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Why are all the black students *still* sitting together in the proverbial college cafeteria?

A look at research informing the figurative question being taken by the Supreme Court in *Fisher*

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Renowned scholar and former Spelman College President Beverly Tatum drew attention to a provocative question capturing the public imagination and policy debate regarding the issue of critical mass at the cusp of the 21st Century. Tatum's (1997) famous book *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* explained that what looks like black kids excluding themselves from the rest of the (white) students in the cafeteria to the untrained eye, is actually a response to students' own feelings of racial isolation on campus, one that facilitates their capacity to not only develop a positive racial identity but also fully participate across race-lines in the broader educational experience.

In maintaining that race continues to be modestly considered to a similar degree as other student life experiences (e.g., musical talent, socio-economic hardship) in college admissions, the 2003 Supreme Court decision on affirmative action in *Grutter* affirmed the imperative of addressing impediments to participation that arise when students from historically excluded groups are not present in "meaningful numbers" or "critical mass" (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003, p. 318–319; Garcés & Jayakumar, 2014). In fact, even the dissenting opinions of the *Grutter* Court agreed with the majority about the need for more than token numbers of minorities to avoid the harms of racial isolation and create the conditions for educational benefits.² In Rehnquist's own words, a critical mass was necessary "[t]o ensure

that the...minority students do not feel isolated or like spokespersons for their race; to provide adequate opportunities for the type of interaction upon which the educational benefits of diversity depend; and to challenge all students to think critically and reexamine stereotypes" (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, C. J. Rehnquist dissenting, 2003, p. 3). The Court further asserted that breaking down stereotypes in classroom discussions requires enough minority students such that "nonminority students learn that there is no minority viewpoint but rather a variety of viewpoints among minority students" (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003, p. 320). These holdings reflect alignment with Tatum's lesson and an understanding of the importance of critical mass for the purpose of fashioning/signaling a learning environment where *all* students thrive and benefit from student body racial diversity.

Another powerful underlying question addressed in Tatum's book (the one that didn't make the cover and is less often asked)—*Why are all the white kids sitting together in the cafeteria?*—had also created some pause and justification for educational intervention.³ White students who lacked exposure to diversity would certainly be ill-prepared for a diverse democracy. Indeed, *Grutter* upheld campus racial diversity and the ability to interact across race lines as educational imperatives in a national context where high levels of neighborhood and secondary schooling segregation contribute to a

reality where most white students enter college having primarily experienced homogeneous white environments. Research from various sectors, including the educational and business communities, affirmed that while there is more room for conflict and racial vulnerability in breaking from homogeneous groups, heterogeneity (or diversity) leads to greater innovation and positive benefits vital to an increasingly pluralistic democracy,⁴ but this comes with a caveat: organizations, whether business or educational institutions, must foster an institutional climate that reflects on and addresses impediments to participation, including stereotypes and racial isolation.⁵

The *Fisher* Supreme Court again takes up the issue of critical mass but with a slightly different figurative question: Why are all the black kids *still* sitting together in the proverbial college cafeteria? The University of Texas at Austin's proverbial cafeteria is certainly more racially diverse than that of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor (the focal institution of *Grutter*), with significantly more Latina/o students and similar gains in Asian/Asian American and international students. Texas, after all, is a state with a growing Latina/o population, and, while the numbers on campus are not reflective of equitable educational opportunities at the state level, they are reflective of differential state demographics. The proportion of black students on both campuses—and at most selective institutions nationwide for that matter—is declining and staggeringly low,⁶ especially where race-conscious admissions are banned.⁷

The Defendant claims that in a state demographic context and legacy of institutional exclusion specific to the University of Texas (and different from UM), race-neutral tactics and extensive outreach efforts alone were ineffective mechanisms for recruiting underrepresented students (Latina/o and black), particularly in the case of black students. For example, the McNair program under race-neutral terms consistently had only one black student from 1999–2003; similarly, the South Texas Graduate Fellowship Program served zero black students (out of 40 participants). An accompanying race-sensitive process was deemed necessary for creating a climate of positive intergroup relations where students would not feel tokenized and where stereotypes could be broken down. The University's

