

Revisiting Racism at the Community College:  
Minority Students' Experiences in a Pre-collegiate Program

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Abstract

In this article, stories of Latina/o students in a pre-collegiate program highlight incidents of the racial microaggressions that create hostile educational environments for non-White students. These counterstories document the persistence of racism and other forms of marginalization in society and in the campus environment. The prejudice and discrimination that Latina/o students encounter contradicts the premises of color-blindness and meritocracy in the new racial ideology. The authors use the conceptual frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Race Theory to examine the intersecting structural systems of oppression and privilege that shape the experience of Latina/o students at predominately white institutions. It is crucial that these voices from the margins inform the development of college programs to support the success of Latina/o and other minority students.

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Postsecondary institutions strive to create microcosms of a more equitable society by implementing programs to increase diversity and inclusion and reduce educational inequities among underrepresented populations. Since inequities in postsecondary institutions still exist, it is critical to understand experiences of racism on campus with the aim of creating a classroom and campus climate that attracts and retains students and faculty of color. The students and faculty of color must have a voice in co-authoring the postsecondary landscape.

In this paper, we examine some of the conditions that impeded the flow of people of color, specifically Latinas/os, through the educational pipeline. First, we consider the new racial ideology in which the rhetoric of “color blindness” is used to defend the structural advantages that White Americans enjoy. Then we look at how this racial ideology manifests on the college campus where students of color face negative racial experiences and microaggressions. Next we review selected data on the leaks in the Chicana and Chicano educational pipeline since two thirds of Latinas/os are of Mexican origin (Covarrubias, 2011). In the subsequent section, we describe the conceptual framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) that foregrounds voices from the margins and acknowledges that racism exists. After that, we highlight stories of Latinas and Latinos in a pre-collegiate program who describe experiences of discrimination and acts of micro aggression. In the section on implications and recommendations, we offer suggestions for fostering culturally diverse educational environments and implementing educational institutions that respond to the multicultural reality of the communities they serve.

## The Issue in Context

### *The New Racial Ideology*

According to Mills (1997), White people are able to deny the centrality of race and put forward the concept of a social contract in which “race is ostensibly absent, the polity is represented as basically egalitarian, and structural subordination is nowhere to be found” (Mills, 2000, p. 454). This recent racial ideology assumes the passage of civil rights legislation has eliminated racism and the new rhetoric of “color blindness” is used to defend the structural advantages that white Americans enjoy. However, Mills (2000) posited the domination contract makes exclusion central and states that maleness and whiteness are prerequisites for full personhood.

When White Americans assert they are “color-blind,” they are able to “maintain and defend significant social and economic advantages” (Doane, 2007, p. 162) by stating that rectifying racial inequality violates principles of meritocracy and free choice. Using data from a 1997 survey of social attitudes of college students and subsequent in-depth interviews with a random sample of White students who completed the survey, Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) found that White students deny that racial inequality is structural and they explain existing inequities as the result of the “cultural deficiency” of Blacks. Therefore, most White students who profess to be “color-blind” still perceive Blacks as the “other.”

### *Campus Racial Climate*

Museus, Nichols, and Lambert (2008) define campus racial climate as “the current perceptions and attitudes about the campus environment with regard to race” (p. 114). The campus climate is complex and includes “experiences with prejudice and discrimination, knowledge of acts of discrimination committed against others, differential treatment by race,

perceptions of the overall attitude toward students of a particular race, an institution's valuing of diversity," (p. 114) and many other factors that influence the adjustment and persistence of both White and racial minority students. In a quantitative study to examine the relationship between campus racial climate and baccalaureate degree completion, Museus et al. (2008) used a conceptual framework of theories of student involvement from Tinto and Astin to hypothesize that students' levels of academic and social involvement affected their likelihood of degree completion. Their findings indicated that the effects of racial climate on persistence and degree completion were mainly indirect influences on academic involvement, social involvement, and institutional commitment. Further, knowledge of campus climate on two-year college students is problematic since large numbers of students regularly enroll and depart.

