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### Authors

Levin, John S  
Haberler, Zachary  
Walker, Laurencia  
et al.

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# Community College Culture and Faculty of Color

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**John S. Levin<sup>1</sup>, Zachary Haberler<sup>1</sup>, Laurencia Walker<sup>1</sup>,  
and Adam Jackson-Boothby<sup>1</sup>**

## Abstract

This investigation examines and explains the ways in which community college faculty of color construct their understandings of institutional culture. We investigate four community colleges in California through interviews with 31 full-time faculty of color. This faculty group expresses identity conflicts between their professional roles and their cultural identities. Their understandings of their institutions suggest that the culture of the community college is more complex and multi-faceted than that portrayed in the scholarly literature, which often portrays the institution as homogeneous and the faculty body as uniform.

## Keywords

faculty, faculty of color, community colleges, qualitative field methods, institutional culture

Scholarship that addresses community college culture, and implies either actualities or idealizations of the institution as focused upon equity, or democratic principles, or social mobility (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Kempner, 1990; Shaw, Rhoads, & Valadez, 1999), ignores perspectives that emanate from faculty of color, who constitute 17% of faculty in community colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This omission limits both scholarly understanding of community college faculty as a whole, including faculty-student and faculty-faculty interactions, and of the institution itself, including its values and actions. Scholars (Baker & Associates, 1992; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; McGrath & Spear, 1991; Shaw et al., 1999; Weis, 1985a) have addressed community college culture from numerous perspectives,

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<sup>1</sup>University of California, Riverside, USA

## Corresponding Author:

John S. Levin, Graduate School of Education, University of California, Riverside, 900 University Avenue, Riverside, CA 92521, USA.

Email: johnlev@ucr.edu

yet the image of the institution is often homogeneous—as a junior college, as oriented to social mobility for students, and as a middle class and largely non-descript school for an adult population. Although there is ambiguity over mission and purpose of the community college (Meier, 2013), there is generally a uniform view of institutional culture, in large part because of its student population (Levin & Kater, 2013). Yet, race and ethnicity have rarely been the basis of the cultural identity of the institution. However, as early as 1978 (London, 1978), there was evidence that race and ethnicity were components of the U.S. community college's organizational culture and played a role in organizational behaviors, particularly in the behaviors of students.

While scholars have acknowledged the perspective of students of color as one way to understand community college culture (Weis, 1985a), the perspective of faculty of color is not apparent in the literature. The several treatments of faculty in community colleges (Grubb et al., 1999; Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2011; Outcalt, 2002; Roueche, Roueche, & Milliron, 1995) ignore not only the ways in which faculty of color understand the community college, but also the concepts of race and ethnicity. For example, in questioning the professional status or legitimacy of community college faculty, scholars do not address a faculty divide by race or ethnicity (Levin, Walker, Haberler, & Jackson-Boothby, 2013).

## Purpose

Through an emphasis upon the experiences and perceptions of faculty of color, our purpose is to expand the understanding of both the community college faculty and the community college as an institution. We offer descriptions and explanations of behavioral patterns narrated by faculty of color. We view these patterns, for example institutional members' interactions with each other, as components of a collective form of institutional culture. We understand culture more as what a community college is—its behaviors and patterns of meaning—than what a community college possesses (Smircich, 1983), such as corporate images (e.g., student success), public images (e.g., job training), or reputation (e.g., second chance educational institution). We set out to add to cultural understandings of community colleges, through meanings generated by faculty of color.

“Faculty of color” is a phrase scholars use to refer to all non-White faculty; “minority faculty” or “underrepresented faculty” more specifically refers to African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian faculty. From even a functional perspective, this population of faculty of color encounters different conditions in their institution than White faculty. Arguably, these conditions in turn shape the experiences of faculty of color (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey, & Hazelwood, 2011; Griffin & Reddick, 2011). To frame our investigation, we rely upon culture theory, specifically Martin and Meyerson's (1988) critique of organizational culture as consistent and integrated rather than differentiated and fragmented (Martin, 2002). Indeed, organizational theory transported to the study of both higher education institutions

generally (Tierney, 1991) and community colleges specifically (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Levin, 2001) has largely adhered to the Schein (1985) view of organizational culture: the unifying meanings of organizational life found in artifacts, symbols, rituals, behaviors, and stories. That is, for the community college, a monolithic or all-encompassing view is based upon an imperative for consensus, coherence, and for public image (Levin, 2013; Meier, 2013). Martin and Meyerson (1988), similar to other later scholars on organizations who tread on postmodernism, reject the notion of culture as either singular or unifying.

Thus, this investigation not only includes previously ignored voices—those of faculty of color—but also suggests that institutional culture is arguably pluralistic, fragmented, and even ambiguous. This perspective is largely counter to that which has guided community college research and scholarship for the past several decades.

