

The Economization of Diversity¹

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ABSTRACT

Through a case study of an ongoing diversity initiative at Diversity University (DU), a public, flagship university in the US South, this research advances our understanding of the discursive relationship between neoliberalism and contemporary racial ideology. As part of a larger ethnographic project, I draw upon over ten years worth of diversity discourse at DU to illuminate diversity's *economization*: the process whereby specific formations of economic values, practices, and metrics are extended toward diversity as justification for DU's efforts. My analysis responds to three questions: (1) how is diversity *economized* by the organization; (2) how is this *economization* articulated through organizational discourse on diversity; and (3) how does the *economization* of diversity potentially reconfigure race and racial subjectivities? My findings reveal three interrelated processes that facilitate diversity's: *diversity-as-investment*, *diversity metrics*, and *diversity-as-affective labor*. Together these processes congeal and convert multicultural principles and practices into economic ones. Consequently diversity's economization recasts nonwhite racial subjectivity as human capital for DU and its white publics, minimizing and entrenching existing racial inequality in the process.

INTRODUCTION

It is nearly a foregone conclusion that contemporary racial ideology is defined by and through the paradigm of colorblindness and hollow multiculturalism (Bonilla-Silva 2013; McLaren 1995). Scholars note contemporary racial ideology's mirroring of colorblindness, whereby racism and racial inequalities are obscured and/or overlooked in favor of benign 'happy talk' (Bell and Hartmann 2007). Likewise, scholars studying contemporary diversity ideology reveal how it perpetuates race-based inequalities in part by condensing race with other, less meaningful forms of difference, thereby minimizing race's role in the shaping of race-based outcomes (Edelman, Fuller, and Mara-Drita 2001; AUTHOR). While not synonymous, multiculturalism, colorblindness, and diversity ideology are products of a discursive shift that constructs racial inequality as a particular problem requiring certain solutions: symbolic commitments to abstract equality, market individualism, and inclusive civic nationalism to name just a few (Melamed 2006). The historiography of this shift is inconsistent. Some scholars place its emergence at the conclusion of World War II (Melamed 2011); others at the tail end of civil rights victories in the 1960s (Embrick and Rice 2015). Nevertheless, the emergence of this discursive shift point to a larger racial project unfolding in the United States and other Western nations from the mid-twentieth century to the present (Omi and Winant 2014). This racial project reorganizes and redistributes the meaning and continued significance of race around abstract ideals of equality, fairness, and market opportunities (Faist 2009).

Research on the critical limits of multiculturalism, colorblindness, and diversity ideology illuminates the everyday dynamics of colorblind racism across social contexts: from surveys of public attitudes (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Bonilla-Silva 2013), to corporate settings (Embrick 2011), urban neighborhoods (Mayorga-Gallo 2014), and colleges and universities (E. C. Berrey

2011; Warikoo and de Novais 2014). This research makes clear that colorblindness, multiculturalism, and diversity ideology are the dominant methods for talking about race (see Hartmann 2015). Less clear is the relationship between the discourse of contemporary racial ideology and the discourse of the contemporary economic order, commonly identified as neoliberalism (Harvey 2007).

Neoliberalism is broadly defined as the set of regulatory policies that include the privatization of public goods and services and the deregulation of markets. To date, the sociology of race has been unclear on neoliberalism's connection to contemporary racial ideology. Though some scholars assert that the shift toward neoliberalism in the 1970s gave rise to diversity ideology (e.g. Berrey 2015), few bother to analyze this relationship in depth. Some scholars claim neoliberal elites use diversity to make racial inclusion more palatable for whites, but never specify how these neoliberal elites come to occupy their positions of power (Herring and Henderson 2012). Other research mischaracterizes neoliberalism as a doctrine that de-emphasizes state intervention (see Berrey 2015, 258); when in fact the neoliberal state aims "to play the role of general regulator," (Foucault 2010, 147; see also Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). Finally, other scholars take for granted diversity's commodification as irrefutable evidence of its imbrication with neoliberalism (e.g Berrey 2005; Downey 1999). This confuses and conflates capitalism, a historically specific mode of production, with neoliberalism, a historically specific governing rationality.

Where analytic attention has been paid to the relationship between neoliberalism and contemporary racial ideology, empirical rigor and precision is often wanting. Melamed (2011) makes a compelling argument that post- World War II, official or state-recognized antiracist discourses have functioned as unifying discourses for US state, society, and global ascendancy

and as material forces for postwar global capitalist expansion. Yet the reliance upon popular literature as the empirical material from which to frame this conclusion raises more questions than answers, particularly for an American public that increasingly consumes digital and social media rather than long-form books.

It is with these concerns in mind that I proceed. As part of a two-year ethnographic case-study of Diversity University (DU), a public flagship university in the US South, I draw upon over ten years worth of institutional diversity discourse to illuminate the *economization of diversity*: the process whereby specific formations of economic values, practices, and metrics are extended as justification for the university's efforts toward diversity. My research responds to three questions: (1) how is diversity *economized* by the university; (2) how is this *economization* articulated through organizational discourse on diversity; and (3) how does the *economization* of diversity potentially reconfigure race and racial subjectivities? My in-depth focus on a single case follows a recent call from critical race scholars for a more precise analysis of how neoliberalism is raced, and how neoliberal practices produce racialized bodies (Inwood 2015; Roberts and Mahtani 2010). Centering the dynamics within a single case study helps reveal the processes and contradictions structuring the relationship between neoliberalism and contemporary racial ideology, and provide 'flesh to the bone' for sociological theory (see Zamudio and Rios 2006).