In contrast, Cerezo, McWhirter, Peña, Valdez, and Bustos (2013) found that experiences of a hostile climate were the strongest negative predictor of whether Latina/o students had a sense of belonging in the college environment. At predominately white institutions (PWI), the students of color perceive university environments as more hostile and unfriendly than White students. The lack of diversity creates challenges for students of color who face negative racial experiences and microaggressions. In addition these students of color at PWIs are underrepresented on campus, which diminish their ability to effect change within the university climate (Cerezo et al., 2013).

Further, the prevalent viewpoints of "color-blind" and "race-neutral" allow higher education institutions to deny the existence of structural racism and "to endorse diversity to the extent that it serves White students" (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009, p. 664). Students of color confront racial assaults, or microaggressions, that are incessant, subtle, and persuasive messages of rejection designed to erode self-confidence and to produce feelings of humiliation.

*Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline*

According to Yosso and Solórzano (2006), most Chicanas/os who pursue higher education begin at the community college. Yosso and Solórzano used 2000 U. S. Census data to find leaks in Chicana and Chicano educational pipeline. The authors tracked an average of 100 Chicanas and Chicanos elementary school students and 54 dropped out or were pushed out. Of the 46 students who graduated from high school, 17 enrolled in a community college and nine went to a four-year college. Only one student in the community college transferred to a four-year college and eight of the ten students at a four-year school graduated with a bachelor's degree and two students earned a graduate or professional degree. In contrast, from an average of 100 White elementary school students, 84 students graduate from high school. Further, 26 graduate with a baccalaureate and 10 earn a professional or graduate degree.

## Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has roots in critical legal studies and responds to the legal system's perpetuation of racism. Since Critical Race Theory brings race and racism to center stage, racism is acknowledged to exist. Underlying CRT is the reality that racism continues because of policies and structures that perpetuate the dominance of White privilege and the marginalization of underrepresented populations (Bergerson, 2003).

Within the framework of CRT is the Latino/Latina Critical Theory (LatCrit). LatCrit challenges the message that Latina/o students are "culturally deficient" and are not agents of knowledge (Bernal, 2002). Other researchers have positioned CRT and LatCrit in their research on how meritocracy works systematically to exclude Latina/o students from educational opportunities. For instance, Loza (2003) reported non-Latina/o Whites believe anyone who works hard enough can achieve success. This standard for meritocracy is established by middle

and upper class who work within the dominant culture (Loza, 2003). Although our society champions merit, it functions under the burden of racism and continues to marginalize underrepresented populations (Bergerson, 2003).

Through a CRT and LatCrit lens, Latina/o students are seen as holders and creators of knowledge who have valuable histories, experiences, cultures, and languages (Bernal, 2002). Together CRT and LatCrit in educational research define a framework that challenges the dominant discourses on race, gender, and class. This challenge happens when the researcher asks the question “how complete of a picture can we get about Latina/Latino education if we rely only on the dominant (school) discourse” (Fernandez, 2002, p. 46)?

#### Experiences of Discrimination and Prejudice:

##### Stories from Latina/o Students in a Pre-collegiate Program

Analyzing data collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews of students participating in a pre-collegiate program, Ebie (2009) uncovered experiences of discrimination and prejudice. Repeatedly, the dominant White culture communicated the message to these Latina/o students that they were not welcome to participate fully in the educational systems. Although the dominate culture members might believe the discrimination is negligible or non-existent, this belief was not shared by these members of the Latina/o community.

Ebie (2009) interpreted the students' stories through Critical Race Theory (CRT) that states racism is perpetuated by policies and structures that marginalize underrepresented populations (Bergerson, 2003). A theoretical branch extending from CRT is Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), which challenges the institutional culture that denies Latina/o students are agents of knowledge. The CRT and LatCrit lenses reveal Latina/o students as creators and

holders of knowledge with valuable histories, experiences, cultures, and languages (Bernal, 2001; Fernandez, 2002; Villalpando, 2003).

