A CRT-Informed Model to Enhance Experiences and Outcomes of Racially Minoritized Students

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Racial inequities in retention and graduation rates are a top concern in higher education, yet scholars and practitioners rarely look to racism to explain these disparities. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a vehicle to reveal and challenge power and oppression dynamics between racialized groups. This article proposes a practical model for student affairs professionals to leverage CRT concepts to address racial inequities in student outcomes and experiences.

Introduction

Recent high-profile cases of racism at preeminent colleges and universities are sparking national movements wherein students are demanding action and institutional reform around issues of racial equity. These high-profile cases reflect institutional challenges in successfully identifying and addressing the operating procedures and cultural norms that marginalize students of Color (Scheurich & Young, 2002). University educators and professionals have been increasingly called upon to respond to racism in higher education. However, clear guidelines, models, or best practices for responding to today’s iterations of racial tension and inequity are not readily available outside of traditional scholarly discourse and spaces.

Multicultural competence in student affairs practice articulates the need for practitioners to develop heightened awareness and knowledge about the diaspora of students of Color as well as the skills to initiate social justice advocacy for inclusive campus environments (Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Pope, Reynolds, & Muller, 2019). However, this scholarship—while significantly advancing institutional attention to the experiences and needs of students of Color and acknowledging the role of racism in oppressing and marginalizing these students in college—does not center racism as the primary mechanism by which students of Color are marginalized as the primary focus of purpose. The intentional decentering of race and racism within the multicultural competence literature in favor of speaking to multiple marginalities more broadly significantly limits its capacity to guide student affairs practitioners to address the very specific, current realities of racism on their campus and how racism impacts student
experiences and outcomes. This gap in practical guidance about ways to directly address issues of racism on campus comes at a great cost to institutions who strive to improve enrollment, retention, and graduation rates for students as well as professionals of Color—metrics that are often considered within an institution’s performance goals (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015). A deeper understanding and confrontation of the experiences of students of Color with racism as a primary factor contributing to marginalization, and mechanisms to skillfully disrupt racism would support more equitable student success efforts and outcomes.

To enhance collegiate experiences and outcomes for students of Color, we propose a model for student affairs professionals (SAPs) that promotes race and racism consciousness, racial equity, and improved student support. Student affairs professionals include educators, personnel, policymakers, and administrators working to advance student success within and beyond the classroom at colleges and universities. Our model is rooted in the principles of critical race theory (CRT). CRT is used across academic disciplines to understand and challenge power and oppression (Harper, 2009; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Our model aims to provide SAPs with an accessible model for recognizing, validating, discerning, and acting on racial inequities as a part of their daily work to enhance students’ educational experiences and outcomes.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory is an interdisciplinary area of scholarship drawing from perspectives in law, history, sociology, ethnic studies, and women’s studies (Yosso, 2005). CRT holds that racism undergirds and operates within all institutional systems in the United States, unpacking the dynamics of power and oppression exerted onto racialized groups (Harper, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Principles of CRT included in our model include: racial realism, the myth of meritocracy, White supremacist narratives, essentialism and intersectionality, and interest convergence.

Racial Realism

Racial realism holds that racism is an endemic and permanent function of U.S. society perpetuated by discriminatory ideology stemming from the legalized enslavement and oppression of people from African descent (Bell, 1992; Haney López, 1994; Harris, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1994). Bell (1992) asserted racial realism is not a hopeless stance; rather, it raises an individual’s critical consciousness, bringing awareness toward the possibility of actual social progress given the acknowledgment of racism. Racial realism empowers marginalized individuals and allies by providing a sense of purpose to organize actionable strategies as they combat institutional racism and navigate everyday assaults (Anyiwo, Bañales, Rowley, Watkins, & Richards-Schuster, 2018). For SAPs, embracing racial realism is critical for appreciating and implementing effective racial equity practices. Accepting and understanding the deep-rootedness of racism as causes of inequity within U.S. society enables individuals to adequately address inequity among and within student experiences and outcomes. For example, many people of Color at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) encounter overt and covert acts of racial discrimination and, to directly challenge these experiences, is to engage in individual and collective acts of resistance to support the community and make a difference for current and future generations. SAPs who embrace racial realism may be more likely to identify where an institution is complicit in perpetuating racism, and, understand its impact on the lived experiences of students of Color.
The Myth of Meritocracy

