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# Nine Themes in Campus Racial Climates and Implications for Institutional Transformation

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**I** *This chapter synthesizes fifteen years of published research on campus racial climates. It also presents nine themes that emerged from a qualitative study of campus racial climates at five predominantly White universities.*

## Nine Themes in Campus Racial Climates and Implications for Institutional Transformation

*Shaun R. Harper, Sylvia Hurtado*

Administrators at two universities were probably less than excited about the news coverage their campuses received on April 27, 2006. Although they were located in different regions of the country, various indicators of racism and racial/ethnic minority student discontent were apparent at both institutions. On one campus in the Northeast, four alarming headlines and race-related stories were printed on the front page of the student newspaper. An incident in which a campus police officer made racist remarks to three African American female students was juxtaposed with the story of a philosophy professor suing the university for demoting him from department chair because he reported to the dean of his college that students had been racially harassed and discriminated against by his faculty colleagues. The third front-page article described a letter sent to the administration by Hillel, the Jewish student organization, demanding an apology and other concessions for the unfair cancellation of a student art exhibit on campus. Among their requests, Hillel student board members asked the university to conduct “an investigation into the discrimination, racism, and intimidation” one of their members experienced in his interactions with the art gallery director.

A protest at the Office of the President organized by Black Caucus and the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) student organization the day before was described in the final story. Protestors said they were insulted

that staff members locked the office door and the president walked by refusing to address their concerns. Therefore, they slid a letter under the door, chanted outside on megaphones, and subsequently posted a video of the entire protest on YouTube.com. The protest was in response to what students perceived to be insufficient punishment against the women's head basketball coach, a White woman, who allegedly interrogated a Black female player about her sexual orientation, repeatedly threatened to dismiss the student from the team if it was discovered that she was in fact a lesbian, and eventually demanded that the player leave the team. While this story appears to be more about sexual orientation than race, Black Caucus members were especially disturbed that this happened to an African American woman who was probably not the first or only player the coach suspected was gay. Perhaps institutional leaders believed these were isolated incidents that coincidentally occurred around the same time, hence there being no formal assessment of the campus racial climate following this day of problematic news coverage.

With support from the president and provost, the second university commissioned an audit of its campus racial climate. The day after a public presentation of preliminary findings from the audit, a reporter from the city newspaper wrote an article with a bold headline indicating the institution had received "a poor racial report card." The story included a summary of the auditor's findings and this quote from an African American male sophomore: "It is not a sensitive community for Black students. If I stay, the only reason will be to help effect change." The article was also retrieved by the Associated Press and reprinted in newspapers across the nation. Unlike at the first university, administrators on this campus felt public pressure to respond to the problems that had been exposed and were expected to use findings from the racial climate audit to guide institutional change. Within one year, the midwestern school hired a chief diversity officer, crafted a memorandum of understanding with the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to improve the campus racial climate, organized a conference to examine the status of racial/ethnic minority male students, and pursued more purposefully the recruitment of a diverse faculty, among other efforts. The audit clearly raised institutional consciousness about the realities of race on campus and revealed racial toxins that had long existed but remained unaddressed.

These two predominantly White institutions (PWI) had similar responses to racial issues on campus. Although the second university was forced to change after having been embarrassed in the local and national press, it is highly unlikely that the audit was the first indicator of racial turbulence on campus. Instead, there had been signals such as those at the first institution that had been disregarded, either intentionally or inadvertently. Unfortunately, such incidents and subsequent responses are not atypical.

In this chapter, we synthesize fifteen years of research about campus racial climates and present nine themes that emerged from a multi-institutional qualitative study we conducted. The primary goal here is to

illuminate trends that persist on many college and university campuses, especially those that are predominantly White. At the end of the chapter, we use perspectives on transparency and organizational change to frame our implications for institutional transformation.

