LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT AFFAIRS: THE RELEVANCE OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDENTITY IN ELICITING STUDENT VOICE

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Abstract

This study examined the development of student voice of a highly diverse group of graduate students as they were affected by evolving historical consciousness and social identities. What is the relevance of students learning the history and purposes of education while reflecting on their own personal experiences and beliefs toward understanding their social identities? How did this development of their social identities influence Master's degree students' voices and learning to be transformative, social justice-oriented leaders in higher education student affairs? Using narrative analysis as a methodology, this paper scrutinized student writings to answer these questions. Findings reflected the relevance of historical consciousness and understanding of salient and intersecting identities in beginning to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1973). There were further indications of the students drawing connections between critical consciousness and being social justice-oriented leaders. Three general themes emerged: 1.) Most students were generally unaware of the perspectives of history that has brought forth the experiences and voices of marginalized populations; 2.) Learning about the historical experiences of disenfranchised populations often led to deeper contemplation and understanding of their own racialized, classed, and gendered identities; 3.) Many students who previously lacked historical consciousness and awareness of their own social identities, began to make linkages to their role as social justice leaders with engaged responsibility for social change efforts.

Introduction

Increasing college student activism in recent years may have put to rest concerns about student passivity and lack of political engagement. Concurrently, the eye-opening influence of students on presidential job security at the University of Missouri, and the shouting down of invited speakers at U.C. Berkeley, Harvey Mudd College, and others, leave even political progressives with many questions to consider. Among them, what is the role of student leadership development in this time of increased political divisiveness? How might an examination of student "voice," particularly of minoritized, first-generation graduate students, aid our understanding of the continued influence of dominant institutional structures and curricular limitations in higher education? This article examines the leadership development of graduate students in a Master's degree in higher education student affairs program, particularly as it relates to the emerging understanding of their own social identities, their own sense of "voice," and the effect of this development in their own leadership capacity, as well as their potential work with student leaders.

Higher education leaders have responded to student protests across the country with listening sessions, apologies, reprimands, resignations, etc. These protests and counter-protests, underscore the volatility of the everyday campus climate for students from marginalized backgrounds (including racialized minorities, Muslims, gay/lesbian and transgender students) as well as institutional values that underscore the continued privileging of some, while disadvantaging others. As educational leaders respond to specific incidents and broader systems that perpetuate inequity, student affairs professionals often find themselves in difficult positions. For new student affairs professionals with a passion for social justice, are they advocates for student voice? Or institutional agents ensuring continued institutional viability? How can young professionals reconcile such potential conflicts between their own voice, passions and commitments to social justice and equity with their institutional responsibilities toward equality and the rights of free speech for all students? These questions are posed to demonstrate the linkage between student voice, social identity, and leadership in social justice.

Defining student voice in the literature has ranged from the perfunctory (planning entertainment activities or fundraisers); to a role in school decision making; to being partners in co-creating meaningful education reform; to influencing government agencies, community based organizations, and businesses to address issues of importance to youth development (Mitra, 2009). For students from marginalized communities, the expression of their voices is often tempered, if not outright excluded, from the dialogue. In this sense, the development of their social identities as related to those marginalized communities, becomes an important element of the institutional response to their voices. For graduate students studying leadership with a focus on social justice, understanding how their perceived social identities have been impacted by historical and current-day institutional inequities would appear to affect their subsequent development as leaders and educators.

Literature Review

While the racial, ethnic, gender and socio-economic diversifying of the student population in higher education is well documented, little is known regarding how this may be affecting the development of student leadership and the role of student voice. Student affairs professionals often

enter the field through a traditional path, having been very involved in campus life and leadership as undergraduates and being steered into the profession by a mentor or advisor (Amey & Reesor, 2009). At the same time, it may be difficult for new professionals of color to acknowledge or voice different raced (Park, 2011), classed, and gendered realities within hegemonic institutional settings that struggle to develop equitable and inclusive campus cultures (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Similar to students of color in predominantly White institutions who "feel compelled to accept prescribed roles and identities" (Winkle-Wagner, 2012, p. 53), new student affairs professionals are often entering institutions steeped in unexamined issues of power, privilege, and a myth of "meritocracy" (Liu, 2011).

