American psychologist Perry. Perry’s conception of cognitive development was based on a study that included only male students from Harvard. Although there are similarities in their work, Belenky et al. (an all-female team) took an alternative approach. They interviewed 135 women from diverse backgrounds and concluded that women’s epistemological ways of knowing are greatly impacted by historically and culturally ingrained definitions of femininity. According to Belenky’s team of researchers, female cognitive development represents an understanding of self, relationships with others, and consequent perceptions of authority, truth, and knowledge. The study identifies 5 ways of knowing: (a) silence, (b) received knowledge (voices of others), (c) subjective knowledge (inner voice), (d) procedural knowledge (reasoned reflection of multiple voices), and (e) constructed knowledge (integrating voices). In order for women to move through categories of cognitive development, they often have to reject past experiences,

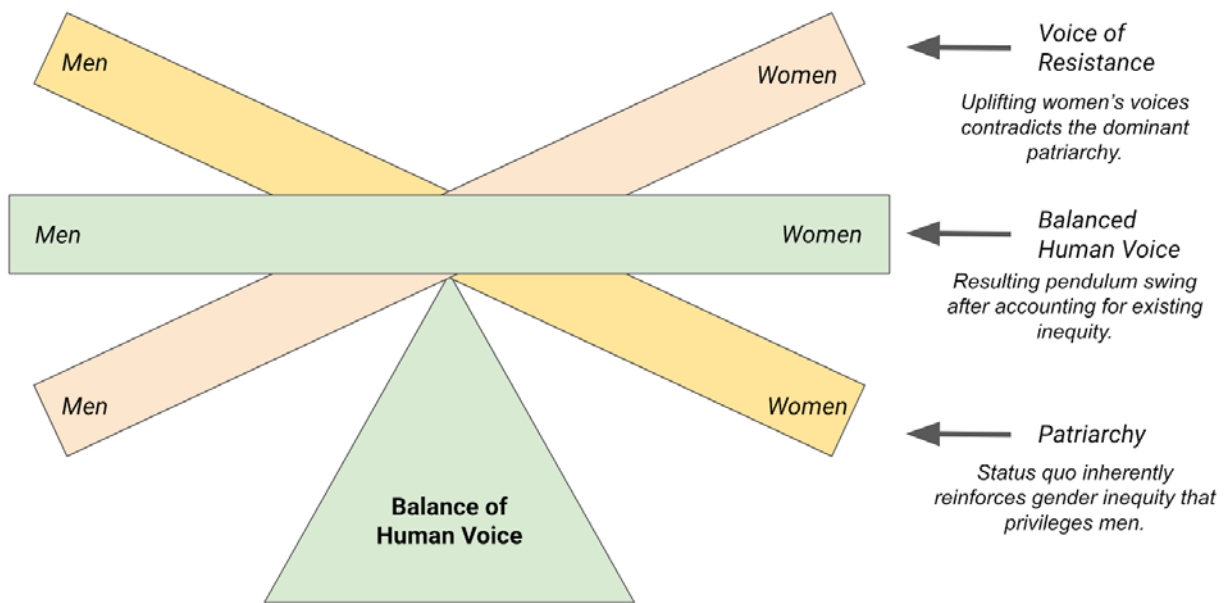


Figure 5. Human voice scale represents the importance of uplifting female voices to counterbalance inequities perpetuated by the patriarchy.

recognize the impact of physical, mental, and sexual abuse related to being raised in a patriarchal society, and/or integrate both *separate* and *connected* ways of knowing (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

To elaborate more on the latter, separate knowers rationalize situations by evaluating facts and remaining impartial, whereas connected knowers seek to understand situations through the contextualization of others' points of view. Although both separate and connected knowing have gender connotations – wherein men are often linked to separate ways of knowing and women are often linked to more connected ways of knowing – they are not gender specific and can be influenced by other identity markers such as race, class, sexual orientation, regional affiliation, and more (Belenky et al., 1986; Love & Guthrie, 1999).

In thinking through how the human story changes when women are the storytellers, Lesser (2020) noted, “History is often a distorted window into the past, the perspective of those with the power to tell it. And once again I was reminded of the opportunity we have to participate in changing the narrative” (p. 100). Through their work, Gilligan (1977) and Belenky et al. (1986) reveal that when theorizing starts from a female centered premise, conclusions about what constitutes morality shift considerably. Likewise, gendered connotations of values such as *care* and *justice* and cognitive processes such as *rational* and *connected* have epistemological implications for those in leadership. If we approached educational leadership from a balanced foundation that included both principles of connected care and separate justice, instead of privileging one over the other, conclusions about leadership approaches would similarly shift. How might this change in leadership approach impact educational learning objectives, student discipline, or achievement outcomes? We will not know unless we examine this further.

In speaking on Black women (and Black men), Lorde (1984) asserted, “. . .it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others – for their use and

to our detriment” (Lorde, 1984, p. 45). By viewing women in leadership positions through female-centered theories of moral development, we can begin to understand how this shift in epistemology affects how women are viewed in the professional workspace, and how women's perspectives can increasingly shift the workplace to center on alternative moral ontologies, especially when in leadership positions. In doing so, we can begin to define the role of female educational leaders in improving educational conditions, not only for ourselves, but for others.

Women’s Ways of Leading

In speaking about how women construct knowledge by integrating the voices of others and themselves, Belenky et al. (1986) stated the following:

These women want to embrace all the pieces of the self in some ultimate sense of the whole - daughter, friend, mother, lover, nurturer, thinker, artist, advocate. They want to avoid what they perceive to be a shortcoming in many men - the tendency to compartmentalize thought and feeling, home and work, self and other. In women, there is an impetus to try to deal with life, internal and external, in all its complexity. And they want to develop a voice of their own to communicate to others their understanding of life’s complexity. (p. 137)

To fully understand gender differences in ways of leading, we must continue to closely examine how gendered differences manifest themselves into leadership actions. In reviewing prior research that assessed the impact of gender on psychological characteristics and abilities, the psychologist Janet Shibley Hyde (2005) concluded that gender differences had very little impact on the psychological factors that often impact leadership capacity, such as cognitive abilities, verbal and nonverbal communication, aggression, leadership, self-esteem, moral reasoning, and motor behaviors. In fact, “Only a few main differences appeared: Compared with

women, men could throw farther, were more physically aggressive, masturbated more, and held more positive attitudes about sex in uncommitted relationships” (American Psychological Association, 2005, n.p.). Yet, if we dig deeper and attend to relationships in a collective sense, a subtle theme emerges in each of these differences; each represents a distancing away from more intimate and interconnected relationships – a theme that persists throughout literature.

For example, Thompson (2000) noted that studies focused on gender and leadership seem to vary; some claiming virtually no differences in leadership styles and effectiveness, while others pointing to noticeable differences in leadership approaches. However, when determinations of effectiveness are teased apart from behavioral approaches, critical patterns surfaced in his research, which was corroborated by other studies: men’s leadership became characterized as more goal oriented, directive, opportunistic, and transactional; whereas women’s leadership became characterized as more democratic, interpersonal, interactive, and transformational (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Gibson, 1995; Kelly et al., 1991; Rosener, 1990; Statham, 1987; Thompson, 2000). In a meta-analysis of 45 studies that addressed the question of whether or not gendered leadership styles exist, Eagly and Carli (2009) found that male leaders were more likely to be transactional leaders in that they were more likely than women to utilize corrective and disciplinary actions or take less responsibility for managing in general. Conversely, women were more likely to be transformational leaders in that women were more likely than men to give support and encouragement to subordinates, in addition to rewards and positive incentives more characteristic of the transactional leadership approach. Eagly and Carli (2007) combined these findings with another meta-analysis that concluded “. . . women adopt a more participative and collaborative style than men typically favor,” and attributed this behavior, not to genetics, but to an act of navigating stereotypical expectations. In

other words, collaboration can get results without seeming particularly masculine. Although modern 21st century organizations increasingly value team synergy over positional hierarchy, they noted that if there is insufficient critical female mass present in the organization, female leaders often conform to a more masculine leadership style. Despite this study being rooted in leader/subordinate relationships, the female behavioral trends of collaboration and wealth sharing (through rewards and incentives) indicates a more collectivist ontological approach to leadership.

These differences are attributed more to socialized norms and expectations, rather than differences in biological factors. In fact, many studies on gender include warnings that cultural claims regarding gender differences can lead to performance-based consequences wherein cultural expectations lead to individual performance that matches expectations more than inherent skill or will (APA, 2005; Hyde, 2005; Rosener, 1990; Steele, 2010; Thompson, 2000). Thus, although rooted in socially reinforced constructs, differences in women's ways of knowing can shed light on their biased origins and reveal methods for addressing the inequities that follow. In fact, this understanding may be the key to disrupting the repetitive and cyclical nature of the inequity itself.

Ultimately, Thompson's study claimed that, regardless of the leadership style employed and whether it is associated with male or female characteristics, leaders who demonstrate more balanced leadership approaches (for example, navigating when to be mentors and facilitators, directors, or producers) are perceived to be more effective by those they supervise. This conclusion is valid; yet, balancing these roles requires adept interpersonal skills to navigate the shifting of relationships in time and space, relationships that require flexible identities and make us more human. The approach is more aligned with the aforementioned collaborative,

interpersonal, and collective female styles of leadership. Thompson's conclusion minimized the value of what can be learned by reviewing the gender differences outlined in the very literature he studied, differences that can provide valuable insight in how to open more doors to other marginalized and oppressed groups.

On the topic of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia, Lorde (1984) stated, "The above forms of human blindness stem from the same root - an inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic human force, one which is enriching rather than threatening to the defined self, when there are shared goals" (p. 45). In reviewing literature regarding female leadership from the female perspective, the understanding that follows is enriched, expanded, and ultimately more human.

Women in Educational Leadership: Intersectionality of Knowing

Although gender disparities persist in educational leadership, females are assuming educational leadership positions at increasingly higher rates. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the number of female superintendents in the United States has tripled from 6.6% to 24% since the 1990s and 54% of female school site leaders are female (Glass, 2010; IES:NCES, 2020). Furthermore, education can intuitively be seen as the first step in initiating social change, since "teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced" (Dewey, 1938, p. 18). Thus, education provides an ideal field of study to consider how female centered leadership can lead to positive social change.

Female leaders do not have the luxury, however, of focusing solely on the changes they wish to see in the next generation. On the contrary, female education leaders are often faced with the pervasive challenge of changing the status quo both for themselves and the students they serve. In fact, the practice of self-reflection may be an integral part of understanding how to

improve conditions for others. To mirror this process, this section starts by first reflecting inward on the characteristics of female educational leaders before shedding light on how these characteristics can facilitate equitable conditions for all.

Rouleau-Carroll (2014) conducted a qualitative study of four female secondary site leaders using a critical feminist theory approach which takes into consideration gendered power relationships. She found that the themes that surfaced from her research corroborated much of the literature she found on women in leadership. Similarly, these themes also surface in Thompson's (2000) literature review, even if de-emphasized. In the data from her study, participants noted the following trends (Rouleau-Carroll, 2014, p. 100):

1. Extended support was necessary for balancing family and work.
2. They communicated frequently about their passion for the work.
3. They considered interpersonal social skills as critical to success.
4. They regarded "the ability to be reflective and introspective" as important characteristics for educational leader effectiveness (Rouleau-Carroll, 2014, p. 100).
5. They encountered bias or discrimination for being a female site principal and altered their behavior to adjust for social stereotypes and expectations, such as "watching their air time" or being mindful of gendered "double bind" situations.

Theme 1 corroborated the work of Metz and Moss (2008) among others (AAUW, 2020; Wipperman, 2019) who found that women had "diminished managerial ambitions (when without high-level support) due to the responsibility of balancing family and work" (Rouleau-Carroll, 2014, p. 100). Eagly and Carli (2007) further state that although gender balances are improving, women are still spending more hours than men in raising children and completing housework, which reduces their ability to socialize and network professionally. Attributes from themes 2-4

are foundational requirements for being the “transformational” leaders previously discussed in the Eagly and Carli (2009) meta-analysis study. Statham (1987), Kelly et al. (1991), and Eagly et al. (1992) found that women were more likely to exhibit interpersonal skills required of democratic leadership styles, and men were more likely to exhibit the dominating, assertive skills required of autocratic leadership.

The adjustment to fit stereotypical expectations is referenced in Eagly and Johnson’s (1990) study which determined “women were more likely to adopt a democratic or participative leadership style, while men were more likely to adopt a more autocratic or directive style” (Thompson, 2000, p. 975). Women may use the democratic style of leadership when they think about and weigh the potential consequences of deviating from expected gender behavioral roles (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Demaniter & Adams, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sandberg, 2013), which often leads to a “temper[ing of] their reactions, responses, and professional goals,” but can also lead to a “resiliency within academic leadership” related to successfully navigating gender norms over time” (Rouleau-Carroll, 2014, pp. 100-102).

As a result of these multiple studies, I can concur that social dynamics have a substantial impact on leadership behaviors and the importance of attuning to interconnected relationships is at the core of these findings. The actions of balancing, communicating, and accommodating actions speak to setting intentional and strategic conditions for a more collectivist (female) approach to leadership. For instance, interpersonal communication and collaboration requires a willingness to engage with others without knowing the conclusion ahead of time. Because this approach to leadership requires a different type of leadership strength, leaders need to be vulnerable enough to trust and connect with others through the sharing of personal stories, ideas, and solutions. In many ways, the act of sharing stories is an act of sharing power. In a paper that

outlines how storytelling can lead to social change, Prasetyo (2017) uplifts how storytelling processes can build community:

In the community development processes, sharing stories or experiences can build trust, cultivates norms, transfers tacit knowledge, facilitates unlearning, and generates emotional connections. Storytelling teaches us how to deal with the different individual situations by improvising alternative futures through narratives of change. (p. 1)

However, this type of communication is only possible if a leader rejects hierarchical practices and engages with their colleagues on common ground. This type of action may be seen differently depending on the context -- as a sign of weakness in traditional, hierarchical settings or strength in collaborative settings. Yet, these are precisely the actions needed in order for genuine change (and a rebalancing of human voice) to occur.

Collective storytelling expands and diversifies our shared understanding of ourselves and our communities. In a tribute poem to the German artist and sculptor Käthe Kollwitz, feminist poet Rukeyser asks and answers, “What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? / The world would split open” (Berke, 2016). In doing so, Rukeyser asserts that stories told by women reveal variation in the human experience that are often suppressed, and these stories have the capacity to change the way we collectively see our world.

There are three underlying narratives of the storytelling: the story of self, the story of us, and the story of now. The story of self could articulate what we are doing and why we care about it. The story of us encompasses hopes and concerns. And the story of now will help us translate our ambitions into action (Kellogg Foundation, 2010, as cited in Prasetyo, 2017, p. 2).

Women engaged in self-reflection may reveal personal experiences with gender bias that stem from the social sexual contract. This heightened awareness raises questions and concerns that can provide insight on similar social contracts faced by other subjugated, oppressed communities who seek to overcome group-centered inequities, such as students of color who are resisting against racialized opportunity gaps. Women educational leaders who are willing to take the journey through self, us, and now have the added charge of recognizing the need to interrupt limiting social contracts for the students they serve in addition to themselves (Ganz, 2011).

However, recognizing a system of oppression is not equivalent to understanding the experience within said system; women antiracist educational leaders are tasked with understanding this nuance as well. For example, women school leaders may empathetically internalize what it means to endure sexism without presuming to know the individualized racist experiences of the students and families they serve. In this case, utilizing our established definitions, to ignore the broad influence of racism is racist, yet to generalize experiences of racism to all people of color is also racist. Antiracist leaders must recognize and navigate through the tension of setting culturally relevant and academically rigorous goals that recognize and address the impacts of systemic racism, while also acknowledging that every individual experience with racism is unique and the interventions needed to achieve equity should be differentiated. This theoretical leap is interpersonal and complex such that some women leaders do not accept the charge to see, disrupt, or address oppressive social contracts, but we can certainly learn from those who do.

As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, the bleak reality is that education opportunity gaps continue to exist in the United States, many of which begin even before formal schooling. In 2020, The U.S. Chamber of Commerce compiled research in six sectors, including education, to

inform social justice initiatives seeking to make “equal opportunity” a reality for all. The report, along with other academic research, outlined some disturbing realities. First, schools themselves are operating on unequal playing fields: 60% of Black students in America attend high-poverty, majority-minority schools, where per pupil spending is \$1,500 less than the national average. Second, the opportunity gap for children starts shortly after birth, with the rate of Black children living in poverty double that of White children. Average math scores for Black students entering kindergarten are 21% lower than those of White students and are strongly correlated to access to resources like libraries and museums. Only one in five Black 4th graders is reading on grade level compared to half of the White students, and 14% of Black 8th graders are on grade level in mathematics, which is 20% below the rate for all students combined. Finally, these inequities are carried into postsecondary education. The Institute of Educational Sciences: National Center for Education Statistics (2019) reported the following:

The 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began their pursuit of a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution in fall 2010 was highest for Asian students (74%), followed by White students (64%), students of Two or more races (60%), Hispanic students (54%), Pacific Islander students (51%), Black students (40%), and American Indian/Alaska Native students (39%).

Kendi (2019) clearly states in his antiracist pseudo-manual, “To be antiracist is to focus on ending the racism that shapes the mirages, not to ignore the mirages that shape peoples’ lives” (p. 55). The educational inequities in America are clear warning signs that the “achievement gap” is actually a mirage hiding the underlying *opportunity gap* that our students face daily (see Figure 6). Mills (1997) contends that the racial contract reinforces white supremacist values that influence resulting sociocultural structures, norms, and expectations that lead to cycles of racial

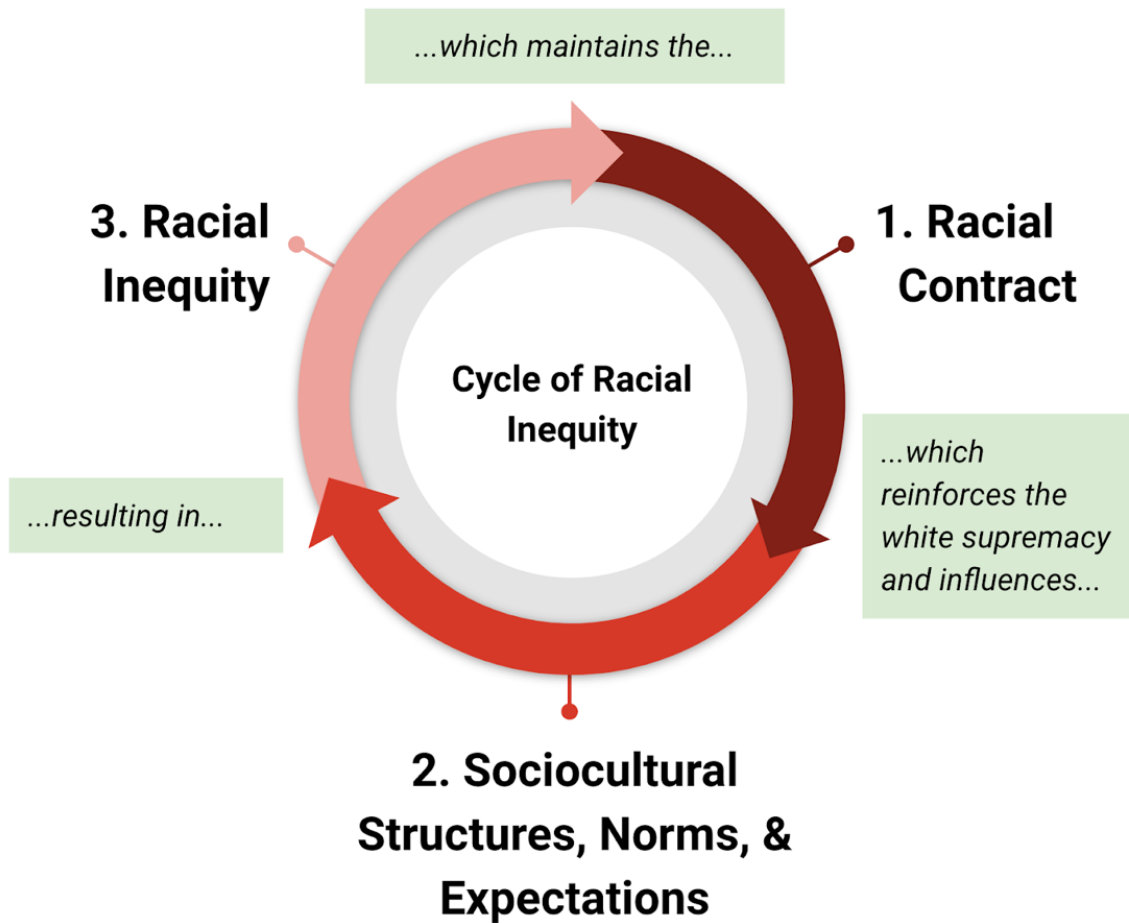


Figure 6. Cycle of racism.

inequity. Just as with the sexual contract, in order to disrupt these inequities, we must once again balance the scale of opportunity with voices of resistance that reveal alternative racial approaches to education.

To a certain degree, the female experience with sexism provides insight into how oppressive systems are capable of affecting individuals, which in turn may inspire allyship with other oppressed groups. Peters and Nash (2021) acknowledge this reflective application of experience as intersectional leadership:

Intersectional leadership explicitly acknowledges the multiplicative influences of marginalization centering race and gender, and across planes of identity, emboldening historically underserved individuals and communities to walk in the full truth of their distinctive existences. Intersectional leaders realize that any identity marginalization is oppressive.

Intersectionality – the interconnected and complex relationship between the multiplicity of ones’ identities and power – is not new, yet the use of the term has become more popularized to describe the concept. Crenshaw (2015) stated, “Intersectionality was a lived reality before it became a term... The better we understand how identities and power work together from one context to another, the less likely our movements for change are to fracture.” Even over a century ago, Cooper, who was born a slave and later became a high school principal and the fourth Black woman to earn a doctoral degree (Leiter, n.d.), urged women to employ their experiences and positionality in support of social justice for all. While addressing attendees at the World’s Congress of Representative Women in 1893, she issued this call to action:

Let woman's claim be as broad in the concrete as the abstract. We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all

special favoritism, whether of sex, race, country, or condition. If one link of the chain is broken, the chain is broken. A bridge is no stronger than its weakest part, and a cause is not worthier than its weakest element. Least of all can woman's cause afford to decry the weak. We want, then, as toilers for the universal triumph of justice and human rights, to go to our homes from this Congress demanding an entrance not through a gateway for ourselves, our race, our sex, or our sect, but a grand highway for humanity. (Cooper, 1894, p. 714)

Increased Intersectionality of Black Women

Women are recognized as a subordinate class within a normative patriarchy, although this subjugation is not equivalent to that experienced by people of color (hooks, 1989; Lorde & Gay, 2020; Mills, 1997; Wilkerson, 2020). Perhaps this lack of equivalency between gender and racial biases, inequities, and injustices is best illustrated by the contrasting experiences of White women and women of color when fighting racism. When it comes to racial advocacy, White women have choices in how, when, and even whether they get involved. In contrast, Black women and other women of color often do not often have these choices.

Although all women have the choice to co-sign or resist the patriarchy, it is easier for White women to act in accordance with their White-male counterparts and the dominating culture of whiteness, than it is for Black women and women of color who are less likely to be accepted (hooks, 2013; Kendall, 2020; Lorde, 1984). At any given time and place, White women stand at an intersection of identities (White, female, etc.) that allow them to weaponize their whiteness in ways that could exacerbate or reduce racial power dynamics at play. In her book *Hood Feminism*, Mikki Kendall (2020) highlighted the dangers of White feminism operating from a place of racial ignorance: “When white feminism ignores history, ignores that the tears of

white women have the power to get black people killed while insisting that all women are on the same side, it doesn't solve anything" (p. 6). The legacy of Emmett Till who was lynched in 1955 for flirting with a White woman, or more recently, the caught-on-camera 2020 story of Christian Cooper who after asking a White woman to leash her dog (in a leash restricted area of the park) had the police called to arrest him based on false claims that he threatened her, serve as stark reminders of this power differential. Yet, it is the recognition of this power that also opens the door to opportunities to enact antiracist leadership and advocacy with commensurate influence.

Unification Against Oppression

In terms of racial justice, "None of us alone can save the nation or the world. But each of us can make a positive difference if we commit ourselves to do so" (West, 2001, p. 109). Just as the converse is true, White women have the capacity to exercise their unique positional power within society to facilitate social reform and racial equity. Whereas White women have the potential to leverage their relative privilege in the service of racial equity; women of color, and particularly Black women, have an intimate understanding of racial oppression and thus the capacity for deeper insights into how to disrupt and destroy it, even if they lack the positional political power to do so. Moreover, when women work together in solidarity, standing side by side in racial justice marches or voter registration booths for example, they have an opportunity to leverage their collective power to improve racial justice reform efforts. Thus, the unification of respective assets and capacities of both women of color, including Black women and White women, has the potential to function as force multipliers when mobilized in service of collective interracial antiracist leadership initiatives.

In the collection of her earlier work, Lorde connected racism with sexism through a similar response: anger – anger of exclusion, unquestioned privilege, distortion, silence,

stereotyping, and defensiveness – and calls on women to use this learning as a spotlight for growth and improvement on both sexist and racist platforms (Lorde & Gay, 2020). Similarly, Cooper (1894), Davis (1981), and hooks (1989) argued that feminists should not attempt to fight sexism without acknowledging its interlockings with racism.

In sum, because women have experienced gender discrimination, but hold more collective power than people of color, they are primed to draw connections and bridges towards the antiracist movement. Furthermore, when women of color and White women work in solidarity to challenge the structural racism that exists in our educational system, the sum impacts of their combined efforts may be greater than either group could accomplish in isolation from each other.

The Three Cs: Frames for Antiracist Leadership

In preparing to take up this coupled work, we find blueprints and guides, particularly provided by Black women in the last 75 years, that provide insight on how to shift away from patriarchal, White supremacist educational settings to more inclusive, multicultural, and culturally responsive spaces. These frames are founded in female “ways of knowing and leading” and focus on three Cs: collectivism, critical conditions for engagement and learning, and centering of marginalized voices (see Figure 7).

Collectivist Approach

The first method of resisting and shifting the unequal power dynamics of oppressive systems (*imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*) involves moving towards structures, systems, and norms that encourage the sharing of power. Collectivist or pluralistic approaches prioritize the needs of the group over the needs of individuals within the group and recognize that diverse sets of principles can not only coexist, but when integrated well, elevate



Figure 7. Three Cs framework for antiracist leadership.

experiences of the group as a whole. This approach also requires attention to the relationships between members of the group as well as between members and their world. In speaking on feminism, communism, and being a Black Panther during the Civil Rights Movement, Davis highlighted this collectivist approach, despite efforts from her male interviewer to push her into his frame of knowing.

