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Intersectionality's Revisiting The Latinx Identity Phenomenon At Hispanic-Serving Institutions

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Abstract

Hispanic-serving institutions educate students of color within racialized organizational and policy structures. This study looks at how diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plans at Hispanic-serving community colleges construct narratives of intersectional diversity and racialized Latinx identity (HSCCs). Using critical discourse analysis, critical race theory, and LatCrit, the analysis broadens DEI policy implementation at HSCCs. The findings demonstrate the interdependence of state-level policy, policy implementation guidance, and institutional-level discourse on intersectional diversity and demographic data. It also pays sufficient attention to the racial composition and HSI status of Latinx students. This study demonstrates how state-level diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies can either advance or eliminate Latinx intersectionality.

Keywords: Hispanic-serving institutions; Community colleges; Diversity; Equity; Inclusion

1. Introduction

Institutions of higher education in the United States have diverse racial demographics representing the multicultural nature of the country (Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2018). To achieve inclusive and equitable learning environments it is important to understand and promote racial diversity in higher education. To foster cross-cultural understanding, enhance educational experiences, and develop a diverse and tolerant education setting, educational institutions such as the rapidly increasing Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) have taken initiatives such as affirmative action and diversity programs (Casellas Connors, 2021). However, initiatives based on colour-neutrality are criticized by racialized organizational theorists who promote higher education institutions as racialized and contain individuals from different racial backgrounds (Ray, 2019). Critical Race Theory (CRT) also recognizes race as a socially constructed concept that is anchored in policies, and practices of institutions and which affect the education, educational opportunities, and outcomes of the marginalized (Wright et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to understand how institutional discourse, practices, and policies influence racial equity in higher education institutions.

2. Purpose and Objectives

Higher education in the United States places a high value on fostering an inclusive learning environment that values differences between students. The history of affirmative action, legal precedents, and the broader political landscape have all contributed to public higher education's unique approach to diversity. There are a few states where policies promoting DEI at the systemic or state level have been put in place to influence institutional behavior (Casellas Connors, 2021). Many states are considering DEI-report-requiring policies. State-level DEI policies and reports serve as platforms for institutional perspectives on diversity and racial equity. Examining institutional DEI plans in the context of state policy can clarify their meaning and advance racial equity (Ching et al., 2018). Because of the rise in Hispanic-serving

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institutions (HSIs), the discussion of racial equity fostered by DEI plans at the institution level is especially important. This work is a critical discourse analysis (CDA) based on the theoretical frames of critical race theory (CRT) and Latina & Latino Critical Legal Theory (LatCrit). It looks at how institutional discourse advances or pushes back against a complex framing of Latinx students. The focus is on the intersectional identities of Latinx students. This study examines HSCCs, expanding on earlier research on institution-level DEI plans (Iverson, 2005, 2007) and state DEI policy frameworks (Ching et al., 2018; Felix et al., 2018). This study illustrates how policymakers and HSI practitioners can use mandatory reporting to enhance racial equity through the implementation of DEI policies.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Racialized Organization Theory

Institutions of higher education are racialized sociopolitical groups. Research is now expanding beyond the conventionally race-neutral organizational language as a result of the junction of race and organization theory (Ray, 2019). Membership, classification, and a racially legal environment are shaped by state and federal legislation (such as DEI). Color-neutrality is criticized by racialized organizational theory in order to admit that all organizations are racialized and contain colored persons (Ray, 2019, p. 36). For centuries, higher education institutions (HEIs) have served as a primary source of knowledge that excludes communities of color and perpetuates racial hierarchies (Allen & Jewell, 2002). This study weaves through the literature of racialized organizations to investigate how institution-level DEI plans contribute to the construction and elimination of intersectional racial equity (Casellas Connors, 2021). This analysis employs the critical race theory framework.