2004 proposal to consider race, following a year-long classroom study, reported that black students were missing from 90% of discussion-size classrooms (but also across larger classes); that underrepresented students were present in severe token numbers across disciplinary fields (e.g., black students made up .007%, .01%, .07%, .05% of Colleges of Engineering, Business Administration, Education, and Public Affairs, respectively)⁸; and, that students indicated feelings of racial isolation in learning environments upon investigation into their campus and classroom experiences.⁹

The Petitioner Abigail Fisher argues that UT had reached the level of students of color that UM strived for and thus no longer needs to consider race in admissions. In the words of the Fifth Circuit Court, "Fisher insists that our inquiry into narrow tailoring begin in 2004, the last year before UT Austin adopted its current race-conscious admissions program. Looking to that year, Fisher argues that the Top Ten Percent Plan had achieved a substantial combined Hispanic and African-American enrollment of approximately 21.5%; and that this is more minority enrollment than present in *Grutter*, where a race-conscious plan grew minority enrollment from approximately 4% to 14%. Because UT Austin was already enrolling a larger percentage of minorities than the Michigan Law School, the argument maintains, UT Austin had achieved sufficient diversity to attain the educational benefits of diversity, a critical mass, before it adopted a race-conscious admissions policy; that even if sufficient diversity had not been achieved by 2004, it had been achieved by 2007 when the combined percentage of Hispanic and African-American enrolled students was 25.5%."¹⁰ Notably the Petitioner's arguments consistently combine percentages of black and Latino students, while UT based its decision to modestly consider race in admissions on both combined and separate group percentages.¹¹

Thus, while there is indication of a lack of critical mass of black students that might lead to racial isolation (and a need to sit together in the proverbial cafeteria), the related policy question at hand seems to be about whether an institution would *still* need to address low numbers of black students in the context of a relatively more racially diverse institutional setting, to attain *Grutter* Court approved compelling educational interests.

WHAT DOES THE SOCIAL SCIENCE EVIDENCE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE FIGURATIVE QUESTION IN FISHER?

Students of color tend to group together under conditions of racial isolation as a means toward decreasing racial stigma and vulnerability to stereotypes.¹² As Tatum had explained, same-race grouping of black students in a predominantly white context enables students to gain validation, resist stereotypes, and develop culturally affirming identities. By contrast, white students tend to group together when they are accustomed to segregated white environments.¹³ Oftentimes, such students have not yet developed their capacity for and comfort level with cross-racial interactions. Unlike students of color who are bound to interact across race lines with students and/or teachers throughout schooling and certainly at predominantly white institutions, white students today are increasingly in neighborhoods and educational environments that are *de facto* segregated (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Beyond the above reasons, students may simply tend to gravitate toward same-race grouping due to greater comfort in such environments; nonetheless, doing so exclusively has a detrimental impact over time on interracial attitudes, perceptions of racial conflict, and educational experiences and outcomes.¹⁴ Intergroup contact, despite potential challenges and tensions that can arise in discussing differences and diverging perspectives, is a necessary step toward diminishing some of the very same barriers—stereotypes, lack of intergroup empathy, prejudice—that are known to inhibit meaningful interactions that are a precondition to desired educational (and workplace) benefits.

Cross-racial engagement contributes to learning in manners that challenge students' pre-existing stereotypes, worldviews, and current beliefs,¹⁵ but such interactions are inhibited in relatively homogeneous groups wherein racial isolation and heightened perceptions of stereotype-based differences between majority and minority group members create barriers to learning.¹⁶ Where there are token numbers, there is a greater need to attend to the nature of intergroup relations because there is a greater tendency for reinforcing prevailing stereotype by majority group members.¹⁷ Productive conditions for cross-racial engagement that reduce rather than strengthen stereotypes, require that the learning environment is not lopsided with regard to

social identity groups and that it does carry the potential for discrepant and varying experiences/examples within the same identity group.¹⁸

All of this research is consistent with Tatum's initial musings and evidence-based insights on the dynamics of low black student representation at predominantly white universities. Social science to date also maintains that cross-racial engagement leads to educational benefits, clarifying however, that institutions must attend to the impediments to full participation as a necessary condition. Despite the depth and breadth of large-scale quantitative studies, including several meta-analyses (e.g., Bowman, 2011) compiling this overwhelming evidence, the query posed in this brief's title calls for a slightly different set of questions regarding the relationship between critical mass and cross-racial engagement (in light of overall campus diversity).

