Ponte Las Pilas: Hidden Narratives and Latinidad at Macalester College

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By: Luz Ramírez Cruz

Introduction

In 2017, the Hispanic origin population in the US was calculated to be 57.5 million, about 17.5 percent of the total US population, making them the largest minority group in the US (US Census Bureau 2017).[1] Since the addition of the Hispanic/Latino category to the US census in 2000 it has been easier to see trends in the group that help to better understand their experience in the US. Latinos are among the largest minority racial group to enroll in university; for the first time in 2012, Hispanic college enrollment among high school graduates between the ages of 18-24 was higher than that of white high school graduates of the same age (49 to 47 percent respectively) (Krostag 2014). Despite strength in numbers, and the occasional dip in the number of those living in poverty, in 2012, only 14.5 percent of Latinos aged 25 and older had attained a bachelor's degree, compared to 51 percent of Asians, 34.5 percent of whites, and 21.2 percent of African Americans (Lopez and Fry 2013). This means that although

Latinx students are graduating high school and enrolling in undergraduate programs, their graduation rates still lag behind. This begs the question of why do individuals from the largest minority group in the US struggle to obtain a higher education? I argue that an important factor to understand high college enrollment but low college graduation rate among Latinxs is due in part to the university environment.

In order to investigate the above puzzle, I turn to the Latinx graduates themselves in order to learn more about their experiences navigating the college's environment. I interviewed three alumni from Macalester College.[2] The interview subjects are all Latinx first generation college graduates and children of immigrants. By understanding the complexities of their unique experiences, and finding their commonalities, a hidden narrative of the Macalester student experience emerges. How does their experience differ from the one that has been showcased and promoted by Macalester? What does it mean for their experiences and narratives to be different?

The importance of asking such a question lies in what inclusion and diversity will mean for future Latinx students. Higher education has changed

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[1] The US census bureau defines "Hispanic/Latino" as someone of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. United States Census Bureau 201. "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010." (https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf)

[2] Macalester is a prestigious private liberal arts college located in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

radically since the student protests in the 1960s that demanded ethnic studies programs and an increase in racial diversity efforts from universities, but has this change really made a difference? Is higher education today simply another system employing "new racism," as described by Bonilla-Silva (2003), to exclude racial and economic minorities? Is it even possible to imagine a truly inclusive university and what does that mean? What has to change in order for Latinx students to receive an education that truly cares more about their success than their presence in diversity statistics and advertisements?

In order to cohesively begin to answer these questions, I will begin by providing a social and historical context for understanding the educational system in the US and what this has meant for Latinx students throughout the decades. Following this historical context, I will present the theoretical framework the research builds upon. Then, I will illustrate the student narrative that Macalester embraces, as well as the student experience it promotes to incoming first year students. I will then contrast this image to the narratives of the interview subjects to suggest that there is an alternate experience, one that has always existed despite the popular sentiment that no one feels excluded at Macalester. What will emerge evidence that Latinx students, like the alumni I interviewed, are experiencing social and economic exclusion at the highest levels of education; even socially liberal, inclusive, multiculturally focused

institutions like Macalester are reproducing inequality and exclusion of certain ethnic and racial groups.

Before this can be discussed, however, there is the issue of addressing my own positionality in this research both as a currently enrolled student at Macalester College and as a first generation Latinx college student. This research came about because of questions about the purpose of my own presence in higher education, since I am a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow[3], and the effects of predetermined social and class mobility on my connection to the Mexican immigrant community I grew up in. I wondered if others felt the fear of losing touch that I did and how they approached it. The fact that this research is situated at Macalester, the same college I am attending, was not my intent from the beginning. I wished to work with the University of Minnesota in this investigation because of their significantly larger student population and I thought it would bolster my "objective credibility" on the topic. Since then, I have come to value the connection I have to both the population I interviewed and the environment I am drawing conclusions about. If anything, I believe my positionality, as queer first generation college student from a poor immigrant community, allows me to better speak to

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[3] The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship is aims to diversify the professoriate by providing graduate level research opportunities, information about graduate school, and financial support to undergraduate minority students

the harsh realities of higher education that are felt by not only the Latinx students around me, but other marginalized students from class backgrounds similar to my own.

Historical Context

In order to understand the issues that are being observed in higher education today, one must understand the complexities and intersectionalities of race and socioeconomic class in the US. It must also become evident that higher education, though promoted as a bridge to opportunity via the American Dream, is still reproducing inequality and social exclusion even at self proclaimed liberal institutions like Macalester College. For Latinx students, the struggles to connect and thrive in a college environment are made difficult because of deficits in white social capital, the burden of social citizenship, and economic class.

