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Knowing Leadership:

Students of Color (Re)considering Togetherness with Leaders and Authority Figures

ABSTRACT: Drawing on Bauman's (1995) conceptualization of various *forms of togetherness* and Giroux (2005) and Anzaldúa (2007) explication of border theory, this paper presents findings of a research study that investigates how students of color come to know leaders and authority figures. Findings suggest that students identified "leaders" in part based on their relationships and connections with them and the perceived benefit of such connection. Family members and teachers were considered leaders when students' relationships with them reflected Bauman's (1995) "being-for" perspective, as characterized by positive role modeling and empathy. In schools, teachers—rather than school administrators—were most often described as leaders. These relationships were commonly associated with disciplinary issues and the enforcement of rules, and a colorblind system. Implications suggest that relationship characteristics in the *borderlands* of schools influence the perception of effective school leadership and school authority for students of color.

KEY WORDS: Students of Color, School Leaders and Authority, Leadership

There is strong national focus on the quality and type of educational opportunities available to students of color. Demographic shifts in the United States have significantly increased the number of students of color in public schools (Dancy & Horsford, 2010; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). This reality coupled with discourses and concerns about the

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achievement gap between white students and students of color—discourses that often fail to account for the reality of opportunity gaps (Beard, 2018; Milner, 2015)—reflects a growing interest in the schooling experiences of students of color. Recognizing these continuing educational disparities, in 2014, the White House created the “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative during the Obama administration, for example. The initiative, in partnership with community leaders, set goals to support young men of color through enhanced access to social networks and mentoring, and also by focusing efforts to increase access to a high-quality education (Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016; White House, 2014). While there are varying perspectives on the success of the My Brother’s Keeper initiative, such efforts build on the work of scholars who have written about various aspects related to the experiences of students of color in school. Areas of research include, but are not limited to, studies on culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally relevant leadership (Brooks & Miles, 2010; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011; Khalifa, Bashar-Ali, Abdi, & Witherspoon-Arnold, 2014; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009); school discipline practices (Ferguson, 2000; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008) and school achievement (Lipman, 1998; Noguera, 2008; Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2012; Noguera & Wing, 2006, Ríos, 2011; Ríos-Vega, 2015).

While school leaders are instrumental in closing the achievement gap between students of color and white students (Beard, 2013; Mistry & Sood, 2011; Rodríguez & Alanís, 2011), and as some scholars rightly place more emphasis on opportunity gaps (Milner, 2015), and school leaders’ practices (Beard, 2012, 2016), research has yet to disentangle *student* views of leadership and authority figures, and what may distinguish the two. Extant research has yet to fully understand and integrate students’ views to engage leadership literature and practice. Further, research does not fully examine if students perceive that their race makes a difference in their relationships with people they identify as leaders. Pertinent to this special issue’s focus on the psychology of leadership and what it means to be a “leader,” our study asks: (1) How do students of color perceive what it means to be a leader or authority figure, and (2) Do students perceive that race matters in the relationships they have with those they identify as leaders? We frame our examination by integrating Zygmunt Bauman’s (1995) conceptualization of “togetherness.” We use a phenomenological approach to better understand the lived experiences of 12 students of color in two school districts located in the central region of a Southeastern state.

Knowledge of students’ views carries implications for leaders and their ability to build and nurture trusting relationships with students, express care, and find meaningful ways to advocate for students. While we do not delve explicitly into the psychology of leadership itself, we

follow Witherspoon Arnold (forthcoming) and Beard's (2016) assertion that unpacking how leadership is understood or known across a range of contexts can lead to transformative practice. We see possibilities for transformative and more-authentic leadership practices by learning from students, particularly those who have been historically underserved and underrepresented in schools.

GUIDING FRAMEWORK

In his book, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, Bauman (1995) envisioned various expressions of and forms of "togetherness," delineating differences among perspectives of "being-aside," "being-with," and "being-for". He contended that experiences of togetherness can be fragmentary and episodic. *Being-aside* others, as a form of togetherness, occurs during episodic, largely inconsequential encounters. Individuals share the encounter and each other's presence, but the impact is minimal (pp. 49-50). An example of a shared experience is attending a protest rally or concert with thousands of other people. In schooling contexts, it might be students and teachers who are at the same school, but have little or no connection. Similarly, *being-with* togetherness is episodic and context-based; however, encounters involve some individuals becoming "objects of attention." Encounters may be guarded, disengaged, and reflect secrecy (p. 50). *Being-with* experiences create superficial levels of connection. In schools, students and educators may be physically together in smaller, more personal settings, such as in a classroom, but remain disengaged from one another. The episodic nature of both "being with" and "being-aside" encounters, "in as far as the encounters are enacted as if they had no past history and no future; whatever there is to the encounter, tends to be begotten and exhausted in the span of the encounter itself" (p. 49).

