The White-Centering Logic of Diversity Ideology

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Abstract

In this article, I present a framework for diversity as a racial ideology that rearticulates the logic of civil rights. Diversity ideology is, in part, a co-optation of calls for race consciousness that challenged color blindness: it highlights race and other axes of difference to achieve a color-blind ideal of fairness where race will no longer matter. In this way, diversity ideology creates space for minor acknowledgment of structural inequality in the abstract. This is an important difference from color-blind racism, which explains inequality as a function of the past, individual "racist" bad apples, or the failings of people of color. The logic of diversity ideology is based on four tenets (diversity as acceptance, diversity as intent, diversity as commodity, and diversity as liability) that frame an amorphous diversity as the answer to racial inequality, while centering White people's desires and feelings. These conceptualizations of diversity are devoid of power and history, which is how systemic Whiteness is reinscribed.

Keywords

diversity, color-blind racism, critical race theory

After years of race scholars identifying the prevailing racial ideology of the United States as color-blind racism, the almost universal valuing of diversity presents a challenge to color-blind racism's "major ideological linchpin . . . that race no longer matters" (Doane, 2014, p. 18). While some color-blind racism scholars argue that diversity talk shows the ideological flexibility of color blindness (Burke, 2011; Doane, 2017), there are indeed important differences between these two ideologies. Diversity ideology as an analytic framework provides conceptual tools to help us understand White

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individuals who are conscious of racial inequality and desire to be close to people of color, yet still reproduce Whiteness as structure.[1] Diversity's ubiquity and its effective justification of racial inequity warrant analyzing diversity as a racial ideology.

In this article, I present a framework for diversity as a racial ideology that rearticulates the logic of civil rights (Embrick, 2006; Herring & Henderson, 2011). Diversity ideology is, in part, a co-optation of calls for race consciousness that challenged color blindness: it highlights race and other axes of difference to achieve a color-blind ideal of fairness where race will no longer matter. In this way, diversity ideology creates space for minor acknowledgment of structural inequality in the abstract. This is an important difference from color-blind racism, which explains inequality as a function of the past, individual "racist" bad apples, or the failings of people of color. The logic of diversity ideology is based on four tenets (diversity as acceptance, diversity as intent, diversity as commodity, and diversity as liability) that frame an amorphous diversity as the answer to racial inequality, while centering White people's desires and feelings. These conceptualizations of diversity are devoid of power and history, which is how systemic Whiteness is reinscribed.

The focus of this article is the organizing logics or tenets of diversity ideology. These tenets originally emerged from my own fieldwork in a multiracial neighborhood. I constructed these categories based on White residents' understandings of racial matters in their "diverse" neighborhood. Importantly, I did not ask residents about diversity until the end of our interviews. Discussions of diversity were most often spontaneous and a result of the residents' own framing of themselves and their neighborhood. Diversity ideology was a way to think about the world and help White residents make sense of their place in it. This article expands on that framework to build a theoretical model that weaves in existing scholarship on diversity in universities, corporations, and as a discourse. While diversity ideology may not manifest in the same form across contexts, its logic (captured via its four tenets) is largely consistent. Of course, as with all ideologies, diversity ideology's dominance is never total and works in tandem with other existing ideologies (Hall, 1986; C. W. Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017). Exactly how individuals weave multiple ideologies together is outside the scope of this article (see C. W. Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017; Warikoo & de Novais, 2015). Below I map diversity ideology's origin as well as the logic of the four tenets of diversity ideology. I also address how diversity ideology differs from color-blind racism and identify arenas for future research and theorization.

Diversity as Ideology

Why Is Diversity a Racial Ideology?

In this article, I use cultural theorist Stuart Hall's (1980) definition of ideology: "systems of meaning, concepts, categories and representations which make sense of the world" (p. 334). In other words, ideology is about common sense or shared logic. Much research in critical diversity studies has approached diversity as a discourse rather than an ideology, focusing on the language of diversity (J. M. Bell & Hartmann,

2007; Berrey, 2015b; Burke, 2011). Ellen Berrey's (2015b) work on diversity as a "keyword" argues diversity is not an ideology because diversity can support various kinds of ideological messages—both progressive and conservative. By studying diversity as an ideology, I capture a shared logic of diversity that supports the racial status quo. Since the four tenets of diversity ideology are common sense in the United States, all references to diversity contend with its logic. Moreover, studying diversity as a discourse and an ideology is compatible as they both focus on distinct elements of a broader system of racial inequity. When we approach diversity as an ideology, we better understand how that system is justified.

By theorizing diversity as an ideology, scholars can see how the logic of diversity spreads beyond the use of a specific term. In thinking about diversity's logics, we are also able to identify its continuity and breaks with other ideologies, as well as how it rearticulates racial justice policies and practices into accommodationist ones. For example, while I focus on the similarity and differences between diversity ideology and color-blind racism in this article, analyses of how diversity ideology is similar or different to multiculturalism are possibilities for future research.[2]

Thinking about diversity as an ideology rather than a discourse also allows us to analyze subversive breaks from its dominant logic. Even those moments of subversion, however, are shaped by the parameters of diversity ideology. Actors strategically using diversity for specific social justice aims still have to grapple with the ways that many White people understand diversity (as acceptance, as intent, as commodity, and as liability). The diversity ideology framework helps scholars flip a discussion from apparent contradictions (valuing diversity and maintaining Whiteness as a system) to an understanding of how these beliefs, practices, and policies seamlessly reinforce one another under the logic of diversity ideology.