Cycles of Incorporation and Exclusion

Citizenship refers to the relationship between individuals and the state but is a status that has historically limited its acceptance of ethnic minorities in the United States and these limitations, although amended legally in 1965 with the Voting Rights Act, still exist socially. This is pertinent because it means that barriers to legal and social inclusion have not been removed, only changed (Bonilla-Silva 2003: 273). Systems have evolved to exclude people by less overt means, and present day legal amendments to racially charged laws do not change the

legacy of such historical discrimination overnight.

Mexicans, and by extension Latin Americans, have been incorporated into US American society and the US imagination not as contributing members, but as a permanent *other*. Ana Castillo argues that Latinxs will never be allowed to assimilate into the social fabric of the US because of 1) the historical, institutionalized, and legislated racism in the US; 2) the protestant ideology of the US as compared to the Catholic beliefs of most of Latin America and the Caribbean; 3) Spanish colonization and the resulting Mestizaje has placed those with more indigenous roots, and therefore darker skin, at the bottom of the social strata in all Latin American countries, which has resulted in the majority of Latinxs in the US being poor dark skinned Mestizos; 4) and lastly, the view that these Latinxs *can* and *should* assimilate assumes that all immigrants to the US have been received in the same ways (Castillo 1994: 4).

For instance, the reality is that although European Jews were heavily discriminated against after their arrival to the US in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, no aspect of their religion or way of life was ever outlawed. Contrastly, the use of *peyote* in religious ceremonies led to the outlawing of the Native American Church for decades (Blauner 2001: 56); the criminalization of psilocybin mushrooms as a class 2 drug to date is also a form of legal exclusion given that the plant is sacred to various Mexican indigenous communities and is considered

medicinal. This difference has meant that European Jews, and other European immigrant groups that were discriminated against in the past, were allowed to assimilate into the US social fabric, and whiteness, freely and on their own terms, a privilege denied to Latinxs.

The outlawing of Spanish in public schools, the mass lynching of Mexicans, SB 1070 in Arizona, and toxic unregulated pesticides in the fields are just a few of the many dangers of being brown in the Southwest after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Castillo argues that many US perceptions of Mexican Americans in modern politics and social spheres are influenced by the black/white polarization of racial discourse. Essentially, well documented and undeniable historical evidence of slavery prevents the US from denying the violence wrought upon black bodies; similar evidence exists for its massacre of indigenous peoples which leads to the teaching of such subjects across all public schools; but the lack of knowledge over US history with Mexicans, not just outside its borders but within them, has promoted the perception that all Mexicans and their descendents are immigrants, and thus, obligated to assimilate just as Europeans immigrants did and do (Castillo 1994: 22-23). Such historical and legal context prevent ideas of assimilation and integration from making it into tangible or plausible approaches to a solution to the numerous struggles of the Latinx community today.

This is not to say that Latinxs have not broken into the middle and upper classes of the US or sought acceptance by the mainstream. Geraldo Cadava writes extensively about the rise of Latinx/Hispanic conservatism and the Hispanic alliance to the Republican Party's conservative platform. It began to gain traction with Republican Benjamin "Boxcar Ben" Fernandez who, in 1980, become the first Hispanic[4] to run for President of the United States. Peak Hispanic conservatism came about during the Reagan and Nixon administrations with the appointment of Katherine Ortega, the first Hispanic to be appointed US Treasurer, the creation of the Republican National Hispanic Assembly (RNHA), and George HW Bush's appointment of Catalina Vasquez Villalpando as Ortega's successor (Cadava 2016: 385, 390). It is argued that these appointments helped give Hispanics a sense of political representation and acknowledgement that Democrats had failed to consider. Additionally, the rise of Leftist radical politics throughout Latin America during these decades is another reason that certain Hispanic ethnic groups chose to align themselves with the US American right.

However, this allegiance to the Republican party was not unconditional. Prominent Hispanic conservative figures denounced and spoke out against the

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[4] For this section on Cadava's work, I will replace the term "Latinx" with "Hispanic" since that is the identifying term used during the time period Cadva is writing about.

Republican platform when its members lobbied for the passage of racially discriminatory immigration laws. Cadava draws comparisons between this break from the Republican party and strict conservatism to the recent political rhetoric of Donald Trump and his supporters. Despite "finding a home in the GOP," the Hispanic/Latinx community enjoyed only relative acceptance into the mainstream that was revealed to be a fallacy by racialized immigration politics.

