Dialogues of Difference:
Practical Implications for Navigating *The Diversity Paradox*

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Abstract

In recent decades, an emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)efforts has increased exponentially for nonprofit and for-profit organizations alike. Despite this increased emphasis, however, the discursive understanding of "diversity" remains unclear for many organizational leaders. Some leaders respond to such ambiguity by gravitating toward one specific understanding of diversity, while dismissing alternative expressions of difference. I have referred to this phenomenon in previous studies as "the diversity paradox": a propensity for organizations to promote one potential understanding of diversity in a way that diminishes alternative expressions of difference for certain organizational members. This study continues a dialogue surrounding the diversity paradox by building upon nearly 250 hours of ethnographic fieldwork. In doing so, it offers three practical implications for cultivating authentically diverse organizations: (a) member-generated content, (b) increased virtual interaction, and (c) reflexive mechanisms of change. Each of these implications was co-created alongside research participants, highlighting the value of collaborative research and underscoring the capacity for applied research to foster healthier organizations. Each of these implications also holds promise for intercultural leaders and members who hope to mitigate a limited/limiting understanding of difference within their own organizational settings.

Keywords*: the diversity paradox, fractionation, tokenism, genuine dialogue, reflexivity*

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In recent decades – and especially since the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 – an emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has increased exponentially among nonprofit and for-profit organizations alike (Boatright, Berg, & Genao, 2021; Brown et al., 2022; Martinez, 2022; see also Bunn &LaCour, 2009; Unzueta& Binning, 2010). As a result, DEI has become a central priority for many organizational leaders, who have exalted diversity as a key source of strength (Richard, 2000), innovation (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995), and knowledge sharing (Mannix & Neale, 2005).Meanwhile, others have gone out of their way to publicize the value placed upon creating and maintaining a diverse organizational setting via formal mission statements, job calls, advertisements, and other promotional materials (Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Friedman, 2004; Kochan et al., 2003).

Despite their increased emphasis on diversity, however, organizations typically avoid any formal effort to define such an enigmatic term (Banks, 2009; Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Peterson, 1999; Unzueta & Binning, 2010).Such ambiguity affords anever-broadening understanding of diversity's potential role and definition: variations in age, race, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, marital status, economic income, education level, able-bodiedness, sexual orientation, political affiliation, or linguistic disposition, to name but a few (Coalition for Cultural Diversity, 2010).As argued in previous studies (Jenkins, 2021, 2019, 2014a, 2014b; Jenkins & Dillon, 2012), organizational leaders commonly respond to this level of ambiguity by gravitating toward one specific understanding of diversity. Despite diversity's broad range of possibilities – or rather because of it – organizations often focus upon one potential expression of the term in a way that overlooks or dismisses alternative expressions of difference. I refer to this phenomenon as *the diversity paradox*: a propensity for organizations to emphasize one potential understanding of diversity in a way that diminishes alternative expressions of difference for certain organizational members (see Jenkins,2021, 2014a, 2014b).

In the present study, I continue this dialogue surrounding *the diversity paradox* by offering three practical implications for cultivating genuinely diverse organizations: (a) member-generated content, (b) increased virtual interaction, and (c) reflexive mechanisms of change.

Each of these implications was co-created alongside the leaders and members of Central Community Church[1] – an intercultural congregation located in Tampa Bay's urban corridor – highlighting the value of collaborative research,and underscoring the capacity for applied communication research to construct healthier organizations. Each of these implications also holds promise for intercultural leaders and members who hope to mitigate a limited understanding of difference within their own organizational settings.

Building upon four years of ethnographic research, I begin by offering a brief overview of the organizational context and mixed methodologies used for this study. I then summarize existing literature on*the diversity paradox* and its six core tenants: (a) fractionated understanding, (b) visible hierarchy, (c) false attainment, (d) neglected representation, (e) diminished alternatives, and (f) potential tokenism. Next, I outline each of the aforementioned implications that organizational leaders and members helped to co-create. I conclude by discussing potential ways in which these implications can be recontextualized to other organizational contexts, in effort to successfully navigate any (un)intended consequences of *the diversity paradox*.

Organizational Context

The implications offered within this study emerged during my four-year ethnography of Central Community Church, an intercultural congregation located in Tampa Bay, Florida. Central Community is a nondenominational Christian church founded in 2006. At the time of this study, the church employed three full-time and two part-time employees. It had an average weekly attendance of 200 adults who were divided evenly between two Sunday morning services.