Kline and Megan (2005) looked at a student affairs program focusing on social justice as a core competency. Through interviews with students as well as examining written assignments, the study looked at students learning of theory to practice. Findings included resistance to the material, and concluded with the importance of laying a foundation for the development of critical consciousness. Walton (2011) researched resistance to social justice-related materials through a critical theory lens. Focusing on "consciousness raising" efforts, this article includes research in cognitive dissonance and how it can lead to resistance. Walton cites Gorski's (2009) work, which explicitly leads students to expect cognitive dissonance in learning about issues of oppression; this has led to less resistance from students in learning about issues of social justice. Further, while the use of contradictory material and the inducement of ambiguity is often used in such classes, building a "safe" classroom environment is recommended.

Research on student voice in high schools points to the importance of teacher/administrator-student partnerships (Mitra, 2009), adult development and self-care (Ginwright, 2005), as well as the "possibilities and pitfalls" in developing student empowerment (McQuillan, 2005) in the interest of democratizing our educational processes. While noting the limiting factors presented by institutional structures and regulations, Mitra, Sterriere, & Stoicovy (2012) further examined the role of leaders in the institution to "enable" authentic student voice. In post-secondary environments, related research includes studies on the development of student voice in curricular development (Brooman, 2015); the voices of culturally and linguistically diverse social-work students who migrated as refugees (Testa & Egan, 2014); and first-year students' interactions with student affairs professionals on leadership development (Martin, 2013).

More directly relevant to this research, undergraduate leadership development efforts were examined by Cohen, Cook-Sather, Lesnick, Alter, Awkward, Decius, Hummer, Gerrier, Larsen, and Mengesha (2013). This work utilized Baxter-Magolda's work on self-authorship to examine the linkage between personal development and leadership. The study emphasized the importance of "co-design(ing) liminal spaces with students, neither academic nor social per se, but suspended among the spaces that students navigate" (p. 11) toward the development of self-authorship and student voice. A key finding was a linkage between development of self, and one's leadership capacity.

While Mansfield (2014) coupled the literature on student voice and leadership for social justice in her examination of how minoritized youth developed historical consciousness and social identities at an all-girls' public secondary school, similar work that examines Master's degree students in student affairs is missing. Of particular note is the absence of research examining the experience of a student cohort that is predominantly students of color, many of whom grew up low-income and were first generation college students.

This study examined how the development of student voice and social identities of a highly diverse group of graduate students through evolving historical consciousness, may be affecting the eliciting of graduate student voices. The graduate student voices present in this writing are of specific interest, as not only are they highly culturally diverse, many of them will be working with undergraduate student leaders whose voices are historically and typically silent or silenced. Using narrative analysis as a methodology, this study examines the development of students' voice and social identities, particularly as it relates to exposure to historical perspectives often not taught in mass education. What is the relevance of students learning the history and purposes of education while reflecting on their own personal experiences and beliefs toward understanding their social identities? How did this development of their social identities influence Master's degree students' voices and learning to be transformative leaders in higher education student affairs? This paper seeks to respond to these questions through examining student writings in a graduate program in educational leadership at a four-year public university.

Theoretical Foundation

As a profession, student affairs has been at the forefront in valuing and practicing diversity and inclusion. Particularly relevant has been the development of holistic student-identity development, rooted in psychological theories of understanding. While this area of understanding has enabled important growth in bringing awareness to individuals in the field through recognizing salient as well as intersecting identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009), it is only recently that the limitations that this psychological emphasis has had on challenging institutional inequities in a structural and systemic way have begun to emerge. Sanchez and Fried (1997) challenged the lack of political awareness in both undergraduate and graduate programs in the "helping professions", including student development programs. More recently, Winkle-Wagner's (2012) work broadened our analysis, as she noted the need to develop a more sociological perspective through examination of roles and locations associated with both privileged and marginalized identities. Building on Winkle-Wagner's insights, this study attempts to reveal the linkages between crucial historical knowledge; identity development; and how understanding historical consciousness and identity may increase the capacity of leadership through underrepresented voices to challenge existing power structures.

