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“Diversity is a corporate plan”: racialized equity labor among university employees

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ABSTRACT
Drawing on ninety-four interviews with university employees at two four-year publics, we identify elements of the “racialized equity labor”, or efforts to challenge racial inequities in the university environment, primarily undertaken by employees of color. We argue that the amount and intensity of racialized equity labor is related to organizational logics of race, or cultural values and beliefs about race that people use to organize their activities in the university. “Diversity” logics, focusing on individual differences in experiences, values, and worldviews, are associated with identity-focused infrastructure and create greater need for racialized equity labor. In contrast, “equity” logics focus on the structural changes needed to address race as a system of oppression and are instantiated in institutionalized infrastructure that alleviates and transforms racialized equity labor. We conclude that diversity logics are profoundly limiting for addressing racial inequities in academia.

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Students of color on college campuses often seek the support of non-white university employees as they navigate historically white institutional spaces (Ahmed 2012; Hirshfield and Joseph 2012; Matthew 2016; Moore 2017; Thomas and Hollenshead 2001). Employees of color are thus more likely to engage in insufficiently compensated labor in support of racially marginalized communities (Baez 2000; Gorski 2019; Wright-Mair and Ramos 2021; Zambrana 2018). This labor – what we refer to as “racialized equity labor” (or “REL”) – is geared toward changing racial inequities within the university.

The REL of employees often occurs in universities that have institutionalized a visible and often benign commitment to “diversity”, or the celebration of individual differences (Ahmed 2012; Berrey 2015; Byrd 2019; Thomas 2018,

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2020). Diversity as a set of cultural logics shaping university approaches to race is characterized by new forms of institutional infrastructure, such as chief diversity officers and multicultural centers. As scholars have documented, diversity logics often distract from or derail efforts to address or dismantle systemic racism on campuses (Byrd 2019; Thomas 2020).

We draw on interviews with ninety-four university employees working at two campuses in the same state system to define features of racialized equity labor and document racial inequities in whom performs it. We identify the role of organizational logics of race, or cultural values and beliefs about race that people within organizations use to organize their activities, in shaping campus infrastructure and the amount and nature of employee REL. We detail the limits of diversity logics for supporting racially marginalized employees engaged in racialized equity labor.[1] Our findings expand the concept of REL to faculty and staff (see Lerma, Hamilton, and Nielsen 2020) and demonstrate how racial logics and infrastructure matter for the experiences of racially marginalized workers.

Defining racialized equity labor

Universities have historically been spaces of racial exclusion. Longstanding schools were involved in Native American genocide, grew rich from the slave economy, and were founded to serve white men only (Byrd 2017; Du Bois 1935; Wilder 2013; Wooten 2015). Today most prestigious four-year research universities in the US still enroll few numbers of historically unrepresented students. Yet, even when the student body is majority-marginalized, universities can still be white spaces. Except for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Tribal Colleges, most Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) started as majority-white organizations that transitioned over time (Hamilton and Nielsen 2021). Given this legacy, staff, faculty, and administrators generally remain majority-white, and organizational practices are often modelled after predominately white institutions (Vargas and Villa-Palomino 2018; Vargas, Villa-Palomino, and Davis 2020).

The universities featured in this study are Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions and serve economically marginalized student populations. MSIs are primarily determined by a threshold percentage of the student body that identifies as part of a specific group.[2] They can vary in organizational "servingness" (Garcia 2019), or the degree to which the school not only enrolls the targeted population but *serves* these students, for example through the compositional diversity of faculty, staff, and administrators, engagement with marginalized communities, and the development of supportive structures. Some MSIs provide an affirming culture and infrastructure for targeted populations, while others are MSIs only in name (Vargas and Villa-Palomino 2018). Anti-

Blackness can also persist at universities not designated for Black students (Dancy, Edwards, and Davis 2018; Pirtle 2021).

On virtually all campuses, representational inequalities among employees create challenges for workers of color. Existing research is focused on racially marginalized faculty, who cope with racial microaggressions, devaluation of their research, tokenism (i.e. being asked to be a visible reminder of the presence of marginalized groups and to "speak for" a particular group), and expectations that they will contribute to the appearance of the university as a "diverse" organization in ways not expected of their white peers (Baez 2000; Matthew 2016; Moore 2017; Wright-Mair and Ramos 2021; Zambrana 2018). Many campuses also include employees whose official jobs are to make visible organizational commitment to diversity – despite university leadership's resistance to structural change (Ahmed 2012).

We offer the term "racialized equity labor" (or "REL") to describe the struggle of organizational actors, from a variety of positions, to address race-based marginalization and inequity. Previous research on REL has examined the efforts of students of color and their allies to make campus safer, more comfortable, and welcoming to racially marginalized communities (Lerma, Hamilton, and Nielsen 2020). In this article, we focus on the racialized equity labor of university employees.

We use the word "equity" rather than "equality" to signify that racially marginalized workers may need more than "equal" (or the same) supports as those who are not marginalized. Institutional whiteness – in university leadership, policies and practices modelled after historically white organizations, and the erasure of how race matters – can make universities hostile places for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color). These individuals often experience greater harms in the university setting and shoulder a heavier burden in working to change environments (Matthew 2016; Misra et al. 2021; Moore 2017; Thomas and Hollenshead 2001). As prior scholarship documents, employees of color are more likely to engage in insufficiently compensated labor in support of racially marginalized communities (Baez 2000; Gorski 2019; Wright-Mair and Ramos 2021; Zambrana 2018).