Whiteness and the American Dream

The definition of whiteness that I employ in this work goes beyond just European ancestry to include socioeconomic class because terms of color, and thus identities of color, imply non-whiteness which will always remain as barriers to perceived legality and national belonging. "The concept of 'whiteness' implies both European ancestry and a middle-or upper-class status….with terms of color such as 'Mexican American'…not only is (a largely) non-European ancestry implied, but also a lower or working-class status is indicate" (Murgia and Foreman 2003: 65). The importance of this lies in the fact that even when Latinxs do achieve traditional success, such as obtaining a college degree and moving up in economic class, they will almost always never be white, especially if they hold on to non-white traits like manner of speaking, cultural traditions, names, etc. This consequence only serves to prove that as an individual strategy, assimilation only serves as a

reminder that racial inequality exists at all social levels; furthermore, as a collective strategy, assimilation can not work for the entire group as it has for European immigrants in the past because of aforementioned evidence of the intense othering of Latinxs (Blauner 2001: 59-60).

MacIntosh provides a useful metaphor of what it means to be white in American society in saying "[it is like having] an invisible weightless knapsack of provisions, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, compasses, and blank checks" (Murguia and Foreman 2003:65). These are tools exclusive to those who are white, and tools minorities must struggle to obtain by other means.

This provides a difficult obstacle for efforts to diversify not only work but educational environments as well. The success and incorporation of ethnic minorities requires the deliberate replacement of cultural values and traditions with those associated with traditional economic success. This is evident in modern day economic analyses of why ethnic minorities are "unsuccessful" in corporate jobs. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America*, argue that schools create occupational immobility, a contradictory claim to that of opportunity via education in traditional narratives of the American Dream (Bowles and Gintis 1976). The leading factor behind this is the lack of what they call "soft skills" which are personality traits that determine an individual's success in the workforce. These traits are loosely defined as

ambition, organization, deliberation, discipline, efficiency; but what is lacking from this list is empathy and altruism, which if emphasized or included in curriculum, may incline individuals towards social justice, and social justice is not conducive to capitalist interests (Spring 2016: 156). These soft skills are often inherited through family social capital and in the case of white US American families, the traits need not be taught in schools only reinforced. Part of the reason white students have more occupational success is the structure of their education, which is tailored to include more opportunities for leadership. These opportunities often come in the form of increased presence of specialized charter schools in high income neighborhoods. On the other hand, low income students are more likely to receive an authoritarian education designed to teach order and respect, thereby preparing low income students with the skills necessary for service careers (Spring 2016: 150). Thus, when minority students seek to enter higher education and pursue non-service careers, they are often wholly unprepared to compete. Not only must they keep up with coursework, they must also learn the skills white students have known their entire lives, adding burden and feelings of inadequacy to an already challenging environment to navigate.

In the case of the interviewed Latinx alumni, and students like them, this struggle is compounded upon by their immigrant parents. In 2009, 8% of children born in the United States had at least one unauthorized parent, with higher rates for children from certain ethnic communities (Dreby 2012). Unauthorized parents experience disadvantages that are often passed on to US-citizen children, such as less information about and access to social services and knowledge about laws, which come to affect the resources their children interact with (Dreby 2012). Not only are class related barriers a major cause of lack of social mobility and access, but they are compounded upon when race is involved.

Driving Theory: Inclusion and Social Citizenship

The pressures to prove one's worthiness of the privileges of legality often fall on the shoulders of the second generation of immigrants. They are not allowed to fail and this is a message they often receive not only from society, but from parents who have a narrative of sacrifice to their immigrant story, one that risked everything and left home to find opportunity for the next generation. All the participants come from mixed status families, meaning while they may be US citizens, they are related to people who are not, often times their parents or siblings. Lisa Park argues that for the second generation, the pursuit of greater social status is ultimately a pursuit of legitimate social citizenship (2005:112). Social citizenship has racial connotations and is the performance of citizenship via consumption through career choice, which often means entering white spaces as one moves up in economic status (Park

2005:87). If one appears to be a good citizen, getting an education, having a stable job, buying a home, speaking English, adhering to cultural values, etc., one is deemed worthy of it. Another side of social citizenship, in addition to performance via consumption, is having the appearance of a citizen; essentially, social citizenship can belong to someone without legal citizenship if they fit a society's visual characteristics of a full citizen, which is almost always whiteness. Roberto Gonzales would call this a "phenotypic passport" which is indicative of the diversity of skin tone among Mexicans and other Latin Americans (Gonzales 2016:105). Appearance clearly has a say in the sense of security and determining deportability, as evident in the discriminatory law SB 1070, passed in Arizona in 2010, which could draw on prior US and Arizona Supreme Court decisions that authorised Border Patrol officers to consider what the bill terms "Mexican appearance" in the enforcement of immigration law at the Mexico–US border (Hessick, Massaro, and Miller 2011). Of course this "Mexican appearance" spills over to include all Central and South Americans given the shared history of Spanish colonization. It becomes evident that the denial of citizenship since the annexation of the Southwestern states has meant more than just a lack of civil protections for Latinxs and their descendants; it has meant the creation of a permanent otherness, of an unchanging foreignness despite centuries on these lands now owned by the US.