So how does one study an ideology? First, we need to identify how the logic of diversity ideology permeates not just individual-level beliefs but is also present in organizational and institutional-level justifications of the racial status quo. Second, we need to study how these logics at the micro, meso, and macro levels interact with patterns of behavior, policies, and laws. Given that ideologies provide explanations of material conditions and social relations, identifying the mechanisms and material foundation of ideologies is central to mapping any ideology's scale and effects (Burke, 2016; Ray, 2019). As such, studies of diversity ideology are most effective when they incorporate discussions of material conditions, as well as policies and practices that use the logic of diversity ideology to facilitate the maintenance of White supremacy. Given the need for these multiple points of evidence, I synthesize existing research in critical diversity studies that span a variety of settings, foci, and levels of analysis.

My analysis of diversity ideology was originally motivated by an attempt to capture the dominant racial ideology of White people who consider themselves progressive and perhaps even antiracist, yet enact practices and policies that perpetuate systemic Whiteness (Mayorga-Gallo, 2014). Rather than frame these seeming contradictions as hypocrisies, I identify diversity ideology as the rationale through which these beliefs and practices are possible, predictable, and logically consistent. Ideologies, of course, affect everyone in a system, including subordinate group members. Interestingly,

however, work in critical diversity studies has shown how diversity as a framework is often less popular among Black, Latinx, Asian, and Native peoples. To paraphrase Ellen Berrey (2015a), diversity seems to be for White people. In fact, my research has found that middle-class White people use diversity ideology to distinguish themselves from categories of sullied Whiteness (e.g., racists, "White trash," boring suburbanites), but even those who occupy these sullied categories (e.g., suburbanites) may also use the logic of diversity ideology (C. W. Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017).

Comparing Diversity Ideology and Color-Blind Racism

It is well-established by sociologists that race is a social system that shapes group-level outcomes across a variety of institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Feagin, 2001; Omi & Winant, 1994/2015). This differs significantly from the common sense conceptualization of race as an individual identity. Decades of research in critical race studies have used structural and institutional-level analyses to capture the realities of racial inequality, challenging the neutrality and universality of legal scholarship as well as the assimilation, prejudice, and "race relations" paradigms of White sociology (D. A. Bell, 1995; Collins, 1991; Ladner, 1973; Steinberg, 2007; Wellman, 1977). Over the past 20 years, color-blind racism has emerged as a key framework to understand racial inequity in the United States.

Diversity ideology, much like color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003/2018; Mueller & Dunston, 2017), helps individuals who live within an increasingly multicultural environment reconcile a national value of egalitarianism with pervasive racial inequity.[3] Unlike color-blind racism, however, diversity ideology does not insist that race is unimportant or that structural racism does not exist, but frames race as one marker of difference to be lauded within the contemporary United States. This focus on race as one element of difference that should be considered among many can be traced back to the Supreme Court's 1978 *Bakke* decision on affirmative action in university admissions, where diversity's value was laid out by Justice Powell (Moore & Bell, 2011). While he labeled decisions based solely on race as discriminatory, he argued that race could be seen as a "plus" that contributed to "beneficial educational pluralism" (cited in Moore & Bell, 2011, p. 602).

Some color-blind racism scholars have argued that a new focus on diversity is an extension of color-blind racism. There are important parallels, particularly in how race is often conceptualized as an individual trait. However, many Whites identify discrimination and institutional racism as features of contemporary racial inequity. For example, recent survey research has found that "When asked to assess the statement 'Prejudice and discrimination against African Americans explains black disadvantage' the majority of whites agreed that racism shapes the life experiences of Americans" (Manning, Hartmann, & Gerteis, 2015, p. 539), while 47% of Whites surveyed believe laws and institutions contribute to White advantage (Croll, 2013). This is a far cry from the color-blind adage that if racial inequality exists, it is because of the cultural deficits of people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2003/2018).

Although ideologies can shift (Doane, 2017), when a foundational logic of an ideology loses some currency—for instance, the idea that racism is a thing of the past—it is worth marking that shift with a different set of analytical tools. We may otherwise lose sight of how seemingly antiracist practices, such as being prodiversity or acknowledging racial discrimination, may still reinscribe racial inequity. At the same time, if we expand the scope of color-blind racism to include diversity talk and an identification of racial discrimination, the essence of color-blind racism's logic shifts, and we may lose an important, still relevant analytic tool.

How Diversity Ideology Explains Racial Inequity and Fortifies White Identities

Pioneered by W. E. B. Du Bois's (1920) essay on the "Souls of White Folks" in *Darkwater*, Whiteness studies have put a much-needed lens on the naturalized identity of White people and the underlying structure that maintains racial inequity. In particular, I build on the critical race scholarship that theorizes the social relations of White supremacy (Du Bois, 1920; Haney-López, 1996/2006; Harris, 1993; Lewis, 2004; Mills, 1997). My analysis also borrows from critical race work on civil rights law and affirmative action. These conceptual threads illuminate the similarities across decades of White supremacy, while helping us identify what is particular about the diversity moment.