We know that failure to address token numbers of historically underrepresented students as a condition for cross-racial engagement increases vulnerability to racial tension and conflict. Notably, this vulnerability is informed by broader social context regarding how groups are positioned in relation to marginalized or dominant social identity statuses (Steele, 1992). Under conditions of token representation students from marginalized social identity statuses are vulnerable to greater scrutiny; research indicates they are more likely to be guarded in classroom interactions and to have a heightened sensitivity to insults that are racially triggering (McCabe, 2009; Smith, Hung, and Franklin, 2011). Even students from the dominant group status (e.g., male students in a gender grouping, or white students in racially heterogeneous group) can experience heightened awareness of their racial identity, and proceed with guardedness within group interactions when there are very few dominant group members. This experience of vulnerability is, however, still shaped by social status in that dominant group members have a perceived entitlement to being in the majority, especially if accustomed to it and unaware of status privilege.¹⁹ Thus vulnerability in the context of cross-racial interaction is racialized and needs to be addressed in order to promote full participation that leads to benefits.

How then is same-race-representation related to *racialized vulnerability* that arises during cross-racial

interactions? How does overall campus diversity influence cross-racial interaction similarly or differently than same-race representation for black, Latina/o, and white students?

I analyzed longitudinal data²⁰ from the Higher Education Research Institute to address these questions. Specifically, I employed structural equation modeling (SEM) methodology to examine relationships between the individual-level constructs of cross-racial engagement and racial vulnerability with the institutional-level variables of overall proportions of students of color on campus (structural diversity index) and critical mass (same-race representation). While all four variables in the parsimonious structural model have been extensively used in prior research on the educational benefits of diversity, I revised the *racialized vulnerability* variable based on developments in the diversity literature and on extensive related literature on vulnerability.²¹ I name racial vulnerability as “racialized” given that feelings of vulnerability for marginalized racial groups are based on lower social status, while feelings of vulnerability by dominant group members stem from perceiving unfair treatment based on entitlement to (or threat of losing) dominant social and representational status.²² I used confirmatory factor analysis²³ to establish credibility of the latent constructs before testing theorized relationships between individual and institutional variables through SEM analysis. Findings²⁴ show same-race representation to be strongly associated with a decrease in racial vulnerability. In the case of black and Latina/o students in particular, same-race representation plays a more defining role in shaping quality of cross-racial engagement than does the broader diversity of a campus (see figures 1 and 2). The same is true for Asian/Asian-American and Pacific Islanders, whom I analyzed as a separate subgroup of students of color in this study. I do not elaborate on this further given this brief’s focus on informing UT’s position

in *Fisher*. The low sample size for Indigenous students did not allow for statistically trustworthy analysis of this group.

The findings from this study are consistent with previous research indicating that although decreasing homogeneity on college campuses can increase tensions and discomfort, intergroup contact (with attention toward equal status conditions) is necessary for promoting genuine cross-racial engagement that is *not* solely characterized by tokenization and hostile interactions that foster racial vulnerability. The data indicate that for black and Latina/o students—who share a subordinate ethnic/racial status—increasing critical

Figure 1. Critical Mass and Cross-Racial Engagement (Black Students Sub-sample)