Even though Latina/o students are denied full access to the dominant culture in higher education, they are expected by Whites to conform to the dominant culture. Since Latinas/os are closely aligned with their families and their culture, they are reluctant to be assimilated into the dominant culture. Additionally, when Latinas/os participate in the dominant culture, they are ridiculed by their peers for betraying their own culture. Yet the Latina/o students in Ebie's (2009) study reported the social and cultural capital gained from their relationships with people in the dominant culture. Here are their stories.

#### *Alejandra's Story*

Alejandra told the following story of being marginalized at her high school. She also told about her racist treatment by a judge at a state-wide school sponsored speech competition. Her mother was present when Alejandra relayed her story to me. Initially, Alejandra spoke about "just feeling kind of bad" about the way she and other Latinas/os were treated when they joined clubs. Ultimately, Alejandra acknowledged the obvious, that the judge was bigoted at the speech contest.

I did kind of feel bad because in most of the clubs at school, except the Hispanic clubs, Hispanics did not join them. It was mostly just me and my friend who would always join the clubs, just me and her as Hispanics. Student council had more Hispanics but the other clubs didn't have Hispanics involved at all. I remember talking about it when we were at a speech competition. In all the competitions we did we never did see one other Latino. Even when we went to state competitions we didn't ever see one other Hispanic. It was just me and her. I remember a state competition we won second place although we were close to first place. We suspected that we lost first place because we were Hispanic. There were four judges. We were ranked first place by two judges, second place by the third judge, and last place by the fourth judge. We were surprised when we were ranked last by that one judge. How did that happen? Was it because we were the only Hispanics in the competition? When our coach looked at our ranking he also commented "he ranked you last?" We were all puzzled at being ranked last by one judge when all the other judges ranked us first or second place. We knew we weren't that bad because we had

gotten first and second place by the other judges and now for us to go to the bottom by one judge was confusing. Because we were ranked last by one judge we won second place instead of first place. It was close. I asked my friend “was he being biased or racist or what?” I felt out of place and said to my friend “maybe we shouldn’t be here.”

### *Andrea’s Story*

Andrea revealed similar experiences of not belonging. She spoke about being made to feel stupid by her counselor for asking a question. The unintended consequence was that Andrea no longer went to her counselor for advice for her degree requirements.

I pretty much decide on my own what classes I take at Panorama Community College. I was calling Daniel [the high-school pre-collegiate director] every day for registration advice my first semester. Registration was so painful. I remember going to the counselor at Panorama Community College and almost crying. My English wasn’t very good so I was trouble and I couldn’t take many classes because of my English level was low. I remember one time asking the counselor about Astronomy and what Astronomy means. She told me I don’t think you’re going to be able to go to that class, it’s really hard. Well I know that. She treated me like I was stupid. Probably she was doing her job but she wasn’t giving me the support that I needed. She was a really bad counselor. I didn’t say that, but that was in my mind.

Clearly Andrea’s counselor at Panorama Community College was not responsive to Andrea’s needs. When Andrea left the counselor’s office “almost crying” she experienced what it felt like to navigate through the American educational system without cultural capital. She felt like she didn’t belong. For a student without cultural capital, the counselor’s office was where Andrea should go to receive the information she needed. Once again, Andrea, like many Latinas/os, was made to feel pushed aside, marginalized, and not belonging to the mainstream American culture.

### *Monique’s Story*

Although many Latinas and Latinos experience racism, they are reluctant to share their “not equal” experience with someone who resided in the dominant culture (Monique). Monique talked about “feeling more equal” in college although she had a hard time putting words to her

feelings of “more equal.” She resisted using an overt word like segregated or racist, but had a difficult time coming up with the right words for how she felt she had been treated. Instead she used a vocabulary that was more subtle or insidious to how she had been treated.

As soon as I moved from high school to Panorama Community College, I felt more equal. Well, I know that I wasn't segregated or anything in high school, but in college I was just like you; I was able to interact with more people. I felt more equal, but not equal. I met a lot of people and it was fun. I liked it better than high school. I felt more equal. I'm not saying I was segregated or I felt set apart because I was Hispanic.

