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A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MAINSTREAM COLLEGE STUDENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Abstract

Developing leaders for a diverse democracy is an increasingly important aim of higher education and social justice is ever more a goal of leadership education efforts. Accordingly, it is important to explore how dominant leadership models, as blueprints for student leadership development, account for and may unwittingly reinforce systems of domination, like racism. This critical discourse analysis, rooted in racialization and color-evasiveness, examines three prominent college student leadership development models to examine how leaders and leadership are racialized. We find that all three leadership texts frame leaders and leadership in color-evasive ways. Specifically, the texts' discourses reveal three mechanisms for evading race in leadership: focusing on individual identities, emphasizing universality, and centering collaboration. Implications for race in leadership development, the social construction of leadership more broadly, and future scholarship are discussed.

Introduction

Leadership development is a central goal of higher education (Chunoo & Osteen, 2016). To this end, co-curricular leadership programs are now institutionalized in most colleges to facilitate student leadership development, regardless of a student's field of study (Kezar et al., 2006; Owen, 2012). Co-curricular leadership education programs increasingly recognize the need to center diversity, inclusion, and social justice in their efforts (Guthrie et al., 2013; Mahoney, 2016; Pendakur & Furr, 2016). Thus, leadership scholars have begun integrating race and power in their explanations and enactment of student leadership development (Chunoo et al., 2019; Dugan, 2017; Museus et al., 2017). For example, Dugan (2011) asserted that the myth that everyone can be a leader "represents an incredibly privileged perspective that neglects a broader recognition of systems of social oppression that operate in society" (p. 82). However, in broad leadership theories and models, social identity and racialization (defined as the production of racial meaning per Omi & Winant, 2015) have often been neglected (Dugan, 2017; Suarez, 2015). Likely, these models' authors intended to provide accessible and universal texts for all students. However, the result was mainstream models that are

often silent about race and racism. More commonly, race, racism, and racialization, are considered in research and leadership models about racially marginalized groups (e.g., Black women leaders) or that is explicitly centered on equity (Kezar et al., 2006). This lack of attention to racialization in common leadership models likely results in programs and practices that disproportionately empower students with multiple dominant identities (e.g., white men) as leaders (Harper & Kezar, 2021; Museus et al., 2017).

As we face the continuing need for institutions to protect the interests of all people – not only its historically white power structure – higher education must consider how the modes of thinking into which it trains people for leadership may be implicitly reproducing racial and other social hierarchies. Texts provide larger, dominant blueprints that guide the work and beliefs of leadership educators and the meaning and value attached to leaders themselves. The deconstruction and reconstruction of dominant models are therefore worthwhile efforts in the improvement of leadership education for diverse colleges, universities, and society. In recent years, scholars have critiqued and revised the Social Change Model (Dugan, 2017), for example, adding community cultural wealth (Harper & Kezar, 2021), and explicitly centering justice and the experiences of marginalized groups to facilitate transformation (Museus et al., 2017). While the Social Change Model is the most widely used leadership development model in higher education (Kezar et al., 2006; Owen, 2012), it is only one of several common models worthy of a closer look and reconsideration.

By looking across multiple commonly used student leadership texts there is an opportunity to identify – and perhaps disrupt – patterns of racialization in leadership discourse that inhibit social justice and inclusion. This paper reports a critical discourse analysis of the Social Change Model of Leadership Development, the Leadership Challenge, and the Relational Leadership Model. Our research question is: What racialized discourses are present within commonly used leadership models? By understanding how these models implicitly or explicitly racialize leaders and leadership development, research and practice alike may better disrupt whiteness as both embedded and masked within leadership discourse and development.

We begin with an overview of how racialization is ingrained in leadership education efforts before describing our texts of interest. Then, we describe color-evasiveness as our conceptual framework and detail our approach to critical discourse analysis. We find that all three texts frame leaders and leadership in color-evasive ways, deploying color-evasiveness as the discursive instrument through which racialization functions. Specifically, the texts evade racism in three ways: focusing on individual identities, emphasizing universality, and centering collaboration. Finally, we offer implications for administrators, leadership scholars, and leadership educators.

Literature Review

We ground our analysis in several bodies of literature. First, we synthesize literature about racialization in leadership. Then, we summarize college student leadership development efforts, before describing the three models at the center of this inquiry.

Racialization in Leadership. Dominant western paradigms purport leadership as an innate trait and glorify white men as leaders (Dugan, 2017; Liu, 2020). Increasingly, dominant leadership theories and models forward relational views of leadership that center collaboration and leadership's social contexts (Dugan, 2017; Owen, 2020). Although these models construct leadership as learnable and accessible to all, few models interrogate how systems of social power (e.g., white supremacy, patriarchy) intersect with the philosophy and practice of leadership (Dugan, 2017; Liu, 2020; Museus et al., 2017). Beliefs about what constitutes effective leadership are embedded in systems of power. When unexamined, silence about power may reinforce ignorance and privilege (Spiller et al., 2021).