NEOLIBERALISM, IN REVIEW

Emerging in the 1920s, neoliberal doctrine premises the economic as society's base, and the market as "the foremost social body," (Mises 2007, 315). The market is theorized as an informational system through which knowledge is acquired, communicated, and coordinated

among society's members (Hayek 1948, 91) (Hayek 1948, 91). The pricing mechanism is key: "In a system in which the knowledge of the relevant fact is dispersed among many people" the pricing mechanism "can act to co-ordinate the separate actions of different people" because it possesses "all of the information which is in fact dispersed among all the people involved in the process," (Hayek 1948, 85–86). Thus the market becomes the basis and means through which a governing rationality emerges and proceeds. More than just a set of economic practices, an ideology, or a transformation of the relationship between the economy and various functions of the state, neoliberalism is a conduct of conduct. Within it all conduct becomes economic conduct, while all domains and endeavors are recast as and measured by economic terms and metrics (Çalışkan and Callon 2009). The result of all of this is the formation of a new kind of subject, a neoliberal subject (Foucault 2010). Rather than a partner of exchange, this new subject – *homo oeconomicus* – is an entrepreneur of themselves (Foucault 2010, 226).

As a governing rationality, neoliberalism is hegemonic. Thus *homo oeconomicus* extends to "every social actor in general", and to "domains of behaviour or conduct" that lie well beyond the market (Foucault 2010, 268). Subjectivity is recast as financialized human capital: a form of self-investment intended to "enhance its own value, or to attract investors through constant attention to its actual or figurative credit rating, and to do this across every sphere of existence," (Brown 2015, 33). Simultaneously, activities once distinct from the economic sphere, like higher education, are reconfigured as strategic practices for enhancing the self's future value:

When competition becomes the market's root principle, all market actors are rendered as capitals, rather than as producers, sellers, workers, clients, or consumers. As capitals, every subject is rendered as entrepreneurial, no matter

how small, impoverished, or without resources, and every aspect of human existence is produced as an entrepreneurial one (Brown 2015, 65).

The economization of previously noneconomic domains and practices entails refashioning their knowledge, form, content, and conduct. To claim the economization of all life is to draw attention toward how neoliberalism disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities, and reconfigures subjectivities always, only, and everywhere as *homo œconomicus*. The economization of noneconomic domains, activities, and subjectivities is *the* distinctive feature of neoliberalism (Brown 2015).

HOMO ŒCONOMICUS AND DIVERSITY AS SELF- ENHANCEMENT

If at the heart of neoliberalism is a new *homo œconomicus*, then a key question is whether and how *homo œconomicus* repatterns and rearranges race and racial subjectivity. Previous scholarship has shown how an emphasis on market individualism and self-entrepreneurship subsumes the relevance of race and racial subjectivity under the auspices of meritocracy. Consequently, structural racial inequalities are recast as personal deficiencies or natural outcomes of competition, while personal success is attributed to entrepreneurial acumen. This recasting of racial inequality affirms race neutrality, or colorblindness, and silences claims of racism (Davis 2007, 350; Giroux 2008; Inwood 2015). Other scholars illuminate the emergence of a ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’ whereby generic ‘difference’ is symbolically embraced at the expense of meaningful discussions of power and inequality (e.g. Grzanka and Maher 2012).

Portraying multiculturalism as “the spirit of neoliberalism,” neoliberal multiculturalism prevents the calling into question of global capitalism (Melamed 2011, 42). Simultaneously, it deracializes antiracism by converting racial references into rhetorical gestures of ethical right and certainty (Melamed 2006, 16).

Relatedly, Kapoor (2013, 1032) argues that neoliberalism modifies race by appealing to a general, nonracialized category of ‘the people’ rooted in “essentialist categories of commonsense experience and practical moralism.” These appeals then justify market-based approaches to contemporary social problems. Here, neoliberalism entails the erasure of racial discourse from the public sphere. Racial expression is privatized, and individuals are free to express racial preference without state interference. As a consequence, race comes to operate from an altered and less obvious place than it once did. While the privatization of race does not mute the possibility of referencing race, it mutes or makes difficult the possibility of invoking language that identifies the phenomenon (Kapoor 2013, 1034). The result is a benign multiculturalism that functions as an accommodation to the larger social order (see McLaren 1995).

In a recent report the US Department of Education acknowledges the persistence of educational inequalities and opportunity gaps for low-income and minority students (US Department of Education, 2016). Yet the impetus to remedy these disparities is not because educational inequality undermines democratic ideals; but rather diversity’s potential for improving workforce productivity:

Research has shown that more diverse organizations make better decisions with better results. CEOs, university presidents, the military, and other leaders have accordingly expressed a strong interest in increasing diversity to ensure our nation

enjoys a culturally competent workforce that capitalizes on the diverse backgrounds, talents, and perspectives that have helped America succeed (US Department of Education 2016).

Here, diversity is recast as a set of skills (e.g. cultural competency) necessary for workers to succeed. When workers succeed, organizations succeed in making “better decisions with better results.” Diversity’s value is in its potential for self-investment.

If neoliberalism subsumes and transforms all spheres, endeavors, and even subjectivities so that the Department of Education’s report reflects the new language for talking about race (see Hartmann 2015), then examining this *economization of diversity* may prove fruitful for revealing how this discourse takes shape and where opportunities are for resistance. In what follows, I narrow my focus to an ongoing diversity initiative at DU, a public flagship university in the American South. Studying the economization of diversity within a university setting provides an opportunity to present the imbrication of neoliberal discourse with contemporary racial discourse in sharp relief, and within a context in which both discursive formations are increasingly paramount.

