Hispanic-Serving Institutions as Racialized Organizations: Elevating Intersectional Consciousness to Reframe the "H" in HSIs

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Conceptualizations of servingness must include an understanding of how racial ideologies shape Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Three Latinx scholars offer testimonios on our experiences as students, faculty, and researchers at teaching and research-intensive HSIs. From our testimonios, we found that practices of Blanqueamiento (Whitening of a population) and Mestizaje (racial mixture) operate at HSIs to flatten our understanding of Hispanics in U.S. society. To make sense of our testimonios within these HSI contexts and constraints, we applied an intersectional consciousness perspective on racialized organizations. Findings include Whiteness operating as a credential, legitimizing unequal resources, diminishing agency among minoritized groups, and continued use of Mestizaje (disguised as Hispanic) as a prevailing ideology. We provide considerations for HSI leaders, researchers, and administrators to elevate their intersectional consciousness and disrupt how HSIs contribute to essentialist notions of Latinxs.

Keywords: *HSI, racialized organizations, intersectional consciousness, testimonio*

HISTORICALLY, most universities with Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) designations have been public, open-access campuses that enroll large proportions of people of color (Nuñez et al., 2016), making HSIs racialized organizations (Garcia, 2019). As such, HSIs have expanded access to higher education for Latinx communities. According to Excelencia in Education (2021), HSIs enroll 67% of the Latinx undergraduate student population across 569 campuses. Scholars (Garcia, 2019; Marin, 2019) and policy intermediaries (Excelencia in Education, 2021) have challenged HSI leaders to move beyond enrolling Latinx students to serving them. Yet this diversity within HSIs also makes understanding servingness for Latinx students a complex issue and not easily generalizable (Cuellar, 2019). In fact, scholars have questioned whether HSIs are serving themselves (Smith-Aguilar, 2022) and White students (Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019) while marginalizing Black (Pirtle et al., 2021, Vega, 2019), Indigenous Latinx (Kovats Sánchez, 2021), and Afrolatinx (Abrica et al., 2020; Boveda, 2019a) students. In recent years, researchers have taken a sharper focus to examine how practices related to servingness have been influenced by racial ideologies and perpetuate racial inequities (Abrica et al., 2020; Kovats Sánchez, 2021; Pirtle et al., 2021). We build on this body of scholarship about servingness by interrogating how dominant racial ideologies shape practices designed to serve Latinx people at HSIs.

Racial ideologies are organizational maps that inform people's societal actions and consist of "common frames, style, and racial stories" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 10). These organizational maps are often unclear to hide the racial interests of the dominant group. As political tools, they provide logics and rationales to empower dominant groups (e.g., White people) to wield power over nondominant groups (e.g., Black and Indigenous people; Bonilla Silva, 2015). Essentially, racial ideologies justify and maintain the current racial order; without them, racialized societies could not exist (Bonilla Silva, 2015). Critical scholars have utilized racial ideologies to explain the experiences of racially minoritized students and faculty in higher education broadly and minority-serving institutions (MSIs) specifically. Among racial ideologies discussed by higher education scholars, two include Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje. Blanqueamiento refers to the strategies used to Whiten a population in the genetic and cultural sense (Godreau et al., 2008). Mestizaje elevates racial mixture by dominant group members as evidence that racism does not exist (Godreau et al., 2008). Both Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje are embedded in postsecondary organizations, including HSIs, and perpetuate the invisibility of Latinxs, specifically those

who embody Black and Indigenous consciousness, cultures, and physical characteristics.

As three U.S.-born Latinx education scholars, we consider how our distinctive familial ties to Latin America (e.g., Ecuador, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic), geographic locations (e.g., New York, NY; Los Angeles, CA; and Miami, FL), and racialized experiences in the United States (e.g., Afro-descendiente, Chicano, and Black) have shaped our understanding of the *H* in HSIs. We share our collective yet distinct experiences with Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje in HSIs. We pay particular attention to the insidious ways Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje operate in servingness and how our unique positionings as racialized Latinxs have shaped our experiences. Our study advances current understandings of servingness by highlighting Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje as dominant ideologies that racialize HSIs, creating inequitable outcomes for those HSIs purport to serve. In practice, Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje essentialize diversity within Latinx groups and overserve Latinx groups who are White and aspire to Whiteness. We offer autoethnographic tracings of tensions we encountered working at HSIs, collecting data at HSIs, or attending HSIs to answer the following research questions:

(1) How does a collective comprised of an Afro-descendiente Latina, Chicano, and Black Latina scholars make sense of the term *Hispanic*?
(2) What has this collective of scholars learned about servingness through their lived experiences and research with HSIs?
(3) What higher education practices reify Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje in servingness?

We share our collective testimonios to illustrate how Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje operate in servingness. We applied intersectional consciousness (Boveda, 2019a; Boveda & Weinberg, 2020) and a theory of racialized organizations (Ray, 2019) to bring attention to the tensions we experienced as racialized Latinx scholars and how Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje countered the intended goals of servingness. Intersectional consciousness is an individual's awareness of how professional socialization processes within education organizations are implicated in systemic oppression and how individuals' sociocultural identities are related to their educational opportunities and experiences (Boveda, 2019a). Using an intersectionality conscious approach to examine racialized organizations, we illustrate how we interrogated and navigated racialized HSI practices and norms for their lack of consideration of diverse Latinx experiences. We conclude with implications to encourage HSI administrators, faculty, and researchers to use an intersectional consciousness mindset, examining HSIs as racialized organizations and shedding light on servingness practices rooted in Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje.

Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje in Higher Education

Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje are interrelated White Supremacist ideologies inherited from the colonial histories of Latin America. Blanqueamiento creates a shared understanding of cultural norms "absorbed not only in people's psyches but . . . also inscribed in their bodies" (Lloréns, 2018, p. 161) and a process of distancing from "African ancestry and tak[ing] up White supremacist thinking, practices, and behaviors" (Dache et al., 2019, p. 131). For example, Dache and colleagues explored the ways Blanqueamiento has contributed to essentializing Latinxs. Using their own lived experiences as AfroLatina women in the academy, the authors used life notes (Dillard, 2010) to describe how faculty, including other Latinx faculty, often questioned their Latinidad and their position as faculty because they did not reflect racialized imaginations of professorial dispositions. Dache and colleagues extended ideas of Blanqueamiento by considering what it means to "pass for Latinx" (2019, p. 131), which they stated privileges European ancestors while ignoring African and Indigenous origins. As an example of this kind of passing, they interrogated the use of the terms *Hispanic* and *Latinx* and the microaggressions they experienced because of them. These microaggressions manifested as questioning their identity and their choice of research. They concluded that a commitment to dismantling White Supremacy must include a commitment to rejecting a panethnic Latinx label that counters Blanqueamiento. Additionally, they found that Blanqueamiento pervades interpersonal relationships within Latinx groups, often privileging Mestizo or White Latinxs in higher education. Essentially, "passing for Latinx" includes a racial ideology that centers Mestizaje while simultaneously elevating Whiteness to the detriment of Latinxs who do not embody mestizo or European cultures, characteristics, or consciousness.

Similar to Blanqueamiento, Mestizaje is a racialization process conceptualized to move away from and negate Indigeneity and Blackness (Oro, 2021) while affirming racial mixture with ancestors of European descent. In fact, Mestizaje is considered more than just an ideology of racial mixture; it is also a "state eugenicist program of Indigenous erasure" (Urrieta & Calderón, 2019, p. 145) that originated in Latin America and extended to the United States. In the U.S. context, Mestizaje is used to negate, silence, or trivialize racism among Latinx populations (Godreau et al., 2008). Kovats Sánchez (2021) explained that HSIs employ Mestizaje to invisibilize Indigenous Latinx students through programming and curricula centered on panethnicity—people who share language, culture, and heritage but not race (Taylor et al., 2012). Additionally, Mestizaje suggests that Indigenous people and culture are part of a historical past, negating the current lived experiences of Indigenous students who are very much present and have ties to Indigenous people, land, and culture (Kovats Sánchez, 2021). This violence is often perpetuated by White and Mestizo Latinxs

who elevate Whiteness by using Indigeneity as a cover to deny racism. Urrieta and Calderon (2019) demonstrated "AntiIndio" violence by exploring Indigenous erasure in historical racial projects such as the land dispossession of Native Americans and the rape of Indigenous women—sites of Mestizaje committed to the Blanqueamiento of Indigenous people. They concluded that the use of a Latinx panethnic label disenfranchises and miseducates Indigenous Latinx. As such, a broad sweep of implications about Latinx may cause more harm than good for Indigenous Latinxs.

Servingness as a Racialized Practice

Servingness includes a set of organizational practices that move HSIs away from simply enrolling Latinx students to serving them (Garcia et al., 2019). These indicators and structures (Garcia et al., 2019) include practices (e.g., admissions, faculty and administrator hiring, student mentoring, and student organizations) and outcomes (e.g., retention, graduation rates, grades). Analyses of these practices have revealed, however, that servingness is racialized and has demonstrably excluded Black students (Abrica et al., 2020; Pirtle et al., 2021; Serrano, 2020; Vega, 2019), Afro-Latinx students (Boveda, 2019a, 2019b), AfroLatinx faculty (Dache et al., 2019), and Indigenous Latinx students (Kovats Sánchez, 2021). Researchers have concluded that these disparate, racialized outcomes have specific consequences on HSIs such as color-evasive plans to support Latinx students (Smith-Aguilar, 2022; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019), hostile climates for Black and Latinx students (Serrano, 2020), misrepresentation of Indigenous Latinx students in curricula and programming (Kovats Sánchez, 2021), and institutionalization of psychological torment against Black students (Pirtle et al., 2021). Further, Pirtle and colleagues (2021) demonstrated how harm toward Black students was embedded in HSIs servingness. In a qualitative study consisting of 33 Black students at an HSI in California, they found that the HSI was highly exclusionary and committed to low levels of servingness for Black students, including AfroLatinx students. Practices included overrepresentation of White administrators, lack of Black educational spaces, and negative interpersonal relationships with non-Black Latinx and other peers. Specifically, AfroLatinx students felt an "Anti-AfroLatinidad" from Latinx students and only felt more inclusion at this HSI when they spoke Spanish to signal they were Latinx. The researchers made clear that despite an institutional designation geared toward minoritized students, Black students, including AfroLatinx students, were not being served equitably or humanely.

Another example of racialized servingness includes the allocation of resources, such as Title V grants. Title V funding is described as racialized practice because it is earmarked for HSIs to serve Latinx students. HSIs not only propose color-evasive plans to support Latinx students (Smith-Aguilar, 2022; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019), but HSIs with larger proportions of White students and smaller numbers of Black students are more likely to receive the funds (Vargas, 2018). For instance, Vargas and Villa-Palomino found 85% of the 132 HSI Title V grant recipients proposed programs and initiatives with a color-evasive approach, whereas 4% of the proposals relied on efforts that did not benefit Latinx students. Title V proposals that do not benefit Latinx students or contain color-evasive approaches produce gaps between stated intentions to serve Latinx students and practices that HSIs enact.

