

The New Principle-policy Gap: How Diversity Ideology Subverts Diversity Initiatives

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Candis Watts Smith¹ and Sarah Mayorga-Gallo²

Abstract

Colorblind ideology is a dominant mode of thinking about race matters in the United States, but it is not the only racial ideology that operates today. The United States appears to be shifting toward becoming more race conscious. We add to the critical diversity studies literature, and argue that even though we see a greater appreciation for the presence of nonwhite bodies in various spaces, we are not likely to see real systemic change in the American racial hierarchy because of a reliance on diversity ideology. Through an analysis of semistructured interviews with 43 white Millennials, this article outlines the ways in which diversity ideology's four tenets—diversity as acceptance, commodity, intent, and liability—help whites maintain power in multiracial spaces. This article pinpoints how whites employ these tenets to subvert policy efforts that aim to incorporate people of color into predominately white institutions, introducing a new principle-policy gap for the twenty-first century.

Keywords

racial ideology, colorblind, diversity, whiteness, millennial generation

For nearly eight decades, scholars have noted that even though most white Americans value liberty, justice, and equality (of opportunity), there is a gap between these ideals and their willingness to support policies that will lead to a more egalitarian society (Feldman and Huddy 2005; Jackman 1996; Kinder and Mendelberg 2000; Myrdal [1944] 1962; Stoker 1998). While some suggest this gap has little to do with race (Sniderman and Carmines 1997), many more have provided evidence that the distance between white Americans' principles and policy preferences is best explained by the dominant racial ideology of the time (Kinder and Mendelberg 2000; Sears 1988, Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000, Tesler and Sears 2010).

Scholars have also noted that acceptable expressions of racial attitudes, prejudice, and animus change over time. White Americans' racial attitudes have shifted from being primarily based in overt Jim Crow, biological racism (Schuman et al. 1997) to being characterized as symbolic racism or racial resentment (Henry and Sears 2002; Kinder and Sanders 1996).¹ These shifts occur due to changes in the shape of the economy, what society deems socially desirable or

¹The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

²University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Candis Watts Smith, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 131 S. Columbia St., CB 3435, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, USA.

Email: cwsmith@unc.edu

acceptable (i.e., social norms), the political landscape, and the demographic makeup of the American population (Bonilla-Silva and Lewis 1999). Nearly two decades ago, scholars such as Leslie G. Carr (1997) and later Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (Bonilla-Silva [2003] 2014) embarked on an intellectual enterprise to more accurately capture forms of racial expression and ideology as they evolved near the turn of the twenty-first century. As a consequence of those efforts, today's emerging consensus among race scholars is that whites' racial attitudes are best described as colorblind.

Colorblind racial ideology holds that because race *should not* matter in shaping individuals' life chances, then it *does not* matter. It is an "ideological insistence that everyone be treated without regard to race, accompanied by a denial of the causes and consequences of racism" (Berrey 2015b:4). Colorblind racial ideology requires individuals to ignore past and present patterns of racial discrimination, instead, focusing on individuals' behavior and "culture" as explanations of persistent racial inequality. In his seminal text *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Bonilla-Silva [2003] 2014), Bonilla-Silva adeptly describes and analyzes the central frames of colorblind racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism.²

Although we continue to see white Americans (as well as some people of color) eschew structural racism as an explanation for ongoing social, economic, political, and psychological disparities between racial groups (Bonilla-Silva 1997) and oppose policies aimed to close these disparities, we simultaneously see an increased desire for the descriptive and symbolic representation of people of color in neighborhoods, schools, businesses, and, to some extent, the government.³ That is to say, there appears to be an increasing desire to develop and participate in multiracial, diverse spaces among white Americans. We argue that even though we see a greater appreciation for and actual presence of nonwhite bodies in various spaces, we are not likely to see real systemic change in the American racial hierarchy because of a reliance on *diversity ideology*.

Diversity ideology is a means by which whites are able to maintain dominance in multiracial spaces.⁴ Diversity ideology, which is often sutured with the frames of colorblind racism, allows individuals who live in an increasingly multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural society to reconcile the American creed of egalitarianism with ongoing and persistent inequality. Unlike colorblind racism, however, diversity ideology centers an appreciation and lauding of racial difference. In the face of dynamic demographic changes—shifts that may eventually make whites a numerical minority—diversity ideology is, in part, a co-optation of calls for race consciousness that challenge colorblindness. Essentially, diversity ideology highlights race (and other axes of difference) to achieve colorblind ideals.

Sarah Mayorga-Gallo (2014) identified the presence of this ideology in her urban neighborhood study in Durham, North Carolina, while David G. Embrick (2006, 2011) identified its use across Fortune 1000 companies. And while not using the diversity ideology frame specifically, many authors in critical diversity studies have found evidence of the four tenets across a variety of settings and locations (Aptekar 2015; Bell and Hartmann 2007; Berrey 2015b; Burke 2010, 2012b; Tissot 2014, 2015; Warikoo 2016). In this paper, we provide additional evidence that this ideology is employed by members of the largest and most demographically diverse, living U.S. generation—Millennials—born between 1981 and 2000; and the pattern holds across three very different interview sites: the South, the Midwest, and the Northeast.

To be specific, we find that even in an increasingly race-conscious society, white Americans still waiver in their support for policies aimed to increase diversity and ameliorate racial disparities in comparison to their endorsement of diversity and egalitarianism, in the abstract.⁵ That is to say, we see a persistent, yet ever-evolving principle-policy gap. Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation helps to explain this contemporary conundrum. They assert a theory of racial formation, which refers to the "sociohistorical process by which racial

categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi and Winant 1994:55); from this perspective, racial ideologies—or justifications surrounding racism—play an important role in creating and sustaining racial categories, and, thus, patterns of racial stratification. Relatedly, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2001:63) explains,

Although ideologies do not provide individuals, as group members, with an explicit road map of how to act, what to believe, and what to say, they furnish the basic principles individuals use to sift through contested and often contradictory information in order to make sense of social reality.

It appears that we are seeing a new racial project, one that is racially conscious, challenges colorblind racial ideology, and is “ostensibly uplifting” (Bell and Hartmann 2007:895; Burke 2016) but still maintains white supremacy.

We assert that colorblind racism is an important theoretical antecedent, but it does not help us to fully comprehend the disconnect between Millennials’ valuing of diversity and their aversion to diversity policies. In this article, we consider how diversity ideology sustains this principle-policy gap. We reveal that highly educated white Millennials use diversity ideology to navigate contemporary racial issues, and we illuminate the ways in which diversity ideology frames their racialized policy preferences.

We begin by discussing the necessity of a theory that helps us understand how in an increasingly multiracial society, whites are still able to maintain power. We argue that diversity ideology captures the dominant ways that many whites, especially young whites, discuss racial matters within contemporary multiracial spaces. Through an analysis of 43 face-to-face interviews with white Millennials, this article pinpoints how diversity principles are used to maintain whiteness—a set of power relations that socially, politically, and historically privilege those identified as white and disadvantage others—in multiracial spaces.

Here, we provide additional evidence in support of Mayorga-Gallo’s (2014) diversity ideology framework, which identifies four tenets of diversity ideology: diversity as acceptance, diversity as commodity, diversity as intent, and diversity as liability. Our main focus in this article is to illuminate the connections between how highly educated white Millennials understand diversity and their ideas about diversity policies. Through this effort, we uncover how diversity ideology helps whites move between valuing diversity and maintaining a lack of support for policies that would bring those values to fruition. Ultimately, by using the framework of diversity ideology to understand the principle-policy gap in the twenty-first century, we contribute to the growing literature on the shortcomings of diversity for achieving racial equity (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Berrey 2015b; Burke 2012a; Embrick 2011; Mayorga-Gallo 2014; Tissot 2014).

