

Calling out Whiteness: Faculty of Color Redefining University Leadership

Rebecca Covarrubias
Katherine Quinteros

Department of Psychology
University of California Santa Cruz

Author Note

Rebecca Covarrubias  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9943-8496>

Katherine Quinteros  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4144-3767>

Please address correspondence to Rebecca Covarrubias, Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1156 High Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95064, or email rebeccac@ucsc.edu.

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Abstract

The current study examined how faculty of color (FOC) experience university leadership structures (e.g., policies, processes, values) and how these structures align or conflict with their own leadership views and efforts. The research team analyzed semi-structured interviews with 16 FOC using both inductive and deductive methods. Guided by critical race perspectives in higher education (Patton, 2016), the research team constructed three areas of misalignment. FOC noted leadership structures that prioritize Whiteness (e.g., representation, characteristics), value productivity, and utilize authoritarian approaches. FOC promoted leadership practices that prioritize equity, value grassroots efforts, and utilize collaborative approaches. These findings reveal a need to re-define leadership in the academy that reflect the strengths of FOC, whose leadership sustains the university.

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Students of color (SOC) account for 45% of student enrollment in postsecondary institutions nationwide, while FOC only account for 24% of faculty demographics (Davis & Fry, 2019; Martinez & Welton, 2017). Even in disproportionate numbers, FOC lead much of the diversity work that supports SOC and that creates a campus climate of inclusivity (Brown-Glaude, 2009; Duncan, 2014). Yet, in working to radically change academia through leadership (Baez, 2000; Duncan, 2014), FOC encounter little to no support (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Duncan, 2014). These barriers include a lack of consideration for roles by administration (Montgomery, 2020), an absence of leadership mentoring (Freeman Jr et al., 2019), heavy engagement in invisible labor that takes time away from participating in other roles (Brown-Glaude, 2009; Duncan, 2014), and tenure expectations that do not incentivize participation in leadership (Baez, 2000). One area less examined is how FOC define and redefine leadership, and how these views shape their experiences within university leadership. To address this gap, the current study examined how FOC experience university leadership structures – including policies, practices, values, and processes – and how these structures align or conflict with their own views and efforts of leadership. We utilize a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective (Bell, 1995; Delgado et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to analyze the racialized experiences of FOC navigating university leadership.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory in Higher Education

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 incorporating CRT into higher education, bringing attention to how policies and practices rooted in racism and White supremacy perpetuate inequity (see also Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). She offered three propositions. First, because of these racist roots, present-day issues of inequity in U.S. systems of higher education persist. Second, imperialistic (e.g., spreading White concepts of knowledge) and capitalistic (e.g., producing products for consumption) goals inform the functions and values of higher education. For example, these systems continue to value the norms and knowledge of White, middle class people (Brunsma et al., 2013; Davidson, 2017; Phillips et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2012). Finally, U.S. higher education serves as a venue through which formal knowledge production is generated by systems rooted in racism and White supremacy. One way this manifests is through the censoring of non-Eurocentric knowledge by government officials, such as the Arizona ban on Ethnic Studies lasting from 2010 to 2017 (Terry, 2017) or recent attempts to ban diversity-related trainings labeled “un-American” (Exec. Order No. 13950, 2020).

The application of CRT in higher education provides a lens for understanding how FOC experience the racialized structures of higher education, including formal leadership. First, FOC confront persisting inequities in higher education across a variety of domains, ranging from racist course evaluations (Han & Leonard, 2017) to lower-than-average salaries than White faculty

(Renzulli et al., 2006; Toutkoushian, 1998). Second, imperialistic and capitalistic goals make it so that FOC experience a push to produce research at the expense of participating in diversity or community work, or face having to make the choice to engage in diversity or community work at the expense of their careers (Baez, 2000; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Fryberg & Martinez, 2014; Tippeconnic Fox, 2009). Third, FOC may confront having their knowledge and research viewed as illegitimate (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002), negatively impacting reviews for tenure. In this way, CRT can highlight how engagement in university leadership is necessarily a racialized experience that is fraught with systemic barriers for FOC.

While Patton (2016) theorized about the endemic nature of racism in academia, her framework has not been widely applied to the study of leadership for FOC (Han & Leonard, 2016; Freeman Jr et al., 2019). Some research has adopted positionality theory – an examination of how identity and experience impacts our perceptions – to examine power dynamics within community college leadership (Kezar, 2000; Kezar 2002), yet race has not been centered when examining university leadership. This is especially the case within research-intensive institutions (R1), where there is likely to be more tension between the priorities of FOC (e.g., social justice efforts) and university expectations (e.g., publishing and grant acquiring) for tenure.

