Subversion or Cooptation?
Tactics for Engaging in Diversity Work
in a Race-Adverse Climate

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Abstract

The current lack of awareness and understanding about the work of diversity professionals in higher education manifests into missed opportunities for increasing knowledge, training, and practice for greater impact and may ultimately sabotage institutions' success in their commitments to diversity and inclusion. This qualitative study examines the challenges faced by diversity professionals when engaging in the work of promoting diversity and inclusion in institutions of higher education; how diversity professionals navigate these challenges; and if, and how, race and racism are addressed (or ignored) in their work. Recommendations for both future research and institutional practice are offfered

Keywords: Diverity Professionals, Diversity Work, Diversity and Inclusion

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Introduction

In the past decade, "diversity" and "inclusion" have become catch-all phrases, evolving beyond historical connotations of race and underrepresented racial groups alone. Rightfully, the concepts of diversity and inclusion now address difference of all kinds and the intersectionality of different identities (Crenshaw, 1990; Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017; Mueller & Broido, 2014). Unfortunately, as many higher education scholars have noted, the ever-evolving and expanding meaning of diversity has allowed many higher education institutions to co-opt the language of change and inclusion while sidestepping the difficult and uncomfortable challenge of specifically addressing race and racism (Ahmed, 2007; Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017; Wilton, Good, Moss-Racusin & Sanchez, 2015). Institutions often exalt diversity and inclusion as core values while neglecting to examine historical legacies and cultures of racism and exclusion that have affected campus climate, recruitment, and retention of racialized populations. Higher education continues to prioritize rhetoric of diversity and inclusion and hires more diversity professionals to do diversity work. Diversity work refers to responsibilities and tasks designed to create, cultivate, implement, and promote diversity, inclusion, and equity. If institutions are to fully realize their diversity and inclusion goals, more research is needed about the work of the diversity professionals they hire, what challenges they face, and how they address resistance to change, especially in regard to stratified race and racism in higher education (Ranero, 2011).

Purposes/Objectives

There is very little awareness and understanding about the work of diversity professionals in higher education. Despite doing the essential work of fulfilling institutional diversity and inclusion goals, most diversity professionals often go unnoticed and unacknowledged in popular media, scholarly literature, and on their own campuses (Ahmed, 2012). Even less studied is how the current socio-political and institutional contexts complicate the work of these professionals when it comes to addressing race, racism, and racialized populations.

Engaging in the work of promoting change for greater diversity and inclusion means combating resistance to change. However, within an environment where diversity and inclusion are embraced as a value but are used to circumvent addressing race and racism, it can be difficult to determine when diversity professionals are actually engaging in change efforts to promote greater diversity and inclusion for all and when they are being used to co-opt an agenda that touts a value without any real commitment to change. This study examines the challenges faced by diversity professionals when engaging in the work of promoting diversity and inclusion in institutions of higher education; how diversity professionals navigate these challenges; and if, and how, race and racism are addressed (or ignored) in their work. The goal of this study is to identify subversive strategies diversity professionals use to engage in work toward change, or "change work," particularly around racial diversity and inclusion, and to address the potential of the co-option of diversity professionals' work to further institutional, corporate, or political agendas. Better understanding the relationships between institutions, diversity professionals, and students allows us to better understand what change work is needed to ensure students are offered effective resources.

Significance

The current lack of awareness and understanding about the work of diversity professionals in higher education obscures our ability to support the work of these

professionals. This dearth in knowledge manifests into missed opportunities for increasing knowledge, training, and practice for greater impact and may ultimately sabotage institutions' success in their commitments to diversity and inclusion. Bensimon (2007) highlights the need to examine diversity work, noting that "if our goal is to do scholarship that makes a difference in the lives of students whom higher education has been least successful in educating (e.g., racially marginalized groups and the poor), we have to expand the scholarship on student success and take into account the influence of practitioners." (p. 445). This study addresses the work of diversity practitioners so that their influence, and the constraints to their influence, can be better understood, with the aim of improving resources for students.

Diversity as a Commodity in Performative Universities
Diversity has become a hallmark commodity in higher education. Institutions now incorporate diversity and inclusion in their mission statements, strategic plans, and boast it as one of their noteworthy attributes (Wilton, Good, Moss-Racusin & Sanchez, 2015). This has resulted in a national wave of institutional pledges to recruit more "diverse" students, provide resources for diversity initiatives, and to hire "diverse" faculty and staff. These institutional pledges are often viewed as evidence of an institution's commitment to improving diversity and inclusion (Clark, 2012).

Institutions are frequently treated as monolithic entities. All successful ideas, practices, and outcomes related to diversity and inclusion in an institution are usually attributed to the institution's senior leadership. However, there is often a schism between an institution's stated priorities and the successful implementation and sustainability of their goals. The work of creating initiatives, programs, and activities for increasing diversity and inclusion falls into the hands of a variety diversity professionals who also facilitate these programs and activities and manage day-to-day operations of these initiatives. Diversity professionals can range in position from faculty to entry level and mid-level administrators across the university and many engage in their work without significant contact with institutional policymakers.

There are notable disparities between the rhetoric of change and the practices necessary for real diversity and inclusion. These disparities are exacerbated by the gulf between policymakers and the diversity professionals implementing the diversity policies. While many institutions appear to strongly embrace diversity and inclusion both in policy and representation, deeper inspection often reveals significant *racial* disparities in terms of services, support, and feelings of inclusion (Bensimon, 2004; Williams, 2006).

This asymmetry between an institution's espoused valuing of diversity and its actions and outcomes can be explained by isomorphism. Cole and Salimath (2012) assert that organizations seek legitimacy and conformity to external norms or appraisal politics. Institutions achieve this by constructing symbolic flags such as diversity programming and language that often align with expectations of the law, accreditation standards, professional standards, and public demands. Dwyer and Gigliotti (2017) describe this phenomenon as well, explaining that isomorphism within institutions has taken root in large part because equity has become *normativ*e in society. However, one of the weaknesses of this kind of isomorphism related to diversity in higher education is that in an effort to subscribe to norms for competition or acceptance, institutions try to accomplish externally ascribed goals in spite of poorly designed, rigid, or ineffective appraisal systems (Cole and Salimath, 2012; Meyer and Rowan, 1970). Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) propose that when it comes to diversity programming and resources, many institutions engage in the most surface level of isomorphism.