Although Monique was reluctant to talk about overt racism during high school, she was treated “less equal.” Following high school when she enrolled in and attended Panorama Community College, she felt less segregated and free to interact with students who were not Latina/o. In college, Monique said “I was just like you.” Said another way, the environment at Panorama Community College was not segregated, and she was not set apart because she was Latina or because her English was easy or difficult to understand.

### *Enrique's Story*

Like Monique, Enrique also spoke about “feeling more equal” in college. Even though Enrique had lived in the United States and attended public schools since he was 7 years old, he frequently felt isolated and not part of the mainstream American culture. When I first met Enrique he had completed high school but had not attended the local community college yet. By the third time I met with Enrique, he had completed his freshman year at Panorama Community College. He clearly had gained confidence and freedom in his new environment at Panorama Community College. Enrique appeared to live comfortably in both the dominant culture and the Latino culture; he reported that he lived in the borderlands. So although he identified himself as bi-cultural, he continued to feel distanced from the dominant culture.

I still have a hard time getting to a comfortable spot when I meet new people who are American. My really close friends are Latinos, but now that I'm in college I got to be

close friends with some of the American people there. For me that is just awesome. I'm getting to see that there's not that big of a difference. We get along so well. I gained a lot of confidence and a lot of knowledge about the American culture. That's where my confidence comes from, getting to know about the people you are around and not feeling they're aliens or something. I learned that they are just people too. Throughout high school I tried, I tried to like my peers that were American, but it was always different. I did it and it was okay, but there was still that little something. This is a little strange for me, but now that I'm in college, it's changed. I guess I'm at a higher level now with my relationships with the Anglo community. I got to be really good friends with some American kids at school and it's just awesome! They like to go dancing with us at Latino clubs and they like it a lot too! It's definitely something they probably wouldn't have done otherwise if we weren't there. We get to experience the best of both worlds. Yes! It's really good. I like it. (Enrique)

Like all the participants, the pre-collegiate program was the only club Enrique joined during high school. And like Monique, at Panorama Community College he felt free to interact with students who were not Latina/o. The "awesome" relationships, previously unavailable to him during high school, were now a great source of confidence and knowledge about the American culture. As Enrique gained knowledge about the American culture, he was using social capital as a bridge to gain cultural capital. Enrique benefited from the multicultural environment. Enrique recognized that both he and his Anglo friends experienced the best of both worlds in the multicultural environment.

### Implications and Recommendations

#### *Barriers in Educational Institutions*

"There's always that barrier; we're from different cultures" (Alejandra).

Research offers insights into how barriers limit or end educational pursuits throughout the educational process. Bergerson (2003) uses CRT as a framework for educational researchers to view racism in education by centering on issues of race and challenging dominant views in both research and practice. Bergerson identifies structural areas that are problematic when viewed with a CRT lens: neutrality, merit, and colorblindness arguments. "Neutrality is a problem

because whites consider whiteness the norm; neutrality is perceived as equivalent to whiteness” (p. 53). Because Whiteness is considered the norm in educational institutions, non-Latina/o Whites are frequently not aware of their own Whiteness and their perpetuation of racial dominance (Brandon, 2003; Rolon, 2002/2003). This illusion seduces non-Latina/o Whites to consider themselves colorblind.

Colorblindness is another problematic concept for critical race theorists. Bergerson (2003) reports non-Latina/o Whites frequently cannot practice true colorblindness. For instance, a classroom teacher may say she treats all students equal regardless of their race while referring to students of color as slow learners or educationally disadvantaged. Villenas and Deyhle (1999) reported colorblindness in the dismantling of bilingual education programs. The author uses the lens of CRT to understand how eliminating bilingual educational programs strengthens non-Latina/o White cultural and linguistic supremacy and maintains the subordination of Latinas/os. Here the critical race theorist contends colorblindness allows racism to persist in subtle ways (Bergerson; Brandon, 2003). Although Romo (2004) argues that minimizing a Latina/o student’s language and culture actually has a subtractive effect on their school experience, Americanization continues to be the goal for many pre-collegiate programs aimed at helping Latina/o students (Grant & Wong, 2004).