And as with all things foreign, the US government either assimilates or expels them, which in the case of Mexican Americans and the rest of Latin America, has meant assimilation via schools or expulsion via deportation and incarceration.

As postsecondary education has become critical to social mobility, the presence of college access organizations like Summer Bridge, AVID, TRIO, and many more, have played a vital role in helping low income and racial minorities enroll in college and university. These organizations provide information about the college admissions process and can provide financial assistance to students who need it. However, just as important as financial access to college is a sense of belonging, "college needs to be more than a bright idea, a possibility, or a dream—it needs to be connected to the self" (Stephens et al. 2015). What Stephens and his colleagues attempt to argue is that belonging, and seeing oneself represented in higher education in the form of professors, administrators, etc., is central to success. This is the area in which institutions of higher learning, both public and private, like Macalester, fall short and where this exploratory research takes root.

Methodology

This is a case study of Latinx college students and their experiences in college, specifically at Macalester College. This school was chosen because of its very public endorsement of social justice, dedication to diversity, and overall liberal

goals and environment. With graduation rates hovering around 80 percent (Macalester 2016), much higher than the national average of 59 percent (NCES 2016)[5], Macalester is a stellar institution that claims to have the student's best interest in mind. I was mostly concerned with if such a prestigious and liberal institution was still reproducing systems of inequality as previously described, or not. In order to answer this, I draw on in-depth interviewing of alumni, video analysis, and textual analysis. Interview participants were all first generation college students and US citizens in addition to being children of Latin American immigrants. The only notable difference in how the Central American participant recounted his collegiate experience in relation to the others was in terms of ethnic self-identification. Besides this detail, his experiences did not differ radically as to demand a serious distinction between the Central American and Mexican experience at Macalester. All participants were asked to discuss their education before Macalester, their time as an undergraduate student, and their lives immediately following graduation. In order to asses the experience at Macalester and how that experience had an impact on the individual's life, I made sure to interview people who had graduated at least three years ago. Interviews were conducted in person in a private location on campus location or over video call (Google Hangouts) from the comfort of

the interview volunteer's home. None of the subjects were aware of each other's participation in the study.

Macalester, like many universities private or public, promotes their prospective students a university experience. Institutions do so through recruiting pamphlets, videos, student testimonials, flying students into the school, etc. and succeed in promising students an intellectually stimulating but all inclusive next few years at their school. In order to provide a concrete image of this, I rely upon the public Macalester College Youtube account and the content published on Macalester's official website. On the Youtube account, there are 472 videos that have been uploaded since the creation of the account in late 2009. Since the participants graduated in either 2014 or 2015, I only looked at videos between 2009 and 2015 as to analyze content they may have watched as prospective first years and understand how videos produced during their time at Macalester may have been indicative of the College's social climate. For this section, I watched every fifth video posted in my target time frame which amounted to fifty six videos. I addition to the 56 video selected, based on the titles, I analyzed in depth those that detailed student experience which were not in the initial group. The final total of videos watched was sixty-one. Analysis of the college's website was done to obtain official statistics on race and class in addition to mission statements to understand the school's official goals and interests. All together, this study analyzes

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[5] These are numbers for six-year graduation rates.

content gathered from sixty-one videos, various pages from the Macalester website, and the three in depth interviews.

Participant Profiles[6]

I interviewed three Macalester alumni for this research. The first was Oscar, a 2015 Macalester graduate from Santa Cruz, California. The oldest of three children and the son of Mexican immigrants, Oscar was the first to attend and graduate from a college and is currently enrolled in graduate school in Minnesota. He was able to attend Macalester thanks to help from a program called Summer Bridge. While at Macalester, he was heavily involved in the Bonner Scholars program and *Adelante*, the Latinx student group. Second to be interviewed was Graciela, a 2014 graduate from Brooklyn, New York who also has Mexican parents. Contrastly, Graciela is the youngest of her siblings but the first born in the US. Her two older sisters, both at least ten years her older than her, obtained their undergraduate degrees but struggled immensely due to citizenship status. A program called LEDA (Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America) assisted her in her pursuit of college during high school and introduced her to Macalester. At Macalester, Graciela was also a Bonner Scholar and involved with the DML (Department of Multicultural Life) as well as the Women of Color Identity Collective. Identity Collectives are a way for students who

share and identity to gather anonymously once or twice a month. Last was Scott, who is the second of three children born to a Salvadoran mother and Guatemalan father. He graduated in 2014 and is from East LA in California. One Voice Scholars was the organization that assisted him through high school when he became interested in attending college. At Macalester, he was a Bonner Scholar, an Outing Club leader, and rugby player. All participants happened to share similar working class family backgrounds and grew up in low income immigrant neighborhoods. All attended public school and graduated from Macalester four years after enrolling.