Diversity ideology explains racial inequality in two ways. First, diversity ideology frames exclusion as the cause of racial inequity and fair representation as the solution. Per the logic of diversity ideology, visible representation by nonmajority members across a variety of axes of marginalization is the key to challenging inequity. As philosopher Sara Ahmed (2012) argues,

> Diversity is often imagined as a form of repair, a way of mending or fixing histories of being broken. Indeed, diversity enters institutional discourse as a language of reparation; as a way of imagining that those who are divided can work together; as a way of assuming that "to get along" is to right a wrong. Not to be excluded becomes not simply an account of the present (an account of becoming included) but also a way of relating to the past. (p. 164)

When representation is the most important measure of fairness, it is proposed as the solution to structurally embedded issues of inequity and power. These "tick box" approaches, as Ahmed (2012) refers to them, include "when institutions can 'show' that they are following procedures but are not really 'behind' them (showing can be a way of not committing)" (p. 114). This explains a popular obsession with hitting an ideal number of "diverse" people to make an institution, group, or place diverse or "inclusive." A focus on positive public relations—part of the appeal of tick box approaches—influences how both White individuals and organizations attempt to protect themselves from deeper power-based conversations about racism.

Second, diversity ideology psychologically and materially protects Whites and White organizations from discussions of racial inequality. While many White Americans acknowledge the existence of racial inequality, direct discussions of inequality are still uncomfortable for most (DiAngelo, 2011). Diversity ideology creates a logic by which Whites can discuss racial inequality or the importance of diversity, while centering their desires, intentions, and comfort. In this way, diversity ideology buttresses Whiteness as identity, status, and property (Harris, 1993). The logic of diversity ideology allows Whites to construct a positive White identity as open-minded and accepting of difference or organizations as innovative and cutting-edge, while maintaining the social and legal benefits of systemic Whiteness.

Diversity's Reach

How beloved is diversity? The latest data show that it is very popular in the United States. For example, a recent survey from Pew Research Center (2018) indicates that a majority of respondents (58%) agreed that increased racial and ethnic diversity in the United States makes the country a better place to live. A majority of Whites (57%) also agreed with this statement, as did Black (66%) and Hispanic (56%) respondents. Even among conservative Republicans (the group most likely to disagree with the statement), diversity is still popular, with only 17% responding that racial and ethnic diversity makes the United States a worse place to live.[4]

While these findings may seem encouraging for those in support of racial justice, extant research in critical diversity studies gives plenty of evidence for skepticism of diversity's power for social change. Many scholars have focused on the contradictions between what diversity initiatives and discussions are purported to achieve and what they produce.[5] In addition to studying these shortcomings across corporations (Berrey, 2015b; Embrick, 2011; Kalev, Kelly, & Dobbin, 2006; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998), similar principle–policy gaps are found among university students (Berrey, 2015b; Moore & Bell, 2011; C. W. Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017; Warikoo, 2016). Urban scholars of gentrification and multiracial neighborhoods have also captured how touting diversity does not preclude White homeowners from enacting social control practices against neighbors of color or having predominantly White friendship networks (Aptekar, 2015; Berrey, 2015b; Burke, 2012; Mayorga-Gallo, 2014; Tissot, 2015). By synthesizing existing empirical and theoretical findings, I present a framework for how diversity maintains White supremacy through four primary tenets, identifying the logic and consequences of diversity ideology across various sites.

Tenets of Diversity Ideology

Diversity's ideological form is not dependent on its consistent manifestation across institutions, such as higher education, neighborhoods, or corporations. Its ideological constitution is apparent via four tenets through which individuals interpret the social world: diversity as acceptance, diversity as commodity, diversity as intent, and diversity as liability. The forms in which these tenets manifest may differ across

institutions, but their defining logics are generally consistent. For example, while research in critical diversity studies has illuminated seemingly disconnected patterns across institutional contexts, the diversity ideology framework helps us identify the parallels and equivalencies across these sites. By seeing these points of connection, we are better equipped to identify resistance strategies to combat the reinforcement of systemic Whiteness across contexts. While for the purposes of this article, I focus on the distinctions between tenets, they work in tandem to maintain systemic Whiteness. Below I describe the four tenets in detail, including the historical context from which they emerged.

Diversity as Acceptance

Diversity as acceptance is the tenet most commonly identified by scholars of diversity. Diversity as acceptance calls for the broad tolerance and inclusion of difference across various axes, while equating structural difference (e.g., race and sexuality) with idiosyncratic difference (e.g., hobbies or personality). This trend is far-reaching and has been identified by many scholars, including Margaret Andersen (1999, p. 13), who calls it "diversity without oppression" and James M. Thomas (2018), who calls it "condensation" (see also J. M. Bell & Hartmann, 2007). In contrast to color blindness, diversity celebrates racial difference and frames racial representation as a remedy to racial inequality.