Researchers of higher education such as Bensimon (2004) and Williams (2006) have used isomorphism to examine the practices of leadership and institutional approaches to increasing diversity and inclusion. Institutions may adopt diversity and inclusion efforts to signal they are legitimate, conveying an appreciation for the values of diversity and inclusion in their policies, language, and brochures. They may even have a critical mass of students or faculty of color. However, in spite of these outward manifestations, persons of color may in fact experience exclusion and marginalization within the institution. This can result in poor campus experiences and heightened attrition among students and faculty of color within the institution—an outcome obviously at odds with the institution's stated values of inclusion (Templeton, Love, Davis, & Davis Jr, 2016). Tools such as "Bensimon's Equity Scorecard" offer opportunities for institutions to move past these surface efforts to signal legitimacy and to truly assess college policies and practices so that equity is addressed in a way that is more transformational (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012).

As the literature on diversity and inclusion expands, there continues to be a predominant focus on narrowing the schism between the espoused goal of institutions and the realities faced by diversity professionals and students alike (Gigliotti, Dwyer, & Ruiz-Mesa, 2017). Empirical inquiry in this field often focuses on institutional initiatives, climate, and outcomes such as student retention, student academic performance, and graduation rates. As these outcomes are reliant on face-to-face work often implemented by diversity professionals—and less often by senior level administrators—more attention should be paid to lower-level diversity professionals.

Diversity Professionals and Their Work

For the purposes of this paper, the term *diversity professional* refers to a professional charged with the task of creating, facilitating, and/or supporting the development, execution, and sustainability of diversity and inclusion efforts. These efforts include broad campus-wide efforts and specialized initiatives and programs targeted towards specific groups.

Diversity professionals, also referred to as diversity workers, represent a relatively new professional category in higher education. Empirical studies on diversity professionals have tended to focus almost exclusively on senior administrators—namely Chief Diversity Officers. To date, the scholarly and practitioner literature has failed to capture (or even acknowledge) other types of diversity professionals in higher education (Dodge and Jarratt, 2013; Leon, 2014; Williams, 2013). As the vast majority of diversity programming is carried out by lower to mid-level administrators, staff, and faculty, with some schools having no Chief Diversity Officer, additional research is required (Barnhardt, 2014; Clark, Fasching-Varner, & Brimhall-Vargas, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Ranero, 2011).

The work. Higher education is entering a new era. In the wake of the so-called "post-racial" Obama years, our current era might be characterized as "anti-diversity" in comparison. Under the Trump administration, the U.S. Department of Justice has begun laying the groundwork for "a civil rights initiative to investigate and sue universities over affirmative action admissions policies viewed as discriminating against white applicants" (Lewis, 2017). In this type of socio-political climate, policies and practices that seek to address historical and systematic racism against people of color invite accusations of "reverse racism," "race-baiting," and "playing the race card" among purveyors of higher education. Diversity professionals in higher education thus have to be more politically savvy and strategic in the ways in which they address race and racism on college campuses, or risk increased scrutiny and political backlash (Nigel, 2016; Patel, 2015).

As the concept of diversity encompasses all varieties of difference, some elements of diversity initiatives face additional challenges. While people of different identities can experience common disadvantages and marginalization, studies indicate that perceptions of race and racism remain markedly divided along racial lines. Though a broader definition of inclusion and diversity can encourage empathy for people from all kinds of backgrounds, racism on campus is not a problem that can be addressed without a specialized approach.

There have been many studies on the strategies *senior-level* diversity advocates use to do change work on college campuses (Kezar, 2008; Leon, 2011; Smith, 2009). In a study of presidents and diversity in higher education, Kezar (2008) showed that institutional leaders utilize a number of strategies to carry out their goals, including mapping the political terrain; building coalitions of advocates and allies; using persuasion; bargaining and negotiation; mediation; and persistence. In my own research, I found that diversity professionals also use networking in and outside of the institution, reaching out to the greater campus to build and sustain their diversity and inclusion programming (Jones, 2016).

The goals of diversity professionals are inherently transformative. Their work is focused on changing campus culture and climate to be more welcoming for historically underrepresented and marginalized students. Ideally, diversity professionals would challenge and critique traditional campus systems, structures, processes, and practices that do not include, affirm, or advance persons from underrepresented and marginalized students in the course of their work. However, the extent to which diversity professionals can employ the aforementioned strategies, especially on behalf of racialized populations, has not been fully explored. As a movement outside of higher education grows to combat higher education's "liberal diversity agenda," our understanding of diversity professionals and how they navigate their institutional environment to make it more inclusive and equitable have become especially important as an area of study.

Challenges to Diversity Work
Existing empirical studies on diversity professionals, both inside and outside higher education, have been done internationally and with a gendered focus (Hunter & Swan, 2007). Still, the focus of these studies on the line between resistance to institutions and the potential for institutional co-optation provide a helpful foundation for the goals of this study. Drawing from Meyerson and Scully (1995), Blackmore and Sachs (2003) and Swan and Fox (2010), I identified some core common challenges and threats to the work of critiquing and pushing for change from within an organization. These threats are: 1) isolation; 2) delegitimization and devaluation; and 3) co-optation.
Isolation describes the phenomenon, common to diversity professionals, of working while disconnected from the rest of the organization. This may also include being cut off from support networks, information, and resources within the organization. A similar challenge is the *delitigimization* and *devaluation* of diversity work, within and without the institution. This devaluation may take the form of "humoring"—when senior officials decline to take the work of campus diversification seriously. Diversity professionals may also sometimes (or often) be regarded as auxiliary or non-essential employees. Their work may be more likely branded as needlessly political, which results in the distancing of diversity professionals from the campus at large and contributes to their isolation. In contrast, institutions that value diversity professionals and their work view include diversity professionals, their perspectives, and their suggestions as invaluable and essential to institutional change.

The final challenge to diversity work is *co-optation*. While diversity professionals seek to increase awareness and support efforts for change, they risk becoming symbols for—and enablers of— institutions and administrators who only embrace the language of diversity and inclusion for its surface level benefits. This study takes the position that the status quo is best challenged with critique. If diversity professionals are not engaged in institutional critique, their work is at much greater risk of being co-opted by the institution. This has the effect of appearing to support the status quo rather than of creating more effective student support for marginalized students.

To resist these common challenges, diversity professionals may practice strategies of subversion. *Subversion* is defined as a process by which the values and principles of a legacy system are claimed, critiqued, and contradicted in an attempt to transform the established structures of power, authority, and hierarchy of an institution. Subversion is usually more subtle, hidden, and nuanced than outright opposition (Olsson, 2016). However, as argued below, the line can be thin between subversion and co-optation. Care must be taken by diversity professionals to stay critical of their institution to ensure their resistance is subversive in nature.

This study seeks to investigate the line between resistance and co-optation to examine what strategies used by diversity professionals are subversive or if they are at higher risk of co-optation from institutions, corporations, or politicians.