## Literature Review

### *Community College Culture and Faculty of Color*

The growing body of the literature on community colleges contains, either implicitly or explicitly, understandings of institutional culture. These understandings suggest that institutional culture is homogeneous. This homogeneity pertains as well to disaggregations that feature one group (e.g., students) or one aspect of the institution (e.g., governance). For example, even though an early understanding such as London's (1978) claims to address "the culture of the community college," the analysis is only directed at faculty/student cultures. Later, McGrath and Spear (1991) addressed academic culture, but again their focus was upon faculty, particularly academic faculty, and their effects upon students. More explicit efforts to tease out faculty culture can be found in E. Seidman (1985), Weis (1985b), Kempner (1990), and Grubb et al. (1999), specifically through relying upon the perceptions of faculty groups, whereas student culture is more explicit in Weis (1985a), Roueche and Roueche (1993), and Levin and Montero-Hernandez (2009). Efforts to generalize community college culture can be found in the assumptions of Brint and Karabel (1989), and more overtly in Baker and Associates (1992) and Shaw et al. (1999). Cohen and Brawer's (2008) overview of community colleges implicitly frames the institution as a multi-purpose, comprehensive endeavor, but with a single overarching goal, related to student access and opportunities, and a consistent set of behaviors.

In short, community college culture, whether the term is applied to the institution as a whole or to disaggregated groups, is portrayed, with some exceptions (e.g., Cooper & Kempner, 1993),<sup>1</sup> as uniform or what Martin and Meyerson (1988) call "consensual culture." Such a view from the scholarly literature misses entirely the segmented, variable, and diverse culture or cultures of community colleges. While there may be a general faculty culture in community colleges, there may also be several faculty cultures within the institution, comprised of the views, behaviors, and actions of diverse faculty groups related to their employment status and racial/ethnic categories.

### *The Functionalist Perspective*

A functional perspective is among the most common applied to community colleges, where both practitioners and scholars have defined a purpose or purposes for the institution and then proceeded to examine the institution on the basis of its ability to live up to these purposes (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Grubb et al., 1999). Yet, even the issue of race and ethnicity, when it is addressed in the community college, is framed by functionalism, and scholars and practitioners ask "Are there enough faculty of color?" (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; Nicholas & Oliver, 1994; Owens, Reis, & Hall, 1994). This perspective and this approach have led to considerable emphasis upon diversity in higher education, with the focus upon race and ethnicity.

### *Diversity in the Community College*

The topic of diversity in higher education institutions, an increasingly salient concern in higher education since the 1960s, has given considerable prominence to faculty of color. While student diversity in higher education has increased dramatically in the last half-century, faculty diversity is another story as White faculty continue to comprise an overwhelming majority in all levels and sectors of higher education (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2007). In 2004, the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) reported that 80.8% of full-time faculty and 85.3% of part-time faculty were White (Cataldi, Fahimi, & Bradburn, 2005). While these figures express an imbalance for higher education in general, for the community college, the imbalance is amplified given the close to majority population of students of color and the large proportion of underrepresented minority student population (NCES, 2007, 2008; Owens et al., 1994). Currently, the 1,177 community colleges educate large numbers of underrepresented minority students including the majority of Hispanic (52%) and Native American (52%) undergraduates (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Overall, 45% of all community college students are categorized as underrepresented minority students (NCES, 2008), and this does not include students enrolled in non-credit courses, which might include English as a second language (ESL). Yet in the fall of 2007, the proportion of community college faculty who were minorities was 17% (NCES, 2007).

There is considerable scholarly work that addresses minority faculty at four-year institutions; this cannot be said of underrepresented faculty at community colleges. Collectively, the body of literature on minority faculty illustrates that in spite of significant recognition of the need for and benefits of minority faculty in higher education, there are significant structural and cultural issues that contribute to their relatively low numbers. Recent research stresses the importance of minority faculty in the academic community and the resultant quality of education offered at colleges and universities. For example, minority faculty often have perspectives or utilize techniques that raise new questions and alternate solutions that can challenge traditional epistemologies and explore new frontiers in research (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). These new perspectives toward knowledge and research often correspond with behavioral

patterns in the classroom. Exposure to such educational experiences and diversity-related activities benefits all students, not just those with diverse backgrounds themselves, as White students gain familiarity with new ways of thinking and cultures, and students of color receive an education that legitimates their presence in higher education (Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Gurin, Nagada, & Lopez, 2004; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Hurtado, 2007).