Merit is another CRT problematic idea, announcing that anyone who works hard enough can achieve success. The reality is the middle and upper class population establishes the rules for who gets what by establishing the social and cultural capital needed to succeed. Because the dominant culture has the power to set the standards for meritocracy, the dominant culture is depicted as normal (Loza, 2003). Affirmative action is just one casualty of the high value placed on merit. Because merit has been highly valued in the educational system it is not easy to

convince a non-Latina/o White privileged person that people of color are “systematically excluded from opportunities to succeed, by individual racism as well as racist structures and institutions” (Bergerson, 2003, p. 53). When Latinas/os are continually and systematically barred from educational opportunities, it becomes clear that although merit is championed, it operates under the burden of racism and continues to marginalize underrepresented population.

### *Student-centered Programs*

“Even when their kids are smart, Latino parents still believe their kids can’t go to college” (Andrea).

A student-centered program identifies a specific group of students and then develops strategies for success in postsecondary institutions. Many Latina/o students have attained access and success in college, however, many Latina/o students remained excluded or on the fringes of the educational system (Loza, 2003). School failure at all levels is widespread for many Latina/o students.

School-centered programs attempt to restructure and reform schools as a whole and focus change on school policies, structures, systems, and processes that include all students (Loza, 2003). In an environment where Latinas/os are the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States and with only 57 percent possessing high school diplomas, inclusion becomes important (Baez, 2003, High School Journal, 2005). As the Latina/o population continues to increase proportionally, it is time for schools to initiate school-centered programs that are inclusive of all Latina/o students. Researchers can assist in determining how school-centered policies and structures will look.

*Faculty Diversity at Community Colleges*

“Although Latinos and Anglos are together in classes, it is obvious in group projects how separate we are. The Latinos would talk among themselves and the Anglos would among themselves. It’s obvious that it’s hard to try to mix the two groups. We’re so different in so many ways.” (Alejandra).

Facing demands for accountability and responsive to community needs, community colleges should enhance the racial/ethnic diversity of the faculty (Robinson, Byrd, Louis, & Bonner, 2013). As Fujimoto (2012) noted, community colleges disproportionately serve students of color when compared to four year institutions. However, Fujimoto found evidence of racial discrimination in hiring faculty in a case study of a community college. With over 50 percent of community college faculty expected to retire by 2015, two-year institutions have an opportunity to recruit and retain faculty members of color who will be more reflective of the populations of students and community constituents. In addition, diverse faculty members contribute to the quality of education and student achievement in a multicultural society (Umbach, 2006).

*Cultivating Diverse Educational Climates*

“Unfortunately I never joined any clubs at school. I graduated from high school but now I look back and realize I didn’t do a lot of things because I was embarrassed and felt inferior.” (Monique).

As Latina/o students progress through the postsecondary educational systems they move between two cultures. The prevailing educational practices in the U.S. endorse the assimilation of Latinos into the dominant culture. As a result, in order for Latinas/os to function in educational institutions as well as society they must typically learn the dominant culture while at the same time living in the margins. These margins that Latinas/os often live in are called

borderlands. Elenes (1997) defines borderlands as the “discourse of people who live between different worlds” (¶2). This borderland can be geographical, emotional, and psychological and serves as a metaphor for the condition of living between spaces, cultures, and languages (Bernal, 2001). For many Latinas/os this means that they live somewhere “belonging” and “not belonging” (Elenes, 1997). This discourse illuminates the social conditions of people with hybrid identities and accurately describes the Latinas/os who live in the U.S. with their native cultures.