Conceptual Framework

Meyerson and Scully (1995) offer a strong basis for this study's framework in their seminal work 'Tempered Radicals.' Tempered radicals are defined as "individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organizations" (p. 586). This describes the core tension for the participants of this study. Diversity professionals in higher education are hired to engage in change work, yet they cannot escape the reality that they are employees of the very institutions they are expected to change. As employees, they are expected to assimilate into the institutional culture they must critique.

While the theory of tempered radicals perfectly defines the positionality and perspective of most diversity professionals in higher education, the theory's ability to conceptualize or frame inquiry regarding strategies of resistance is both too vague and limiting.

In order to capture the experience of those who are "on the ground" doing this work in higher education, I chose a theory that spoke to the specificity of this work and the forms of resistance that can be exercised by diversity professionals. Swan and Fox (2010) offer three strategies of resistance that diversity professionals often use in their work: 1) reflexivity in the use of language; 2) bodies of resistance; and 3) technologies of resistance. Each of these strategies can be used to resist dominant ideologies and systems, but because diversity professionals are "tempered radicals" as defined above, these strategies also run the risk of being co-opted by their employers, as well as corporations and politicians.

Table 1.1 describes in detail what each of these strategies are, and how they can operate as subversive resistance or run the risk of co-option.

Table 1.1 Strategies of Resistance and Co-option

Strategy	As Resistance	As Co-option
Reflexivity in the use of language	Refers to a diversity professional's knowledge of the political nature of particular words, and the strategic choice to use certain language to create buy-in for different audiences.	The use of *distancing* language that is disconnected from the critical roots upon which diversity work is built. Preference for relying on the words 'diversity' and 'inclusive' and shying away from using language that explicitly addresses particular forms of critical theory, e.g., language focusing on race, gender, sexuality, social justice, etc.
Bodies of resistance	Refers to the embodiment of difference through one's identity and presence. Representation of people from a variety of backgrounds and not only compared with the 'normative' 'normative' i.e. white male able bodied. Simply being present challenges the status quo	Representation as tokenism, where the diverse 'other' becomes a symbolic tool and cultural capital for organizations.
Technologies of resistance	Refers to the mobilization of expertise in management and associated techniques that support the goals of diversity professionals	When expertise and techniques are borrowed or framed in ways that are also used by systems to oppress and justify disparities

Methodology

The research questions posed for this study were:
1) What strategies and tactics do diversity professionals utilize to accomplish their goals?
2) What challenges and barriers do diversity professionals experience in their work?
3) What strategies and tactics do diversity professionals utilize to navigate and overcome the barriers and challenges they encounter in their work?

Using a descriptive qualitative approach to data collection allowed me to gain a much more in-depth understanding of our participants' challenges and strategies in sustaining diversity efforts in the current socio-political climate. I conducted focus groups with a total of 26 diversity professionals. These professionals work in various four-year institutions of higher education across the United States and hold a variety of roles and responsibilities. Participants included multicultural and intercultural center directors, bridge program leaders, minority recruitment and retention officers, and senior chief diversity officers. Participants were selected regardless of social identity (race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality) and ranged in age from 25-58 years of age. The majority of our participants were persons of color (n=23). All diversity professionals were employed at four-year universities and colleges that ranged from high to low selectivity, with both public and private schools represented.

Snowball sampling was used to identify diversity professionals within their professional network. Snowball sampling (also known as network or reputational sampling), is a method of identifying participants accessing "informants through contact information that is provided by other informants" (Noy, 2008). The breakdown of participants is as follows:

- Three senior administrators
  - 1 Chief Diversity Officer
  - 1 Vice-Provost for Equity and Diversity
  - 1 Dean of Multicultural Affairs

- Twenty mid-level administrators
  - 8 Directors or Coordinators of Multicultural Affairs/Services
  - 1 Director for Inclusive Excellence
  - 2 Directors of Minority Outreach Programs (Upward Bound and Minority Engineering)
  - 5 Assistant Directors of Multicultural Affairs/Services
  - 1 Director of International and Multicultural Student Services
  - 1 Coordinator for LGBTQ Student Support
  - 1 Director for Hillel
  - 1 Director of Women Support Services

- Three entry-level staff members
  - 2 staff members for Multicultural Affairs
  - 1 staff member for Minority Outreach Programs

Of the 26 participants in this study, 23 identified as persons of color while 3 identified as white. 18 women and 8 men participated. Of the 18 women, 16 identified as persons of color, while 7 of the men identified as persons of color.

Using a semi-structured protocol that was tested on key informants within diversity administration, I collected data from 20 diversity professionals using virtual focus groups facilitated by a Zoom platform. Six (6) diversity professionals participated in individual interviews. The Zoom virtual platform allowed us to talk to diversity professionals from around the country simultaneously. To increase trustworthiness and rigor, interrater reliability checks were conducted on my coding method. Per Saldaña's (2015) suggestion, I created a codebook, describing each code with a definition and example quote. I had a professional colleague review my conceptual framework, list of definitions, and codebook. Then my professional colleague and I coded the same four masked interviews separately. Afterwards I compared our coding schemes. There was high agreement (over 90%) among all codes for all interviews. Where there were discrepancies, we discussed the different perspectives and rationale for assigned codes (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2010).

Analysis

Drawing on Saldaña (2015), I employed both first and second cycle coding. In my first round of coding I utilized thematic, in vivo, and descriptive coding. Using the above conceptual framework, I identified and categorized forms of resistance within diversity work and forms of institutional co-option to develop thematic codes. Using these thematic codes, I did a preliminary read of the data and then refined the code list to reduce redundancy. I then read through the data once again to capture emergent ideas and concepts not affiliated with the thematic code words. In my second round of coding, I used pattern and axial coding to further reduce redundancy and capture themes

across all of our data. It was important that I conducted data analysis in a way that honored the voices of those I interviewed while also employing my conceptual framework. I conducted a multi-layered analysis that included using the qualitative software program Dedoose to analyze the results outputs, looking at individual participant responses before doing comparative coding.

Findings

In this section, I present my findings on resistance within diversity work. First, I discuss some the challenges participants experience when it comes to change work, including the way that social political context and budget shape their work. This also includes a discussion of the emotional costs and risk of burnout for diversity professionals. Next, I review the emergent strategies of resistance these diversity professionals revealed as well as signs of co-optation.

Challenges to Change Work

Among the challenges faced by diversity professionals in carrying out their work are: socio-political context; resistance to diversity and inclusion; allocated budget; and emotional costs and burnout. All of these obstacles can have varying impact on the work on diversity professionals depending on their support system, regional context, institutional support for diversity and inclusion, institutional resources, and senior leadership.

