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Faculty of Color Exposing and Reforming Structures of Whiteness in Leadership

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We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Abstract

Faculty of color (FOC) lead much of the diversity, equity, and inclusion work that supports racially- and economically-minoritized students and improves the campus climate. In this way, FOC help institutions develop a stronger organizational identity around *servingness* - a shift from enrolling to serving the needs of minoritized students holistically (Garcia, 2017). Such work is critical. As campuses serve increasingly diverse student populations, like Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), the underlying structures of these institutions remain rooted in Whiteness. Research examining the experiences of FOC in leadership in HSI settings is limited (Ledesma & Burciago, 2015). The current research examines how FOC experience Whiteness in structures of leadership in an HSI context, and how their own leadership efforts reform such structures. Guided by perspectives in Critical Race Theory and Critical White Studies, the research team analyzed semi-structured interviews with 16 FOC using both inductive and deductive methods. Results revealed how Whiteness was reflected in the structural diversity of leadership; in the devaluation of leadership efforts of FOC; and in undemocratic approaches to decision-making. FOC reformed such structures by focusing their leadership efforts on the needs, voices, and lived experiences of people of color at the university; pushing forward collective, grassroots activities; and centering their approaches in collaboration. The collective voices of FOC call for an urgent need for transformational changes to structures of leadership in an HSI context toward the goal of building a more racially-just, equitable institution.

Keywords: faculty of color, university leadership, Hispanic Serving Institution, critical race perspectives, structures of Whiteness

Faculty of Color Exposing and Reforming Structures of Whiteness in Leadership

Students of color (SOC) account for 45% of student enrollment in postsecondary institutions nationwide, while faculty of color (FOC) only account for 24% of faculty demographics (Davis & Fry, 2019; Martinez & Welton, 2017). This disparity is greater at institutions serving larger numbers of SOC, such as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), where at least 25% of the student population is Latinx (Laden, 2004). Even in disproportionate numbers, FOC lead much of the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work that supports SOC and improves the campus climate (Baez, 2000; Brown-Glaude, 2009; Diggs et al., 2009; Duncan, 2014; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012). That is, FOC help institutions develop a stronger organizational identity around *servingness* - a shift from simply enrolling minoritized students to serving their needs holistically (Garcia, 2017; Garcia et al., 2019).

Such work is critical. As HSIs and similar types of campuses serve increasingly diverse student populations, the underlying structures of these institutions remain rooted in Whiteness (Brunsma et al., 2013; Cabrera et al., 2017; Davidson, 2017; Ledesma & Burciago, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). This is reflected in leadership. Extensive research documents how FOC navigate racialized barriers (e.g., invisible labor, lack of leadership mentorship) in university leadership (e.g., Baez, 2000; Brown-Glaude, 2009; Duncan, 2014; Freeman Jr et al., 2019; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Montgomery, 2020; Settles et al., 2020). Most of this work focuses on the experiences of FOC at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). We know less about how FOC navigate structures of Whiteness in HSIs, where there exists a public mission to DEI in the name of educational equity for minoritized groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The current research examines how FOC experience Whiteness in structures of leadership in an HSI context, and how their own leadership perspectives and efforts reform such

structures. We draw from perspectives in Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995; Delgado et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patton, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and Critical White Studies (Dubois, 1903; Foste & Irwin, 2020; Owen, 2007; Patton & Haynes, 2020) to engage this work and to center the lived experiences of FOC.

Theoretical Frameworks: Critical Race Theory & Critical Whiteness Studies

Critical Race Theory (CRT) acknowledges how minoritized identities intersect to inform experiences with racism and other forms of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; see also CRT in psychological science, Adams & Salter, 2011; Salter & Adams, 2013). In extending CRT to educational settings, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued for the importance of understanding the historical context of education and its relation to race and of highlighting problems of racism in educational structures. Patton (2016) furthered this argument by bringing attention to how policies and practices rooted in racism and White supremacy perpetuate inequity in higher education settings (see also Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). For example, FOC confront inequities across a variety of structures: racist course evaluations (Han & Leonard, 2017), lower-than-average salaries than White faculty (Renzulli et al., 2006; Toutkoushian, 1998), limited representation in leadership (Han, 2018; Teraniishi, 2010; Yan & Museus, 2013), and hypervisibility as diversity tokens (Buchanan & Settles, 2019; Settles et al., 2019).

These inequities stem from a structure of Whiteness that illuminates a hierarchical ordering of group values, practices, and ways of being. Critical White Studies (CWS) names Whiteness as a *system* of dominance, one that upholds routine practices of Whiteness while marginalizing the lived experiences and knowledges of People of Color (POC) (Foste & Irwin, 2020; Swan, 2017). For example, White normativity assumes Whiteness as norm and

mainstream and, as such, as in a “location of economic, political, social, and cultural advantage” (Owen, 2007, p. 206). Ways of knowing that deviate from these norms, such as those of POC, are considered illegitimate. The exception is when the norms and values of POC align with the interest and values of Whiteness (see interest convergence, Bell, 1980).

One way Whiteness is reinforced in the academy is through epistemic exclusion - systemic devaluation of the scholarship of FOC (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Foste & Irwin, 2020; Kubota, 2019; Pérez-Huber, 2009; Settles et al., 2020). For example, drawing from interviews with 118 FOC at a research-intensive (R1) PWI, Settles et al. (2020) documented how FOC experienced both formal (e.g., negative evaluations about the quality of their scholarship) and informal (e.g., lack of recognition for their achievements) forms of epistemic exclusion. CWS ties this type of exclusion to a process of epistemic ignorance, or a “collective forgetting of the brilliance, beauty, and contributions” of POC (Foste & Irwin, 2020, p., 446). Scholars argue that Whiteness operates through ignorance, a systemic and acceptable form of forgetting or refusing to acknowledge how systems of domination actively exploit those at the margins (McLaren, 2007; Swam, 2017)

Leveraging both CRT and CWS allows us to better understand how FOC experience epistemic ignorance - a collective forgetting - in leadership. That is, in which ways do structures of leadership invalidate and ignore the contributions of FOC? Indeed, a critical approach to an investigation of Whiteness requires an understanding of how such power structures are “exposed, challenged, and re-formed” (Owen, 2007; p. 218). A CRT perspective that centers the voices and experiences of FOC, including how they push back against oppressive structures, is critical for this work. Without a commitment to honoring the expertise of FOC, an analysis of Whiteness

can re-center dominant perspectives. There is a dearth of research examining structures of Whiteness within leadership in HSI contexts, but this has been done in PWI contexts.