Historically, diversity as acceptance referred to gender, racial, and ethnic differences, since diversity initiatives were an extension of multiculturalism and the civil rights and women's movements in the United States (Embrick, 2006; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). Current interpretations of diversity, however, do not focus solely on the acceptance of White women and racial and ethnic minorities: everyone's differences are accepted—whether they are structurally contingent or not. Inclusion is not about addressing power or structure, but everyone having "a seat at the table." In fact, Wendy Leo Moore and Joyce Bell (2011) illustrate how amorphous diversity policies were crafted and enacted to "water down" the racial reform of affirmative action policies (p. 599). Acceptance of diversity is modeled either through visible representation or general calls of inclusion (e.g., "everyone's welcome"). Without any emphasis on how structure-based identities shape life chances and how equity should be guaranteed across groups, calls for diversity can easily become a celebration of difference for the sake of difference. But more important, by equating these two distinct types of characteristics, diversity ideology protects the structural advantages and privileges of those in power. A general ethos of acceptance that is not grounded in a discussion of inequitable power distribution becomes a tool of oppression for the powerful.

By equating structure-based identities with idiosyncratic details, such as hobbies (C. W. Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017), diversity policies are serving as a tool of structural violence by ignoring the material effects of structure-based identities. For example, open-door policies in predominantly White organizations, such as neighborhood associations, use the passive logic of diversity as acceptance to mark themselves as inclusive and welcoming of everyone. When Black and Latinx people do not attend

meetings or events, as I saw in a multiracial Durham, NC, neighborhood, White organizers assume that people of color are not interested since no one is barring them from attending (Mayorga-Gallo, 2014). By defining acceptance of people of color as the threshold for promoting diversity, White organizations can let themselves off the hook and maintain the Whiteness of their organizations. These discussions of everyone being welcome also ignore and obscure how organizations are political entities with particular agendas. While a neighborhood association may be able to claim it is representative and inclusive of all residents, its priorities are likely to reflect those of homeowners—which, given the racist history of housing and homeownership in the United States, largely benefits White people (Rothstein, 2017). This logic also shapes academic events. When combined with the discriminatory nature of academia (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012; Matthew, 2016), "open to all" becomes "all male, all white, or all but one" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 179). Recruitment that depends on word of mouth or personal networks serves as a mechanism of racial inequity, particularly since White social networks are racially isolated (Ingraham, 2014; Korver-Glenn, 2018; Mayorga-Gallo, 2014). These mechanisms of vague acceptance and nonexclusion also coalesce with discussions of intentions, which I address next.

Diversity as Intent

Critical race theorists have critiqued the role of intent in antidiscrimination law (Crenshaw, 1988; Freeman, 1978; Lawrence, 1987; Spann, 1990). Diversity as intent refers to the centering of good intentions during discussions of diversity issues and initiatives. This pattern is well-documented in research on corporate diversity initiatives (Berrey, 2015b; Dobbin, 2009; Embrick, 2006), educational settings (Lewis & Diamond, 2015), and neighborhoods (Mayorga-Gallo, 2014). Since diversity ideology focuses so much on visible representation, the emphasis remains at the front end of the process (e.g., everyone is invited!). Prioritizing power and equity would require attention to the back end of the process as well (e.g., what about our recruitment and/or organization made Whites most likely to attend?).

Diversity initiatives accommodate systemic Whiteness by focusing more on identity construction (e.g., not racist, progressive, and inclusive) than structural changes and the production of equitable results. Firms and individuals—however well-intentioned—use the language of diversity to signal a commitment to humanist principles, such as equity and justice. This commitment, however, often focuses more on being an institution or person who values diversity than challenging a system of structural inequity. Ahmed (2012) describes this phenomenon as "nonperformative," where naming something is meant to *not* bring it into being (p. 117). Rather than a failure of process, this inaction is by design; naming their failure is often enough to showcase their good intentions (Ahmed, 2012). Jennifer Mueller's (2017) work on White ignorance highlights how this type of focus on racial awareness has missed the creative ways Whites maintain willful ignorance of structural inequity. The logic of diversity as intent sustains a system of structural inequity by centering White feelings, intentions, and self-identification rather than the material

conditions of marginalized peoples. This echoes Alan David Freeman's (1978) critique that antidiscrimination law "has thus been ultimately indifferent to the condition of the victim," and that those who created the harm are preoccupied with establishing their own innocence (pp. 1054-1055; see also Pierce, 2003).

The importance of a positive/inclusive identity for Whites is tied to the common sense way that racism is defined: as the personal beliefs of ignorant "bad" apples. In fact, recent public incidents highlight how even individuals who say explicitly racist things or act in racially discriminatory ways toward strangers frame themselves as being mischaracterized or misunderstood after they are called racist and subsequently chastened (Robbins & Salam, 2018). Being labeled a racist is an insult because it is viewed by Whites as a moral condemnation (Picca & Feagin, 2007; Warikoo, 2016). A recent study finds that

> Whites claim increased life hardships when exposed to evidence of racial privilege, that these claims are motivated by threat to self and they help Whites deny that racial privilege extends to themselves. (Phillips & Lowery, 2015, p. 16)

The threat Whites feel when approached with evidence of White privilege is not only based on the U.S. myth of meritocracy, but the immorality associated with benefiting from racism. Without the language to talk about systems and the predictability of racism in contemporary America, racism is framed by many Whites as something only morally objectionable individuals—such as David Duke and other White supremacists—perform and benefit from. Yet even the Ku Klux Klan resists being labeled racist.[6] By moving a discussion of racial inequity beyond whether an individual is good or evil, scholars can also move beyond intent. Even people with good intentions can reproduce racial inequity and benefit from White supremacy—that is the reality of structural racism. By focusing on intent, White identity, and morality, diversity ideology ignores, yet guarantees, inequitable outcomes. By ignoring outcomes and centering the intentions and feelings of those in power, diversity ideology preserves the structural status quo of White supremacy.