This research draws on both a psychological and sociological approach to identity and the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1973) as overlapping and complementary approaches. The development of critical consciousness is most strongly influenced by critical theory. With the understanding that there is no monolithic definition upon which all critical theorists would agree, several concepts were core in formulating the steps taken in this study. These include a recognition of social inequality based on race, class, gender and other forms of social identity; how issues of power and privilege as socially constructed realities maintain such inequalities; that social institutions often can and do serve to produce and reproduce social inequalities; that the manifestation of power and privilege in the service of this production and reproduction of inequality is always contested and unstable; that all research is based in one's values and political orientations; and that the focus of this research should ultimately serve the purpose of dismantling such forms of oppression toward a liberatory and emancipatory end (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1969; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

Consistent with this liberatory theoretical foundation, the conceptual framework that guides this study is the Cycle of Socialization and Cycle of Liberation (Harro, 2013). This work succinctly and ably provides a framework that allows for effective examination of dominant structures and systems of power as they are socially reproduced to perpetuate inequities.

Methodology

The location for this study was a 4-year public state university in the Southwest United States. One of the largest universities in the state in terms of undergraduate student population, the campus also serves approximately 4700 graduate students. The university is known for connecting student learning with practice such as service learning, internships/practicum courses, and university/community partnerships. This study focuses on the voices of Master's degree students in the educational leadership program. One focus of the educational leadership program is to prepare graduate students for careers in student affairs. The program is cohort-based and for over two years the students learn about the different functional areas of higher education, participate in fieldwork, and engage in personal and professional development. The program uses an "inside-out" approach to learning and developing one's identity and voice. Students are expected to reflect on their own experiences, beliefs and biases to develop more of an understanding of who they are; their sense of self; and their positionality in the larger educational system. As a result, students become more aware of inequities within educational institutions, and their role and responsibility in addressing them as future educational leaders.

Participants

The data for this study was collected from student journals in two class sections in the Masters of educational leadership program. Criteria for participant selection included: successful completion of at least two semesters in the Master's of educational leadership program; enrollment in the equity and diversity course in summer of 2015; completion of the three-journal sequence as part of a class requirement. Thirty-two graduate students met this criteria. Demographically, the group included 22 women and 10 men; 29 participants of color (13 Latina/os; 7 African Americans; 5 Asian Pacific Islanders; 3 Multi-racial; and one Arab American) and three Whites. Within the cohort were three self-identified gay males and one international student. Many of these students were first-generation college students; immigrants or children of immigrants; and several whose first language was not English.

Data sources

Data collection occurred in three phases over the course of a summer term in an equity and diversity course. This course focused on *"the examination of diversity, access, equity, multiculturalism, and pluralism as concepts in education. From an historical lens, students gain an understanding of these concepts and their applications to student affairs and higher education"* (Course syllabus). The phases coincided with reflection journals in which students were required to "[articulate their] reactions, learning, and reflections based on recent class sessions, assigned readings, and experiences from life and work." Each entry was 2-3 double-spaced pages. All

student participants' names remained confidential through the use of pseudonyms and consent forms.

Procedures

During the first phase of data collection, students responded to their own educational process and what they had read and discussed about the history of education in the United States. The second phase, included students writing about their perceptions of their educational experience and identity. In this phase their voice was connected to a broader context, shifting from an individual voice to the voice of being a member of a particular group affected by educational policies or practices. As part of the final phase, students reflected on their identities, the history of education and their role as educational leaders. The goal of this phase was to have them (as future educational leaders) examine the context influencing the education of various groups so that they could consider their own practice and how they might improve educational practice and policies.