Socio-Political Context. Nearly two-thirds (n=16) of our participants expressed that either the national, state, and/or local social and legal climate shaped how they framed diversity in the course of their work. One diversity professional had this to say about the social and legal landscape:

> But then there's other challenges, which is when you're trying to advocate for something. It means that you have to advocate for it and it means just the idea that you have to advocate for something means that it's not [a] naturally occurring process. And when you have to do that, sometimes you do hit some walls . . . some people don't think; some people believe we live in a post racial society. And that we don't really need to be doing a lot of these programs. [They think] that our minority students are getting more resources than other domestic students…. So, it's a little bit difficult sometimes within certain socio-political landscapes to kind of push these kinds of programs. (Assistant Director of Multicultural Affairs, Cranston State University)

Many of our participants (n=13) referred to sociopolitical resistance to programs and efforts that were perceived to target racial minorities specifically. While many surveyed institutions had major diversity initiatives, I found wide differences in institutional support for actual diversity and inclusion among students. Even in the most welcoming campus environments, participants recounted instances of resistance to racial diversity in particular. As one diversity professional explained:

> I think people are now using different language, relaxing requirements saying, "Ah well, we could use the economic factor," or another. And the bottom line is that [race] doesn't seem to be as important as it once was. And it should be because the numbers haven't changed that [much] in the sciences . . . there's this new post-racial atmosphere where people—I could be wrong about this, but I've heard other people say this too—It's like people saying, "Hey, what do you want? You had a Black president." (Director of Multicultural Affairs, Edofor University)

Institutions tended to de-emphasize race or omit it from discussion around diversity altogether on the basis of diversity's conceptual progression. This was voiced as a frequent concern among the diversity professionals surveilled. As one explained:

> I'm starting to worry that people won't really see the need for this type of thing eventually. Like, "Come on, it's 2017. Who is discriminating against you?" You know what I mean? "You got admitted to the program. What's your problem now?" I haven't heard that. But it's just something that when I think about why these initiatives are not supported, this is probably the thinking. (Director of Inclusive Excellence, Tassel University[1])

These statements demonstrate a pattern and climate that minimizes and discredits the problem of racial marginalization that may be occurring on campus.

There appears to be a pervasive feeling among those interviewed that racism is often regarded as a relic of the past. Participants expressed anxiety that their programs and initiatives were vulnerable because their work was perceived to be connected to a phenomenon that either no longer exists or is an undeserved entitlement for underrepresented racial groups.

The Budget. One important area strongly connected to this feeling of devaluation was the amount of funding and support provided to diversity initiatives by the institution. While over half our participants (n=17) felt their institutions provided adequate funding and support, almost half said that they were understaffed and underfunded. A third of our participants (n=8) have a staff of three people or less, and some were the sole representative for their unit/office. This lack of funding and resources can severely limit a diversity professional's ability to provide the type of support, outreach, and programming needed to fulfil institutional diversity and inclusion goals. As one diversity professional explained:

> To get the work done is difficult as well...because of budgetary challenges. 70 employees were cut including my assistant director, senior secretary, and graduate assistants so we've had to find creative ways to get even more work done than we were doing before. But I think that's becoming a real challenge because the folks who look at the finances just see that we don't bring in anything and so they base their value on being able to bring in revenue and they don't quite understand the importance of our work and how it's not meant to be revenue generating, it's meant to work with and develop people into good human beings. So, that's a real financial challenge and so as we experience—the school has experienced a fair amount of budget cuts over the last few years and some actual folks lost jobs. (Vice-Chancellor of Diversity and Inclusion, Calle State University)

Underfunding and understaffing also affects the amount of investment and time a diversity professional can commit to the actual work of improving diversity and inclusion.

Emotional Costs & Burnout. In addition to understaffing and underfunding, many of our participants struggled with boundaries between work life and personal life. Many

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[1] Pseudonyms were used for institutional names in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants and their institutions.

described the importance of being involved in both student and community events, whether they were held in the evening or on the weekend. Some of our participants believed their presence was necessary in almost every aspect of the programming and planning for their success:

> But we try and do the things ourselves…we find that it's hard to find somebody who's committed to do that type of work. We work all the time. She works on the weekends, too. And mostly because I have had more of my share of overtime work, which I don't get paid for. But you just do it because people have to graduate. I do believe in that effort. (Director of Minority Engineering Bridge Program, Towel University)

Most of our participants (n=20) spoke of this kind of dedication and passion for the work, as well as the costs that come with being so invested in the work. One possible consequence of this work model is the high risk of burnout. As one diversity professional commented:

> I think the one challenge that everybody talks about is this sort of not being burnt out. This work requires you to really give a lot, not just intellectually, but emotionally, when you listen to some of the students' stories of struggle and as you try to help them get through the school year or semester let alone graduate. So, I think those kinds of emotional—there's an emotional cost to doing this work that if you don't manage it properly can create burnout, and I think that happens at a lot of different places, especially when you're under-resourced. (Director of Multicultural Affairs and Services, Watch Technical University)

Strategies of Resistance
As the aforementioned challenges indicate, there are many barriers to institutional change. Diversity professionals must then incorporate strategies of resistance to both overt and subtle institutional forces that impede their efforts to cultivate diversity and inclusion. Resistance to institutional norms emerged as a theme among participants in different forms. However, as also noted above, the strategies of resistance shown by diversity professionals run the risk of co-optation from institutions, corporations, and politicians. The line between subversion and co-optation can be difficult to discern.

Building on Swan and Fox (2010) above, I identify the forms of resistance among participating diversity professionals as: 1) the use of discursive language in making allies, that is more neutral language that strays from the true social justice meaning of the idea that it describes; 2) the use of discursive language in partnering; 3) the use of the body to represent and give voice; 4) taking care of the body as resistance; 5) technologies of resistance; and, arguably (as argued below), 6) the use of friendliness and approachability as a method of effectiveness.

When it was clear that diversity professionals were implementing diversity initiatives with the aim of critique and challenge of the status quo, I classified this as resistance. Participants also, at times, exposed that their strategies for implementation had resulted in the co-optation of their work by institutions and corporations. I explore the difference below.

The Use of Language in Reaching Broader Audiences and Making Allies. The diversity professionals in this study make conscious efforts to make connections with—and offer support, activities, and services to—those who were indifferent or resistant to diversity programs at all levels. This strategy was coded in the study as "reaching out to the greater campus," because it often emerged when a diversity professional spoke

about their efforts to fundraise, recruit, persuade, and advocate for the program with senior administrators, students, faculty, and departments that had a history of being resistant or indifferent to diversity efforts.