Analysis: The Two *Macalester's*

For many young adults, college is seen as a stepping stone, as a way to refine the skills they already had in high school that led them to college in the first place and prepare for the workforce. For others, it becomes a site of struggle and realizations. This section first introduces the student/campus image crafted by Macalester via narratives in Youtube videos and the official website. Then, I focus on two main aspects of the college experience as told in the interviews: (1) coping with socioeconomic disparities; and, (2) their adjustment to the racial environment. For the purpose of the analysis, the above topics have separated into their respective sections although I recognize the interconnectedness of the topics.

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[6] In order to preserve anonymity of the participants, I assigned each one of them a pseudonym.

I look at how the aforementioned aspects are interconnected with and influenced by the goals of the school. Macalester College's main tenets are: "involvement of students with faculty in the pursuit of learning; creation of a diverse campus community; incorporation of an international perspective in the curriculum and campus life; involvement of the College in the life of the metropolitan area; and espousal of service as a way of life" (Macalester 2017). In order to promote these core values, the College emphasizes academic rigor and collaboration; but as the interviews will show, both of these settings can be full of obstacles and stressors that only racial and economic minorities have to face.

Who is Macalester?

Utilizing videos and web pages published by Macalester, an understanding of the student body and its attitudes can take shape. According to the data on the Macalester website, during 2010 and 2011, the years all three interviewees enrolled in College respectively, the number of Hispanic students was at its highest it had been in almost ten years. During the years the interview subjects enrolled at Macalester, a majority of incoming first years came from Minnesota, followed by California, Wisconsin, and Illinois (Macalester 2011). In the examined document, it was notable that following statistics on first year enrollment, numbers detailing students of color were presented without specifying that it was showcasing

total enrollment, not just first year enrollment.[7]

According to the numbers, Macalester was the most diverse it had ever been, seeing as how the college had only begun including diversity and multiculturalism as central goals beginning in 1992 (Gudeman 2001). This, of course, is a message Macalester seeks to transmit to the world and future students. Videos from Macalester's Youtube channel feature students, faculty, and staff talking about the school and its environment. Both students and faculty can be seen describing Macalester students as smart, feisty, committed, unique, happy, unafraid to express opinions or challenge professors, broad-minded, and diverse (Macalester 2009). Prospective students enroll at the college because they are drawn to who Macalester students are portrayed to be, as seen in a video where first years were interviewed during orientation. While that video interviewed seven students, only one was a domestic student of color, and her reasons for attending Macalester differed immensely from the others and correlated with that of the alumni interviewed (Macalester 2010). She cited money and family as being the main two factors in her decision, while her peers were allowed to focus on programs, class size, location, and social environment, her immediate motivations had little to do with herself. Even that ten second clip gives a glimpse into the hidden narrative of the student experience

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[7] See *Fig.1* in Images section.

at Macalester, and one that deserves to be brought to light.

(1) Coping with Socioeconomic Disparities

How I analyze this section According to economic statistics gathered by *The New York Times*, in 2015, Macalester was among the highest in Minnesota colleges/universities to have students from the top one percent (almost 7 percent of students). Additionally, in that same year, about 55 percent of students came from the top 20 percent (defined as a median income of $125,000), while barely 5 percent come from the bottom fifth ($20,000 or less per year) (New York Times 2017). According to these statistics, more than half of the students are affluent, indicating a lack of economic diversity. Economic diversity is rarely as emphasized as racial diversity and can be an additional source of disconnect between the individual, institution, and peers. Social class can be as cultural as ethnic and racial identity, complete with its own language dialect, customs, and traditions exclusive to respective classes (Murguia and Forman 2003:65). When socioeconomic class is shared, however, it can be a point of understanding and bonding between individuals. For example, Oscar described his high school as consisting of a lot of Latinx and Asian immigrants, where he says he did not see a reason to differentiate himself from other people racially because despite those racial and ethnic differences, they all attended the same school which meant they all shared a class identity. This comradery

was lost for him in college because there was hardly anyone at Macalester to relate to his experiences and therefore listen to him. Graciela and Scott similarly recounted struggling to "find a voice" at Macalester.