Research on the community college, while limited, offers a similar discourse regarding the value of diversity in the faculty. Hagedorn et al. (2007) studied faculty in the Los Angeles Community College District and found that a "critical mass" of Latino faculty increased Latino student retention. In addition to fostering increased connectivity between minority students and community colleges, minority faculty play crucial roles in developing community college environments that value diversity (Harvey, 1994; Owens et al., 1994). Minority faculty can be powerful advocates for institutional change and are pivotal figures in a community college's commitment to diversity. Yet, all evidence aside of their educational and cultural importance in all sectors of higher education, faculty of color are underrepresented in the community college, underrepresented in the community college, and under studied in scholarship.

### *Minority Faculty Status*

While higher education research highlights significant differences in status between White faculty and faculty of color, the variation is more complex than color. In general, White and Asian/Pacific Islander faculty have higher rank, tenure, and earnings than Black/African American faculty. Hispanic faculty appear to be situated in between those groups as their attainment fluctuates depending on the variable measured (Bradburn & Sikora, 2002; Nettles, Perna, & Bradburn, 2000). Researchers who operate within a human capital framework focus on the influence of a specific group of structural variables, workload variables, and on racial/ethnic differences in employment outcomes (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Bonous-Hammarth, & Suh, 2000; Antonio, 2002; Baez, 2000; Bellas & Toutkoushian, 1999). These studies examine institutional reward structures for different workload roles, specifically research, teaching, and service, and the influences of these reward structures on faculty tenure and promotion rates, which, in turn, influence faculty salary. They argue that faculty of color may be, either by choice or appointment, more heavily involved in workload roles that yield fewer benefits, such as service roles (e.g., committees), indicating a serious disadvantage for these faculty members. At institutions that reward research more than teaching, faculty of color are less successful at gaining promotions than their White counterparts.

Demographic research has also identified important disciplinary and institutional differences in the distribution of faculty along racial/ethnic lines. The NSOPF indicates that White and Asian/Pacific Islander faculty are more concentrated in the natural sciences, engineering, and business disciplines, while Hispanic and African American faculty are concentrated in the social sciences, education, and humanities disciplines. Institutionally, these NSOPF data illustrate that White and Asian faculty

are more likely to teach at doctoral institutions than Hispanic and African American faculty (Bradburn & Sikora, 2002; Cataldi et al., 2005).

Similar investigations are few at community colleges. The community college is both categorized and lauded as a minority-serving institution (Malcom, 2013). This may obfuscate the diversity issue that the overwhelming majority of community college faculty are White, and only 17% are categorized as faculty of color. Nicholas and Oliver (1994) argue that in spite of growing sensitivity to faculty diversity since the 1960s, culminating in affirmative action policies and institutional quotas for minority faculty during the 1970s and 1980s, the community colleges of the 1990s had not attained a diverse faculty (see also Harvey, 1994). In over a decade and a half since Nicholas and Oliver (1994), little has changed in community colleges (Levin et al., 2011). Even in states as diverse as California, community college faculty are overwhelmingly White, and underrepresented faculty are overrepresented in the counseling (in California, counselors are deemed faculty), education, social science, and humanities disciplines.

Research on the community college in the area of diversity falls under the theoretical framework of functionalism, primarily out of concern for offering appropriate support, instruction, and guidance to the institution's diverse student population. As a result, this research views institutional culture as homogeneous. Critical perspectives of the community college are limited as are studies that rely upon faculty perspectives as the unit of analysis. Rarely, do studies rely upon the perceptions of faculty of color as their unit of analysis.

Thus, the community college is understood, first, from perspectives that do not take into account the perspectives of faculty of color and, second, as an institution that serves minority students, or students of color as one of its major purposes. Collectively, the literature portrays community college culture as a largely homogeneous entity related to institutional functions, and underemphasizes, if not ignores, the experiences of faculty of color. This portrayal of community college culture is particularly troubling in light of the needs of the highly diverse community college student population, the clear value faculty of color add to their educational experiences, and the lack of diversity among faculty within community colleges.

## **Analytical Framework**

To understand and convey a more complex community college culture that reflects the experiences and perceptions of faculty of color, we utilize two analytical frameworks: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Cultural Identity Theory (CIT). We take the position that institutions are not neutral institutions with respect to ideology and cultural and social identity; that is, institutional participants enact ideological, cultural, and social preferences on a daily basis. To help us account specifically for racial biases in community colleges, we utilize CRT, which emphasizes that racism is embedded in institutions, whose everyday activities, standards, norms, and cultures often favor White individuals (Diggs et al., 2009; Fenelon, 2003; Yosso, 2005). More focused research on four-year colleges and universities employs CRT and identifies "micro-aggressions"



aimed at faculty of color (Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008; Solorzano, 1998). Faculty of color experience these micro-aggressions in the form of overt and covert racism, as well as conditions of invisibility or hyper-visibility. Within the context of CRT, we address the articulated and self-represented cultural identity of faculty. We follow the tradition of identity development and projection in cultural worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), which suggests that identity is shaped by an individual's internal logic (e.g., personal understandings) and their social situations (e.g., interactions with other individuals and groups). We focus our analysis on identity development and its representation within the context of the "historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed 'worlds'" of the faculty and community colleges we studied (Holland et al., 1998, p. 7). For the purposes of our study, then, the articulation of identity integrates the personal experiences and expectations of faculty of color with their social-cultural environment, specifically the community college, including its structures, norms, and practices. These include, on the one hand, what these faculty encounter in interactions with other faculty and, on the other hand, what values they carry in their roles as teachers.