REL is connected to other concepts. For example, Padilla's (1994) term "cultural taxation" refers to the additional service obligations of BIPOC faculty members. Hirshfield and Joseph (2012) expand this concept with "identity taxation" – acknowledging that faculty members with other historically marginalized social identities also take on extra service. Wingfield and Alston's (2013) "racial tasks" includes all forms of ideological, interactional, and physical labor that people of color perform in white spaces of employment, not just the university. Perhaps most centrally, Wingfield's (2019, 37) notion of "racial outsourcing" highlights the fact that when organizations adopt politically correct diversity rhetoric – but fail to address systematic and

interactional racism – then professional workers of color may be left "to do the equity work of connecting organizations to communities of color".

Racialized equity labor is a result of racial outsourcing by universities. We define this labor as: *intentional efforts to support marginalized communities and challenge inequitable organizational structures*. REL is almost always a racial task and is often a form of identity taxation – except when performed by the racially privileged. It can be done by employees in a variety of organizational contexts. In the university, REL is shouldered not only by faculty but also by other employees. REL does not include shallow efforts to promote an organization's image as diverse or multicultural. It is often outside of employees' credentialed areas of expertise and goes above and beyond job expectations. Like racial tasks and identity taxation, REL comes at a cost to personal time, well-being, and career development – especially for racially marginalized employees.

The importance of organizational logics

Racialized organizations theory, as articulated by Ray (2019), recognizes that universities are meso-level organizational settings in which individual- and macro-level racial inequities are reproduced (or potentially challenged) through racialized practices. Racial logics are a form of organizational logics – or cultural values, beliefs, and normative expectations that people use to organize their activities. They define how universities approach race, racial difference, and racial inequities. There are at least two racial logics that organize the postsecondary sector, as summarized in Table 1.

Equity logics arose as a direct result of Civil Rights era activism and evolved in a period of high public support for postsecondary education (Hamilton and Nielsen 2021). Jayakumar and Museus (2012, 16) explain that equity logics recognize "the pervasiveness of persisting institutional racism, historic and current exclusionary institutional practices, and disparities". These logics

Table 1. Organizational logics of race.

Logics of race	Equity	Diversity
Historical roots	Civil Rights era activism	Neoliberal era
Definition	Focused on structural change needed to address race as a system of oppression	Focused on individual differences in experiences, values, and worldviews
Perspective on race	Communal and collective	Colorblind
Goal	Push back against systemic racism	Numeric inclusion
Level of focus	Structural	Individual
Associated infrastructure	Multiple, resourced, and semi-autonomous group-based centers	One-size-fits-all multicultural centers and diversity trainings and identity-based student and faculty organizations
Impact on racialized equity labor	Eases the burden of REL on employees and allows for proactive and broader efforts	Increases need for employee REL by outsourcing supports for marginalized students

highlight race as a system of oppression stretching across societal institutions and structuring organizations. On college and university campuses, they are typically institutionalized in multiple, well-resourced, group-based cultural centers grounded in marginalized communities. Equity-related infrastructure tends to be communal and collective, focused on the uplift of marginalized communities, and challenging to oppressive structures (Byrd 2019). It pushes back against systemic racism, even within the university, providing a central hub for equity work (Hamilton and Nielsen 2021).

Equity logics, and associated infrastructure, have been challenged by the diffusion of diversity logics in higher education. Thomas (2018, 141, 2020; also see Berrey 2015; Byrd 2019) argues that most universities in the US have developed a "diversity regime", or "a set of meanings and practices that institutionalizes a benign commitment to diversity". Diversity logics involve celebrating a wide range of individual differences in experiences, values, and worldviews (Ahmed 2012; Moore 2018) and are characterized by attention to numeric inclusion (Byrd 2021). A diverse learning environment may be a celebrated campus feature – if it does not upend racialized power structures (Warikoo 2016). These individual-level, colorblind logics do not recognize race as a system of oppression that structurally disadvantages/advantages some groups (Ahmed 2012).

"Diversity" was introduced in the anti-affirmative action *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* case as the only "compelling governmental interest" for considering race in admissions (Moore 2018). The *Bakke* case was followed by state-level affirmative action bans (starting with California's Proposition 209 in 1996). The end of affirmation-action dovetailed with the withdrawal of public support for higher education, in the wake of increasing access for marginalized groups in the late 1900s and early 2000s (Loss 2012). Diversity logics are thus the dominant racial logics of what some have referred to as the "neoliberal" era of higher education. This period is defined by a belief in the need for fiscal austerity and the blocking of democratic demands on organizations (Hamilton and Nielsen 2021).

The infrastructure associated with a diversity regime is often one-size-fits-all, such as a single multicultural center, diversity training, or administrative position expected to deal with all diversity-related issues, without providing "special treatment" for any group (Hamilton and Nielsen 2021; Shotton, Yellowfish, and Cintrón 2010; Thomas 2020). Identity-based student and faculty organizations may proliferate; however, these are typically not well-resourced, similar to employee affinity groups in private companies (see Berrey 2015). Indeed, diversity logics suggest that the duty of schools is narrowly defined inclusion, not remedying inequities. Racial equity work is "outsourced" to people of color and may even be blocked by organizational leadership (Ahmed 2012; Lerma, Hamilton, and Nielsen 2020; Wingfield 2019).