Leadership prototypes scholarship illustrates how power shapes beliefs about leadership by identifying

the role of race and racialization in perceptions of leadership enactment. White racial identity persists as a central aspect of these prototypes, regardless of an industry's or organization's racial diversity (Livingston et al., 2012; Logan, 2011; Rosette et al., 2008; Rosette et al., 2016), because endemic racism threatens the perceived legitimacy of leaders who are not white (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). White leaders' racial identity is often unnamed and unmarked, while Black leaders' racial identity is frequently marked and/or scrutinized. Research on discourses about white leaders in Australia indicate these discourses represent "all people" while discourses about Black leaders highlight their representation of Black people and issues purportedly of concern to Black people, rather than all people (Liu & Baker, 2016). Put another way, white leaders' efforts are constructed as universal, while Black leaders' efforts are characterized as particular. These racialized experiences are largely ignored in student leadership theory and leadership prototypes, where leaving whiteness unnamed implies leadership as race-neutral (Liu & Baker, 2016) and preserves whiteness as the default.

College Student Leadership Education. This inquiry focused on models common in co-curricular, or student affairs, contexts. These programs appear in diverse forms, intend to serve all students and as such, are generally broader than leadership programs with specific disciplinary affiliations (Komives et al., 2011; Owen, 2012). Analyses of curricular leadership education contexts confirmed whiteness is often reproduced through discursive practices (Wiborg, 2020). Thus, it is also important to consider how whiteness is reproduced in co-curricular contexts. Research on co-curricular leadership educators indicates they are predominantly white (Jenkins & Owen, 2016; Owen, 2012). Most leadership programs report using similar resources, with the Social Change Model (Komives & Wagner, 2017), Relational Leadership Model (Komives et al., 2013), and the Student Leadership Challenge (Kouzes & Posner, 2014) as three widely used models (Owen, 2012; Rosch & Anthony, 2012). In almost all cases, white scholars authored these theories. Student leadership programs are largely staffed by white professionals, who disproportionately use leadership models authored by white scholars, with the intent to facilitate leadership for all students. Next, we briefly summarize each model.

Social Change Model. The Social Change Model (SCM) is the most widely used leadership model in higher education (Kezar, 2006; Owen, 2012). It originated from scholars who developed a model explicitly for college students with the intent to move beyond positional conceptions of leadership. Although it has evolved over time, the model's core elements have persisted. The SCM defines leadership "as a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive social change" (Komives et al., 2017, p. 22). Change is the model's goal, where seven values (7 Cs) are grouped across three domains (Table 1).

Table 1
Social Change Model of Leadership Development

Domain	Value	Summary
Individual	Consciousness of Self	Consciousness of self requires an awareness of personal beliefs, values, attitudes and emotions. Self-awareness, consciousness, mindfulness, introspection, and continual personal reflection are elements of the leadership process.
	Commitment	Commitment requires intrinsic passion, energy, and purposeful investment toward action. Follow-through and willing involvement through commitment lead to social change.
	Congruence	Congruence requires that one has identified personal values, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions and acts consistently with those values, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions. A congruent individual is genuine and honest and 'walks the talk.'
Group	Collaboration	Multiplies a group's effort through collective contributions. Collaboration assumes that a group is working towards a Common Purpose, with mutually beneficial goals, and serves to generate creative solutions as a result of group diversity, requiring participants to engage across difference and share authority, responsibility, and accountability for its success.
	Controversy with Civility	For a group to work toward positive social change, open, critical, and civil discourse can lead to new, creative solutions and is an integral component of the leadership process. Multiple perspectives need to be understood, integrated, and bring value to a group.
	Common Purpose	Common purpose necessitates and contributes to a high level of group trust involving all participants in shared responsibility towards collective aims, values, and vision.
Community	Citizenship	Citizenship occurs when one becomes responsibly connected to the community/society in which one resides by actively working toward change to benefit others through care, service, social responsibility, and community involvement.
Goal/ Outcome	Change	Goal of the SCM. Change means improving the status quo, creating a better world, and demonstrating comfort with transition and ambiguity in the process of change.

Note. Summaries taken from Cilente's (2017, p. 54) overview of the Social Change Model.

> *The Student Leadership Challenge.* The Student Leadership Challenge (SLC), or The Five Practices, began in 1982, with Kouzes and Posner (2012) asking leaders: "*What did you do when you were at your personal best as a leader?*" (p. 2, emphasis in original). The stories that followed led to the five practices that anybody can use to enact leadership: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Table 2). The SLC departs from the two other models in this inquiry as it was not initially designed for college students; rather the Student Leadership Challenge is a version of their work translated for college students.

Research that informs the SLC relies on business and management paradigms. It positions leaders as individuals, nested in organizational contexts, and targets their need to "mobilize others to want to make extraordinary things happen in organizations" (2014, p. 2). We analyzed the model's original text, *The Leadership Challenge*.

Table 2
The Leadership Challenge

Practice	Summary
Model the Way	Leaders establish principles concerning the way people (constituents, peers, colleagues, and customers alike) should be treated and the way they should pursue goals. Leaders create standards of excellence and set an example for others to follow. They put up signposts when people feel unsure of where to go or how to get there. Leaders create opportunities for victory.
Inspire a Shared Vision	Leaders passionately believe they can make a difference. They envision the future and create an ideal and unique image of what the organization can become. Through their magnetism and persuasion, leaders enlist others in their dreams. They breathe life into their visions and get people to see exciting possibilities for the future.
Challenge the Process	Leaders search for opportunities to change the status quo. They look for innovative ways to improve the organization. In doing so, they experiment and take risks. Since complex change threatens to overwhelm people and stifle action, leaders set interim goals so that people can achieve small wins as they work toward larger objectives. Effective leaders unravel bureaucracy when it impedes action. And, because leaders know that taking risks involves mistakes and failures, they accept occasional disappointments as opportunities to learn.
Enable Others to Act	Leaders foster collaboration and build spirited teams. They actively involve others. Leaders understand that mutual respect sustains extraordinary efforts. They strive to create an atmosphere of trust and human dignity. They strengthen others, making each person feel capable and powerful.
Encourage the Heart	Accomplishing extraordinary things in organizations is hard work. To keep hope and determination alive, leaders recognize the contributions that individuals make. In every winning team, the members need to share in the rewards of their efforts, so leaders celebrate accomplishments. They make people feel like heroes.