### **Post-1992 Research on Campus Racial Climates**

“The Campus Racial Climate: Contexts of Conflict” (Hurtado, 1992) is the most widely cited study on this topic. Results were derived from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) fourth-year follow-up survey, a nationally representative longitudinal study of college students in the late 1980s. Among the most salient findings was that approximately one in four survey respondents perceived considerable racial conflict on their campuses; this proportion was even higher at four-year institutions that were large, public, or selective. When racial conflict was present on campus, few students were convinced that fostering racially diverse learning environments was a high institutional priority. Racial/ethnic minority students were more likely to believe espoused institutional commitments to multiculturalism when racial tension was low. Hurtado also found that White students were less likely than Blacks and Latinos to perceive racial tension on their campuses, as most believed racism was no longer problematic in society. Furthermore, she concluded that racial tension is probable in environments where there is little concern for individual students, which is symptomatic of many large PWIs that enroll several thousand undergraduates.

The Hurtado study has been reprinted in books and frequently cited by scholars who have written about racial realities on college campuses over the past fifteen years. Given the problematic nature of the results presented in this landmark study, we retrieved and analyzed empirical research studies that have since been published in education and social sciences journals to determine how campus racial climates have evolved since 1992. Although considerable effort has been devoted to studying various topics concerning racial/ethnic minority undergraduates at PWIs, we reviewed only journal articles that focused on the racialized experiences of college students and campus racial climates. Also excluded are climate studies regarding racial/ethnic minority faculty and other underrepresented populations (such as LGBT and low-income students), conceptual pieces, literature reviews, unpublished conference papers, dissertations and theses, legal proceedings, reports, and books (with one exception: Feagin, Vera, and Imani, 1996).

Findings from studies that have been published since 1992 can be divided into three categories: (1) differential perceptions of campus climate by race, (2) racial/ethnic minority student reports of prejudicial treatment and racist campus environments, and (3) benefits associated with campus climates that facilitate cross-racial engagement. Studies in which these findings have emerged as well as the methods and samples on which they are based are presented in Table 1.1. Seventy-one percent of the articles we

**Table 1.1. Clusters of Post-1992 Research Studies on Student Experiences with Race and Campus Racial Climates**

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Sites</i>	<i>Sample (N)</i>	<i>Respondents/Participants</i>
<i>Differential perceptions of campus climate by race</i>				
Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000)	Quantitative	Single	578	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Cabrera and Nora (1994)	Quantitative	Single	879	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Cabrera and others (1999)	Quantitative	Multiple	1,454	Black and White students
D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993)	Quantitative	Single	146	Black and White students
Eimers and Pike (1997)	Quantitative	Single	799	Asian American, Black, Latino, Native American, and White students
Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto (1998)	Quantitative	Single	566	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Johnson-Durgans (1994)	Quantitative	Single	2,957	Black and White students
Nora and Cabrera (1996)	Quantitative	Single	831	Asian American, Black, Latino, Native American, and White students
Radloff and Evans (2003)	Qualitative	Single	27	Black and White students
Rankin and Reason (2005)	Quantitative	Multiple	7,347	Asian American, Black, Latino, Native American, and White students
Suarez-Balcazar and others (2003)	Quantitative	Single	322	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
<i>Racial/ethnic minority student reports of prejudicial treatment and racist campus environments</i>				
Davis and others (2004)	Qualitative	Single	11	Black students
Diver-Stammes and LoMascolo (2001)	Qualitative	Single	153	Asian American, Black, Latino, Native American, and White students
Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996)	Qualitative	Single	77	Black students and Parents