Different college campuses have different constellations of racial logics, established over time and instantiated in infrastructure. In this article, we argue that campuses defined primarily by diversity logics and infrastructure produce a greater need for REL – as important student supports are outsourced to employees. In contrast, we contend that campuses that have retained equity logics and infrastructure offer an institutionalized web of supports that eases REL, such that not all employees of color must engage in this work; under these conditions, racialized equity labor can also expand beyond basic needs.

Data and methods

We draw on interviews of university employees from case studies of the University of California-Merced (UCM) and the University of California-Riverside (UCR), conducted between July 2016 and August 2017.[3] The larger project focuses on how limited economic resources shape university supports for majority racially and economically marginalized students. In 2016, over 50 per cent of the UCM student body and around 40 per cent of the UCR student body identified as Latinx. Both schools enrolled around 60 per cent Pell Grant recipients.

UCR and UCM have distinct histories. First opened in 1954 as an elite liberal arts campus, UCR transitioned to a research university starting in the 1960s. A "state-university" partnership meant greater public funding, and Civil Rights activism led to the growth of infrastructure for marginalized populations (Loss 2012). On UCR's campus continued investments in group-based centers reflect equity logics, even as diversity logics have become more present on campus. University investments continue because the centers have grown to be powerful, semi-autonomous actors on campus, in the local community, and in relationship with corporate sponsors – all of which protect them from removal. In contrast, UCM was opened in 2005, when state support for higher education had retracted and diversity was the dominant framework for understanding race. There was no existing equity infrastructure to push back against diversity logics, which defined, and were even used to justify, the limited infrastructure built at UCM.

Data collection involved interviews with employees and students, ethnographic observations, and historical work. We did not set out to study racialized equity labor, but this issue emerged almost immediately. This article centers ninety-four interviews with faculty, staff, and administrators, nearly evenly split at the two schools. Employee participants were typically selected because they had a reputation for being supportive of racially marginalized students. We sought to interview as many Black and Latinx employees as possible. Given our sample selection processes, it is likely that racialized

equity labor was higher among those we interviewed than among university employees overall.

Table 2 provides the racial and gender demographics for our sample, as well as the university positions held by respondents. Although the specific racial group breakdown varies by university, 57 per cent of our total sample was BIPOC. Slightly less than half of the overall sample identified as women.

Interviews were conducted by Laura Hamilton, a cis-gender white woman, and Kelly Nielsen, a cis-gender white man. Our semi-structured interview guide included questions about the respondent's background, job duties, interactions with racially marginalized students, and race relations on campus. We did not explicitly ask about "racialized equity labor". However, we did inquire about supports that respondents (or their offices) provided for students of color. We also asked respondents how they understood the word diversity and what it meant at their university. University rules prohibited compensation of employees participating in the study.

Laura had built trust with faculty and staff over multiple years. Kelly, a newcomer to his university site, had to work at developing trust. Cultural center staff were understandably cautious of what a white man wanted from and for UCR's cultural centers. These interviews were only possible after multiple conversations and participation in university trainings. In analyzing the data, we were joined by Veronica Lerma, a cis-gender Latina scholar with expertise in this area of research.

As a group, we thought carefully about what it means for white scholars to write about race. We believe that the work of changing racist structures should not be shouldered solely by colleagues of color. At the same time, we are aware of the damage that well-intentioned white people can inflict

Table 2. Characteristics of university employee samples.

	UC-Merced ($N = 49$)	UC-Riverside ($N = 45$)
Race		
Black	9 (18%)	11 (24%)
Latinx	15 (31%)	9 (20%)
White	19 (39%)	21 (47%)
Asian or Pacific Islander	6 (12%)	4 (9%)
Gender		
Woman	21 (43%)	23 (51%)
Man	28 (57%)	22 (49%)
Position		
Administration	10 (20%)	11 (24%)
Faculty	8 (16%)	5 (11%)
Academic affairs	9 (18%)	9 (20%)
Admissions, financial aid, institutional research	5 (10%)	2 (4%)
Diversity, inclusion, equity	2 (4%)	6 (13%)
Health and well-being	3 (6%)	1 (2%)
Housing and security	4 (8%)	2 (4%)
Student affairs	8 (16%)	9 (20%)

while attempting to support communities of color. Therefore, in this article, we are careful to give voice to our respondents, whose experiences (and analyses of these experiences) are a valuable source of knowledge.

Respondents often described REL as "work", "diversity work", "effort", "building up the community", "serving", and "support". We identified ideal-type transcripts with explicit articulation of efforts to support marginalized communities and challenge inequitable university structures, as well as transcripts in which respondents indicated that they did not do REL (but others did). These transcripts helped us identify core features of employee REL and generated codes that we applied to the entire body of interviews in Dedoose (an online qualitative data software program). Later, in Excel, participants were identified by race and participation in REL. Examples were flagged and imported into Excel, revealing clear campus patterns in the nature and type of REL, consistent with our prior analyses of the racial logics and infrastructure available on each campus (see Hamilton and Nielsen 2021 for more). Finally, we coded all references to diversity and summarized each participant's understanding of diversity in Excel, with relevant quotes to support our classifications.

