Privileged Social Identities and Diversity Leadership in Higher Education

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A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* discussed a number of cases in which White men were recruited into diversity leadership roles to make the organization's diversity efforts more effective (White, 2007). The questions raised by this piece—whether White men should take on diversity leadership roles and whether doing so would increase or diminish the effectiveness of an organization's diversity efforts—are crucial questions at this phase of the integration of diversity in organizations, and especially in predominantly White institutions of higher education.

The concepts of diversity, inclusion, equity, and access have all become aspects of the leadership and administration of many colleges and universities in the past decade. Colleges and universities are more frequently creating offices and positions near the top of the leadership hierarchy to establish and operationalize their commitment to diversity. The breadth of this change is shown by the increasing number of conference sessions devoted to the meaning, function and responsibilities of the senior (or chief) diversity officer, and by the June 2006 creation of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education. As this type of leadership position expands and becomes

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increasingly a part of the normal operations of colleges and universities, the question arises about what makes a good diversity leader. A general examination of this question must be left for another time. However, in this paper, I would like to examine a particular aspect of diversity leadership—namely, the significance to the role of diversity leader in a predominantly White institution of socially ascribed identities that are privileged.

Diversity leaders in higher education are not expected to be White males, though men of color are as prevalent as women of color in these positions.[1] Since racial and gender justice is typically not seen as part of White men's personal agenda, they are expected, minimally, to be tolerant of diversity efforts in higher education as long, of course, as those efforts do not impose too great a burden on White men, and maximally, to be strong supporters of men and women of color and White women as *they* champion diversity in predominantly White institutions of higher education. Do these expectations imply, then, that individuals with privileged social identities, such as Whites, men, able-bodied individuals, heterosexuals, etc., have no role to play as institutional leaders for diversity and social justice in predominantly White institutions? What does it mean when a person with privileged identities assumes (or is appointed to) an institutional role as a leader on diversity issues? To be sure, the problem is not so much what it means for a particular individual, but what the consequences are for the institutional commitment to educational excellence through inclusion and equity. Does it represent progress when someone with privileged identities assumes an institutionalized position of diversity leadership in a predominantly White institution and a role that embodies a challenge to privilege? Or does it signal a recentering of privilege within the operations of the institution? Is it a step forward, or back? These questions are also personally relevant to me as a White male committed to the goals and principles of diversity and social justice in higher education. At the intersection of my privileged social identities (White, male) and my commitment to diversity and social justice, I have confronted these challenges and here I seek to systematically examine the arguments for and against diversity leaders that have privileged social identities.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Before considering the particular question of the role and effectiveness of individuals with privileged identities as diversity leaders in predominantly

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[1] I will forgo quotation marks around "White" since I assume that the reader already understands the socially constructed nature of racial categories, which results in both their biological fictitiousness and their social, cultural, political, and economic efficacy.

White institutions, it is necessary to clarify some preliminary matters. First, the concept of diversity is too often used without careful definition. Since "diversity" has at least two meanings in the context of higher education, it will be useful to indicate the sense that I rely on for the purposes of this paper. Second, the question motivating this analysis—in what ways are privileged social identities relevant to diversity leadership?—already presupposes *that* social identity is relevant to diversity leadership. However, since this relevance is not self-evident, it is necessary briefly to make the case for this assumption. And third, it will be helpful for purposes of this analysis and discussion to clarify what is meant by "privileged social identities" and also which identities are especially salient in the contemporary sociocultural context and, hence, for this analysis.

First, how is the concept of diversity understood in this analysis? "Diversity" has two common meanings in the context of higher education. The first understands diversity simply as difference, and the valuing of diversity means valuing those differences. This first sense is what I will refer to as "diversity of difference." However, there is another sense that is used, though more often merely implied, and that is of diversity as a concern in making the academy inclusive and equitable. In this sense, diversity includes the notion of "diversity of difference," but it goes further to a concern for social justice. This second sense, which I will refer to as "diversity for equity," is concerned with *the differences that differences make.* In other words, some differences have a very real and material effect on one's life chances, while other differences (the size and shape of earlobes, for example) have little or no social meaning and material consequences. Thus, in higher education, diversity for equity is concerned to mitigate the effects of the more salient social identities for educational effectiveness. This article uses "diversity" in the second sense—that is, as diversity for equity—with the implication that the purpose and function of diversity leadership is to lead efforts for organizational change that specifically seek to eliminate or reorganize those structures that generate (as a function of social identity) barriers and disadvantages for some and privileges and advantages for others.

Second, when hearing the question of whether individuals with privileged identities should be appointed to diversity leadership positions, one might wonder why such ascriptive social identities should be considerations in our post-civil rights era, when policies of race-neutrality or color-blindness and gender non-discrimination are (ostensibly) generally advanced. While my concern in this article is to examine the impact of privileged social identities generally on diversity leadership, the most visible and the most dominant social identities are those of White men. Being White and being a man are both identities and social locations that are privileged in our culture, and especially privileged in academe. Thus, I will often use "White men"

as an exemplary privileged social identity. This exemplary use of race and gender should not be understood, however, to exclude other relevant social identities, such as sexual orientation, ableness, and socioeconomic status. A race- and gender-neutral approach dictates that the racialized and gendered identity of a candidate for a job should not be a barrier or advantage to hiring or appointment; in other words, ascribed social identities of this sort are irrelevant to merit as it relates to diversity leadership.