Conversely, *being-for* togetherness represents "an emotional engagement with the Other" (p. 62). *Being-for* relationships reflect deeper, individualized connections and concern for the Other. It is a "leap from isolation to unity; yet not towards a *fusion*, that mystic's dream of shedding the burden of identity, but to an *alloy* whose precious qualities depend fully on the preservation of its ingredients' alterity and identity" (p. 51). Extending previous examples, a "being-for" relationship might be characterized by students who attend similar classes and study together, share resources, and support each other toward a common goal like graduation. A teacher and student who work closely together and show mutual care is another example. Teachers who push students of color to excel past perceived

stereotypes may reflect a “being-for” relationship. Notably, a “being-for” relationship is particularly poignant for historically and systemically marginalized cultures and peoples, who have been subject to “Otherization.” Villaverde (2008) describes *Otherization* as “the process of marginalizing difference, most times through negative stigmas and stereotypes” (p. 42). Those with dominant positionalities have historically silenced difference and stultified subordinate groups through *Otherization* (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gause, 2008; Johnson, 2006). Greater attention to “the Other” then, in the form of “being-for” relationships, is especially significant for students of color.

Bauman would argue that student perceptions of leaders and/or authority figures can be transformed from more neutral or negative perceptions of “being-aside” or “being-with” to more positive perceptions of “being-for.” This movement matters: school leaders and authority figures whom students of color perceive as “being-for” them may have an impact on closing the achievement gap (Mistry & Sood, 2011). However, something is needed to transform these perceptions. Bauman (1995) asserts that emotional experiences that facilitate a sense of responsibility and compassion and are followed with contextually relevant courses of action can transform relationships from “being-with” to “being-for” (Bauman, 1995). Emotions can move individuals away from indifference and objectification if the Other reciprocates. Of particular significance to this discussion and the ways students of color experience schools and the leaders in them, is the reality that reciprocation is always an action (e.g., student engagement) in response to the actions of another (e.g., the perception that a leader is *for* them).

In schooling contexts, emotional engagement is fostered when students and leaders are viewed beyond their positional role, and rather as individuals showing mutual respect. Genuine concern develops meaningful relationships. Relationships that reflect aspects of “being-for” togetherness are marked by a personal connection and emotional engagement that reveals openness, a lack of predetermined views and stereotypes, and a sense of responsibility for the another’s well-being. By allowing space for emotion, individuals can move away from “stereotyped certainty” (found in “being-with” relationships) toward questioning and openness (Bauman, 1995). Emotional engagement with the Other prevents objectification, promotes meaningful engagement, and liberates “the Other from the world of convention, [and] routine and normatively engendered monotony” to allow space for uncertainty (Bauman, 1995, p. 62). In this study, we wanted to learn if students of color perceive school leaders and authority figures as “being-aside,” “being-with,” or “being-for.” However, we acknowledge that different or conflicting perceptions of relationships can emerge. Students

of color could perceive “being-for” relationships negatively. Teachers who push their students to excel past their stereotypes may be viewed as too harsh. Further, while we assert that Bauman’s (1995) forms of togetherness may be relevant, forms of togetherness may not fall into either/or dichotomies. Moreover, students’ perceptions are not static but transition between forms of togetherness.

In seeking to understand how individuals come together (in this case, students and teachers or leaders in schools), it is also important to consider *the where* of the togetherness. As the work of scholars like William Tate, (2008) who unpacks the “geography of opportunity,” and Terrance Green, (2015) who maps the “opportunity in geography,” indicate, we contend that there are spacialized, racialized, and placialized realities of occupying particular geopolitical locales (Douglas, 2016, 2017).

The schoolhouse is one of those locales. To account for the interpretative *opportunities* that emerged from our dataset, we employ border theory in this paper, understanding that it is a transient and fluid conceptualization that allows the theorist to recognize and rupture the “epistemological, political, cultural, and social margins that structure the language of history, power, and difference” (Giroux, 2005, p. 20).

Border theory embraces the physical, ideological, epistemological, existential, national, geopolitical, and cultural divides that exist between various people groups (Anzaldúa, 2007; Douglas, 2016, 2017; Douglas & Witherspoon-Arnold, 2016; Giroux, 2005; López, Gonzalez, & Fierro, 2006; Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 2003; Wilson, Ek, & Douglas, 2014). While philosophical and cultural studies have been familiar terrain for the employment of border theory, scholars have sought to utilize more specific branches of border theory to capture the multidimensionality of perspective, experience, and Otherness (Larson, as cited in Hicks, 1991). For example, Anzaldúa’s (1999) *Borderlands: La Frontera* and her concept of the “new mestiza consciousness” offer geopolitical critiques that situate the complexity of U.S.-Mexico border relations, analyze the implications of occupying a hybrid racial identity, extend dichotomous explanations to encompass the breadth of gendered, sexualized, and class-based difference, to ultimately create context for consideration of the tensions of occupying borderlands. Borderlands are spaces or contexts that are created when two or more cultures differ; where people of different races occupy the same space; where socioeconomic classes make contact; and where the space between two individuals or groups challenge intimacy (Anzaldúa, 2007).

