Between Words and Deeds: Diverse Voices and the Communicative Constitution of Diversity

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BETWEEN WORDS AND DEEDS
DIVERSE VOICES AND THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION OF DIVERSITY

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the Organizational Communication Master’s Program
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, KY

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
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August 2017
BETWEEN WORDS AND DEEDS
DIVERSE VOICES AND THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION OF DIVERSITY

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For my Buddy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been the most challenging and fulfilling endeavor thus far in my life. That said, this project would not exist without a collection of contributors and supporters. First and foremost, I’d like to thank my diverse faculty members for affording me the opportunity to fill these pages with your words, power, and heart. Thank you for your time, patience, and vulnerability. My words will never fully capture the incredible work you do every day. You literally gave life to this project. Next, I am beyond grateful to my committee for the endless support and willingness to challenge me at every turn. Specifically, I’d like to thank both Dr. Angela Jerome and Dr. Laura Brown for your flexibility and kindness during this process. Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Holly Payne, for the countless hours of editing, honest feedback and compassion you brought to this partnership. I call it a partnership because without you, none of this would be possible. Not only am I a better scholar from having worked with you, but I am better person. I am not sure that I will ever find the words. I’d also like to thank the Western Kentucky Forensics Team for their incredible support and understanding throughout the season as I juggled my coaching duties and the demands of this project. Thank you for accepting me as family. My fours remain firmly pointed up! Additionally, I’d like to thank my friends and family, near and far, for loving me unconditionally, especially my mother and my brother for their emotional and financial support. I’d also like to thank Dr. Michael Chouinard, Dr. Jessica Furgerson, and Dr. Marko Dumancic for pushing me to challenge myself in so many ways, especially academically. Finally, I most certainly could have not done this without my better half, Gary Hutchinson. You have changed my life in so many ways. Thank you for constantly making me laugh and being my compatible rock throughout this crazy journey.
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While diversity is widely discussed throughout management literature, the impact of diversity management on diverse organizational members remains exceedingly sparse. Furthermore, the present case study uses a communication centered approach to address how diverse faculty member’s organizational experiences with diversity align with an academic institution’s publicly stated values of diversity. Through a critical interpretive lens, 15 semi-structured, in-depth interviews of diverse faculty members were conducted at a medium sized, Southern university (“Southern U”). Findings suggested that contradictions were heavily embedded into Southern U’s diversity communication resulting in a host of paradoxical tensions for diverse faculty members. This study explored the communicative constitution of organizations and how organizations constrain and enable diversity through communicative enactment.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The events that transpired on the University of Missouri’s campus have sparked a national discussion about diversity and higher education. Public protests coupled with legislative pressure, forced President Tom Wolfe and Chancellor R. Bowen to subsequently resign (Pluviose, 2016). Following their resignations, Michael Middleton, retired deputy chancellor, became the interim president. In a short time, he worked tirelessly to change the campus culture, starting with university faculty. Middleton contended that many faculty were hesitant to confront diversity issues because it mirrored the country’s inability to address issues of diversity, specifically race. As he notes, “It’s that deep. And most people don’t recognize the magnitude of the problem” (Pluviose, 2016, para. 6). In that time, there have been major efforts to enact changes across college campuses, especially in the way administrators, faculty, and students construct and talk about diversity policy and programs. To combat and prevent incidents of discrimination associated with racism, homophobia, sexism, and transphobia, institutions have begun developing Bias Response Teams (BRT). BRT’s are typically comprised of university administrators engaged in educationally-based prevention, investigation of reported incidents and punishing offenders (Snyder & Khalid, 2016). The belief is that BRT’s cultivate a “safe and inclusive environment [through]...advocacy and support to anyone who has been a victim or witnessed an incident of bias or discrimination” (Snyder & Khalid, 2016, para. 2).

Equally important, to increase diversity through recruitment, hundreds of institutions have dedicated positions to “Chief Diversity Officers” charged as the managers of academic multicultural centers (Zimmerman, 2016). Universities often place
expectations on their administrators to come up with more diversity-centered programs; while diversity programs may meet the momentary needs of campus culture, an ongoing lack of diversity persists as programs fail to cultivate real change. Groggins and Ryan (2013) assert that an increase in diversity programs does not equate to effectiveness, but tends to “fall short of goals, have unintended negative effects or are short lived” (p. 265). Furthermore, Lurie (2015) compiled a list of all the top colleges and research intensive universities in the country to analyze the racial demographic of faculty. Lurie’s findings were unsurprising, as white males collectively made up 60% of faculty at more than twenty of America’s top academic institutions. Recently, students around the country have called for more diverse faculty representation. The Demands, a website with formal demands made at more than fifty institutions, calls for several diversity changes on campus. At the top of nearly every list is “increasing diversity of professors” (Libresco, 2015, para. 3). Students also listed more trainings as part of their demands, for both faculty and students. At Sarah Lawrence College, students called for a new mandatory class on race that students would have to take before they graduate (Libresco, 2015). Even though response teams, CDOs, and trainings are critical to enhancing diversity on campuses, more transformative change is needed to facilitate the creation of organizational cultures that cultivate and value diversity. The reality for most institutions is that administrators and faculty remain primarily white and male. Thus, systematic changes remain elusive.

As a queer person of color working toward his second graduate degree, I can only attest to my own experiences. The fact that I have spent so much of my life in academia, one could assume I would have crossed paths with or been instructed by a few diverse
faculty. In all honesty, I have only shared a classroom with two faculty of color. What is most problematic is that I have come to expect this in my own journey. At times, the methods used on college campuses to discuss topics of difference are often superficial and rooted in tokenism. Snyder and Khalid (2016) perfectly espouse my feelings asserting “there has always been tension…between the rhetoric and the reality of diversity on college campuses” (para. 5). While much of diversity work is devoted to increasing student populations, very little attention is paid to diverse faculty members. In fact, Snyder and Khalid (2016) paint a perfect picture: “If the photographs of smiling students in college catalogs depict a multicultural utopia, the groups of students sitting in the cafeteria often tell a different story” (para. 5). This narrative is unmistakably real, and cause for investigation. Still, organizations neglect the lived experiences of faculty who must cultivate this “multicultural utopia.” They are typically the facilitator of diversity programs and policies; yet, many are jaded by the revolving “lip service” initiatives that do little to change the discourse. These troublesome discoveries require a deeper investigation that “directs attention to things that are not quite right” (Thomas, 1993, p. 47). This study asks questions that are rarely addressed in the extant literature. It points the scholarship into the direction of diverse voices that are rarely questioned about their experiences with diversity. More specifically, exploring their experiences can offer incredible insight into the important, but minimally studied, area of diversity communication.

As organizational communication scholars, we have the privilege and opportunity to investigate varying levels of phenomena. Unfortunately, organizational communication researchers tend to shy away from topics of diversity, especially race. Even more,
diversity-dedicated research typically hails from management scholarship. This approach, unsurprisingly, privileges the voices of managers and organizations, rather than the diverse voices being managed. Allen (1995) called for more diversity-related research in the discipline over twenty years ago. Although much has changed in organizational communication, research focused on diverse voices is still anemic. Fine (1996) contends that studying diversity and striving to give voice to participants of difference is “often identified as an academic fad, especially when newer research methods are employed” (p. 489). Thankfully, organizational communication scholars have shifted to interpretive and critical paradigms that expose power structures. A few scholars have called for more work in communication to unearth some of the deeply rooted “cultural stereotyping and racism […] in the institution and [that] affect work process” (Aries, 2004, p. 180). Recently, Gallant and Krone (2014) point to the expectedly problematic discursive debates “on how organizational members experience and enact [diversity] programs” and the continued hierarchical connection to human difference (p. 39). This study aims to unpack how diversity is experienced and enacted in communication by contributing differently to the scholarship. Critical scholars Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, and Nkomo (2010) shift from a diversity management perspective and argue for a deeper understanding of how “diversity is made sense of and experienced by a diverse workforce itself” in an organizational context (p. 17). Methodologically, diverse voices have been virtually silent in the diversity management literature. Standpoint Theory shaped the initial stages of this research where marginalized bodies “frame research questions and concepts, develop designs, define what counts as what” (Wood, 1993, p. 12). In fact, standpoint is sufficiently suited for diversity communication work because marginalized
individuals can understand the perspective of both dominant and non-dominant groups (Allen, 2016). That is, they are attuned to the politics of “oppression and discrimination” (p. 12). This study recognizes that diverse voices should be privileged when discussing diversity work. At present, diversity management employs a managerial focus which privileges the white male perspective, rather than diverse voices. The project shifts the focus from diversity management to a communication centered approach. Diversity communication offers a unique opportunity to focus on diverse voices, and examine the dual role constraints experienced through communicative enactments of diversity work. I explore this phenomenon through a case study analysis at an institution of higher education because faculty members are simultaneously managed and serve as managers of diversity throughout the institution. Furthermore, studying this dual role through a communicative framework provides “thick description, is grounded, is holistic and lifelike, simplifies data to be considered […] illuminates meanings, and can communicate tacit knowledge” (Merriam, 2009, p. 49). I argue that diversity communication is “almost ripe,” meaning that the current academic culture is uniquely suited for the taking. Academic institutions purport to be the leaders in all things diversity. As such, this project is meant to “weigh information to produce judgement” and serve as the “final and ultimate act of evaluation” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 375). It challenges these warrants by extracting truth from the voices of faculty who enact and experience diversity communication. In doing so, this case analysis created a starting point in the legitimacy of diversity communication. This study explored several areas of theory such as the Communicative Constitution of Organizations and communicative enactment and what that means for understanding two points: the lived experience of diverse faculty
members, and how systems of higher education communicate about diversity. This research was guided by two overarching research questions:

RQ1: How do diverse faculty’s organizational experiences with diversity align with Southern U’s diversity communication?

RQ2: What, if any, tensions or paradoxes are experienced related to Southern U’s diversity communication?

To answer these questions, a case analysis and interview of faculty were conducted. Chapter 2 is an expansive literature review that synthesizes the historical breadth of research on diversity management and overall diversity within organizations both empirically and theoretically. Chapter 3 contains the methodology for the project and provides a thick description of Southern U’s organizational commitment to diversity. Chapter 4 describes the thematic findings of the interview data, and Chapter 5 contextualizes the findings and explores the practical and theoretical implications of an emerging field. Finally, Chapter 6 offers reflections on the project including limitations of the research and avenues for future work.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The national discussion on diversity remains complexly situated as disparate definitions continue to emerge. In modern American discourse, diversity is ambiguously and explicitly used in everyday language (Bell & Hartman, 2007). As a result, the term diversity faces considerable scrutiny from critics because it lacks a universal definition. Bell and Hartman (2007) assert that diversity research is sparse largely because empirical data measurements of American’s perceptions and experiences are difficult to collect. Still, many consider diversity to be the “buzzword” of choice in contemporary politics (Allen, 1995). For communication scholars, diversity is firmly entrenched in organizational and management scholarship. The current literature review attempts to disentangle diversity and offer a clearer understanding. This chapter begins with a historical synthesis of diversity definitions in organizational communication. I then explore how diversity is contextualized in organizations, and more broadly communication. Specifically, I examine the positioning of diversity in management and its connections to whiteness. Finally, this study examines the intersections of diversity work and communication.

Defining Diversity

Early on, diversity was tenuously referenced to describe the rapidly changing demographic of the American workforce (Bell & Hartman, 2007). Two critical studies commissioned by the Hudson Institute, Workforce 2000 and Opportunity 2000, examined the demographic changes and cited an increase of women and minorities entering the workforce (Carrell & Mann, 1993). By the late 1980’s, the term diversity was widely used in organizational literature. Within organizational scholarship, diversity provides us
with an alternative framework to discuss the incorporation of underrepresented groups into the workforce (Long, Doer & Steward, 2016). Traditionally underrepresented groups contain “members of racial and ethnic minority groups and women…who fall under a protected class status” (Kaiser, Jurcevic, Brady, Major, Dover & Shapiro, 2013, p. 505). Over time definitions of workplace diversity have broadened to include “sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, socioeconomic status, and country of origin” (Irizarry & Gallant, 2006, p. 44; Madera, 2013). These definitions take from the Equal Opportunity and Employment (EEO) and Affirmative Action (AA) policies which include legal requirements and reporting of organizational demographics (Irizarry & Gallant, 2006).

Beyond the operational definition, diversity functions in a far more complicated manner, allowing for many different interpretations. Ditomaso, Post, and Parks-Yancy (2007) offer a more fluid definition describing diversity as inclusive of “cultural or demographic characteristics… [which are] salient and symbolically meaningful in the relationships among group members” (p. 474). They relationally define diversity in reference to groups rather than individuals. Individuals naturally assign meaning to groups and people based on difference which are then categorized socially and structurally. When these categories are produced, and reproduced as distinctions of structural, social and organizational in-groups and out-groups, the term diversity alludes to a “group-based inequality…subject to potential challenge” (Ditomaso, et al., 2007, p. 475). The core of diversity themes in an organization vary based on members’ understanding of diversity and their level of decision making (2006). For instance, Carrell and Mann’s (1993) study examining workplace meanings of diversity programs and
policies found that most participants were familiar with the meaning of workforce diversity within their organizations; however, across organizations “there was no consensus […] on what that meaning really is” (p. 762). Moreover, diversity is most tangibly defined as it applies to group processes within work units. This focus on productivity concretizes diversity into measurable concepts of managing and creating diversity through programs and policies that are goal oriented. As an instrument or tool, diversity helps organizations enhance interactions with internal organizational members and external stakeholders (Gallant & Krone, 2014). Organizational discourse situates diversity as an enhancement to the organization that is beneficial and manageable (Carrell & Mann, 2007). Witherspoon and Wohlert (1996) explain the process of “valuing, managing, and increasing diversity, as fundamentally a change effort […] where researchers may become change strategists and role models for change agents” (p. 375).

**Diversity communication.** Similarly, communication scholars have struggled to craft an adequate definition of diversity in organizations. The inability to define diversity stems from an overall lack of research attending to diversity-specific communication. However, research that does attempt to define diversity tends to be mostly conceptual in nature. Therefore, it is important to understand how communication scholars define diversity before extracting a purposeful definition for this study.

Communication scholars have expanded the definition to incorporate a theoretical understanding of workplace diversity rather than the strict operational meaning found within management literature. This aligns with the idea that organizations are not static entities, but ever changing. More specifically, *organizations* are communicatively comprised entities made up of individual actors; *organizations* are fluid, and constantly in
a state of change and based on the values of those in power. Likewise, diversity definitions within an organization are fluid and contingent upon the values of those in power (Irizarry & Gallant, 2006). To this end, diversity is identified as a “social construct, translated and enacted in social practice” (Long, et al., 2016, p. 178). Diversity and diversity actors work to produce and reproduce this social construction through communicative processes. Next, diversity is most often defined as a point of “organization change” containing several layers of difference that move beyond policy, to include ethics of social justice and equality (Witherspoon & Wohlert, 1996). Allen (2016) pulls from the working definition to equate diversity with difference suggesting its influence on organizational member attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and interactions. In fact, difference is present within many areas of an organization including norms, values and beliefs, but also manifest in recruiting and retention practices. Other researchers posit diversity as meaningful negotiation. Organizational diversity facilitates sites of contest where multidimensional forces of difference communicatively “come together and are negotiated” (Mease, 2016, p. 60). In a sense, diversity as negotiation is exhibited through organizational communicative enactments carried out in how we construct, affect, and organize difference. Along those same sentiments, Okoro and Washington (2012) define diversity as a positive motivational tool meant to solidify the “human and intellectual capital of [organizations] through…communication and negotiation” (p. 59). (See Table 1).
Table 1

Definitions of Diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational Definitions</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups and women</td>
<td>Carrell &amp; Mann (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Definition expanded to include “sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, socioeconomic status, and country of origin”</td>
<td>Madera (2013); Irizarry &amp; Gallant (2006, p. 44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cultural or demographic characteristics… [which are] salient and symbolically meaningful in the relationships among group members</td>
<td>Ditomaso, Post, &amp; Parks-Yancy, (2007, p. 475)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• As an instrument or tool, diversity helps organizations enhance interactions with internal organizational members and external stakeholders</td>
<td>Gallant &amp; Krone (2014)</td>
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<th>Communicative Definitions</th>
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<tr>
<td>• “valuing, managing, and increasing diversity, as fundamentally a change effort […] where researchers may become change strategists and role models for change agents”</td>
<td>Witherspoon &amp; Wohlert (1996, p. 375)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “social construct, translated and enacted in social practice</td>
<td>Long, Doerer, &amp; Stewart (2016, p. 178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• difference that influences organizational member attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and interactions</td>
<td>Allen (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• facilitates sites of contest where multidimensional forces of difference communicatively “come together and are negotiated”</td>
<td>Mease (2016, p. 60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• positive motivational tool meant to solidify the “human and intellectual capital of [organizations] through…communication and negotiation”</td>
<td>Okoro &amp; Washington (2012, p. 59)</td>
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</table>
In short, there remains no agreed upon definition of diversity within organizational communication. However, I argue that communication scholars have created an evolving definition of diversity that only needs reifying. This study recognizes the importance of meaning in organizational communication processes. Irizarry and Gallant (2006) agree with my supposition and argue that “attention to the meaning of diversity communication in organizational contexts” (p. 44) is a critical area that deserves examination. Without an adequate synthesis, diversity communication will continue to be under researched. Instead, a conceptual meaning would equip organizations with opportunity to concretize frameworks outside of legal definitions. At the same time, it would still allow organizations to craft their own meaning of diversity. For the purpose of this study, I use the term diversity to describe the conceptual alternative to legal mandates that seeks to incorporate and value marginalized groups including but not limited to sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, disability, gender, transgender, gender-nonconforming, class, religion, and nationality. Concomitantly, organizational diversity communication refers to the dialogical and conceptual organizational change efforts to address the construction of whiteness, power and the negotiation of individual and organizational difference. Equally important, diversity communication demonstrates how organizations communicatively enact and perform diversity. As such, this study will refer to organizational diversity communication as simply diversity communication. The importance of defining and assigning a name to this type of communication cannot be hyperbolized. In offering my own definition of diversity communication, I hope to add legitimacy to an emerging area of the field.

Managing Diversity
Within much of the literature, diversity management is most often framed through a business lens, necessitating its value in terms that emphasize benefits and enhancing the organization. (Allen, 2016; Fine, 1996; Witherspoon & Wohlert, 1996). The business frame largely emerged because organizations, and especially corporations, saw the globally diverse marketplace as fertile ground offering “a competitive advantage, among other benefits” (Madera, 2013). Several sources mention diversity and “competitive advantage” as a legitimacy tool for organizations. Kirby and Harter (2001) refer to this type of framing as strategic: one that utilizes a business model approach and highlights the importance of implementing diversity policies and programs. At the same time diversity proves difficult to define organizationally, it is often seen as an “economic imperative and economic asset” (Allen, 2016, p. 10). Other noted benefits of diversity include but are not limited to “maintaining a heterogeneous workforce that provides new and fresh ideas, improving firm growth, enhancing firm image, and gaining a pool of valuable resources” (Madera, 2013, p. 125), or more profit-based reasons aimed at market share retention, cost reduction, and improving production (Kirby & Harter, 2001).

Irizarry and Gallant (2006) assert that diversity is transformed into a “productive logic” focused on outcomes, “where management communicatively creates diversity management systems” (p. 45).