Common Structures of University Leadership

U.S. universities have traditionally utilized a top-down leadership approach, where leadership is power-centered (i.e., power is held in a few top positions), hierarchal (i.e., those at the top have higher authority and status), and authoritarian (i.e., those under the hierarchy are expected to fall in line) (see Bensimon & Neumann, 1993). A top-down approach creates a power dynamic where administrative roles within the university (e.g., presidents, deans) hold more power in decision-making than faculty and staff (Morgan, 1997). There are benefits to this leadership model. Such approaches provide structure and direction for an organization. A mission statement for the university, for example, offers aspirational goals and values to respect and achieve (see Morgan, 1997). Yet, such an approach can also facilitate oppressive experiences for groups lower in the hierarchy (Kezar, 2011; 2012; Morgan, 1997).

There are three processes for such oppression: investment in profit-making agendas, normalization of oppressive actions, and ongoing resistance to change (Morgan, 1997). First, top-down leadership approaches reflect a continued interest in profit-making agendas. This becomes evident with the rise of academic capitalism, especially within science fields and in research universities (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Academic capitalism is a system in which the production of knowledge has moved away from being seen as a public good to a tool that can be used for monetary gains (e.g., acquisition of patents and funding) and for the privatization of knowledge (e.g., limited access to academic journal articles) (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

The growth of academic capitalism is reflected in the activities of research faculty and in criteria for their career advancement. National surveys tracking the activities of faculty from the 1960s to 1990s documented an increase in research-related activities (e.g., time spent in a lab, writing manuscripts) and a decrease in time allocated to teaching, particularly at 4-year universities (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). With a focus on productivity, faculty recognize that research productivity is a critical factor for career advancement. In a recent survey with 338

faculty members from 55 institutions across the U.S. and Canada (Niles et al., 2020), respondents viewed number of research publications as a top evaluation criterion for tenure and promotion. Such criteria placed higher value on research productivity, including securing grants, than on other campus engagement opportunities, such as leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Even under this pressure to publish, faculty, particularly FOC, are also expected to engage in heavy service and teaching (Ards & Woodward 1997; Baez, 2000; Guillaume, 2020). While FOC often want to engage in equity efforts and feel they are serving their communities (Baez, 2000; see also Antonio et al., 2000; Duncan, 2014), navigating these efforts is stressful (Baez, 2000; Fries-Britt et al., 2011). Thus, in a climate of vested interest in profit and productivity, FOC are left to manage competing demands (Kezar & Lester, 2009).

Reflected in these multiple demands is a normalization of oppressive work climates. This normalization reinforces a culture of “workaholism”, where the overworking of employees is commonplace. Employees are encouraged to devote large portions of their time to work even at the expense of their own well-being. Surveys with 400 faculty at a large R1 university revealed that workaholism positively predicted burnout and emotional exhaustion (Moyer et al., 2017). Because power structures normalize a system that overworks its employees, faculty enter academia expected to shoulder many responsibilities. Faculty understand that they must uphold these expectations if they are to get ahead in their careers (Morgan, 1997; Niles et al., 2020).

While faculty have called for change in these structures (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Kelly et al., 2017), resistance to shifting power dynamics persists (Morgan, 1997). Some power shifting happens through demands for change, such as calls for more diversity (Kelly et al., 2017; Lewis & Shah, 2019). Yet, such change can be shallow, leaving internal structures intact (Authors, in press; Ahmed, 2012; Morgan, 1997; Williams & Clowney, 2007). Past research utilizing a CRT framework in focus groups with Black faculty at a large public R1 institution illustrated this process (Kelly et al., 2017). Participants acknowledged how their university hired more Black faculty due to public demands. Yet, once hired, they noted little efforts to change the hostile and racist climate for new faculty; the daily features of institutional culture remained unchanged.

Through these three processes of oppression, top-down leadership models maintain a tight grip on power (Morgan, 1997). While important to document, what is missing is a critical analysis of race and racism. A CRT perspective roots a top-down leadership approach in Eurocentric ideologies and racist beliefs (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). While top-down approaches can be oppressive for all faculty, there are added layers of oppression for FOC as they are expected to assimilate into a White space not designed for them (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). We see these consequences in the underrepresentation of FOC in leadership roles and in the difficulties they face when they do acquire a formal position.