Racialized Experiences of FOC in University Leadership

FOC encounter several barriers when navigating a university space not designed for them (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Duncan, 2014; Griffin; 2013; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012). Research documents issues with structural diversity - the numerical representation of minoritized people (Gurin et al., 2002) - within university leadership. FOC are underrepresented in leadership roles such as presidents, provosts, and deans (Freeman Jr. et al., 2019). A national survey of postsecondary institutions illustrated that of the 18,000 faculty who responded only 12.8% of FOC served as academic leaders (e.g., president or provost) even though they make up 24% of total faculty (Davis & Fry, 2019). This is compared to 87.2% of White faculty (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2011). In R1 universities, the number of FOC who serve in formal leadership is about half this number (Freeman Jr. et al., 2019).

FOC who do obtain such positions negotiate organizational structures and decision-making processes that reflect a top-down approach. This is an approach where leadership is power-centered (i.e., power is held in a few top positions) and hierarchal (i.e., those at the top have higher authority and status) (see Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Garcia, 2018; Kezar, 2011; 2012). Although shared governance assumes collaboration between administrators and faculty for advancing the goals of the university (Jones, 2011), common structures of governance reflect decision-making practices of those in power -typically White leaders (Garcia, 2018; Greene & Oesterreich, 2012; Ledesma & Burciago, 2015).

Leadership practices that deviate from these current structures are often overlooked, dismissed, or mischaracterized - a form of epistemic ignorance (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando,

2002; Freeman Jr. et al., 2019). For example, many FOC report satisfaction in leadership activities that focus on social justice and on the collective well-being of POC in the institution (Baez, 2000; Casado Pérez et al, 2021; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Duncan, 2014; Fryberg & Martinez, 2014; Griffin, 2013; Griffin et al., 2015; Kezar, 2000; Kezar et al., 2011; Meyerson, 2003). Such efforts might not be regarded as legitimate leadership but instead as political activism (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). But for FOC, these efforts constitute grassroots leadership, where political, bottom-up efforts (e.g., leading a bilingual education initiative) are linked to advancing the needs of POC in education (e.g., increasing graduation rates) (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002).

There are several consequences to epistemic ignorance. First, it renders invisible the labor and contributions of FOC, who take on an uneven burden of DEI work that sustains the university (see identity taxation, Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; see also cultural taxation, Padilla, 1997). Even if these efforts are not formally recognized, FOC are still expected to engage in heavy service, teaching, and mentoring (Ards & Woodward 1997; Baez, 2000; Guillaume, 2020). This is particularly the case at HSIs serving higher numbers of minoritized students who disproportionately seek guidance from FOC (Laden, 2001; Ledesma & Burciago, 2015).

Second, when the work is recognized, it is not as highly valued as other university activities, such as individual research productivity (Antonio, 2000; Baez, 2000; Casado Pérez et al., 2021; Fries-Britt et al., 2011; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Settles et al., 2020; Stanley, 2006). Indeed, in a survey from 55 institutions across the U.S. and Canada (Niles et al., 2020), 338 faculty respondents viewed the amount of research publications as a top evaluation criterion for tenure and promotion. The overemphasis on individual outputs over collective campus engagement activities, such as grassroots leadership, is at odds with building a

racially-just institution (Garcia, 2018; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). This is especially problematic when claiming an identity as a Hispanic *Serving* Institution, where servingness necessarily involves equity and community-engaged work (Bensimon, 2012).

Third, and related to this last point, dismissing grassroots efforts thwarts transformative institutional change. Grassroots leadership has the capacity to shift institution culture (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Ek et al., 2010). Yet, when such efforts are co-opted by structures of Whiteness, daily features of institutional culture remain unchanged (Owen, 2007). Semi-structured interviews with a group of women faculty at a community college revealed the consequences of converging their grassroots goals of diversifying the college with a DEI committee started by the administration (Kezar, 2011). Though the group pushed for more diversity in hiring, they noticed that the hires were more conservative in their thoughts. They also noticed insufficient support for goals beyond hiring practices. The faculty felt their DEI agenda had been "watered down" and lamented trusting administrators.

Other examples of how DEI-related leadership is co-opted by structures of Whiteness have been documented at R1 institutions (Kelly et al., 2017). In focus groups, Black faculty acknowledged how their university hired more Black faculty due to public demands from institutional members. Yet, once hired, they noted little efforts to change the hostile and racist climate for new faculty. Both examples reflect processes of interest convergence, where marginalized people achieve advancement toward equity only when it aligns with interests of Whiteness and dominance (Bell, 1980). Hiring diverse faculty allows universities to claim a commitment to DEI. However, such efforts are often insufficient or shallow attempts at institutional change as they leave problematic internal structures intact (Ahmed, 2012; Byrd, 2021; Williams & Clowney, 2007).

The Current Study

The current study examines some of these tensions in a four-year, public research-intensive (R1) HSI. Research examining the experiences of FOC in leadership in this context is limited (Kezar & Lester, 2011; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). Some work investigates general experiences, attitudes, and work satisfaction of faculty in HSIs (B.A.L, 2007; Hubbard & Stage, 2009; Venegas et al., 2021) but not within leadership. Other work highlights the grassroots efforts of FOC at an HSI to counter experiences of racism and sexism (Ek et al., 2010).

