The Campus Racial Climate and Undergraduates’ Perceptions of the Academic Library

Ethelene Whitmire

abstract: Using secondary data analyses, this study investigated the relationship between the campus racial climate and how 851 White and 252 students of color attending a midwestern Research 1 predominantly White institution perceived the academic libraries on campus. Results indicated that race-related aspects of the campus environment were correlated to the perception of the academic libraries for White undergraduates. This was not the case for the students of color. Future research on this topic is suggested in the conclusion.

Introduction

Last time we went to the library . . . to study . . . obviously, it’s finals time . . . people are going to study. But when we walked in there looking for somewhere to sit down, it’s like . . . they’ve never seen African American people before in their lives, or they’ve never seen African American people study before!”

The above quote is from an African American student participating in a focus group study about racial microaggressions (defined as subtle insults directed toward people of color) and demonstrates that even non-classroom environments, such as the academic library, can be unwelcoming for African American college students. One purpose of this current study is to begin developing a body of research exploring the library experiences of students of color as a user group. This suggested research corresponds to an emerging area of library and information science research that focuses on the library in the life of the user, as described by Wayne A. Wiegand in a recent editorial.² Such studies would give both researchers and practitioners a better

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understanding of how various racial/ethnic groups view the academic library to determine if any of these groups perceive it as a counter-space where they can build imagined communities in response to the campus racial climate. One way that undergraduates in the aforementioned focus group dealt with racial microaggressions was to create counter-spaces on campus where they felt comfortable. Daniel Solorzano, Miguel Ceja, and Tara Yosso define counter-spaces as “sites where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained.” Can the academic library be considered as a counter-space?

When considering academic library experiences, it is important to think about the context of undergraduates’ overall experiences on college campuses. The academic library does not exist in a vacuum but is a part of the institutional environment. One important, often intangible aspect of undergraduates’ experiences is related to the campus racial climate—“the overall racial environment of the college campus.”

Little is known about the connection between the campus racial climate and undergraduates’ academic library experiences.

Some information does exist about the racial differences in the academic library experiences of undergraduates. Ethelene Whitmire found differences in the academic library experiences of White and African American undergraduates. African American undergraduates reported engaging in academic library activities—such as asking the librarian for help, finding materials while browsing the stacks, and using the indexes to find journal articles—more frequently.

In another related study Whitmire examined the differences in the undergraduate academic library experiences of White versus students of color (African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native American undergraduates combined as one group). When the academic library experiences of students of color were compared with White undergraduates, there were statistically significant differences between the two groups for four of the ten items measuring academic library experiences.

Whitmire also studied the relationship between perceptions of the campus environment and the academic library experiences of both 1,392 African American and 13,817 White undergraduates. The results indicated that both African American and White undergraduates had positive perceptions of their campus environment, with White undergraduates having greater positive perceptions. Perceptions of the campus environment were positively associated with undergraduates’ academic library experiences for both ethnic groups. The present study more explicitly examines aspects of the institutional environment specifically related to the campus racial climate.
Literature Concerning the Campus Racial Climate

Literature about the campus racial climate informs this study. This section presents a variety of studies, both quantitative and qualitative, examining the impact of the campus racial climate on a variety of factors—including undergraduates’ adjustment to college, persistence, and academic and social integration. This literature review provides insights into the college experiences of both students of color and White undergraduates, which helps to inform how the campus racial climate might have an impact on the perception of the academic library as an organization that is part of a larger institution.

Sylvia Hurtado, Deborah Faye Carter, and Albert Spuler explored the college experiences of Latino undergraduates (Chicano, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central and South Americans). Undergraduates who believed that the faculty and administration were student-centered were more academically adjusted to college. Negative perceptions of racial/ethnic tension had a negative impact on all outcomes (academic and social integration, personal emotional adjustment, and attachment to the institution). Undergraduates who reported experiencing discrimination at greater levels also reported being less attached to the institution.8

African American undergraduates, graduate students, and professionals were interviewed by Joe R. Feagin and Melvin P. Sykes concerning their experiences attending predominantly White institutions (PWI). Overall the subjects described problematic relationships with faculty, peers, and the curriculum. They also reported feeling marginalized, depicting incidents of subtle discrimination and cultural bias.9