As a first year, Graciela remembered an instance in a geography class when she was afraid to speak on a racial segregation, "...the professor just wrote 'What is racial segregation?' on the board and I don't know why, I just felt so uncomfortable because you're giving people a space to talk about it but yet I felt I had the most burden on it...like it was the most personal to me...here I was one of two people of color and we were about to have that conversation. I didn't want to be that person that people look at and are like, 'Yes, you tell us what to think.' And I could tell that the people around me, I could tell that they were very careful with their words." There in that classroom, the professor created an open and obvious platform on which to discuss issues that affected a student in her class and yet Graciela felt she could not speak on it. She felt outnumbered and unsupported. Contrastly, her senior year, when presented with a situation she did not agree with, she did not hesitate to speak out.

The context was a class assignment to go to Frogtown, take a photo, and make an assessment of the neighborhood and its people based on that photo. When her time came to present, a more confident and assured Graciela vocalized her issues with the assignment, openly

opposing her professors. She stated that doing the assignment was disrespectful of the community and that it was reinforcing the disconnected way geographers were already studying communities. In this sense, Graciela lived up to the image of a Macalester student; professors often laud their students who take a stand (Macalester College 2009), but this confidence did not come easy to her, and she admits it took her years to achieve it. This presentation involved feedback from classmates that was only given to the student, so professors were unaware of comments, "Some of them were like, 'Yeah! I support you!' but there was a couple that said 'Why are you so angry?' like, 'this was just an assignment' you know like, 'I don't understand why this is a big deal.' And I was just like, well of course, you know, of course. Even when I do have a say, in that moment...there was still this sentiment of like 'Why? Why do you have to bring this up?'" Graciela was unsurprised by the fact that some students refused to and did not understand her critique. Even years later, the frustration is evident in Graciela's voice, in part because she knows even though she spoke up, a lot of students did not actually listen to her.

Similarly, even after leaving the biology department, and entering into the educational studies department, where he thought he could find a way to connect to others, Scott hesitated to participate, "You know, I came from a neighborhood where people get shot, where some people get stabbed where it happens everyday, stuff that I didn't really talk about my first two years at Macalester. I didn't really tell people where I was coming from or who I was…[my professor] told me, 'Hey Scott, don't be afraid to tell people where you're coming from, what you're about' and I realized that my life was worth listening to."

What Scott described was a failure to find a connection, something that bound him to academia and academia to him, contrary to Macalester's inclusive image. As stated by Stephens et al., without examples to prove otherwise, a lack of role models can convey to working-class students that people "like them" are not college material and that they may not have what it takes to excel in college (2015). Macalester is not immune to reproducing a sense of exclusion like this, and in fact, testimonial from the interview subjects proves it. Oscar felt it when he began pursuing college and even after he was enrolled. When asked about his desire to attend college as a high schooler, Oscar very readily said, "it was never really a question for me whether or not I would go to college...I was never really presented any other options...After my first year of high school...I was pushed into AP classes and at first I resisted them. I was like, 'No, no, I'm not smart enough to do that. Like, those are for the hella smart kids, I'm only like kinda smart' you know?" Even during his time at Macalester, he had feelings of doubt, "I went to a really crappy public high school...You know like, I wasn't very well educated before coming to Macalester, and I felt it, [mentor

professors] felt it, and they helped me catch up." Feeling he did not have another alternative, that he was obligated to be traditionally successful, is representative of what Park (2005) calls social citizenship. Oscar was never allowed to fail at college, he "[wasn't] allowed to do that."

Scott felt it when he dropped out of the biology department in favor of an education degree, "I don't think I was prepared when I got in there…it seemed like everybody already had a strong understanding of the classes they were going into and I was like 'Oh, shit' you know? And I really wasn't able to find the help to catch up."