Pettigrew & Martin's (1987)time-honored definition of an intercultural congregation is one in which no one racial group makes up more than 80% of attendees (see also DeSantis, Graham, & Jenkins, 202; Driskill & Jenkins, 2019; Rennels, Gomez, Gonzelez, Rougeau, & Jenkins, 2016). Nearly 90% of churches in the United States fail to meet this standard, with more than 8 out of 10 congregations comprised of at least 80% one racial group (Smietana, 2015; Chavez, 1999).Meanwhile, only 1/3 of Americans have regularly attended a church where they are a racial minority, and less than 3% of historically black Protestant church members self-identify as White (Briggs, 2015). In light of such racial/ethnic disparity, Central Community was founded on the desire to create a "diverse community of believers." Consequently, the church's website described itself as "a *multi-ethnic community…* transforming the world through Jesus Christ" (Central Community, 2013c, par. 3, emphasis added).Central Community also promoted this goal via church literature, sermon topics, congregational events, and communal outreach efforts.

Central Community's desire to create a diverse community is especially noteworthy since the demographic makeup of its surrounding neighborhood reflected the projected demographics of the United States by year 2050(U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). More specifically, there were an estimated 160,000 persons living within six square-miles of Central Community. Thirty-nine percent of this population self-identified as Hispanic/Latino, 30%White, 27% African American, and 4% Asian American or Unlisted. In addition to race, Central Community's neighborhood also boasted a broad range of ages, economic incomes, education levels, and marital statuses. The age of local residents ranged from newborn to 81, with a mean of 36.5. Meanwhile, economic incomes in the area ranged from below $15,000 to above $150,000, with a mean of $41,457. For their highest level of education, 19% of adults reported having a bachelor's degree, and less than 6% reported a master's degree. Finally, forty-four percent of adults were single, 40% married, and 16% divorced or widowed (Percept, 2007; Robinson, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a, 2012b).

As America's cultural composition continues to grow, it is vital that organizational leaders and members learn to communicate within increasingly diverse milieu. Thus, Central Community offered a unique case study for organizational scholars and practitioners alike.

Research Methodology

In order to co-create practical implications alongside the organizational leaders and members of Central Community Church, this study used a combination of participant observations and semi-structured interviews. The present section outlines that methodology in more detail, including (a) data collection and (b) data analysis.

Data Collection

Ethnographic Fieldwork. Over the course of four years, I logged nearly 250 hours of observations and recorded more than 120 pages of ethnographic fieldnotes within Central Community Church. The majority of these observations centered on Sunday morning: the time immediately before, during, and after weekly church services. I spent most of this time within the building's foyer prior to services, and within the sanctuary once services had begun.

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[1] The organizational name is a pseudonym, as are all names used in this study.

This allowed me the opportunity to observe both informal interactions between members and leaders of the organization, as well as formal messages made by the lead pastor and associate pastors during each church service. Pen and paper were used to record any observations that occurred to me. Consisting primarily of short sentence fragments and descriptive adjectives, these observations were subsequently typed and fleshed out where necessary, resulting in 127 single-spaced pages of field notes.

Semi-Structured Interviews. After several months of ethnographic fieldwork, I began to integrate semi-structured interviews into the research process as well. These interviews engaged a total of 35 participants: each of the church's five employees and a representative sampling 30 congregational members – a number well above the recommended sample size for organizations of Central Community's size (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001). Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 58 years of age (*M* = 39.4). Each of the church's five leaders was male. The lead pastor identified as White, as did two associate pastors. One associate pastor identified as African American, and another as Hispanic/Latino. Sixteen of the 30congregational participants were male; fourteen were female. Nineteen self-identified as White, five as African American, five as Hispanic/Latino, and one as Native American.

I interviewed each participant at a time and location of her/his choosing. Interviews centered upon the church's aforementioned desire to create a "diverse community of believers." Participants were asked such questions as "What does community to mean you?," "Do you believe Central Community Church is a diverse community? Why or why not?," and "What do you see as the greatest obstacle to community within Central Community?" (see Appendix). Interviews were otherwise unstructured, allowing opportunity for each participant to direct the conversation as much as possible. The interviews lasted between 54 minutes and 90 minutes, totaling32 hours and 19 minutes in length. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed, resulting in 320 single-spaced pages of transcription. Confidentiality of each participant was ensured by removing her/his name from the transcriptions and from all subsequent manuscripts. A digital copy of each interview was stored in a secure location.

Data Analysis

Data collected through ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Morse's (1994) four-stage conceptualization of data analysis: comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing. The comprehending stage involved selecting the most appropriate methodological approaches, entering the field, and gaining rapport with participants. After collecting the data, I worked to identify when I had enough to offer what Morse labels as a *descriptive slice* of the organizational culture. I then transcribed and coded the data.

I examined the coded transcriptions in search of dominant themes, and completed an intensive reading of the individual codings. Next, I clumped and re-coded the codings together until a tree of large-order and small-order themes emerged from the data (Lindlof& Taylor, 2011). The subsequent process focused upon theorizing, a procedure Morse (1994) describes as "the constant development and manipulation of malleable theoretical schemes until the 'best' theoretical scheme is developed" (p. 32).

