



Strategies of Resistance among Racially Minoritized Students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution: A Critical Race Theory Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Employing critical race theory and a student resistance framework, this study qualitatively explored how minoritized college students view and interpret their racialized experiences in academic settings at a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) and what strategies they have employed to manage and respond to the campus racial climate. Drawn from seven focus groups and eight in-depth interviews, the findings demonstrate that the studied campus promoted racial diversity but failed to facilitate the processes and practices to achieve the educational benefits of a diverse college campus. Study participants were keenly aware of the campus racial climate and encountered racism in a variety of forms. They strategically relied on informal networks for support and collective well-being and also engaged in subtle and creative strategies of resistance. The article includes recommendations for creating equitable, safe, productive environments for racially minoritized students at HSIs and elsewhere.

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Over the last decade, colleges and universities have served more racially minoritized students than ever before.¹ The number of Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), and Native American students on college campuses is a result of the expansion of secondary education and increased high school graduation rates (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Upon entrance to college, many students have their first opportunity to interact meaningfully across racial and ethnic lines—an experience that can manifest differently for different racial and ethnic groups (Hurtado et al., 1998).

Increasingly, studies reveal how interrelated elements of the campus racial climate—broadly defined as the racial history of the campus, its racial composition, and the current views, behaviors, and experiences of faculty, staff, and students regarding race relations (Hurtado et al., 2012, 1998)—are associated with a range of educational experiences and outcomes for students (Denson & Bowman, 2013; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Yosso et al., 2009). As such, it is important that higher education researchers, professionals, and policymakers understand and explain campus racial climate for a wide range of

institutional types. This is especially important for racially minoritized students who have not historically been well served by colleges and universities, including Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs).

HSIs—where Hispanic and Latinx undergraduate students constitute at least 25% of the total enrollment—are among the most compositionally diverse post-secondary institutions in the United States. They can be instructive sites for preparing graduates for a pluralistic society and for engaging with and positively impacting racially diverse communities (Núñez et al., 2015). HSIs can support students by increasing their sense of belonging, cultural connections, identifications on campus, and academic self-concept (Cuellar, 2014; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Maestas et al., 2007; Sebanc et al., 2009).

But racially minoritized students—at HSIs and elsewhere—are likely to encounter an array of psychosocial stressors that can influence their levels of academic and intellectual development (Abrica et al., 2020). Further, studies addressing the campus racial climate at HSIs (and emerging HSIs) reveal differences across historically marginalized racial/ethnic groups, including their experiences with administration and institutional structures (Abrica et al., 2020; Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016). This is perhaps even more evident with the recent upsurge in hate crimes and racist incidents on college campuses (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Campus Safety and Security, 2016). For example, in an interview study at an HSI, Black students reported their campus racial climate mirrored the racial climate nationally, leaving them feeling unsafe and unsupported (Lu & Newton, 2019). Indeed, we have evidence that racially minoritized students experience a hostile campus climate at HSIs, as documented in the steadily growing work in this area (e.g., Abrica et al., 2020; Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016; Lu & Newton, 2019).

As racial and political climate issues become more troubling and the racial demographics on campuses shift, it is important to investigate how racially minoritized students experience and respond to the campus racial climate at HSIs. Researchers have primarily focused on the experiences of Latinx students on these campuses and have not regularly accounted for other racial/ethnic groups, such as Black, AAPI, and Native American students. Understanding these understudied student groups and their racialized experiences at compositionally diverse institutions like HSIs is critically important for better serving them and for the broader goals of improving racial equity in higher education. Moreover, it is instructive to understand how students from a wider range of racial/ethnic groups view their encounters with an HSI campus racial climate, whom they seek out for support, and how they struggle and engage in different forms of resistance amid and in spite of structural racism (Linder et al., 2019; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Prior studies have provided insight into challenges related to racial climate issues and pedagogical practices that racially minoritized college students may encounter at HSIs with majority enrollment of racially minoritized students

(e.g., Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016; G. A. Garcia, 2017; Garcia & Dwyer, 2018). And, in recent years, scholars have pushed to understand how HSIs actually *serve* Latinx students and in what ways the campus climate may be shaped by the HSI designation (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020; Garcia, 2018b; Garcia, Núñez et al., 2019). The current study seeks to build on these earlier works and qualitatively document how Black, Latinx, AAPI, and Native American students view and interpret their racialized experiences in academic settings at one such institution. We focused on their racialized experiences and their resulting strategies for managing and actively responding to the campus racial climate. In so doing, we gained new insight into the impact of the distinct and complex racial climate at an HSI and where racially minoritized college students make up the majority of the student body.

Literature review

In this section, we highlight the interrelated dimensions of the campus racial climate framework. We also provide a brief overview of the research on the experiences of racially minoritized students with respect to the campus racial climate.

Campus racial climate

To develop policies and programs that enhance the overall well-being of racially minoritized students, we must understand an institution's racial climate. Broadly, the campus racial climate is how "students, faculty, and administrators perceive the institutional climate for racial/ethnic diversity, their experiences with campus diversity, and their own attitudes and interactions with different racial/ethnic groups" (Hurtado et al., 1998, p. 281). As outlined in the introduction, the campus racial climate affects students in multiple significant ways; here we focus more on precisely what it is.

Developed by Hurtado et al. (1998), the four dimensions of the campus climate framework are: a historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion; structural diversity; a psychological dimension; and a behavioral dimension. *Historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion* refers to practices regarding access and support for racially minoritized students. *Compositional diversity* refers to the numerical composition of students from various races/ethnicities. The *psychological dimension* revolves around individual views of discrimination and racism, group relations, and attitudes toward other racial/ethnic groups on campus. Relatedly, the *behavioral dimension* refers to actual interactions and relations between racial/ethnic groups on campus. Milem et al. (2005) asserted a fifth dimension—*organizational/structural*—to highlight how everyday business practices and organizational norms influence climate. Cumulatively, these dimensions provide a useful framework for

understanding and explaining the racialized experiences of minoritized students.

In the remainder of this literature review we provide a brief overview of the research on the experiences of Latinx students, Black students, AAPI students, and Native American students associated with the campus racial climate on postsecondary campuses, including HSIs. Although this is not a comprehensive review of the literature, the summary that follows provides important context for our findings.

Latinx students

HSIs produce a significant number of graduates from low-income, first-generation, and Latinx backgrounds, and award a high percentage (54%) of STEM bachelor's degrees for Latinx students (Harmon, 2012). Nonetheless, HSIs are criticized for their relatively low completion rates and concern over whether they are *serving* Latinx students instead of merely *enrolling* them (Contreras et al., 2008; Garcia, 2018b).