Fries-Britt and Turner (2001)	Qualitative	Single	15	Black students
Hurtado (1994a)	Quantitative	Multiple	510	Black and Latino students
Hurtado (1994b)	Quantitative	Multiple	859	Latino students
Hurtado and Carter (1997)	Quantitative	Multiple	272	Latino students
Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996)	Quantitative	Multiple	203	Latino students
Lewis, Chesler, and Forman (2000)	Qualitative	Single	75	Asian American, Black, Latino, and Native American students
Smedley, Myers, and Harrell (1993)	Quantitative	Single	161	Asian American, Black, and Latino students
Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000)	Qualitative	Multiple	34	Black students
Swim and others (2003)	Mixed	Single	51	Black students
Turner (1994)	Qualitative	Single	32	Asian American, Black, Latino, and Native American students and faculty
<b>Benefits associated with campus climates that facilitate cross-racial engagement</b>				
Antonio (2004)	Qualitative	Single	18	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Antonio and others (2004)	Mixed	Multiple	357	White students
Chang (1999)	Quantitative	Multiple	11,680	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Chang (2001)	Quantitative	Single	167	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004)	Quantitative	Multiple	9,703	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Chang, Denson, Sáenz, and Misa (2006)	Quantitative	Multiple	19,667	Asian American, Black, Latino, Native American, and White students
Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002)	Quantitative	Multiple	12,965	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Levin, van Laar, and Sidanius (2003)	Quantitative	Single	1,215	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Milem, Umbach, and Liang (2004)	Quantitative	Single	536	White students
Pike and Kuh (2006)	Quantitative	Multiple	42,588	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students
Sáenz, Ngai, and Hurtado (2007)	Quantitative	Multiple	4,380	Asian American, Black, Latino, and White students

reviewed are based on quantitative methods, and only one qualitative study (Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000) was conducted at multiple institutions. Also apparent is that too few researchers have explored how Asian American and Native American students experience campus racial climates. What follows is a brief synopsis of recurring findings within each thematic cluster of studies.

**Differential Perceptions of Campus Climate by Race.** Researchers have consistently found that racial/ethnic minority students and their White peers who attend the same institution often view the campus racial climate in different ways. For example, racial/ethnic minorities in Rankin and Reason's study (2005) perceived campus climates as more racist and less accepting than did White survey respondents. Similarly, D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) noted, "Almost all of the sampled African American students reported having borne the brunt of racist remarks and most assumed that African Americans would be mistreated on campus" (p. 77). White students in their study did not report similar experiences and expectations. Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that Whites and racial/ethnic minorities alike perceived the campus climate negatively, reported discrimination from faculty, and recognized insensitivity in the classroom. However, White students' perceptions were weaker on all three measures and not necessarily attributable to race. While both White and Black participants in Cabrera and Nora's study (1994) felt alienated in various ways on campus, racial prejudice and discrimination was the predominant source of such feelings among the latter group.

Radloff and Evans (2003) linked perceptual differences to their participants' home communities. That is, the White students they interviewed grew up in predominantly White neighborhoods and thus had limited firsthand exposure to racism prior to college. Cabrera and others (1999) found that perceptions of racial prejudice had greater effects on Black students' levels of institutional commitment in comparison to their White counterparts who had also experienced various forms of discrimination. Multiple studies have shown that Black students report lower levels of satisfaction with racial climates and perceive differential treatment on the basis of race more frequently than do their Asian American, Latino, Native American, and White peers (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr, 2000; Cabrera and Nora, 1994; Hurtado, 1992; Suarez-Balcazar and others, 2003). These differences are not just in perceptions but also in the way racial/ethnic minority students experience PWIs.

**Minority Student Reports of Prejudicial Treatment and Racist Campus Environments.** The second cluster of studies, half of them qualitative, offer insights into how racial/ethnic minority students experience race and racism on predominantly White campuses. Consistent with the pre-1992 literature (Allen, 1988; Fleming, 1984; Loo and Rolison, 1986; Nettles, Thoeny, and Gosman, 1986), the research reviewed here consistently calls attention to the isolation, alienation, and stereotyping with which these students are often forced to contend on campuses where they

are not the majority. Perhaps the title of Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner's article, "Guests in Someone Else's House: Students of Color" (1994), best characterizes a feeling that is shared among many at most PWIs. In their study of racial/ethnic minority first-year students, Smedley, Myers, and Harrell (1993) discovered that racial conflict and race-laden accusations of intellectual inferiority from White peers and faculty engendered stresses beyond those generally associated with attending a highly selective university; they also found these stresses were most pronounced among Black students. While similar research has focused mostly on undergraduates, Hurtado (1994a) confirmed that Black and Latino graduate students are not immune to the deleterious effects of campus racial climates.