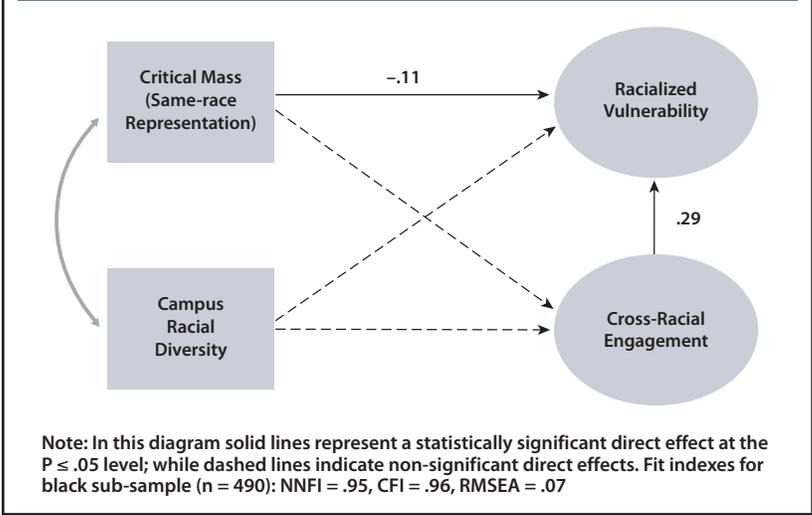
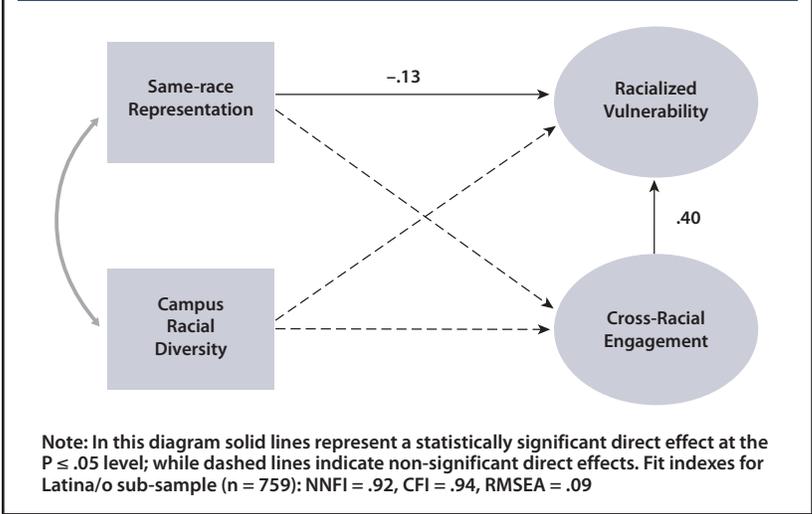


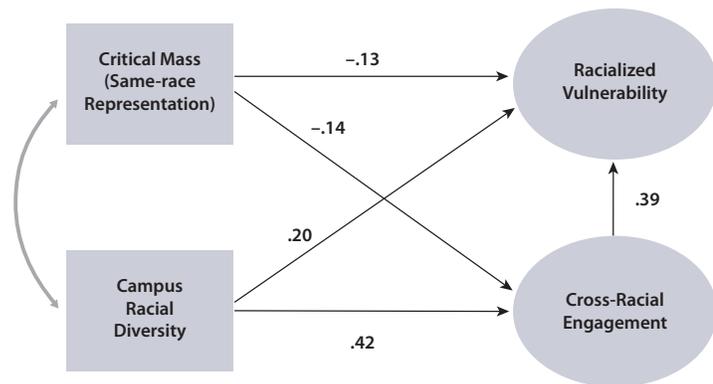
Figure 2. Critical Mass and Cross-Racial Engagement (Latina/o Students Sub-sample)



mass is imperative for reducing racial vulnerability that arises during cross-racial engagement. According to Tatum (2003), while black youth tend to have an awareness of race and racism from childhood experiences, they often further explore their racial identity around the time of college in community with same-race peers. Critical mass, as the current study affirms, is especially important for supporting black and Latina/o students (and all students of color) with mitigating vulnerabilities that arise in conversations and interactions across race. Also consistent with previous research, this study supports the assertion that same-race representation does not hinder overall cross-racial engagement among students of color. In other words, black students sitting together in the cafeteria does not mean they are not engaging across race lines frequently while on campus.