Experiences of FOC in University Leadership

FOC are underrepresented in leadership roles such as presidents, provosts, and deans (Freeman 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 et al., 2019).

For FOC who do obtain such positions, there are additional barriers to navigate. For example, FOC are expected to conform to a top-down leadership model and to play by the rules (Kezar, 2000). Part of “playing by the rules” includes practicing neutrality and avoiding behaviors perceived as too disruptive to or too deviant from current structures (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Freeman et al., 2019). Such neutrality discourages FOC whose research agendas and goals tend toward increasing equity and social justice (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). In response to these limitations, FOC reported gravitating to and constructing informal spaces which resist Eurocentric practices, such as competition and productivity (Johnson et al., 2018). For example, early career faculty rejected competing against one another on the job market and instead created a space of support. These informal spaces also offer opportunities to demonstrate leadership in teaching, mentoring, and service. Many FOC report satisfaction in teaching and mentoring and in developing relationships with community members, as these activities fuel commitments to service and social justice (Baez, 2000; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Duncan, 2014; Fryberg & Martinez, 2014).

Because such activities often reside outside of formally recognized positions, administrative leaders tend to overlook, dismiss, or mischaracterize this labor. Whereas some would label FOC leadership as political activism, many FOC interpret their efforts as educational leadership (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). Educational leadership links political efforts (e.g., leading a bilingual education initiative) with a commitment to advancing the needs of POC in education (e.g., increasing graduation rates). What makes informal spaces unique is that FOC experience more freedom to participate in grassroots leadership grounded in community and reflective of their lived experiences and skills (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Indeed, minoritized groups prefer grassroots approaches to leadership because of their roots in social justice (Kezar, 2000; Kezar et al., 2011; Meyerson, 2003).

Yet, continued privileging of top-down leadership discourages grassroots efforts, often pushing them, along with FOC, into marginalized spaces (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Based on semi-structured interviews with community college professors, Kezar (2011) explained that top-down leadership styles tend to overtake the original goals of grassroots efforts, changing them to match the university’s mission. This occurred when a group of women faculty combined their grassroots goals of diversifying the college with a diversity committee started by administration. 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 their radical goals beyond hiring practices. The women faculty members felt that their agenda had been “watered down” and lamented trusting administrators. This mistrust is one example of why faculty may be weary of converging grassroots leadership with formal leadership to meet a “shared” goal.

We examine these same tensions at a R1 university, with a heavier emphasis on research productivity. Most work on FOC leadership assumes they want to participate in formal roles, not that they choose to disengage from such roles because of differing views and goals (Freeman et al., 2019; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2011). We expand the understanding of FOC definitions of leadership and how formal leadership roles can better reflect these views. By centering the

expertise of POC – an important tenet of CRT (see Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) – we can document how FOC respond to institutionalized oppression in university leadership and how they work to construct and redefine leadership for themselves.

Method

University Setting

Participants included faculty at a four-year public R1 university on the west coast serving approximately 19,494 undergraduate and graduate students. The institution received designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution (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 male) 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 deductive (i.e., codes informed by literature, such as Patton, 2016) and inductive (i.e., codes constructed from the data) 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 thoughts and 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 meet and 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 discussed discrepancies and came to convergence to finalize codes. During these discussions, we also combined and organized codes into larger categories to help summarize the data. We then organized the categories into themes using Patton's (2016) tenets. For example, we combined initial codes of *Campus Leadership as White* and *Campus Leadership as Neutral* under a larger theme labeled *Campus Leadership is Rooted in Whiteness*. We repeated this process until all interviews were coded and all discrepancies discussed.

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

We constructed three areas of misalignment with existing leadership structures for FOC. First, FOC viewed *campus leadership as rooted in Whiteness* in both representation and in prioritization of values, including preferences for neutrality and objectivity. Countering this Whiteness, FOC noted a *need for leadership rooted in equity*, noting a commitment to serving the needs of and removing barriers for POC. Second, FOC noted that *campus leadership valued productivity* (e.g., research, grants) as the most important faculty function; such prioritization was embedded in university reward structures (e.g., advancement criteria, allocation of resources). FOC reported a *need for more grassroots work and processes* rather than a focus on products for consumption. Finally, FOC observed *campus leadership as authoritarian* in structure, as it reflected a top-down approach in decision-making and power dynamics. They called for a *need for leadership centered in collaboration*, including engaging in observing, listening, and adapting to community needs and strengths.