More recently, the argument of the irrelevance of race and gender has been used against affirmative action policies, which, of course, take racialized and gendered identity into account. The argument here is that affirmative action policies provide unfair advantages to men and women of color and White women, whether they are seeking employment, entrance into a selective college, or entrance into a professional school. By providing unfair advantage to men and women of color and White women, such policies, it is argued, effectively put White men at a disadvantage for those desired opportunities. The problem with the race- and gender-neutral approach is that it fails to account for the current sociohistorical context in which we find ourselves, which is one that is fundamentally structured to systemically advantage Whites and men.

To be sure, White men and White women are not equally situated either, nor are men and women of color. A significant body of social scientific research has been generated establishing this claim; for a particularly useful source see Brown et al. (2003). Our current social formation has inherited from the past a legacy of racial and gender domination that is embedded in the structures of our social, cultural, political, and economic interactions (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Lawrence, 1987). Given this context, when a policy of race-neutrality is adopted, the consequence is a reproduction of the White male-dominated status quo. The unjust structures of unearned advantages and disadvantages that are embedded in the present social formation as a result of past injustices are permitted to remain; and indeed, such policies necessitate a willful blindness to them. As Guinier and Torres (2002, pp. 32–66) cogently argue, the path to social justice lies not with "blind" or neutral social policies, but with policies grounded in a consciousness of the ways the present social formation is distorted by the legacy of the past, for it is only then that these already existing structures of social advantage and disadvantage can be targeted and dismantled.

Given that identity formation is mediated through interactions with others, how I am socially categorized (by race or gender, for example) fundamentally affects my identity. The implication, then, for the argument at hand is that ascriptive social identity is relevant to the role of diversity leader. If structures of systemic White and male dominance are to be challenged and reconstructed, then the ways that White male-dominated organizations

function to make it difficult for men and women of color and White women to occupy leadership roles needs to be taken into account. Here, "systemic racism" refers to a system of de facto White dominance, and "systemic sexism" refers to a system of de facto patriarchy. One means of challenging the unintentional reproduction of systemic structures of privilege and oppression is by the appointment of persons of color to senior leadership roles.

But there is another, perhaps more compelling, argument for the relevance of ascriptive social identities to diversity leadership. This argument, which has its roots in Marxian methodology and has been most thoroughly developed by feminists, focuses on the sociocultural position of the knowing subject, which has become known as standpoint epistemology. Marx (1964) and later Lukács (1971) argued that the sociohistorical position of the proletariat afforded them privileged insight into the true nature of social conditions. Because of their marginalized perspective, the proletariat could see through the normalized social relations that ideologically naturalized their own exploitation. Feminists have extended and deepened this line of argument by linking the knower's sociohistorical position, the status of knowledge claims, and the construction of subjectivity (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). In particular, feminists "have insisted on the constitutive part that epistemic location plays in the making and evaluating of knowledge claims" (Code, 1998). (To be sure, there is a range of approaches to feminist epistemology, but these difference are not salient to my argument in this article.)

What this means in practice is that the knowledge claims recognized as legitimate by the dominant culture are those that are ostensibly objective and value-neutral, such that they are made by raceless, classless, genderless subjects; that is, the particulars of the subjects' race, class, and gender identities should not be a factor in determining the validity of knowledge claims. But historically, of course, individuals who are culturally normed as raceless, classless, and genderless are propertied White males, while White women, women of color, men of color, and the working class or poor are explicitly—and publicly—constituted in terms of these socially constructed identities by the dominant cultural discourses. Women, people of color, and the poor cannot escape being partially defined by their social location for they are invariably marked by it, while middle- or upper-class White men can understand themselves as simply "human." There is a similar argument in the literature on race and White privilege that maintains that Whites, because they occupy the normalized sociocultural location, are ideologically understood as raceless (Frankenberg, 1993; McIntosh, 2005). And, as Mills (1997) argues, Whites are subject to an "epistemology of ignorance," meaning that race functions in such a way so as to ensure that generally Whites will be ignorant of their own privileged positioning within the racially structured social order (see also Sullivan & Tuana, 2007).

Thus, while propertied White men are seen by the dominant culture, and by themselves, as classless, raceless, and genderless, we nonetheless *are* classed, raced, and gendered, and these privileged identities unavoidably shape our epistemological perspectives. The result of these privileged identities is that, too often, White men experience a social landscape that is structured by norms of Whiteness and masculinity. As a result, from our privileged perspective these White, male norms appear to define common sense standards of behavior and what counts as normal—not as advantaging particular social identities. Correlatively, from this privileged vantage point, individuals with "other" social identities are seen as deviating from the norm. To be sure, since individuals' identities are complex, one can be both dominator and dominated, depending upon the intersection of identities (Collins, 2004).

Third, it will be helpful to clarify what I mean by "privileged identities," as well as which social identities are salient. According to Johnson (2006), privilege can be understood as the case when "one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they've done or failed to do" (p. 21). Bailey (2004) refines Johnson's account by defining privilege as "unearned assets conferred systematically" (305). Thus, privilege refers to a kind of property or valuable thing that we have, not by virtue of having earned it, but because it was conferred on us by an anonymous social system and not by any particular number of individuals.