In their study of Latino student transition to college, Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) suggested, "Even the most talented Latinos are likely to have difficulty adjusting if they perceive a climate where majority students think all minorities are special admits [and] Hispanics feel like they do not 'fit in.' . . . Students may internalize these climate observations, presumably because these are more difficult to identify or sanction than overt forms of discrimination" (p. 152). Reportedly, experiences with racial discrimination and perceptions of racial/ethnic tension complicated the participants' first- and second-year transitions. Beyond the first year, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that perceptions of racial hostility had negative effects on Latino students' sense of belonging in the junior year of college. In another study (Hurtado, 1994b), 68 percent of the high-achieving Latino students surveyed felt their peers knew very little about Hispanic culture, which significantly increased the participants' feelings of racial/ethnic tension and reports of discriminatory experiences on campus.

Feagin, Vera, and Imani's study (1996) appears to be the first to involve both Black students and parents in an examination of the campus racial climate. Situated at a public university in the Southeast, the participants were well aware of the institution's racist history and the reputation it had garnered for being racially toxic. And the students described the confrontations they had with White peers and faculty, the absence of cultural space they could call their own, barriers to successfully navigating the institution, and the constant burden of disproving racist stereotypes regarding their academic abilities. Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) described how Black students' confidence in their academic abilities is often eroded by stereotypes regarding their intellectual inferiority and presumed entry to universities because of affirmative action.

Black undergraduates participating in a research study by Swim and others (2003) wrote in diaries each time (if at all) they experienced racism or perceived something on their campuses to be racist over a two-week period. Thirty-six percent documented unfriendly looks and skeptical stares from White students and faculty, 24 percent chronicled derogatory and stereotypical verbal remarks directed toward them, 18 percent kept a log of bad service received in the dining hall and other facilities on



campus, and 15 percent noted other assorted incidents. The students attributed all of this negative treatment to racism. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) found that when Black students experience racial microaggressions (subtle verbal, nonverbal, or visual insults), they begin to feel academically and socially alienated in spaces where such oppression occurs, and as a defense mechanism they create their own academic and social counterspaces (ethnic enclaves that offer shelter from the psycho-emotional harms of racial microaggressions). While the worth of ethnic culture centers, minority student organizations, and other counterspaces has been empirically proven in recent studies (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper and Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2006; Solórzano and Villalpando, 1998), a reality is that they often limit interactions between White students and racial/ethnic minorities.

**Benefits Associated with Campus Climates That Facilitate Cross-Racial Engagement.** Findings from studies in the third cluster are relatively consistent. Researchers have recently furnished a large body of empirical evidence to confirm the educational merit of deliberately creating racially diverse college campuses. Much of this evidence was used in support of testimony for the University of Michigan affirmative action cases (*Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*). These studies verify that students who attend racially diverse institutions and are engaged in educationally purposeful activities that involve interactions with peers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds come to enjoy cognitive, psychosocial, and interpersonal gains that are useful during and after college (Antonio and others, 2004; Chang, 1999, 2001; Chang, Astin, and Kim, 2004; Chang, Denson, Sáenz, and Misa, 2006; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin, 2002; Pike and Kuh, 2006).