Colorblindness in a Race-conscious World

Colorblind racial ideology creates a façade of racial inclusion by suggesting that in a post-Civil Rights era, everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed, and if differences in outcomes across racial groups continue to exist, these differences are best explained through culture, natural occurrences, or “a little bit” of residual racism that may still exist due to prejudiced individuals. In all, a theory of colorblind racism suggests that people ignore structural racism in their conceptualization of the way the world works; this ideology serves to prop up the existing racial hierarchy, where whites dominate (Bonilla-Silva [2003] 2014).

As James Scott notes, state hegemony can be characterized as thick or thin. In contrast with thick hegemony, where subordinate groups consent to the dominant racial ideology, states with thin hegemony, such as the United States, have to convince these groups that “the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable” (Scott 1990:72). As such, there have been public denunciations of colorblind ideology in the United States, with scholars and activists calling

instead for race-conscious and antiracist action. In the past, underrepresented minority groups and their allies attempted to move the United States toward a more racially egalitarian society. While some concessions are made, however, these denouncements are co-opted by (conservative) whites but employed to maintain the racial status quo (Omi and Winant 1994).

Indeed, colorblind racial ideology is a perfect example of this appropriation. The great majority of Americans aspire to attain Dr. Martin Luther King's "colorblind" dream, a society where people are "judged by the content of their character, not the color of their skin." This imagined society is one in which race is not a predictor of one's life chances and opportunity structure. Colorblind racial ideology, however, co-opts this notion of "colorblindness," leading the public to ignore *the role of racism* in American society and leaving many structural inequalities unaddressed (Andersen 1999).

Demands for race consciousness and diversity have similarly been co-opted. Antiracist and civil rights activists have called for diversity in the media, in institutions of higher education, in corporations, and the like, often as shorthand for highlighting multiple oppressions.⁶ However, calls for diversity have also been appropriated and rearticulated by many whites in the form of diversity ideology to maintain a racialized social system, marked by white supremacy.⁷ Consequently, it appears that we are seeing a new race-conscious racial project, one that challenges colorblind racial ideology and is marked by "happy talk" (Bell and Hartmann 2007:895). In this iteration, "people can simultaneously recognize diversity, but not oppression; deny difference and appreciate diversity; be conscious of racial differences, but nonconscious of continuing race injustice" (Andersen 1999:17).

This is well illustrated by the fact that while traditionally whites have explained the persistence of de facto segregated spaces to individuals' personal preference to interact with people like them (Bonilla-Silva [2003] 2014; Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001), today, segregated spaces are viewed by many whites as undesirable and morally suspect (Ley 1997; Mayorga-Gallo 2014; Tissot 2014). Nonetheless, even in multiracial spaces, organizations, and political institutions, the ever-familiar racial hierarchy still exists. For instance, in colleges and universities, one might see an increased number of faculty of color, but these faculty members are not necessarily full members of the faculty (e.g., lecturers, adjuncts) and are not easily found in the upper echelons of college or university-wide administration (Alex-Assensoh 2003; Brayboy 2003). Similarly, in Fortune 500 and 1000 companies, there is a push for greater diversity in middle management and on executive boards (especially for [white] women), but not necessarily at the chief executive officer (CEO) level (Daily, Certo, and Dalton 1999; Oakley 2000). Relatedly, while political scientists such as Robert C. Smith (2009:17) have noted, "the progress of black incorporation into [American] legislative and executive branches has been remarkable," they also note that these black political actors have to march their political agendas and expectations to the ideological right to gain political power and prestige, which does not necessarily lead to more optimal policy outcomes for the black public (Smith 2009; Tate 2004, 2010). As a final example, the U.S. military is renowned as one of the most diverse and ostensibly meritorious organizations in American society (Moskos 1997), yet scholars find indelible marks of racial discrimination and racial hierarchy in this organization despite its incredible levels of racial and ethnic diversity (Ray 2015). In summary, the presence of more underrepresented racial minorities has not necessarily been met with more equitable structural outcomes.

What is more, we have not seen a surge in support for policies and programs that serve to incorporate a greater number of people of color, particularly when whites perceive these programs as guaranteeing equality of outcome or addressing past discrimination (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Drake 2014; Schuman et al. 1997). These attitudes are exemplified by affirmative-action bake sales on college campuses across the United States (Dietrich 2015) and cases brought to the Supreme Court of the United States (e.g., *Fisher v. University of Texas*). Natasha K. Warikoo addresses similar disconnects between valuing diversity and support for affirmative action in her

research at Harvard, Brown, and Oxford Universities (2016; Warikoo and de Novais 2015). Rather than identify “contradictory race frames” (Warikoo and de Novais 2015:871), we make an argument that racial justice work is effectively curtailed by the logic of diversity ideology. We argue that support for diversity and an aversion to affirmative action is predictable via the tenets of diversity ideology rather than contradictory.

In all, we see and will show how whites applaud diversity but maintain lukewarm support of policies that would encourage the incorporation of people of color in traditionally/predominantly white spaces; we are able to explain this gap by using a diversity ideology framework to ground our analysis. Our sample also extends Warikoo’s findings to showcase how this principle-policy gap exists not just among elite university students and in discussions of college admissions, but among white Millennials more broadly, and in discussions of the workplace as well as college. (See Online Appendix A for a more detailed profile of our sample.)

Diversity ideology is a concept first introduced by David G. Embrick (2011) to describe the disconnect between the stated purpose of corporate policies and their outcomes. Embrick’s (2011:542) conceptualization of this idea is characterized by,

a set of beliefs held by many individuals in US society that women and minorities are not only treated equally in comparison to their white male counterparts, but that institutions such as major US businesses are sincerely invested with creating a racially and gender diverse workplace.

In this paper, we use Sarah Mayorga-Gallo’s expansion of this concept, which argues that diversity ideology is pervasive and is employed in various domains of U.S. life. Diversity ideology is not just a set of beliefs but rather a holistic logic that serves to maintain white supremacy, particularly in multiracial spaces, through its four main tenets: diversity as acceptance, diversity as commodity, diversity as intent, and diversity as liability (Mayorga-Gallo 2014). We elaborate and provide examples of each tenet below.

By identifying how diversity ideology helps defend the status quo, we can see how a new principle-policy gap emerges that is simultaneously race-conscious and white supremacist. While diversity policies could be used to push forward an antiracist, equitable, and emancipatory agenda, what we chronicle in this paper is how the logic of diversity ideology necessarily constrains that possibility. Here, we build on a growing body of literature that requires us to move beyond colorblindness and seriously engage with the logic of diversity (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Berrey 2015b; Embrick 2011; Tissot 2015). To be sure, like any ideology, challenges to its logic and dominance are inevitable. What we aim to address here is how praising diversity connects to rejecting diversity initiatives. Diversity ideology is the bridge.

Analytic Approach

The data for the analysis come from a project focused on the racial attitudes of the Millennial generation; because our goal is to analyze whites’ interpretation, understanding, and conceptualization of race, racism, and diversity in the twenty-first century, we rely on qualitative, face-to-face, semistructured interview data. We analyze interviews with 43 individuals identified as white Millennials. The present study is focused on illustrating how diversity ideology undergirds persistent racial inequality in American society.

