Chapter 13: Insights from a Critical Qualitative Inquiry in Leadership Scholarship

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Sharrell Hassell-Goodman is a Ph.D. candidate at George Mason University in the Higher Education program with a concentration in Women and Gender Studies and Social Justice and a certificate in qualitative research. Sharrell has taught courses on identity, social justice, career development, leadership, and diversity. Prior to teaching she served as a student affairs professional in the areas of sorority and fraternity life, residence life, and academic advising. Sharrell is a part of a research collective interested in shifting research practices to be more inclusive, less oppressive, and explicitly anti-racist and decolonial. Sharrell's current research interests include first-generation college students, Black women in higher education, DEI pedagogy, anti-racist research approaches, social justice advocates in higher education, identity and leadership, and critical participatory action research, and anti-racist/ decolonial research methods.

Lauren N. Irwin is a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Iowa's Higher Education and Student Affairs program and a research assistant in the Center for Research on Undergraduate Education. Lauren's research uses critical organizational perspectives and theories of race and racialization to interrogate whiteness in higher education contexts. Lauren previously created and ran a leadership education program at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Further, Lauren contributed to the 2020-2025 National Leadership Research Agenda and has authored critical pieces about leadership practice, including "Strengths so white", which continues to be the *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs'* most downloaded article. As a queer, white, cisgender woman, she is committed to engaging in teaching, research, and service that pursues social justice and equity in higher education and leadership education.

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Trisha Teig is a Teaching Assistant Professor in leadership studies at the University of Denver. She is the faculty director for the Colorado Women's College Leadership Scholars Program, a program focused on supporting leadership learning for first generation, women of color, and LBGTQ+ identified undergraduates. Prior to becoming a faculty member, she served in student affairs administration for ten years. She focuses her research through a critical feminist lens in collaboration on topics of gender, critical leadership pedagogy, and college student leadership development. A white, straight, woman, she centers her work in critical leadership studies from a perspective of collaboratively dismantling and re-imagining leadership learning for equity and justice.

Abstract

Critical interrogation, deconstruction, and reconstruction of leadership texts, tools, and scholarship are necessary to achieve a more equitable future in the field of leadership studies. This chapter highlights the experiences and learning from a team of early-career scholar-practitioners engaged in a critical inquiry process about leadership learning, development, and scholarship in higher education. Critical inquiry illuminates present inequities to facilitate the imagination of a more equitable future. Following a brief review of the purpose and process of our collective work, we present the ways we observed power as a central tension in developing a research agenda for leadership scholarship. Finally, we engage in problem-posing and future-casting to offer possibilities for the future of leadership education.

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The Critical Inquiry Team and Process

Critical interrogation, deconstruction, and reconstruction of leadership texts, tools, and theories are essential to advancing the field of leadership studies (Dugan, 2017). Pasque et al. (2012) describe critical qualitative inquiry as a radical, democratic act that illuminates the inequitable present to imagine a more equitable future. Given these aims, our team of early-career scholar-practitioners was charged with engaging critical inquiry to promote a more equitable future for leadership learning and development in higher education. This chapter serves as a summary of our experiences and learning. After briefly reviewing the purpose and process of our work as a collective, we present the ways we observed power as a central tension in developing a research agenda for leadership scholarship. In the spirit of problem-posing and future-casting, we conclude with our critical hopes and wonderings about the future of leadership education.

Critical Inquiry Team's Purpose, Process, and Positionality

The six of us were invited to serve as members of the critical inquiry team by the editors of this text. As a group of mostly early-career scholar-practitioners, we were honored to be recognized in this way, particularly by Susan Komives and Julie Owen who have cultivated a rich and meaningful legacy in leadership education scholarship. Moreover, this invitation affirmed the critical lenses that we bring to our leadership education work. We served as additional reviewers for the text's chapters with an intentional focus on interrogating the functions of identity, equity, and power within the research agenda. This form of power-sharing was a purposeful disruption to traditional dynamics bound in the peer review and academic publication process.