Studies have shown that once Latinx students enter an HSI they are confronted with a hostile campus climate that undermines their morale, sense of belonging, and academic success (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016; Maestas et al., 2007; Sanchez, 2019). Cuellar and Johnson-Ahorlu (2016), employing a mixed-methods approach, examined students' views of the campus racial climate at a community college with an HSI designation. The authors in part found that Latinx students reported general positive views on the survey but in a focus group shared negative perceptions of the campus climate, indicating the complexity of student perceptions of racial climates at the institution. Further, Sanchez (2019), in an interview study of 40 Latinx students enrolled at HSIs, found that participants on campuses with 23% full-time equivalent (FTE) and 45% FTE reported experiencing more racial microaggressions than those with 80% FTE.

Three types of racial microaggressions generally affect Latinx students: interpersonal racial microaggressions, racial jokes, and institutional microaggressions as evidenced in structures, practices, and discourses (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; Yosso et al., 2009). Furthermore, institutional microinvalidations diminish the value of Latinx students within the campus community by creating barriers to building community and by decreasing retention (Sue et al., 2007; Yosso et al., 2009). Each of these can cast doubt on students' academic merits and capabilities, demean their ethnic identity, dismiss their cultural knowledge, and hinder their participation in different aspects of campus life (Yosso et al., 2009).

Importantly, the surrounding community and sociopolitical context influence campus climate and quality of cross-racial interaction (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014). For example, in one study the 2016 election “profoundly

and negatively” impacted Latinx/Chicanx students’ assessment of their campus racial climate; students noted that classrooms in particular have become more unsafe and this has taken a toll on students’ health (Franklin & Medina, 2018, p. 75). Cuellar and Johnson-Ahorlu (2020) also linked the external context and surrounding community to the campus climate experiences of Latinx students, finding that Latinx students routinely faced racial microaggressions and at times physical threats in the surrounding community, and that they felt a racial divide between peer groups on campus.

In response to hostile campus climates, Latinx students often seek ways to culturally nourish themselves through sites of resistance—“a location of radical openness and possibility” (hooks, 1990, p. 153). By building community in counter-spaces, Latinx students are able to foster each other’s academic achievements and hold each other accountable toward graduation. Likewise, they cultivate friendships with people who share similar experiences and may develop “critical resistant navigational skills” (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998, p. 216) to navigate multiple worlds by maintaining a “disciplined work ethic, high self-expectations, and self-vigilance” (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 679).

Black students

On college campuses in the United States, Black students tend to experience more racial conflict and separation than any other racially minoritized group (Ancis et al., 2000; Harper, 2009). This hinders their academic success and promotes an unhealthy campus environment where they experience microaggressions from faculty, staff, and peers, particularly at historically white institutions (HWIs; Comeaux, 2013). To navigate a hostile campus climate, Black students tend to create on- and off-campus counter-spaces—including Black student organizations, fraternities, sororities, peer groups, and study groups—which provide room to challenge deficit notions and to foster and maintain a positive racial climate (Solórzano et al., 2000). In particular, academic counter-spaces have been found to nurture a supportive environment where Black students can foster their own learning and find educational, emotional, and cultural support (Black & Bimper, 2020; Solórzano et al., 2000).

Overall, Black students endure discriminatory verbal comments, are excluded from events and activities, and are subjected to visually offensive images on campus and online (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2012; Tynes et al., 2013). They also face racial microaggressions—unconscious forms of racism, defined as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of blacks by offenders” (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 60). Since the 2016 election, Black students have been harmed by the reemergence of overt antiblack racism and white supremacist organizing (Mwangi et al., 2018). Interviews with 25 Black students at HWIs revealed how the campus racial climate mirrored the national climate, leaving them

feeling unsafe and unsupported, but also with a desire to engage in activism to change the campus environment (Mwangi et al., 2018).

Despite the impact of the campus racial climate on minoritized students, only a handful of studies have explored Black students at HSIs (Abrica et al., 2020; Brooms, 2020; Lu & Newton, 2019; Serrano, 2020). For example, Abrica et al. (2020), using focus groups and individual interviews, explored the racialized experiences of Black males attending a 2-year, Hispanic-serving community college. They discovered that settler colonial logics and antiblackness largely shaped the experiences of Black males at the studied community college. The authors concluded that Black students should be explored independent of nonblack minoritized students to better understand how nonblack students may produce and reproduce antiblackness at HSIs.

AAPI students

Researchers often overlook the impact of racial climate on the campus experiences of AAPI students (Teranishi et al., 2009). Moreover, when AAPI individuals are discussed in the literature, they tend to be referred to as one homogenized group rather than as a set of diverse subgroups. At present, there is more focused scholarship on Asian American student experiences than on Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders (M. H. Nguyen et al., 2018). Recent research has begun to disaggregate ethnic subgroups to better understand how each experiences campus racial climate (e.g., B. M. D. Nguyen et al., 2016; M. H. Nguyen et al., 2018). Nevertheless, there remains a lack of research on AAPI students on HSI campuses; the focus instead tends to be on their experiences at HWI. Due to the small population size of individual AAPI subgroups, however, studies conducted at HWIs tend to aggregate data by region. As well, a prevalent stereotype is that AAPI students have escaped racialized and discriminatory experiences (B. M. D. Nguyen et al., 2016), yet extant research demonstrates that Asian Americans are subject to racial harassment, microaggressions, isolation, pressure to racially segregate and assimilate, and an overall silencing on campus (Museus & Park, 2015; M. H. Nguyen et al., 2018; Yeung & Johnston, 2014).

Relatedly, in an in-depth interview study, M. H. Nguyen et al. (2018) found that AAPI college students were not free from harmful stereotypes and blatant racism even when they attended an institution with a large percentage of AAPIs among the general student body. They concluded that “... as one of the most overlooked with regard to the provision of support and resources, AAPIs stand at a critical position for defining what it means to embrace a positive campus climate” (p. 499).

Native American students

Historically, Native American and Indigenous students have been excluded from the benefits afforded by institutions of higher education (Brayboy, 2015).

Instead, they carry a history of viewing educational institutions as centers for assimilation. They currently make up less than 1% of the entire U.S. college population (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Jackson et al., 2010). Few researchers have explored how these students experience the campus climate, prejudicial treatment, and racist campus environments—at HSIs or otherwise (Brayboy, 2015; Caplan & Ford, 2014). This is especially troubling since Native American students “present unique academic, social, cultural, and psychological needs as they attempt to establish themselves in the academic and social systems of a campus” (Larimore & McClellan, 2005, p. 22).