Bradley J. Fisher and David J. Hartmann conducted another study of the experiences of undergraduates attending a PWI. One hundred-twenty African American and 120 White students completed a questionnaire about their college experiences. Overall the authors concluded that social integration was indeed affected by race.10

How do negative racial experiences have an impact on undergraduates’ intention to remain in college? A study by Maria Cecilia Zea et al. examined how collegiate coping skills, high self-esteem, academic integration, identification with the university, and experience of disrespect because of race, ethnicity, or religion affected both students of color (African American, Asian Americans, and Latinos combined as one group) and White undergraduates’ intention to remain enrolled in college. The sample included first-year undergraduates attending a large, private PWI in the northeastern United States. Both students of color and White undergraduates reported that experiencing disrespect had a negative impact on their desire to remain in college. Students of color reported more disrespectful experiences. White undergraduates reported greater identification with the university. Only academic achievement had a positive relationship with the intention of students of color to remain in college.11

Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar et al. created a survey that included vignettes. Undergraduates in the sample (146 Caucasian, 39 African American, 56 Asian Americans, and 47 Latinos) were asked to note three things: if a similar incident had happened to them, if the incident was personally offensive, and if the incident involved discrimination using Likert scales to measure the frequency of encountering such incidents and the degree of offensiveness and discrimination. The results indicated that African Ameri-
can undergraduates perceived greater differential treatment, particularly in academic situations, followed by Asian Americans and Latinos.12

Undergraduates attending four midwestern institutions were surveyed by Barbara J. Gossett and Michael J. Cuyjet. The sample consisted of 324 African American undergraduates and 805 undergraduates they labeled as non-African American undergraduates. The students answered a 60-item instrument, Perception on Community/Environment of Undergraduates in Higher Education. African American undergraduates reported feeling marginalized in response to 45 of the 49 items. However, none of African Americans reported feeling marginalized more than African American undergraduates in three of the academic and personal advising items and one of the delivery of campus services items.13

Using the Cultural Attitudes and Climate Questionnaire, a 100-item instrument, Julie R. Ancis, William E. Sedlacek, and Jonathan J. Mohr surveyed 578 undergraduates. The sample consisted of 136 African American, 130 Asian American, 77 Latinos, and 235 White undergraduates. The results indicated that African American students reported more negative experiences than any other racial group. Specifically, African Americans reported experiencing more racial tension, racial pressures, residence hall tension, and faculty racism. On a positive note they reported more cross-cultural comfort. In contrast, although both the Latino and Asian American students reported negative racial experiences, Latino students experienced less racial conflict than the other students of color in the sample. They also reported the greatest comfort with their culture. White students reported greater levels of fair treatment and overall satisfaction than any other racial group. White students also reported greater levels of agreement that faculty and students respected other cultures. White students generally described lower levels of negative racial experiences.14

Amaury Nora and Alberto Cabrera sampled 831 undergraduates (50.4 percent were White) attending a midwestern PWI. The students of color in their sample reported higher perceived racial discrimination when compared to the White undergraduates. However, the impact of this perception on minority students’ adjustment to college was indirect compared to the indirect and direct impact it had on White undergraduates. The authors surmised that perhaps the students of color had simply grown accustomed to racial discrimination and did not let it affect their intentions to persist.15

The study by Mardy T. Eimers and Gary R. Pike consisted of 799 undergraduates (86 percent were White). Surprisingly, although there were differences in how both groups (students of color and White undergraduates) perceived discrimination, the impact of this on the undergraduates’ intention to persist in college was the same for both groups. Their findings were consistent with the results of the study by Nora and Cabrera.16

Alberto Cabrera et al. compared the impact of prejudice and discrimination on adjustment to college for 315 African American as compared to 1,139 White undergraduates. They found no difference between the two groups in terms of perceptions of prejudice and discrimination. These perceptions had no direct effect on the decision to persist for either group—only an indirect effect.17

The final article may provide insight into what impact the campus racial climate has on the academic library. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso conducted focus groups with
34 African American undergraduates attending three PWIs about their experiences with racial discrimination and the racial climate for African American students on their college campuses. The authors examined instances of racial discrimination in academic and non-academic spaces. The opening quote used for this current study describes an instance of perceived racial discrimination in a non-academic (i.e., non-classroom) space. Subjects also described instances of racial discrimination in academic spaces. In response to repeated incidents of racial discrimination, the subjects in the study turned to counter-spaces. Examples of counter-spaces included African American student organizations, sororities and fraternities, and multicultural student centers.¹⁸