Campus Leadership is Rooted in Whiteness

In her first tenet, Patton (2016) argued for the pervasiveness of racism and Whiteness in higher education. Supporting this tenet, 14 of the 16 (87.5%) FOC gave examples of campus leadership reflecting Whiteness both in structural diversity – the numerical representation of minoritized people in an institution (Gurin et al., 2002) – and in cultural values. Full professor Dr. A shared his 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.” The systematic nature of racism includes the idea that Whiteness is an ordinary feature of these spaces; that is, the lack of FOC in leadership 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.” Whiteness is a taken-for-granted feature of some leadership spaces.

FOC described how Whiteness permeated even decisions about why and which FOC are selected into leadership positions. Assistant professor Dr. N, for example, stated that part of the decision for her being asked to engage in leadership or service was focused on “the need to round out the demographics in that group”. She noted that as a woman of color, decision makers often considered her “perfect to have on [the] project”, as a representative for diversity. This experience aligns with literature on identity taxation – the disproportionate burden placed on minoritized faculty to engage in additional labor for the benefit of the institution (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012). Beyond the issue of tokenism, Dr. D described the characteristics in leadership style that determine who is selected for positions. She 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). She described this as:

[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 he could be an effective leader when he “navigated within the rules of the game and the status quo.” However, he also remarked on how his effectiveness was limited “as soon as [he] tried to be disruptive.” Dr. A shared this sentiment. After describing a good chair as “careful and diplomatic,” he shared that he was “not political enough in that sense.” He described himself as not being good at negotiating power dynamics because he was too

outspoken and honest. 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.

In addition to preferences for particular types of leaders, FOC also noted preferences for particular types of research, service, and leadership. Associate professor Dr. E viewed Whiteness in the academy as pushing forward narrow beliefs about what is valuable scholarship. She described how the administration undervalued her work as director of a POC-focused program:

I felt that the kind of research... that the scholars associated with the center did was totally undervalued... I had to fight tooth and nail to get like a pittance... [T]here 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.

Dr. E’s frustrations align with research demonstrating the challenges FOC encounter in getting their work legitimized, often resulting in difficulty securing necessary resources (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Duncan, 2014).

Associate professor Dr. H also shared how her leadership was devalued, as it did not fit “easy, readable” definitions of service criteria, like serving on a committee. Part of Whiteness for Dr. H included narrow definitions of what constituted service and leadership, and that building positive relationships with underserved communities did not fit these definitions. She 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....

Beyond not fitting “standard” notions of service, FOC also expressed being devalued even when engaging in recognized leadership. Dr. B, a full professor, engaged a project with another woman FOC exploring the institutional climate for FOC, with the goal of increasing their retention. She took on the project under the belief from “higher administration” that if they produced a report “things would change for faculty and staff.” The culmination of the project did not lead to the changes Dr. B hoped for, which she described as a “resistance to change”. In an attempt to support an important diversity-related issue on campus, she instead experienced a questioning of her expertise and knowledge. 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. This idea is linked to interest convergence, a concept highlighting that goals of POC will only be carried out if they align with and serve the interests of White people (Bell, 1980). Dr. B explained that after reflecting on the actions of the university, the goal was not to change the system, but instead the university looked to “pacify them with a climate [project]”.

These FOC provided examples of how work focused on the needs of POC, rather than centered in Whiteness, is often given less importance. As women of color who led either POC-focused initiatives or research centers, they confronted a mismatch in what they believed their leadership purposes should serve and what the university valued. Their efforts looked to forward change within a predominately White space, yet when such efforts were thwarted by resistance or motivations of interest convergence, they felt disillusioned with systems of formal leadership. 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.”

A Need for More Leadership Rooted in Equity

When asked to define leadership, 15 of the 16 (93.8%) FOC offered perspectives that countered notions of Whiteness and, instead, centered POC. They viewed leadership as fostering equity and removing barriers for minoritized groups, including colleagues, staff, and students. Dr. A shared the following perspective of leadership: “I’ve been forever committed to social justice, to educational access, [and] against racism.” Dr. J, in reflecting on his own thoughts about leadership, noted being drawn to leadership roles where he 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, full professor 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).