We do know that Native American students experience both active and passive forms of racism, and those with a stronger sense of Native cultural identity experience higher rates of racism or harassment (Larimore & McClellan, 2005). For instance, students have reported being either ignored or singled out as representative of the entire Native community, either of which can engender feelings of isolation and social pressure. Moreover, through false narratives, infrequent or pathologizing media portrayals, and racist mascots, educational institutions have undertaken efforts to assimilate Native American students and eradicate their cultural identities (Fish et al., 2017). Tachine et al. (2017) found that first-year Native college students shared experiences of isolation, disconnection from their home communities, and frequent racist incidents that led to feelings they did not belong at an HWI. This underscores the importance of cultural centers as spaces of connection, shared experiences, and understanding for Native American students.

Desai and Abeita (2017), through individual interviews, explored the experiences of a Diné (Navajo) woman who protested the use of an official university seal that promoted settler colonialism. Employing critical race theory and TribalCrit as analytical lenses, the authors in part revealed how student activism at this HSI served as a mechanism to challenge and disrupt institutional racism. They concluded that “structural and institutional changes can be made to stop the marginalization of Native students, especially regarding issues such as offensive seals, mascots, and Native artifacts” (p. 286).

Theoretical framework

We used critical race theory (CRT) as an analytic lens to understand how race influences racially minoritized students’ views of their college experience. We also employed a resistance framework to understand the various strategies used to resist institutional challenges. We nested our analysis in Hurtado et al.’s (1998) campus racial climate framework (described earlier) to explore how individual experiences reflect institutional dynamics, as well as how student perceptions of the campus racial climate inform their strategies of resistance. Here we describe the relevance of each theory.

Critical race theory

We drew on CRT to illuminate how race and racism influence the quality of experience for racially minoritized college students. CRT emerged in the mid-1970s, primarily from criticisms that the critical legal studies movement inadequately addressed race and racism in legal scholarship. Progressive legal scholars, such as Derrick Bell (1987, 1992), Alan Freeman (1978), Richard Delgado (1984), and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991, 1997), drawing from foundational writings of Du Bois (1903, 1935), attempted to foreground and account for race and racism in American law. CRT scholars argue we must address how the judicial system legitimizes and legislates racial inequalities in the United States.

Foundational to CRT are the ideas that race continues to be deeply problematic and race relations sustain hegemonic systems of white supremacy (Crenshaw, 1991; Matsuda, 1995). Through a CRT lens, racism in U.S. society is perceived as permanent, and systemic racism is viewed as infiltrating political, social, and economic domains (Bell, 1992). CRT scholars assert that racism is deeply embedded in social structures and practices, and its effects are often hidden in normality or are now subtler than in earlier race segregation (Bell, 1992; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Because racism is closely ingrained in U.S. society, whiteness can be considered a property interest—the CRT tenet of a whiteness-as-property norm. Harris (1995) contended that property—and, as such, whiteness—functions on three levels: the right of possession; the right of use and enjoyment, reputation, and property status; and the right to exclude. Today, whiteness has evolved from race to a signifier of identity, status, and property entrenched in white supremacy. In short, whiteness is viewed and perpetuated as a material asset benefiting only white people (Harris, 1995).

A CRT lens has been used to examine the experiences of racially minoritized students, primarily in HWIs (Espino, 2012; Griffin et al., 2014; Harper, 2009; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; Solórzano et al., 2000, 2005; Turner et al., 2011); to critique institutional diversity policies (Donahoo, 2008); to document university racial climates (Harper, 2012; Yosso et al., 2009); and to interrogate K–12 postsecondary pipeline barriers (Howard, 2008; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002; Teranishi, 2002). For the present study, CRT is a useful conceptual framework to explain and operationalize the role of race and racism in discourses on minoritized students and to understand their experiences and responses to the racial climate at an HSI.

Student resistance framework

Oppressive circumstances may be worsened when racially minoritized students lack supportive social networks and face systemic challenges to seeking assistance during college. These different forms of oppression also tend to

incite student resistance strategies (Jones & Reddick, 2017). Put another way, minoritized students tend to recognize and reject oppressive spatial arrangements, and their actions can take multiple forms, including co-creation of counter-spaces—spaces of alliance—and new ways of existing and demanding autonomy (Black & Bimper, 2020; Solórzano et al., 2000). As such, viewing their experiences through a resistance lens is particularly instructive. In particular, we drew upon Solórzano and Bernal's (2001) framework of resistance, which is divided into quadrants that signify a student's level of critique of oppressive conditions and level of social justice motivation. The framework includes reactionary behavior, self-defeating resistance, conformist resistance, and transformational resistance.

Reactionary behavior is oppositional behavior (e.g., challenging an authority figure) with little critique of oppressive conditions; a social justice orientation is absent (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Students demonstrate *self-defeating resistance* when they critique oppressive conditions but have no social justice orientation. These behaviors—for example, dropping out of school—often perpetuate oppressive and inequitable systems. Conversely, students who engage in *conformist resistance* are motivated by social justice but lack a critique of oppressive systems (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Students may work to fix inequitable outcomes that result from larger systems of oppression rather than address structural issues with the system itself.

Lastly, *transformative resistance* results from the culmination of both a social justice orientation and a critique of oppressive conditions. This is best illustrated by students who are motivated to change institutional structures and social relations. The combination of a social justice orientation and critique of oppressive systems may lead to broader social impact and influence structural inequities (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). External resistance is overt and “outside the traditional system”; internal forms are more subtle, such as personal actions that go unnoticed because they do not *appear* to be disrupting the larger system (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 326).

Research questions

Overall, frameworks that draw from CRT and student resistance help us understand how racially minoritized students attending an HSI may struggle and engage in strategies of resistance to reduce or overcome environmental challenges. As we explored the issues, we were guided by two research questions:

- (1) How do racially minoritized college students view and interpret their experiences in academic settings at an HSI? To what extent do race and racism play a role?

- (2) In what ways, if any, do racially minoritized students struggle and engage in strategies of resistance to oppressive structures on an HSI campus?

In keeping with principles described by Solórzano and Yosso (2002), our analysis aligned with CRT by focusing on the centrality of race and racism, counter-storytelling and narratives, the construction of whiteness as property, and racial justice. This helped us understand and interpret the racialized experiences of minoritized students in academic settings at an HSI.

Methods

CRT theorists view experiential knowledge as a strength rather than as a deficit. This allows researchers to highlight the centrality of lived realities. In keeping with this, we utilized a counter-storytelling method to privilege and illuminate the voices of students. This speaks to our desire to challenge deficit notions of their racial and community backgrounds (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and to frame them as strong, capable individuals who should be valued by institutions of higher education.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) outlined three types of counter-narratives and counter-stories: (a) personal stories, (b) other people's stories, and (c) composite stories. *Personal stories* tell of an individual's experiences with interlocking oppressions, generally in the form of autobiographical reflections. *Other people's stories* present someone else's story in third-person voice to reveal experiential realities with various forms of oppression. And *composite stories* "draw on various forms of 'data' to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33).