And still, other scholars put forth rich theoretical discussion of the importance of FOC representation in university governance in HSI settings (Laden, 2001; Garcia, 2018; Ledesma & Burciago, 2015; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). For example, Ledesma and Burciago (2015) adopt a CRT lens to examine the unique features of HSI settings that shape the experiences and involvement of FOC in leadership, especially as they work to serve minoritized students. This theoretical work notes that scholarship and empirical investigation on issues related to faculty governance and leadership in HSIs - especially with a focus on FOC - is sparse.
Thus, the current study contributes to existing literature by empirically investigating the leadership experiences of FOC in an HSI R1 setting. This context is critical as FOC navigate unique priorities, such as balancing leadership efforts in the name of servingness with pressures of meeting standards for research productivity.

We pursued two research objectives. First, we examined how FOC experience Whiteness in structures of leadership in an HSI context. Second, we document how their own leadership perspectives and efforts reform such structures. We explored these questions using data from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 16 FOC. The sample represented FOC across academic positions (i.e., early-, mid-, and later-career) and divisions (i.e., Engineering, Humanities,

Physical and Biological Sciences, and Social Sciences) providing an opportunity to capture diverse perspectives and experiences within the university.

Method

University Setting

Participants included FOC at a four-year public R1 university on the west coast serving approximately 19,494 undergraduate and graduate students. The institution received designation as an HSI in 2012, when they began enrolling at least 25% Latinx undergraduates. The institution is one of only 22 HSIs in the nation to also be a R1 doctorate-granting university. This setting provides a unique opportunity to study beliefs about leadership where there is a high expectation for research productivity.

The campus has a diverse student population; yet, since receiving HSI designation the number of Latinx students has slowly declined. In Fall 2019, the year of the study, the racial/ethnic breakdown of undergraduates included: 32% White, 26% Asian, 24% Latinx, 11% International, 4% Black, 2% Unknown, and 1% Native. The racial/ethnic breakdown of faculty does not reflect a similar pattern of diversity, with the majority being White (67%), followed by 14% Asian and/or Pacific Islander, 9% Latinx, 6% Other or Unknown, 3% Black, and 1% Native. The gender breakdown included 55% men and 45% women.

Research Team and Positionality

The lead principal investigator (PI) identifies as a Mexican American female faculty member from a low-income, first-generation background. Before earning tenure, the PI engaged in heavy leadership – both formally and informally – at the institution and became interested in understanding how other FOC on campus navigate similar roles at the university. The project

gave her an opportunity to understand her own experiences and the experiences of other FOC on campus, and to build better connections with other FOC, especially as an early-career scholar.

The lead graduate student researcher (GSR) on the project identifies as a Salvadoran American female also from a low-income, first-generation background. The GSR has research interests in the diversity-related work of FOC, particularly as it helps to support the retention of SOC. These research interests coupled with her own experiences connecting with faculty mentors were assets to the project.

There were two co-PIs (white non-binary, Latino man) from different departments who consulted on the project. Both co-PIs have 35 combined years of institutional experience and have engaged in extensive leadership roles and initiatives at the university. This institutional history provided a wealth of knowledge to the project.

Participants

We recruited participants in two ways during Fall 2019 and interviewed them in Winter and Spring 2020. The first recruitment procedure included an email invitation to four existing racial/ethnic affinity groups for faculty (i.e., Asian, Black, Latinx, Native). Funded through a university presidential grant, faculty interested in FOC retention established the groups. Funded by the same office, the current study is a continued effort to understand retention of FOC with a focus on leadership. The email invitation included a survey link to determine study eligibility (e.g., identify as FOC, be ladder-rank tenure-track faculty). We recruited ten participants using this method. The second recruitment approach included a snowballing method, where Co-PIs and participants offered names of FOC. We recruited six participants using this method.

The final sample included 16 FOC. We use broad descriptive categories and report social identity information separately to protect the identities of participants. Nine faculty were Latinx,

three were Asian, two were multi-racial, one was Black, and one was Indigenous. The majority of the sample (n=10) identified as female, with five identifying as male and one as non-conforming. Participants represented four of the five academic divisions at the university, including Social Sciences (n=6), Humanities (n=5), Physical and Biological Sciences (n=4), and Engineering (n=1); there were no faculty from the Arts. The sample was also diverse in terms of academic positions, with 8 full professors, 4 associate professors, and 4 assistant professors. The length of time they were at the university ranged from 1.5 years to 30 years (*Mean* = 14.5 years).

Procedure

Participants participated in 60-90-minute semi-structured interviews focused on their experiences with formal leadership, including the challenges and opportunities they experienced in these roles. To develop the protocol, the PI drew from past scholarship on leadership of FOC and her own experiences as FOC. The GSR refined the protocol based on her own observations from the literature. The Co-PIs reviewed the draft for length of protocol, framing, and clarity of questions. Once revisions were made, the protocol was then shared with a leader (woman of color) of one of the FOC affinity groups for feedback. As the affinity groups had ongoing conversations around issues of leadership on campus, this lead faculty member was critical in further narrowing and refining the protocol. Finally, the protocol was piloted with a FOC (Latino man) who helped the research team understand the clarity of questions and what aspects were missing. After a final round of adjustment, the PI conducted the rest of the interviews.

The PI conducted semi-structured interviews to allow for consistency in topics but also freedom to modify questions and delve deeper into certain themes (Josselson, 2004). When interacting with participants, the PI openly expressed her identities and the goals for the work. The PI reached saturation – the point during data collection when no new information emerged –

within the first six interviews (Hennik et al., 2017). Yet, the PI continued to host interviews to both provide an opportunity for FOC to share their experiences and to obtain a more diverse sample of participants. All interviews were audio-recorded, and the audio files were submitted to an online service for transcription, TEMI. The GSR checked the transcriptions for accuracy. The university's Institutional Review Board approved all procedures and materials.