Researchers have also explored how race operates in servingness through campus climate, curricula, and programming. Serrano (2020) found Latino men perceived a positive campus racial climate when considering their HSIs' enrolled Latinx student population. However, lack of racial diversity in the faculty body and prevalence of racial microaggressions in campus subunits (e.g., classrooms) resulted in Latino men experiencing a hostile, unwelcoming campus racial climate (Serrano, 2020). Kovats Sánchez (2021) explored how students made sense of the curricula and programming in a study of testimonios of 10 Indigenous Mixtec/Ñuu Savi, Zapotec, and Nahua students at an HSI in California. Kovats Sánchez found that Latinx-centered programming was influenced by Mestizo ideologies and often misrepresented and minoritized Indigenous students, rendering them invisible. These studies demonstrated the importance of analyzing racial dynamics of higher education institutions and, most importantly, MSIs such as HSIs.

Finally, to address racialization of servingness, Garcia (2019) offered a framework including Mestizaje as an ideology that could guide practices of membership in HSIs. Garcia and colleagues (2019) defined Mestizaje as "racial and cultural mixing . . . with the intent of valuing and respecting all ways of knowing" (p. 142). Although we agree with the push for HSIs to be more inclusionary, the historical use of Mestizaje, alongside Blanqueamiento, included racialized ideologies designed to Whiten organizations and further invisibilize Black and Indigenous Latinx people. We add that HSIs, as policy actors (Ray, 2019), enact a Mestizaje perspective of Latinxs that endanger Latinxs who embody Black and Indigenous consciousness, culture, and characteristics. The relationship between these two aspects and the HSIs' role as purveyors of White Supremacist logics is evident in the research. As such, this literature base is critical and related to our conceptual lens—an intersectional consciousness perspective on racialized organizations—that serves to explore validating experiences for Black and Indigenous Latinx people related to servingness.

An Intersectional Consciousness Perspective on Racialized Organizations

To examine how Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje influence servingness, we interconnected the ways that other nonethnic categorizations—such as class, gender, nationality, geographical origin, and educational attainment—shaped

our experiences with HSIs. As such, we put intersectional consciousness and racialized organizations theory in conversation with one another.

Intersectional Consciousness

Intersectional consciousness, rooted in intersectionality as informed by Black feminist scholars and activists (Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1991), is useful for understanding the complexity of Latinx people's identities. Additionally, it informs a framework for HSI administrators to shed light on racialized practices of HSIs, such as servingness. A term first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality unpacks how several biological, social, and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, and ability interrelate on multiple, often simultaneous, dimensions. Beyond essentialized categorizations of sociocultural identities, intersectionality emphasizes structural dynamics that lead to social inequities. Experiences at the intersection of identity markers and group categories contribute to systems of privilege and oppression, which Collins (2000) referred to as a "matrix of domination" (p. 19).

Boveda (2019a) offered intersectional consciousness as a construct for educators and university personnel to explore and alleviate tensions that arise for racialized people within university contexts. Boveda and Weinberg (2020) delineated six considerations for developing intersectionally conscious collaborative practices: (a) establishing collaboration through engagement in self-inquiry that identifies collaborators' multiple sociocultural markers, (b) developing practices and pedagogy with an inclusive mindset, (c) engaging in reflections postinstruction/postprogramming, (d) including students when evaluating programming, (e) facilitating reflection and cogenerative dialogues, and (f) maintaining ethical and collaborative partnerships. Our collective testimonios are enactments of the first, fifth, and sixth considerations, whereas our implications for future research and practice reflect the second, third, and fourth.

A Theory of Racialized Organizations

Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations provides framing to identify seemingly race-neutral processes that erase Latinx people's intersectionality. Ray merged organizational and race theories to argue that organizations are influenced by racism and operate through racial processes. Racialized organizations connect individual racial beliefs to structural racism by (a) enhancing or diminishing the agency of racial groups, (b) legitimizing the unequal distribution of resources, (c) relying on Whiteness as a credential, and (d) engaging in racialized decoupling of formal rules from practice.

According to Ray's (2019) first tenet, the unmarked Whiteness of organizations shape agency. As such, where people exist in their organization's racial hierarchy determines when and how they enact their agency. Ray's second tenet posits that seemingly race-neutral processes legitimate unequal distribution of resources. For example, Vargas (2018) used multivariate analysis to examine how institutional characteristics, including student racial demographics of HSIs, were associated with receiving Title V Developing HSI grants. He found that HSIs with larger White and smaller Black student populations were more likely to receive HSI grants. Ray's third tenet further explains how racialized processes motivate organizations to rely on Whiteness as a credential. If funders reward HSIs that exemplify Whiteness, then access to resources legitimize programs and practices that maintain existing racial hierarchies. At HSIs, Blanqueamiento operates as a credential, much like Whiteness, through programs and practices that do not consider, for example, Blackness or Indigeneity of Latinx groups as credible identity markers worthy of servingness. Lastly, the fourth tenet discusses the racially disparate consequences of decoupling rules from practice. Racialized decoupling allows organizations to maintain legitimacy and appear progressive without seriously addressing racial inequity (Ray, 2019). For example, when HSIs decouple Title V's intention to serve Latinx students by designing programs that are not intentionally culturally enhancing (Garcia, 2019), they contribute to erasing the heterogeneity of Latinx communities.

An Intersectional Consciousness of Racialized Organizations

We offer an intersectional consciousness perspective of racialized organizations to highlight the ways racial ideologies such as Blanqueamiento and Mestzaje influence servingness practices. An intersectional consciousness understanding of racialized organizations provides opportunities for HSI personnel interested in rethinking the *H* in HSIs by first recognizing HSIs as racialized organizations and working with students, faculty, and administrators to consider how racialized practices contribute to multiple, interlocking oppressions. Intersectional consciousness makes visible how HSIs invisibilize Latinx people who are racialized and do not embody Whiteness. Using an intersectional consciousness perspective of HSIs, we learn that Latinx people who are Black and Indigenous—especially those at the intersections of other minoritized experiences—are relegated to the bottom of the racial hierarchy, compared to their White Latinx counterparts (Boveda, 2019b; Boveda & Weinberg, 2020). Intersectional consciousness reveals the perniciousness of Whiteness because the entanglements of race (e.g., Black, Indigenous, White), panethnicity (e.g., Latinx), and educational level are all relevant to the Blanqueamiento processes with which Latinx faculty and students contend at HSIs.