In the present study, by amplifying the voices of minoritized students, we can reveal their racialized experiences with and responses to racism and other forms of oppression. Likewise, as Delgado and Stefancic (2001) concluded, "critical writers use counter-stories to challenge, displace, or mock . . . pernicious narratives and beliefs" (p. 43). Our approach centers minoritized students' voices concerning their racialized experiences to challenge and reframe liberalist claims of race neutrality and equitable educational opportunities (Matsuda et al., 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Participants

Study participants were enrolled at a large public research-oriented university in the western United States. The studied university has received HSI grants from the federal government in order to develop its capacity for serving Latinx students. For example, the institution received an HSI STEM grant to increase the number of Hispanic students in the fields of science, technology, engineering

and mathematics. In recent years, the university established an HSI committee to broaden the institution's understanding of "servingness" and what it means to serve Hispanic/Latinx students beyond high enrollment numbers. Additionally, with 30% of students self-identifying as AAPI, the studied university holds the distinction of being an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI). It has developed and implemented a comprehensive set of best practice strategies to address documented barriers AAPI students encounter on campus, but has not received any major AANAPISI grants to better support this population.

Racially minoritized students make up the majority of the student body. Specifically, 38% of the undergraduate population is Hispanic and Latinx, 30% of students are AAPI, 4% are Black, and 0.1% are Native American. All full-time students who self-identified as Latinx or Hispanic, AAPI, African American or Black, or Native American were invited to participate. We recruited students for focus groups and individual interviews through classroom announcements, assistance from professionals in cultural centers on campus, and snowball sampling.

The focus group and interview samples were distinct from one another. We conducted a total of seven focus groups and eight in-depth interviews with a total. Each focus group included four to eight participants and was homogeneous by race/ethnicity (Table 1). We strived to conduct an interview with at least one student per racial/ethnic group (Table 2). Interviewees varied in their year of school and came from a range of majors, including liberal studies, business, anthropology, sociology, history, psychology, English, Spanish, linguistics, and ethnic studies.

Data collection

Each of the interviews and focus groups was approximately 45 minutes long. Discussions were open and free flowing and provided a nuanced and complex understanding of students' racialized experiences (Burgess, 1984; Maxwell, 2005). The semi-structured interview protocol was based on a review of

Table 1. Focus group participants.

Race/Ethnicity	Female	Male	Total
Latinx	6	6	12
African American/Black	6	6	12
Asian and Pacific Islander	6	7	13
Native American	4	0	4
Total	22	19	41

Table 2. Individual interview participants.

Race/Ethnicity	Female	Male	Total
Latinx	2	1	3
African American/Black	2	2	4
Asian and Pacific Islander	0	0	0
Native American	0	1	1
Total	4	4	8

campus racial climate literature and allowed us to probe with follow-up questions surrounding their responses to oppressive structures and/or experiences of racism, as aligned with Solórzano and Bernal's (2001) framework. Questions addressed topics such as students' interactions with faculty, staff, and other students; their peer-group composition; their experiences with racism and stereotypes; their support networks; the forms of resistance they employed; and their views of the racial climate. We used the individual interviews to validate and further illuminate focus group findings.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

Each participant reviewed their interview transcript for accuracy and to ensure trustworthiness of the data (Shenton, 2004); all agreed the transcriptions accurately depicted their experiences. Then, to maintain consistency in coding and establish intercoder reliability within and across themes, we went through a coding calibration exercise (Armstrong et al., 1997) that yielded a high rate of intercoder reliability.

Employing CRT and a student resistance framework as analytical tools, a thematic analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken to examine the data for themes associated with each research question (M.Q. Patton, 2002). Four CRT tenets were included in the thematic analysis: a) the permanence of racism, b) the construction of whiteness as property, c) racial justice, and d) counter-storytelling and narratives. Solórzano and Bernal's (2001) framework of resistance was also incorporated in the thematic analysis. We analyzed all interview data in this study through open and axial coding to identify emerging patterns and themes. This involved reviewing, comparing, labeling, and categorizing the data. We used the constant comparative method to examine similarities and differences and draw new meanings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

During open coding, we read and re-read participants' responses to get a holistic picture of their answers and independently identify patterns and raw data themes. We recorded initial reflections and comments associated with participant responses and documented key words and raw data themes. We regularly revisited the transcripts to ensure that raw data themes reflected participant accounts. We compared and contrasted interpretations in the first-order codes until we achieved consensus. Then, during axial coding, we organized open coding categories into smaller clusters and identified relationships among codes. We collectively identified and interpreted major themes, locating commonalities and identifying support for themes across transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Researcher positionality

To fully embrace a CRT methodology, and to privilege the epistemologies of scholars of color, our research team consisted of six people of color—one

faculty member, one postdoctoral fellow, and four graduate students—and one graduate student who identified as white. We have a vested interest in studying how the campus racial climate affects the experiences of minoritized students. As a multiracial team—some of whom were first-generation college students—we brought multiple identities and sensibilities to this study as well as a level of credibility and connection with participants.

CRT scholars contend that, as racialized subjects, we have different ways of viewing events, perceptions, and group conversations (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Because we shared a set of racialized experiences, community ties, and concerns for the future with the participants, we are indelibly linked to this work. We believe, as Stanley and Slattery (2003) asserted, “by consciously locating our individual contexts, egos, biases, and agendas in the study, we enhanced the quality and integrity of the research project” (p. 724).

Findings

Our findings shed light on three interrelated themes about the experiences of racially minoritized college students in an HSI setting: awareness of racism in various forms; institutional “magical thinking” about benefits associated with racial diversity; and strategies for navigating racist postsecondary contexts. We describe and illustrate these themes using quotes from participants. Identifying information is excluded to preserve anonymity.

Campus racism

Racially minoritized students constantly face myriad obstacles to satisfaction with the college experience (Smith et al., 2007). Our participants described a range of experiences with the campus racial climate that lend support to CRT research in higher education. For example, they pointed to racial microaggressions—indirect everyday insults directed at people of color with cumulative effects and consequences (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015)—as well as hostile social environments, invisibility and erasure, and negative experiences with members of the campus community. All of these suggest to these students that they are inferior and unwelcome on campus.