We focus upon the ways in which faculty of color represent themselves (projected identity) and the context and influences that shape this identity. We employ Holland et al.'s (1998) term "self-authoring" to signify the ways faculty of color define and explain their own views and actions. We use CRT to contextualize self-representations of faculty of color (e.g., to identify micro-aggressions) and in so doing endeavor to explain the ways in which these faculty view and judge the values, behaviors, norms, and assumptions of community colleges, that is, the meanings attributed to experiences through self-authoring (Holland et al., 1998) by faculty of color. In the context of CRT, we use examples of subordination and racism for our analysis.

## Methodology

Research sites were selected based on the data obtained from the California Community College Chancellor's Office regarding numbers of full- or part-time faculty of color currently teaching in a credit program. These data were used to compile a comprehensive ranking of California's community colleges for faculty diversity (which was defined as the number of faculty who were neither White nor Asian), specifically the percentage of faculty of color, at all of the 112 community colleges in California. Three institutions with high numbers (>30%) of faculty of color and one with low numbers (<20%) were chosen from the list for a total of four research sites. Because all of the highest ranking institutions in terms of faculty diversity came from the same regional area (southern California), we modified our institution selection criteria to capture different geographical regional locations as well as to maximize faculty diversity. Thus, the three high-ranking institutions selected for this study are all within the top 20 of the comprehensive list of 112 colleges. Our data were drawn from the following institutions, to which we have assigned pseudonyms: Cosmopolitan City College (Los Angeles County), North Point Community College (Northern California), Water's Edge Community College (Inland Southern California), and Oasis Community

College (Southern California desert). As well, we considered institutional size and location (i.e., urban, suburban, rural). At two of our colleges, and among the highest ranking in the state, there were 128 and 118 total full-time and part-time faculty of color, excluding Asian faculty. To access the colleges and their faculty, we contacted each college and asked chief executive officers if they would agree to have their college participate in our study, which would include interviews and observations on their campuses carried out by a team of five researchers.

Data collected for this study consisted primarily of one-on-one, semistructured interviews. We followed the advice of field methods' scholars, including Burgess and Seidman (Burgess, 1984; I. Seidman, 2006) in particular, to ensure a conversational style and not a simple question and answer approach. Data collected included faculty's educational preparation, professional background, prior community college experience, and level of satisfaction as a community college faculty member, as well as factors that influenced personal decisions to become and to remain community college faculty. Data were collected between October 2010 and April 2011. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Faculty were assured that their names and their personal identities would be concealed for protection.

We also collected institutional data from college websites to contextualize interviews. Data from websites include demographic data, institutional policies, plans, and mission and goals' statements, and program curricula. Through these data, we developed "vignettes" of each campus.

At each institution, we interviewed between 8 and 10 faculty for a total of 36 faculty, at four sites, consisting of both full-time and part-time faculty with the majority of them full-time (see Table 1). Faculty came from various program areas, including Auto Mechanics, Business, Counseling, Criminal Justice, Dance, English, Health Sciences, History, ESL, Mathematics, Nursing, Engineering, Psychology, Reading, Sociology, and Visual Arts. Potential participants were identified through a gatekeeper (vice-president, dean, and faculty member, known to one of the researchers) at each site. Invitations were sent to those identified via e-mail to faculty of color to solicit their participation in the study. From these faculty, others were recommended using snow-ball sampling and invited to participate. Participants were identified by gender, department, contract type (full-time or part-time), as well as racial or ethnic affiliations. For reporting, we use pseudonyms for faculty and their institutions to maintain anonymity as agreed upon with participants.

