

Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates

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In this article, Tara Yosso, William Smith, Miguel Ceja, and Daniel Solórzano expand on their previous work by employing critical race theory to explore and understand incidents of racial microaggressions as experienced by Latina/o students at three selective universities. The authors explore three types of racial microaggressions—interpersonal microaggressions, racial jokes, and institutional microaggressions—and consider the effects of these racist affronts on Latina/o students. Challenging the applicability of Vincent Tinto’s three stages of passage for college students, the authors explore the processes by which Latinas/os respond to racial microaggressions and confront hostile campus racial climates. The authors find that, through building community and developing critical navigation skills, Latina/o students claim empowerment from the margins.

According to most university brochures, college represents a time of unbridled optimism, exciting challenges, and myriad opportunities. Few students would anticipate that their university experience might be marked by ongoing racialized and gendered incidents questioning their academic merit, cultural knowl-

edge, and physical presence (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Certainly, recruitment brochures would not advertise a campus climate wherein Whites enjoy a sense of entitlement, while Students of Color face charges of being unqualified and “out of place.”¹ Though initially shocked by this sense of rejection, historically underrepresented groups, such as Latinas/os, learn to critically navigate this bittersweet reality, drawing on cultural knowledge and skills gained in overcoming earlier structural barriers to education (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005, 2006).² Indeed, because inadequate conditions permeate Latina/o schooling experiences from preschool through community college, enrollment at a selective university represents a significant achievement (e.g., Carter, 1970; Carter & Segura, 1979; Haycock & Navarro, 1988; Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). De facto segregation in K–12 schooling further exacerbates the disproportionate underrepresentation of Latina/o undergraduates (Perea, 2004; Perna, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Valencia, Menchaca, & Donato, 2002) and shapes what may be the first opportunity for academic interaction between Latinas/os and Whites.

The ways race, racism, and racial ideologies influence these collegiate interactions remain underresearched. For example, Vincent Tinto’s (1993) argument that college students engage in three stages of passage (separation, transition, and incorporation) does not account for how Students of Color experience campus racial climate (see Tierney, 1999). As a result, his model cannot sufficiently explain the experiences of Latinas/os, who, as our research shows, engage in three distinct processes, beginning with confronting incessant, subtle, yet stunning racial assaults, or *microaggressions*. In response to these pervasive messages of rejection, Latinas/os foster academic and social counterspaces in which they build a culturally supportive community and develop skills to critically navigate between their worlds of school and home. In this article, we contribute to the literature on Latina/o undergraduates by using critical race theory (CRT) to shed light on their experiences with racial microaggressions and campus racial climate.

Racial Microaggressions

Probably the most grievous of offensive mechanisms spewed at victims of racism and sexism are microaggressions. These are subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal and/or kinetic. In and of itself a microaggression may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence. (Pierce, 1995, p. 281)

Chester Pierce, a professor of psychiatry and education at Harvard, first introduced microaggressions in 1969 in referring to incessant “offensive mecha-

nisms” aimed at Blacks on a daily basis and “which are designed to reduce, dilute, atomize, and encase the hapless into his ‘place.’ The incessant lesson the black must hear is that he is insignificant and irrelevant” (Pierce, 1969, p. 303). In defining the worst of these mechanisms as microaggressions, Pierce (1988) reminds us that, “regardless of site or social variables, all Blacks, in any workplace suffer added stress as a result of threatened, perceived, and actual racism” because the “microaggression controls space, time, energy, and mobility of the Black, while producing feelings of degradation, and erosion of self-confidence and self-image” (pp. 27, 31).

Indeed, racial microaggressions cause stress to their victims, who must decipher the insult and then decide whether and how to respond (see Davis, 1989). If they confront their assailants, victims of microaggressions often expend additional energy and time defending themselves against accusations of being “too sensitive.” In our previous campus racial climate research, we identified various verbal and nonverbal microaggressions that African Americans encounter in the social and academic spaces of their predominately White universities (see Allen & Solórzano, 2001; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002; Solórzano et al., 2000). Over time, the mundane but extreme stress caused by these assaults (Carroll, 1998) can lead to mental, emotional, and physical strain—what William Smith (2004) has termed “racial battle fatigue.”³ We found that some Black students changed majors, dropped classes, and even left campus to avoid racial microaggressions.

Very little research qualitatively examines how racial microaggressions shape a negative campus racial climate. One significant study, by Daniel Solórzano (1998), documents microaggressions endured by Chicana/o scholars as stunning “acts of disregard” that included nonverbal gestures, stereotypical assumptions, lowered expectations, and racially assaultive remarks, such as:

“You’re not like the rest of them. You’re different.”

“I don’t think of you as a Mexican.”

“You speak such good English.”

“But you speak without an accent.” (p. 125)

Similar to the African American students, these Chicana/o scholars acknowledged being injured by the affronts but did not view themselves as helpless victims. In contrast, many found motivation in the accumulation of subtle and overt racial incidents. Indeed, they relentlessly pursued academic and professional excellence to “prove wrong” these racialized and gendered assumptions and low expectations (see also Yosso, 2000). Our study builds on this earlier work to further illustrate how Latina/o university students experience and respond to racial microaggressions.

Pierce (1989) warns that a crucial debilitating factor in dealing with racial assaults is the “inability to decipher critical micromessages” (p. 310). Derald

Sue and his colleagues (2007) in clinical psychology identify three types of microaggression messages: (1) *microassaults*, or intentionally and explicitly derogatory verbal or nonverbal attacks; (2) *microinsults*, or rude and insensitive subtle put-downs of someone's racial heritage or identity; and (3) *microinvalidations*, or remarks that diminish, dismiss, or negate the realities and histories of People of Color (p. 274). In their various forms, racial microaggressions send messages implying that People of Color are unintelligent, foreign, criminally prone, and deserving of socially marginal status (see also Constantine, 2007; Constantine & Sue, 2007).

As we document the types and effects of racial microaggressions confronting Latinas/os and provide some context for how they respond to these incessant miniassaults, we also consider what insights universities might glean from their resilience to foster a positive campus racial climate (e.g., Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Whitmire, 2004). Most public discourse in the United States frames racism as a concern specific to Black and White communities, and higher education scholarship tends to replicate this tendency to overlook the racialized histories and experiences of other Communities of Color. Our work pushes beyond this Black/White binary.

Critical Race Theory

Rooted in critical community and scholarly traditions dating back to W. E. B. DuBois (1903), critical race theory (CRT) evolved out of critical legal studies in the 1980s as a movement seeking to account for the role of race and persistence of racism in American society (Delgado, 1995a). CRT scholars initially critiqued ongoing societal racism in Black and White binary terms and focused on the slow pace and unrealized promise of civil rights legislation. They eventually advanced the framework to examine the multiple ways African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Chicanas/os, and Latinas/os continue to experience, respond to, and resist racism and other forms of oppression (e.g., Arriola, 1998; Caldwell, 1995; Wing, 1997, 2000).