In effort to validate my readings, I returned the initial findings to each research participant on multiple occasions. Together we worked to sense make the preliminary data, while strategizing future directions for both this study and the organization writ large. The final step of my analysis engaged in recontextualization. In this sense, I worked with organizational leaders and members to identify ways in which my theoretical explanations could prove useful to other organizations (Gibson & Papa, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

Having offered a brief overview of this study's organizational context and research methodologies, the present section summarizes *the diversity paradox* and each of its six core tenants. In brief, *the diversity paradox* is an organizational emphasis placed upon one potential understanding of diversity which, paradoxically, deemphasizes alternative expressions of difference. An organizational focus on representations of gender, for instance, synchronously moves the focus away from sexual orientation, an organizational focus on representations of sexual orientation synchronously moves the focus away from age, and so on. Through observational and interview data, I found this paradox occurred among Central Community's leaders and members in six interrelated ways. Among Central Community's leaders, (a) organizational discourses promoted a *fractionated understanding* of what it means to be a diverse community, resulting in (b) a *visible hierarchy* of difference and (c) the sense of *false attainment* by its leadership.

Among Central Community's members, (d) organizational discourses resulted in *neglected representation* for certain minorities, as well as (e) *diminished alternatives* for organizational life and (f) an increased level of *potential tokenism*(see also Jenkins, 2021, 2014a, 2014b, 2012).

Fractionated Understanding

As previously mentioned, the notion of diversity is steeped in ambiguity, resulting in a broad range of potential understanding. In response to this range of possibilities, Central Community's leaders were found to place an organizational focus on racial/ethnic difference. Central Community's emphasis on race/ethnicity was evidenced through its intentional use of culturally diverse band members, promotional materials that featured stereotypical phenotypes, and the lead pastor's frequent challenge for congregational members to interact with others "who do not look like you" (field notes, April 17, 2011). Organizational discourses also caused members of Central Community to profess a similar characterization of diversity. During our interviews, participants commonly described the organization by referring to "unique physical characteristics" (Hispanic/Latino male), "a variety of races" (Hispanic/Latina female), and "people who look different" (African American male). Thus, instead of embracing diversity's broad range of possibilities, its leaders chose to extol one fractionated understanding of the term.

Originating in the field of chemistry, the term *fractionation* initially referred to the separation of an isotope into smaller quantities (O'Neil, Clayton, & Mayeda, 1969). Fractionation has since been used as a theoretical framework to describe the subdivision of large, complex concepts within social science into smaller, more palatable ideas (see Fisher, 1971; Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). By subdividing an issue like diversity into smaller parts and focusing upon only one potential understanding, organizations are able to make sense of a potentially overwhelming topic. Although useful in many instances, such a fractionated approach to diversity was problematic in this particular instance because it inherently neglected opposing perspectives. The leaders of Central Community professed to value difference, yet they expressed that value exclusively through representations of racial difference. This emphasis served to overlook alternative understandings of diversity, while simultaneously creating a hierarchy of difference.

Visible Hierarchy

Central Community's organizational emphasis on racial/ethnic difference not only created a fractionated understanding of diversity, but also resulted in the (de)valuation alternative expressions of difference. By focusing solely upon the issue of race/ethnicity, organizational leaders eventually came to view this form of difference as being more valuable than other potential forms. More specific still, Central Community's hierarchy of difference was based solely upon physical and visual representations of racial diversity (a.k.a., *marked bodies*). Again, this reality was best evidenced by the way Central Community featured racially/ethnically diverse band members and its use of promotional materials featuring racial/ethnic phenotypes. The lead pastor even opened one service by imploring the congregation to "Take a look to your left and to your right. Isn't it beautiful to see so many different types of people here celebrating together? This is what we're all about" (field notes, April 17, 2011).

Central Community's emphasis on visible representations of race seemed due, in part, to the fact that external differences are the easiest forms of diversity to observe and quantify. Phenotypical markers such as skin color and hair texture can be confirmed at a distance, and without the need for personal interaction. Alternative expressions of difference, such as nationality or linguistic disposition, are much more difficult to detect, requiring a greater investment of time and energy. As a result, these unseen markers of diversity were devalued within Central Community's organizational discourses – or else overlooked entirely – resulting in a false sense of attainment among its leadership.

False Attainment

By communicating a fractionated and hierarchical view of diversity, Central Community's leaders perpetuated their limited conception of this term, rendering themselves unable to recognize the ways in which this understanding rendered their organization utterly homogenous. Although a relatively equal number of men and women attended Central Community, for example, its leadership was entirely male. Central Community's homogeneity was further evidenced by its complete lack of LGBT, disabled, international, and/or non-English speaking members. During my four years of participant-observations, I identified only one openly gay couple in attendance at Central Community. My informal interactions with each of these women confirmed they were Central Community's sole LGBT attendees (field notes, September 26, 2010). Furthermore, this couple stopped attending the church after only a few weeks, restoring Central Community's collective status to that of wholly heterosexual.

