Intersectionality in Educational Leadership: A Critical Review

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Chapter 11

Intersectionality and Educational Leadership: A Critical Review

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In this review of research, we explore intersectionality in the literature on K–12 educational leadership. We seek to understand how researchers have used intersectionality and what their findings or arguments reveal about the work of leading to reduce inequities in education. We ask, What traditions and trends associated with intersectionality have been brought into educational leadership research to inform the development of transformative leadership? The sample includes 15 articles published in peer-reviewed journals between 2005 and 2017. We identify the themes individualism and knowledge relations, which leads us to three interrelated findings concerning conceptions of leadership and intersectionality. We find that intersectionality primarily (1) is used to support micro-level analysis rather than both micro-level and macro-level analysis of the inequities being confronted by leadership practice, (2) is used to focus on individuals’ experiences as “leaders” and “leadership” capacity rather than “leading” practices, and (3) serves as an emergent knowledge project in its support of agendas related to transformative educational leadership. We discuss how the use of intersectionality, conceptions of leadership, and leadership and research practices coincide, pointing to the implications for the continued use of intersectionality in educational leadership, and provide recommendations to support the use of intersectionality in future research.

In educational leadership research, various approaches to scholarship are being advanced to help expose and explain the complexity of social injustice and transform education accordingly (Capper, 1989; Horsford, 2012; Quantz, Rogers, & Dantley, 1991). Examples of such approaches include critical race theory (CRT; Capper, 2015), feminist theory (Blackmore, 2013), critical spirituality (Dantley,
2010), and multiculturalism (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013). This critical review of literature drew from the common theme across these approaches, leading social transformation toward social justice, to focus on transformative educational leadership.

The purpose of this review was to understand the use of intersectionality by researchers studying educational leadership and related inequities. The guiding questions were the following: (1) How is intersectionality used in relation to leadership and intervening in inequities in education? (2) How is leadership conceptualized when intersectionality is used? In the next paragraph, we will introduce theoretical conceptions of leadership in the field of educational leadership and describe the recent turn to a transformative leadership. Then we provide some historical background on intersectionality to expose traditions and tensions that are important for those who seek to use it at this point in the trajectory of its development.

**Theoretical Conceptions of Educational Leadership**

Research in educational leadership has favored leadership theories that focus on organizational goals and emphasize transactions, management, and efficiency (Larson & Murtadha, 2003; Quantz, Cambron-McCabe, Dantley, & Hachem, 2017). During the 1980s, as the focus shifted from organizational management to leadership, education research introduced new leadership theories that centered human agency rather than organizational structure (Evers & Lakomski, 2013). The focus on the agency of human actors recentered individualism and ushered in a leader-centric view in which leadership was an expression of a single person’s influence—the formal leader of an organization. According to Evers and Lakomski (2013), leader-centric accounts involve a commitment to methodological individualism whereby logical structures are reduced in the analysis on how leading is practiced in educational organizations so as to understate the significance of a broader range of influences.

The addition of the principal’s office within schools changed the culture and organization of schools to match the traditional social and leadership expectations for men (Rousmaniere, 2007). Even as women began to increasingly enter into educational administrative positions during the start of the 20th century (Blount, 1998, Hansot & Tyack, 1981; Tyack & Hansot, 1982), White, Protestant, heterosexual men remained dominant in the field. Furthermore, notions of masculinity, heteronormativity, and White supremacy informed by their prominence and dominance continue to serve as the basis for theories of leadership (Liang, Sottile, & Peters, 2016). This historiography of educational leadership illustrates how inequities developed to further shape educational leadership theory, practice, and research. Next, we describe how William Foster paired Burns’s (1978) transformational leadership with Giroux’s (1988) transformative intellectual to help pave the way for scholarship on leading as a practice involving the analysis of power relations and the use of findings to further educate.
Transformative Leadership Practice

Foster (1989) argued that administration in K–20 education “needed to be recast as a transformational practice where leadership and critique form the basis for establishing true educational communities” (p. 10). He defined critique, based on critical theory, as “a sustained and formal attempt to analyze social relations and the impact of class, power, and ideology on these, with the ultimate, if utopian, goal of freeing people from the conditions that they themselves identify as being repressive” (p. 11). Therefore, as he argued, leadership is educative, and those who serve in leadership roles should perform as “transformative intellectuals” who analyze forms of discourse for how they disguise power relations and use those findings to educate.

Drawing on the work of adult educators using critical social theory (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991), some scholars have theorized transformative leadership in education as a practice of intervening in inequities. For instance, Shields’s (2012) approach to transformative leadership in education is grounded in the four critical components of Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed: awareness (conscientization), reflection, analysis, and action or activism. Others have referred to these processes as ways of being, relating, knowing, and doing (henceforth leading) that are needed to respond to a globally changing context (Montuori & Donnelly, 2017). According to Shields (2010), transformative leadership begins by recognizing the ontological dimension of leadership; how “some material realities of the broader social and political sphere” and “the inequities and struggles experienced in the wider society affect one’s ability to perform and to succeed within an organizational context” (p. 568).

Transformative leadership is a broad-based framework constituted by the following tenets:

- Acknowledging power and privilege
- Articulating both individual and collective purposes (public and private good)
- Deconstructing social-cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity and reconstructing them
- Balancing critique and promise
- Effecting deep and equitable change
- Working toward transformation: liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, and excellence
- Demonstrating moral courage and activism (Shields, 2011)

There is growing emphasis in the literature on leading to transform education into a more equitable and just system.

Intersectionality as an Oppositional Knowledge Project

Oppositional knowledge projects contest hegemonic or dominant scholarship that “aims to preserve the status quo, ensure social order, and redefine social change as a process of polite gradualism” (Collins, 2016, p. 139). Scholarship supports
oppositional knowledge projects when it exposes uneven power relations behind unjust practices that result in patterns of inequity. Intersectionality is an oppositional knowledge project that began in social movement settings and was brought into American higher education to support social awareness and change (Collins, 2009). Across decades, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins have worked to define and use intersectionality. Their ongoing scholarship can inform how researchers/scholars in educational leadership can proceed when taking up intersectionality. For instance, to expose how Black girls are pushed out, overpoliced, and unprotected in schools, Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda (2015) used intersectionality to connect race and gender to zero-tolerance policies, social marginalization, and criminalization. They pointed to the need for leadership at all levels and sectors of society to provide the necessary resources to ensure that Black girls, and girls of color more generally, have equitable opportunities. Given the promise of intersectionality to assist in exposing inequities in K–12 education, its examination in educational leadership research is warranted. Despite the use of intersectionality across various social science fields, it remains underused in educational leadership literature focused on understanding and critiquing inequities in PreK–12 schooling (Capper & Young, 2014). According to Capper (2015), detailed analyses of the use of intersectionality within equity leadership practice would benefit the field.