Solórzano (1997) identified at least five tenets shared by CRT scholarship and has worked alongside a growing number of scholars to apply this dynamic framework to education (e.g., Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez & Parker, 2003; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano, & Parker, 2002; Parker, Deyhle, Villenas, & Crossland, 1998; Tate, 1994, 1997).

The intercentricity of race and racism. CRT in education starts with the premise that race and racism are endemic to and permanent in U.S. society (Bell, 1992; Russell, 1992) and that racism intersects with forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexuality, language, culture, immigrant status, pheno-

type, accent, and surname (see Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1991; Espinoza, 1998; Valdes, McCristal-Culp, & Harris, 2002).

The challenge to dominant ideology. CRT challenges claims of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity, asserting that these claims camouflage the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups (see Bell, 1987; Calmore, 1992; Delgado, 2003; Solórzano, 1997).

The commitment to social justice. CRT's social and racial justice research agenda exposes the "interest convergence" of civil rights gains, such as access to higher education (Bell, 1980, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Taylor, 2000), and works toward the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty as well as the empowerment of People of Color and other subordinated groups (Freire, 1970, 1973; Lawson, 1995; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001a).

The centrality of experiential knowledge. CRT recognizes the experiential knowledge of People of Color as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination (Carrasco, 1996; Delgado Bernal, 2002). CRT explicitly listens to the lived experiences of People of Color through counter-storytelling methods such as family histories, parables, testimonios, *dichos* (proverbs), and chronicles (see Bell, 1992, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995b, 1996; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Espinoza, 1990; Love, 2004; Olivas, 1990; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Yosso, 2006).

The interdisciplinary perspective. CRT extends beyond disciplinary boundaries to analyze race and racism within both historical and contemporary contexts (e.g., Calmore, 1997; Gotanda, 1991; Gutiérrez-Jones, 2001; Harris, 1994).

Taken together, these tenets present a unique approach to existing modes of scholarship in higher education because they explicitly focus on how the social construct of race shapes university structures, practices, and discourses from the perspectives of those injured by and fighting against institutional racism. Informed by the Chicana/o Latina/o consciousness in these tenets (Valdes, 1997, 1998), we deliberately examine the racialized layers of subordination that have historically restricted Latina/o access to equal educational opportunities and that continue to shape Latina/o experiences.⁴

In the remainder of this article, our CRT lens exposes some of the ways racism on college and university campuses has become more subtle but no less pervasive as compared with the racially tumultuous 1960s (Bowman & Smith, 2002; Carroll, 1998). Pierce (1974) reminds us that "one must not look for the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative miniassault is the substance of today's racism" (p. 516).

Campus Racial Climate

We broadly define campus racial climate as the overall racial environment of the university that could potentially foster outstanding academic outcomes and graduation rates for all students but too often contributes to poor academic performance and high dropout rates for Students of Color (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Carroll, 1998; Hurtado et al., 1998; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). A positive campus racial climate features: (a) the inclusion of Students, Faculty, and Administrators of Color; (b) a curriculum reflecting the historical and contemporary experiences of People of Color; (c) programs to support the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Students of Color; and (d) a mission that reinforces the institution's commitment to diversity and pluralism (e.g., Carroll, 1998; Guinier, Fine, & Balin, 1997; Hurtado, 1992, 1994).

We distinguish between diversity of convenience, the form most often endorsed by universities, and genuine diversity or pluralism, which seems increasingly difficult to realize in an era of "color-blind," "race-neutral" politics. Evidenced in reactionary and superficial policies to increase the size of underrepresented groups, diversity of convenience can actually contribute to a hostile campus racial climate.⁵ Beyond portraying a racially diverse group of students in recruitment brochures, historically White universities do not necessarily commit to providing equal access and opportunities for Students of Color, let alone promise an inviting, positive campus racial climate. Genuine racial diversity or pluralism refers to underrepresented racial and ethnic groups being physically present *and* treated as equals on the college campus. All administrators, faculty, and students affirm one another's dignity by demonstrating readiness to benefit from each other's experience and willingness to acknowledge one another's contributions to the common welfare of the college. Evidence of genuine diversity would include programs to compensate communities the university has historically underserved and initiatives to remedy social inequalities the institution has perpetuated.⁶ Such efforts may disrupt the institutional status quo and destabilize the university's historical racial power base.

Instead, colleges tend to endorse diversity to the extent that it serves White students. Derrick Bell (1980, 1987, 2004) has identified this practice of allowing People of Color to benefit from society's institutions only at the convenience of White society as "interest convergence" (see also Dudziak, 1988, 2000). Bell's critique helps explain the evident contradiction when universities celebrate diversity with ethnic food and fiestas while failing to provide equal access and opportunity to Students of Color. If, as research suggests, enrolling Students of Color helps White students become more racially tolerant, livens up class dialogue through more diverse points of view, and prepares White students to gain employment in a multicultural, global economy, then what is the role of Students of Color? Seemingly, in return for admission, uni-

versities expect Students of Color to enrich the experiences and outcomes for Whites. This pattern of prioritizing the needs of White students occurs “often with a complete lack of self-consciousness” because “White supremacy creates in Whites the expectation that issues of concern to them will be central in every discourse” (Grillo & Wildman, 1995, pp. 566–567). CRT guides our purposive shift of this discussion.

Methodology

We used qualitative research through focus groups to examine how Latina/o students experience campus racial climate. Focus groups generate a wealth of understanding about participants’ experiences and beliefs through guided discussions, during which the group dynamic provides insights into the world of the participants (Morgan, 1998), elicits new perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gray, 2004), and enables diverse views to surface. Through our focus groups, students realized they were not alone in experiencing rude remarks, nonverbal insults, and other racial incidents. Just as we listened to them, they listened to one another.

Participants

The study participants consisted of Latina/o college students attending three predominantly White, elite institutions classified as Carnegie Doctoral/Research Universities–Extensive.⁷ These included one private East Coast, and two public Midwest and West Coast universities. Thirty-seven Latino students (nineteen females, eighteen males) participated in eight focus groups convened at these institutions. To gather participants, we adapted a purposive sampling technique “based on predetermined criteria about the extent to which the selected subjects could contribute to the research study” (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996, p. 58). Project coordinators contacted students to invite their focus group participation. All participants self-identified as Latina/o and had completed at least one year of study at their respective universities. Focus groups ranged from three to six students and lasted approximately ninety minutes. At least two authors of the current study facilitated or cofacilitated each focus group.