The Process

The critical inquiry process had both individual and collective components. Individually, we reviewed and provided feedback on two chapter outlines and subsequent chapter drafts. Each of us also served as secondary reviewers for two additional chapter drafts. Collectively, we engaged in hours of dialogue over the course of four meetings in which we discussed each chapter at length, as well as themes we noticed across chapters. These conversations provided space for us to highlight each chapter's strengths while also grappling with the authors' critical gaps or areas of improvement. We took this task seriously and treated it with a great deal of care, providing feedback and recommendations to the editors and the chapter authors who then incorporated them into their editing of the overall volume. In addition to reviewing the texts' chapters, we were tasked with composing this chapter – a chapter that summarizes our learning, experience, and concluding thoughts.

Positionality

As scholar-practitioners who center critical approaches to leadership, we understand the importance of naming, accounting for, and attending to one's positionality throughout the research and writing process. We understand a scholar's positionality to include their identities, lived experiences, and beliefs, all of which influence the ways in which new knowledge is generated, conceptualized, and shared. As a team, we embraced positionality work throughout our collaboration, constantly reflecting on who we are and how we show up to the work of leadership education. We also wonder about traditional practices of positionality-sharing and how they might perpetuate tokenism, performativity, and other issues that simply do not enhance one's research or writing. In our discussion on this chapter's section, we identified a number of ways we could thoughtfully share our individual positionalities; still, we remained unsatisfied.

As a six-member team with a range of social identities, some marginalized and some privileged, we worried that each of us drafting one or two lines that simply list our identities might not feel meaningful enough to include. To that end, we strongly considered not including individual positionality statements. Ultimately, we agreed on a both/and approach in which we transparently shared our thinking around individual positionality-sharing, highlighting both its importance and its messiness, while also giving space for each of us to share a bit about our positionality to this project and to the landscape of leadership education. We recognize that our conscious decision to engage in positionality-sharing in this both/and way may generate confusion or critique for some readers. Ultimately, we hope that transparently explaining our thinking is generative and encourages other scholar-practitioners to be both critical and purposeful in when, how, and why they decide to share their positionalities.

- **Lauren** - As a queer white cisgender woman critically interrogating power, including whiteness, I recognize that my scholarship cannot and does not absolve me from complicity with whiteness and other forms of oppression (e.g., Applebaum, 2010). Thus, I try to remain vigilant about how my ways of knowing, being, and doing in and beyond the academy reinscribe whiteness, and white people, as authoritative (Applebaum, 2013; Foste, 2020). Broadly, I approach this work from a place of love and critique – grounded in ongoing critical reflection – to contribute to leadership education's evolution towards an inclusive, empowering, and agentic space.

- **Danyelle** - In my practice and approach to leadership education, my experiences as a Black cisgender woman from a working-class, immigrant household are most salient. Conscious of the multitude of people, circumstances, and policies across time that have shaped my current positionality, I see my work as one contribution to a broader

movement of liberation and justice. This approach necessitates critical reflection on the link between knowledge and power in research and how that relationship impacts those of us on the margins. Additionally, being a full-time staff leadership educator in higher education shapes my approach to critical inquiry of leadership scholarship.

- **Adrian** - I approach my work and scholarship within leadership education with the knowledge that my privileged identities (e.g., white, cisgender, straight) have facilitated my experience within the academy. This awareness fuels my life-long commitments to critical self-reflection, learning and unlearning, and the pursuit of equity and justice. My experiences and identity as a dual citizen adds a layer of complexity and nuance in how I interpret the world and engage with others. My marginalized identities as a Jewish woman with a working-class upbringing also anchor my work to socially-just leadership education and serve as a connection point for solidarity building with others who hold marginalized identities.

- **Sharrell** - As an African American biracial woman with a learning disability, who grew up as a working-class and proud first-generation Ph.D. student, I am aware of the ways in which my identities impact how I navigate the world. At the same time, I recognize how both the minoritized and privileged identities (as a straight cisgender woman) I hold impact how I navigate the world and influence my lens as a researcher. Working towards critical reflexivity, my interest is to maintain an ethic of humility to work with others (Henderson & Esposito, 2019) and always to consider how research is answerable (Patel, 2016) to not only those involved but also to those affected by the research in which I engage. Finally, through reflexivity, I hope to move towards deep questioning about my assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs around research (Jones, et al., 2022).