Interviewer: *How does it feel to be an icon?*

Angela Davis: *I don't feel myself to be an icon, so that question itself. . . I have to question the question. I know that there is an image of representation that I understand is not so much about me personally, but it captures a movement. It captures a possibility. Of course, I could never live up to all of the assumptions about what it means to be an icon. I've come to terms with that by recognizing that it's not so much about me as an individual; it's about the collective power that was harnessed in the campaign around my freedom, so that I can actually appreciate it.*

Interviewer: *But you're intellectualizing it. I wonder if you've personally, when you got that kind of attention then, and to some extent still now. Does it make you feel. . . do you feel flattered by it? Do you feel embarrassed? I'm just trying to imagine what that would be like.*

Angela Davis: *I used to feel embarrassed by it because I experienced the vast difference between who I felt myself to be and what was projected onto the image, the representation, the icon, and I came to terms with it by recognizing precisely that it was actually a production of a people in struggle and so I don't identify so much with the images. I don't identify with them in the sense that they are of me as the person that I am,*

but they are the creation of a people who struggle with and for me. (Channel 4 News, 2018, 21:28)

To achieve a collectivist approach in a school or district setting, it requires active voices of communal resistance to rebalance existing power dynamics. This requires honoring students' own cultural communities, as well as explicit instruction of the oppressive systems that work against those communities. In considering our current state of cultural inequity, Paris (2012) stated, "Such a climate has created the need for equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality" (pp. 95-96). If we do not actively and explicitly address cultural inequity, students of color are left to unpack the challenges of their individual situations without support and guidance. They are left to believe that they are solely responsible for their failure; they are left to believe that the system which does not represent them is not for them, and they experience the shame, disenfranchisement, and self-doubt that comes from experiencing these pervasive messages. However, if given the space and tools to identify, understand, and resist this inequity, students can develop the agency to "build a better world" (Paris, 2012, p. 138). Gay (2018) asserted that this instruction is more than just "leveling the field;" it is a critical and empowering step in restoring students' humanity and dignity:

All our children deserve to be empowered on multiple levels. Empowerment encompasses competence, accomplishment, confidence, and efficacy. Their achievement needs to be academic, social, emotional, psychological, cultural, moral, and political. Children of color deserve to receive this kind of empowerment from their educational experiences so that the dream of a secure and successful future for them will no longer be deferred, minimized, or vanquished, but realized and maximized. (Gay, 2018, p. 293)

This collectivist approach replaces the *imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy* with a multicultural one that is more representative of the group it is intended to serve. It also requires educators to do the ongoing and pervasive work of understanding their students' sociopolitical context and appropriately adjust and innovate pedagogy to empower students accordingly (Gay, 2018; Neri et al., 2019). In other words, educators have to understand and internalize the experiences of their students, not from their own perspective, but with that of their collective body, the majority of which are students, and adjust their pedagogical practices accordingly.

In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) modeled this approach by sharing her learning directly from the classroom. She begins with imparting that “. . .any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged” and valued and that everyone must contribute to the collective good of the classroom (hooks, 1994, p. 8). She recognized that this can be a challenge for some teachers because, “Let’s face it: most of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teachings reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal” (hooks, 1994, p. 35). By creating a participatory space, power dynamics between students and/or between the educator and students can be replaced with more collectivist values where power is shared by the group as a whole. hooks recognized that to implement a more collective experience for students, educators have to face the fear of losing control and create an environment that actively invites new perspectives, ideas, questions, content, and dialogue. Moreover, they may have to open this invitation without knowing the answers ahead of time and trust in the community’s ability to search for the answers that best fit their needs. In this way, the “how” will not come from the

educator, school, or district, but the community itself – the very foundation of multicultural, collective education.

Multiculturalism compels educators to recognize the narrow boundaries that have shaped the way knowledge is shared in the classroom. It forces us all to recognize our complicity in accepting and perpetuating biases of any kind. Students are eager to break through barriers to knowing. They are willing to surrender to the wonder of re-learning and learning ways of knowing that go against the grain. When we, as educators, allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve. We can teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of a truly liberatory liberal arts education. (hooks, 1994, p. 44)

Although not a traditional teacher in a classroom, Ella Baker used education as her primary tool for grassroots change efforts. She collaboratively founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960 to support uplifting the collective voice of students. The SNCC later led the Freedom Riders, organized voter registration drives, developed Freedom Schools, and much more. In her own words, “The major job was getting people to understand that they had something within their power that they could use, and it could only be used if they understood what was happening and how group action could counter violence...” (Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, n.d.). In her recent book *We Want to Do More than Survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*, Love (2019) highlighted Baker’s belief that the collective space to exchange ideas was more powerful and lasting than that of a one-man or charismatic leader. “Baker approached all her work through participatory

democracy, which rejected top-down, hierarchical, male-centered leadership” (Love, 2019, p. 67). Instead, Love asserted,

Baker wanted everyday people to resist oppression through their collective power, which, she argued, was a more sustainable and transformative method to attain freedom.

Through meetings, reading groups, debates, and strategy sessions, everyday people were centered in their communities for the fight for justice. (Love, 2019, p. 67)

Conditions for Engagement

Through the engagement, organization, and incorporation of everyday people, Baker attuned to the critical conditions required for collectivist objectives to be achieved. Critical conditions for engagement refer to the state of being, either within the environment or within individuals, that facilitate active engagement. Baker’s de-centering of singular leaders allowed room for shared power towards enacting change. Conditions that facilitate or inhibit power sharing can be physical, psychological, and sociopolitical. Again, conditions for engagement are rooted in feminine ways of leading in that they are rooted in understanding the relationships of others with each other and their environment.

Through the navigation of personal identities, social pressure, and the intersections between them, societal oppression roots itself in the psychological framework of both school leaders and their students. According to Steele (2010), when confronted with the pressure of fulfilling a negative stereotype, people can experience cognitive overload which disrupts focus and ultimately performance. Pressure can come from explicitly messaged stereotypes or environmental contingencies that “arise from the way a setting is organized around identity and from the way identities in the setting are stereotyped” (Steele, 2010, p. 68). In this way, cycles of oppression are again overtly and/or subtly reinforced. This phenomenon occurs in schools, for

example, when academically strong Black students test poorly on standardized tests or mathematically apt female students participate less in math discussions. The social cues in the environment, such as more White than Black students in Advanced Placement classes or more male than female math teachers in a department, apply pressure and stress on students to counter the stereotype threats in their environment, and studies show that this hypervigilance negatively impacts performance.

Understanding how contingencies signal expectations to students regarding their success or failure is essential to the work of being an effective antiracist school leader. In considering contingencies, Steele (2010) asserted, “Internal characteristics are hard to change; situational identity contingencies, the cues that signal them, and the narratives that interpret them are easier to change” (p. 216). He offered five research-based suggestions for reducing threatening stereotype contingencies:

1. Provide critical feedback in ways that raise minority students’ motivation and receptiveness.
2. Improve a group’s critical mass.
3. Foster in-group conversations and discourse.
4. Provide opportunities for students to engage in self-affirmation.
5. Support the development of “a narrative about the setting that explains [students’] frustrations while projecting positive engagement and success in the setting” (e.g., help students become aware of the contingencies impacting their performance, so that they do not internalize less-than-expected performance, while simultaneously reinforcing positive associations within the otherwise threatening space.)

Similarly, Hammond (2015) connected safety with how the brain processes new information. She noted that psychological and social safety is insufficient alone, “The brain needs to be part of a caring social community to maximize its sense of well-being. Marginalized students need to feel affirmed and included as valued members of a learning community,” otherwise learning is stopped so the brain can focus on protecting itself from harm with a fight, flight, freeze, or appease response (Hammond, 2015, p. 47). Thus, educators must provide curriculum content that interacts with the classroom environment to ensure that new content builds on students’ funds of knowledge and cultural ways of knowing. Without this interaction and connection, educators run the risk that content will be cognitively blocked (especially for students of color) due to status quo environmental stereotype threats and contingencies that often do not equitably represent, nor empower increasingly multicultural populations served by public education (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Muhammad, 2018; Nasir et al., 2016; Neri et al., 2019; Paris, 2012; Steele, 2010).

Pushing this idea further, Muhammad (2018) reframed literacy through a four-layered equity model that includes identity, skills, intellect, and *Criticality*. According to Muhammad (2018), “Criticality is the ability to read print and nonprint text with a lens of understanding how power, oppression, and privilege are present” (p. 139). She believed that the modern Common Core standards are full of skill and knowledge components but are lacking the identity and Criticality components needed for the sociopolitical climate of today. With this perspective, educators must create conditions that include opportunities for students to become aware and critical of the oppressive systems they face in order to empower them to enact change for themselves and others.

Centering of Marginalized Voices

Finally, the third “C” connects with both collectivism and conditions by focusing on moving minority voices from the margins to center space in equitable ways that account for existing inequalities. Without these efforts the racial inequity of the status quo persists.

Historically, this shift can be complicated and complex. For example, school desegregation is often considered a historical milestone in the civil rights movement, a moment to celebrate the integration and the American melting pot. However, it has also been linked to the decentering of Black voices and the loss of protected and affirming spaces, particularly for Black people who entered spaces that were not integrated and therefore lost their Black teachers, Black school buildings, and Black curriculum. Instead, these “desegregated” schools were filled with White teachers, White school buildings, and White curriculum (hooks, 1994; Love, 2019). hooks (1994) described the experience as follows:

School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle. Bussed to white schools, we soon learned that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us. (p. 3)

Given this loss, it should be no surprise then that attempts to re-center marginalized voices continue to occur in both integrated and segregated spaces. For example, 1960s Freedom Schools were six-week summer programs designed to “prepare disenfranchised African Americans to become active political actors on their own behalf (as voters, elected officials, organizers, etc.)” (Menkart & View, 2021). These schools were intended to support children and

adults in accessing their own lives by navigating the sociopolitical barriers that impeded progress for people of color. Freedom Schools were collective efforts with targeted purposes. In Freedom School documents entitled “Notes on Teaching in Mississippi” that were collected and preserved by the SNCC Legacy Project, the Introduction to the Summer is presented by Jane Stembridge and reads in part:

Remember this: These young people have been taught by the system not to trust. You have to be trust-worthy. It's that simple. Secondly, there is very little if anything that you can teach them about prejudice and segregation. They know. What you can and must do is help them develop ideas and associations and tools with which they can do something about segregation and prejudice. How? We can say that the key to your teaching will be honesty and creativity. We can prepare materials for you and suggest teaching methods. Beyond that, it is your classroom. We will be happy to assist whenever we can. How? You will discover the way - because that is why you have come. (Freedom Schools, n.d.)

Adjustments to curriculum is another method of re-centering (or at minimum re-balancing) marginalized voices. Recognizing the cultural disconnect in schools, Delpit (1988) asserted that educators should center minority voices by integrating culturally relevant content into instruction and decoding elements of White middle-class culture when necessary. Based on research conducted throughout the 80s and early 90s, Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the concept “culturally relevant pedagogy,” which was “. . .designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society” (p. 483). In 2012, Paris combined the sentiments of Delpit and Ladson-Billings by advocating for culturally sustaining pedagogy, which “. . .requires that [educators] support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while

simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). In expounding on her four framed equity model with an emphasis on *Criticality*, Muhammad (2018) rationalized further to say that “if we look at the most violent and oppressive people in history, they were typically (but not always) very intelligent and skillful. What they lacked, however, was a strong sense of self and knowledge of the identities of others” (p. 139).

Finally, powell et al. (2019) introduced the policy-based approach of targeted universalism; in schools this involves setting universal goals for all students that are accomplished through strategic approaches based on the needs of different student groups. In this way, “Targeted universalism is an approach that supports the needs of the particular while reminding us that we are all part of the same social fabric” (p. 4). In education, targeted universalism may involve setting a graduation goal for all students, knowing that some students achieve that goal with no additional support, but others require targeted support. Subgroups who are identified as at risk of not achieving the universal goal receive tailored support to meet their needs. For example, the academic program could provide access to affinity spaces (e.g., African American History courses, female empowerment clubs, mentorship programs, etc.) or support resources (e.g., college and career center, special education aids, grief groups, mental health counselors, etc.) designed to provide scaffolded student support. Support initiatives are then evaluated by their effectiveness to support those they serve in reaching universal goals.

Although not all these examples speak to antiracist leadership directly, they provide critical guidance for how to approach, engage, and continuously refine the work of reducing racial inequities in education. Moreover, they stem from distinct moral perspectives that balance values of caring and justice. Without women’s ways of leading and the nurturing collectivist approach to taking up sociopolitical inequities, each strategy would drastically miss the mark. In

the words Edelman, the Black female founder and president emerita of the Children's Defense Fund, "You really can change the world if you care enough" (Association to Benefit Children, 2020).

Woman Antiracist Educational Leader (WAEL)

When I juxtaposed the three Cs Frames for Antiracist Leadership with the aforementioned common characteristics of women in leadership, a convergence of pedagogy is revealed (see Figure 8). Subsequently, women who have a focus on antiracist educational outcomes may be better equipped than their male counterparts to implement leadership approaches which promote antiracist educational communities.

Thus, the rationale uplifted in this study for privileging women's voices in the dialogue of antiracist leadership is threefold:

1. Moral Obligation to Work Against Oppression: When experiences lead to awareness of cycles of oppression, women are morally obligated to disrupt oppressive forces in all forms.
2. Voice of Resistance: Due to current privileging of patriarchal leadership styles, female leadership styles must be privileged in order to achieve a more balanced human voice.
3. Shared Leadership Characteristics: Current theory, research, and practitioner experience indicate that there are shared characteristics between female leadership approaches and antiracist pedagogy.

Conclusion

In the Harris/Pence 2020 VP debate, Kamala Harris spoke the phrase "I'm speaking" on three occasions, a total of six times (Page, 2020). In all three occasions, Harris carved space to

Characteristics of Women Leaders		Antiracist Pedagogy (Three Cs)
Transformational (vs. transactional)		Critical Conditions, Centering of Marginalized Voices (toward sociopolitical change)
Collaborative [Space/Resource Sharing] (vs. hierarchical)		Collectivist, Centering of Marginalized Voices
Relational/Interpersonal/Reflective (vs. singular, autocratic, directive)		Collectivist, Critical Conditions (enhance collective by engaging and empowering others)

Figure 8. Shared stereotypical characteristics of women leaders with antiracist pedagogy.

speak, not on behalf of herself, but on behalf of others. On the first occasion, she surfaced the challenges of the American people regarding their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the second, she compared the caring actions of then-Presidential-nominee Biden's campaign and the autocratic actions of the then-President Trump administration. And on the third, she spoke on the value of integrity in leadership. In contrast, Pence responded to all three statements with language of blame, fear, and bullying. We can achieve entirely different values, words, actions, and outcomes when starting from female ontologies and epistemologies.

In this study, I focus on what we can learn when we listen to women who direct their ways of knowing towards antiracist educational leadership. In the literature review, I outlined how female ontologies and epistemologies (ways of knowing) influence female leadership approaches that support equity and antiracist pedagogy (see Figure 9). I started by uplifting the importance of drawing on research that includes women's voices (in design, participation, and analysis), so that the resulting conclusions are fair and accurate. Then, I discussed how sociopolitical and sociocultural influences shape female leadership ontologies and epistemologies. Finally, I reviewed practitioner knowledge, best practices, and experiences regarding antiracist education and noted similarities with typical female leadership approaches. Through the process of reviewing this literature, three approaches emerged as female-centered leadership approaches that can counter oppressive social systems such as the patriarchy and White supremacy: collectivism, critical conditions for engagement and learning, and the centering of marginalized voices.

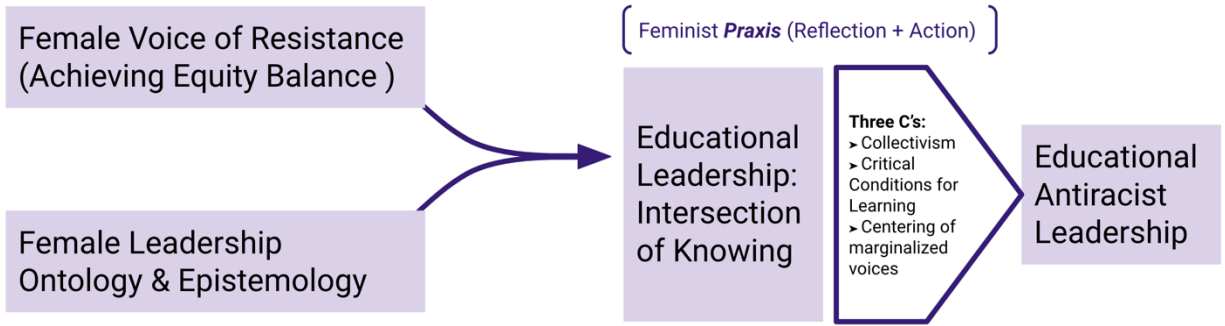


Figure 9. Emergent conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

*Genuine understanding must be rooted in a rejection of dominator culture. . .
When the world truly listens to the voices of women who have and are daily
working to decolonize our minds, who live in the joy of that transformation, we
can all walk the path to greater liberation, to solidarity. The shared journey will
bring us to a place of peace and possibility. Then we will not need to shore up
wounded spirits by creating false sentiment fictions to hide in; and we can
embrace the truths that do indeed set us free.*
(hooks, 2013, p. 57)

With the rise in public discourse regarding issues of racial justice, it is important that we learn from past experiences (some of which are outlined in the proceeding chapter) and carve out space for the female voice of resistance to be heard. As visible female sociopolitical leaders such as Kamala Harris, Stacey Abrams, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and even in passing, Ruth Bader Ginsburg continue to capture our nation's attention, there is momentum for female site and district leaders to shift the landscape of educational leadership if we are brave enough to reconceptualize it from a female perspective and affirm female ontologies and epistemologies. By focusing on women in educational leadership in the dissertation, I represent a voice of resistance that can be leveraged to rebalance the scales of equity as they relate to sexism, racism, and other related -isms that oppress marginalized communities.

In this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study, a team of female Co-practitioner Researchers and I engaged in critical inquiry and reflection to further understand how female school and district leaders address the tensions of racial inequities in their educational settings. Enacting a PAR study in collaboration with other women educational leaders in close proximity to the area of focus created the conditions to help us ensure that our individual and collective assets and challenges as social justice leaders working on behalf of racial equity were authentically portrayed and patriarchal influences of the dominant culture were reduced.

The PAR study's theory of action asserts that female educational leaders who convened with the goal of surfacing, understanding, and addressing the tensions of leading for racial equity expanded their collective knowledge of how to improve approaches, strategies, and outcomes regarding their work. Furthermore, the learning can be used to construct models and tools to inform other educational leaders who seek to disrupt racial inequities in their school or district communities and/or who seek to engage in educational antiracist action research of their own.

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological approach to the PAR study (Hale, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2014; Hunter et al., 2013) that includes elements of critical ethnography for educational research (Carspecken, 1996; Given, 2008), feminist interpretive research (Given, 2008), and Community Learning Exchange (CLE) philosophy and structures (Guajardo et al., 2016). First, I provide an overview of the research design and methodology for the study; then, I outline research questions, participant profiles, and inquiry methods for action research. Finally, I conclude with detailed descriptions of the methods for data collection and analysis and potential limitations of the study.

Qualitative Research Process

The moral purpose for the PAR study directly informs its design and methodology. Each of the methodologies used in the PAR provide opportunities for female education leaders to learn from each other by attuning to the three Cs outlined in the literature review: The PAR is rooted in *collective* values and practices, establishes culturally responsive *conditions* to enhance collective and engaged learning, and *re-centers* a feminine voice of resistance within the context of real-world educational professional practice. The PAR engaged participants in qualitative research methods including elements of critical ethnography, feminist research, and Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms and protocols.

Participatory Action Research

According to hunter et al. (2013), Participatory Action Research (PAR) is the process of working *with* a community to address common concerns within an organization or a community through cycles of inquiry (COI) that follow a predictable pattern: Build understanding of the context and topic of interest (*reflect*), devise a plan (*plan*), act on the plan (*act*), describe the effects of the action (*observe*), then review the plan and its effects in order to strategically inform the next cycle (*reflect* again), and the cycle repeats. PAR is participatory because the process relies on expert participants from the field of study to take an active role in COI construction and implementation by sharing their knowledge, skills, and experiences regarding complex, real-world situations (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Unlike traditional forms of research, PAR utilizes a systematic process that is rooted in the community it serves. In other words, it is not done *to* or *on* a community by an outside researcher, but rather *by* or *with* organizational or community members who have a stake in the concerns being investigated, which rebalances power in a way that allows participants to question and self-determine values, intended outcomes, and notions of improvement (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Thus, methods such as Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs) are important components of PAR because they are framed within the three ecologies of knowing self, organization, and community and are guided by axioms that effectuate the relational and collaborative aspects of PAR principles and processes (Guajardo et al., 2016). Because the evidence is often qualitative and iterative, this style of research is particularly useful when directed towards actions that promote social change, as researchers can validate and empower the voices of those closest to the inquiry research question while maintaining reliable and strategic

research practices. In this way, PAR methodology is emancipatory, dialectical, critical, and reflexive with the potential to transform both theory and practice (hunter et al., 2013).

Participatory Activist Research

Participatory Activist Research (PA¹R) emerged from the field of PAR to emphasize and further distinguish the active role of the researcher. An “activist researcher shifts from being a passive/participant observer to being an active investigator of change” who understands the sociopolitical context in which they work and explicitly and deliberately seeks to make “a positive difference in the lives of those suffering disadvantage or oppression” (hunter et al., 2013, p. 21). PA¹Rs are not organized around politically benign goals; rather, they take an explicit equity stance while employing a critical qualitative research approach. In this study, I will assume the activist researcher role, but continue to use the more commonly used acronym PAR to refer to both PAR/ PA¹R, unless emphasizing the activist element.

Given the collaborative nature of PAR and the questions raised in this PAR in particular as they relate to gender and racial equity, I established a team of Co-practitioner Researchers who were closest to the issues that the PAR sought to address, namely women district leaders in the United States who self-identified as being or wanting to be antiracist leaders and/or wanting to improve their existing antiracist leadership practices. In turn, the CPR team engaged in qualitative PAR informed by critical ethnography and feminist research and utilized Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms and protocols.

Critical “Feminist” Ethnography

Much like PA¹R or participatory activist research (hunter et al., 2013), critical ethnography utilizes intense fieldwork with an explicitly political focus “through which social, cultural, political, and economic issues can be interpreted and represented to illustrate the

processes of oppression and engage people in addressing them (Given, 2008, p. 148). Critical ethnography is a qualitative research approach that explicitly examines power relations to foster social change, and the role of the researcher is to “work directly with community members, engaging in participatory research and ongoing dialogue with those being researched” (Palmer & Caldas, 2015, p. 1). In addition to recalling the example of Gilligan and Belenky et al.’s female-centered research as a contrast to the preceding male-dominated research that was detailed in Chapter 2, Carspecken (1996) further explains the need for critical ethnography to be firmly planted within the field or community of study:

Part of the problem with the social science that has produced labels and diagnostic instruments is its failure to understand the relation of power and truth. Traditional social science never regarded it as epistemologically necessary to allow those worst affected by such diagnostic instruments to play any role in designing them or in deciding whether the construction of such instruments was desirable. (p. 8)

Given the definition of critical ethnography, the role of feminism in this study cannot be understated. In their introduction to *Feminist Activist Ethnography: Counterpoints to Neoliberalism in North America*, Bridges et al. (2013) stated, “It is clear that gendered experiences are crucial to understanding all things social, and it is clear that regardless of the theoretical road one chooses... gender is in some way refracted in how we interpret our ethnographic data” (p. 5). Through the PAR, I, as a female researcher with my unique perspective, sought to discover what learning I could glean from providing a space for women leaders to design and implement antiracist research from female ontological and epistemological perspectives. In doing so, I uplifted the feminine voice of resistance by centering on female

leadership voices and creating a protected space where participants could interrogate their own identities, leadership, and actions.

Consequently, I have interjected the word *feminist* into this methodological confluence in order to “...stress the importance of acknowledging women who [have] been left out of mainstream research models” and to once again uplift “...the diversity of women’s lived experiences [so that we may collectively examine] the intricately connected matrix of difference” which ultimately helps us all better understand our own individual life experiences (Given, 2008, p. 337). In doing so, and for the specific purposes of this PAR, I combine *critical ethnography* and *feminist research* together to form the term: Critical Feminist Ethnography (CFE). How CFE influences PAR methods will be further outlined in the Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis section of this chapter.

Culture of Change & Role of Praxis

Both PAR and CFE methodologies are intended to empower participants to be agents of social change by setting critical conditions for learning and creating space for *praxis* wherein learning leads to action. Fullan (2001) stated,

Leading in a culture of change means creating a culture (not just a structure) of change. It does not mean adopting innovations, one after another; it does mean producing the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices – all the time, inside of the organization as well as outside it. (p. 44)

I selected methods to emphasize the role of participants as co-practitioners, thereby modeling a critical and collective culture of change that is ultimately required of antiracist leadership as well. Thus, the research model demonstrates the values and practices inherent in the research

topic by enacting methodology aligned with feminist and antiracist pedagogical practices from the field of study.

Finally, this theory of action is rooted in learning theory, which posits that new learning is processed and retained when it is connected to existing funds of knowledge and prior experiences, both informational and cultural, and the learning environment is socially, emotionally, and physically safe (Hammond, 2015; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). CPR participants entered this study with antiracist educational leadership practitioner experience, and together we established a social-emotionally safe learning collective, which will be further outlined in the Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis section of this chapter.

By integrating the intentionally selected research methodologies described above into PAR processes, I intended to strengthen the reception, impact, and praxis experienced by participants collectively (see Figure 10). To reiterate from Chapter 1, Freire (1970) defined praxis as dialogue with the power of “reflection and action directed at structures to be transformed” (p. 126). Without praxis, Freire asserts, individuals cannot be truly human for it is the only antidote to oppression and manipulation. He elaborated, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Thus, with each other and by design, PAR participants engaged in reflective experiences collectively. These experiences were not intended to be contained by the group itself, but rather they were intended to yield transformed action in the communities of the participants. As Fullan (2001) continued, “Reculturing is a contact sport that involves hard, labor-intensive work. It

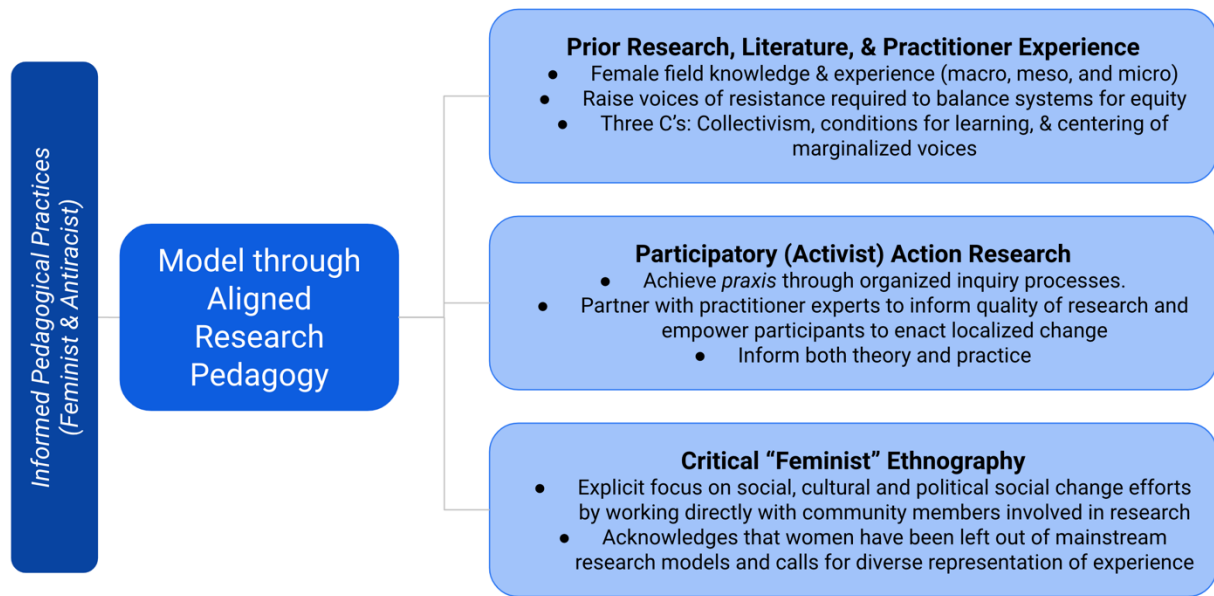


Figure 10. Overview of research methodology.

takes time and indeed never ends. This is why successful leaders need energy, enthusiasm, and hope, and why they need moral purpose...” (Fullan, 2001, p. 44).

Statement of Positionality

Although the CFE amalgam is not new, some researchers have noted concerns regarding the challenge of conducting research and achieving praxis with reciprocity when both academic and public interests are at play, specifically in regard to CFE (Junqueira, 2009). To counter these concerns, I took intentional steps to develop a research proposal that balanced the power dynamic between participants and myself, including forming a CPR team that relied on democratic methods of sharing knowledge and information (e.g., CLEs, circles, collaborative listening, etc.)