It is a fact that Macalester is an expensive school, and prices are only getting higher. In the 2011-2012 school year, the cost of attendance for a Macalester student living on campus, which is all first year and second year students, was $49,124 with the cost increasing by an estimated $2,000 every year since (Macalester 2017). Though the college promises to meet student financial needs (Macalester 2017), with an average financial aid package of $47,908 in 2017, students with low income backgrounds like Oscar, Graciela, and Scott were still facing barriers that money can not solve. The interviewees are the cream of the crop, the best of the best so to speak. In 2010, around the time all three of them were looking into colleges and universities, nearly a quarter of all Hispanic/Latinos in the US were living in poverty (Flores, López, and Radford 2017). They are among the most

successful cases because they all have a bachelor's degree from a private out of state college. The interviewees are Latinx, they are children of immigrants, they grew up working class, and all had the help of college programs that provided resources and money to get them to Macalester and yet they struggled. All of this support and still there were barriers they were not prepared for. Why? They struggled to find a place to belong, to find support so far from home, to find others they could relate to, to find a voice, and to navigate this new whiter and wealthier environment. The experiences described in the interviews link back to the concept of white social capital as described by MacIntosh that Oscar, Graciela, and Scott did not receive as students of color in low income immigrant communities. Fortunately, all three of them were able to find support in the Bonner Scholars program, a four-year civic engagement program providing leadership programming, academic support, engagement opportunities and a social network (Macalester 2017). His work study job through the program helped Scott figure out he was interested in education, and find a new major to pursue after struggling in Biology. The network Oscar built at his work study helped him find a job after graduation. By his senior year, Oscar was spending more time on Lake Street[8] than on Macalester's campus. Graciela found solace in her work study

[8] Lake Street is well known in Minneapolis/Saint Paul as a diverse neighborhood with a large Somali and Latinx community.

because it allowed her to get away from the whiteness at Macalester and spend time around immigrants and immigrant families.

In addition to the traditional adjustments all students make during their first year of college, the adjustments made by those who already know what to expect and worry about, students like the interviewees had to learn to exist in such tight quarters with whiteness and elitism. Institutions are bringing in economic minorities into their elite private liberal arts environment but failing to address the ways in which their background may affect their experience at the college; they fail to care about their student experience past the recruitment of one more minority into their statistics.

(2) Navigating the Racial Environment[9]

A look at Macalester's *"About"* page on their official website gives more insight into the experiences it promises prospective students.[10] Under the *Why Macalester?* tab, the section on multiculturalism boasts what appear to be positive statistics on student diversity (no year is specified for all data).[11]

The number of undergraduate students enrolled at Macalester during any given academic year tends to stay around 2,100, meaning around 400 of these students are domestic students of color which sounds like a large number. Students in promotional videos on Macalester's Youtube channel often described the College as being "a place for everybody" (Macalester 2011). Despite this, every one of the interview subjects reported having difficulties adjusting to the "how white Macalester was." Scott, Oscar, and Graciela had been surrounded by Latinxs and other racial minorities their entire lives, they almost never interacted with whiteness on the day to day like they did at Macalester. "College for us was a place to learn how to work and live with white people," Graciela recounted.

A closer look at Macalester's racial makeup show that faculty seem to follow a similar trend in diversity to that of the student body.[12] The graphs feature both non-tenure and tenured professors at Macalester between 2007 and 2017, which include the years the interview participants were at Macalester. At no point in time does the combined number of tenured domestic professors of color equal even half that of tenured white professors. When one looks at the numbers for non-tenured professors, the numbers are even worse. Much like Stephens et al. (2015) previously stated, the need to see oneself represented in education has a large impact on the success on minority status students. Oscar was the one that sought out and found professor mentors the most, of the three

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[9] I will conduct follow up interviews with participants to expand on analysis in this section.

[10] It was not possible for me to access previous versions of the website as to see what the interview subjects might have browsed as prospective students so I am working off the most recent update to the site in August, 2018 but it's most recent update is marked 2017.

[11] See *Fig. 2* in Images section.

[12] See *Fig. 3* and *Fig. 4* in Images section.

interviewed. The two mentors he found were some of the only Latinx professors at Macalester, "I felt at home in psych, mostly because of [one professor]. She's one of my favorite people on the planet." He says she also pushed students, especially those that were female and Latinx, "She would tell them, 'You guys just have to be better than everyone else in the room. It sucks and I'm sorry, but like here we are.'" The professor recognized the unique difficulties and challenges her Latinx students would face, and she was honest in her mentorship and support of them. Just the presence, and willingness to talk, from one professor made Oscar comfortable enough in a department as to stay and minor in it. Oscar also bonded with another Latinx professor in a different department, "She just always made it a point to make her Latinx students feel welcome...she knows what it's like, to be a Chicana in Minnesota and come from such a different place." Oscar's primary major, International Studies, was not a place comfortable place for him mostly because of the way students were polarized between one, who he claimed to be racist, professor who often tokenized his Latinx/Spanish speaking students. Because of this, and a few other reasons, Oscar could not call the International Studies department a home. His experiences exemplify the importance of professors for students of color, not only in making a positive impact, but a negative one.