While Americans of all ages may employ this particular racial logic, it should be noted that the interview population was not intended to be a random sample of Americans, but rather a purposive one. We intentionally focus on white Millennials, or those who were born between 1981 and 2000, for a number of reasons: This generation is the largest living generation, outpacing Baby Boomers. They are the largest generation in the U.S. labor market, overtaking Generation X. This generation is the most racially and ethnically diverse, aside from the cohort born after them. This

group has been socialized to appreciate “diversity” and “diverse” spaces. Furthermore, research shows that whites are increasingly aware of their racial group membership and the privileges that come with it (Croll 2007; Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll 2009). As such, this group is considered to be the most tolerant generation (Pew Research Center 2010; Zogby 2009), and they are the most educated adult generation. Extant literature and polls suggest that members of this group would both laud diversity because of their socialization, but also be likely to think more critically about racial inequalities, given their level of education and awareness of white privilege (Croll 2007; Hartmann et al. 2009). In all, any bias we see should be toward racial tolerance, inclusiveness, deep thinking about complex issues, and liberal policy preferences.

While nearly all of the respondents are college educated, they were not recruited through college/university student pools. Instead, the respondents were gathered through snowball samples in three states: a Midwestern state, a Southern state, and a Northeastern state. The respondents were race-matched and interviewed by one of three young white women. They were asked questions about their socialization, ideas about the American Dream, the state of American relations, and their understanding of “diversity.” The interviews were conducted between June and August of 2014, just before the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The interviews occurred in a public place of the interviewees’ choosing and lasted between 23 and 107 minutes. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by a research assistant and coded by Candis Watts Smith. Demographics of the participants and the semistructured interview schedule can be found in the online appendix.

For this article, we primarily explore the responses concerning diversity and policies aimed to ameliorate racial disparities. Specifically, we examined responses to three questions. We begin with an analysis of responses to two questions: “When you think of the word ‘diversity,’ what comes to mind?” and “Is diversity important in college? In the workplace? Government?” Then, we move to analyzing the extent to which our respondents are supportive of policies aimed to ameliorate racial disparities by examining their levels of support for “affirmative action.” Even though our semistructured interview schedule includes questions about affirmative action, many of our respondents spontaneously brought up the subject well before they were asked about it. We examine the patterns that arose from these responses, both prodded and spontaneous, and present them below.

For the Love of Diversity

Mary R. Jackman (1994:69) asserts,

ideology is a political instrument, not an exercise in personal logic: consistency is rigidity, the only pragmatic effect of which is to box oneself in . . . the members of dominant groups are not drawn to patterns of thinking that would limit their own maneuverability.

Just as colorblind ideology has its limits in a color-conscious world, diversity ideology also has its limits; as such, we find that whites suture these two ways of thinking together, filling in the holes of one with the other. That is to say, diversity ideology is not mutually exclusive of colorblind racism, but rather the two are mutually reinforcing. This means that unlike colorblind racism, whites are allowed to notice persistent racial inequalities and even the race of the people with whom they interact, but they do not have to implicate themselves and their decisions in maintaining those inequalities (i.e., racism without racists). Similarly, the logic of diversity serves to associate those who value diversity and multiculturalism with principles of equality and justice. As such, people who value diversity are viewed as good, ostensibly nonracist with laudable intentions, but they do not have to assure that equitable outcomes come to fruition to fulfill their values. This is where the new principle-policy gap is born. We begin our analysis with a

discussion of the four tenets of diversity ideology and how they delimit understandings of race for highly educated white Millennials, producing a reality where diversity is embraced in theory and yet kept at arm's length in actuality.

Diversity as Acceptance

The first tenet of diversity ideology is *diversity as acceptance*, whereby diversity is framed as a celebration of differences (Bell and Hartmann 2007). The distinction between idiosyncratic and structurally based identities, however, is blurred, particularly in terms of their perceived impact on individuals' life chances (Berrey 2015a). Diversity as acceptance equates the presence of various kinds of people as a sure sign of deep inclusion and integration despite ongoing and underlying structural inequalities. By making personal preferences equal to structurally based identities, diversity ideology protects the systemic advantages and privileges of dominant group members. Consequently, diversity ideology ignores power asymmetries; a general ethos of acceptance that is not grounded in a discussion of inequitable power distribution becomes a tool of oppression for the powerful.

This tenet is best illustrated in our respondents' answers to two very direct questions concerning their conceptualization of diversity: "When you think of 'diversity,' what comes to mind?" and "Is diversity important in schools, in the workplace, and in the government?" All of our respondents fell into one of two groups. The first group did not believe that the inclusion of structurally based identities was necessary for a space, organization, or institution of education to be characterized as diverse; the second group, however, did incorporate these kinds of identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality), but they equated them with idiosyncratic ones.

Those in the first group show how both colorblindness and diversity ideology are easily sutured together. For example, Miles explained that when he thought of diversity, he thought of

different groups of people within one collective group . . . having many different people without the same backgrounds or perspectives on the world or having many differences within a group.

Similarly, 20-year-old Ophelia said, "Well, I think of people coming from different backgrounds, different stories." Jacob explained,

Diversity is basically heterogeneity within the context of political realm; it's not only heterogeneity but also an acceptance of heterogeneity of whatever trait or dimension.

People in this group suggest that they are open to all kinds of diversity, even if they do not mention structurally based identities or if they discount them altogether. Jacob specifically calls for "acceptance," although he relies on an ambiguous version of "heterogeneity." As another example, Jackson asserted,

I would say in any setting . . . there's diversity. It's a family business and it's three relatives who run the business, I'd say there's very much diversity in that. Because everybody has a different personality . . . I think the word gets used too much exclusively in view of you have to have diversity racially speaking or gender speaking in these jobs . . . If you have ten black people working in a job or ten white people working in a job, I think there's huge diversity there.

Jackson's version of diversity only requires individual differences; for him, diversity is defined in terms of sense of humor, hobbies, personality, and the like. Jackson then moves on to argue that structurally based identities are "used too much exclusively," and suggests that even racially segregated or homogeneous workplaces are diverse. For him, the focus on race leads people to "neglect" the diversity that inherently exists among individuals. Jackson represents a group that

does not necessarily view segregated spaces as suspect, relying instead on a perception that they are above the racial fray. This is a great example of the quilting of both colorblindness and diversity ideology; Jackson's analysis is a straightforward colorblind reading that uses the diversity as acceptance tenet.

In addition to the reliance on individual-based characteristics, words such as "background," "culture," and "perspectives" allow individuals to avoid race-talk but still maintain that a space is diverse. Sebastian provides another illustration of this tenet; when asked what comes to mind when he thinks of "diversity," he explained,

I think of diversity of culture as the most important thing . . . I don't think people look at it that way a lot of times, which is why, for example, check boxes are problematic on, like, forms for what race you are because . . . if you grow up African American in an extremely white community, and if you grow up white in an extremely African American community, I feel like the culture is more important there than the skin color.

"Culture" allows one to completely ignore the role race, a structurally contingent identity, can have on a person's opportunity structure. Indeed, Jodi Melamed asserts that in this era, where diversity and multiculturalism are laced with neoliberalism (which we will elaborate on in the next section), "'culture' no longer replaces older, biological conceptions of race; it displaces racial reference altogether" (Melamed 2006:19). Whites are able to maintain dominance by employing this frame because, as is directly suggested, there is no need to pay close attention to the racial or ethnic makeup of a space to determine whether those places are working to be inclusive and egalitarian. From this perspective, all differences are equally important and should be celebrated.