Public universities have been subject to increasing privatization since the 1980s (Newfield 2016). Once considered exclusive to the economic, higher education is now subject to it (Canaan and Shumar 2011; Giroux 2014). The extension of economic values, practices, and metrics into the sphere of higher education has come at significant costs to the public good, as public partners, purposes, and interests are replaced with private ones (Newfield 2011). Yet this economization of higher education parallels the rise of diversity initiatives in higher education. The aftermath of the 1978 Supreme Court Case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*

witnessed unprecedented growth in minority student enrollments within higher education, while colleges and universities made historic levels of investments in diversity infrastructure (Snyder and Dillow 2013; Thelin 2011). Given these parallel developments, it is worth considering how they intersect and interact today. If neoliberalism “transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor along with human themselves, according to a specific image of the economic,” (Brown 2015, 9) then an analysis of neoliberalism’s interpenetration of diversity discourse begins by examining what that transmogrification looks like in practice. With this in mind, I proceed by responding to the following questions: (1) how is diversity *economized* by DU; (2) how is this *economization* articulated through DU’s official diversity discourse; and (3) how does the *economization* of diversity reconfigure race and racial subjectivities?

RESEARCH DESIGN

To answer these questions I draw upon official diversity discourse at DU, from 2006 to the present. Though situated within a larger ethnographic project, here I give special attention to discourse. My understanding of discourse and its importance to the production of social life is informed by a dialectical model (Fairclough 1993; van Dijk 1993). This model views discourse as socially constitutive of social structures and categories, while at the same time shaped by and constrained by the very things it constructs (Fairclough 1992, 64). Thus a focus on DU’s diversity discourse can help reveal its modification by larger social, political, and economic shifts (e.g. neoliberalism); and how this affects social action (e.g. diversity efforts). Because my focus is on the *economization of diversity*, I give little attention here to how social actors interpret this phenomenon. Elsewhere, however, I examine diversity as interpretive practice (AUTHOR 2018; AUTHOR FORTHCOMING).

About DU

DU's history is steeped in racial conflict. Chartered in the mid-nineteenth century by enslavers, the school's first buildings were constructed using enslaved labor. The advent of the Civil War led to DU's temporarily closure. Upon the war's conclusion DU was reopened and soon become a steward for tropes of the Old South, including a variety of iconography meant to symbolize the 'Lost Cause'. In the 1990s DU began efforts to distance itself from its reputation, changing its school mascot and banning the display of Confederate flags at sporting events. These changes were not without conflict, and DU has since become a lightning rod for many whites committed to a neo-Confederate, southern identity (see AUTHOR 2016). Despite its 'dirty laundry', DU is not an extreme case. Its legacy of segregation mirrors that of many other public and private universities, as do its recent racial conflicts and institutional responses to those conflicts (Wilder 2013). As a public flagship, DU's organizational structure and institutional conditions, including those belonging to its diversity initiative, resemble the structure and conditions of other public colleges and universities (see DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Thus DU serves as a useful case study for generating theoretical constructs generalizable across other college campuses.

Diversity Discourse at DU

Documents collected for this project span the period of 2006 through 2016, and include system-wide communications from administrative offices, campus policies, internal and external evaluations and reports, brochures, pamphlets, and multimedia. Documents were collected by searching through archived content on the university's website, the campus policy directory, and the offices of the DU's President and Provost. I also used networks gained through fieldwork to solicit communications from DU's faculty, students, and staff.

DU's movement toward a diversity initiative began in the late 1990s with the formation of an Office of Multicultural Affairs. However, few documents archived with the institution describe the process that led to the creation of this office. In 2002, the state-governing board that oversees DU established for all of its institutions "a commitment to ethnic and gender diversity." In 2005, this governing board adopted a formal diversity statement. Subsequently, 2006 marked the first year in which diversity became an organizational mandate for DU. It was not until 2014, however, that DU began taking steps to put together an official Diversity Action Plan (DAP) that includes goals, targets, and timetables. At nearly one hundred pages in length, the DAP is the primary mechanism through which DU communicates diversity's meaning and importance.

All told, nearly 700 pages of material from over 75 sources were collected and analyzed. Though large, it is unlikely the sample is statistically representative. Documents and materials are not archived with any internal consistency. Therefore, my sampling strategy and subsequent analysis focused on generating the greatest maximization of logical inferences required to build conceptual and theoretical strength (Small 2009).

Methodology

My analysis employs a grounded approach (Corbin and Strauss 2007; Charmaz 2006). Because of its ability to generate a theoretical account grounded in empirical content, grounded theory is especially equipped to elucidate the complexities of organizational culture, including the culture of diversity (Martin and Turner 1986; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980). Working with a graduate assistant, we began our coding strategy with DU's 2020 Strategic Plan (SP) and its planning principle for diversity, both of which were drafted in 2010. We carefully read through it with an eye toward how diversity was defined and how it was discussed in relation to other elements of the strategic plan. Following Charmaz (2006), we developed initial codes identifying categories

of information related to diversity's definition, its stated strengths, the principles or values behind it, and then any other principles or values that were claimed as important to diversity. We then moved to DU's 2014 DAP and its 2016 update, both of which draw upon the 2020 Strategic Plan's language to set goals, targets, and timetables for DU's diversity initiative. We began to attach more substantive definitions and statements to our initial codes, and link the chunks of coded data to bigger ideas about how diversity's strengths were characterized, the benefits diversity brings to the campus and its various publics, and how diversity's successes were characterized. Memos were constructed as a way to speculate or specify what various codes and their content shared with one another. Working together throughout this process helped strengthen the method of constant comparison.