In conducting this review, we leaned heavily on the historical and ongoing work of Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, including but not limited to what was cited in the literature we reviewed herein. In the following sections, we describe intersectionality, the methodology, and present the findings. We then discuss the findings and offer recommendations to guide the use of intersectionality as a tool that supports research as a dispositionally informed practice involving critique and analysis.

### What Is Intersectionality?

The origins of intersectionality can be traced back to early social movements, during the 1960s and 1970s, which analyzed inequities within political, social, and economic structures, including education, employment, and the legal system (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Combahee River Collective, 1981; Harlan, 1957; Shoben, 1980). Inspired by CRT and Black feminism, Crenshaw (1988) coined the term *intersectionality* while exposing the inadequacy of antidiscrimination law to address employment barriers and undo racism and sexism that directly influenced Black women in particular. She relied on the history of Black liberation politics to illustrate the limitations of antiracist and feminist theories to address structural discrimination affecting interactions and marginalization associated with social “categories of experience and analysis” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). In doing so, she broadened her focus from race to include sex/gender in her criticism of antidiscrimination laws and continued developing and applying intersectionality to examine other phenomena such as violence against Black women (Crenshaw, 1991).
Core Ideas About Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a tool researchers can engage analytically and dispositionally in examinations of interlocking educational injustices (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Natapoff, 1995; Scanlan & Theoharis, 2016). It has been described as a way for researchers to highlight the relational aspects of human connections and society (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Crenshaw (1991) identified three forms of intersectional analysis: structural, political, and representational. These forms refer to overlapping structures of subordination in which marginalized people are situated, the material consequences of interactive oppressions, the erasure of people’s experiences at the intersections of multiple oppressions, and the cultural construction of identities that result in negative stereotypes that are used to further discredit marginalized experiences.

In contrast to critiques that intersectionality is simply an identitarian framework (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013), Hancock (2013) argued that empirical research using intersectionality has gone beyond the politics of identity (i.e., race, gender, and sexuality) to analyze uneven power relations that shape structural manifestations of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, and heterosexism), but also noted the following issues: a lack of attentiveness to the historical context of experience lived by the participants, the marginalized aspects of their social locations, and the privilege and agential aspects of their social locations. Although descriptions of intersectionality abound, there are few analyses of how it has been used methodologically across the social sciences (Gross, Gottburgsen, & Phoenix, 2016; McCall, 2005).

The core ideas of intersectionality can be applied in educational leadership. Its use in the study of educational leadership could potentially strengthen transformative leadership as an educative oppositional knowledge project focused on intervening in interrelated systems of oppression. First, its emphasis on the experiences of social groups, social structures, and social oppressions challenges methodological individualism with analysis of individual–organizational relationships and practices (Evers & Lakomski, 2013). Second, intersectionality also supports critique and researcher reflexivity on how education and education research is transformed by ways of relating, knowing, being, and leading.

METHODOLOGY

To examine how researchers used intersectionality in articles focused on educational leadership, we drew on the grounded theoretical approach to conducting literature reviews suggested by Wolswinkel, Furtmueller, and Wilderom (2011). They claimed that “a high-quality review inspires valuable studies that extend the earlier theoretical and empirical repertoire” (p. 9) and “must be a richly competent coverage of a well-carved out niche in the literature” (p. 3), and be informed by the background knowledge researchers bring to the process. An additional criterion by which to judge the quality of reviews or research in general is whether or not it fosters emancipation and provides insight into the structure of human experience
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(Clegg, 2005). The five stages of the model are defining, searching, selecting, analyzing, and presenting.

Defining the Parameters for Inclusion and Exclusion

Scope, Criteria, and Field of Study

We focused the review on educational leadership at the K–12 level involving administrative roles, such as superintendents, principals, and assistant principals, rather than nonadministrative leadership roles (i.e., teacher leaders, counselors, or social workers). We included studies of students in advanced educational leadership preparation programs that combined leadership preparation on K–12 and higher education (Welton, Mansfield, Lee, & Young, 2015). We excluded studies of administratively certified teachers, who had not taken an administrative position.

Searching

We used five criteria to conduct the initial search for articles on intersectionality related to educational leadership: (1) the time frame from 1989 to 2017; (2) peer-reviewed journals; (3) research conducted in the United States; (4) the inclusion of the word “intersectionality” in the title, keywords, and/or abstract; and (5) emphasis on K–12 educational leadership and/or educational leadership preparation programs. This 28-year time frame allowed us to capture literature published since the inception of intersectionality in critical legal studies and its entry into the field of education and educational leadership. Initially, we searched for articles using the key terms intersectionality and education leadership or administration in the title, keywords, or abstract. As the search progressed, we expanded the terms to include “intersect” on noticing that some articles used the terms intersected and intersectional, either with or without intersectionality. We restricted our search to peer-reviewed journals since they provide a review process to evaluate and enhance the quality of published work and excluded dissertations, books, reports, white papers, conference proceedings, and social media, which generally tend to be inconsistently reviewed by other scholars. Geographically, we restricted the search to literature focused on the United States given that its historical context for marginalized groups has been shaped by particular federal and state-level politics and policies, including housing, immigration, desegregation, disability, and (de)colonization.

To begin, we searched using Google Scholar and saved articles we thought met the criteria in our respective Google Scholar Libraries. From there, we each created an Excel table that we populated with the saved articles. After combining our libraries and filtering out doubles, we read the remaining articles’ titles, abstracts, and sections of text referencing intersectionality. Then we searched the following library databases: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Academic Search Premier, and Education Source.

We repeated the search by targeting journals specific to educational leadership, such as Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ) and the Journal of School
Leadership. We found two additional works in EAQ that we initially excluded but then included: an essay (Alston, 2005) and a literature review (Capper, 2015). Prior to this review, Capper and Green (2013) reviewed articles on equity and organizational theories published in EAQ (2000–2010) but found none that addressed the intersection of multiple identities. They did not include Alston’s (2005) article in their analysis, though we eventually did, since she included intersectionality as a keyword and used to theorize about leadership.

Selecting

We organized the initial sample into groups and arranged each group alphabetically; articles reporting on studies with human subjects and articles without human subjects. Using a dialogical process similar to intercoder reliability, we read the first article in a group and discussed our justifications as to why it should or should not be included in the sample. When we had a difference in opinion, offered a weak rationale, or remained tentative about excluding an article, we placed it on hold and then proceeded to read and deliberate on others in the sample. This process allowed us to further define the parameters for including/excluding articles previously placed on hold.

We excluded articles introducing themed issues, articles about leadership outside of formal institutions of education, and studies of women (a single category) in educational leadership engaging intersectionality that met the marginalized identity criteria (gender: women), but did not engage in analysis beyond a single axis. If we found articles focusing on intersectionality, leadership, and the benefits of privilege, while ignoring its harms for those in multiple marginalized social locations affected by social oppression(s), we excluded them. We did this after taking into account the assertion made by Collins and Bilge (2016), that intersectionality exists to expose social inequities that are rarely caused by a single issue (e.g., racism or sexism).