Note. Summaries taken from the Leadership Challenge website (https://www.leadershipchallenge.com/Research/Five-Practices.aspx)

Relational Leadership Model. Unlike the SCM and the LC, the Relational Leadership Model (RLM) is a theoretical and aspirational model written specifically for college students to help them use their college experiences as a "frame within which to understand leadership" (p. x). The RLM defines leadership as "a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change" (p. 13). Anchored in a process orientation, the RLM details four leadership elements: purposeful, inclusive, ethical, and empowering (Table 3). In short, the RLM is about how to work with others more effectively, as relationships are central to leadership. The RLM shares many authors and conceptual foundations with the SCM.

Table 3
The Relational Leadership Model

Element	Summary
Purposeful	Being purposeful means having a commitment to a goal or activity. It is also the ability to collaborate and to find common ground with others to facilitate positive change.
Inclusive	Being inclusive means understanding, valuing, and actively engaging diversity in views, approaches, styles, and aspects of individuality such as gender or culture, that add multiple perspectives to a group's activity.
Empowering	Empowerment has two dimensions: 1) a sense of self that claims ownership, claims a space in the process, and expects to be involved, and 2) a set of environmental conditions that promote the full involvement of participants by reducing the barriers that block the development of individual talent and involvement.
Ethical	The RLM emphasizes ethical and moral leadership, meaning leadership that is driven by values and standards and leadership that is good – moral – in nature. For the purposes of this model, ethics will be defined as "rules or standards that govern behaviors" (Toffler, 1986, p. 10).
Process- oriented	Process refers to how the group goes about being a group, remaining a group, and accomplishing a group's purposes. The process component means that individuals interact with others and that leaders and other participants work together to accomplish change. The process creates energy, synergy, and momentum.

Note. Summaries adapted from Komives et al.'s (2013, p. 93-145) overview of the Relational Leadership Model.

Collectively, these models position leadership as learnable, accessible to all, process-oriented, and directed towards change. Given their widespread use, these models provide the language and frameworks through which increasingly diverse college students come to explore leadership and envision themselves as leaders. What messages about power dynamics and race do these models send along the way? To answer this question, we examined racialization embedded within and across three prevailing leadership models.

Conceptual Framework

Racialization inscribes people, knowledge, and objects with "ideas from race thinking" (Saha, 2018, p. 11) and thereby facilitates the reproduction of racism and associated racial hierarchies. Texts, and the discourses and ideologies that they communicate, are a central site for racialization. Critical scholars have long documented how dominant texts – and therefore, knowledge — to which students are socialized reflect systems of domination (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Collins, 1989; Hull & Smith, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Smith, 2013; Stanley, 2007). As such, those of us in higher education institutions must interrogate how the knowledge we use to inform understandings and enactments of leadership may preserve, rather than challenge, social inequities. As such, we present an exploration of racialized discourse and ideologies. Then, we detail color-blind (Bonilla-Silva, 2017) and color-evasive racism (Annamma et al., 2017) as racialized ideologies that may be anticipated in the models we examine.

Racialized Discourses and Ideologies. The production and consumption of educational texts offer myriad opportunities for communicating dominant ideologies. Importantly, texts communicate through both inclusion and absence – what is said is often as important as what is not, especially in terms of race and power (Wodak, 2011). Discourse is a core means by which communication of racial ideologies occurs (Hall, 2017), particularly in leadership settings (Wiborg, 2020). For example, Glover's (2019) critical race discourse analysis of criminology textbooks demonstrated that racialized discourses produced knowledge and public discourses that facilitated the consumption of deficit perspectives and stereotypes about criminality – specifically, in relation to experiences of people of color with the criminal justice system. Texts help construct racialized knowledge, and in so doing, shape what people come to believe as racial realities.

Discourses also signify racial differences in historically specific ways, as the racial meanings attached to human practices may shift across time and context (Hall, 2017). Thus, racialization, as constructed through discourse, must be considered in the context of the racial social structure, which has been structured in support of white domination in the contemporary United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Jung, 2015). The dominance of white people and whiteness, or habits, ideologies, and discourses that ignore the material realities of racism and normalize the experiences of white people (Cabrera et al., 2017), continually legitimize racialized social structures, in support of white supremacy (Jung, 2015). In short, discourse is intertwined with material realities (Lewis, 2004).

Critical analysis of dominant discourses and their associated ideologies provides an avenue to examine racialization. Racial ideologies (i.e., socially shared systems of idea about race), are frameworks used to explain and legitimate the racial status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2001); therefore, we conclude our conceptual framework by articulating two well-established ideologies that may be anticipated in the leadership models we are analyzing.