Methodology

Testimonio is rooted in oral traditions emerging from Latin America that disrupt hegemonic narratives spun by oppressive institutions (Cruz, 2012). It has the power to "expose racial-, gender- and class-based encounters" (Espino et al., 2010, p. 805) to build a more powerful and accurate narrative of social conditions (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Perez Huber, 2009). Testimonios are political expressions intent on exposing unjust systems. As such, those enacting testimonios may incur personal and political risks (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). A testimonio "entails a first person oral or written account, drawing on experiential, self-conscious, narrative practice to articulate an urgent voicing of something to which one bears witness" (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012, p. 525). Those engaged in testimonios make themselves vulnerable to engender transformative action. That is, "*testimonio* is and continues to be an approach that incorporates political, social, historical, and cultural histories that accompany one's life experiences as a means to bring about change through consciousness-raising" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363). We engage in testimonios of recovery, an act of resistance to the flattening of our identities and histories. In our testimonios, we seek to elevate an intersectional consciousness to the work and experiences of racialized students and faculty at HSIs.

Methods

Enacting dual positionalities as researchers and participants in this study, we begin by discussing our positionalities, both personal and organizational. Our data were derived from our personal experiences with HSIs and what we have learned from data we collected at HSIs. Blanca currently works at a teaching-intensive HSI and conducted a study on racial conflict at one research-intensive HSI in the Northeast United States. Roman attended an HSI and facilitated a study at a liberal arts HSI in the Southwest United States; he currently works at a teaching-intensive HSI in the Northeast. Mildred attended a research-intensive HSI in the Southeast United States and is presently affiliated with a research-intensive Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Northeast. The Northeast and Southeast HSIs primarily enroll Latinxs who identify as Caribbean (e.g., Puerto Rican and Cuban), whereas the Southwest HSI enrolls a Mexican/Chicano student body.

We discuss our shared experiences within social contexts related to our identities as Latinxs. Blanca, a second-generation Ecuadorian woman, grew up in the working class in Harlem, New York. Her organizational identity intersects with her personal context as a first-generation college student and assistant professor of higher education. Roman, a U.S.-born first-generation Mexican man who grew up in working-class immigrant Mexican communities in the San Fernando Valley. His experiences with racialization in education organizations influenced how he designed his research program on racial equity and organizational change. Mildred is a U.S.-born daughter of Dominican working-class immigrants who grew up in Miami; her sociocultural identities intersect with her role as an associate professor of education. With knowledge of our collective contexts, we independently wrote our individual testimonios. Scholars have found that HSIs' institutional histories and dynamics with Latinx students are heavily influenced by local contexts and minoritized populations (Doran & Medina, 2017; Zerquera et al., 2017). As such, in each testimonio, we discuss the Latinx community surrounding these HSIs and our personal relationship to Latinx identity both within and outside higher education spaces.

After our initial conversation in October 2020, we individually reflected on our lived experiences. We shared our first-draft testimonios with one another and, in the spirit of an intersectionally conscious coconstructed epistemology, offered each other feedback. We granted each other access to these written expressions on a shared Google Drive. When engaging one another's testimonios, we annotated our responses to the written accounts. From October 2020 to May 2021, we scheduled five meetings to discuss our reactions to each testimonio and identify commonalities. We engaged by listening deeply and deconstructed meanings and thematic developments to understand how Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje operated in our experiences within HSIs. This analytical deconstruction provided an opportunity to reconstruct understanding and experience as a collective. Thus, we forged a "collective consciousness" (Espino et al., 2012) or, given our conceptual framing, a collective *intersectional* consciousness across various social identities.

Findings

In offering testimonios of our affiliations with and research studies conducted within HSI contexts, we witnessed how we learned about the term *Hispanic* and our relationship with the *H* in HSIs. We also accounted for what our research revealed about who enrolls in HSIs, the assumptions made about Latinxs in HSIs, and which members of Latinx communities are not serviced by how Latinidad is enacted in HSIs. Our testimonios shed light on how HSIs continue to reinforce global White Supremacist logics and vestiges of eurocentrism, despite adopting the symbolic racialized categorization of HSIs.

Blanca's Testimonio: Context for the Term Hispanic/Latinx

Being of Ecuadorian origin and living in Harlem in the 1980s posed a series of questions around my identity. For one, Ecuador has invisibilized its Black population to the point that many Ecuadorians will either deny or not know about their Black ancestry (Belkin, 1993). Ecuador's two main racial discourses were Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje

(Johnson, 2007), which invisibilized Blackness and shamed Indigeneity, as exemplified in Juan Garcia Salazar's comments about being Black in Ecuador (Kleymeyer, 2019). In short, Afro-descended people in Ecuador have been part of a culture that was always "polyethnic and polycultural" (Bryant, 2005, p. iii). As such, I reflect on how the erasure of Blackness in Ecuador continues to shape my identity and conversations about race and Latinidad centered around growing up in New York City. Additionally, I am not part of any dominant Latin American group in the United States. For a precocious child like me, that resulted in a search for anything related to being Ecuadorian (Vega, 2011). An added complication was that my physical appearance confused people outside my family. I am often referred to as racially ambiguous, multiracial with "Black features," and a multitude of variations on Blackness. Given the *casta* or racial classification system that Latin Americans inherited from the Spaniards, my family had no such ambiguity; I was called Zambita.[1] However, in New York, no one knew how to describe me, and I could not articulate that identity in a 1980s New York City culture that could not place me anywhere.