Meritocracy is a system of allocating opportunities and resources built upon the assumption that hard work of equal caliber by any person—regardless of their social identities—yields equal access and outcomes (Bergerson, 2003). In CRT, meritocracy as a general and sole practice for allocating student resources and opportunity is inherently inequitable as it fails to account for the systematic exclusion and marginalization of people of Color (Bergerson, 2003; McNamee & Miller, 2018). Historically, White people gained access to Ivy League and elite public institutions while Black people and other persons of Color were excluded based on racial discrimination resulting in disparities in access to positions of power within various professional communities and careers (Katznelson, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As meritocracy enables disproportionately more White individuals to assume positions of power, it allows them to control narratives about which norms and experiences are valued, upheld and espoused as the common college experience. Additionally, it supports the inaccurate framing of opportunities typically more accessible for White people as equally accessible for people of Color (Bergerson, 2003). Many high-impact programs at PWIs, including internships, global study, and research, are merit-based and tend to select students based on GPA and pre-professional experiences. White students from wealthier means may be more likely to have social networks and experiences preparing them to better meet the merit-based standards of high-impact programs than students of Color. Meeting merit-based requirements are more difficult for racially, ethnically, and economically minoritized students because of systemic inequities narrowing their access to requisite resources and opportunities that facilitate the attainment of those requirements. PWIs embracing meritocracy as a mechanism for choosing students worthy of high impact experiences do so through SAPs who have power to grant access to high-impact programs in ways that often discount, minimize, and frame racial inequities as indicative of the lack of individual effort, fit, or preparedness rather than a consequence of racial disparities in education (Posselt, 2014).

White Supremacist Narratives

White supremacist narratives are descriptions of circumstances constructed to protect and perpetuate power, prestige, and privilege among White individuals in power at the expense of people of Color (Patton, 2015). Such narratives assert whiteness as property ideology, or a White person’s right to use space, resources, opportunity, and authority at the exclusion of other racialized groups (Harris, 1993). White supremacist narratives in higher education are disseminated via the reframing of racialized circumstances to influence institutional decision-making in favor of White people (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). White supremacist narratives protect a PWI’s reputation and prestige, perpetuate ideologies of meritocracy and colorblindness, minimize the effect of racial realism, and frame students of Color as inherently deficient and lacking experiences requisite to be successful in college (Harris, 1993; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Many programs are created at PWIs with the espoused intention of supporting minoritized students’ transition to the university. Such programs are typically designed to enculturate marginalized students to university norms, rules, and expectations that were cultivated by historical campus traditions deeply rooted in White and male perspectives. Yet, the creators of such programs rarely consider the influence of racism and race as part of the need for the programs’ creation, nor do they utilize the traditions and knowledge of students and faculty of Color as assets to the holistic historical intellectual legacy at PWIs distinct from diversity and inclusion efforts (Delgado & Villalpando, 2002).
**Essentialism and Intersectionality**

Essentialism is the idea that a social group can be defined by a narrow set of common experiences or characteristics shared by all members of that group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Harris, Barone, & Patton, 2015). Essentialism is problematic because no social group holds a singular perspective and every member holds multiple, salient, and intersecting identities producing unique experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; Harris, 1990). Understanding how the intersections of these identities are experienced dismantles essentialism by valuing the complex and multidimensional identities of people of Color such as race, class, and gender, and how collectively they yield unique standpoints and epistemologies for navigating dominant spaces like PWIs (Collins & Blige, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991). At a PWI, a student could simultaneously self-identify as a member of a racially minoritized group, be part of a gender majority group, and come from a high socio-economic background. Furthermore, this student may identify as a full-time student, a parent, and an immigrant. Intersectionality challenges the systematic structure of acknowledging and valuing how these identities influence individual students’ college experiences and outcomes.

**Interest Convergence**

Interest convergence details that social and economic progress for people of Color only occurs when such progress serves the interests of White people in power (Bell, 1980). Provisions made to advance the position of people of Color tend not to be transformative investments for dismantling racial inequity; rather, they are symbolic gestures that function to appease those without power and protect the interests of those in power (Bell, 1980). Institutional initiatives catalyzed by interest convergence are rooted in good intentions but are not equitable for students of Color (Harris et al., 2015). For instance, many PWIs create temporary forums, committees, and one-day conferences with the intention of understanding the experiences and needs of minoritized groups without endeavoring to change long-standing, oppressive policies or practices (Harper, 2013). PWIs also often employ recruitment strategies to increase enrollment of students of Color and tout the benefits of increasing student diversity for the institution, yet seldom do institutions change aspects of the campus environment, such as monuments, curriculum, and elitist programs, that marginalize students of Color (Smith, 2009).