As the emphasis on the business model expanded, more and more literature focused on the productive nature of a heterogeneous and diverse workplace through diversity management. In fact, several mainstream scholarship offers best practices, organizational tips, and promote diversity initiatives and trainings as essential to improving an organization’s bottom line. What’s more, critics of the business model
often admit that corporate structures are contingent upon a productive order, and diversity management is subject to that order. Consider that organizations were historically homogenized places of interaction; thus, the heavy focus on management in a changing society is a logical choice. Allen and Ashcraft (2003) also acknowledge this reasoning noting “we sympathize with the impulse to build a business case for valuing difference, as practical appeals are more conducive to timely social change” (p. 16). As a result, workplace diversity is, in effect, operationalized through the managerial gaze to meet organizational needs. Moreover, managing diversity involves overseeing policies, programs, initiatives, and interactions between diverse organizational members to establish a “productive order” (2003). While Allen and Ashcraft (2003) accept the fundamental purpose of organizational functioning, they expose the notion of diversity management as production oriented, asking “productive for whom?” (p.16).

To understand the question posed by Allen and Ashcraft (2003), look no further than the demographic makeup of diversity management within organizations. First, the majority of management scholarship employ the perspective of the “white-male” manager as the overseers of diversity. Diversity management research privileges the dominant group perspective, neglecting voices that showcase gender, racial and ethnically diverse experiences (Fine, 1996). To be fair, this bias is unsurprising because there is a dearth of diverse voices in positions of power in the majority of organizations. Although, as Allen (1995; 2016) explains, organizations have increased diversity; yet, dominant groups still hold more organizational power than non-dominant groups. Additionally, values and knowledge constructions held by dominant groups tend to be privileged in organizations (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; 2016). Moreover, organizational
studies implore a neutral standpoint that eliminates an emphasis on difference, and situates white males as the authority group (Allen, 1995). In this case, management serves as the privileged subject and diverse members as the managed objects “bearing the stigma of difference” (Sharp, Franzaway, Mills, & Gill, 2012, p. 559). Furthermore, management, whiteness, and masculinity are all constructions of power; yet, most of the research focuses on upholding these constructions by enacting managerial control over diverse people. For this reason, the white male perspective is concretized within organizations and management scholarship and becomes the normative reference for all other diverse groups (Zanoni et al., 2010). When the focus is on white male privilege, the tendency is to offer up a racial comparison, but intersectionality and other points of difference suggest that management affects all marginalized bodies (Allen & Ashcraft, 2003). In other words, construction of the white privilege/racial oppression binary, ignores the effects of whiteness on difference such as gender, sexuality, religion, and disability.

The white male perspective is frequently identified in a variety of organizational contexts. Aries (2004) explains how health care organizations suffer from inherent bias where managers are “predominantly white and male [who] assume affirmative action and minority hiring into lower-level jobs resolve conflicts” (p. 173). In a similar vein, Witherspoon and Wohlert (1996) describe the engineering culture studied in their research on communication strategies and organizational diversity, as overwhelmingly “Anglo” and “male” for three decades. They point to homogeneity as the reason “inertia and resistance to change have characterized this organization” (1996). Kirby and Harter (2002) echo these sentiments observing that management literature privileging “a black
businessperson or an individual with disabilities who wants to better manage his or her white (or able-bodied) workers” rarely gets written, if at all (p. 40).

Beyond the underlying privilege of white males, diversity management is linguistically problematized because it situates diversity as a tool to be managed. In a call to organizational communication scholars, Fine (1995) problematizes the managerial perspective demonstrating that we should veer away from diversity as a tool to be managed, but one that seeks to transform organizations from within. As we’ve learned, managing diversity treats under-represented groups as resources to be managed, and “persons as objects” (Allen & Ashcraft, 2003, p. 17). What’s most problematic is that those managing underrepresented groups come from the dominant group who also control decision making power. In this respect, discourse that purports to embrace and appreciate diversity “seems empty and patronizing” (2003, p. 16). Diversity communication frequently ignores the politics at play, instead of challenging managerial constructions of difference. Ultimately, we must unearth the political dominance of the majority and expose the failure of organizations to become sites that cultivate true diversity communication (Sharp et al., 2012).

**Diversity and Whiteness**

Urciuoli (2010) examines diversity through a communicative duality and points to the association of “diverse in relation to non-diverse [...] as the concept of markedness where [...] a marked element is not simply different but opposed to the unmarked” (p. 49). Moreover, Urciuoli explains the historical relationship between diversity and whiteness suggesting that diversity represents the “marked” category where whiteness remains the “unmarked.”
Nevertheless, when organizations situate diversity as something that is worthy of management, it also positions diversity as impression management. The focus resides in producing a proper image of whiteness attached to an organizational “image” instead of constituted within the organization (Ahmed, 2007). More importantly, diversity related work centers on altering the “perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations” (p. 605). Grimes (2002) offers a sound understanding of whiteness perspectives illustrating three primary areas found in diversity management scholarship: interrogating whiteness, re-centering whiteness, and masking whiteness. Through _interrogating_ whiteness, research is aimed at “naming, unmasking, and de-centering whiteness” while privileging and diverse voices (p. 390). To interrogate whiteness is to be aware ones’ own privilege and challenge the powerful dominant ideologies produced by whiteness. In fact, interrogating whiteness exposes tactics such as denial where issues of diversity are rationalized away based on a white male reality. Similarly, _re-centering_ whiteness recognizes difference. However, recognition is often rooted in stereotypes with surface level changes being enacted. Unlike the interrogating whiteness perspective, Re-centering ignores systemic and structural reifications of power for an image of inclusion based on a white male perspective (Grimes, 2002). In several ways, re-centering whiteness refrains from challenging deeply embedded assumptions about marginalized others, and situates alternative beliefs and approaches as inappropriate. Lastly, _masking_ whiteness works to uphold whiteness as “invisible and natural” (p. 396). In most contexts, masking whiteness is more about what is unspoken or ignored. In this case, whiteness becomes the “way things are” and eliminates discussion surrounding diversity.
What’s worse, minorities are expected to assimilate into the dominant ideology to succeed, yet are rarely afforded the privileges that come with being white.

**Diversity Work**

An organizational commitment to diversity can resemble a spurious attempt to manage a crisis surrounding discrimination complaints or negative press related to issues of diversity. As a result, a commitment to diversity is organizationally necessary, and most often resembles a declaration across the entire organization internally and externally “in a formal written statement, or documents such as a Workplace Diversity Plan” (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014, p. 543). Additionally, diversity measures offer a way for organizations to bring EEO and AA requirements together with their own commitments to morally embrace diversity (Irizarry & Gallant, 2006). In this instance, organizations can construct their own meaning of diversity communication as a commitment difference. Thus, *diversity work* refers to the convergence of the moral and financial rationale for diversity which guides the negotiation of programs, policies, structures, initiatives, strategies. Management does more than manage diverse organizational members, they also enforce diversity structures established by the organization. It should be noted, diversity structures constitute more than just strategic objectives, they are cultivated and nourished through diversity communication (Mease, 2016). Diversity structures have many different functions, but they mostly serve to develop diversity-based committee groups, enforce mandatory training on diversity, and highlight achievements and milestones associated with diversity (Kaiser et al., 2013). Diversity training programs are frequently used by organizations as the obvious step in diversity discussions. Trainings are organizationally enacted, often mirroring “online modules, classroom-based training,
videos, discussions, role-plays, simulations and exercises” (Madera, 2013, p. 125). Regardless of how the diversity initiative is instituted the benefits are commonly understood to uproot and challenge our perceptions of discrimination, pointing out biases that are present, and improving the trust held by the minority groups (Kaiser, et al., 2013). Despite this knowledge, research examining the “implications for everyday communication about diversity among employees who must work with and implement these policies” is woefully lacking (Gallant & Krone, 2014, p. 40).

**Individual versus Organizational Discrimination**

Although diversity structures provide organizations with a means of addressing diversity issues, some argue against effectiveness of these programs. In fact, they reject the notion that diversity structures offer a fully developed remedy. Irizarry and Gallant (2006) assert that diversity programs may detract from valuable diversity communication aimed at organizational transformation. Along this same line, Prasad, Prasad, and Mir (2011) posit that diversity work is most often used to mitigate organizational change by “highlighting cosmetic [differences] and creating a new kind of acquiescence and docility in organizations” (p. 705). The goal of diversity communication is to expose deeply embedded organizational problems related to power and inequality. Soldan and Nankervis (2014) agree with this assertion, arguing that many diversity training programs are counterproductive to their original purpose which undermines their diversity communication. For example, their study on public service organizations found a gap between the rhetorical policies reinforced by diversity managers and the reality faced by employees. They conclude that training programs worked to increase employee awareness of diversity and supported working alongside organizational members from
diverse backgrounds. However, there was a failure “to address issues of assimilation, dominance, or privilege and […] deeply ingrained attitudes within the agency about oneself and toward different others” (p. 551). Diversity initiatives tend to unintentionally situate individual over organizational oppression which ignores larger institutional inequalities that take place. As we have seen, workplace diversity, may at times, subscribe to legal policies such as EEO=AA to signify an organizational commitment to diversity. Unfortunately, this oversight privileges individual discrimination over deeply embedded organizational inequality (Sharp et al., 2012). To illustrate, individual discrimination is an interpersonal interaction resembling overt actions that are often in contention with legal and organizational policies (Branton & Payne, 2017). An example would be if a supervisor repeatedly used a homophobic slur to address an employee. In this case, the organization would view this as problematic, isolated and not indicative of the organizations value of diversity. By comparison, organizational inequality is typically covert and deeply rooted. For instance, an organization may claim commitment to the promotion and retention of gender diversity, yet have no women in positions of power. How does the organization describe this organizational inequality? What’s more, critics argue that diversity initiatives place the onus of change interpersonally which obfuscates the organization (Fine, 1996). Similarly, Soldan and Nankervis (2014) demonstrate how employees reconcile organization fairness of diversity policy and practices: “the policies are fair, but the implementation of them is not always fair, and that practices do not fit well with the diversity plan” (p. 546). The theme of fairness is ironically significant because diversity programs are strategically positioned to promote fairness (Kaiser, et al., 2013). In another example, Aries (2004) documents the perspective of senior
management at a healthcare facility to measure how the hospitals contributed to the inefficiency of diversity initiatives. For instance, managers thought “the problems arose on an individual basis but were not systemic problems that required managerial attention” (2014, p. 178). This effectively explains senior managements’ empathy gap with their line managers and employees; furthermore, it supports the Witherspoon and Wohlert (1996) observation of “the most powerful organizational actors becom[ing] institutionalized as the organizations reality” (p. 379). More importantly, communication specific research analyzing diversity policies and the interaction in everyday practices is needed. A critical approach towards organizational diversity communication is essential, in so much that it uproots the “micro and macro level of dominance and power” to examine the everyday interactions and enactments of diversity (Allen, 1995, p. 149.)

**Critical Approach to Diversity Communication**

Much of the research surrounding diversity within organizational communication has steered away from a strictly critical approach. However, distancing oneself from the critical approach is a disservice to this area of communication because diversity is inexplicably linked. In fact, Fine (1996) argues that the critical approach is synonymous with diversity because the “social construction of gender, race, and class” expose diverse identities within multicultural organizations (p. 488). Allen (2014) sides with Fine asserting that researchers should “analyze issues of power and control […] during specific communication events […] fulfill[ing] a need to systematically examine organizational actors” (p. 149). Addressing power is necessary to a critical paradigm. It seeks to expose underlying systems of subtle control. For decades, management or “managing” has served to progress the scholarship where the word manage refers to “to
control the movement or behavior of” organizational members (Kirby & Harter, 2001, p. 123). The critical approach is not relegated to only race or ethnicity. For example, sexual politics of gender works well with the critical approach to challenge business case approach to unearth the power structures that undergird organizational life. Sharp et al. (2012) contend “gender is relational” and “always political” which includes “the sexes [races, castes, classes] as well-defined and coherent groups and thus subject to politics” (p. 557).

Additionally, neutrality is consistently found in diversity literature, especially from the managerial perspective. Even neutrality from the researcher’s perspective is problematic because it is enacted “out of the knowledge produced by those who manage and control” (Sharp et al., 2012, p. 566). Kirby and Harter (2001) offers this summation of neutrality: “the metaphor conceals the people involved; managing diversity linguistically sets up behavior without actors fail[ing] to recognize a diverse workforce” (p. 123).

**Communication centered approach.** With much of the scholarship stemming from management and business, extracting areas that specifically reference communication might serve as definitive starting point. Allen (1995) bridges the gap between management and communication in diversity. Allen offers Hopkins and Hopkins’ (1994) model linking communication effectiveness and the integration of diversity into organizational culture, and its effect on production. In fact, Gallant and Krone (2014) point to Ashcraft and Allen’s (2003) work on race as an area of contribution declaring “we answer the call for increased sensitivity to race in
communication scholarship” (p. 40). They offer several areas for communicative work and provide justification for a communicative focus:

A communication lens requires carefully attending to the different values underlying the business case and the sociopolitical case for diversity, how majority and minority group members experience diversity policies/programs, and considering the interaction patterns produced when they share these experiences with each other (p. 50). Furthermore, university settings are sufficient organizational contexts that support the business case and instantiate systems of power and control (Rothman, Kelly-Woessner, & Woessner, 2010). Moreover, the use of a communicative framework gives us the freedom to examine micro-interactions that undergird enactments of diversity policies and programs into everyday practice. Allen’s (1995) early work sets a foundational path for analyzing diverse backgrounds through communication. It demonstrates how difference is negotiated through formal and informal organizational communication enactment.

Alternatively, the construction of frames and meaning in diversity messages may provide an area worthy of communicative analysis. For instance, identifying how and when diversity is framed through the managerial lens (Kirby & Harter, 2001). According to Witherspoon and Wohlert (1996) at the core of the communication process is framing which facilitates the interpretation of messages “based on the organizational reality in which those messages are communicated” (p. 379). What’s more, introducing diversity into an organizational culture initiates change allowing for the emergence of new frames or meanings (1996). As these frames are contested, communication becomes central to the management of “different frames of reference, different life experiences, and different
personal and professional found […] in an increasingly diverse workforce” (1996, p. 379).

**Communicative Constitution of Organizing**

Reflecting on my proposed definition of diversity communication, it is important to remember that diversity communication is most certainly a change effort. As such, it remains a fluid concept of ongoing messages, interactions, symbols, and structures that constitute organizing. To this point, most references to the term organization qualify it as an entity that is ever changing. While I briefly mentioned this point early on, it bears further attention. Bisel (2010) argues that organizations are not static, self-contained systems, but rather a communicative collection of “interacting and sensemaking” individuals working and performing to meet an objective (p. 125). This ontological reframing of organizations as “contingent, collaborative accomplishments constituted by people” comes from CCO theory, or the communicative constitution of organization (Mease, 2016, p. 60). In essence, CCO theorists illustrate how communication processes affect organization so much that it is “called into being” and constituted as always in “states of becoming” (2010, p. 125; 2016, p. 60). Not only is organization theorized as constantly changing, but the meaning for organization is also up for contest. Putnam and Nicotera (2010) outline three primary meanings for organization: as being, as a constant “state of change or becoming, and as grounded in action” (p. 159). With regard to this delineation, there is a tendency to conflate meanings of organization and organizing when discussing CCO theory. In fact, as Bisel (2010) warns, CCO theory oversimplifies the relationship between communication and organizing by exaggerating the significance of the communicative process. That is, organizing cannot happen without communication;
yet, organization requires more than just communication to be constructed
“because…communication itself may undermine organizing” (Bisel, 2010, p. 128).
Although there are competing meanings of organization, a CCO approach views them as
separate concepts to be individually called in question (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010). Most
importantly, CCO theory is critical to diversity communication because it is
fundamentally a change effort that meets all the meanings of organization. By the same
token, Mease (2016) emphasizes how diversity communication’s unique relationship with
organizing is “paramount to understanding how organizations---and diversity initiatives
executed in the organizational context---are created, maintained, and changed” (p. 65).

Enactment. The robust body of research examining management of diversity
notoriously precludes managers from effectively enacting diversity communication
because it labels them as separate from those being managed. CCO theory, however,
provides a more acute explanation of how diversity communication filters through an
organization. Drawing from Weick’s (1995) notions of sensemaking, CCO employs the
concept, communicative enactment, to understand the role of diversity communication.
First, enactment happens as organizational members continuously consume and filter
through organizational information (Norton & Sadler, 2006). Members then interpret
norms, rules and regulations of the organization; ultimately, they extract meaningful
information in order to “organize micro-practices into larger processes” (Norton &
Sadler, 2006, p. 367). What’s important to note, as members construct meaning from the
information they receive, they often facilitate the information and construct
organizational meaning. Hence, communicative enactment entails message delivery and
message reception of stated goals. Dougherty and Smythe (2004) simplify enactment
“suggest[ing] that organizational actors not only act within an environment, but also that they are part of that environment” (p. 295). Organizations do more than simply enact diversity communication; diversity communication constitutes organizational culture. Subsequently, CCO theory contextualizes Gidden’s work on structure and agency as the inevitable paradox constituted in organizing. Consequently, Bisel (2010) reinforces this paradox explicating that “the enactments of agency become structures that […] produce possibilities for agency enactment” (p. 125).

Clearly, diversity is communicatively enacted in organizational culture, and subject to paradox. Supporting the notion that diversity is a part of organizational culture, Kirby and Harter (2003) contend that organizations communicatively enact diversity policies without grasping how members fully interpret these enactments. Similarly, Gallant and Krone (2014) question whether organizations are knowledgeable about the day-to-day enacted diversity communication on members who experience and enact diversity initiatives. Being that diversity communication is multilayered, one would assume that organizations would notice the obvious difficulty of enacting diversity. For one, diversity work on any level leads to constant communicative enactment. Diversity is enacted through policies, procedures, initiatives, and discourse which work to constitute organizational culture. In the same manner, Mease (2016) concludes that communicative enactment also constitutes who is involved in diversity, “how they should be structured, what they should do, and how they will be portrayed to others” (p. 65).

Under these circumstances, enactment sufficiently and adequately demonstrates how diversity communication is constituted in organizations. For the purpose of this study, I argue that Weick’s notion of enactment is a singular construct bound to diversity
communication. Moreover, Norton and Sadler (2006) assert that enactment as a concept must be “placed within a larger organizing framework” (p. 367). Additionally, CCO theory is an overarching framework meant to situate enactment as central to organizing through “members’ communication and sensemaking; […] word by word, message by message, and turn by turn” (Bisel, 2010, p. 126). Given that diversity communication enactment is not just carried out by members, but negotiated by “corporate agents who act; become enacted” (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010, p. 161) in organizational practice, a further understanding of tension and paradox in diversity communication is needed.

**Tensions and paradox.** Equally important, one cannot discuss CCO theory without discussing the inherent contradiction found in communicative enactment. As has been mentioned, do more than enactments accomplishing goals, they impact the environment with which they are enacted. That said, scant research focuses on communicative interaction within diversity policies and practice. In any case, a small body of research points to two areas of contradiction: tension and paradox. Most notably, the literature points to these contradictions as inevitable and a necessary part of CCO work. Tracy (2004) claims that contradictions are natural occurring parts of communicative enactment that may even prove valuable. More to the point, Tracy concludes that contradictions are not inherently “productive or unproductive, good or bad, liberating or paralyzing” (2004, p. 120). Organizational members’ response to contradictions determine how they perceive organizational tensions (2004). On the other hand, focusing on tension proffers an organizational shift in meaning and practice, notably, when unpacks “systems of identity politics” (Mease, 2016, p. 66).
Within the few articles that connect diversity communication and tension, tension is most often referenced at the individual or structural level. Individual tensions tend to be carried between communicative interactions among people, whereas structural tensions stem from organizational deficiencies. For example, addressing organizational inequality could seek to diminish the “structural tensions” managers are forced to negotiate (Irizarry & Gallant, 2006). Putnam and Nicotera (2010) highlight how structural constraints on communicative enactment lead to tension, but also “concomitantly enable transformative action” (p.162).