Data Collection: Interview Protocol

The interview protocol gathered information on the educational and personal experiences of the participants with regard to campus racial climate. Open-ended questions fell into five categories: (a) educational aspirations and experiences; (b) experiences with racial discrimination; (c) responses to racial discrimination; (d) effects of racial discrimination; and (e) school characteristics and campus climate issues. We based protocol questions on research demonstrating the significance of racialization processes and K–14 schooling influ-

ences in relation to Latina/o college experiences and campus racial climate (e.g., Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Solórzano et al., 2005).

Data Analysis

To foster a sense of trust, we asked participants both during and at the completion of the focus groups to provide whatever clarifications they felt necessary and express any additional thoughts about issues that arose during the discussion (Kvale, 1996). Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1985) characterize this informal process of member checking as “an opportunity to give an assessment of overall adequacy in addition to confirming individual data points” (p. 314).

Our grounded theory approach to investigating campus racial climate led us to uncover racial microaggressions as a consistent theme surfacing in the experiences of Latina/o undergraduates (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After reflecting on our data—including research memos, field notes, and transcripts—we coded the transcripts and organized them into thematic “chunks” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). This process involved taking text data, creating common categories, and labeling those categories (e.g., experiences of discrimination, student responses to discrimination, academic effects of discrimination). We first did this separately and then collectively to ensure consistency in data coding and interpretation. Several iterations of this process determined whether different themes could be further collapsed into similar categories (Cresswell, 2003).

On reaching theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we used CRT as a conceptual lens for understanding and identifying our thematic categories (Creswell, 2003). At this stage, we engaged in dialogue as a research team and sought out social science and humanities scholarship addressing racism in higher education (e.g., Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Prillerman, Myers, & Smedley, 1989; Willie & Sanford, 1995). This process led us to refine our initial research questions around racial discrimination and campus racial climate and to consider:

1. What types of racial microaggressions do Latina/o undergraduates experience?
2. What are the effects of racial microaggressions for Latina/o undergraduates?
3. How do Latina/o undergraduates respond to racial microaggressions?

We returned to our data, mindful of the students’ descriptions of the types and contexts of everyday incidents of racism (Essed, 1991) and of their remarks suggesting the effects of and responses to these subtle, pervasive forms of discrimination. The quotes we extracted begin to illuminate these navigational experiences.

Findings

The focus groups, indeed, shed light on how racial microaggressions shaped Latina/o students' undergraduate experiences and how these students succeeded in spite of negative campus racial climates. Furthermore, in addition to race, class, and gender inferences, we found that racial microaggressions aimed at Latina/o students carry insinuations about language, culture, immigration status, phenotype, accent, and surname.

We describe our findings in three sections below, outlining the types, effects, and responses to these incessant racial assaults on Latina/o undergraduates. We identify three main types of racial microaggressions prevalent for Latina/o students: *interpersonal microaggressions*, *racial jokes*, and *institutional microaggressions*. These covert aggressions cast doubt on students' academic merits and capabilities, demean their ethnic identity, and dismiss their cultural knowledge. Latinas/os experience the accumulation of racial microaggressions as a *rejection* of their presence at the university. In response, they engage in processes of *community building* and *critical navigation between multiple worlds* (Yosso, 2006).

Types of Racial Microaggressions

— Interpersonal Racial Microaggressions

You never know what someone's intentions are, but I could just say that it definitely is harder for minorities here . . . It's definitely harder if you're the only Person [of Color] in there. It's hard for other people to relate to you based on your differences: how you look, how you speak, how you act, and what you like to do when you're not in class.

Interpersonal microaggressions refer to verbal and nonverbal racial affronts directed at Latinas/os from students, faculty, teaching assistants, or other individuals in academic and social spaces. These incessant interpersonal attacks lead Latinas/os to feel that their presence disrupts the "natural" state of being on campus. For example, the above quote from a Latino undergraduate indicates the heightened awareness and stress associated with being the racial Other. In academic contexts, these racial microaggressions leave Latina/o students feeling that their intelligence has been called into question. A Latina student from a different campus recalled asking some classmates to join their study group:

They just looked at each other like . . . and, then the one [student said], "Oh, sorry, our study group is full." And, I was like, "how does a study group get full?" I go, "What, do you gotta sign up on television or something?" If these women didn't feel that I was intelligent enough to be with them, then I didn't want to be with them either. I was just like "Oh, well, no big deal." But it's happened a couple of times.

Even though she appeared nonchalant about the incident (“no big deal”), this student has also experienced this type of rejection in other classes. Her remarks indicate that she interpreted these exchanges as *microinsults* (Sue et al., 2007) seemingly based on assumptions about her academic merit. She did have an opportunity to respond to this particular insult later in the semester. Knowing she had been working alone to excel in the course because they denied her the benefits of collaborative study, these same women asked to borrow her notes. Stunned by their lack of consideration and the irony of their request, the Latina replied, “Oh, I don’t share my notes.”

Nonverbal racial microaggressions in academic spaces reinforce the sense that White students believe themselves to be intellectually superior to Latinas/os. A Latino majoring in the arts described his frustration at not knowing why the White students in his cohort would avoid interacting with him altogether:

I’m not really comfortable just being in the classrooms. Just going to class I feel the fact that I know that I’m different and I’m reminded of it every day . . . There’s me, a Black male and a Black female, and everybody else is White in my classroom. And me and those two Black individuals tend to sit together every session, every class session, whereas everybody else would just kind of tend to sit away from us. So as I put my book bag on the table, I would notice that the rest of the chairs would be empty while the other table would get crowded. It would be sixty people sitting at one table pushing each other off whereas I would be by myself sitting at my own table.

He described becoming distracted by wondering whether he was somehow at fault for the racialized seating arrangement: “The professor is talking and the whole time you’re thinking . . . Why doesn’t anybody sit here?” A Latino majoring in history at a different university shared his negative experience interacting with the predominately “older White male [faculty].” For example, when the professor explained that, as a rule, he did not arrange times to meet students beyond his regular office hours, he felt a little disappointed. His disappointment turned to astonishment on hearing the professor, just moments later, making just such an arrangement with a White student. “I mean it . . . it just . . . it didn’t feel right.” Indeed, the subtle nature of the microaggressions leads to a nagging sense of self-doubt for many Latinas/os as they constantly question, “Did that just happen?” (see Solórzano & Yosso, 2001b).

Likewise, a Latino on a different campus sensed awkwardness in his interactions with faculty, perceiving that, as one of the few Students of Color in the School of Engineering, faculty may hold low expectations of his intellectual capabilities. He explained how this heightened awareness of his racial/ethnic position weighed on him:

It’s very difficult for me to go up to a professor and ask him questions. I see all the White students just going up to him and asking questions. And it’s so simple for them. And when I try to do it, they usually, I know, I feel uncomfortable, and I think [the faculty] do too.