While I intend my analysis and arguments to be generalizable across a range of privileged social identities, it is important to recognize that, in specific sociohistorical contexts, certain social identities are more salient than others. In the contemporary context in higher education in the United States, race and gender are especially visible and salient identities. Thus, for purposes of this article, I will focus on the privileged social identities of being ascriptively identified, socialized, and acculturated as White and male. This limiting example should not be understood as dismissing or marginalizing the significance of other social identities such as sexual orientation and socioeconomic status.

DIMENSIONS OF THE RELEVANCE OF PRIVILEGE

There are four dimensions in which privileged social identities can affect the role and function of a diversity leader.

First, what effect do diversity leaders with privileged identities have on the structures of power within the organization? Do White men in diversity leadership positions sustain or alter conventional power relations?

Second, what symbolic messages are created, or challenged, by the appointment of White males as diversity leaders? How will such an appoint-

ment be perceived by the university community, and what will the effects of that perception be?

Third, to what degree is the appointment of diversity leaders with privileged identities consistent with the objectives of the organization in terms of diversity for equity? Is having White men in diversity leadership positions supportive of, or contrary to, the diversity goals of the institution?

And fourth, to what degree does privileged identity either enhance or undermine the effectiveness of diversity leadership? Does being a White man make one more or less effective as a diversity leader?

Power

Many of the arguments against appointing diversity leaders with privileged identities share common assumptions about the systemic nature and historical persistence of patriarchy and White supremacy in the United States. In this line of reasoning, structures of advantage and disadvantage based on race and gender are not consequences of mere individual prejudice and wrongful discriminatory action, but instead are (primarily) effects of patterns of practices and institutional rules that reproduce racial and gendered inequalities even when such practices and rules are on their face race- and gender-neutral. Moreover, when race and gender oppression are understood in this way, they can be seen to have a certain historical perdurability or momentum that results from its reproduction from generation to generation. This momentum operates behind the backs, so to speak, of social agents such that when I, as a social agent, engage in practices and with institutions in the ways that I have been socialized to do so, then I am likely to reproduce social inequalities that are embedded historically in those practices and institutions. Thus, given the principles of standpoint epistemology, when a diversity leader is a White male, the structures of social domination are more likely to be reproduced behind his back or below his consciousness. These reasons, in general, are initial arguments against White men's assumption of diversity leadership positions.

More specifically, it can be argued that when White men are in diversity leadership positions, the problematic effect is to recenter the interests of White men in the institution, at least symbolically. White male interests, needs, and values have been taken as the institutional norm for most of the history of higher education in the United States and, more generally, in the history of Europe and its collective colonization of most of the world. When White men occupy positions of senior institutional leadership, those interests become consciously and unconsciously institutionalized within the organization (Mills, 1997; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997).

It is difficult to see how academe could be immune from this broader social impact of race. Nonetheless, there is disagreement concerning the

depth and scope of this impact, a debate that for reasons of space cannot be engaged in here. An organization reflects the interests, needs, and values of its key leaders since the leadership exercises considerable power to shape the organization according to its collective vision. When those leaders are White men, the organization itself will be shaped by the perspectives of those leaders—that is, by the interests, needs, and values of its White-racialized and masculine-gendered leaders. This is not to say, however, that the organization is determined in a strict way by the interests, needs, and values of the leadership. Promoting White men into positions of diversity leadership can have the effect of recentering White men and our interests in the institution, while continuing the marginalization and devaluing of the interests of men and women of color, and White women.

A closely related argument is that the institutional power in higher education has historically been held by White males, and it largely continues to be held by White males (Altbach, Lomotey, & Rivers, 2002, pp. 23–42; American Council on Education, 2007; Anderson, 2002, pp. 3–21; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005, pp. 23–46). Appointing White men to senior diversity leadership positions, especially when the institution already has a predominantly White male leadership team, can contribute to the reproduction of White male domination of the academy. At a minimum, it does so by placing individuals with the socially ascribed identities of "White" and "male" in highly visible, symbolic, and oftentimes powerful positions in the institutional hierarchy with the consequence of giving at least the appearance of perpetuating White male control of the institution.

But there is also the risk, if not the likelihood, that appointing White males to such positions will result in the subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, distortion of the institution to serve the interests of White males. When White men have this decision-making authority, their racial- and gender-specific interests, needs, and values can infuse the institution. In these often-subtle ways, the institution becomes structured and shaped to serve the purposes of White men. An example of how White male interests can become institutionalized is found in the case of White support of affirmative action. Generally, Whites support affirmative action efforts, but only insofar as they perceive such efforts not to negatively impact their own interests (Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006, pp. 961–974). Thus, when affirmative action policies appear to conflict with the interests of Whites, Whites withdraw their support. If the Whites in question are in positions of power in an institution, their defensive posture will be reflected in policy decisions that shape the institution as a whole.

Perhaps this explains the recent retreat of colleges and universities from affirmative action programs such as race-based scholarships and outreach programs (Jacobson, 2006; Schmidt, 2006, 2007). As the political-cultural

climate shifts toward a more anti-affirmative action stance, the predominantly White male leadership of colleges and universities has felt that it is in its own interests to acquiesce to vague threats rather than defend such justice-based policies. This hypothesis is largely conjecture, however, and further defense of this claim is beyond the scope of this article.