By reaching out to persons not typically aligned with diversity efforts, diversity professionals expressed hope that they could raise the visibility of their purpose and efforts while also making connections to persons who could potentially become allies and collaborators:

> But for me it's all about relationships. I spend a lot of time meeting with different people, getting people to understand what we do. And impressing upon them that even though we can assist in these diversity issues that they have to take the responsibility of moving. (Coordinator of International and Multicultural Student Services, Olive St. University)

This process can often include the use of persuasion to impart to others the importance of inclusion of marginalized student populations. As one diversity professional described:

> And so, just trying to get outside of our bailiwick, our wheelhouses as we call it here…to work with, collaborate with, interface with my colleagues on the academic side to make sure that they understand that these students are all our students. And we need to take a very systematic approach towards doing what needs to be done to make sure that they're successful here. (Assistant Director of Multicultural Affairs, Granite and Lime College)

This language of inclusion came up frequently and appeared to be paired with efforts to reach out to different communities to highlight approaches to being welcoming and serving the needs of all. As one diversity professional explained:

> So, we prefer to think about creating an environment that's inclusive, where everybody feels like they belong. We have a number of international students that have been regularly coming to our stuff, people who were looking for the community that was present from the people who regularly participated in those activities, people from all different countries. We wanted to serve all of our graduate students so that all of our students would feel like [the program] is for them. (Associate Dean of Diversity and Inclusion, Eastern University)

One of the primary reasons diversity professionals reach out to the greater campus is to develop collaborative relationships with others. After making connections with people within and outside of the institution, diversity professionals discussed how they identified persons with similar goals that they could partner with to share resources or produce products that would meet the needs of everyone involved. Diversity professionals also used collaboration to help when employing other noted diversity professional strategies, such as coalition development, building allies, persuasion, expanding one's networks, and bargaining and negotiation. The following two quotes highlight how diversity professionals used language that connected multiple marginalized identities in order to create allies and coalitions:

> One of the things I really try to do is to get allies, so I try to connect with other social identities that also might be experiencing marginalization on the campus. There's strength in numbers. I connect myself with other groups or units on campus that I think can be helpful in us putting a cause out there that's

collective and not so individual (Assistant Director, Multicultural Student Affairs, Sunbeam State College).

Me, as a person of color, I might connect with our LGBT community and see what kinds of things that we have in common, and if we can find ways to move an agenda forward that's an issue that we have in common, but move it forward in a way that it becomes a sustainable part of the operation of the university and not just a one-stop program that happens and then it's over with. I think that's really key that we diversity professionals have to create ways to sustain the work we're doing beyond ourselves because then when we leave, we can know that's ingrained in what the university does and not that's what the university does because I was there (Director of Minority Affairs, Deep Southern University).

Discursive language tools, or creative and more neutral ways of describing politically charged concepts, were also used by professionals to overcome the challenge of limited funding and resources. Making allies and partnering can be a means to support diversity professional goals, but it is often framed as collaboration and what could be offered in exchange for needed support. As described by a diversity professional:

I think for me because of my relationships with a number of people on campus, I do a lot of collaboration. I mean, even if I don't have it in the budget I can pick up the phone and say to this office, whether it's housing, whether it's alumni affairs, whether it's the center for public service, whether it's the center for engagement and teaching, "I've got this idea, is there a possibility for collaboration? Is there a possibility that you can help fund? this?" (Coordinator for Minority Outreach, Coffee University)

Embodiment as Representation and Voice. In my interviews, participants used their very presence and representation of difference as a form of resistance to the status quo to platform for ideas that pushed change. Serving on committees was presented as one way to advocate for diversity and inclusion. As one of our diversity professionals explained:

Well, first of all, I try to be a part of the committee work that goes into that. I try to bridge gaps between the silo mentality that exists between academic affairs and student affairs. I serve—as a matter of fact I just came back from a conference presenting—in a national conference with one of our academic faculty. And I'm student affairs all day. (Director of Multicultural Affairs, Basin University)

Still others spoke of the importance of just being visible, of representing bodies of difference within spaces where they are not usually included. As one diversity professional described:

As a black female, I could be the angry black person. But I try to be very collaborative. But I know, as a black female in an institution which is a traditional old boy network, for lack of a better word, there are still some challenges there. There are very few African Americans—The Vice President for Institutional Equity is the highest ranking black official on this campus, and even she on a day to day basis is always trying to protect herself from folks who always challenge her wisdom, her experience, and the job that she's supposed to do. (Assistant Director of Multicultural Affairs, Six State University)

Other diversity professionals described using their embodiment of diversity as a way to role model for students from marginalized groups:

> So, I've met with the different student groups although not as much as they would like because just time, you know, and my own personal health kinda gets in the way, but engaging students, attending their meetings, attending events, creating an open door kinda policy, being visible outside of the center so, again, that's students who don't normally see themselves or don't think they have a place at this particular center see me and I'm a visible presence. (Director of Multicultural Student Services, Big Midwest State University)

> There are not that many people of color in higher positions at this institution or others for that matter, but you feel it more because it's a smaller school or a midsize school. So, often yes, I am the only person of color in those big meetings. (Director of Multicultural Affairs, Small Midwest State)

Some participants (n=6) also discussed how they used their presence to challenge, critique, and represent marginalized populations:

> [P]ersonally I just kind of keep focused on the fact that the work that I'm doing is important, and I try to reframe the...little bit of hostility...as the fact that I'm pushing people's buttons, and I kind of see that as my role to do that, especially with this program. But this is the work that has to be done. I also recognize as somebody who identifies as straight and an ally for the LGBT population specifically, I focus on how much harder this would be for LGBT people to be receiving those kinds of messages. And if I can be a buffer there and take those on, that's good. (Director of Multicultural Affairs, Ironbridge University)

Persistence and Taking Care of the Body as Resistance

In previous research (Jones, 2013; Lockwood, 2003), it was found that diversity professionals maintain a continued commitment to a cause or task in spite of obstacles. For minoritized diversity professionals in particular, this means using one's body to represent difference in places they are not desired or expected. In fact, it is often a testament to their commitment that diversity professionals continue to do their job in site of some of the challenges, such as insufficient and unstable funding. This attitude of perseverance and sticking to the task for a higher purpose also emerged among study participants, who identified network support as among the tactics used to help prevent burnout:

> I mean, for me, networking with other colleagues around the city... Lots of friends who I have called upon, you know, picked their brain on various issues. I mean if nothing else but moral support, just in trying to benchmark ideas on the things we're doing. I'm all about trying to network to make sure that if I can't get it this way, I'm gonna try to get it through some other way. (Coordinator for Minority Outreach, Coffee University)

Persistence can also become a form of co-option. Diversity professional risk exploitation in the absence of sufficient institutional support. Our participants discussed the emotional toil their work takes and how they take care of themselves to make perseverance possible:

I think, again, that relationship I've talked about outside of the institution and so finding colleagues at other outside helps because you can just bounce stuff off of them and then you say oh, well, they're going through this so they're doing this too, not that it's great, but it's a supportive environment where it makes you feel like you're not going crazy so to speak. (Director of LGBTQ Student Support Services, Southwestern State University)