Color-blind Racism. Color-blind racism is the U.S.'s dominant racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2017) and highlights how racialization can manifest via silence or avoidance. It reproduces the existing racial hierarchy, in support of white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Jung, 2015; Lewis, 2004) by minimizing the salience of race. Color-blind racism provides a set of linguistic resources through which white people can talk about the existing racial hierarchy in socially acceptable ways, often by avoiding racism. As a racial ideology, color-blind racism relies on four frames: Abstract liberalism, cultural racism, naturalization, and minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Abstract liberalism claims to support equity but does so by prioritizing individualism in ways that do not consider power. In the post-civil rights era, evident racism and inequality threaten the U.S. democracy's legitimacy; thus, diversity and meritocracy discourses emerged as sources of legitimacy, while also furnishing covert means of reproducing racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Garces, 2012; Warikoo, 2016) and legitimating racial stratification. Cultural racism relies on culturally based explanations for racial inequities (e.g., stereotypes about particular racial or ethnic groups not valuing education). Naturalization explains racial phenomena by suggesting they occur naturally (e.g., legitimizing segregation as natural because people gravitate towards others who are like them). Finally, minimization of racism denies racism's endemic and systemic nature by framing it as sporadic and individual (e.g., biased acts, overt racism; Bonilla-Silva, 2017). We can anticipate these frames in a wide variety of texts, including perhaps leadership models.

Color-evasiveness. Scholars have revisited color-blind racism to disrupt deficit framings of disability (e.g., blindness) and to position the absence of race in texts as something that may result from active, intentional, discursive moves rather than occurring by happenstance (Annamma and colleagues, 2017). Such a framing empowered us to

consider what discourses were absent, not only those that were present. For example, if authors subscribe to abstract liberalism or minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017), they may neglect acknowledging racial inequities in access to higher education out of a belief in equal opportunity or individual choice. This is how individual beliefs about racial realities can produce discourses that evade racism. Going forward, we use language of color-evasiveness in support of these advancements.

Mueller (2017, 2020), extended Bonilla-Silva's (2017) work by offering racial ignorance as a cognitive foundation for color-evasiveness. Mueller (2020) notes that ignorance is actively produced by white people and dominant institutions, thus, ignorance becomes the mechanism by which white people produce color-evasive discourse. Spiller and colleagues (2021) agree, and they assert that silence about race in leadership facilitates ongoing racial ignorance in support of privilege hoarding. Importantly, Bonilla-Silva (2017) and others (e.g., Mueller, 2017, 2020) state that color-evasive racism and racial ignorance are so pervasive that even race-conscious white people may use multiple logics to obscure the realities of racism. These discursive maneuvers protect white dominance at an individual and structural level. Analyses of meanings within texts, must consider the collective understandings social groups use to explain their world.

Although Bonilla-Silva's (2017) theory of color-evasive racism arose from analyzing survey data and conversations with Black and white participants, people create and consume racialized discourses in multiple mediums, including texts. Leadership texts present a new context to examine color-evasive ideologies and allow us to identify how racialized discourses facilitate the production and validation of future leaders. To the extent we find racialized discourses in leadership texts, we can expect that they will also shape who believes that they can embody and enact leadership on college campuses and beyond.

Critical Discourse Analysis

We employ CDA to examine racialized discourses in three texts' discursive representations of leadership. Textbooks are an important site to examine the (re)production of racialized knowledge and discourses (Glover, 2019), and critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides a powerful tool to examine these discourses (Glover, 2019; Liu & Baker, 2016; van Dijk, 1993; Wiborg, 2020). CDA recognizes the interplay between discourse and ideology, with ideology transmitted and reproduced through discourse (Van Dijk, 2013). Discourse "gives human practice meaning" (Hall, 2017, p. 31) and racialization imbues people, practices, and objects with racial meaning, often in support of racism (Saha, 2018). Importantly, discourse is a dialectical process, navigated and produced by multiple parties, their subjectivities, and worldviews (Fairclough, 1992). By examining language in textual form, CDA illuminates how meaning and power relations are embedded in texts (Fairclough, 1992; Glover, 2019). CDA, with attention to color-evasive discourses, allowed us to go beyond simply identifying the presence or absence of specific racialized ideologies. Rather, we heed the urging of scholars to connect the presence of color-evasive discourses to social and material relations (Burke, 2016), including the implications for developing leaders in higher education.

Data Sources. As described above, our texts of interest are *Leadership for a Better World* (Komives & Wagner, 2017), which outlines the SCM, *The Leadership Challenge* (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), which presents the LC, and *Exploring Leadership* (Komives et al., 2013), which details the RLM (Table 4). These models were authored primarily by white scholars – a trend that reflects leadership education at large. Thus, our examination specifically considers how white scholars constructed leadership texts within a societal context that generally privileges white peoples' racial ignorance and silence about racism.

In selecting excerpts for analysis, we read all three texts and considered the messages, content, and structure of each text holistically. Our familiarity with the texts' totality, and their (lack of) grappling with power, identity, and racism, allowed us to feel confident that the excerpts we selected were representative of the texts' racialized discourses. We analyzed each text's leadership model overview and introduction, to examine the underlying axiologies and epistemologies in the text's construction of leaders and leadership.