Within a negative campus racial climate, these interpersonal interactions create anxiety for Latina/o undergraduates, who cannot shake the sense that their every word may reaffirm racialized assumptions and cast doubt on their academic merit. Students were also frustrated when they could not respond directly to racial *microassaults* (Sue et al., 2007). One Latino describes being “wounded by words” (see Solórzano, 1997):

I dance for the *folklorico*. And we’re a very colorful group. And we tend to walk in uniform through the yards to whatever performance we’re doing. Sometimes we’ve actually just carried our costumes over, but you can see us, because everybody has orange and pink and everything. And, so we’re walking to the yard, and I think we’re being a little loud. I mean someone was singing or something. And someone yelled out of a window at one of the dorms, “Fuckin’ beaners!” And we had no idea who it was, but I mean, just hearing that just kind of, I wouldn’t expect that to come out of a dorm at [this university].

These remarks indicate the student’s shock at the hate speech he and his peers confronted. His description of their costumes and the seemingly mundane surroundings reveals his sense of vulnerability. The racial microaggression presents a hurtful realization that the university is not a safe, welcoming place for Latinas/os. The group, who moments earlier had been joyfully preparing for their dance performance, felt upset long after the verbal assault. They tried to respond by yelling their frustration back toward the residence hall. However, just as they retaliated, another group of White students, unaware of the incident, walked by. This caused further stress about whether their actions would reaffirm racial stereotypes held by the White students and reiterate the sense that Latinas/os do not belong on the elite campus.

— Racial Jokes as Microaggressions

Latina/o students on all three campuses witnessed and became targets of compulsive racial joke-telling, which seems to be a persistent part of the White campus subculture. As microaggressions, these racial jokes surfaced most often in the form of offensive verbal remarks with questionably humorous intentions expressed in social contexts in the company of, or directly to, Latina/o students.⁸ The undeniable intentionality of racial jokes distinguished these assaults from interpersonal microaggressions. One may argue that the microaggressor, in this case the would-be comedian, unconsciously holds the racist beliefs coded as humor. Whether or not White students realize they would hurt someone with their attempt at comedy, the act of telling a joke is intentional. Some may laugh because they too hold stereotypical, racist beliefs. Indeed, a joke cannot make audiences laugh if they do not readily recognize the stereotypical assumptions about the group being chided.

In this study, some students’ phenotype masked their ethnic identity, which then exposed them to more racial jokes. A Latino explained, “If you look at me, I don’t really look that Mexican, so when I tell people I’m Mexican, they

might make the Taco Bell joke, Chihuahua jokes.” A Latina in the same focus group affirmed her peer’s experience, remarking,

They don’t realize they’re being offensive, [that] the jokes are offensive or hurtful. And sometimes, like you said, people can’t tell I’m Mexican or a [member of a] minority group, so when I get offended they don’t understand why. They’re like, “It’s just a joke.” I’m like, that [excuse] still allows people to abuse [minorities]. It just allows racism [to continue].

In explaining that they may not “look that Mexican,” these Latina/o undergraduates generously gave the benefit of the doubt to White students, suggesting their peers would not tell racist jokes about Mexicans to be intentionally malicious and that Whites “don’t realize” how their words wound.

While the racial joke-teller was usually someone Latina/o students had periodic or regular contact with, this microaggressor also assumed that she/he was a friend or close acquaintance. As a result, the sting of the microaggressions left a greater personal impact. The stress of one racial microaggression can last long after the assault because the victim often continues to spend time with the microaggressor while considering whether the assailant intended harm, and whether or how they must launch a sufficient response. As Pierce (1995) notes, “The most baffling task for victims of racism and sexism is to defend against microaggressions. Knowing how and when to defend requires time and energy that oppressors cannot appreciate” (p. 282).

Latina/o undergraduates on each campus expressed a sense of urgency in pointing out to Whites that their jokes projected derogatory racialized messages.⁹ For example, a Latino student shared his anxiety that White students would continue their aggressive behavior if he did not intervene,

What makes it even worse is along with the joking . . . they might not be totally aware of what they’re saying. It’s kind of hard to stop them with everything that they say, and explain to them that that this is offensive to me. It’s not right . . . you don’t want to come at them hostile because of course they’ll come back at you and say “wait a minute.” The thing is though, when you don’t call them on these racial jokes and remarks and things, then it just, of course it’s going to stick with them and they’ll think, “Oh it’s okay. I might be making a crack about his grades or whatever, but if he didn’t tell me anything that’ll be fine. I’ll keep on with what I’m doing.” And that’s how it gets difficult at times.

Regardless of White students’ intentions, racial jokes caused Latinas/os tremendous stress as frustrated integration efforts reduced their sense of belonging and hindered their participation in campus life. A Latino student athlete stated,

For the past two years I played soccer for the university and we had one Mexican and one Black player, one African American player. And they always made jokes, racial jokes, and, I just sort of got used to it. And I knew they were joking but I also knew they did it on purpose. And, I just got used to it and didn’t say

anything. Because there was one of me and twenty-six, twenty-seven of them and coaches and everything. This year we got a varsity team, and I decided not to even try out.

In the discussion of whether racial jokes were intentional jabs or unconscious acts of ignorance, it became clear that students expended an enormous amount of time, energy, and stress trying to respond. A Latina described a sense of regret in her first year:

I didn't really know how to respond . . . When I was a freshman, . . . I felt like . . . if I responded in an angry way, these people would think I was being too defensive. I didn't know how to take a joke. But, I didn't really know how to interpret people's comments. I knew that they had affected me, but I wasn't sure like if they were just joking around. Even if they were joking around, now I understand that I should have said something.

As she described feeling guilty for not responding to the racist humor she had witnessed, this Latina revealed some of the insidious effects of these microaggressions. In the moment, she had been rendered silent, concerned that any remark would elicit an additional attack. Still processing these racial incidents years later, she felt she had been wrong for not speaking up. Other students echoed this sense of responsibility to speak up on behalf of all Latinas/os and Students of Color. This obligation seemed to drive their efforts to explain to White students why even "humorous" assaults reinforce racist ideologies. Ironically, although racial priming consistently codes race-based messages related to skin color and phenotype (e.g., dark skin:bad, light skin:good), it also allows most Whites to operate throughout their lifespans in an illusory color-blind world (see Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). All too often, as this Latina anticipated, when students spoke out against racial jokes, they found themselves on the defensive, responding to accusations of being "complainers," "whiners," "too sensitive," and not able to "take a joke." Some White students also claimed the critique was a personal attack, as a Latina at another university explains:

They feel like I'm telling them they're racists. They just sit there like, "No." I'm just telling [them] that it's offensive, and part of the way of correcting it is by pointing it out so that [they] know next time. You don't have to be necessarily a minority to point something out if you know it's wrong. You know if you're a White student among other White students you should be able to correct them and say, "I think that's offensive for them." 'Cause sometimes you just know when something's blatantly racist.