For white students, reducing racialized vulnerability is also influenced by higher levels of white student representation. This is not surprising given that most white students entering college have primarily experienced same-race (white) environments and have not yet developed an understanding of white identity and capacity to interact across race lines (Tatum, 2003). Thus, retreating to homogeneous white environments may be comforting because one does not have to think about whiteness or can provide validation for feelings of guilt, shame, and anger (Tatum, 2003). However, while increasing same-race representation is not directly associated with cross-racial engagement for students of color, it strongly decreases the likelihood of white students engaging in cross-racial interactions. Thus, same-race representation functions differently for white students and appears to be problematic with regard to discouraging intergroup contact. Student body diversity is on the other hand (as both prior and present research emphasize) necessary for encouraging interactions across race lines for white students. As shown in figure 3, in the case of white students only, higher percentages of white students on campus have a direct negative effect on individual white students' cross-racial engagement.

Figure 3. Critical Mass and Cross-Racial Engagement (White Students Sub-sample)



Note: In this diagram solid lines represent a statistically significant direct effect at the $P \leq .05$ level; while dashed lines indicate non-significant direct effects. Fit indexes for white sub-sample ($n = 10,511$): NNFI = .91, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .08

Thus, removing barriers to productive interactions for white students may require colleges to address white students' racial isolation within mostly white environments. Not only are whites most likely to come from segregated neighborhoods but they are also the most racially isolated group at all levels of schooling.²⁵

A forthcoming study in the Winter 2015 issue of the Harvard Educational Review, also based on HERI data, indicates that white students who were primarily socialized in and accustomed to segregated white environments prior to college are more inclined toward sticking to white-dominant environments on campus (e.g., Greek organizations) and less likely to choose to engage in cross-racial interactions (compared to their counterparts from racially integrated precollege environments). In light of high levels of neighborhood and schooling segregation among whites, these recent findings underscore how imperative it is that colleges provide opportunities for interacting across race within structural learning environments (e.g., classroom and within majors or field of study). Without such exposure, many white students are left with cumulative experiences in segregated white environments that not only inhibit learning from engagement with diverse peers in college and beyond but also impairs their capacity to perceive racial bias and discrimination. Furthermore, as Tatum had warned, in predominantly white college environments where stereotypes and racial discrimination/bias are left to run rampant and to hinder genuine

cross-racial engagement, black and other students of color may continue to feel alienated and have good reason to sit together in the proverbial cafeteria.

CONCLUSION: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A review of the social science literature²⁶ related to diversity indicates that critical mass is not quantifiable but rather depends on particular factors within the educational context in which benefits may arise (see Garces & Jayakumar, 2014). In combination with numbers of particular racial subgroups on campus, a positive racial climate at both the institutional and interactional levels is vital to fostering the synergy of environmental and interpersonal conditions that encourage participation in the learning environment. Both the prior and more recent research evidence point to the importance of addressing barriers to full participation, which impact overall sense of belonging and perceptions of campus racial climate. Indeed, as highlighted in this brief, the latest research shows that institutions must address barriers to productive interaction for both students of color (e.g., harms of racial isolation, tokenism, vulnerabilities, feeling scrutinized) and white students (e.g., primary socialization in segregated white environments that do not reflect the increasingly diverse society we live in). This is consistent with the University of Texas' approach and moreover, with Justice Powell's vision of a diverse student body that "serves values beyond race alone, including enhanced classroom dialogue and the lessening of racial isolation and stereotypes" endorsed by the *Grutter* Court (*Bakke*, 1978, as cited in Fifth Circuit 2014 ruling that UT's consideration of race in admissions was narrowly tailored toward a compelling educational interest, p. 10–11).

Higher education institutions must consider and address the historical legacy of exclusion and other factors that impact campus racial climate, past and present. These factors include patterns of admissions and retention for students of color; and state and institutional contexts and policies, which are key indicators or signals to students' about whether or not they are welcome on a particular campus. For example, a lack of institutional commitment to diversity as signaled by banning consideration of race in admissions has a "discouraging effect" on the application and

enrollment of students of color in undergraduate and professional schools.²⁷ The University of Texas' implementation of the statewide Top Ten Percent (TTP) policy and its substantial race-neutral outreach efforts toward maximizing the potential benefits each offers speak to the University's commitment to addressing an unwelcoming climate for underrepresented students and barriers to full participation. Furthermore, UT was responsive to evidence of limitations of race-neutral plans in addressing historically and currently severely low numbers of black students, proposing comprehensive review (inclusive of race) to signal a more inclusive campus climate toward facilitating cross-racial engagement where all students thrive.