Yet while the symbolic recentering of White men seems unavoidable, the functional recentering within the policies and practices of the institution of the interests, needs, and values of White men is not a necessary and unavoidable outcome. A White, male diversity leader who understands the nature of oppression and is self-reflective about his role in an oppressive system would be aware of this pitfall and take steps to guard against promoting the interests, needs, and values of White men instead of those of all social identities, both privileged and oppressed, in the community. Recall, however, that, in the conception of diversity for equity, the function of a diversity leader is not to promote the interests, needs, and values of each social identity constituency group. Instead, the diversity leader's objective is to restructure the systemic policies and practices that privilege and advantage some identities while at the same time marginalizing and excluding others. A White male diversity leader cannot avoid the initial impression of business as usual that is created by a predominantly White male leadership team, but he can work to mitigate this negative impact by going beyond promoting the interests of various social identity groups to challenge the structures that result in the differential privileging and inclusion of ascriptive social identities.

What about cases, however, where the institution possesses a significant number of men or women of color or White women in its senior administrative ranks? In such cases, the worry about reproducing a pattern of White male institutional dominance is less of a concern since the institution would likely be closer to the type of multicultural organization in which diversity is an integral part of the values, policies, and practices of the institution. (I discuss multicultural organization theory below in the section on "The Relevance of Organizational Context.") When an organization is *not* dominated by White males, appointing a White male to a diversity leadership position carries much less risk of perpetuating White male domination of higher education. The considerations here are similar to those in the context of a multicultural organization.

To be sure, the degree of race- and gender-consciousness of the individual in power is critically relevant to whether White male interests become institutionalized. If a White male understands the nature of oppression and is self-reflective, then presumably he would resist external pressures on the institution deriving from culturally dominant structures of White supremacy and patriarchy and, furthermore, work to dismantle these structures insofar as they are already embedded in organizational demographics, policies,

and practices. Hence, the uninterrupted perpetuation of race and gender privilege in the institution is not a necessary outcome. Much depends on the depth of understanding of the nature and functioning of oppression as well as the commitment of the individuals in power.

Perception/Symbolism

A second dimension to consider is how a diversity leader with privileged identities might be perceived by the university community and what such a diversity leader symbolizes. The appointment of White men to diversity leadership roles might mitigate the common perception that diversity and social justice are issues that are relevant only to men and women of color and to White women, not to White men. The commonness of this perception is indicated by (a) the paucity of White men who engage actively in diversity-related work in higher education, and (b) the mild surprise felt by most people upon hearing of, seeing, or meeting a White male who is a diversity champion. This perception is a serious problem and one that needs to be challenged if substantial movement toward genuine inclusion and equity in the academy is to occur. Moreover, White men who have well-developed, reflective understandings of oppression ought to be able to engage in diversity work and even to take on leadership roles, if only to reduce the burden on women and men of color and White women to do so. It is far too often the case that women and men of color and White women are called upon to serve on diversity committees, mentor students of color or female students, and fulfill other functions that serve the institution's diversity goals (Turner & Myers, 2000, pp. 25–26, 94–97; Kolodny, 2000, pp. 83–111). This disparate treatment of faculty of color and women—what Padilla (1994) refers to as a "cultural tax" (pp. 24–27)—places an unjust burden on members of groups that are already operating at a disadvantage in the academy (Turner & Myers, 2000; Villalpando & Bernal, 2002).

One consideration that should not be overlooked has to do with who is *expected* to have an interest in diversity leadership. While appointing men and women of color and White women to diversity leadership positions may be seen by senior academic leaders who are committed to diversity as one of the best means for diversifying the organizational leadership, it is also unjust to *expect* people of color or women to be naturally interested in assuming such leadership roles. The purpose of diversity leadership ought to be about increasing the degree of inclusiveness and equity in the organization by challenging and altering the policies, practices, and beliefs that form the organizational system, and this should be everyone's concern, both Whites and persons of color, both men and women.

Numerical diversification of the upper echelon of leadership is crucial, but it is also fraught with contradictions when men or women of color or White women are expected to fulfill such functions. It is manifestly unjust

to place the burden of dismantling structures of race and gender privilege that are the consequence of hundreds of years of systemic oppression in the United States on men and women of color and White women. All individuals in the organization have a responsibility to enhance its inclusiveness and equity, not just those who suffer from systemic oppression. But insofar as increasing the racial and gender diversity of the leadership, the goal should be to create substantive equality of opportunity for women and men of color and White women to enter into the various domains and ranks of leadership, and not limit these opportunities to diversity-related positions.

Turning to the matter of role modeling, it is more complex than is typically reflected in the diversity literature, for we are each constituted by multiple social identities, some public and visible, others less so. So a White male who is openly gay can be a role model for gay men, and an Asian female who is heterosexual can role-model for other Asians and women. Hence, role modeling is a complex phenomenon since an individual is constituted by a complex of social identities. Nonetheless, while there are role-modeling benefits for people of color and women to be gained by appointing men and women of color and White women as diversity leaders, there is also a complex symbolism involved in such appointments. On one hand, the symbolism of a person of color or a woman in a position of substantive institutional power is positive; but on the other hand, the symbolism of such an individual being appointed to a *diversity-specific* position can carry a negative meaning in that it may send such messages as: (a) Diversity is a concern only for persons of color or women; (b) Persons of color and women are "naturally" interested in doing this work, and (c) Diversity leadership positions are the only executive positions that persons of color or women are competent to hold.