Results

In what follows, we first describe the nature of racialized equity labor and who participates in it. We then detail how different organizational logics of race are performed and instantiated in infrastructure on the two campuses and explain how this shaped the nature of REL for BIPOC employees. Finally, we discuss the limitations of "diversity" as a racial logic.

Racialized equity labor among university employees

"Racialized equity labor" (or "REL") describes the struggle of organizational actors to provide supports for students and employees of color and address race-based marginalization and inequities in the university. Examples of REL include working alongside student activists to demand resources from administration, organizing employee of color support groups, pushing for the translation of events into languages other than English, and working to remove curricular barriers that block BIPOC students from advancing academically.

As discussed earlier, REL is not shared equally across racial groups. This was true even in our sample, which included employees viewed as supportive of racially marginalized students. Only 6 (or 15 per cent of) white employees engaged in REL, while 38 (or 70 per cent of) BIPOC individuals did so. Women were not more likely to perform REL than men; however, we suspect that the racial equity labor performed by women involved more

emotion work, consistent with prior research (Griffin and Reddick 2011; Misra et al. 2021).

Overall, REL involved *extra labor* beyond job requirements, even if the position was in diversity, equity, and inclusion (or DEI). For example, two Black employees (one in a faculty position, the other in academic affairs) were available between 5 and 7pm to offer mentorship for Black students. They would also share cell phones, provide home-cooked meals, buy interview-appropriate clothing, and offer shelter for Black students, as needed. As one of these employees described, "There was a woman who was with me today, she interviewed at the state capital … . I said, 'Let me take you shopping before you go to that interview'. She'll start in February". This kind of pragmatic support had tangible outcomes for Black students.

For many, REL was *outside of credentialed areas of work expertise*. Thus, a Latinx academic affairs employee described being "more like a social worker here on campus". A Black faculty member served as an African-Americanist in their department to ensure that Black students had access to this curriculum, even though this person would rather be their "true self … [teaching in an entirely different area] which is my truth, that is me".[4] A Black housing and security employee was a mentor for Black men on campus. As this individual noted, "I speak to the Black young males most of the time … . I treat them like they [are] my sons".

REL was centrally about *supporting marginalized communities* – and not about promoting a personal or university image. For example, as a Latinx student affairs worker explained of REL, "This is my driving force because it represents the need for equity, not just for myself, but everyone". These individuals consulted with marginalized students and communities, rather than imposing an agenda. As an Asian faculty member explained of working with student activists, "We spent a good amount of time talking to them about their concerns and all the activisms that they had been doing … . Like how can we help support you? What can we do as faculty?" At UC-Riverside, outreach extended off campus. As a Latinx employee in DEI stated of efforts to support communities hit by deportation raids, "The community needed an ally, and they needed to feel empowered. And that's what I hope to have done".

REL also entailed *challenging problematic or inequitable structures*. Employees worked to create supports that were not institutionalized or standard practice. For instance, a white administrator known for efforts to diversify STEM argued that this labor was intended to "lay the [organizational] groundwork [for a pipeline] because I don't know if the next [person in my position] is going to find this a priority … . This is my window of opportunity to really push it and lay that groundwork". Other employees were urging administration to build staffed cultural centers to support racially marginalized students, "de-militarize" campus police, create ties to local middle and high

schools with large Black and Latinx populations, build group-based living learning centers, and increase diversity in staff, faculty, and leadership positions, among other things. These individuals were the frontlines in organizational change.

Employees doing REL *expressed intentional commitments to racial equity* that could not be separated from their larger life goals and world views. As a Latinx employee working in DEI described: "Most who have worked here [in this center] have kind of made it their life". These commitments made it difficult for racially marginalized individuals to turn down seemingly endless requests from students and university leaders to provide labor toward racial equity. As an Asian faculty member explained,

> Everybody wants to diversify their committees. And so people of color get asked to serve on them. Of course they want to do that. [But] if you say yes to everything that you altruistically think that you should do with your raced body, you're going to burn out. And you're not going to get to meet the requirements of tenure … But the hardest thing to say no to are the students.

REL frequently *comes at a cost to personal time*, *well-being*, *and career development*, as has been found in other studies of marginalized employees in academia (Hirshfield and Joseph 2012; Moore 2017; Wright-Mair and Ramos 2021; Zambrana 2018). A Black employee working in DEI described being in "constant trench warfare … . There's just a lot of different battlefronts; the mental health, the social, the microaggressions. You know it's just all of these things that are swirling around for our students … . [But] who the hell is there for me?" An Asian faculty member explained that engaging in REL "chipped away at my tenure clock and it wasn't healthy for my marriage or personal life". A Black faculty member told us about "learn[ing] the hard way that stepping in to be a resource for African American students, something I love to do and can't resist, where resources do not exist, has taken its toll on my career".

Notably, there were racial differences in the costs of REL. The labor of white employees was also time consuming and meant not pursuing other potentially promising projects. Yet, white employees were more likely to be rewarded by the university for doing REL – e.g. being tapped for high-level positions such as dean or receiving university awards for their service. White employees described facing conflict or barriers in pursuing REL but did not state that this hurt their career progression. The emotional costs were described differently by white employees, as they were not facing as many racial "battlefronts".