When intentions are the centerpiece, minimal gestures by those in power—such as identifying a problem—are privileged over how people of color experience a space. Limited budgets, pigeonholing, and poor advertising of policies are mechanisms by which organizations use the logic of diversity as intent to maintain racial inequity. By only focusing on the construction of a positive institutional identity, organizations do not need to include outcome-based assessment as part of their diversity plans. In *Rage of a Privileged Class*, Ellis Cose (1994) discusses the "dozen demons" that shape the racial climate of corporations for the Black middle class. Pigeonholing was one of them, as Black employees were more likely to be placed within departments associated with Black expertise, such as community relations—and diversity—limiting their ability to ascend up the corporate ladder at the rate of their White peers (Cose, 1994). David Embrick's (2011) research with Fortune 1000 companies also identified how when diversity is championed by corporations, its meaning is often amorphous and poorly communicated to employees (see also Thomas, 2018).

Diversity as intent reframes discussions of equity into discussions of positive identity construction. Robin DiAngelo's (2011) work on White fragility highlights this process:

> In a white supremacist context, white identity in large part rests upon a foundation of (superficial) racial toleration and acceptance. Whites who position themselves as liberal often opt to protect what they perceive as their moral reputations, rather than recognize or change their participation in systems of inequity and domination. (p. 64)

After an initial acknowledgement about the importance of diversity or recitation of diversity goals, the onus then shifts to the underrepresented to enact diversity. In fact, research shows that elite White students resent students of color when they do not integrate appropriately, denying White students the benefits of their diversity (Warikoo, 2016). Of course, these White students ignore how being one of the few people of color in a predominantly White space is psychologically and physically taxing (see W. A. Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007, on racial battle fatigue). For example, Cheryl, a Black homeowner that I interviewed in Durham, NC, identified the extra burden of joining the neighborhood association as a Black resident. Despite living in a multiracial neighborhood where Whites made up neither a majority nor a plurality of residents, the neighborhood association was almost exclusively comprised of White homeowners. Cheryl explained that becoming involved in a predominantly White organization and trying to recruit other Black people to join "was like another job in my off time and so I was like 'nah.'" I discuss the burden to do uncompensated diversity work in more detail in the diversity as commodity section below.

Diversity as Commodity

The commodification of the otherness of racial–ethnic minorities by Whites is the third tenet of diversity ideology. I define commodification as the treatment of Asian, Black, Latinx, and Native peoples as objects rather than humans for the benefit and satisfaction of others, namely White people. Diversity research on consumption, particularly on restaurants in multiracial neighborhoods, best reflects this tenet (Burke, 2011; Tissot, 2015). Commodification, however, includes more than just consumption of food. In this section, I discuss commodification in relationship to objectification, White identity, and neoliberal instrumentality. Nancy Leong's (2013) work on racial capital is instructive here. Her excellent analysis draws a connection between Whiteness as property (which established the racial value of Whiteness), to contemporary valuations of non-Whiteness. Nancy Leong (2013) writes, "As a result of the legal and social preoccupation with diversity arising from affirmative action doctrine, white people and predominantly white institutions may elevate their status within various markets by affiliating themselves with nonwhite individuals" (p. 2178). She continues, "Racial capitalism then leads to the exploitation of nonwhite racial value, and in so doing instantiates race as a commodity" (p. 2198).

Diversity ideology's emphasis on visible representation, as well as the deployment of "appreciation of diversity" as a classifying taste within a particular White, urban, middle-class habitus, incentivizes this racial commodification (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick, 2006; Mayorga-Gallo, 2014). To exhibit one's compliance with diversity ideology and with "fairness," one needs to display diversity for others to see. To achieve this end, people of color are used as symbols by Whites. This objectification is a marginalizing process and mechanism of racial inequity because it does not center people of color's humanity, but their symbolic power in reifying Whiteness. While inequitable power relations are at the root of commodifying practices, diversity ideology obscures these roots, framing Whites' desires as positive (Sullivan, 2006). As a result of the privileged position of Whites, a narrative that explains their desires and values as universally beneficial becomes dominant. This pattern is echoed in previous studies on White identity (Perry, 2001; Rodriquez, 2006). Diversity as commodity most directly challenges the naturalization of Whites' racial isolation. Using the logic of color blindness, Whites explain their segregation from people of color as nature taking its course (e.g., "birds of a feather"). Diversity as commodity, however, captures White people's desire to be near people of color, although, as I discuss below, it is still a White-centering desire dependent on White racial comfort.