Data Analysis

This research draws from the cycle of socialization as an analytical approach that "considers how the socialization process happens, from what sources it comes, how it affects our lives and how it perpetuates itself" (Harro, 1982, p. 46). It starts from the premise that students are typically taught an inauthentic and incomplete history that reflects dominant attitudes and ideologies and that teaching about social identities and power may lead to students rethinking, challenging or questioning their approach as future educational leaders.

Narrative inquiry as a methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006) was used in this study, to capture students' stories in response to learning the history of education, which included how policies and institutions responded to ethnic, linguistic, and racial diversity. Narrative inquiry also allowed students to discuss their identities and how they shifted and changed, and examined their role and responsibility as future educational leaders in improving education. A careful reading of student's journals was completed; open coding was then used to analyze all the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Afterwards, theoretical coding was utilized to capture how students are socialized into particular identities through their families, the process of schooling, and society more generally (e.g. mass media; institutions; etc.). Data from journals was also analyzed, drawing on theoretical insights from the cycle of socialization.

It is worth noting here that the use of text as a form of "voice" is not without controversy. Kamler (2003) challenges the ways in which the metaphor of voice is often used as if it is the authentic experience of the writer, and not a mediated representation of that experience. Further, she argues that the use of voice in the sense of a pedagogical classroom practice seeking student engagement, can easily devolve into educational exchanges that are absent of any recognition of power, and rather seek out and reward the "right" type of response to a particular reading or course lesson. Given the classroom setting of this study, this argument is worthy of attention. Although Kamler eloquently concludes there is no simple alternative to resolve these contradictions in liberatory pedagogical practices, she does state preference for "stories" over "voice."

> Stories are specific rather than abstract, they 'arise out of specific rhetorical situations, cultural contexts and historical moments: they are relative to time, place, gender, race, ideology' (Summerfield 1994, p. 180). Stories do not tell single truths, but rather represent a truth, a perspective, a particular way of seeing experience and naming it. Stories are partial, they are located rather than universal, they are a representation of experience rather than the same thing as experience itself ('not authentic') (p. 38).

Recognizing the limitations of this study provided by these critiques of research on "voice" in the classroom, the consistent themes that emerge from these written narratives remain arguably worthy of study.

Trustworthiness. In qualitative research, the goal is not to establish "truth" or objectivity so much as it is to strive for legitimacy and trustworthiness (Angen, 2000). The intersection of narrative and voice in narrative research in particular, attention to the deliberate choices related to writing up the study and reflecting participants' lived reality, is essential to trustworthiness (Holley & Colyar, 2009). Ultimately, this study attempts to establish "credibility" through the inferences drawn from the data and not the data itself (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).

Establishing credibility of such an inferential approach requires recognition of the limitations of viewing the world through either positivist or relativist perspectives. Angen (2000) raises the shortcomings of this dualistic perspective,

> …arguing that we cannot step outside of our intersubjective involvement with the lifeworld and into some mythical, all-knowing, and neutral standpoint anymore than we can give up our responsibility for taking a stand and adopt a solipsistic position. By our very being in the world, we are already morally implicated. Our values and beliefs will show themselves in our actions whether we stop to think about them or not. We do not live in the world as if nothing mattered, as if everything was relative; rather, we live in constant meaningful interaction with people and things, continually, if not consciously, making practical and ethical choices about how to act and interact. (pp. 384-385)

In this context, the researchers in this study recognize such limitations, as well as our responsibility to make such "practical and ethical choices" in the interest of trustworthiness in the data, as well as the inferences and interpretations as presented.

Results

Findings from this study reflected the relevance of historical consciousness and understanding of salient and intersecting identities in beginning to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1973). There were further indications of the students drawing connections between critical consciousness and being social justice-oriented leaders. Three general themes emerged: 1.) Most students were generally unaware of the perspectives of history that have brought forth the experiences and voices of marginalized populations (Spring, 2013; Takaki, 1993; Zinn, 1980). 2.) Learning about the historical experiences of disenfranchised populations often led to insightful contemplation and understanding of their own racialized, classed, and gendered identities. 3.)