Despite such a lack of diversity, Central Community's leaders remained convinced that their organization was in fact diverse. Thus, the inability for Central Community to fully recognize or value alternative expressions of difference resulted in a false sense of attainment among its leaders, as evidenced by the comments from one associate pastor:
 "The vast majority of churches in America are all made up of the same kinds of people… [but] we're doing something different here, you know?" (Hispanic/Latino male). In other words, by emphasizing visible representations of racial difference alone, the leaders of Central Community were able to maintain that their church was diverse without ever considering the multitude of ways in which it was not. As its website asserts: "People from every walk of life make

[Central Community] their home… we find common ground when we come together. (Central Community, 2013c; see also 2013a, 2013b). This characteristic of *the diversity paradox* is also why an entirely male leadership could fail to recognize the need for female leaders. Moreover, Central Community's false sense of attainment serves to underscore several of the consequences faced by minority members within the organization – namely that of neglected representation, diminished alternatives, and potential tokenism.

Neglected Representation

As a consequence of Central Community's fractionated understanding, visible hierarchy and false sense of attainment, *the diversity paradox* also resulted in neglected representation for certain minority members. The preceding paragraphs of this section highlighted Central Community's absence of female leadership, as well as its lack of LGBT, disabled, international, and non-English speaking members. Additional demographics that were shown to be neglected by church leadership included age, marital status, economic income, education level, and political affiliation. Such individuals were allowed to fully participate in the organization; however, they were not considered as part of the church's diversity quotient. Consequently, they were not valued or celebrated in the same way as other visibly diverse congregants.

On several occasions Central Community's leaders were heard discussing the need for more visually diverse lay leaders and band members. Yet this same priority was never extended to unseen markers of difference, nor to expressions of race/ethnicity that were not visibly apparent (e.g., culturally diverse preferences in music, food, attire, etc.) Even though several minority participants in this study desired to hear more gospel music, for instance, music choice was not an organizational discourse used to measure diversity. One organizational member commented specifically on the lack of gospel music and an excess of what he called "White church music:"

It took how many years to get our (African American) music….just here in the last few weeks I finally heard a song that was done with a salsa beat…more than half our congregation has probably grew up with that music in the background….that is the music of their lives. (African American male)

A second participant laughed when I asked her about Central Community's choice of music. "We don't have any reason to go there," she elaborated, "Isn't anybody playing my type of music anyway" (African American female). Despite the dissention surrounding Central Community's choice of music, this trend continued because musical rhythm, tempo, song selection, and instrument choice were not organizational measures used to determine the church's diversity. Thus, grievances against such a "minor" detail as music were neglected by leaders and other members as merely personal preference. Or worse, these grievances were seen as grumbles of discontent – an affront to the organization's superordinate goal of creating a diverse community.

Diminished Alternatives

Because of the way Central Community neglected unseen markers of difference, certain minority members felt unable to express their diverse views and approaches to organizational life. Hence, the emphasis that organizational discourses placed upon visual and physical representations of race/ethnicity not only devalued alternative understandings of difference, but also devalued alternative ways of *being*. In addition to those ways already mentioned (e.g., female leadership and music selection), yet another example of diminished alternatives includedWhite normative approaches to time management. *White normativity* views White ideology and cultural practices as the conventional mode of association and belonging (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Mills, 2003). Within this context, the way White persons act and interact are accepted as the way things "should be" or "just how things are." Therefore, White normativity privileges White individuals because they need not validate their own way of being. All other races/ethnicities are left with the burden of explanation whenever they stray from White normative beliefs or practices (Dyer, 1988, 1997).

With this understanding in mind, White normative approaches to time management were observed throughout my study of Central Community. As a White male, the church's lead pastor adhered to a strictly monochronic understanding of time management. Rooted in Western society and stemming from the Industrial Revolution, a *monochronic* view of time is defined by precise and regimented scheduling. In contrast, a *polychronic* view of time is less rigid and more fluid, and is largely associated with Asian, Arabic, African, and Latin American cultures. Because of his monochronic view of time, the lead pastor expected congregational members to arrive promptly for Sunday morning services; he expected the same punctuality from other leaders. On several occasions, he walked through the foyer and café, encouraging people to move into the sanctuary (field notes, June 5, 2011; June 12, 2011; July 17, 2011).
During staff meetings, he also encouraged other members of leadership to do the same: "Let's get them into the sanctuary on time. Let's get things going" (field notes, October 19, 2010). Central Community's lead pastor even addressed the issue of time management within his weekly e-newsletters, emphasizing the start time of services and the need for members to arrive promptly. Despite each of these efforts, several organizational members seemed to resist the

lead pastor's monochronic view of time management via foot-dragging, dissimulation, and even feigned ignorance of the services' actual start time (DeSantis, Graham, & Jenkins, 2021). Opposing conceptions of time is a commonly cited difference among diverse cultures (Guerrero, DeVito, & Hecht, 1999); thus, the lead pastor's strictly monochronic view of time management diminished alternatives for organizational life among certain minority members, while also increasing their potential for racial tokenism.

