The Irony of Diversity Numbers

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ABSTRACT

This article compares "official" college representations of race as diversity with narratives by students of color about racialized experience, with particular attention to the metasemiotic principles governing the first and the discursive organization of the second. Colleges and universities (like other contemporary organizations) represent race as a set of equally weighted, equally ordered demographic categories not explicitly differing in markedness, presented as if universal and deployed in accounts of institutional progress. Students of color (racially marked) talk about their experiences of race in relation to whiteness (unmarkedness). Colleges and universities rely on these students to provide the numbers for representations of progress but too often ignore the conditions that make their experiences so difficult, as those are also the conditions that match the habitus of the elite white students who constitute the school's primary market.

In contemporary organizations, the characterization of race as "diversity" is generally considered obvious, and most people who do not consider themselves diverse take it as such. People who are considered racially diverse—that is, not white—know that the classification masks a lot of issues but this perspective gets little general traction in public diversity discourses. Drawing from research on a nationally ranked private liberal arts college ("the College"), I examine the discrepancy between race represented by diversity numbers and the experience of race as students of color talk about it. I show how diversity numbers feature in accounts of progress directed at external observers (including prospective students and their parents, and current and potential donors), accounts that requires the College have a certain "diversity" proportion, while ig-

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noring the reality of "diverse" student experience. I then examine that reality through student narratives anchored in particular times, places, and relationships, all of which are systematically disconnected from the social world of the elite white students, who are the school's target market.

Counting Diverse Students versus Being a Diverse Student

The use of "diversity numbers" in higher education publications and websites has been common practice since at least the 1990s, particularly in undergraduate education, where admissions officers consider a diverse demographic necessary to attract higher achieving students (Stevens 2007, 180–81). College websites routinely post fact pages listing student demographics along with other pieces of institutional information, including numbers of majors, where students are from, tuition costs, outcomes, and so on.[1] The College maintains a "Just the facts" page linked to information about the incoming class; this includes the number of students entering, the proportion of men and women, the proportion of *students of color from [the] United States* subdivided into *Hispanic/Latino*, *Asian-American*, *African-American*, *Multiracial*, the proportion of *non-U.S. citizens*, and the proportion of *first-generation to attend college* (italics indicate wording on the web page). This information is followed by SAT (old and new) and ACT composite scores, then by the class's geographic distribution across different regions of the United States, and then the percentage of international students. Such arrangements establish an equivalence among demographic classification based on race and other defining categories including gender, place of origin, or academic accomplishment. They also rely on applicants selecting that demographic box to begin with.

Student demographic information figures in representations and comparisons of schools, and in accounts of progress. For example, at the College's first faculty meeting each fall, the admissions director presents a profile of the entering class, concluding whenever possible with the declaration that this is the "best" (in terms of test results) and "most diverse" (in terms of nonwhite demographics) class accepted to date. So demographics signify each incoming class moving closer to a desired goal. Finally, the numbers figure into assessments of schools within comparison groups, a concern among admissions per-

1. Comparable schools include Swarthmore (http://www.swarthmore.edu/about/facts-figures), Williams (https://communications.williams.edu/media-relations/fast-facts/), and Skidmore (http://www.skidmore.edu/admissions/facts/index.php), all accessed May 31, 2017.

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sonnel who know how much demographic "diversity" is expected of a nationally ranked liberal arts college.[2]

In these contexts, diversity demographics indicate that the institution is doing what it should be doing relative to its peers. Ahmed (2012) has examined the institutional function of diversity discourse as projections of positive imagery through institutional texts. While she did her work in the United Kingdom and Australia, the substance of her argument applies to the United States as well: institutional diversity discourses encode race in ways that elide recognition of the historical conditions of inequality that generate race to begin with. The comparative nature of this representation reflects marketplace concerns particularly characteristic of US institutions, which operate in a competitive environment of ranking and customer satisfaction. Accordingly, such discourses are set up in ways foregrounding indicators of continuous year to year improvement.

Central to such diversity discourses is the deployment of the term *diversity* itself, seemingly as a referring expression but mainly as an alignment of positions and interests, its apparently primary and usefully vague referential value masking that alignment function.[3] To the extent that discursive uses of *diversity* and their accompanying demographics orient observers toward understanding what liberal arts education is supposed to be, they operate metasemiotically. Drawing from Silverstein's (1993 and elsewhere) notion of metasemiotic regimentation of linguistic phenomena, Parmentier (1994, 128) explains how such regimentation can "regulate the range of acceptable interpretants of specific segments of social semiosis." Interpreters are guided toward particular interpretive patterns without being "confronted with explicit metasemiotic forms" (134), that is, without ever being certain where the regimentation is. As I have noted elsewhere (Urciuoli 2014), this principle governs college branding, which guides those outside the institution to see the language of branding in preferred ways. Whether quantified information in accounts for outsiders, presentations to faculty, or internal discussions among administrators, its primary metasemiotic function pertains to institutional status. Whatever information it provides about specific students is in relation to that function. So the information

2. In his study of admissions in a liberal arts college, Stevens (2007) provides excellent discussion of the uses of numbers generally and specifically the management of representations of diversity in the admissions process.