These African American undergraduates created counter-spaces to help them deal with a negative racial climate and to lessen the impact of these incidents on their efforts to persist in college. Could the academic library be considered a counter-space? Brent Mallinckrodt and William E. Seldacek conducted a study analyzing the relationship between student retention in college and their use of various campus facilities. The academic library was the only campus facility related to the retention of African American undergraduates.¹⁹

In summary, the previous studies indicate that students of color frequently contend with issues of racism and discrimination at predominantly White institutions. In some cases these incidents affected their intentions to persist and their academic and social integration. The main research question guiding this study is does the campus racial climate affect undergraduates’ perceptions of academic libraries. Consider the quote at the beginning of the study. Is the undergraduates’ perception of their reception in the academic library based upon a perceived negative racial campus climate? Could the academic library be viewed as a counter-space—a neutral setting in a tumultuous campus racial climate?

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By conducting secondary analyses of existing data and drawing upon previous work on the campus racial climate, the present study examines the relationship between aspects of a campus’ racial climate and how the academic library is perceived by both students of color and White undergraduates attending a predominantly White midwestern Research I institution.

Methods

Data Source

This study is a secondary analysis of data obtained from the “2000 University of Wisconsin–Madison Undergraduate Student Satisfaction Survey” collected by the
university's survey center staff James A. Sweet, Lina Guzman, and Tak Yun Yu. The survey asked undergraduates about their satisfaction with campus services, facilities, and their academic experiences in general. Undergraduates completed the computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) between March 1 and April 20, 2000. The average interview length was 21.5 minutes. The university's Information Technology Office drew the random sample of 1,465 subjects from student records. Eighty subjects were determined to be ineligible to complete the survey, because they were either not enrolled or studying abroad during the fall 1999 semester. One hundred twenty-six subjects refused to participate, and an additional 151 were not interviewed for a variety of reasons—including being unable to find a current telephone number, never answering the telephone, or because the study ended. From the sample of 1,465 students, 1,108 completed the survey for a response rate of 80 percent.

The Setting and Subjects

The subjects in this study attend the University of Wisconsin–Madison, a mid-western Research I institution. The university is a predominantly White institution (PWI). According to the figures from the university's Office of Budget, Planning, and Analysis for the academic year of this study, 1999–2000, the fall semester enrollment by ethnic category was as follows: White/Other (N = 24,597; 87 percent), African American (N = 573; 2 percent), Asian American (N = 1,209; 4.2 percent), Native American (N = 141; .5 percent), Hispanic (N = 660; 2.3 percent), and Foreign (N = 1,090; 4 percent) for a total of 28,270 undergraduates.

After deleting five subjects that did not meet the criteria of the study (i.e., were not undergraduate students), the majority of the remaining 1,103 undergraduates in the sample were White (N=851; 78 percent). Although not desirable, but due to the small sample sizes and for easier data analyses, the remaining undergraduates were classified into a group named students of color (N=252; 22 percent). The composition of this group included Asian American (N=104; 9 percent), followed by African American (N=93; 8 percent), Latino (N=32; 3 percent), and Native American (N=23; 2 percent). This was a weighted sample. Because of the small number of students of color at the university they were sampled at a higher rate than White students in order to include an adequate number of students of color in the study.

There were gender differences between the groups. A little more than half of the White, African American, and Native American undergraduates were female while the majority of the Asian American and Latino were male. In fact, two-thirds of the Latinos were male. Overall when the students of color were combined into one group, 55 percent of the students of color were male compared to 45 percent of the white undergraduates (see figure 1).

Regarding class year, observations of individual ethnic/racial groups revealed that the majority of White (35 percent), Asian American (31 percent), and Latino (28 percent) undergraduates were seniors (actually the percentage of freshmen and seniors were equal among the Latino undergraduates). The largest percentages of the undergraduates in the African American undergraduate sample were freshmen (2 percent) while the majority of Native American undergraduates were juniors (39 percent). When the
students of color were combined into one group the largest percentage of students of color were seniors (28 percent). See figure 2 for more details.