FOC reported that their own experiences as POC in education served as catalysts for their equity motivated efforts. Dr. O spent the early part of her career with her “head down” focusing on earning tenure and then shifted to thinking more broadly about what she wanted to “see in the world”. For Dr. O, this included wanting her “field to be more inclusive and diverse... to be welcoming and... to be in a room full of people that look different.” She described her 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 she wanted to see without “watering down the goals and the vision.” She dedicated her 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 her strengths to lead an effort that changed the structural diversity of her field. This goal of leadership was similar for Dr. N who witnessed “a lot of people fall[ing] through the cracks” even though it sometimes took “minimal effort to keep [students] on track... to get them to graduate or to give them... an opportunity.” Dr. N engaged in leadership through “intentional and purposeful” strategies to “increase the number of underrepresented students in the program.”

Assistant professor Dr. C offered another example of how his own experience – as an undergraduate man of color attending a predominately White private research institution – influenced his leadership as faculty. He remembered when he felt disconnected from his White female professor after he sought her support regarding persisting racial microaggressions from classmates. As she was unable to help him, he now leveraged this experience to guide his own

leadership with students, asking himself, “What would I have really needed when I was an undergrad?” He 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 his reflection, he shared that leadership means finding ways to promote equity, including understanding the struggles SOC face and offering support for those struggles.

Campus Leadership Values Productivity

Stemming from notions of Whiteness in the academy, Patton’s second tenet further described that the values and functions of higher education are informed by both imperialistic (e.g., spreading White knowledge and views) and capitalistic (e.g., producing commodities for consumption) goals. Twelve of the 16 (75%) FOC shared their observations of such goals, particularly when it came to expectations for research productivity. 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.” A past chancellor reiterated this message to Dr. D, as she was told she “needed to just stop doing service work.” Her Dean reinforced this message; she shared that “[the Dean] wrote in one of my reviews that I had been doing way too much service work and insufficiently attended to my own research.”

FOC recognized that research productivity, like securing grant funding, provided special benefits. Dr. A reflected on his own ability to secure research funds for the university and shared, “ten million dollars will get you some respectability...money is a game changer.” The respect he attained meant “it was easier to be heard. It was easier to get resources. It was easier to be invited. It was easier to be seen.” Dr. E further explained that the university often displayed their preference for those who are able to secure funds for research. She added, “it's very profit driven... money-driven...like basically [who] wins the grants.” Dr. P agreed with this sentiment when describing their general thoughts about leadership; they described leadership as “capitalist and entrepreneurial” and noted that it “praises people who are able to be good capitalists”.

FOC expressed that one consequence of such emphasis on research was the devaluation of other aspects of their work—especially efforts at the intersection of leadership, service, and research—which jeopardized their merit and promotion reviews. Dr. E expressed frustration that she had to fight for recognition that her work at the center constituted research:

I had to make the case that my work as the director is both service and research. [With] the money from a huge grant, we put on a series of events and we brought scholars to campus... we ended up putting together a co-edited volume around our seminar...with a university press. So, I was able to basically parlay a lot of the labor, as director, into scholarship.

Though Dr. E creatively combined leadership and service with research, strict criteria in personnel reviews made it difficult for such work to be recognized as legitimate research activity. She added that she was facing this issue “while we were receiving the federal designation as an HSI”, noting the hypocrisy of having to fight for recognition of her work while being recognized as a Hispanic *Serving* Institution. Dr. E described other instances where her *servingsness* was not as highly valued because it did not fit the priority of research. She shared her

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 her efforts went undervalued when considering research productivity as the golden metric.

Narrow university metrics also challenged Dr. D, who shared that her leadership efforts did not fit university notions of service and thus were disregarded by her department. During her tenure review, she struggled to have others recognize that the leadership she provided student organizers fit tenure criteria for service work. Dr. D explained that her department viewed her 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 she already participated in heavy service work with students, “my department was asking me to do [more] service”, even though she was “doing all of this work” with students to bring about change to the campus. As a result of a lack of support for her leadership efforts, she had a “difficult time getting tenure.” Indeed, such efforts toward equity, inclusion, and diversity offer little advancement towards tenure (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). Diversity- or justice-related efforts that sustain the university are viewed as secondary to narrow and strict views of productivity.