In keeping with our purpose to review research based on a systematic scholarly inquiry, we excluded the Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, since it publishes pedagogical cases rather than case studies. Cases from the 2016 themed issue on intersectionality have been reviewed elsewhere (Roland, 2016), and another case is reflected in an empirical study included in our sample (Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010).

Analyzing

To support our collaborative review, we developed a data extraction tool that helped us systematically extract key segments of text that illustrated the traditions in which intersectionality and leadership were situated, related, and used in the articles we analyzed. We posted the data extraction tool in the form of a table within a virtual shared folder and reproduced it to allow each of us to complete the extraction. Each of us read an article closely and conducted the data extraction independently, which was repeated for approximately three to five articles. This process provided us with an archive
consisting of two tables per article and focused our discussions on the data extraction process, outcomes, and weaknesses in order to improve the tool. Once we were comfortable with the process of interpreting based on more defined understandings, we read each article and marked excerpts by hand on paper copies. We then extracted excerpts from the sample and entered them along with our interpretations into the online data extraction tool. The data extraction tool was essential in the process of dissecting each article and identifying themes and gaps across the selected literature.

As the review progressed, we expanded the timeline by 10 years to identify gaps in the publication record (1980s), and then opened the search from 1900 to 2000 to add to the historical record on the use of the term intersection alongside inequity in education (e.g., Harlan, 1957). To understand how intersectionality was rooted and used, we focused on how the articles grounded the concept in previous scholarship, discussed its purpose, and used it in relation to educational leadership and inequity. Within the sample, we examined articles that were coauthored and/or included human participants ($n = 10$) to examine how the researchers provided participants with opportunities to engage dialogically in narrating their leading experiences and the opportunities they created for themselves to collaborate with other researchers or scholars in the knowledge process. We identified the themes of (1) individualism and (2) knowledge relations through open coding. Individualism concerns the focus on leadership at the individual level. Knowledge relations concern how leading was conceptualized and how intersectionality was used in research/scholarship.

Presenting

After removing 7 articles that either focused on higher education leadership or failed to substantively discuss intersectionality, even after having used it in the title, keywords, or abstract, we settled on a final sample of 15 articles: 9 qualitative studies, 4 essays, 1 review of literature, and 1 mixed methods study (see Table 1). Overwhelmingly, the selected articles focused on the identities of school-based administrators and how they navigated difficult situations. Black women administrators were the main participants in 10 of the 15 articles.

Limitations

This review is limited by the criterion that restricted the sample to empirical research situated in the United States. We excluded empirical studies from abroad given that school leadership is mediated in the particularities of the policies and practices of each country, and our knowledge of such is limited to the United States. We were willing to include conceptual work; however, we found no published literature that went beyond mentioning intersectionality in a sentence or two. Another limitation is the small sample of articles ($N = 15$), which is not unusual for a review of concepts or practices recently introduced into educational leadership research. For example, an initial review of research literature on “turnaround principals” by Meyers and Hambrick Hitt (2017) included 18 studies.
**TABLE 1**

**Articles Reviewed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Intersectionality Origin</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Identity Categories</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Themed</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fostering an Ethics of Care in Leadership: A Conversation with Five African American Women</td>
<td>Lisa Bass</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td><em>Advances in Developing Human Resources</em></td>
<td>Feminist care focused and Black feminist theory</td>
<td>Collins (2000)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Exploratory multicase study</td>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pastoral Care: Notions of Caring and the Black Female Principal</td>
<td>Noelle Witherspoon and Bruce Makoto Arnold</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td><em>The Journal of Negro Education</em></td>
<td>Womanist theory</td>
<td>Crenshaw (1991), Collins (1998), Tate (2005)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Spiritual narratives: In-depth interviews</td>
<td>Black women Christian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Through the Challenge of Change: African American Women Principals on Small School Reform</td>
<td>April L. Peters</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td><em>International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education</em></td>
<td>Afrocentric feminist epistemology</td>
<td>McCall (2005)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Instrumental case study: Semistructured and open-ended interviews</td>
<td>Black, women, age (less than 40 years)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<th>Approach</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mentoring Educational Leadership Doctoral Students: Using Methodological Diversification to Examine Gender and Identity Intersections</td>
<td>Anjale D. Welton, Katherine Cumings, Mansfield, Pei-Ling Lee, and Michelle D. Young</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td><em>International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation</em></td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative</td>
<td>Focus group interview and exploratory survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Year</td>
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FINDINGS

In reviewing the literature, we asked how intersectionality was used when inequity in education was a concern expressed by the researchers. We subsumed all approaches urging educational leadership to develop more just and equitable education under the descriptor *transformative leadership*, although not all researchers used this phrase. Horsford (2012) advanced a vision of leadership “that engages transformative educational practices, which promote equity, diversity and social justice for all students” (p. 12). Other researchers in the sample provided purpose statements, problems, or questions that reflected an interest in supporting the ideal of transformative leadership, often framed as a contribution to fostering a more equitable and just educational system and society.

Several researchers named and criticized the centrality of Western, Eurocentric styles and theories of leadership based on the normative (White) lens in educational leadership practice and scholarship and positioned their work as support for the reconceptualization of leadership based on the experiences of marginalized groups, their voices, and the ways in which they lead (Alston, 2005; Bass, 2009; García & Byrne Jiménez, 2016; Horsford, 2012; López, 2016; Reed, 2012; Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010). Liang and Peters-Hawkins (2017) named knowledge suppression as a threat to the economic, political, and social vitalization of Black women and their realities (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003), which reflected Collins’s (2016) concern about the depoliticization of oppositional knowledge (i.e., intersectionality). They argued that the absence of historically underrepresented groups and their stories, such as Asian American women within educational leadership, allows for the continuation of discourse that “perpetuates a system that refuses to acknowledge the genuine needs and legitimate concerns of Asian-American women, and fails to provide access and equity to those who aspire to leadership” (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, p. 42).

Witherspoon and Taylor (2010) also situated their study of Black women’s knowledge, in the form of spiritual or religious epistemologies, “as powerful counter-narratives to traditional knowledges in educational leadership, schools, and society” rather than as ways of “not knowing” (p. 156). We interpreted research that used intersectionality to challenge traditional notions of leadership, make visible and audible the voices and narratives of groups who have been marginalized or rejected, and promote equitable opportunities and outcomes for groups who have been underserved by the educational system, among others, as adding to the oppositional knowledge project we refer to as transformative leadership.