Maintaining Blanqueamiento via racial decoupling. My undergraduate student experience shaped how I understood Latinidad in postsecondary spaces. At an HWI, I learned about the benefits and consequences of panethnicity—itself a reaction to White Supremacy. I was no longer the only Ecuadorian girl. I could now be part of a larger group. Unfortunately, as a Latina student activist, I discovered that the organizational constructs of who the university wanted me to be clashed with my perceptions of that identity. I understood that postsecondary institutions preferred a celebratory, cultural perspective of Latinidad. A Latina student activist should carry the university's vision, not challenge it. My desire to build resources for Latinxs and push the institution to acknowledge how they continued to minoritize us directly conflicted with my peers' perceptions and the university's desires for the type of Latina I could never be.

I became cautious of spaces that claimed to work toward justice while ignoring the very injustices before them. My cautiousness was cultivated into a critical lens through which I saw that this fight was no different in HSI settings; it was only more difficult to discern the university's racialized interests (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). In these ways, I am reminded of Mestizaje discourses and how HSIs where I have worked or conducted research used racial mixture to claim distinction from HWIs. This reminded me of Oro's (2021) claim that Mestizaje in Latin America was developed to be distinct from Jim Crow in the United States. To me, HSIs employ Latinidad to claim a particular type of racial justice that is confusing at best and Whitening at worst.

These experiences with Latinidad in HSI spaces became particularly salient as I entered HSIs as a practitioner, faculty, and researcher of race and racism in postsecondary settings. As a faculty member at a designated HSI, I still recall being told that my student evaluations may be low because I am "too Latina" and speak with a thick New York accent, write about race, and discuss equity in my courses. I was constantly mistaken for the one or two other Latina faculty at the college. How, at a designated HSI, could this be possible? I am reminded of Ray's (2019) tenet of decoupling—stated practices and policies did not always match what occurred in organizations. Being part of an HSI meant that although Latinx students are at the undergraduate level, the graduate school where I worked was not the same, and the state of Latina faculty was even more dismal. Our graduate school is predominantly White students (60%) and White faculty (60%), with only 16% and 6%, respectively, identifying as Latinx. In a sense, by only focusing on diversifying undergraduate student enrollments, HSIs can maintain and justify Blanqueamiento processes and continue to use Whiteness as a credential.

Mestizaje via minimizing Blackness. As a scholar, I subscribe to race theories that unequivocally position racism as a permanent part of our society. As a researcher who also studies organizational conflict, I am aware that conflict is endemic. With these two perspectives in mind, I was interested in understanding how administrators understood racial conflict at two racially distinct institutions—an HWI and an HSI with a student of color population of over 75%. I interviewed the student president of the Black Student Organization (BSO) who identified as AfroLatina. She described how this HSI did not make space for students who identified as she did. No centers there helped them understand how Blackness and Black people were positioned in society, and mentors were lacking. Whereas the Latino student organization did not identify this student as Latina, the BSO embraced her identities as a Black woman whose parents were of Latin American origin. As she provided services to the HSI through her student leadership, she also took time from her school day to fight for more resources for Black students while seeking a space for herself as an AfroLatina woman. The lack of HSI awareness about AfroLatina activists contributes to a type of organizational conflict based on scarcity of resources (Burke, 2006; Vega, 2021). Resource deprivation not only minimizes agency for AfroLatinx groups at HSIs, it also legitimizes it (Ray, 2019).

Roman's Testimonio: Intersectional Consciousness to Resist Racialized Constructions of Latinidad

In the United States, Mexicans have a history of investing in Whiteness because of the "honorary White status" granted to them by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Almaguer, 2012, p. 145). That is, the Whiter one is as a Mexican—or the more one embodies Whiteness—the more people will be accepting and offer those individual opportunities within the

Mexican community. In Mexican U.S. communities, *blanco*, *indio*, and *negrito* are used to define in-group and out-group boundaries (Almaguer, 2012; Kovats Sánchez, 2020). Such terms associated with Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje dehumanize Latinxs with phenotypic Indigenous and African traits. For example, White Mexican kids called me Indio and Prieto while pointing at the nopal[2] on my forehead to remind me I was lazy, dumb, and undesired.

In this testimonio, I illustrate how Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje operated at HSIs in ways that shaped my intersectional consciousness and agency. Specifically, the informal and formal structures of the undergraduate HSI I attended—San Diego State University (SDSU)—amplified my intersectional consciousness. When I attended SDSU, most Latinx students were from Northern or Southern California or Tijuana; nevertheless, the majority were ethnically Mexican. As a community college transfer student, I experienced culture shock when transitioning to SDSU. I was born in the San Fernando Valley (i.e., the 818). I grew up in Mexican immigrant working-class communities neighboring Black and Asian immigrant working-class communities. Although there were racial enclaves, the basketball court was a space where racially diverse people came together. For me, the basketball court brought harmony and home, no matter where I was physically. *So, when I say "my people," I mean people who share my values for racial inclusion and harmony, just like the racially diverse people with whom I grew up sharing a basketball court.*

Overwhelming Whiteness in HSIs. The overwhelming Whiteness of SDSU explained the culture shock I experienced at an HSI. SDSU's architectural layout reflected a Spanish mission with a bell that rang at noon; the institutionalized practices and programs intended to serve racially diverse students centralized Whiteness and AntiBlackness; the type of Latinx students who attended the campus racialized what it meant to be Latinx. For example, it became apparent during the first semester that I had two options for the type of Latinx student I could embody at SDSU. One option was to build community with the White, middle-, or upper-class Latinxs who often were not from immigrant homes but claimed their Spanish ancestry through dialect, dress, and mannerisms. I did not entertain this option to build community with them, given my experiences in educational organizations with Latinx students. The other option came in the form of the institutionalized student group of MEChA. Indeed, Chicanx in MEChA welcomed me and helped me transition to campus (shout out to all). However, Mestizaje's insidious ways to decentralize Blanqueamiento dripped in racialized, gendered, transphobic, and heteronormative constructions of Latinidad.