The second group includes respondents who mentioned that race, gender, or other structurally based identities were important to consider when thinking about diversity; however, these individuals also tended to equate individualized differences with structurally contingent identities. For example, when asked what comes to mind when she thinks of diversity, Riley explained,

People of all different backgrounds, who therefore have different experiences. They think differently, different opinions, whether that's, like, different backgrounds in things like where they've lived, race, homosexuality—sorry, sexuality . . . socioeconomic status, all that stuff.

Maria made a similar comment, "I think of, like, different types of people, whether that be race, or interests." Dylan defined different backgrounds as "ethnic, that means religious, that means philosophical, that means esthetic." What these three representative comments have in common is that they lump together identities that highly influence one's life chances with those that do not.

Relatedly, diversity as acceptance allows whites to celebrate the descriptive and symbolic representation of individuals of color. As such, some respondents derived satisfaction from the celebration of holidays and symbols as signs of diversity even without the presence of people of color. For example, Claire, an admissions officer at a community college in Massachusetts, explained,

Honestly, I think of [diversity]—there's a woman that works in my office. She's just delightful and she oversees our diversity community. She's Mexican American and she has created . . . a Day of the Dead event on our campus. And so, I guess when I think of diversity, I think of her and I think of how that particular event has grown over time and that people actually know what the Day of the Dead is and participate in that . . . and then I also just think of different country flags.

And in a response to a question about her racial socialization, Mary told this story,

For the longest time, my elementary school didn't have Martin Luther King Day off, and that just was so upsetting to my parents. They ended up talking to the school because we didn't have much diversity, but it's a national holiday and that's something to celebrate. I think we talked about it [race] a lot then. But, my community has definitely gotten better so I think it's not really, like, a thing that we would talk about. I don't know, I think there are other, like, obstacles that we talk about more.

Claire can rely on the presence of a Mexican American woman in a predominantly white workspace as a marker of diversity, but Mary cannot. Nonetheless, both Claire and Mary emphasize the symbolic representation of people of color as an important aspect of diversity. Claire focuses not only on the woman but also the holiday she introduced to the community and "different country flags." Mary latches on to the fact that her school now celebrates a national holiday dedicated to Dr. King. It is important to point out that Mary notes that because her school has begun to celebrate this holiday, they can move on from focusing on issues of race and racism to other more pressing issues. Symbolic concessions are made, while demands for racial egalitarianism are left for another day.

Diversity as acceptance allows whites to maintain the privileges of whiteness. Similar to Margaret L. Andersen's conception of "diversity without oppression," this tenet "reduces questions of group difference primarily to culture and identity when far more is at stake," and it "implies that diversity is simply a matter of equally situated groups vying for resources, with each equipped with the presumed power base to force 'consequences' if their demands are not met" (Andersen 1999:12–13). Because whites imbibe acceptance of all types of differences, there is no need to focus on the power asymmetries and unequal access to opportunities that arise due to specific, structurally contingent differences. All of this combines to maintain the existing racial hierarchy.

Diversity as Commodity

The commodification of *the otherness* of racial-ethnic minorities by whites is the second tenet of diversity ideology. By commodification, we mean that nonwhites are treated as objects rather than people and are used by whites as objects that serve to benefit, entertain, or color the lives of whites. Diversity ideology allows whites to be lauded as antiracist for appreciating the different perspectives of people of color without considering the underlying structure that leads them to have these "different" perspectives and experiences than whites.

Diversity ideology stems not only from the recognition of new racial realities, including shifting demographics, but also from the dominant political and economic ideologies that govern society. As previously mentioned, diversity ideology is embedded with neoliberal logic. Neoliberalism is a "governing agenda that includes the increased privatization of government programs and institutions like public schools or even prisons," and it "also involves an intensifying rhetoric that is grounded in the belief that markets, in and of themselves, are better able than governments to produce, in particular, economic outcomes that are fair, sensible, and good for all" (Cohen 2010:11). The problem that neoliberalism poses is that as it equates economic choice with personal freedom, it obscures how elites are benefiting from the reorganization of society (Harvey 2007). Diversity ideology buttresses the valuing of individual comforts over equality in the name of freedom and liberty. Via the normalization of a "market mentality," it becomes common sense that individuals should have access to all goods and services they desire, while avoiding conversations about power (Centeno and Cohen 2012). As a system of capitalism, neoliberalism also places profits above people. How does this translate diversity into a commodity?

In corporate settings, the diversity management rhetoric and rationale has shifted from reducing discrimination in hiring and promotion to increasing profits, improving innovation, and

benefiting the bottom line (Kelly and Dobbin 1998). Sharon M. Collins (2011:519) notes, “in employment settings, a diverse workforce is embraced symbolically as a marketable commodity.” In neighborhood and educational settings, the value of diversity is often framed in terms of the enhancement people of color bring to the lives of their white neighbors and colleagues. By focusing on these personal benefits, diversity ideology creates a situation where diversity (represented by people of color and other underrepresented minorities) becomes another good in the market that whites can consume to fulfill their individual desires and make themselves more attractive in the marketplace.

Among our sample, commodification is well represented by the value attributed to the food and entertainment that racial and ethnic minorities bring into predominantly white spaces. When Kaitlyn was asked about policies aimed to allow more racial minorities to have an opportunity to attend college, she explained that she could provide lukewarm support, at the very least, to these kinds of policies because,

I think that like you do kinda need it . . . it’s no fun . . . it’s kind of, like, more interesting when you, like, meet people from, like, different backgrounds and different eth—Because you, like, learn things, like, along the way.

For Kaitlyn, the presence of people of color is “fun”; they have more interesting lives than whites do, and you can learn from them. Another theme that arises is food and “culture.” When asked if he believed diversity was important, Brody, our oldest respondent at 31 years old, asserted,

Yes, absolutely. I think we all have something to bring to the table and even something as simple . . . [as having] all kinds of different food vendors and local organizations, and I think it’s awesome. . . . I went to Madison, Wisconsin . . . and I was just blown away by the diversity and the different cultures, every type of food, every type of person and it was like the most relaxed and calm place to be. Everybody just did their thing. They were friendly and it was awesome. I love it.

What Kaitlyn and Brody fail to capture is the whiteness of multiracial spaces. Sociologist Korie L. Edwards’ (2008) study of interracial churches reveals that white normativity often dictates practices in these spaces because whites must feel comfortable to participate in them. Similarly, in Sarah Mayorga-Gallo’s (2014) study of a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood, whites dictate the behavior of their black and Latinx neighbors through the use of the neighborhood association, which is both well connected with the city’s police and is formed primarily of white homeowners. These patterns also arise in diverse Midwestern and Northeastern neighborhoods as well (Burke 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Tissot 2014, 2015). In the examples presented, we see Kaitlyn’s and Brody’s desire to be in a space where people of color can teach them something and share new foods and experiences with them; they are pleased with the presence of bodies of color because these bodies come with benefits to them. Kaitlyn and Brody do not seem to recognize that the norms of behavior in these spaces are dictated by whiteness and white comfort (Dalmage 2004).

When we asked our respondents what came to mind when they heard the word diversity, they generally provided colorblind responses or equated structurally contingent identities, such as race, with idiosyncratic ones, such as sense of humor. However, when they responded to our question about the importance of diversity, they provided race-conscious responses, largely focusing on the role that people of color play in college settings. For example, Harper simply notes, “I kind of think so [diversity is important] because it brings in a different cultural perspective, and I think that makes us more well-rounded.” Similarly, Peter explains,

Yeah. I mean, I do [think diversity is important] definitely because with those specific races comes specific cultures that are valued. I think that all cultures should be valued. There’s a lot to be learned from a lot of that. With that diversity comes more knowledge that leads to higher success.