3. I have termed these *strategically deployable shifters* (Urciuoli 2003 and elsewhere), referring expressions whose semantic value seems obvious but are relatively indeterminate. Their functional impact lies in their indexical value. Their shifter (Silverstein 1976) value lies in their capacity to align users with addressee(s) or audience, or in some cases, nonpresent third parties. Their semantic indeterminacy can strategically mask that end.

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quantified has no necessary connection with the experience of the students checking the boxes. The labels on the boxes themselves (drawn from federal affirmative action categories) are best understood as truncated approximations of more complex demographic distinctions. Much of the effectiveness of this metasemiotic frame lies in its invisibility, in the generally taken-for-granted notion that in some transparent way it says everything there is to be said about racial diversity, with each demographic classification arranged as if all are equivalent in status.

The general truth of this metasemiotic frame, existing as if a "view from nowhere," apart from any positioned gaze (Irvine and Gal 2000, 36), is taken for granted by most racially unmarked social actors. Indeed, it indexes their unmarkedness. By "unmarked," I mean the representation of defining characteristics of some set of elements as typical, in contrast to marked elements that, in some defining way, are atypical. In this way, markedness is not just different but contrastive.[4] In racial terms, the unmarked position, the default setting, is that of whiteness, and therein lies the basis of white privilege. A considerable literature on race lays out the range of social and historical contingencies through which whiteness and nonwhiteness have emerged in mutually constituted ways and the processes through which whiteness operates as a ground against which figures of nonwhiteness takes on specific and shifting historical meaning (see, e.g., Omi and Winant 1986; Frankenberg 1993; Harrison 1995). In the United States, specific manifestations and meanings of whiteness have been in flux throughout its history, but whiteness systematically perdures as a normative social condition linked in complex ways to investment in a status system.

Central to that investment is the denial of systematic structural inequality, and the belief that whatever inequality exists can be overcome by individual effort. The existence of demographic categories that are treated as equivalent presupposes such denial of structural inequality. This places racially marked students in a peculiar institutional situation. On the one hand, their status as diverse is linked to that system of demographic accounting. On the other hand, the metasemiotic principles ordering that system are not those that structure their everyday experience. What structures routine existence is the perduring contrast of whiteness and nonwhiteness, and for many students it is a considerably more privileged mode of whiteness than they had encountered before starting college. Their experience of these conditions illustrates DuBois's (1903) "dou-

4. This use of markedness is adapted from formal linguistic usage in which marked members of sets relate to unmarked members as specialized to basic or atypical to typical, a concept explored by Jakobson (see, e.g., [1957] 1971) and further developed by Silverstein (1976).

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ble consciousness": continual pressure to evaluate oneself and one's actions through the lens of a system that perpetuates the inequality structuring one's life.

How do students wind up in this situation? Liberal arts colleges recruit students of color through regular admissions and through special programs. In his study of admissions, Stevens (2007) describes the networks of connections through which admissions personnel reach out for likely recruits, networks operating most readily in primarily white high schools. He also raises the point that while it would be possible to build networks reaching far more deeply into high schools in communities of color, this rarely happens. Paradoxically, there is considerable competition among elite colleges in the same comparison groups for students of color, and admissions personnel seem to truly value the idea of increasing their admissions numbers. But they seem to change actual recruitment practices very little, nor do they seem to aim for numbers much past their comparison group's norm of 25–30 percent. Above all, recruiters seem little oriented toward what being students at such colleges is actually like for students of color—nor apparently are many student life administrators or for that matter faculty.

To understand why that should be, a brief look at student life administration is in order. For much of the history of higher education, the default setting for student life oversight has been a sort of benign neglect, particularly at elite institutions dominated by Greek life, where student sociality has been the concern of the unmarked majority. LaDousa (2011) documents the history of the notion of "student fun" over the history of college undergraduate life, showing how "fun" is productively understood as an expression of autonomy in terms meant to be slightly transgressive, while not taken seriously. Since around 1970 or so, student life professionals have taken proactive approaches to containing the worst excesses of "fun," while keeping the detention rate in check through policies meant to develop a well-socialized student, largely focusing on programs for entering students (Upcraft et al. 1989).

In these efforts, in most primarily white liberal arts institutions, the situation of students of color has largely not been understood. The primary, though not only, reason for this is that from most administrative perspectives, students of color are one of several kinds of students. The exception are administrative personnel (associate deans and directors of multicultural, diversity, and inclusion programs) who specifically work with students of color, twelve of whom, along with six faculty, I interviewed at the College between 1998 and 2014. As they consistently pointed out to me, the institution itself does not seem to recognize

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the habitus, in Bourdieu's (1986) terms, of racially marked (particularly working-class) students. They cited limited resources and personnel provided by the institution and above all the discrepancy between institutional attempts to recruit students of color and institutional recognition of how those recruits experience the institution. With little opportunity to implement structural changes that might benefit students' situations, student life administrators addressing marked students' situations spend most of their time and effort addressing immediate needs (especially financial) and crises (academic, social, and family).