As a racialized HSI, SDSU constructed Latinidad through its recruitment and admissions processes visible through Latinx enclaves existing on campus. The Chicanx curriculum via the elective options and the federally funded Ronald E. McNair Scholars programs were two institutionalized practices designed to serve racially minoritized students, including Latinxs. Although both forms of servingness were limited, particularly as the McNair program socialized students to learn White heteronormative norms to access graduate education, they empowered me to name and embrace the intersectional consciousness I had developed in the basketball court. My experience with racialization at an HSI set the foundation for designing my research program to study racial equity and organizational change in higher education.

"Just a higher ed researcher studying racialized organizations." Anyone who has been in higher education long enough knows that the field is small, especially among Latinx scholars. These academic spaces had a normative vibe of Latinidad, including an unspoken norm that Latinx scholars study Latinx communities or HSIs. When I shared my work on racial equity and organizational change with Latinx scholars, I saw disinterest in their wandering eyes. Although I shared similar ethnicities with most Latinx scholars, my scholarship misaligned with group norms—talk about epistemic exclusion! Nevertheless, I share this as an example of how Latinx scholars create exclusionary boundaries that resemble boundaries HSI faculty and administrators also use to exclude Latinx colleagues from decision-making processes.

In writing this testimonio, I realized I am hyperaware of racialized and gendered hierarchies regarding who exerts more energy to advocate for racial equity and who is heard and valued when advocating for racial equity. For example, I studied an HSI where senior leadership invested in training a select faculty to become equity advocates (Liera 2020b). The equity advocates were responsible for supporting search committees to create and use equitable and inclusive hiring procedures to hire faculty who could mentor the university's growing Latinx student population (Liera, 2020a). In these spaces, I observed how senior faculty silenced and devalued non-White Latinas (Liera & Hernandez, 2021). Specifically, in one search committee, I observed a Brown-skinned Latina with curly hair *doing the work* that the university asked her to do as an equity advocate. Although the Latina agreed to be interviewed, we could not find the time to share her experiences with me. I observed some important points. Racial equity work in White-serving HSIs as a non-White Latinx requires additional unpaid and devalued labor. This observation made me vigilant to how much I ask of my racially minoritized participants, including compensating them for their time and ensuring that their knowledge will provide actionable recommendations for their campus leadership. Through my scholarship, I learned that for Latinx faculty at HSIs, doing racial equity work does not necessarily mean that their work is valued or seriously considered expertise for change.

Mildred's Testimonio: Navigating AntiBlackness and Hispanic Identity

The colonial histories of Latin American countries and their imperial dynamic with the United States matter in understanding HSIs. Florida International University is situated in the large Miami-Dade County district where I was born and raised, and its largest ethnic group is Latinx. In my experience growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, high value was placed on sustaining our ties to our heritage through speaking Spanish, keeping up with Latin American events and politics, and traveling if documentation or political dynamics with the U.S. government allowed. It was socially acceptable, for example, for Miami residents to guess a Spanish speaker's ethnic background by engaging in visibility politics or deciphering accents.

Today, I self-identify as Black, Dominican, and Afro Latina. During my childhood, it was most common for Latinxs and Caribbeans to refer to the country from which they or their family came. When asked, "What are you?" I simply answered, "I'm Dominican." I grew up in a section of Miami-Dade that was predominantly Black (African American and Caribbean) mixed with non-Black Latinx people who had ties across the Caribbean and Central and South America. It was not common to see Mexicans, Chicanxs, or Mexican Americans in this area. The panethnic term most often used to describe those of us with Latin American roots was *Hispanic*. While my neighborhood was a mix of Black and Brown people, most Hispanics in Miami-Dade were fair-skinned Cubans.

As a child, I assumed all White Spanish speakers were Cubans and Black Spanish speakers were either Dominicans or Puerto Ricans. To illustrate, I was 7 years old when my mother made an appointment with a Black woman dentist. When she spoke Spanish, I excitedly asked if she was Dominican like us. When she said she was Cuban, I hastily replied that she did not look Cuban. The dentist responded, "What is a Cuban supposed to look like?" I realized I had offended her with my naive assumptions.

Being Black in Miami, regardless of class, heritage, or citizenship status, was a distinct experience. I was most often embraced as a fellow Hispanic but experienced frequent AntiBlack indignities to remind me that I was other (see Boveda, 2019b). I witnessed AntiIndigeneity as well, such as the use of slurs like "tira-flesha" to describe some of my Central American peers. Even so, it was obvious that racial hierarchies ranked "Negras" lower than "Indias," and "Blancas" as ideal; the numerous Spanish euphemisms for Black people resulted in pejorative interpretations when I was explicitly referred to as Negra by non-Black Latinxs. Ultimately, I experienced the notion of Hispanic as a hurtful, at times confusing, inclusion. Blackness was the most important racial marker of my identity, no matter how much I sustained my Dominican culture or Spanish language. The most affirming spaces for me were consistently predominantly Black.