Conclusion

Macalester College has been outwardly ambitious in it goals to diversify its campus not only domestically, but internationally. As with all liberal institutions, it is service oriented, and wants to create global citizens who will change and serve the world for the better. The College's goals, though admirable, need to be recentered to give attention to the students it is working so hard to recruit. As this exploratory research has demonstrated, for all the financial aid before and during college, Latinx students are still struggling to make it through to the end of their degrees. Money is not enough. Those interviewed were the most successful of cases, they made up for what was missing by finding professors, programs, and peers to create an intricate network of support. So has the educational system really evolved to include and serve all of its students? This case study shows the barriers faced in a setting that is committed to multiculturalism and social inclusion. Even in this setting, the interviews shed light on important barriers. The narratives of the interviewees indicate a deep rooted problem in higher education, one that not even a socially conscious, diversity oriented, and inclusive college like Macalester seems to have remedied. Higher education is still reproducing systems of inequality and students are still having to work significantly harder to overcome despite it. All three of the participants expressed a profound gratitude for the Bonner Scholars program and the opportunities it provided. What this demonstrates is a

need for support outside of the financial realm, for more diverse faculty, for opportunity and guidance that students feel they lack.

Images

Fig. 1: Demographics for Students of Color at Macalester (2002-2011).

RACE/ETHNICITY

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11**	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Number of Full-Time Faculty (NTT)										
Asian	2	1	2	0	4	5	2	0	1	3
Black, African Am.	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Hispanic	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	3	4	4
Native American, Alaska Native	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
Two or More Races	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
White	27	35	24	29	32	34	35	37	49	38
International*	4	5	2	2	2	3	5	4	6	5
TOTAL	37	44	31	34	42	45	45	45	63	53
Number of Part-Time Faculty (NTT)										
U.S. faculty of color	8	10	12	9	9	11	14	12	15	15
White	66	64	75	57	59	63	65	65	65	46
International	2	3	1	4	2	1	3	5	3	3
Unknown	9	7	7	4	4	7	6	7	16	0
TOTAL	85	84	95	74	74	82	88	89	99	64

NOTE: **2016-17 data will be updated in the spring.** Totals are larger than those reported to external audiences in part because these totals include persons who teach only in the spring. External counts incorporate fall faculty only.
*International faculty does not include persons in the US with permanent resident status.
**Beginning in 2010-2011, Hispanic faculty are counted as Hispanic, regardless of any race identification they make.

Fig. 2: Data on Student Diversity circa 2017

- Percent of U.S. students who are students of color: 25

- Percent of student body who are U.S. students of color: 21

- From 2007 to 2016, the enrollment of U.S. students of color increased from 347 to 449, a 29% increase

- Percent of international students (excluding students with dual citizenship): 15

- If dual citizens and permanent U.S. residents are counted: 23

Fig. 3: Non-Tenure Track Faculty Racial Demographics (2007-2017)

RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP ENROLLMENT

Race/Ethnicity	Fall 02	Fall 03	Fall 04	Fall 05	Fall 06	Fall 07	Fall 08	Fall 09	Fall 10 *	Fall 11
Black, African American	58	48	63	71	83	88	70	83	72	59
Hispanic	53	54	53	73	72	73	87	87	117	129
Asian	93	91	120	131	148	168	169	178	132	125
Native American, Alaska Native	21	21	17	16	17	18	20	20	10	10
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0
Two or More Races	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	77	85
Total Males	70	73	86	97	112	131	125	136	156	144
Total Females	155	141	167	194	208	216	221	232	253	264
TOTAL ENROLLMENT	**225**	**214**	**253**	**291**	**320**	**347**	**346**	**368**	**409**	**408**

* Beginning in fall 2010, Hispanic students are counted only in the Hispanic category regardless of any other race identifications they make. Non-Hispanic students who identify with more than one race are counted in the Two or More Races category. Non-US citizens are counted separately and not included in any of the racial/ethnic categories.

Fig. 4: Tenure Track Faculty Racial Demographics (2007-2017)

RACE/ETHNICITY

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11*	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Number of Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty (T/TT)										
Asian	16	15	15	14	13	13	13	15	16	15
Black, African American	6	7	7	7	6	6	8	7	8	8
Hispanic	4	5	6	6	8	9	11	12	10	10
Native American, Alaska Native	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Two or More Races	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2
White	109	104	113	115	115	114	115	115	110	113
International (NRA)	2	2	5	5	6	4	2	1	2	2
TOTAL	139	135	148	149	150	148	152	152	149	152

NOTE: US permanent residents are identified by their race/ethnicity and are not included in the international counts.
*Beginning in 2010-2011, Hispanic faculty are counted as Hispanic, regardless of any race identification they make.

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