Markedness and Sociality: The Experiential Disconnection

By and large, students fend for themselves in day-to-day sociality, which is where the key differences between marked and unmarked student experience emerge; Lee and LaDousa (2015) provide useful accounts of students' experience of such disconnection. A few words on student sociality are therefore in order. Students tend to experience life in a liberal arts college as a closed world. At most liberal arts schools there is a critical mass of mostly racially unmarked, middle-class students who slide easily into a general college sociality (often taking the form of private or Greek letter societies) because this enclosed world is continuous with an already familiar precollege social world. They grew up with a habitus quite continuous with that of elite college life. They are likely to be from families who have gone to similar colleges or universities, and they easily meet and get along with people like themselves and their families in defining ways. Some of those families already know each other. Students from this world are as likely to be drawn to their school's social networks as to its academics or organized activities. This world is grounded in the structures that shape access to resources, opportunities, property, capital, and wealth. In this way, to again draw on Bourdieu, students from such backgrounds come in with considerable social capital, as well as cultural capital in the sense of knowing how to act to their advantage in the discursive fields into which they will move during and after college; all of this is enhanced and solidified by their connection to the school. This tightly organized world of social relations is connected to specific shared places and times and is endlessly recreated in linked social (and therefore discursive) events. References to shared memories and experiences can be seen in the "Class Notes" sections of college alumni magazines, and I have seen it at wedding receptions of former students. It is the form of college sociality that feeds popular representations of college life going back at least to the origins of the Ivy League (Thelin 2004). It is the presupposed background on which college offices of institutional advancement build their fundraising efforts, telling

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alumni, in effect, this is the world you loved, remember it when we ask you to you open your checkbook. And that works.

Such assumptions have serious consequences for students whose access to that world is constrained, students who experience other social configurations in the closed world of undergraduate life. Class difference plays a major role in disconnecting students from unmarked social networks, as Lee (2016) shows in her study of first generation students at a school much like the College. Race also plays a major role, especially when it intersects with class, as I found in interviews with more than 60 College students and alumni of color between 1995 and 2017. Recruitment programs aimed at increasing "diversity" numbers operate on the basis of class and to a large extent racial markedness and account for perhaps half the students of color at the College and a sizable proportion of students making up the Black, Latino/a, and Asian "cultural" organizations. In interviews, students often describe pressures to incorporate into their sociality ways of acting, dressing, and talking that project degrees of belonging to that unmarked world—otherwise known as "acting white." As we see in the next section, racially marked students, especially from urban working-class backgrounds, talk about entering college with minimal connection to the insider world of elite whiteness. As I have discussed elsewhere (Urciuoli 2009, 2016), students of color develop social networks anchored in the programs through which they were recruited, in participation in cultural organizations, and sometimes in private societies with a "diversity" focus. Dealing with markedness is a recurring concern in these social networks, particularly among students connected through recruitment programs. Racially marked students are the core membership in the cultural organizations, which usually list as their mission the provision of cultural awareness and often the provision of safe social space. At the same time, marked students share an acute sense of disconnection from the easy world of unmarked sociality described above, particularly since, as we see below, there are unmarked students who act as if racially marked students are objects to be wondered at, commented on, or touched.

These critical differences between the social worlds of racially marked and unmarked students generate discursive and, correspondingly, chronotopic disconnections. As Silverstein (2005) explains, interactional, that is, discursive, events comprise indexically related elements that, for a particular set of participants, can become comparable to other discursive events so that participants perceive likenesses across events not apparent to others. For them, like events form a set. This is a critical consideration for students of color, who (as we see in detail below) routinely experience being racialized in ways apparently invis-

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ible to most racially unmarked people. This experience is mediated by the semiotics of interaction and the larger structures in which interaction is embedded. Students of color come to see certain interactions as having defining common elements that are largely imperceptible to racially unmarked students. The chronotopic organization (Silverstein 2005, after Bakhtin 1981) shared through such discursive linkages envelops the commonly held frames through which people interpret what happens to and around them (i.e., metasemiotic frames). These time-space-bound interactional envelopes thus come to shape subjectivity, a process noted by Agha (2007) as fundamentally cultural, linking cultural action and personhood to participation frameworks anchored in specific places and times. The importance of such a chronotopically bound process in the formation of racial subjectivity has been noted by Dick and Wirtz (2011). At the same time, the experience of both racially marked and unmarked students is shaped by their being students. Students whom I interviewed often commented on coming to perceive what it means to be black or Latino/a or Asian in new ways in college. So the details of racial identity can be variable and fluid. What makes them constant is the experience of opposition with the unmarked, an experience that starts before they even start college.