As a practicing educational leader working to improve racial equity in my own community for the past fifteen years, I am no stranger to the field of educational leadership and the deep longing for educational justice that continues to elude many of our schools and districts. Thus, I am not only aware that my personal experiences, political affiliations, and socially constructed identities – Black, biracial, female, academic, etc. – informed how I developed this research; indeed, I am proud of it. As Hale (2008) stated, “...this affirmation, in turn, far from an admission of ‘political bias,’ is a step towards deeper reflection on the entanglement of researcher and subject and, by extension, toward greater methodological rigor” (p. 8). I have intentionally sought to change the lack of representation of marginalized voices sustained in part by the lack of close examination of dominator identities. My identity certainly impacts this study, and not acknowledging that fact would be squarely at odds with the intent of this research. Instead, I embraced my positionality. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire wrote:

Education as the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the process of domination – denies that [wo]man is abstract, is independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract [wo]man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither proceeds the world nor follows it. (p. 81)

As a biracial woman, I have spent my life cutting through the Black-White binary to find beauty in the in-between spaces. This research allowed me the opportunity to act in praxis with my educational community and to explore the intersection of womanhood, race, and power with others. This journey was one traveled collectively and with a moral compass. For when any one of us achieve a greater understanding of ourselves or a more racially just world for our students, or both, it's a victory for us all.

Research Questions

My overarching research question is as follows: How do women educational leaders address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders? To address this question, I developed the following sub-questions, which were explored with intentional methodologies and data collection tools:

- What frameworks (knowledge, skills, tools, and dispositions) do women antiracist leaders employ that can add to the current body of educational literature for future generations of anti-racist leaders?
- To what extent do participants use their ontological and epistemological lens to address the tensions that surface when leading for racial equity?

- To what extent do I as an educational leader develop antiracist identity as a researcher practitioner in order to engage other women educational leaders as co-conspirators?

Action Research

As shown in Figure 11, action research for this study merged elements of practitioner experience with PAR and CFE. Traditionally, PAR cycles of inquiry focus on a particular problem of practice and follow a predictable pattern: reflect, plan, act, observe, and reflect again. While participants in this study were encouraged to consider elements of this iterative process, participants were also encouraged to collectively and intuitively select, create, or adjust inquiry processes in order to best support their personal and practitioner work as Women Antiracist Educational Leaders (WAEs). In doing so, we protected space for our collective point of entry in determining research methods to stem from a different epistemological place, one that privileged our work as WAEs, rather than WAEs in a community that generally privileges the *imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*. Although undoubtedly influenced by the latter, when given the opportunity, CPR members collectively and routinely privileged relational processes, such as personal check-ins and storytelling, over more linear methods, such as protocols.

Still iterative and reflective, each meeting provided an opportunity for participants to engage organically in COI elements (i.e. reflect, plan, act, observe, and reflect again) and to lean into aspects of individual WAEs experiences in a shared affinity space (see Table 1 for study timeline). As WAEs brought their experiences from their respective districts to group convenings, they received additional insight and resources from the group, which would in turn influence plans and actions enacted at school and district sites. Observations from this action would then be brought back to the group for additional reflection. Unlike PAR that focuses on a

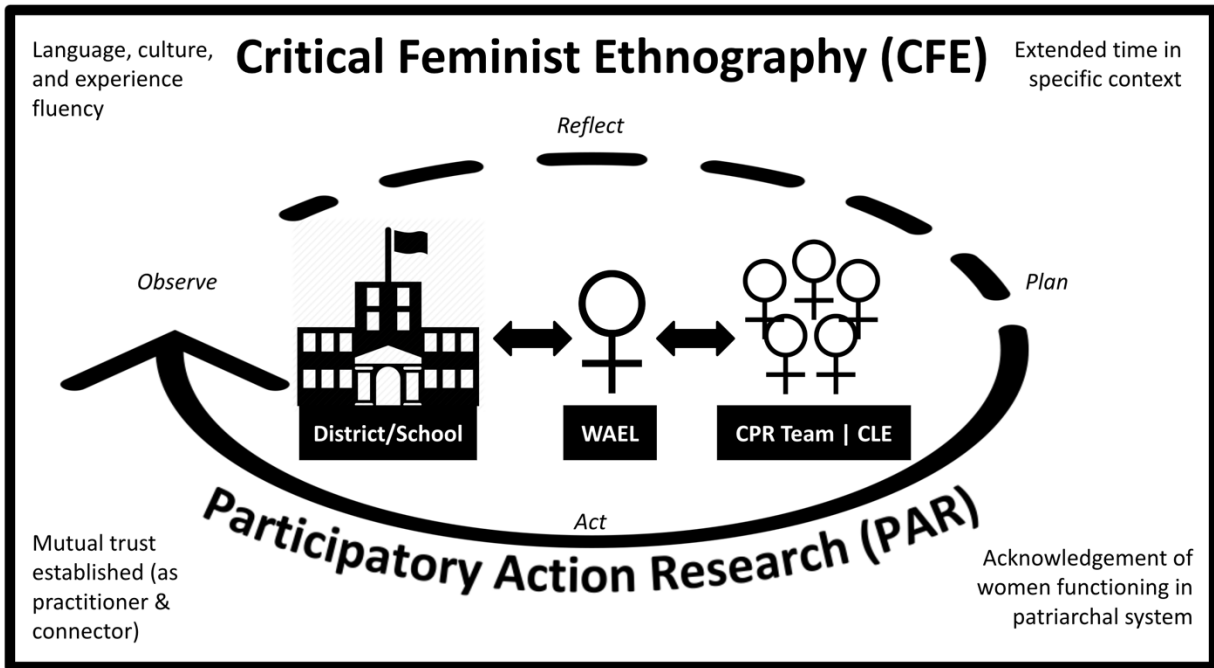


Figure 11. Layered overview of research methodology.

Table 1

Overview of PAR Timeline

Year	Season	Study Development
2021	Spring/Summer	• Practitioner Engagement • FoP Literature Review & Methodology • Submit PAR proposal for IRB approval
2021	Fall/Winter	• Initiate PAR • Analyze data
2022	Spring/Summer	• Continue PAR Process • Analyze data
2022	Fall/Winter	• Complete PAR Process • Analyze data
2023	Winter/Spring	• Analyze data in full to discover findings • Complete writing PAR

specific problem of practice, however, CPR members maintained the authority to go deeper on a particular topic or bring new topics to the team that surfaced between meetings, provided it supported the group in further exploring our central research questions.

Context

Currently half of all school site administrators nationwide are women, and, although women superintendents are sorely underrepresented, their percentage has continued to increase over the last 30 years (Glass, 2010; NCES, 2020). Even with the increase of representation, women practitioners in educational leadership informally report a tension between the desire to employ some aspects of stereotypically female leadership approaches and the reality that these traits are often perceived negatively. For example, a district leader who showed vulnerability in a collaborative working group may be perceived as showing a weakness instead of exhibiting a necessary component of collaboration. This double-standard is reported to be exacerbated as women assume higher level positions (e.g., move from site level to district-level positions.)

Meanwhile, our education system has failed to achieve racial educational equity, as achievement gaps, more aptly described as opportunity gaps, continue to persist. Given the shared characteristics of female leadership with antiracist pedagogy (see Figure 8 in Chapter 2), there exists an opportunity to explore the impact of this congruence further by closely examining how current WAEL practitioners approach racial equity leadership. Within this context, this PAR seeks to explore how women educational district leaders address the tensions of being or becoming antiracist leaders in partnership with a network of women currently engaged in the work.

Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis

Participants

I selected participants using purposeful sampling, the selection of individuals or groups who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Participant criteria for sampling included female district administrators in the United States who self-identify as either being or wanting to become antiracist leaders and/or wanting to improve existing antiracist leadership practices. In order to recognize the diversity of the female experience, I made an effort to select as diverse a group of participants in terms of racial background, ethnicity, sexual orientation, as reasonably possible for a small research group.

Context

I am a practitioner in educational leadership located in the Bay Area, a geographical region known for progressive values related to equity; therefore, I had a wide network of colleagues and associates from which I could ask to participate as Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team members. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, even practitioners located in progressive regions reported social, political, and interpersonal challenges related to shifting district and site culture towards identifying and addressing racial inequity. Furthermore, district leaders described the transition from site leadership into district leadership as more socially restrictive, patriarchally biased, and less tolerable of sociopolitical change, vulnerability, and innovation. Because expectations of leadership changed at the district level, participants shared frustration at having to alter or taper antiracist approaches that proved successful at site levels, but were less accepted at district levels. Thus, I had to proceed carefully with invitations to participate in this study in order to curate a safe space that would allow all participants to process

the multitude of emotions, reactions, and realities inherent to women who are leading for antiracist district communities (see Appendix B: Consent Form: Adults).

In employing purposeful sampling, this premise was confirmed; securing the utmost privacy and confidentiality became paramount. In selecting potential CPR members, I recognized on multiple occasions that antiracist leadership is deeply interpersonal and requires a delicate balance of ever-changing variables of influence within their communities (e.g., work relationships, community values, sociopolitical trends, intra-district social power and capital, etc.). For members to be potential participants and participate fully, they needed to be assured of the ability to share openly and honestly without fear of narratives or comments traveling back to district communities out of context. The women shared their fear of consequences arising from the following: information shared during the meaning-making or processing phase of learning which is often subject to change and should not be represented as conclusions, barriers being misrepresented or misidentified, relationships being disrupted before trust could be established, discord with supervisor decision-making which could impact sociopolitical workplace dynamics, oversimplified sharing of information that lacks the nuance required of complex racial issues, and more. Furthermore, potential participants were concerned about compromising the delicate relational balance of their current antiracist community change work. Thus, once a colleague was selected from a particular geographical region, no other leaders were approached or selected from that region unless permitted by existing CPR members. Moreover, because there are a limited number of female district leaders of color in the Bay Area, my identity and participation is explicit, and participants could be identified as participants through their relationship to me and/or specific identifiers in quotes and anecdotes, I committed to removing all pseudonyms

from data citations; this made the process of cross-checking across narratives more challenging and further protected the anonymity of participants.

I started by contacting a previous colleague who I had valued as a critical professional partner in a previous leadership role (see Table 2 for participants). Once she agreed, I determined that no other leaders from that particular district would be invited to participate. I met another district level leader through university relationships who was taking a similar journey of leading for equity, including racial equity specifically. She agreed to participate, and, when I mentioned the desire to recruit another woman of color, she recommended another district leader from whom she herself had built trust through inter-district collaboration and collegiality. After an initial conversation regarding the purpose of the study, she became our fourth CPR member. Finally, I shared my recruitment script with coaches and mentors who I have met through my graduate studies and received approximately ten recommendations of women district leaders who were perceived as being or becoming antiracist leaders. Of those ten recommendations, one expressed availability, interest, and capacity to participate.

While personal stories of the final five participants are shared as part of the data collection process, study participants represent the diversity of women engaged in daily district antiracist leadership, as evidenced by the recognition of those who recommended them for the study and their willingness to participate. Although the specificity of their experiences is recognized, each participant has a personal network of female colleagues who affirm similar experiences related to this study. Consequently, I chose to not detail more about each participant, as they represent a broader community of women antiracist educational leaders. Again and again, our stories have been recognized as familiar to practitioners currently in the field; albeit not privileged in the more universally-known conversation on educational leadership.

Table 2

CPR Group

Name	District Leadership Role	Description
Aliyah	Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services	Black Biracial, new to role (previously a site administrator/principal for 10 years), located in the East Bay Area, CA
Anya	Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services	White, established in role for over 3+ years, located in the South Bay Area, CA
Raquel	Executive Director of College and Career Readiness	Latinx, new to role (former deputy superintendent for 3+ years), located in the East Bay Area, CA
Jada	Superintendent	Black, second year in role (previously held district or site leadership roles for 13+ years), located in the South Bay Area, CA
Nadia	District Community Liaison	Latinx, established in role for 5+ years (former site administrator and educator), located in Central Texas.

Co-Practitioner Researcher Group

To achieve the purposes of the PAR, all participants acted as members of the Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team. This was to ensure that the power of planning, learning, and analysis remained with the collective group, instead of being held by a sole researcher or small group of researchers. Furthermore, by establishing a democratic structure, practices and methods employed in the PAR model were rooted in the three Cs of antiracist pedagogy outlined in Chapter 2: collectivism, critical conditions for engagement and learning, and the centering of marginalized voices.

Data Collection

In addressing the role of emancipatory PAR and CFE, research tools and methods remained sufficiently open-ended to allow participants to engage in meaning making and analysis of learning. Although I hypothesized that data would vary, the purpose of this study was to listen and learn from women practitioners in educational leadership work, allowing their knowledge to be derived from their own epistemologies, rather than impose an interfering external structure (see Table 3).

Community Learning Exchange

During the PAR participants participated in CLEs. Guajardo et al. (2016) define a CLE as a collective leadership act and meaning making process that brings people together from diverse backgrounds to share their stories, wisdom, and experiences. CLEs are rooted in establishing the spirit and the environment of a gracious space, “a spirit and a setting where we invite the stranger and learn in public” (Hughes, 2010) and utilize scaffolded protocols that promote social and relational meaning making, reflection, and exploration to allow for the co-construction of knowledge (Guajardo et al., 2016). Although convenings were private, the study protected a

Table 3

Research Questions and Data Sources

Overarching Question: How do women educational leaders address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders?

Research Question (Sub-question)	Data Source (Metrics)	Triangulation
What frameworks (knowledge, skills, tools, and dispositions) do women antiracist leaders employ that can add to the current body of educational literature and guide future generations of anti-racist leaders?	CLE artifacts CPR documents and notes Participant journals Fieldnotes	Memos (analytic and reflective) Member checks
To what extent do participants use their ontological and epistemological lens to address the tensions that surface when leading for racial equity?	CLE artifacts CPR documents and notes Participant journals Fieldnotes Reflective memos	Memos (analytic and reflective) Member checks
To what extent do I as an educational leader develop antiracist identity as a researcher practitioner in order to engage other women educational leaders as co-conspirators?	CLE artifacts CPR documents and notes Participant journals Reflective memos	Memos (analytic and reflective) Member checks

space where participants from different districts could openly process, reflect, and learn in front of and with other leaders to allow for new ideas to emerge.

Furthermore, CLEs are guided by five self-evident, experienced, and rational axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016):

1. *Learning and leadership are dynamic social processes:* Leading and learning processes are rooted in social relationships.
2. *Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes:* Gracious space and healthy relationships are required to ensure that learning through social means (e.g. dialogue, storytelling, etc.) is possible. This includes behaviors such as building trust and seeking to understand.
3. *The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns:* As experts of their local communities, CLEs support participants in finding voice, agency, and power in understanding and responding to topics that impact their local contexts.
4. *Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational process:* Learning cannot always be comfortable, since it requires change. Boundaries include those related to geography, economic standing, age, culture and race, gender, faith, personal abilities, etc. When participants cross boundaries, they expand their curiosity and openness to new and different ideas.
5. *Hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities:* By empowering communities to self-identify issues and their solutions, CLEs can lead to more accurate identification of local assets, challenges, and hopes for change as well as give local communities more ownership in sustaining radical transformation.

CLE pedagogy is rooted in these axioms; however, a wide variety of protocols and strategies can be utilized to intentionally foster collective inquiry, mostly through dialogical means (see Table 4). For example, Guajardo et al. (2016) explained the impact of storytelling as a common CLE pedagogy:

We have lived the reality that when people are invited to share their story as they author themselves, their wisdom radiates with excitement in a public way. Certainly the intensity and complexity of our realities vary, but the building elements of learning and teaching in public remain the same. This public and collective learning yields a power that is inviting and contagious. (p. 27)

During the PAR inquiry process, the CPR team participated in CLEs with each other, allowing participants to learn and lead collectively and interchangeably as needed. Each participant shared the common desire to improve racial equity within their schools and districts, but even with that commonality, participants experienced the discomfort of crossing boundaries as we learned about each other's educational contexts, challenges, and assets with the goal of transferring and applying new knowledge to our hopes and dreams for racial equity within our respective educational settings. Evidence and artifacts from CLEs served as evidence for qualitative analysis, which was in turn used to develop tools and strategies for further collective inquiry and implementation.

The first CLE structure was as follows: community building activity that helped further establish relationships between participants, review of purpose and gracious space norms with the opportunity to co-construct additional norms as needed, discussion of question prompts and methods of inquiry, intentional closing, and appreciations. Once members fortified relational trust within our network, CLE structures followed a truncated pattern. Meetings started with

Table 4

Examples of CLE Pedagogies

Pedagogy	Description	Purpose	Resulting Artifact
Circle	Participants gather in a circle and share personal responses to an open-ended, but intentional discussion prompt. Individuals speak when in possession of a talking piece, which is circulated.	Democratizes voice, honors personal and cultural wisdom, raises multiple perspectives	Notes, transcripts, photos
Collaborative Listening	Participants take turns answering a prompt. While in the listening role, partner(s) seek to truly understand, influence, and engage with the speaker.	Builds trust, promotes generative, iterative, and collective learning	Process notes or photos
Arts Integration	In response to a prompt, participants create visual or written pieces connecting to a theme.	Enhances learning processing and synthesis	Art, notes, photos, or recordings
Storytelling	Participants tell personal stories related to a discussion topic through multiple means: verbal, written, art-based, etc.	Honors personal and cultural wisdom through lived experiences	Notes, transcripts, photos
Crosswalks	Participants compare two or more sets of data to discover noticings (e.g. similarities, differences, themes, missing components, etc.)	Allows members to co-construct meaning from sets of data	Notes, transcripts, posters, photos

group greetings and informal personal check-ins. Next, WAELs took turns sharing personal stories related to being WAELs and/or updating the group on actions carried out between meetings related to a particular equity challenge. Finally, we closed with an interpersonal check out, the content of which varied to match relevant group experiences, such as celebrating a member's recent accomplishment, sharing upcoming personal or professional plans, and offering encouragement to persist in challenging professional work. Examples of artifacts collected from CLEs included agendas, individual and group notes, and meeting transcripts (see Appendix C: Data Collection Instrument: Community Learning Exchange).

Co-Practitioner Researcher Meetings

By having participants act as Co-practitioner Researchers, I ensured that this study emphasized close proximity to participant voice and modeled the core tenets of PAR and CFE. The process of applying prior knowledge and new learning to PAR co-planning during CPR team meetings assisted in deepening participant understanding of the emancipatory approaches and practices employed – learning which participants also internalized and further applied towards their antiracist leadership. CPR topics were embedded in our WAEL meetings before, after, or even during CLEs. Topics included adjusting elements of the PAR, such as CLE questions, activities, and/or group norms, as needed and appropriate. During these occurrences, meeting transcripts and notes were collected as additional evidence and artifacts for analysis.

Participant Journals & Memos (Analytic and Reflective)

Participants were encouraged to maintain journals during their PAR engagement. In these journals, participants were encouraged, but not required, to write about moments where they noticed learning from PAR experiences impacting their role as educational leaders. Participants were encouraged to write while in the field as close to the time of occurrence as possible and as

often as possible and appropriate (see Appendix D: Data Collection Instrument: Journal Protocol).

In addition, all participants were encouraged to include both analytic memos to express an opinion in an organized fashion and reflective memos to contemplate and/or process a new concept or idea. Memos included structured writing or drawings, mind maps, poems, photos, and any other form that supported in a CPR member's meaning making and/or reflection. These memos were added to the body of qualitative evidence and supported the verification of themes that surfaced from the other data collection sources.

Field Notes

Finally, I collected field notes throughout the PAR, including artifacts such as emails and direct messages (texts, ZOOM chats, WhatsApp messages, etc.) sent between members during the study. These notes were added to the body of qualitative evidence and provided additional insight into how WAELs drew on group support to navigate their professional roles between meeting spaces.

I collected artifacts from CPR and CLE meetings, journals, and field notes collected. Then I coded, and analyzed these data as advised in Saldaña's (2016) coding manual for qualitative researchers.

Data Analysis

When working within complex social systems, ontologies, epistemologies, and relationships, collecting and analyzing qualitative data can be a challenge, but a worthy one. "One can gain much insight into a culture by paying attention to the validity claims routinely employed in the construction of meaningful action" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 110). In fact, Saldaña (2016), opened his manual with a statement of beliefs on qualitative inquiry:

Qualitative research has evolved into a multidisciplinary enterprise, ranging from social science to art form... The more well versed you are in the fields' eclectic methods of investigation, the better your ability to understand the diverse patterns and complex meanings of social life. (p. 3)

Thus, in this study, I analyzed data using the five-step process for data analysis presented by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and described in more detail in Saldaña's (2016) reference guide for coding of qualitative research. First, I collected, organized, and prepared data for analysis. This included tasks such as transcribing meetings and interviews, typing memos and journal entries, and digitizing drawings and posters. Second, I scanned the data in its entirety to get a general understanding of the information and its overall meaning. Third, I coded the data.

Coding is a cyclical process that includes first segmenting sentences and/or images into codes and then culling together similar segmented sentiments into categories. The goal of this process is to "...break the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9, as cited in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). To develop categories, the researcher must classify codes that share common characteristics to consolidate meaning and discover the beginning of a pattern for further analysis (Saldaña, 2016). The relationship between codes and categories is stated by Saldaña (2016, as cited by Dey, 1999) by noting, "With categories we impute meanings, with coding we compute them" (p. 9). To ensure accurate classification of the data, I returned to the original data multiple times to adjust codes and relabel categories as more data was processed and new codes and categories were required to accurately portray the original data set in its entirety.

The final fourth and fifth steps included generating descriptions for categories that surfaced from step three and ultimately selecting four themes that summarize trends discovered

from the coding process. These themes or *findings* were used for further analysis, conclusions, and next steps as outlined in Chapters 6.

Study Considerations

As the primary researcher for the PAR project, I came to the study with general ideas of what I wanted to study and the criteria for CPR members who should be engaged in the work. Once the CPR team was established, we planned and implemented CLEs and then reviewed artifacts from the event collaboratively. I conferred with our CPR team throughout the PAR process to allow space for team members to have an authentic voice in the co-construction of process and conclusions. This included making space for raising multiple perspectives, discussing considerations of validity, and making adjustments as needed to maintain the efficacy and legitimacy of the research process and participant experience.

I considered my role in the group and in the field of education as a district-level administrator with its related power. Although CPR members shared similar roles, I took special measures to ensure that all participants gave informed consent without any coercion or sense of obligation. If at any time participants decided to terminate consent, they did so without reprisal.

Because this study was not situated in a district specifically, and participants were volunteering their time, no formal requests to conduct the study were requested for school sites or districts. However, I completed Institutional Review Board Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (IRB CITI) certification in January 2021 to comply with the ethical requirements governing human research (see Appendix A: Citi training certificate). Even with these safeguards in place prior to the start of the project, termination of the study could have occurred at any time, for any reason. Upon approval, study limitations were inevitably revealed and documented accordingly in this next section of Chapter 3.

Internal Validity

Activist research holds intrinsic value in the collection of use-oriented data to participants who are researching in their field of study (Hale, 2001). To measure this validity, Hale (2001) posed the following question: “Has the research produced knowledge that helps to resolve the problem, to guide some transformation, which formed part of the research objectives from the start? Is the knowledge useful? If so, to whom?” Sub-research questions addressed this validity directly when they asked to what extent do participants use their ontological and epistemological lens to address the tensions that surface when leading for racial equity.

At the conclusion of this study, we reviewed Hale’s (2001; 2008) criteria for validity in qualitative action research:

- Dialogical and Process Validity: How were problems framed and analyzed? How did we incorporate new knowledge and perspectives with responsive changes to PAR methods?
- Outcome Validity: How did the actions in this study influence change? What was changed because of the evidence collected as the study progressed?
- Catalytic Validity: How did participants interact and learn from each other? How did we interrogate ourselves and our values as the study progressed?
- Democratic Validity: How did methods support people closest to the work in making individual and group decisions? How did evidence collected inform group processes?
- Process Validity: Did the intended methodology unfold? Why or why not?

Furthermore, data collection and data analysis incorporated numerous checks and balances to ensure the validity of the research, specifically indicators of trustworthiness involved establishing credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure

internal validity, data processes underwent the following (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gerdes & Conn, 2001):

1. Triangulation: Data was collected by multiple sources and cross referenced.
2. Member checks: CPR members served as informants reviewing data analysis and confirming or denying the interpretation with their reality.
3. Prolonged engagement: CPR members engaged with each other actively over an extended period of time.
4. Persistent observation: CPR members collectively utilized direct and probing modes of inquiry to uncover deeper meaning where present.
5. Peer examination: A graduate assistant monitored the process in full.
6. Participatory modes of research: CPR member informants were involved in most phases of this study from design to interpretations and conclusions.

External Validity

The project was established within the scope of one researcher's work to explore the specific ontologies and epistemologies of female educational leaders engaging in antiracist work within their school and/or district communities. The study may be transferable towards other studies on female leadership; however, caution should be taken if attempting to apply this study to other individuals, schools, districts, or other organizational, cultural, and societal contexts. This is one study with a small group of female educational district or site leaders. Thus, the process for undergirding the study could be replicated with a new group of participants, but outcomes are not dependable across contexts.

Confidentiality and Ethics

The participants in the study were female district administrator practitioners who self-identified as being or becoming antiracist leaders. I met with each potential participant privately to gauge interest, reinforce the voluntary nature of the study, and establish expectations for participation prior to convening a CPR team. Districts, schools, and participants in the study were protected through the use of pseudonyms and broad terms, such as “participant.”

Participants signed consent forms approved by East Carolina University’s Institutional Review Board (ECU IRB). Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and they could opt out of the study at any time.

Data security and the confidentiality of the participants was a priority for the study. Confidentiality was maintained through the following measures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018):

1. Important and personal files were stored in a locked file cabinet.
2. All electronic forms for data collection were kept in a password-protected file.
3. Data and copies of reports were shared with the CPR group for purposes of transparency, improvement, and reflection.
4. Pseudonyms were removed from most direct quotes and anecdotes to prevent revealing participant identity through cross-checking of known relationships and experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided the research design and methodology for the PAR study to answer the overarching research question guiding the project: How do women educational leaders surface and address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders? The CPR team participated in PAR methodology by engaging in iterative inquiry processes, which included

Community Learning Exchanges, using PAR, CFE, and CLE axioms and pedagogical approaches to surface, understand, and address the tensions of being female educational district leaders leading for racial equity. Throughout this PAR, I collected and analyzed data to ascertain patterns and determine next steps in collaboration with the CPR team. The processes for data collection and analysis were detailed in this chapter, as well as the role of reflection, potential limitations, and ethical considerations of the study.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRE-CYCLE

Every gathering is an opportunity to create a temporary world.
(Parker et al., 2017)

The focus of the Participatory Activist Research (PAR) project was on what we could learn when we listen to the voices of women educational district leaders reflecting on how they address the tensions of leading antiracist school and district communities. In Chapters 2 and 3, I noted similarities and overlap between common characteristics of women leaders and established known antiracist pedagogies. Using Critical Feminist Ethnography (CFE) and Participatory Action/Activist Research (PAR) in an affinity space with women antiracist educational leaders, I protected and amplified women's voice in the conversation about how to transform schools and districts for racial equity. Furthermore, in Chapter 3, I committed to research methodology that mirrored activist, antiracist, and feminine pedagogies, which include collectivist methods such as Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs) and gracious space.

In this chapter, I model the *learning in public* principle of gracious space by transparently detailing research data collection. I describe the process through which the Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) group was established and the processes through which data was collected and analyzed. Subsequently, I explore the categories that emerged as a result of early data analysis and how these categories are related to the initial research questions and emerging conceptual framework. Finally, I explain how findings and reflection from this pre-cycle informed the following Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycles of inquiry. I use the term Women Antiracist Educational Leader (WAEL) to refer to study participants.

PAR Pre-Cycle Process

The PAR Pre-cycle process started with individual conversations regarding CPR

participation throughout Fall 2021. This process required careful navigation and became an important first step towards building trust within the team.

Activities

Once the team was established, we initiated a PAR Pre-cycle in December of 2021 with a CPR meeting. During the initial CPR planning meeting, the team was introduced to each other and given the opportunity to build relationships through CLE pedagogies such as circle and storytelling. This process started with the prompt, “Share an artifact that represents your role as women educational leader” and ended with a crosswalk of experiences shared. Finally, the CPR group provided feedback on a draft Community Learning Exchange (CLE) agenda for January 5, 2022, with the following objectives in mind: continued group community building, collective unpacking of research questions, and utilization of the affinity space to share best practices, challenges, and successes as it related to our antiracist work as women leaders. Throughout this process, I continued to write reflective memos. In the next section, I provide more detail about the data collection and analysis that took place in PAR pre-cycle process.