As Douglas and Peck (2013) and Douglas (2016, 2017) have previously posited, Hick’s (1991) contentions that “border writing,” “border text,” “border

subject,” and “border culture” are manifestations of the transformational power of border positionalities and “polarities” to challenge dominant positionalities and deconstruct vestiges of the colonial/postcolonial, center/periphery binarisms (p. xvi) are powerful and important notions. Similarly, Giroux’s (2005) utilization of the concept of border pedagogy to describe the power relations in educative settings that must be dismantled by students and teachers—border crossers—who are willing to challenge the “physical . . . [and] cultural borders historically constructed and socially organized within rules and regulations that limit and enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms” (p. 22). This is equally poignant for the argument we later make *about* schools and the work this paper seeks to promote *in* schools. As we later address in the discussion section, we assert it is a border crossing imperative to help teachers and school leaders to learn how to develop *being-for* relationships with students could be a significant step in bridging disconnects between students and the adults in school buildings asking for the border crossing imperative piece to be moved.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological approach, which is appropriate to understand how people position themselves in a particular context and devise meaning from it (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological research is concerned with unpacking “common, everyday human experiences” (Merriam, 2002, p. 93) as people interact with their world and construct interpretations of their world and their experiences in it (Merriam et al., 2002; Husserl, 1970; van Manen, 1990). Through a phenomenological approach, researchers focus on the *meaning* of an individual’s lived experience of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). According to Wolff (1999), “Phenomenology thus attends to how people experience phenomena existentially. The aim is to describe and interpret how the situated body makes sense of phenomenon” (p. 220). The phenomenon we sought to better understand was the experiences students of color had with school leaders and school authority figures.

According to Creswell (2014), describing what participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon is important. We wanted to learn and describe what the students of color in our study had in common in regards to their experiences with school leadership and authority. We sought to understand the essence of *what* they experienced in relation to school leadership and authority, and *how* they experienced the phenomena (Creswell, 2014).

PARTICIPANTS

We identified two schools in a central region of a Southeastern state. The primary research setting for this study was a large public high school within a small school district. A portion of the research was also conducted in a small, public alternative high school within a mid-sized urban school district. Two members of the research team were employed in the school districts, and their colleagues helped identify potential participants. Research members also verbally presented research parameters to students and staff. A convenient and purposeful sampling strategy was used to recruit participants, namely students of color, from the two settings. This criterion-based selection strategy (Maxwell, 2005) was employed to be representative of the students in each school. All students who self-identified as African American/Black or Latino/a were eligible. Participants included 12 high school students (M age=17.33 years). Two students attended the public alternative high school while the other 10 participants attended the public high school. Five participants were female and seven were male. Of the 12 students who participated in the study, 2 were Latina, 2 were Latino, 3 were African American females, and 5 were African American males.

PROCEDURES

Study participants signed an informed consent form. Students under 18-years-old obtained a parent's signature. The research team members then assigned the students to an interviewer and set up an interview appointment. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview to capture students' perspectives of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2005; See Appendix A). Individual interviews were conducted at the schools in classrooms and offices over the lunch hour or break time to ensure privacy and confidentiality. As much as possible, the research team tried to match students' self-identified gender and ethnicity to the interviewer. Interviewers' gender and ethnicity varied from one Black male, one Latino male, one Latina/Asian female, and one Caucasian female. Before starting, the interviewers briefed participants on the study's purpose, and participants could ask questions. The interviewers sought to utilize a "being-for" approach during the interview process by striving to build rapport with participants prior to the interview and by assuring them of their interests in student well-being and their willingness to be resources for them. Interviews lasted approximately one hour, and audio recordings were used for later transcription. Afterward, the "being-for" ethos led to the sharing of professional resources, counsel, and information based on the interests and questions

of study participants. Data included transcripts of interviews, researcher notes, and interpretation efforts.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis procedures were informed by analytic options offered by Maxwell (2005), Creswell (2014), and van Manen (1990). Interview data were individually transcribed and reviewed by the research team. Initially, the research team had a detailed discussion of a descriptive analysis of the data. After reviewing interview data, the team organized the data by using a priori codes in order to “facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96). These seven organizational categories helped focus the data analysis relevant to the research question (see Appendix B). Next, we developed clusters of meaning (van Manen, 1990) to refine categories further. We condensed these into subcategory concepts (e.g., racism, families, administrator, discipline, imperfection, motivation, context, teachers, being-for/with/aside).

To aid the researchers, we used a document called an organizational category data template (see Appendix B) when coding interview data, fitting data under one of the concept categories. The seven categories were as follows: Race, Leaders, Authority, Leaders/Authority Defined, School Leaders, Race Related to Leaders/Authority, and Relationships. Through member checking with participants and through research team discussions around interview data and concepts, each researcher assigned data to the appropriate category, and themes revolving around each of the organizational categories emerged. Lastly, the team discussed and formed interpretations regarding these themes.