Unsurprisingly, the extant literature privileges the managerial perspective addressing issues related to diversity. However, Vangen and Winchester (2013) offer an alternative framework for us to view this tension, collaboration. Essentially, they studied collaboration as their unit of analysis instead of the organization. Their work focuses on cultural paradox or how difference among individuals functions to “help and hinder” the outcomes of collaboration (p. 687). Moreover, diversity in collaboration creates tensions that are “necessary” and that “should not be resolved or managed away” (p. 688).

While Vangen and Winchester (2014) posit tension as organic, Irizarry and Gallant (2006) explain the tensions associated with managerial uncertainty of EEO=AA policy enactment and diversity practices. Ostensibly, managers in their study perceived diversity interactions as negative and uncomfortable because “they felt lack[ing] in both [formal and experiential] knowledge to make decisions about diversity in the workplace” (p. 47). At the same time, diversity communication enactments become problematic when organizational meaning and practice fail to address the structural inequality pertaining to larger societal issues (Gallant & Krone, 2014). As Allen (2016) points out, disavowing
national issues of inequity such as “marriage equality, transphobia, police brutality, immigration, anti-muslim sentiment” only serves to bolster the tension within diversity communication (p. 10). Gallant and Krone (2014) interviewed thirty employees to understand their perceptions about organizational diversity mandates and diversity programs. Ultimately, they found that employees mostly associated fairness with tension “convey[ing] discomfort, ambivalence, and even avoidance of interaction” in everyday management of diversity (p. 47). They offer the alternative to the business model, “the sociopolitical case” which is situated in the larger and historical framing of inequality. However, without a fully integrative approach, employees ascribe meaning as “required governmental legal mandates” (p. 50). They warn that diversity structures, without grassroots discussions, further “constrain meaningful interactions” about diversity (p. 50).

Finally, Mease’s (2016) work shines a much-needed light on diversity work in organizations. Not only is Mease’s work essential to the field, but it updates the paucity of scholarship. Through “a tensional approach,” Mease (2016) explored the lived experiences of professionals enacting diversity work (p. 77). More specifically, this work focused on the discursive tensions constituted in diversity communication through four flows theory found within CCO work. Accordingly, the four flows outline four parts: negotiation of organizational members, “self-structuring”, “activity coordination”, and “institutional positioning” (Mease, 2016, p. 66). Mease’s (2016) work is influential for two reasons. First, it is one of the few pieces to examine paradox and tension simultaneously through discursive action and negotiation. It suggests that discursive paradox is at the cornerstone of diversity work. Mease’s definition is highly proficient and deserves attention:
I use discursive tension to describe a tension that is not explicitly acknowledged or described as difficult by individuals, but surfaces as inconsistent within a discourse (such as diversity) on closer inspection. I use the term discursive paradox to describe a discursive tension that, although seemingly contradictory, serves a necessary function (Mease, 2016, p. 66).

Lastly, converging the communicative constitution of organizing, communicative enactment, and discursive actions together instantiates future diversity communication scholarship. Thus, adding legitimacy to an overlooked area of communication.

To conclude, CCO theory necessitates the study of diversity communication because diversity and organizing are fundamental concepts of change; even more, the communicative enactment of diversity in organizations involves structures and members who are in constant negotiation. This process is filled with contradictions, paradoxes, and tensions; therefore, this study seeks to explore this phenomenon guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do diverse faculty’s organizational experiences with diversity align with Southern U’s diversity communication?

RQ2: What, if any, tensions or paradoxes are experienced related to Southern U’s diversity communication?
Chapter 3: Methods

To engage research that is rooted in the exposition of lived experience while equally attending to the theoretical suppositions I bring to the table requires a deep understanding of methodology. More importantly, conceptualizing our role as the researcher can be an exhaustive and emotional part of the research process, especially when discussing methodology. This chapter uniquely outlines the specific methods of this study and adheres to the foundations of theory as it pertains to diversity communication. That said, in this chapter, I utilize a reflexive tone to help contextualize my thought process, and for a brief moment, I situate myself alongside my participants.

Assumptions of Qualitative Research

For qualitative researchers, the lenses used to conduct and explore others’ experiences are based in many general assumptions. The interpretive approach recognizes the realities of the individuals being explored, but still views the researcher as independent of these experiences. However, it is through naturalistic inquiry that scholars gain an understanding of the day-to-day interactions of individuals (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Furthermore, Creswell (2003) explains how qualitative research takes “an inquiry approach useful to exploring and understanding a central phenomenon” (p. 58). Despite the intent to “develop context specific statements about the multiple constructed realities” of participants, our assumptions, as the researcher, are inevitably constructed (Baxter & Babbie, 2003, p. 257). In fact, Baxter and Babbie (2003) contend it is “inconceivable for the researcher not to hold any of these [beliefs]” (p. 258). For this study, I recognized that an interpretive approach allows the researcher to organize and contextualize participant interpretations.
Case Analysis

To conduct this study, I engaged in a case study approach which “proves to be critical or relevant to the transferability of findings to other cases” (Browning & Boys, 2015, p. 171). In short, Stake (2006) notes “A case is a noun, a thing, an entity; it is seldom a verb, a participle a functioning” (p.1). Case studies serve as strong units of discovery and might include a “program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy” (Merriam, 2009, p. 41). Specifically, diversity communication is enacted in organizational culture in a variety of ways from structure to discourse. Therefore, examining a bounded system’s layered enactments of diversity communication unearths “unique qualities that can be used to help understand social processes” (Dougherty & Smythe, 2004, p. 298). I chose an institution of higher education as my “bounded system” because universities offer a relevant worthwhile context for studying diversity communication. Okoro and Washington (2012) assert that academic institutions who prioritize diversity “enrich the teaching and learning experience of students and faculty” (p.60). Colleges and universities are systems of interlocking parts (i.e. departments, colleges) that work independently and require further study and examination. Diversity communication is a natural part of higher education because institutions have come to “recruit, effectively manage, and maintain a diverse workforce” (Okoro & Washington, 2012, p. 61). However, Allen (2016) disagrees with this sentiment, because academic institutions are “not making much progress in terms of diversifying full-time faculty or senior administrators” (Allen, 2016, p. 10).

Research Context
This case study was conducted on a medium-sized, public university, which I have renamed as Southern U, located in the United States. Southern U is considered up and coming, with a heavy regional focus but also national prominence. Over the last decade, the university’s student population has exploded, containing about twenty thousand or more students at any given time. The university offers a midsize campus experience with a growing academic focus on applied research. On its website, there is an outward commitment to “diversity” as it describes undergoing a “transformation” in recent years to accomplish this goal. Demographically, the student body is comparable to other midsize universities. Recent student enrollment numbers illustrate an overwhelmingly white student body with People of Color (POC) accounting for less than 13%. On the other hand, faculty members the demographics were varied on both ends as white faculty reflected a greater percentage gap than the student population with POC accounting for a about 7%. Gender diversity was the most surprising as women outnumbered men among university faculty and student populations. It should be noted that Southern U does not track “invisible” diversity groups based on sexual orientation, transgender status, class, and religion.

Southern U is an ideal case to study because of its proposed commitments to increasing and developing a diverse campus population. Along with its legal obligations of diversity, Southern U’s commitment to diversity is outlined extensively throughout the campus. The campus is not subtle about its diversity goals. In fact, advertising on-line and around campus is fully realized and intentional. Moreover, the university has developed several programs on campus dedicated to increasing and enhancing diversity including a department specifically geared to diversity as well as a campus diversity
institute. Additionally, Southern U created an administrative position specifically dedicated to diversity on campus, and a diversity committee comprised of faculty and administrators. While these additions are clear steps toward creating a more diverse campus culture, Allen (2016) contends that several practices halt growth and prevent institutions from transforming campus cultures. Specifically, Allen points to institutions situating diversity apart from institutional culture where “only particular programs, disciplines, groups, or individuals are responsible” (p. 10). Furthermore, Southern U has seen strides in its student body diversification. The faculty, however, is still lagging in terms of growth and retention. That said, recent incidents involving discrimination have called the university’s commitment to diversity into question. A pilot study employing a qualitative text analysis of several official Southern U documents uncovered three overarching values of the institution’s diversity communication including the cultivation of diverse faculty and staff, diversity initiatives, and a diverse environment (Branton & Payne, 2017). Next, I offer a brief description of each category including the university’s conceptualization of diversity.

**Difference and representation.** Southern U both broadly and narrowly associated diversity with difference. While they used the terms interchangeably, difference was expressed as diversification and representation. First, diversity encapsulated difference as “an appreciation of the differences and unique contributions represented by individual identity, opinion, and culture” (Diversity Statement, para. 1). Southern U paid special attention to marginalized differences such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion and disability with specific emphasis on historically and ongoing underrepresented groups (Diversity Statement, para. 1).
Diversity was also defined according to how well the university population was representative of the state demographics. Southern U’s Diversity Plan highlighted the value of developing an organization that reflects the diversity of communities, “Southern U places a premium on teaching and student learning and growth; therefore, it is important for the University to seek achievement of diversity among its faculty, staff and student populations” (Diversity Plan, para. 2). To that end, many structures and strategies were discussed throughout the documents aimed at making sure the university attained adequate representation of different groups among faculty and students. In keeping with most academic institutions, Southern U was beholden by state and federal mandates around diversity inclusion rooted in EEO/AA policy. Southern U’s historical connection to the State Plan, served as a guide for the university’s diversity work. While many goals were specific to student enrollment and retention, the university placed a heavy emphasis on increasing faculty diversity. In fact, they outlined a five-year plan with strategic expectations of diversity recruitment measures such as offering departmental incentives for the hiring of diverse faculty with African-Americans as the primary focus. Although recruitment of diverse faculty was paramount, the focus on retention was less obvious, with obscure references to retaining faculty but no specific plan for how to achieve this goal other than proposing annual departmental assessments.

**Inclusive community.** Southern U considered a diverse campus environment or “culture” as imperative to their goals. “…Southern U insists on a welcoming environment in which it is committed to promoting acceptance, providing support, and encouraging diversity” (Diversity Statement, para. 3). Indeed, the idea of inclusion was used concomitantly throughout their diversity communication:
Diversity is a natural and enriching emblem of life. Diversity as a concept, describes an inclusive community of people with varied human characteristics, ideas, and worldviews…. Diversity in concept expects the creation by institutions of a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment that honors and respects those differences. (Diversity Plan, Section 2, para. 1)

Southern U frequently pointed to its diversity structures as evidence of its commitment to cultivating an inclusive environment. A vast number of responsibilities were under the purview of the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) including the creation of an “inviting campus culture” that “embraces diversity” and combines “diversity with education” (CDO Job Description).

**Civil discourse.** The final value of note within the university documents and responses was the university’s promotion of an environment rooted in communal civility. According to the Southern U Diversity Statement, the university’s strategic goals included “enhancing the climate for diversity and collegiality” (Diversity Statement, para. 2). To this end, the university, along with faculty, staff and students, were expected to show their appreciation for difference and engage in civil discourse. The role of faculty included cultivating civil discourse through both curriculum and involvement. According to the Diversity Plan, faculty could contribute to the civil discourse by, “assisting in offering courses and training on multicultural issues; maintaining and improving communications across campus about diversity issues, and encouraging diversification of the curriculum (Section 5, para. 5). Although collegiality and civility were mentioned in the policy documents, there was little mention of specific strategies for accomplishing this goal.
Given these points, Southern U offers endless opportunities for investigation. The university faculty and staff are appropriate subjects for this research because of their dual role of facilitator and subject of diversity initiatives. For starters, Southern U specifically tasks faculty members with facilitating diversity communication goals. As matter of fact, they are expected to engage students in discourse through curriculum and promote embrace of difference. Faculty and staff are accountable to all levels of diversity communication. This includes leading diversity discourse and constructing campus-wide and interdepartmental diversity initiatives. Although the bulk of initiatives are organized by the CDO, diverse faculty and staff are used as consultants within their respective departments. On other hand, faculty are the subjects of enacted diversity communication. The expectation to enact diversity rules is often reified in hiring committees, faculty trainings, diversity policies, and the day-to-day interaction, maintenance and negotiation of difference. Not to mention, faculty must negotiate their roles as diverse bodies who construct the meaning of diversity, and are constructed on by that very same meaning. As a result, this study attempts to unpack this complex phenomenon.

**Procedures**

**Sampling.** After obtaining IRB approval, I recruited participants through purposeful convenience sampling. Because of the expansive nature of academic institutions, I initially used purposeful convenience sampling to find participants who were experts on issues of diversity, who had “gone through, or have observed, the process” (Morse, 2007, p. 9). In that same manner, I fought to make sure my participants hailed from as many departments and colleges as possible. It is no secret that universities function as small cities where departments and programs are run independently but in
concert with the overall community. Next, I employed theoretical sampling to find participants with “particular responses to experiences, or in whom particular concepts appear significant” (Morse, 2007, p. 15). That said, I intentionally sought participants who were of diverse backgrounds this includes race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender-nonconforming, religion, ability, nationality and sexuality. At the same time, I carefully considered the precarious role constraints placed on faculty. In effect, I assured participants that their identity and eventual responses would remain anonymous. I understood fully the fears attached to the participation in this study. Politics play a significant role in academia. For some, the objective is to earn tenure and thus, drawing any unwanted attention could jeopardize those opportunities. In light of this fact, I took special care in respecting and honoring those participants by changing names, broadening any associations with visible and identifying factors.

**Participant interviews.** First, in conjunction with my sampling techniques, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with faculty members who identified as diverse. Participants identified themselves as diverse based on race, ethnicity, religion, class, ability, international status, gender, age, and region. The semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) used with minority faculty members included questions that were more specific and intentional to answer my research questions; additionally, there were moments where I applied follow-up questions to extract clarifications. I allowed my participants to share their lived experience without micro managing the interview process. Interview sessions typically lasted between forty minutes and two and half hours. During interviews, I used the Sony ICD-PX3333 digital voice recorder to capture each interview session in their entirety. For reasons outlined earlier, I accommodated my
participants fully allowing for flexibility and anonymity. In fact, almost all of the interviews were conducted in the participants’ campus offices. Finally, I transcribed four of the fifteen interview while the remaining eleven were outsourced to third party transcription site. Each interview was transcribed in entirety excluding repeated words and disfluencies. All told, I collected 16 hours of interview data over the course of four weeks resulting in 357 pages of transcripts.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed utilizing a grounded theory approach attuned to the needs of diversity. For instance, Green, Creswell, Shope and Clark (2007) advise “not to reject, ignore, or remain ignorant of forces of race and ethnicity, but to engage in grounded theory research that explores how these forces permeate processes of social interactions” (p. 3).

Within the spirit of grounded theory technique, I set out to give voice to my participants. The transcripts were analyzed for codes and themes. First, interview transcripts were scanned individually and read through several times in entirety before moving on. I conducted three rounds of thorough and reflexive line-by-line analysis of open coding searching for emergent themes, patterns and categories. Through constant comparative method, I compared and contrasted lines, phrases, and eventually codes to extract themes, categories and sub-categories that informed how diverse faculty experienced Southern U’s diversity communication. During the axial coding process, I exercised theoretical sensitivity, reflecting on the theoretical frameworks of CCO Theory, communicative enactment, and organizational role constraints. Theoretical sensitivity requires the researcher to “maintain analytic distance from the data […] and […] be able
to develop theoretical insight and abstract conceptual ideas’’ (Holton, 2007, p. 12). After subsequent readings, categories and themes emerged from the data. I hand coded data by comparing and contrasting categories and themes with Southern U’s stated values. Finally, I selectively coded the categories further to formulate and refine connections that best described the phenomena. Five rounds of axial coding along with an additional three rounds of selective coding helped sufficiently determine the twelve major themes and five subthemes.

**Verification Strategies**

Much like quantitative research, verification strategies bolster and demonstrate how the data serves to provide “a lens…using the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125). As qualitative researchers, we constantly fight against what quantitative researchers believe fall short of traditional verification (Creswell, 1998). To combat this, qualitative researchers use the ‘lens’ to craft a robust means of establishing credibility. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), qualitative researchers must also have paradigmatic perspective alongside the ‘lens’ creating a two-dimensional approach. Two paradigms, critical and interpretive, are used to illustrate the perspective of qualitative researchers. Both critical and interpretive are appropriate because the researcher can both “believe in interpretive, open-ended, contextualized perspectives” and “uncover… a situatedness based on social, political, cultural…ethnic and gender antecedents of studied situations” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125-126). That said, two verification strategies were used to verify the present research: rich, thick description and research reflexivity.
First, utilizing thick, rich description was essential to display the findings in such a way that helps readers understand “the feeling that they have experienced or could experience, the events being described in the study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 202). Using thick description, credibility and transferability are present in the findings through “shared characteristics” with the readers (Creswell, 2003, p 203). Thick description is synonymous with qualitative research because it prioritizes the participants’ voice over the researcher. Creswell and Miller (2000) remark how “locating individuals in specific situations” is necessary for the reader to fully experience the voices of my participants (p. 129).

Second, reflexivity in research offers the reader a spotlight into the “personal beliefs, values and biases that may shape inquiry” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). By disclosing my honest “assumptions, beliefs and biases” early in the process, readers are able situate the study to “bracket or suspend those…biases” for the duration of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Validity is enhanced and the researcher’s point of view is clearly stated for the reader. I used “research reflexivity” to bracket myself off by describing my personal experiences, while still remembering that my perspective affords me a unique awareness and understanding of my participants’ experiences.
Chapter 4: Findings

Even before conducting these interviews, this project set out to create a safe platform for diverse faculty members to speak about diversity. In many ways, these findings are only a glimpse into the organizational experiences and perspectives of fifteen diverse individuals who entrusted me with their words. Their willingness to embrace this project with fervor and sincerity ultimately gave life to these pages.

This chapter addresses diverse faculty member’s organizational experiences with Southern U’s communicated diversity values. The values outlined in Chapter 3, “Difference & Representation,” “Inclusive Community,” and “Civil Discourse” were paired with faculty responses to answer research question one: How do faculty’s organizational experiences with diversity align with Southern U’s diversity communication?

My analysis of the interview data found that faculty’s organizational experiences with diversity were explicitly and implicitly understood. For the purposes of this study, explicit messages referred to messages intentionally communicated by the university through official university policies and documents. Explicit messages were expressly promoted by the university as a part of its diversity communication. On the other hand, implicit messages were typically communicated through action and were identified through faculty’s experiences with the university’s diversity communication. Differences between explicit and implicit messages resulted in the perception of misalignment.

This chapter opens with an overview of Southern U’s diversity communication. The values of “Difference & Representation,” “Inclusive Community,” and “Civil Discourse” will serve as a thematic roadmap. As previously mentioned, faculty responses
were categorized based on the corresponding diversity value. Twelve themes emerged
demonstrating explicit and implicit messages (See Table 2).