Almost half the College's current "diversity number" enter through one of two special recruitment programs that provide financial incentive and aid; the other half enter through the general admission process. The Opportunity Program (OP) provides grants and loans financed by a combination of state and college resources. The Posse Program provides full tuition paid by the admitting institution. Each program also sets students off along distinct social paths, as each requires recruits to participate in highly structured preparation activities prior to their first college semester. OP recruitment is based on academic potential and financial need, and its incoming cohorts are typically 35–40 students. About two-thirds to three quarters are students of color from New York, Chicago, or other major cities; the rest are white, often sports recruits or children of college staff. OP recruits live together on campus for five weeks of intensive coursework addressing academic needs, concluding some weeks before the start of the fall semester; this program is famed for its "boot camp" quality of rigorous standards and very limited social ties to the outside world. It is designed to foster both self-reliance and close relations among its members. The Posse Foundation is a private nonprofit organization. Students nominated for Posse scholarships are high school seniors with leadership potential who are likely to be overlooked in the usual admissions process. Students selected from these nominations apply to the colleges and universities partnered with the city

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from which they apply and are admitted in cohorts (or "posses") of ten. In keeping with the leadership criteria, they attend training and mentoring sessions and workshops, beginning some months before matriculation until they graduate college, all designed to foster individual leadership and changemaking skills, as well as social connections among the student posse.[5] Despite differences in how students are socialized into each program, despite the fact that both programs recruit some white students, and despite the fact that there is some degree of rivalry between the programs, students of color in both have in common that they are, in fact, students of color in a predominantly white elite institution. (See Urciuoli 2016 for a detailed comparative treatment of these programs.) OP and Posse students are generally first-generation college students in their families, so the whole process of college selection is far less negotiated through family and far more through their respective organizations. They thus enter on a social footing different from most unmarked students and continue on a different footing through graduation.

Finding Yourself in a Pretty White Place

We now turn to what students themselves have to say about finding their way into networks of marked social identity, starting with the process of finding and applying to college.[6] The first task to be done is to navigate one's way into as elite a school as possible with the best funding available. High school counselors who know about OP (Opportunity Program) funding do a lot of the steering, with the deal clinched by the OP financial package. As Ana (Dominican), Celia (Cuban and Ecuadoran), and Patricia (Ecuadoran) explained when I asked them how they picked the College,

A: Money.

C: Money.

P: Money.

B: Oh. Well. How did you hear about it?

A: Lourdes came here.

5. However, three Posse mentors expressed concern that these training sessions foster a problematic interdependency.

6. All names are pseudonyms.

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Lourdes (Honduran) had heard about the school through her high school advisor, the same advisor passing on the information to Ana. Celia and Patricia had also heard about the school through high school advisors. All were OP. It is not unusual for students coming in through OP to know little about the College. Kevin (Chinese) first heard about the College from his guidance counselor, who told him, "The College is having a Multicultural Weekend, are you interested?" When he responded "What's the College?," his counselor said, "I don't know." This introduction to the school runs counter to the classic admissions story in which prospective students, in consultation with their parents, choose particular schools that they then visit (with their parents), searching for the right fit; financing is not central to the narrative. Most OP and Posse students interviewed here do not recount their parents participating significantly in the selection process. As Richard (Puerto Rican) explains,

> We went to a private school and we had college counselors. And they very much placed you in a college before you left high school, to make sure you were somewhere. And basically they told you to apply to around seven schools. I think most everyone did that, and basically out of the schools that accepted you you'd just go with the best.

Sara (Puerto Rican), in the same interview, spoke of wanting to attend a small college where she could get to know her professors, adding,

> *S:* So that, in combination with the fact that the College gave me the most financial aid—
>
> *R:* Yeah, financial assistance has a lot to do with it—
>
> *S:* made me decide to go here.

The students who came in through Posse heard about the College because it was one of three schools that had contracted with their city's Posse program. While their initial and to an extent their continuing connection with the school was mediated differently from those coming in through OP, the initial draw, as with OP recruits, is financial. As Posse student Jared (African American) explains:

> I didn't even know the College existed til I was recruited to try for the Posse scholarship. Until then I had no idea what it was. I thought it was an opportunity because they were offering so much benefits that

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> came along with the scholarship so I said, why not try it and find out about the school. And I hadn't really researched it much because at that point I was still in the process of applying for many colleges. So this was an easier ticket into a school.

Incoming students of color know that the College is likely to be predominantly white, but may not immediately realize just how isolated they might be there. Sara and Richard, like many other students, spoke of visiting the school and meeting who they later suspect must have been every other student of color on campus. Sara elaborates:

> For me, I knew two girls that already went here, both of them happened to be Hispanic, and I came and I was definitely worried about diversity on the campus and stuff like that. And they explained to me that it was not as diverse as they would want it to be but they were doing OK and they really wanted me to come, they were encouraging me to come and they always want more students of color to come.