This Latina suggests that Whites can recognize "when something's blatantly racist" and should not rely on Students of Color to monitor these incidents. Bernard Guerin (2003) argued that researchers may overlook the importance of racial jokes as "everyday" language that grants Whites "in-group" status at the expense of People of Color. Racist humor seemed to offer White students

a quick and easy method for gaining acceptance, status, and social capital in primarily White networks. When Latinas/os approved of the joke(s), through silence or other verbal/nonverbal cues, Whites granted them peripheral, temporary, or token acceptance. Latina/o students' open disapproval led to their "voluntary" exit or dismissal from the group.

Of the few studies examining racist humor and its impact on People of Color in the United States (e.g., Barnes, Palmary, & Durrheim, 2001; Middleton, 1959; Santa Ana, 2009), to date, and to our knowledge, research has not assessed racial joke-telling in higher education contexts. We concur with the assertions of critical race scholars about the significance of racially assaultive "words that wound" (see Lawrence, Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).

We found the racial jokes confronting these Latina/o undergraduates reflective of a troubling societal acceptance of stereotypes and racial epithets (e.g., "beaner," "wetback") historically consistent with the treatment of Mexicans in mainstream media.¹⁰ The same stereotypes of violent, sexually promiscuous, unintelligent, and morally depraved Mexicans, which subtly and systematically shape public perception, electoral politics, and legal and educational discourse, also ambushed Latinas/os with constant reminders of their subordinate status in the social/racial hierarchy of the university (see Bender, 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 1992; Flores, 1973; Santa Ana, 2002; Solórzano, 1997). One Latino succinctly remarked, "I felt like a complete outsider."

— Institutional Microaggressions

Students' stressful confrontations with a campus racial climate replete with commonplace, recurring microaggressions instilled feelings of self-doubt, alienation, and discouragement. Their experiences echo the research literature about how racism pervades institutions of higher education via university and local culture, organizations, informal rules, implicit protocols, and institutional memories (Feagin & McKinney, 2003; Hurtado et al., 1998). For example, Kenneth González (2002) documented the social, physical, and epistemological "cultural starvation" endured by Chicana/o college students. Socially, they find themselves a numerical minority with very little, if any, political power. This social isolation leaves students with a clear sense that communicating in any language other than English (e.g., Spanish) is inappropriate. Students' physical world also elicits cultural alienation, featuring campus sculptures, buildings, flyers, and office postings that do not reflect Chicana/o histories or experiences. The cars and clothes of the predominately White student body further evidence the physical reproduction of White middle-class culture. Moreover, González noted that the epistemological world of the Chicanas/os in his study featured very little access to Faculty of Color and a paucity of ethnic studies curriculum. The institutional maintenance of this "apartheid of knowledge" effectively "marginalizes, discredits, and devalues the scholarship, epistemologies, and other cultural resources" Students and Faculty of Color bring to the academy (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002,

p. 169). These stealth racial assaults adversely have an impact on the adjustment, academic performance, sense of comfort, sense of value, and ultimately the persistence of Students of Color (Smith, 2009).

At the selective institutions in our study, such “cultural starvation” (González, 2002) contributes to the already negative campus racial climate for Latinas/os and can be understood as *institutional microaggressions*. We define institutional microaggressions as those racially marginalizing actions and inertia of the university evidenced in structures, practices, and discourses that endorse a campus racial climate hostile to People of Color. These assaults appear to be “collectively approved and promoted” by the university power structures (Pierce, 1970, p. 268). Institutional microaggressions comprise what social psychologist Claude Steele (1997) calls a “threat in the air.”

Though arguably one of the most difficult types of microaggressions to discern, explain, or prove, institutional *microinvalidations* (Sue et al., 2007) diminish the value of Latina/o undergraduates within the campus community. “I don’t know if I’m making this clear,” said a Latina student. “For me it’s just more this feeling of like almost hopelessness. You’re working so hard. You’re part of this campus. You take your work seriously, yet there aren’t any professors that could really identify with you, culturally.” The passive aggression of institutional microaggressions, evidenced here in the failure to recruit and retain a diverse faculty, left this student feeling disregarded and insignificant.

Indeed, institutional microaggressions create barriers to building the community necessary for Latina/o student retention. One Latina perceived that student efforts to combat a negative campus racial climate would never be recognized, let alone supported. She observed that Students of Color initiated most of the culturally relevant programming on or around campus, and yet they felt completely neglected by the administration: “When you look at other schools, for example, they have minority students, they at least hire coordinators to help the students do activities. So we’re basically left alone, and you know this is a very strong statement.” The administrative inertia around issues of improving campus racial climate left Students of Color feeling irrelevant. The reality of institutional microaggressions, described here as an inability to commit university resources to cultural programming, confirmed for these Latinas/os that the administration simply did not care to better their undergraduate experience.

Effects of Racial Microaggressions

Research shows that all students benefit from the maintenance of resources from the home culture within academic institutions (Bowman & Howard, 1985). While many White high school students are products of racially segregated communities, schools, and experiences (Hurtado et al., 1998), this does not appear to impair their adjustment to college. Their cultural resources remain intact and their ecological fit is almost guaranteed. Tinto (1993) argues that these students engage in three processes early on in college: *separa-*

tion, transition, and incorporation. Separation refers to disassociating from one's precollege community (i.e., family and friends). Transition takes place during and after separation, when students let go of their old norms and behaviors and instead acquire new college norms and behaviors. And incorporation refers to the process of integration into various college communities.

We find that Latinas/os engage in very different stages: *rejection, community building, and critical navigation between multiple worlds.* When Latinas/os travel to postsecondary institutions outside their immediate communities and feeder colleges, they rarely enjoy the same guarantee of ecological fit as do their White classmates. To survive and resist the racism they encounter, they draw on the cultural resources of their home communities (e.g., Carter, 2003; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Gonzalez et al., 1995; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992; Yosso, 2005).

— Rejection, Race-Related Stress, and Stereotype Threat

There's a lot of ignorance on campus that other students don't necessarily realize. When their concept of racism is very different, they don't realize minor things can be considered racist . . . A [White] friend of mine, and I know she didn't do it on purpose, but there is just this ignorance there, she introduced me to a group of students. We were doing introductions and everyone stated their name. And she introduced me as "Lupe, she's Mexican." You know, it's not saying that I'm not and I wasn't proud, but it's not necessarily [how] I introduce myself every time I meet people.