Through a grounded theory process of analysis, three interrelated findings emerged from the data. The first finding on the centrality of “the leader” points to the continued use of a person-centric conception of leading (alone) analyzed at the micro-level—focused on individual(s) and interpersonal experience. Majority of the researchers throughout the sample tended to pose questions about individuals rather than about issues related to oppression. Within five studies, the subfinding exposed
how women of color working in school-based administrative positions continued to experience workplace discrimination.

The second finding, evident in a smaller number of empirical studies with and without human subjects, switched between a micro-level and macro-level analysis, as well as between conceptions of leadership and the leader. More specifically, four studies expressed the hybrid conception of transformative leadership involving the leader, leadership, and leading (with others). The active construction, leading, is echoed in the emphasis transformative leadership scholarship places on praxis involving action and change related to the subfinding: contextualized sociopolitical consciousness.

Unlike the previous findings, the third finding speaks to the politics of knowledge affected by research processes and relations between people, theories, and their power to support oppositional knowledge projects. The third finding is that intersectionality is inchoate as an emergent knowledge project in educational leadership research and risks underserving political and research agendas associated with the development of transformative leadership theory/practice. The subfindings are as follows: intersectionality is a floating signifier across the sample, citation practices made questionable the people and traditions supporting the development and application of intersectionality over time, and the tenets or principles of oppositional knowledge projects tended to be ignored in descriptions of design and implementation of studies involving human subjects. This final finding largely concerns how researchers develop and report on studies, including how they illustrate their and others’ understandings and applications of intersectionality in relationship to knowledge production processes of power.

Finding 1: Person-Centric Conception of Leading—The Leader

In most studies, researchers used intersectionality to understand experience at the individual and interpersonal levels (Bass, 2009; Horsford, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Liang et al., 2016; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; López, 2016; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012; Welton et al., 2015; Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010). A micro-level analysis was evident in the research questions posed across the sample, such as: “How does African-American women leaders’ experiences with intersectionality inform ethics of care in responding to social injustices within the educational system?” (Bass, 2009, p. 621), and “What are the experiences of highly visible, early career African-American principals in a large urban school district? Specifically, how do age, gender, and race intersect in their professional experiences?” (Jean-Marie, 2013, p. 616).

Drawing largely on data from questionnaires and surveys, Welton et al. (2015) studied mentoring experiences and relationships among doctoral students in educational leadership programs based on their intersectional social categories of identity. The researchers noted that “female doctoral students of color experience both racism and sexism, and alleviating this interlocking oppression would require both feminist and race-conscious approaches to mentoring” (p. 59). The researchers’ focus on
identity politics was evident in their recommendation that programs help develop students’ understanding of how their social identities intersect. Crenshaw (1991) argued that intersectionality is not “some new totalizing theory of identity” but rather an analytical tool for making sense of structural power relations (p. 1244). Helping individuals understand their identity intersections, without helping them analyze intersections of oppression linked to power relations, can serve to minimize the significance of group or shared patterns of experience in their perception of the magnitude of oppression.

There was a vague example of leading evident in another study. A principal commented, “When I stopped focusing so much on achievement at my school, our test scores increased by 19%” (Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010, p. 227). Other researchers captured more specific examples of leading among school-based administrators (Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012; Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010). For instance, a principal attempted to garner the support of the community by switching to a beauty parlor in a part of the town where students and their parents were going, she described how she “tried to become a part of the life they lived” (Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010, p. 227). Bass (2009) described African American women as leaders whose experiences with intersectionality influenced how they “used their power to bend the rules” (p. 629). She attributed their capacity to bend the rules to their personal insights into the system that makes the rules, alluding to how perceptual acuity can be gained through prior experience navigating similar arrangements of institutional power.

The most concrete examples of leading were expressed in quotations made by Black, women school principals related to funding inequities. For instance, to sustain professional development for instructional classes, there was a need to gain district-level finances to implement reform. One principal went to the “district office and asked for $5000” to continue an instructional practice, but when her request “was declined” she had to continue the implementation of the educational reform with limited funds (Peters, 2012, p. 30). Another principal, quoted in two articles, “fought for a laboratory at school” (Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010, p. 227), which she thought “needed it more than the rich school they were trying to give it to” (Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010, p. 146). Also related to economic equity affecting building infrastructure, another principal stated, “What people don’t get is that I’m still trying to get sections of this building wired [for the Internet]” (Reed, 2012, p. 53). This quote was in reference to disparities between schools and how she observed that as the enrollment of students of color increased the school’s funding decreased, while in suburban schools money was available to fund extracurricular activities. These specific efforts to intervene in the perpetuation of inequities through the reallocation of human and nonhuman capital reflect transformative leadership.

Overall, participants were portrayed as working and persisting alone rather than in alliance or in fellowship with others. Only Reed (2012) provided an example, a single quotation, of a participant describing how they led relationally. She stated, “So
we decided as a staff that we would change to uniforms” (p. 49). Reed described this principal’s approach to leading as a dispersion of power for the general good of the community rather than “having power for power’s sake” (p. 42). While her inclusion of this quotation suggests a distributed leadership approach to power used by the participant while leading to transform policy and practice to be more equitable and just (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007), the majority of the articles and comments made by participants in the study focused on leaders and leadership rather than leading.

**Workplace Discrimination**

Analyses of individuals primarily focused on how they perceived and responded to workplace discrimination while seeking social justice for themselves and others. Some claimed that, historically, Black women’s awareness of self and self-preservation have been intertwined with leadership for social justice in education (Horsford, 2012), and the field of educational administration has reinforced gender norms, including the image of the White, protestant, heterosexual men so that traditional conceptions of upward mobility reflect their experiences (Liang et al., 2016).

Also pointing to workplace discrimination related to institutions and identities, Welton et al. (2015) described how two Asian women with international student status felt discriminated against given that they were ineligible for funding reserved for domestic students and unable to secure employment on campus. Others’ feelings and perceptions of discrimination were included in studies that reported on how Asian American women used their individual agency to navigate their employment contexts, while attempting to remain true to their cultural identities and values (Liang et al., 2016; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017). In studying Asian American women principals, Liang et al. (2016) suspected that participants were reluctant to violate leadership norms and risk being perceived as violating social and cultural expectations for Asian women. Although the researchers situated the problem and interpreted the data as evidence of systemic discrimination affecting career mobility, the data generated were in response to the question about individual pathways to school leadership, which were then analyzed for how their experiences differed across the group and in comparison with other women of color. Thus, most data were biographical, focused on mentoring as an interpersonal relationship, and absent description of their work in their leadership positions as principals and assistant principals.

In some cases, an aspect of one’s identity was maximized to support leadership and self-preservation. Spirituality (a source of power) was a common focus among studies that centered on the experiences of Asian American women (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017) and Black women (Bass, 2009; Horsford, 2012; Peters, 2012; Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010) in educational leadership. Witherspoon and Taylor (2010) pointed to the intersectionality of race, gender, and religiospirituality in participants’ active resistance aimed at social justice on behalf of the students. Relating the participants’ experiences to intersectional identities and social
oppressions, they typically described the participants operating independently—though not apart from “a higher being” (Bass, 2009, p. 628).