- **Trisha** - As a cisgender, straight, white woman, I identify with the majority identities of most leadership educators (see Jenkins & Owen, 2016) in positionality of privilege. In considering this social location as a critical leadership scholar, I must integrate critical reflexivity about my identities, particularly my dominant identities in race and sexuality in relationship to how I research, write, and teach leadership from an anti-racist, feminist lens.

- **Nick** - In examining my positionality to this particular task of critical inquiry, I think about my whiteness, my queerness, my identity as a cisgender man, and my role as a tenure-track faculty member. As a member of this team, I was mindful of the privilege I carry into this work, accounting for the amount of space I occupied in our conversations while also interrogating my own thinking and learning and the ways in which they might perpetuate white dominance and other harmful norms bound in the academy.

As a collective, our positionality is grounded in a diverse set of experiences that have brought us to and kept us critically engaged in leadership education as scholars and practitioners. These experiences have, at times, led us to question our place in the leadership education field (or, at least, our desire to remain in the leadership education field). That is, our experiences have been both marginalizing *and* empowering. Our experiences have cultivated both frustrations over the status quo *and* hope for the field's future. With a shared critical epistemological commitment, we came together around a goal of grappling with issues of power, equity, and justice in leadership education, understanding that this work is hard, imperfect, and never complete. Together, with humility and compassion, we joyfully took on the task of critical inquiry.

Manifestations of Power in Leadership Scholarship

Individually and collectively, as a critical inquiry team, we noticed that tensions related to power continued to arise in the processes of creating a research agenda for leadership studies. At its core, research contributes to the power-knowledge nexus that shapes how and what we know. Specifically, we urge researchers to be conscious of how power manifests in their epistemological approaches, understanding and application of theory, and methodology. We noticed that when power was named and accounted for in the chapters, there was no cohesive definition or conceptualization of power. Given the wealth of scholarship about power across multiple disciplines, we consider cohesive conceptualizations of power to be instrumental to leadership scholarship that promotes equity and justice.

Each chapter in this text engaged with the vastness of published work to varying degrees to offer future directions. In doing so, discussions of epistemology, paradigms, methodology, and theory arose. Authors frequently detailed what methods and theories were commonly used in existing scholarship and offered "new" methodological and theoretical perspectives for advancing leadership education research. Engaging with these reviews illuminated a tension in wanting to acknowledge existing scholarship without replicating or perpetuating exclusionary practices. Authors, and our team, grappled with what is available to cite and what has often been cited. The limitations of existing scholarship shaped literature reviews and the construction of legitimate knowledge across chapters.

In presenting literature reviews, many chapter authors acknowledged the dominance of quantitative inquiries that used positivist and post-positivist approaches. Further, some authors recognized that existing scholarship often centered on white people and white-dominated United States contexts and institutions. Despite the consistency of these trends in the existing

scholarship, scholars unevenly acknowledged and troubled the implications of these realities. Commonly, authors recommended scholar-practitioners take up critical, Indigenous, and post-structural theories, epistemologies, and methodologies. In considering these recommendations, we confronted multiple tensions related to power. Here, we summarize how literature reviews, and the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological recommendations that followed, led us to a number of cautions and recommendations.

Interrogating Power in Scholarly Approaches

First, not every theory or method is for every scholar. We are glad many scholars in this text, and more broadly, are advocating for epistemological and methodological approaches that challenge power and decenter white supremacist and settler-colonial norms in research (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Pasque et al., 2012; Patel, 2016; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Yet, positionality and scholarly commitments matter in these efforts. What might it mean for non-Indigenous scholars to utilize Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies? What are the possibilities and dangers? What responsibility do scholars have in taking up particular approaches? We are not advocating for reductionist approaches that equate identity with epistemology or scholarly perspective. All scholars must critically reflect on and make explicit their motivations, perspectives, and orientations to scholarship (Beatty et al., 2020; Pasque et al., 2012). Without ongoing learning and reflection, we worry about the misapplication or appropriation of theories and methodologies intended to counter ways of knowing and approaches to research that have harmed people and disciplines.

Shallow engagement or co-optation has the potential to at best, provide a seemingly cosmetic fix to structural flaws and at worst, erase scholarly lineages. Harris and Patton (2019) reviewed the (mis)uses of intersectionality in higher education scholarship and found many

scholars applied intersectionality incorrectly and often failed to engage with the concept's rich

lineage, rooted in Black women's theorizing and activism. These practices undermine the social

justice aims that intersectionality advances. As such, we ask scholars to engage thoughtfully and

faithfully with perspectives and approaches that center power and to make explicit their goals

and commitments.