Coding Procedure

The PI and GSR utilized both inductive (i.e., codes constructed from the data) and deductive (i.e., codes informed by literature) methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allowed us to co-create the codebook based on overlap in our own observations and guidance from the literature. To begin, we familiarized ourselves with the data in two ways. First, we discussed and noted initial impressions in an ongoing manner while conducting interviews and listening to audio files during transcribing and cleaning. Second, we built on these notes by reading two transcripts, again noting initial impressions. Our next step was to discuss these impressions and begin developing codes. We coded both with and without the research questions in mind (Merriam, 1998). We noted all codes on a shared, password-protected Excel file.

In weekly meetings over the span of four months, we continued to read and discuss transcripts, including reviewing discrepancies and coming to convergence to finalize codes. During these discussions, we also combined and organized codes into larger categories to help summarize the data and to reduce redundancies. We then organized the categories into themes reflecting concepts in the literature. For example, CWS and CRT frameworks and published work in HSI settings helped us to construct how structures of Whiteness were reflected in three distinction ways. This included the structural diversity of leadership, in practices of White normativity that undervalue the contributions of FOC in leadership, and in top-down approaches

that undermine shared governance. We repeated this process of coding until all interviews were coded and all discrepancies discussed, and until we felt all themes represented the data well.

Trustworthiness

To enhance trustworthiness and ensure credibility of the analyses, we engaged in synthesized member checking where we shared synthesized versions of analyzed data (see Brit et al., 2016). To begin, we sent a single-item confidential survey to all participants offering different ways to engage in discussion of the findings. Fifteen of the 16 FOC expressed interest in reading either the full draft of the paper or a condensed 3-page summary of the research, depending on their availability. One FOC was on sabbatical, which might explain the lack of response. We then shared the full paper and brief summary with participants and invited the opportunity to anonymously comment and reflect on either document or both.

Our goal in using two types of documents was to increase accessibility for participants. Adopting a constructivist perspective, our goal was to explore whether the themes resonated with the experiences of FOC participants or left out important perspectives. While there were no suggestions for adding new data, we did integrate suggestions on clarifying terminology and on strengthening our discussion of implications from the research. Overwhelmingly, FOC expressed gratitude for the work and for bringing visibility to a collective voice and shared struggle.

Results

Responding to our first question, we first present three themes that reflect the ways in which structures of Whiteness are reflected in university leadership (i.e., structural diversity, devaluation of FOC leadership, top-down approaches). We then present three themes reflecting how FOC reform structures of Whiteness in their own leadership (i.e., centering the needs and goals of POC in leadership, grassroots leadership, collaborative approaches).

Structures of Whiteness in University Leadership

Whiteness is reflected in the structural diversity of leadership and preferences for leadership characteristics

Part of the structuring nature of Whiteness is its taken-for-granted feature in mainstream spaces. For example, FOC gave examples of campus leadership reflecting Whiteness both in structural diversity and in preferences for what is considered a "good" leader. And yet, such leadership does not reflect the cultural diversity of the student population. Full professor Dr. A shared their[1] observation that the "department has always been administered by White women or White men." Dr. I, another full professor, shared this sentiment noting, "the people who [have been] elevated have been White men…. So, even when there are openings to appoint… a higher administrative leadership position to faculty of color… we're not given those opportunities." Associate professor Dr. D echoed this idea: "This university is a place in which the appointed positions are often White men. They could be White women as well. I mean, look at our current leadership right now."

FOC also described how Whiteness permeated even decisions about why and which FOC are selected into leadership positions. Dr. D described the characteristics in leadership style that determine who is selected for positions. They stated, "When there is an administrator of color, that person often is not just tokenistic but explicitly chosen for their supposed apolitical, neutral stance." The idea of being apolitical or objectively neutral reflects longstanding preferences for objectivity in academia (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). Indeed, Dr. D connected the problem with apolitical tokenized leaders to the concept of "Black misleadership" (Russiagate & Black Misleadership, 2018). They described this as:

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[1] We use "they" and "their" pronouns for all FOC to further protect their identities.

> [S]ort of tokenized figure heads who appear to represent demographics that are historically not represented within the political process, yet in their policies, [they] adhere to something that reproduces, oftentimes, systems of domination.

Dr. D suggested that to access upper-level leadership positions, FOC are, at times, expected to assimilate into existing practices and shy away from transformative change.

Instead, FOC must learn to play the political game to be successful in university leadership and, ironically, part of that game is to learn to be apolitical or neutral. Dr. K, a full professor, observed how they could be an effective leader when they "navigated within the rules of the game and the status quo." However, they also remarked on how their effectiveness was limited "as soon as [they] tried to be disruptive." For associate professor Dr. P, this gatekeeping of leadership – deciding who gets access to positions of leadership at the university – happens among peers and more senior colleagues who hold positions of power. Yet, the gatekeeping still reflected a preference for particular types of leadership. Dr. P described that their peers and senior faculty "underestimate the capacity of people who don't display the traditional bearing of a leader." Because they grounded their own approach in "subverting the norms of the institution", Dr. P was not often taken seriously as a leader.

The lack of FOC in leadership roles or the prioritization of particular types of leaders - especially those who help to maintain existing structures of Whiteness - can "appear both normal and natural to people" in the space (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). As full professor Dr. J noted that one "can go into these rooms where there are 30 chairs and three of them are people of color and it's okay. It's not an outrage." The structure of Whiteness persists when little is done to disrupt it (Owen, 2007, p. 209).

Whiteness in leadership devalues the efforts of FOC, unless such efforts align with university interests

White normativity details how Whiteness is naturalized, including that any deviations from Whiteness are rendered as illegitimate or deficient (Foste & Irwin, 2020). FOC shared the ways in which their efforts in leadership were invalidated. Associate professor Dr. H shared how their leadership did not fit “easy, readable” definitions of review criteria, like serving on a committee. Part of Whiteness for Dr. H included narrow definitions of what constituted leadership, and that building positive relationships with underserved communities did not fit these definitions. They shared,

> [E]stablishing a positive relationship with… communities takes time and a lot of effort and isn't seen as something that is of direct service to the campus. [S]ome campuses… recognize that it is important campus leadership because they've set aside staff positions for it. But, in some cases, like ours … we don't have those types of resources….