Dominant educational practices in the U.S. promote the assimilation of Latinas/os into the dominant culture. However, Elenes (1997) maintains that a hybrid identity is problematic. Elenes states the assimilation of Latinas/os into the dominant culture is detrimental to their educational advancement. However, in order to function in the educational system Latina/o students must assimilate into the dominant culture. In a review of the literature, Harbour, Middleton, Lewis, and Anderson (2003) confirm the opposition felt by Latinas/os to assimilate into the dominant culture. The authors report the pressures felt by the Latina/o to “assimilate into the dominant culture, appearing as absorption, was hostile to multiculturalism and diversity” (Harbour et al., 2003, p. 832). Shaw, Valadez, and Rhoades (1999) state these students must “either maintain separate identities, behavior patterns, and peer associations or they are forced to leave one culture behind and uneasily accept the dominant culture” (p. 174). This frequently results in a profound sense of isolation or loss for the student (Shaw et al.). Gay (2004) wants educational institutions to know that multicultural education is the solution to these problems that appear currently unsolvable. Shaw et al. informs educational policy makers whose students “possess border knowledge—knowledge that resides outside the canon, outside of the cultural mainstream—must be incorporated into a learning community that recognizes distinct [cultural]

groups...” (p. 174). In this way, crossing these borderlands can become an integral part in the experience of multiculturalism education.

It is imperative for schools to respond to the multicultural reality of the society that they serve (Sogunro, 2001). Cultural diversity is promoted when multicultural organizations implement multicultural curriculum in educational institutions. Because of the link between cultural diversity and multiculturalism, it is important to understand the terms multiculturalism and canon (Rhoades & Valadez, 1996). Canon is the traditional knowledge that is produced by White European males and is superior to the knowledge of other populations (Rhoades & Valadez). Tierney (2002) refers to this as “cultural imperialism” (p. 598). Canon knowledge involves “value judgments about the quality or aesthetics of specific works, ideas, ways of knowing, and forms of knowledge” (Rhoades & Valadez, p. 7). Therefore, the canon is believed as the appropriate knowledge to be acquired by all educated people in a society. For this reason the canon as a form of knowledge suppresses border knowledge or knowledge outside the cultural mainstream. As a result, the canon would deem border knowledge, as a form of cultural capital, unworthy of exchange in mainstream educational settings (Rhoades & Valadez). The goal of multiculturalism is to create educational institutions that authenticate cultural identities and border knowledge, and at the same time, “build educational opportunities for culturally diverse students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in mainstream society” (Rhoades & Valadez, 1996, p. 107). It is because culture exists in every social context and for each student, that it plays a role in the way students function and make sense of the world.

The traditional American mainstream culture resists different ways of being in the world. Additionally educational institutions have traditionally and systematically barred from academic

study any ethnicity foreign to the dominant culture (Pradl, 2002). As a result, members of non-dominant cultures have little opportunity to develop the kind of confidence that makes it possible to venture into mainstream society. Salinas and Reyes (2004) state a need to develop an awareness and alternative to mainstream educational structures and practices that clash with the lives and cultures of Latina/o students. Sogunro (2001) concurs with the previous researchers, recognizing the essence of multicultural education while struggling on how best to teach multiculturalism to reflect cultural diversity.

### *Multicultural Education*

“Latinos stay in groups with Latinos, we don’t mix with Anglos and that’s the deal. My friend and I would get comments like we were trying to become Anglos. We were hanging around with them and you’re not supposed to do that.” (Alejandra).

It is necessary that educational institutions respond to the multicultural reality of the communities they serve (Sogunro, 2001). Cultural diversity is promoted when multicultural organizations implement a multicultural curriculum. Because of the connection between diversity and multiculturalism, it is important to review the terms canon and multiculturalism.

Canon is the traditional knowledge that is produced by White European males, and is deemed superior to the knowledge of other populations (Rhoades & Valadez, 1996). Because canon knowledge involves “value judgments about the quality or aesthetics of specific works, ideas, ways of knowing, and forms of knowledge,” it is believed as the appropriate knowledge to acquire by all educated people in a society (Rhoades & Valadez, p. 7). This stance requires border knowledge to be unworthy of exchange in mainstream educational settings (Rhoades & Valadez). As a result, canon knowledge suppresses knowledge outside the mainstream of the dominant culture.

