University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

2022

Counterstories of Honors Students of Color

Michael Carlos Gutiérrez

Counterstories of Honors Students of Color

MICHAEL CARLOS GUTIÉRREZ

University of California–Davis

Abstract: This study explores the experience of high-achieving students of color in an honors program at a large research university. Qualitative methods involve surveying students ($n = 39$) and interviewing a select group ($n = 5$) in attempts to measure both the frequency and severity of racial microaggression as well as subjective experience relating to diversity and representation in honors. Using critical race theory, a discourse analysis of four broad questions pertaining to pre-entry, entry, continuation, and exit of honors programs suggests that more is needed to foster an honors community that better understands and meets the needs of students' racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. While several students report nearly withdrawing from honors, citing feelings of racial tokenization, alienation from peers, and impostor phenomenon, the author notes how results elucidate a pressing need for university honors programs to recruit more students from underrepresented backgrounds and provide targeted resources to support honors students and the programs to which they belong.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, universities have made increasing efforts to promote diversity programs and to display to the world that they serve students from a wide array of backgrounds. Although diversity is a step in the right direction, there is a difference between an institution intentionally combating structural inequalities that prevent students of color from obtaining equal access and an

institution creating the illusion that it is doing so. Universities must not solely focus on diverse numbers of students but also on the students themselves.

We must not ignore the discrimination that students of color regularly face in education, particularly at predominantly White institutions; diversity in a non-inclusive environment is inauthentic and sure to fade (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018). Our higher education system needs to work hard to serve an increasingly diverse college population by developing academic and social support systems to retain students of color and propel them to graduation.

The present study focuses on the experiences of students of color in higher education, with an emphasis on high-achieving students of color in honors programs. The study examines how these students encounter and cope with discrimination and the extent to which such experiences affect their perceptions of campus climate, inclusion, and overall sense of belonging.

The study expands on the minimal research available on honors students of color, adding valuable qualitative data to broader discussions of diversity, inclusion, and sense of belonging on college campuses. The analysis seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What enables honors students of color to succeed academically?

2. How does discrimination in the form of microaggressions impact their feelings of belonging on campus?

KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Key concepts in this analysis include the following:

- *Students of Color* are defined as those who come from historically under-represented, underprivileged, non-White backgrounds in higher education, including students of Hispanic, Filipino, Indian, and Middle Eastern descent.

- *Diversity* refers to representation of people from a wide array of colors, religions, racial and ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, genders and sexual orientations, geographic areas, cultures, languages, and abilities.

- *Microaggressions* are subtle instances of discrimination against members of a racial or ethnic minority.

- *Inclusion* means providing equal access to opportunities and resources for underrepresented groups, primarily People of Color.

- *Sense of belonging* is a human need to feel connected with and accepted by others.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Topics

A review of the relevant literature reveals four main topics: 1) high-achieving honors students, particularly those of color, 2) discrimination in the form of microaggressions, 3) student perceptions of campus climate and inclusion, and 4) overall sense of belonging.

Honors Students of Color

Most honors programs within institutions of higher education are predominantly White (Badenhausen, 2018; Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019). Thus, the negative experiences of honors students of color, which may run contrary to the dominant narrative, are often overlooked or brushed aside, resulting in a gap in attention toward the needs of this population. It is no coincidence that there is very little research that documents the experiences of students of color in honors programs.

In a rare examination of students of color in the honors college at Bowling Green State University, Pritchett (2018) found that the few students of color enrolled did not feel at home nor supported during their time in the honors college. Students also reported seeing the need for increased diversity not only in the student body but also in the faculty. In another study, Hébert (2018) examined the experiences of ten high-achieving first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds. The study found a parallel between the academic success of the students and their exposure to both rigor and relationships throughout their academic careers. In other words, having an academically rigorous high school experience with emotionally supportive teachers was equally as important as forming relationships and engaging intellectually with mentors and other supportive adults on their college campuses; both were key in allowing these students, the majority of whom were students of color, to develop the resilience they needed to be successful and high achieving.