By prioritizing this productivity, FOC balance heavy research demands to meet tenure criteria with leadership and service work in which they feel compelled to engage. Indeed, several FOC noted the pressure to “keep your head down and do your work”, as full professor Dr. F noted, in order to “get ahead and get... tenure or full.” Part of balancing these multiple demands was the realization that it was important to establish a research career before engaging in leadership (see Kezar et al., 2007). This realization was particularly evident among FOC in STEM-based fields, where three of four FOC noted this. Assistant professor Dr. M shared, “I think in order to take on leadership roles, you have to succeed as a young faculty. And if you're not able to succeed and meet those milestones, then you just won't have that path available to you.” Dr. N noted a similar tension when she shared that while she wanted to engage in leadership, she also did not “want to be in a situation where [it] can hurt your career”. She described that the constant advice she received from others was to “get tenure first” since engaging in leadership and service would “work against you”. Expanding on this, Dr. K shared that being productive and establishing one’s career first is an important strategy:

If your... academic component is not strong and it's not recognized, then the respect that you get from your colleagues is not strong. So, I felt like early on I was able to solidify my academic career to a point that allowed me to have a voice... because people have a harder time not listening to me because they respect me as a scientist.

Even though playing by the rules of the game and meeting standards of productivity proved a useful strategy, one FOC highlighted why this still created tension for FOC. 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 with a narrow focus on productivity.

A Need for More Grassroots Efforts

Thirteen of the 16 (81.3%) FOC advocated for leadership that extended beyond a focus on research productivity. They noted valuing leadership that was about on-the-ground processes and activities rather than promoting one's own career or research products. We labeled this grassroots leadership, and it included viewing leadership being driven by dedicated people on the ground with a strong commitment to a cause. While the *Leadership Rooted in Equity* code highlighted the importance of centering POC to counter notions of Whiteness, this code captures the need to focus on collective on-the-ground processes rather than productivity or self-interest. Dr. O, for example, noted that what made her leadership endeavors successful was "a core group of people who were prepared to do it all themselves..." Dr. F made a similar observation about the importance of committed people. She noted learning a lot from a faculty organizing group, including how to get things done in a "decentralized way". She described that the faculty divided tasks based on the strengths of the members so that "people work on the thing that is calling to them." This created "micro communities" where all people in that group were "invested in that particular thing." This was similar to Dr. A's notion of "collective efforts and collective energies", which for him was a countermeasure to more "marketplace" leadership styles that solely rely on one individual to lead, such as "chancellors or executive vice chancellors." In his leadership spaces, teams collectively decide on goals and hold each other accountable.

Dr. D added to the need for collective grassroots processes when she explained that leadership "has to be driven by a lot of hard on-the-ground work." She 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." For Dr. P, this meant having to do "interior work" of putting "aside any kind of insecurities or any kind of fragility that we have around particular ideas.... If we're not able to do that... it becomes more about our needs and our idea of ourselves." 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 her 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 she 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. She led an intellectual reading group – which later transformed into a critical social community – with Black graduate students who experienced the campus as "really alienating". She shared how as soon as she arrived on campus "Black students and students of color from all over campus were flocking to my office hours." As such, she saw the intellectual space as important leadership while also recognizing that "none of it is going to count for... tenure". She 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. In describing her efforts with students, Dr. L shared, “It's kind of this on the ground thing that you're doing that's so important.” Dr. A shared similar passions about his leadership when he stated, “I'm committed to it. It makes me really happy to do it.” He called his leadership work a “labor of love” and a “labor of faith.” For him, leadership was not about promotion or his 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. N said,

Leadership is my choice, so I don't do it unless I think it makes an impact. I think that's the main difference. [S]ervice is something I'm pulled into... it's like the government, right?... Leadership, yeah, that's my choice. And I don't do it unless it's worth my time.

Dr. O shared a similar distinction, highlighting that service was “stuff that needs to get done” and that leadership was “working for a positive change in whatever role you play.”

Campus Leadership is Authoritarian

As Patton argued in her final tenet, systems of knowledge production rooted in Whiteness are maintained through persisting oppressive structures (e.g., polices). One way this happens is by adopting an authoritarian style of leadership in which undemocratic processes work to maintain power and control over university functions. Eleven of the 16 (68.8%) FOC observed that campus leadership functioned in a top-down 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.” For her, this type of leadership communicated to faculty that, “I'm the elephant and I sit on whoever I want.” She further added that “it's alienating and it's telling people that it's autocratic...you conform or else.” Dr. G described “bureaucratic administrative positions” as reflecting “top-down management”. She 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 her, 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. Dr. O, for example, noted that while “higher up administration” seemed more “concerned with power” they

might also be “more constrained by the budget”. She knew people in leadership position 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 she 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.”