Potential Tokenism

Finally, via neglected representation and diminished alternatives, *the diversity paradox* reveals a potential danger for intercultural organizations to consign minority members to that of token status. First defined byKanter (1977) during her study of gender representation in the workplace, *tokenism* is a perfunctory gesture toward the inclusion of minorities within an otherwise majority group or organization. Such inclusion is typically used to create an artificial façade of diversity, while averting any potential accusations of discrimination. Token individuals are often appointed to highly visible roles within an organization, yet are granted limited influence or capacity for organizational change. Due to such heightened visibility, tokens commonly experience an increased level of pressure and expectation placed upon their personal performance. Meanwhile, the uniqueness of token individuals is often overlooked by those within the dominant group, resulting in their assimilation into one collectively inferior grouping, characterized by erroneous and exaggerated stereotypes. Tokens often accept these flawed stereotypes for fear of exclusion, yet feelings of isolation and segregation are still commonplace among token individuals (Kanter, 1993).

It should be made clear that at no point during this four-year study did I perceive intentional malice, hypocrisy, or deception on the part of Central Community Church's leaders and members. I believe, in fact, that they had only the best of intentions: to create a genuinely diverse body of believers in accordance with Christian Scripture (see Genesis 1:26; Matthew 8:10-12, 28:9; John 3:16; Acts 2:1-5, 17:26-27; Revelation 7:9). Nonetheless, *the diversity paradox* reveals a risk for tokenism within intercultural contexts like Central Community because of the possibility for organizational discourses to become focused upon one specific (and visibly apparent) view of diversity. For this reason, the mere presence of organizational members who fulfill that view could be interpreted as enough to "satisfy" an organization's diversity quotient. Furthermore, these members could be made highly visible within the organization – as exemplified by Central Community's aforementioned desire for more visually diverse lay leaders and band members – while simultaneously granting those same members limited influence or capacity for organizational change.

Practical Implications

The diversity paradox reveals a propensity for intercultural organizations to emphasize only one potential understanding of diversity. In the case of Central Community Church, an organizational emphasis on visual representations of race/ethnicity deemphasized a countless number of alternate understands (e.g., gender, nationality, able-bodiedness, sexual orientation, to name but a few).Toward the conclusion of my four-year study with Central Community Church, I shared my preliminary findings with each research participant. Together, we then workedto co-create three practical implications for how Central Community Church – and other intercultural organizations like it – might navigate such a limited/limiting view of diversity: (a) member-generated content, (b) increased virtual interaction, and (c) reflexive mechanisms of change. The present section outlines each of these implications in turn. This study then concludes by discussing how these implications might be recontextualized to other intercultural milieu.

Member-Generated Content

During my four-year study of Central Community Church, it became increasingly clear that the organization needed to develop a more variegated view of diversity. One specific way in which organizational members suggested accomplishing this goal was through the creation of member-generated content that prominently featured a diverse range of congregational members (field notes, November 16, 2011).After sharing this suggestion with Central Community's leadership, they responded by creating a series of video narratives entitled "Dialogues of Difference." Each of these prerecorded narratives featured a different organizational leader or member, as participants were invited to share their personal stories and experiences: how they came to be a part of Central Community, personal struggles they had overcome, the positive impact of Central Community's community on their lives, and so on.

Dialogues of Difference constructively complicated Central Community's limited/limiting understanding of diversity in several ways. First, these video narratives served to offer several representations of diversity beyond that of race/ethnicity alone. The videos featured men and women of all ages, in varying life stages, and with an assortment of marital, economic, educational, and political backgrounds. The result represented a broad array of attires, dialects, linguistic choices, etc.

Second, Dialogues of Difference offered participants an opportunity to share personal details and stories that reached beyond socially constructed phenotypes. The narratives often discussed marital struggles, financial successes, political tensions, and even depressive tendencies. One video, for instance, featured a middle-aged White male who discussed the stress he felt during a recent stint with unemployment (field notes, September 18, 2011).A second video featured a 20-something Hispanic/Latina female and the positive impact of Central Community's tutoring initiative upon her child's education (field notes, November 20, 2011). Narratives such as these served to construct a more nuanced and holistic understanding of fellow congregational members, thus, allowing each to "see through different eyes from beyond" (Edwards, 1997, p. 54).