Thus, the issue of role-modeling is complex, with benefits and drawbacks on both sides; and the relative weighting of these benefits and drawbacks will need to be decided in light of particular institutional contexts. In some contexts, it may be particularly important symbolically and for role-modeling reasons to appoint a man or woman of color or a White woman to a position of diversity leadership while, in others, these reasons may be diluted by other organizational features. For example, in an institution that is strongly dominated by White men, both at the leadership levels and in the faculty, and in which little progress has been made toward diversifying either (which probably also means that the student body lacks a significant degree of racial diversity), the importance of advocating for change and of demonstrating that White men are not the only candidates for competent leaders might lead to the conclusion that, on balance, the symbolic advantages of appointing a woman or man of color or a White woman to a diversity leadership position are preeminent. An interesting complication

of this analysis is how the motivation of working for diversity for equity in higher education, and having an interest in social justice generally, will be differentially inflected by one's social identities.

As I discuss further below, having White men in diversity leadership positions can deprive women and men of color and White women of role models in the upper administrative ranks. But conversely, when White men are in diversity leadership positions, they can also serve as positive anti-racist and feminist role models for other Whites and other men. This reason may not, at first, sound very compelling; but it is crucial for White men to be committed to, and engage in, the work of diversity for equity. Lacking positive role models, it is less likely that many will do so.

It can make a significant difference in a particular organization to have positive role models that can inspire and mentor younger colleagues. Role-modeling White antiracism and feminism is not a trivial matter. For young White male faculty, staff, and students to feel empowered to actively and publicly challenge unjust social structures requires the willingness to go against expectations, and the expectations for White men are that they will choose White- and male-bonding rather than undermine the sociocultural status quo. (For the argument that White identity is constituted by expectations to racially stigmatize people of color, see Stubblefield, 2005, pp. 112–143.) Role-modeling White antiracist and feminist behavior is an important empowering mechanism for those who are sympathetic to social justice but who lack the understanding of how to be a diversity leader.

Consistency with Diversity Objectives

A third dimension to consider is the degree to which a White male in a diversity leadership position, by virtue of occupying that position, promotes or undermines the objectives of diversity for equity in the organization. It can be argued that promoting White men into diversity leadership positions works against one of the explicit goals of diversity efforts: to increase the numbers of individuals from underrepresented groups at all levels in the institution. However, although this goal is important, numerical diversification should not be the sole goal of an organization's diversity efforts. If diversity for equity, and not diversity of difference, is the objective, then the structures and operations of the organization also need to be aligned with the value of social justice and restructured to become more inclusive and equitable.

While some measurable progress has been made at diversifying the student body and the lower levels of the faculty along the dimensions of race and gender, less progress has been made when it comes to senior faculty and administrators (see, e.g., June, 2007). Promoting White men to diversity leadership positions continues the White and male numerical dominance of the administration and forecloses one of the limited means for men and women of color and White women to break into the administrative ranks.

A related argument against White men (or others with privileged social identities and locations) occupying diversity leadership roles is that, when White men occupy diversity leadership positions, they deny people of color and women in that institution the opportunity for a positive role model in the administration. This is not to say that those of us with privileged social identities cannot be positive role models as diversity leaders; indeed, as I have argued, we can be effective role models, though with certain constraints. But we are more likely to be effective role models for other White men in the institution than for men and women of color and White women. For men and women of color and White women, it is important to have the positive image of a man or woman of color or of a White woman who has successfully risen to executive levels of the institution and who has attained a degree of institutional influence and power. White male diversity leaders simply cannot role model for people of color or for women in this way.

Perhaps the most important concern with respect to the achievement of diversity objectives is who has the obligation or responsibility in the university community to work for these objectives. While men and women of color and White women can serve an important function as role models, it is also important to avoid both the perception and the reality of placing the responsibility for achieving the organization's diversity goals exclusively or disproportionately on White women and women and men of color. Thus, White men also have a moral obligation to actively work for diversity for equity. The moral obligation follows from the obligation to avoid the harm that results from reproducing structures of oppression in the academy; and to do this effectively, White men will need to step up.

If White men undertake only supportive, behind-the-scenes roles, we can take credit and feel personally virtuous for working for diversity and social justice, while at the same time avoiding the risks of directly challenging a system that is deeply structured by race and gender inequalities. In these cases, we can avoid breaking publicly with White male peers over practices of Whiteness and White bonding, or maleness and male bonding, nor do we need to take a public oppositional stance against the racialized and gendered structures of the institution (Sleeter, 1996). In other words, we can be "good liberals" (or, perhaps more derogatorily, "politically correct") when it comes to diversity without taking on any of the burdens or risks.