Overall, the principles of CRT explicate how racism undergirds and influences the norms, culture, and procedures of higher education. CRT also helps decipher how traditional notions of support that do not readily account for racism and oppression fail to change racial disparities in student outcomes. CRT helps promote race-consciousness and racial equity in higher education toward more socially just experiences for students, faculty, and staff of Color (Cabrera, 2018; Harper, 2012a). Exploring and embracing CRT concepts can encourage SAPs both familiar and unfamiliar with CRT to engage in socially conscious action and decision-making (Harper, 2009; Patton, 2015; Robbins & Quaye, 2014).

**Dialogic Action**

Dialogic action is work entered in solidarity with oppressed people and has been used within CRT scholarship to address educational inequities (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). True solidarity and social revolution are not possible without the humbling of the privileged, empowerment of the oppressed, and appreciative dialogue (Freire, 2005). In efforts to promote social advancement and change, Freire (2005) wrote about the need for “acts of cognition” or recognizing and interweaving the voices and consciousness of all those present in a shared space (p. 79). Through intentional acts of inclusion and validation for others’ ways knowing and experience, learning is
transformed from a process that transmits information from one to another or molds other individuals to replicate the presentation and behaviors of the dominant power, into a shared space where the roles of teacher and student are blended, and everyone progresses forward.

**A Model for Student Affairs Professionals to Take a CRT-Informed Approach**

Our model, illustrated in Figure 1, encourages SAPs to take a CRT-informed approach to their work. Specifically, our model provides a point of entry for appreciating and applying CRT concepts to practice among people who work directly with and make decisions about students who may be unfamiliar with the CRT literature and terms. This model, which attempts to reframe select CRT concepts into more accessible language, can be individually applied to one’s daily efforts as well as the collaborative developments of teams, systems, and programs supporting student success outcomes for marginalized students. The model consists of four key practices: validate, reflect, discern, and act.

*Validate* involves embracing racial realism as a permanent component in social systems and developing an awareness of how racism detrimentally impacts students of Color. It is not possible to engage in social justice action without validating racial realism as the force perpetuating the social minoritization and marginalization of populations racialized as nonwhite (Harper, 2012b). *Reflect* involves exploring one’s positionality, or one’s power and privileges within an environment.

*Figure 1. Model for student affairs professionals to take a CRT-informed approach.*
that is afforded to them or limited by their education, class, race, ethnicity, gender and physical abilities (Milner, 2007; Taylor, Tisdell, & Hanley, 2000). Such active reflection, which could take place via group discussion, individual journaling, or a workshop led by an expert on racism and power, helps individuals understand the lens through which they see the world and how that lens influences their understanding and decision-making for improving conditions for marginalized students (Relles, 2015).

Our model also encourages SAPs to “discern” normalized situations with critical consciousness—a deep awareness of how societies oppress people—along with a personal commitment to not perpetuate oppression (Freire, 2005). SAPs with a critical consciousness can understand new realities and truths separate from the confines of one’s own privilege and can discern how one’s power and privilege consistently preserves dominance for one group at the expense of others (Freire & Ramos, 2014). Embracing racial realism and exploring one’s positionality are effective practices for raising critical consciousness (Zamudio, Bridgeman, Russell, & Rios, 2009). For example, SAPs should question the historical context for programs designed to support students of Color, if students of Color have an equal place at the decision-making table regarding the program, and if the assumptions undergirding the program (e.g. its reputation and notoriety) promote a deficit-based narrative about students’ cultural wealth and belonging at the institution. Critical consciousness is developed as a person begins to critically analyze the underlying structures shaping social norms and creates an opportunity for dialogue and anti-subordinate action to dismantle oppressive systems (Freire, 2005; Lynn, Johnson, & Hassan, 1999).

Individuals who effectively engage in the first three practices are prepared for the next component: “act” by taking dialogic action. Dialogic action describes work entered into solidarity with oppressed people to disrupt inequitable practices, systems, and conditions (Freire, 2005). Fruitful work to improve the experience of individuals must occur in partnership with those individuals. Unfortunately, such partnerships do not frequently occur in higher education. Faculty, administrators, and staff rarely engage students as equitable partners when making decisions about how to create better conditions, policies, and programs for students. Rather, SAPs often view themselves as holding knowledge about what students need rather than considering students as the holders of knowledge about their experiences (Delgado, 2002). Dialogic action treats students as equitable partners in designing student supports, services, and programs, and ensures students are at the table for decision-making processes regarding their experience.