We use data from interviews of 31 full-time faculty. Although our sample of part-time faculty was small—5 of 36 total and 4 of these from one campus—the perceptions of this population were not aligned with those of the full-time faculty. What we can conclude is, consistent with the scholarly literature (Levin et al., 2011), that these part-time faculty, because of their employment conditions, did not have the same experiences as full-time faculty. Their teaching during any one academic year was limited, as were their interactions with campus personnel. They were not party to departmental meetings or campus decision-making. They did not in their self-authoring convey any sense that their race or ethnicity or that of their colleagues had any

**Table 1.** Participant Characteristics.

College	Number of participants	Instructional or counseling faculty	Race/ethnicity	Full-time or part-time
Cosmopolitan City College	10	8—Instructional faculty 2—Counseling faculty	4—Latino/a 5—African American 1—Asian/Pacific Islander	9—Full-time 1—Part-time
North Point Community College	8	4—Instructional faculty 4—Counseling faculty	3—Latino/a 4—African American 1—Asian/Pacific Islander	All Full-time
Water's Edge Community College	11	9—Instructional faculty 2—Counseling faculty	4—Latino/a 3—African American 3—Asian/Pacific Islander	7—Full-time 4—R
Oasis Community College	7	4—Instructional faculty 3—Counseling faculty	4—Latino/a 2—African American 1—Native American	All full-time

effects upon college professional experiences. Their sense of divide was between full-time and part-time status.

Interviews ranged from one to one and a half hours in length, and these were conducted in environments suitable to faculty comfort and choice, such as office spaces or vacant library study rooms. In three or four cases, phone interviews or interviews in more public places were conducted because of scheduling issues or at the request of faculty who were not comfortable talking to us on campus within the vicinity of colleagues or supervisors.

Interview data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti software, which facilitated a research team coding process by providing a central location where the researchers could see all of the coding for the project, and by providing an efficient way of identifying meaningful areas of overlap or connection between different codes. This enhanced the strength of the coding process. Throughout the coding process, members of the research team used concept mapping (Cañas et al., 2005) as an additional way to make sense of the interview data, the analytical frameworks, and the relationships between the different codes in the coding scheme. Concept maps are characterized by the hierarchical organization of concepts that are connected to each other through the use of linking words or phrases. The connections among concepts are aimed to produce propositions (Cañas et al., 2005), and in this investigation to produce or support findings.

CIT and CRT served as the analytical frameworks for provisional coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Initial codes included topics such as personal and professional identity, socialization, dominant ideologies, and resistance to change. Following the advice of Miles and Huberman (1994), we used secondary coding drawn from concepts in CIT (e.g., positionality, self-authoring) and from CRT (e.g., subordination, racism) both to generate meaning and to reduce the large data set. Using these codes, we relied upon several techniques to generate findings including clustering, making comparisons and contrasts, making metaphors, locating intervening variables, and finally making

conceptual coherence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During this process, the research team both analyzed individual interview transcripts and then synthesized the individual transcript data with the total data from all 31 transcripts to achieve findings. We then arrived at conclusions from these findings after several iterations of discussion of findings and their connections to theory.

## Findings

Our findings are placed under two categories related to tenets of CRT. First, we show that faculty of color represent themselves through self-authoring as possessing different understandings of institutional life than their White colleagues and situating themselves in separate social spheres (i.e., personal and professional communities) from their White colleagues. That is, they view the community college as comprised of divided professional worlds. Second, we show that faculty of color view themselves as subordinated to their White colleagues, and in this process the social and cultural identities of faculty of color are suppressed.

### *Different Understandings and a Separate World*

Faculty of color described their institution as a professional, student-oriented workplace. Jesse, a full-time African American history instructor at North Point Community College, characterized behaviors at his college as “pushing toward a common goal . . . [W]e’re trying to promote achievement and success in our students’ lives, and that is what we’re all working for.” Jesse, similar to other faculty of color, valued the student-centered environments of the community college, a characteristic commonly referred to in the scholarly literature (Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2009). Yet, faculty of color also noted that considerable differences exist between their understandings and their White colleagues regarding the meaning of “student-centered.” Soledad, a full-time Latina ESL instructor at Oasis Community College, attributed the discrepancies to “how little understanding of the student population there was here,” and that she heard some faculty talk about students of color in an “us versus them kind of a dynamic.” Thus, to faculty of color at Oasis Community College, the mainstream population of faculty and administrators understood the concept of “student-centered” or “student-oriented” in a technical way by stressing student learning outcomes or by embracing the teaching function of the community college. In some contrast, faculty of color understood “student-centered” as personal, connecting their own backgrounds with students. Cesar, an Auto Mechanics instructor at Cosmopolitan Community College, detailed how his experiences as a youth increased his ability to relate with students in contrast to other faculty members or administrators.

[W]hen I go in that classroom I can relate with at least 50% of the people . . . because if you go back to my youth, I had a lot of problems . . . because I grew up in a very gang, drug infested city and my high school was bad . . . I don’t think my Dean has been in the situation I have been [in] . . .

These separate understandings of “student-centered” presented the faculty of color with an insoluble dilemma: it was not always possible to identify with both the mainstream or dominant profession of faculty at their college and their own racially or ethnically oriented identification of themselves as student-centered professionals.