As the process unfolded, patterns and themes became clear. We discovered that many of the official policies, reports, and communiqué mentioned the value of diversity for the campus and its publics. We began to theorize the meanings of value, how value was used to frame diversity, and identify the 'story' that illustrates how diversity, value, and racial meaning are linked (see Corbin and Strauss 2007). I employed Miles and Huberman's (1984) suggestion that qualitative researchers turn their analytic focus toward metaphor-making as a means of providing a more complete method for illuminating, rather than describing, the contours of social life. In considering the function 'value' serves in articulating diversity for DU's campus publics, I landed upon the metaphor of the *economization of diversity*. It became clear within the official discourse that specific formulations of economic values, practices, and metrics were being extended as justification for diversity efforts at DU. In a more quantitative approach the themes and patterns we discovered would be subjected to some form of statistical testing. However, our grounded approach was more focused on elaborating our observations and taking into account

the full range of meaning and establishing linkages to other discussions of neoliberalism and diversity ideology in the existing literature (see Turner 1983). Future research may well take up the themes and patterns elaborated here and subject them to more quantitative techniques to demonstrate their scale, scope, and generalizability elsewhere. Indeed, such research will help test the strength of my analysis.

FINDINGS

In what follows, I define and describe three processes within the economization of diversity: *diversity-as-investment*; *diversity metrics*; and *diversity-as-affective labor*. These processes are not meant to be exhaustive. They are meant to provide a roadmap for scholars interested in the imbrication of neoliberal doctrine with contemporary racial ideology. *Diversity-as-investment* describes the process whereby diversity is actively reimagined as a tool for the university and its campus publics to enhance their personal portfolios. Diversity-as-investment converts diversity efforts strategic market-oriented actions. Consequently, the ‘doing’ of diversity is recast as self-enhancement for the university and its publics. *Diversity metrics* describes the process whereby progress is defined and measured. This includes how *diversity-as-investment* is converted into entrepreneurial human capital. *Diversity metrics* is not simply a ‘numbers game’ of counting the number of minority students, faculty, and staff; it also describes how the university communicates diversity’s progress to its publics. Progress in this context has little to do with dismantling racial inequalities on campus. Instead, progress reflects the measurement of the extent to which *diversity-as-investment* is made ubiquitous. Finally, *diversity-as-affective labor* describes the process whereby the production and management of diversity centers on the production and management of a set of affects associated with diversity. With diversity recast as

self-investment, and progress reconfigured as the extent to which self-investment is pervasive, the university increasingly seeks to mobilize excitement and satisfaction around its efforts. Yet the mobilization of excitement often entails minimizing, ignoring, and obfuscating issues of power and inequality. Ironically, minority faculty, students, and staff perform a disproportionate amount of diversity's affective labor. This results in new forms of exploitation by way of expropriation of their racial differences. Taken as a whole, these three processes reimagine nonwhite racial subjectivity as financialized human capital that, once acquired, enhances white students' competitive edge in an increasingly globalized world.

Diversity-As-Investment

In 2010, DU's then-president charged his leadership team with developing an "inclusive and comprehensive approach for creating a campus-wide strategic plan." Known as the 2020 report, the planning framework consisted of a vision, core values, goals, priorities of excellence, planning principles, and enabling infrastructure. The framework continues to serve as DU's road map for obtaining national and international recognition. Among its planning principles is diversity:

As a public institution, the key component of DU's mission is providing a high-quality and affordable college education. We recognize that diversity and excellence go hand in hand, and that diversity enhances our teaching, scholarship, and service as well as our ability to welcome, respect, and interact with other people. Our nation is becoming more diverse, and the growing importance of international collaboration underscores DU's need to promote and enhance the

integration of domestic and international diversity while elevating its programs and initiatives to improve access for all.

The planning principle makes clear that diversity has instrumental value for DU: diversity can elevate DU's programs, and facilitate pathways to national and international acclaim. Yet, reimagining diversity as a positive and self-enhancing feature for DU entails obfuscating issues of equity for historically marginalized groups. Diversity and excellence are tethered at the same time that existing racial inequality is rendered unintelligible by way of DU's generic commitment to "improve access to all."

In the 2020 report the planning principle for diversity gives rise to 'priorities of excellence': unit-level categories intended to ensure DU's efforts are aligned with its existing infrastructure and that "goal congruency is achieved throughout campus." Among those priorities is undergraduate education and student success:

Our past has taught us that diversity plays a key role in enhancing the quality of our academic and nonacademic enterprises and ensuring the success of our undergraduates in an increasingly complex world. Our commitment to providing access to all our programs, excellent teaching, intellectually engaging learning experiences, and academic support for all undergraduates is a direct result of this legacy, as is our responsibility to educate the whole student. In this context, a liberal education and rich co-curriculum within a research university setting provide strong intellectual foundations for ensuring every student's personal and professional development.

The legacy mentioned here is unclear. DU's segregationist past is not made explicit, and diversity is not framed as either a mechanism for atonement or for reducing current racial inequalities. Instead, diversity is recast as an investment in "academic and nonacademic enterprises" that ensures "every student's personal and professional development" and their success "in an increasingly complex world." The document continues by identifying how diversity as an investment will provide for a competitive edge. To achieve excellence in undergraduate education and student success DU commits to:

[Prepare] students for the complexity and diversity of a rapidly changing world; enhance opportunities for civic engagement, service learning, and internships to prepare students for not only careers but also leadership, citizenship, and stewardship; develop students' global and cross-cultural competence; and teach them to master information technology to enhance their lives as learners, citizens, and professionals.

Diversity's potential for reducing existing racial inequalities is entirely absent. Instead, global knowledge, cross-cultural competency, and technological proficiency are configured as mechanisms for self-enhancement and self-improvement. Diversity becomes an investment strategy for students seeking to enhance their own future value.