Study participants commented on the racial climate and sometimes described particular racist incidents. These experiences manifested in different forms for students from different racial/ethnic groups. Indeed, Black participants described racist incidents more than any other participant group. For example, a Black man was confronted by campus police with guns drawn because police claimed he fit the profile of a suspect:

I still feel like we're viewed as dangerous. My experience was, I was walking home ... dressed in, like, a clean t-shirt, some black pants, and dress shoes. And I'm walking home to

my apartment and the police are there. And something happened in my apartment, but then they turn around and they're like, "Freeze, put your hands up," with a gun pointed at me. And I'm thinkin' like, it's a joke, 'cause like, you don't, I mean it's not a joke, but like, why is this happening to me? Right, so I'm walking, and they're saying, "Stop, freeze," and getting closer with his gun drawn at me. So, and at that moment I realized, like, you know—And before this all happened, I was in love with this school, like everything was, like, so, it was my safe haven. But as soon as that happened, I realized that no matter where I go, you know it's always going to be, like, how you're viewed. You're just, you're a Black person.

Across racial/ethnic groups, participants were keenly aware of how strained relationships with faculty affected their learning experience in classroom settings. A Latinx participant, for example, described feeling marginalized and devalued:

I actually took a class and the professor would always question me—like, always. He would question my work ethic, and I would tell him that I read the material, and he would still question me . . . He would just try to mock me. . . . I thought that was racist in my own view, but I talked to people and just like weigh it out, but in the end I was like, "Uhh, I'm not going to go to that level."

Likewise, several participants across AAPI focus groups shared experiences of faculty members mispronouncing or avoiding saying their names—racial microaggressions they framed as "annoying" that inhibited their ability to develop faculty–student relationships (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). When asked in a follow-up question whether faculty mispronounced their names in classroom settings, one student commented:

It's pretty often. My last name—'cause they don't really call me by my first name—it's always "Mr." and my last name. So, like, yeah, I get that a lot. I mean, I'm used to it. I mean, once or twice it's okay, 'cause, you know, you're only human. After like two or three times, though, it kinda gets annoying, like, you know, "We've gone over this. Say my name right or just don't address me. You don't need to address me."

A small portion of Native American students described structural barriers and a hostile campus racial climate. For example, when asked about racist episodes in day-to-day campus life, one student referenced an opinion piece about Thanksgiving in the school newspaper. Similar to other Native American participants, he noted the systemic and institutional erasure of Native American history:

The way that it was written was that history shouldn't matter anymore, that the history involving Thanksgiving shouldn't matter anymore, that we should just look past that. And that was very problematic for a lot of Native students that read it. And it was also interesting that the newspaper would allow for an opinion like that.

Relatedly, a Latinx participant shared her experience at a sponsored social event on campus, noting callous, racialized remarks from the invited speakers:

It was held here [on campus]. I went just to see. I saw a lot of nasty people who were just saying disrespectful things. They had no respect for [the] undocumented community and working-class people. A lot [of event speakers were] like, “Well, you take advantage of the government and food stamps.” It’s just the fact that I know that students also share this campus with those ideals.

Both of these instances point to a larger institutional negligence in which the ahistorical approach to university programming created conditions that harmed minoritized students on campus.

“Magical thinking” about campus diversity

Nearly all of the Black and Latinx participants noted that the HSI promoted a racially diverse campus but had not created conditions or engaged in practices that actually led to educational benefits or meaningful interactions across racial lines. Moreover, they critiqued the university’s promotional tools that relied on diversity as the selling point, noting an absence of any visible effort to create an inclusive and supportive environment for minoritized students to succeed. Borrowing from Chang et al. (2005), there was a sort of “magical thinking”—that is, a notion that interaction across racial lines would simply happen—versus recognition that certain campus conditions would need to be intentionally fostered.

Consider, for example, this comment from Black male participant who questioned the university’s commitment to racial diversity:

I think it’s just a blanket term. ‘Cause when I got admitted, and you get your packet and you finally see that you are admitted, you see, you feel some sense of pride that you actually accomplished something, especially being a Black male. . . . The words they throw at you just seem so empowering, that it’s almost like an illusion, right? But then, when you start thinking more critically about it, you start to see that, well, this campus isn’t diverse.

Relatedly, a Latinx participant noted that the campus might have effectively messaged its campus racial diversity but went no further: “Like, they actually told us, like, we’re like a few of the campuses that are diverse. But yet I didn’t hear it from the college itself. . . . It [diversity] was promoted, but, like, I didn’t see them making the effort.”

The campus climate also appeared to promote racial silos. A Black female participant explained how, over time, she had settled into one of these silos:

Of course you start to make friends within communities, but they don’t stick, you know? Like, versus me having friends who look like me. . . . And even in classes, what I end up doing is gravitating towards people who look like me.

Others reflected on racialized experiences within campus clubs and organizations. An AAPI female participant, for example, described her same-race campus interactions and noted a lack of opportunities for meaningful exchanges across racial lines: “I would say mostly [I interact with] Asian

[students], because I'm really active in an organization called Circle K International. It's not like a specific ethnic club or anything, but for some reason we attract a lot of Asians."

Strategies of resistance

Even though the institution did not help facilitate meaningful interactions across race, students used same-race peer groups and cultural organizations to engage in various forms of resistance to create more just and equitable learning environments. Across racial/ethnic groups, students engaged in multiple strategies of resistance, such as establishing informal support networks, proving others wrong through academic success, and confronting institutional structures that perpetuate racism. Each strategy was informed by their experiences on campus and the extent to which they named the campus racial climate as either hostile or unwelcoming.

Informal support networks

Participants tended to rely on informal support networks rather than formal campus resources for their personal and academic needs. A Black woman commented, for example, that she found professors to be "standoffish and not very relatable," and instead emphasized the value of informal academic support from friendships developed within peer groups, particularly at cultural center events. Within-group informal support networks were a mechanism of restoration and collective well-being for many students.

Others described support networks outside of the university. For example, a Native American participant described a network that included "community members, even, like, that are associated either with the community or outside of the university setting. And my family or other people that I seek out [for] guidance and wisdom." A Black male participant described how this often played out:

The Black people on this campus—and I've heard it from other people that aren't Black—tend to stick together and, you know, go to each other for help. So, I feel like our success is due to that, due to that family dynamic that people are coming together and asking for help. Like, you can go to another Black person, but as far as faculty, because there is not a lot of Black faculty, I don't feel like people are comfortable enough to go to them for help.

Others were able to build informal support networks through cultural centers, which provided both informal and formal spaces that supported students' academic needs and mental health. These centers had open-door policies that helped build community and facilitate connections among students with similar campus experiences. Accordingly, in a focus group of Black

women, one participant expressed a sentiment that was very common in the group:

I'll meet Black girls randomly in my classes, and they won't know about [the center]. And they'd tell me how they struggled for the first couple of years because they had no friends, no one to talk to or relate to. And they'd find like one Black person, and they'd go like, "Where's all the Black people?" So that's what [the center] is for, that's what it's for. Like, if they would've came here, their experience would've been a lot different here.