Discrimination in the Form of Microaggressions

Manifesting in both blatant and covert forms, discrimination in college is an issue that students of color are all too familiar with (Williams, 2019).

Microaggressions are subtle, often unconscious or unintentional "mini assaults" of discrimination (Wong et al., 2014); they are "layered" in that they attack a person's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname (Franklin, 2019; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015). Microaggressions are a subset of discrimination that shed light on the experiences that students of color face every day.

It has been established that microaggressions have a significant impact on People of Color (Wong et al., 2014). Not only can they exhaust students and make them feel "personally diminished" (Solórzano et al., 2000), but they may also represent both health and mental health risks to students of color (Williams, 2020), in whom they have been correlated with anxiety and alcohol-related consequences (Blume et al., 2012). Given that microaggressions have the potential to impact students' sense of belonging and academic performance (Parsons, 2017), it is important to examine what types of coping strategies college students of color implement to deal with racial microaggressions, many of which are daily occurrences.

After investigating experiences with racial microaggressions among Mexican and African American students, Franklin (2019) found that the most common coping strategies included accepting that microaggressions occur and receiving emotional support from others. When looking more closely at African American students, Franklin determined that religion, spirituality, and emotional support were frequently reported coping strategies whereas, for Mexican Americans, focusing on work or other activities was more often reported along with receiving comfort from others. Another study reported that students of color at a predominantly White college used a strong network of social support, became resilient and self-sufficient, and on occasion used detachment and self-selected isolation as coping strategies for race-related stress (Maina et al., 2011).

In a survey of over 300 Mexican American college students, findings indicated that racial discrimination was negatively correlated with student well-being (Villegas-Gold & Yoo, 2014). Students who coped with instances of racial discrimination by disengaging via self-criticism, wishful thinking, and social withdrawal were negatively affected when it came to their subjective well-being. Moreover, a study examining multiracial college students' experiences with racial microaggressions illustrated that educating others about multiracial issues, using support networks, embracing fluidity of multiracial identity, and avoiding confrontation with sources of prejudice and discrimination were all coping strategies (Museus et al., 2015).

Student Perceptions of Campus Climate and Inclusion

Experiences with microaggressions can predict perceptions of campus climate and culture among students of color and are directly tied to a sense of belonging. The historical roots of a campus are a significant factor since college campus histories marked by exclusion may leave remnants of a past that tell certain students that they do not belong. The aspects of campus climate relevant to diversity include

1. an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of various racial/ethnic groups,

2. the campus's composition of diverse groups of students,

3. the psychological climate of perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and

4. the behavioral climate characterized by intergroup relations on campus. (Hurtado et al., 1998)

In a study of over 4,000 Latinx undergraduates from the University of California, Franco and Kim (2018) documented that negative campus climate for racial/ethnic diversity was the most frequently identified campus climate type and that negatively perceived campus climates significantly impacted students' college GPA. Students of color have reported that negative views of campus climate often stem from racial microaggressions from White peers and faculty (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). Racially insensitive campus climates can create feelings of exclusion and alienation among students of color, leading them to feel unwelcome on college campuses and experience negative academic effects (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Overall Sense of Belonging

Students of color in honors programs are very often underrepresented (Badenhausen, 2018; Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019), leading to a diminished sense of belonging (Hussain & Jones, 2019). Previous studies have shown that students of color feel less strongly that they belong in their educational programs than their White counterparts (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007), and feelings of not belonging remain a leading cause for students of color dropping out of school (Just, 1999; Swail et al., 2003; Zea et al., 1997).

Hussain and Jones (2019) found that more diverse peer interactions and positive perceptions of an institution's commitment to diversity protect against the negative effects of discrimination on the sense of belonging of students of color at PWIs. Moreover, Means and Pyne (2017) determined that institutional support structures that enhanced students' sense of belonging included need-based scholarship programs, social identity-based student organizations, community-building within residence halls, supportive faculty, academic support services, and high-impact educational practices, such as study abroad.