Supplementing the larger race-neutral mechanisms with an accompanying review of a smaller set of admission offers that does allow for considering race is necessary to move toward a more positive climate and culture that involves a history of exclusion and a current state context of *de facto* segregation that continue to detrimentally impact campus intergroup relations. UT recognizes that it was established and continued for over 70 years under racial segregation by law (until the 1950 *Sweatt* case, in which the UT Law School itself fought to deny admissions to Heman Sweatt solely based on being African American), that the Texas Constitution required segregated schooling by law until 1969, and that discrimination and *de jure* segregation against African Americans continued for decades thereafter. As Respondents' brief asserts, the lingering impact of this history is evident in the perception that "[UT] is largely closed to nonwhite applicants and does not provide a welcoming supportive environment to underrepresented minority students."²⁸

The University of Texas paid attention to statewide demographic data in relation to addressing its current context, including signaling a genuinely inclusive campus climate and attending to barriers to full participation at both the institutional and interactional level of the classroom. This evidence reflects their overall contextual interest in critical mass toward the goal of dynamic diversity supported by past and present research. Whether the *Fisher* Court will be as in sync with social science research in answering the figurative and real questions about critical mass remains to be seen.

As we await this verdict of grave national importance, black students will continue sitting together and collectivizing²⁹ together at selective institutions across the country where their representation is on average 3.4 percent. They will continue naming problems with their campus climates toward rewriting their racialized vulnerability and reclaiming visibility and belonging under conditions currently signaling that they are less than welcome.

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NOTES

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2. See Garces and Jayakumar's (2014) review of literature related to diversity and critical mass for more on the essential factors that institutions must attend to in order to facilitate educational benefits. The extensively documented benefits of diversity include cognitive development (e.g., Antonio et al., 2004; Bowman, 2010), academic and social self-concept (e.g., Denson & Chang, 2009), intergroup dialogue skills and pluralistic orientation (e.g., Engberg & Hurtado, 2011; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004), decreasing prejudicial attitudes and discrimination reduction (e.g., Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, and Wright, 2011).
3. For example, Fortune 500 companies and military officers strongly supported affirmative action before the *Grutter* Court based on the concern that without exposure to diverse peers all students, but particularly white students, would lack cross-cultural leadership, problem-solving, and workforce capacities (Gurin, Lehman et al., 2004). See also, Ledesma (2003) and *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), p. 306–308.
4. See e.g., Bowman's (2011) meta-analysis of literature on educational benefits of diversity for college students; see e.g., Neale and Northcraft (2006) on better small group decisions in business courses; Dezsö and Ross (2012) on improved financial performance of firms.
5. See e.g., Gurin et al. (2013) and Page (2007) noting that heterogeneous social identity groups may have greater potential conflict than homogeneous groups, but this tension or disagreement under supportive conditions can lead to greater innovation and improved intergroup understanding. Also, see in-depth report "State of the World's Science" indicating that while social diversity can cause discomfort and greater perceived conflict, it is vital to improving individual and company outcomes, and leads to "unfettered discoveries" and "breakthrough innovations" (Phillips, 2014).
6. Reardon (2012) reports that there were 5.6% black, 6.0% Latino, 3.5% Asian American at selective institutions (15.1% students of color, non-indigenous) in 1982; by 2004, there was an increase in overall racial diversity on these campuses (22.4% students of color, non-indigenous) but a significant decline in black students in particular (with 3.4 % black, 6.9% Latino, 12.1% Asian American). More specifically, Reardon (2012) reveals a decrease in the number of black students at highly selective institutions from 5.6% in 1982 to 3.4% in 2004.
7. See e.g., Kidder (2006) for more on detrimental impact of California's statewide ban on affirmative action as it relates to racial representation. See also, evidence of bans on race-conscious admissions leading to declines in minority enrollment in: graduate fields of study (Garces, 2013), law school (Kidder, 2003), and medicine (Garces & Mickey-Pabello, 2013).
8. Data Source: Office of Institutional Research, The University of Texas at Austin, Statistical Handbook, 2002–2003 edition.
9. Defendant's statement of facts: "Officials discovered when talking with students that minority students still felt isolated in the classroom and a majority of undergraduates believed there was no diversity in the classroom." Walker Dep. 21:6–12.
10. See 2014 Fifth Circuit Opinion, page 14–15.
11. See UT's official 2004 report proposing to consider race after *Hopwood* state ban was overturned by *Grutter*.
12. See Garces and Jayakumar (2014) reviewing the literature on diversity related to critical mass, including the harms of racial isolation and stereotype threat.
13. See e.g., Quillian and Campbell (2003) showing that when children do not have opportunities to interact across race lines, they are less inclined to envision themselves as capable of interacting with children from different racial backgrounds.
14. See Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, and Stellmacher (2007) for more on interracial contact as a precondition for racial prejudice reduction.
15. See e.g., Crisp and Turner (2011) arguing that cross-racial interaction contributes to learning to the extent that the encounters challenge students' pre-existing stereotypes, beliefs, and worldviews; Gurin et al. (2013) showing that failing to address the quality of intergroup relations, including token representation of underrepresented groups, can increase racial tension and negative outcomes. Gurin et al. (2013) assert the importance of dialogue that highlights similarities and differences across people from different social identity groups.
16. See e.g., Allport's (1954) seminal theory establishing that intergroup contact can only lead to the reduction of stereotypes and prejudice where there is equal status contact amongst members. Kanter's (1977) well known work on tokenism demonstrates how varying proportional statuses within groups of individuals from different social identity groups determines the nature of interaction. For more recent finding affirming the same conclusions, see Elgart, Plaut, Hirsch, and Paterson (2015) on the benefits of diversity in remedying identity-related threats.