Table 2

*Thematic Contradictions in Southern U’s Diversity Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Southern U’s Stated Diversity Values</th>
<th>Explicit Message</th>
<th>Implicit Message</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Difference and Representation</strong></td>
<td>Broad Definition</td>
<td>Narrow Definition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spectrum</td>
<td>Racial focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>International focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Checkbox</td>
<td>Homogenized reality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase numbers</td>
<td>White/hetero/male/cisgender makeup</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Checkbox mentality</td>
<td>Vague faculty recruitment and retention measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusive Community</strong></td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Illusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Documents and statements</td>
<td>Lip service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td>Overt acceptance</td>
<td>Not physically valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civil Discourse</strong></td>
<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>Housework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>Classroom and curriculum</td>
<td>Only diverse faculty tasked with facilitation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Establish campus discourse</td>
<td>Low Non-diverse faculty participation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collective responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil embracement</td>
<td>Reactive mediated communication</td>
<td>Negativity to proactive diversity efforts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Allow for diversity celebration</td>
<td>Reactions of discomfort and fear</td>
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It should be noted that the relationship between explicit and implicit messages is not inherently contradictory. However, faculty responses point to an organizational experience in constant negotiation where the explicit rhetoric contradicted faculty’s organizational reality. Thus, this chapter ends by addressing the inevitable tensions and paradoxes.

**Difference and Representation**

For Southern U, the value of difference and representation was the cornerstone of diversity. Southern U viewed diversity as a conceptual aspect of human existence that often represented difference and its many variations. From the diversity of ideas to visible differences such as race or ethnicity, Southern U promoted diversity as an integral part of its university culture. Additionally, Southern U placed a heavy emphasis on increasing representation among its faculty and students. To achieve this, Southern U’s diversity structures and initiatives functioned to increase and sustain a diverse campus culture.

From these values, two contradictions emerged: *Broad versus Narrow Definitions of Diversity* and *Checkbox versus Homogenized Reality*.

**Broad versus narrow definitions of diversity.** The *Broad versus Narrow* theme focused on Southern U’s conceptualizations of diversity. Specifically, diverse faculty members viewed diversity as a spectrum that focused on many voices rather than group-based identifiers. On the other hand, diverse faculty members spoke about how race and international status remained the primary, narrow focus of the university.

First, Southern U explicitly attempted to situate diversity as “complex and difficult to define,” while pointing to a wide range of differences to support this claim (Branton & Payne, 2017, p. 18). To that end, diversity was broadly defined to include a
range of differences from race to regional diversity. Surprisingly, most faculty experienced alignment with the university’s broad definition. When asked how they defined diversity, diverse faculty members almost always focused on the broadness of diversity to include a spectrum of difference. As one faculty member noted, “It’s funny. I guess as a big of an umbrella as you can imagine...the biggest mixture that you can think of as far as a diverse community, a spectrum of individuals, that, to me, is diversity.” Framing diversity in broad terms made it increasingly difficult for faculty to define the term diversity. Moreover, faculty responses suggested an unconscious alignment with Southern U’s message that diversity encompasses individuality, thought, and culture. For instance, Karen an African American professor framed diversity as culture in her classroom lectures. She reflected:

I talk about culture as being the things that shape you, the things that shape how you think. I think we are all culturally diverse because we are all members of multiple cultures. You are a member of a culture called a student. I’m a member of a culture called a faculty. I’m a member of a culture called adult daughter of a recently widowed mother. And that, will shape what I do. If you are a member of a culture called pet owner, then you do certain things.

In discussing culture, Karen’s description highlighted the layers of difference (i.e. identity and opinion) that are congruent with Southern U’s diversity communication. Like Karen, Francine, another African American professor taught students to see diversity broadly while addressing particular sites of difference. In some ways, Francine’s explanation mirrored Karen’s because it transitioned from visible differences to examples of layered culture. Francine noted:
When most people talk about diversity, they just assume race. I teach across the span, and when I talk about it, I teach it across the span. So, we go from the beginning of the semester to the end, we go through, we cover all the isms, all the isms in the diversity of like classism, ageism. We cover all the isms, sexuality, religion, and spirituality. You know, we cover all of that so diversity and multiculturalism is broad. I tell my students every household is a different culture. So, we’re all diverse, right? In every single household, each house you walk into, their rules, their norms, their values, it makes them diverse in regards to another place, right?

For faculty, the university’s explicit definition of diversity aligned with their individual definition of diversity. Faculty served as the facilitators of this broad definition to students in the classroom. Faculty were animated in their discussions about diversity, offering lengthy stories about these experiences. Sabrina, a multicultural professor explained, “We live in a multicultural pluralistic society, not everyone may even recognize that. I have students who say ‘I didn't realize that. I didn't realize that I was part of diversity.’ It really is so many different things.” Not only did faculty challenge perceptions of diversity, their interactions with students promoted the university’s explicit value that difference encapsulates everything.

Second, despite faculty’s congruence with the university’s definition of diversity, their day-to-day organizational experiences told a different story. As one faculty member stated, “I think the university does define diversity in the ways that I do, as sort of an umbrella term. But when you put it into practice, it’s much more difficult.”
For instance, when asked how the university defined diversity, faculty members described glaring contradictions: rhetorically the university promoted diversity as a broad concept; in practice, faculty experienced an opposite reality where the university implicitly communicated a narrow definition of difference. Southern U’s diversity communication publicly valued all differences, but prioritized visible differences over invisible ones. In fact, several faculty expressed frustration with the university’s narrow definition because it excluded invisible diversity. Glenda, a religiously diverse professor denoted the exclusion she witnessed:

I had a very difficult time, very difficult time having any impact with regard to religious diversity cause here’s why. If we’re going to have a calendar, an academic calendar, a university calendar, how hard is it to put Jewish holidays, Muslim holidays? We have faculty that have not one clue about Ramadan and will schedule a dinner meeting.

By ignoring religious diversity, Southern U contradicted the notion that diversity is broad and all encompassing. Glenda’s desire for religious recognition highlighted an ongoing frustration with the university. Furthermore, Glenda’s frustration extended to faculty who remained ignorant about religious experiences. In comparison, faculty pointed to two areas of diversity heavily promoted by the university: racial and international.

First, several faculty described racial diversity as the focal point of Southern U’s diversity communication. One faculty member explained how diversity is often used interchangeably with race stating, “I think about diversity broadly in that way, but I do know that that’s like the word we use when we’re talking about folks of color.” Other faculty members discussed the black/white binary that is filtered throughout the campus.
Though the university refrains from explicitly stating race as a primary component of its diversity communication, many of its efforts surround this racial binary. For instance, Jennifer a queer professor argued:

It’s black/white because it’s a state thing. And the state’s never changed that. And it's just a shame. It needs to be more than that, but they’re not going to give because you’ve got to put money in the programming and stuff. They think it’s easier to just do it with African American and white students and bring them together. Because if they have to do it for everybody, that’s going to cost them a fortune.

Jennifer’s response suggested that diversity work was economically fragile. The university’s historical relationship with African Americans remained a driving force behind its diversity efforts because of state metrics. For Southern U, a broad emphasis on diversity would be costly and time consuming. Again, the contradiction between the broad and narrow definition is represented.

Second, the university’s narrow definition of diversity was implicitly communicated through its international focus. When asked how the university communicates its definition Sabrina offered this description:

With events and organizations, and with the brand "international reach.” So, I think of slogans, events...I'm trying to think of a good way to explain this...There seems to be some sort of object or thing being pushed across as an example to illustrate the international inclusivity.

Along with a focus on race, faculty described international diversity as a dominating factor in Southern U’s diversity communication. Interestingly, international
diversity was not frequently mentioned as a value in the university’s diversity documents. Yet, the university devoted considerable time and money to promote it across campus.

Sean, a queer professor illustrated this implicit focus:

I think the university’s definition revolves around nations outside of the US. Considering the motto of the university... for them, diversity is about how can we target these other countries and work together. One of the areas where there is a lot of attention and resources being allocated is doing international stuff. In my current college, my dean rewards us if we did anything for international work, or if we have any international thing.

Here, Sean’s organizational experience reinforced the notion that international diversity was a central part of the university’s definition. Additionally, the university’s dedication to international work was boosted by consistent funding and resources. As a result, faculty were typically in agreement that international diversity was a part of the university’s narrow definition. Despite this agreement, faculty questioned the motives of the university’s international focus:

So, that says something good about us because we’re cultured when we reach out and we have students from all over, but we don’t talk about how we [treat] these students once they get here, right? But we have this international aspect and this, this huge number of languages spoken on our campus, right? So, there’s that lip service.

In contrast, Kevin a religiously diverse professor considered the international focus authentic and vital to the university experience. Even during the interview, Kevin
emotionally attempted to counteract the perception of Southern U’s financial focus on international students. He offered this response:

Yes, they pay more; yes, we get more revenue out of them, that’s not why we’re bringing in so many international students, though. We’re not just in it for the money. We’re in it because we genuinely believe that a student who has never been outside of their county in Kentucky until they came to school here needs to meet somebody from another country.

International diversity was the primary focus for Southern U where other types of diversity seemed to be of secondary concern or worse, ignored. For instance, Sabrina discussed how issues of ability were not a primary concern for Southern U stating “I don't see as much on ability as I would want to especially with our hills. I would think ability would maybe be something just because of our geographic area.” This speaks to the continued contradiction between broad and narrow definitions of diversity.

**Checkbox versus homogenized reality.** The theme of *checkbox versus homogenized reality* demonstrated how diverse faculty acknowledged Southern U’s strategic commitment to increase diversity as represented by statistics and checkboxes. In comparison, participants experienced a homogenized reality in that Southern U lacked diverse representation while strategies of recruitment and retention remained consistently ignored.

First, Southern U’s value of representation promoted an appreciation of difference. This appreciation of difference was filtered through increasing diverse representation among faculty and students. To achieve a culture that “reflects the diversity of communities,” Southern U employed strategic initiatives to facilitate this goal
across the campus (Diversity Plan, para. 2). Diversification and representation were inherently connected to the act of increasing numbers. The organizational experiences of diverse faculty aligned with Southern U’s explicit message of increasing representation. Nevertheless, faculty consistently identified Southern U’s value of representation as a numbers game. In fact, the reluctant identification with numbers gave diverse faculty an acute awareness of the university’s explicit message, and its impact on one’s role as a faculty member. Christian, an international professor offered this perspective:

> Basically, my identity is a showcase as far as the university goes. I am just one more number. I think that’s my perception. It is just about recruitment. It is just about increasing the visibility of certain groups and there we are. The university has stopped there. I have never been approached by the diversity office. I think part of my funding comes from the diversity office. They want to increase the number.

Christian’s response is an example of the university’s obsession with increasing representation. Subsequently, Christian’s experiences were not unique as several diverse faculty members attested. In a sense, faculty were treated as numerical tallies for the university to measure. Juan, a queer professor described the relationship between numbers and inclusion:

> I don’t think the administration is driven by the sentiment of equality and inclusion, but more by the numbers. Diversity means nothing to me, if there is no way of living it. For me, it’s more than just the number of pacific islanders, and foreigners we have on campus, or even the number of resources we have. Diversity is nothing without inclusion. I don’t think we have inclusion.
Alongside numbers, a checkbox mentality was often felt by diverse faculty. When the focus was on increasing numbers, faculty were subjected to checks and markers that reinforced diversification and representation. In other words, increasing numbers reflected an increased commitment to diversity which was literally and metaphorically enacted on faculty members. Glenda offered a similar account of feeling like a “checkbox”:

Checkbox. I’m just something to be checked off so we can say that we did it so we can pass accreditation. And I think the same is true for my department and it makes me sick. That’s my, that’s my short; I finally have a short answer.

Southern U’s explicit messages of the checkbox were defined by recruitment measures, departmental hiring incentives and a comprehensive plan. Ashley, a queer professor beautifully described the checkbox mentality:

And I think that we do a lot as a university to check off boxes and to do things that make a statement rather than things that make a difference. Do I think that this university is any different than any other university or any other business, for that matter? No. I mean I think that it is a topic that is still difficult for people to talk about. It’s, it’s one of those, you know, taboo things that is kind of like talking about abortion, sex or religion. It’s like you don’t talk about it, and if you don’t talk about it, then you don’t have to do anything about it. I think that there’s a culture of checking boxes and giving the, appearance of appreciation of diversity.

The value of representation alluded to an idealistic community where diversity was omnipresent. In effect, Southern U recognized the need for increased representation.
Not only was increased representation explicitly promoted, but faculty’s organizational experiences reflected a basic and visible level of organizational change. Instead, faculty experienced a homogenized reality where visible and invisible diversity came at a premium. In other words, increasing numbers became problematic when the numbers did not increase. Thus, a contradiction emerged between the explicit message of increased representation and the experience of a homogenized reality. Based on faculty responses, the organizational landscape at Southern U lacked diverse representation. Much like the literature, faculty depictions of the environment, particularly among faculty and administrators, were comprised mostly of white heterosexual males. Not to mention, the organizational reality unconsciously prioritized a white masculine existence. Juan, who identified as queer, explained this experience, “Aside from me being gay which is definitely public, it’s clear to me from the way I see women and African American faculty being treated that it has to do with me being Americanized white and male.” Juan understood that his ability to “pass” as a white male offered him privileges that other diverse faculty members could not obtain. Meanwhile, Glenda reiterated this notion of a white male existence emphasizing her frustration with faculty positions around campus:

I think we give a lot of lip service here, but if we really cared, we’d have a black dean. If we really cared, we’d have a variety. Everybody would be at...invited to the table. There’s just...this is the most white, male place on earth except for a Trump White House. I mean it’s just like in our face. It’s true. It’s so...that’s the part that’s important. It’s what are you doing, not what lip service do you give. Where’s your follow through?
Glenda’s story contrasted Southern U’s explicit message that increasing representation mattered. In this instance, the effort to improve diversity among faculty remained a hollow promise. Glenda’s comparison of the “Trump White House” to Southern U’s leadership implied a university community that suppressed the values of diversification and representation. Additionally, faculty perceptions of the university’s faculty diversity had not changed over time. While Southern U boasted its “strategic efforts to enrich the [campus] with a diverse population” of faculty, staff and administrators, the organizational experiences of faculty continued to contradict this message (Letter to Community, para. 2). Jensen, a veteran African American professor, offered this description of his department’s efforts:

I mean that tells you something...that’s 20...20 years and faces hadn’t changed. We just now picked up two Asian professors over the last five years. One was just hired maybe a year ago. No Hispanics, no international professors if I’m not mistaken, yeah, no international faculty. Everybody else is white. You’re looking at 20 something years in a field like this... we should be more aware of that, but we’re not...that’s kind of frustrating.

Interestingly, Southern U communicated that its diversity efforts were “intentional” and pointed to this intentionality as a sign the diversity culture had changed. However, Jensen’s experience challenged the narrative script of intentionality constructed by the university and illustrated an organizational culture that lacked diversity, and remained completely unaware of the deficiency. Moreover, other diverse faculty members described a similar experience where the university lacked awareness about diversity. Jennifer’s concerns about diversity awareness came up in her response:
They’re clueless. We have white men running this campus who don’t check their privilege and don’t realize it. I’m always like we need...we need the whole experience at the table. We’ve got a bunch of white men and we have one white woman sitting here. We have no people of color. We don’t have anybody that’s trans, and they’re like “Well I don’t understand why that makes a difference”. And I’m just like because you set policy based on your privilege and you don’t get that.

Jennifer’s response exposed the flawed nature of diversity efforts by those who do not consider themselves diverse. In a sense, Southern U’s ignorance about diversity stemmed from its white male leadership who remained unaware of the impact of representation deficits. More importantly, Jennifer’s emphasis on the “table” specifically pointed to leadership roles which were consistently made up of white males. Diverse faculty members’ organizational experience directly contradicted the value of difference and representation and suggested that if increased representation was a numbers game, then why was Southern U’s organizational makeup so homogenized? Based on faculty responses, this homogenization was sustained through problematic recruitment and retention efforts that misaligned with its explicit message of representation.

**Recruitment.** As faculty pointed out, Southern U’s desire to increase representation contradicted its organizational practices. This was most evident in recruitment and hiring strategies at the university and departmental levels. While the university stated its efforts were intentional and strategic, faculty experience with recruitment practices portrayed something different. For some diverse faculty members, the importance of diverse representation was vaguely discussed in search committees.
Diverse faculty representation on hiring committees was a part of Southern University’s policy. Yet, the effects of this “strategy” undermined its intended purpose which was to increase diverse representation. Sean echoed this contradiction in his statement:

Often the no, isn’t as clear cut as they don’t have enough research or teaching experience...It often comes down to things you don’t necessarily want to write.

It’s nothing bad, they just aren’t going to be a good fit. I have found, I’m the one who must come with a reason for it. They like using what I said for it. Whether it is because I am a diverse faculty member, or I’m just good with words, I don’t know.

Ambiguity is prominently featured in Sean’s description of hiring practices. He presented a scenario where merit was not a question, but rather departmental “fit” guided the narrative. On the surface, this rationale seemed neutrally sufficient, but Sean’s role dissonance as the diverse voice on the committee cannot be ignored. For example, an African American professor, Leslie gave credence to this experience:

I’ve been on committees where I’ve heard someone say, “Well, I only want to work with somebody who’s like me and who I think is... the same color as me.”

Which is you know, code for you want somebody who is white.

Aside from hiring practices, faculty recruitment efforts were also called into question. Southern U frequently promoted its strategic efforts to increase diverse faculty representation, but implicitly that message was often dismissed and not reinforced. Leslie detailed one example of how recruitment ambiguity was perpetuated:

I had someone in the department, like, “It’s so hard to find a person of color with this degree. And if we could just find one who’s qualified and this and this and we
will hire them immediately.” So a South Regional Education Board, they had this initiative for mentoring and teaching with these very intelligent people from very good schools who are considered a minority in a specific field. I ended up meeting someone and I was like, oh great and I gave this person their name. I’m like here’s a person of color that met all your criteria, here you go and you all have a job opening. They basically half interviewed this person from what I was told. Like they didn’t take them out to dinner like the other candidates and didn’t put much effort. So, I was embarrassed because I had recruited this person and like I said, they didn’t, they couldn’t even get in a quorum enough to take this person out to dinner for an interview.

Leslie’s experience suggested that recruitment inefficiency was often blamed on a limited diversity pool. Here, Leslie counteracted the narrative and challenged her department by providing them with a qualified diverse candidate. This resulted in a failed attempt because the candidate was not perceived as adding value. Not only was Leslie’s judgement questioned, but this experience showed her that the worth of a diverse candidate is often decided by non-diverse people. Again, the rhetoric of increased representation contradicted the lived reality for diverse faculty. Southern U’s explicit diversity messages promoted recruitment as an active process, but its enacted efforts were highly ambiguous.

Retention. In a similar vein, faculty retention was frequently combined with recruitment in Southern U’s diversity communication. That said, specific measures used to retain faculty were mostly absent. As faculty pointed to several examples of recruitment, there was little mention of specific retention measures. Along with
increasing representation, the current diverse faculty must also be retained. Sabrina elucidated this contradiction stating “They've tried to reach out to people. The issues here is keeping people. You might get someone here if they get hired, but you have to keep people.” Sabrina’s acknowledgment that Southern U struggled to sustain diverse faculty diminishes its value of difference and representation. Christian, perfectly summarized the implicit message sent by the university:

I think that is where the university’s communication has stopped by showing that we are increasing diversity by hiring someone different. But the university hasn’t approached and said “How is it going for you? Do you think our students are more welcoming to other people because of your experience” The university has not reached out. I’m just a showcase. The diversity office could simply say how is it going? Do you feel like we are doing this? How can we improve your relationship with others? How can we communicate that you have different experiences, but nothing, right? It goes back to how we define it.