Table 4
Textual Sources

Leadership Model	Text	Selection(s)
Social Change Model (SCM)	*Leadership for a Better World* (2nd ed.) (Komives & Wagner, 2017)	Foreword (p. 17-20), Preface (p. 21- 24), Ch. 2: Overview of the Social Change Model (Skendall, 2017, p. 60-93)
Relational Leadership Model (RLM)	*Exploring Leadership* (3rd ed.) (Komives et al., 2013)	Preface (p. i-xiv), Ch. 3: The Relational Leadership Model (p. 93-145)
Leadership Challenge (LC)	*The Leadership Challenge* (5th ed.) (Kouzes & Posner, 2012)	Introduction (p. 1-7), Ch. 1: When Leaders Are at Their Best (p. 9-40)

Analytical Approach. Before engaging with the texts, we individually reflected on our own experiences with each model, so that we were attuned to our positionalities as factors in analysis. Analysis occurred across four stages (Fairclough, 1992; Suspitsyna, 2012). First, we each read the texts independently, reflecting on recurring words, phrases, and assumptions. We then discussed our reflections, sharing emerging themes before constructing analytic memos. Next, we conducted open coding across all three texts, constructing codes to reflect the embedded leadership values and assumptions as constructed through discourse. At this stage, we noticed the constructed codes and themes reflected notions of color-evasiveness. We then engaged in theoretical coding, using frames from Bonilla-Silva's (2017) color-blind racism (e.g., liberalism, minimization of racism) and Annamma and colleagues' (2017) color-evasiveness to revisit our existing codes. Given the texts' general silence about race and racism, we created a code for power-evasiveness. However, we did not want to replicate color-evasiveness in our own analysis by failing to directly engage race, racism, and racialization in favor of such broad framings. Thus, we revisited all instances of power-evasiveness and considered their relation to other codes, color-evasive racism frames, and our research questions.

Researcher Positionality. We approach this project as critical scholars of higher education, both of whom are white women. Specifically, I (Lauren), as a doctoral student, come to this project as a former student leadership educator. Thus, my interest and investment in this project stems from my own familiarity and deep engagement with the texts at the center of this analysis. I recognize that my own affinity to and investment in leadership education, as a student and later as a professional, cannot be separated from the whiteness embedded in these texts. I was validated by these texts, and by

leadership and higher education, in part because of my whiteness. However, much of my professional and now scholarly career centers on critically examining whiteness and racism, in an effort to facilitate more equitable and just leadership education efforts. I come to this project with a deep respect for the weight, complexity, and difficulty inherent in examining and disrupting whiteness in leadership education scholarship and practice.

I (Julie) am a tenured professor of higher education and associate dean whose engagement with these texts before this project was via doctoral coursework in the 2000s. Unlike Lauren, co-curricular leadership education models are not central to my scholarship. However, I do come to this study with a commitment to the development of faculty and administrators' critical consciousness and building their capacity to lead with and for racial equity. I was pleased to critically re-engage with these models for the purposes of this research. Given our positionalities, CDA aligned with our perspectives and motivations; however, we frequently paused to check our interpretations for alternatives and disconfirming evidence.

Limitations. A few limitations of this study bear mentioning. Our familiarity with leadership education texts, as a student, practitioner, and scholar are assets to this project; however, as two white women, there is a risk that our interpretation will be marked by the same oversights that these models' authors had regarding race, racism, and power as realities of leadership. As explained above, we do not interpret the entirety of these texts. We sampled them for maximum representativeness, but they are not complete. A common critique of CDA, and therefore one potential critique of our project, is the difficulty of attributing meaning to silences in texts and, relatedly, of understanding authors' intent – especially around race. However, silence is a form of discourse (Wodak, 2011), and often furnishes a way to further normative and dominant constructions of leadership (Dugan, 2017; Spiller et al., 2021). As our findings detail, we identified three mechanisms of color-evasiveness.

Findings

Our analysis uncovered three themes that reflect how leadership models evaded race and racism in ways that normalized whiteness, or the structures, habits, ideologies, and discourses that ignore the material realities of racism and normalize white peoples' experiences (Cabrera et al., 2017). Specifically, we found that a focus on leaders' individual identities masks endemic racism, an emphasis on universality masks whiteness, and a discourse of collaboration masks contestation (Table 5). Collectively, these discourses reflect two frames of color-evasive racism: Abstract liberalism and minimization of racism.

Table 5
Color-Evasive Discourses in Leadership Models

Visible discourse	Evaded discourse	Alignment with color-evasive racism frames
Individual identities	Racism	Abstract liberalism; Minimization of racism
Universality	Normalized whiteness	
Collaboration	Contestation	

Individual Identities. Leadership texts evaded racism by centering individual identities. Across all three models, human differences were mentioned in relation to axes of social, personal, and/or professional identities. However, in no case did these models engage with systems of domination, like racism and white supremacy. Largely, discussions of racial identity mirrored abstract

liberalism and minimization of racism, by avoiding the significance of race and individualizing leaders' experiences. Identities are embedded within – and indeed matter in leadership because of – systems that differentially distribute material and status resources.

The SCM and RLM often named social identities. The SCM positioned understanding of personal identities as central to leadership:

> [I]ndividuals also must take time to reflect on who they are in terms of social identities (for example, race or ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender and gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, or ability); personal identities (for example, sister, parent, friend, or partner); and core values (p. 67-68).

However, individual identities, including race, were often reduced to individual experiences or as part of a list of identities, minimizing the endemic nature of racism.

The RLM invoked identity in a similar way, though at times it went deeper than the SCM and LC by presenting examples of exclusion. Consider the following example:

> Organizational practices, such as always meeting at 9 p.m., might exclude the involvement of people such as adult learners and those who cannot be on campus at that time because of family or work obligations, or because commuting is a problem. When the group realizes, for example, that no commuter students, or students of color, or men are involved in their activities, that should be a signal that something is wrong (p. 112).

Here, the RLM acknowledged that identity may inform who and how inclusion occurs within a group – thus, recognizing that some groups or identities may be privileged in a context. However, these examples fall short of examining how power and racism shapes exclusion.