Peter notes that people of different racial groups have different cultures, which are equally valued. He suggests, as does Harper, that there is something to be learned from other groups, which will ultimately lead to more success for him. Again, we see that people of color are viewed as objects that exist to benefit white students. Finally, Scarlett commented that “different cultures can teach you a lot without you even realizing it; things you never thought of, different perspectives.” She explains that her tennis coach was from Ghana and had to deal with corporal punishment in their school when they made a mistake, whereas she was motivated by her parents wanting her to “go to a good school.” She concludes, “You learn a lot about appreciation for your own versus another culture and it’s just generally enriching to your life.” In this example, it is important to note how Scarlett’s Ghanaian teacher’s experience serves to remind Scarlett how good her life is. While difference may be appreciated in the abstract, the specifics of different cultures can also be used to reinforce a white supremacist hierarchy.

Diversity as commodity allows whites to celebrate the presence of racial and ethnic minorities in their lives because nonwhites teach them something, help them become well rounded, and enrich their lives. People of color are viewed as tools to enhance the lives of whites. While whites are able to appreciate the different perspectives and the knowledge that people of color bring, they do not have to focus on the structural disadvantages that people of color are likely to experience, which foster different sets of experiences and knowledge; rather, these differences are chalked up to “cultural” rather than structural explanations. Johnston and Baumann’s (2007:169) analysis of omnivorousness and food writing culture hits on this dualism, “frames of authenticity and exoticism contain elements of democratic inclusivity, but also legitimize and reproduce status distinctions.” So, while seeming to emphasize inclusivity and broad acceptance, diversity ideology has become a new way to maintain white supremacy and status inequality. This is because diversity ideology is rooted in a rationale that focuses on its benefits to whites rather than one grounded in power-sharing or equity.

In addition to transforming racial minorities into a means to an end, diversity as commodity also facilitates whites’ disavowal of nonwhites when they no longer benefit them. Our respondents were asked whether they believed that diversity was important in college, in the workplace, and in government. They typically lauded diversity on college campuses but were less enthusiastic about the idea in the workplace, where people of color may represent a threat to gainful employment. For instance, in response to our question, Ella stated, “As far as schools go, I think that in having a bigger racial diversity is a good thing because you’re—you see more of people’s cultures and that broadens your mind.” In college, the presence of racial minorities is important because it represents a benefit to her; however, later, she explains,

I don’t know . . . I do think creating a diverse environment is important at least for a college. For work, it seems a little unnecessary because work is not social. But I think college is a really important time for people to leave what their parents think and start [to] get into their own opinions and stuff, so I think that’s important.

Like Ella, Caden answered the same question this way,

Definitely for college because college is the time when you learn. Like, K through 12, you learn about history and all that stuff, but I think it doesn’t really apply or click until you get to college, move off, and you see all these different kinds of people . . . I love to learn about different cultures and stuff. Now, like, when you move into the workplace—I mean I think diversity is important everywhere but when it starts coming down to the ratios, going back. I don’t really know about that. Like at all.

Caden provides us with a preview of the principle-policy gap, which we elaborate on later. Here, we see that diversity is appreciated in college because whites “love to learn about different

cultures,” but the effort to ensure the presence of the same people in a workplace is disavowed and equated to unfair “ratios.” As previously mentioned, diversity ideology and colorblind racism are often married in whites’ racial logic. Caden praises the presence of people of color when it benefits him (diversity as commodity), but then turns to “abstract liberalism” when that suits his purposes.

Diversity as commodity frames whites’ desires to be near or in the presence of racial minorities as positive, but it (1) obscures the power asymmetry that exists in these interactions, (2) avoids the fact that whiteness is seen as the norm in multiracial spaces, (3) sidesteps the underlying racial structure that leads to nonwhites having wholly different “experiences” and “perspectives,” and (4) supports the narrative that views whites’ desires and values as universally beneficial. As Ellen Berrey (2015a) succinctly put it in her *Salon* piece, “diversity is for white people.”

Diversity as Intent

Because diversity ideology focuses on the acceptance of descriptive and symbolic representation, its emphasis only requires individuals to concentrate on the front end of the process to attain superficial goals. The third tenet, *diversity as intent*, requires whites to only have intentions of being inclusive. Firms, universities, organizations, and individuals—however well intentioned—use the language of diversity to signal a commitment to principles of justice and equality. This commitment, however, often focuses more on being the type of institution or person that values diversity more so than creating systemic change with equitable results. Consequently, this myopic focus on intent is a way to sustain a system of structural inequity because equitable *results* are not required.

Again, how this tenet plays out depends on the organization. For example, in corporate settings, diversity initiatives primarily serve to include (white) women in midlevel management rather than at the ranks of executive (Daily et al. 1999; Oakley 2000). Meanwhile, sociologists show that whites are, at best, ambivalent about diversity, where they laud living in a diverse space but still work to maintain a white habitus (Burke 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Mayorga-Gallo 2014). In this study, diversity as intent is best illustrated among white Millennials when they discuss the composition of their friend groups and whether they support policies that aim to increase racial and ethnic diversity on college campuses.

As previously mentioned, nearly all of our respondents were in support of diversity (however they conceived of it) and did so because they felt that interacting with people who had different perspectives or knowledge could make them well rounded, cosmopolitan citizens who were better prepared for the “real world.” We found, however, that 32 of our respondents (75 percent) had no nonwhite friends⁸; they were not necessarily doing the work required of them to become well-rounded, cosmopolitan citizens. When we asked Dylan whether he believes something could or should be done to diversify racially homogeneous schools and neighborhoods, he explained,

Well, I fully support a diversity of experiences. I understand why that happens, and I understand how it happens, and I have a hard time understanding a way to change that process that isn’t very draconian or that doesn’t result in the kind of busing problems that have happened historically in the U.S. So in theory I would have loved to spend more time around people who came from different backgrounds, spoke different languages at home, any number of factors of diversity both economic, ethnic, and even ideological. But I also loved my sort of high-cost, bourgie, Montessori education and those two things unfortunately didn’t work coincident [*sic*].

Dylan notes that, yes, his friend group is racially homogeneous, but he believes that it is only through “draconian” efforts that people who would not usually cross paths, no less interact, can do so. Dylan is still able to maintain a positive sense of himself because he values the idea of “spend[ing] more time around people who came from different backgrounds” even though he does not actually do so. He is able to let himself off the hook because he believes (1) that he had to choose between two equally important but dueling values—diversity and his “high-cost, bourgie, Montessori education”; and (2) that policies that would allow for these values to coexist are best characterized as draconian.

Callie, in contrast, attended a high school in a Boston suburb that sponsored a Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program.⁹ Students from low-income, predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods were bused into her school. Unlike Dylan, she had the opportunity to interact with the students who brought racial and ethnic diversity to her high school, but still found that she maintained an all-white friend group. First, she suggests that something should be done to incorporate underrepresented minority groups into predominantly white institutions or organizations and, in turn, provides an example of diversity as acceptance. Second, she stitches together an explanation that includes both diversity ideology and colorblind racism. She suggests, in general, METCO students will end up hanging out together and implies that this happens naturally; “it’s just chemistry,” she argues, using the naturalization frame of colorblind racial ideology (Bonilla-Silva [2003] 2014). She ends by saying that there is really nothing you can do about racial segregation because “You can’t force people to be friends.” You can *intend* to do some good by inviting students from various places to be in the same space, whether these students feel fully integrated is not of concern, nor is it fully expected.