Jared describes his visit to the school and his hosts' emphasis on its location, comfort, and safety, but,

> When we got here we just had each other so we weren't really concerned with the campus as a whole, we were more concerned with getting to know each other and being able to function once we got on campus.

Bianca (Puerto Rican) described realizing how white the school was when classes started: "It came to a point that first week where I was like, 'all right, students of color, come on, like any minute.'" Ely (Puerto Rican) describes the realization of that isolation as follows

> Well, when you come to this school you come as an OP student, and you come to the summer program. And then you have to identify as an OP student, you're all in the same shoes, for you to make it to the College you have to pass a certain program and then you become associated with the people and the people tend to be all lower class or people of color but there are some white students. And you have something in common then. But when you hit the big scene which is September, you realize that if you don't identify with who you are . . . then you don't have a group in this school because the rest of the people are too busy with their own things like the drinking and the parties and things like that. So you need to know who you are.

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People's response to the largely elite whiteness of the College depended to some degree on their prior experience with middle class whites. Gina (Puerto Rican) came to the College having already spent years in a largely white environment, so she reported finding the transition less daunting than it was for some of her OP cohort. Rita (Filipina) reported having "lived with a family who was American and white and I knew their culture and I was able to integrate just fine," though she found that after a couple of years at the College "the social life has been stale, I guess, for me. So I've submerged myself into my studies, basically." Khia (African American) described moving from a demographically complex neighborhood in Brooklyn to a relatively segregated school in Atlanta in which white students all knew each other and black students all knew each other and neither were easy networks for Khia to join. She added, "So after that experience . . . I really don't have much of a problem (here)." Sara and Richard grew up in New York working-class neighborhoods and went to a mostly white private school in Manhattan. Both learned, not always easily, to negotiate the contrast of their own backgrounds with that of their more privileged classmates, and both came to sharpened realizations about the effect of race on people's perceptions.

Nearly everyone I interviewed mentioned the relief of not having to deal with white students all the time. Whatever the term *diversity* might mean to the College, to students it means being racially typified as Black, Latino/a or Asian—usually Black and Latino/a. As Sara put it, "everyone always clumps the two together." The "two clumped together," the place of maximum markedness, is chronotopically convergent. As Richard and Sara explain,

R: It's just so obvious when you get to the College, how significant a role race plays in your life. I know a lot of people experience this. I think I can look at absolutely any minority on this campus and say hi to them and not feel weird about it. And it's because—

S: When you first come to school—

R: There's so few of us that it's sort of like they look out for each other.

S: It's funny, when you first come to school, you know no other minorities but when you pass each other—

R: They'll say hi.

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This brings us to the peculiarly elite quality of college whiteness. The effect that Sara and Richard describe, of all students of color seeming to know each other, is a function of the particular nature of the kind of unmarkedness that typifies the College. As many students put it, there is a big difference between whiteness at the College and whiteness back home. Melissa (Puerto Rican), a first year from New York, explains it as follows:

M: In the city I never felt like "I'm Puerto Rican, this person's white." Here I totally feel it. My best friend in the city's white, I didn't feel any racial barriers or anything. And here I feel it totally, it's really present here for me.

B: In what ways does it come out?

M: People's tone of voice, the way they look at you, just . . . I don't know.

"City" whiteness signifies a different set of markedness relations. White/nonwhite is less polarized, more interactionally (and chronotopically) continuous, and (ironically) much more like the apparently evenly distributed set of demographic categories that most institutions claim. Where "city" whiteness can fade into the background, college whiteness is continually salient. The interactional (reflected in chronotopic) discontinuities are continually indexed by "people's tone of voice, the way they look at you." Janelle (African American, and from a city near the College) describes the same contrast in markedness dynamics as she compares whiteness at the College to whiteness at her high school:

I wasn't expecting it (the College) to be so white? I mean, it's really white. I mean, at my high school there was a lot of white students too but I guess you don't really feel it because no one treats you any differently, you know? There's definitely a socioeconomic difference, but because everyone dresses the same, everyone hangs out together, we've all gone to school together for all our life because there is only one high school and two junior highs and we'd already known each other for so long that you don't really feel like you're in such a white community. When you come here it's like [imitating stereotypical white girl voice] "Oh, so you're from [name of Janelle's city]?"

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Rachel (Thai and Puerto Rican) also described the same markedness dynamics:

R: And I was aware of the racial issue, minorities and the white population. That didn't bother me so much because I didn't think it was going to be a big thing until I came here.

B: What did you find different about dealing with whites here from in New York?

R: The whites in New York are city oriented, and here they're not. Here most of the white students come from privileged families, upper class, and just their perception of minorities . . . sometimes it's very degrading.