Coding

Each of the activities, I collected, data, including analytic and reflective memos and CPR scripts and notes. For example, reflective memos captured research experiences in real-time, such as connections between conversations, ideas, and theoretical literature as the collective meaning-making process unfolded. CPR scripts captured all conversations during CPR meetings verbatim. Using a combination of what Saldaña (2016) defines as exploratory and descriptive coding, I assigned labels to short phrases within each text as a way of inventorying and organizing the information received into manageable emerging categories for further exploration and elaboration. To support these efforts, I used a tool called ATLAS.ti Mac (Version 22.0.2),

which recorded a list of existing codes and calculated repeated codes when they surfaced more than once. For example, one participant noted guilt related to getting much needed help with childcare, while another participant noted a change in career to allow for more time child raising. In initial coding, both statements were coded similarly under *mothering professional leadership challenges*.

After coding several pieces of data, I completed a second round of deductive coding in which I reviewed emerging codes and adjusted them to better reflect the data set as a whole. Then, I coded additional statements that may have been missed in the first round. For example, after coding my initial data, I found that two similar codes: *Differing expectations (women vs. men)* and *Gender Work Dynamics (differing expectations)*. Ultimately, I combined these codes into one entitled *Gender Work Dynamics (differing expectations of women vs. men)*. Similarly, I noted that I had multiple codes related to participants expressing emotional responses to micro/macro aggressions. These included *Anger (asked to allow a man to take credit for her work)*, *Anger (justifying experience/knowledge)*, *Anger (public mansplaining)*, and *Microaggression (sarcastic remark)*. I considered combining these codes into a similar code called *Emotional response to micro/macro aggressions*, but ultimately decided to leave these codes separate. For when I looked at other codes such as *Response to micro/macro aggression (guilt, race card)* and *Justification of role/actions*, it appeared that these codes may fit into an emerging category entitled Responses to Micro/Macro Aggression. Ultimately, rather than rename the original codes, I decided to leave these codes unedited in order to keep code clear as more data was produced.

In my second review of the data, I highlighted additional sections of the script that I missed in the first reading and looked closer to see if I missed emotional responses to

micro/macro aggressions. In doing so, I noted that although some codes, such as *Underestimation of women*, elicited anger from me as an observer. However, the data within this code did not express anger; rather the data surfaced an example of a gendered aggression. In fact, in this early data, I deemphasized emotional responses in lieu of practical solutions for maintaining interpersonal relationships while mitigating gender bias. For example, one participant responded to her community's underestimation by sharing her prior work experiences and related knowledge and skills as a way of justifying her professional decision making. Thus, I revised the category to remove the "emotional" component, and the category Response to Micro/Macro Aggression emerged. Codes such as *Response to aggression (naming explicitly)*, *Ignored response to micro/macro aggression*, and *Response to aggression (refocus on student data)* were also added to this category. Finally, in creating this new emerging category, I noted that some codes that fit this category did not belong in other emerging categories as initially labeled, so these codes were removed from those groups and appropriately placed in this new emerging category.

After this lengthy review and adjustment process, I noted which codes were appearing most frequently, which codes summarized seminal group meaning-making moments, and which codes might be outliers. As I continued to code, patterns within the codes continued to emerge as possible categories, which I outline further in the next section, including portions of my emerging coding table.

Emerging Categories

Although I expected categories to shift as relationships within our group solidified and I collected more data over time, some interesting categories emerged early in our CPR introductory meetings. In some ways, these categories reflected what would be expected when an

affinity group is formed around a particular topic. In other words, as I brought together women who identify as being or becoming antiracist educational leaders, I expected to see categories about womanhood, antiracism, and education that reflect this initial purpose. Indeed, emerging categories included the following: (a) Gendered Professional Dynamics, (b) Attention to Interpersonal Relationships, (c) Desire to Share and Problem Solve Equity Decision Points in Affinity Spaces, (d) Response to Micro/Macro Aggressions, (e) Connecting Personal Experience to Professional Equity Work, and (f) Equity Tools (see Table 5). Over time, however, I expected these categories (the latter three in particular) to become more nuanced and shift to reflect the knowledge and expertise of the group as we unpacked our identities collaboratively.

Gendered Professional Dynamics

In this initial data review, the codes related to gendered professional dynamics surfaced the most frequently. Overall, participants noted differing expectations for women versus men in their professional setting. Examples included taking on more menial work tasks that maintained the overall system but were not job responsibilities; men in similar positions did not seem to be taking on these responsibilities as frequently. For instance, WAELs discussed taking notes during a meeting, monitoring the project management of other team members, taking the time to train and support others despite receiving limited on-the-job training themselves, and frequently substituting for hierarchically lower roles when needed by the organization. One participant even noted that she had spent the morning making 800 sandwiches due to an issue with their district kitchen. Other examples included being frequently underestimated in experience, knowledge, and skill at work and gendered concerns related to child-raising. For example, WAELs were expected to care for children or elders more than the men in their lives; mother participants felt

Table 5

Emerging Categories from PAR Pre-cycle

Category	Sample Embedded Codes [Frequency]	Sample Coded Quotes
Gendered Professional Dynamics	• Gender work dynamics (differing expectations of women vs. men) [16] • Menial work tasks (details that maintain system) [6] • Professional decisions influenced by child raising [4] • Professional contingencies [3] • Circumstances of position availability (accepting less, doing more) [2]	“When I’m not here, it’s noticed. Why doesn’t anyone notice when the male boss isn’t here?” “I get asked all the time, ‘What do you do with your children?’ But nobody asks my husband that question.” “It’s so blatant that within the district supervision team... the work gets distributed [unfairly by gender].”
Attention to Interpersonal Relationships	• Attention to interpersonal relationships in CPR meetings [11] • Attending to group comfortability [8] • Importance of confidentiality [7] • Colleague connection [7] • Attention to interpersonal relationships in professional role [5] • Attention to interpersonal relationships during professional conflict [4]	“I wasn’t going to share this because you never know who knows who, but since it’s a confidential space...” “I’m really sorry that you got hurt... are we in the business of throwing out black and brown children from our district, or are we in the business of supporting them to do the best that they can?” “I’m not really going to correct him, or anyone, in public.”
Desire to Share and Problem Solve Equity Decision Points in Affinity Spaces	• Desire to share affinity experience [21] • Appreciation for female leadership models [6] • Desire to problem solve equity issues in community space [4] • Desire to share affinity experience (male dynamics) [21] • Equity Decision Point (community support) [2]	“I’m proud and amazed to be a part of this group.” “I’m wondering in our own spaces that we have control around... what elbows can we continually link arms with to do this good work because it will never be done, and sometimes, I’m a little bit disillusioned.”

Table 5 (continued)

Category	Sample Embedded Codes [Frequency]	Sample Coded Quotes
Response to Micro/Macro Aggressions	• Anger (male credit for female work) [3] • Response to Micro/Macro Aggression (refocus on student data) [2] • Response to Micro/Macro Aggression (naming explicitly) [2]	“He says to me privately, ‘Why didn’t you make it look like he did it?’” “Sometimes we’re just in shock and disbelief of the absurdity... and then it’s almost like processing... I can’t overreact; I can’t underreact because I’m not sure did I hear that right?”
Connecting Personal Experience to Professional Equity Work	• Applying personal experience to equity decision point (position vs. person) [3] • Connecting personal experience to equity work [1] • Early experience with discrimination [1]	“I was in foster care as a youth... that’s why I really believe in public education, because I do believe that we have to create systems.” “That experience really linked up to my experience in public schools as a Mexican immigrant.”
Equity Tools	• Importance of mentors (fight against discrimination) [1] • Norming equity work (daily practice) [1] • Using data to uplift issues of equity [2] • Vocabulary at equity tool [1] • Importance of literature (fight against discrimination) [1]	“When I was looking at some of our data, you can predict in fifth grade (from our kids who stayed in our system) who is most likely to end up in Alt Ed.” “Blessings I should say, right, when you meet up with certain people, certain mentors, even literature, that begins to disrupt your way of thinking...”

guilt for not being as present at home due to conflicting professional demands, and mother participants indicated gratitude for having their own mothers as critical supports for childcare.

The focus on professional barriers that WAELs experience may have been due to the introductory nature of our initial CPR circle questions, which asked participants to consider an artifact that represented their role as a Woman Antiracist Educational Leader (WAEL). Given that CPR members were meeting as a complete group for the first time, the group chose to share experiences in which all participants could possibly relate to as women, especially when WAEL participants represented different races. Participants may have chosen to focus on a more common and shareable topic, given the newness of the group. As a reflective researcher, I noted this phenomenon and considered proposing questions that facilitated group exploration of gender and race in balance at later convenings.

Attention to Interpersonal Relationships

On the topic of relational dynamics between men and women, the second most frequently highlighted codes were combined into an emerging category related to attending to interpersonal relationships in general. This attention and care to relationships included our own CPR meeting space, the communities in which CPR members serve, and the overlapping (or potentially overlapping) networks in which CPR members navigated. As previously illustrated, the code *Importance of confidentiality* first appeared when discussing CPR membership to potential participants. As mentioned previously, it was critically important that information shared within the group space remained confidential so as to not impact community relationships with colleagues, direct reports, and/or supervisors. Participants were knowledgeable and aware of connections across districts and social networks. At times, conversations would note possible connections that members in the group may have with others being discussed. As participants

sought to create a safe and comfortable space for each other, protection of outside relationships and connections was balanced with attention to the newly forming relationships within the group. For example, participants checked in with each other throughout meetings to ensure their needs were met. This included a wide range of offerings including reassuring each other that the space would remain confidential when known connections were revealed, rescheduling meetings to accommodate personal and professional needs, and offering social emotional support to WAEL colleagues experiencing conflict or trauma.

Similarly, the code *Attention to interpersonal relationships in professional role* surfaced as participants often noted how they navigated relationships during their equity work. For example, one participant made a point to thank some of her colleagues for their work after a professional disagreement and another chose to address a colleague about a potential conflict in private versus a more public setting. In these incidents, participants were not just going through the professional motions, their personal narratives included reflection that revealed a deeply rooted desire to maintain positive relationships and establish genuine trust and comradery. For example, as the participant shared about being in disagreement with colleagues, she also shared how she took time to check in with those she disagreed with before their meeting, reinforced her position and her rationale during the meeting, and then reflected on the relationship afterwards stating, "...actually I was supporting this person because they were becoming an interim in a role where the role was demoted" and "I'm hoping she read between the lines ... and [then I] showed my, you know, gratitude for [her] stepping into this role" (CLE, December 15, 2021).

Desire to Share and Problem Solve Equity Decisions

Related to the emerging category on interpersonal relationships, the third emerging category consisted of a desire to share and problem solve equity decision points in affinity

spaces. Participants first noted appreciation for the space, saying, “I’m so thankful that you connected me to [other participants in the CPR group],” “Excited to be reinforced, to make some change,” and “I can’t tell you how excited I am to be in a room with such badass women educational leaders.” Then as WAELs shared stories, other participant responses indicated value in having a space to process challenging experiences. For example, after one participant shared a personal challenge, another responded,

It really is so difficult, even when you are direct and there’s so many undercurrents that happened in so many different situations that sometimes people really aren’t even aware there’s so much ignorance out there. And even when somebody asks you directly, right, they don’t see themselves as ignorant. They don’t see themselves as, like, gender biased or racially biased. (CLE, December 15, 2021)

This participant’s words justified her new CPR colleague’s feelings and reinforced that, in the co-created affinity space, they could openly discuss topics regarding equity openly and explicitly that was often challenging in other spaces. In fact, at the end of the first CPR meeting, participants agreed to start a WAEL chat group in order to share personal experiences as they happened in real time. The goal of this space was twofold: We would be allies for each other and not feel so alone in this work, and we could share advice and problem solve collaboratively when challenging equity-related situations surfaced.

Response to Micro/Macro Aggressions

As discussed in the coding section of this chapter, responding to micro/macro aggressions became an emerging category that included emotional responses, responses to others, and moments of reflection. They had emotional responses that more often than not included anger or frustration at micro/macro aggressions directed at themselves and/or the students and staff that

they served. After one participant experienced a public aggression, she noted, “I came home and was pissed off.” Responses to others included a wide range of responses, including ignoring the micro/macro aggression, having direct and explicit conversations about the aggression with the offender, or neutralizing the aggression by offering alternative information. For example, one participant discussed how one direct report disagreed with her district decision on the basis of his extensive experience. In reality, she had more experience than he did, but this fact did not bring her comfort. She stated, “I had to go through this process of justifying my own experience, which was super frustrating” (CLE, December 15, 2021).

Connecting Personal Experience to Professional Equity Work

As introductory conversations began to delve more into specific equity decision points, WAELs began drawing on personal experiences with inequity to make sense of current equity leadership challenges. For example, one participant noted the need to focus on educational systems and told of her experience navigating the foster care system. Another noted her experiences immigrating from Mexico and learning English as an additional language while she expressed the importance of having diverse (as it relates to gender, race, and language) representation in educational settings. She stated,

We really did experience just a wide range of discrimination, discriminatory practices, derogatory names and, of course, at that age you can’t make any kind of sense of it because you’re the only immigrant family there, and you begin to think surely there’s something wrong with me... Blessings I should say right when you meet up with certain people, certain mentors, even literature, that begins to disrupt your way of thinking about who you are, who you think you are, or who others have told you [that] you are and begin to rehabilitate and reimagine and recreate a narrative. (CLE, December 15, 2021)

Equity Tools

While participants began to connect personal experiences to their equity work, they started sharing approaches and tools in which to address inequities. For instance, two participants discussed the need to establish equity-minded norms that included not always coming to a resolution and understanding that social justice work is a practice that must be recommitted to and practiced every day. As the group continued to discuss antiracist work in more detail, I wondered in reflective memos if this emerging category would expand and/or be refined to reflect additional tools utilized by participants in the group.

Relatedly, the love and passion that participants had for their communities of practice and their equity/antiracist work within those communities were significant. Although feelings are not an equity tool *per se*, initial data indicated that their feelings were a significant motivating factor in sustaining equity work. For example, when each CPR member introduced herself, her current location and role, and what brought her to the group, multiple WAELs stated that a primary reason for doing their educational equity work was out of love for her community. For example, one participant said, “I needed to get back to families and be in connection with teachers... If we’re trying to effect change in schools, I want to be in schools.” Another stated, “Now it’s my passion and I can’t see myself anywhere else.” At this point in the data collection, I noted that an additional category could emerge.

Reflection and Planning

In modeling the *learning in public* principle of gracious space, I detailed early research data collection and analysis. In extending this transparency, I share reflections on leadership and adjustments to planning subsequent PAR cycles and CLEs in order to further investigate research questions.

Reflection on Leadership

Based on this early pre-cycle data review and emerging categories, using a collaborative affinity space to unpack how women educational leaders address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders was indeed critical to research methodology and data collection. In fact, I noted in my reflective journal that affinity spaces are important tools for any antiracist educational leader to feel supported and empowered to make change within their own communities. All participants noted appreciation for the affinity space, and all participants attended to building interpersonal relationships with others within the space. Once we had solidified this space as a place of support, I intentionally crafted CPR and CLE meeting questions to provide opportunities for WAELs to develop collective capacity at identifying and analyzing their ontologies and epistemologies as women leaders as well as opportunities to develop collective capacity to improve antiracist leadership practices.

Planning for PAR Cycles and CLEs

As we explored research questions further while maintaining the organic structure of the space, we included opportunities to review CLE axioms and elements of gracious space and encouraged open inquiry, dialogue, and equity of voice related to the established research questions. I facilitated a circle-like format with open ended questions and/or prompts such as the following:

1. What are some leadership actions and practices that we are engaging in that aren't currently in the corpus of literature about antiracist leadership that should be?
2. What are educational leadership skills, characteristics, abilities, and practices that you possess that you have found the most useful in your work?
3. What do you do as a leader that you don't see many male colleagues doing?

4. What else would you like to do (related to your leadership) that you have been withholding and why?

By asking questions such as these, we hoped to better understand how women *act* differently than men based on how they experience the world around them. For example, in the PAR Pre-cycle, we discussed many challenges related to being women antiracist educational leaders. In proceeding meetings, we intended to unpack how we navigate these challenges and how we draw on these experiences in our antiracist leadership approaches.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how I coded initial data from the PAR Pre-cycle (i.e., early reflective memos, potential participant recruitment conversations, initial CPR meeting scripts, etc.) to reveal emerging categories. I explained how these emerging categories related to the research questions and how sharing this process transparently modeled the collectivist principles of gracious space and learning in public. In the proceeding chapters, I discuss how additional data from PAR and CLE processes clarified, altered, and changed this initial analysis.

CHAPTER 5: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES & FINDINGS

The struggle for educational freedom does not somehow vanish when you apply theory, but your barriers are no longer hiding in plain sight; now you have the language, understanding, and, hopefully, coconspirators not only to fight but also to demand what is needed to thrive.

(Bettina Love, 2019, p. 147)

Early practitioner feedback from the PAR Pre-cycle indicated that privileged White patriarchal values often overwhelm or diminish the strategies that women bring to educational leadership, and women of color feel an exacerbated level of this bias. By convening an affinity group of a racially diverse group of women antiracist educational leaders, the research process emphasized the voices of women of color and focused attention on the knowledge and insight that may otherwise remain de-centered and marginalized in both practice and theory. As Anzaldúa (1990) declares, “theory, then is a set of knowledges. Some of these knowledges have been kept from us — entry into some profession and academia denied us... By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space” (p. xxv).

I focused the study on what can be learned from women educational leaders who direct their learning and doing toward improving racial equity outcomes in their educational communities. In addressing the central research question – *How do women educational leaders address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders?* – the Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team collectively examined this question in our individual contexts. We allowed ourselves to bring our knowledge, experiences, and hopes into our affinity space and return to our respective districts with new insights on our leadership practices and their impact on unique educational communities.

In this chapter, I build on Chapter 4 data by detailing the PAR processes, identifying emerging categories and themes, and determining the findings resulting from PAR data analysis.

In addition, in this chapter, I include quotes from participants and longer vignettes or examples of their work as evidence to demonstrate their growing commitment to antiracist leadership. In doing so, I recommit to learning in public and further discuss how PAR data was added to Pre-Cycle data, member checked, and consequently re-organized to clarify study findings.

PAR Process

Throughout the PAR process, the CPR team built on the activities of the previous PAR Pre-cycle (see Table 6). Data collected during this phase included scripts and artifacts from CPR meetings, Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs), reflective and analytic memos, and field notes. We pre-planned all activities, except for independent communications and resource sharing which occurred organically and spontaneously from the group. When I was included in correspondences, I collected communications as fieldnotes.

As the CPR team had decided, we began PAR Cycles by extending and elaborating on the CLE activities from our first CPR team meeting, which included sharing additional artifacts related to being Women Antiracist Educational Leaders (WAELs). We responded to four discussion questions in circle format: (a) What are some leadership actions and practices that we are engaging in that aren't currently in the corpus of literature about antiracist leadership that should be? (b) What are educational leadership skills, characteristics, abilities, and practices that you possess that you have found the most useful in your work? (c) What do you do as a leader that you don't see many male colleagues doing? (d) What else would you like to do (related to your leadership) that you have been withholding and why?

Because our CPR team agreed to create an organic space, we permitted conversations to flow from one topic to the next without redirection to the organizing questions. In this way, our research met Kemmis et al.'s (2016) description of critical participatory action research:

Table 6

PAR Activities

Activity	PAR Pre- Cycle (Jan.- Dec., 2021)	PAR 2 (Jan., 2022)	PAR 3 (Feb., 2022)	PAR 4 (March, 2022)	PAR 5 (April, 2022)	PAR 6 (Oct., 2022)	PAR 7 (Oct., 2022)	PAR 8 (Oct., 2022)
CPR Meetings (n=2)	•	•				•	•	•
Community Learning Exchanges (n=4)	•	•	•	•	•	•		
Reflective Memos (n=29)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Fieldnotes (n=13)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

[C]ritical participatory action research, as a practice-changing practice, is a self-reflective process by which [participants] remake their practice for themselves... this process of self-transformation – a process that transforms the sayings, doings and relatings that compose one’s own life and the collective life of a class or a school or a community – sayings, doings, and relatings that give our lives meaning, substance and value. (Kemmis et al., 2016, p. 26)

For the remaining PAR meetings, we continued a co-created process of WAEL artifact sharing and storytelling followed by guiding questions using generative circle and collaborative listening formats. Samples of additional questions that deepened conversation included the following:

- Thinking through these experiences and your responses to them, what’s behind this; what’s informing your lens and perspective? (March): and
- What are the effective and powerful WAEL skills, characteristics, abilities, and practices that you have found the most effective in your work? (April)

To illustrate how the group adapted our process to best meet our collective needs, the second question replaced the original question, “What are some leadership actions and practices that we are engaging in that aren’t currently in the corpus of literature about antiracist leadership that should be?” which I asked in an earlier CLE but was then largely ignored. In my reflective journal, I presumed that this may have occurred because the replacement question proved to be more accessible, better aligned to our roles as researcher practitioners, and/or was posed in a later CLE month after we discussed various equity decision points and began to develop a better understanding of our identities as WAELs. Similarly, I observed that responses were more comprehensive when the previously asked question, “What are educational leadership skills,

characteristics, abilities, and practices that you possess that you have found the most useful in your work?” was altered slightly and asked again. In the April iteration, the question decentered what “you possess” in exchange for what parts of our collective identities as WAELs we found “most effective” in our work. By rephrasing the question within a collective frame, we exhibited the ethnographical principles discussed in Chapter 3 regarding language and culture fluency. Thus, participants identified and engaged with the question more thoroughly because it was asked in a way that decentered participants as individuals and focused on the collective transformation they were attempting to achieve.

The flexible flow for discussion combined with discussion prompts resulted in frequent resource sharing. I referenced resources a total of 11 times during our first five convenings and sharing resources became a standard practice during, after, and in-between meetings. These resources often deepened group conversation and collective understanding. For instance, after two members referenced White supremacist frameworks, one shared a handout from the Minnesota Historical Society entitled “White Supremacy Culture: From Dismantling Racism A Workbook for Social Change Groups” (Jones & Okun, 2001) (see Appendix F). Members reported finding the framework useful in prior discussions on dismantling racist school and district structures, and the resource helped to facilitate language and connect ideas between members. For example, one participant noted the more substantial relational impact of parent “house” meetings versus more formal (and sometimes performative) district engagements; another connected this sentiment to high stakes standardized testing:

The emphasis on the numbers versus the results really aligns to the white supremacy culture... I don't know if you're familiar with the characteristics of white supremacy. I'll put them right here in the chat, but that really resonates with me in regard to the value of

really having quality interactions with individuals. I don't know, performance-based assessment to really inform us about how students are doing, because we definitely want to flip this deficit narrative. (CLE, January 5, 2022)

Sharing resources served a practical purpose. For example, after our first CPR meeting, one participant suggested I create a WhatsApp group, so that members could stay connected between meetings. These "chat" fieldnotes were spaces where members requested feedback, shared emotional responses to life events related to equity, and linked professional opportunities. After a meeting that included discussions on removing AP pre-requisites, de-tracking secondary math courses, and lessening the frequency of leveled reading assessments, one participant shared a Google slides deck that she had been working on regarding more equitable math progressions and another shared upcoming local professional development offerings related to the topics discussed. In another session, after a brief discussion on an artifact related to the importance of multiracial, multi-level district representation and the antiracist responsibility to promote equitable recruitment and hiring practices, one member suggested the group share hiring and recruitment resources in the following CLE.

Finally, sharing resources occurred in order to gather feedback and/or garner support. For example, during one session participants discussed pressure to reproduce educational status quo around student assessment, the group noted that standard assessments often led to inequitable, racialized student "achievement" [finger quotes emphasized in discussion] outcomes. After the session, one participant said in a group chat how she decided to forgo mid-year assessments for alternatives that better guided teacher instruction and supported students, but this meant a deviation from the standardized, state approved assessments. She emailed this message to the WAEL group for feedback before ultimately sending it to her elementary assessment leads:

Elementary teams,

We will not be asking teachers to enter MOY [mid-year] assessment data into [the district's Student Information System].

This decision is not because we are in a pandemic. The decision is because this is a prime opportunity to do what is best for staff and students to reinforce practices that make a difference.

Last year, Shelter-in-Place slowed us down and made our eyes wide-open to racial inequities and oppression black and brown communities face daily. Witnessing the death of George Floyd and Ahmad Aubrey and learning about the death of Breonna Taylor forced us to acknowledge institutional racism indeed permeates throughout our society and, consequently, our schools. We responded by creating an antiracist statement, continually checking our own implicit biases, teaching beyond the Eurocentric perspective, and setting a goal to know every child well to teach them well.

*I want us to continue to be bold and courageous and challenge institutional practices that may inadvertently perpetuate us oppressing our children. This is why we started to examine what assessments inform instruction. The examination then led to a small group of management and teacher leaders starting an inquiry around the book *Street Data* that led to further conversations with the [district] management discussing what we value and how we measure it. As a result, we decided to take action and do what was in our immediate control as it relates to assessments.*

We do not want the entering of MOY data to meet a deadline to be the task. Instead, we want team members to decide what assessments to give to support a child, especially during this time. So I reiterate that instead of entering MOY data in a system, I encourage teachers to give assessments that will provide valuable data to support their students' learning.

Thank you for all that you do, and I look forward to continuing to learn and grow with you. (Fieldnotes, January 28, 2022)

Her decision to send this email to staff was not an easy one. The act of removing a familiar assessment used to measure student progress meant that students could no longer be reduced to a reading level. As a result, teachers would have to focus on what holistic knowledge and skills that individual students required in order to be better readers, instead of teaching from a checklist of next steps according to a scripted reading level guide. The change demanded more work from teachers but removed traditional accountability tools (reviewed by principals and families) to measure student growth. Furthermore, explicitly naming an antiracist rationale for her decision highlighted an educational philosophy with a sociopolitical stance. In sharing this email with our CPR group prior to sending to her community, she self-checked her own decision-making against antiracist values to legitimize this courageous, and potentially contentious, deviation from institutional norms. In doing so, we collectively realized objectives of critical ethnography to narrate our experiences in ways that “depict conditions of injustice” and reveal the “psychological, material, political or social conditions that hinder societal transformation” (Duncan, 2005, p. 103).

Furthermore, although sharing resources may seem like a common occurrence, in this case, the process is a transgressive act when viewed within standard patriarchal leadership contexts. As discussed in Chapter 2, American patriarchy favors male leadership, and male leadership trends toward transactional approaches, which can lead to zero-sum interactions and mindsets. In these cases, WAELs shared resources in order to move conversations forward, support each other in our work, and garner feedback, courage, and strength to continue antiracist

work. In doing so, we privileged interpersonal interactions, collective benefit, and transgressive thinking.

Reflective Memos

As the facilitator for this CPR group, I wrote reflective memos throughout the PAR process. Reflective memos included reflective analytic memos that drew on ongoing educational research, reflective journal entries that connected practitioner experience to topics raised during PAR activities, legacy letters that continued to root me in the purpose and value of this study itself, and personal narratives regarding research process and practitioner experience. I utilized reflective memos in data analysis to reflect on and compare data, examine relationships, and explore interpretations.