Universities that actively acknowledge the diverse experiences, voices, and histories of all students demonstrate that they are trying to create spaces where all students feel that they matter.

THEORY AND METHODS

The present study adopted Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a primary perspective. As it pertains to higher education, CRT is a framework that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of schools (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In addition to empowering students of color to combat systemic racism, CRT allows for analysis of racial microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000) perpetuated by institutionalized racism and guided by white supremacist ideologies that justify the superiority of a dominant group over non-dominant groups, or Whites over People of Color (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; Solórzano, 1998).

This study targeted fourth-year students of color in the honors program at a large research university in the Western United States. The methodology included the qualitative measures of surveying and interviewing its subjects. Students were first administered a survey inspired by the Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS) (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). The survey consisted of thirty-eight questions and aimed to measure both the frequency and severity of experiences of racial microaggressions on a four-point Likert-type scale.

Some questions included asking participants whether they had been treated like second-class citizens, felt invisible, and been the only person of their racial background in their classes. Three questions were added to the RMAS with respect to being an honors student: 1) There are few people who look like me in honors, 2) I have felt racially tokenized as an honors student, and 3) People are surprised when they hear I am in honors. Interviewees were selected based on their responses to the RMAS, which was used to

gather qualitative data. During interviews, participants were asked four broad questions (with follow-ups) pertaining to honors program pre-entry, entry, continuation, and exit. Interview questions aimed to evaluate the program as well as students' experiences with microaggressions and sense of belonging.

While the study was initially submitted for IRB review, it was ultimately determined that IRB review was not required due to the relatively small size and scope of the research.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section consists of qualitative data gathered from five hour-long interviews with students of color in honors.

Interview 1

Rosa, a Second-Generation Honors Student of Hispanic Descent

When offered a spot in the university honors program, Rosa initially questioned if she was smart enough to be an honors student. She had reservations about the honors dorm and questioned the program's motives for inviting her. Was she merely checking off a diversity box as a student of Hispanic descent? Having come from a high school consisting of 70% international students primarily from East Asia, Rosa had become accustomed to not feeling represented in school; she viewed any increase in diversity as an improvement to being one of only a handful of students of Hispanic descent. When initially invited to the honors program, Rosa was wary of its academic rigor, wondering whether it was a mistake she was chosen and whether she would fit in. She also had concerns about the potential financial burden of the program. Ultimately, Rosa was convinced to join the honors program after positive experiences on decision day and during summer orientation, including an overnight visit at the honors dorm.

In reflecting on the positive aspects of the honors program over the last four years, Rosa shared her love of honors classes, her appreciation for the honors community and advisors, and the personal connections she built with peers. Challenges she outlined included a lack of flexibility in program requirements as well as the stress involved in completing the senior project. Although she described not being able to imagine her transition to college without the support of the honors community, Rosa made it clear that more representation would have been better. She found it bothersome that there were so few people who looked like her in honors.

While Rosa did not personally experience discrimination in honors and believed that microaggressions were reduced relative to the overall campus, she shared that a few of her friends were subject to microaggressions during honors orientation. In addition, Rosa reiterated feelings of racial tokenization when first invited to join the honors program, questioning whether her invitation was rooted in filling its diversity quota. While she enjoyed most of her selected honors courses, many of which were taught by female professors of color, Rosa observed that some fields seemed underrepresented, especially among those pertaining to her field of study. She did question if joining the honors program was the right decision early on due to uncertainties about some of the requirements as well as perceptions about its focus on STEM, and Rosa still to this day questions whether she belongs. She described feeling intimidated by others and doubting herself and her own achievements, detailing that people are often surprised to hear that she is in honors.