Many students who previously lacked historical consciousness and awareness of their own social identities, began to make linkages to their role as social justice leaders with responsibility for transformative social change efforts. Examples from the data are presented here from each of the three themes.

Revisionist history

A few students in this study who were familiar with the narratives of historically marginalized populations had taken undergraduate courses in ethnic studies, women's studies, and sociology that examined the experience of these populations. But most students had little to no exposure to the work of Spring (2013), Takaki (1993), Zinn (1980) or other similar historians. The responses of these students were striking and consistent. Marisela, a Latina who did not speak her native Spanish language wrote the following:

> Reading about the history of American schools ... presented a source of frustration for me. I am interested in history and . . . how it shapes the present but there is something complicated and disheartening about learning about how one purpose of schools was to spread a particular culture and suppress another (Spring, 2013). This wasn't shocking to me as I had done a good deal of research on the schooling of Native Americans and within my own family history. I have knowledge of the experience of Mexican Americans in American schools. What frustrated me was that I had never considered the extent to which this practice has affected me. I don't speak Spanish. . . Reading about the history of our schools . . . and the concept of cultural imperialism allowed me to explore the extent to which school (and media) have infiltrated my life and, in many ways, allowed and encouraged me to suppress my Mexican culture in favor of the dominant Anglo-American culture.

Marisela writes painfully that her focus on history in her earlier schooling did little to prepare her for the reality of how our educational system originated. Further, how this reality has socialized her to view her own experience in very particular ways (Harro, 1982a). Her cohort-mate Jackson, an African American male, shared memories of his early childhood education:

> The class activity and reading made me think of two moments in my life…(One example was when) I grew up attending urban primary schools that were occupied by mostly working-class African-American and Latino students. I now realize what was happening. To begin the day, we sang the Pledge of Allegiance and followed it up with an encore performance of either *You're a Grand Old Flag* or *America the Beautiful*. Throughout the day we receive non-stop instruction about various subject matter, much of which was didactic in nature. We had to sit straight with our hands folded, keep our desks clean, show proper etiquette, and subscribe to jobs as line-leaders, ball monitors, chalkboard cleaners, eraser cleaners, and paper monitors to pass out assignments or materials, among other tasks. We mostly received orders and spent very little time being inspired to think critically or address education in an exploratory manner.

While these experiences of students of color presented emerging critical consciousness based in historical analysis of their own experiences of racial and class subjugation, Brooke, one of the few White students in the class, spoke from her developing understanding of privilege:

> (V)iewing history from multiple lenses is a new concept. Previously, I did not understand the importance of (this) and how my Anglo-American perspective on history affects how I view society (Spring, 2012). From a young age I was taught certain groups of people were historically excluded from the education system. However, the barriers and discriminatory foundation created and ingrained into American society were never discussed. Instead I was taught the United States has moved past this dark portion of history and has formed a blissful melting pot.

The words of Marisela, Jackson, and Brooke all point to how institutions and dominant cultures socialized them to see the world through a specific lens (Harro, 1982a), and how their writings reflect the ways in which a different perspective of history challenges their previous educational experiences. Further, the relationship of this learning to the students' own social identities also emerged.

What does this have to do with me? As students were challenged to consider what these historical perspectives meant to them, many linkages were made between these perspectives and their social identities:

> I was born into a family of undocumented immigrants who came to the United States in search of better opportunities than what they had in Mexico. Growing up as part of an undocumented community made me experience the stressors and fears of being different or accepted in society. I did not understand why my parents had to run from *la migra* while working in the fields. As I grew older and started school, I became aware of how different I was in comparison to my classmates. I was the only Latino male in my class. Although my experiences and my environment continues to shape my identity it's important to reflect on my background and its contributions to identity as well. (Javier; Latino male)

Ahmed, a Muslim of Arab descent, shared this:

> Understanding my own identity is not only necessary for my own personal growth and development, but to help the students that I want to serve…I possess many of the dominant identities in this American society. I am an able-bodied male that writes and speaks the dominant language. Although…in situations throughout my personal life I do not view myself as dominant. Growing up as a youth in post-9/11 America I see myself outed at times by peers and viewed differently in the media. Every single Middle Eastern male that I have seen in film, and news is an abusive misogynist, religious extremist, anti-Semitic, and/or threat to the lives of westerners. The irony of it all is looking back I seemed to have most in common with white identity. I grew up agnostic,

> and my mother coming from Jewish descent. All of this stereotyping…in pop-culture irritates me, but allows me to view myself and this dominant society through a new lens that I never really understood until recently.

Some students began to understand the U.S. role more globally through parental and familial experiences:

> … notions of cultural imperialism were rampant in my household, as I was taught to view White culture as the norm in society (Young, 2013). This viewpoint has also consistently been imposed on my immigrant mother, which has been a source of unrest in my household. As a mixed-race individual, this mindset has made it difficult for me to fully ingrain myself in my Filipina heritage. (Eva; mixed-race heritage female)

While Javier's writing appears to reflect confusion, Ahmed states he is irritated and perhaps angry over the constant stereotyping he experiences. Eva's reflection of "unrest" in her household may be due in part to misinformation, and internalization of positions of power (Harro, 1982a). Importantly, these emerging understandings of their own social identities appeared to enable linkages to their leadership responsibilities toward social justice.

Social justice and leadership. Exposure to a historical viewpoint heretofore unknown, as well as the relevance of this to their own lives, led many students to critical analysis. Howard, an Asian American male, conveys his growing understanding of the influence of the dominant narrative that includes the "myth of meritocracy," challenging his historical knowledge, while questioning aspects of his own upbringing:

> (T)he idea that meritocracy is not what it seems, shook me to the core. Growing up, my parents instilled in me the idea that if you work hard and did well in school, that everything else would play itself out for the best. (This has) really opened up my eyes to the idea that meritocracy does not apply to everyone; that those who just work hard and become successful are the minority, not the majority. I am coming to understand with greater clarity what social justice, advocacy, and diversity really means in terms of Higher Education.

Eva, who in the previous section shared her very personal experience with "cultural imperialism", has begun to question the "color-blind" narrative that has been the dominant, neo-liberal view of how best to work with cultural differences. She further has examined concepts such as "cultural appropriation" and how she can play a role in resisting such practices:

> (T)hroughout my upbringing and education, I hardly noticed the problems associated with holding a color-blind perspective, having a viewpoint of diversity in numerical terms, and engaging in cultural appropriation, indicative of the dominant-minded bubble I lived in. This changed dramatically as I was exposed to issues of social justice during the first year in this program. Now, I feel as though this class will equip me with the tools necessary to

> combat oppression and work toward the objectives of social justice…I believe that through understanding myself, I can better understand the
> differences that exist in our society and can work to ensure I do not engage in oppressive behaviors, but instead, strive toward social justice.

Gary, an Asian gay male, had begun to see the ubiquitous nature of the problem. He had previously assumed diverse demographics meant inclusiveness and equity were present:

> I'm (now) more aware of the present dominant cultures in our society. There are times when I don't think the dominant culture is present because I might be in an environment that has a diverse physical make up. But after reflecting on the readings and our classroom discussions, I am more aware that the dominant culture is always there and might be ingrained in the policies, curriculum, or our very own way of thinking. In addition to recognizing the presence of the dominant culture, I am starting to see how the dominant rhetoric has played out in society, in our history, and is still shaping how we think. The readings served as a wake up call for me. . .

Howard, Eva, and Gary, all show evidence that they are beginning not only to link their growing historical understanding with their sense of self, but are also now looking to interrupt the socialization process and to move toward a "cycle of liberation" (Harro, 1982b) and considering their roles as practitioners and leaders in striving for social justice.

Discussion

Attempting to convey the authentic voice of a diverse cohort of future educational leaders requires the understanding and contextualizing of terminology referred to in the data above. This section attempts to unpack a few of these terms.