In this instance, Christian’s depiction of Southern U’s post-hiring practices is illuminated. After a diverse faculty member is hired, the university process is devoid of any ongoing assessments. Instead the university’s priorities were firmly rooted in visibility while retention was ignored. Ultimately, Southern U’s enactment of Difference and Representation cultivated an organizational culture where contradiction was inevitable.

**Inclusive Community**

Building off its first value of *Difference and Representation*, Southern U’s diversity communication showcased a culture that was inclusive at all levels, specifically its campus environment. The university proclaimed that acceptance and encouragement
of diversity was built into the campus culture. At the same time, Southern U positioned inclusion at the center of its diversity goals where difference flourished in a welcoming campus culture that “honors and respects those differences” (Diversity Plan, Section 2, para. 1). Southern U promoted an image of community and diversity as intertwined with the community which was supported by its diversity organizing structures such as a Chief Diversity Officer and an Intercultural Center. Two themes were present in Southern U’s value of “Inclusive Community”: Inclusion versus illusion and welcoming versus unwelcoming.

**Inclusion versus illusion.** The theme of inclusion versus illusion referred to how Southern U embodied an inclusive community where difference was recognized and protected. The university publicly pointed to inclusion as a sign of its commitment to diversity. However, for diverse faculty members this explicit message was resembled an illusion of inclusivity that was not valued.

First, several diverse faculty mentioned how the university’s message was focused on inclusion. However, respondents typically mentioned that inclusion was often left out of conversations. Still, there was recognition that Southern U’s intentions were to explicitly promote and support inclusion. For instance, one African American professor, Benjamin stated “The university defines diversity probably a lot more eloquently than I did, but I know the university’s definition wants to be very much inclusive.” In this response, Benjamin was aware that inclusion was promoted as a goal of the university because it was outlined in its definition. He goes on to explain how diversity and inclusion were frequently apart of the university-wide events, such as convocation:
I think the president…has done a very good job in recognizing diversity as being a very important element. He talks a lot about it, sort of indirectly though from the standpoint of he wants to be inclusive, he wants to have a diverse group of people working around them.

Benjamin’s example highlighted a scenario where the university proclamation of inclusion was explicitly stated in a public space. Other faculty witnessed this explicit enactment of inclusion in official university documents and statements. As Francine noted:

I think that the university as a whole promotes it or tries. I think it’s doing the best that it can with what it has, I should say that. I think that’s because of state requirements and different things we have a diversity plan and those kind of things, where it’s on paper.

From her statement, Francine was aware that the university promoted a message of inclusion while at the same time she questioned its attempts at delivering this message. In fact, Francine implied that this focus on inclusion stemmed from state requirements. Like Francine, Marian, a queer professor detailed how Southern U’s value of inclusion was explicitly promoted through reactive statements:

We say the right things when, when things happen, right? When there’s an incident on campus or if a car gets keyed with the n-word or whatever, like we’re really good about making statements about inclusiveness and, how we want to make people feel safe. We’re really good at making statements.
Essentially, there was a hyper awareness among diverse faculty members, that Southern U valued inclusion based on its explicit messages, but they questioned the sincerity of the communication surrounding the depiction of the university as an inclusive community.

Even though Southern U explicitly promoted inclusion, its implicit message was one marked as an illusion characterized by “lip service” where faculty’s organizational experiences were not reflective of its message. This contradiction was frequently mentioned throughout as faculty were inundated with explicit messages touting inclusion. For this reason, faculty responses were incredibly animated, showcasing their frustration with Southern U’s contradictory messages. To illustrate this contradiction, Marian explained how the university messages of inclusion were not substantive and lacked meaning:

When there’s an incident and then, you know, you get this email blast that the university supports people of all races and ethnicities and sexuality, and whatever. But, words are words. Appreciating people and demonstrating that they have value are two different things. Like you can talk all day long, but you must put some action and values in people before you do that.

In this situation, Marian’s comparison of appreciation and demonstration highlighted a disconnect between what Southern U said explicitly and what its actions implied. Namely, the university’s actions suggested that inclusion was not a priority because there were few efforts in place. Subsequently, Marian’s emphasis on “demonstration” suggested that inclusion required action or effort as evidence. Diverse faculty almost always valued action over Southern U’s explicit rhetoric. Indeed, Karen attested to this notion of action over rhetoric while building on the idea of valuing inclusion stating, “I
think it needs to be a part of our value, and I think it probably is a part of our mission statement, but, it should be a part of something we value. And so, it should be physically valued.” Again, Karen questioned the university’s commitment to inclusion by dismissing that inclusion was frequently mentioned in official university documents. Instead, Karen prioritized a “physical value” as an illustration of inclusion. While Karen and Marian were subtler in their depiction of Southern U’s lip service, other faculty members were more vocal about this contradiction. Glenda, directly acknowledged the absence of inclusion and offered concrete examples of missed opportunities:

I don’t think there have been any of that; you know, as my mom used to say the proof’s in the pudding. There’s no diversity around here. There’s no respect for diversity. There’s certainly no inclusion. There’s no inclusion where it counts. You take a look; The implicit message is I’m not willing, as the president of the university...to claim being a sanctuary campus. That’s the message. I think we give a lot of lip service here because we have to. If we really cared, we’d have a black dean. We’d have a variety. Everybody would be...invited to the table. You say what you say by what you imply. You say what’s real by your unsaid.

Glenda emphatically criticized Southern U’s commitment to inclusion outlining several ways its practices have failed. She emphasized that inclusion must be valued in the active day-to-day realities rather than words. It’s clear, Southern U prioritized rhetorical efforts to promote inclusion; yet, for diverse faculty, there was no question that Southern U’s message of inclusion was undermined by its actions or more accurately, inactions.

Welcoming versus unwelcoming. The second theme within the value of “Inclusive Community,” welcoming versus unwelcoming focused on how Southern U
explicitly acknowledged and promoted overt acceptance of difference, whereas subtle experiences suggested that diversity was conditionally accepted and at times excluded.

First, Southern U valued a safe environment that welcomed everyone regardless of difference. As one faculty member posited “the explicit message is we are welcoming.” Other diverse faculty supported these sentiments of overt welcoming. For example, Jaylen perceived the university as welcoming and accepting of diversity:

I think from all I’ve ever seen is that the university wants everyone to feel welcome. Doesn’t matter your status, your age, whatever. I think the ultimate goal of the university is to make everyone feel wanted, whether you’re a student, or whether you’re a faculty or staff.

In Jaylen’s eyes, the university promoted an inclusive culture that welcomed all people. His response suggested that his perception is based on visible or overt efforts of welcoming. Furthermore, Southern U’s explicit message depicted a welcoming environment that was boosted by diversity structures and programs. One faculty member pointed to this endorsement as a realistic experience within the university culture. For instance, Matthew insisted that Southern U’s diversity structures fostered a welcoming community:

I think the university does understand that there is a need for these types of programs, initiatives and this committee is an example of that. We get these mailings about these events, cultural events, so we have a cultural committee that brings in, you know, all kinds of stuff to campus.
Based on Matthew’s experience, the university attempted to cultivate an inviting environment through structures and organizing. Again, Matthew pointed to overt examples of this welcoming.

Meanwhile, diverse faculty experienced alignment with Southern U’s value of inclusive community typically at the departmental level. Most faculty found their department as a safe haven from the rest of the university. Several diverse faculty felt solace in their department because they had more diverse persons to connect with which enhanced their experience. Conversely, Benjamin was the only diverse person in his entire department, but still felt a sense of welcoming:

From a black standpoint, the climate here is welcoming. And from my standpoint it’s not a negative climate. I think faculty here have been very accepting. Now, I have to laugh, I smile sometimes because again my background, we used to have this twenty percent rule, have you ever heard of the twenty rule? It’s if you live in a neighborhood and more than twenty percent of the houses become black, folks start really moving out.

In many ways, Benjamin felt comfortable in his department despite being the only diverse person. For the most part, faculty had been overtly accepting of Benjamin. However, behind this feeling of acceptance was the unspoken idea that faculty might not be as accepting if there was a visible collective of diverse persons. Here, Benjamin shed light on the inherent contradiction that diverse faculty experience through implicit messages.

Concurrently, diverse faculty experienced subtle messages of unwelcoming in a variety of university contexts which directly contradicted its overt messages. Faculty
identified surface level welcoming by Southern U, but implicitly felt messages tended to
depict a culture that was less than inviting. For example, Jennifer acknowledged the
prevalence of these subtle messages:

I’m like it's the covert stuff that’s hard to stop, but as long as you’re not in my
face I think I can deal with you okay. But, don’t say anything to me to my face.

You know and unless you want to have a conversation, don’t say something ugly.

Jennifer’s response suggested overtly discriminatory messaging as easier to combat
because interaction allows for confrontation. Whereas covert messages remained
discursively invisible making them difficult to both identify and confront. This resulted in
the diverse faculty member second guessing whether the message was problematic or not.

Francine provided an illustration of these experiences:

There are some things that I’m certain of. I often experience this presumed
incompetence just as an African American and a female so we have that dynamic.

But then, also, I think about how it affects it on both sides, whether it be from
administration down or from students up.

In this situation, it was difficult to point out the discursive action where Francine’s
intelligence was repeatedly questioned. For this reason, Francine eliminated any doubt of
whether the experience was valid by naming it and describing its prevalence. Still,
Francine openly recognized this experience as one that created frustration and self-doubt.

She further stated:

I think a lot of people experience this when it comes to racism, and when you
have different experiences or micro aggressions or different things that happen,
and you’re sitting there like, now I know this just happened. No, am I crazy?
The subtle messages experienced by Francine are mirrored in situations where diverse faculty have felt unwelcomed. Other subtle messages were enacted in public spaces where diverse faculty were outnumbered. For diverse faculty members, outward acknowledgement of situations that were covertly discriminatory led to an unwelcoming environment cultivated by non-diverse faculty. A case in point, Glenda illustrated how subtle messages of exclusion forced a faculty member to quit:

We had a, University Senate had a policy proposal over this, separation of church and state, that little issue, that when we go represent, you know, or have a dinner in Smallville or wherever, that we don’t do a Jesus prayer because it’s inappropriate. One faculty member could not see it and stood up at the University Senate meeting to say it is his right as a Christian to do that prayer. I mean, and we went nowhere with it, and this, and this Jewish faculty member, an attorney, left the city, and left Southern U over this issue.

Glenda’s story directly contrasted the environment that Southern U promoted. The faculty member felt so unwelcomed that they exited the environment because there was no support. Without diverse and non-diverse allies, the faculty member experienced an unwelcoming environment. Conversely, Southern U promoted its culture as a community that was accepting of all differences. Yet, diverse persons rarely considered this as evidence. Instead, they looked at the actions of the university to validate this sense of welcoming. Jennifer described outsiders’ perceptions of a welcoming environment:

I said you know that they find my name online and they’ll you know call, say you’ve got new faculty coming in, you’ve got students, they’ll find my name online and they’ll call and say “hey do you all have partner benefits?” I said a lot
of these people are heterosexuals, but they don’t want to be in a place that’s not welcoming because it sets a tone for what you represent in your commitment to diversity.

Jennifer understood that a welcoming environment was rooted in actions and not words. Additionally, covert messages of discrimination were equally detrimental to the organizational environment. Because Southern U’s culture was not overtly discriminatory, the perception was that everyone was welcomed. As Southern U’s faculty outlined, the value of inclusive community was defined by visible markers that undermined its organizational reality. Again, rhetoric was the primary focus of the university’s efforts which inevitably contradicted its day-to-day practices.

**Civil Discourse**

The third and final value offered up by Southern U, *Civil Discourse*, endorsed an organizational culture entrenched in civility. Meanwhile, Southern U situated diversity and civility together as cultural markers that firmly and explicitly embraced difference. Faculty expectation was focused on collegiality and facilitating diversity discourse. Through collegiality, faculty were expected to communicate appreciation and respect for diversity in every aspect of the university. Southern U expected faculty to foster diversity in the classroom and through initiatives. Accordingly, Southern U’s promotion of diversity was backed by a collective tone of civility instantiated as a necessary facet of diversity communication. Thus, two contradictions were explored: *Facilitation versus Housework* and *Civil Embracement versus Uncivil Other*.

**Facilitation versus housework.** The theme of *facilitation versus housework* emerged because Southern U expected faculty to serve as the facilitators of diversity.
This message of facilitation was explicitly stated in university documents or through email communication. While diverse faculty were not always aware of this expectation, Southern U’s organizational culture was such that faculty willingly embraced this role. Conversely, diverse faculty were tasked with the diversity housework which placed the burden of diversity implementation squarely on their shoulders.

When asked about the role faculty should have in communicating about diversity, almost all the respondents stated that faculty’s role is vital to diversity work particularly in curriculum and the classroom. Interestingly, diverse faculty’s experiences accurately aligned with Southern U’s diversity communication. Not only did Southern U explicitly promote faculty facilitation of diversity, they also gave faculty the freedom to enact diversity in their own way. This congruence was consistently felt by diverse faculty in their curriculum development and classroom discourse.

First, diverse faculty creatively incorporated diversity into their curriculum. From role playing exercises to critical topic assignments that included diversity, diverse faculty used courses as a training ground for students. When asked about faculty’s role in communicating about diversity in the classroom, Juan described how he incorporated diversity in his courses stating:

I think there is no limit to faculty’s role. For starters, I research queer issues in a part of the world that no one really talks about. For instance, you teach courses in a way that is open and queer or you teach topics that specifically deal with diversity issues. You also become an advisor to minority students and a mentor. I think faculty can do all kinds of things to be role models and help students to live as authentically as possible.
By including diversity in his coursework, Juan felt empowered to be creative in developing opportunities for students. He highlighted an often-ignored part of diversity work: creativity. In another case, Juan’s story mirrored Sabrina who explained how diversity can shake up stagnant curriculum allowing for students and faculty to be creative:

When the students see that you're the person who's comfortable with it then they all come to you. I love that, but with all the other things I was doing, it was a lot to carry. The assignments in my classes changed. I had a student win first place in the state of Tennessee covering Ferguson. She also came in second place nationally. People would comment on it when we would go to state competitions, they would say "no one is doing diversity in the state. You all really have that market cornered." By me talking about, it made the students comfortable to talk about it. Then it was actually changing what they were doing.

Sabrina’s statement demonstrates how transformative diversity work can be when it is nurtured and supported. Implementing diversity into coursework provided students with a platform for innovation. For Southern U, Sabrina’s work with students matched its explicit messages and supported the promotion of inclusion and civility. Next, diverse faculty often engaged in classroom discourse by challenging students’ assumptions. At times, diverse faculty were compassionate in understanding that many students entered college with a lot of misconceptions regarding diversity. In class, Francine actively challenged students on the first day:

I teach in my diversity class, you’re not responsible for your first thought, but you are responsible for your second, and what to do with that. Most of my students in
my class are coming from rural areas. Your first thought, somebody else gave to you. What you think about me as a black woman, somebody else put that in you. You’re not responsible for it. We don’t even, you don’t even have to own that, but you are responsible for your second thought now that you know me, now that you know a different experience. So my first thought is I’m pursuing you as an individual.

Francine used her identity to challenge students’ assumptions. This allowed students to discuss incendiary comments and beliefs associated with her race and gender. Moreover, Francine employed Southern U’s value of civil discourse by easing students’ tensions. Francine’s classroom became a safe space where diversity discussions were welcomed. This idea of an inclusive and welcoming classroom happened for both faculty and students. In fact, Southern U explicitly promoted a climate that was welcoming to faculty and students, and this included the classroom. Glenda offered this example of a student feeling comfortable to challenge her assumptions:

What I love about teaching is some of my most eye-opening experiences of my life have been in the classroom. Why do I look at what movies I show? Because a student said to me, “Do you not have a movie where there are black people?” And I said, “Clearly not because I suck and I will rectify that.” I hate to victimize the victim, but I asked everybody in this class to think of movies that you’ve seen around this topic that showcase or really are 100% people of color, I’ll binge-watch. I mean I did and it raised my consciousness. Had that student not had the balls to, excuse my language, the nerve to say that to me, I would like to think I
created a comfortable environment, but that was all her. That was all her standing up.

Clearly, Glenda’s classroom environment was welcoming as her student felt comfortable calling her out. However, Glenda’s reaction affirmed the student’s feelings to demonstrate how everyone experiences some form of privilege. As a result, Southern U’s value of civility was effectively used to cultivate a safe classroom environment.

Although diverse faculty experienced alignment with Southern U’s explicit message of facilitation, the “who” and “how” of facilitating diversity was never addressed. To this end, Southern U’s message suggested that “faculty, staff and students” were all expected to be involved in communicating about diversity. Comparatively, diverse faculty responses suggested that facilitation of diversity discourse was solely carried out by diverse faculty as they were consistently tasked with diversity work regardless of whether or not they could manage the extra responsibilities. Southern U’s explicit message directly contradicted its implicit message that diversity is only for those who identify as diverse. In fact, Glenda called this “organizational housework.” “We do the same thing we do at home. We’re picking up the deans dirty socks and I am frigging sick of it.” The housekeeping metaphor typifies the day-to-day experiences of diverse faculty. Nonetheless, diversity housework was deeply embedded in Southern U’s organizational culture so much that Juan, accepted this notion as fact stating:

I feel like minorities have to do the majority of work and that comes with the territory. Sometimes people talk about diversity as things need to be done. But by whom? It’s not in the majority’s interest to do something for us unless we are going to meet them half way.
Juan’s reasoning was surprising; yet, his statement illustrated why the expectation is left up to diverse faculty to enact change. Southern U’s organizational culture implicitly tasked diverse faculty with the “diversity housework” to generate, develop and maintain diversity structures and discourse. In some cases, this housework mentality manifested because there was not a collective embracement of diversity. Sabrina demonstrated how this played out in her department:

There are a couple of things that happen in academia, specific to here...for a while I felt like I was the diversity person. Anything that had to do with diversity went to me, instead of the entire faculty really needing to embrace diversity. I was sequence coordinator for the largest group within the school. Over half of the school I was a coordinator for and diversity was as much work...because no one else was doing it. I want to be able to talk about diversity. I don't want to have to be the only person or one of a few people talking about diversity and carry that with me every single place I go, and have to talk about that every single place I go.

Sabrina expressed her frustration with being viewed as the “diversity person” because it meant she was tasked with all diversity-related work. The metaphor of housework was reified here as Sabrina’s diverse status demoted her to a subservient role where diversity embracement transitioned into diversity housework. For Sabrina, non-diverse faculty members were never expected to engage in diversity work. Not to mention, they showed an unwillingness to volunteer which worked to contradict Southern U’s message of collegiality. Moreover, Sabrina’s story exposed the weight and expectation placed on
diverse faculty members to carry out every aspect of diversity work. Francine added to the narrative pointing out how others are unaware:

I get it all the time, students applying to pharmacy school, wherever, they say Dr. Perry, look over this for me, and it’s students of color, right? And, someone said, “Dang, every time I talk to you, you’re doing that. Why do you do that for people?” And my response to her was, “Who else is going do it?” Like for real, who else is going do it? Because a lot of white faculty don’t have interest in doing it. I know some amazing faculty that are not people of color that do support students of color, but it’s limited. So, my response to her was, “Well, who else going do it?” It’s like I have another job in that, so.