This moral obligation derives from the right of each citizen in a democracy to equal educational opportunities, however this right might be grounded. Indeed, it is argued that a flourishing democratic society rests on a well-educated populace. Consequently, insofar as individuals have some power to act (recognizing the appropriate constraints of one's sphere of influence within the institution), they have the moral obligation to make the educational enterprise accessible, inclusive, and equitable. Since White men's interests, needs, and values are normalized in the dominant culture,

White men possess a prima facie public legitimacy and authority in their actions and words. The result is a relative high degree of social, cultural, economic, and political power wielded by many White men. This power can be used *against* itself to challenge the system of White male domination that results in this privilege of power. Failing to satisfy this obligation may result in White men playing merely supportive roles while at the same time avoiding any significant burdens on our time that being a diversity leader or champion brings, as well as avoiding both the professional and personal risks that the responsibility of leadership entails.

Effectiveness

A fourth dimension to consider is the degree to which a diversity leader with privileged identities either enhances or diminishes the effectiveness of the organization's efforts concerning diversity for equity. One argument is that, because of the race and gender privilege that accompanies White male identities, White men have particular blind spots about the fact of and the ways in which the U.S. social system is shaped by social structures of race and gender. Here "social system" refers collectively to the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of social interaction. As Mills (1997) has argued in *The Racial Contract*, the peculiar racial system that structures modern social systems operates in such a way that it requires a certain blindness from Whites about how it operates, generating what he refers to as an "epistemology of ignorance" (pp. 18–19; see also Sullivan & Tuana, 2007). White men are, in effect, blinded by Whiteness (and maleness as well), with the consequence that they are likely to be less effective at promoting the goals of diversity and social justice. This does not mean, of course, that it is *impossible* for White men to see and understand how race and gender systems operate, but rather that it requires a specific intention and effort on our part to develop the understandings and capabilities that will allow us to recognize the way these systems function in our everyday lives.

In her widely read article on White privilege, McIntosh (2005) defines White privilege as "an invisible knapsack of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (p. 109). She goes on to identify 26 racial privileges of which she is typically unaware. And Kendall (2006) devotes an entire chapter in her *Understanding White Privilege* to what she calls "barriers to clarity." Similarly, Sullivan (2006) analyzes racial privilege as an unconscious habit that "operates as nonexistent and actively works to disrupt attempts to reveal its existence" (pp. 1–2). Even those Whites who have a well-developed, reflective understanding of the systemic nature of racial oppression and who understand the experiences of people of color will still be under the spell of White privilege, which will at times prevent us from seeing the racial implications of certain situations. This dynamic suggests that an individual who occupies

a position of diversity leadership should work collaboratively across racial and gendered lines, always seeking, truly hearing, and valuing the perspectives and insights of individuals with nonprivileged identities.

THE RELEVANCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

In examining these arguments, it becomes clear that an adequate analysis of these questions requires paying attention to context, which includes various elements, from individual privileged identities, to the broad sociohistorical background shaping the situation under consideration. However, there is another context-forming element to consider, and that is the properties of particular organizations. The character of an organization—its structure, history, and personnel—is relevant to these questions because the degree to which the organization institutionalizes patterns and structures of marginalization, exclusion, and inequity necessarily has an impact on the desirability and effectiveness of diversity leaders with privileged identities.

In general, the organizational context frames the parameters of the leader's effectiveness by determining the explicit responsibilities of that leader's position, defining that leader's relationships with other leaders and stakeholders of the organization, and identifying the resources at that leader's disposal to accomplish his or her goals. In the preceding sections, I discussed the particular characteristics of privileged racial and gender identities as embodied in White males and how such identities are relevant to the diversity leader's effectiveness in generating organizational change that is in the interests of social justice. In this section, I turn to the relevance of organizational context to the issue of diversity leadership with privileged identities.

Recently, organizational development theorists have begun to think of organizations in developmental terms, analogous to the cognitive or moral development of individuals. For example, Jackson (2001) and Hardiman (2001), who have separately generated important scholarship on racial identity development theory for individuals, have also jointly constructed a stage model of development for organizations (Jackson, 2005; Jackson & Hardiman, 1994). In this model, organizations can occupy one of three levels: monocultural, nondiscriminating, or multicultural, with each level divided into two stages. In the monocultural level of development an organization can be (a) exclusionary, where it excludes on the basis of explicit policies or practices; or (b) an "insiders' club," where persons of color may be allowed in, but only on the terms defined by the insiders.

On the second level, the organization is nondiscriminating, and it may be either (a) compliant, where the concern is with increasing numerical access, or (b) affirmative, where the concern focuses on success in, as well as access to, a still largely monocultural organization. As for the multicultural

level, the organization may be (a) redefining itself, meaning that the insti-
tution is genuinely trying to move away from being monocultural, or (b)
multicultural, where it is dedicated to inclusion, success in a multicultural
environment, and social justice both on campus and in the community.

As organizations move from the first through the sixth stage of this
model (and note that such progress is neither necessary nor immune from
regressions), they move from being more monocultural and exclusionary
of persons of color to being multicultural and truly inclusive and equitable.
The stage that an organization occupies on this multicultural development
model is relevant to the question of Whites as diversity leaders, because the
degree of an organization's multicultural development will directly impact
the reception, the valuing, the support, and, consequently, the effectiveness
of a White diversity leader.