Narrow university metrics also challenged Dr. D, who shared that their leadership efforts were disregarded by their department. During their tenure review, they struggled to have others recognize that the leadership they provided student organizers fit tenure criteria for service. Dr. D explained that their department viewed their leadership with students as “rabble rousing with undergrads” and “not legible [be]cause it's not academic service.” A consequence of this was that although they already participated in heavy service work with students, “my department was asking me to do [more] service”. This reflects one way in which critical efforts of FOC that contribute to the mission of serving students become mislabeled and rendered invisible, and how such mislabeling has consequences including creating disproportionate workloads for FOC (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Padilla, 1994). Indeed, as a result of a lack of support for their

leadership efforts, they had a “difficult time getting tenure.” Diversity- or justice-related efforts that sustain the university are often viewed as secondary and offer little advancement towards tenure (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). Such institutionalized structures reflect a form of acceptable epistemic ignorance, a refusal to acknowledge and reward how the DEI contributions of FOC sustain the university.

Associate professor Dr. E shared their own experiences of such devaluation and the burden of having to advocate for resources and recognition of their work. Dr. E creatively combined leadership and service with research as a director of a POC-focused center, yet strict criteria in personnel reviews made it difficult for such work to be recognized as legitimate (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Duncan, 2014). They shared, “I had to make the case that my work as the director is both service and research.” Part of the difficulty, they explained, was that there “is a lack of recognition not only for these different kinds of leadership, but for different kinds of knowledge, different kinds of methods, different kinds of research.” For Dr. E, this lack of recognition demonstrated a particular kind of hypocrisy, given that the campus was in the midst of “receiving the federal designation as an HSI". They went on to offer other instances where their *servingness* was not as highly valued. They shared their contributions in dealing with “students’ stress, regarding like housing, the stress regarding immigration matters.” Despite providing much needed support to the campus, Dr. E expressed that their efforts went undervalued when considering research productivity as the golden metric.

Dr. E exposed the ways in which FOC felt pressure to meet expectations that aligned with university goals and interests, including focusing on research productivity above service, leadership, and mentoring (Stanley, 2006; Trejo, 2020). Stemming from notions of Whiteness in the academy, the focus on individual research productivity can reflect capitalistic goals (e.g.,

producing commodities for consumption, Patton, 2016). As an R1 university, Dr. E observed that among the three evaluation criteria (e.g., research, teaching, service) for personnel reviews "service is the least valued of those three."

This prioritization of research productivity meant, for some FOC, that they should establish a research career before engaging in leadership (see Kezar et al., 2007). Assistant professor Dr. M shared, "I think in order to take on leadership roles, you have to succeed as a young faculty member. And if you're not able to succeed and meet those milestones, then you just won't have that path available to you." Assistant professor Dr. N noted a similar tension when they shared that while they wanted to engage in leadership, they also did not "want to be in a situation where [it] can hurt your career". They described that the constant advice they received from others was to "get tenure first" since engaging in leadership and service would "work against you". Even though playing by the rules of the game and meeting standards of productivity proved a useful strategy for some FOC, one FOC highlighted why this still created tension. Dr. F shared, "[T]hey want this book or they want two articles or they want whatever. And so that becomes your main goal and, you know, that's not when we do our best teaching. That's not when we create communities." Dr. F called attention to what is lost - the contributions of FOC - when you have narrow ideas of what is legitimate (Foste & Irwin, 2020).

For FOC who did choose to focus on leadership, they encountered other existing tensions between their goals and the interests of the university. Dr. B, a full professor, engaged in a project with another FOC exploring the institutional climate for FOC, with the goal of increasing their retention. They took on the project under the belief from "higher administration" that if they produced a report "things would change for faculty and staff." In an attempt to support an

important diversity-related issue on campus, they instead experienced a questioning of their expertise and knowledge and a “resistance to change”.

Highlighting an example of interest convergence, Dr. B also noted an institutional trend to publicly commit to diversity initiatives, but only provide support for faculty projects that align with university goals. Dr. B explained that the goal was not to change the system, but instead the university looked to “pacify them with a climate [project]”. Even if leadership efforts of FOC furthered the mission of servingness on campus, such roles were secondary to interests of research productivity or DEI work that fit specific goals. Such structures of Whiteness left many FOC disillusioned with systems of leadership (see Freeman et al., 2019; Ledesma & Burciago, 2015). Indeed, when asked about the outcomes of the climate survey project, Dr. B shared, “I don’t know because I have not wanted to serve on that committee [again].”

Whiteness is reflected in undemocratic processes that undermine shared governance

Structures of Whiteness are maintained through persisting policies and practices (Owen, 2007; Patton, 2016). FOC observed that campus leadership functioned in a top-down, undemocratic manner, including making decisions without engaging the community and without appropriate checks and balances. Dr. B noted a trend in which campus leaders sent the message that, “I'm in charge and I don't have to tell you anything.” She further added that “it's alienating and it's telling people that…you conform or else.” Dr. G described “bureaucratic administrative positions” as reflecting “top-down management”. They questioned the interest of the leaders noting, “Are they being advocates for members of their community or are they trying to preserve their positions or maintain the status quo?”

Along this line, Dr. I wondered how campus leadership could be “more democratic” and “more transparent”. For them, the top-down approach was less about involving more community

members, like students, as part of the decision-making process, and more about “protecting the system”. For Dr. F, this approach lacked empathy. Indeed, when describing how the administration responded to the graduate student teaching strike, Dr. F shared, “There is just no empathy…. I mean these are our students.”