Finally, the 2020 report identifies institutional goals and specific targets for achieving "excellence in diversity." One goal is to "provide an unrivaled collegiate experience." Targets for this goal include supporting nationally competitive athletic programs; strengthening the

relationship between the university community and the city/state in which it resides; delivering an accessible, affordable, and high quality education to a diverse student body; and fostering “an inclusive, student-centered, and welcoming campus environment.” The goal to provide an “unrivaled collegiate experience” illustrates the degree to which DU perceives its diversity efforts in competition with other colleges and universities. Diversity is a tool for attracting ‘student investors’ who are promised a return on their investment by way of an enhanced market position upon degree completion. Diversity matters not for its potential to reduce, or even address, existing racial inequalities. Instead, diversity matters for its potential in promoting personal portfolio growth.

Diversity Metrics

Diversity metrics describes the process whereby progress is defined and then measured. This includes measuring the conversion of *diversity-as-investment* into entrepreneurial human capital. Progress as it is defined and measured has little to do with dismantling existing barriers to opportunities, resources, power, or decision-making for historically marginalized groups. Instead progress reflects the measurement of the extent to which *diversity-as-investment* is made ubiquitous. Progress is a matter of efficiency rather than of redress. When diversity is made efficient, or rather when self-enhancing features of diversity are made efficient, this is evidence of diversity’s success.

In its 2014 Diversity Action Plan (DAP), DU formally commits to “expand” and “enhance” diversity training by implementing an online delivery system. Once in place, employees can receive diversity-training certification by successfully completing a series of online modules. The DAP recommends new employees be required to complete this training. Requiring this

training allows DU to use completion rates as a measure of progress toward its institutional goals. Using certification rates as an indicator of progress casts diversity as a ‘pro-social’ skill set for successful job performance. Indeed, the certification itself can be printed or emailed, allowing for individuals to provide documentation of their marketable skill-set. While the online certification program remains in development, DU’s Office of Human Resources currently offers on-demand, customized diversity training for offices and workplace settings across campus. This training, like others offered by HR, is intended to “offer DU’s staff and faculty an opportunity for continual growth,” and “improve professional skills and personal development.” As a matter of workplace equity, diversity’s progress is measured not by whether historically marginalized groups have greater access to power, resources, opportunities, or decision-making, but by the number of employees who demonstrate self-investment and self-improvement.

In 2016, DU undertook an “in-depth analysis of all university publications and electronic content” to determine “the degree to which communication demonstrated diversity and a welcoming environment.” This undertaking was framed as part of “increased efforts to assess and respond to campus climate.” In campus communiqué, DU reports that “66 percent met criteria, 31 percent were identified as needing minor improvement and 2 percent showed a need for major improvement, reflecting little or no diversity in selected photography.” DU’s efforts to better align its marketing material with its actual campus climate mirror efforts taking place at other colleges and universities, some of which have come under harsh criticism for doctoring their marketing materials in order to misrepresent ethno-racial diversity (Osei-Kofi, Torres, and Lui 2013). These efforts are best understood within the larger context of public disinvestment, rising tuition costs, the increased difficulty in securing federally backed student loans, and the pressure to recruit ‘high dollar’ students and increase overall enrollments. These shifts lead many

public colleges and universities to incorporate ethno-racial diversity as part of their marketing strategy for prospective students (Pippert, Essenburg, and Matchett 2013). For the record, DU has one of the highest proportions of black student enrollments of any flagship in the United States. However, consideration of DU's stated goals and the actions taken to achieve those goals raise concerns.

While DU has one of the highest proportions of black student enrollments of any flagship in the United States, its campus climate remains quite chilly for racial and ethnic minorities. Students, faculty, and staff report near-daily experiences with microaggressions. In 2014, white students placed a noose over the neck of the statue on campus dedicated to DU's first black student, shaking the campus to its core. An informal interview with a black woman and professor on campus revealed that while walking to a campus discussion on recent acts of racism, she was verbally accosted by white men who shouted racial and sexual epithets from their passing vehicle. For many, whether campus publications are accurately portraying the ethno-racial composition of the campus was the least of their concerns. Many I spoke with described DU's diversity efforts as "lip service", and even "superficial bullshit", suggesting that campus leadership was more interested in performing institutional impression management than they were in achieving equity (see Pippert, Essenburg, and Matchett 2013).

In a formal interview with Richard, DU's Multicultural Affairs Officer, I asked him what aspects of DU's diversity efforts would he like to change. "I would change the diversity and inclusiveness of the administration," he replied after brief pause. Rising from his desk and walking to the table by his office window, he began digging through a stack of papers. Pulling out DU's 2015-2016 directory, he continued, "The material that we send out to students is often good material that we try to make diverse, but this is a publication that just kind of disturbed me

greatly.” He began flipping through the pages until he arrived at the image of DU’s executive leadership team. Holding it out in front of me, he smiled and shouted, “DU!” I counted aloud, “Seven, eight, nine white folk. Seven white men and two white women.” I looked back at him as he sighed, shook his head, and said, “I would wave a wand on that one. I would wave a wand on it, I tell you what.”

When coupled with the remarks of others with whom I spoke, Richard’s comments highlight a disconnect between the concrete realities of everyday racism on campus (racial assaults on minorities, and unequal access to power and decision-making), and the focus of DU’s institutional efforts. More smiling pictures of men and women of color in campus media does not improve the day to day climate on campus for those men and women. It does, however, help promote the belief that diversity is ubiquitous, and progress is undeniable. This staging of difference, whereby men and women of color are strategically placed and deployed throughout campus (AUTHOR 2018), is a normative response by university administrators conditioned to turn racial references into rhetorical gestures toward broader appeals for freedom, equality, global citizenry; themes that have clear resonance with the larger shift both within and outside of the university toward neoliberalism (see Melamed 2006, 2011).