In a similar vein and as a final example of diversity as intent, Savannah notes,

I mean, I think I’m someone who values diversity and who really loves to talk to people and listen to people who come from different backgrounds. But I just named my closest friends, and we’re all from similar backgrounds. And so I don’t know. I think it’s really hard to, how do you say it, enforce certain social interactions. I think the best thing that one can do is to expose—like increased exposure and like encouragement and, basically, I think trying to foster an atmosphere where different stories are valued and really listened to. And one narrative isn’t necessarily prized or privileged over another one. But I don’t think that—like, all of you get together, you have to be friends with each other. I think that’s really hard. I don’t think it’s possible.

Savannah explains that she values diversity and “loves to talk to people . . . who come from different backgrounds,” but she does not have any nonwhite friends with whom she interacts. Again, we see that she values diversity but believes that the most that can be done is to “foster an atmosphere where different stories are valued.” She focuses on intention rather than outcomes. She values the existence of bodies of color, but she does not believe that she is required to interact with them to maintain her humanistic sense of self.

Nearly all of our respondents believe diversity is important, but they do not have diverse friend groups nor do they necessarily care whether people of color are also deriving some benefit from being in “diverse” communities or schools. Our respondents intend to take advantage of the potential benefits of diversity (e.g., talking with and learning from people who are different from them, of the commodities that result from diversity initiatives), but use colorblind racial frames to explain the persistence of their otherwise homophilous social networks and interpersonal interactions; that is to say, they use colorblind frames to explain why their intentions do not lead to more equitable results. For them, it is their intention that matters most. While these explanations from respondents may seem contradictory, their coherence and logic is a product of our contemporary conceptualizations of diversity and racial inequality.

Diversity as Liability

Walter B. Michaels in *The Trouble with Diversity* asserts that diversity “has become virtually a sacred concept in American life today. No one’s really against it; people instead tend to differ only in their degrees of enthusiasm for it and their ingenuity in pursuing it” (Michaels 2006:12). The range of responses to diversity policies is captured by our final tenet, *diversity as liability*. Previous work has identified resistance to diversity policies as dependent on colorblind ideology (Warikoo 2016; Warikoo and de Novais 2015). To be sure, diversity as liability is the tenet most closely aligned with colorblind racism frames, particularly abstract liberalism. While the logic of

these two tenets may parallel one another, we specify liability as a diversity ideology tenet because of the way white liberals, in particular, discuss the shortcomings of diversity. For example, sometimes diversity as liability is used to frame diversity as incompatible with other values, such as meritocracy—similar to abstract liberalism.

Diversity as liability, however, also includes the justification for social control practices, such as increasing police presence in multiracial (or gentrifying) neighborhoods (Mayorga-Gallo 2014); banning (or moving the sites of) traditionally held cultural events of underrepresented minority groups (White 2015); or proposing legislation to ban (primarily black) student athletes from participating in antiracist protest on predominately white college campuses (Miceli 2015). In each of these examples, whites use their political, economic, and social prowess to make whiteness the norm in multiracial spaces. In this way, liability is framed in contrast with racial comfort, not just meritocracy. Rather than dismiss diversity altogether as an expendable value, as abstract liberalism might dictate, diversity as liability creates room both for love of diversity and the need to control diverse spaces and people of color for the sake of comfort, fairness, and high standards.

Similar to the other three tenets, this tenet changes shape across different environments. In the context of neighborhoods, for example, liberal whites want to live in racially diverse neighborhoods but believe that living in these spaces may bring their housing values down or that they must cope with the perceived deficient behaviors of nonwhites (e.g., poor dog treatment, loud music, parking cars on grass; Burke 2012b; Mayorga-Gallo 2014). Sylvie Tissot's (2014, 2015) work on how white gentrifiers in Boston value diversity that they can control captures the duality of this tenet well. In these neighborhood contexts, white-dominated neighborhood associations played a major role in facilitating social control of people of color and neighborhood space while praising the neighborhood's diversity. In the broader political landscape, we see great resistance to affirmative-action policies couched in terms of meritocracy and fairness (Dietrich 2015; Stoker 1998). In our study, respondents tended to focus on the downsides of diversity initiatives that they experienced as students, emphasizing comfort and high standards.

The first of these liabilities concerns feeling uncomfortable due to the implication that because there are people of color on campus, they must interact with them. For instance, when we asked Adeline if she thought something should or could be done to see that different people of different racial groups interact, she explained,

At my previous institution before I transferred to [my college], they were very big on pushing diversity where almost it wasn't natural, and I kind of feel like it should be a natural kind of thing where you're not forced to hang out with other races that you don't want to.

Later, when asked, "Do you think that the tension that having policies that affirmative action—the tension that it brings outweighs the benefit?" Adeline simply responded, "Yeah. I think so." Even though Adeline, like most of our respondents, supports the idea of a multiracial campus, she felt whites carry an unnecessary racial burden to interact with people of color on campus. Adeline's argument also incorporates the logic of neoliberalism; as Miguel A. Centeno and Joseph N. Cohen (2012:330) explain in their review, "The neoliberal perspective highlighted the senselessness of creating government-imposed rules that would steer individual behavior effectively." In other words, freedom of choice and personal comfort are more important than any structural change the government could impose for equality, which would inevitably fail anyway. As Adeline put it, interracial interactions should just naturally happen.

Second, diversity is viewed as a potential threat to the racial status quo, where whites feel that they are edged out of opportunities or feel that the only way more people of color can actually gain admission is through "reverse discrimination" against whites. When asked about how he feels when race and ethnicity are asked on job and college applications, Charles notes,

I think it causes tension in terms of some people may feel that like a lot of people are against giving people preferential treatment because of the race issue. It causes issues among like a lot of Caucasians and majority population feel that it is disadvantaging them now.

Charles notes that there is a *perception* of disadvantage, and as a consequence, asking about race results in a cost to whites' psyches.

Third, and closely related to the second, diversity is viewed as a threat to meritocracy. Harper answers the question in the same way,

Why do we have to have this whole race question? . . . What if somebody who is African American is not as smart as I am and I'm white, but they get chosen because, oh, we need more African Americans? That's not really fair. I don't know if that's how they do it, but my opinion when it comes to applications and things, it needs to just be all about if you're qualified or you're not.

As we have shown before, diversity ideology often gets stitched together with the frames of colorblind racial ideology. Harper recognizes that there are organizations that might be interested in increasing diversity at their firm, but she is only able to conceive of a situation in which the African American applicant is "not as smart" as she is, but will ultimately get the job because of their race. Harper previously explained that diversity is important because "it brings in a different cultural perspective, and I think that makes us more well-rounded." When she feels that efforts to increase diversity might edge her out of an opportunity, however, she defaults to the colorblind frame of abstract liberalism.

Among our respondents, some believed that meritocracy and efforts to achieve greater diversity are mutually exclusive. Ophelia, like Harper, illustrates this sentiment when she explains,

You don't want to like just try and be so diverse that you forget about people's actual like qualifications, and like look a little bit more objectively at like what they've done and—So I think it's a tricky balance to hit.

Our respondents tend to believe that it is "tricky to balance" both meritocracy and diversity, so we should either focus on meritocracy as Harper argues, or closely monitor diversity initiatives to make sure they are balanced with other values, as Ophelia suggests. This balancing logic undergirds the social control practices in diverse neighborhoods as well. Diversity as liability justifies delimiting the boundaries of diversity programs so colleges, corporations, and nations avoid any chance that they may be thrown off-kilter (Lam 2017).