Some responses from FOC highlighted the complexity of this issue by balancing multiple perspectives. Some FOC acknowledged the competing demands of campus leadership. Full professor Dr. O, for example, noted that while “higher up administration” seemed more “concerned with power” they might also be “more constrained by the budget”. Dr. O knew people in leadership positions who valued equity and diversity but were “not able to act on [these values] because… they have to play [the] game”. Dr. O recognized the politics involved in those roles. Similarly, Dr. L noted how some campus crises, like a graduate student teaching strike, are difficult to deal with, even if they disagreed with the decisions that were made by administration. Dr. B also noted that such leaders “probably are dealing with a hell of a lot of things behind closed doors.”

Still, Dr. B and others argued that the lack of transparency in the communication from campus administrators, including the limitations they confronted, left faculty to draw their own conclusions. Dr. E felt that being “all about authority” and “oblivious to accountability” stifled the ability to cultivate a culture where “leaders assure…and not exacerbate the matters” for faculty. Instead, this approach cultivated a lack of confidence in leadership being able to “overcome certain problems.” Dr. L expanded this further and acknowledged that even when the administration sought feedback from the Academic Senate in an attempt to make a decision, this feedback was often ignored. Sometimes feedback seeking did not happen: “I have to admit that there were times when they didn't consult with [the Academic Senate] at all.”

Reforming Structures of Whiteness: Centering the Efforts of FOC

FOC leadership efforts center the voices, needs, and lived experiences of those on the margin

Just as structures of Whiteness normalize and legitimize ideologies, values, and practices of those in power, a reforming of such structures centers the efforts of POC. This was evident in the leadership efforts and perspectives of FOC. FOC centered the voices, needs, and lived experiences of those on the margin. Such centering is critical in an HSI context.

For example, FOC viewed leadership as fostering equity and removing barriers for minoritized groups, including colleagues, staff, and students. Dr. J, in reflecting on their own thoughts about leadership, noted being drawn to leadership roles where they can support minoritized students and described that FOC are often "seen as leaders… kind of agents for [SOC]." Dr. P felt similarly. For them, the aim of leadership was to figure out "how to make [academia] more inclusive and more accessible… and to work with students and help them figure out what their path is." As part of supporting students and other minoritized people on campus, Dr. O described leadership as "wanting to pave the way for it to be easier for… people of color coming behind you." Consistent with CRT, these FOC importantly linked leadership to social justice that centered POC (Bell, 1980; 1995; Delgado et al., 2017).

This was true for Dr. O, who wanted their "field to be more inclusive and diverse… to be welcoming and… to be in a room full of people that look different." Dr. O described their field as being "incredibly behind the curve in inclusion and equity and diversity". This experience compelled Dr. O to "put some energy" into building a field they wanted to see without "watering down the goals and the vision." They dedicated time to obtaining grant funding to launch and direct robust equity-grounded programs for diverse student scholars and to strategically hire

diverse staff and graduate students to help lead the programs. Dr. O leveraged their strengths to lead an effort that changed the structural diversity of their field.

FOC reported that they often leveraged their own experiences in education to guide their equity efforts. Assistant professor Dr. C offered another example of how their own experience – as an undergraduate of color attending a private PWI – influenced their leadership as faculty. Dr. C remembered feeling disconnected from a White female professor after seeking her support regarding persisting racial microaggressions from classmates. As she was unable to help Dr. C, they now leveraged this experience to guide their own leadership with students, asking: "What would I have really needed when I was an undergrad?" Dr. C recognized how many minoritized students have less access to educational opportunities, noting "…it's still not easy to get [to this university] if you started with what you've been given at the ground level with our public schools." In their reflection, Dr. C shared that leadership means finding ways to promote equity, including understanding the struggles SOC face and offering support for those struggles.

FOC leadership efforts engage grassroots processes

FOC advocated for leadership that was about on-the-ground efforts rather than promoting self-interest (e.g., research productivity). This type of grassroots leadership was driven by dedicated people on the ground with a strong commitment to a cause. Dr. O, for example, noted that what made their leadership endeavors successful was "a core group of people who were prepared to do it all themselves…." Dr. D added that good leadership "has to be driven by a lot of hard on-the-ground work." Dr. D believed that, "if there isn't an openness to community work, we have no mandate".

Full professor Dr. L described what it took to be open to the community, "I mean, you really have to put aside … your own needs… a lot of times even your own opinions." Grassroots

leadership contrasted the pressure to focus on one's career to be productive and instead focused on the needs of others to make change possible. In describing their own leadership efforts in supporting graduate students, Dr. F shared, "I understand… what their needs are. I guess what I'm saying is you've built the constituency for your work, from the ground up, you see who those people are and then you're able to be a leader in relationship to that." This was also evident for Dr. H, who shared, "What it means to be a…. leader within the context of the academy is to be of service to [minoritized] people… with buy-in from our communities." For these FOC, ensuring that leadership is first practiced at the ground level creates community-based goals that humanizes and prioritizes community needs and voices.

Dr. B felt similarly that leadership must have "a bigger sense of community" but they also noted that grassroots leaders do this work "at great personal cost because they believe in a cause." Assistant professor Dr. G described this tension. Dr. G led an intellectual reading group – which later transformed into a critical social community – with Black graduate students who experienced the campus as "really alienating". Dr. G shared how as soon as they arrived on campus "Black students and students of color from all over campus were flocking to my office hours." As such, Dr. G saw this intellectual space as important leadership while also recognizing that "none of it is going to count for… tenure". Dr. G explained this further:

> I feel like as junior faculty of color, we get told to not do this kind of stuff. Um, but I can't not do it because this is the stuff that makes everything else feel meaningful. So, I'm willing to take the hit and I feel like I've managed to, you know, maintain a steady research output so I don't have to worry. But like, I just can't imagine not doing this stuff.

This example highlights how FOC build critical retention spaces from the ground-up and remain committed to supporting these spaces, even at the cost of their own career advancement.