These rhetorical gestures are often coupled with particular metrics that constitute the very things they then seek to measure in order to demonstrate diversity’s progress. At DU, this entails a lengthy accounting in its DAP of the number of events, partnerships, and programs it claims are diversity-focused. Few if any of these things are assessed for whether they increase minorities’ access to power, resources, opportunities, or decision-making at the university. Instead, their existence is made to be evidence of their success. The more events, partnerships, and programs accounted for, the more evidence that progress is being made. This also has the

effect of reinforcing *diversity-as-investment* by casting all of these listed goings-on as opportunities for potential participants to acquire the ‘pro-social’ skills that DU claims will help give those participants a competitive edge going forward.

Diversity-as-Affective Labor

Affective labor is broadly defined as the production, circulation, and management of affect; and reflects the increasing importance of a variety of social bonds produced by labor in the new economy (Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2001). *Diversity-as-affective labor* describes the process whereby the production and management of diversity centers on the production and management of a set of affects associated with diversity. As diversity becomes actively reimagined as self-investment, and as progress is recast as the extent to which diversity as financialized human capital is made ubiquitous, then one of the primary strategies of a diversity initiative becomes mobilizing the excitement and satisfaction surrounding the ubiquity of opportunity for self-investment and portfolio growth.

In 2017, DU unveiled a new webpage promoting its campus-wide diversity initiative. The webpage reads:

The presence of a diverse mix of students, faculty and staff, with their individual intellectual perspectives and contributions, enriches the university community.

Therefore, we are an institution that seeks to instill in its students and employees a lifelong appreciation for the value of diversity.

Nowhere on the new webpage is there any mention of whether and how diversity will help make DU a more equitable campus for historically marginalized groups of people. Instead, diversity is

condensed alongside of benign matters of difference like intellectual diversity, and rendered empty and divorced from any relationship to structural inequalities. This condensation shifts the focus toward the celebration of diversity's value, which appears to be diversity for diversity's sake. As a matter of affective labor, the enrichment of the university and its community is dependent upon the university's ability to instill appreciation for diversity into its campus publics.

Instilling "a lifelong appreciation for the value of diversity" is not empty rhetoric, however. According to the DAP, all new employees at DU are subject to a 'Welcome Home' orientation that includes an hour-long presentation on the history of the university, including its commitment to racial reconciliation. The orientation is not managed by DU's nationally-acclaimed Institute for Racial Justice. Instead, DU's Office of Human Resources manages the orientation. Yet the HR webpage provides a different description of the orientation. HR describes Welcome Home as an introduction to campus leadership, and an overview of DU's "mission, vision, rich history, DU's 'It' factor, and the relationship between DU Athletics and the larger University." Nowhere is any mention made of racial reconciliation.

But here is the rub: the orientation does not need to include racial reconciliation at all to meet DU's commitment to instill in its employees a lifelong appreciation for diversity's value. Diversity's condensation renders its relationship to race and racial inequality empty. This allows for diversity to become invested with other kinds of meanings, like diversity of thought, geography, and as I witnessed first hand in one orientation for new faculty, "left-handedness." According to the DAP, "DU embraces and encourages diversity *of all forms*." This includes race and gender, but also "political perspectives", "fields of study," and "other characteristics." Collapsed into a general orientation entitled 'Welcome Home', complete with a presentation on

DU's 'It' factor and the importance of Big Time College Sports, diversity is reconfigured as part of an entire package for demonstrating why it is annually among the Chronicle of Higher Education's "Great Colleges to Work For."

On the one hand, *diversity-as-affective labor* centers the production and management of excitement and satisfaction with its diversity efforts. On the other hand, *diversity-as-affective labor* entails managing the production and circulation of negative affects that could do harm to DU's perception of its efforts. As mentioned above, the DAP and various other official communiqué I analyzed list a number of partner groups, organizations, centers, and institutes that assist in DU's diversity efforts. One of those partnerships is with a working faculty group whose interests are in the study of race and racism. In the DAP, DU describes the goal of this partnership as taking

proactive measures to prevent predictably embarrassing racial incidents from occurring perpetually, to develop the means for faculty to have a greater role in Student Affairs, and to increase clarification of the procedures faculty members should follow when students bring them their concerns.

When members of the faculty working group were made aware of this description of their partnership, their responses ranged from bewilderment to rage. DU's communiqué frequently states that as part of its efforts to create a culture of research excellence related to race it "continues to support" the work of this faculty group and others on campus. Yet, members of this group were adamant they receive little if any material support for their efforts. Some members became visibly upset with how their mission was characterized in the DAP. Two group members

soon contacted university administration and demanded their group's name be removed from the DAP entirely.

The exaggerations and mischaracterizations of diversity programming within DU's institutional documents are not unique to DU, or organizations more generally. Instead, organizational scholars have shown that 'cheap talk' around social values is often strategically deployed by management to maintain organizational cohesion and commitment (Levy et al. 2011; Wickert and Schaefer 2015). DU's diversity efforts, including its characterization of those efforts, ought to be seen as an attempt to increase its own competitive advantage among potential 'investors', be they potential students or potential employees. American colleges and universities find a great deal of currency in claiming a commitment to diversity, even if their actions are little more than commitments to that commitment (Ahmed 2012). The aforementioned shifts in public disinvestment and increased pressure to recruit 'high dollar' students and increase overall enrollments create an economic incentive for DU to maintain the perception of a welcoming and inclusive environment. *Diversity-as-affective labor* goes beyond just maintaining excitement about diversity's progress. This work also entails the ongoing work of assuring racist events are kept out of the public spotlight. What this work is not about, however, is the dismantling of concrete racial inequality on campus.