Latinas/os experience racial microaggressions as a rejection of their efforts to become integrated on their university campus. Lupe's remarks speak to the racial ignorance pervading the campuses we studied.¹¹ Latina/o students seem stunned, especially during their freshman year, by silencing, dismissive, and verbally assaultive behaviors from professors, graduate teaching assistants, and peers. The accumulation of these microaggressions communicates to these undergraduates that they should expect to be treated like intruders.

As noted earlier, racial microaggressions cause Latinas/os a troubling amount of stress. Though very little research examines how race-based stress affects Latina/o college students, one significant mixed-method study by Daniel Muñoz (1986) found that racialized stress is also gendered. For male students, for example, he finds that "the whole of the academic experience is more stressful to the Chicano student than to the Anglo student" (p. 142). Indeed, he notes a theme of "alienation—a feeling of not belonging—was referred to again and again" regarding the institutional climate of the university, and these undergraduates reported "extremely high stress levels seeking help with academic problems, asking for academic assistance, and approaching a faculty member for academic assistance" (p. 142). Chicanas/os reported higher levels of personal stress than White students when "seeking help with your personal and academic problems" and "meeting parents of friends from other ethnic or social groups" (p. 143).

Muñoz (1986) further found “Chicanas as a group consistently reported greater stress than any other group” (p. 145). These young women noted high levels of stress on items such as “taking unmeaningful or irrelevant courses, seeking help with personal or academic problems, not meeting teacher’s expectations for academic achievement, approaching a staff or faculty member for assistance, being asked to verbally participate in class, and adjusting to a new school environment” (p. 145). As the Latinas/os in our focus groups confirm, each of these situations carries the potential of an assaultive incident. The possibility or expectation of confronting a racial microaggression certainly induces race-related stress (Smith, 2009; Smith et al., 2006).

To further understand the effects of this race-related stress, we refer to Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson’s (1995) research examining the underperformance of African Americans on standardized tests believed to measure “intelligence” or “aptitude” because of an “immediate situational threat that derives from the broad dissemination of negative stereotypes about one’s group—the threat of possibly being judged and treated stereotypically, or of possibly self-fulfilling such a stereotype” (p. 798). We argue that racial microaggressions function in similar ways to the stereotype threat that Steele and Aronson identify. However, the pervasiveness of racial microaggressions reaches beyond the “immediate situational threat” and causes an ongoing environmental stereotype threat. In addition to causing underperformance on high-stakes tests, the threat posed by a negative campus racial climate may diminish the cumulative grade point average for Latina/o undergraduates. Moreover, the mundane, extreme environmental stress (Carroll, 1998) caused by the accumulation of racial microaggressions can manifest as racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2006). Our findings reflect a need for further consideration about the cumulative effects of racial microaggressions and, in particular, how the debilitating race-based stress from racial battle fatigue hinders not only the academic achievements of Latina/o undergraduates but also their physical, emotional, and mental health (see Pierce, 1969, 1995).

Tinto’s (1993) separation stage marks students’ physical, emotional, and social break from their home community, initiating their university transition. His model assumes that Students of Color would be readily welcomed and equitably rewarded for assimilating into mainstream college life. The reality for most Students of Color does not support this assumption. For the Latinas/os in our study, severing ties with the people and places representing safety, comfort, and belonging would only exacerbate their sense of isolation and rejection.

Responses to Racial Microaggressions

Rather than demand that students of color attending mainstream institutions of higher education undergo initiation rites that inevitably lead to cultural suicide, we argue that a more protean cultural model of academic life should prevail. Such a model should contend that students of color on predominately White

campuses be able to affirm, rather than reject, who they are. (Tierney, 1999, p. 89)

In his critique of Tinto's stages of passage model, William Tierney (1999) calls for a more complex understanding of how African American students maintain "cultural integrity" in historically White universities. As a result of chronic racial microaggressions, many Students of Color perceive their campus environment as an extremely stressful, exhausting place that diminishes their sense of control, comfort, and confidence while eliciting feelings of loss, ambiguity, strain, frustration, and injustice (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Turning to others within one's ethnic/racial group may feel like the only logical and safe choice (Constantine, Wilton, & Caldwell, 2003).

— Community Building and Critical Navigation on the Margins

We know better the margin as site of deprivation . . . We know less the margin as site of resistance. (bell hooks, 1990, p. 151)

Research demonstrates that Latina/o students engage in specific actions to culturally nourish and replenish themselves in response to marginalizing campus climates. They begin a process of choosing the margin, as hooks (1990) asserts, "as site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility" (p. 153). Here, Latina/o students build a sense of community in academic and social counterspaces that represent the cultural wealth of their home communities (see Yosso, 2005, 2006). An ethnographic study of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for example, documents collaborative Latina/o student efforts to create a sense of home in the dormitories with Spanish-language books, culturally authentic meals, and extracurricular cultural activities.¹²

Similarly, in González's (2002) study two Chicano roommates fostered a sense of home in their residence halls by covering their walls with Chicana/o cultural symbols (e.g., posters and pictures), playing Chicana/o music loudly (despite complaints from neighbors), and speaking to each other in Spanish. In addition, they reached out by telephone or drove home to visit with family members and friends from their hometowns. To counter the cultural starvation they experienced, these students also sought out Chicana/o studies courses, Chicana/o faculty, and Chicana/o student organizations.

Likewise, in our study, a Latina described her efforts to seek out a sense of family among her Latina/o peers at the university:

Back home, school was school, and home was home. I had my family at home, and it was my family. I didn't need to reaffirm my culture when I was at school. But, when I came here, I didn't have that home. I didn't have those people at home. So, in a sense, my Latino friends here became like a family to me.

Trying to interact with White students left her angry because she was made to feel inferior for not identifying with their prep school as well as their "upper-

class, elite background.” She went on, “And I didn’t want to be around them. So, I surrounded myself with people like me.” Indeed, our findings demonstrate community building occurs during and after rejection, when Latinas/os seek out and establish socioacademic counterspaces that position their cultural knowledges as valuable strengths.

This is very different from Tinto’s (1993) transition stage, when students acquire new socioacademic skills, values, and networks in their new college environment through a process of leaving behind their previous attitudes and behaviors. Latina/o students’ resilience depends on their ability to draw on the cultural knowledge, skills, and contacts from their home communities (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005). They cultivate this community cultural wealth in academic counterspaces, such as in study groups and student-organized study halls (Yosso, 2006). These spaces enable Latina/o students to engage in the rigors of the university curriculum from a “safe,” supportive environment where they position Latina/o histories and experiences as valid and important knowledge. In academic counterspaces, students can struggle through a math problem or brainstorm about a literary essay without the additional pressure of being “on display” as the spokesperson for all Latinas/os. Building community here also means fostering each other’s academic achievements and being accountable to help each other graduate.