As Francine demonstrated, diversity efforts qualified as a separate job that she was expected to do. At the same time, the lack of awareness by non-diverse faculty again spoke to the notion of housework. Moreover, the admission that non-diverse faculty were disinterested in diversity-related work should not be understated. In fact, Leslie outlined the implicit message in Southern U’s diversity communication:

I think the university knows there’s a diversity plan and I think they say well there are people who work on diversity and those are the people who should do diversity, but then I don’t think they see it as everyone should be a part of diversity...Everyone should have a role in diversity.

Leslie was aware of the university’s contradictory message that diversity was for people who worked on diversity and not the entire campus community. Leslie combatted the message adamantly stating, “I think everybody should be educated and comfortable
talking about diversity issues and not just refer to someone who is diverse.’’ In a similar vein, Sabrina illustrated her expectations for non-diverse faculty:

It's everybody. White, male, over 60, protestant, from Wyoming. It's not my job to teach them diversity. We should be able to have a well-educated discussion about diversity. It should be just as much their job as it is my job even if they don't consider themselves diverse. By saying that they are the diversity fixer or putting that on someone...that is not a way to go about diversity.

Sabrina’s response exposed the contradiction present in Southern U’s diversity communication and its organizational reality where diverse faculty were tasked to do diversity housework. Sabrina combatted this unfair contradiction with her explicit expectation that everyone should embrace and willingly engage in diversity work.

Civil embracement versus uncivil other. The final theme of civil embracement versus uncivil other demonstrated how Southern U publicly embraced diversity through civility. More specifically, civility was promoted as the way the campus should deal with issues of race and diversity, and these messages were communicated through emails and public statements. Simultaneously, when diverse faculty engaged in proactive discussion about diversity they were viewed as negative and as creating discomfort.

Southern U’s value of Civil Discourse was enacted under the guise of civil embracement. Embracing diversity means “caring and respect for [diversity] and for one another” throughout the campus (Letter to Faculty and Staff, para. 1). This was frequently seen in curriculum and communication related to diversity. In many ways, Southern U explicitly promoted this message through reactionary emails. These emails typically communicated a message that highlighted the campus culture as one that embraced
diversity, while also challenging students, faculty and the entire campus community to temper the emotions and uphold civility. For instance, Juan points to an example of the university’s reactions of civil embracement in response to negative incidents:

When the president sends out these messages, either about racial incidents or the recent ban, it’s very tepid...I wouldn’t say politically correct, but they will never go above and beyond. The current president is all about “nice matters, inclusive community, and cumbaya we all get along.

Juan, recognized that Southern U attempted to promote diversity and inclusion. At the same time, he questioned the university’s lack of initiative to discuss and embrace diversity. His response highlighted the university’s neutrality until initiatives were pushed by the university culture in response to negative events.

Still, diverse faculty members recognized that Southern U’s promotion of diversity was focused on organic efforts backed by faculty, staff, or students. Matthew explained how the university created an open space for programs and initiatives to grow, but this embracement required diverse faculty or students to take the lead:

You know, I think the university celebrates it. You know, and I think it doesn’t, it doesn’t try to put a lid on it, any shape, form or fashion. I think that sometimes people struggle with what’s the best way to talk about it and to approach it. But I don’t know if it’s the university’s role to promote me. I think it’s my role to promote myself and my community. And the university embraces that. And if we take advantage of those things, they’ll say sure, how can we help? I think of it more like the Supreme Court. They’re reactive. Supreme Court doesn’t go and find court cases. The court cases come to them.
Matthew considered embracement as a reactionary experience where the university did not attempt to silence or shut down diversity discourse. Likewise, Juan echoed this sentiment by supporting that the university was reactionary because it was overwhelmed by organizational operations. In fact, he outlined why Southern U’s intentions were not malicious or intended. He furthered:

I don’t necessarily think the university is like this bad institution that is trying to oppress people on purpose. I choose to believe that it’s not because they are willfully oppressive, but simply because the circumstance is such that they need people who are being affected to come up with some solutions.

Juan suggested that the Southern U’s embracement was tempered by the external fact the university was tackling a host of issues. That said, he pointed to diverse faculty as the catalyst for promoting change with the university following suit.

Although Southern U publicly embraced diversity and promoted a proactive diversity discourse, diverse faculty members perceived that this message was primarily communicated during times of trouble. Consequently, faculty attempts to proactively embrace diversity through civil discourse was either unsupported or met with resistance. Negative perceptions of diversity discourse were normalized by organizational members in a variety of ways. Specifically, diverse faculty members highlighted three common reactions to diversity talk: discomfort, indifference, and fear/backlash.

First, diverse faculty members described how non-diverse faculty members experienced feelings of discomfort and helplessness when diversity was introduced during meetings. For example, Francine recalled discomfort by her colleague:
I’ve had colleagues and many people have left here, people of color, but I’ve had colleagues that talk about major challenges when they bring up diversity issues. It is hard being that person that’s bringing up like, we need to look at this. Then everybody else like freezes. You see this like deer in the headlights look. Based on Francine’s description, the mere mention of diversity was enough to halt the conversation. This suggests that faculty were uncomfortable talking about diversity, especially when it came from a diverse faculty member. Jaylen detailed a similar experience where diversity was negatively perceived by colleagues:

I’ve learned working here there are people to watch for. For as many people that are on your side, there are a lot of people that aren’t, and they don’t want you to, present your diversity too much. They look at you and they can tell you’re diverse, but they don’t always want you to be talking about it, they don’t want to hear you saying, I’m doing this, I’m doing that, I believe in this, I believe in that. That makes them, for whatever reason, uncomfortable.

Like Francine, Jaylen also noticed the discomfort his colleagues experienced when he discussed diversity. For Jaylen, there was no space for civil discourse because diversity was not embraced by everyone. Instead, diversity functioned as a disruptive measure that was antithetical to Southern U’s value of civil discourse. Additionally, Jaylen’s cautious navigation of Southern U’s organizational culture was evidence that embracing diversity was optional. This undermined Southern U’s communicative expectations for faculty engagement in civil diversity discourse.
In other cases, diverse faculty experienced an apathetic response from faculty surrounding diversity. This indifference was felt by Christian, who was warned about serving on a diversity committee:

I was once told you might be asked to serve on these diversity committee because you are minority. It’s okay. I would be okay with being asked. Most people see it as a task based on some statement we must put out. There’s the problem of like diversity is not a problem...maybe we should do this but it’s kind of pointless...that is the typical response and you’re like no wait a minute... there is a problem. They are in their own world, in a closed world, instead of in an open world which is what diversity is supposed to be.

By warning Christian of this committee, his colleague situated diversity as a negative and pointless part of Southern U’s culture. However, Christian challenged this perception arguing that Southern U had a problem with diversity. His statement outlined the contradiction between Southern U’s diversity communication and its organizational actors. Southern U may have wanted the entire university to embrace diversity, but diverse faculty experiences suggested that non-diverse faculty were disconnected from the message. Finally, diverse faculty encountered situations where proactive discussion was mired in fear. For this reason, some non-diverse faculty perceived diversity discourse as a threat to their identity. Francine summarized this experience:

Like nobody wants to talk about that, or they do things that are passive-aggressive towards that individual. I know that happens. When I see that people like may roll their eyes or they take it as some type of attack...I always come in love, but you’re not always taking it.
Francine’s discussions of diversity were viewed negatively by her colleagues regardless of intent. Thus, she was positioned as the uncivil *other* whose actions were antithetical to Southern U’s value of civil discourse. Ironically, diversity discourse was supposed to change the conversation from one that excluded diverse others to one where everyone was invited to the table. Here, diversity was viewed as a discursive force meant to threaten non-diverse people. What’s more, Francine’s experience was not unique. Sabrina explained a similar experience:

I’ve seen people not even want to say the word diversity, like this is ethics, “Well yeah, it is a part of ethics but it is also diversity.” This professor and I were co-instructing this student on an independent study. I actually went with her to figure out what was going on...the paper was on Blacklivesmatter. He kept saying "All lives matter. This is ethics.” Yes, we all matter, but that's not the issue. I'm not trying to come at you with an agenda that is different than yours. This is something we are investigating; Sometimes people in tense times get uncomfortable or feel threatened

Sabrina’s interaction with her colleague spoke to the difficulties experienced by diverse faculty as she attempted to provide clarity to the situation. Again, even when diverse faculty engaged in civil diversity discourse, it was often perceived as a personal indictment. Just as faculty viewed diversity as a threat so too did the students. Sabrina continued:

I have students saying I don't care about diversity...scared...I have had multiple students say they are scared minorities will become the majority by 2050...like it’s a personal threat.
Not only was diversity negatively perceived by Southern U faculty, but as Sabrina illustrated, students held similar perceptions. In this case, Sabrina explained that students similarly expressed a sense of fear when engaging in diversity discourse. Thus, diverse faculty were forced to carefully navigate a campus environment that refused to proactively embrace diversity. Ultimately, the contradiction between the explicit embracement of diversity and the implicit reality where diversity was communicatively denigrated remained ever present. Between Southern U’s diversity value of civil discourse and the related contradictions, diverse faculty experiences were entrenched by tension and paradox.

**Paradox and Tension**

As the previous themes emerged focusing on alignment and misalignment, related tensions and paradoxes were exposed. In other words, diverse faculty experiences contradicted Southern U’s publicly stated messages of diversity and were often presented in communicative enactments of diversity. Therefore, research question 2 (RQ2) asked: What, if any, tensions or paradoxes are experienced related to Southern U’s diversity communication? Three emergent organizational contradictions and two tensions emerged corresponding with Southern U’s diversity values (See Table 3).

**Paradox.** Stohl and Cheney (2001) describe paradox as discursive interaction where the effort to meet one objective devolves into an unforeseen objective that serves to undermine its original intent. They contend “paradoxes are contradictions with an added element of interdependence” (p. 356). Furthermore, a pragmatic paradox is bound by space and time where context and situation are vital to understanding how organizational actors interact within an organizational structure. At Southern U, faculty
members experienced a great deal of autonomy along with an expectation that they would enact diversity on campus. Yet, diverse faculty members were also subject to communicative enactments of diversity. What’s more, this enactment was layered in contradiction resulting in a paradoxical experience. Three overarching paradoxes emerged from the data including the: Paradox of Representation, Soldier Paradox, and Paradox of Diverse Organizing.

Table 3

Contradictions and Tensions in Southern U’s Diversity Communication

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradox</th>
<th>Tensions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Paradox of Representation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fear of the Spokesperson</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased representation, feelings of tokenism</td>
<td>• Desire to represent identity, but won’t represent the group</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Representation meant diverse voice received a seat at the table</td>
<td>• Refuses to be the voice for a group</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provided with more diversity related tasks</td>
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**Soldier Paradox**

- Sense of duty to diversity
- Shoulders bulk of diversity work which impacts job performance, and emotional and physical health

**To be or not to be Uncivil**

- Vocal is a way to have voices heard, but without being too outspoken
- Negative perceptions outspokenness

**Paradox of Diverse Organizing**

- Organizing provides network and connections with other diverse faculty,
- Organizing is fragmented, viewed as exclusive
- Negative perceptions about non-diverse individuals
Paradox of representation. At Southern U, diverse faculty were constantly subjected to the pragmatic paradox of representation. As the university pushed to increase diverse representation, diverse faculty were often forced into the role of token. According to King, Hebl, George and Matusik (2010) tokenism emerges when “numerical underrepresentation is a primary cause of negative work experience for [diverse] persons” (p.484). They posit that tokens experience negative processes such as high visibility and role constraints. In this case, Southern U’s effort to increase representation enhanced the visibility and also subjected diverse faculty to unrealistic participatory expectations. As such, the contradiction between Southern U’s explicit and implicit messages created a discursive pragmatic paradox where diverse faculty were expected to be highly visible. Jaylen, an African American faculty member spoke to this pragmatic paradox:

I want to work for a diverse university. I want to work at a campus where I see students that look like me, faculty and staff that look like me, so that I don’t feel like I’m the one token sitting in the corner that they just show, the dog and pony show, just to say, “Hey look, we got one.” That, that’s not diversity to me, that is anything but diversity.

Jaylen associated diversity with increased representation and visibility, but also detested feeling like a token. However, context mattered here as Southern U’s homogenized reality made diverse visibility inevitable and forced faculty into the token role. Additionally, as diverse faculty experienced an organizational makeup that was anything but diverse, they recognized that increased representation and visibility were essential to
diversification. One faculty member, Matthew, acknowledged feelings of tokenism while accepting that it might be inevitable:

I feel like the token Latino, but I embrace that. At the same time, I’m kind of like, golly, really? I know why you’re asking me and I kind of appreciate it because I enjoy that kind of work. I also understand that is the reason why I’m here is because I’m the representative. I was telling somebody the other day; you don’t want to make yourself irreplaceable. You know?

Matthew was consciously aware that representation often meant being the token. By embracing the token role, Matthew attempted to subvert its negative effects. However, he also realized that his visibility as the token made him an asset to the organization. On the other side, not all diverse faculty negotiated this experience in the same way. For some, representation and visibility did not necessarily lead to diversification. Sabrina, for example, viewed representation and visibility as a quick fix that undermined diversity. She stated:

I tell [students] I’ll always be there for you, but I can't be the person that is here that keeps allowing them to pass or get by and not have them deal with the issue at hand. I don't want to be the Band-Aid. I want them to deal with the festering problem.

Unlike Matthew, Sabrina realized the role of token was counterproductive to the organizational goal of diversification. Sabrina felt objectified in a way that inhibited meaningful change. This objectification manifested itself in the paradox of representation. Southern U’s push to increase representation not only meant enhanced visibility for diverse faculty, but signified an increase in tasks and expectations. As Stohl
and Cheney (2001) note, pragmatic paradoxes are not always developed in the immediacy, but “over time through the accumulation of messages and activities” (p. 356). As such, faculty were expected to be the representative in every situation to signify that the university had increased representation for diverse faculty. Jennifer identified this discursive paradox as exhaustive and constant:

Well, you get this torn, and I don't know how many times Sharon and I have stayed up half the night talking about this. You get torn because you want to be there and you want your voice to be heard and without having your voice at the table then it doesn’t get better. But when you don’t have those voices and you’re the only one it gets old. A lot of times she said they want a black voice at the table. She said “why can't white people talk about black people without us being there? Why do we always have to be there? Can't we come in and then you go do the work? Why do I have to be there the whole time holding your hand?” And I was like you know I kind of feel that way sometimes too. It’s like why do you ask me so many questions?

Clearly, the weight of this paradox was palpable. Jennifer’s experience illustrated how increased representation was important during the early stages of diversity work. However, if that increase in representation was motivated by visibility then tokenism is constant rather than brief. Thus, diverse faculty were faced with more paradoxical experiences.

**Paradox of diverse organizing.** The underlying contradictions of Southern U’s diversity communication subjected diverse faculty to an organizational reality where paradox flourished. Attempts to cultivate an inclusive community that encouraged and
nurtured diversity furthered fragmentation of diverse persons while deterring efforts to organize. That said, diverse faculty were forced in an ongoing paradox. First, the perception that diversity organizing was only for diverse persons undermined organizing efforts because diverse faculty were afraid to network with other diverse faculty. Francine pointed out the salience this perception had on organizing efforts:

It’s funny cause all of them, it’s usually only the people, it’s the same people that are at those things. But a lot of times people will just perceive like, oh, if they have a black on it, then, that’s just for the black people.

Francine’s statement suggested these perceptions were misconceptions that prevented Southern U’s diversity structures and programs from reaching a wide audience. Juan had similar feelings to Francine in his experience with diversity organizing except his example focused on faculty:

It’s funny that a lot of faculty will go to events like black graduation when students invited me...that tells you something about the culture. Faculty will go if a black student is like come, otherwise they feel they are intruding. Even my straight colleagues ask if it was okay if I come to lavender graduation because I don’t want to intrude.

Like Francine, Juan found this experience to be humorous, while realizing its paradoxical nature. In promoting diversity and inclusion, diversity organizing was perceived as exclusive. Thus, limiting the effectiveness of diversity work and undermining Southern U’s value of inclusive community. Additionally, this perception could inevitably cast doubt over diversity organizing and programs in which diverse faculty were afraid to organize. At the same time, diverse faculty support was vital to their organizational
survival, especially when the environment was not welcoming and inclusive. Sabrina, for example, experienced an unwelcoming department for diversity. However, Sabrina found solace in faculty organizing. She posited:

I think there is a group of us and we all kind of know that we support diversity and we gravitate towards each other. We have almost this professor culture we have created and it's like you find each other. That can be good or bad depending on how you look at it. If you just stick in that pack and don't want to explore other options. You don't want to be the opposite of what you're hoping to be.

As Sabrina illustrated, diverse faculty were constantly aware of how others perceived their efforts to organize. In keeping with pragmatic paradox, context was essential to understanding the paradox. At Southern U, the culture was contradictory where inclusion and community acceptance were overtly stated, but not embraced in the organizational reality. Furthermore, Southern U’s organizational culture was homogenized which fragmented diverse faculty engagement. This fragmentation created a balkanization that deterred diverse faculty from working together. Because resources for diversity structures was limited, organizing became a fight for resources instead of a collective fight for diversity and inclusion. Matthew provided an example of this paradox:

As individuals of diversity, even though it’s easier to connect to other minorities, there’s so many double binds here. You want to promote yourself and you want to promote your issues and your ideas. And you don’t want to get lost in the shuffle. You know? And I see that sometimes. You know, where like, I’m not sure if it’s jealousy or getting left behind and I think maybe we could do a better job of sort
of all boats rise together kind of thing. And I don’t know, I don’t know how that works. I don’t have the answer to that, but I wish I did.

Ultimately, the paradox remained in constant flux because the organization was not static, but filled with interactions and contestations. As a result, diverse faculty navigated a culture that was not conducive to diversity. Organizing was seen as the core of diversity work where faculty and students could engage in message collection. At Southern U, contradictions shaped the organizational reality to one that negated its explicit message of an inclusive community. Thus, problematizing the collective efforts of diverse voices to organize and further undermining diversity.

**The Paradox of the Soldier.** Southern U’s value of civil discourse was fraught with contradictions between its explicit and implicit messages cultivated an environment where contestation was inherent and diversity negotiation was discursively difficult. First, Southern U’s explicit messages suggested that all faculty should engage in diversity facilitation; yet, implicitly the expectation to facilitate diversity work was primarily assumed by diverse faculty. Second, Southern U explicitly promoted a culture that embraced diversity, but diverse faculty described negative perceptions about diversity discourse. These contradictions forced diverse faculty to individually and collectively identify as “diversity soldiers” engaged in a constant contest for diversity. Amidst this contest, diverse faculty took on added roles and responsibilities that were potentially detrimental to their organizational experience. Matthew’s response illustrated this experience. He stated:

You know, if I want diversity, then that means that I must step up to the plate with all these committees so that I can offer that diversity. Personally, because I’m a
minority, and I’m part of a diverse community, I feel like I have a role because I am part of the diversity.