Melissa, Janelle, and Rachel all see a contrast between "city-oriented" whiteness (compatible with the class habitus with which they grew up) and college whiteness. Social relations in public school systems where people go from grammar to high school together are demographically continuous in ways that are conspicuously atypical at the College. My interviewees routinely typified College whiteness in terms of, as Janelle put it, "everybody driving their little BMWs" and J. Crew catalogs everywhere. Perceptions tend to be organized by the speaker's gender and attached to social personae. Women specify differences in clothing style, makeup, and hair, often mentioning blonde and blow-dried hair and pearl earrings. I interviewed fewer men, but in my limited sample, they spoke of clothing style ("popped" collars and khakis) and personality characteristics (condescension). Men and women both talked about elite whiteness in terms of ready spending. Although some of my interviewees did own J. Crew or Northface or other pricier brands, when they talked about those brands as white, they talked about how well-off students consume the brand. As Rachel put it, "Or like if you're rich, you always have to wear J. Crew. God forbid you go like to Deb's and you get something that's not name brand." How name brands are consumed, how certain styles of hair or clothing are displayed, how money is spent, all signify privilege.

That this is as much a class as a race characterization is evident in the fact that both male and female white students from non-elite backgrounds make the same comments.[7] And students of color, particularly men, do talk about having

7. Notably, both men of color and white men recruited for football and basketball talked about elite condescension. The most racially diverse fraternity is the football and basketball fraternity.

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non-elite white friends at the College. But even non-elite white students have the option of fading into the general background of unmarkedness, as white OP and Posse participants routinely do (Urciuoli 2016). As David (Chinese, OP) notes,

> these students kind of felt that to identify as OP or Posse was not to identify economically with it but to identify racially with it, to say oh, you're part of this Black, Latino and Asian rubric. That's kind of the alienation I think they felt, though they were not alienated during OP [the summer program]. I see videos and stuff of OPs that came after me and they were all very united, all these students, very integrated. . . . And as soon as they stepped into the school the students of color from OP and Posse would stick together, that's a similarity between the two groups, whereas the white students in these respective groups would disappear.

Jared (Posse) notes the general assumption that students of color are either OP or Posse:

> and then when we get here it's like, what are you, OP or Posse? So then it's hard for you to even want to contribute to the campus when you don't even feel worthy . . . it devalues your worth here . . . because then it feels like you're just helping the College fulfill what they need to do for a quota, or to make their campus more diverse. And at the same time it doesn't feel like you're appreciated as a student.

Jared brings us back to the important distinction between diversity presented as a set of numbers ("it feels you're just helping the College fulfill what they need to do for a quota, or to make their campus more diverse") and racially marked experience (being unappreciated). Joseph (Black Caribbean and neither OP nor Posse) expands on this irony:

> It was like from the very first day of Orientation onwards, it was like boom, boom, boom: *multicultural, diverse, multicultural, diverse*. . . . during Orientation that's one of the things that's thrown at you constantly, this whole idea of how very diverse you are as a class coming into this school, and how you represent all these groups and cultures and things like that and what wonderful contributions you will be making to the College Community and stuff like that. . . . On the one hand, there are instances where it's capitalized on in terms of describing the College community, in terms of putting out the numbers and figures and stuff like that. But on a

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> day-to-day basis, being a part of the community, it's sort of pushed aside and it's not recognized or embraced or anything like that.

As Jared and Joseph make clear, this awareness of the contrast between marketing and social reality becomes part of the student experience of elite whiteness. This is the starting point for their typifications of racializing discursive events.

Chronotopically Linked Perceptions of Racializing Discourse

I now turn to student accounts of racialized interactions. The following interview excerpts center on judgmental typifications by white students talking to or about students of color. Taking the behavior of one person as group-typical is certainly routine; it becomes problematic when assumptions about typicality are generated by those in a position of privilege as happens in racializing discourse. And although it never occurred to me to ask if students have a specific term for narratives like this as a type, the ways in which students narrate them strongly suggest that for students they do constitute a distinct type of racializing commentary.[8] I also strongly suspect that these narrators have had considerable experience of discursive events in which whites characteristically make judgments like this, and that students of color do regard such events as a distinct type. In these narratives, white speakers typically appear to be privileged, with minimal experience of nonwhites, often treating their object of discourse as a noninterlocutor.

A simple form of such narratives is a straightforward racial typification, such as this example from Ely:

> I know for the general College culture which is all students in general . . . if one person is out there, one Latino or Latina, and is really really loud, this person is seen as "they're Latino." Period. Like every Latino acts this way. . . . [But] . . . like [Ely's friend] Rosa, she goes out and she's really quiet and she doesn't interact much with people. . . . She goes out into a classroom and they're like "but this girl, she's not meeting that expectation, she's not like that other girl that we met? Why? She's Latina, she's supposed to talk loud, she's supposed to be loud."