Exposure to diverse perspectives during college could interrupt longstanding segregation trends in society. Students (especially Whites) who engage meaningfully with peers from different backgrounds and diverse perspectives both inside and outside college classrooms are unlikely to remain isolated within their own racial/ethnic communities (Sáenz, Nagi, and Hurtado, 2007), which is believed to be sustainable in environments (such as residential neighborhoods) after college (Milem, Umbach, and Liang, 2004). In contrast to those who maintained racially homogeneous friendships, undergraduates (especially first-year students) with friends outside their race held fewer biases about and expressed less anxiety toward racially different others at the end of college (Levin, van Laar, and Sidanius, 2003). Participants in Antonio's study on friendship grouping (2004) agreed their campus was racially segregated and could describe the range of racially homogeneous groups that existed. Despite this, many selected best friends based on those with whom they interacted most in the first year of college, not on the basis of race. These findings illustrate the importance of institutional intent in creating spaces and opportunities for meaningful cross-racial engagement, especially for students who are newcomers to an institution.

## A Multicampus Qualitative Study of Racial Climates

Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso's article (2000) appears to be the only published qualitative study of racial climates based on data collected from more than one institution. It should be noted that their sample was composed exclusively of Black students. To explore the realities of race more deeply, we used qualitative research methods at five PWIs located in three different geographical regions of the country; two campuses were in rural towns and the others in urban areas. In light of Hurtado's finding (1992) that institutional size affects perceptions of the campus racial climate, only large institutions were included in this study. On average, White students composed 73 percent of the undergraduate populations on these campuses. The primary goals were to pursue a deeper understanding of how contemporary cohorts of students experience campus racial climates in the three areas consistently noted in the literature, while searching for additional themes that have not been captured as fully in previous research.

Focus groups were facilitated with 278 Asian American, Black, Latino, Native American, and White students across the five campuses. The composition of each focus group was racially homogeneous (for example, only Native Americans in one and Latinos exclusively in another). Administrators in academic affairs, student affairs, and multicultural affairs assisted in participant recruitment by sending mass e-mail invitations to all undergraduates from each of the racial/ethnic minority populations on the campus; each White participant led a major campus organization such as student government. In addition to interviews with students, one additional focus group was facilitated with staff persons (mostly entry- and midlevel professionals) from academic affairs, student affairs, and multicultural affairs at each institution. Interestingly, only five of the forty-one staff participants were White, even though we never specified a preference for racial/ethnic minorities who worked at the institutions.

Each focus group session was audiorecorded and later transcribed. The interview transcripts were analyzed using the NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software Program. Several techniques prescribed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Moustakas (1994) were systematically employed to analyze the data collected in this study. The analyses led to the identification of nine recurring themes, which are presented in the next section. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, we shared our findings in public forums on each campus where participants were invited to deny or confirm our syntheses of what they reported in focus groups about the racial climate, a technique referred to as "member checks" (Lincoln and Guba, 1986). Patton (2002) noted that participants with seemingly unpopular or minority points of view might not feel empowered to offer divergent perspectives in focus groups and subsequently may decide against reporting something different or controversial, a trend better known as "focus group effect." This certainly could have been the case in this study and is therefore acknowledged as a limitation.

Using a different sampling and participant recruitment technique for White students, while justified below, is another noteworthy shortcoming.

Each of the five campuses in this study had its own context-specific challenges with race and racism, which are not discussed here to keep the institutions' identities anonymous. Instead, we present and summarize nine common racial realities across the institutions.

**Cross-Race Consensus Regarding Institutional Negligence.** Racial/ethnic minorities and White students alike expressed frustration with the incongruence of espoused and enacted institutional values concerning diversity. "The university has diversity plastered everywhere, but I have yet to see any real evidence of it," one focus group participant commented. Many were also disappointed with the lofty expectation that they would magically interact across racial difference on their own. A White student told of growing up on a ranch in Texas where he had not interacted with anyone outside his race prior to enrolling at the university. Regarding the initiation of conversations with racial/ethnic minorities on the campus, he asked: "Why should I be expected to know how to do this on my own? And the university expects us to talk about something as sensitive as racism without helping us. This is unrealistic and actually unfair." Other students wanted and needed assistance, structure, and venues in which to meaningfully engage with racially different peers, but they found little guidance from educators and administrators. Consequently, almost all of the students interviewed deemed their institutions negligent in the educational processes leading to racial understanding, both inside and outside the classroom.