Toward the end of the interview, Rosa shared that she has had an unspoken motivation to prove herself for her community and her entire culture as a person of Mexican descent, describing an "added pressure" to succeed, and that if she succumbs to failure, she will be perpetuating negative stereotypes about her people. This worry was one of the contributing factors for her to persevere throughout the honors program, working hard for herself, her family, and her people. She closed by sharing that she is saddened by her constant need to prove others wrong.

Interview 2

Fatima, a First-Generation Honors Student of Middle Eastern Descent

Fatima was initially a little skeptical about her acceptance into the honors program at her university because she had heard stories of others being accepted simply because they were People of Color. She questioned whether the university wanted her because of what she had to offer or simply for diversity purposes, and she was hesitant to accept her offer of admission. She worried that her offer was a mistake and did not understand why she stood out from the rest of the pack, feeling unprepared and out of place, as though she would not be good enough nor have much to offer the honors community. She shared that her high school did not have SAT prep and described feeling left out when honors students would compare scores, noting that she often had the lowest score. Fatima was concerned about the lack of diversity, and once she joined the honors program, she realized that she knew few people from her same area and Middle Eastern background.

Fatima's positive honors orientation experience was what finally convinced her to join despite her initial apprehension. She described the financial stress of being a first-generation student as challenging and felt that things she worried about did not even cross the minds of her higher-income, more privileged peers. She recalled that in her second year in the honors dorm, the only Black person on the entire floor ended up leaving due to feeling unwelcome, out of place, and not forming any connections with peers. Despite the lack of diversity, Fatima had a positive experience with her roommates, who were from similar low-income backgrounds, and formed long-lasting bonds. While she found honors advising accessible, Fatima had trouble finding honors classes that she wanted to take, as there were not many honors-approved courses in her non-STEM field. Fatima attributed her staying in the honors program for the full four years to her own internal drive to succeed.

When reflecting on her four years as an honors student, Fatima described that had she not been in honors, she likely would have not felt "special," would have found it more difficult to receive guidance or develop a motivation to do well and would not have formed nearly as many connections with professors and peers. While she enjoyed honors social events and was impressed by the small class sizes, Fatima described the honors environment as exclusive rather than inclusive. She did not encounter many people of Middle Eastern descent and felt that the honors program had taken pity on her and admitted her as a token member of an underrepresented group. Fatima agreed that more representation within honors was needed and that she would have loved to be part of a small community that felt balanced in terms of demographics.

Although she believed microaggressive experiences to be less common in honors relative to the overall campus, Fatima did have such experiences in honors, sharing an uncomfortable instance when an upper-class White honors student told her to give up the career she was pursuing. Fatima confessed that she will always wonder why she was chosen to be in honors. She often felt that people looked down on her for her racial and low-income background, feeling as though people developed negative preconceptions about her before they knew her as a person. Fatima described feeling ashamed of her background, frequently trying to hide parts of herself and blend into the crowd to better form connections and relate to people in honors, forcing an inauthentic image onto herself and portraying herself in a different light to feel accepted by the honors community. She described feeling intimidated by other honors students, often comparing herself to others and feeling that although she may have been one of the top students at her high school, she would likely have been at the bottom of someone else's. Fatima said that people are surprised

when they hear she is in honors, often asking her how she was admitted. She shared that she generally responds by saying that she does not know. Despite initially questioning whether honors was the right fit for her (and almost leaving the program after her second year), Fatima later came to terms with the fact that she received so many opportunities as an honors student that would otherwise have not been available to her and was thankful for all the support she received from her honors advisors.

Interview 3

Vinay, a Second-Generation Honors Student of Indian Descent

Vinay was very excited when he was first invited to join his university's honors program. His only apprehension was the honors dorm, wondering if he would fit into a community consisting solely of honors students. Lack of diversity was not a topic of concern as he had grown accustomed to being one of the few students of color in predominantly White middle and high schools. When asked to elaborate, Vinay clarified that while a lack of diversity was something he noticed, it was not something that worried him. The honors overnight was what swayed Vinay to join the honors program because he connected well with the host students and did not feel intimidated by the academic rigor of honors. Transitioning to his university was a challenge, but it was helpful to live with others his age who shared similar interests, and the honors social activities facilitated meeting other people. Vinay felt that he had found a community in the honors dorm and was able to form lasting connections with peers.