While independently significant, each of the four practices influences one another. Validate, reflect, and discern are interconnected but not necessarily linear in their development. Act, however, is not possible to effectively practice without engaging the first three components of our model. To act effectively, one must first practice validating, reflecting, and discerning in the everyday settings of higher education: classes, meetings, conversations, programming, and planning. All practices are iterative and continuous, requiring ongoing activity and learning across time through continued reading of the growing body of CRT-informed higher education literature and meaningful listening to the stories of People of Color. Such intentionality creates a shared responsibility to improve the experiences and outcomes of students of Color wherein which SAPs continuously reflect and refine their activity and work with students as engaged and equal partners.

**Tangible Ways to Take Dialogic Action**

Higher education scholars have used CRT concepts to encourage SAPs to reflect on inequities of practice and to partner with students in developing approaches to enhance their experiences and outcomes (Harper, 2009). However, minimal guidelines exist for what this process could look like in
everyday practice. Table 1 provides four key practices for SAPs to apply the tenets of CRT to take dialogic action.

**Challenge Notions of Neutrality and Meritocracy.** SAPs concerned with student success should ask which social group experiences are disproportionately rewarded, punished, or simply not considered under a policy and to consider equitable alternatives. SAPs making conscious efforts to look for racial inequity in their work is an extension of the validate and discern components in our model. Critically reflecting on one’s social position to effectively navigate power dynamics predicates efforts to challenge assumptions of neutrality and meritocracy and look for the presence of racial biases within the foundational perspectives of practices, programs, and systems at PWIs (Harper, 2009).

Participation in high-impact educational practices like internships, studying abroad, and research opportunities are critical contributors to success in college, especially for Students of Color (Finley & McNair, 2013; Harper, 2009; Kuh, 2008). Yet, pathways to these opportunities are often merit-based and fail to consider disparities in access to resources and experiences that White students are more likely to acquire because of the racial and socioeconomic privilege afforded by Whiteness (DiAngelo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Museus, Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011). SAPs can challenge neutrality and meritocracy by partnering with directors of high impact programs and students of Color to conduct an equity audit of their recruitment, admissions, and support strategies. These partnerships can generate critical reflection about the criteria high impact programs use to select students (Wells, 2008). Such reflection may also reveal racialized perspectives among SAPs about what kind of experiences contribute to the psychological, academic, and social factors necessary to thrive in high impact programs. This revelation can allow room to deconstruct racist program policies and to reconstruct more equitable and inclusive metrics for student recruitment and support.

**Recognize, Legitimize, and Elevate Experiential Knowledge.** Recognizing, legitimizing, and elevating the experiential knowledge of students of Color includes collecting data about the lived experiences of marginalized students and using data to guide program development and research agendas. Participatory action research (PAR) is one method to recognize, legitimize, and elevate

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<td><strong>CRT-Informed (*Dialogic) Action</strong></td>
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<td>Challenge notions of neutrality and meritocracy</td>
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the experiential knowledge of marginalized students at PWIs. PAR empowers the community of study by repositioning the power of knowledge from researchers to the study participants and treating them as active and equitable contributors of the research process and related interventions (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The goal of PAR is for the researcher to reflect on their socialized experiences and collaborate with the community of study to educate all stakeholders toward social change (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012; Minkler, 2000; Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998). PAR differs from existing interventions, such as the equity scorecard, designed to foster collaboration among SAPs in responding to racial-ethnic disparities in student outcomes by including undergraduates as equal partners experts in their assessment of their lived-experience on campus (Harris & Bensimon, 2007). Inviting students of Color to collaborate in the construction of research agendas and program development can provide a channel to validate their experiences and cultural ways of knowing (Delgado, 2002). These opportunities push students to conceptualize and think through their racialized identities, empowering them to speak about their racialized experiences and better navigate contentious campus climates (Johnston-Guerrero, 2017).

Storytelling. Human narratives of lived experiences with racism add critical context for challenging the assumed neutrality of social circumstances (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Students of Color’s stories encountering racism at PWIs are important for raising critical consciousness, making meaning, empathizing, and connecting with minoritized students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Such empathy plants seeds of critical consciousness to emerge as people who can discern situations in a new light after having an emotional connection to another person’s lived experience. This process contributes to the ability to validate others’ lived experiences as parallel realities constructed by oppressive social positioning.