Coding

As described in Chapter 4, each of the activities produced data. Using ATLAS.ti Mac (Version 22.0.2) as a data organizational tool, I continued exploratory and descriptive coding processes (Saldaña, 2016) by assigning labels to short phrases within each text (i.e., script, memo, meeting note, description of artifact, etc.) as a way of inventorying and reorganizing informational data into digestible emerging categories for further exploration and elaboration. Similar to the PAR Pre-cycle process, I then completed a second round of deductive coding to review emerging codes and adjusted them to reflect the data set as a whole. In total, PAR Cycles ended with 879 unique codes. I assigned codes from PAR Cycle One to emerging categories from the PAR Pre-cycle that represented similar content. Instead of renaming similar codes, such as *Appreciation for female leadership models* and *Appreciation for female supervisors*, I retained the distinct codes and assigned them to the same category Gendered Professional Dynamics, which I later renamed and reorganized as part of the ongoing process. Keeping the integrity of

codes remained intact, I recategorized emerging categories until I found the “right fit” to ensure categories accurately depicted the complete data set. For instance, in the example, *Appreciation for female leadership models*, I ultimately assigned to “Representation” category, and *Appreciation for female supervisors*, which appeared to be an outlier at first, I later recognized as one support tool to mitigate occurrences represented by other codes in the category Self-advocacy Avoidance/Challenges.

Similarly, the category Gendered Professional Dynamics from the PAR Pre-cycle insufficiently reflected the data once I added subsequent PAR data. As a result of this process, I included many codes, such as *Microaggression (sarcastic remark)* or *Male favoring delegation*, in the more nuanced categories, such as Response to Micro/Macro Aggression and Work Distribution. Once I created these categories and reorganized codes, I noted that that these two categories were more appropriate – Double Standards – Differing Professional Expectations of Women vs. Men and Counter-“Feminine” Leadership Strategies.

Finally, I conducted a second-round review of all codes in each emerging category to check for appropriateness and accuracy. If needed, I created new categories, deconstructed categories into smaller groups, or combined emerging categories of similar content into a larger, more comprehensive category. For example, Collectivist Structures surfaced as a new category, but with 141 codes included, I deconstructed this category into more digestible categories in order to detail the precise sentiments more accurately. Examples of these categories include Capacity Building (Collegial & Organizational), Collaboration, Sharing Power, Vulnerability, and Work Distribution. In engaging in this process, I recognized other categories such as Authenticity, College and Career Support, and Communication Structures that represented collectivist power sharing leadership strategies and added to the finding.

As I continued to check for appropriate nuance of category labels, I continued disciplined and intentional reorganization. As expected, these emerging categories differ from those emerging categories developed from early data collection in the PAR Pre-cycle because they reflect this cyclical refinement process with a much larger data set.

The goal of this categorizing process was to ensure that each emerging category accurately summarized the codes organized within them without over-simplifying the data. As in Chapter 4, after this rigorous coding and categorizing process, I noted which codes were appearing most frequently, which codes summarized seminal group meaning-making moments, and which codes might be outliers. This process yielded 47 distinct categories (see Figure 12). Given the professional and personal time constraints of CPR members who balanced district-level careers, families, and personal lives as practitioner researchers, the CPR team could more engage with the data in a reasonable timeframe. Once organized, CPR team members reviewed, adjusted, and/or confirmed that these categories correctly represented group experiences. Finally, I identified emerging findings from patterns in identified categories, which I outline further in the next section.

Praxis Facilitator

Before outlining findings, I pause in this chapter to reflect further on the data collection process. In developing the methodology of this study, I wrote a reflective memo entitled “Language of Praxis – Action of Doing” that summarized my goal of bridging theory and practice as a researcher practitioner:

We cannot seek to improve educational practices and reforms without first examining educational experiences through the perspectives of those we serve. Because I assert that the voices and perspectives of women and people of color are often ignored or

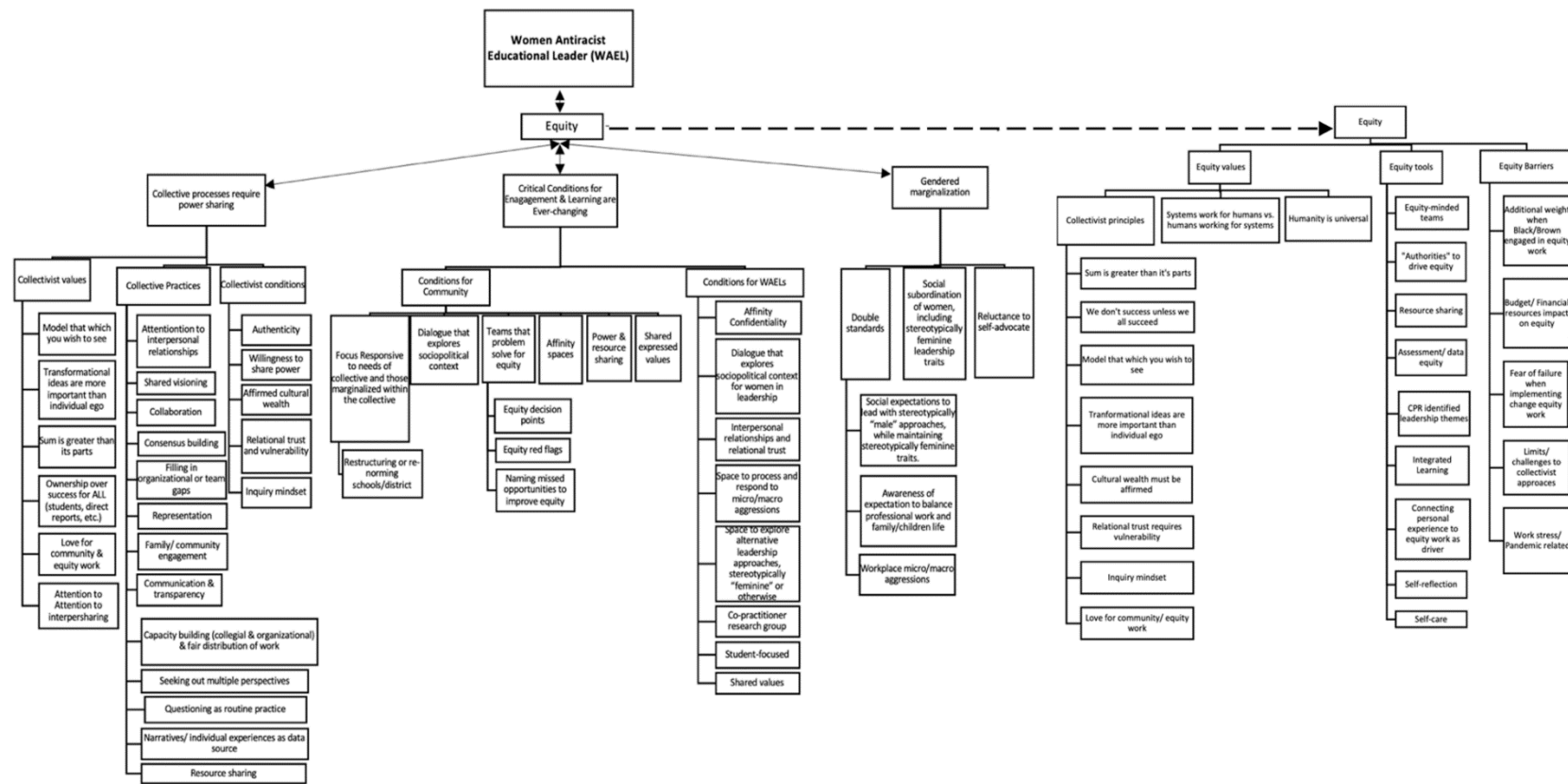


Figure 12. PAR categories grouped by emerging finding.

misrepresented, the study seeks to raise these voices to the forefront, by doing so, we may ultimately “see” situations from this ontological and epistemological perspective. To be clear, this perspective isn’t “different;” it’s just different from the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy lens through which we are accustomed to viewing the world. Thus, we can predict that the data and analysis that follows will be heavily impacted by the voices of the participants included in the research. In order to maintain the collectivist values of the study, I will need to regularly engage with my Co-practitioner Researcher team to ensure that experiences allow us to uncover information from this lens and that data stemming from these experiences are accurately and authentically depicted. As a “praxis facilitator,” I feel the pressure to create experiences that gives participants permission to communicate from their own perspective without leading or influencing the group to over-emphasize the realities of distinctions (race, gender, etc.) within their own lives. By having CPR team members involved in the planning process, I hope to make this balance and intention explicit, and thus easier to navigate and realize. (Reflective memo, October 24, 2021).

Although I began this process with a clear commitment to collective research methods, there were times during this research when I questioned the validity of our processes. Practically, I wanted to pivot to conducting individual interviews when busy schedules prevented group convenings. Ultimately, however, to be responsive to the values and pedagogy of our group, I resisted the impulse to engage in individual processes in lieu of more collective work. In my view, if I decided to pivot to interviews, I would be interrupting the democratic processes and collective values of the Co-practitioner Researcher team. I did not want to risk sliding into

institutional research norms, instead of protecting the space to enact research rooted in collective and participatory research methods.

For similar reasons, during our convenings, I reconsidered the use of storytelling as a research process. Bernal (2002) stated, “Although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings” (p. 106). Bernal’s sentiment was the driving force behind establishing the methodology of participatory activist research because storytelling rooted our collective research was a vehicle for relating and analyzing our lived experiences as a way to build or rebuild our knowledge systems. Furthermore, storytelling in a collective space allowed us to draw connections to each other and validate our shared experiences, which in turn gave us confidence to continue forward in both our research and our professional responsibilities as WAELs.

Still, collective leadership and storytelling required mutual trust with the Co-practitioner Researchers. The unknown trajectory of leading a space without knowing the answers ahead of time was uncomfortable and counter to the agenda-setting, patriarchal leadership skills that I had fostered over time. When expressing this feeling, a CPR member responded,

[We’ve] created this space for women that has never been created before, for high level leaders, where we can come in and be safe and talk about things. I mean, because we are from different districts, and we come in and talk about things that we haven’t been able to, and we share high level resources; we have high level conversations... it’s a phenomenal group of women. (July 30, 2022)

Not only did the research methodology yield valuable information, the research process was impactful on the practice of the participants, as dictated by the definition of critical participatory activist research. Kemmis et al. (2016) state,

People involved in critical action research aim to change their social world collectively, by thinking about it differently, acting differently, and relating to one another differently – by constructing other practice architectures to enable and constrain their practice in ways that are more rational (in the sense of reasonable), more productive and sustainable, and more just and inclusive. (p. 17)

Together, our CPR team addressed the tensions of being antiracist leaders by lifting up frameworks, knowledge, tools, and resources that were being employed to become better antiracist leaders. Furthermore, although the group did not explicitly name their epistemological roots for their antiracist approaches to leadership, that did not mean that our group was not providing the roadmap to their epistemological stances through shared narratives. Once I coded and categorized the narratives, I observed emerging epistemological stances directly connected to values with personal experiences. Consequently, despite my discomfort in facilitating, I remained committed to collectivist processes, including storytelling.

In the recurring reflective memos, I noted that we developed ownership of the research processes with more fervor. As a woman of color facilitating this work, I experienced increased frustration with the status quo because of the increased empowerment involved in conducting this research. I wrote journal entries with titles such as “I’m Tired of Explaining Racism” and “I Now Know the True Meaning of ‘Gaslit.’” Yet, there was power in this process. As WAELs named and shared experiences collectively, we established shared language for shared experiences. Consequently, we co-determined how, when, and why we would respond to

situations in our individual professional settings, as revealed by one of my final entries, entitled “I learned how to say no, and I’m figuring out when to say yes.” Ultimately, the more we met as a WAEL group in CPR meetings or CLEs, the more we recognized the empowerment that we discovered through the collective process. As one member concluded, meeting together gave us “the gumption to continue” (CPR Meeting, October 27, 2022).

Findings

Through the data collection and analysis processes, I identified four findings, all representing how WAELs addressed the tensions of being or becoming antiracist leaders.

- a. Collective processes require power sharing.
- b. Critical conditions for engagement and learning are ever-changing.
- c. Women lead *through* gendered marginalization.
- d. Dynamic interplay is a necessary condition for equity.

In the last finding, I draw the connections among the first three findings and equity (see Figure 13). Through member checks, the WAELs confirmed the findings, which informed the transformed conceptual framework in Chapter 6.

Finding 1: Collective Processes Require Power Sharing

As WAELs conducted conversations about equity in CLEs, collectivist leadership values and approaches surfaced repeatedly (see Table 7). Although one could maintain an individualistic frame while committing to reduce disproportionate outcomes by focusing on individuals and their self-improvement, the Booker T. Washington “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality was not present in our collective space. Instead, an individualistic approach represented a more patriarchal status quo that reproduced the disproportionality WAELs sought to disrupt. Instead, WAELs in our group emphasized collectivist leadership values, structures,

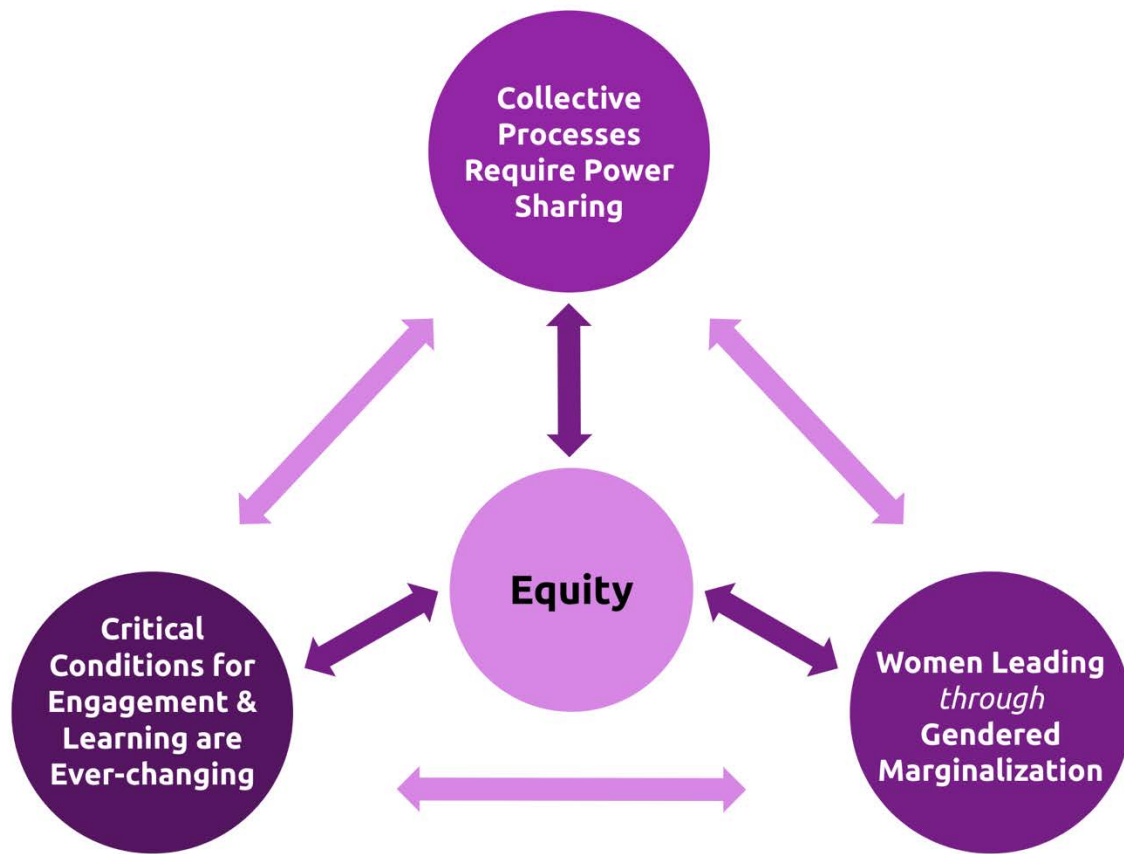


Figure 13. Dynamic interplay among the three findings determines how WAELs “show up” as equity leaders.

Table 7

Collective Processes Require Power Sharing

Collectivist values	Collectivist practices	Collectivist conditions
• Model that which you wish to see • Transformational ideas are more important than individual ego • Sum is greater than its parts • Ownership over success for ALL (students, direct reports, etc.) • Love for community & equity work	• Attention to interpersonal relationships • Shared visioning • Collaboration • Consensus building • Filling in organizational or team gaps • Representation • Family/ community engagement • Communication & transparency • Capacity building (collegial & organizational) & fair distribution of work • Seeking out multiple perspectives • Questioning as routine practice • Narratives/ individual experiences as data source • Sharing resources	• Authenticity • Willingness to share power • Affirmed cultural wealth • Relational trust and vulnerability • Inquiry mindset

practices, and frameworks as means to share leadership power, address inequities differently, and correct existing inequities. Through the process of reviewing data, WAELs emphasized the importance of interpersonal approaches, inquiry mindsets, and authenticity of mind and process as key components of collectivist leadership.

WAELs explicitly referenced or implied collectivist values and practices in their stories, which indicated a deep-rooted belief that all people deserve to be valued, respected, and strategically supported within the community. The WAEL members' values overlapped with their practices and set of the conditions for shifts in their practices and interactions with others. For example, statements such as “we don’t succeed unless we all succeed” and “model that which you wish to see” became mottos for our work. One member told a series of stories about working with her Board of Education. Specifically, she argued for the removal of AP prerequisites in courses where content did not spiral, expanded credit recovery options for students who were struggling academically, and more flexible math course progressions that mitigated student tracking. The WAEL noted that her Board members often defaulted to decision-making that reinforced their experiences or what they believed about their experiences. One Board member wanted to ensure that high rigor by removing the flexibility of credit recovery options; however, through dialogue, he remembered that he had been given additional support to pass a failing class when he was in high school. Another board member had enrolled in mostly AP courses in high school and struggled to understand why some students should be given additional opportunities to pass classes. None of the board members knew that research supported mixed-group settings as means to raise student achievement for all students, regardless of prior high, medium, or low performance levels.

To advocate for greater student equity, the WAEL member focused on expanding her

board members' perspectives by sharing alternative experiences within the district that may have been unknown or unrecognized. By engaging her Board in a series of study sessions, which included student, family, and staff voices and current educational research and frameworks, she articulated to her Board that these academic changes were desirable because they upheld standards for academic achievement while meeting the needs of a fuller range of students who may need additional support for a multitude of reasons (i.e. some students had to work to support their families, some were learning English and needed additional time, and some had a difficult time reengaging in in-person school after two years of distance learning caused by the COVID pandemic). She demonstrated how this differentiated approach matched the district's expressed organizational values and student outcome goals and her personal goals of more opportunity for more students. Her advocacy highlighted marginalized students in the practical sense, while modeling engagement practices that questioned the inequitable functioning of the current system by listening to the voices and experiences of the wider community.

By the end of her story, she reduced her efforts to a simple exasperated phrase, "That's all I do now, is try to take down barriers [for marginalized students.]" However, the details in her narrative indicate a dedication to doing so *with* her community, as a collectivist act, rather than *for* her community, as a singularly *heroic* one. She organized the Board meetings to center the needs of marginalized students require centering; as a result of modeling storytelling, she created favorable conditions for their success, which can in turn promote the success of the collective group as a whole in multiple ways – the first of these is developing an active and interpersonal approach and maintaining an inquiry mindset.

Active, Not Passive: Interpersonal Approach and Inquiry Mindset

An inquiry mindset meant that WAELs were constantly negotiating between and among people, ideas, and concepts with the end goal of building shared community devoted to equitable practices based on values. This vignette of a partial CLE transcript exemplifies this finding:

Aliyah: I'm interested in like what are those things, those effective or powerful antiracist leadership skills, characteristics, abilities, practices, or whatever that you have found most effective in your work. So, Anya, I heard you say earlier, you like 'calling-in' versus 'calling-out,' even with our most challenging parents...

Anya: Like taking a step closer to 'em, yeah.

Jada: I think that's a great call.

Anya: The biggest one that I think I do, Aliyah, and it's kind of a jerk move, well it's not a jerk move, but when they say something that's like super racist, I'm like, "Oh I'm sorry. I don't quite understand what you're trying to tell me. Can you explain that better?" And I make them actually put words to the comments that they make. I'm reading this book about stronger conversations. Then, so like, "Okay, sorry. Can you explain that like a little bit clearer or stronger... give me a little bit more depth on that because I'm not sure that I quite [understand]? So, I'm really trying to like make them actually, basically sound like the racist that they're saying they are... tell me that you don't think that the Black kid or the kid with an IEP should be in the class with your kids, or the kids that speak a different language. Go ahead and tell me that..."

Aliyah: Mm hmm, but I also feel like taking that inquiry stance also allows us to continue to model what it is that we're hoping other people do, like it's a way of calling-out, but then like modeling at the same time.

Anya: Yes, absolutely.

Aliyah: ...I did that the other day, when I was in a Union meeting, and they were like, "Take the student part out; we don't want to hear from students on [professional development] day, and I was like, "I'm sorry. Can you explain that further?" I can't believe in a world, like, I just need you to explain this to me because I don't understand. And he really didn't have a good reason, so over time, I was like, "Okay, so those reasons don't really work for me. Um, are we like going to agree to disagree in this moment or...? Because I'd like to continue to talk about it and hopefully help you understand why I think student voice is so important". And he's like, "Let's just agree to disagree; we've got to move on." I was like okay [save this for a] future conversation. I do think it's a lot of modeling too... I feel like I do a lot of asking to understand, before making judgment.

Anya: Yeah. Yes.

Jada: They can kind of trip over themselves that way, and then it becomes apparent to everybody else. What I'm thinking about too is, around decision making processes, is how can there be more of a collective decision-making process where voices are heard across the board? So, ...we just held our reunion of our assessment working group because we ceased in November, after being part of the achievement network facilitation process. And we decided not to continue with achievement network, because it was very conformative, restrictive, and we weren't able to explore and do the work. And so, this is us coming back and what we ended up doing was doing like a fishbowl and sharing our conversation about how we made the decision not to continue with [this organization] because a group of us from this assessment working group broke off and made this

decision based on people's input. And so we were modeling the conversation... We were actually having authentic conversation, sharing how we came to this decision... as we wanted to proceed with making sure everyone [had a voice]. We just had facilitation where everyone was able to give input about how do we move this group forward next, and not make it be a directive, which I think I heard here. This was really, not really telling, but really inquiring and getting feedback about a consensus approach of moving forward, which is the collective.

Aliyah: It's the collectivist stuff, for sure.

Jada: Which we do on a regular, as we shared at the very beginning of this group, Aliyah that you kind of helped us identify.

Aliyah: And it's different because there's a listening to the collective, and there's also just being aware of different kinds and multiple perspectives, right? ...I think sometimes people try to do the performative thing where they're like, "We want your input, come in." But there's also just like the living life by trying to understand all of these different perspectives and then bring some sort of cohesiveness to it all, you know what I mean?

Jada: Yes, and that's what's hard, because it takes a little more time. It takes a little more time, and so it might be slow to go fast, but I think it's really important to have that buy-in when you're trying to make change and move... We are moving forward with our assessment working group, and we're trying to define like what do we want students to learn... how we're going to document that progress, and then how we're going to assess it, and what tools are we going to use, and then who's going to facilitate and move this process forward, so we're not spinning. And that all came from the group sharing, after a

good 90 minutes, but we finally have our next steps. I just want to emphasize that I think it's important to get consensus and really have authentic participation.

Aliyah: Yeah, and then almost take that consensus, but then like balance it against your values right [overlay hands motion], so like you always do it because sometimes it's like you have your opinion, thank you for sharing, and like I want you to come along, but this is towards developing a shared vision. And so, if that means I'm helping you kind of come a little bit further than everybody else, not that I don't value your perspective, but like, we need to recognize it doesn't actually attach to our values, right? And because it creates inequitable outcomes... How are we taking what you're saying and if not [matching values,] let's adjust it slightly and that's how we start to build a shared collective kind of understanding of where we're trying to go, right? Like, I think that's a big piece of it.

Jada: It was huge. I lost buy-in from the assessment working group with this [other] facilitation. And they were leading us down a path of typical assessments that are used. And we're like... it was facilitated in such a way that we couldn't have dialogue that was authentic and meaningful for our context. And we were as adults, disrespected. And it's like, wait a second, we're professionals, can we have this conversation? I know you are trying to get us to go this direction, but we actually might go off the map.

Aliyah: Yes, yes.

Anya: Preach.

Jada: So, I think it's respecting the adult learner, but yes, have it go up against what you said, Aliyah, the core values. And like we have an antiracist commitment; let's constantly measure that against our antiracist commitment. (Community Learning Exchange, April 5, 2022)

The partial script exemplifies the distinct forms of questioning in which WAELs engaged as they acted on their espoused values in leadership roles while intersecting those values and the practices that represented them with organizational values and goals. In the excerpt, WAELs questioned to know more about the collective experience – especially those on the margins, as evidenced by Jada who pivoted from a facilitated working group to a fishbowl group structure to hear from members of her school community who did not feel heard in the original space. She reinforced collective, shared values as the justification for this shift. Even when Anya utilized questioning as a “jerk move,” she recognized that simply telling others her opinion would most likely not support the development of shared values. Instead, she appealed to community members’ moral imperatives by questioning the marginalization of those more vulnerable within their community as a whole.

Furthermore, WAELs used questions purposefully to understand, consider multiple perspectives, and gain insight, as evidenced by Aliyah who did not agree with her district union president and was appalled by his rejection of student voice in professional development. Still, she actively inquired about his reasoning for making the request, in case he was attempting to make valid, yet unclear points. For example, in a journal entry after the experience, she wrote the following:

He told me later that [his] members didn’t like it when students appreciated specific teachers because it made the teachers not referenced feel bad. My initial thought was, maybe you should do a better job teaching, so that students want to shout-you-out too. Then I thought, what must your life be like that you can’t find joy in your colleagues getting celebrated by their students? Finally, I reflected on the purpose of bringing students into the space. The purpose was not to lift up individuals, but to have teachers

reflect on how the experiences that they foster in their classrooms either culturally affirm or alienate the students that they serve, which ultimately impacts their ability to learn. “I will definitely ask students to refrain from calling out individual teachers,” I said. “That shouldn’t be the focus as we explore culturally responsive teaching practices”. (Journal entry, February 23, 2022)

WAEs questioned whether or not their collective and individual actions aligned to their organizational values in order to ensure that decision-making was within the agreed-upon missions and visions. For example, the WAEs were leaders in districts with explicitly stated student achievement and equity values; however, practices did not always align with these goals. For example, rather than avoiding a particular parent member who was making racist comments, Anya actively invited this parent into their conversation by using questioning techniques to draw out the origins of his impulsive conclusions. By questioning the alignment of practices with values, she set up conditions so that members within the community had an opportunity to learn through the process and become more inclusive as a collective. Similarly, Aliyah asked her union president to elaborate on his request before she concluded judgment. Even after she initially determined his reasoning was insufficient to change the professional development agenda, she noted that the conversation should continue because they had not reached consensus. After listening to his rationale and by noting that some parts of his reasoning were worth examining, she conceded to parts of his request. Both WAEs used what is termed discourse II to avoid blame and shame and keep dialogue open (Eubanks et al., 1997). To change the discourse in schools and districts, the leaders modeled different ways of engaging in dialogue.

However, WAEs shared that their collectivist lenses did not always result in singularly *kumbaya* moments where the results were positive. In fact, WAEs often spoke about needing to

take active steps to question and challenge established norms and systems in order to foster better life experiences for all in their community. Because they pervasively and, in many cases, persuasively used questioning, WAELs did not burden those most impacted by and/or experiencing the “not-working systems” with the task of identifying or addressing said systems. As one CPR member stated, “When you’re in the system, you don’t always see what’s not working.” WAELs felt empowered to advocate on behalf of more equitable conditions for their constituents, using data, common sense, and organizational values. Still, while WAEL participants were guided by values, they understood the importance of consistent community engagements in order to ensure that decisions remained rooted in authentic experiences of those they served, rather than assume they knew what was best for others. By maintaining an inquiry mindset, WAELs strengthened interpersonal relationships among members in their collective, while reinforcing the shared values of their collective communities.