First we presented students' reactions to learning a revisionist history. Revisionist history of education included the participation of non-dominant groups including: racialized minorities, women, immigrants and the poor. Summarized from Spring (2011, p. 4), this revisionist history of education included: 1) the colonization of North America and the development of American schools within the framework of globalization; 2) conflicts over culture, race and ethnicity; 3) the management of ideas in society by schools (ideological management); and 4) the education of immigrants. The findings highlighted in the previous section show how students connected their personal histories to this perspective on the history of education. In this way, there was an attempt to not impose the curriculum upon them. Rather the intent was to have them incorporate their lived experience into the text, and perhaps ground that experience in the larger history of education, with the ultimate purpose of attempting to end inequities. This is consistent with the critical theoretical framework of the study. Different from previous work (Walton, 2011) that called attention to the resistance of learning about social justice, the work in this study appears to have enabled student engagement different from earlier research. In part this may be attributable to the use of Harro's Cycles of Socialization (1982a) and Liberation (1982b), which provided a framework through which to understand the students' own connection to revisionist history.

The intent of teaching revisionist history was grounded in social justice and leadership development. The goal of social justice "is full and equal participation of all groups [and]...includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Adams, Bell, Griffin, 1997, p. 1). Thus the goal of leadership development in this context, was "more about becoming a critical learner" (Dugan, 2017, p. 3) than ascribing a pre-existing definition of leadership that may or may not relate to the students.

As part of the class, students learned about American cultural imperialism of native people. Although cultural imperialism usually refers to the American policy of "expansion" or "acquiring" territory, cultural and racial superiority were also used to justify genocide and containment of native people (Spring, 2011). Upon critical reflection, students also described experiencing subtle forms of cultural imperialism, such as being taught that "being American" is the way to be successful in society. Part of cultural imperialism is the shedding of one's own culture, assimilating and becoming part of the "melting pot". Thus, understanding the concepts of cultural imperialism and assimilation (the melting pot) helped students understand why their families had pushed them to become "American" or to see themselves similar to Whites, or at least not minorities. It also served as an explanation for students who experienced language loss or were not familiar with their family histories. This was further reinforced through the lens of the Cycle of Socialization (Harro, 1982a), particularly early socialization through family, and later reinscribed through institutions and dominant culture.

For some students learning about the myth of the meritocracy challenged their understanding of how people succeed in society. Meritocracy reinforces the notion that the primary reason people do not achieve is due to personal, familial, or cultural deficiency with little attention to institutional and societal factors.

> (M)eritocracy allows people...to believe that all people--no matter what race, class, gender, sexual orientation--get what they deserve based solely on their individual efforts. Those who believe that our society is truly a meritocratic one find it difficult to believe that men gain advantage from women's subordination or that whites have any advantage over people of color (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002, p. 171).

Interestingly, the students did not resist the myth of meritocracy. Upon critical reflection of their lives, experiences, families, communities and histories, they understood the myth all too well. Analyzing this myth through the Cycle of Socialization (Harro, 1982a) and providing transparency to the providing of misinformation leading to confusion and internalizing of power relations, also contributed to deepening students' understanding.

As students developed familiarity and facility with terms such as cultural imperialism, the myth of the melting pot, cultural appropriation and the myth of meritocracy, and others, their critical consciousness (Freire, 1973) appeared to develop along with their authentic voice. As a Freirean inspired term, critical consciousness in this study refers to the capacity to analyze educational inequities through multiple and intersecting ways. This includes understanding how societal oppression historically, systematically and systemically works to privilege some over others based on socially constructed categories of race, class, and gender. These categories developed to divide humanity, may include others such as sexual orientation and disability status.