According to Witherspoon and Taylor (2010), self-preservation strategies used among Black women principals were supported by spirituality and their social justice mission. One participant commented, “I have been discriminated against in every sense of the word and yet I am still here. I would have given up a long time ago if I did not pray and have God” (p. 147). Although this participant did not quit, some participants in others studies did quit their positions. For instance, two African American women left their positions as principals as an act of self-preservation to escape from an unsupportive environment during the reform of the small schools and to resist educational inequities they perceived were being perpetuated by their school district (Peters, 2012). These studies point to what Shields (2012) described as the starting point for transformative leadership, acknowledging that the material reality of leading is affected by inequities.

Finding 2: Hybrid Conception of Leader/Leadership/Leading as Contextualized Consciousness

Transformative leadership is not just about heroic individuals or just about organizations but about participation and collaborative creation (Montuori & Donnelly, 2017). We refer to this individuals–organizations relationship as a hybrid conception that alternates between leader/leadership/leading (people, capacity, and process involving individuals, groups, and organizations affecting the cocreation of one another). While the focus on the leader and leadership was not uncommon in studies of micro-level experience of individuals (Horsford, 2012), we now discuss the literature that addressed the leader, leadership, and leading, and the subfinding—contextualized sociopolitical consciousness.

In a subset of articles, researchers challenged the person-centric notion of leadership with a hybrid conception of leader/leadership/leading supported by intersectionality. They most consistently undermined a person-centric framing of problems and solutions around a single “leader,” and instead treated leading as an expression of power (i.e., agency) related to the value of relationality and communality rather than individualism (Alston, 2005; Nicholson & Maniates, 2015) involving individual and collaborative efforts (Capper, 2015), and modeled or advocated for a contextualized sociopolitical consciousness (García & Byrne-Jiménez, 2016; López, 2016). The first two articles discussed are essays based in different critical traditions (Indigenous knowledge, postmodern thought; Alston, 2005; Nicholson & Maniates, 2015), followed by a review of research (Capper, 2015); all draw from different traditions associated with intersectionality.

Alston (2005) relied on intersectionality to recapture the ways in which Black women in leadership roles have transferred their multiple marginality status into leadership practice. She paired intersectionality with tempered radicalism and servant leadership to argue that a form of tempered radicalism enacted by Black women has
been neglected in leadership theories. She argued that in the historiography of educational leadership, there is evidence that power once intended to serve as a mechanism of oppression was transformed by Black women “into an effective instrument for constructive change” (p. 677). To analyze their form of tempered radicalism, she used a framework centering Afrocentric philosophy involving relationality, agency, identities, and sociopolitical historiography, based on intersectionality as described by Crenshaw (1991) and Collins (2000). Alston (2005) theoretically challenged the person-centric notion of the heroic leader with the communal notion of servant leadership. The essay by Nicholson and Maniates (2015) also referred to tempered radicals (Meyerson, 2001).

Nicholson and Maniates (2015) argued that modernist notions of leadership as rational, simple, and linear must be replaced by postmodern notions of leadership as relational and distributed. Intersectionality as a concept, they argued, can accommodate the complexity of early childhood leadership, where power is shared among professionals with multiple selves/identities. They drew on a multilevel model of intersectionality from the higher education literature, which includes attention to domains of power and the contexts of the past and present. Yet, in describing a first-generation Latina, they used social role descriptors (a small business owner) and general dispositional qualities (i.e., self-confidence in public speaking, nervous), thereby conflating the first level of the model, axes of identity (Crenshaw, 1989), with social contexts (i.e., organizational), and domains of power (i.e., formal positions, relationships). Nicholson and Maniates described her agency as an act of “subverting her state-licensing board’s mandated use of bleach by quietly using an environmentally friendly alternative” (p. 74). The example failed to address the confluence of social power that perpetuates oppression, constitutes the marginalization of (some) identities, and influences which ways of being are recognized as enactments of leading.

It should be noted that the Latina they described was a character in the book by Meyerson (2001), who focused on the field of business. Still we wondered how their discussion of her might have been different if their intersectional analysis had been paired with Black and/or Chicana/Mestiza (Indigenous) thought and/or grounded in more recent contributions provided by Collins and Crenshaw. Models and tools can guide but do not ensure that researchers can hold together an analysis of leading within multiple, entangled, and interpenetrating forces.

In reviewing the use of CRT in educational leadership, Capper (2015) described six tenets across the literature, one of which was intersectionality. Citing Crenshaw (1991), she described intersectionality as a way to “consider race across races and the intersection of race with other identities and differences” (p. 795), and referred to the leader and leadership. She provided several descriptions of leading practices in connection to inequities in education and within a collective, such as teams including students and input from their families. Her focus was on intersectionality as a tool to analyze policies, practices, and injustices affecting students.
López (2016) and García and Byrne-Jiménez (2016) drew on critical race and feminist perspectives (i.e., Black feminist thought, Latino critical theory), related leadership to agency such as resistance and activism, expressed concerns about multiple intersecting oppressions, interpreted problems from the micro-level to the macro-level, and discussed sociopolitical consciousness in context.

López (2016) situated her argumentative essay in critical pedagogical perspectives, Chicana feminist epistemology and Black and Chicana feminist notions of intersectionality, “influenced by Kimberly [sic] Crenshaw (1989, 1991)” (p. 133). She advocated for Chicano/Latino students, education, and educational leadership that can “disrupt the talons of corporate interests in and out of education” (p. 137). She switched between person-centric narratives of the educational “leader” to “leadership” as an expression of agency among political actors, in a “culture of control and governmentality” (p. 134). Although at times López advanced the person-centric notion of leadership, she also situated the individual and problem in a broader sociopolitical context (culture of control) across sectors (corporate, education), attended to past conceptions of leadership, and connected leading (to disrupt the talons) to broader social problems such as immigration. The problems toward which she analytically directed intersectionality were not only those experienced or perceived by individuals but also those developed in the context of leading across people and political conditions affected by intersectoral systemic oppressions (corporate, government).

García and Byrne-Jiménez (2016) offered a pointed critique of educational leadership as operating under a normative White, male lens and related intersectionality to leadership, race (Afro/Black), and ethnicity (Latino, Dominican, Dominican American). In this call to “emerge,” they recentered the person-centric notion of leadership as the “Afro-Latino leader” (p. 135). This was the only study describing leadership enacted by a man, who was one of the researchers (García). While they provided detailed descriptions of his life prior to becoming an assistant principal, they offered little explicit description of specific leading activity while in that role and none that exposed (1) how his efforts to challenge social injustice as an Afro-Latino man differed from traditional leadership approaches or (2) how his male privilege and linguistic capital affected how he was able to lead or advance into an administrative role.