Authenticity of Mind and Process

The inquiry mindset applied not only to leadership “ends,” but also to “means;” WAELs questioned what community members were *thinking* about how systems were *functioning*, and how educators and students were *performing* as a result. As valued members of the community, opinions, beliefs, and experiences of their community members mattered to WAELs. If collectivist structures (such as community engagements for informed decision-making) were implemented superficially and without depth, their actions might be perceived as inauthentic, performative, or at times, manipulative. For example, during a CLE, one participant noted that families do not remember the big district events, but they remember the smaller, more intimate “front porch” conversations. She stated,

It's the parents that are not well connected to the school, and for you to take the time and look them eye-to-eye and engage them in conversation, it makes a world of difference. And it starts to build a different culture level, but it's slow. The thing is, it's slow. And you know public education goes 100 miles an hour. You have parents and families traveling 40 miles an hour, and the train is not slowing down. So, leaders are wanting to convince parents to speed up, right, run faster, do what you can to run faster and jump on the train, because we can't slow it down, because we have decisions to make. So yeah, it's that adage, "If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go together to go far..." it's the collective spirit of it. (CLE, January 5, 2022)

Another WAEL added, "With all of the equity work that people are doing, people have said, okay you have to go into your community to get feedback and engagement, but those engagements aren't authentic... [they're] going through the motions." She then told an anecdote about working with a male colleague who was developing community engagements. She noted how he decided about the topic and then began scheduling community engagements. She stopped him from doing this, saying,

You can't just make a decision. You've got to wait and see what their input is and then bring that input back to the teachers... it's got to be a constant negotiation between them. Then you've got to bring them together and see, you know, what it looks like in order to inform your decision. (CLE, January 5, 2022)

Another participant elaborated on this experience by noting that families within the educational community can often sense when community engagements are done performatively (i.e., engagements done in efforts to justify decisions already made by district staff versus engagements done to inform district staff decision making.)

I think part of it is really, really understanding what can be decided in a collective and what really has to be decided within the organization. Because I think, um, when we have approached our community engagement events, um, there are things that are only up for debate until this moment in time and then the district is going to have to make a decision, but we are willing to collect and invite and propose that you accept our invitation... if the authenticity in inviting is there, then oftentimes the invitation is accepted, but if the authenticity in the invitation is not there, then people see through it. Families see through it, and they know you're only doing this to check off the box that you invited stakeholders, right, because families now are very well aware of all the jargon that we utilize, so when we say stakeholders, [they say] yes you just want my opinion so that you can have a sign in sheet saying look at all these people that we invited to [collaborate with], but then we made this decision over there... I think the authenticity for me is this understanding that I'm getting out of this relationship as much, if not more, than I'm what I'm trying to support you with, right? So I always say, we're blessed really to work with the families that we're working with; they're saving our souls. Right, and if we don't recognize that they're saving our souls, working with them, then we're only approaching it from the one-directional; I'm really trying to convince you that you need what I have. (CLE, January 5, 2022)

Another WAEL agreed that authentic engagements intended to better understand the needs of the collective required a mutually beneficial relationship between the community and its leadership:

I don't know how to get at this authenticity - but it's real care; it's like real compassion.

Like I'm listening to you [as community members] to get a better perspective on this

leadership, instead of I'm listening to you to check something off. (CLE, January 5, 2022)

Finally, for a reciprocal community engagement to be possible, district leaders needed to address positionality and power dynamics within their community spaces, since they have the potential to undermine collectivist intentions. A WAEL stated, "In our positions, going into a group and saying we want to have some really big conversations, and we want to hear the truth [is critical to setting conditions for quality engagement]" (CLE, January 5, 2022).

The participants had conversations and stories about the topic of incongruence of authenticity and inauthenticity. When leaders use collectivist practices for transactional purposes, others rejected their actions as means to secure power. When they use collectivist practices to gain collective insight for collective good, they were deemed authentic. For example, one member noted that her supervisor often uplifted collaborative protocols under the guise of shared leadership primarily in situations where he did not seem to know how to proceed. However, in areas where he felt more confident, he abandoned protocols for more directive leadership stances. Conversely, another member noted that her supervisor implemented community engagements to appear fair or democratic, but he would strategically select and/or modify protocols in order to influence their results. In these instances, protocols seemed like a method for social control or manipulation, rather than authentic input. As one member stated, "True collaboration requires the sharing of power" (April 5, 2022).

Finding 2: Critical Conditions for Engagement and Learning are Ever-Changing

WAELs did not believe conditions for antiracist development were concrete or stagnant in nature; their narratives indicated that conditions had to be flexibly responsive to the needs of the group being served, the needs of the collective as well as those at the margins of the

collective. In this regard, we needed to critically consider appropriate conditions for engagement and learning during our WAEL convenings, with authentic input from those within our group. The WAEL affinity space opened room for discussions about equity that both we and our community members experienced (see Table 8). Toward this end, WAELs determined that confidentiality, relational trust, and a focus on students as equity-minded co-conspirators were conditional keys to our success as an affinity group.

Confidentiality and Relational Trust

WAELs in our group experienced marginalization, either as women, women of color, or women engaged in antiracist change advocacy. Thus, to create a space where WAELs could engage and learn with colleagues, my research involved listening to CPR members about what conditions would be necessary for our group to effectively address the research questions and our work as antiracist educational leaders. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, confidentiality was a necessary condition for all discussions. Once given the opportunity during CPR planning meetings to select additional conditions, the group consistently valued interpersonal methods of check-ins and storytelling over more structured agendas and protocols. Members noted that one of the main reasons that members felt comfortable trusting the space was due to the preexisting relationships that brought the group together. Although not every member knew each other before the study began, every member had at least one known relationship from the start of the study. This “built-in” trust allowed group relationships to be established faster than it would have if we were a group of strangers coming together for the first time. It built in a feeling of accountability to each other to ensure that the space was mutually beneficial, safe, and supportive. As one member stated during member checks,

Table 8

Critical Conditions for Engagement and Learning are Ever-Changing

Conditions for WAELs	Conditions for Communities
• Confidentiality • Dialogue that explores sociopolitical context for women in leadership • Interpersonal relationships and relational trust • Space to process and respond to micro/macro aggressions • Space to explore alternative leadership approaches, stereotypically “feminine” or otherwise • Co-practitioner Researcher group • Student-focused • Shared values	• Responsive to needs of collective and those marginalized within the collective ○ Restructuring or re-norming schools/districts (e.g., student voice, credit recovery, culturally relevant assessment, etc.) • Dialogue that explores sociopolitical context • Teams that problem solve for equity ○ Equity decision points ○ Equity red flags ○ Naming missed opportunities to improve equity • Affinity spaces • Power and resource sharing • Shared expressed values

I do think there is something about you as a connector. People probably feel some sort of relational value to you. If you were some random person that we had no relationship with coming to us, asking to create this space. I think it would have actually taken longer to get to the point where we went. (CPR Meeting, October 19, 2022)

Once trust was established, members felt comfortable to discuss a wide range of equity issues that impacted both their communities as well as themselves. In fact, it became clear that the WAEL space was unique in this respect. When looking at our draft chart of codes towards the end of our study, one member determined that the chart felt accurate, but noted that the wide range in topics may have been because, “There are so few spaces to have these conversations where people feel comfortable... [we] experience[d] like a dumping” (CPR Meeting, October 19, 2022). Essentially, the group served as an affinity space where WAELs could privately, yet collectively process inequities that we faced on a daily basis with others who shared similar values and experiences. One WAEL noted that our study space served as a support group, “I would love to talk about how to help support our team... to navigate through [our challenges] and start like chipping away” (CPR Meeting, December 15, 2021). Another member noted that this closeness seemed to stem from having similar values and objectives:

There’s something about this group, people really focus on students in a genuine way. I feel like I’ve been in a lot of central office discussions or with different leaders who say they’re about kids, but really its politics or ego driving decision making, or some new grant dragging [conversations], instead of what’s going to move outcomes for kids. (CPR Meeting, October 19, 2022)

The shared and sustained focus on outcomes for students reinforced trust and community within our WAEL affinity space and paved the way for us to share about ourselves. Even when

conversations focused on our own wellbeing as women in leadership, the purpose was not self-serving; it was to improve our capacity to navigate these challenges and better serve our communities.

Students First: Equity-Minded Co-Conspirators

In the majority of our convenings, WAELs reiterated their gratitude to have a space where complex equity decision points and equity red flags could be collaboratively processed in a safe and confidential affinity space. In the transcripts I shared earlier in this chapter, I demonstrate that the conversations included discussions on equity values, tools, and barriers. For example, after one WAEL shared frustration around a missed opportunity for her Board members to vote in a more racially representative board, which was a previously expressed Board value and objective, she asked the WAEL group to watch the meeting video and relay our thoughts. In response, another WAEL noted that a common equity red flag involved members of an organization trying to work on the system, while neglecting their actions. Another WAEL told a story from Love's (2019) book, *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* as motivation. The story differentiated between what it means to be an ally versus a co-conspirator:

We started affinity groups in our district and one of the videos that our coordinator of DEI [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion] shared with us is an excerpt that included Dr. Bettina Love and two other women of color... It's in her book, and it's about the individual who, the Black woman who climbed up the pole to pull down the confederate flag. After, yes, after a shooting... Then, she, this Black woman climbs up the pole, pulls down the confederate flag, and then there's a white male involved as well. And they don't know each other, but they planned for this to happen, and they got notice of when it

should happen. And how they planned is that they taught her how to go up the pole, and they had bail money ready for her. Like they, they were planning, and the co-conspirator is this white male who didn't just. . . stand outside the barrier that blocks the flagpole, but is literally next to the pole, so that when the law enforcement said, "Oh, we can just taser the pole and that will get her down." The white man puts his hand on the pole.

You know, and those women did not put their hand on the pole. (CLE, March 2, 2022)

Co-conspirator leadership decisions on behalf of equity were not always easy. The conversation following this anecdote focused on helping the WAEL decide whether or not she had the political power to withstand speaking to her board about the consequences of their decisions to elect a nonrepresentative, mostly White board. Although ultimately, no decision was made in this convening, this WAEL member did not want to decide in a vacuum; rather, she preferred to gain insight by talking to her WAEL colleagues as she weighed the consequences of questioning her board's actions.

Consistently, WAELs verbalized gratitude for our space after sharing personal stories. For instance, one WAEL expressed, "And there's just been interesting things going on, and I'm happy to share them in more detail. Thank you for allowing the space" (CPR Meeting, December 15, 2021). In response, other participants shared similar sentiments: "It's so real; I love it." "Fascinated with being able to have these conversations and being in conversation with you all and very glad to be here." "Can't tell you all how excited I am to be in a room with such badass women educational leaders." "So glad this is a safe space to kind of, you know, have some of these conversations" (CPR Meeting, December 15, 2021). Understanding that issues of equity are often complex, WAELs appreciated the space to collectively consider issues of equity with women who shared common values and experiences but may bring a diverse set of expertise or

ideas, in order to better address equity issues in their own individual districts. This appreciation for the WAEL space was emphasized, when participants' respective district spaces felt more resistant to change and/or didn't understand the need for change. One WAEL shared,

Well, I already heard some really good ideas, I would love to get a discussion going because there are things that happen every day. Then, I'm like wait a second no. No, I can't be that crazy, there has to be something else going on here. (CLE, December 15, 2021)

In having the opportunity to unpack challenges collectively, members developed the courage to return to their communities with more confidence in their equity change work. This collective processing and encouragement started early and became a pattern in our WAEL space. One WAEL stated, "I'm ready. Yesterday, I was like I'm going to meet with these women; I'm going to be able to talk about this; I'm going to do it" (Community Learning Exchange, December 15, 2021). Although she understood that other WAELs would not tell her what to do, she was ready to share her ideas, garner feedback, and receive encouragement that would help her determine the best path forward in her own district leadership equity work.

In sum, when conditions are equity-minded, they are flexible and responsive to the needs of the group they serve. For students, WAELs discussed that conditions may require settings to include student voice, add credit recovery options, or implement culturally relevant assessment measures. For WAELs to process these needs, conditions required safety from social stereotypes, trusted interpersonal relationships, and a safe space to process improved leadership approaches. In this case, both students and WAELs require open dialogue that helps them better understand their own sociopolitical context in order to navigate it effectively and eventually change it for the

better. There was no checklist for effective and equitable conditions; conditions were considered critically to meet the needs of the groups they served and balanced to achieve collective goals.

Finding 3: Women Lead *through* Gendered Marginalization

Just as WAELs actively considered the needs of marginalized voices within their communities to better achieve equity within their districts, WAELs wanted convenings to be a space where we centered and de-marginalized our voices. As grateful as we were to have established a space where we could address issues of equity, we were equally grateful to better understand how issues of inequity impacted our leadership. We understood that there was no way under, over, or around gender bias; we would have to lead “through” it, maneuvering between gendered social stereotypes and leadership demands. Additionally, women in leadership and women of color in leadership understand that their epistemological leadership lenses are shaped by the oppressive marginalization; thus, we were better equipped to recognize and challenge marginalization experienced by others. In this case, the word *through* served as a conceptual double entendre that signified navigating barriers and drawing on the experience from navigating barriers to understand how to dismantle them for others.

Thus, I describe how WAELs experienced marginalization through double standards that included the consequences from (a) being stereotyped as a woman leader, (b) subordinating stereotypically feminine leadership traits, and (c) feeling trapped. We wanted to act outside of socially accepted, stereotypically feminine roles but retain the strong characteristics of being women in leadership. I discuss how WAELs utilized our affinity space to disrupt the silent subordination that often stems from socially limiting gender stereotypes and expectations (see Table 9). I discuss how WAELs drew on these experiences as an equity tool to better understand and enact antiracist leadership.

Table 9

Women Leading through Marginalization

Double Standards	Social Subordination of Women
• Social expectations to lead with stereotypically “male” approaches, while maintaining stereotypically feminine traits. • Awareness of expectation to balance professional work and family/children life • Workplace micro/macro aggressions	• Stereotypically feminine leadership traits • Directive over collaborative, • Hierarchical over collective • Reluctance to self-advocate

Double Standards

WAEELS consistently referenced how frequently they experience a double standard and described these experiences by juxtaposing their professional experiences to those of their male coworkers. For instance, WAEELS often reported filling in gaps in order to maintain the functioning of the collective, which was often coupled with concerns about the inequitable distribution of work that followed. According to participants, male coworkers often delegated more professionally and personally, but women were hesitant to do so. Participants attributed this trend to societal norms that stereotype women as supporting figures, instead of figureheads. Thus, WAEELS in our group often attempted to accomplish both roles as a way to garner social acceptance and overcome socially limiting stereotypes. Consequently, WAEELS reported that they would often be assigned more exhaustive workloads, while being unrecognized for doing so. For example, one participant held three high level district positions for over nine months until vacancies could be filled and another completed her work while filling in for her supervisor while he was away for unknown reasons for weeks at a time. Participants noted how women who sought credit for this additional work risked being deemed selfish or aggressive, because a “women’s place” was to selflessly serve in the background. Yet, men who took credit for their work were considered strong, reasonable leaders who were asking for no less than their deserved recognition. One participant shared that her supervisor asked her to work on her soft skills after casually requesting a letter of recommendation after a meeting. However, when a male colleague asked for a letter of recommendation just months later, he was given a short, encouraging, and positive response. In fact, her supervisor volunteered the WAEL to write a letter of recommendation for the male colleague, even though she was not directly asked.

Because WAELs viewed others' success as the success of the collective, they were often willing to support their colleagues when gaps in performance surfaced. In fact, the majority of WAELs discussed the importance of capacity building in others, including students, direct reports, supervisors, and colleagues, even if they did not receive this desired support themselves. This high-level support became part of their leadership identity, although not always embraced whole-heartedly. One participant noted, "It doesn't matter if I'm not involved whatsoever, they will still email/call me because they know I'll answer" (CLE, February, 2, 2022). And another journaled,

It doesn't matter if we know how to do it. We do what needs to be done, which often means that our identity is wrapped around the gaps of others, instead of gifts from within that we want to cultivate. (Journal entry, June 22, 2022)

Although WAELs recognized this capacity to fill in gaps as a strength for the collective, it tended to be more weaponized than valued by supervisors, which led to feelings of frustration and burn-out.

Furthermore, WAELs were expected to balance their professional careers with their families and children at home. Participants noted that any gaps that surfaced in their caregiving roles from assuming professional leadership duties remained their responsibility to manage. For example, community members would ask married WAELs, "Who is watching your kids?" when working late at a board meeting or use the desire to spend more time with family as an excuse to overlook a WAEL for a promotion. WAELs reported feeling tension, internally and externally motivated, between professional duties and duties to their own families. WAELs used the affinity space to encourage each other to spend more time with their kids when feeling distance, get space from their kids and take advantage of support networks if needing to get work done, or

navigate through professional decisions when kids were impacted by professional duties. Ultimately, attending to family, children in particular, was a priority added to the collectivist plates that WAELs carried.

The WAELs experienced the double standards as direct micro/macro aggressions. WAELs reported being delegated more secretarial tasks such as calendaring, note-taking, or agenda setting during mixed-gendered meetings, despite holding high-level district leadership roles. Frequently, WAELs commiserated about *mansplaining*, which refers to when a man explains an idea or concept to a woman in a condescending or patronizing way without considering that she may already know the information being explained. They were told how to do the work they were already doing – work that no one else seemed willing or able to complete. Sometimes, these moments seemed to be small power-grabs. For example, one participant spoke about how her supervisor corrected her during a board meeting for using the word disaggregate incorrectly. She did not want to embarrass him so she waited until they could meet privately to correct his correction by looking up the definition. Instead of apologizing, he changed the subject. Other times, aggressions were more explicitly about maintaining power dynamics.

As our WAEL convenings developed into spaces where members could empathize on the micro/macro aggressions they themselves faced as WAELs, sharing more personally intimate issues became more frequent. Still, even early on in our convenings, one member shared a story that I represent as a vignette in which she was trying to support the transition of a male colleague into her previous job, and the experience took an unexpected sexist turn.

There are two men of color that hold my previous position... I reorganized the office and then choose to move into a different role because I thought there has to be a more sustainable way to do this work that I'm passionate about. . I supported both of them, like shadowed,

followed, sat in on meetings, still held a lot of the work, did a transition plan to try to set them up for success. So, last year the superintendent and the board wanted to do a [department] redesign, keep in mind I'm no longer overseeing this [department — that was like two positions ago. So, I got asked to do the work. The man who's in the role, they're like, "Well, he can't do it yet; he's not ready. You have to lead this." Day-one in my job, no one [helped]... so it felt very gendered to me, like no one gave me that grace, right? But I'm passionate about [my department equity work] so I was like okay, I'll support and collaborate. So essentially, I was asked to do his job. We're both in the same title, same salary, everything, and so this goes on for months; he's not doing anything, not pulling his weight, and I'm still trying to make it collaborative. And we get to the point, we have to present to some of the leadership. Confidentially [while caring for family], I did so much work on this... Still split up the presentation, so he had a part of it. My direct supervisor, who is a man, who is in my previous role now, he says to me privately, "Why didn't you make it look like he did it?" [This] was the first thing that he said to me. Not, "great job." Eight months of work that I had been doing, leading, and trying to be collaborative, leading sessions with principals, doing tons of work, but he said, "Why didn't you make it look like he did it." And I'm like, "You asked me to lead this work." He's like, "Yeah, but I wanted you to make it look like he's doing the work." I'm not kidding. Verbatim; this is what he said to me. I almost fell out on my seat, so I said, "Let me get this straight, you asked me to lead this, and you want me to do all the work, but you want me to make it look like he's doing it in a public setting." And he said, "Yes, why is that so hard for you." And I'm just sharing this as one, one thing that he said to me [pinches fingers together, indicating there was more]. And I said, "That's a very gendered statement that you're making."

But this is my supervisor; this is still technically my supervisor right now, and these are the dynamics that are happening on the team, and it's just so blatant... When I was in that position... I'm working like 12+ hour days; I don't see my kid. I was doing what used to be five jobs by myself. Now he has [money] for a coach, more positions added to support him, when he was doing half of the scope of work that I was doing... But I love working [here,] but like now, that's my direct supervisor, and I know if I go to HR, if I try to do anything, that's going to get out in the district... [Sometimes I'm told by the men in the office,] "Oh... you have too high of expectations." But I'm like, "Do I?" Like, my expectation is we should be impacting outcomes for kids, not protecting each other's jobs. But this is why I do the work, and this is why I'm passionate about the work. I want to still be able to impact the work, but I don't want to have to deal with these dynamics.

And that's just one snippet of several conversations, where I'm being told that I have to make the men look good, and do the work, but make it look like they're doing it. (CLE, December 15, 2021)

In this instance, this WAEL had to navigate experiencing inequity directed at her, while holding tight to her collectivist values. She actively resisted taking actions or inactions that would disrupt the collective good of the organization by providing support to others that she did not receive herself, conversing quietly with her colleague about her supervisor's inappropriate actions, rather than reporting her colleague publicly to HR, and returning to her values in order to continue doing the professional work that prioritized students.

Disrupting Silent Subordination and Socially Limiting Gender Stereotypes via Affinity Spaces

WAELs were ready and willing to actively advocate on behalf of students, families, and colleagues; however, each struggled to employ advocacy on behalf of themselves. When

confronted with the advocacy of others, WAELs used questioning to support informed decision making. When inequity or bias worked against them as leaders, WAELs realized that the questioning often remained internal: Were they unwilling to further *other* themselves by surfacing additional needs or differences? Were they fearful of a gendered double standard response? Did they internalize the social stereotype that women are to remain quiet and meek? Participants shared these sentiments as speculations, but regardless of the cause, each WAEL expressed a desire to process these situations when they surfaced. Specifically, they sought guidance from the WAEL affinity group on ways to self-advocate without damaging their reputations as quality leaders.

Thus, the WAEL affinity space served as a unique opportunity to express this normally internalized and silent processing sexism or racism with trusted peers. For example, one member decided to ignore a microaggression when colleagues were surprised to hear her use high-level academic language to discuss a professional dilemma, saying, “You threw out some words I hadn’t even considered. Your vocabulary is much better than mine.” Another colleague then added, “And she’s a second language learner too.” When the comment was ignored, the colleague looked straight at the WAEL and repeated, “Right, you’re a second language learner.” In this setting, the WAEL was the only women of color in a room with four White directors. Although English was in fact her second language, her ability to navigate two languages allowed her access to a greater range of language functions. In other settings, her multilingual status would be valued. Internally, she struggled with the ignorance of “studied people,” especially those who were older with more life experiences in public schools where they have had many opportunities to “challenge their biases.” Still, she questioned whether or not to comment on the experience and educate her colleagues, wondering if the comments would be accepted or

minimized as a mere compliment; she worried that her colleagues would think she was “playing the race card” (CLE, December 15, 2021). What surprised her further is that her district was in the midst of antiracist work, having just completed a racial equity audit. They had been interviewing students, teachers, and parents for over a year, and this WAEL hoped that it would result in more cultural awareness as an organization, but instead the efforts appeared isolated and compartmentalized.

Without the space to process daily micro/macro aggressions with other WAELs who shared similar experiences and challenges, the majority of WAELs noted a tendency to remain quiet and absorb the impact of micro/macro aggressions in order to maintain interpersonal relationships and their community’s collective goodwill. At the time, this participant was feeling dejected, saying,

Oftentimes it seems like those who think they have reached a level of conscious awareness on equity think they've arrived and they just don't get it. And so, you wonder how do you get those people to get it or to care enough to want to get it, because they're so staunch in their ways. (CLE, December 15, 2021)

WAELs in our space offered social emotional support to this colleague while also discussing ways to lead continuously improving organizational antiracist shifts. Members suggested bringing in resources, such as the aforementioned Characteristics of White Supremacy (see Appendix E) or the National Equity Project’s Liberatory Design (Anaissie et al., n.d.) as a way to normalize new district office behaviors.

In response to consistent micro/macro aggressions against them, WAELs often reported avoiding situations altogether by looking for a new job or waiting for more data to confirm a pattern before responding. Without a space to fully process these experiences, members would

default to stereotypically feminine behaviors of remaining pleasantly silent and avoiding conflict, which often reinforced the cycle of marginalization. However, as our WAEL group continued to convene, members started to make plans for how to address situations within their own communities. Although many times, actions were small in comparison to the actions WAELs were willing to take on behalf of their communities, nonetheless, they were impactful. One member reiterated her request for a letter of recommendation, another member held a private check-in with a colleague requesting for a fairer distribution of work, and yet another was able to talk to her executive cabinet about equity-based budgeting. “I’m so thankful to be connected to you [all]” (CLE, December 15, 2021), one member revealed after sharing about a personal and professional challenge with the group. Even if not always immediately acted upon, the opportunity to speak about these concerns brought members the comfort of knowing that they were not alone. Moreover, sharing helped WAELs better understand their experiences, and understanding meant that they had new hopes about they could foster more equitable outcomes for community members and themselves.

Finding 4: Dynamic Interplay as a Necessary Condition for Equity

Each participant entered the WAEL affinity space with a lens on equity as a precursor to understanding how to develop and enact racially equitable, antiracist leadership. Yet, conversations among WAELs revealed how their experiences with equity influenced the way they approached enacting equity.

One WAEL suggested that the definitions of equity and collectivism are connected concepts. She argued that an equity mindset considers the fair distribution of resources based on need. The definition of collectivism emphasizes the needs and goals of the group as a whole, while individualistic principles emphasize the needs of the individual regardless of the needs of

the group. In order to best judge how to fairly distribute resources based on need, she argued that one must consider the goals of the group as a whole. With this correlation in mind, collectivism and equity terms were interchangeable in group conversations, provided there was an intention to distribute resources to those most in need in order to raise the overall good within educational communities.

Furthermore, participating WAELs rooted antiracist values and objectives in their experiences with marginalization and explicitly stated their desire to disrupt patterns that would reproduce similar inequities for the next generation of students. One WAEL spoke about her experience learning English in American schools and two others drew on their experiences as people of color in predominantly White educational settings. One member spoke about her experience as an adopted child.

I was in foster care as a youth, and then I was adopted, and that's why I really believe in public education. Because I do believe, we have to create systems to support all youth. And you know for me when I worked in [alternative education], it really shaped my perspective of education, because you're working with the kids at the end of the continuum, right, that our system has failed. But when I was looking at some of our data, you can predict in fifth grade from our kids who stayed in our system, who is most likely to end up in [alternative education] and that's why I do the work that I do. That's why I'm like, how do we become strategic and actually target, and how do we disrupt this? Our system is producing what it is set up to produce right now. (CLE, December 15, 2021)

Each WAEL connected their experiences with marginalization to their purpose for wanting to enact more equitable change in schools. In doing so, WAELs in our group recognized that the

conditions for equitable engagement needed to be adjusted and protected for both students in classrooms and the leaders supporting said changes.

To illustrate further, one WAEL who identified as Black spoke about attending schools in predominantly White settings. One of the drawbacks of collectivism is that when prioritizing the needs of a group as a whole, those on the margins can sometimes get dismissed. According to these guidelines, her specific needs and the needs of other Black students in her setting may not have risen to the level of group-worthy action, but that didn't make their achievement any less important. Black students in her schools were disproportionately failing to achieve at similar levels as their peers. When achievement patterns aligned with protected classes such as race or gender and were sustained over time, she concluded that the disproportionality indicated a flaw with how the educational system was supporting (or not supporting) groups of students based on their race. Even as a youth, she recognized that the only way to combat this type of systemic racism was to systematize countermeasures, such as distributing resources equitably to students in need.

As an adult, she further recognized that when considering academic achievement in the United States, minority status is only one possible cause of marginalization. As noted by other WAELs during meetings, even if White students represent the minority in schools, they tend to academically outperform all other races of students. Marginalization represented more than lack of representation; it represented lack of power and opportunity, which could only be addressed by centering support for marginalized groups. To do this, WAELs leaned on strategies that balanced the needs of the collective with that of marginalized groups, such as targeted universalism, a management approach that targets and addresses disparities in subgroup performance as means of reaching a universal goal (powell et al., 2019).

Thus, collectivist principals for power sharing can inform conditions for engagement in a manner that ensures marginalized voices are valued, protected, and heard. Table 10 shows how WAELs considered equity values, tools, and barriers towards this end. For example, WAELs considered the use of integrated learning as a way to support all students while meeting the needs of those students who may not have been exposed to widespread college and career options. By integrating learning into school experiences, all students benefited, even if the approach was developed to support the increased graduation rate of specific groups of students. Another example provided was equity-based budgeting, wherein schools or programs within the district received additional funds to address the particular needs marginalized subgroups. One WAEL discussed how suspension rates for African American students was on the rise, so she collaborated with district leaders to fund restorative justice training for staff and support staff that led African American clubs and support spaces. She hoped by doing so, suspension rates for African American students would decline, and the culture and climate across the schools implementing this approach would be improved for all students. In the end, she discovered that restorative justice tools benefitted all students, and remaining staff were subsequently trained.