Lastly, Central Community's Dialogues of Difference challenged previously limited/limiting understandings of diversity through their inclusion of peripheral details. The video narratives were recorded in a variety of contexts and locations, they varied in length and structure, and they included an assortment of video filters and musical components. This inclusion of cultural elements and objects beyond that of skin color, hair texture, body type, and facial features further promoted an understanding of diversity beyond mere visual representations of racial/ethnic difference.

These congregational narratives were shown to the entire church during Sunday morning worship services. They were also uploaded to Central Community's website and other social media outlets. Their online use concurrently served to foster online engagement among organizational leaders and members, which segues into this study's second implication of increased virtual interaction.

Increased Virtual Interaction

In addition to a variegated view of diversity, several participants described the need for increased dialogue between organizational leaders and members. One member in particular commented:

And see what the deal is, we don't talk, you know it's like, we don't come together and talk about hey, yeah, these are some of the things that I struggle with. I think, what's that big church in um, Chicago outside there some place? Anyway…they just bring [the members] together and say, hey let's talk. What's going on? What's happening? And then they talk that way, because it's amazing what happens when it gets through dialogue and talk. (African American male)

In response to the need for more dialogic engagement, a number of participants suggested using the congregation's website to increase virtual interaction between organizational leaders and members (field notes, November 16, 2011). The suggestion for increased virtual interaction should come as no surprise, as the number of American churches with congregational websites nearly tripled between 1998 and 2007, increasing from 17% to 44% (Chaves & Anderson, 2008; see also Rennels, Gomez, Rougeau, & Jenkins, 2016).Meanwhile, more than 28 million Americans report using the internet for spiritual reasons, and most do not visit a church without first browsing its website (Baab, 2008; Larson, 2000). The increased popularity of congregational websites (Baab, 2007; Esrock & Leichty, 1998), coupled with the flexibility and immediacy of online content, make them a particularly viable tool for addressing the issue of genuine dialogic engagement. This reality is especially evident for intercultural organizations like Central Community Church. As free and low-cost access to the internet continues to increase (Huffington Post, 2013), its use has shown potential to "level the playing field" between and among its users (Adams & Smith, 2008; Cvjeticanin, 2006), hence, embodying many of the notions of *democratic dialogue* and its emphases on intercultural collaboration and participation (Gustavsen, 2008, p. 19).

A particularly notable way that Central Community used its congregational website to foster virtual interaction was through an initiative entitled "Community Voices:" a blogging series that partnered the organization's website with Facebook to generate conversation by, from, and among organizational constituents. The Community Voices blog invited a diverse participant to post each week in response to that week's sermon message – to reflect, ponder, and comment on what was said.

On average, blog entries were 500-1200 words in length. They augmented the week's sermon with additional anecdotes and pop cultural references (see Rennels, 2012; Wilder, 2012). Blog posts seldom used scripture or cited religious sources, but rather were more personal in nature. As a result, authors commonly revealed struggles or shortcomings in their own life as a way to ruminate on the week's sermon. One blogger by the name of Jonathan epitomized this trend by writing:
"I may have failed at most of the accomplishments I aimed for, but even if I had succeeded, as Paul states he did, what would it have been worth?" (Rennels, 2012, par. 7). A second blogger named Nick went a far as to openly discussed his struggles with alcohol:

Drinking. I have had difficulty avoiding the masses walking down the partying path. Now, I don't consider myself an alcoholic, but I should be enjoying beer in moderation. And I'm not doing that. This is a lifestyle that was developed in college that I didn't leave behind when I graduated. In complete honesty, I have challenged myself to eliminate alcohol from my body for the next seven days. (Bridges, 2012, par. 5)

In response to Westboro Baptist Church, a denomination infamous for its public demonstrations against the LGBT community, yet another blogger named Cynthia wrote:

If I were to meet a member of [Westboro Baptist Church] face-to-face, I'd have to really think about what I'd say to them. I don't want to have evil, vengeful thoughts in my heart. God doesn't ask that of me. I have been called to love God above all other things and to love my neighbor as myself. A hard pill to swallow considering how outraged I feel when I see what this hate group is doing. But being aware of this has lit a fire for me to want to share about God's love and grace that He extends to all, and about the upside-down, backwards, first-shall-be-last-and-the-last-first way that he handles things. (Yates, 2012, par. 5)

Blog entries were initially submitted to a member of Central Community's leadership before being posted online. During an impromptu conversation with the church's lead pastor, however, a church member suggested that Community Voices be published without editorial oversight or censorship. This member emphasized the importance of honesty, sincerity and vulnerability, arguing that if Central Community wanted to foster *genuine dialogue* among its members that it must allow their authentic and unfiltered comments to be read by others (see Buber, 1955, 1957). The lead pastor encouraged participants in subsequent weeks to raise questions and even to voice doubts through their blog entries. He also made it clear that the participants' original views and thoughts were to be posted online as-is, free from editorial input or scrutiny by Central Community's leadership.