Often social counterspaces develop out of academic ones, and vice versa. Social counterspaces allow room outside the classroom confines for students to vent frustrations and cultivate friendships with people who share many of their experiences. Primarily student-initiated and student-run, social counterspaces exist on and around campus, through both formal and informal activities (e.g., dinner gatherings, community outreach programs, campus cultural centers, intramural sports, cultural floors in residence halls, and ethnic newspapers or radio shows). Building community in social counterspaces cultivates students’ sense of home and family, which bolsters their sense of belonging and nurtures their resilience.¹³

One Latina expressed concern that White students simply did not understand the need for these counterspaces: “They think that we’re trying to exclude them. They’re like, ‘You exclude yourselves.’ And it’s not that we’re trying to exclude them. We’re just trying to not lose ourselves.” A Latino student described how hurt he felt when a White friend’s remarks belittled his efforts to build community:

During a conversation, [she] brought up [the fact that] I’m studying Latin American history, and I’m pretty involved with different aspects of the Latino community at school here. And she implied that my involvement in these communities and activities were kind of reflective of me limiting myself. And in a certain way, I was trying to take the easy way out, by studying Latin American history . . . At first, I was in shock because this was someone that I thought knew me pretty well and knew my background . . . I kind of gave up trying to explain to her. I’d thought I’d known her for a long time, and she came out with that. It took me

[off guard]. I did think about it a lot, but then I realized that I do a lot of different activities at school, and it's not limiting myself. So once I kind of reconciled that, I think I was a lot more comfortable with my identity, with my involvement in the school.

This student painfully described the socially tenuous reality wherein most Latinas/os find themselves: never knowing at what moment relationships might turn sour due to color-blind statements. He felt confident that his longtime White friend really “knew” him, yet she disparaged his participation in what she considered superfluous and nonrigorous ethnic studies classes. Indeed, research shows that White students tend to share this perspective, and exhibit low levels of support for or engagement in curriculum diversity programs (see Smith, 1998, 2009). Latinas/os in our study felt obligated to learn, participate in, and accept the White campus subculture, even while it seemed that White students made little or no effort to learn about, participate in, and show respect for Latina/o culture, epistemologies, and ontologies (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Scheurich & Young, 2002).

Many Latina/o students felt responsible for improving race relations, while at the same time they believed racial and social integration was really just a one-way road to the White mainstream culture. As one overwhelmed Latino student conceded, “I feel like it's futile, and I don't want to make myself angry and bothered when the people are still going to remain ignorant.” Indeed, many said that they would rather forgo relationships with White students—even those with whom they would have liked to have had relationships—in order to protect themselves from the inevitable disregard.

Despite the benefits of building a Latina/o community, some Latinas/os expressed concern about contributing to what they perceived as an already racially segregated campus. For example, concerns about being accused of “self-segregation” led a number of students to initially avoid Latina/o organizations, which may have contributed to the rejection they encountered their freshman year. But over time, students came to realize the need for “self-preservation” (Villalpando, 2003) in the face of a negative and sometimes hostile campus racial climate.

The process of building communities reflective of their cultural knowledges and their university insights and skills can transform students. As hooks (1990) notes, “We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle . . . We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world” (p. 153).

In this regard, counterspaces enable Latinas/os to develop skills of critical navigation through multiple worlds (e.g., home and school communities) and ultimately to survive and succeed in the face of racism. Latinas/os carry the community cultural wealth and aspirations of their families with them to the university and build on these assets (Yosso, 2005). They also benefit from previous and ongoing Latina/o institution-building efforts. As they utilize the col-

lege's resources to persist, they also fulfill their family and community needs (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Students engaging in this process can gain a socially conscious worldview and "critical resistant navigational skills" (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998, p. 216) unaccounted for in Tinto's (1993) incorporation stage. They maintain a disciplined work ethic, high self-expectations, and self-vigilance. Latinas/os are quite aware that for many White faculty and students, the individual academic failure of one Latina/o tends to confirm low expectations for all Latinas/os, whereas individual outstanding academic achievement earns the label "exceptional Latina/o"—itself a racial microaggression. To critically navigate in spite of the burden of possibly representing all Latinas/os in a negative light, students work hard to "prove wrong" racial stereotypes of Mexicans (see Yosso, 2000, 2002, 2006).¹⁴ As one Latino explained, "I know I have to prove myself every day no matter what because people don't know who I am. I don't have my resume tattooed on my forehead. I don't have . . . all my different medals, or patches, or all my achievements tagged on me." A Latina echoed this statement, adding that the stress of racial microaggressions reaches beyond the university and is "not just on campus. It's almost everywhere I go. You have to really prove yourself."

In response to frequent racial microaggressions, students often sought out Chicana/o or Latina/o studies classes that served as academic counterspaces in which they fostered skills of critical navigation and learned to see themselves as contributing to a legacy of resistance to oppression. They applied their critical navigational skills by "giving back" to their communities, aiming to achieve a university degree for themselves and their *familias* and working to increase educational opportunities for the next generation of Latina/o undergraduates. While they acknowledged the pain of rejection, they refused to remain complacent or be perceived as defenseless victims. A Latina reflected on how she has changed since her freshman year: "I feel like I got something that's kind of developed over the time, like a little more confident expressing who I am and kind of defending that."

In Tinto's (1993) model, when students become integrated parts of the college, the *university* represents the center of a student's world. This is not necessarily the case for Students of Color, who have been fostering communities of resistance that deliberately bridge their worlds of home and school.

Discussion

Utilizing a CRT framework, we have demonstrated that Latinas/os at three selective universities are navigating a negative, and even hostile, campus racial climate in which they endure incessant covert, yet shocking, racial assaults. William Smith (2009) recognizes that these microaggressive acts can appear as a unique form of racial misogyny for Women of Color and racial misandry for Men of Color (see also Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007).

As a dynamic framework in education, CRT challenges us to name racist injuries and identify their origins. Naming the types of racial microaggressions Latina/o undergraduates confront, outlining their effects, and highlighting ways they respond provides survivors of such hostile campus racial climates a vehicle to find their voice—a way to name their pain. They discover that they are not alone in their marginality. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments are framed, and learning to make the arguments themselves.

These students' experiences elucidate three types of racial microaggressions evident in social and academic spaces on college campuses: interpersonal microaggressions, racial jokes, and institutional microaggressions. Such racial affronts cause students immense stress, especially when they confront the microaggressor about the offensive actions or remarks. Battling racial microaggressions drains the energies and enthusiasm of Latina/o undergraduates, leaving them feeling like "outsiders" within their own universities.