The LC infrequently named specific identities, like race. In fact, within the LC, race, gender, and other identities were often only invoked to downplay their relevance to leadership:

"Leadership knows no racial or religious bounds, no ethnic or cultural barriers" (p. 15). Further, the LC's authors mentioned different dimensions of identity to demonstrate that they were not statistically significant in their analyses:

> And our research documents that this pattern [leadership preferences] does not vary across countries, cultures, ethnicities, organizational functions and hierarchies, genders, levels of education, and age groups. For people to follow someone willingly, the majority of constituents believe the leader must be honest, forward-looking, competent, [and] inspiring (p. 35).

The LC's discourses exemplified abstract liberalism and minimization of racism by focusing on individual choice and perceived leadership merit. At times the LC named leaders' identities via profiles. For example, describing one leader as "the highest ranking Asian female executive" (p. 26). However, as with the SCM's tendency to aggregate identities, these identities were presented without consideration of their salience to leaders' experiences. Despite this color-evasive framing by the LC's white male authors, it is likely that the Asian female executive was conscious of how race, racism, as well as gender and sexism shaped her leadership experiences (see, for example, Liu, 2019). Positioning racial identity as decontextualized from racism and circumstantial to one's leadership and lived experiences, exemplifies whiteness via abstract liberalism and minimization of racism, in that white people are often ignorant to the particularities of power dynamics and of whiteness, believing their experiences to be universal or

attributable to anything other than race (Ahmed, 2007; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Liu & Baker, 2016).

Universality. Consistent with Dugan's (2017) deconstruction of leadership theory, we found a prominent role in all three models for universal notions of leadership in each text's leadership propositions. Universality was used to indicate the model's audience (e.g., "all students"), who should use the models (e.g., "everybody", "all people"), and the model's applicability across contexts. We noted universal discourses were used to make claims that access to and enactment of leadership was common and accessible to all people, reflecting abstract liberalism. As noted in our discussion of leadership prototypes, access to and validation as a leader occurs within systems of power, where whiteness and masculinity are often requirements for leadership (Liu, 2019).

The SCM described leadership as "inclusive and accessible to all people" (p. 62). The LC, in describing the model's foundational principles, asserted, "leadership is everyone's business" (p. 6) and claimed these leadership practices "are available to anyone who accepts the leadership challenge" (p. 15). Finally, the RLM proposed that "we are all capable of being effective leaders" (p. viii). These appeals to universality may be attractive to readers but contribute to color-evasive discussions of inclusive leadership.

In advocating for the universality of the LC's practices, Kouzes and Posner (2012) asserted, "The more we research and the more we write about leadership, the more confident we become that leadership is within the grasp of everyone and that the opportunities for leadership are boundless and boundaryless" (p. 3). The RLM similarly argued that college students will find their interests reflected "regardless of [their] age, gender, race, ethnicity, or academic major" (p. 3). Invoking universality may be empowering and inclusive at face value, but only insofar as lived realities of leadership can be isolated from systems of power, like racism, that shape organizations and social systems within which individuals might wish to lead.

As mentioned above, the SCM recognized that identity shapes leadership experiences, and asserted that contemporary shifts to relational, inclusive, and values-based approaches to leadership are more likely to align with the values and epistemologies of women and People of Color. In detailing leadership theory's evolution, the SCM's authors stated, "it is important to acknowledge that for many underrepresented groups, such as women and people of color, the approach to leadership practice had traditionally been relational, inclusive, and focused on values as well as outcomes" (p. 47). They also recognized that shifting views of leadership "opened the door to a wider spectrum of talent" beyond "those who had the social privilege to hold leadership positions, mostly White men" (p. 47). Despite this early acknowledgement, subsequent language used in the SCM's description largely generalized, appealing to universal "human values" like "self-knowledge, service, and collaboration" (p. 62). Such universal framings position leadership as equally accessible to all without interrogating whose perspectives and values are represented. Despite the authors' recognition that white men's social privilege afforded them disproportionate access to leadership roles, these models' universal framings of leadership concealed how whiteness undergirded leadership, thus reinforcing color-evasive discourses.

Collaboration. A third theme we identified across models is that collaboration is presented as an essential component of effective leadership. We do not disagree with this assertion. However, in each of the models, collaboration is presented uncritically as the primary way to ensure diversity, inclusivity, and success in leadership contexts. Without a consideration of the norms and the power differentials that inform interactions, the models painted a rosy view that fails to equip leaders with the necessary perspectives and tools to navigate the contestations, negotiations, and struggles that defy simple solutions.

Collaboration was central to the LC's five practices (see, Table 2): "leaders foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships" (p. 21). Cooperation, collaboration, and community building

were also integral to the RLM, facilitating the creation of shared goals and norms. Among these, collaboration was presented as an outgrowth of group members' self-awareness and desire to know others: "Knowing yourself well and seeking to know the members of the group creates a group atmosphere conducive to collaboration" (p. 137).

Finally, collaboration was one of the SCM's "seven Cs" (i.e., group values essential for leadership). Collaboration provided the model's means of engaging across difference by "capitalizing on the diversity and strengths of the relationships and interconnections of individuals involved in the change process" (p. 65). Thus, leaders must be able to facilitate "open, critical, and civil discourse" (p. 65) to understand and integrate multiple perspectives. However, failure to acknowledge the power dynamics that necessarily come with critical discourse could leave emerging leaders unprepared for equitably engaging the people who represent "differing viewpoints" (p. 65).