In the Fall of 2016 DU hosted leaders from the US Department of Education (DoE). University administrators gathered a racially diverse group of students to meet with the visitors, and held a panel discussion with DoE representatives moderated by the university's lead Student Affairs Officer. Following the visit, DoE officials noted how impressed they were with DU's "intentionality and humility", and DU's willingness to "acknowledge its racist past for the purposes of creating an opportunity for frank dialogue." The officials specifically mentioned

how impressed they were with the DAP. Yet if as I show above at least some of the programming and partnerships listed within the DAP are mischaracterized, then it suggests that DoE officials are most impressed with is DU's ability to manage its commitment to diversity, and not necessarily its ability to manage efforts toward reducing or eliminating racial inequalities.

Diversity-as-affective labor is a key process within the economization of diversity because it actively converts diversity into an intangible asset for the university. As noted in DAP, “the health and well-being of DU— indeed the well-being of America—is dependent” upon DU embracing diversity. Though vaguely defined, diversity's conversion into an intangible asset provides it with a certain value that increases the more it circulates (see Ahmed 2004). Importantly, diversity's circulation is driven through the disproportionate amount of affective labor performed by people of color at DU. Furthermore, the production of diversity's intangible properties and value expropriates their racial subjectivity for exploitative purposes. For men and women of color who perform the vast majority of diversity work at DU, their labor converts ethno-racial difference into self-enhancement and self-investment for the campus and its white publics. Their ethno-racial difference becomes something to be acquired by potential investors, as part of the ‘pro-social’ skill-set necessary for competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

Following an act of racial violence on campus in March of 2014, the outgoing director of diversity and multicultural affairs for DU's student body government penned an editorial for the campus newspaper on diversity's importance:

[It is important] to understand why cross-cultural engagement and inclusion will enhance the quality of our education and envision ways we may convert our

words into actions...After graduation it is essential we learn to communicate with people from other cultures if we expect to compete in the global job market. Yet many of us make little to no effort to get to know people who look and think differently. Without challenging our minds through outside thoughts, we allow our education to go stale and we allow ourselves to fall behind the competition...Roughly 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies have formalized diversity efforts in place. World-class brands like General Electric, Boeing, Walgreens and Bank of America know that creating inclusive environments can improve the bottom line. Inclusivity is not just for large corporations; all businesses, big and small, are competing globally today. As for brands that strive to become global competitors, like DU, creating an inclusive environment is a necessity...Overt inclusionary tactics will make our student body more competitive in the job market, more educated in forming opinions and maximize our “DU connections” to a global scale.

The editorial closes by asking the reader to consider the following:

Why allow students from other universities to pass us by, to beat us out for the job because we cannot identify with an employer, client, coworker or associate from another culture? Why allow DU to hold itself back from the All-American institution it strives to become?

This editorial helps clarify the relationship between *diversity-as-investment*, *diversity metrics*,

and *diversity-as-affective labor*. Like the 2016 U.S. DoE report, “Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education,” cross-cultural engagement is discursively represented as an important investment for students that enhances their competitiveness in the global marketplace. Cross-cultural engagement is readily convertible into measurable outcomes like certificates or even credit hours, and these “overt inclusionary tactics” help distinguish DU students from others, especially after graduation. Diversity and inclusion become intangible assets that facilitate sociality, formulate “DU connections” around the world, and ensure market-based success. But the questions posted in the editorial are telling. Without stating it explicitly, the questions presume the students unable to identify with a potential employer or client from another culture are members of a normative one — white and elite. It ignores that the black student body at DU — one of the largest, proportionately, of any public flagship in the US — is not already engaged with a normative culture different from its own. The result of this discursive framing of the issue is that blacks and other non-white groups on campus are actively converted into forms of human capital to be acquired by entrepreneurial whites.

CONCLUSION

My analysis follows a recent call for race scholars to better attend to how neoliberal rationale constitutes racial subjectivities (Roberts and Mahtani 2010). My focus has been on elucidating the relationship between neoliberalism, as doctrine, and contemporary racial ideology: specifically, how the precepts and principles of multiculturalism are remade through the reason and governance of neoliberal logics. Examining diversity ideology - what other scholars have defined as central to the contemporary racial order (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Berrey 2015; Embrick and Rice 2015; Faist 2009) - I show how diversity is *economized*: how specific

formations of economic values, practices, and metrics are extended as an order of normative reason toward diversity. The *economization of diversity* reflects the active and ongoing conversion of diversity's principles and practices into economic ones. As diversity is economized, the focus on reducing racial inequality retreats to the background. In its place arise three interrelated sets of practices: *diversity-as-investment*, *diversity metrics*, and *diversity-as-affective labor*. In tandem these practices reimagine nonwhite racial subjectivity as financialized human capital that, once acquired, enhance individuals' and the organization's efforts to entrepreneurialize their endeavors, appreciate their value, and increase their market competitiveness.

Diversity-as-investment describes the process whereby diversity is discursively recast as a set of strategic market-oriented actions that enhance the personal portfolios of the campus and its publics: from opportunities for civic engagement through service learning and internships; to programs for enhancing global and cross-cultural competencies. These actions and others help convert diversity into entrepreneurial human capital. *Diversity metrics* describes the process whereby progress is defined and then measured. This includes measuring the conversion of *diversity-as-investment* into entrepreneurial human capital. Progress as it is defined and measured has little to do with dismantling existing barriers to opportunities, resources, power, or decision-making for historically marginalized groups. Rather, progress reflects the measurement of the extent to which *diversity-as-investment* is made ubiquitous. Here, the focus is on demonstrating the number of events, partnerships, and programs taking place across campus. Assessing whether these events, partnerships, or programs are effective in dismantling inequality is of little concern. Instead, *diversity metrics* function as a literal and figurative accounting of all the opportunities for campus publics to acquire the pro-social skills DU claims will give

participants a competitive edge going forward.