Sure, burnout is definitely something I'm trying to [avoid]. I hit that wall every once in awhile and then in the morning I tell myself I just can't come in today. I can't see, let alone do some work. I definitely…because my staff deals with a lot of heavy issues, I'm pretty lax with them in taking flex time and here at 10:00, 11:00 or whether it's dealing with a student issue or being in our program, take the time you need to be mindful of your self-care and I have to do that sometimes myself, even as a workaholic. (Director of Multicultural Affairs, Basin University)

Technologies of Resistance and Cooptation

The diversity professionals in this study were very savvy and politically conscious about external demands and expectations for their offices. Most of the diversity professionals (n=19) used language, rubrics and reporting technologies that demonstrate the worth of their work and offices to institutions whose expectations of departmental worth don't account for successes that are more difficult to measure. One diversity professional framed the value of his office on a global scale:

I would say, most of my colleagues in other universities don't have a hard time connecting the whole concept of diversity and inclusion to the mission of their university because students are gonna leave a university, and it might be a little cocoon that they're in then, but when they step out into the world, whatever city they're in, they're gonna be exposed to people who are different from themselves and environments that are much more diverse than what they're used to. (Director of Minority Affairs, Deep Southern University).

Other diversity professionals explained how they ensure their office's successes *are* measurable in a way institution will understand. As one diversity professional explains:

I always make sure that the work that comes out of my office is connected tangibly to the mission of the university. It's always connected tangibly to the strategic plan and to the research that's out there that talks about and speaks to why diversity is important in higher education. So, I'm not sure if you're familiar with it, but there's a document that came out in recent years and through the new organization, Chief Diversity Officers, and they have about, I wanna say, 12 to 15 standards, so I think connecting to national standards is also critical because you have to see yourself in a national perspective, not in a singular "I'm a diversity professional at this one institution and I'm meaningless." Because if you think of yourself that way, you will be meaningless. But if you put yourself in the context of what's happening nationally, what the research out there is, what are the best practices that are working at colleges and universities either similar to yours or very different than yours? And so, benchmarking those kinds of things is gonna be important too. And higher education is very focused on research and data for how they improve and progress, but they're also, very connected to how our students can be successful when they leave. (Chief Diversity Officer, National State University)

In this way, diversity professionals use technologies to support efforts to change the status quo and push for greater diversity and inclusion while ensuring their work is recognized by their institution. However, these same technologies can also be used to devalue the work diversity professionals do. If a diversity professional does not adopt the technologies of benchmarking and using standards to show their worth, their contributions are perceived as meaningless regardless of their actual impact in support of marginalized students.

Other Signs of Co-Optation
As shown in the example above, the line between co-optation and subversion in the face of institutional expectations is often thin. For the purposes of this study, I drew the defining line depending on whether institutions were critiqued (subversion) or whether politically charged words were used while also embracing and affirming hegemonic language or ideologies (co-optation)—if, in other words, the strategies of navigating the politics of diversity did not critique, challenge, or change the status quo. I found three main areas where diversity professionals were at risk for co-optation: 1) adopting the language of diversity without reference to race; 2) self-censorship; and 3) acquiring cultural capital by validating corporate interests.

The Language of Diversity (Without Race). Most of our diversity professionals (n=17) confided that they felt their programming and initiatives in support of students of color had to be described in politically savvy ways to stakeholders because of the current political climate. 100% of the diversity professionals emphasized that none of their programs were exclusively race-based or targeted to specific racial groups. In fact, most (n=15) believed that their program's success could be attributed to approaches that helped secure broad-based support and institutional funding. The participants discussed institutional unwillingness to address or embrace diversity as a primary obstacle, the importance of providing open access to program activities and events, and how many diversity professional use of the term diversity *without* referring to race to combat resistance. As one of them explained:

> I would say the anti-affirmative action umbrella affects how we do our business here. Before we had to worry about those kinds of challenges, we would be much more able to use the resources that we had to maybe help people who needed the outreach. Now we have to be much more sensitive to making sure that we can help anybody who asks for it. We can't look partial at all. Even though the program seems to be—I mean, it's not explicitly—it does actually say for underrepresented students. But before, it was explicit. We were talking about American Indians, who are incredibly underrepresented. Whether you're talking about Latino or Hispanic—you might want to shape your global diaspora. But it was clear you were talking about that grouping. And then if you're talking about say African American—so it was clear. Now the term [diversity] is more global. (Diversity Professional, Blossom State University)

Most of the diversity professionals I interviewed emphasized the importance of racial diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, when pressed to discuss how they promoted diversity, the overwhelming majority (n=20) of our participants used a much broader and inclusive definition of the word. Four professionals reminded us that it was illegal to discuss diversity efforts exclusively in terms of race. Most of the participants believed that the use of this broad definition of "diversity" benefited their efforts to promote diversity by increasing faculty and administrative support and participation across the university. As one diversity professional explained:

> And it wasn't—the thing is, it was not just for underrepresented students. So, by having students from all races and backgrounds, it allowed people to be outside of school and find a connection, make a connection. . . I wouldn't say negatively. There aren't any like diversity kinds of things that we've had to deal with like some people in California might have. And I think that's because from the beginning, a lot of things that we did were inclusive. So [the programs] always have had a target for underrepresented students and even on the description of what [the program] is, we use this broadly narrowly term. So, we say broadly, any student, regardless of discipline, regardless of ethnic background, part-time, full-time, you can participate in [the program]. Narrowly, students who are underrepresented should consider this to be the home for them (Diversity Professional, Homewood University).

Other diversity professionals described using strategies that completely distanced them from the language of diversity altogether. They also at times described their rejection of any critique or challenging the status quo. One diversity professional said:

> The word diversity is not a positive, uplifting, "let's go have lunch" word. And so as we—what I tell [departmental faculty] is, "I don't come to take your job or try to figure out what you're doing wrong. I come to figure out what you're doing and doing well and how it's working and helping it sustain and retaining our students. Yet, you praise about doing it, but then are trying to make that thing contagious so other people are doing it as well." (Coordinator of Multicultural Student Affairs, Mica Technical University)

Self-Censorship. Many of our participants described having to "watch" how they phrased or expressed things, particularly related to controversial issues that felt strongly about. This included their participation in activities associated with activism and more explicit forms of social justice. Diversity professionals often felt that the students were better positioned to lead social justice activities:

> Michael Brown got killed in Saint Louis. And [our state] is not necessarily the most progressive place. And so we're just trying to figure out what's the balance between educating students and also trying to figure out what's politically appropriate. I mean, I would like to, for example, take students to a rally or the students had a candlelight vigil by themselves. I would like to have programs where we talk about police brutality without the police coming in and feeling like we're attacking them. We had one of those programs. I didn't plan it, but a student group did it. And the police came on the panel and they just felt like they were being attacked. (Director of Multicultural Affairs, Danzin College)

Another professional described similar uncertainty:

> I live in this community and so it's kind of a—it's a small town. I can't really say and do everything that I might feel the need or want to. So, it's kind of a strange balance. ... I think I'm kinda waiting for the students to take the lead a little bit and so if they will step up—I'm not gonna push anybody to do anything. But I if I see them doing it, then I'll jump on and see what my office or myself can do to support them. Because as students, I feel like they have a lot more leeway to do some things. And for me, personally, I can engage in any manner that I want to, you know, without necessarily playing the role of the administrator, just do it in my private live. (Coordinator for Minority Outreach, Coffee University).