Conclusion

As more data collected from PAR activities was added to PAR Pre-cycle data, subsequent coding and categorizing led to four main findings: (a) Collective processes require power sharing, (b) Critical conditions for engagement and learning are ever-changing, (c) Women lead *through* gendered marginalization, and (d) Dynamic interplay is a necessary condition for equity inform WAEL approaches to antiracist leadership. Although these findings were described in sequence, section narratives revealed how findings were inextricably interconnected. I will discuss the analysis and implications in Chapter 6.

Table 10

Dynamic Interplay is a Necessary Condition for Equity

Equity values	Equity tools	Equity barriers
• Collectivism • Systems work for humans vs. humans working for systems • Humanity is universal • Apply “golden rule” (treat others the way that you would want to be treated)	• Equity-minded teams • Routine reflection • Draw on personal experiences as motivation for equitable change • Authentic inquiry mindset • Shared visioning • Shared values-based decision making • Explicit/ transparent decision making (distinguish between hearing multiple perspectives vs. democratic decisions) • Authentic communication • Listen to individual voices as part of collective effort (including students) • Avoidance of oversimplification • Use of "authorities" to drive/justify equity decisions • Resource sharing • Go “off the map” • Assessment/ data equity • Integrated learning • Leadership modeling • Connecting personal experience to equity work as driver • Use narratives as data source • Question status quo • Remove irrational barriers • Self-care	• Limited budget • Fear of failure when implementing change equity work • Work stress • Limits/ challenges to collectivist approaches • Fragility of others • Additional weight when Black/Brown & engaged in equity work • Distractions (e.g. Pandemic)

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation.
(Audre Lorde, 1984, p. 31)

In the Participatory Action Research (PAR), I examined the extent to which women leaders address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders. The study was designed to lead, engage, and empower a Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team of fellow district Women Antiracist Educational Leaders (WAELEs) in a modified feminist ethnographical process of exploration, inquiry, and analysis to discover key ideas, approaches, and strategies that they use to create more racially equitable educational environments in their communities. By creating and protecting space to listen to women engaged in antiracist educational leadership, I intended to explore further the existing correlation between antiracist pedagogies and stereotypically socialized female leadership characteristics (see Figure 8 in Chapter 2). I predicated the PAR design on the following theory of action: If we can enact PAR that involves educational leaders closest to the focus of practice, namely how women leaders address the tensions of racial inequities in their school and/or district communities and engage them in examining the assets and challenges of being women social justice leaders working on behalf of racial equity, then we can develop constructivist models and tools for other educational leaders who similarly seek to disrupt racialized inequities in their school and district communities and add to the collective efficacy of those engaged in antiracist work.

The central research question, *How do women educational leaders address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders?* guided the PAR study. In addition, the study explored the following sub-questions:

- What frameworks (knowledge, skills, tools, and dispositions) do women antiracist leaders employ that can add to the current body of educational literature for future generations of anti-racist leaders?
- To what extent do participants use their ontological and epistemological lens to address the tensions that surface when leading for racial equity?
- To what extent do I as an educational leader develop antiracist identity as a researcher practitioner in order to engage other women educational leaders as co-conspirators?

Five school district WAELs who volunteered to come together as a Co-practitioner Researcher (CPR) team over the course of a year developed and participated in PAR methodology by engaging in flexible, but iterative inquiry processes. The CPR group used a blend of PAR, Critical Feminist Ethnography (CFE), and Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms and pedagogical approaches to examine our roles as women in district leadership. As a result, the participants engaged in processes for learning in ways that honored their expertise and derived from their epistemologies as women, rather than more traditional knowledge rooted in *imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchal* societal norms.

In a series of confidential meetings among five women educational leaders who identified as being or wanting to develop into being antiracist leaders, we investigated our identities and analyzed the dilemmas that occurred in our contexts. Every participant held a high-level district leadership position – superintendent, assistant superintendent, or executive director roles in districts located in either California or Texas. Although each participant led districts with written equity values or objectives, each participant acknowledged the gap between espoused and enacted organizational equity actions, and each was interested in improving leadership

approaches that would result in increased racial equity and veritable alignment of equity vision with performance.

The WAELs as a CPR group collaboratively designed the study structure to establish an expectation of confidentiality and adopt an organic meeting structure in which participants could engage collaboratively and organically in PAR cycle of inquiry elements (i.e. reflect, plan, act, observe, and reflect again) through a critical feminist lens (see Figure 10 in Chapter 3). As WAELs brought their experiences from their respective districts to group convenings, they benefitted from additional insight and resources of the affinity group, which would, in turn, influence plans and actions enacted at school and district sites. The study structure resulted in these data: transcripts, agendas, fieldnotes, and journal entries. I collected and coded the data using Saldaña's(2016) framing of exploratory and descriptive coding.

In Chapter 5, I presented the findings that emerged as a result of data collected, coded, categorized, and member-checked from study activities. In this final chapter, I address how findings relate to the study research questions posed and sources from the literature review and new literature as applicable. Then, I present a transformed conceptual framework for all leaders to consider in their professional antiracist leadership development. While the WAEL framework is designed for all antiracist educational practitioners, it intentionally stemmed from a process that privileged women's voices in the leadership conversation, thereby providing a counterbalance to the patriarchal bias that currently persists in professional leadership. The result, when combined with existing frameworks, represents a more balanced representation of antiracist leadership. Finally, I address implications for policy, practice, and research and reflect on my leadership development over the course of this two-year study.

Discussion of Findings

As stated in Chapter 5, four findings emerged from the PAR study: (a) collective processes require power sharing, (b) critical conditions for engagement and learning are ever-changing, (c) women lead *through* gendered marginalization, and (d) dynamic interplay is a necessary condition for equity. The findings deepened my understanding of the three Cs of antiracist pedagogy outlined in Chapter 2, which distilled ideas and approaches from a comprehensive collection of antiracist theorists and social activists, most of whom are women of color. The original three Cs framework for antiracist leadership included collectivism, critical conditions for engagement and learning, and centering of marginalized voices as distinct elements of antiracist pedagogy (Crenshaw, 2015; Davis, 1981; Delpit, 1988; Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; hooks, 1994; Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Love, 2019; Muhammed, 2018; Nasir et al., 2016; Paris, 2012; Steele, 2010). The intent of this study was to learn how women directed their ways of knowing toward antiracist educational leadership, especially given the correlation between the three Cs and stereotypical characteristics of female leadership (Belenky et al., 1986; Kelly & Hale, 1991; Metz & Moss, 2008; Peters & Nash, 2021; Rouleau-Carroll, 2014; Rosener, 1990; Statham, 1987).

Working in Concert to Share Power

The importance of considering all findings in concert, rather than as separate entities, is critical to understanding how WAELs approached the tensions of antiracist leadership as the content of the findings is occurring simultaneously in the leadership contexts and actions of the participants. Moreover, the findings explicitly required sharing power and privilege as the prerequisite for enacting collectivist leadership approaches. As discussed further in Chapter 5, implementing collectivist leadership in most organizations is a risk because leaders are

questioning the usual hierarchical assumptions; they are countering organizations in which the will of majority or the will of a single leader holds power, and some members in the community become marginalized. Similarly, an organization that listens to marginalized voices but neglects to establish appropriate conditions to respond to the needs of those marginalized can be ineffective and deemed inauthentic. Finally, an organization that focuses solely on marginalized voices risks establishing conditions that serve a small group rather than the collective; thus, in that organizational structure, they are recreating oppressive power dynamics that collectivist leadership intends to disrupt. As Habermas (1984) suggests, when we are fostering more human conditions in our organizations by attending to the life world, we must always be cautious of how the systems world can colonize and inhabit the life world. As a result, the very people who want to disrupt power systems may reproduce them if they are not careful to insist of new ways of knowing and doing in the context.

The WAELs addressed the tensions of antiracist leadership by enacting ways of knowing and being antiracist leaders in concert, which required adept interpersonal navigation between members of their communities. When utilizing power-sharing collective practices such as consensus building protocols or community engagements, WAELs collaboratively established equity-minded norms, such as “Wear your leadership ‘hat’ while being mindful of voices not in the room” or “We are the change agents,” and paired norms with explicit equity-minded organizational values (Fieldnotes, October, 2022). The process guided the team to establish conditions that acknowledged and supported the needs of the collective as well as the needs of those that may be marginalized, or have less organizational power, within the organization. WAELs uplifted the importance of communication, transparency, collaboration, resource sharing, and relational accountability as necessary components of collectivist leadership. WAELs

utilized these tools to authentically share power and enact distributed leadership. Otherwise, they feared community engagements would be deemed inauthentic, transactional, or fake, which was counter-productive to the transformational leadership WAELs sought to enact. Instead, they wanted to collectively empower their communities to influence and/or determine organizational conditions that supported their full range of constituents.

Interestingly, WAELs recognized that they often lacked a certain level of empowerment within their organization, even as high-level district leaders. While advocating for change within their communities, they often endured oppressive conditions and double standards. The tension mirrored DuBois's (1909) concept of "double consciousness," in which Blacks and other marginalized groups in America experience the internal conflict of understanding oneself through the eyes of society while recognizing a truer self within. In order to navigate this *twoness*, marginalized peoples are forced to hold the tension between socially-viewed and personally-developed identities. In order to strive for success, they must either hold the burden of this double consciousness or find ways to reconcile the differences.

Although at times the WAELs were doing what might be termed double work, they were willing to navigate *status quo* leadership expectations while working on behalf of change. For example, they reported filling in professional gaps in order to shore up the strength of the collective organization; in that case, WAELs stepped into support roles based on the needs of their organizations while deferring or simultaneously holding leadership roles rooted in their unique professional aspirations. In their experiences, social stereotypes allowed men much more freedom to lead with personal legacy in mind, which included behaviors such as bringing in initiatives to enhance their educational communities. Conversely, WAELs sought to lead by uplifting initiatives from their community to enhance community experiences while attuning to

organizational gaps so that the conditions holding these initiatives would facilitate success. By navigating two spaces in one, WAELs transformed their communities through community-based organizational leadership and served in the supportive, relational, and collaborative roles stereotypically expected of women in leadership (Velasco, 2019). However, as always, women need to recognize the need for self-care so they have the energy to lead. A woman needs to ensure that her moral compass does not stagnate in the conventional moral posture (responding most to the needs of others); instead, she should strive for post-conventional stage (Gilligan, 1982). At that stage, women realize that the focus is on the moral imperative of justice which requires each person to attend to the needs of self so that she can be adequately prepared to meet the needs of others.

In the end, these experiences informed WAELs' epistemological lenses of how to enact equity. In processing and internalizing the tension of their double consciousness, WAELs further clarified their conceptions of equity and the conditions that would be needed in order to empower both their collective communities and those marginalized within them. hooks (2013) expressed this experience within the context of the contemporary feminist movement:

The contemporary feminist movement pushed the discourse of race and racism in the United States in far more progressive directions than any other liberation struggle. Significantly, radical visionary feminist insistence that we examine the intersections of race sex and class has forged a new foundation for understanding race. It began to create a contact for feminist solidarity between masses of women across race and class. It started a profound focus on whiteness, white privilege. And it allowed women to see clearly that a politically grounded solidarity across race was utterly threatening to imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As feminist thinking and practices

gain power and momentum, creating a revolution of values in our lives, so has the anti-feminist backlash. (hooks, 2013, p. 40)

WAEs acknowledged that their experiences were often inequitable. Even if they did not always feel empowered to change their conditions, they recognized the intersections of race and gender and committed to change conditions for the next generation.

Even so, WAEs felt empowered through our convenings to begin advocating for more equitable professional working conditions. At the beginning of the PAR study, WAEs were willing to navigate gender double standards in order to hold leadership positions and ultimately empower their communities towards enacting change. Toward the end of our convenings, however, some WAEs began to advocate more strongly on their behalf, which led to both positive and negative consequences. For example, one WAE advocated for more time to consider a contract renewal. When her supervisor continued to pressure her because “he was looking out for her,” despite her legal advisors indicating differently, she eventually pushed back and questioned his intentions which led to some uncomfortable but empowering moments (Journal entry, December 5, 2022). In other cases, a WAE decided to take a sabbatical, and another spoke to her board members about improving her working dynamics. In doing so, they each sought to improve conditions for more fair employment. As hooks (2013) stated,

Our theory was far more progressive and inclusive in its vision than our everyday life practice. In our everyday lives all of us confront barriers to communication—divisive hierarchies that make joining together difficult, if not impossible. Many of us found that it was easier to name the problem and to deconstruct it, and yet it was hard to create theories that would help us build community, help us border cross with the intention of truly remaining connected in a space of difference long enough to be transformed. (p. 2)

Once deemed trustworthy and safe, the WAEL affinity group provided a space where WAELs could not only deconstruct the inequities they faced but consider ways of addressing them. Admittedly, addressing inequities often created tension, but the burden of holding this tension became a shared responsibility, rather than a burden carried by a sole WAEL internally.

Leading *Through* Marginalization

The original three Cs framework included the centering of marginalized voices; however, the transformed framework that resulted from this study accentuates an important prepositional change from “centering *on* marginalized voices” to “leading *through* marginalization.” The change further demonstrates the epistemological shift from leadership rooted in the traditional, directive stance of acting *upon* others to the more interpersonal, collaborative stance of acting in accordance *with* the environment and those within. Moreover, the change of nomenclature emphasizes the power-sharing shift of WAELs and the communities they serve from being passive recipients of attention to being active agents of change, empowered to build on the knowledge of self and community to enact transformational collective leadership. For WAELS, leading *through* marginalization is twofold: (a) Leaders must understand and withstand oppressive factors within their environment that impact their leadership, and (b) leaders must understand, own, and utilize their understanding of personal marginalization to use positional authority to demarginalize conditions for others.

Through the process of acknowledging and integrating marginalization into ontological and epistemological leadership lenses, WAELs developed *separate* and *connected* cognitive abilities that helped them navigate *through* the tensions of double consciousness in ways that helped them better understand how to support the students they served (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Love & Guthrie, 1999). In employing separate ways of knowing, WAELs

evaluated and determined leadership choices objectively, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, removed from gendered social stereotypes and expectations. In employing connected ways of knowing, WAELs analyzed and decided leadership choices subjectively, engaging with and listening to members of their communities and drawing on knowledge that stemmed from expanded sets of contextualized community experiences. They valued connected ways of knowing as a source of increased understanding with multiple perspectives, while separating, navigating, and sometimes addressing patriarchal values and social expectations that influenced these contexts. WAELs utilized both ways of knowing to develop knowledge, skills, tools, and dispositions to be improve the efficacy of antiracist leadership approaches.

Peters and Nash (2021) describe leading *through* marginalization as intersectional leadership; they studied the unique capacity of Black women to resist oppressive leadership. They attributed this phenomenon to their awareness that identity-based marginalization is a form of oppression that Black women inequitably experience being Black and women. “Intersectional leadership explicitly acknowledges the multiplicative influences of marginalization centering race and gender, and across planes of identity, emboldening historically underserved individuals and communities to walk in the full truth of their distinctive existences” (Peters & Nash, 2021, p. 22).

Likewise, WAELs epistemologically connected their experiences with inequity as reason to increase opportunities and remove inequitable barriers for the students and communities they served. For WAELs, “intersectional leadership explicitly leverages authority to serve and protect historically underserved communities, fortifying communities through the authentication of the leader’s responsibility to fearlessly confront injustice” (Peters & Nash, 2021, p. 22). During our meetings, injustice referred to students of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ youth,

and other recognized marginalized identity groups within the collective. By leaning into intersectional leadership and leading *through* marginalization, WAELs understood that the conditions they implemented as leaders would have to be varied and responsive to the need of the groups they intended to serve. In some cases, their intersectionality gave them insight into what those needs may include. In some cases, their awareness of their intersectionality gave them an awareness of groups that they may not identify with but still had a responsibility to serve. In recognizing that they may lack the understanding of what leadership moves may be needed, they employed an inquiry mindset to garner input. For example, when time permitted, WAELs proactively hosted community engagements, facilitated affinity groups, and distributed feedback surveys. They intentionally did this only when they authentically intended to use feedback to change practice and share decision-making power. Otherwise, they understood the cost would be further marginalization, distrust, and disenfranchisement of those they intended to serve.

WAELs recognized that mere awareness of one's intersectionality was insufficient to develop into an antiracist leader. They criticized leaders who stopped at allied awareness and took no active steps to reverse inequities or who purported advocacy but neglected the components of antiracist pedagogy in their approach, thereby rendering their efforts as disconnected and at times insulting. WAELs took mental notes of interpersonal interactions as signals that revealed values and commitment to antiracist work. For example, one WAEL noted that some allies "talk the talk" but center themselves in their advocacy, instead of centering the marginalized voices they seek to serve. Kendall (2020) describes this disconnect as follows:

. . . feminists of all backgrounds have to address would-be allies about the things that we want. And when we act as allies, feminists have to be willing to listen to and respect those we want to help. When building solidarity, there is no room for savior myths.

Solidarity is not for everyone—it cannot realistically include everyone—so perhaps the answer is to establish common goals and work in partnerships. As equal partners, there is room for negotiation, compromise, and sometimes even genuine friendship. Building those connections takes time, effort, and a willingness to accept that some places are not for you. (Kendall, 2020, p. 8)

For this reason, the conditions of the WAEL space remained confidential, safe, consistently aligned to equity values, and focused on improving outcomes for students. Without these conditions, WAELs noted that they may have stopped coming into the space, as it would have mirrored many other social spaces that forced them back into navigating a double consciousness. These everyday spaces mentally taxed WAELs, as they had to invest time and energy into negotiating between peoples, values, and pedagogies—time they were willing to spend to move the antiracist needle forward but needed a break from in order to sustain their work. Instead, the WAEL affinity space felt protected from this tax; it felt socially and emotionally safe, resting in the aligned goals and values of equity in ways that sustained and affirmed their efforts.

When reviewing antiracist leadership specifically, WAELs looked to resources that helped them understand the conditions that reinforce white supremacy; the Minnesota Historical Society’s handout on “White Supremacy Culture: From Dismantling Racism—A Workbook for Social Change Groups” (Jones & Okun, 2001) (see Appendix F) was useful. They surfaced Love’s (2019) definition of a co-conspirator as a way to contrast those who recognize their intersectionality but fall short of taking active steps to dismantle the inequities that stem from identity marginalization. Instead, co-conspirators use their privilege to invite others into power; they are willing to take risks to advance high-quality education for children of color. In taking

active steps, WAELs strived to create what Paris (2012) called a *third space*, where tensions of the double consciousness could be mitigated in culturally affirming schools and districts that “. . . support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously [being offered] access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). By taking leadership steps in partnership with their communities, WAELs strived to create school and district third spaces, where conditions were critically examined to address the unique needs of the students they served, even if critical examination of needs did not always surface immediate answers. One WAEL shared the following excerpt from her journal:

I’m recognizing the dangers of universalizing messages. I am guilty of this. In not wanting to make anyone uncomfortable during professional development, I often try to unite community members around the fact that we all have implicit bias, and we all have moments of feeling like an outsider, etc. But if I don’t fully discuss and explicitly address how institutional, historical, and ongoing racism is markedly different than other situations that require equitable leadership, such as being in a new country for the first time. This is a false equivalency. Intersectionality supports the understanding equity; however, if we quickly pivot to other equity concerns, we have to examine why. Is it to avoid the more challenging conversation of race? Or is it an authentic pulling-in of community members through intersectional leadership? (Aliyah, Journal entry, February 18, 2022)

Even in recognizing the value of intersectional leadership, the WAEL remained critical of how recognizing intersectionality in superficial terms could invertedly reinforce oppressive systems and relationships by promoting false equivalencies. Her critical lens did not inhibit her resolve to continue developing as an antiracist leader; rather, she connected to other ways of knowing. As

Irby (2001) asserts, in order to initiate conditions for change, leaders have to start doing the work (leading *through* marginalization) and allow beliefs to be changed gradually as breakthrough moments occur. “Implementing racially equitable practices before focusing on belief changes is counterintuitive. It asks people to get to work. It creates trouble” (Irby, 2001, p. 213). However, in these moments of trouble, individuals can push to confront their values and beliefs, instead of retreating back into the safety of being stuck, unsure of where to begin. Conversely, this WAEL embraced “the promise of being stuck improving and work[ed] toward continually getting there” (Irby, 2021, p. 224).

Leadership *Third Space*

Participants utilized our WAEL affinity space not only to explore ways to move the needle of antiracist leadership forward in their respective districts, but to protect a *third space* for us to explore and develop leadership approaches that stemmed from authentic personal epistemologies. Paris (2012) credits Gutierrez et al. (1999) and her collaborators for their articulation of third spaces. Gutierrez’s (2008) claims that

. . . teaching and learning is not simply about building bridges for students between the often disparate knowledges of home, community, and school spaces but that teachers and students must bring together and extend the various activities and practices of these domains in a forward-looking third space. (p. 152)

WAELs noted that, although they felt more empowered to create a third space for students as site-level administrators, the higher the district leader position that they assumed, the more likely the organization appeared to default to more traditional leadership approaches that aligned to the *imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*. Just as Paris (2012) and Gutierrez (2008) called for a third space in the classroom, WAELs called for a third space in educational

leadership. In the co-created third space, WAELs reclaimed authentic leadership identities and determined when and how to employ elements of their authentic identities within the context of their respective districts. To do so, WAELs applied the zone of proximal development concept to the communities they led to ensure that leadership approaches employed supported productive organizational maturity (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, WAELs avoided leadership approaches that assimilated to the *imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*, understanding that these approaches would result in stagnant status quo educational results. Similarly, WAELs remained cautious of implementing acute leadership changes that may compromise the reception and implementation of antiracist approaches and/or our positions as leaders altogether. While WAELs led *through* marginalization, our leadership third space offered a welcome space to represent our leadership authentically, consider how marginalization impacted our authentic leadership selves, and determine how to include elements of our authentic leadership within our respective communities in ways that would be effective and productive.

To illustrate, WAELS related the challenges of self-advocacy, even when actively engaging in advocacy on behalf of other marginalized groups. WAELs attributed the hesitancy to the marginalization of stereotypically feminine attributes and the gender double standard, which resulted in a reluctance to enact preferred leadership approaches and pedagogies. WAELs either felt pressured to portray stereotypically feminine leadership, perform stereotypically favored male leadership, or attempt to balance both, all while under the sociopolitical gaze of their constituents and supervisors. Again, this was taxing work. Until a forward-looking third space is normalized, WAELs and other marginalized leaders will continue to rely on affinity spaces and protected third spaces, such as the one created by this study, to safely explore authentically developed, collectively-oriented, and equity-minded leadership.

Thus, the transformed conceptual framework which emerged from the PAR project is meant to support a *third space* of leadership (see Figure 14). This third space holds leadership approaches that stem from the epistemologies of women antiracist educational leaders and the goal of more equitable educational outcomes for students to form a forward-looking leadership profile that has yet to be fully realized. This leadership profile includes the interconnected principles outlined in the study's findings: collective approaches that allow for power sharing, critical conditions that are ever-changing and responsive to the communities they serve, and intersectional awareness wherein leaders draw on their own experiences with marginalization to inform purpose and practice related to equitable leadership decisions in service of others. Although the process and outcomes of the study were grounded in the specific contexts of these particular WAELs, the transformed framework provides insight for those in education and research interested in developing more equitable leadership tools that are leveraged to promote more equitable environments for students.

Implications

In order for WAELs and other marginalized leaders to feel empowered to lead from their unique epistemologies, community members, practitioners, and researchers must normalize approaches that stem from voices of resistance to ensure appropriately balanced representation of the leadership epistemologies follow. The transformed antiracist leadership framework is not an *alternative* to previously accepted models of leadership, it is a normative, balanced framework that arose from the consciousness of women leaders engaged in antiracist praxis. Thus, antiracist leaders, regardless of gender, can employ the transformational practices and possibilities we have identified.

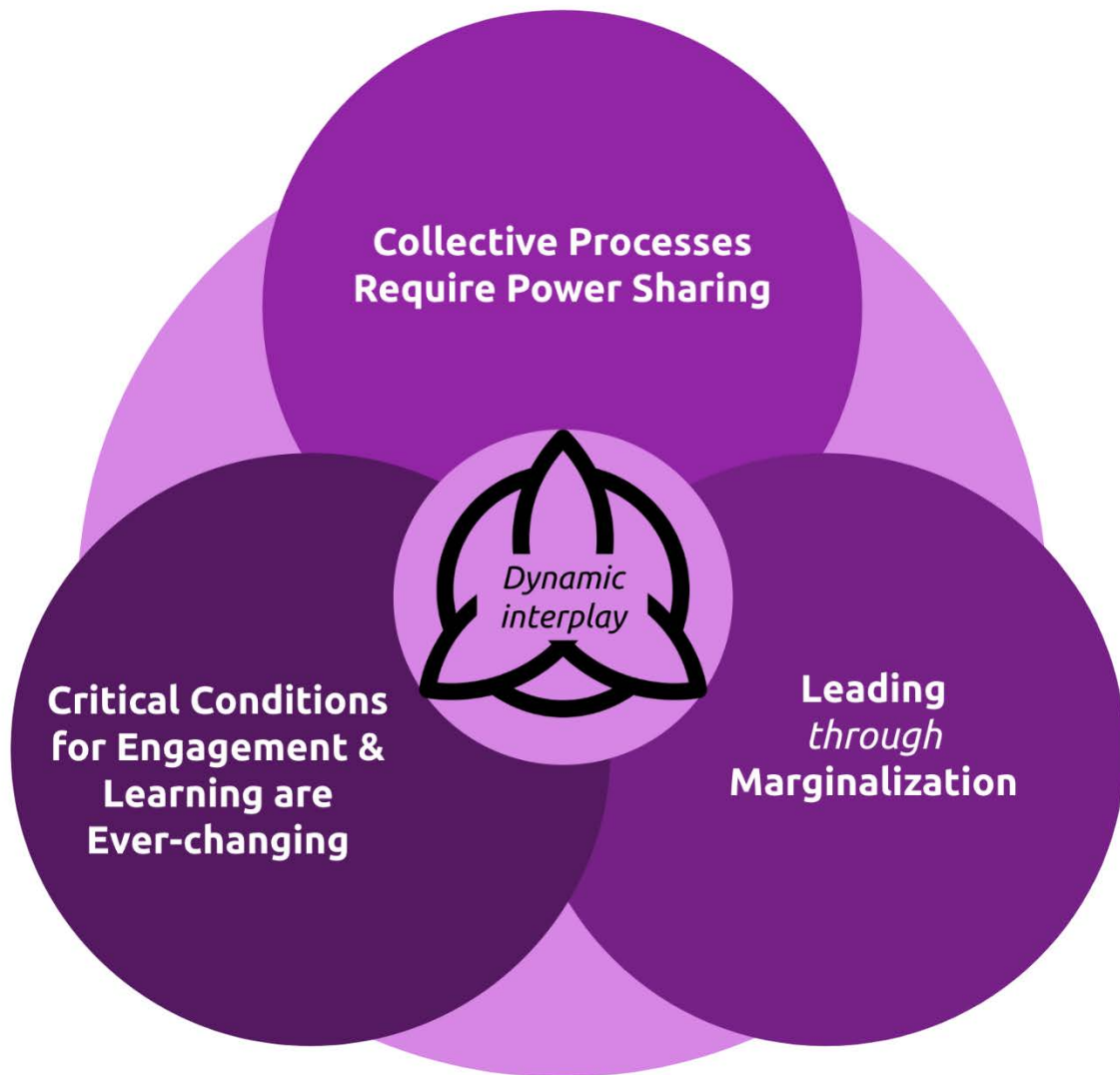


Figure 14. Transformed conceptual framework of antiracist leadership.