Storytelling provides students of Color a platform to express a positive identity and celebrate their cultural ways of knowing within institutions that frame them as problems to be solved or minimize their racialized experiences (Delgado, 1989, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Such expressions challenge dominant narratives about which experiences are valued and raise the voices of people of Color at PWIs. These counterstories can help institutions identify missteps in their support for students of Color by progressing toward a culture of inclusion versus numeric diversity, and expose and debunk deficit discourses about minorized students (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2015).

Student activism is a common platform for students to share their lived experience at PWIs (Rhoads, 2016). Students use social media, sit-ins, and protests to challenge deficit narratives about students of Color at their universities and have attempted to reclaim spaces in which they feel marginalized (e.g., the office of the president or buildings that celebrate racist university benefactors) (Davis, 2015; George Mwangi, Bettencourt, & Malaney, 2018; Son & Madhani, 2015; Vingiano, 2014). SAPs can learn from and collaborate with student activists to create a campus culture where all students feel valued and heard, and where the campus community is held accountable for creating an environment of racial equity (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Patton, 2015). SAPs can use storytelling to disrupt deficit-based narratives of academic preparation for students of Color with videos of students sharing how their pre-college experiences within their homes and cultural communities contribute to their success in college. In all, partnering with students for storytelling equips SAPs with a tangible method of practice to understand and apply CRT concepts to campus work.

Challenge Dominant White Supremacist and Essentialist Narratives. To serve the next generation of college students, institutions will need to attend to their intersecting identities and experiences (Mitchell, Simmons, & Greyerbiehl, 2014). To do this effectively, SAPs must
Programs supporting the success of students of Color in college often perpetuate essentialist narratives by framing their racialized experiences as monolithic (Harper, 2013; Harper & Nichols, 2008). SAPs designing programs to meet the needs of students of Color should critically evaluate if their activities appreciate variations of economic status, gender identities, sexuality, language, and national heritage present within the group the program is intended to serve. This is most possible when programs are developed in collaboration with students who represent the diverse backgrounds present within racial groups. Such collaborative efforts can prevent programs from framing students of Color as people with cultural deficits who would be improved and welcomed in White dominated academic spaces by assimilating into a university’s cultural norms and distancing themselves from the cultural artifacts of language, dress, and traditions of communication associated with their home communities (McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, & Luedke, 2014).

Universities are often charged with informing the campus community about the value of diversity and how socio-political events impact members of the university. These communications may take the form of e-mail messages from the office of the president or chancellor, in-person presentations and consultations, written strategy documents and reports, research papers, and online webpages and printed guides. Harris et al. (2015) stated, “Jargon-laden diversity statements, policies, and commitments, which are not explicitly critical of systems of institutionalized privilege, are destined to fail” (p. 33). It is important for SAPs charged with these communications to describe and acknowledge institutional racial inequalities as contributors to student-group academic underperformance and engagement in college rather than their demographic background. Additionally, professionals must give equal attention to factors contributing to positive outcomes for students of Color as much as unearthing the factors limiting their success, including visibly celebrating the stories of minoritized students and their contributions to the university community in ways that do not exceptionalize their successes (Harper, 2009).

Although dialogic decision-making about programs and communications is essential to a CRT-informed approach to enhance the experiences and outcomes of racially minoritized students, our model encourages SAPs to be proactive in challenging racial bias during everyday interactions. Such individual acts of advocacy are necessary for disrupting racism in education especially when students are not present to defend themselves or are not empowered to do so safely. For example, sharing about students’ racialized experiences as a factor contributing to students’ circumstances may be helpful in disciplinary hearings and on academic reinstatement committees where privacy is required to protect the individual student. These acts are dialogic when they are not informed by one’s own experiences alone, but by a sense of common purpose and shared social justice goals cultivated with racialized students through reflection and active, meaningful listening to many students across time.