Interacting with students is the social and institutional location where the faculty of color articulated the most positive identification with their racial or ethnic identity. When asked what keeps them at their particular community college, nearly all faculty referred to their connections with students. Leticia, a full-time self-described Chicana Psychology faculty at North Point Community College, indicated her feeling of connection to her students because of shared backgrounds: “My students are extremely diverse . . . A lot of them come from the same background that I did: kind of poor, kind of pulling yourself up, not really knowing what to do, needing mentoring.” It is this intimate connection with the students, many of whom share similar backgrounds with the faculty of color, that provides a rationale for faculty of color to view themselves as both professionals and members of an ethnic or racial community.

Different understandings of students—those of faculty of color and those of their White counterparts—can lead to differences in professional identities. Gwendolyn, a full-time African American Reading instructor at North Point Community College, noted that her attempts at embracing practices of diversity led to an “expectation that we should accommodate really stereotypical behavior as if that’s allowing the students to express who they really are. And I think it’s based on stereotypes of minorities.” According to this Reading instructor, White faculty at North Point who assume they are embracing diversity practices are actually adopting a negative racial stereotype of African American students, a stereotype that projects different educational expectations on the students. In this example, the African American faculty member is faced with a salient identity conflict. Her identity as a professional educator at North Point Community College collides with her experiences as an African American, and while she may share experiences with other faculty their interpretations of institutional life are quite different than hers. The result is the realization that what many faculty assume to be diversity embracing attitudes toward students is a form of racist behavior, a realization that inhibits this faculty member’s ability to identify positively with the other faculty and the college.

Separate understandings of White faculty and faculty of color were noted by faculty of color in the selection process of new colleagues. That is, in the deliberation and decision process about membership in the professional group, discordant views are shaped by racial identity. Here, there is a contest between professional valuation of formal academic knowledge, academic credentials, and teaching experience on the one hand and personal backgrounds and experiences on the other. Diego, a full-time Counselor at Oasis Community College, explained how when some faculty of color advance through the hiring process, they are rarely selected as a final candidate: “[W]e start with a great pool but we never wind up with the minority hires that we would like to have.” He notes, with qualification, that one specific hire can be an asset to the recruitment of more faculty of color.

We have a young [Latino] Math instructor and he is an energetic fireball in terms of doing a lot of good stuff. But he is in a department that promotes a lot of acceptance but still is very hard on people in terms of keeping them in a certain mold. And that kind of discourages, and so I am hoping that . . . he doesn't get burned out from us because if he does then he doesn't become a spokesman. And that is what we do need, spokespersons who can go out and convince others to come in.

Selena, a full-time Latina Counselor at Water's Edge Community College, spoke of a move to recruit and hire more people with doctorates: "Well, they got folks with their doctorates, but they're not ethnic minorities." Here, the efforts to hire qualified faculty based upon credentials were in conflict with this faculty member's efforts to hire faculty of color who might be a better match for her college's diverse student population. For this faculty member of color and others, the pattern within the faculty hiring process suggests that racial and ethnic identities, individually and collectively, are of peripheral and marginal importance to the community college.

These four community colleges structure and constrain faculty interactions in a way that limits the possibilities for broader, more satisfying relationships across campus. Faculty of color indicated that the majority of faculty interactions occur within their department or, in the narrower academic specializations, in their academic division in the college. These extra-departmental interactions prove to be problematical. Mae, a full-time Dance instructor at Cosmopolitan Community College, found the lack of interdepartmental interactions to be a significant challenge. "Since I've been here, I think the thing that is the most challenging for me is that it's very difficult to have a lot of interaction with faculty from other departments." Similarly, Josephine, a full-time Business instructor at North Point Community College, indicated that there were no opportunities to interact with other faculty, "not unless I find a way to make it happen."

With the exception of faculty in Counseling departments, the faculty of color in our four institutions are in departments that are overwhelmingly White. William, a full-time African American History instructor at Cosmopolitan Community College, described a dominant White presence in his department.

We're in the Social Sciences division, so you [have] Philosophy, Religion, Economics, Sociology, Psychology . . . [T]here are about 48 faculty. There is one other African American male . . . But it's predominately White . . .

As a result of the combination of interacting primarily within academic departments or divisions that consist of predominantly White faculty, faculty of color lack connection to other faculty across campus who share similar cultural identities and backgrounds. This behavioral pattern reinforces difference and marginalization for those faculty who embrace a cultural identity aligned with their ethnic/racial background.

The difficulty for faculty of color in interacting with other faculty of color or engaging in activities that would foster and support racial or ethnic identity is compounded by the expectations placed on these faculty by their college and academic departments

regarding their role as teachers and mentors of students. Sylvia, a full-time English Language faculty member, highlighted one of many experiences in serving as a role model for her students.