Ely describes not a particular event, but a type of event, of racial typification, using her friend Rosa as an example of the opposite of that typification. A little

8. Such events exemplify what have come to be termed *microaggressions*, the use of casual comments in routine interactions that target racial or gender distinctions; see, e.g., Wing (2010).

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later in the interview, Ely notes that such typifications are not done only by whites, giving examples of Puerto Rican typifications of Dominicans or Mexicans. But she notes that those do not carry the same weight as white typifications which aim at all Latinas (for example). It carries even more weight when done by someone in authority, such as a professor: "Definitely when you're in a class and you're the only person of color. That's when you feel like you're on the hot spot."

Another typifying event is when the marked person is seen as a curiosity or museum exhibit. Janelle observes:

> It's not even the fact that they are white people that seems so racist, it's really not an issue of people being racist, it's just the way people look at you. I think that for a lot of the kids that are here, it's their first time seeing anybody that wasn't white, you know what I mean? So seriously, people just staring at you, people touching your hair, people asking about your hair. It's just weird.

Here the marked person is a noninterlocutor. Where Janelle describes a typical event, Khia (in the same interview) describes a particular event that fits the format, an interchange that took place while Khia was in her friend Niki's room (we meet Niki below) along with Niki's new white roommate and the roommate's mother:

> Her mother got up from (the other) end of the room, walked over to behind me at the computer where I was seated, stood over my head, and at this time, I had just had some braids in my hair, she stood over my head, picked up a braid and talked to her daughter across the room over my head, "Now, is this extensions?" She was just so lucky I was raised well. I really could have jumped up and beat this woman, because personally, I just don't like getting touched. Aside from that, this was the first time in my life—I don't know people that just randomly not only touch you but then talk over your damn head like you're not there, like you're just some little specimen or whatever.

To review the salient points: the mother has never previously met Khia; she addresses not Khia but her daughter; she refers specifically to an aspect of Khia's presentation of self that can be interpreted as a race marker; she refers to this as an object of curiosity; she touches that object. At no point does she acknowledge the presence of Khia as a social actor.

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Isabel (Chinese) describes a comparable experience, although in this instance she is directly addressed—as an exotic collectible:

> I think at this college when they hear Asian they think like "Asia"—that's all they think, like a big land mass, and like exoticness and something very different. I think even to a lot of students here they're not aware of Asian-Americans. I always come back to this because it was like my first week here and this white chick comes up to me and she goes, "Oh my God, you're the first Asian I've ever met." And I was like, "All right, do you want to take a picture?" I was like, where is this girl from?

In their examples, Khia and Isabel illustrate the processes by which markedness is projected onto a person. Synecdochically, a salient element of difference, such as hair, becomes the part standing for the whole: in the moment in which the roommate's mother talks to her daughter, Khia becomes her hair extensions. Metonymically, Isabel's addresser associates her with the land mass for which Isabel becomes the signifier. Joseph adds an extra layer to this typification of person by place: the association of moral qualities. The following example is part of a larger discussion about coming from a place in which Joseph was part of a demographic majority to a school where his white acquaintances had little experience with anyone black. Here, an interlocutor projects onto Joseph the one quality that the interlocutor associates with Caribbean people of color, based on one trip to the Caribbean:

> after a couple of weeks, a month or so . . . of being the only black person living in a building of 132 people, and I was on an all-male floor, and engaging people in conversation and things like that was just absolutely amazing in terms of—I don't know how to describe it except to say that a lot of it was very stupid and I think grossly ignorant. For example this one individual was engaging me in conversation, and was all distraught because he'd been to the Caribbean on a cruise and had been to the Dominican Republic and all he saw was poverty everywhere and he was very much concerned because he wanted to know how my life was before coming to the College and how it was different being here because you don't seem like a peasant and you speak such wonderful English and all this other stuff, and I was like, whoa, where's all this stuff coming from, which was absolutely beyond me.

Joseph describes what appears to be his interlocutor's investment in seeing Caribbean people as the typification of poverty in association with indexes of that

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typification (such as bad English), an investment with which he expects Joseph to concur. Niki (African American) gives another illustration of this principle of moral projection, though without the association with place, as she explains expectations voiced by certain classmates:

> "I don't understand that you're black and you never smoke marijuana. I don't understand—" stuff like that. . . . Like they wouldn't expect me to hang out with a Republican who was WASP, who was rich. I had to have all poor destitute friends. . . . And they'd expect my social life to entail drugs, marijuana . . . I just didn't do those things. I guess they didn't expect me to be a law-abiding citizen in some ways. And they didn't expect me to have good internships.