Collaborative efforts can result in contestation – over differences of opinion, norms, communication styles, and varied perspectives. Further, collaboration can also develop as a strategy for overcoming disagreement and conflict. In this sense, contestation is not neutral but may stem from systems of power that privilege perspectives, norms, and ways of communication based in whiteness. In short, the SCM's portrayal of inclusion as integration presumes all differences can be managed via the leader's skill facilitating collaboration.

In what may be thought of as an example of disconfirming evidence, the SCM recognized that disagreement is inevitable. However, the SCM's approach to conflict, a group value termed "controversy with civility," only validates a narrowly defined type of contestation in its privileging of safety. Civility itself has been critiqued as a white discourse. It encourages dissent and reckoning with power only under certain cultural conditions, which may include tone-policing and emotion management that preserve white interests (see, for example, Dillard, 2018; Harper & Kezar, 2021; Museus et al., 2017; Wegwert & Charles, 2019). Appeals to safety and trust, in explorations of power, often preserve the status-quo by vilifying those who name oppression or cause discomfort (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). In short, a focus on collaboration diminishes how whiteness often dictates norms for "appropriate" dialogue and collaboration. Rather, managing and addressing conflict requires sufficient stamina, self-awareness, and courage through disagreement and discomfort (Watt & MCI Consortium, 2020).

Discussion

This critical discourse analysis sought to answer: What racialized discourses are present within commonly used leadership models? In applying color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2017), we identified three discourses in the SCM, RLM, and LC that masked racism: individual identity, universality, and collaboration. Such framings downplay and fail to interrogate racism and white supremacy as structures that inhibit diversity, collaboration, and positive social change in the first place. Overall, discourses in these texts are better aligned with what Ahmed (2012) calls the 'happy talk' of diversity than guidance for engaging with power asymmetries associated with organizational diversity. However, we would be remiss if we did not explicitly name the LC as the model that was weakest as a tool for preparing leaders for the realities of leadership. It is, among the three, the most frequently silent about identity and systems of power like racism.

Extending Color-Evasive Scholarship. These findings extend scholarship on color-evasiveness in higher education. Our tracing of power-evasiveness aligns with Dugan's (2017) assessments of common leadership models' tendency to offer idealistic and universal framings of leadership. Further, we identified two of Bonilla-Silva's (2017) four frames of color-evasive racism: Discourses of individual identity, universality, and collaboration align with the frames of abstract liberalism and minimization of racism. We did not find evidence for cultural racism or naturalization, two additional color-evasive racism frames (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). These frames may be absent from the texts because these texts barely acknowledge racism's existence. Minimization of

racism downplays the significance of race and racism in everyday life. Further, abstract liberalism, which serves as the foundation for color-evasive racism, employs ideologies of political and economic liberalism to explain racial realities in abstract ways – often defaulting to explanations of individual choice or equal opportunity (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). By emphasizing identity, the texts' authors minimize how racism is related to identity, and they subsequently reinforced liberal ideologies by privileging discourses of universality and collaboration. Further, the color-evasive framings of leadership as universal and of collaboration as the elixir to problems of leadership, trivialize the systemic realities of racism.

Mueller's (2020) work on racial ignorance (i.e., as the cognitive foundation of color-evasiveness), positions ignorance as an ends-based technology for (re)producing white domination in a variety of contexts. Through these models' minimization of racism and abstract liberalism, they can be viewed as actively (re)producing racial ignorance in leadership contexts (Annamma et al., 2017; Mueller, 2020). The authors, who are mostly white scholars, draw on existing theory and research (SCM, LC, & RLM), quantitative analysis (mostly the LC), and lived experiences as authors (SCM, LC, & RLM) to support their assertions.

Knowing that color-evasiveness structures material and social relations in higher education (Burke, 2016; Doane, 2017), we argue that these texts reflect broader patterns through which people and institutions tend to benefit from evading race and racism in leadership. First, dominant leadership texts are disproportionately written by white scholars and rarely consider race or racism (Dugan, 2017), and these three models used the existing leadership canon, written by largely white scholars, to ground their texts and models. Use of a predominantly white and color-evasive leadership canon to support their own "universal" models effectively extends, rather than disrupts, existing color-evasive framings of leadership. Such practices are central to the ongoing reproduction of white ignorance and racism in knowledge production. What is more, these models' predominance in leadership education programs contributes to a broader pattern of developing leaders in higher education who are unlikely to center considerations of racism and whiteness (Patton, 2016). Collectively, these texts manifest color-evasiveness, as discursive representations of ignorance, in ways that have benefitted the authors and the diffusion of their ideas, to the detriment of leadership with and for equity.

Implications

Given the range of stakeholders connected to these leadership models and the discourses found within them, we offer implications for three audiences: institutional leaders, leadership scholars, and leadership educators. We recognize administrators at individual colleges furnish their own discourses about student leaders and leadership. Yet, as is the case for other widely assigned textbooks, the models examined in this study are blueprints in the construction and reproduction of leadership. Campus leadership programs use them as tools to represent visions of leaders and leadership, and students engage with them to determine their readiness and alignment with institutional framings of leadership (Arminio et al., 2000; Komives et al., 2006). For some students, these texts' color-evasive discourses may be inviting. Others may experience such discourses as alienating. Regardless, understanding power dynamics and structures is critical to leadership. Further, disrupting whiteness in leadership education theory and practice is an urgent priority in higher education and beyond (Wiborg, 2020).