Many Latino students, especially women, approach me and say, “How did you get there? How did you do that?” [Y]our presence here is also role modeling for students. And that’s another really good thing to be able to tell them you can do it too. You can do it. You just have to want to do it. And this is the way to do it. Just the fact that you have a Latino woman or man in front of the class, you know, and telling you experiences and sharing views and giving you also another perspective of the world.

Full-time faculty, including counselors, described such time constraints due to their teaching and committee loads. Mae, the full-time African American Dance instructor at Cosmopolitan, described a demanding working load as a result of her instructional and service activities: “Being in the performing arts, we have a major concert that we produce every semester which requires a lot of time and rehearsals and outside activities bleed into the general teaching responsibilities, so I don’t have a whole lot of extra time.”

On the one hand, full-time faculty of color, similar to other full-time faculty, have considerable teaching loads. On the other hand, they are expected to serve for committees not only as faculty representatives but also as representatives of their race or ethnicity. Furthermore, their racial identity places both institutional and personal expectations on them for working with students of color. Overall, they view themselves as functioning in a different realm from White faculty in their professional obligations, and they suggest that they inhabit a separate world.

Moreover, the racial divide understood by faculty of color indicates that they inhabit a world separate not just from their White colleagues but from all colleagues of different ethnicities. Louis, an African American full-time Business faculty at Water’s Edge, articulates the condition where “there still seems to be a mentality, and this is my experience with all the ethnicities on the campus, so whether they are white, black, brown, or yellow, there still is a lot of separation based on ethnicity ...and there’s a feeling of mistrust that exists between them.”

Finally, while campus policies and formal administrative oral articulations speak to diversity, such as an inclusive environment, including greater tolerance for difference, as well as an increase in ethnic diversity among faculty, such formal efforts did not, in the view of faculty of color, work. At North Point Community College, a diversity initiative that began as a formal movement, and was resisted by White faculty, as part of the college’s attempts to foster diversity discussions among faculty, administration, and staff, transformed into an informal network of diversity-oriented activists among faculty of color. This informal effort, however, was not greeted by all as effective or useful, as conveyed by Leticia at North Point.

[I]t’s a very . . . loose organization. It really doesn’t have leadership at all. It’s almost . . . like a group therapy session is what it reminded me of . . . I had been on their emailing



list, and . . . I thought, “Well okay. I’m gonna join. I’m gonna go see what this is. Because it’s diversity, I should get involved.” And so I went into the meeting, and there was hardly anything being done or said . . . Maybe my expectations were too high, but it doesn’t seem that this group, this initiative, has a whole lot of voice . . . It’s mostly a group of faculty who are getting together and saying, “Well what about this? What about that?” . . . [B]ut there doesn’t seem to be anything much more than that, much more than a discussion.

At Water’s Edge, there was reference to a diversity component at faculty orientation, but Dara was skeptical of its utility: “They talked about [diversity]—‘Oh, we encourage that,’—but there is no concrete help. None. It’s ‘Let’s be sensitive about it,’ but I always believe we have to cross that line.” At Oasis, a former president who pressed for increasing faculty diversity, according to Cynthia, was not greeted with favor by White faculty.

[P]rior to our current president, who is a Caucasian male, we had a Latino . . . I would have to say diversity was a priority for her . . . [S]he definitely had a mission. I would say that was part of her mission to increase the diversity among faculty. And I can honestly tell you I’m not sure at the time if all of the Caucasian faculty were comfortable with that.

These different understandings of community college experience may speak to or reflect distinct worlds for faculty of color and White faculty—different conceptions of students, different understandings of the profession, and different personal goals for the campus environment (i.e., diversity).

### *Subordination of Racial and Ethnic Identities*

These different conceptions, understandings, and goals suggest separate professional worlds for faculty of color. Articulations of professional identity by faculty of color indicate that racial and ethnic identities are suppressed, and thus subordinated to expected norms of behavior and expression embedded within the cultural world of each of the four community colleges. Harriet, an African American Business faculty member at Cosmopolitan Community College, contrasts the professional and the personal and the importance of “leaving the personal at the door.” She keeps her “personal, personal and the business, business.” Leticia, a Latina Psychology instructor at North Point Community College, describes her experiences of depersonalization and speaks to suppression of racial/ethnic identity.

[This campus] is welcoming and friendly [towards faculty] until you show . . . your true color, until you show who you are. For me, as a Latina, until my Latina-ness comes out, then they get uncomfortable with that. As long as I’m nice and [compliant] and . . . friendly, they’re nice and kind and friendly. The subject of race doesn’t come up.

Faculty articulated losing or suppressing their own identities and changing, or not expressing, their views to fit the dominant culture.