For Niki, "I don't understand" is a rhetorical ploy signifying her classmates' investment in their typification of African American (e.g., poverty, drugs). The classmates seem to expect credit for befriending so downtrodden a social type (on which more below), as we see in one classmate's indignation about Niki's actual choice of friends, which Niki notes as a sign that people claiming to be "quote-unquote liberal" could also be "racist ignorant people":

> [My friend is] a Republican and he's a little bit conservative but he's not a hardline conservative, he's one of my really great friends. We have totally different political issues but he never said "Niki, black folks are on welfare and black folks are this and that." He never used race as an issue. So me and him, we got along perfectly because, you know, I could understand where he was coming from. . . . And one of the girls goes, "I can't believe you study with him and you're black, how could you study with a Republican? And you're black."

What we see threaded throughout these accounts is a set of judgments by white interlocutors as to what markedness should mean, along with an assumption that these judgments can be unproblematically expressed, often expressed in directive terms ("why aren't you . . .'; "how can you . . .'). In a particularly egregious example of such a judgment, the interlocutor directs attention to the marked person's markedness by denying that it should exist. Niki continues:

> I came (to the College) very optimistic, even though I knew how the situation would be at the College. And when I got here, during Orientation . . . our Orientation leader asked everyone "where do you come from" and this and that, and this one girl from Australia was like, "oh, I'm sorry that you're

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> black." Not, "I never met a black person before" but "I'm sorry that you're black." And that was like my first negative experience of a thousand negative experiences at the College.

Janelle describes a variant of this type of judgment:

> My roommate first year said to me, "I don't see you as a black person" and I was like "Oh, really?" Because I'd never heard anyone say anything like that to me, "I don't view you as a black person," and think that was a compliment? And think it was something like great? 'Cause I'm not really– (it would be like) "Bonnie, I don't really see you as an Italian person, you're not really Italian."

Niki and Janelle describe interlocutors who define their addressees' markedness in relation to the speakers' assessment of themselves: markedness is bad so if I declare you unmarked, that indexes me as a better person for recognizing you as "risen" above your markedness.

These narratives were recorded between the mid-1990s and late 2000s. In spring 2017, I did a couple of focus groups with students in the Black and Latino/a organizations, mostly about their relation to the school. But I mentioned and described the kinds of narratives analyzed above, and focus group members confirmed that such racializing encounters continue to happen. Of further interest to the argument here is our discussion of diversity numbers. Focus group members said that from their perspective (representing cultural organizations), the College's notion of diversity largely added up to numbers and imagery taken by school photographers for the website. Focus group members felt the school's primary interest in their organizations was their existence as representations of college diversity, but their control over programming was limited. They pointed out the limits placed on the hours when organization members could use their allotted campus spaces and the filters through which organizations had to go for their programming. They also noted the limited opportunities afforded students of color to represent the school: admissions tours are given by students asked to draw on their own experience (within limits set by admissions and emphasized in training sessions), yet, even so, few students of color serve as tour guides, so even that modicum of experience is missing from the representation process. Above all they commented on the control exercised by the College's office of institutional advancement over representations of students of color. The latter is a particular sore point. While offices of institutional advancement appear to regard all students as source material

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for website visions of Good Students (Urciuoli 2014), that representational exploitation can easily be ignored by unmarked students. Marked students are very aware of the ways in which they provide the College marketers with useful material and how little control they have over its selection and use.

Conclusion

The semiotic organization of college accounts of student diversity is based on the notion of progress toward a goal with numbers indicating successive stages of progress. The numbers assigned to broad demographic categories (the website uses the terms *Hispanic/Latino, Asian-American, African-American, Multiracial*, but does not use the term *White*) are meant to be read as universal, equal, and unproblematic. Metasemiotically, the very use of the term *diversity* points to the idea that the institution is doing the right thing, even though, ironically, the numbers can only "progress" to a certain point, past which they cease to index those institutions as elite. All this is assumed to be transparent and it generally is to those not themselves being counted as diverse.

Those who are part of the numbers, who are recruited and represented as diverse, talk about race quite differently, starting with the fact that they talk about it *as* race, even if they sometimes (not often) call it diversity. They organize talk about race in relation to whiteness, showing how routinely white speakers position marked addressees or referents in ways that show to advantage the moral position of the white speaker. In these narratives, marked people routinely typify their group and even when directly addressed are positioned less as an addressee than as an object against which the unmarked speaker projects constructions of that marked "type." The value of the marked person thus depends on her/his confirmation of the moral and aesthetic assumptions held about that marked type by the unmarked actor. If we think about these reported incidents playing out repeatedly in real time, we can see their cumulative effect in establishing for students of color a chronotope within which racialized discourse is understood, quite distinct from that of racially unmarked students.

Pretty much everything in these student narratives undermines the notion of institutional progress and institutional virtue measured by increasing numbers of "diverse" students. The student eliteness that figures problematically in these narratives also figures importantly into the College's primary market. The carefully constructed and edited representation of the College, including its diversity, targets that market. Official progress accounts share with the white figures in student narratives the fact that the chief function of the marked seems to be how they reflect values of or for the unmarked. For that to happen, marked

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people have to typify markedness values that the unmarked can easily take for granted; hence the irony.

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