Community Voices addressed the need for increased organizational dialogue in a number of ways. First, the blogging initiative provided a tangible opportunity for organizational leaders and members to engage with the specific experiences and perspectives of others. In addition, the leadership's decision to not editorialize the blog posts also broadened their authors' potential range of expression, without imposing any singular view on the issues at hand. Community Voices also served to engage a diverse group of participants by bringing each into conversation with one another, a feature that was further accomplished by this study's final implication.

Reflexive Mechanisms of Change

Based upon this study's findings, a final need that was identified by organizational leaders and members involved reflexive mechanisms of change (see Pels, 2000; Schon, 1983; Senge, 2006). After receiving the preliminary results of my research, organizational leaders repeatedly asked how they could avoid falling into such a "rut" ever again. They expressed an appreciation for the insight my study offered, yet wondered aloud at how they could be equally insightful on their own, once I had finished my research with the organization. In order to address this concern, the leaders and members of Central Community formed their own "Creative Arts Team."

Central Community's Creative Arts Team was conceived as an opportunity to bring diverse participants and perspectives together in open dialogue with one another. The Creative Arts Team consisted of approximately twenty organizational members that met with Central Community's five leaders once per month to discuss past, current, and future initiatives within the organization. Together, these 25 participants took time to share their personal perceptions and experiences. The group's unstructured conversations reflected upon the previous month's services, outreach efforts, and community building initiatives. They discussed what was successful, what needed to be altered or modified, and so on. The Creative Arts Team was then encouraged to "dream together" about Central Community's future (field notes, February 5, 2012).

"Dreaming together" was an axiom repeated by the lead pastor in effort to inspire uninhibited reflection and dialogue among the Creative Arts Team. Through this process, participants were encouraged to challenge current organizational norms, and to question taken for granted assumptions within Central Community. Each gathering lasted between 45-60 minutes and ended by reflecting on the gathering itself: leaders and members commonly asked whether the meetings should be structured differently, and whether a different style, setting, method, or approach would prove more beneficial in the future. During one meeting in particular, a member of the Creative Arts Team even reflected on what was meant by the term "beneficial:"

So what do we mean by that term…? Are we just talking about growing the church or are we talking about learning from our mistakes? Are we talking about the way I treat someone else or way I'm treated? What do we mean by beneficial? Beneficial for whom?... Beneficial in what way? (White male; field notes, November 20, 2011).

In addition to each of these features, Central Community's Creative Arts Team made it a point to invite outside perspectives into their meetings, and to schedule period self-reflections of their own internal processes. Outside perspectives usually consisted of guest speakers, visiting pastors, or past lay leaders who had since moved away from the area. By inviting these perspectives into the team meetings, organizational leaders and members gained an increased capacity to recognize their own masked assumptions. Similarly, by scheduling formal opportunities for self-reflection, organizational leaders and members were forced to pause systematically in ways described above, and to evaluate their own communicative processes and procedures. Thus, Central Community's approach to its Creative Arts Team embodied many of the ideas that characterize reflexive mechanisms of change (e.g., reflection-in-action, recursive contemplation, Pel's (2000) "one step up" philosophy, and so on), while avoiding its potentially narcissistic tendencies. Through this process, Central Community's Creative Arts Team was also made conscious about its own consciousness. It made the organization itself an object for critical and analytical consideration, creating avenues of discussion for its diverse leaders and members to *live better with* the inevitable tensions of organizational life (Tretheway& Ashcraft, 2004).

Conclusion

Through four years of ethnographic research, this study produced three powerful implications for cultivating truly diverse organizations: (a) member-generated content, (b) increased virtual interaction, and (c) reflexive mechanisms of change. The way in which these implications were co-created alongside organizational leaders and members highlights the value of collaborative research, and underscores the potential for applied communication research to build healthier organizations. Each of these implications also has potential to be recontextualized to other organizational contexts, thus, mitigating the limited/limiting enactment of diversity that I observed within Central Community Church.

Central Community's use of member-generated content can be easily emulated by other religious and faith-based organizations due, in part, to its low-cost commitment. The price of digital recorders continues to decrease, while the video quality of smart phones continues to improve. Meanwhile, video software is also more assessable to the general public than ever before, with an array of free and inexpensive programs available for purchase or download, many of which require no prior training to operate (e.g., iMovie, Roxio Creator, Adobe Premiere, AVS Video Editor, etc.) The resulting "Dialogues of Difference" can be used in each of the ways they were by Central Community, at virtually no cost to the organization. Such videos can also be used to reach a wider, external audience by uploading them to an organization's website and/or other social media outlets.