Thus, if an organization is at the monocultural level of development,
the reception given to *any* diversity leader—if the functional role is even
tolerated—will be decidedly cold. The diversity leader will be isolated and
structurally positioned to guarantee ineffectiveness—in other words, set up
for failure. This is because the organization does not genuinely value diversity
and hence will not provide the necessary resources and support for the di-
versity leader. Since the organization is monocultural, a diversity leader who
is a man or woman of color, or a White woman, would likely be considered
an outsider and thus experience an increased degree of isolation.

In monocultural organizations, the administration will likely consist
largely of White men, and so opening up access and opportunities at this level
of the organization is critical for diversity development to occur. Moreover,
when an organization is overwhelmingly monocultural—that is, charac-
terized by uninformed, unreflective individuals with privileged identities
in central administrative positions—the symbolic value of administrative
leaders who are persons of color or women is especially important. It is
necessary to demonstrate to the White men in the organization that men
and women of color and White women can be successful administrators,
and it is necessary to provide positive role models for other persons of color
and women in the organization.

To be sure, these positive effects can be offset or even undermined by an
institutional devaluing of and lack of support for diversity. In this case, plac-
ing persons of color and women in diversity leadership positions may result
in reinforcing the culturally dominant perception of their "incompetence"
when their effectiveness is being structurally or intentionally undermined.
Appointing White men as diversity leaders in such organizations, however,
would have the effect of reinforcing the monocultural attitude simply
because of the perpetuation of the predominance of White male faces in
the administrative ranks. Even when the White male diversity leader has a

well-developed, reflective understanding of oppression and is principled and courageous, his impact will be deflected by the pervasive monocultural attitude and structuring of the organization. Thus, for reasons of access to the administrative ranks, of symbolism, and of effectiveness, it may be preferable on balance that diversity leaders in monocultural organizations be men or women of color or White women.

At the nondiscriminating level of development, an organization remains monocultural in practice but has some features that move it closer toward being multicultural. Here the focus of the organization's diversity efforts is on increasing access or, going a step further, on enhancing success for individuals from historically marginalized and excluded groups. Thus, there is a prima facie case for men and women of color and White women to occupy diversity leadership positions in institutions at this level of development. Since the organization is already somewhat predisposed to appointing persons of color or women to leadership positions, there will be a moderate degree of acceptance and support for these appointments.

Nonetheless, the organization remains characterized by White- and male-dominated structures, practices, and culture. The consequence is that the efforts of the diversity leader will likely be muted and will not result in substantive and lasting organizational change, as required by diversity for equity. The primary dynamic here is found in the unconscious forms of resistance that are embedded in attitudes, practices, and organizational structures. These forms of resistance are not intentional or explicit but manifest themselves as ostensibly race- and gender-neutral. Diversity leaders who are men and women of color or White women will be tolerated by the organization; but if they push too hard for systemic change, they may be seen as self-interested and motivated by personal agendas, or worse, as "uppity," "angry," as having "a chip on their shoulder," or even "not knowing their place," resulting in an even greater degree of resistance.

White male diversity leaders in nondiscriminating (predominantly White male) organizations, however, will face a different reception. Since there is a degree of tolerance or even acceptance of diversity efforts by the organization at this level of development (even though there are also unconscious forms of resistance), White males will have a unique opportunity in these organizations to influence the unconscious attitudes and practices of Whites and men that can stand in the way of systemic change. Whites and men in the organization will be more likely to give legitimacy to the arguments and actions of White male diversity leaders because these Whites and men have internalized the broader cultural association of White men with the epistemological standpoint that is unbiased and impartial.

Thus, White male diversity leaders may be more successful at persuading other Whites and men in the organization of the legitimacy and necessity

of substantive diversity efforts. Moreover, White male diversity leaders can have a significant impact upon the unconscious practices of Whites and men in the organization through their modeling of how a White antiracist and a feminist behaves. To be sure, these effects are subtle; but I nevertheless believe they are quite real and important at this level of an organization's development. Thus, at the non-discriminating level of development, White men *may* be more effective than men and women of color or White women, though, of course, this "rule" can hardly can considered hard and fast.

Finally, at the multicultural level of development, an organization is either in the final stage of transition, or it is genuinely multicultural, meaning that (a) it is dedicated to the inclusion and success of all individuals and to social justice, and (b) it possesses a multicultural institutional culture, structure, and set of practices. Given that the organization at this level is no longer monocultural, it can be said that all diversity leaders, whether or how their identities are privileged or not, will be comparably effective respective to their ascriptive identities. That is, the identities ascriptively assigned to that diversity leader will have little or no impact on his or her effectiveness. Indeed, in a truly multicultural organization, there ideally would no longer be a need for diversity leadership of any sort because the organization itself would have internalized in its structure, practices, and culture the values of multiculturalism, social justice, and diversity for equity.

Of course, organizations in this genuinely multicultural sense do exist and operate within a broader sociocultural context that continues to be dominated socially, economically, politically, and culturally by individuals with privileged ascriptive identities (i.e., White, male, middle or upper class, heterosexual, Christian, and so on). This context would continue to exert pressures on the organization in such a way that the ascriptive identities of the diversity leader would not be wholly irrelevant. In such a light, the multicultural organization that exists in a nonmulticultural sociocultural context will still have a functional need for diversity leadership to ensure that the organization continues to resist the influences of the broader sociocultural environment.