Challenging Additive Approaches to Addressing Power

Second, we urge scholars to challenge additive approaches to theory development. By

additive approaches, we mean approaches that seek to simply extend the boundaries of

acceptable theories, perspectives, and methodologies in leadership scholarship. It is not enough

to just expand notions of scholarly legitimacy or name what theories and approaches have

dominated to this point. In reviewing and interrogating existing scholarship, we urge scholars to

acknowledge the reasons *why* and *how* certain theories and methods have dominated ways of

knowing and existing scholarship. Such an interrogation opens possibilities for unsettling

normative ways of knowing and notions of legitimate knowledge as well as transforming the

future of theorizing (Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017).

The absence and erasure of scholars, theories, and methodologies that challenge the

hegemony of whiteness, masculinity, heteronormativity, colonization, and capitalism is anything

but accidental. Interrogating who and what has been validated as legitimate knowers and

knowledge contributes to notions of expertise that are laden with, and often reinforce, power

inequities (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzales & Núñez, 2014; Posselt et al., 2020).

In these interrogations, how might we choose to let some theories go rather than keeping

problematic or inaccurate views alive as zombie theories (Dugan, 2017)? In short, literature

reviews must do more than just summarize existing findings and approaches but should

interrogate disciplines' history and how scholarship constructs a narrow sphere of legitimate knowledge and knowers on a topic (to read more about leadership's disciplinary roots, see Chapter 8).

Troubling Power Within Notions of "Expertise"

An issue driving this narrow sphere of legitimate knowledge and knowers is assumptions around expertise. We ask leadership scholars to confront how our assessments and assumptions about expertise reflect larger structures that shape the leadership canon, what types of knowledge are valued, and whose expertise is most often cited in leadership education.

Many of the contributing chapter authors are considered experts and have significant experience in leadership education and higher education. In fact, members of our collective at times grappled with how to provide feedback to chapter authors with noteworthy contributions to the leadership education field. While we desired to engage with the authors' contributions to produce more expansive and equitable perspectives, we had first to confront how we approached expertise. Most members of the collective learned about leadership from this text's contributing authors and editors but were now tasked with critiquing their work. Even as we affirmed our education and experience, some of us second-guessed our ability to provide the "right" questions and critiques in the feedback process. This experience troubled our previous notions around expertise as demonstrated mastery of specific content that legitimizes one's contributions to that discipline (e.g., Posselt, 2015). Our experiences magnified our existing observations about expertise, including the processes that validate knowledge and position some knowers as experts.

We contend that all scholars should consider concepts of expertise in leadership education and recognize our ability to use expertise to exert power over others. Often leadership education scholarship falls short of considering and interrogating the implications of oppressive

systems in and on leadership. Some authors emphasized contextual notions of power and privilege in leadership theories and practical experiences; others relied on our prompting to engage power and systemic oppression. We recommend that scholars continue to reckon with leadership and its relationship with privilege and oppression (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2018; Beatty & Tillapaugh, 2017; Dugan, 2017; Dugan & Leonette, 2021).

However, access to progressive critical literature is limited, which constrains social justice in practice. Leadership education content knowledge is often fostered within a hierarchy of exclusion (e.g., accessing leadership educator roles or leadership educator foundational knowledge in graduate preparatory programs). Kroll and Guvendiren (2021) noted most higher education and student affairs graduate programs do not have consistent course offerings that allow students to develop foundational knowledge about leadership education theory and practice. Although formal leadership coursework alone does not guarantee the transmission and application of critical perspectives, the exclusion of leadership education knowledge only adds another barrier to scholar-practitioners' access to critical leadership education scholarship. Leadership education knowledge and practices must be accessible (Teig & Dilworth, 2021).

Further, much of the existing scholarship that informs leadership education experiences relies on traditional and validated leadership perspectives, which often fail to connect social justice to leadership education (Dugan & Humbles, 2018) or interrogate legacies of exclusion in leadership education (Guthrie et al., 2016; Teig & Dilworth, 2021). For example, whiteness undergirds many processes for developing and conferring expertise in overwhelmingly white professional leadership educator networks (Rocco & Pelletier, 2019). Said differently, whiteness functions as a "credential in [leadership] education spaces, where white people often hold the power to confer legitimacy and are perceived with greater legitimacy" (Irwin, 2021, p. 145-146).