**Measures**

There were five sets of independent variables. The first set contained three variables relating to of undergraduates' background characteristics: race/ethnicity, gender, and class year. The remaining four sets of independent variables were classified as measures of the campus racial climate. The first set included three measures of the campus environment: (1) rating an individual's comfort level as part of the university community, (2) rating the university response to students' interests and concerns, and (3) rating the university in creating a sense of belonging for students. The second set contained three variables measuring undergraduates' perceptions about the importance of increasing the racial and cultural diversity: of students, of administrators, of faculty and staff, and in the curriculum.

The third set consisted of author-created scales measuring aspects of the campus climate. The first scale—Sexism, Racism, Discrimination, and Harassment—was composed of four variables measuring students' responses to the following questions:

1. How do you rate the university in addressing issues of sexism on campus?
2. How do you rate the university in addressing issues of racism on campus?
3. How do you think the university is doing overall in addressing issues of discrimination on campus?
4. How do you think the university is doing overall in dealing with issues of harassment on campus?
Figure 2. Gender

The fourth set, Issues of Academic and Social Integration, was a scale composed of eight variables measuring students' responses to the following questions:

1. How easy has it been for you to find a faculty or staff member to help you deal with problems with university bureaucracy?
2. How easy has it been for you to feel comfortable with students whose racial or ethnic background is different from your own?
3. How easy has it been for you to find people on campus who share your background and experiences?
4. How easy has it been for you to get to know people whose background is different than your own?
5. How easy has it been for you to find students with whom you feel comfortable socializing?
6. How easy has it been for you to be taken seriously academically—that is, find professors that think you are capable of quality work?
7. How easy has it been for you to be respected for perspectives you bring to class?
8. How easy has it been for you to feel you belong in the campus community?

In order to measure the reliability of these newly created scales, the author conducted separate Cronbach alpha reliabilities on the responses of White students and the students of color. Cronbach's alphas assess how well the scales summarize the underlying factor. For example, how well does the scale Sexism, Racism, Discrimination, and Harassment represent the questions on the survey? For the first scale—Sexism, Racism, Discrimination, and Harassment—the Cronbach alphas of both groups were similar: White students = .84 and students of color = .82. There was a difference in the Cronbach alphas of the second scale—Issues of Academic and Social Integration. The Cronbach alpha for White undergraduates was lower than the measure for students of color (.69 versus .78) indicating that there was greater internal consistency between the responses for students of color than for the White undergraduates. However, the alpha reliability coefficients for both scales and both groups were sufficiently strong to signify that these scales were reliable measures of these constructs.

The dependent variable, perceptions of the academic libraries, was measured by responses to the following question: Based on your experiences during the current aca-
demarcation year, how do you rate the libraries? Would you rate them as (1) poor (2) fair (3) good, or (4) very good?

Figure 3 displays the graphical representation of the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. According to this conceptual model, it was expected that undergraduates’ background characteristics and the campus climate would be associated with the dependent variable—perceptions of the academic libraries.

Data Analyses

Data analyses occurred in several stages. The author calculated means and standard deviations of all the variables in the study; replaced missing data with the means of each variable; recoded variables in preparation for the regression analyses; constructed scales for some college experience measures; ran t tests for independent samples to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the two groups concerning the measures in the study; and ran two hierarchical multiple regression analyses. The use of multiple regression facilitated the determination of which background characteristics and campus climate variables and factors were related to the outcome variable for each of the two groups. The independent variables entered the regression models in one block.

Results

An examination of t tests for independent samples in table 1 reveals statistically significant differences between the measures in the study based on undergraduates’ racial/ethnic groups. Although the percentage of female undergraduates in each racial/ethnic group varied considerably, the differences were not statistically different. The same was true upon an examination of differences in class year.

The undergraduates differed, however, by racial/ethnic groups in the variables and factors that measured the campus climate. Specifically, they differed on all three
variables measuring the campus environment. Compared with students of color, the White undergraduates reported being somewhat comfortable as part of the university community (4.56 versus 4.04, p < .001). The White undergraduates also rated the university’s response to undergraduates’ interests and concerns higher than did the students of color (3.08 versus 2.79, p < .001). White undergraduates rated the university higher in terms of creating a sense of belonging for undergraduates when compared with the response of students of color (3.17 versus 2.62, p < .010). The difference between the two groups on this aspect of the campus racial climate was much smaller and the significance level was lower.