RESEARCHER SUBJECTIVITIES

An important part of the phenomenological approach is that researchers address their own subjectivities and positionalities throughout data collection and analysis (Peshkin, 1988). During data collection, we acknowledged that our own race and gender may have influenced the participants during the interview. Each researcher had a personal, vested interest in learning from and working with students of color, and each identifies as a social justice advocate. As such, our sensitivity to how power structures, racism, and discrimination shape educational opportunities could bias interpretation of data. It is possible we demonstrate bias in interpreting data that favors students of color. To account for our positionalities and subjectivities, we clarified our research bias at the study’s onset, and were conscious of our

behaviors and language during the interview process. We also acknowledge we could have been perceived as leaders or authority figures as interviewers. Therefore, we used debriefing techniques to review analyses of the interviews, creating an external check of the process that helped to ensure our subjectivities were both minimized and acknowledged.

RESULTS

Leaders were, in part, identified based on the relationship or connection to others and the perceived benefit of such connection. The results highlight the specific factors that students of color reported as influencing their definitions and identification of school leaders and their relationships with them. Students did not specifically highlight race or racial similarities as factors associated with relationships with school leaders. Instead, they identified “leaders” as those teachers who possessed a genuine knowledge of who they are and who encouraged them personally. The following section will discuss results in relation to the seven categories for how participants experienced and described race and racism, whom they perceived as leaders (both at home and school) and authorities, how they defined leadership and authority, ideas about race and (in)visibility, and perceptions of relationships as “being for” or “being with.”

FAMILY LEADERS DEFINED

Participants defined their perception of a leader broadly in terms of the impact the individual had on those around them. Students consistently reported that leaders model appropriate choices, support, motivate, and encourage others. According to the participants, leaders are strong, independent, open-minded, well-spoken, and honest. Leaders were particularly relevant when an individual or a group faced a challenge or attempted to respond to a specific issue. One African American male indicated a leader is “someone who can step up in a bad situation and take charge no matter what.” Further, students defined leaders as those who are inspirational role-models. One Latina student reported: “I think a leader is mostly a person who shows you the way, and who like, shows you that they can do it.” Having followers does not simply make a leader, according to one African American male. Leaders “have courage” to “speak up” “even if no one else will follow them.” They can also “get people to accomplish a certain goal and not only that but can inspire them to maybe do beyond what’s expected.” Finally, leaders are helpful through efforts to try to “guide” others and make

decisions that “benefit everyone in the group.” Yet, while students often cited leaders’ imperfections, they also valued leaders acknowledging their own flaws. One Latina student stated, “I think a leader would be somebody who steps up and shows the way and like not necessarily somebody who’s always like ‘I’m perfect.’ ... They’re not like I’m Mr. Perfect.”

FAMILY MEMBERS AS LEADERS

Students of color predominantly identified family members as leaders. This was not necessarily due to shared racial identity, but rather as family members exhibited many of the aforementioned leadership qualities. It was not uncommon for participants to begin their discussions of leaders by clearly identifying a particular family member and then, in the case of some, delineating into descriptions of other influential individuals in their lives. A Latino student described his parents as very supportive of his education, stating, “Honestly, my parents [are the individuals I see as leaders]. They motivated me to do the best I can in school . . . and . . . even though my brother is younger he motivates me in a lot of ways too.” Similarly, in describing who he sees as leaders, an African American male shared the following: “My Dad [is a leader]. . . . My dad has five kids. They don’t live with him but he supports everybody. He does something for all of them equally. He always works hard. Always has like two or three jobs and he keeps me on the right track.”

Responses describing the significance of family members as leaders for students of color were consistent across gender and institutions. For example, female participants identified individual family members as leaders. Students in the alternative school setting were also inclined to first identify leaders in their lives as individuals from their families. An African American male from the public high school in our study declared, “Ha. Leaders? I’d probably have to say my mom, my dad, and . . . probably the president.” An African American female from an alternative school described leaders in her life this way: “Well, my grandma, which she’s dead right now, but I still look up to her as a role model. And my mom, and well, my parents, cause they’re my family and I look up to them. . . . Well, I look up to my sister . . . and my older brothers.”

Family members appeared to provide significant leadership in students’ lives, but the results do not demonstrate that student perceptions differed by racial groups. However, the results may suggest that students of color identified family members as leaders according to shared values related to outcomes, goals, and decisions. For students, likeness and commonality, racial or otherwise, might matter when identifying leaders.

LEADERS AT SCHOOL

In schools, teachers—rather than school administrators—were most often described as leaders. As one student put it, “Well the teachers are leaders, some of the teachers . . . um, yeah.” In the narratives, it appears that the distinction of leader was reserved for particular teachers rather than teachers in general. Students named individual teachers they saw as leaders and attributed particular characteristics of these teacher-leaders, or gave specific reasons for ascribing this designation. Notably, the examples of leadership students shared did not take place in a classroom setting. On the contrary, those teachers perceived as good leaders “went the extra mile,” stayed after school, asked students questions about classes and future aspirations, and met students in other settings. A Latino student who was involved in extra-curricular activities with a particular teacher, noted: “He goes the extra mile for Hispanic students. . . . He’s always got projects going on . . . to keep people out of bad stuff.” Another Hispanic boy stated that caring teachers always asked him about his other classes, helped him to apply for scholarships, and contacted his parents if something was wrong at school.