In focus group interviews, many AAPI students shared a similar sentiment. After explaining their experiences of isolation and microaggressions throughout their K–12 years, several students found that college served as a way to find community through cultural centers and student organizations, such as the Vietnamese Student Association or Asian Pacific Student Programs.

Notably, participants did not mention any formalized mentoring resources, suggesting they may not have been adequately supported in this respect. A small portion of participants across racial/ethnic groups did describe unofficial mentors within cultural centers. A Latinx participant, for example, described how a Latina graduate student volunteered to be her "femtor"—an unofficial female mentor:

My femtor, I met her because she was around. She would attend programs and events hosted by [the center], and so that's how I got connected to her. . . . She just mentors people because she wants to.

Disrupting stereotypes and institutional structures

Participants engaged in more individualized and specialized forms of resistance that they operationalized to disrupt larger racial stereotypes. For example, several Black male participants rejected the notion of *coping* within the oppressive environment; instead, they reiterated their desire to *disrupt* racist stereotypes:

I don't want to say "cope," because I feel like "cope," like, that's something you just accept. For me, I was in a program. And one thing that's kind of been our motto is dispelling Black stereotypes. And for me it's not about coping with what's going on on campus; this is about dispelling the stereotypes.

A Black woman shared how she and other Black students were making structural changes to combat campus racism:

So, my involvement in [the Black Student Union] at the beginning of my sophomore year led to a lot of protests that were led primarily by [another student]. And most of them were about the racism encountered on other campuses and how the oppression, lack of attention, lack of resources that the African community needs on this campus, but doesn't have. So, through these efforts and the efforts of [the Black Student Union], the creation of the Black Student Task Force, we have put in the work to make sure that situations like this don't happen on campus.

Similarly, in response to a problematic framing of Thanksgiving in the child development

center on campus, a Native American participant talked about her own resistance to exposing her daughter and other children to content that erases Indigenous history:

I approached her teacher and said that I didn't find it appropriate. She was fine and she took it down, but the teacher that made the art confronted me and attacked me on why I felt that it was offensive and that she was just making art. So in that space I felt that my background and just history in general was, like, under attack and not respected.

In a focus group, AAPI students shared the perception that they had been less affected by the racially hostile political climate, but did notice other students organizing: "I actually saw something positive that could come out of [the hostile climate], was that people banded together to, I guess, protest against Trump, which I thought was a pretty positive way to look at it."

When asked about strategies of engagement during the process of resistance, other participants mentioned their desire to prove others wrong by performing well in the classroom. For example, a Latinx participant shared that when she recognized a racial microaggression or had her intelligence questioned by a professor, she would "kinda prove him wrong." She continued, "I think it's not so much to prove him wrong, but, like, you know, that I'm assertive. Like, 'You're wrong, you know? You can't always be right.' So I think that's how I cope with things." A Black male student shared similar thoughts:

I was in a position where I had to prove someone wrong, that I was gonna be a Black person in [this college]. Because in high school they had told me I wasn't going to go [to this college]. So for me, I was just proving someone wrong.

Discussion

Viewed through CRT and student resistance interpretive lenses, the preceding counter-stories illustrate the subtleties and salience of race and racism as well as the challenges encountered by racially minoritized students at an HSI. Their experiences expose structures and practices that reinforce white supremacy on college campuses.

Limits of compositional diversity

A primary mission of HSIs is arguably to advance the educational goals and experiences of the Latinx student population, yet prior research (e.g., Garcia, 2018a; R. García, 2020) and the current study reveal that there are significant barriers to living up to this promise. It is well documented that a racially diverse student body, coupled with supportive campus conditions, can lessen racial prejudice and positively influence a range of learning outcomes (Denson, 2009;

Hurtado et al., 1998; Oseguera & Rhee, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). We caution against drawing conclusions regarding *servingness* as related to minoritized students at this studied HSI, however, as that would call for different analytic foci beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, doing so may lead to misleading and/or incomplete conclusions about HSIs generally (Garcia, Núñez et al., 2019). Nevertheless, we do offer suggestions for campus climate and student resistance within this unique context. By documenting student racialized experiences and responses to an unwelcoming or hostile campus climate, we highlight institutional shortcomings that may inhibit servingness, as well as a supportive climate for minoritized students in general.

As evidenced by most Latinx, Black, Native American, and several AAPI students in the current study, outside of the existence of cultural centers, there was an absence of any visible institutional effort to create an inclusive and supportive environment for minoritized students to succeed. In short, compositional diversity is important, as it increases undergraduate students' cross-racial interactions, which has been shown to be positively associated with student outcomes (Bowman, 2010; Denson, 2009). It is insufficient, however, for fostering the educational benefits of diversity during college (Gurin et al., 2002). Campus leaders must create optimal conditions for students to communicate across racial lines through curricular and co-curricular activities (Chang et al., 2006).

It is also necessary for campus leaders to engage white students and faculty about the reality of systemic racism, colonization, and microaggressions in order to prevent harmful interactions across racial lines. White students in particular are typically privileged to feel a sense of campus belonging and community and to select and interact with same-race peers rather than engage in meaningful cross-racial interactions, especially compared to Black students (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). At this HSI, the administration appeared to promote (or at least overlook) racial silos and miss opportunities to facilitate quality learning experiences. Many participants expressed feelings of alienation, exclusion, and marginality, lending support to the work of Yosso et al. (2009) and other CRT scholars (Harper, 2009; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015). At the same time, many participants have perhaps grown comfortable within these racial silos, often relying on them for support and utilizing them as counter-spaces for organizing against oppressive institutional structures.

As such, questions remain over whether campus leaders can effectively respond to this racial divide, including the varying needs of unique and racially diverse populations of college students (Pope et al., 2014), without first attending to the conditions that are creating unhealthy campus racial climates. Therefore, it is necessary and essential that campus leaders and institutional actors use student experiences to inform how they address each dimension of the campus racial climate, rather than continuing to rely on intuition or naive

optimism that merely having a racially diverse student body will translate into a healthy campus climate (Chang et al., 2005; Ledesma, 2016).

Experiences of campus racism

Beyond a lack of opportunities for meaningful interaction, study participants expressed disappointment and frustration with perceptions of a hostile campus racial climate, even at this HSI where racially minoritized students make up the majority of the student population. Many exposed overt and more subtle racist incidents that impacted the quality of their campus experiences and their ability to identify safe, inclusive, and productive spaces for learning and personal development. The hostile climate impacted their academic and social experiences, including campus interactions in a range of settings (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lopez, 2005).