Interestingly, the two groups of undergraduates did not differ in their perceptions of how the university addressed the issues of sexism, racism, discrimination, and harassment. Although the White undergraduates rated the university higher in addressing these issues than the students of color, the difference was not statistically significant (3.06 versus 2.57). The two groups did differ in the amount of difficulty they reported about integrating into the university both academically and socially. The White undergraduates reported that it was somewhat easy to integrate while students of color reported that integration was neither easy nor difficult (4.12 versus 3.68, p < .001).

The two groups reported statistically significant differences among the three variables measuring the importance of increasing campus diversity. Students of color somewhat agreed that it was important to increase the racial and cultural diversity of administrators, faculty, and staff at the university. White undergraduates neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement (4.14 versus 3.46, p < .001). Students of color also somewhat agreed that it was important to increase the racial and cultural diversity of the students attending the university. White undergraduates neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement (4.25 versus 3.63, p < .001). Students of color somewhat disagreed that diverse United States cultures were well represented in the university curriculum. White students neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement (2.75 versus 3.39, p < .001).

Regarding the outcome variable, White undergraduates rated the university’s academic library higher (4.01) compared to the students of color (3.97). However, the difference was not statistically significant.
Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, T Tests, and Scales of Variables by Racial/Ethnic Groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White (N = 851)</th>
<th>Students of Color (N = 252)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class year (1 = freshmen, 2 = sophomores, 3 = juniors, 4 = seniors)</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Racial Climate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Campus Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How comfortable do you feel as part of the university community? ²</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating the University response to students’ interests and concerns ²</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating the University in creating a sense of belonging for students ²</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s response to Sexism, Racism, Discrimination, &amp; Harassment ²</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of Academic &amp; Social Integration ³</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Increasing Campus Diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase racial &amp; cultural diversity (administrators, faculty, and staff) ⁴</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase racial &amp; cultural diversity (students) ⁴</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse U.S. cultures are well-represented in the University curriculum ⁴</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratings of the academic libraries⁵</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .001, * p < .010
1 (1 = very uncomfortable, 2 = somewhat uncomfortable, 3 = neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, 4 = somewhat comfortable, 5 = very comfortable)
2 (1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent)
3 (1 = extremely difficult, 2 = somewhat difficult, 3 = neither easy nor difficult, 4 = somewhat easy, or 5 = extremely easy)
4 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree)
5 (1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good)
An examination of the regressions in table 2 reveals that variables and factors related to the outcome variable, perceptions of the academic libraries, varied by racial/ethnic group. For students of color, only one independent variable was associated with their perceptions of the academic libraries. The university’s response to undergraduates’ interests and concerns was positively associated with the outcome variable ($r = .311$). The correlation between these two variables was at the lowest level of significance ($p < .010$). The variables and factors in this regression model accounted for 12 percent of the explained variance.

One factor and one variable were positively associated with White undergraduates’ perceptions of the academic libraries. The factor rating the university’s response to sexism, racism, discrimination, and harassment was associated with the outcome variable ($r = .266$). The variable concerning the importance of increasing the racial and cultural diversity of students was correlated with the outcome variable ($r = .280$). Both the factor and the variable were significant at the highest level ($p < .001$). The variables and factors in this regression model accounted for 16 percent of the explained variance.

**Discussion**

Overall, the measures of the campus racial climate explained 12 percent and 16 percent of variance in how students of color and White undergraduates perceived the academic library. This study differs from previous studies of academic libraries that examined more intuitive factors that would be associated with the academic library, such as classroom experiences and the number of term papers written. The focus of this study is how the institutional environment affects perceptions of the academic library.

It is not surprising that there were differences in the perception of the campus racial climate by the two groups of undergraduates. Previous research has indicated that White undergraduates tend to view the campus racial climate in more favorable terms than students of color.

For White undergraduates two items were related to their perceptions of the academic library: the university’s response to sexism, racism, discrimination, and harassment; and the importance of increasing the racial and cultural diversity among students at the university. Both of these items are race-related. However, it is not intuitive why these items might be related to undergraduates’ perceptions of the academic library. Their responses do indicate that White undergraduates believe that race-related issues may be connected to the academic library.