**Race as a Four-Letter Word and an Avoidable Topic.** Participants, including the staff persons interviewed, spoke of the infrequency with which race-related conversations occurred on their campuses. Put simply, race remained an unpopular topic and was generally considered taboo in most spaces, including classes other than ethnic studies. At one institution, a midlevel staff member shared: "We don't talk about race on this campus because this state has long struggled with racial issues that trace back to slavery. So the political climate is such that the university would get into trouble with the state legislators if we talked too much about race." Students also referenced city and state political norms in their comments about the silencing of topics related to racism and racial injustice. "This campus is a microcosm of [this town] when it comes to running away from anything that even smells like race. It is just something we never talk about here, and most people are okay with that." Many participants recognized the contradiction inherent in expecting students to interact across racial lines on campuses where race is deliberately unacknowledged in classrooms and other structured venues.

**Self-Reports of Racial Segregation.** Like the students in Antonio's study (2004), participants here were well aware of the segregation on their campuses. Few encountered difficulty naming spaces where evidence of racial segregation could be found. Chief among them was fraternity row. In fact, one Black student referred to this segregated space as "Jim Crow Row,"

as he reflected on fraternity parties and other events to which he had been denied access, perceivably due to his race. At the conclusion of a focus group at another institution, the participants led a guided tour through various “ethnic neighborhoods” (as they called them) in the campus dining hall, where racial segregation was visibly apparent. Beyond observable segregation trends on the campuses, most students we interviewed personally confessed to having few (if any) friends from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Several White participants expressed an interest in building friendships with others but said they did not know how. By her own admission, a White female student leader was embarrassed that she had not even noticed until the focus group discussion that all of her close friends were White. In some instances, White students attributed their lack of engagement with racial/ethnic minority peers to the existence of minority student organizations. “If we did not have the Black frats, our chapters would have more diverse members,” an Interfraternity Council president claimed. Worth acknowledging here is that only twenty-nine students held membership in the four Black fraternities on this particular campus.

**Gaps in Social Satisfaction by Race.** White and Asian American students often expressed feelings of social satisfaction at the five institutions and found it difficult to identify aspects of the campus environment they would change. Because all the White participants were student leaders, the universality of this finding should be interpreted with caution. While not as satisfied as the White and Asian American students, Latinos and Native Americans mostly expressed gratitude for having been afforded the opportunity to matriculate at the various campuses. Their expectations for the provision of stronger social support appeared to be modest in comparison to those of their Black peers. It should be noted that Native American undergraduates were less than half of 1 percent of the undergraduate student populations on four of the campuses we studied. In one focus group, a Latina first-year student began with an enthusiastic description of the benefits associated with attending such a prestigious university, but hearing stories from others ignited consciousness of just how little social support she had been afforded at the institution. At every university, Black students expressed the highest degrees of dissatisfaction with the social environment.

**Reputational Legacies for Racism.** One logical explanation for Black student displeasure was the bad reputations that preceded the universities they attended. Some entered their institutions expecting to experience racism. “My parents, sister, aunt, and just about every African American in my home town couldn’t understand why I came here. They told me to go to [a black college] because this place is so racist,” one woman shared. In each focus group, other Black students told similar stories of how they had been warned about the racist environments they would encounter. “Kanye West said George W. Bush does not care about Black people. Well, it is obvious [this institution] does not care about Black people, and we have known this for a few generations now.” Like the students and parents in Feagin, Vera,

and Imani's study (1996), Black undergraduates interviewed for this study described how negatively their institutions were viewed within Black communities across the state because of historical exclusionary admissions practices. Many Black students withdrew prematurely in the past, and those who managed to persist through degree attainment often returned to their home communities with stories of the racism they had endured. Although this was found only among Black students in the study, its salience and consistency across the five campuses makes it noteworthy.