Secular and for-profit organizations can benefit from this approach to video narratives as well: health settings, educational institutions, governmental organizations, etc. A hospice setting, for example, might create a diverse series of video narratives to welcome new patients, comfort family members, or publicize their services to underrepresented populations (Dillon, Roscoe, & Jenkins, 2012). These videos could feature an array of actual clients and employees from the organization, not unlike the way Central Community featured actual congregational members. They could also utilize an array of peripheral details – varied contexts, locations, lengths, structures, filters, and musical accompaniments – in order to promote an organizational view of diversity beyond that of mere racial/ethnic difference. Similarly, universities might create a diverse series of video narratives to welcome first-year students, socialize transfer students, or even caution students against the dangers of drug use, binge drinking, or unprotected sex (see Wolburg, 2001). In each of these examples, the use of video narratives is a relatively swift and cost-effective way to distribute information, while successfully navigating above *the diversity paradox*'s limited/limiting view of difference.

A broad range of religious and secular contexts might also benefit from Central Community's approach to increasing its virtual interaction. Nearly 30% of internet users attest to reading blogs, 12% have left comments on a blog, and 7% have created a blog for themselves, with each of these numbers expected to rise in future years (Rainie, 2005). Due to such popularity, it has become common forlarge and for-profit organizations to have their own blog. Blogs are less common, however, among small and nonprofit organizations like Central Community. Furthermore, most organizational blogs found on the internet are operated by paid employees. They typically have a strict parameter of what can and cannot be discussed, as their sole focus is to promote the organization itself. In fact, three of the world's most popular corporate blogs are produced by Marriot International, Amazon, and Facebook (Fisher, 2012). "Marriot on the Move" is written by Bill Marriot, Chairman of the Board for Marriot International. Meanwhile, Amazon's blog focuses on the technical offerings of its website, and Facebook's blog is used to share privacy updates with its users.

In contrast to such corporate blogs that are written by paid employees to promote their own self-interests, Central Community's blog – "Community Voices" – was written by a diverse range of congregational volunteers. These volunteers were never given limitations on what they could or could not write about. Instead, their voices were published free of censorship or editorial oversight, with members encouraged to raise questions and voice doubts through their posts.

Consistent with the emergence of *multi-author blogs* (see Hearst &Dumais, 2009), this technique fostered virtual interaction among both leader and members by bringing multiple authors' perspectives into dialogue with one another. Given the countless number of free blogging sites available today, such an approach to organizational blogging can be replicated by almost any for-profit or nonprofit organization that is willing to allow its members to publish their candid thoughts, questions, and reflections for consumption by a public audience.

Finally, Central Community's approach to fostering reflexive mechanisms of change can also be recontextualized to a variety of milieu through the creation of their own "Creative Arts Team."To this end, a rich and diversified sampling of leaders and members should be gathered whom embody various levels of engagement throughout the organization. The resulting group should consist of approximately 20-40 interested participants – a range that not only aligns with the size of Central Community's "Creative Arts Team," but also corresponds to the size recommended by Bohm (1987, 1996) for facilitating genuine dialogic interaction.

Periodic meetings of this group should work to emulate Central Community's axiom of "dreaming together." Through45-60 minutes of semi-structured conversation, participants should be offered timeto share their personal experiences and perceptions, to challenge current organizational norms, and to question any taken for granted assumptions. Each gatheringshould conclude by reflecting on its own meeting processes – by questioning whether a different style, setting, method, or approach would prove more beneficial. In addition, such teams should also make it a point to periodically invite outside perspectives into their meetings, and to schedule opportunities for formal self-reflection upon the group's internal processes. Outside perspectives can consist of visitors, guests, past organizational members, future potential participants, and so on. Opportunities for formal self-reflection can be implemented via open-ended surveys or questionnaires, or by intentionally setting aside time for group discussion.

In the end, each of the implications outlined in this study – (a) member-generated content, (b) increased virtual interaction, and (c) reflexive mechanisms of change – can help to cultivate original and self-reflexive thinking which result in increased opportunities for positive organizational change. Each of these co-created implications can also challenge taken for granted assumptions about the meaning of diversity, thus, helping to alleviate much of the ambiguity surrounding this term in today's increasingly globalized society. Ultimately, the results and implications of this study can serve to cultivate genuinely diverse organizations by helping leaders and members to navigate inherent tensions resulting from *the diversity paradox*.

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Appendix
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Greeting/Rapport Building

    Are you busy?

    Is this a good time to speak with me?

Introductory Questions

    Age?

    Race/ethnicity?

    How long have you been involved with/coming to Central Community Church?

Interview Questions

    What does "community" to mean you?

    What does it mean to be a "community church"?

    Do you believe Central Community Church is a diverse community?Why or why not?

    How might Central Community's current sense of community be improved?

    What do you see as the greatest obstacle to community within Central Community?

Closing/Conclusion

    Do you have any questions for me?

    Do you have anything to add?