Diversity as liability protects whiteness because whites can resort to notions of meritocracy (based on measures that structurally advantage them), fairness, and colorblind ideals (Guinier 2015; Schmidt 2007). It also emphasizes how, without regulation, diversity will create as many problems as it solves. Ultimately, this tenet is a form of social closure, which Raymond Murphy (1988:8) explains is a "process of subordination whereby one group monopolizes advantages by closing off opportunities to another group of outsiders beneath it which it determines as inferior and ineligible." Diversity "is for white people," which means that it also ceases to serve its purpose once it becomes a potential hindrance to whites' individual life chances. When people of color present competition for jobs or admission into college, whites can suggest that we should value diversity and intend to diversify, but it will be difficult to implement because implementation will likely require a sacrifice to standards of merit and comfort.

Twenty-first-century Principle-policy Gap

After the 1940s, scholars found that white Americans had great enthusiasm for the principle of egalitarianism but advanced little support for policies that ameliorated racial disparities (Schuman

et al. 1997). Political scientists and sociologists, alike, suggested that this gap was best explained by a “new” racism, one in which whites’ attitudes were marked by a blend of antiblack affect and a sense that African Americans did not incorporate the Protestant work ethic into their own and their children’s values (Henry and Sears 2002; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears 1988).

Today, however, we see a new iteration of the principle-policy gap. Young people support diversity and the presence of people of color in predominantly white spaces—in principle—but they do not necessarily support the policies that are aimed to increase diversity on college campuses and in the workplace. Nearly all of our respondents (41, or 95 percent) answered in the affirmative to our question concerning whether they believed diversity was important. However, when we directly asked our respondents if they supported policies that would increase diversity, 11 (26 percent) provided unequivocal support; 13 (30 percent) were completely against such policies; and 18 (42 percent) replied with some version of, “Yes, but . . .”¹⁰ Bonilla-Silva ([2003] 2014) suggests that the latter semantic move—“yes, but”—is an effort to communicate a sense of ambiguity; it allows people to suggest that they are thoughtfully weighing the pros and cons even when they actually have strong feelings for or against something. Indeed, we find that people in this last, larger group do not fully support diversity policies. We find that while our respondents value diversity, they use diversity ideology as well as frames of colorblind racial ideology to build an argument rejecting policies that would allow for more diverse educational institutions and workplaces. Here, we outline how diversity ideology subverts efforts to implement diversity initiatives.

As mentioned, many of our respondents spontaneously brought up affirmative action, but we also asked, “What do you think about affirmative action in the college admissions process? What about in the workplace?” Riley answered our question this way: “I go back and forth” on this policy issue. Adeline responded, “I remember when I was applying to college; I was kind of torn on that issue. I kind of felt like in some ways it wasn’t fair.” Similarly, Sebastian asserts, “I’m deeply ambivalent about it.” In each of these cases, our respondents suggest that they have thought about both sides of the issue. Adeline, however, does not support the policy because she sees it as unfair because nonwhites get the upper hand (diversity as liability). Sebastian goes on to explain that as a member of a debate team, he has done extensive research on affirmative-action policies, and explains his position on diversity initiatives this way:

I do know certain cases and studies. And after doing all that, I am really confused because I do feel like a lot of people do benefit from affirmative action, especially early on because in a very subjective way, it lets minorities know there is a door open for them. It gives people something to aspire to. But there is a huge problem with the studies at the same time that show that, for example, if you place people who are not quite qualified in that position, they’re more likely to fail that, for example. They’re more likely to feel like they’re struggling, need help . . . So I do believe that can be damaging when misapplied. And that said, I don’t think I want to reject affirmative action in general. But I do think that a lot of times, it’s very, very, very poorly thought through.

Here, Sebastian suggests that, in all, he is “confused” about whether diversity initiatives are the most optimal strategy to include more people of color in predominantly white spaces; he goes on to note that although these policies intend to present new opportunities (diversity as intent) to people of color, they are suboptimal because blacks tend to be mismatched with institutions that are too rigorous for them (diversity as liability). Brooke succinctly communicates Sebastian’s sentiment, “I think the idea of that policy is a good thing, but it’s not going to work, so I don’t think there should be a policy.”

Scarlett equivocates in her response to what she thinks about affirmative action, “I guess I understand where that’s coming from, but I believe more in merit base than just trying to level the playing field.” Again, we see the use of “yes, but.” But, more important, even though Scarlett “understands” why diversity initiatives might exist—to “level the playing field”—and she values diverse communities, she does not believe these programs should be employed to rectify past and

ongoing injustices. This sentiment illustrates the diversity as acceptance tenet. Scarlett wants to enjoy diversity but wants to do so without also being required to incorporate notions of oppression, power, and equity.¹¹ This willful maneuvering around evidence of structural racism to support the status quo echoes Jennifer Mueller's recent work on colorblindness as an "epistemology of ignorance" (Mueller 2017).

Similarly, while Elena explains to her interviewer that she values diversity because "there are good things in diversity," she is also concerned that people of color have special privileges that disadvantage her. She elaborates,

I'm a little concerned about it [special privileges for blacks] because it's hard when you have worked hard your whole life from—it hasn't happened to me, but I know people who were looking for the same job and had the same qualifications and maybe were picked over because someone needed to diversify their firm. So there are good things in diversity and maybe that thing.

Elena sees the main downside of diversity initiatives is that whites may lose out on an opportunity because a firm prefers to hire a well-qualified person of color. Indeed, many of our respondents, like those cited by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and his colleagues (Bonilla-Silva [2003] 2014; Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick 2004), developed hypothetical situations in which the person of color was less qualified. What is more, we had no interview respondents who suggested that the "different perspectives" and "stories" that people of color bring should be incorporated into the evaluative rubrics of college admissions and hiring, even though they all believed that the advantages of diversity (for them, personally) hinge on the "different backgrounds" that racial and ethnic minorities presumably have.

While young whites do wholeheartedly value diversity, they do so in a superficial way. We have already shown that they believe that everyone is different (diversity as acceptance), and value the presence of people of color, in particular, because they are believed to have perspectives of the world shaped largely by their racial group membership (diversity as commodity). While believing that the *idea* of diversity initiatives is a good one (diversity as intent), they do not necessarily believe that diversity is worth the costs: a threat to the racial status quo, white comfort, and fairness (diversity as liability). Andersen (1999:15) wrote, "Like most euphemisms, terms such as 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity' have begun to blunt the imagination, since when they are associated only with culture, they ignore issues of justice, power, and equity." We find that although whites laud the principle of diversity, their reliance on diversity ideology thwarts any possibility for real support for diversity initiatives to come to fruition.

Modes of Interpretation

To be clear, the way that people viewed affirmative action influenced the extent to which they supported this kind of policy. We asked our respondents, "When you hear 'affirmative action' what do you think of? What comes to mind?" Of the 42 respondents who answered this question, 16 (38 percent) believed affirmative action to be "racial quotas," 13 (31 percent) believed affirmative action was aimed to alleviate the effects of historical discrimination, seven (16 percent) of them believed that affirmative-action policies were created to increase diversity; the remaining six (14 percent) provided some other explanation or none at all. Generally, those who believed affirmative action is best understood as quotas rejected the policy. Meanwhile, half of the people who believed affirmative action was created to address past inequality wholeheartedly supported the policy.

In this last section, we focus on those who believe affirmative-action policies are implemented to address diversity. The "diversity" rationale of affirmative action is actually the one on which the Supreme Court of the United States relies (O'Connor 2003; Rehnquist 2003). Interestingly, only two respondents who believe affirmative-action policies aimed to increase diversity supported these policies, the other five in this group were in the "yes, but" category (2) or in the disapprove group (3).