3.2. Critical Race Theory (CRT)

In the view of critical race theorists, the United States' institutional systems are inherently racialized. CRT believes race is a social construct used to oppress and exploit minorities. Combining CRT and LatCrit can help determine state-level DEI policies and HSI DEI plans (Villalpando, 2003; Wright et al., 2018). CRLC focuses on how institutions construct diversity narratives and how this discourse addresses racial equity and intersectionality, especially for Latinx students. It builds on CRT's utility in understanding racial inequities in education. LatCrit focuses on Latinx histories of poverty, immigration, discrimination, and exclusion, drawing on legal scholars' criticisms that the legal landscape fails to advance racial and economic liberation (Bernal, 2002; Espinoza & Harris, 1998). LatCrit highlights the Latinx community's racial and racist diversity (Nunez, 1999). CRT and LatCrit focus on Latinx identities and experiences to address inequities created by HEI legal and policy structures (Bernal, 2002).

4. Methods

The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA supports (re)telling stories by analyzing the text, its discursive practices, and its social context (Huckin, 1997, p. 87). CDA also explained power imbalance through murky or concealed discourse of racialized institutional operations (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

4.1. Data Sources

Consistent with Casellas Connors (2021), the primary data source for this study was an institution's DEI plan and/or report. The researcher also gathered two extra pieces of information in addition to the reports provided by the institutions. Each institution's website was searched for diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI). Second, initial coding revealed preliminary themes.

5. Results

State-level DEI policies include intersectional diversity, especially Latinx students, in HSI DEI plans. This analysis highlights three themes. In the absence of state-level discourse, institutions rarely engage with the HSI designation. These three themes inform an intersectional framework for diversity and how institution-level DEI plans generate a discourse of intersectionality among Latinx students (Casellas Connors, 2021). State guidelines define DEI diversity and demographic data. While a tacit acknowledgment of race and gender impacts is made (CCCS, 2017), the complexities of the Latinx community go largely unaddressed, especially the intersection of race and ethnicity, despite national data showing a growing number of Afro-Latinx (Tamir, 2021). DEI plans address inequity. Institutional DEI programs are informed by state-level DEI policies and implementation guidance. State policies require programs to address inequities, but institutions decide how to prioritize Latinx students and an intersectional framework. The state's broad call for programming results in institution-level DEI plans with Latinx-focused, intersectional programming. Programs

recognize Latinx students' complexity. Inequity is addressed in state-level implementation guidance. Institutional discourse doesn't center or consider Latinx students (Casellas Connors, 2021). Funding may be an entry point, but it can also help Latinx students. The shift's extent has been criticized (Vargas, 2018; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2018). Institution-level plans consider how HSI staff or coordinators are central to their DEI plans beyond funding. /Funding may be a starting point, but it also helps Latinx students. The change's magnitude has been criticized (Vargas, 2018; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2018). Institution-level plans consider funding and how HSI efforts are integrated throughout the institution, with HSI staff or coordinators playing a key role. Despite their importance in educating minority students, state policies such as DEI heavily influence HSIs (Garcia et al., 2019). DEI plans are critical to understanding how to move past the commodification of Latinx enrollment and galvanize racially equitable institutional change. These data show how institutional DEI plans, influenced by state-level policies, respond to or ignore the needs of Latinx students. This analysis also takes into account Latinx students' complicated ethnoracial classification and HEIs' desire to essentialize this identity in order to promote both non-Whiteness and proximity to Whiteness.

6. Conclusion

This research analyzes DEI discourse at HSIs by focusing on Latinx student education. Politics shape HSI discourse and rhetoric. The HSI designation promotes equity for Latinx students, but little attention is paid to what that means (Garcia, 2016; Valdez, 2015). Latino students are not prioritized for federal funding, demonstrating race neutrality (Vargas, 2018; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2018). In public higher education contexts, state-level DEI policies distances themselves from racial equity (Harris et al., 2015; Jayakumar et al., 2018). Institutional plans referenced serving "all" students, citing Eric Felix et al (2018). State-level DEI policy discourse legitimized institution-level Latinx student plans.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author working alone contributed to the writing of this manuscript and there no conflict of interest as agreed to the content of this research.

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