(SCHOOL) LEADERS DEFINED

Participants seemed to appreciate how various school contexts influenced the way teacher leadership was negotiated. Some participants identified particular teachers who were strict in a classroom setting to manage discipline, but these teachers were still good leaders who demonstrated respect and possessed positive attitudes. A Latino male shared that his biology teacher “always stays after school to help the student regardless of the need.” This particular teacher also advocated for students. As the head of the science department, she was able to motivate and make many meaningful connections with many students of color through extra-curricular activities. An African American male who acknowledged past run-ins with the school principal but who was very active with the school football team, defined a leader as someone who steps up in a bad situation and takes charge. His coach represented this leader, with the student saying, “He knew what to do in any situation. He knew how to push you. He knew exactly what to say.” He added that on the football field school they got to listen to each other and worked as a team even when losing a game.

RELATIONSHIPS AND LEADERS

Students also connected leadership to positive role modeling and caring. While defining motivation and its relationship to leadership, students

agreed that teacher-leaders usually challenge them to do better. For example, a Latina participant identified one particular teacher who was “always showing us [how] to do better.” An African American female also shared that her teachers were leaders, because they are “showing me how to do right and teaching me the wrong from the right, and the right from the wrong.” Saliently, most students shared that their teacher-leaders encouraged them to become critically conscious about their situation, especially when they got in trouble or felt other teachers were unfair to them. An African American female explained, “They [teacher-leaders] won’t do the problem for me, but you know, [they will] help me figure out the problem.” Students did not feel that teacher-leaders felt sorry for them, but they pushed them to do things better and get back on track. Consistent with *being-for* togetherness (Bauman, 1995), students valued this affirmation and saw these characteristics as distinguishable features of a leader.

Two participants in the study were in an alternative school setting. Both students felt they developed better relationships with their teachers in this alternative setting. The student-teacher relationships were more akin with Bauman’s notion of “being for” togetherness. An African American student noted that he could tell his teachers cared about him, in part because they helped him find a solution to his problems. He described one particular teacher, saying, “[Ms. M] is helpful, she’s respectful, she’s caring. She is like a lovely person.” As a manifestation of *being for* relationships, students stated it was easier to connect with teachers who acknowledged that they had similar problems in their own lives.

Most of the sentiments participants expressed about teachers who reflect leadership qualities mirrored Bauman’s (1995) “being for” togetherness. One Latino male, a student club leader, noted his teacher, Mr. R. was a leader “because he knows what’s right. . . . He knows the difference between right and wrong. . . . He can make decisions without . . . thinking about it too much . . . gets the work done. . . . He doesn’t rely on anybody to have anything done.” A female African American student declared, “One teacher [who I see as a leader]—she’s encouraging, she says positive thoughts and words and she offers so much help.” Consistent with advocacy as a characteristic of teacher-leaders, one participant shared, “Yes. I really do [see teachers as leaders]. I really do. Because, ok, for example, the fact that uh, Ms. Smith for example, she advocated for me to come to this interview. I’m sure she brought my name to you, right?”

The quality of the relationship between the student and the teacher was critical. Overall, students of color tended to perceive teachers as leaders when they developed close, personal, motivational, inspirational, and respectful relationships with students. Teachers who were identified as leaders seemed to demonstrate a personal connection or setting an

example for students or others to follow. The descriptions of leadership qualities also coincided with Bauman's (1995) "being for" type of relationship in that individuals felt a sense of responsibility for Others. Leaders were not merely leaders in title; they were considered leaders because the relationships they formed with students inspired students to follow their lead.

SCHOOL AUTHORITIES

Students' responses suggested that school administrators were most often viewed as authority figures rather than leaders. Students made this distinction based on relationship characteristics and their experiences. They perceived the school principal and assistant principals to be the authority figures. As one 18-year-old Latino participant suggested, "The principals, they represent the rules." Another, an African American male, noted, "When I think of school authority, I think of my assistant principal, Mr. J. And I think of my principal Mr. P. And I actually think of the old principal Mr. D." The likelihood that administrators or principals were perceived as authority figures may be due to the fact that administrators are titled as school authority figures, have positional power, and are highly visible in the whole-school context, whereas teachers may have exposure only to a smaller number of students.

AUTHORITY DEFINED

Respondents tended to suggest that authority figures create rules. Specifically, an African American female student stated, "You come in the first day and they give you your rule handbook, and they're already setting up for you the rules." Several students noted the positional authority figures have to impose their authority in the creation and enforcement of the rules. As stated by an African American male student, "It's their rules, their way, and you follow them. And sometimes their rules are fair, and you are happy to follow them. They're still their rules though. But sometimes they're not fair, but they're still their rules." Further, authority figures could enforce rules to "make sure that things are done a certain way" (Latina) through the administration of consequences and disciplinary actions. Administrators were thought to have the "power to suspend" (African American, Male); and, at schools, they "just kind of keep it under control" (Latina).