Norms and structures inherent within community colleges place faculty of color in a subordinated role. As these structures have been in place for longer than many of these faculty have been in their current roles, changing them becomes difficult, and tension between the professional and racial identities of these faculty of color ensues. Speaking to the overall structures of the community college, Gloria, a full-time African American Counselor at North Point, noted that “there are norms and expectations and rules that govern how things are done. And most often, they do not tend to account [for] the ways that people . . . understand the world.” Thus, there is a distinct cleavage between the experiences of White faculty and faculty of color. Gwendolyn, a Reading instructor at North Point, furthers the concern with institutional norms by pointing out that the college norms exclude race to the point where her race is invisible.

One of my colleagues came to me, and she said, “You know, I didn’t know that you’re Black. Are you Black?” And I just thought, “How do you not know I’m Black? I know I’ve talked about it before.” . . . Like how does it not come up? And then to ask that question, and she seemed really proud of herself, that she didn’t “realize” that I was Black.

Yet, even within this context of a White majority faculty institution, there are tensions between subgroups or minority faculty groups where identity conflicts lead to suppression. Barbara, a Counselor at Cosmopolitan, takes issue with domination of Latino faculty over African American faculty. For Barbara, “ethnocentricity has . . . no place in the workplace . . .” where Latinos are more important than other ethnic or racial groups: “That kind of rah rah, just our people, *mi familia*; I mean what are the rest of us? Chopped liver?”

## Conclusions and Implications

The full-time faculty in our study articulated a cultural identity based on their race or ethnicity. Yet, depending on the specific historically and socially constructed worlds of their specific community colleges, these cultural identities either operated in the background (i.e., subordinated) and were muted by organizational dynamics, or they were viewed as in conflict with community college attitudes and values enacted by White faculty and administrators. These conditions—subordination and conflict—suggest an ambiguous culture (Martin & Meyerson, 1988), not a consensual one, on community college campuses. Furthermore, even though campuses possess policies and practices that advocate diversity, faculty of color express a condition of isolation. They regard themselves as undervalued, and as a group view themselves as a sub-culture within the larger organization.

Racial and ethnic identities of community college faculty of color are subordinated by the more general aspects of community college behaviors and practices, specifically institution-wide perspectives on faculty professionalism. These ideals of community college professionalism (Levin et al., 2011) present faculty of color with salient and powerful moments of identity conflict through the course of their everyday lives

in their institutions. In some cases, these moments of conflict between the professional and racial identities of faculty of color occur through their interactions with administrators and other faculty in formal structures such as departmental meetings or hiring committees, and may include micro-aggressions, such as where a faculty member of color discusses their experiences of discrimination with faculty or administrators and their experiences are dismissed or told that they misunderstood the situation or are overly sensitive. In others, faculty of color experience these identity conflicts because of the locations and professional functions where they perceive greater freedom to embrace their racial or ethnic identities, particularly in classrooms and with students.

Our investigation challenges previous accounts of community college culture and of faculty. Rather than a consensual culture as captured in numerous accounts, some of which implore alteration (McGrath & Spear, 1991; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996) and others which are highly functional (Bailey & Morest, 2006), this investigation indicates that community college cultural patterns are ambiguous, even discordant, if cultural patterns are observed and experienced by a group of faculty of color. This suggests that community college faculty are not uniform and that community college culture is ambiguous, comprised of discordant parts (Trice, 1993). One implication of an ambiguous culture is that practice based upon the concept of a consensual culture—where behavioral patterns are interpreted in a similar fashion by all college constituents—is likely to ignore the needs of faculty of color and in turn those of others in the college, such as students of color. In other words, continued focus on approaching community college reform by practitioners and policy makers based on their democratic and indeed diversity-serving function in society will continue to meet with limited success without acknowledgment that a more complex understanding that community college cultural values and patterns of behavior might conflict with new reform efforts.

A second implication of an ambiguous culture is that understandings of community college faculty professional identity are legitimately varied. That is, the faculty at community colleges are not one homogeneous body but comprised of those with diverse interests and values and individuals and groups that manifest highly differentiated behaviors with ambiguous meanings (Martin & Meyerson, 1988). Not only research but also practice relevant to community college faculty would do well to acknowledge this form of diversity.

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1. While Cooper and Kempner report on organizational fragmentation and disintegration, the dominant discourse pertains to rational organizational behaviors.

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**Author Biographies**

**John S. Levin** is a professor of Higher Education in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Riverside. He is the Director and Principal Investigator of the California Community College Collaborative (C4).

**Zachary Haberler** earned his PhD in 2013 from the University of California, Riverside, in Education, with specialization in the History of Education.

**Laurencia Walker** is a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration and Policy program at the University of California, Riverside. Her research interests include community colleges, students, and student services.

**Adam Jackson-Boothby** is a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Administration and Policy program at the University of California, Riverside. His dissertation research is on students at emerging Hispanic Serving Institutions.