Our data also included individuals who reported caring about racially marginalized students but were not personally engaging in REL; they discussed campus commitments to "diversity" in vague terms. As a white student affairs employee noted,

> [Diversity is about] looking at a student's or the campus' race, ethnicity, religion, abilities; yeah, anything that makes up a person, right? And, you know, our identities, all that. I think we're very open to that and like we're very prideful [here at UC-Riverside].

Often the focus was on campus image. As this person continued, university employees were happy to "brag about [campus] diversity and what we do". Those not doing REL typically relied on others to support racially marginalized students. As another white student affairs employee indicated, "I have been very, very impressed with the ethnic program offices and their involvement with students in the ways that they outreach to students and campus in general … . I think that's really powerful".

Organizational logics and the nature of REL

Both campuses had "diversity regimes" characterized by benign commitments to individual-level differences and inclusion (Thomas 2018, 2020). This was visible in time-limited diversity trainings and multicultural infrastructure focused on celebrating all forms of difference. Diversity logics were the *dominant* framework for addressing race at Merced. However, Riverside, a much older campus, was also characterized by equity logics grounded in group-based cultural centers that emerged out of Civil Rights era activism. Different levels of organizational support for racially marginalized students shaped the extent to which BIPOC employees – especially staff – felt compelled to engage in REL, as well as the nature of that labor.

Equity logics at UCR

UCR's cultural centers ensured that "equity" logics, focused on the empowerment of groups disadvantaged by race, offered an alternative to the campus' diversity regime. As one center employee[5] described, "The work revolves around [the students'] needs and, not just theirs, but the community. Because we are part of the community. Because we are working with the community". This person noted that centers "do not operate within [the] confines … of the student affairs model", and instead "engag[e] in the politics of our students". Their quotes highlight collective efforts oriented around group uplift, not apolitical identity-based affinities.

Equity logics on campus were thus instantiated and maintained, in large part, by the web of five distinct racial/ethnic centers: African Student Programs, Asian Pacific Student Programs, Chicano Student Programs, the Middle Eastern Student Center, and Native American Student Programs, mostly established in the 1960s–80s. Each of these centers had space in the heart of campus, paid professional staff, and a funding stream. Although separate, centers often worked together. Campus leaders were often leery of challenging cultural centers because centers supported each other and

because local communities attached to the centers could be mobilized against the university. Deep historical roots on campus and in the community helped to preserve the centers, even as diversity-based initiatives developed.

Equity infrastructure allowed for the channelling of support to marginalized populations, aiding and relieving BIPOC employees on campus. UCR's cultural centers served as umbrella organizations providing race-based supports. They were, as a DEI non-center employee explained, "critical agents on campus". Centers provided cultural events, academic programming, and social functions for group-based living learning theme halls; for example, African Student Programs supported Pan-African Theme Hall and Chicano Student Programs supported Únete a Mundo. Having designated cultural centers to coordinate housing communities meant that this labor was not as heavily shouldered by racially marginalized students or employees.

Centers managed numerous student organizations; as a center employee noted, "We do a lot of student org support … . I counted it recently. We have about seventeen student orgs that we advise". Group-based graduations were also run out of centers. The year of our study, Chicano Student Programs was organizing the forty-fifth annual "Chicano/Latino graduation ceremony, Raza grad, which is the culmination of all of the achievements and all of the years [of graduating Latinx students at UCR]". Centers even organized numerous cultural, musical, social, and art-based events – such as radio stations, newspapers, BBQs, and meet ups.

At UCR, centers connected younger and older students via mentoring programmes and current students to alumni who had come through centers in years past. As a center staff member noted, "I'm programming with [the Alumni Chapter], giving our students opportunities to network and connect". Many center staff were themselves also UCR alumni and able to leverage their personal ties and knowledge. Additionally, centers were hubs for meeting students' academic needs – for example by providing letters of recommendation.

Equally as important, however, was emotional support and advice about how to navigate academia as a person of color. As a staff member explained:

> Students have to navigate dozens and dozens of microaggressions all the time, whether it's on or off campus. Coupled with the historical facts of [racially marginalized people] in education in this country, it poses a challenge on a daily basis. To help students get through those challenges … we're here to serve in various capacities. We're not trained clinicians, but we have life skills and understanding. We're capable of letting our students know … this is what it is [that you are dealing with], and this is how you're going to [get by] … . That's a responsibility that we have.

The emotional components of REL undertaken by university employees are often invisible and draining – but matter for students' well-being.

The robust presence of staffed, group-based centers eased the burden of REL for non-center university employees of color. While there was no

variation by campus in the percentage of white employees doing REL, 58 per cent of BIPOC interviewees at UCR engaged in REL, compared to 80 per cent at UCM. In addition, REL at UCR was concentrated in particular positions. All interviewed employees in DEI engaged in REL, while no employees in admissions, financial aid, and institutional research; health and well-being; and housing and security did so. Less than half of faculty and student affairs employees, and less than a quarter of academic affairs employees, engaged in REL.