One thing that stood out was that even among this group—Millennials who place a high value on diversity and believe that increasing diversity is the main rationale for affirmative action—respondents were suspicious of institutions that implemented diversity initiatives. For example, Easton explained, “Well, I don’t know if affirmative action is about fairness. I think schools do it because they want more people of color in their community.” Ironically, Easton believes that institutions of higher education implement diversity initiatives not because they want to be more equitable but instead because he believes they are guilty of the commodification of people of color, which he seems to view disapprovingly. Similarly, when Reagan explained what came to mind when she thought of affirmative action, she explained,

I think of accepting races just to say, “Oh look, I’m not being racist.” And maybe giving a scholarship or a job to someone of a minority race over, I don’t know, a Caucasian just because of their race so they can look like they’re not being racist. That’s what I think of.

Easton and Reagan represent a group of individuals who simultaneously believe that diversity is important but also view institutions that follow through to incorporate more people of color as suspect. Here, Reagan also employs the diversity as intent and diversity as liability frames, noting the possibility that a white person may be edged out of an opportunity so that an institution can present a positive image.

Overall, we see that even though Millennials believe diversity is important, they are, at best, lukewarm about implementing policies that would increase diversity; even those who believe that affirmative action is employed to increase diversity are still against it. At every turn, the overwhelming majority of the very group of people who value diversity most thwart diversity initiatives.

Conclusion

Although there are more people of color in predominantly white institutions and organizations, it does not necessarily follow that there will be a major shift in racial power dynamics. In short, we should not expect to see an upsurge in support for diversity initiatives even among the United States’ youngest generation—a group that has been socialized to appreciate multiculturalism and diversity, is very highly educated, and appears to be incredibly tolerant.¹² While theories centered on racial resentment and, later, colorblind racial ideology helped to explain the maintenance of whiteness as well as the principle-policy gap in the twentieth century, we have provided evidence of a new, twenty-first-century iteration of the principle-policy gap—one that is best explained by diversity ideology.

In addition, this article contributes to the growing body of research that shows that while colorblind racial ideology is helpful in explaining some racial matters, it appears that a race-conscious diversity ideology is shaping the racial project at the beginning of the twenty-first century. While extant research suggests that whites are ambivalent about diversity (Burke 2012b), view diversity in race-neutral ways, and have difficulty explaining its value even though they appreciate it (Bell and Hartmann 2007), we find that whites, especially young whites, believe that people of color bring something special to the table. This group appears to be conscious of racial difference. Their reliance on diversity ideology, however, perpetuates a racialized social system that benefits them.

How does diversity ideology maintain a system of whiteness? While previous iterations of racial ideology deemphasize the role of race in America, diversity ideology allows white people to ask and expect an acceptable answer to the question: “What can Brown do for Me?” (Melamed 2006). That is to say, how can the presence of people of color enhance whites’ well-being? Whites can embrace the humanist and moral principles associated with diversity as acceptance, but diversity ideology only requires good intentions, not equitable outcomes. By using the logic

of diversity ideology and its tenets, whites are able to construct themselves as racially tolerant and progressive. They focus on the importance of diversity as acceptance and intent to shield themselves from having to translate their values into concrete policies of equity and justice. Diversity ideology also avoids discussions of equity by making white gains a central aim. In effect, it commodifies people of color by focusing on the benefits that diversity creates for whites. When those same people are viewed as obstructions to whites' opportunity structure, diversity as a principle is devalued; consequently, diversity initiatives are belittled because any actions that may change the racial status quo are deemed liabilities to other values (e.g., meritocracy, free will, comfort, fairness). But, most important, they are a liability because they challenge white supremacy. These four tenets mutually enforce the existing power structure even in multiracial spaces and in an increasingly race-conscious society.

While a theoretical framework that emerged from qualitative empirical data (Mayorga-Gallo 2014), we show in this article how the four tenets of diversity ideology may be applied to understand a broader swath of contemporary racial matters. We hope other scholars will test its applicability in additional contexts and find the tenets helpful for understanding disconnects between stated values and behavior. Rather than seeing these contradictions as the product of two ideologies or frames, we outline how the very way we conceptualize diversity is the source for these contradictions. At the very least, we hope scholars and policy makers see this framework as another tool for challenging white supremacy—particularly when it is disguised in a multicolored coat.

Authors' Note

Order of authorship is reverse alphabetical, but levels of contribution and effort were equal across authors.

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Notes

1. Symbolic racism and racial resentment are closely tied; they both rely on the idea that whites' racial attitudes are best understood as a blend of antiblack affect and the perception that blacks have failed to live up to the American Dream because they have not relied on a Protestant work ethic (Kinder and Sanders 1996).
2. Abstract liberalism involves using ideas related to political and economic liberalism (e.g., equal opportunity, individualism) to justify racial inequality. Naturalization "is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences." Cultural racism frames racial minorities' behavior as the reason racial inequality exists. The use of minimization of racism allows whites to assert that race is "no longer a central factor affecting minorities" (Bonilla-Silva [2003] 2014:76–77).
3. Hanna Pitkin (Pitkin 1967) describes "descriptive representation" as "the making present of something absent by resemblance or reflection," and "symbolic representation" as "representation in which no resemblance or reflection is required." In contrast, "substantive representation" is one in which the interests of a group are accurately represented.

4. By multiracial, we mean spaces where more than one racial-ethnic group is present. Unlike when social scientists discuss “integrated” spaces, there is no numerical threshold for multiracial spaces. The term simply refers to the presence of multiple racial groups in a space (e.g., neighborhood; university).
5. White Americans have increasingly warmed to the idea of affirmative-action policies, this support is largely based on purposes of increasing “diversity” rather than reducing racial disparities. Polls have shown that whites’ support for affirmative-action policies range from 46 percent to 55 percent (Drake 2014). However, levels of support also depend on how questions are asked. In all, 75 percent of whites do not support the use of race in college admissions (Jones 2013), even though the Supreme Court of the United States affirmed that using race is helpful and necessary to increase diversity in higher education.
6. We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out that diversity has also been used by activists seeking to dismantle the existing racial hierarchy.
7. By white supremacy, we mean a system that is built to advantage whites and disadvantage racial others (Bonilla-Silva 2001).
8. Our sample mirrored the general population on this issue. Christopher Ingraham found that three quarters of whites had no nonwhite friends (Ingraham 2014). Among the remainder of our respondents, six (14 percent) had one nonwhite friend, three (7 percent) had two, and two (4.6 percent) had three nonwhite friends.
9. The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) Program is a voluntary desegregation program in Massachusetts that allows students from underperforming schools to attend schools in more affluent communities.
10. One person did not answer this question.
11. This knowledge of racial inequity without regard to it was not uncommon. Another example arose when Reagan was interrupted by the recorder shutting off: “It bothers me, it really does because I think that it’s not fair that—I do understand that they probably have to deal with maybe some more hardships and people maybe are more racist towards them and they might have to work harder sometimes, but—”
12. Research centers like Pew (Pew Research Center 2010), some scholars (Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch 2012), and pundits (Zogby 2009) suggest that the Millennial generation is tolerant, but they tend to base their conclusions on racial distance measures rather than on newer (but perhaps flawed) measures such as Racial Resentment or the Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale (Neville et al. 2000).

Supplemental Material

The online supplementary material is available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0731121417719693>.

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Author Biographies

Candis Watts Smith is assistant professor of public policy at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. She is the author of *Black Mosaic: The Politics of Black Pan-ethnic Diversity* (NYU Press, 2014).

Sarah Mayorga-Gallo is assistant professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts–Boston. She is the author of *Behind the White Picket Fence: Power and Privilege in a Multiethnic Neighborhood* (UNC Press, 2014).