Throughout his four years in honors, he mentioned that the only truly challenging part of being an honors student was having to complete the senior project. Had he not been in honors, Vinay would have had greater difficulties finding a friend group and sense of community within the context of his university. He noted that being an honors student provided him with a small college feel on a large college campus, appreciating the small class sizes within honors. Vinay described the honors learning environment as both supportive and challenging; it fostered a sense of community while pushing him to achieve his academic limits and to take advantage of opportunities. He described the honors program as welcoming and inclusive, neither experiencing discrimination in honors nor knowing of anyone in honors who experienced discrimination. Vinay also believed that microaggressive experiences of discrimination were lessened in honors compared to the overall campus. Although he did not know anyone who looked like him as a person of

Indian descent in honors, he did not find this bothersome given that he grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood and did not have any friends of Indian descent in middle and high school. In addition, Vinay did not identify any experiences of racial tokenization as an honors student, nor did he ever feel as though people were surprised that he was in honors.

When reflecting on his four years as an honors student, Vinay did not question whether honors was the right fit for him, having found a community of like-minded people. Nonetheless, he claimed that seeing more representation of people who looked like him would have enhanced his experience in honors and made the honors environment even more welcoming and inclusive.

Interview 4

Eddy, a Second-Generation Honors Student of Filipino Descent

Eddy came from a very diverse high school background and had some initial hesitations regarding diversity when he was first invited to join his university's honors program. He wondered about the ethnic composition because he preferred diversity and did not want to be labeled a tokenized member of a minority group. Despite his initial hesitations, Eddy decided to join the honors program with the mindset of taking advantage of the opportunity and having the option to leave if it was not the right fit. Eddy found the honors requirements to be challenging but not unnecessary, and he outlined numerous helpful opportunities made available to him as an honors student.

When he moved into the honors dorm, Eddy recognized that the honors student composition could have been a lot more diverse but was still able to find a sense of community, noting that joining the honors program was one of the best decisions he had ever made. Eddy shared that he experienced an academically difficult transition to being in honors, yet he was able to benefit from the social connections he formed as an honors student, bonding with peers and connecting with fellow like-minded and well-rounded students. When meeting other honors students, Eddy experienced a sense of impostor syndrome, at times questioning whether he fit in both academically and intellectually, but he also recognized that being surrounded by intelligent people could help him reach his full potential. Eddy claimed that had he not been in honors, he would not have enjoyed his college experience quite as much nor would he have been able to take advantage of a multitude of opportunities.

When prompted to reflect on his four years in honors, Eddy noted that while he did not often consciously think about honors demographics, he did

recognize that the honors program could have been a lot more diverse. While he could name a few fellow Filipino people, he could not name a single Black person in honors. In retrospect, Eddy viewed the honors environment as academically enhancing and full of opportunities, saying that feelings of welcomeness and inclusivity improved over his four years as an honors student. He experienced neither discrimination nor racial tokenization in honors (believing microaggressions to be less common in honors than in the overall campus) and did not encounter people who were surprised he was an honors student. Eddy acknowledged multiple times that the honors program could have done a much better job at increasing diversity, going so far as to say that had Filipino culture been represented more, he would have felt a stronger sense of belonging and less sense of impostor syndrome. Eddy never questioned whether honors was the right fit for him, having appreciated the role of the honors program in creating a positive student culture, allowing for strong connections with staff, facilitating extracurricular opportunities, and opening doors after graduation. As a second-generation college student, Eddy benefited greatly from familial support, particularly from parents who encouraged him to take advantage of every opportunity as an honors student.