They argued that Afro-Latino perspectives can empower disenfranchised communities to join with other communities to transform the education system, which situated race and ethnicity as political and social tools for use in analyzing power dynamics. They concluded by urging educational leadership scholars to “emerge from the shadow of their own complacency” in neglecting the “intersectionality and unique experiences of Afro-Latinos” (García & Byrne-Jiménez, 2016, p. 135), and described how leadership as an agency can be a source of inspiration for collective transformation.
Those who grounded their use of intersectionality in the broader knowledge project of CRT or a variation such as LatCrit, or in combination with philosophical principles and branches of epistemology, such as Black feminist thought based on Afrocentric (Indigenous) knowledge, were able to discuss leaders, leadership, and leading with attention to social consciousness, criticism, and actions that help promote equity and justice. Intersecting identities can also be a source of collective agency, alliance, and political activism to challenge inequities in education, including the person-centric conception of leadership, which can pave the way for a recentering of individualism and narratives of heroism.

Finding 3: Intersectionality as Emergent Knowledge in Educational Leadership

The third finding is informed by the first two on the focus of the analysis (microlevel) and the conceptions of leadership (person-centric), which is that intersectionality is emergent knowledge in educational leadership and its use is inchoate. Subfindings point to how intersectionality’s oppositional force and analytical power is at risk of being depleted by its appearance as a floating signifier, its detachment from oppositional knowledge projects, and its separation from philosophical principles that have helped constitute it and guide the development of researchers’ dispositions and processes of inquiry.

Conceptual clarity about what intersectionality is, how it is used, and how it is defined through empirical study affects the strength of the knowledge base produced around it and its subsequent use. Concepts represent abstractions and inform theory construction. According to Watt and Van Den Berg (2002), the research community benefits when researchers clarify the meaning(s) and use(s) of concepts. Conceptual clarity

- Allows other researchers to critically examine the definitions or replicate the investigation using the concept(s)
- Allows validity to be enhanced, since other researchers understand the concepts that can be improved and used
- Allows other researchers to use the concept(s) in measuring or devising a conceptual scheme
- Allows other researchers to account for conflicting findings in different studies, focusing on the same phenomenon

In other words, conceptual clarity can support conceptual acuity among researchers in the field and in their reading of scholarship produced by other researchers. Theoretical definitions of intersectionality would clarify its meanings to readers, whereas operational definitions would clarify its use in the study, such as the purpose it serves. The extent to which intersectionality continues as oppositional knowledge in educational leadership depends on how well it serves the construction and maintenance of knowledge, which “is a vitally important part of the social relations of domination and resistance” (Collins, 2000, p. 221).
Floating Signifier

Across this sample, intersectionality was a floating signifier (Hall, 1996). It was not always clear to us when its general use of the term (to describe a condition or relationship) ended and its use as an analytical construct began. Researchers referred to intersectionality as a concept (Peters, 2012; Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010), framework, theory (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Nicholson & Maniates, 2015), or notion (López, 2016). It was sometimes used to qualify perspectives or experiences (Bass, 2009; Horsford, 2012; Liang et al., 2016; Welton et al., 2015). At other times, the term was altered, as in “intersected world” (Liang et al., 206), “intersected” or replaced by terms such as “identity complexities” (Welton et al., 2015). For instance, Welton et al. (2015) referred to “compounded oppression” but did not explain it or cite a resource that offered a definition. Still, we included this article since compounded oppression is an antecedent of intersectionality, and the researchers also used the term “intersected” to describe participants’ experiences with social oppression. This was the only study that focused on participants in leadership preparation programs.

Collins and Crenshaw situated their work in the history of broader knowledge projects with which they were engaged (Collins with Black feminist thought, Crenshaw with CRT) and cited previous contributors to those projects. This brings us to the next subfinding associated with intersectionality as an emergent knowledge project within the oppositional knowledge project of transformative leadership: attribution through citation. Attribution concerns the ways in which credit is assigned through citation practices, which has implications for the historical record and the development of careers, legacies, and research agendas.

Citing as a Practice of Power

Academic citing is a knowledge/power practice involved in the marginalization and subjugation of certain types of intellectual labor. Across the sample, we found examples of citation practices that were misleading, such as when the researchers attributed intersectionality to others (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017), or cited Crenshaw in a way that suggested she contributed a feature to intersectionality (Liang et al., 2016; Nicholson & Maniates, 2015). Liang et al. (2016), for instance, wrote “interconnected and constructed social identities” (Collins, 2000), followed by “intersected experiences” (Crenshaw, 1989), before the “concept of intersectionality,” which they did not attribute to anyone (p. 5). Then, they described intersectionality as such: “and intersectionality, which examines the multiplicative aspects of a person’s identity in informing their experiences (McCall, 2005, p. 25)” (p. 5). This citation pattern may lead readers who are unfamiliar with the history and trajectory of intersectionality to reasonably surmise that Crenshaw and Collins provided some ideas that McCall brought together in order to define intersectionality. Welton et al. (2015) did not cite any of the scholarship that contributed to the development of the concept of intersectionality.
Through citation, intellectual contributions and meaningful connections with broader literatures can be traced (May, 2014), whereas the lack of citation disconnects intersectionality from its genealogical trajectory and the contextual dynamics under which it is paired with other oppositional knowledge projects.

Relating Research to an Oppositional Knowledge Process

Only one researcher described the philosophical underpinnings of their methodology in connection to the work of scholars they cited when describing intersectionality. Jean-Marie (2013) situated Collins's (2000) epistemological tenets of Black feminist thought in her conceptual framework, which was composed of Afrocentric epistemology and gendered racism, which she used to analyze data at the intersection of age, race, and gender. She described how she purposefully designed the study to privilege feminist perspectives and combined case study with a dialogical approach to conducting four group interviews with two participants. She wrote,

A dialogical approach encourages individuals to participate in a pool of shared meanings while reflecting on their perspectives. Since both participants have similar characteristics, the dialogical approach (e.g., group interview) provided them an opportunity to reflect and share their experiences with each other. (p. 620)

It should be noted that the data collection activities spanned a year and a half, which extended the time and opportunities with which the participants were supported to engage in a dialogical process.

In discussing the findings, Jean-Marie (2013) referred back to her data generation process, stating that the two women developed a close relationship, continued to help each other, and stayed connected. The participants began to seek each other out “to obtain moral support” (p. 635). The methodological choices made by Jean-Marie, which were based on philosophical tenets and justified theoretically (i.e., feminist, Black feminist theory), affected the design of the study and the participants. Her research process afforded them opportunities to build a relationship where they could obtain moral support while navigating through common barriers. Her approach reflected what Capper (2015) recommended researchers using intersectionality do; consciously address intersectionality in the formation of the problem, question, design, and process of conducting research.