Challenges of Using Tenets of Critical Race Theory in Student Success Practice

Taking a CRT-informed approach means competently and unapologetically exposing racism and proposing action steps to address it from a place of cultivated critical consciousness. While universities are concerned with increasing diversity, they tend to choose strategies that serve the interests of White people in power and do not disrupt the structures that are built on racism (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). As such, CRT is met with resistance because it threatens White control of resources, opportunities, and narratives about value and reality (Ladson-Billings, 1998).
Maintaining inequity is not always an act of conscious defiance. People in power are often not aware of the ways their power is maintained by inequality. Nor are many people in multiple positions of social power ready to acknowledge how they reinforce systems of inequity in order to maintain their own power because—unlike people holding marginalized identities—they do not experience the negative effects of inequity. People in positions of power may avoid embracing racial realism because doing so may trigger unpleasant feelings and recognition that leveling the playing field may require them to relinquish their power and privilege (Bergerson, 2003; Delpit, 1995). Even when conscious of institutional missteps in addressing a racial issue, many staff and faculty of Color and women are afraid to raise concerns about racism for fear of the consequences for challenging the dominant order (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2014).

Interest convergence is another challenge to implementing our model as it simultaneously serves as a significant barrier and a tool for challenging White supremacist and essentialist narratives in higher education. Institutions heavily rely on White and wealthy alumni or state governments to fund its programs and services. This reliance on survival and advancement is a strategic tool of oppression because it distracts the oppressed from the workings of power and privilege (Freire & Ramos, 2014). This form of interest convergence prevents persons within the institution from disrupting inequitable systems preserving privileges for wealthy benefactors and other people who hold influence on university resources because an institution’s livelihood is predicated on preserving that privilege. For example, White and wealthy donors may not be as apt to provide increased funding to supplement aid for students of Color because they feel they are taking resources away from deserving White students or because they may feel uncomfortable confronting their own privilege. Understanding the concept of interest convergence challenges SAPs to identify and articulate how the juxtaposition of addressing inequities and preservation of White privilege hurts institutional goals (Harper, 2009). A shared understanding of how interest convergence shapes existing initiatives supporting students of Color at PWIs forces SAPs to deeply reflect on how their programs ultimately serve the interests of White students and perpetuates deficit views of this student population while still advancing more conscious means of progress and investment for students of Color (Harper, 2009).

Finally, CRT is an unwelcome truth-teller, and is often met with resistance in institutions that tend to be more concerned with appearance and civility rather than with equity (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Despite this resistance, Bell (1992) asserted people must continue to work against oppression toward a more socially just world. CRT has rich potential to equip SAPs with tools to identify and work against oppressive forces along minoritized students’ path to graduation. Particularly, the application of CRT principles by White researchers can legitimize attention to racism at universities where White people’s perspectives are normalized and valued (Bergerson, 2003).

**Directions for Future Study**

This article proposes a model for SAPs to take a CRT-informed approach to enhancing experiences and outcomes for racially minoritized students. The first three practices in our model, validate, reflect, and discern, are not linear or simple processes. Rather, they each represent developmental processes that require quality internal exploration and external support. More work is needed to explicate tangible steps for navigating the developmental processes represented in our model. Additional research is required to fully explore those steps and the lived experiences of professionals who take a CRT-informed approach to improving student experiences and outcomes in higher education. This includes examining the effectiveness of our model in promoting transformative, instructional change.
Conclusion

The current social landscape of higher education is multifaceted and complex, representing decades of progress in racial equity as well as entrenched problems yet to be solved. Such a landscape and the espoused values of most PWIs necessitate that SAPs clearly understand and effectively respond specifically and directly to racism on college campuses. Improved student experiences and outcomes must be cultivated and measured beyond aggregate retention and degree completion rates as a multi-dimensional idea that includes valuing the lived experience of all students. Processes that are based on racial equity and dialogic action are informed by intentional dialogue with students of Color, see students’ cultural experiences as strengths, frame pre-college experiences within home cultures as valuable knowledge rather than deficient in preferential resources, and focus on demonstrations of academic progress and development within the context of their socialized experiences rather than as exceptions to racialized social and environmental factors. Professionals involved with student success efforts have a responsibility to regularly discuss racial equity with colleagues who design and execute policies and programs. These discussions support critical reflection on strategies to reform practices toward more equitable decision-making.

Engaging in work for equity in student success requires clear guidelines and models of best practice. CRT provides a timely and relevant framework for examining and challenging power and oppression between racialized groups (Harper, 2009; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Yosso, 2005). The model presented herein encourages validating, reflecting, discerning, and acting, to identify and challenge racism. It is offered to enhance the work of student affairs professionals including faculty, researchers, instructors, academic advisors, student affairs personnel, policy-makers, and administrators. We remain critically hopeful that sharing ideas about how to engage in these practices will contribute to the disruption of historical inequity’s persistent grip on higher education outcomes and widen pathways for equity in student success.

References


A CRT-Informed Model to Enhance Experiences