Our data suggest it was more possible to be a racially marginalized employee at UCR and *not* do REL. These employees certainly cared about racial equity and students of color but did not go above and beyond official duties. For instance, a high-ranking staff member who was "visible at this institution", was well aware of the challenges Black students faced: "There are not many of us that look like them. They can't find mentors and models, and they can't get their hair cut or done … . They can't find a church home or cultural things that are happening". However, rather than seeing it as their job to help students "plant both feet here", this employee recognized that "we have staff that helps us with that".

There were no BIPOC UCR *faculty* in our sample who stepped back from REL. The limited presence of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx individuals in tenure-track positions – especially at the highest levels – may make it harder for BIPOC faculty to benefit as much from equity infrastructure. The labor of BIPOC faculty was, however, lightened when they did not need to serve as advisors for all student of color groups on campus or plan all university events for racially marginalized communities.

For all UCR employees doing REL, equity infrastructure changed the nature of their labor: They could be more *proactive* and focus on *social issues* rather than basic supports. For instance, several staff and administrators worked with the Black Student Task Force (or BSTF) to create a town hall in which students and community members could share concerns with campus police and brainstorm strategies to prevent violence against communities of color. The event was not a result of outcry around a negative event at UCR, but rather an attempt to prevent such events from occurring. As a Latinx administrator involved explained,

> I posited to [the BSTF] that I agree, we have problems across America, we have problems here on campus. But I think it's also the case that we're better off here on campus at UCR than most, many places … . Let's do some things that others can't do.

Diversity logics at UCM

As UC-Merced was built in the twenty-first century, there was no historical legacy of equity logics or equity infrastructure. Campus leaders argued that

forward-thinking universities were moving away from Civil Rights era models of infrastructure. One administrator glowingly reported that a friend recently appointed at a prestigious university decided to "eliminate the individual cultural centers and create more of a combination of a community center around culture and identity". The administrator thus also pushed for identity-based, one-size-fits-all diversity initiatives on the UC-Merced campus.

At UC-Merced, diversity logics were visible in diversity infrastructure – which, unlike at UCR, was the only infrastructure attending to race on campus. For instance, a one-time "Speed Diversity Dialogue" for first-year students focused on identifying different identities that students could have and encouraging students to develop individual "multicultural excellence". The goal was to help students to interact across difference. The training did not, however, provide targeted supports for groups grappling with racialized power structures.

UCM also provided a multicultural center, after much lobbying by students (who wanted multiple group-based cultural centers instead). All groups that sought a "safe space" would need to share the small "Intercultural Hub". The room was unstaffed, leaving students of color to manage explosive situations when white students made racialized comments in the Hub. This type of multicultural center, even if better resourced, highlights problems with diversity infrastructure. "Inclusive" spaces that do not recognize power differentials can be unsafe for marginalized communities (see Shotton, Yellowfish, and Cintrón 2010).

There was only one UCM staff member devoted to cultural programming on race: "As an office of one, I would get a phone call of 'What are you doing for Black history month? What are you doing for Native American heritage month? What are you doing for Hispanic heritage month, right?'". Because this employee was spread so thin, their efforts were mainly geared toward demonstrating inclusivity. Students would also form many identity-based student organizations and even kick-start a living learning community as noted below, but these initiatives received little university support.

A lack of equity infrastructure to help students cope with racial inequities both on and off campus meant that racialized equity labor performed at dedicated centers on UCR's campus was outsourced to employees on UCM's campus. Indeed, a greater percentage of BIPOC employees in our sample engaged in REL at UCM than at UCR. At UC-Merced, even employees in admissions, financial aid, and institutional research; health and well-being; and housing and security were doing high levels of REL. All faculty in the sample were engaged in REL, as well as a much higher percentage of student affairs and academic affairs employees than at UCR.

The lack of equity infrastructure at UCM meant that faculty and staff were primary supports for race-based student organizations. As a Black faculty member explained, "You want to do it, because it can help, but it takes

energy, and it takes time. There's work that is involved, right, and I have come to learn that it'll just be pro bono (laughter)". The term pro bono was apt, as the university did not officially recognize the extensive REL faculty did to support race-based student organizations. This faculty member also played an integral role in the campus' Black graduation. Without center support, Black graduation (and the Chicanx/Latinx graduation) were a student and employee driven effort.

Absent institutionalized equity structures, individual employees became vital hubs for marginalized populations on campus. Thus, when two enterprising Black students had the idea for AFRO (Afrikan's for Recruitment and Outreach) Hall, they worked closely with two Black employees to make this happen. The amount of labor was enormous. A new Black faculty member hardly had time to unpack before students asked for help. This faculty member engaged in extensive interfacing with administration, grant writing, attending social events, and hosting office hours for AFRO students – even through family leave.

Impactful employees were known as the point-people for entire communities of color. For example, Latinx students flocked to a Latinx academic affairs employee, seeking help with everything from grades to housing and food insecurity issues. This person was also pulled into working with Black students on campus. As the employee noted: "The African American students sa[id], we want a Black [My Name]!" which resulted in the hiring of a Black employee in academic affairs – unofficially the new point-person for Black students.

Employees engaged in REL were not able to tap into a larger web of equity infrastructure to do their work. They had limits on what they could do, especially since employees had other official job obligations. Furthermore, there were concerns about what would happen when they retired or left. Because their positions were not embedded in institutionalized equity infrastructure, it was unclear that the university would replace them.