The commodification of diversity is intimately tied to White identity construction. For those Whites who consider themselves liberal, progressive, tolerant, or even just "not racist," diversity ideology helps facilitate a positive construction of self. The valuing of the presence of people of color, their cultural productions, or predominantly non-White space becomes currency in a market where being "not a racist" is essential to a moral White identity. This is slightly different from previous work that has focused on the "culturelessness" of White identity for which Whites try to compensate via contact with non-White peoples and objects (hooks, 1992/2015; Rodriquez, 2006). Since racial inequality is identified as a feature of our society by many Whites, Whiteness as a racial category is sullied by people of color's experiences of racism at the hands of White people and White institutions. Some Whites seek to distinguish themselves from other (read: worse) White people by associating the latter with White racism and institutional oppression, through discussions of their blandness, backwardness, or irrational fear of people of color, for example. These types of distinguishing processes are rooted in classist and racist ideas about enlightened versus ignorant White people (Isenberg, 2016; Wellman, 1977).

These attempts at distinction among Whites can also translate into commodification and emotion work for people of color, another mechanism of racial inequity. Within this lopsided exchange, Whites see people of color as a means to an end on their journey to racial absolution and a moral racial identity. This commodification process includes, for example, White tweeters asking Black writers on Twitter to be their "racial confessor." Here Whites feel entitled to ask Black strangers to educate, absolve, and comfort them and lash out when these strangers do not oblige (Bouie, Demby, Harris, & McMillan Cottom, 2016). Studies have also documented the overwhelming tax for students and faculty of color on campuses, where they are expected to serve on diversity committees that provide very little in terms of structural change,

yet demand their time and attention (Ahmed, 2012; Thomas, 2018; Vidal-Ortiz, 2017). Diversity as commodity also strips people of color of their humanity through stereotyping and misrepresentations of their cultures and histories, such as serving fried chicken and collard greens to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday (Leong, 2013; Yuhas, 2015). People of color are also asked to be symbols of diversity in advertisement campaigns for admissions brochures—literally being added via Photoshop if no visible racial minority was in the original picture (Leong, 2013; Wade, 2009). These mechanisms of faux inclusion dehumanize and tax people of color while maintaining the systemic Whiteness of these institutions.

The logic of diversity as a commodity is also intertwined with neoliberal instrumentality. An entitlement to all available goods and services is normalized through a neoliberal "market mentality," simultaneously evading any power analyses about who has access to the marketplace, and who is for sale (Centeno & Cohen, 2012). Non-White racial value is rendered "fungible" (Leong, 2013, p. 2199), equated with other exchangeable goods. Research has repeatedly found that Whites support multiculturalism and diversity as long as it benefits them, either through their education or enrichment. Natasha K. Warikoo (2016) identifies this instrumentality as the "diversity bargain." In corporate settings, diversity programs and policies are acceptable so long as they coalesce with norms of profitability and corporate power (Berrey, 2015b). As soon as diversity policies pose a threat to their privileged positions as students and workers, however, Whites challenge diversity's value (see also C. W. Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017). This ambivalence is common sense for Whites; diversity as a commodity represents one more good available in the marketplace, rather than a set of practices necessary to combat structural racism and White supremacy.

This "bargain" echoes Derrick Bell's (1980) assessment of civil rights legislation and the role of "interest convergence" in implementing school desegregation policies. The benefits of desegregation were emphasized as universal, helping White children as much as Black children. When White interests no longer aligned with Black people's desire for equality, civil rights were not only abandoned, but framed as a threat to the flourishing of White children. In similar ways, some contemporary challenges to structural inequality have used the language of diversity in intentionally instrumental fashion (Berrey, 2015b; Warikoo, 2016). Since instrumentality is not a new strategy to advance social justice aims, we can also identify the limitations of this approach. While it may provide important short-term wins, it also does not change the logic or discourse around these issues that center White comfort and interests. If diversity is seen as good for business, for example, what happens to diversity in hiring if profits decline? This is not to say that instrumental arguments should never be used or interest convergence should be avoided. In the fight against structural oppression, many strategies are necessary, including short-terms gains via instrumental means. But this logic is not necessarily the challenge to the racial status quo that some believe it to be: Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (1994/2015) research on the rearticulation of civil rights logic shows us how challenges to structural racism can be absorbed into racist regimes. That does not mean these challenges are useless, but rather that we should be

clear on what they do and do not accomplish. I discuss the role of ambivalence and White comfort in more detail in the diversity as liability section.

Diversity as Liability

The final tenet of diversity ideology is diversity as liability. While diversity is generally understood as a positive aspect of multiracial spaces, it is also seen as a threat to other White American values. This ambivalence, as it is often labeled, is not new, as it parallels responses to affirmative action (Berrey, 2015b; Doane, 2007; Herring & Henderson, 2011; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Moore & Bell, 2011). What makes diversity as liability unique is how it is paired with praise for diversity and abstract acknowledgements of inequality.