For Black students in particular, the findings illustrate experiences with antiblackness and a violent campus racial climate, as also evidenced in previous works (Abrica et al., 2020; Allen et al., 2018; Dancy et al., 2018; Lu & Newton, 2019; Mustaffa, 2017; Stewart, 2019). Other clear incidents of institutional racism emerged from Native American participants' descriptions of erasure and exclusion—a phenomenon that has been demonstrated in research studies, textbooks, websites, curricula, campus newspaper stories, campus events, and media outlets (Minthorn & Nelson, 2018; Saunders, 2011; Shotton et al., 2013). When this identity, history, and culture are not readily available to campus stakeholders and the broader community, it gives the false impression that these students are rare or absent, reinforcing this erasure (Rifkin, 2009). The results are low enrollment and retention rates as well as isolating and violent campus climates (Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Shotton et al., 2013; Tachine et al., 2017). This has long-lasting impacts on Native culture and identity and contributes to discrimination and institutional racism (Rifkin, 2009).

Though AAPI students did not explicitly make connections to the socio-political climate affecting their racialized experiences on campus, they shared more subtle instances of microaggressions, primarily from faculty (B. M. D. Nguyen et al., 2016). Although this held true across students from different AAPI subgroups, it would be instructive to increase the sample size and disaggregate subgroups by ethnicity and generational status. Doing so would acknowledge the heterogeneity of racial and ethnic categories and avoid erasing their unique experiences (Museus & Chang, 2009).

Through a CRT lens, racist incidents and behaviors represent structurally embedded practices that marginalize underserved student groups, and these endemic, routine, and normalized activities play out in very subtle yet complicated ways (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Solórzano et al., 2000). Students' routine exposure to racial microaggressions, for example, is validated by CRT research

that has copiously documented similar occurrences across HWIs (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015). While this racism may be normalized or ignored, hostile campus racial climates contribute to students' anxiety in, mistrust of, and distance from learning communities; this prevents them from fully engaging with academic and social resources (Yosso et al., 2004).

When racially minoritized groups repeatedly describe a campus as unsupportive, alienating, and racially hostile, it speaks to the normalization of whiteness and exclusionary institutional logics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Harris (1995) argued that institutions remain the “property” of whites; the material benefits of safe, inclusive learning communities and campus engagement (free of hostility) have been relished primarily by white people, thereby maintaining inequality. Thus, although the racialized experiences of our study participants highlight the hostile terrain they have navigated at an HSI, their stories likely resonate at HWIs, demonstrating the currency of racism in different educational contexts. This also brings forth the need to document how both HWIs and HSIs may perpetuate racist institutional norms to ensure that institutions designated as HSIs (and AANAPISIs) are held accountable to servingness and equity (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016; Garcia, 2018b; Garcia, Núñez et al., 2019).

Support and resistance in a racialized climate

Viewed through a whiteness-as-property lens, it is evident that colleges and universities have historically not been structured to serve racially minoritized students (Harris, 1995). Often, these students find themselves in racially hostile and unfair learning environments and experience more unfair treatment by faculty, staff, and teaching assistants than their white counterparts (Ancis et al., 2000). As such, they may not seek formal campus assistance (Chiang et al., 2004). Indeed, in the current study, many participants were well aware of their institution's violent racial climate and institutional racism as well as its effects on their commitment and quality of experience during college. Nevertheless, as in prior studies, they tended to eschew formal supports or services in favor of informal support networks, such as friends, family, same-race peers, and cultural centers (Chiang et al., 2004; Constantine et al., 2003; Grier-Reed, 2010; Yosso, 2005). These findings dovetail with earlier research showing that students' informal social connections are positively associated with higher levels of persistence during college (Fischer, 2007), that familial capital and family support improve the quality of experience for racially minoritized students (Yosso, 2005), and that cultural centers are integral to minoritized student success and sense of belonging (L. D. Patton, 2010; Ramirez, 2018).

Constantine et al. (2003) noted that utilizing informal support networks to deal with academic and personal stressors can be an important coping strategy

for racially minoritized students. These networks can be viewed as therapeutic mechanisms for healing and collective well-being, places of refuge, counter-spaces for safety, validation, acceptance, intellectual growth and development, and reaffirmation of identities and cultures (Grier-Reed, 2010; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Thus, by recognizing oppressive conditions on campus and forming informal support networks, many racially minoritized students engaged in multiple types of resistance.

CRT methodology acknowledges that racial oppression and racial inequalities are met with various forms of organized resistance (Black & Bimper, 2020; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). According to Solórzano and Bernal (2001) framework, some resistance strategies may be self-defeating and/or conformist, as students find ways to succeed without changing or putting pressure directly on larger structures. However, our findings may push this framework forward and question the nature of categorizing forms of resistance in relation to institutional change. For instance, while some Black participants formed a Black Student Task Force to challenge the administration and document harmful conditions, others recognized the institution as a violent, exclusionary space and sought to invest their energy in forming support networks outside of it. The same can be said for Latinx students, who created informal support networks and mentorships that were affirming and supported their sense of self and belonging long-term.

These support networks—though not intentionally aimed at “transforming” the institution—arguably were informed by a greater awareness and analysis of the institution as an environment that could further harm them and their communities. We contend that the support networks Black, Latinx, and Native American students formed are a type of resistance that is in direct opposition to the institution and that has immense transformative potential. They recognized the structure of the institution as perpetuating racism, and they actively chose to find support elsewhere; they succeeded academically despite hostile institutional structures and explicitly named their experiences of racism on campus as connected to historical and ongoing projects of racism and colonization in the United States.

When asked about specific strategies of resistance, some students described a desire to prove others wrong by performing well in the classroom—something traditionally categorized as a form of transformational resistance (Yosso, 2000). This drive and motivation for success acknowledges racist perceptions that people of color are intellectually inferior and confronts systemic racism through students’ own successes, thus disrupting the dominant narrative (Wood et al., 2014). Viewed through a CRT lens, these oppositional behaviors, in many ways, can be seen as a conscious push toward racial justice in higher education. When college student resistance has been explored and discussed in the literature, it has often been described as defiant, destructive, and negative (Seidel & Tanner, 2013). This study therefore offers a reminder that an

interrogation of college student resistance as positive and constructive allows for students to be understood as poised to contribute to conditions that enhance their overall well-being and that create sites of endurance, belonging, and community.

In line with Solórzano and Bernal (2001) work, we caution against romanticizing external, overt forms of resistance, particularly in the current socio-political climate, where these forms of resistance may threaten students' safety and well-being. Many students in this study demonstrated internal forms of transformational resistance by critiquing their oppressive environment, and they paired those critiques with motivation to dispel racial stereotypes and succeed, despite institutional barriers. Although these subtle acts of resistance may go unnoticed in the larger structure, their effects can reverberate. For example, informal support networks fostered a supportive environment for racially minoritized students to succeed on campus; they also fostered space for political mobilization across cohorts, as new students were mentored into growing networks. Thus, informal support networks have the potential to disrupt institutional structures over time.