Several students suggested authority figures tended not to listen or negotiate, often demonstrating approaches resembling zero tolerance. For example, one African American male student contended, "Most times, I see

authority figures, they just kind of run with their head strong will and just do [things] how they want it to be done.” When asked about violating the rules, another African American male said:

I can understand some things like that, cause the rule book is the rule book. But, for some things that are specifically not in the rule book, and a problem might come up . . . and I see the authority figure . . . turn a problem that has nothing to do with the rule book into a problem that fits into the rule book. And . . . then . . . I get in trouble for it. . . . Then I go home for it. And, I . . . I see it as to the point where maybe they have something out against me. Or maybe they just wanna push me . . . you know what I’m sayin? (African American, Male)

Another student suggested, “There’s no second chance” (African American, Male).

Student responses suggested that how they saw authority being used matter to them. If an authority figure used their power to help, their role as an authority figure was viewed more favorably. A Latino student responded that the school administrator “looks down on us but he’s also making sure if something is wrong with us or something’s not going well in school, then he’s listening to make that better.” Referring to a particular incident, an African American male student agreed that there were times when administrators used their authority to “help somebody.”

RELATIONSHIPS AND AUTHORITY

Students’ perceptions of authority as overly punitive and consequence-based highlights how discipline may emphasize and devalue minority students via school rules and disciplinary/behavioral school norms if seemingly used to punish students. The domineering description of administrators seems to highlight a division between students and administrators. The perceptions of harsh or biased treatment may signal to students they are perceived as “Other,” and therefore undermine connections and relationships at school. This reality stands in stark contrast to the responsive, caring, genuine relationships with school leaders that characterize Bauman’s “being-for” relationships. To note, study findings do not specifically indicate participants’ perceptions of authority and discipline are different from students of other racial groups. However, research indicates minority students are exposed to and experience different disciplinary outcomes than other racial groups, like being more often subjected to exclusionary disciplinary practices, like suspensions (Ferguson, 2000; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011).

RACE AND PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERS' RACIAL MIRRORING

When asked how important it is to have a school leader who shares their own socioeconomic, cultural background and ethnicity, some students stated it was usually unnecessary. More importantly, students wanted an educator who could genuinely connect and relate to them. However, three students commented about the importance of having someone whose appearance and socio cultural backgrounds were similar to theirs and their perceptions of school leaders. A Latino student described the impact of a particular Latino teacher this way: "He helps a lot of Latinos . . . he helps out a lot of other races. I don't know him very well . . . like I don't know his past, whether he suffered racism or not, but I feel like he has." Referring to her relationship with an African American teacher, an African American female student added, "We are both African American, so we have a better understanding." While the school both students attend has predominantly white teachers and students, they asserted that racial and socio economic similarities become salient assets when defining teacher leadership in schools among students of color. Similarly, an African American boy, previously in a predominantly Black school setting, argued that the lack of school leaders with shared racial and socioeconomic backgrounds represented long-standing disadvantages for Black students. He said Black students did not tend to emulate school teachers and administrators, because they do not look like students. He stated, "When we see somebody like that (Black people) who we can relate a perfect mental image of ourselves in them, then we can say, yeah, yeah, I can do that too."

For the most part, students of color seemed to minimize the significance of race when defining their teachers as leaders, while not ignoring the presence of their few teachers of color. However, when describing leaders outside of school, students usually mentioned family members. It is important to remember family members share the same cultural and socio economic backgrounds, further underscoring the influence of similar backgrounds. Given that "being-for" relationships reflect a deep connection with Others, a willingness to be led by individuals may be intricately connected to racial demography and perceived similarities.

RACE LEADERS, AUTHORITY, AND (IN)VISIBILITY

Overwhelmingly, students reported that race makes an impact on their lives inside and outside school. Students cited a variety of ways that race influenced their experiences, including feeling "judged ... [or] that I don't fit

in, and that I'm not one of them," "criticizing the way we dress," or believing that "African Americans have to work harder than the white folks in pursuing what we want." One African American male asserted,

Cause, like say you got a White kid and a Black kid walkin together in the hallways. The White kid is sagging (wearing his pants below his waist) and his is clear as a day. And then you got the Black that's saggin probably just a little bit, like you can't really tell. He probably ask the White kid to lift his shirt up, and see how he's saggin and then tell him to pull his pants up. But then if he sees the Black kid and sees that he's saggin then he'll give him 3 days of ISS (In-school Suspension) automatically. I just be like, "wow."

However, when asked if race influenced their relationships with leaders or authority figures, the vast majority indicated it did not. Students often appealed to the higher moral standards of those they identified as leaders, expressing these leaders would not demonstrate racial bias. An African American female also articulated that some racialized experiences could be buffered through relationships and familiarity. When asked if race might impact her experiences with school leaders or authority she stated, "Some of them, but once they get to know you then they realize, 'oh no, he or she is not gonna be a problem.'" Students also appeared to have somewhat idealized perceptions of leaders concerning racial equality. A Latina participant explained, "I feel like a leader doesn't look at that [race] so everybody I see as a leader is a leader for everybody not just certain people."