DISCUSSION

Although CRT, and with it, intersectionality, entered the educational leadership scholarship in the 2000s, transformative leadership has at least a decade longer body of literature from which to draw. The sample of literature reviewed herein suggests that the body of research claiming to use intersectionality remains inchoate in the field of educational leadership and in its support for the development of transformative leadership practice and scholarship. Following Collins's (2016) discussion of
what can be done to ensure that intersectionality stimulates oppositional knowledge, we point out the importance of research in examining and documenting transformative leadership as an oppositional knowledge project and the support that intersectionality can offer to studies of educational leadership. This includes, as noted by Collins (2016), how the work of researchers is developed and practiced with regard to identifying, problematizing, and criticizing existing knowledge and the broader social world while attempting to solve or stimulate new ways to solve problems.

**Critiques of Power and Oppression**

Critiques of oppression and oppressive forces in the sample of articles were more subdued than we anticipated, given that intersectionality is rooted in Black women's liberation politics and CRT in legal studies. More pointed critiques of oppression were evident in articles that situated intersectionality alongside critical theories such as LatCrit, critical pedagogy, and critical (prophetic) spirituality. These few articles exposed uneven power relations beyond the leader's identity related to systemic inequities within education, especially those concerning discipline and funding. For example, López (2016) offered an analysis of structural inequities and framed educational leadership practices as forms of resistance and activism, especially for Chicano/ Latino communities. This subset of articles targeted the meso-level (societal norms and practices promoted in the field of educational leadership, school districts, and the curriculum and instruction of educational preparation programs), while deconstructing notions of leadership as a secular performance of an idealized White man devoid of an ethic of care.

Transformative practices in research and leading aim to expose uneven power relations at various levels and contexts of decision making in public spaces or with social movements involving students and communities, as illustrated by Collins’s (2016) reference to the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Across the sample, researchers named the intersections of social categories of identity, but often apart from examining structural oppressions (e.g., racism, sexism, and ageism) in conjunction with leading practices. For instance, several researchers neglected to discuss how the individual is shaped by structural systems of power. While pointing out how religion and spirituality guided participants navigating personal and professional expectations, they neglected to describe the power and oppression associated with their systems of belief, such as how those systems contribute to colonization, genocides, racism, and sexism (Grosfoguel, 2016).

Additionally, what participants attempted or wanted to enact were not discussed by the researchers problematically or situated in broader sociopolitical issues. For instance, one participant who attempted to establish a policy requiring that students wear school uniforms described feeling resistance from parents of Black students (Reed, 2012). This effort could have been interrogated or at least situated in the literature that relates mandatory school uniforms to the socialization of students of color to enter the school-to-prison pipeline. In another instance, a participant
demonstrated care by asking a student who was being sent to jail if he was hungry (Bass, 2009). This was a missed opportunity to connect the incident, and leading as caring, to disparities in school discipline. It is in such examples, of blurred lines between decisions that will ignore, improve, and/or worsen a situation, where researchers can demystify how educational leadership and scholarship serves as a transformative knowledge project. Otherwise, readers are left to think of leading as a mythical phenomenon. It is important that inequities affecting politically minoritized social groups be erased, and not their presence in the field. In the context of transformative leadership, this also means that their experiences, practices, and belief systems are also open to critique as part of historically situated power relations and systems of domination.

**Researching and Leading Relationally**

At the onset of the review process, we anticipated that we would learn much about how leadership and intersectionality were being paired to study the inequities affecting groups of students, such as how school- or district-based administrators are involved in issues spanning from classrooms to courtrooms (i.e., discipline, disability, community protest). In retrospect, we were more stringent in our search for “intersectionality” than we were for “leadership.” We assumed that leading practices would be made evident through specific accounts and were surprised at how few descriptions were provided to illustrate the daily experiences of leading to connect theoretical understandings of “leadership” with concrete images of “leading.” General practices such as building trust, setting a vision, and increasing morale were implicit, but the efforts involved were seldom described. We concur with Witherspoon and Arnold (2010) that “ordinary day-to-day administrative practices must become more of a focal point in understanding how administrators actually engage in the process of social justice” (p. 221).

To emphasize researching as a relational process is to resist the recentering of the individual self (the researcher) apart from others. Research and researchers starting from the assumption that leading is a distributed and relational network of interactions and that encounters can open a window to students’ experiences. Methodologically, this was exemplified by Jean-Marie (2013), who produced brief detailed reports of activities involving interactions and encounters based on notes she took during her onsite-based observations of two Black women serving as school principals. Under the heading, “The daily challenge of putting out fires: Caring for children,” she provided the following excerpt describing how she and one of the participants responded to an alert that two kindergarten boys had left the school building:

Panicking, Principal Gilbert and I jumped in her car to search the neighboring premises while her security personnel also went searching for the boys. Fortunately, the boys were found unharmed. . . . Principal Gilbert was relieved that her “babies were safe” and she gave them a motherly and tough lecture about their misconduct while waiting to meet [with] the boys’ parents. She also had a stern conversation with her
security personnel because of the [their] failure to follow specific procedures. I was privy to her interactions with various individuals involved in the situation; her determination to deal with the different stakeholders provided some initial insights about her leadership style: assertive, caring, and decisive. (p. 624)

The use of observations and interviews, coupled with reports from researcher(s) on the praxeology of the study, and decisions made in the process of conducting the study, allowed us to better understand the interconnectedness of this researcher’s and her participants’ praxis. While the examples of the participants’ responses illustrate a web of relations across power differentials, there was no discussion of students’ experiences in relation to patterns of inequities or shared decision making.

This sample illustrates how despite the recent trend in educational leadership away from the modernist notion of leading as a linear practice, and toward a conception of leadership as a distributed web of influence focused on structures, programs, and processes (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010), the person-centric conception is still discursively embedded in the literature. Given that some researchers were able to criticize the field and its contributions to forms of oppression while illustrating the benefits of both person-centric and relational leading, perhaps Capper and Young’s (2014) suggestion to blend the heroic and collaborative approaches is a third way forward for using intersectionality to study educational leadership. More specifically, the hybrid conception of leader/leadership/leading may assist those using intersectionality to examine how the problems under study are affected by forces of power and privilege exercised across micro-climates and macro-sectors that influence how just and equitable education is, in its processes and outcomes, for groups.

**Resistance to Individualism as a Political Stance**

Crenshaw’s (1991) articulation of intersectionality assumed that the more comprehensive the analyses of social problems were, the more likely effective social actions would result—redefining the individual, which reshapes the political and reorients the individual (Collins, 2009). Hence, the organizational–individual and the isolated individual divide is blurred in this view of identity and problem re-creation and re-orientation.