Further, critical consciousness refers to one's capacity to understand one's own positionality within this system of societal oppression. This study suggests that the development of students' critical consciousness was influenced through students having a holistic understanding of their personal identity, an awareness of historical (and current) misrepresentations of their group and inequities in education as well as hope and evidence that oppressive circumstances can change (Harro, 1982b). Further, this study points to the need for research on the role of student affairs educators in "amplifying student voice" (Sather, 2012) in higher education in the interest of social justice and democratizing of the teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

As Mansfield (2014) states, "(S)eeking student voice in leadership and research practice inherently operationalizes social justice practices that have potential to sensitize our research efforts as well as inform and strengthen social justice leadership and transformative learning spaces" (p. 393). Through narrative inquiry this study seeks to represent the voices of future educational leaders who have generally not been heard (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This study attempted to understand the relationship between helping budding educational leaders develop an awareness of how educational inequities came to be by re-examining history and their own personal identities, developing their voice and reflecting on their future educational leadership and practice. It is the listening to this voice that may be crucial in developing leadership that may respond effectively in these times of great political turmoil and dissonance.

Within the higher education literature on social justice leadership, a number of sources point to the resistance from students on learning theories of oppression (Gorski, 2009; Kline & Megan, 2005; and Walton, 2011). Interestingly in this study, resistance to learning the material was an inconsequential aspect of the findings. There was minor evidence of difficulty in being self reflective and connecting readings to their own experience. But nearly all of the written data from this study indicated that students experienced a strong sense of resonance with the material. Many participants found the material challenging; but for the most part, this was due to having some aspect of their worldview challenged. There was also a sense of affirmation and congruence between their lived experiences and the stories that they read and discussed that ran counter to much of their formal educational experience. This begs the question: What made this study different?

On the surface, the obvious difference may have been the cultural diversity of the students in this study. With 29 of the 32 students being racially minoritized students, how might this have impacted the findings? In part, this may have meant that most students, in the context of the program, did not start from a place of being identified as "different" from a White, male, middle class, heterosexual norm. Many higher education studies have taken place on predominantly White institutions; these are institutions where Whiteness, maleness, and middle class values are normative. That was not the case in this study. It appeared from the data that each student shared a unique experience with struggle; a struggle that often helped them to understand themselves and each other. Perhaps they felt understood in a way that they have not often felt. Mayra states:

> I still struggle with internalized subordination. Sometimes due to my race I doubt my abilities. Sometimes I ask myself if I'm worthy enough to be in a master's program.

> Sometimes I think I am an Oreo— black on the outside but white on the inside. But my education has caused me to realize why I have these thoughts or sometimes find myself struggling with my identity. My education has exposed the oppressions, the injustices I have gone through and others are going through.

While there appeared to be a recognition and at times a respect for each other's struggle, for some, the issues of social justice appeared to come too "close to home". While there is an intentional aspect of this educational leadership program that attempts to counter the deficit thinking that is normative in attempting to explain educational underachievement, this more "asset"-based approach is not always immediately appreciated. There can be a grudging acceptance that there have been "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) that have aided a family's survival; or Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2006) that develops a different understanding of forms of capital that have remained on the fringes of educational discourse.

This is not to say that this recognition of a common struggle resulted in a type of harmonious unity. As one student stated, this reconceptualization of their life experience does little to alleviate the pain and suffering of societal exclusion. In other words, it is nice to have others recognize that marginalized communities have value, but they still "would not wish that experience on anyone." For those still working to understand their own privilege, this is a perspective that can be difficult to grasp. And it can provide a key opportunity to build a bridge of understanding between oppressed and oppressor. But to be clear, this "bridge" is one that requires an understanding of the authentic voice of what these students are saying. Howard states:

> I believe much of my anger stems from feelings of betrayal; that education has been used historically to subdue any ethnicity not deemed white in the hopes to make them docile. This deculturalization is not congruent with what I felt was at the core of Education.

From the perspective of leadership, when these students begin the process of finding "voice" through the telling of their own stories, the question is not whether these students have the capacity to lead. Rather, the question becomes whether our institutions of higher education can develop the capacity and compassion to hear such authentic voices in a way that compels an authentic movement that challenges current regimes of power toward social justice.

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