RACE RELATED TO LEADERS/AUTHORITY

Students seemed reluctant to call teachers or self-named leaders racist. However, no less than half of the students shared that race might impact their experiences, and that relationships and familiarity served as important reasons for considering the influence of race on their school experiences. Other insights students shared seemed to highlight their desire to be more visible to school leaders but less visible to authority figures. Their responses revealed a pattern suggesting they often felt invisible to school leaders whom they needed more of a connection with while feeling very visible to school authority figures, from whom they wished to be invisible. One Latina student suggested, "I notice that if a child as in any other race besides white needed some help with something, it would take a teacher longer to get to him or her. But if they was white, they would go to him or her automatically and they'll help them and it's like any other color will get behind and will have trouble and they'll go to the next grade and they'll just fall even more behind."

When it came to authority figures, students perceived greater—and perhaps undue—visibility. An African American male said, “So many strict rules. I can’t really explain it. They watch for things more. . . . A certain group of people. They watch for you. If you ever got in trouble once they watch you and pressure you to see if you ever going to do the same thing again. They just watch you the whole time.” When asked about relationships with authority figures, an African American male student stated, “I just try to avoid authority in school and outside of school as much as I possibly can” and “I don’t have a relationship with . . . [the particular school authority figure they previously mentioned].”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Data in this study suggest students of color believe leaders are strong, motivational, and inspirational individuals who care about their success. Most often, students identified their most significant leaders in their lives as family members, with whom they are most likely to share views, beliefs, or values. In school settings, teachers were most often identified as leaders. Students indicated that leaders demonstrated positive characteristics including being inspiring, motivating, and encouraging. Participants suggested that their relationships with leaders revolved around the extent to which they felt leaders cared for and helped them, which reflects Bauman’s “being-for” relationships.

At school, teachers who made individual connections with students by going “above and beyond” general classroom activities were considered leaders by study participants. In contrast, school administrators were frequently identified as authority figures who administer disciplinary actions. While leaders and authority figures might not be defined differently by students of color than White students, the being-for orientated relationships and connections to adults seemed to occur with leaders who students felt genuinely knew and cared about the student, including their racial experiences. Thus, teachers who share a student’s race might influence students’ perceptions of them as a leader. Perceptions regarding discipline might be colored by racialized experiences with disciplinary outcomes in the school, influencing relationships with school administrators.

Additional findings suggest that students perceived both school administrators and family members to be authority figures. Authority figures were most often associated with rules and discipline, and students’ perceptions were more negative than positive in nature. While many students of color seemed to want to conform to the schoolhouse norms or expectations, many chose to be invisible in relation to authority figures. Concerning relationships

with leaders, these students of color seemed to engage with school leaders mostly outside the classroom context. Students discussed what seemed to matter for school leaders was the “being-for” characteristics and “as long as they can relate to you.” Relationships based on “being-for” characteristics were those that inspired, were caring, encouraging, and motivating. The findings suggest that power relations can be dismantled if students of color perceive leaders and authority figures as “being-for” them.

We posit that transitioning between various “forms of togetherness” entails a border-crossing experience. Border theorist understand, as we do, that borders can enable or exclude (Giroux, 2005, p. 6) and borderlands are real and contested spaces. In this light, Giroux (2005) posits, and we agree, that power relations are present in the school borderlands. While those in power in the borderlands typically decide if/how the power is shared proportionately, and sharing is infrequent, we argue that students and educators can dismantle these power relations, acting as “border crossers” who challenge the “physical . . . [and] cultural borders historically constructed and socially organized within rules and regulations that limit and enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms” (Giroux, 2005, p. 22). In schools, administrators, teachers, and other authority figures are proxies who exercise the state’s power. Therefore, it is critical these individuals are conscientious as to how their power and the positionalities may be perceived by those whose ideological, epistemological, existential, national, geopolitical, and cultural backgrounds are incongruent with the norms of the dominant culture, as reflected in the schools (Douglas & Peck, 2013). Failure to account for these dynamics is failure to account for the borders that impede students’ relationships and success in school.

One way leaders can dismantle power relations is by “being-for” students. Teachers and administrators must be cognizant of the potential impact of their role being based upon discipline and rule enforcement alone, which might result in “being-with” or “being-aside” types of relationships that students try to avoid. We speculate that positive student perceptions can lead to more respectful, reciprocal exchanges with leaders. The findings suggested that students’ perceptions of both school leaders and authority figures shift according to their experiences and relationships with school leaders, along with their interpretations of being a student of color. Such perceptions shape student identities. More insight is needed into what led to this vital border-crossing experience for leaders as they interact with students of color, and also how students of color engage in border crossing.

Practically speaking, school leaders might benefit from instruction and support in identifying ways to enact racial and cultural appreciation and encourage the development of leadership ability in students of color. The perpetuation of colorblind ideologies influences how students of color

navigate schoolhouse borderlands. Eurocentric curricula and a culture of whiteness continue to pervade the school experience and academic achievement of students of color. What adolescents learn in school significantly influences how they regard rules and social institutions later in life (Darder, 2012; Gouveia-Pereira, Palmonari, & Rubini, 2003). School leaders can better support students of color and encourage their development through partnerships with various community programs. According to Gavazzi, Alford, and McKenry (1996), some community programs that target students of color have found that leaders who encourage adolescents to embrace their ethnic and cultural background result in long-term positive effects for these students. These adolescents demonstrate greater self-sufficiency, resilience, and leadership skills (Cammarota, 2008; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Gavazzi, Alford, & McKenry, 1996).