Participants also described how posting things on social media could create more problems for them as diversity professionals if their comments were misconstrued. They were very conscious that they were first and foremost representatives of their universities. As one diversity professional explained:

> I think social media right now is a big thing and so how do you sort of maintain your standards of speaking out against discrimination, prejudice, etc., while knowing that… it can be used in a negative way. [It] documents everything that you say. So, students may share what you think is a personal email with other students or bring that to a dean or bring that to other colleagues. Now, sometimes it could be a good thing for the student because it's a way to show people that they might be getting discriminated against, but if you aren't doing discriminating against and people misinterpret that, their sort of negative reaction to a comment like if you're talking about privilege and that makes them feel uneasy, them coming back and saying that you're racist or you're sexist or whatever it is, so I think that's become a real big kind of struggle that folks in these kind of positions have to think more strategically about, sadly. (Chief Diversity Officer, National State University)

This type of self-awareness and self-censorship extends past forms of activism and expression on social media. Our participants also expressed how their self-awareness of others and their interests could lead to a willingness to adjust language for co-optation by corporate interests.

Acquiring Cultural Capital by Validating Corporate Interests. I found evidence that diversity professionals were increasingly drawing upon corporations to subsidize and support their efforts. This was often viewed as necessary because their institutions either refused to support their work or did not have the resources to support their work (Lipson, 2007). Often when diversity professionals engage in partnering with corporation it required a reframing of their efforts to align with and appeal to corporate interests. They explained:

> Yeah, so things like that, working with other businesses around the area who are invested in diversity and inclusion—but, again, they don't know how to do it and so that goes back to me being able to speak their language in a way that makes them feel good about giving that amount of money who helps a student stay in school. (Director of Minority Affairs, Deep Southern University)

Another diversity professional described a grant he proposed to a private corporation that addressed diversity in a way they found appealing:

> I'd been trying to float this idea for a diversity series for training students to use more inclusive language and be able to confront and moderate difficult conversations but no one [at the university] was really biting. So, I took the idea to a big telecommunications company in the communication area and pitched it as a program for developing better communication skills. Bam, it got funded for two years. That's just the way it is now. Whenever the university can't or won't do it, I try to figure out another way to package it for a company that might. (Diversity Professional, Homewood University)

> That demand of needing to help contribute to the university's financial health puts a lot more pressure on us financially, but for me to think about strategic ways that don't compromise my moral values, you know—but I feel like I can

> also do the work. So for example, that might look like offering diversity, again, trainings or workshops to the larger community we reside in to corporate businesses. Now, you can't do too much of that because that takes me then away from my job, what I consider the real part of my job which is helping out the...student community first. (Director of Inclusive Excellence, Tassel University)

Another diversity professional had the following to say about securing funding and the necessity of aligning with corporate interests:

> You might not see them, and they might all be, oftentimes or often, White, heterosexual, 50- to 70-year-old men, but some of them do care about diversity where their way of doing it is through giving money, you know, so how can I develop more of those relationships that, again, still falls out with my moral code, but that's the way that I think initiatives will be funded in the future? (Director of Multicultural Student Affairs, Taupe University)

Some diversity professionals even described changing their positions of being anti-corporation in order to support their work. As one diversity professional said:

> Before I got in this position, I was really anti-working with Corporate America, but me being in this position then meeting those people in those roles has opened me up to saying, well, people do care. (Assistant Director of Multicultural Student Services, Topaz State University)

In addition to adjusting their view of corporations in order to collaborate with them, one diversity professional has adopted the opinion that, though opposed to corporations, corporations may be necessary for supporting the type of diversity work they do:

> As we search for the financial stability, I am gonna have to think strategically about how can we generate revenue or how can I work with a donor or an alumni who happens to have some decent amount of cash and wants to give back but just need direction. So, I'm hoping to do a lot more of that. Not the part I enjoy about the job by far, but it has become a sort of necessary evil, if you will. And I think those are the main ways to get funded. So, like we have partnership, an example, with Macy's. (Director of Multicultural Student Affairs, Mango University)

Though a clear example of co-optation, the framing of corporate relationships as means to an end casts into question how participants viewed their own resistance. It was sometimes difficult to code other actions as resistant or co-opted because they straddled the line so well that they could be counted as either depending on the context, person, and the extent to which it was implemented by a diversity initiative. While many of the strategies of resistance can also be turned against the diversity professional, the use of deliberate language, friendliness and approachability, and accommodation were among those actions appearing grey in terms of where they fell between resistance and co-optation.

The Use of Language. Many of the diversity professionals I spoke to viewed deliberate choice of language as a necessary tool to accomplishing their goals. This raised the possibility that diversity professionals were using accepted institutional language for their work to elicit support and collaborative opportunities that will eventually support dismantling the status quo. There is inherent tension in the notion of doing outreach and making allies to dismantle hegemonic systems. As one diversity professional explained:

I'm also the only fairly youngish person so sometimes my age, and racial identity certainly, pose a challenge in terms of not necessarily being heard because I think that I am heard, but in terms of securing those resources and articulating in a way that people who don't identify with me on those levels get what I'm saying, so I have to be more strategic, put it in their kind of language, you know, that kinda way. (Assistant Director of Multicultural Affairs, Six State University)

Smiling and Making Friends. These concerns were closely related to the social etiquette involved in making allies and doing outreach. The use of "smiling" and "making friends" among different constituencies who were unfamiliar or potentially hostile to the work of diversity professionals was viewed as a necessity in the eyes of many, which had clear repercussions for the effectiveness of resistance to the status quo.