Other FOC shared this commitment to a cause. Dr. A shared their passion about their leadership activities when they stated, “I'm committed to it. It makes me really happy to do it.” Dr. A called their leadership work a “labor of love” and a “labor of faith.” For Dr. A, leadership was not about promotion or their own advancement, but about creating “a space where real change can happen”. For Dr. A and others, leadership was the place where transformative change can happen. Indeed, when distinguishing between appointed university service and leadership, Dr. O shared that service was “stuff that needs to get done” and that leadership was “working for a positive change in whatever role you play.”

FOC leadership efforts center collaboration

FOC leadership highlighted collaboration. Dr. B explained that informal leadership roles felt comfortable because they are sites where “the hierarchies really drop and we say, ‘how are we going solve this problem?’” Rather than centering individual power, collective power is used to forward the goals of the group. The benefit for FOC was a leadership model where people “build leadership together”, as Dr. P noted. They described leadership as “getting shit done and in a way that brings people together”. Dr. I had a similar idea about leadership as “collaborative governance”. Dr. I described a leader as a catalyst for bringing groups together to lead and as someone who serves as a platform for the group launching their work.

In being a catalyst for collaboration, FOC noted the importance of three steps: observing, listening and adapting. FOC shared that observation was crucial for understanding community needs before initiating action. Dr. N shared that “[leadership is] observation, like just observing and absorbing… information and processing it.” For Dr. N, leadership was about understanding others’ “motivations and agendas” and “finding those shared agendas, goals, [and] motivations

and tapping into that." Dr. M also described a good leader as being able to "understand where everyone is coming from…. and understand what motivates them."

Listening was another important facet of collaborative leadership. Dr. L engaged in listening in their own leadership position. Dr. L shared, "I try to do kind of like hallway conversations or talk to people, especially if I feel like they're uncertain or unhappy, or I detect that something happened in the faculty meeting that they didn't feel comfortable with." Dr. L highlighted the critical need for being able to "notice when someone isn't being heard and making sure that they're being heard". This was also the case for Dr. M. For them, leadership was learning how to "get a group of people to work together effectively", so they often engaged in intentional listening practices. This included "opening the floor" and giving the opportunity for those in the space to speak.

Dr. C, who viewed leadership as starting in the classroom, described the first time they taught a course and noticed their students struggling to understand the material. To understand better, Dr. C sent out a survey to students and learned they were struggling to navigate a hidden curriculum in the class (e.g., how to approach a class assignment) and were intimated by their "Ivy league" background. Dr. C realized their approach was distancing students from the course and that they had to "do things differently", meaning restructuring how they led the course and presented to students. By engaging in intentional listening, Dr. C accessed a different perspective about the student experience and responded in ways that could ensure their success.

Dr. C's ability to respond to the voices of others illustrated the final facet of collaborative leadership: adaptation. Scholars have argued for the importance of flexibility, responsiveness, and adaptation in leadership, especially in a rapidly changing landscape in higher education (Montgomery, 2020; Mrig & Sanaghan, 2017). Part of adapting included knowing when to

leverage one's strengths. Though Dr. B felt more comfortable behind the scenes, they expressed being "willing to be on the podium" for an important issue. Similar to Dr. C who adapted their classroom leadership in response to students' needs, Dr. B described a willingness to change their approach when necessary. Adaptive leadership affords freedom to take lead or a more behind-the-scenes role while working toward a common goal. Dr. E explained, "a leader should know what her strengths and her limitations are. A leader should know when to rely on other's expertise and to trust them". If leaders do this effectively then they are able to "surround [themselves] with the best, most competent people and to work with them to collaborate."

General Discussion

In-depth interviews documented three ways in which FOC exposed and navigated structures of Whiteness within leadership in an HSI context. First, they noted that leadership reflected a preference for Whiteness, both in numerical representation of White leaders and in characteristics and practices of leaders. Second, they reported an epistemic ignorance of the leadership efforts of FOC, as review criteria promoted narrow definitions or preferences for individual outputs (e.g., research productivity). And the efforts that were valued generally served the interests of the university or were co-opted in ways that served those interests. Finally, they noted top-down approaches that undermined shared governance and that facilitated a lack of transparency. While similar experiences have been noted in PWIs (e.g., Freeman et al., 2019; Han, 2018; Han & Leonard, 2017; Kezar, 2011; Kezar, 2012; Settles et al., 2020), this work contributes new empirical understandings of the ways in which HSIs - with a public mission to serve minoritized students - reflect and reinforce structures of Whiteness.

And yet, FOC are doing the work to transform these structures in the name of servingness. Such transformative leadership efforts of FOC have been documented in PWIs

(Casado-Perez, 2019; Casado Pérez et al., 2021). Extending this to an HSI context, we learned that FOC transformed structures of Whiteness in three ways. First, they adopted leadership practices that centered the needs, strengths, and lived experiences of minoritized groups. Reflecting the mission of a public HSI, FOC engaged leadership that aimed to remove barriers and promote equality and representation for minoritized students. Second, they engaged leadership processes that reflected bottom-up, grassroots efforts. Their efforts required a strong commitment to a cause, rather than a sole focus on self-serving or university-serving goals, such as research productivity or shallow attempts at DEI activities. Finally, FOC engaged leadership in collaborative ways, leveraging skills in observation, listening, and adaptation. These skills served as guiding principles to ensure community members felt heard and valued for their strengths.

The collective voices of FOC call for an urgent need for transformational changes to structures of leadership in an HSI context. This need stems from a goal of building a more racially-just, equitable institution that can better serve the needs and reflect the cultural realities of an increasingly diverse student demographic. An investigation of structures of Whiteness within leadership in this context - and how FOC are working to reform such structures - highlights steps for where this work can begin.