Professional development is vital for all school leaders, and greater intentionality is needed in helping school leaders and authority figures to be aware of and understand the challenges students of color face in navigating the complex borderland of the schoolhouse. Ongoing professional development must combat the fact that many teachers and staff demonstrate “multiple negative and subjective perceptions associated with race and gender identities,” which negatively shapes student performance and school outcomes (Jain, 2010, p. 89). Professional development is important and needed for school leaders and authority figures to be knowledgeable about using strategies that enable them to develop “being-for” relationships as opposed to “being-with.” Future research, training, and support in this area is critical so school leaders find more effective ways to encourage and nurture the “leadership ability among African American male high school students” (Roach, Adelma, & Wyman, 1999, p. 97), and other students of color. Certainly, the experiences that African American and Latino/a students have with school leaders and authority figures is significant to the identities they construct, and their future opportunities in a society that privileges predominately White ideologies that are evident in schools, school leaders, and school authority. The influence school administrators and teachers have on students makes a difference. One student said, “I realized that every teacher from the time I was in kindergarten up, always was tryin’ to help me out. So, I would just recommend that teachers who feel that they have a student that’s not seeing that they’re trying to help em . . . just don’t give up on em.” This student’s counsel is not just vital in teachers and leaders “knowing” that their contributions and belief in their students matter; it is also critical in teachers and leaders not giving up on themselves as they seek to navigate fragile school terrain and relationships with students who, in many ways, are coming to know themselves. As educators, our capacity to (re)consider and (re)commit to forms of togetherness

that are authentic, anti-oppressive, and hopeful are keys to transformative and liberatory leadership that can ultimately support students as they cross borders and borderlands inside and outside the schoolhouse.

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APPENDIX A

THE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS OF COLOR OF SCHOOL LEADERS, LEADERSHIP, AND AUTHORITY

Participant Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Name & Age: _____

Gender: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

This interview is part of a study that investigates the perceptions and experiences of students and teachers of color in relation to school leaders, leadership, and authority. Data collected in this study will be processed, analyzed, and used for potential publication. I am going to ask you some questions related to this topic.

You do not have to answer any of the questions I ask if you do not want to. You can choose to exit the interview at any time you wish with no personal consequences to you. You can also ask me any questions you like about the interview or the research study. Any questions before we begin?

GENERAL OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you define a leader?
2. How do you define authority?
3. Who are the people you view as leaders in your life?
4. Who are the people you view as authority figures in your life?
5. How would you describe your experience in school?
6. What do you like most/least about this school? Please explain.

SCHOOLING FOCUS

7. When you think of a school leader, who comes to mind?
8. How would you describe your relationship with school leaders?
9. Tell me about your experiences with school leaders?
 - a. Have you had any positive/negative experiences with school leaders? If so, what were they?
 - b. What do you think influences your relationship with school leaders?

10. When you think of school authority, who comes to mind?
11. How would you describe your relationship with school authority?
12. Tell me about your experiences with school authority?
 - a. Have you had any positive/negative experiences with school authority? If so, what were they?
 - b. What do you think influences your relationship with school leaders?
13. How would you describe your experiences with leaders outside of school?
14. Do you see school leaders differently from leaders outside of school? If so, what are the differences? If not, why not?
15. How would you describe your experiences with authority outside of school?
16. Do you see school authority differently from authority outside of school? If so, what are the differences? If not, why not?
17. Does race influence your life experiences? If so, how? If not, why not?
18. Do you think your race (as a person of color) affects your school experiences? If so, how? If not, why not?
19. Do you think your race (as a person of color) affects your relationship with school leaders? If so, how? If not, why not?
20. Do you think your race (as a person of color) affects your relationships in this school authority? If so, how? If not, why not?
21. Do you think your experiences with school authority in this school are affected by the fact that you are a person of color? If so, how? If not, why not?
22. Do you think you are a leader? Why or why not?
23. Do you have any questions for me about this interview or the research study?

Thanks. If at any time during this research study you want to withdraw from it, you have the right to do so with no personal consequences to you. I appreciate your participation in this study.

APPENDIX B

ORGANIZATIONAL CATEGORY DATA TEMPLATE

Research question: Does race influence how students of color perceive school leaders?

Based on the research question, the following color code system was used to organize the data:

Table 1 Coding Scheme

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Color code</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>
Race	Red	racism	other		
Leaders	Dark Blue	families			
Authority	Yellow	administrator	discipline		
Leaders/Authority Defined	Green	imperfection	motivation	example	context
School Leaders	Light Blue	teachers			
Race related to Leaders/ Authority	Purple	visible/invisible			
Relationships	Pink	Being for	Being With		