For one FOC, this style of leadership also created a culture of fear of retaliation if one opposed or resisted rules or norms. Dr. B explained that, due to the unbending nature of administrative leaders, faculty put themselves at risk of disciplinary action when they do not conform to university expectations. She argued that this can be especially challenging for FOC. Dr. B described an incident where a FOC who supported graduate teaching assistants on strike felt uneasy about being at the picket line as a woman of color. She “felt threatened”, noting that being at the picket posed risks to her career. Dr. B described that part of the fear was the consequences of supporting a cause that was not university-sanctioned and the administration being unwilling “to take [disciplinary] letters out of your file... [or] consider the possibility of not sanctioning you.” Under authoritarian approaches, Dr. B observed that FOC who disagree with leadership decisions run the risk of career detriments.

A Need for More Collaborative Practices

All 16 (100%) FOC offered a leadership definition that highlighted collaboration and consensus-building. For FOC, collaboration included a recognition of power dynamics and a desire to move away from a top-down hierarchy. Dr. B explained that informal 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”. Contrasting a top-down model, Dr. P described the process of good leadership when “you lose a little bit of visibility”, meaning when everyone reflects back on progress, people can say “‘look what we did’ and not ‘look at what this individual’ did”. Dr. K described the same process in different words, “[Leadership is] the opportunity to influence decisions from a consensus point of view.” Dr. I had a similar idea about leadership as “collaborative governance”. For her, a good leader is “someone who if they were to be taken out, things wouldn't crumble.” She 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. First, FOC shared that observation was crucial for understanding community needs *before* initiating action. Dr. B recalled one particular chair who utilized this strategy. She explained that his perspective was, “let me get a sense of how your space operates and *then* I’ll be a leader as opposed to here I am, I’m in charge”. By understanding the “intricacies” involved in how the department functioned, he prevented the community from feeling “betrayed” or taken over by his leadership. Dr. N agreed with the importance of observing, “[Leadership is] observation, like just observing and absorbing... information and processing it.” For her, 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.” An important facet of observation, then, is a commitment to learning about a group. Dr. D iterated this point when describing how diversity statements can feel “prescriptive” and out of touch when leaders do not take time to observe and learn, “Anyone who works... from the ground up would never be so arrogant as to say, ‘When I go there, I’m going to be working with [student group] by doing X, Y, and Z,’ without asking what work is being done.” Without careful observation, Dr. D viewed leadership actions as arrogant since they reflect an attitude of intervening on a group for whom they have little familiarity or exposure.

Listening was another important facet of collaborative leadership. Dr. K described leadership as the opportunity for “people to listen to you and trust you and to listen”. Dr. L engaged in listening in her own leadership position. She 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. I’ll go and talk to them about it.” She highlighted the critical need for “people skills in leadership” and being able to “notice when someone isn’t being heard and making sure that they’re being heard”; listening was an important part of that process for her. This was also the case for Dr. M. For him, leadership was learning how to “get a group of people to work together effectively”, so he 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 he taught a course and noticed his students struggling to understand the material. To understand his students 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 intimidated by his “Ivy league” background. Dr. C realized his approach was distancing students from the course and that he had to “do things a little differently”, meaning restructuring how he led the course and presented himself to the 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. Dr. B described two types of leaders: the “movers and shakers” who are comfortable leading from the front and center in a movement and the “washing dishes” leaders who support the group behind the scenes. To her, neither was more important than the other and

they were not mutually exclusive. Though Dr. B felt more comfortable behind the scenes, she expressed being “willing to be on the podium” for an important issue. Similar to Dr. C who adapted his classroom leadership in response to students’ needs, Dr. B described a willingness to change her 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 revealed that FOC viewed campus leadership as misaligned with their own in three ways. In line with Patton’s first tenet (2016), FOC reported that university leadership reflected a preference for Whiteness, both in numerical representation of White leaders and in practices, styles, and research interests of these leaders. Consequently, FOC struggled for recognition of their leadership, especially during tenure and promotion reviews, and to obtain resources for this work. To combat Whiteness, FOC identified a need for leadership models that promote equity and representation for minoritized groups. These goals of equity reflect why FOC are drawn to informal spaces and leadership; where they can pursue initiatives which propel changes that further the needs of POC rather than ignore them (Baez, 2000).