Institutional Leaders. Our findings complement Ahmed's (2012) analysis of how institutional diversity efforts and discourses often preserve whiteness' dominance by changing how institutions talk about diversity rather than addressing institutions' embedded racism. In these efforts, "racism is treated as a breach in the happy image of diversity" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 152). Diversity becomes a way of adding color to white organizations while simultaneously protecting whiteness (Ahmed, 2012). Given the prevalence of diversity and inclusion discourses across these leadership texts, it is important to

consider how models' centering of diversity fails to challenge whiteness.

We urge institutional administrators and leaders to consider how framings of leadership and inclusion evade racism and power inequities. These leadership models, especially the SCM, center positive social change as leadership's goal. However, administrators often reward students who engage in leadership in ways that fulfill institutional interests (e.g., student body presidents who preserve the status quo) while vilifying those who challenge power inequities and pursue transformative change (e.g., student activists; Ahmed, 2012; Broadhurst, 2014; Martin et al., 2019). In short, university leaders are often invested in student leadership development as a form of social control (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992), where promising student leaders are groomed in support of maintaining a positive organizational image. Such efforts may encourage administrators to reproduce leadership discourses as happy diversity talk, rather than embracing leadership directed at addressing and disrupting institutional racism (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). As Ahmed (2012) asserts, "To talk about racism is thus to be heard as making rather than exposing the problem: to talk about racism is to become the problem you pose" (p. 153). This is especially true for People of Color.

Leadership Scholars. Beyond critiquing institutions' continued reliance on diversity discourses, these findings also offer implications for leadership scholars. Leadership models are not self-generating, rather they are authored by scholars with specific experiences, perspectives, and positionalities that inform how they approach their work and make meaning of leadership. Thus, scholars who are engaged in theoretical development must engage in critical reflexivity. Toward that end, leadership scholars can articulate positionality statements in their research, regardless of methodology (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Posselt et al., 2020). Owen (2020) recognized that many leadership texts are authored by white scholars who rarely name their whiteness; her positionality statement is notable for its inclusion and explicit discussion of whiteness.

Such critical reflexivity allows leadership scholars and texts to embrace the inherently particular nature of theorizing and make their intentions explicit. Critical reflexivity can disrupt color-evasive leadership theorizing and interrogate potential gaps between intent and impact. We propose that scholars who want to develop, apply, or critique leadership theory start by explicitly engaging with race, racism, and racialization in their lives, ways of knowing, methodologies, and texts. Then, scholars can consider which leadership ingredients they prioritize (e.g., collaboration, resistance) and consider how these elements contribute to resistance, transformation, or the status quo. Here, we discussed how authors' likely well-intended efforts to craft widely accessible leadership models normalized whiteness. Critical reflexivity can help leadership scholars name and trouble the oppressive systems, like racism, that leaders navigate and resist, and invite leadership educators and students into critical reflection as well.

Leadership Educators. Finally, this research has implications for leadership educators. As we carried out this project, we continually asked: What do we do with these imperfect texts? In response, we offer two possibilities for leadership educators: (1) beginning with models' imperfections; and (2) expanding and integrating leadership models and discourses.

Dugan (2017) offered examples of how leadership educators can recognize models' imperfections and involve students in reimagining and modifying existing models. Engaging students in such processes facilitates critical thinking and meaningful learning about power and privilege (Dugan, 2017). Leadership educators can ask students to explore the SCM and Museus and colleagues' (2017) SALT model side by side or Tapia-Fuselier & Irwin's (2019) deconstruction and reconstruction of StrengthsQuest alongside students' explorations of personal strengths. By starting with tools' imperfections, leadership educators open space for students to question, critique, and resist models as drafted. We do not expect leadership educators will have all the answers – rather collaborative processes provide a

powerful way to disrupt whiteness and shift students' perceptions of authoritative knowledge and leaders.

In the spirit of collaboration and disrupting whiteness, we encourage leadership educators to consider other leadership models. What if leadership educators and programs centered writings from feminists of color, like Chicana Feminism, as models for engaging difference and fostering solidarity? Moraga and Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back* (2015), centers Women of Color's reflections on and efforts to enact justice and solidarity and could be employed as a leadership text. Further, rather than using existing leadership models and encouraging white students to learn about white privilege, leadership educators and programs might use memoirs by leaders of color, which portray both principles and real-life stories of grappling with power. Bell's (2000) *Wanted: White Leader to Free Whites of Racism* is one such example, as is his 2008 letter to students, *Ethical Ambition*. Patton and Haynes (2020) ask white people to use such texts to disrupt, reimagine, and decenter whiteness. Altering the blueprints through which we develop leaders requires exposure to diverse approaches and a commitment to affirming the legitimacy of historically marginalized communities' experiences by incorporating their values, norms, and experiences into the canon of leadership theorizing and practice.

Conclusions

Higher education's enduring commitment to leadership development necessitates models that reflect and validate diverse leaders and communities. To develop leaders who reflect society's diversity, leadership education must confront, rather than evade, racism. This critical discourse analysis illuminated how dominant leadership models deployed color-evasive discourses. All three texts named race, but they did so in very cursory ways. They did not acknowledge systems of power, including racism, that make race and other identities salient to leadership. This evasion of racism's realities (re)produces leadership knowledge that is culturally irrelevant to the emergent majority of college students, who know the salience of racism to social, educational, and professional processes. This study's findings amplify the need to reconstruct leadership theory and practice while displacing color-evasive perspectives to make space for diverse perspectives, enactments, and theorizing about leadership.

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