Building Racially-Just, Equitable Leadership Structures

Scholars theorizing about the importance of FOC leaders in HSI contexts provide some recommendations for building a more racially-just university (Laden, 2001; Garcia, 2018; Ledesma & Burciago, 2015; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). This means supporting structures and adopting practices that are race-conscious, grounded in equity, and disruptive of White

dominance (Bensimon, 2012; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). Our findings provide empirical support for these recommendations.

First, we need better structural diversity, particularly within leadership roles (Ledesma & Burciago, 2015). FOC noted the overrepresentation of White leaders on campus. Yet as campuses become more diverse, there will be a higher need and demand for FOC leaders. Shifting structural diversity can range from hiring more FOC to shifting selection processes for who is identified as a leader. These criteria can include demonstrated evidence of efforts and abilities to lead, recruit, and support diverse teams, to advance DEI in concrete ways, and to employ anti-racist and collaborative practices. In valuing such criteria for leaders, universities can begin to develop leadership pipelines that counter Whiteness. This work also supports leaders who will center the needs of POC within the university.

Second, undoing Whiteness calls for a rejection of centralized and bureaucratic hierarchies that undermine collaboration and that push White normative standards (Garcia, 2018; Ledesma & Burciago, 2015). FOC not only modeled collaboration within their own leadership but they also noted the ways that top-down, bureaucratic approaches undermine shared governance and transparency. This is particularly consequential when administrators are handling issues (e.g., teaching strike, police presence on campus) that directly affect minoritized students. Instead, a racially-just approach intentionally includes voices and representation of FOC - and others who have been marginalized - within decision-making processes.

Third, in contrast to centralized leadership, FOC modeled transformative grassroots efforts. As scholars have noted, grassroots leaders should be supported, selected, and empowered (Petrov & Garcia, 2021). These leaders hold the institution accountable. Their efforts reflect an approach that is grounded in the daily realities of members of the institutions, aiming to reflect

their voices back to the institution, to stay committed to serving their needs, and to transform practices that reflect social justice. These leaders work to change underlying structures of Whiteness to better reflect an organizational identity rooted in a mission of servingness. Many do this work outside of formal governance structures (Garcia, 2018), rendering their work invisible or creating disproportionate workloads. Working toward a racially-just leadership structure means empowering grassroots efforts, in ways that do not co-opt or water down the processes.

Finally, and related to this last point, we must value and reward the leadership efforts of FOC. FOC engage leadership models that support the needs of minoritized groups (Baez, 2000; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Duncan 2014; Fryberg & Martinez, 2014) and that help them feel connected to the university (Ledesma & Burciago, 2015; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Yet, restrictive evaluation criteria limit the value of these efforts. FOC in this project felt frustrated in having to explain how their efforts met evaluation checkboxes or how their community-engaged efforts were as vital as individual research productivity. Without shifting narrow and rigid metrics, universities ignore the diversity of skills and efforts required to support, advance, and execute the mission of R1 public universities designed to serve diverse student populations.

Future Directions

Although this study contributes new ideas about how FOC experience and reform structures of Whiteness in an HSI context, there are potential areas for further investigation. While we focused on the racialized experiences of FOC in university leadership, future analysis should consider how other identities (e.g., professor rank, gender) shape experiences with leadership. For example, professorship rank can impact willingness to partake in leadership roles (Kezar et al., 2007). Pre-tenured professors may fear that participating in leadership might negatively impact their tenure promotion as it may involve too much engagement (Kezar et al.,

2007). Gender also plays a role in constructions of and experiences with university leadership. Women of color tend to engage in heavier service loads relative to their counterparts (Guarino & Borden, 2017). These efforts might impact their capacity or desire to participate in leadership or might impact how they think about their own leadership. Examining how various identities and positions impact leadership experiences is essential for developing a nuanced understanding of how FOC experience leadership.

Still, the focus is on the labor of FOC - across various social identities and campus positions - to reform structures of Whiteness. Yet the responsibility to unmask, challenge, and disrupt structures of Whiteness rests with all members of the institution. White leaders who benefit from structures of Whiteness should shoulder a greater deal of this work (Owen, 2007, p. 219; see also Petrov & Garcia, 2021). And scholars caution against White leaders moving too fast in ways that reinforce inequity and recommend intentional listening as a form of praxis for disrupting racism (Swan, 2017). More investigations should focus on how White leaders are working to disrupt structures of Whiteness in HSI and similar contexts (see Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Reguerín et al., 2020).

We also conducted this study during a critical time on the campus: first during a graduate student strike and then later during the beginning of global pandemic. Both events potentially impacted the views of FOC. The graduate student strike showcased the ongoing top-down power dynamics between university employees (i.e., graduate students and faculty) and university leadership (i.e., upper administration). During this time, continuing oppressive practices were highlighted and called out (i.e., low wages, lack of affordable housing, food insecurity) by the campus community.

The campus then transitioned into dealing with hardships related to COVID-19 restrictions. Many states in the U.S. entered a lockdown, and long-standing issues of wealth disparity, racial tensions, and political distrust came to the forefront. FOC were interviewed during a time where the virus was both politicized by national leaders (Halpern, 2020) and minoritized groups were overrepresented in the numbers of those infected. This sociopolitical context, both locally and nationally, critically informed how FOC understood their own leadership on campus but also how they observed and experienced formal leadership structures. Future research is needed to better understand what elements of their experiences with leadership sustain, strengthen, or change over time, especially with changing local and national realities.

Concluding Remarks

As universities aim to become an inclusive space for all its members (i.e., students, staff, and faculty), reflecting the needs and priorities of these members is essential. FOC play a critical role in recognizing, representing, and addressing the needs of the communities they serve. They bring many strengths to these endeavors, including a commitment to equity and social justice, to grassroots practices grounded in community needs, and to collaborative leadership that fosters consensus-building and trust. Transformative leadership, then, is the capacity to recognize these various strengths as avenues for social change in the university. Such transformation is critical for the retention and success of FOC, the SOC they serve, and a university system claiming a mission of servingness.

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