Practice

Practitioners understand that current practices are often at odds with antiracist pedagogy, and incredibly challenging to establish and maintain a third space in many American districts. As a small affinity group, WAELs established the critical conditions for learning and engagement that were tailored to our needs and contexts as WAELs. We prioritized the following two conditions for exploring their practice in an affinity space – maintain absolute confidentiality so that members can speak their truth without unintended consequences and privilege interpersonal relationships over meeting agendas and protocols so that members would feel both professionally and personally supported by the affinity space. This model is one that can be used to adapt to other contexts, keeping in mind that conditions may need to shift to meet the particular needs of the members of the group. In normalizing a safe space for leaders to consider antiracist approaches, districts can create favorable conditions for a third antiracist leadership space to emerge.

To use the model in another affinity group space, a key characteristic is that each WAEL participant had at least one preexisting relationship to another member on the team. Members noted that those with existing relationships could more reliably trust the process because relational groundwork had already been established. The feeling was mutual, as I only asked those in my social circle to participate and/or recommend someone to participate if I deeply respected them as both strong district leaders and committed antiracist advocates. Those I did not know directly were recommended by an individual who I or an existing member deeply trusted, and the study benefited from the vicarious trust of those interpersonal relationships. Members noted that the relational accountability existing from these relationships assisted in the development of trust required for this study to authentically impact current practice and move

beyond the often superficial, safe conversations permitted by the sociopolitical contexts in which participants lived and worked.

While my WAEL colleagues have full confidentiality, there are realistic implications for me as the facilitating practitioner researcher of this PAR study. As a Co-practitioner Researcher involved in the study, there may be narratives that my colleagues recognize pertaining to my experiences being a woman of color in district leadership. My sincere hope is that if colleagues do recognize an experience or vignette that may challenge their understanding of a particular situation, that knowledge will not compromise existing interpersonal relationships. Instead, I hope that readers can use our stories to further enact CLE axioms of utilizing dialogue to improve relationships and pedagogy in service of our collective wellbeing as an organization. In fact, I hope that they offer an opportunity to center other women of color who may feel marginalized at times. Regardless of how this study is perceived, I rest in the courage of sharing my story and legitimizing my experience on behalf of other WAELs that may not have the opportunity.

Beyond the creation of affinity spaces and/or leadership third spaces, the study provides a blueprint for other antiracist educational leaders to fold into their leadership identities and practices. To reiterate, the findings from this study are as follows: (a) collective processes require power sharing; (b) critical conditions for engagement and learning are ever-changing; (c) women (or antiracist, intersectional leaders) lead *through* gendered marginalization; and (d) dynamic interplay is a necessary condition for equity. As stated previously, the study prioritized the voices of women in order to balance the resulting findings against current patriarchal frameworks and further explore the congruence of stereotypically feminine leadership approaches with antiracist pedagogy (see Figure 15). Study participants revealed how leading *through* marginalization



Antiracist leaders...

Enact Findings in Concert

If leaders enact three Cs pedagogy, or more specifically, the findings outlined in the transformed antiracist leadership framework (collective processes require power sharing; critical conditions for engagement and learning are ever-changing; antiracist leaders lead *through* gendered marginalization) in concert, they can create conditions for antiracist leadership.

Lead *Through* Marginalization

If leaders acknowledge marginalization across identity planes, including race & gender, they can use authority to enact more culturally affirming spaces for all.

Create “Third” Spaces

If leaders can sustain cultural competence across their own identities, while navigating the dominant culture of leadership, they can protect a “third” space for themselves & others.

Figure 15. Summary of what all antiracist leaders can learn from WAELEs in this study.

required intersectional leadership, which is accessible to most leaders who reflect, understand, and own the impacts of carrying a unique set of personal identities that span race, gender, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and more. Thus, the transformed antiracist leadership framework can and should be assumed, adjusted, and implemented by current and future antiracist leaders of all genders and racial backgrounds who seek to employ balanced, equitable leadership.

Policy

When considering implications for policymakers, supporting legislation and practices that reflect the transformed antiracist leadership framework and support authentic engagement with community, marginalized groups within the community, and the conditions that will achieve outcomes for both.

Local Policy

Leaders are often challenged to support the localized conditions required for the successful implementation of policies intended to achieve equity, especially when schools and districts are often underfunded and low-staffed. However, the more that equitable outcomes are expected, the more equity-minded practices become normalized as a result. For example, California implements a Differentiated Assistance program that highlights academic subgroups who are demonstrating disproportional outcomes in two or more of the following grouped categories: academic achievement or English learner progress, chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, and/or suspension rates. Directors of the program then work with qualifying districts to develop community-driven plans of addressing the opportunity gaps for students. Although a state program, county and district leaders need to carve out time to address the challenges without fear that supervisors, board members, or community members will either act as barriers

and/or reprioritize other items. The practice normalizes the centering of commonly marginalized groups differentiated by such factors as race, language preference, and/or other designations related to special education, foster care, and unhoused statuses.

Still, the role of local educational leaders remains critical if policies are to be successful. This process often includes *tethering* stated institutional values, such as equity, with actions, policies, and processes as a way to shine light on discrepancies when they surface (Velasco, 2009). Tethering occurs at all levels. For board members, that process involves highlighting areas in the district's core values that are related to equity and yet de-emphasized by the district. For executive cabinet members, leaders may tether equity values with practices in leadership, such as developing equity based budgeting formulas or removing deficit language from district documents. For teachers, leadership can support in the establishment of culture that recognizes the ongoing and pervasive work of understanding their students' sociopolitical context and appropriately adjusting and innovating pedagogy to empower students accordingly (Gay, 2018; Neri et al., 2019).

State and National Policy

State and national policymakers can curate spaces to share best practices that legitimize antiracist leadership approaches and provide roadmaps for other districts to consider adopting and adjusting to meet their particular needs. Policymakers should continue to improve assessments and measurement tools, curriculum, and frameworks that reflect both the collective as well as those that fairly and accurately reflect marginalized communities. To illustrate, WAELs shared how sharing alignment with established authority figures, such as State Departments of Education or well-known universities, often legitimized antiracist work, making it harder to dismiss. For example, when a board member dismissed restorative justice practices as

a quality approach to more equitable discipline, one WAEL shared research she found on the California Department of Education website at a board meeting. Even if he did not agree when the presentation concluded, it was harder for him to dismiss restorative practices publicly because his rationale was rooted in a status quo, that according to state level data, maintained disproportionality. When state and national policy members do not express antiracist and equitable policies, it makes it that much harder for leaders to enact reform at local levels.

Research

Similarly, researchers can support state and national policymakers by continuing to add to the body of research that reflect antiracist stances, which includes aligning methodology to the intention of studies. For example, this study explored how WAELs address the tensions of being or becoming antiracist leaders. By matching research methodology with antiracist pedagogies, I was able to merge existing historical and theoretical examples to the ontologies and epistemologies of the study participants. Because these examples were mostly rooted in community and interpersonal relationships, designing research that included isolated interviews and holding research power unilaterally would have mismatched purpose and methodology. Therefore, I established a CPR team to balance power dynamics between participants and myself, and in turn, the CPR team elected to enact research methods, such as Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs), rooted in the belief that we learn best from real, lived experiences, and authentic and honest relationships (Guajardo et al., 2016).

The merging of participatory activist research with critical feminist ethnography empowered study participants to engage in research that sustained their authentic leadership selves and resulted in authentic data collection and deeper collective understanding of the problem of practice. By choosing this methodology, I honored participant epistemologies and

acknowledged their unique challenges and assets as women. Consequently, participants developed a stronger understanding of how they approached antiracist leadership and refined how they implemented antiracist leadership in real time. For participants, the study represented not just a theorizing space but an action space – a space where transformation was possible. Similarly, researchers can adapt methodologies to reflect antiracist pedagogy by honoring the knowledge and experiences of marginalized communities they seek to research.

Moreover, I was permitted further insight into the experiences of WAELs as a member of the community. Although researchers have long recognized the value of a researcher embedding themselves into the community of research, traditional research can have voyeuristic qualities when enacted by an outsider. Professional leaders have spent lifetimes developing their understanding of their profession and the proficiency required to lead. As noted by the WAELs in this study, just as there are leadership moves that are expressed outwardly, there are leadership moves that remain internal and can easily go unnoticed. This is especially true for the WAELs in this study who privileged interpersonal relationships. Relational work was often achieved behind the scenes and in the in-between moments, but it set the conditions for forwarding transformational leadership. Continuing to uplift the value of researcher practitioners and their contributions to research will continue to ensure that research findings reflect the experiences of those engaged in the daily work, including the moments that may be less noticeable to others.

Continuing with research methods and methodologies that match participants and study goals, future research should explore what further differentiates WAELs from other women who may not be driven by their epistemologies to enact equity-minded leadership or intersectional leadership. Although WAELs in this study posited that non-WAELs may have internalized social norms and stereotypes reinforced by social sexual and racial contracts, there may be other factors

worth exploring, such as capacity for different forms of empathy: cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and/or empathic concern.

In addition, future research could explore how educational leaders along the gender spectrum enact antiracist leadership. If the transformed antiracist leadership framework were applied to other groups, what tools could we surface to further clarify and routinize antiracist practices and values? Which tools prove most effective in improving outcomes for students, and which tools need to be created to ensure the outcomes we are measuring are relevant and will lead to a more successful, just, and equitable future society?

Finally, creating a third space for antiracist leaders in isolation is not an antiracist's end goal. WAELs utilized our third space to envision a space not yet created, but once an antiracist district is successfully established, a third space is effectively no longer required. Future research should examine the range of zones of proximal development regarding community antiracist change. If the spectrum starts with closed door, secret antiracist conversations, moves through tempered antiracist change, and ends with radical and ongoing antiracist reflection and change, leaders that may require private affinity spaces on one end of the spectrum yet more public systemic guidance at the other end of the spectrum. Research could explore what types of spaces are required to support the leaders of these communities and how do leaders appropriately assess their communities before making such a decision.

Limitations

The study was established within the scope of one researcher practitioner's work to explore how women educational leaders addressed the tensions of engaging in antiracist work within their district communities. Although the study may be applicable in other contexts, I conducted this with a small group of women educational district or school leaders in specific

contexts within California and Texas. Thus, a new group of participants of different cultural backgrounds in different geographical regions could replicate the study to determine transferability, but outcomes are not dependable across contexts.

Leadership Development

“I believe it is time for women to dig deep, to excavate our voices, to elevate our emotional and relational intelligence, and to transcend the limiting stories of the past” (Lesser, 2020, p. 14). As I started the PAR project, WAEL CPR colleagues and I were intentional about establishing a methodology that reflected antiracist pedagogy and honored our epistemologies as women leaders. If we wanted to know how to do education differently, we had to engage in education differently. We had to approach our work from within instead of tailoring our work to the system. Awati (2013) in discussing Habermas’ conceptions of communication differentiates between *lifeworld*, our everyday worlds filled with family, culture, and informal social interactions, and *system world*, our “common patterns of strategic action that serve the interests of institutions” (n.p.). All too often, our life worlds are colonized with our system worlds, but in breaking away from the system, we assigned value to our life worlds. We were allowing our life worlds to influence our system worlds, and in doing so, we empowered ourselves to create a new third space.

Still, as I began to analyze our shared data, I struggled to believe that it would be possible for women to be able to reconcile these worlds. For example, early in data collection the tension between professional work and family/children life appeared inescapable. During group sessions, the pressure related to child-raising and family-care revealed itself in stories such as guilt from missing bedtime routines, desire to be present for a ballgame, or indecision surrounding maternity leave. Data collected in this category revealed a desire to be adept in both arenas, a

social expectation to do so, the inability to find balance, and consistent, intentional moves to find balance despite the outcomes of previous attempts. We attempted to protect time with children by de-prioritizing work and time away from children to protect quality of work, while commiserating on the moments where they seemed to collide.

We needed to be more aware of how our professional work and family lives revealed discomfort as we recognized that the *system world* had colonized and, to some degree, usurped our *lifeworld*. The double standards experienced in our daily professional and personal lives indicated that we had already been colonized; each conversation or story we told about the double standards we experienced was simply an act of therapeutic resistance. Yet, each small step of resistance seemed to empower us to dream differently, and in some cases, those dreams led to actions resulting in more equitable experiences for our students and ourselves as leaders. As Lorde (1984) describes, “The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken” (p. 44).

As a result of the PAR experience, I am changed as a woman in leadership. I now have the language and experiences to understand the various influences on my leadership as both a woman and an antiracist educator. In some ways, I have simply uncovered that I have so much more to learn. But at minimum, I have learned to examine tension when it surfaces as the tension I feel may lead to other ways of knowing, processing, and leading.

Conclusion

The study began with a call to action to listen to women using their voices of resistance to balance existing conceptions of how to approach antiracist educational leadership. Given the congruence of antiracist pedagogy culled from historical and theoretical literature with socially

influenced female leadership characteristics and stereotypes, the inherent value of this call to action was evident. Through literature reviews and research processes that affirmed the epistemologies of women engaged in this antiracist educational leadership, the transformed *Leadership Third Space* framework was developed to demonstrate how to address the tensions of being or becoming antiracist leaders. This framework included the following tenets: (a) collective processes require power sharing, (b) critical conditions for engagement and learning are ever-changing, (c) women lead “through” gendered marginalization (by navigating barriers and drawing on experiences with inequity to create more equitable conditions for others), and (d) dynamic interplay is a necessary condition for equity. These tenets can be used to further the conversation about quality equitable educational leadership in service of all students.

To be clear, listening to women, by itself, will do nothing to move the needle on district equity outcomes or antiracist educational leadership models. However, if we can build on the knowledge gained from voices of resistance and use this knowledge to reshape power structures and strengthen our collective landscape of educational leadership, then perhaps we can harness the full the strength of our collective power. The next generation of students deserve nothing less.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-
2284 · rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Nicole Pierce](#)

CC: [Matthew Militello](#)

Date: 9/20/2021

Re: [UMCIRB 21-001530](#)

Splitting Open the World with Women for Racial Justice

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 9/20/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1 & 2ab.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
ECU Consent Form.docx(0.01)	Consent Forms
ECU Recruitment Scripts.docx(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Interview_Focus Group Protocols.docx(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Splitting Open the World with Women for Racial Justice(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM: ADULTS



Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Splitting Open the World with Women for Racial Justice: What happens when women educational leaders share ontologies and epistemologies in service of antiracism?

Principal Investigator: Nicole A. Pierce-Davis	Telephone Number: (925) 413-4443
Study Coordinator: Dr. Matthew Militello	Telephone Number: 252-328-6131

Participant Full Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____
Please PRINT clearly

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this participatory action research (PAR) project is to understand how antiracist school leadership can be approached through a female ontological perspective. The theory of action asserts that if female school leaders convene together with the goal of surfacing, understanding, and addressing the tensions of leading for racial equity, then participants will expand their collective knowledge of how to improve approaches and outcomes regarding their own antiracist work. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a self-identified female school or district administrator in the process of being or becoming an antiracist educational leader. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn more about how educational leaders who similarly seek to disrupt racial inequities in their own school or district communities can do so.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 3-8 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study. However, you should not volunteer for this study if you are under 18 years of age, or if you are on medicine for depression.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted remotely using Zoom virtual conferencing tools. You will need to join via a computer with internet access to a zoom meeting location to be determined approximately six times during the study. The total time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately 10 hours over the next eighteen months.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to participate in an observation during or after research team meetings, focus groups, and community learning exchanges. You may also be asked to participate in an interview and keep a reflective journal. The interviews may be recorded in addition to handwritten notes by research team members. All of the activities and interview questions will focus on your experience as a female educational leader seeking racial equity for students.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of this research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research study and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from interviews and focus groups will be maintained in a secure, locked location (or password protected if being stored on a computer database) and will be stored for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at phone number (925) 413-4443 (Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 4:00pm) or email piercen20@students.ecu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (Monday – Friday, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

Is there anything else I should know?

Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future studies.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.

- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT:

COMMUNITY LEARNING EXCHANGE

Protocol for Community Learning Exchange (CLE) Artifacts

Each semester for the duration of the participatory action research study, the researcher will host a Community Learning Exchange on a topic related to the research questions in the participatory action research (PAR) project. At the CLE, the researcher will collect and analyze artifacts that respond to the specific questions listed below. The researcher will collect qualitative data based on the activities in which the participants engage at the CLE. The data will be in the form of posters and notes that participants write and drawings that participants make in response to prompts related to the research questions.

Participants will include the Co-practitioner Researchers who sign consent forms and other members of the school or district community. All information will be collected, analyzed, and reported in aggregate form without attributing responses to any individual. All responses will be anonymous and no names will be attached to individual written or visual responses.

Anticipated Dates for CLE:

- Spring 2022
- Fall 2022

Number of Participants: 3-8 female district or school administrative educational leaders

Purpose of CLE: To identify and gather data that informs a central research question: How do women educational leaders surface and address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders?

Questions for Data Collection: (CLE questions may change, pending CPR team feedback.)

- What are educational leadership skills, characteristics, abilities, and practices that you possess that you have found the most useful in your work? What do you do as a leader that you don't see many male colleagues doing? What else would you like to do (related to your leadership) that you have been withholding and why?
- What are effective and powerful antiracist leadership skills, characteristics, abilities, and practices that you have found the most effective in your work? If we crosswalk our conversation from previous cycles, are there any similarities that can be surfaced? What are some leadership actions and practices that we are engaging in that aren't currently in the corpus of literature about antiracist leadership that should be?

APPENDIX D: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT: PARTICIPANT JOURNALING

Journal Protocol

Throughout the duration of the participatory action research study, the researcher will encourage participants to keep an interactive journal related to the research questions in the participatory action research (PAR) project. At the end of each cycle, the researcher will collect and analyze journal entries that participants are willing to share with the researcher that respond to the specific questions listed below. The researcher will collect qualitative data based on journal entries. The data will be in the form of notes and drawings that participants document in response to experiences related to PAR participation, research questions, and ongoing fieldwork related to the research questions.

Participants will include the Co-practitioner Researchers who sign consent forms. All information will be collected, analyzed, and reported in aggregate form without attributing responses to any individual. All responses will be anonymous and no names will be attached to individual written or visual responses.

Anticipated Cycles for Journal Collections:

- Spring 2022
- Fall 2022

Number of Participants: 3-8 female district or school administrative educational leaders

Purpose of Participant Journaling: To identify and gather data that informs a central research question: How do women educational leaders surface and address the tensions of being and becoming antiracist leaders?

Sub-questions to Inform Journal Entries: Journaling participants are encouraged to write down ideas, memos (analytic and reflective), experiences, drawings, poems, etc. related to research questions and ecologies of knowing (self, organization, and community) as they surface between and after network convenings. See sub-research questions below.

- What frameworks (knowledge, skills, tools, and dispositions) do women antiracist leaders employ that can add to the current body of educational literature for future generations of anti-racist leaders?
- To what extent do participants use their ontological and epistemological lens to address the tensions that surface when leading for racial equity?
- To what extent do I as an educational leader develop antiracist identity as a researcher practitioner in order to engage other women educational leaders as co-conspirators?

APPENDIX E: SHARED RESOURCE: WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE



Department of Inclusion and
Community Engagement

White Supremacy Culture

From Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, ChangeWork, 2001

This is a list of characteristics of white supremacy culture which show up in our organizations. Culture is powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify. The characteristics listed below are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the group. They are damaging because they promote white supremacy thinking. They are damaging to both people of color and to white people. Organizations that are people of color led or a majority people of color can also demonstrate many damaging characteristics of white supremacy culture.

Perfectionism

- little appreciation expressed among people for the work that others are doing; appreciation that is expressed usually directed to those who get most of the credit anyway
- more common is to point out either how the person or work is inadequate
- or even more common, to talk to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work without ever talking directly to them
- mistakes are seen as personal, i.e. they reflect badly on the person making them as opposed to being seen for what they are mistakes.
- making a mistake is confused with being a mistake, doing wrong with being wrong
- little time, energy, or money put into reflection or identifying lessons learned that can improve practice, in other words little or no learning from mistakes.
- tendency to identify what is wrong; little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what is right

antidotes: develop a culture of appreciation, where the organization takes time to make sure that people's work and efforts are appreciated; develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning; create an environment where people can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results; separate the person from the mistake; when offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism; ask people to offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering criticism

Sense of Urgency

- continued sense of urgency that makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, to think long-term, to consider consequences
- frequently results in sacrificing potential allies for quick or highly visible results, for example sacrificing interests of communities of color in order to win victories for white people (seen as default or norm community)
- reinforced by funding proposals which promise too much work for too little money and by funders who expect too much for too little

antidotes: realistic workplans; leadership which understands that things take longer than anyone expects; discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity, particularly in terms of time; learn from past experience how long things take; write realistic funding proposals with realistic time frames; be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency

Defensiveness

- the organizational structure is set up and much energy spent trying to prevent abuse and protect power as it exists rather than to facilitate the best out of each person or to clarify who has power and how they are expected to use it
- because of either/or thinking (see below), criticism of those with power is viewed as threatening and inappropriate (or rude)
- people respond to new or challenging ideas with defensiveness, making it very difficult to raise these ideas
- a lot of energy in the organization is spent trying to make sure that people's feelings are getting hurt or working around defensive people
- the defensiveness of people in power creates an oppressive culture

antidotes: understand that structure cannot in and of itself facilitate or prevent abuse; understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege); work on your own defensiveness; name defensiveness as a problem when it is one; give people credit for being able to handle more than you think; discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission

Quantity Over Quality

- all resources of organization are directed toward producing measurable goals
- things that can be measured are more highly valued than things that cannot, for example numbers of people attending a meeting, newsletter circulation, money spent are valued more than quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, ability to constructively deal with conflict
- little or no value attached to process; if it can't be measured, it has no value
- discomfort with emotion and feelings
- no understanding that when there is a conflict between content (the agenda of the meeting) and process (people is need to be heard or engaged), process will prevail (for example, you may get through the agenda, but if you haven't paid attention to peoples need to be heard, the decisions made at the meeting are undermined and/or disregarded)

antidotes: include process or quality goals in your planning; make sure your organization has a values statement which expresses the ways in which you want to do your work; make sure this is a living document and that people are using it in their day to day work; look for ways to measure process goals (for example if you have a goal of inclusivity, think about ways you can measure whether or not you have achieved that goal); learn to recognize those times when you need to get off the agenda in order to address peoples underlying concerns

Worship of the Written Word

- if it's not in a memo, it doesn't exist
- the organization does not take into account or value other ways in which information gets shared
- those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in organizations where ability to relate to others is key to the mission
- antidotes: take the time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information; figure out which things need to be written down and come up with alternative ways to document what is happening; work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization (for example, the ability to build relationships with those who are important to the organization's mission) • only one right way
- the belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it
- when they do not adapt or change, then something is wrong with them (the other, those not changing), not with us (those who know the right way)
- similar to the missionary who does not see value in the culture of other communities, sees only value in their beliefs about what is good

antidotes: accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal; once the group has made a decision about which way will be taken, honor that decision and see what you and the organization will learn from taking that way, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen; work on developing the ability to notice when people do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach; look for the tendency for a group or a person to keep pushing the same point over and over out of a belief that there is only one right way and then name it; when working with communities from a different culture than yours or your organization, be clear that you have some learning to do about the communities ways of doing; never assume that you or your organization know what is best for the community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community

Paternalism

- decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it
- those with power think they are capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power
- those with power often don't think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions
- those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does

- those without power do not really know how decisions get made and who makes what decisions, and yet they are completely familiar with the impact of those decisions on them

antidotes: make sure that everyone knows and understands who makes what decisions in the organization; make sure everyone knows and understands their level of responsibility and authority in the organization; include people who are affected by decisions in the decision-making

Either/Or Thinking

- things are either/or, good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us
- closely linked to perfectionism in making it difficult to learn from mistakes or accommodate conflict
- no sense that things can be both/and
- results in trying to simplify complex things, for example believing that poverty is simply a result of lack of education
- creates conflict and increases sense of urgency, as people are felt they have to make decisions to do either this or that, with no time or encouragement to consider alternatives, particularly those which may require more time or resources

antidotes: notice when people use either/or language and push to come up with more than two alternatives; notice when people are simplifying complex issues, particularly when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made; slow it down and encourage people to do a deeper analysis; when people are faced with an urgent decision, take a break and give people some breathing room to think creatively; avoid making decisions under extreme pressure

Power Hoarding

- little, if any, value around sharing power
- power seen as limited, only so much to go around
- those with power feel threatened when anyone suggests changes in how things should be done in the organization, feel suggestions for change are a reflection on their leadership
- those with power don't see themselves as hoarding power or as feeling threatened
- those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ill-informed (stupid), emotional, inexperienced

antidotes: include power sharing in your organization's values statement; discuss what good leadership looks like and make sure people understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others; understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership can be healthy and productive; make sure the organization is focused on the mission

Fear of Open Conflict

- people in power are scared of conflict and try to ignore it or run from it
- when someone raises an issue that causes discomfort, the response is to blame the person for raising the issue rather than to look at the issue which is actually causing the problem
- emphasis on being polite
- equating the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude, or out of line

antidotes: role play ways to handle conflict before conflict happens; distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues; don't require those who raise hard issues to raise them in "acceptable" ways, especially if you are using the ways in which issues are raised as an excuse not to address the issues being raised; once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently

Individualism

- little experience or comfort working as part of a team
- people in organization believe they are responsible for solving problems alone
- accountability, if any, goes up and down, not sideways to peers or to those the organization is set up to serve
- desire for individual recognition and credit
- leads to isolation
- competition more highly valued than cooperation and where cooperation is valued, little time or resources devoted to developing skills in how to cooperate
- creates a lack of accountability, as the organization values those who can get things done on their own without needing supervision or guidance
antidotes: include teamwork as an important value in your values statement; make sure the organization is working towards shared goals and people understand how working together will improve performance; evaluate people's ability to work in a team as well as their ability to get the job done; make sure that credit is given to all those who participate in an effort, not just the leaders or most public person; make people accountable as a group rather than as individuals; create a culture where people bring problems to the group; use staff meetings as a place to solve problems, not just a place to report activities
- I'm the only one
- connected to individualism, the belief that if something is going to get done right, "I" have to do it
- little or no ability to delegate work to others

antidotes: evaluate people based on their ability to delegate to others; evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team to accomplish shared goals

Progress is Bigger, More

- observed in systems of accountability and ways we determine success
- progress is an organization which expands (adds staff, adds projects) or develops the ability to serve more people (regardless of how well they are serving them)
- gives no value, not even negative value, to its cost, for example, increased accountability to funders as the budget grows, ways in which those we serve may be exploited, excluded, or underserved as we focus on how many we are serving instead of quality of service or values created by the ways in which we serve

antidotes: create Seventh Generation thinking by asking how the actions of the group now will affect people seven generations from now; make sure that any cost/benefit analysis includes all the costs, not just the financial ones, for example the cost in morale, the cost in credibility, the cost in the use of resources; include process goals in your planning, for example make sure that your goals speak to how you want to do your work, not just what you want to do; ask those you work with and for to evaluate your performance

Objectivity

- the belief that there is such a thing as being objective
- the belief that emotions are inherently destructive, irrational, and should not play a role in decision-making or group process
- invalidating people who show emotion
- requiring people to think in a linear fashion and ignoring or invalidating those who think in other ways
- impatience with any thinking that does not appear “logical” to those with power

antidotes: realize that everybody has a world view and that everybody’s world view affects the way they understand things; realize this means you too; push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you; assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is

Right to Comfort

- the belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort (another aspect of valuing “logic” over emotion)
- scapegoating those who cause discomfort
- equating individual acts of unfairness against white people with systemic racism which daily targets people of color

antidotes: understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning; welcome it as much as you can; deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into a larger picture; don't take everything personally

One of the purposes of listing characteristics of white supremacy culture is to point out how organizations which unconsciously use these characteristics as their norms and standards make it difficult, if not impossible, to open the door to other cultural norms and standards. As a result, many of our organizations, while saying we want to be multicultural, really only allow other people and cultures to come in if they adapt or conform to already existing cultural norms. Being able to identify and name the cultural norms and standards you want is a first step to making room for a truly multi-cultural organization.