In a multicultural organization, the ascriptive identity of diversity leadership will not make a significant difference to that leadership's effectiveness. This is true, however, only for internal effectiveness within the organization; it likely will not hold when the diversity leadership interacts with members of the surrounding local community and broader society. Nonetheless, from an organizational perspective both individuals with either privileged or nonprivileged identities can be equally effective as diversity leaders in multicultural organizations.

Conclusions

What, then, can we conclude about the institutional effectiveness of individuals with privileged social identities (e.g., White, male, heterosexual) assuming positions of diversity leadership in predominantly White institutions? To begin, two general conclusions seem clear. First, the question of the privileged identity of diversity leadership is a complex matter; there is no simple, single answer. Second, following from the first, deciding on the desirability of individuals with privileged identities assuming positions of diversity leadership depends on context, where the context includes: the ascriptive identities of the prospective leader (especially in terms of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation), the character of that individual (including her or his understanding of oppression, degree of self-reflection, and commitment), the institutional history and context, and the broader sociohistorical context in which the institution is embedded. To be sure, examining the particulars of these contexts will not necessarily provide a clear answer to the question since there is no algorithm, but such an examination will clarify and narrow the range of issues. Thus, this article should be seen as the beginning of an examination of these issues and not as the final word of such an inquiry.

As I have shown, it is not the case that individuals with privileged identities (e.g., White men) are never desirable or effective as diversity leaders. In certain situations and some contexts, such individuals can function effectively—perhaps more effectively than men or women of color, or White women. In institutional contexts where the organization is at the nondiscriminating level of multicultural development, White men may have the potential to be more effective as diversity leaders by virtue of our capacity to engage sympathetic, though passively resistant, Whites and men in support of diversity efforts. At the multicultural level of development, the organization should be sufficiently well-developed that White men and women with well-developed, reflective understandings of oppression and committed women and men of color can function equally effectively as diversity leaders. Thus, an accurate assessment of the organization's level of multicultural development is necessary to determine whether individuals with privileged identities can be effective diversity leaders.

In the sociohistorical context of the post-civil rights era, Whites benefit from a largely unacknowledged White privilege. Whites with well-developed, reflective understandings of oppression who understand and acknowledge this fact are in the unique position of being able to utilize this privilege against itself. Since Whites cannot simply give up White privileges, we have a responsibility to use it in the service of greater racial justice. Thus, in this context, Whites can use our racial privileges to undermine the structures, understandings, and practices that constitute those privileges. To be sure,

such a project does not mean that using privilege against itself results in the immediate dissolution of those privileges; it *does* mean that those privileges can be exposed, challenged, and undermined, thus making their mechanical reproduction less likely.

Leadership means, in part, leading someone; and the identities ascriptively assigned to both the leader and the led are critically important. When diversity leaders are White males, those leaders must lead other White males in the organization when it comes to matters of social justice. This means that the White male diversity leader has the responsibility to model antiracist, feminist practice, to educate, and to prod other Whites and men into more just attitudes and behavior. While the diversity leader with privileged identities should avoid alienating other individuals who also have privileged identities, he or she should not serve as an ally on projects whose outcomes, whether purposeful or unconscious, include maintaining the racial and gender status quo. Being an ally to those Whites and men would mean engaging in, among other things, practices of White racial and male bonding and other passive or indirect means of reproducing the current racially stratified social order.

At the same time, however, the White male diversity leader must function as a strong ally to women and men of color and White women (both in and outside the organization) and not as a leader (in the narrow sense) to them on matters of social justice. This generalization, naturally, is complicated by the diversity of persons of color and White women, but it is important to be an ally with those committed to diversity for equity. Given the arguments concerning epistemic privilege, White males are epistemically disadvantaged in matters of racial and gender oppression compared to men and women of color and White women. White men are epistemically disadvantaged when it comes to perspectives on the operations of oppression, but they are not disadvantaged—and indeed may be *advantaged*—when it comes to strategies for generating systemic organizational change. The possible advantage derives from the fact that these organizations are White and male dominated, as is the surrounding sociocultural context. Thus, White males may possess certain insights into the modes of resistance and the potential points for change.

It is therefore crucial that White male diversity leaders take seriously the perspectives of, and in many cases follow, people of color and women in these matters, which means working actively as an ally to restructure the institution so that it is more inclusive and equitable for all individuals, irrespective of ascriptive identities. The perspectives and moral principles guiding the diversity leader who has privileged identities should be grounded in the worldview of those who are disadvantaged by their ascriptive identities, but such a recognition does not mean that such diversity leaders may not disagree in matters of strategy with the marginalized and excluded.

What all of this comes down to is that diversity leaders with privileged social identities need to lead with modesty, understanding, nuance, and courage. We need to demonstrate strong, public, antiracist, feminist, social justice leadership that is grounded in working in an actively collaborative way with those who are marginalized and excluded at every level of the organization. Diversity leaders with privileged identities should never begin to imagine that we possess comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the workings of oppression. Nevertheless, we need to model what it means to be a modest yet courageous social justice leader. Being a diversity leader, whatever one's ascriptive identities, requires serving a constituency that is deeply divided by race, gender, class, and sexual orientation and doing so effectively in an organizational context that inherently resists change.

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