Developing intersectional competence while confronting unmarked Whiteness at an HSI. I became a doctoral student, researcher, and adjunct faculty member at a research-intensive HSI. There, I developed the Intersectional Competence Measure (ICM), an instrument intended for university-based teacher education programs to gauge students' understanding of intersecting oppression (Boveda, 2016). The institution purported to serve minoritized students. I have since documented, however, the racial battle fatigue I experienced during the time I collected and analyzed data for this study (Boveda & Weinberg, 2020). First, I cannot recall one instance where any faculty explicitly discussed Indigeneity, let alone decolonization, during my time at the HSI. Second, as a Black Latina who anchored intersectionality in her research design and drew on Black feminist theory as a teacher education faculty, I found conversations about race with self-identified "White Hispanics" incredibly taxing. There were clear class, "White-streaming" (Urrieta, 2006), and Blanqueamiento aspirations among several Latinx peers, students, and research participants. Further, by the time I completed my doctoral program, all the tenure-line faculty affiliated with my doctoral program were White "non-Hispanics"; in fact, all four members of my dissertation committee were White.

I realized that the Ivy League schools I attended for undergraduate and graduate studies had more faculty of color than the HSI where I conducted my doctoral research. How can a school that markets itself as an international and multiethnic community give its doctoral students limited access to scholars of color? Why were tenure-earning Black and Latinx faculty at this HSI's college of education leaving or not making tenure? Although I benefited greatly from being close to home and working with a group of undergraduate students who understood the complexity of living in cities like Miami, several implicit and explicit AntiBlack sentiments took a personal toll on my wellness and praxis. Memories of my time as an emerging researcher at an HSI are tinged with bittersweet reminders of what Puerto Rican scholar Ramón Grosfoguel (2013) argued is a White Supremacy function of universities, "constitutive of the racist/sexist epistemic structures that produced epistemic privilege and authority to Western man's knowledge production and inferiority for the rest" (p. 86). Even with such a diverse population of students, there was insufficient intentionality to disrupt this White Supremacy among the faculty I worked with at this HSI.

Discussion

Our findings add to the growing body of literature that describes how racialized ideologies shape the experiences of racially minoritized people in higher education. An intersectional consciousness approach to racialized organizations allowed us to analyze the specific ways Blanqueamiento and

Mestizaje operate at HSI campuses in the U.S. Southwest, East, and Southeast. Our testimonios revealed how servingness is a racialized practice shaped by the interaction between our individual contexts and identities and HSI organizational practices and processes. The outcomes suggested that HSIs operate as racialized organizations and are engaging in a new Mestizaje made possible through decoupling, promoting and privileging Whiteness as a credential, and legitimizing the unequal distribution of resources. Ultimately, these processes are influenced by and lead to a Blanqueamiento or Whitening of HSIs.

Racialized Decoupling of Formal Rules From Practice

Our testimonios demonstrated that HSIs engage in decoupling practices consistent with how HSIs promote racial/ethnic diversity while simultaneously engaging in Mestizaje fueled by Blanqueamiento. We entered HSIs as students, faculty, or researchers expecting HSIs to have more welcoming environments, even possibly culturally enhancing those at HWIs. We learned that simply having an HSI designation does not denote racially diverse members. Similar to Dache et al.'s (2019) findings, we wonder if HSIs may be "passing for Latinx" by performing an expectation of a White Latinidad through Mestizaje ideologies. Additionally, we extended Vargas's (2019) finding that HSIs with Title V grants typically enroll more White faculty and fewer Black faculty, and these practices reify old colonial ideologies of Blanqueamiento that include White "overseers" (Harper et al., 2018). This also was evidenced by the ways we all experienced the consequences of this kind of Blanqueamiento, an overwhelming Whiteness at HSIs. Blanca demonstrated how she was understood as "too Latina," signaling the lack of Black, Indigenous, and AfroLatinx faculty. Roman experienced lack of support for his scholarship and research, signaling expectations of a Latinx researcher. Mildred, who drew on Black feminist thought and whose research participants were largely Latinxs, did not have a Black or Latinx faculty member on her dissertation committee. The message was clear to us that Blanqueamiento was happening in the HSIs where we studied, worked, or conducted research. In these ways, we extended Dache et al.'s (2019) findings to name the racial othering we experienced by Latinxs who signaled our non-Whiteness and perceived inadequacies as Latinx scholars. This kind of behavior suggests that HSIs need to do more intentional work around enhancing Latinx cultures (Garcia, 2019). Being more intentional involves adding an intersectional consciousness perspective such as engaging in more self-inquiry, identifying collaborators with multiple Latinx identities, and including students when evaluating programming (Boveda & Weinberg, 2020). In doing so, HSIs can demonstrate that the decoupling between their stated goals and actual behaviors is being ameliorated.

Whiteness as a Credential

From our testimonios, we learned that Ray's (2019) tenet, Whiteness as a credential, is essential to the operations of HSIs in that as researchers who identify as Latinx, our scholarship is often, as Roman stated in his testimonio, "misaligned with group norms." In particular, intersectional consciousness revealed how our language, class, gender, and other differences contributed to these tensions between organizational norms and our individual desires. The consequences of these credentialing processes manifested in tensions with acknowledging that not choosing these norms in our research or scholarship had interpersonal, educational, and even economic consequences. For example, Roman's testimonio revealed that doing racial equity work that does not include the lived experiences of Latinx people is not supported, paid, or prioritized in HSI organizations. In another example, Blanca described an Afro Latina student's narrative about being completely ignored by the Latinx student association, whereas Mildred poignantly addressed her interactions with faculty and students who did not understand her lived experiences as a Black Latina. Racialized organizations that use Whiteness as a credential employ practices that seemingly benefit Latinxs while still maintaining Whiteness in their institutions. Here, we extend Kovats Sánchez's (2021) finding that Mestizos and White Latinxs benefit from the Mestizaje politics surrounding the Whitening of HSIs.