Much like soldiers internalize the role of protecting the country as a duty because of their citizen status, Matthew’s diverse status obligated him to assume the role of “diversity soldier.” Boyd (2004) talks about the war metaphor as a paradox that unites organizational actors. In this case, Southern U’s diverse faculty united under their diverse status as soldiers fighting for diversity. While diverse faculty refrained from specifically naming their organizational experiences as a “war” or “battle” they alluded to this feeling in other ways. For example, Jaylen offered this understanding of what it meant to be a diverse faculty member:

> We need to be on the frontline, that’s our job and I know it’s not always the easiest conversations to have, but it’s one of those conversations, one of those things that you must do.

By suggesting diverse faculty should be on the “frontline,” Jaylen inferred that contestation is at play. Even his description of diversity conversations as difficult supported the depiction of a battle that must be fought. He continued:

> I think it’s my duty. I think it’s something that we all should be doing to some degree, whether I’m working with black kids or whether I’m working with Bosnians. I’m still living off the work [others] have done. And I think a lot of us are, and so now it’s our turn to do the same, to build off what they’ve done, so that in twenty years, hopefully there’s even more diversity.

The soldier metaphor fits here because soldiers often feel an unimaginable sense of duty for their country. At Southern U, diverse faculty embodied this role for diversity. Jaylen’s
use of words like “duty” or “job” spoke to the role perpetuation felt by diverse faculty. Diversity remained a duty because no one else was willing to do it. In addition, Jaylen viewed his role as serving two functions: creating opportunities for diverse people and working for the benefit of future generations. Like Jaylen, a soldier’s role is to protect the country and fight for the nation’s present and future freedoms. Francine mirrored these sentiments of “duty”:

It’s my purpose. I get meaning from it. Like me being able to serve in this capacity is giving me life. It’s my life. I just do it. You know, I get up and I see a need. I just do. Like, even if people don’t support it or whatever. Oh, well, it might help one person, right? So, for all of those students of color, and those students who may come from environments where they didn’t have somebody that could teach them about transitioning into the university setting, that’s who I have to be. It really is a whole other job. Like how some faculty will send people to me, or simple things like just navigating this environment, like I need to be there.

As Francine described, diversity was a part of her identity. Along with the university’s expectation, there was an inherent feeling of responsibility to support diversity in any capacity without hesitation. Francine recognized that there was a duty to save and support diverse youth because Southern U’s culture was not conducive to diversity. In many ways, Southern U’s diverse faculty were forced to fight for diversity even at their own expense. By the same token, soldiers often sacrifice themselves for the good of the country by assuming overly demanding tasks and responsibilities. The soldier paradox arises when diverse faculty attempted to exclusively fill the void in diversity work. In
some ways, a literal sacrifice was taken up as time, resources, and opportunities were strained to meet the additional pressure associated with diversity work. As latent objectives emerged to counteract initial goals, paradoxes are “self-referential, contradictory, and trigger a vicious cycle” (Cheney & Stohl, 2001, p.355). Southern U’s environment was inherently paradoxical because diverse faculty were the sole participants in diversity work which, in turn, deterred their ability to facilitate diversity discourse. Benjamin described the paradox experienced by diverse faculty:

Here’s why I say it’s difficult: My minority status has granted me a lot of possibilities and opportunities, but the downside of it, and I tell this to my white colleagues, I can't do everything. You participate on all these diversity committees that takes you away from doing the research that’s necessary to get you tenured. It's a pretty stressful period for young faculty, especially young African American faculty not only are they trying to work on getting tenure, they have this conflict with trying to mentor students, minority students, or any students. It came to a point where I was turning down these opportunities from the students or saying no to a colleague who can affect my tenure.

As Benjamin noted, diverse faculty are situated to shoulder an unrealistic amount of diversity work. However, shouldering this load worked antithetically to the goals self-enacted by diverse faculty and the diversity communication enacted by Southern U. In fact, bearing the bulk of diversity work paradoxically stifled diverse faculty’s ability to mentor diverse students, facilitate diversity and to secure organizational stability. Along with Benjamin, Juan recognized this pragmatic paradox:
I think once you become the [diversity] person, your effectiveness drops. You’ll be on taskforces, committees...once you become identified as the voice for the diverse community...the school newspaper will talk to you all the time, the local news will talk to you all the time.

Next, diverse faculty expressed how diversity was simultaneously a duty and an organizational burden. As diverse faculty assumed greater diversity-related responsibilities, they became emotionally and physically exhausted. Sabrina’s response highlighted this paradoxical experience:

Being a non-tenured professor, I am on tenure track, but I don't have tenure yet, and I had an administrative role on campus. I also had a 4-3 teaching load and 60 advisees. When I had an administrative role, it got lessened to a 3-3. But still that is a lot and I do [diversity] research, and I was a faculty advisor for two student groups both diversity focused. That puts that extra burden on you too. I don't mind doing it and I enjoy it, but if you're doing a whole bunch of other things too, and you're focusing on diversity and a lot of microcosms. It's a lot to carry.

As Sabrina posited, supporting and promoting diversity is an additional weight that diverse faculty consistently experienced. In some instances, this organizational burden led to burnout and turnover for diverse faculty. Sabrina, like many others, considered this burden unsustainable and decided to part ways with the university. She clarified this decision stating:

I’m moving on...I’m hoping that it will send a message to the university and my department. It is the reason I left. I now have students that come to me saying “where are we going to go, now that you’re leaving?”
Organizational turnover meant that remaining diverse faculty must either assume that responsibility and further constrain their effectiveness or allow it to go unfulfilled. Regardless, the soldier paradox was organizationally reified as diversity discourse and structures inevitably faltered.

**Tension.** Stohl and Cheney (2001) called tension or “The clash of ideas or principles or actions and the discomfort that arises” (p. 354). Tension is different from paradox because it represents the negotiation of conflicting discursive experiences and the “communicative demands” that undergird enactment (Gallant & Krone, 2014, p. 40). Simply put, the failure to address tension often leads to the formation of paradox. Two major points of tensions emerged from the analysis: *Fear of the Spokesperson and To be or not be Uncivil.*

**Fear of the spokesperson.** Diverse faculty were also expected to speak on behalf of all diverse people. Faculty often attempted to subvert or even shun this role. At Southern U, diverse faculty were the face and voice for diversity. However, diverse faculty typically expressed discomfort and frustration with this role; thus, they looked to distance themselves from speaking for the entire group. Matthew stated “I’m a spokesperson for Latinos, but that doesn’t mean that I should be a spokesperson for Latinos, if that makes sense.” Likewise, Sean spoke adamantly about not wanting to be the only voice for the entire group:

> A common issue for diverse people with diverse backgrounds in an area that is very homogenous... I don’t want to be the representative for a group...that is not how I see myself, much less be the representative for the groups that people want me to be for...I’m not the representative for east Asian people. There are times
when I can bring in a different perspective, but it’s not who I am. I am in this field studying this and the choice to tie it in is up to me.

As Sean pointed out, speaking for the group should be left up to the diverse individual. Tension manifested when representation led to an expectation that a diverse faculty member must always speak on behalf their group. Sean also described how this tension occurred most often when the organizational reality was homogenized. More importantly, diverse faculty spoke of the exhaustion that accompanies being the spokesperson. The expectation to speak for the group became a burden on diverse faculty resulting in self-silencing:

Part of me is tired from standing up for my community which is like horrible. There is a sense of guilt that comes with this where “I shouldn’t go to the gym, but instead go to this meeting.” There is also that being politically active. I’m okay, but I also know that other people aren’t okay.

Juan’s frustration exposed feelings of guilt and conflict when he refused to represent his group. Juan considered the role of spokesperson a separate job which created constant tension. He furthered:

It’s like a double burden. I have to be visible, isn’t that enough? Can I just be visible? Or do I have to actively promote, and speak for those who truly cannot be visible?

Here, the tension simultaneously forced Juan to shun the role of spokesperson while settling for the role of token. For diverse faculty, tension and paradox deeply embedded the enactment of Southern U’s value of difference and representation and cultivated a constantly negotiated organizational reality.
To be or not to be civil. Southern U’s contradictory messages about civil discourse revealed a constant organizational tension affecting diverse faculty. Such a tension emerged when diverse faculty engaged in sensemaking to navigate Southern U’s ambiguous diversity communication. Based on Southern U’s diversity communication, civility was ideologically prioritized and recursively positioned. Without a standard for enacting civil discourse, diverse faculty were subjected to an organizational experience cloaked in doubt and uncertainty. As Jaylen reminded, diversity discourse pushed by diversity faculty was inconsistently supported. He stated:

It’s important to understand that not everybody is going to appreciate and be onboard with your vocalization of your diversity. Some people would rather you just be diverse and shut up, whereas some people are proud that, to hear [you] speaking up or saying something.

Jaylen experienced tension as he negotiated what constituted civility. From his perspective, the act of vocalizing diversity, regardless of delivery, was perceived as uncivil in certain situations. Under these circumstances, diverse faculty were forced to cautiously adapt or risk deflection of their diversity discourse. This tension was reflected especially in the everyday interactions of diverse faculty. Karen isolated the discomfort she experienced at Southern U:

There are times I’m not as comfortable being more vocal about [diversity], but you’re always black. One faculty member said she liked that I had an iron fist and a silk glove, and that I was firm, but I didn’t hurt your feelings. I don’t want to do that, but I do want to speak up about things that are a challenge. If I think that an issue whether it’s dealing with race, or grades, or money, is going to make
someone feel uncomfortable, then I’m going to feel uncomfortable. I’m not going
to not do it, but I’m going to feel uncomfortable. I’m going to think, Oh, I know
they’re going to hate me, or there goes that race talk again.

Interestingly, Karen’s experience when vocalizing diversity resulted in a mirrored
discomfort. The tension was reflective of non-diverse faculty members’ reactions to
diversity discourse. As diverse faculty elucidated, reactions to diversity discourse were
frequently met with negativity or dismissal. Other situations offered a similar
organizational tension where diverse faculty negotiated responses to problematic rhetoric.

For example, Jennifer described the struggle navigating this tension in meetings:

> You know when I’m in a meeting and somebody will say something and I roll my
> eyes. It’s like I knew you’d have a problem with it. “Well, you know you’re being
> a sexist asshole, sorry.” But I do, I am kind of that one that will correct people. If
> they’ll say they’re manning a table. I’m like you know you’re personing it. You
> know I say stuff like that all the time. Or, if somebody says something racist, I’m
> just like yeah, that’s a micro aggression.

Alternatively, Jennifer’s outspokenness was tempered during the tenure process. Jennifer
furthered:

> When I was going up for tenure, I watched what I said. I even watched what I said
> in front of my boss downstairs. I thought “just six more months, man, and I’ll
> have tenure and I can just start cussing people out”. And, then when I applied for
> this job, I was real careful.

Outspokenness for diversity was associated with incivility when advancement or, in this
case, tenure was a factor. Diverse faculty understood that perceptions of incivility
negatively impacted one’s chances at earning tenure. This contextual negotiation of diversity discourse by diverse faculty echoed a recurring tension embedded in Southern U’s organizational culture. What’s more, Southern U failed to provide diverse faculty with a consistent platform for engaging in what was deemed civil discourse. Hence, diverse faculty were repositioned into competing organizational enactments of diversity discourse; that is, embody the activist role or constantly experience discomfort in discussions where diversity is a component. For instance, Glenda embraced the outspoken role and recognized its necessity in initiated change:

I push and I push. I believe if I’m going to be complaining, I need to be proactive and I need to be part of the conversation, and not let somebody else take that lead. I’m just like, I am the stirrer of all things crap. That’s like my job. You know how in groups; everybody has a role? Well, that’s mine. Stir it up. I am female in my presentation, but I’m viewed as the Hillary Clinton. I’m just a bitch. I will go and I will make sure I sit at the table, and I really don’t care.

Glenda understood that outspokenness may be received negatively by other faculty. Furthermore, Glenda’s response suggested diversity work was inherently a change effort that was meant to “stir” things up. By contrast, some diverse faculty viewed this method of diversity enactment as ineffective. Within Southern U’s organizational culture, diverse faculty like Glenda became permanently associated with incivility. Juan described how the diversity label existed in tension:

...it’s hard because you don’t want to be the person that people avoid because there comes the crusader...I’ve seen people viewed like that. That shuts people down. On the other hand, you don’t want to be an Uncle Tom. “oh shucks those
funny gay people” It’s very tricky for me to negotiate. I don’t want to be the person at the meeting whose like “what about gay people, what about diversity? What about foreigners?” it is very difficult to negotiate that.

Glenda’s role as the diversity activist mirrored Juan’s description of the “crusader”. However, there is a clear difference between their perceptions of the activist role. Glenda viewed outspokenness as a means for promoting discourse whereas Juan saw it as an ineffective method. In the context of diversity communication, diverse faculty negotiated multiple tensions with relation to their diversity discourse, depending on whether their message was considered civil or uncivil, their organizational stability, and the reactions of non-diverse faculty. Ultimately, Southern U’s diversity communication repeatedly contradicted the organizational realities of diverse faculty. Contradiction characterized Southern U’s organizational identity as an environment where tension and paradox were normalized and diversity enactment was inconsistently supported or squelched.
Chapter 5: Discussion

In conducting this project, I set out to shift the conversation of diversity work to one where communication is at the center. In doing so, it became clear that diverse faculty’s organizational experiences with diversity were complicated and surprisingly similar. This chapter contextualizes the findings in the study and offers theoretical contributions to CCO theory, communicative enactment, and tension and paradox. Additionally, these findings build on previous work in diversity communication, organizational communication, and higher education. This chapter also provides a discussion of potential diversity praxis to further organizational understandings of diversity work.

Perhaps one of the most fundamental aspects of the findings was the overwhelming expression of contradiction in Southern U’s diversity communication. Contradiction specifically resided between the explicit and implicit communications of diversity. Southern U frequently positioned itself as an organizational model of diversity through its explicit messages. From its broad definition of diversity to an explicit focus on inclusion, Southern U maintained an image that prioritized diversity. A case in point, Southern U’s image of “civil embracement” sought to actively encourage an appreciation for diversity through mediated communication. Other explicit messages focused on increasing diverse representation which Southern U publicized as a leading goal compared to other institutions. Indeed, Southern U’s commitment to diversity was reinforced through the values of Difference and Representation, Inclusive Community and Civil Discourse. Implicitly, however, diverse faculty members substantiated an organizational reality where such values were inconsistently employed. For example, its
definition of diversity was narrowly defined by race, ethnicity and international status; inclusion was an illusion of lip-service where inclusion was rarely upheld. Instead of “civil embracement”, Southern U’s organizational culture allowed negative perceptions of diversity to flourish. As for increased representation, Southern U’s culture resembled a homogenized reality that privileged white males. Because of these contradictions, diverse faculty experienced discursive ambiguity and resistance attached to diversity from colleagues, departments and the university. These experiences are consistent with much of the literature surrounding diversity work where organizational rhetoric and reality are incongruous. In fact, Southern U’s explicit/implicit dichotomy exposes the diversity divide “between words and deeds, between what organizations say they will do, or what they are committed to doing, and what they are doing” (Ahmed, 2017, p.107). Diverse faculty members’ experiences are invaluable to resolving the inevitable disconnect facing organizations because they provide an inroad into the rhetoric/reality relationship within diversity communication. For starters, diversity communication may be bound by the materiality of organizational culture; that is, diversity rhetoric has a limited impact on constructing an organizational culture that is conducive for diversity. In many ways, organizational decision makers author the production and reproduction of diversity communicated both internally and externally. In the case of Southern U, non-diverse faculty members considered proactive diversity work as uncivil exhibiting feelings of fear, resistance and discomfort during encounters with diverse faculty members. This prevented the rhetoric of civil embracement from becoming a cultural norm. This is dually problematic as the organizational non-diverse faculty members in positions of power were instrumental in creating the diversity communication. Putnam and Nicotera
(2010) suggested an interdependent “alliance between the material and ideational [...] as
texts, such as documents and policies reified from past interactions [...] that impose on
and are shaped by organizing processes” (p.163). To further understand this alliance,
acknowledging how communication constitutes diversity is necessary.

**Communication Constitutes Diversity**

Calls for understanding diversity work through a CCO lens have not yet produced
a wide body of scholarship in organizational communication. The communicative
constitution of organizations challenges scholars to view organizations as complex social
entities comprised of interacting organizational members who influence communicative
practice (Bisel, 2010). This study contributes to the diversity scholarship by necessitating
the link between CCO theory and diversity work. First, CCO theory creates an
ontological delineation between organization as process and organization as entity.
Diversity work speaks to the process-oriented description of organization. Here, diversity
communication represents the focus on “how organization as an activity occurs” (Putnam
& Nicotera, 2010, p. 159). A CCO approach reframes the notion that diversity
communication is a linear process, enacted down, and built on conditioned actions and
responses. Instead, the communicative practice of diversity remains richly layered in
contest and negotiation. At Southern U, competing messages at the university,
departmental, and individual level meant that diversity work remained inconsistently
communicated through varying organizational actors. Consistent with other themes,
Southern U promoted a sense of “welcoming” where difference was respected, and
organizational members felt safe from acts of hate. Yet, diverse faculty members
considered covert acts of exclusion to be indicative of the organizational environment.
Next, diversity work is a communicative practice that helps organization entities come into being. Since organizations maintain a “relatively fluid, permeable and ambiguous” existence, a rhetorical demarcation is constructed to establish legitimacy (Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2015, p.10). As a communicative practice, diversity functions as a form of image management for the organization (Ahmed, 2017). For example, Southern U’s perception as a white institution was considered problematic for its image. Diversity work attempted to reframe this institutional image into one focused on increasing diverse representation. Interestingly, diversity work became about maintaining existing organizational realities rather than transforming them. This was demonstrated in Southern U’s recruitment efforts where non-diverse faculty members frequently defaulted to the status quo. As Leslie demonstrated, attempts to recruit diverse faculty members rarely translated into a hire.

Additionally, this study demonstrated the importance of considering organizational actors in diversity work. A CCO approach provides insight into how organizational members become active participants in diversity communication. That is, organizational actors construct explicit messages and dictate how and if that message is applied. As organizational boundaries are constantly negotiated, members influence its communicative constitution. In effect, diversity is co-constituted by organizational members through communicative practices. This is especially evident in higher education as faculty members experience high levels of autonomy and collectivity at varying times. At Southern U, faculty, administrators and staff functioned as “corporate agents” who represented an organizational commitment to diversity (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010, p. 162). For instance, Southern U expected faculty members to conduct and facilitate
diversity discourse throughout campus and particularly in the classroom. As corporate agents, organizational members can speak for and on behalf of the organization to “exert authority and gain legitimacy” (p. 162). Here, Southern U’s faculty members seemingly engaged in their own diversity communication because of their organizational status. CCO perspectives consider that organizational actors regardless of their organizational identification are made up of incredibly diverse and potentially competing voices (Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2015). At Southern U diverse faculty members encountered inconsistent messages of support and encouragement as well as negativity and apathy from non-diverse faculty. This speaks to the complexity of organizations, but also diversity work. Even among diverse faculty members, organization reality was contested. For example, diverse faculty members held competing beliefs about where diversity communication should start. Some viewed a bottom up approach as most effective whereas others valued a top down approach. Recognizing the role of organizational actors in diversity communication exposes how Southern U’s organizational reality was bound in contest and negotiation to diversity.