Whiteness' dominance in conferring leadership educator expertise reflects larger patterns of normalized whiteness in leadership theories and tools (Tapia-Fuselier & Irwin, 2019). Though critical scholar-practitioners have begun to interrogate the impact of exclusionary legacies on leadership education (Mahoney, 2016; Wiborg, 2020), there are opportunities to center liberatory approaches and move away from Western, patriarchal, and colonial types of leadership expertise.

Dominant leadership theories taught many scholars to continue to privilege ontological beliefs around leadership that center oppressive ideologies and preserve normative leadership theories and approaches. These normative beliefs create boundaries around what is considered leadership education scholarship and practice, limiting the infusion and integration of critical and liberatory approaches, and leaving systems of oppression intact (Teig & Dilworth, 2021; Wiborg, 2020). For example, Tapia-Fuselier and Irwin (2019) employed critical whiteness studies to critique StrengthsQuest, a commonly used personal and group leadership development tool, to demonstrate how the tool may invalidate Students of Color's experiences and ways of leading. When tools and theories are applied uncritically, they may insidiously reproduce existing boundaries and perspectives that preserve oppression in leadership education.

Many chapter authors acknowledged the exclusionary nature of leadership theory and educational approaches that centered normative claims around colonial, racist, patriarchal leadership expertise. We also noticed that authors' engagement varied across chapters and often became more explicit through the critical inquiry process – highlighting the utility of collective work rather than individualized work. This evolution demonstrates how challenging it often is to name and disrupt prevailing norms in existing scholarship. Such work requires scholars' sustained commitment to recognizing how their writing may perpetuate deficit approaches.

Additionally, scholars must grapple with ontological considerations that construct a narrow sphere of legitimate knowledge and knowers on a topic. One approach to disrupting these practices is engaging in applied or participatory approaches to leadership scholarship that value and center, rather than extract, minoritized communities' knowledge and experiences. Grounding these approaches in theories like Black Feminist Thought, Indigenous knowledge, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Queer Theory can offer scholarship that counters dominant narratives and practices. Though the canon often limits how we come to know and think about leadership education, there are opportunities for unlearning our taken-for-granted knowledge and practices.

Engaging the Power of Authorial Voice

Authorial voice was another way we noticed power manifest throughout the text. Because research is a process of knowledge production, the author's voice is a tool of power that shapes what is constructed as truth and, as such, should be interrogated. In thinking about the research cited throughout the text, we acknowledge that leadership education, research, and knowledge production are embodied processes that can reproduce inequalities that critical research aims to disrupt. Researchers may claim to "give voice" to participants; however, we encourage researchers and scholar-practitioners to consider and name power. In what ways are participants "voiceless", or rather unacknowledged or silenced? Such questions also invite critical consideration about what inequitable power dynamics are replicated through researcher/participant/co-conspirator relationships. Researchers have a responsibility to consider the implications of their research on the broader community (Magolda & Weems, 2002), including considering how data might be (mis)used, (mis)interpreted, and/or (mis)represented to oppress marginalized communities through dominant narratives, societal policies, and colonized

thinking. Or conversely, by pursuing advocacy, agency, and liberation through research practices and data use.

Authorial voice and positionality powerfully influence and are assets in knowledge production. Published scholarship often privileges "objective" knowledge within Western academic writing and often perpetuates the Cartesian mind/body duality (Shalka, 2020). We caution against practices of disembodied research and writing as it often invalidates subjective ways of knowing and ignores the embodied realities of what Moraga and Anzaldúa (2015) term "theory in the flesh" (p. 19), or how "knowing and meaning making occur within the multidimensionality of the individual's social location (explicitly acknowledging the body, emotions, and lived experiences as marginalized bodies moving within historically situated systems of oppression)" (Shalka, 2020, p. 458). We urge scholars to challenge false distinctions between subjectivity, lived and embodied experience, and academic knowledge to offer accessible theorizing that resonates with and is useful for people's daily lives (hooks, 1984), rather than producing theory for theory's sake.