Interview 5

Ananya, a First-Generation Honors Student of Indian Descent

Ananya chose to attend her university because of the honors program and the opportunities it seemed to provide, including the sense of community and small class sizes. She came from a small town that was very diverse and claims that she was not initially concerned about diversity as an honors student because she simply did not have the language for it. Ananya did not feel that it was a mistake she was chosen for the honors program, noting that she was proud of her accomplishments and did not doubt her abilities. She said, though, that her impostor syndrome arrived after being admitted to the university, particularly while observing how different she felt when compared to other students. Ananya was excited to join the honors program based on the numerous opportunities it seemed to offer.

During her first few months as an honors student, she tried to form connections with peers but was unable to locate a sense of community given the lack of diversity in the program. Not only did she find that there were a lot of White students who did not make it a point to welcome others into their groups but also that there was very little socioeconomic diversity; her financial

worries did not even cross their minds. After finding herself not meshing well with the honors community, Ananya began to blame herself for not fitting in and questioned whether she had made a mistake by entering the honors program. She felt that although the honors program tried to acclimate its students, resources tailored to the needs of low-income students of color were nonexistent. Ananya advocated for more diversity in honors as well as in the institution, noting that she has never had a Black professor and is troubled by White professors teaching ethnic studies courses. While ultimately succeeding in finding a community outside of honors, she felt that she might have found her community sooner had she not lived in the honors dorm in her first year. Ananya shared that while the honors program has been an important resource, she wishes that more People of Color had the opportunity to take advantage of it, pointing to the lack of diversity in the program. She described the honors community as neither welcoming nor inclusive, instead associating it with prestige and primarily benefitting high-income White students. She was unable to identify a single Black or Indigenous person in her honors dorm and was taught by majority White professors in her honors courses.

Ananya did outline microaggressive experiences and believed that microaggressions were more common in honors when compared to the overall campus, sharing a specific instance where a White student discredited her stance on a sensitive racial topic as well as many uncomfortable instances where she was the only Brown person in her majority White honors classes, resulting in numerous uncomfortable conversations. It saddened her to report that she did not enjoy most of her honors courses, identifying the lack of diversity in the composition and curriculum of the classes as contributing factors. Ananya shared that she has experienced racial tokenization as an honors student, often feeling that she was expected to speak on behalf of all Brown people. She also felt that the honors administration takes credit when People of Color succeed without recognizing the struggles of being a Person of Color in a White-dominated learning environment. Ananya described both peers and professors as frequently surprised to hear that she is an honors student, which has been especially upsetting when coming from White students outside of her community. She believes her frustration stems from the fact that not many people who look like her are in the program to begin with, placing the blame on systemic inequalities as opposed to the students themselves.

When reflecting on her four years in honors, Ananya questioned her belonging in the program, confessing that she almost withdrew after her third

year but was convinced to remain in the program by a supportive graduate student who encouraged her to not be "just another statistic." She took this advice to heart and chose to take advantage of every opportunity the honors program offered. Ananya stated that honors advising has been helpful and that while the honors program seems to be invested in making sure everyone succeeds, other systemic issues must be addressed. Overall, Ananya's frustration stems directly from a lack of diversity not just in honors but in higher education as a whole. There is a lot to be gained from being in an honors program, and Ananya wishes that the program were more open to involving students of color who, even without meeting the same criteria as White students of higher socioeconomic status, should receive some recognition for the fact that they had to work twice as hard to be considered.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In amplifying the voices of these five students, this paper aims to generate additional research for colleges and universities to draw on when taking the necessary steps to rectify the challenges faced by high-achieving honors students of color. Although the participants painted a brighter picture of honors than the literature review might have predicted, most agreed that more diversity and representation were needed in honors and that it was at times difficult to find a community of people within honors who understood and could relate to their racial/ethnic, cultural, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds. A few participants recalled almost dropping out of honors altogether, with many experiencing feelings of racial tokenization, alienation from peers, and impostor phenomenon. Some recounted traumatic microaggressive experiences directly correlated with being an honors student; however, only one student reported that racial microaggressions were heightened in honors relative to the overall campus.