As these employees were filling unmet need, their racialized equity labor was often reactive and oriented toward basic supports. For example, an Asian and white faculty member became embroiled with administrators in pushing for the undergraduate Intercultural Hub and in arguing for protections for undocumented Latinx students. The Black faculty members mentioned above joined Black students in protesting the lack of support on campus and in writing demands for infrastructure. Rarely did employees doing REL at UCM have time and energy to think beyond what students needed from the university at that moment.

As our campus comparison illustrates, equity infrastructure – often instantiated in cultural centers, but sometimes via university-supported academic pipeline programmes, living learning centers, and summer bridge programmes – benefits more than students. This infrastructure also supports

BIPOC university employees who typically do the lion's share of REL, providing them with more bandwidth. For those doing REL, university infrastructure grounded in equity logics can also enable a proactive focus on social change.

The limits of diversity logics

A national tendency toward diversity logics celebrates a plethora of individual identities, encourages exposure to different cultural traditions (without a critical structural framework), and can lead to a single campus multicultural center (Shotton, Yellowfish, and Cintrón 2010; Thomas 2020). Our respondents on both campuses were clear that this approach is problematic: Diversity regimes do not meet the needs of racially marginalized students or employees and threaten the robustness of equity logics and group-based cultural centers.

On both campuses, employees doing REL pointed out that "diversity" is a colorblind logic. It is broad and inclusive and can decenter race and efforts to address structural racism. A Latinx student affairs employee explained,

> That's very much where the campus is: "Like, hey, we're a diverse campus. We celebrate it, we love it and I have lots of Black friends and they're gay" … But what happens when … a conversation happens in class around Black Lives Matter?

As he continued,

> Barriers lie in the illusion of colorblindness and the false reality of a diverse California. The colorblindness meaning [is], "I see people; I don't see race or ethnicity … I don't care what color your skin is". That's multiculturalism. That's not social justice … . We see the difference around us [and] it's easy to assume that … we're in a better place.

As he articulates, celebrating the inclusion of individual differences is different than, and can distract from, tackling systems of oppression, such as white supremacy.

A white faculty member working in DEI detailed the limits of diversity for increasing racially marginalized representation, particularly in states with anti-affirmative action policies:

> Faculty will try and use the language [of diversity] … to their benefit. For example, say they want to bring in a [white] person who is from Germany. They [claim this person] bring[s] diversity to the table, [noting that] they're from another country … . [But] the other side is the racial justice side where when we think about the United States and our history of colonization in Mexico, history of enslaving African Americans, genocide of Native Americans, Black opportunities for mobility, there's that side too. Because of [anti-affirmative action legislation], I can't say we want to give special attention [to underrepresented racial groups] [or that] our role as a university is to rectify these

> historical inequities. Because that's not what it's about. On paper, it's about diversity, so there's that. [I am] trying to play around that line.

As this person points out, diversity becomes an inadequate tool to address racial equity, in part because it can be leveraged (both intentionally and unintentionally) in ways that work against addressing systemic racial disparities.

Those doing REL also saw diversity regimes as falling short in support for marginalized employees. An Asian faculty member described, "[The university is] using the discourse of diversity in really cynical kinds of ways … . You get all those colored bodies in and then you don't do anything for them". Similarly, an Asian academic affairs employee explained, "We want you to come so we can brown it up, so that we can say this is how diverse we are, and yet what is the action that comes along with it?". Both respondents emphasize that it is not enough to bring BIPOC bodies into universities to create numeric diversity; instead, cultural and structural change must occur so that these employees can thrive (also see Byrd 2021).

When BIPOC employees are not sufficiently supported, they may be drained by their employers, who extract far more than the services for which workers are contractually obligated. As the Asian academic affairs employee quoted above continued, diversity logics feed into this exploitation:

> I try to stay away from the word diversity because … it's this coded word. In [some] spaces it means that we're going to have numbers and we're commodifying you. My body has been commodified for every day that I've existed, and the quantification and exotification of my body does not feel good.

For this person, "diversity [was a] corporate plan; about … making sure that they have [a racially marginalized] presence versus this being about justice".

BIPOC faculty also discussed ways in which their racialized equity labor was commodified by the university to promote a diverse image. Even though university leaders blocked substantive change, administration was often ready to take credit for accolades that were a direct result of REL – without supporting those doing the work (also see Ahmed 2012). At UCR, respondents pointed out that the campus did not sufficiently invest in the equity infrastructure that produced such accolades.

For instance, a DEI employee at UCR argued that the cultural centers played a vital role in helping UCR to achieve public recognition: "We're the first UC to receive [the Hispanic-Serving] designation. So we have fulfilled our diversity requirements according to administration. The box is checked. We're good". This designation helps UC-Riverside to attract more Latinx students and receive targeted grant dollars. The employee indicated that, while for the administration recognition of a racially diverse student body was a sufficient end goal, further "investment [in centers] is long overdue".

Of particular frustration was university willingness to invest in emerging diversity infrastructure, rather than continuing to grow equity infrastructure. The DEI staff member quoted above continued, "In their attempt to increase programs and initiatives and create other offices, like diversity and inclusion … we have not invested in the original spaces that have cultivated this work in the first place". As racially marginalized populations have skyrocketed, group-based centers have not been cut – but they are doing more work to support more students and employees, without corresponding increases in staff, space, or funding.