Legitimate the Unequal Distribution of Resources

The lack of educational opportunities manifests in resource deprivation, causing harm (Dumas & Ross, 2016) and legitimizing unequal distribution of resources (Ray, 2019). Our experiences as professors and researchers who often expect to research Latinx students in education could also reflect a diminishing of agency. Additionally, this Mestizaje of research further influences the curricula that privilege Mestizos and White Latinxs to the detriment of Indigenous Latinx students (Kovats Sánchez, 2021). For example, fellowships marketed to Latinx scholars often imply that applicants should demonstrate a record of doing research that reinforces narrow notions of Latinidad or focuses on Latinxs as a unit of analysis. This impacts curricula and programming identified by Kovats Sánchez (2021) as influenced by Mestizaje, which further reduces the agency, origins, histories, and cultures of Indigenous Latinx students to a panethnic misinformed label. Instead, a focus on Latinxs as a unit of analysis could be enhanced if an intersectional approach to studies on Latinxs can be encouraged in Title V grants and fellowship opportunities. In these ways, allocation of resources could legitimize an intersectional approach, as opposed to a panethnic and White-centric approach, to studying and understanding Latinxs.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Our recommendations are based on how we, Blanca, Roman, and Mildred, came together to describe the various ways we experienced servingness in HSIs, as students, faculty, or researchers. Although we identify as Latinx, we each depart from a White or Mestizo Latinx identity. Our Afrodescendiente, Chicano, and Black Latinidad created an opportunity to establish collaborations based on our intersectional experiences with race, ethnicity, and immigration status. Our shared desire to interrogate White Supremacist ideologies and practices in education allowed us to witness how Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje continue to pervade HSIs. By reflecting on our experiences with Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje, we found that HSIs contribute to White-dominant narratives (Garcia, 2019). Applying an intersectional consciousness framing of HSIs as racialized organizations, we propose the following recommendations. The first is to establish collaborations across different groups, such as student organizations, faculty councils, or administrative initiatives focused on disrupting AntiBlackness and historical erasures of Indigeneity. Building relationships—not just with Latinx groups but with community partners, students, and faculty whose work is focused on dismantling Blanqueamiento and Mestizaje—are key to revealing White Supremacist–serving practices that panethnicize Latinxs. These collaborations must be maintained ethically (Boveda & Weinberg, 2020) to ensure practices and policies are conceptualized not to harm Black and Indigenous communities. These kinds of collaborations could have supported the three authors and their research participants with building resources related to mentoring, funding, and meaningful doctoral experiences.

Second, we recommend HSI stakeholders consider an intersectional consciousness that centers Blackimiento (Dache et al., 2020) and Critical Indigenous (Urrieta et al., 2019) mindsets when developing practices and pedagogy. Blackimiento and Indigenimiento depart from a Mestizaje ideology that prioritizes racial mixtures in membership practices. Similar to other critical and race-conscious mindsets (e.g., equity-mindedness), administrators, faculty, and staff need to invest resources to develop an intersectional consciousness. Research on equity-mindedness has emphasized the power of inquiry for developing critical and race-conscious frameworks (Ching, 2018; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Liera, 2020b). An intersectional consciousness centers Black and Indigenous people and includes a commitment to dismantling interlocking systems of oppression.

Third, there is a need for critical spaces that invite collaborative reflections with partners who focus on dismantling AntiBlackness and AntiIndigeneity. These intersectionally conscious collaborations can, for example, review HSI Title V grants, servingness practices, and racial climate studies and address the aftermath of conflict. Intersectionally conscious reflections must include student groups, organizations, or collaborations in continuous and ethical program evaluations, primarily as HSIs obtain grant monies using student bodies as a numerical representation of Latinx diversity. Additionally, facilitating ongoing intersectionally conscious reflection and cogenerative dialogues encourages an awareness that Latinidad is in constant flux and continually reconstructed due to economic and sociopolitical contexts that shape the Latinx identity (Beltrán, 2010). Our testimonios demonstrates the insufficiency of simply designating organizations like HSIs as racialized organizations. We seek actions, practices, and policies that support Blackimiento and Indigenimiento politics, adopt intersectional consciousness within HSIs, and dismantle White Supremacy practices that promote harm within Latinx communities.

Fourth, researchers who study HSIs as racialized organizations should do more research on the ways racial ideologies inform how we think about the *H* in HSIs by investigating grants, curricula, student organizations, and leadership. As HSIs continue to garner more funding on the backs of increasing Hispanic/Latinx enrollments, researchers must interrogate how these HSIs processes are shaped to exclude or include Latinxs who embody and enact Black and Indigenous characteristics, culture, and consciousness.

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Notes

1. *Sambo* is a racial slur for many in the United States and Caribbean. While "zambo" is also loaded with racist connotations in Ecuador and has been used as a slur, its origins are derived from a racial classification ordered by Spanish colonizers to distinguish African people who had rebelled against Spain and established Black societies in Ecuador. In 1553, a slave boat shipwrecked off the coast of what is today known as Esmeraldas, Ecuador. An AfroIndigenous society, the Zambo Republic, was established and AfroEcuadorian men were often in charge of representing the Spanish colony (Ritter, 2011). While the Casta system is no longer employed, *Zambo/a* continues to be used for Ecuadorian people who are perceived as having both African and Indigenous heritages.

2. Similar to other pejorative names like "indio," people use the phrase "nopal on your forehead" to trigger feelings of shame for Latinx people with Indigenous features. Literally, the phrase "nopal on your forehead" is used to remind an individual with Indigenous characteristics that they are dark skinned and for that reason are less than those who are White.

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