One diversity professional explained approachability as a necessity step for ensuring that her office and by extension herself were being seen as *human*. Some of the work of diversity professionals became not only reaching out on the behalf of, but simply humanizing the people being advocated for, and sometimes themselves. She explained:

> "Let's have lunch, let's talk, let's find similar interests." So that way the office is identified as being human and not always tackling these hard topics of which we have to do every day. But also: "Oh, you enjoy this; that's great." Or, "Oh, your son's a veteran; okay, that can pair up with this." Or, "You are interested in safe zone training; well, we're doing that." So, I think it's just being able to create these connections and putting yourself out into your own institutional community and outside community, as well. (Coordinator for Minority Outreach, Daniel State University)

This language of humanizing has obvious socio-historical racial connotations about the way people of color are often dehumanized and objectified. It also raises a question about the boundaries diversity professionals traverse when attempting to make allies. Where is the line between making allies and self-censorship? When does smiling and making friends become co-optation and pacification of hegemonic norms? These are questions diversity professionals straddle in their daily work. One diversity professional explained:

> Sometimes it's something as simple as just smiling. When you are in a role—and I think many of you can understand—where people think that you're the person that is always politically correct or is going to pick out or pull out some of their political incorrectness, or kind of gauge them and be like: "oh, you're a racist," which none of us say. But I think that's the kind of feeling some people get around is an uncomfortable—like I don't want to say anything to be offensive or a bigot or whatever else. So, I try to have individual conversations with as many people as possible, whether it's other staff members, faculty, higher administration, deans, provosts, of: "hey, this is what my alliance does and we do programs and would you be interested in pairing up?" (Assistant Director, Multicultural Student Affairs, Sunbeam State College).

Discussion and Implications

Harper and Hurtado (2007) and Harper (2012) highlight the new taboo of openly discussing race and racism in higher education, describing an unwritten code that has

widely been adopted to avoid creating discomfort and 'hostile' environments. This sort of race-neutrality that silences discussions of race has most often been cited as an unconscious tactic used by educators who unwittingly align themselves with white hegemony (Pollock, 2004; Castagno, 2008). In higher education, diversity professionals are purposefully using more distancing language that is disconnected from their change work as a tactic for protecting their programs and initiatives to avoid the political landmine of singling out race as a diversity goal. Additionally, as the profession of doing diversity work becomes more standardized, Ahmed (2006) and Smith & Mayorga-Gallo (2017) warn that diversity workers run into the potential problem of getting absorbed in bureaucratic technologies and rhetoric that are more concerned with the symbolic performance of diversity than critique and challenge dominant and exclusive policies and practices. When this occurs their strategies for doing change work—language reflexivity, their use of their body, and their use of technologies—can be coopted to maintain the status quo.

Diversity professionals are very committed and passionate about their work and engage in many forms of visible and invisible labor to accomplish their goals. This kind of embodiment and energy put into being the "face" of diversity while advocating for change can be tiring. While diversity professionals seek to increase awareness and support for change efforts, in doing this work of spreading the message, they also risk becoming symbols and enablers for those who only embrace the language of diversity and inclusion for its surface level benefits and have no understanding or willingness to address issues that impede real change. This could also lead inevitably to feelings of exploitation.

There are implications of this research for institutional policy. Institutions that really value diversity and inclusion and want to move towards real change must offer more support for the diversity professionals. In addition to professional development, staffing, and more robust funding for diversity work, institutions should begin to consider how diversity and inclusion can be embedded throughout the organization so that it is not relegated to a few. This would require space and processes that allow for feedback and evaluation of institutional progress, gaps, and barriers to improving upon diversity inclusion. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, institutional leaders should take care of diversity professionals. The work of dealing with emotional turmoil, conflict, and crisis is draining, especially for those who are members of an underrepresented group.

Historically, diversity and inclusion efforts have depended on some level of institutional funding to sustain their program's efforts, whether it is departmental, from a senior administrative office, or from the general college budget. Resistance and cooptation can sometimes be dependent on the support of senior leadership, institutional context, resources and how particular institutions and their actors use these areas to negotiate power and race (Squire, 2015). More research needs to be conducted on resistance and cooptation within this profession and context with these areas in mind to highlight obstacles to hegemonic resistance. When senior leadership is not fully invested in the value of diversity and inclusion, in times of economic hardship and recession, diversity initiatives and programs are likely to be reduced or cut. This makes the work of diversity professionals especially vulnerable to co-optation. Diversity professionals may be more inclined to bow to institutional expectations in the hope of reducing their own work's precarity.

What is less clear is whether avoiding controversial words and topics, aligning themselves to corporate interests, and being friendly and approachable are tactics that turn diversity professionals into pawns of their host institutions, or whether this is a

much more sophisticated way of dismantling the status quo from within. These questions need to be explored further so that we can think and act more critically about how diversity professionals can be better trained and supported in doing the work of institutional transformation.

Conclusion

Diversity has become a commodified asset for institutions of higher education and diversity professionals are hired to create, facilitate, and/or support diversity and inclusion efforts to signal institutional value in this area. As the literature on diversity and inclusion explodes, there continues to be a predominant focus on improving this schism between the espoused value of diversity and inclusion and reality. This study addresses this gap by providing grounded empirical support for both the work of Meyerson and Scully (1995) and Swan and Fox (2010). The findings demonstrate that diversity professionals are constantly straddling the line in their work between resisting institutional efforts to stifle change and allowing cooptation to occur in order for their work to continue. While many diversity professionals have found a way to successfully straddle this line, it should not be their burden to bear. Institutions have to do a better job of support these professionals and their work if they are truly committed to the value of diversity and inclusion to which they espouse.

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APPENDIX I

Diversity Professional Interview Protocol

1. What is your formal professional role? Please provide official titles.

2. What official responsibilities come with each of your official titles?

3. What type(s) of informal role(s) do you play as a diversity leader?

4. What <u>professional</u> challenges have you faced, as a diversity leader, within your institution?

5. What strategies do you use to overcome these professional challenges?

6. What <u>personal</u> challenges have you faced, as a diversity leader, within your institution?

7. What strategies do you use to overcome these personal challenges?

8. What <u>professional</u> challenges have you faced, as a diversity leader, from outside of your institution?

9. What strategies do you use to overcome these professional challenges?

10. What <u>personal</u> challenges have you faced, as a diversity leader, from outside your institution?

11. What strategies do you use to use to overcome these personal challenges?

12. What resources, from within your institution, have you drawn on to help you with the challenges you face as a diversity leader (both professional and personal challenges)?

13. What external resources have you drawn on to help you with the challenges you face as a diversity leader (both professional and personal challenges)?

14. What education and/or training have you received from within your institution that has helped you succeed as a diversity leader? This can be formal education/training or informal education/ training.

    a. What about from outside your institution?

15. Please list up to three skills you possess that you think help you in your role as a diversity leader.

16. Please list up to three skills, you would like to possess or would like to be more efficient with, that you think would help you in your role as a diversity leader.