Second, FOC noted university leadership as reflecting both imperialistic and capitalistic goals, as outlined by Patton’s second tenet. FOC expressed concern with university emphasis on research productivity. This focus often made it difficult to gain recognition in tenure and promotion reviews of leadership work, such as in teaching or service efforts, that did not meet these narrow ideas of productivity. Yet, FOC were conscious that the university thrives from this type of leadership (e.g., Zuroski, 2018). FOC, aware of this double-bind, continued their efforts because of a commitment to creating change. To combat these productivity goals, FOC participants called for the valuing of grassroots leadership, which required a strong commitment to a cause, rather than a focus on productivity and self-serving goals (Meyerson, 2003).

Patton’s final tenet noted how leadership practices uphold oppressive structures. In line with this, FOC viewed top-down approaches as silencing the voices of faculty and as lacking transparency and accountability. Such approaches fostered distrust in administration and fear of retaliation if they resisted. To combat this, FOC called for leadership rooted in collaboration, leveraging skills in observation, listening, and adaptation. These three processes served as guiding principles to ensure community members felt heard and valued for their strengths.

In general, FOC at a R1 university experienced misalignment between existing university leadership and how they define and enact leadership. This misalignment reflects past work on the experiences of FOC and women in leadership at community colleges (Kezar, 2011). Yet, we extend this work in three ways. First, in taking a race-forward approach, we observed how FOC dealt with and experienced Whiteness within formal university structures and goals. While past work assumes FOC want to participate in these formal roles (Freeman et al., 2019; Jackson & O’Callagan, 2011), our work demonstrates that FOC instead were weary of these spaces because of continued oppressive practices. Second, in studying this question at a R1 university, we can

better understand how this misalignment is exacerbated through an emphasis of research productivity over other areas such as teaching and service. Finally, past work has not directly examined or asked how FOC defined leadership. In highlighting these constructions, grounded in FOC lived experiences, we document new forms of ongoing inequality for FOC and also how they are reimagining and resisting against these oppressive spaces.

Future Directions

Although this study contributes new ideas about how race and racism impact leadership for FOC, 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 define and experience leadership.

Finally, we 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 (CDC, 2020). 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 definitions of and experiences with leadership sustain, strengthen, or change over time, especially with changing local and national realities.

Implications & Conclusions

The combined voices of FOC call for an urgent need for transformational changes to formal university leadership, especially moving away from practices and values rooted in Whiteness and White supremacy. These data reveal avenues for progress. FOC call for a re-evaluation of profit-making agendas, specifically the valuing of research productivity and grant acquisitions. The overemphasis on this types of productivity left FOC overworked in meeting

tenure expectations while balancing heavy service and leadership. Shifting from an emphasis on productivity to an explicit emphasis on equity better affirms the practices and priorities of FOC.

One way to shift to a focus on equity includes re-evaluating tenure and promotion criteria. Often, FOC engage in multiple areas of their work – teaching, mentoring service, leadership, research – to create change that supports the needs of minoritized groups (Baez, 2000; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Duncan 2014; Fryberg, 2010; Fryberg & Martinez, 2014), yet restrictive evaluation criteria limit the value of these efforts. FOC in this project felt frustrated in having to explain how their efforts met all evaluation checkboxes. Changing such criteria affirms the many contributions of FOC – the same contributions that have helped university spaces, like departments or programs, become more diverse. 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. Indeed, research has shown that with adequate support and resources, there are benefits to integrating diverse skills and perspectives in organizations (see Mannix & Neale, 2005; Page, 2008). As such, an explicit commitment – embedded within rewards structures (e.g., promotion criteria, course reliefs, monetary resources) – to recognizing FOC efforts highlights the *racial equity labor* that builds racial inclusion and resists racial marginalization in the university (see Lerma et al., 2020).

Relatedly, shifting selection processes and criteria for who is identified as a leader or what universities define as valuable leadership is also a step toward equity. These criteria can include demonstrated evidence of efforts and abilities to lead, recruit, and support diverse teams, to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in concrete ways, and to employ anti-racist and collaborative practices. In valuing such criteria, universities can begin to develop leadership pipelines that counter Whiteness and White supremacy. Even more directly, however, these pipelines should also include explicit leadership training in the practice of anti-racism work.

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, 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 who survives on the labor of FOC.

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