The diversity as liability tenet serves as a tool to justify White control as well as a lack of support for diversity policies, particularly among those who praise diversity and critique racially segregated spaces. While an apparent contradiction to the "openness" of diversity rhetoric, diversity as liability works as an obfuscating logic precisely because it is paired with this abstract appreciation for diversity. What distinguishes diversity as a liability from other racist logics is its juxtaposition with a valuing of diversity. It is that value that allows Whites to construct a positive identity as accepting and nonracist (e.g., Donald Trump's Cinco de Mayo declaration, "I love Hispanics!") while warning against the perils of non-White advancement and inclusion (e.g., Trump's comments about Mexican immigrants 1 month later, "They're bringing crime. They're rapists."). Importantly, the warnings are framed as common sense fears with which all "reasonable" people would agree, such as the worry that having Black people in your neighborhood increases crime. In that way, diversity as liability frames itself as the measured response to calls for diversity.

Research in corporations and schools has identified ambivalence toward diversity policies via discussions of racial quotas and unqualified people of color taking spots from deserving White people (see Pierce, 2003). This often leads Whites to support diversity in the abstract, but not diversity policies (Moore & Bell, 2011; C. W. Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017; Warikoo, 2016). In fact, this is the logic of Justice Powell's opinion in the foundational *Bakke* admissions case, where he argued against "illegal quotas" and using race in admissions (Moore & Bell, 2011, p. 602). Justice Powell pivoted from affirmative action to an amorphous diversity, which could include race as one of many elements of diversity.

Scholarship on multiracial neighborhoods has also found ambivalence around diversity, particularly as it presents an interpersonal and financial risk to middle-class Whites (Aptekar, 2015; Berrey, 2015b; Burke, 2012; Mayorga-Gallo, 2014; Tissot, 2014, 2015). Many White individuals see the downside to diversity as inevitable and integral to life in multiracial spaces. They then either accept it as part of the character of the space or actively work to combat what they see as the negative by-products of diversity (Mayorga-Gallo, 2014). This is how diversity ideology buttresses Whiteness as property: the logic of shared spaces centers the feelings and desires of Whites over

people of color and legitimates Whites' strategies to protect their possessive investment (Lipsitz, 1998/2006).

While valuing "meritocracy" and individualism over equity may sound very similar to the abstract liberalism tenet of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003/2018), diversity as liability uniquely frames White racial comfort as more important than diversity. As DiAngelo (2011) explains, "Whites often confuse comfort with safety and state that we don't feel safe when what we really mean is that we don't feel comfortable" (p. 61). While Whites appreciate diversity, they want to be able to consume and engage it on their own terms, particularly in multiracial spaces (hooks, 1992/2015). Rather than avoid multiracial spaces, as color-blind logic prescribes, those who adhere to diversity ideology aim to control it. This is well-captured by Sylvie Tissot (2014, 2015) in her study of a gentrifying Boston neighborhood, where White homeowners loved diversity when they were able to dictate its bounds through the control of various neighborhood associations.

These critiques against diversity's costs to White people are used by White supremacists (Doane, 2007), including President Donald Trump. Conservatives, however, are not the only ones who frame diversity as a liability. In fact, it is a central logic that White residents use as they participate in social control practices in gentrifying and multiracial urban neighborhoods. In *Behind the White Picket Fence*, I found that liberal-leaning White homeowners identified financial, physical, and emotional risks of diversity, and these beliefs motivated them to become actively involved in social control practices in their neighborhood (Mayorga-Gallo, 2014). This included calling the police, spying on neighbors, and using the neighborhood association to protect homeowner interests—all practices that disproportionately affected their Black and Latinx neighbors. Some of these White residents also identified how their Black and Latinx neighbors would likely not benefit from these interventions, yet they continued to enact these social control practices. Ellen Berrey's (2005, 2015b) study of Rogers Park in Chicago found similar social control patterns among White homeowners. Identifying racial disparities does not necessarily stop one from reproducing Whiteness as structure.

Racial ideologies help individuals make sense of the racial data they see and experience every day. As such, ideologies reflect specific political, social, and economic interests. While praising racial difference, ostensibly including people of color, and even sometimes acknowledging racial inequality, those who adhere to diversity ideology reinforce systemic Whiteness—even in multiracial contexts—through various mechanisms, including practices of social control and objectification. Under the logic of diversity ideology, systemic Whiteness and prodiversity attitudes are complementary.

Conclusion

Diversity ideology is a racial ideology of the contemporary United States.[7] This ideology maintains the racial status quo of systemic Whiteness by emphasizing four elements of diversity: diversity as acceptance, diversity as commodity, diversity as intent,

and diversity as liability. Diversity as acceptance demands that all differences be embraced and lauded as exemplars of diversity—whether these differences are structurally based, such as race and sexual orientation, or idiosyncratic, such as house style. Diversity as intent refers to the focus on good intentions during dialogues about diversity issues and initiatives. This process focuses on the experiences of those in power rather than the effects of their actions on marginalized groups. Diversity as commodity concerns the objectification of people of color in discussions of diversity, which often reduce racial minorities to counts or representatives of ideals, such as authentic urban ambiance. Last, diversity as liability warns against the presumed downsides of diversity (e.g., disorder and discomfort), thereby justifying a reluctance to support diversity initiatives and engaging in social control practices while embracing diversity in the abstract. As a result of these four tenets, the logic of diversity ideology obfuscates and reproduces White supremacy in the contemporary United States.