17. See e.g., Berndsen, Spears, van der Pligt, and McGarty (2002), and Stroessner and Plaks (2001), showing that rare or superficial cross-racial interactions are likely to promote the perception that one's observations of token member's behavior confirms already existing biased judgments and stereotypes. See e.g., Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), and Smith et al. (2007), showing that students come to college with pre-existing negative racial primes and minorities and specifically toward black people.
18. See e.g., Kanter's (1977) seminal research on *tokenism* asserting "If there are enough people of the token's type to let discrepant examples occur, it is possible that the generalization will change to accommodate the accumulated cases. But if individuals of that type are only a small proportion of the group, it is easier to retain the generalization and distort perception of the token" (p. 971–972).
19. Tatum (2003) reports that whites can experience discomfort, anger, and victimization, stemming from frustration of being seen as a group member as opposed to an individual. For students who are becoming more aware and working toward a healthy white racial identity, discomfort and vulnerability can also stem from feelings of guilt and shame that intensify cross-racial interactions. She elaborates that in contrast to people of color, this is a new experience for whites. Jayakumar and Adamian (in press) found that white students attending historically black colleges and universities reported greater salience/awareness of their racial identity and perceived impact on personal interactions once on campus (but not necessarily when reporting about high school experiences in white majority high schools), and indicated greater perceived victimization and scrutiny (especially among those unaware of white racial identity and privilege).
20. Data for this analysis were derived from survey research administered by the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP), housed in the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). The longitudinal survey data was collected in 2006 and 2010. Institution-level data, particularly the information about the student enrollment and percentages by racial identification, are from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). I first employed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish a multi-group measurement model including two latent factors: Cross-Racial Engagement and Racialized Vulnerability, across four racial groups of students: black, Latino, Asian American, and white. Thereafter, I conducted separate-group analyses of structural models to examine how critical mass (same-race representation) impacts Cross-Racial Engagement (CRE) and Racialized Vulnerability (previously called "negative quality cross racial interaction"), considering overall campus racial diversity. While the Cross-Racial Engagement variable is based on items measuring frequency of interactions, the Racialized Vulnerability latent construct is based on participant ratings of the quality of intergroup contact, specifically: whether they felt guarded, perceived insults, and experienced interactions as hostile.
21. Based on an extensive review of the literature on vulnerability, Armfield (2006) argues that a cognitive vulnerability model is most useful for conveying the phenomenon. Definitions of vulnerability in this approach capture the pervasiveness of unease experienced by the individual based on the situation or context and based on how much perceived control a person has over protecting themselves against various threats to their integrity (e.g., in racially heterogeneous classrooms, how much perceived access is there to seek refuge in same-race groups either in the classroom or on campus?). Notably, vulnerability is racialized; in addition to research discussed in this brief, see Satterfield, Mertz, and Slovic's (2004) research on health risks, showing how discrimination and vulnerability are moderated by race and gender, particularly social hierarchies and injustice.
22. See e.g., Sidanius et al. (2008) arguing based on social dominance theory that because students of color share a subordinate ethnic/racial status, ethnic identity and race salience can "bolster feelings that minorities get unfair treatment in the United States"; while for whites, ethnic identity and race salience are "associated with a *denial* that minorities get unfair treatment" (p. 164). Also see footnotes 19 and 21 of this brief.
23. Multigroup confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to first assess the validity of the measurement model testing, which includes the two latent variables utilized in the study. The results indicated both factors operated similarly across racial sub-groups and presented good multigroup data-model fit [NNFI = .946; CFI = .961; RMSEA = .096], demonstrating measurement invariance (baseline CFI and all constrained with difference in CFI \leq .01). Separate structural analyses were then conducted for black, Latino/a, Asian/Asian-American and Pacific Islander, and white students. The small number of Indigenous students did not allow for separate sub-group analysis with trustworthy statistical results. However, Indigenous students who indicated multiple races were included in other sub-groups and thus reflected in the reported findings.
24. This brief shares results of black (n = 490), Latino (n = 759), and white (n = 10,511) sub-samples. Separate structural models were run, with good data model fit. For the black sample fit indexes were: NNFI = .946, CFI = .961, RMSEA = .07; Latino student sample: NNFI = .917, CFI = .940, RMSEA = .09; white student sample: NNFI = .909, CFI = .934, RMSEA = .08). Analyses on Asian/Asian-American students were conducted and not highlighted here due to focus of the *Fisher* case on the two racial groups of color (black and Latino) identified as underrepresented when comparing institutional figures to state population demographics of Texas. Indigenous students were also analyzed as a separate subsample, but results are not reported because they are not technically regarded as trustworthy statistical findings due to very low sample size availability. Analyses of Asian American and Indigenous student subsamples reflected the same patterns evident in the black and Latino subsample results shared in this brief.