Though certainly injured by racial microaggressions, Latinas/os do not consider themselves helpless victims. They respond to the *rejection* they face from a negative campus racial climate by *building communities* that represent and reflect the cultural wealth of their home communities. In academic and social counterspaces, Latinas/os foster skills of *critical navigation between multiple worlds* of home and school, academia, and community. These students' experiences remain underresearched and, indeed, unaccounted for in Tinto's (1993) model.

Further research is necessary to increase our understanding of racism's multilayered effects on Latina/o undergraduates; the limitations of this study can provide direction for such research. Our study focused on Latina/o students' experiences of racial climate at three doctoral/research extensive universities. Latina/o experiences at Hispanic-serving institutions (where the Latina/o student body comprises at least 25 percent), comprehensive liberal arts universities, and community colleges definitely merit attention as well. While racial microaggressions surfaced as the most pervasive form of racism confronting Latina/o students at these three elite colleges, our interview protocol did not include specific questions about microaggressions. Developing a racial microaggressions protocol would enable researchers to advance our understandings of: the persistent racial humor directed at Latinas/os; the experiences of undocumented Latina/o undergraduates confronting unique types of racial microaggressions; an explicit gender analysis to account for the distinct ways Latinas and Latinos experience and respond to racial microaggressions; the role of phenotype in the internalization of racial microaggressions (see Arce, Murgia, & Frisbie, 1987; Murgia & Telles, 1996; Padilla, 2001; Quintana, 1999; Telles & Murgia, 1990); and the longitudinal, environmental threat that cumulative racial microaggressions pose to the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of Students of Color (see Carroll, 1998; Pierce, 1969; Smith, 2004, 2009; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aron-

son, 1995). Furthermore, our study of Latina/o undergraduates may not have fully uncovered the types and effects of racial microaggressions for Latinas/os in higher education or all the ways Latinas/os respond to a negative campus racial climate. Focus groups with Latina/o faculty or graduate students, for example, may elicit additional insights about institutional microaggressions. Such critical race research can shed further light on experiences of racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith et al., 2006) and reveal how to better support People of Color who demonstrate “invulnerability” (Alva, 1991; Arellano & Padilla, 1996) in the face of societal and campus racism.

Pierce (1970) expressed hope that “every black child will recognize and defend promptly and adequately against every offensive micro-aggression. In this way, the toll that is registered after accumulation of such insults should be markedly reduced” (p. 280). As Chicana/o and African American educators, we share this hope and express it anew for Latina/o university students.

Notes

1. We capitalize *People of Color*, *Students of Color*, and *Faculty of Color* to position groups often referred to as minorities (e.g., African Americans, Latinas/os, Chicanas/os, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans) in a place of importance, where they do not exist merely in relation to the assumed White majority. As part of our work conceptualizing and articulating critical race theory as a framework that challenges dominant ideology in education, our capitalization of these terms calls into question those institutionalized practices that subtly minimize the role of race, refer to Women of Color and Men of Color diminutively, or repeat practices of marginalization.
2. We use the umbrella *Latina/o* to refer to women and men of Latin American origin or descent (e.g., Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Puerto Rican) residing in the United States, regardless of immigrant status. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that Latinas/os comprise 14 percent of the total population. When we use *Chicana/o*, we refer to women and men of Mexican origin or descent residing in the United States, regardless of immigration status. Chicanas/os account for at least 64 percent of the Latina/o population.
3. Symptoms associated with racial battle fatigue include: suppressed immunity and increased sickness, tension headaches, trembling and jumpiness, chronic pain in healed injuries, elevated blood pressure, constant anxiety, ulcers, increased swearing or complaining, insomnia or sleep broken by haunting conflict-specific dreams, rapid mood swings, difficulty thinking or speaking coherently, and emotional and social withdrawal. In anticipation of a racial conflict, reported symptoms include a pounding heartbeat, rapid breathing, an upset stomach, and frequent diarrhea or urination (see Smith, 2004; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith et al., 2006).
4. For further discussion of the Chicana/o, Latina/o consciousness that scholars brought to CRT, see Solórzano and Yosso (2001a) and the Latina and Latino Critical Theory, Inc. Web site. For an intellectual genealogy of CRT in education, see Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, and Lynn (2004).
5. For example, see Project 500 at the University of Illinois (Williamson, 1998, 1999). In 1968, the university admitted 565 African American and Latina/o students but did not carry out the initiative well, providing little attention to the new admits' course placements, financial aid packages, and housing assignments. On September 10, 1968, tensions escalated when a series of miscommunications led to a student protest against

- the administration at the Illini Union and police arrested more than 240 Black students. See also http://www.diverseeducation.com/artman/publish/article_11903.shtml (retrieved July 21, 2009).
6. The work of universities would bring about the improvement of social services (e.g., medical, judicial, educational) for Communities of Color and develop a strong pool of leaders and role models within Communities of Color (see Yosso et al., 2004).
 7. See <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications/> (retrieved June 1, 2009).
 8. The similarities in analyzing the content and effects of racial jokes as microaggressions and the form and impact of visual media microaggressions indicate that future research should address campus-community media, including university newspapers (Alemán, 2009), radio programs, and advertisements from the local, campus-area businesses.
 9. Some students also expressed frustration with the levels of ignorance about the diversity within Latina/o communities and the disregard for their distinct ethnic identity when people assumed they were Mexican.
 10. Thank you to David G. García for his insightful contributions to our conceptualization of racial jokes as microaggressions, especially in relation to how seemingly innocuous racist humor about Mexicans bears the weight of a legacy of racism endured by Mexican communities in media and society. See also García's (2006) comparison of the reactionary racial jokes of stand-up, Latino comedian Carlos Mencia to the critical race satire of the Chicano theater group Culture Clash (pp. 216–218).
 11. This is a pseudonym.
 12. Undergraduate students conducted and analyzed many of the interviews in this cross-campus research initiative at the University of Illinois called Ethnography of the University. The study began in 2002–2003 with a focus on six areas, including race and the university. Descriptions of the research methods explain, "Whether spoken of in the context of 'diversity' or 'multiculturalism,' race is at the heart of the American university—its history, its contemporary challenges, and its futures. This project examines ways in which the U.S. university and the American college experience are indelibly racialized" ("White Paper," <http://www.eotu.uiuc.edu/what/index.htm> [retrieved August 5, 2009]).
 13. In their review of the literature, Madonna Constantine, Leo Wilton, and Leon Caldwell (2003) found that Black and Latino students tend to avoid campus services in part because they have a cultural distrust of White professionals, a desire to maintain a strong level of commitment to their respective cultures, and cultural values that emphasize a preference for depending on family and friends for social and mental health support.
 14. Expanding on Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal's (2001) research defining forms of Chicana/o student resistance, Yosso (2000, 2002, 2006) identifies these strategies of "proving them wrong" as resilient resistance.

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