Embracing the power of the authorial voice means going beyond positionality. Instead, we invite scholar-practitioners to engage with critical reflexivity, a process that calls for deep reflection upon epistemological orientations, social location, personal, cultural, and professional values, and more importantly, reveals the researcher's proximity to power (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022; for more details, engage with the writing prompts offered in this chapter). Critical reflexivity recognizes that social identities are not static, and neither is our relationship to the research and each other; rather it calls for the work to be situationally contextualized and culturally bound (Torres-Olave & Lee, 2020). In doing so, we trouble power-laden notions of "legitimate" knowledge and expertise that fail to recognize the contributions of Scholars of Color

due to the ways Eurocentrism and colonialism maintain and (re-)produce hegemonic knowledge and knowers (Almeida, 2015; Patel, 2014).

To address many of the critiques posed throughout the text, we offer intersectional qualitative research as a way to pursue possibilities for connection and liberation through expanding research topics and practices. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) build on Crenshaw's (1989) formal academic writing on intersectionality, "as research methodology is about contemplating, interrogating, naming, and simultaneously reclaiming and rejecting that nexus between the *known and unknown, invisible and (hyper)visible,* and *humanizing and dehumanizing*" (p. 4, italics included in original). Embracing the messiness of research, especially when engaging with the complexity of human experience and social phenomenon (i.e., leadership), requires scholar-practitioners to grapple with issues of power and to reject notions of objectivity or neutrality within the research process including, but not limited to, methods and dissemination (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Dei & Johal, 2005; Fine, 2018; Lee, 2011).

From Problem-posing to Future-casting

In our chapter's final section, we wish to move into a space of the unknown. We have reviewed the critical inquiry process, identified challenges and inconsistencies across this text's chapters, and interrogated manifestations of power that arose in the process. We conclude with a focus on the "now what?" – where do we go from here? While this question may be addressed in multiple ways, we move from problem-posing to a practice of future-casting. Recent business and technology writers tout the methodological relevance of "future-casting" to "generate unconstrained ideas" for designing into an unrevealed future (Tobias, 2022, para 5). Despite our hesitation to replicate deeply capitalistic concepts and norms, the concept of future-casting most closely reflects the spirit of our offering. We recognize critical inquiry may err on the side of

identifying problems rather than offering solutions. However, we contend scholar-practitioners must simultaneously critique, co-imagine possibilities, and design the future we hope for society. Join us in dreaming about how we may create and enact possibilities for co-learning in leadership education scholarship.

Coming to Terms with the Realities of Power

We addressed the complexities of how we grappled with the concept of power and its many manifestations. Asian-Australian critical feminist scholar Helena Liu (2020) entreated researchers to engage in "undoing and redeeming" (p. 125) leadership to reflect upon and disrupt leadership's inequitable and exclusionary legacies and current practices. Liu (2020) offered three practices for re-creating the study and practice of leadership. First, she posits we must practice self-love by decolonizing our minds from "the taken-for-granted hegemony of white masculinist power and rejecting its hierarchies" (Liu, 2020, p. 127). We caution against uses of "decolonizing" that are not deeply rooted in Indigenous perspectives and methodologies, as "decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). Liu describes this decolonizing process as individualized and contextualized and involving the recognition and disassociation from disempowering and hegemonic messages telling historically marginalized communities we/they are not and should not be leaders. This process is unique to our social location and context. However, this individual reflection and reclamation is an important first step "but is not adequate in and of itself to dismantle the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Liu, 2020, p. 128).

Liu's (2020) second step encourages us to find new ways to relate with others. This is an act of collective solidarity that does not reify competitive and controlling structural norms.

Rather, in collaborative efforts of understanding across difference, we can disrupt power through hierarchy and instead co-create and share power through love and care. These ideas align with our suggestion to wrestle with notions of expertise to disrupt exclusive practices and assumptions about leadership education knowledge holders, producers, and providers. Imagine a world in which we all are affirmed as knowledgeable about leadership because of our lived experiences and can share that knowledge for collective action and disruption of our current inequitable status quo.