25. Mickelson, 2003; Orfield & Yun, 1999; Lewis & Manno, 2011.
26. In this literature review Garces and Jayakumar (2014) introduce the term “dynamic diversity,” which conveys a more nuanced and evidence-based understanding of critical mass and its impact on college student engagement and outcomes.
27. See e.g., Brown and Hirschman (2006); Garces and Coghurn (2015); Garces (2013); Kidder (2003); Garces and Mickey-Pabello (2013).
28. See Respondents’ Brief 2013, p. 3–4, citing Texas’ long history of discrimination against blacks and Mexican Americans in public education; and emphasizing historic current problematic role of segregation. For more on Texas’ specific history as it relates to admissions practices at the University of Texas, see Brown-Nagin, Guinier, and Torres (2015).
29. See e.g., Twitter hashtag called #BBUM, short for Being Black at the University of Michigan, sharing students’ feelings of alienation from classroom discussions and

discriminatory comments from peers and faculty; photo-campaign and play both called “I too am Harvard,” shared black students’ experiences of microaggressions on campus; a group called the Black Bruins described how their low representation on campus signaled their status as second-class or unwanted members of the University community, impacting both their own participation and the perspectives of black people amongst other students. The common thread is naming and resisting their racialized vulnerability in the face of a lack of critical mass.

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The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) is based in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. The Institute serves as an interdisciplinary center for research, evaluation, information, policy studies, and research training in postsecondary education.



The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) is administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. CIRP is the oldest and most established study of American higher education, consisting of data on more than 15 million students from some 1,900 colleges and universities. CIRP continues to advance understanding of student learning and development in college through numerous books and publications and is the most comprehensive source of information on college students.

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