Finally, *diversity-as-affective labor* describes the process whereby the production and management of diversity centers on the production and management of a set of affects associated with diversity. While *diversity metrics* captures the extent to which *diversity-as-investment* is becoming ubiquitous, *diversity-as-affective labor* attempts to mobilize excitement and satisfaction with all of the opportunities available for self-investment and portfolio growth. Divorced from any relationship to structural inequalities, diversity is freely condensed alongside of benign matters of difference like geographical, intellectual, and political differences. This discursive shift allows for a near uninterrupted celebration of diversity's value: diversity for diversity's sake. Simultaneously, *diversity-as-affective labor* entails the work of managing any threats to the organization's perception of itself as welcoming and inclusive: from the minimization of everyday racism; to proactive steps to counter potential high-profile racist incidents when they happen. Shifts in public disinvestment, the increased financial pressure to recruit out-of-state and international students, and the demand to increase overall enrollments require an effective public relations strategy that maintains the perception of a welcoming campus environment, even when this is empirically falsifiable. *Diversity-as-affective labor* completes the economization of diversity in that it actively converts diversity into an intangible asset whose value increases the more it circulates (see Ahmed 2004). Its circulation is driven by the disproportionate amount of affective labor performed by people of color. Their work to produce a 'diverse campus' actually produces a new form of exploitation by way of expropriation of their racial subjectivity. The production of the campus as 'more inviting', 'warmer', or 'friendlier' for marginalized populations does not redistribute power, resources, decision-making, or opportunities among those marginalized populations. Instead, their very

presence is incorporated into the portfolios of the campus and its white student body, enhancing their own values without adding any to those marginalized groups. Their ethno-racial difference becomes a form of self-enhancement for DU and its (white) campus publics: encounters and interactions with nonwhites become things that, once acquired, facilitate a competitive advantage in the global marketplace. By attending to the specific processes behind the *economization of diversity*, my analysis provide ‘flesh to bone’ for contemporary theorizations of the dynamics between neoliberalism and contemporary racial ideology.

One question my analysis may raise for some is on the causal link between neoliberal rationale and contemporary racial ideology. Is one determined by the other? While a single case study cannot determine the order of this relationship, a wider focus suggests the relationship is mutually constitutive. Higher education has long been considered a noneconomic sphere governed and shaped by noneconomic values. However, the shift toward neoliberalism in the 1970s produced, among other things, its economization. This shift transposed the multicultural principle of diversity into an economic idiom, and transformed the university into a manager of diversity based on the model of the firm.

Beyond DU, how diversity is assessed among other colleges and universities further reflects the conversion of diversity’s principles and precepts into economic ones. Increasingly colleges and universities are spending considerable time and resources trying to document a wide range of experiences and benefits of diversity through the use of campus climate surveys. Often led by a team of psychologists and higher education researchers, these surveys seek to measure the ‘warmth’ or ‘chilliness’ of campus climates by way of the frequency and depth of cross-cultural interactions (e.g. “How many of your friends are of a different race or ethnicity than you?”). Others note the rise of Chief Diversity Officers in higher education (Gose 2006). These

new positions help financialize diversity, export it to a variety of publics, and measure its progress through economic values and practices.

At a national level there is the American Council on Education (ACE). It represents roughly 1,800 American colleges and universities, and is the nation's most influential and visible higher education lobbying association. Its June 2012 Board of Directors' diversity statement lists four reasons why racial and ethnic diversity ought to be considered in college admissions. Among those given is diversity's enhancement of economic competitiveness: "Sustaining the nation's prosperity in the twenty-first century requires us to make effective use of the talents and abilities of all our citizens, in work settings that bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures," (American Council on Education 2012). Elsewhere, the independent, nonpartisan Center for American Progress provides ten reasons why colleges and universities need diversity. Among those include the need to prepare our future workforce, the need to leverage diversity to achieve business goals and foster innovation and competitiveness in business, and the belief among Fortune 500 companies that diversity is good for the bottom line (Kerby 2016).

This meshing of economic lexicons with noneconomic spheres is the hallmark of neoliberal governance, and has important consequences for our understanding of race and racial subjectivities. As higher education is increasingly configured as a site for human capital investment, and as diversity is increasingly imagined as a mechanism for enhancing competitiveness among transactional students, racial subjectivity is converted into a form of capital investment. Cross-cultural contact is converted into a series of transactional experiences that overwhelmingly benefit whites (Hurtado, Alvarado, and Guillermo-Wann 2015). Whether its acquiring a diverse network of friends, studying abroad, or simply attending a university upon

which there is a presence of international students constitutes self-investment for whites, for many of whom the college experience is their first encounter with people of different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds than their own. These ‘multicultural transactions’ help reinforce the neoliberal shift in higher education as one in the college experience is discursively represented as a series of strategic decisions and practices for enhancing the self’s future value. Yet, ‘multicultural transactions’ do not benefit whites and nonwhites equally. Instead, the discursive representation of all that is nonwhite as an investment opportunity converts ethno-racial difference into embodied human capital. This transmogrification of racial subjectivity entrenches racial inequality. Indeed, further research should focus on this transmogrification as a contemporary racial formation; whereby neoliberal rationale determines the content and importance of nonwhite racial categories, and reimagines the meanings attached to them. Such investigations remain undertheorized within the sociology of race. My hope is that this article, as a first effort, inspires others to remedy this state of affairs.

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