By focusing on the individual’s experience, the sample illustrated how workplace discrimination at the intersection of marginalized identities continues alongside the growing expectation that school leadership teams will lead alliances and coalitions of educators away from oppressive policies and practices, and toward social justice. By focusing on the individual’s experience, the use of alliance building, coalition building, social movements, fellowship, mentoring networks, and other relational practices that provide a collective struggle against shared experiences with oppression remained underrepresented. An oppositional stance to individualism can be taken up in research that examines coordinated action against oppression.

Whereas Capper (2015) pointed to the role of CRT and intersectionality in addressing inequities faced by students rather than by those leading in schools or districts, the main focus in a majority of the articles in the sample was on inequities
encountered by those working in educational leadership positions who researchers often described as Asian, Latina, Afro-Latino, and African American/Black women. We were left wondering how Capper’s (2015) questions for those using intersectionality while leading might be revised in light of the findings from this sample to consider the barriers and opportunities one can face and overcome when entering educational leadership programs as faculty and/or researchers, alone or as a member of a collective or coalition.

Intersectionality and transformative leadership theory both provide multiple and overlapping recommendations (i.e., engaging in criticism, reflection, and action toward social transformation). Based on the findings of this review, we offer two recommendations (acuity and intersectoral analysis) to support the development of research projects involving analytical focus and critique that is sharp and broad.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations take into account the findings, lessons learned, and questions raised in the process of conducting the review, as well as our background knowledge to inspire studies that extend the field’s engagement with intersectionality. To the question of how intersectionality and transformative educational leadership can be of service to one another and to what end, we offer two recommendations aimed at documenting and ameliorating historically marginalizing policies and practices that negatively affect groups and individuals: to bring a sharper focus to the issues and a more trenchant criticism when engaging intersectionality in educational leadership. We understand, as Clegg (2005) asserted, criticism is complex and arduous. We recognize that in the attempt to hold together an analysis of multiple forces associated with multiple oppressions, the labor of critique is magnified as is its urgency. The following recommendations are intended to support the field of educational leadership, scholarship and practice, through and beyond its emergent engagement with intersectionality.

**Conceptual Acuity**

According to Capper (2015), educational leadership scholars interested in transforming education to be more socially just must “consciously address intersectionality in the problem, formation, research questions, and conduct of their studies” (p. 825). This argument expands intersectionality from simply being a way to analyze to being a way to design and conduct studies. Capper (2015) situated intersectionality within an overarching framework of CRT and argued for the study of races and other categories of social identity affected by powers and privileges. In other words, she provided conceptual clarity around intersectionality by positioning it in relationship to broader theoretically based political movements toward social justice. Such clarity provides a more solid grounding for her statement, as well as for the work of those who might respond to her call and design research to explore and explain leading practices associated with transformative leadership. The following recommendations,
beginning with conceptual acuity, are meant to be supportive of the developing research on transformative leadership and intersectionality.

Acuity denotes keen thought, vision, and action that can guide researchers in the work of conceptualizing, conducting, reporting, and disseminating research. More specifically, we suggest beginning with conceptual acuity, which stems from clear conceptual and operational descriptions and definitions based on a range of resources. With regard to intersectionality, this means seeking conceptual clarity on what intersectionality is and what one is enlisting intersectionality to do, in addition to other concepts and how they are understood in relationship to intersectionality. Conceptual vagueness regarding intersectionality and its usefulness in educational leadership research places intersectionality at risk of being appropriated in the depoliticization of transformative educational leadership.

Understanding how researchers are engaging intersectionality entails investigating how they are not engaging it to its fullest expression. Looking ahead, researchers might explore (1) how and why other tenets associated with variations of CRT, such as interest convergence, have traveled into educational leadership unaccompanied by intersectionality and (2) why critical race feminism (mentioned by Horsford, 2012) has not yet seen the same flight across fields and into educational leadership. Conceptual acuity can support perceptual acuity, and together can support a sharper critique of oppressive forces. To that end citing more recent examples of work by Collins and Crenshaw applying intersectionality across sectors (i.e., media, juvenile justice) can be informative beyond describing its historical development. This brings us to our second recommendation, which is to focus intersectionality on complex problems associated with inequity by considering the forces emerging from various sectors of society.

**Intersectionality Across Sectors (Intersectoral Analysis)**

The majority of leading activities described in the sample concerned economic inequities, which suggests a need for researchers to pay attention to macroeconomic sectors (e.g., household, business, government, foreign) that affect what is consumed, produced, and regulated, within and outside of the educational organizations. We recommend future studies of educational leadership take an intersectoral analysis approach, which means examining how educational inequities are influenced by multiple sectors, paired with intersecting social group identities and social issues (Agosto & Rolle, 2014). For instance, issues about which school has its laboratory funded, how many buses are available to transport which students, and which students' Internet searches via school-based computers will be surveilled are all part of elaborate funding structures involving taxation, property, and access to virtual/physical places such as learning modules, schools, or science laboratories. Implicated in these issues are housing, technology, and science sectors to name a few. Intersectoral analysis paired with intersectionality can bring attention to the complexity of injustice and deliberation over which interventions will alleviate or exacerbate it. For example, how one responds to chronic student absenteeism depends on how one understands the cause
of it. Students who are the primary caregivers for adults may be compensating for inequity in the health care system that underserves racially minoritized families. Thus, caring, compassion, and grant seeking to support home tutors or transition to a full-service model of schooling are options one might consider over others.

In addition to an intersectoral analysis, we encourage researchers in educational leadership to point intersectionality analytically across micro- to macro-levels, as others have done across the social sciences. This could include studying how the lack of choice in housing and choice options in education contribute to displacement or excessive mobility associated with poor school performance, or how public planners of urban landscapes reimagine them when students participate in mapping a community’s wealth and desires. Researchers in educational leadership and practitioners might learn from youth leadership research using intersectionality at multiple crossroads of being, such as queer activists involved in social movements from various locations in the crosshairs of immigration reform. intersectionality and transformative educational leadership share common aims and features that, if further supported by conceptual acuity and intersectoral analysis, can be used in research to better understand the past, monitor the present, and foreshadow the future.

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NOTES

1For examples of studies mentioning intersect or intersectional, and focused on multiply, marginalized identities and leadership career paths, see Davis, Gooden, and Bowers (2017) and Reed and Evans (2008).

2In our initial search, we found a conceptual paper presented by Lumby (2014) at a conference that focused on intersectionality. However, it was later published by Lumby and Morrison (2010) with much less attention to intersectionality.

3For an example of current research engaging intersectionality focus on workplace prejudice, see Jones et al. (2017).

4For an example of intersectionality used in a study of queer youth leadership in the immigrant rights movement, see Terriquez (2015).

5Gibson and Tarrant (2010) describe leadership toward organization resilience and argue that how organizations respond to that which enhances or degrades their resilience will depend on how they exercise acuity (understand the past, monitor the present, and foreshadow the future).

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