**White Student Overestimation of Minority Student Satisfaction.** White student leaders were selected because they were thought to be most likely to have interacted with racial/ethnic minority peers in the student organizations they led. Moreover, we suspected they were positioned to offer more meaningful appraisals of the campus racial climates because of their levels of political leadership on the campuses. Focus groups with these participants were always conducted after those with racial/ethnic minority students. The White students were most satisfied with the social environments, and they erroneously assumed their Black, Latino, and Native American peers experienced the institutions this same way. They reported that racial/ethnic minority student engagement in mainstream campus organizations was low, but for some reason those students were thought to be equally satisfied with their college experiences. When asked about the basis of their assumptions, the White participants often responded with, "I don't know . . . I just figured everyone loves it here." Because there was so little structured and meaningful interaction across races, student leaders who were presumed to have understood the general pulse of the campus were generally unaware of the disparate affective dispositions their racial/ethnic minority peers held toward the institutions.

**The Pervasiveness of Whiteness in Space, Curricula, and Activities.** Beyond ethnic and multicultural centers on the five campuses, Asian American, Black, Latino, and Native American students found it difficult to identify other spaces on campus in which they felt shared cultural ownership. White interests were thought to be privileged over others, which many racial/ethnic minorities viewed as inconsistent with institutional claims of inclusiveness. These perceptions are perhaps best illustrated in this quote from a sophomore student: "Everything is so White. The concerts: White musicians. The activities: catered to White culture. The football games: a ton of drunk White folks. All the books we read in class: White authors and viewpoints. Students on my left, right, in front and in back of me in my classes: White, White, White, White. I feel like there is nothing for us here besides the [cultural] center, but yet [this university] claims to be so big on diversity. That is the biggest white lie I have ever heard." Other participants also critiqued the isolation of ethnic culture to a single center, office, or academic major. Although Asian American students generally appeared to be as satisfied as their White peers, even they expressed a desire for greater cultural representation.

**The Consciousness-Powerlessness Paradox among Racial/Ethnic Minority Staff.** Nearly 88 percent of the staff persons we interviewed were racial/ethnic minorities. Interestingly, they were fully aware of the degree to which minority students were disadvantaged and dissatisfied on the five campuses. They also knew about the extent to which racial segregation existed. Much of what the students shared in focus groups was confirmed (mostly without prompting) in interviews with the staff. One of the five White staff participants asserted, “Everyone around this table knows how segregated students are, but we never talk about it. It is the sort of thing that will piss the upper administration off and make them leery of you for raising the issue.” Despite their consciousness of the realities of race, most indicated a reluctance to publicly call attention to these trends for fear of losing their jobs or political backlash. “I feel bad for what the young brothers and sisters go through here, but there is only so much I can do since I have only been here two years,” a Latino academic advisor explained. Staff persons would complain to each other and privately strategize with students but felt powerless in voicing observations to senior administrators and White colleagues. Fear of being seen as troublemakers who were always calling attention to racism compelled many to remain silent.

**Unexplored Qualitative Realities of Race in Institutional Assessment.** In every focus group on each of the five campuses, student participants (Whites and racial/ethnic minorities alike) indicated that it was the first time any institutional effort was made to inquire about the qualitative realities of their racialized experiences. “You’re the first person to ask us these kinds of questions” was a common remark. Furthermore, the White student leaders said no one, including their student organization advisors, had ever asked them questions about minority student engagement and satisfaction or the frequency with which they interacted with peers who were racially different. Reportedly, the institutional research offices had not conducted any formal climate assessments. Likewise, informal queries from faculty and administrators were also uncommon. “If they truly cared, they would have asked us about these things before now,” a Native American male senior believed.

## Implications for Institutional Transformation

The 2006 report of the commission appointed by U.S. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings to explore needed areas of improvement in higher education called for more transparency regarding student learning outcomes on college and university campuses. Merely reporting outcomes, however, keeps the source of racial inequities undisclosed and does not result in better, more inclusive climates for learning. The consistency of results from fifteen years of empirical research, along with the nine themes that emerged in our study, make clear the need for greater transparency regarding racial realities in learning environments at PWIs. Even when cues

are readily available (for example, a newspaper with four front-page articles related to racial injustice), the realities of race are typically made transparent only when there is a highly publicized, racially motivated incident or when embarrassing findings from an external auditor are made public.