At the same time, however, the fact that these same students rejected formal support or services in the broader academic community demonstrates the effects of a hostile and discriminatory racial climate on the quality of their experiences. This finding suggests a lack of institutional commitment to racial equity and, likewise, comfortable, inclusive, healthy environments for optimal student learning and personal development (Bensimon, 2004; Hurtado et al., 2012). As such, researchers and campus leaders must continue to develop a critical, multidimensional understanding and comprehensive assessment of the experiences of racialized bodies in different institutional contexts and conditions.

Conclusion and recommendations

Colleges and universities continue to send chilling messages that racially minoritized students are unwelcome. Although the students who participated in this study had persevered, their counter-stories highlight the permanence of racism and the arrogance of the whiteness-as-property norm, both of which create significant roadblocks as racially minoritized students traverse a difficult educational landscape. Previous work has detailed the importance of evaluating servingness and campus climates at HSIs (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020; Garcia, 2018b; Garcia, Núñez et al., 2019). Likewise, our findings underscore the need for coordinated efforts to address the campus racial climate at HSIs and across colleges and universities that serve diverse student populations, as well as holding university administrations—and governments that often underfund or devalue HSIs—accountable to serving minoritized students, faculty, and staff (Garcia, Núñez et al., 2019).

Higher education leaders who advocate for the collective well-being of minoritized students indeed face tremendous pressure to respond to oppressive structures at HSIs and non-HSIs. It seems evident that the quality of the educational experience for minoritized students will be shaped to a significant degree by the vision, knowledge, frames of reference, and competencies of those providing leadership. Before we can open new spaces and possibilities, advocates of minoritized students must commit themselves to racial justice education, which aims to create and promote an anti-racist culture of resistance. Through what Patel (2016) characterizes as “the fugitive acts of learning,” advocates of minoritized students can learn how to become critical change agents, rather than remain relatively passive and disengaged from the change process (p. 397). For change agents who develop and operate with a racial justice commitment, they must deeply consider the organizational structures for serving minoritized students. For example, in line with Garcia, Núñez et al. (2019), change agents might focus on organizational structures that include developing an institutional mission and strategic plan for serving minoritized students, transforming recruiting and hiring practices to enhance the racial diversity of campus members, and actively pursuing HSI grants to demonstrate a commitment to serving diverse student populations.

Complex engagement designed to explore the history of racism and the racialized harm experienced on campus is imperative. While many campus leaders may not be consciously aware that they harbor implicit bias toward minoritized students, it would be instructive for them to work closely with scholars, grassroots organizations, and the like—those who are racially literate—to initiate and design professional development trainings and workshops that include sessions on coloniality, racism, whiteness, white supremacy, structural competence, and other critical issues. An interactive and experiential session on minoritized students and their histories, and what it means to exist as fully human, for example, would facilitate intergroup dialogue and foster cross-cultural understanding of the types of conscious and unconscious prejudices and discriminatory attitudes directed toward minoritized students. Trainings and workshops alone are not the answer to addressing oppressive structures; rather, they must be viewed as a phase of this critical work.

We also echo the call to elevate the importance of cultural centers on campuses and funnel more resources toward their work, as these administrators and staff are most often the professionals creating and supporting affirming, safe spaces for students (L. D. Patton, 2010; Ramirez, 2018; Stewart, 2012). Further, the subversive work cultural center professionals engage in must be recognized and applauded. Critical scholars should seek collaborative partnerships with cultural center administration and staff to enhance student experiences, combat racist institutional policies and practices, and nurture student resistance and autonomy.

In line with Hurtado et al. (1998), a comprehensive assessment of the campus racial climate is an important first step. This data-driven approach will allow campus leaders to identify strengths and problem areas and to increase awareness of campus conditions that impact the quality of experience for racially minoritized students. As Abrica et al. (2020) revealed, attending to the campus climate and dynamics of race and racism at HSIs is increasingly important; some institutions may be using the HSI designation to shield themselves from further critique or from actually addressing hostile racial climates, specifically antiblackness. Both Latinx and Black students in this study were poised to offer this critique of the studied institution, again underscoring the need to re-center race and racial inequity on college campuses that have “achieved” enrolling a racially diverse student body while simultaneously neglecting other dimensions of the campus racial climate.

Further, more research and collaboration can be done with informal support networks—to understand how they form, what their function is, how they can be sustained, and perhaps how they can be facilitated and replicated across campuses. These networks can foster supportive environments and encourage political and social justice organizing. Whether they are formed in response to hostile environments or through campus cultural centers, these networks are vital to racially minoritized students’ well-being. Student affairs professionals, administrators, and faculty should support students who are part of these informal networks as they develop actionable strategies of resistance to disrupt oppressive structures and practices.

More research is needed to understand and document how “a critical mass of same-race peers” at HSIs and other institutional types may enhance learning outcomes for all college students (Jayakumar et al., 2018, p. 31). With a critical mass, we know that racially minoritized students will have greater levels of campus representation and are less likely to become vulnerable to racist stereotypes and feelings of tokenization inside and outside of the classroom (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014; Jayakumar, 2015). Moreover, they will likely be placed in supportive and less racially hostile conditions to participate in meaningful interactions and exchanges across racial lines; this, in turn, may lead to increased access and a greater sense of community during college (Jayakumar, 2015). Our findings illustrate that even though there was a critical mass of Latinx students at the studied university, racist structures and campus norms prevented a healthy campus racial climate from being realized (see Ledesma, 2016).

Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate and create campus conditions that support student engagement, rather than force students to do extra labor to create those conditions elsewhere. It would be instructive to identify new ways for campus leaders to engage, reengage, and truly serve diverse student populations—at HSIs and elsewhere—for example, through culturally sustaining and responsive curricular and co-curricular activities, including ethnic

studies and peer support programs (see Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2017). Likewise, support initiatives and co-curricular activities at HSIs should encourage students to communicate across racial lines and feel connected to campus. These efforts could include racially diverse study groups, structured trainings that foster racial and cultural awareness, and meaningful cross-racial exchanges that challenge students to think about their own and others' world-views (Cuellar, 2014; Maestas et al., 2007; Núñez, 2009).

Note

1. "Minoritized" refers to groups of people not necessarily in the numerical minority who have been assigned socially constructed characteristics of a minority; others view and even treat them as inferior, valueless, and subhuman in order to maintain control and power over them (Shields et al., 2005). We reject this socially constructed power structure.

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