Participants described individual, familial, and cultural factors as influencing their desire to succeed in honors. While adjusting to honors was challenging for some, many were able to form connections with peers in honors. Nevertheless, all students would have felt a greater sense of comfort and camaraderie in honors had they been surrounded by others who looked like them and in whom they could see themselves reflected.

One of the limitations of this study was the lack of diversity to begin with when searching for survey and interview participants in the honors program. Out of the thirty-nine students who completed the initial screening survey, only a small handful were students of color, and no Black or Native

American students were in the initial pool. This lack of representation is consistent with previous findings; a recent study found that only about 30% of honors students at American public research universities are students of color (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019). Another limitation was that not all interview participants had the same amount of information to share. Some chose to elaborate extensively on their experiences whereas others did not. Consequently, some narratives are more detailed than others.

One final limitation of the study is that all interviews had to be conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with some participants opting not to show their faces. While interviews of a sensitive nature are best conducted in person, most participants appeared comfortable elaborating on their survey responses and detailing their personal experiences in a virtual interview format. Future research building off this investigation of high-achieving honors students of color might consider conducting in-person interviews, waiting longer to recruit more participants of color, providing incentives to participants, and potentially incorporating focus groups for participants to bond and share common experiences as students of color in honors.

To better meet the needs of a growing population of high-achieving students of color, universities across the country need to consider the discriminatory and psychosocial experiences faced by these students when designing and implementing honors programs. All voices should have an equal opportunity to be heard, especially those of the underheard. Increased representation, social and academic support, and awareness of the unique needs of high-achieving students of color are fundamental to such students feeling a sense of belonging throughout, succeeding within, and remaining at their institutions of higher learning and honors programs.

Through the activist dimension of critical race theory, we as scholars can not only better understand our school's social situation but also transform it for the better (Delgado, 2001). Let us continue to create spaces where all voices are heard, where the status quo is deliberately challenged, and where education is a means for catalyzing positive change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Badenhausen, R. (2018). Making honors success scripts available to students from diverse backgrounds. *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, *19*(1), 9–14.

Blume, A. W., Lovato, L. V., Thyken, B. N., & Denny, N. (2012). The relationship of microaggressions with alcohol use and anxiety among ethnic minority college students in a historically White institution. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *18*(1), 45–54. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025457>

Buchanan, N. T. (2011). Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *35*(2), 336–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684311401818>

Cognard-Black, A. J., & Spisak, A. L. (2019). Creating a profile of an honors student: A comparison of honors and non-honors students at public research universities in the United States. *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, *20*(1), 123–57.

Cuellar, M. G., & Johnson-Ahorlu, R. N. (2020). Racialized experiences off and on campus: Contextualizing Latina/o students' perceptions of climate at an emerging Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). *Urban Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920927772>

Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., & Harris, A. (2001). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press.

Franco, M. A., & Kim, Y. K. (2018). Effects of campus climates for diversity on college GPA among Latinx students at selective universities: An examination by gender, first-generation college status, and immigrant status. In K. M. Soria (Ed.), *Evaluating Campus Climate at US Research Universities*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94836-2_2>

Franklin, J. (2019). Coping with racial battle fatigue: Differences and similarities for African American and Mexican American college students. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *22*(5), 589–609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1579178>

Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services*, *2007*(120), 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.254>

Hébert, T. P. (2018). An examination of high-achieving first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, *62*(1), 96–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986217738051>

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, *70*(4), 324–45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2673270>

Hurtado, S., Milem, J. F., Clayton-Pedersen, A. R., & Allen, W. R. (1998). Enhancing campus climates for racial/ethnic diversity: Educational policy and practice. *Review of Higher Education*, *21*(3), 279–302. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1998.0003>