Consistent with Kezar and Eckel's recommendation (2002a), we suggest that administrators, faculty, and institutional researchers proactively audit their campus climates and cultures to determine the need for change. As indicated in many of the nine themes, racial realities remained undisclosed and unaddressed in systematic ways on college campuses. As long as administrators espouse commitments to diversity and multiculturalism without engaging in examinations of campus climates, racial/ethnic minorities will continue to feel dissatisfied, all students will remain deprived of the full range of educational benefits accrued through cross-racial engagement, and certain institutions will sustain longstanding reputations for being racially toxic environments.

Eckel and Kezar (2003) defined *transformation* as the type of change that affects the institutional culture, is deep and pervasive, is intentional, and occurs over time. Accordingly, deep change reflects a shift in values (for example, from espoused to enacted) and assumptions that underlie daily operations (for example, the flawed expectation that cross-racial interactions will magically occur on their own). Pervasiveness indicates that change is felt across the institution in the assumptions and daily work of faculty, staff, and administrators. For example, the Black culture center on a campus cannot improve an institution's external reputation if professors routinely perpetuate racist stereotypes in classrooms. Also, racial/ethnic minority students will continue to feel like "guests in someone else's house" if student activities offices fail to sponsor programs that reflect the diverse cultures represented on a campus. Intentionality in constructing culturally affirming environments and experiences that facilitate the cultivation of racially diverse friendship groups must substitute passivity and negligence. As previous research has established, these racial climate issues have consequences for student outcomes (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen, 1998). For example, attention to diversity in the curriculum and cocurriculum, particularly in the first two years of college, results in student development along many dimensions of complex thinking and social cognitive growth (Hurtado, 2005).

Eckel and Kezar (2003) also distinguished transformation from other types of change, including adjustments that continually happen in academia that are neither pervasive nor deep, such as showing a one-hour video on respecting diversity at new student orientation; isolated change that may be deep but limited to one unit or program area, as when an ethnic studies department offers a cluster of elective courses on race; or far-reaching change that affects many across the institution but lacks depth, as with a policy regarding the symbolic inclusion of an equal opportunity statement on letterhead and all hiring materials. Moreover, Kezar and Eckel (2002b) found that senior administrative support, collaboration, and visible action

are among the core elements requisite for transformational change in higher education. While administrative leadership on its own is insufficient, our findings make clear that entry- and midlevel professionals, especially racial/ethnic minorities, often feel silenced and powerless to transform campus racial climates.

In their 2005 study, Kezar and Eckel interviewed thirty college presidents who had been engaged in organizational change with a significant emphasis on the success of racial/ethnic minority students. The presidents used a strategy of dialogue and discussion in the appraisal of their own and their institutions' commitments to diversity, while holding various stakeholders accountable for aligning efforts with stated institutional values and priorities. If this is to occur on other campuses, race cannot remain an avoidable topic. For instance, if accountability for student learning is a high priority, dialogue and strategic efforts must be directed toward addressing undercurrents of racial segregation that inhibit the rich learning that occurs in cross-racial engagement. Likewise, faculty and staff in academic affairs, student affairs, multicultural affairs, and other units on campus should be challenged to consider their roles as accomplices in the cyclical reproduction of racism and institutional negligence.

Despite fifteen years of racial climate research on multiple campuses, the themes of exclusion, institutional rhetoric rather than action, and marginality continue to emerge from student voices. Conducting a climate study can be symbolic of institutional action, only to be filed away on a shelf. We advocate that data gathered through the ongoing assessment of campus racial climates guide conversations and reflective examinations to overcome discomfort with race, plan for deep levels of institutional transformation, and achieve excellence in fostering racially inclusive learning environments.

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