Although students of color expressed more concerns about the importance of increasing campus diversity among administrators, faculty, staff, students, and in the curriculum than White undergraduates, only one measure of the campus climate was related to their perceptions of the academic library—their perceptions of the university’s response to students’ interests and concerns. This item is not overtly race-related. Perhaps students of color do not view the academic library as a race-related space. In their book *The Agony of Education* Joe R. Feagin, Hernan Vera, and Nikitah Imani describe “White spaces” on campus where students of color do not feel welcomed. They found that the academic library was not among these “White spaces” on college campuses. 21 Liz Greenhalgh and Ken Worpole describe libraries as neutral places where people are accepted regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or class. 22 Libraries can also be considered
Table 2  
Multiple Regression Analysis of Factors Related to the Ratings of the Academic Library’s Services and Resources (Beta and significance) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students of Color (N = 252)</th>
<th>White (N = 851)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class year</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campus Climate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How comfortable do you feel as part of the university community?</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>-.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rating the University response to students' interests and concerns</td>
<td>.311*</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rating the University in creating a sense of belonging for students</td>
<td>-.180</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s response to Sexism, Racism, Discrimination, &amp; Harassment</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.266***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of Academic &amp; Social Integration</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance of Increasing Campus Diversity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase racial and cultural diversity among administrators, faculty and staff</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>-.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase racial and cultural diversity among students</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.280***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diverse cultures of the U.S. are well-represented in the University curriculum</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>.164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = .01 level, ** = .001 level

"third places," a term coined by Ray Oldenburg. He describes "third places" as neutral ground where people can come and go as they please and where everyone is made to feel comfortable. Examples of third places include coffee houses, bars, bookstores, among others. Robert D. Putnam writes about a Chicago Public Library branch as a third place in his latest book. This branch successfully serves both a predominantly low-income African American community and a more affluent predominantly White
community. Putnam further describes libraries as places without barriers that welcome everyone. Chicago Public Library Commissioner Mary Dempsey states that libraries are “the least threatening public institutions.”22 This paper argues that academic libraries can also be a third place on college campuses—a racially neutral space for students of color—a counter-space.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

Understanding which elements of the campus racial climate have an impact on students of color is important for academic libraries interested in providing a non-classroom environment that is welcoming to students of color. For example, the study by Mallinckrodt and Sedlacek, which was previously cited, demonstrated that academic library use was important to the retention of African American undergraduates. One way that academic libraries can contribute to the educational attainment of students of color is by providing this welcoming environment. Future research needs to develop academic library climate variables designed to assess specific aspects of the academic library as they relate to the racial issues.

Due to the limitations of secondary analyses, this study was unable to determine what aspects of the academic library students perceive favorably. Future studies could address explicitly such issues as whether or not academic libraries provide a welcoming environment to students of color in terms of services, interactions with reference librarians, and fulfilling undergraduates’ academic and non-academic information needs. For example, does the collection contain sources or databases such as Ethnic Newswatch or Hispanic American Periodicals Index (HAPI) that are useful for completing term papers on topics related to racial/ethnic issues? Does the collection contain leisure reading materials such as Audrey, Latina, or Ebony magazines or popular literature by multicultural authors? These questions could be part of the variables designed to address the academic library racial climate.

Because of small sample sizes this study had to consider African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native Americans as a group. However, for future quantitative research, larger sample sizes of students of color are desirable in order to conduct separate analyses by racial/ethnic group. Different groups have diverse experiences, as well as different perceptions, of racism and discrimination prior to and during college. For example, John U. Ogbu’s work describes the differences in, what he calls, immigrant and voluntary minorities versus non-immigrant and involuntary minorities. He believes differences between these groups have an impact on educational success and attainment.25 An additional suggestion includes examining each racial/ethnic group by
sub-groups as in the previously cited study conducted by Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler that considered Chicano, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos undergraduates separately. Future research would also benefit from the use of qualitative research methods. Specifically, future studies could use critical race theory (CRT) as the interpretive framework and use counter-storytelling as the research method so that researchers could really “hear” the voices of the students of color describing their academic library experiences.

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Notes
3. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 70.
4. Ibid., 62.

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