This framework provides a unique analytic lens to understand racial realities in the United States, particularly some Whites' acknowledgement of racial inequity coupled with behaviors and policies that reinforce systemic Whiteness. Rather than see these as contradictory processes or characterize these Whites as hypocritical, diversity ideology provides a framework for understanding the underlying logic of these actions. Diversity ideology also expands critical diversity studies beyond the analysis of discourse. By identifying these shared logics, we can better respond to accommodationist policies and practices. This work also speaks to research on Whiteness and identity, showcasing how ideological logics intersect with constructions of self.

There are still many questions left unanswered in this piece for scholars to address in future research. For example, is diversity ideology only for White people? How do Black, Latinx, Asian, and Native peoples interact with the logic of diversity ideology? Do they identify its logics and act instrumentally? In addition, are there spaces in which diversity ideology is more prominent than color-blind racism, or in which the two are used together? My sense, based on the extant research on diversity, is that diversity ideology is prevalent in middle-class multiracial spaces, but this is an empirical question worth investigating more directly. My research in Cincinnati, Ohio, shows that working-class Whites in a multiracial neighborhood still relied heavily on color-blind racial logic, although some also used diversity ideology in tandem with color-blind racism. Some preliminary work speaks to how White millennials suture color-blind racism and diversity ideology to discuss resistance to affirmative action (C. W. Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017). Future research should more fully explore the nuances of how diversity is used (or not) across race, class, region, and age, among other factors. Importantly, research on diversity ideology should not lose sight of its material effects. How specifically is diversity ideology used to justify the racial status quo across different sites? What policies and practices are readily justifiable using diversity ideology? As material conditions shift, justifications move as well. This may also lead to identifying additional tenets of diversity ideology that I have not captured here. While I have focused more on institutional and organizational deployment of diversity ideology to justify racial inequality, more research on diversity ideology, interactions,

and micro-level patterns is needed. For example, is the logic of diversity ideology shaping interracial interactions in public spaces and if so, how?

Diversity ideology maintains an inequitable racial system because it is an accommodationist framework that, at best, focuses on surface-level solutions. Appreciating and desiring diversity has become a taste distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), but not one that necessarily leads to political action or structural change. In fact, both the majority of White and college graduate registered voters agree diversity makes the United States a better place to live (Pew Research Center, 2018), yet these same groups voted in Donald Trump, a president with White nationalist policies.[8] That is why we need to continue to lend a critical eye to diversity ideology and the mechanisms of systemic Whiteness it helps obfuscate and justify. While diversity as a concept could be used in service of more liberatory work, diversity ideology is by definition a White supremacist ideology. As a tool in contemporary institutions and spaces, those in power have used diversity (via the logic of diversity ideology) to obfuscate their role in reproducing a system of Whiteness. If diversity is to be a useful frame for racial justice, we must explicitly redefine it as a counterframe to White supremacy, centering power and equity with an accompanying set of tools for structural reorganization.

Notes

1. When I use the word Whites in this way, I am not suggesting that all White people behave in one way; I am making an argument about White people as a structural category within a racialized system (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). By "Whiteness" I mean a system that systematically privileges Whites and disadvantages racial others (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Harris, 1993; Mills, 1997). I use Whiteness and White supremacy interchangeably, as they both identify the particular racialized organization of the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Feagin, 2001).

2. While outside the scope of this article, it is arguable that diversity has more elasticity in its usage than multiculturalism. For example, with diversity ideology, you get bumper stickers that encourage you to "celebrate diversity" alongside multicolored and differently shaped beer glasses (Bell's Beer, n.d.). Multiculturalism seems more closely aligned with the claims of underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities in the vein of cultural pluralism, while diversity has become a celebration of amorphous conceptualizations of "difference" that can include beer style. Research has also shown, however, that multiculturalism is not immune from co-optation, as Antonia Randolph's (2013) work on color-blind multiculturalism shows. Further work is needed to fully theorize and capture the important differences and overlaps between multiculturalism and diversity, both in the United States and abroad.

3. I use equity in line with Frazier, Margai, and Tettey-Fio's (2003) work, they define equity as "the fair distribution of risks, costs, services, and benefits across demographic groups, neighborhoods, counties, states, countries, and even generations" (p. 16).

4. Respondents could also answer that diversity has made no difference in the United States.

5. In fact, the concept of diversity ideology was first introduced by David Embrick (2011), who coined it to identify the disconnect between how corporations framed themselves and what their diversity policies accomplished–not very much.

6. In a recent interview, KKK members were quoted as saying they were not White supremacists, but preferred White separatists, because like the term racism, "[White supremacist's] got that 'hiss'" ("KKK Disavows White Supremacist," 2016).

7. As Stuart Hall (1986) states, there is never a single ideology at work. Diversity ideology does reflect the interests of those in power, making it a dominant ideology rather than a subversive one.

8. "Among whites, Trump won an overwhelming share of those without a college degree; and among white college graduates—a group that many identified as key for a potential Clinton victory—Trump outperformed Clinton by a narrow 4-point margin" (Tyson & Maniam, 2016).

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