Moreover, discussions of power and control are unpacked through a CCO perspective as organizations are reified as a “multitude of material and [corporate agents] constituted in communication” (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010, p.163). At Southern U, non-diverse faculty maintained discursive power over diversity even though they were rarely involved in the groundwork. The proliferation of diversity throughout the organization was contingent on non-diverse faculty understanding of diversity. The power to reject or support diversity communication typically rested in the hands of non-diverse faculty regardless of their organizational status. As reported in the findings, Sabrina described
how her department allowed two of her junior colleagues to discursively stifle her fight for diversity work. She described emailing those in positions of power, but accountability was passed back down the chain. The imbalance stemmed from a lack of organizational value for diversity work. Perceptions of diversity work as inferior work were consistent with diversity scholarship where diversity is described as “dirty work” (Mease, 2016, p. 60). As such, power becomes constituted through communicative practices of diversity work. Subsequently, diversity work becomes shrouded in civility. For diverse faculty members at Southern U, judgments of civility were determined based on their identity as a diverse person and how they specifically spoke diversity into being. Juan highlighted how “diversity crusaders” were perceived by other faculty as too outspoken. Outspokenness became culturally attached to incivility which further marginalized diverse voices. Ignoring how power is communicatively manifested, discursively restricts diversity work. Equally important, organizational actors are not without suppositions. A CCO approach illustrates how these must be addressed individually and collectively. If not, inclusion and exclusion of voices formulates a problematic reality. In keeping with management literature, Southern U frequently ignored the link between individual and organizational oppression. Even during times of national crisis, Southern U would distance itself from the national conversation and ignore opportunities to address covert acts of organizational oppression. That said, overt acts of oppression reflected poorly on Southern U’s image and were addressed through emails and social media. Ultimately, corporate actors were neutrally expected to assume the diversity values as their own. More broadly, these actors, especially non-diverse faculty, resisted messages of civil
embracement by negatively reacting to communicative enactments of diversity and cultivated the social reality of the organization.

**Communicative Enactment: Why the Doing Matters**

As CCO reframes diversity communication as a process, communicative enactment is the central focus. Communicative enactment is a component of CCO. In its simplest form, communicative enactment centers on message delivery and message reception. However, diversity work is loaded with communicative enactment where those constructing organizational messages are subject to them as well. Diverse faculty experience a dualistic sense of enactment because they experience the “doing” and the “feeling.” Southern U failed to address how diversity enactment affected faculty members which contributed to the discursive suppression of diversity. When diverse faculty discussed this unique experience, feelings of hopelessness, frustration and exhaustion surfaced. This study adds to the diversity management literature illustrating that communicative enactment of diversity constrains those doing the “doing”. At Southern U, communicative enactment is manifested through autonomy and agency.

**Autonomy.** Communicative enactment of diversity is typically shown through a managerial lens where enactment is subject to organizational oversight. As previously noted, faculty members experience a unique level of organizational independence. *Autonomy* refers to the independence and flexibility which permits faculty members to subvert accountability and demands. This limits diversity work because organizational actors are restricted to individual enactments of diversity. Trittin and Schoeneborn (2015) explained how diversity work can be individually enacted by organizational actors as long as it “contributes to the attribution of collective actorhood” (p. 6). At Southern U,
diverse faculty were forced to enact diversity work in a dialogic way, but through an individual voice. Thus, diversity messages remained subject to deflection by non-diverse faculty members based on who was saying it. Similarly, diversity organizing was frequently considered an exclusionary enactment. Diverse faculty cited the implicit discouraging of structural enactments of diversity. Diverse organizing events such as the Black graduation were frequently seen as exclusionary for non-diverse individuals. As a result, Southern U only cemented the fragmented reality already in place. With individual enactment as the primary mode, dominant organizational actors work to discursively limit diversity work and eliminate collective action.

Agency. For diverse faculty members, agency was critically associated with communicative enactment. First, diverse faculty were always enacting diversity regardless of the context. The agency of diverse voices remains problematically situated. Agency represents how diversity embodies and negotiates disruptions through diverse identity. Ahmed (2017) argues that for diversity workers “being is never just being. There is so much you have to do to be” (p. 135). In other words, enactment is agentic. Diverse voices are enacting diversity even when they are unaware. The mere existence of diversity instantiates feelings of otherness where expectations of “doing” diversity work remains constant. In this case, diversity means “to be noticeable [...] diversity is often offered as an invitation [...] To be welcomed is to be positioned as not yet part, a guest or stranger” (p. 129). At Southern U, diverse faculty expectation to perform their identity was attached to their organizational experience. Not only was diversity work perceived as a disruption, but so was their diverse agency. Faculty overwhelmingly recognized that agency within the classroom along with organizational meetings was vital. Not being at
the table meant that one’s voice might be ignored, while being at the table further marginalized them. In the classroom, diverse faculty members’ representation both challenged and normalized diversity into organizational life. More exactly, diverse status subjugates diverse bodies to engage in diversity housekeeping; that is, the more one “does not quite inhabit the norms of the institution” the more they are expected to transform the institution through enactments of diversity. Ignoring communicative enactment left Southern U’s organizational environment bound in discursive contradiction, tension, and paradox. In short, communicative enactment legitimates diversity as a communicative process that is recursively carried out in organizational life.

**Universality of Tension**

Within a CCO approach, organizational tension flourishes because communicative practices remain in constant negotiation. Organizational actors expand this understanding to include competing voices who seek to limit diversity communication. This study demonstrated that organizational tension exists when individual and structural contradictions go unchecked. Specifically, individual tension exists because issues of structural oppression and assumptions often go unnoticed. Southern U’s struggle to retain diverse faculty remained a problem as it never addressed its organizational issues with diversity. As a matter of fact, Sabrina chose to leave the university because it refused to address that structural oppression within her department. The acknowledgment of diversity is undoubtedly a necessary step, but biases and assumptions held by organizational actors cultivate organizational lived experience rooted in contest and tension. Following this, organizations should work to affirm the experiences of diverse voices. In comparison, Southern U rarely affirmed the experiences
of oppression attached to diverse faculty members. Failures to address these discursive experiences suggested that diversity enactment became an impossible task for diversity workers. Ahmed (2017) perfectly summarized this inevitable experience:

You have to work not to appear as aggressive because you are assumed to be aggressive before you appear. The demand to not be aggressive might be lived as a form of body politics, or as a speech politics: you have to be careful what you say, how you appear, in order to maximize the distance between yourself and their idea of you (p. 131).

For this reason, it is essential that diversity work address these feelings of fear and anxiety by non-diverse faculty members.

This study contributes to diversity scholarship by privileging diverse voices. In doing so, this study found that tension exists regardless of who is enacting diversity. Diversity management literature illustrates how tension is deeply embedded in the diversity work of non-diverse managers. To differentiate, diverse faculty members as both diversity managers and those who are managed frequently experienced tension because of their identity whereas diversity management literature highlights white male managers' difficulties in articulating organizational diversity messages. Beyond tension, paradoxes are an inescapable feature of diversity work.

**Diversity is a Paradox**

Based on the work by Stohl and Cheney (2001) paradoxes are not inherently positively or negatively associated, but “moral or practical assessments [...] attuned to specific situations” (p. 353). While this is certainly true in traditional participatory contexts, diversity work at Southern U offered few, if any, instances where paradoxes
manifested positively. In fact, Southern U’s context was embedded with discursive contradictions that stifled diversity enactment and often hindered diverse faculty’s organizational experience. Specifically, the paradox of representation positioned diverse faculty as constantly tokenized, or without a voice represented at the table. Likewise, the paradox of organizing functioned as a structural paradox where diverse organizing continuously undermined its intended objectives. Finally, the paradox of the soldier suggested that diverse voices shoulder the bulk of diversity enactment to the point where it became debilitating. In this case, extreme paradoxes within diversity work were problematic and debilitating. Furthermore, these paradoxes only reified instances of power and control through the proliferation of whiteness. Because Southern U failed to address structural contradictions between its words and actions, paradoxes were normalized within the day-to-day organizational experiences of diverse faculty members.

This study supported Mease’s (2016) understanding that paradox constitutes diversity work. More specifically, the notion of diversity housekeeping suggested that diversity work enacted by diverse voices was so emotionally and physically exhausting that paradox was unavoidable. To eliminate these paradoxes would mean that diversity would become an “automatic thought” among organizational actors (Ahmed, 2017, p. 110). As previously mentioned, diversity work is a change effort so much that the goal of diversity work is to normalize diversity into organizational life. This would inevitably eliminate the need for diversity work. Meanwhile, the ongoing push to transform institutions also serves to solidify dominant organizational ideologies. In shouldering the load of diversity work, diverse faculty members allowed Southern U to maintain existing organizational realities.
A Push Towards Constitutive Polyphony

At present, organizational discourses privileging diverse voices are incredibly limited. A productive understanding of diversity communication requires a shift in the conversation. Ideally, a dynamic approach that combines grassroots work with structural organizing requires a thoughtfulness that is beyond the scope of this study. That said, diversity should be embedded into organizational life. Until then, diversity communication cannot cease to disrupt “because this kind of thought is not automatic” (p. 96). Trittin and Schoeneborn (2015) build off Bakhtin’s (1984) work on polyphonic dialog to reimagine diversity communication within organizations. They combine CCO theory with polyphony to extend the study of diversity work into new territory. Polyphony works because it strays away from an identity-based conceptualization of diversity to the center on the collection of diverse voices. Intrinsic to polyphony is dialogic communication where the collection of voices engage in a unifying expression of thought. Extensions of Bakhtin’s (1984) work suggest a shift that allows for the plurality of voices to maintain their distinctive perspective, but still engage in dialog. Diversity organizing at Southern U was enacted through individual interaction which limited the audiences and scope of change. Moreover, those on the receiving end of the diversity discourse had the power to deflect or listen; thus, minimizing the transformative power of diversity work. Following the work of Trittin and Schoeneborn (2015) this study can offer practical implications related to constitutive polyphony for Southern U based on two of their theorized frames: facilitating the polyphony and structural resonance for contextual voices.
**Facilitating the polyphony of organizational voices.** Focusing on different perspectives and voices is an important aspect of constitutive polyphony. Recognizing the plurality of voices allows organizations to address diversity in a way that minimizes assumptions. Explicitly, Southern U maintained a broad range definition of diversity. In action, the university only focused on visible differences such as race and international status which were firmly subject to legal and/or mission mandates. For Southern U, that challenge will always persist, but instituting a constitutive polyphonic approach in recruiting and retention would be a notable first step. More exactly, recruitment strategies could focus on how diverse voices add to the organizational experience through strategies, methods, or work experiences. Recognition that new voices must offer an alternative perspective that privileges the uniqueness of the individual. To clarify, attending to the plurality of voices suggests a contribution that is different than current contextual representations; that is, potential organizational members offer different viewpoints such as emotionality and collaboration. For example, bringing in faculty members with extensive work experience over research publications.

**Structural resonance for contextual voices.** Structural resonance attends to “organizational structures that enable a multitude of contextual voices to be heard in an organization setting” ((Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2015, p. 9). Southern U most often denied any similarity to the outside world and the university community as it related to issues of oppression. In response to national conversations surrounding race or sexuality, Southern U frequently maintained a neutral position and ignored the impact on the university community. In fact, Southern U only mentioned this notion for large scale issues through mass emails. Instead, creating new diverse pathways through social media or
organizational colloquiums to communicate about diversity would help mitigate the structural disconnectedness of diversity communication.

Viewing diversity through a constitutive polyphonic approach proposes cultivating an organizational environment where diversity dialog is collectively constituted and not so fragmented. At Southern U, diverse faculty often served as the lone wolf in various discursive settings. Allowing all organizational voices to express themselves speaks to the transformative nature of diversity work. What’s interesting, diverse faculty members constructed classroom cultures that mirrored constitutive polyphony because all voices could speak including dissenting voices. A constitutive polyphonic approach requires further examination of how faculty interactions in this type of organizational atmosphere would embrace or constrain organizational voices. Universities are consistently changing and subject to regulation and oversights. Still, a constitutive polyphonic approach is communication centered and important for future diversity and organizational scholarship because it focuses on providing a platform for dialogic engagement.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This project began with a curiosity for how diversity communication works in organizational contexts. Since then, it has become a part of my foundation as a communication scholar. After conducting an extensive literature review, I found that in diversity management literature, a communicative perspective was inconsistent and diverse voices were often left out of the conversation. This project was a step to change that conversation to prominently feature the plurality of diverse voices and their lived experience in organizations. Utilizing a grounded theory approach, this study analyzed how Southern U’s diversity communication aligned with the organizational experiences of diverse faculty members. More specifically, Southern U uniquely expected faculty to enact diversity work, but ignored how this communicative enactment affected their experience. As such, this study looked for tensions and paradoxes experienced by diverse voices. Based on the experiences of diverse faculty, contradiction marked by inconsistency and ambiguity undergirded much of Southern U’s organizational experience, which, in turn, discursively constrained its diversity communication. What I have found is that diversity communication is more than explicit words, it is the actors, actions, and communicative enactments that orchestrate or silence its transformative power. Organizations are comprised of many different voices in constant negotiation. When organizations fail to attend to this understanding, diversity in any capacity remains stifled.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study succeeds in creating descriptive inroads for organizational diversity communication, it is not without limitations. For starters, these research findings
are still bound by a particular context that may not transfer across organizational contexts. It is understood that every university is different. They often function as micro-cities within larger communities. What works for a specific institution will not necessarily be applicable to another institution in a community with a different demographic makeup. For instance, Southern U’s situation is rather unique. Prior to this study, Southern U decided to dismantle its diversity structures which limited its diversity communication. During the interview process, Southern U was in the process of restructuring its diversity communication. In fact, a couple of diverse faculty members had received invitations to serve on a new diversity committee. In many ways, diverse faculty members’ responses were a reflection of the transitional constraints within the university. In many ways, this is a frequent narrative among predominantly white academic institutions. Still, these experiences are only a glimpse into the organizational experiences of diverse faculty members. While experiences were similar in many respects, not everyone experienced them in the same way. Departmentally, some diverse faculty remained content in their situation whereas, other diverse faculty experiences were highly negative forcing them to part ways with the university. It must be noted that despite its problems, most diverse faculty members believed that Southern U’s intentions were rarely malicious. To that end, Southern U is a large organizational system with a host of moving parts. Future work should examine the experiences of diverse voices in smaller organizational contexts and across higher education institutions.

Next, CCO theory suggests that organizations are made of various voices and perspectives. This study focused on diverse voices as a way of filling the gap in research. However, this still limits that scope of practical considerations because diverse voices are
not the only voices that should be analyzed. If there is to be effective change, future work must look at all communicative actors within an organization. This is especially important in diversity work where non-diverse voices often hold discursive power over the enactment of diversity. Including non-diverse voices would have provided a further understanding of their perspectives in comparison to diverse voices. Additionally, this study was limited in its attempt to be prescriptive. While descriptive research is an essential part of organizational communication scholarship, prescriptive approaches are vital for diversity work. There may never be a best practice guide for diversity communication, but a communicative framework is needed.

Finally, the scope of this study meant that a prescriptive approach would be difficult. Organizational diversity communication is an emerging area of study which limits the ability to narrow down units of analysis. Still, focusing on a specific department may offer greater opportunities to understand the inner workings of diversity in a university setting.

Aside from these limitations, this project offers a wealth of future directions for communication and diversity scholars. For instance, looking at the day-to-day interactions of diversity communication could be a useful first step. While this study looked at the contradictions present between Southern U’s explicit and implicit messages, diverse faculty pointed out that diversity was most often a communicative practice enacted through interaction. As we know, organizational norms are communicatively reified through interaction. Therefore, a further exploration adopting a critical bend on Giddens’ (1984) Structuration Theory would focus on the impact of “talk” in diversity work and how it generates and sustains systems of power and control. At the same time,
future research should explore the materiality of diversity communication as a process. Current diversity scholarship tends to focus on diversity as communicative practice within an organization, but as Putnam and Nicotera (2010) note, CCO theorists should look beyond the human interaction aspect of diversity work to focus on non-human agents. Here, the materiality of diversity as a process provides a necessary and boundless area for communicative scholars.

Within diversity communication, examining the experiences of diverse voices in other organizational contexts could be fruitful. While institutions of higher education provide a unique lens, future work should focus on for-profit organizations. For one, the organizational structure in corporations tend to be more defined. By extension, there is also much less organizational autonomy for organizational members. Previous diversity literature suggests that diversity work is typically carried out by a designated person or department. Exploration into how diverse voices experience diversity communication would expand this scope and possibly offer more insight for praxis. In addition, a constitutive polyphonic approach is an incredible next step for diversity scholarship. Tritten and Schoenborn’s (2015) work provides a necessary bridge into this emergent framework. Ideally, organizations should look to move past individual categories of difference based on legal mandates to extrapolate how to cultivate an organizational platform that is conducive and actively encourages diversity dialogue.

Finally, future research privileging diverse voices should specifically focus on identity negotiation. At times this study touched on areas of identity, but future work could explore how voices who identify as diverse must negotiate this experience. For some diverse faculty, diverse identity was not always how they viewed themselves, but
how other organizational members viewed them. In fact, my participants frequently discussed notions of “passing” as a non-diverse person and of how intersectionality impacted their organizational experience. For example, diverse faculty members often had to negotiate several intersections of difference. Some identified more with their gender than sexuality. These are discussions that require further exploration as they relate to diversity work. By the same token, future work on how diverse voices negotiate and engage in sense making strategies is needed. Wong (2007) found that diverse faculty often experience high instances of emotional labor in diversity work. Expanding that knowledge to look at other sense making strategies used by diverse faculty members could provide important practical insight.

In short, this project not only gave life to diverse voices within an organizational context, but also provided an endless scope for future organizational and diversity scholarship. These experiences demonstrated how notions of power and control are constructed through communicative enactments of diversity. These findings are unique, but only to those who haven’t been looking. Diverse voices have endured these experiences for as long as they can remember, and at times, diversity work feels pointless. Yet, persistence is a defining trait. Whatever we call it: diversity, difference, diversity work, diversity communication, it is meant to transform and to include the spectrum of voices and experiences. The potentiality for diversity to work itself into extinction remains a distant dream for diversity workers. Sara Ahmed (2017) offers this conceptualization:

We are still doing diversity work here because the foundation upon which the house has been built creates strangers; those who are passing by at the edges of
social experience; those who, when they meet themselves in the materials, feel
grief for not having met themselves before.

It is my hope that this study, prompts future researchers, regardless of background, to
consider the power of diversity in organizational life. As organizational communication
scholars, we must do our due diligence in the fight for inclusion. We must keep pushing.

We must *communicatively* persist.
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Appendix: Interview Protocol

1. How long have you worked on campus?
2. My study focuses on diverse faculty members. I’d like for you to describe how you identify as a diverse person, if at all?
3. How do you think your identity as a diverse person affects your experience on campus?
4. How would you describe the diversity culture on campus?
5. What has been your experience within your department as a diverse faculty member?
6. How do you define the term “diversity”?
7. How do you think the university defines diversity?
   - How has this definition been communicated?
8. Tell me about your own beliefs, values and expectations as they relate to diversity.
9. What is your understanding of the university’s diversity goals and values?
   - How have these goals and values been communicated?
10. Describe your experience with diversity programs and initiatives at the university?
    - What are your perceptions of the university’s diversity programs and initiatives?
11. How does your identity as a diverse person influence your participation in or communication about diversity programs and initiatives?
12. What role does your identity play in the university’s diversity related communication?
13. What role should faculty play in communicating about diversity on campus?
14. How should the university communicate about diversity?
15. Is there anything else, you’d like to add regarding your experience as a diverse faculty member?