The traditional American mainstream culture opposes different ways of being. Similarly, educational institutions traditionally and methodically have excluded from academic study any ethnicity unfamiliar to the dominant culture (Pradl, 2002). Bergerson (2003) asserts the American educational model is not as neutral as it claims to be. Instead, he argues that any curriculum that ignores issues of racism serves to further oppress while supporting the status quo. For this reason, members of non-dominant cultures have little opportunity to develop the confidence that make it possible to venture into the dominant culture mainstream. The research becomes more explicit when we listen to the voices of the participants who are required to navigate between “belonging” and “not belonging.” Living between two cultures and residing in the borderlands, however, becomes problematic. For the participants who live in the borderlands between “belonging” and “not belonging,” they feel the life sentence that will always exist because “we are from different cultures” and “we don’t mix with Anglos” (Alejandra).

We suggest multicultural education is the solution to these persistent and enduring problems. Educators can no longer sit back and declare it is not their problem, and there is no solution. The move to multicultural schools begins with a shift from cultural deficit thinking to cultural valuing (Grant & Wong, 2004; Paul, 2003; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Research advocates a culturally sensitive approach which would view bilingual and bicultural skills as enhancing students’ ability to positively respond to their communities and a multicultural economy (Rolon, 2002/2003). So rather than assimilating Latinas/os into the dominant culture, the more appropriate multicultural response would be to value and give meaning to the Latina/o culture and the Spanish language.

*Transitioning to Multicultural School-centered Institutions*

“I was the only Hispanic in my grade and no one spoke Spanish. The kids at school were really nice to me. They invited me to play. If you don't know how to communicate how do you know how to play games? I was really shy and didn't want to talk. That's why I still have an accent. I didn't have any Anglo friends so I didn't get to practice English. I don't know what my problem is.” (Monique)

The goal of multicultural education places value on the historical, cultural, and language contributions from the diverse groups of our population. Multicultural education honors the multiple ways of thinking. School-centered multicultural education provides equitable educational opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. In the process, multicultural schools prepare all our children for work in the multicultural workforce they will inevitably encounter. Researchers recommend additional research to provide strategies and policies for educational institutions as they transition to multicultural school-centered institutions. “Although Latinos and Anglos are together in classes, it is obvious in group projects how separate we are. The Latinos would talk among themselves and the Anglos would among themselves, then they would try to come together at the end of the project. It's obvious that it's hard to try to mix the two groups. We're so different in so many ways” (Alejandra).

*Listening to the Latina/o Voice*

“One of the hardest things would be to talk about my legal status in front a bunch of American people, but I've actually done that. It was hard. I was pretty uncomfortable. It was supposed to be to inform one of the local community leadership groups. It was hard to talk about it with anybody because you think about things you have struggled with and a bunch of memories come up. It just makes you want to start crying right then and there.” (Enrique)

Although all the participants lived in the borderlands, they spoke about living and navigating between cultures. “You know that you wouldn’t be a fool in front of them and have them think that you’re just completely worthless. No wonder Anglos don’t like us” (Alejandra) Research reports about the cultural barriers that are regularly invisible to non-Latina/o Whites but are a part of everyday of life for many Latinas/os (Lujan, Gallegos, & Harbour, 2003). These cultural barriers that are indiscernible to non-Latina/o Whites have also been substantiated by the participants in this study and their parents. It is also reported that the voices of those who live in the borderland are frequently silenced (Auerback, 2002). For these reasons, researchers suggest the cultural barriers are best described through the voices of Latinas/os.

### Conclusion

Museus et al. (2008) investigated the impact of campus racial climate on minority students’ persistence at four-year institutions and their recommendations for practice might also apply to community colleges. These strategies include cultivating both classroom and campus environments to include racial minority students. For example, faculty members should improve the climate within their classrooms by recognizing the importance of diversity in teaching and facilitating cross-racial interaction as part of student outcomes. On campus, staff and faculty should promote activities that reflect distinctive cultural interests and engage students of color in purposeful academic and social activities on campus such as campus-wide cultural awareness events and support for culturally diverse student organizations.

Additionally, institutions can increase and maintain structural diversity among faculty, staff, and student bodies to create more welcoming environments for students of color (p. 130). Listening to the counterstories of those students of color who are injured by the persistence of racism on campus will change these voices from the margins to voices of authority.

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