Change begins as a collective process of relationships. In *Emergent Strategy* (2017), adrienne maree brown identified change as non-linear, iterative, and influenced by the intentional relationships we co-create with each other and our world. We believe the process of critical inquiry serves as an example of this emergent change process. As leadership educators attending to a broadening understanding and developing perspective of the leadership process, being open to critical inquiry in our scholarship provides tools for a deeper examination of our professional world as well as knowledge production and dissemination processes.

Power as Generative for Reimagining Leadership

In envisioning equitable and inclusive futures for leadership education, we wonder how we might conceptualize and engage power as generative. hooks (2014), echoing Elizabeth Janeway's (1981) feminist theorizing, encourages disbelieving as a way to challenge and engage power to advance social justice:

> By disbelieving, one will be lead towards doubting prescribed codes of behavior and as one begins to act in ways that deviate from the norm in any degree, it becomes clear, that in fact there is no just one right way to handle ideas or events (p. 92).

In this way, disbelieving encourages a practice of questioning and critiquing to unlearn and challenge taken-for-granted practices, knowledge, and ways of leading.

In a similar vein, Liu's (2020) third step exhorts scholars to reimagine leadership. As a socially constructed concept, can we as leadership education scholars be collectively active and responsible in leadership's re-definition? Every choice in the research process – including the literature review, study design, analytical procedure, and dissemination – has powerful implications for how leadership is defined and studied, who is (not) validated as a leader, and what practices are (not) considered leadership. Scholars often point to the plurality of conceptions of leadership and leaders as a potential challenge (Kezar et al., 2006; Riggio, 2011). We offer a reframe: How might the plurality of notions of leaders and leadership be a space of possibility rather than a limitation? When does theoretical or definitional consensus limit our ability to acknowledge and disrupt power inequities? We agree that scholars should clearly explain their orientation to and conceptualization of core concepts, such as leaders and leadership. Yet, the expansive nature of leaders and leadership points to these terms' socially constructed nature. Thus, there are possibilities to deconstruct and reconstruct notions of leaders and leadership in more power-conscious and socially just ways (Dugan, 2017; Liu, 2020).

Finally, we contend understanding the complex nature of systemic oppression in relationship to leadership is a resolute practice for change. Liu (2020) cautions against simplifying these power systems: "When we…confine change to one axis of power at a time, we preserve the dominator culture as a whole" (p. 11). bell hooks (2014) notoriously implemented the laborious descriptive, "imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy" to denote the interlocking systems of power that pervade all aspects of society (p. xv). Her insistence on the phrase persisted because she could not envision a future of liberation for some without focusing

on liberation for all. By embracing these concepts and practices, we believe leadership education scholarship can future-cast towards consideration and use of power as generative and productive in our efforts for change.

Conclusion

Leadership scholarship illuminates and shapes the processes and content of leadership education. The editors of this book invited us, a group of early career scholar-practitioners, to engage in a critical inquiry process to interrogate identity, equity, and power within and across the text's chapters. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this critical inquiry process further highlighted how power manifests and is reproduced in leadership education research. In our individual observations and collective conversations, we noticed how power pervaded leadership scholarship's epistemologies, theories, and methodologies. Even senior scholars' encouragement and invitation to provide feedback to established leadership scholars magnified power differences and notions of "expertise".

To meet the dynamic needs of our communities and world, leadership education scholarship must interrogate how power shapes and directs who knows, what we know, and how we know it. Critical inquiry, as a tool for illuminating inequity, can be instrumental in us moving towards more socially just leadership education scholarship and practice. In support of these aims, we share questions that guided our conversations and thinking for your critical reflection, engagement, and discussion:

- As a scholar-practitioner, how do my identities, epistemological commitments, and proximity to power influence how I engage in leadership education (research)?

- Who do I consider to be an expert in leadership studies? What beliefs about expertise inform this consideration?

- What does my embodied leadership practice look like? How does this inform how I engage with leadership scholarship?

- In attempting to unlearn harmful and dominant norms in leadership scholarship and practice, what is my role as a leadership educator in facilitating these processes with students?

- How am I being congruent in my espoused social justice values and actions?

We cannot stop after reflection and acknowledgment, as change requires "intentional adaptation" (brown, 2017, p. x). Rather than being solely reactive in our change processes, we must be proactive and future-oriented. Critical inquiry offers one tool to support intentional adaptation and learning in support of leadership scholarship and practice for a more just world.

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