Hussain, M., & Jones, J. M. (2019). Discrimination, diversity, and sense of belonging: Experiences of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *14*(1), 63–71. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000117>

Johnson, D. R., Alvarez, P., Longerbeam, S., Soldner, M., Inkelas, K. K., Leonard, J. B., & Rowan-Kenyon, H. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, *48*(5), 525–42. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2007.0054>

Just, H. D. (1999). *Minority retention in predominantly white universities and colleges: The importance of creating a good 'fit'* (ED439641). ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED439641.pdf>

Ledesma, M. C., & Calderón, D. (2015). Critical race theory in education: A review of past literature and a look to the future. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*(3), 206–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557825>

Maina, F., Burrell, M., & Hampton, B. (2011). *Coping strategies for students of color in a predominantly White college: Voices from the alumni* (ED518766). ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518766.pdf>

Martinez-Acosta, V. G., & Favero, C. B. (2018). A discussion of diversity and inclusivity at the institutional level: The need for a strategic plan. *Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education*, *16*(3), A252–A260.

Means, D., & Pyne, K. (2017). Finding my way: Perceptions of institutional support and belonging in low-income, first-generation, first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, *58*(6), 907–24. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2017.0071>

Museus, S., Sarinana, S., & Ryan, T. (2015). A qualitative examination of multiracial students' coping responses to experiences with prejudice and discrimination in college. *Journal of College Student Development*, *56*(4), 331–48. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2015.0041>

Parsons, Anna (2017). The effect of microaggressions, predominantly White institutions, and support service on the academic success of minority students. *Perspectives*, *9*(1), Article 9. <https://scholars.unh.edu/perspectives/vol9/iss1/9>

Pérez Huber, L., & Solórzano, D. G. (2015). Racial microaggressions as a tool for critical race research. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *18*(3), 297–320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.994173>

Pritchett, D. (2018). An examination of the experiences of students of color in the honors college, BGSU. *Honors Projects.* 330. <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects/330>

Shiroma, K. Y. (2014). *Factors that motivate high-achieving underserved students of color to succeed in college* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Hawaii at Manoa). <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/100483/1/Shiroma_Kiana_r.pdf>

Solórzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education*, *69*(1/2), 60–73. <https://www.middlesex.mass.edu/RLOs/748/Critical-Race-Theory.pdf>

Solórzano, D. G. (1998). Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experiences of Chicana and Chicano scholars. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, *11*(1): 121–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095183998236926>

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *8*(1), 23–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103>

Swail, W. S., Redd, K. E., & Perna, L. W. (2003). Retaining minority students in higher education: A framework for success. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*, *30*(2), 1–187.

Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade, Jr., A. L., & Romero Diaz, C. E. (2012). The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. *Cultural Diversity and*

Ethnic Minority Psychology, *18*(2), 153–64. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027658>

Villegas-Gold, R., & Yoo, H. C. (2014). Coping with discrimination among Mexican American college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *61*(3), 404–13. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036591>

Williams, M. T. (2019). Microaggressions: Clarification, evidence, and impact. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *15*(1), 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619827499>

Williams, M. T. (2020). Psychology cannot afford to ignore the many harms caused by microaggressions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *15*(1), 38–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619893362>

Wong, G., Derthick, A. O., David, E. J., Saw, A., & Okazaki, S. (2014). The what, the why, and the how: A review of racial microaggressions research in psychology. *Race and Social Problems*, *6*(2), 181–200. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-013-9107-9>

Yosso, T., Smith, W., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o under-graduates. *Harvard Educational Review*, *79*(4), 659–91. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.4.m6867014157m707l>

Zea, M. C., Reisen, C. A., Beil, C., & Caplan, R. D. (1997). Predicting intention to remain in college among ethnic minority and nonminority students. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *137*(2), 149–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224549709595426>

_____

The author may be contacted at

mcbgutierrez@ucdavis.edu.