What this employee describes reflects the cycle of racialized equity labor appropriation faced by students engaged in REL (Lerma, Hamilton, and Nielsen 2020). In this cycle, BIPOC identify racial equity issues in the university and work to solve them, while often encountering resistance from university leadership. However, due to external pressures such as the need to appear "diverse" or interest in receiving additional funding, university leadership may appropriate REL for university gain – but only with diluted diversity initiatives that are not equipped to support collective action and produce social justice.

As these respondents highlight, diversity logics will not lead to rich supports for racially marginalized populations. In fact, diversity infrastructure often competes with existing equity infrastructure – diluting or redirecting funding, staff, and programming away from efforts to address racial inequities.

Discussion

We described "racialized equity labor" (or REL) as intentional efforts to support marginalized communities and challenge inequitable organizational structures. Those engaged in racialized equity labor intentionally took on extra labor, beyond job requirements or areas of credentialed work expertise, and often at a cost to their time, well-being, or career development, with the goal of creating an environment supportive of people of color.

We use the concept of racialized equity labor to expand earlier work on cultural or identity taxation (see Padilla 1994; Hirshfield and Joseph 2012) beyond faculty, to look at university staff. We also highlight the possibility that white employees may join BIPOC in their efforts to create racial change in the university; indeed, this is one important way that white employees can be effective allies. BIPOC employees, however, tend to shoulder most of this work, as well as its costs.

Employees' racialized equity labor provides academic mentorship, knowledge and information, material and financial resources, emotional connection, pragmatic strategies for coping in racist organizations, and a source of affirmation for racially marginalized student populations that have historically

been blocked from four-year research universities. REL is thus profound in its impact – but it is also deeply extractive. When universities rely on the REL of their employees to create safer and more welcoming campuses, they are also outsourcing central responsibilities to workers, without providing adequate compensation (also see Wingfield 2019). As many have noted, the REL of BIPOC faculty is often invisible in career reviews, or even counts against them (Matthew 2016; Moore 2017; Thomas and Hollenshead 2001; Zambrana 2018). Employees who engage in REL may also see their efforts appropriated and diluted, as diversity initiatives that maintain the status quo (Ahmed 2012).

Our analyses highlight the importance of understanding the organizational context in which REL occurs. As Ray (2019) explains, cultural understandings of race shape resource distribution and practices within organizations. Both of our campuses had developed or emerging "diversity regimes", marked by attention to multiple forms of individual difference (see Thomas 2018, 2020; also Berrey 2015; Byrd 2019). Only UC-Riverside had competing racial equity logics, grounded in longstanding cultural centers focused on collective action to challenge oppressive structures (see Jayakumar and Museus 2012).

At UCM, where diversity was the dominant logic, BIPOC employees were more likely to take on the REL necessary to address basic university supports. In contrast, at UCR, where equity logics were instantiated in infrastructure, some BIPOC employees (especially staff) could focus on doing their official jobs. Among those doing REL, equity infrastructure enabled proactive and forward-thinking efforts.

Our analyses treated the two campuses as distinct environments; however, universities are internally complex and multi-faceted. The equity logics apparent in UC-Riverside's cultural centers were not evenly spread throughout the campus; employees in some units encountered only diversity logics, and some faced explicit racism in their daily existence. In contrast, at UC-Merced, some units opposed the campus' diversity logics, instead favouring equity logics. Because parts of the university can be siloed from others, the local environments in which BIPOC labor can be greatly variable, even at the same university.

Employees performing REL emphatically emphasized the limits of diversity logics. The focus on individuals rather than groups, and on characteristics rather than structures of oppression, means that all individual differences are considered equally worthy of university attention (Ahmed 2012; Moore 2018; Thomas 2020). Diversity is easily commandeered to support groups not subject to racial discrimination and oppression. Working to create structural change within diversity regimes is thus profoundly difficult.

Our findings suggest the importance of equity-oriented infrastructure that encourages the collective empowerment of racially marginalized

communities. Equity infrastructure provides vital resources to students of color *and* helps BIPOC employees who face unique challenges in the historically white spaces of research universities – spaces that remain white in their power structures and practices even as student bodies rapidly change racial composition (Vargas, Villa-Palomino, and Davis 2020). Campuses are increasingly interested in a least appearing to recruit and retain faculty and staff of color and should recognize that equity logics and infrastructure are needed to do so successfully. Change requires substantial and targeted funding for racially marginalized university communities, staff and space for equity-oriented initiatives, and acknowledgement of the ways in which universities are complicit in supporting white supremacy and settler colonialism in everyday operations.

REL should also be rewarded by universities. Many campuses implicitly rely on this labor to retain marginalized student populations at greater risk of leaving the university. As larger numbers of racially marginalized students enter four-year universities, campuses would be well-served to recognize the employee resources that exist on campus, and to provide them with incentives to continue this important labor – labor that is not equally shared by white employees. Even if university leadership is not explicitly interested in racial equity, accountability measures like recruitment of marginalized populations and student graduation rates should serve as reminders that REL is valuable.

The need for racialized equity labor is a reminder that universities are racialized organizations reflecting hierarchies that privilege white knowledge, experiences, and expectations over those of racially marginalized groups (see Ahmed 2012; Byrd 2017; Ray 2019; Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019). University spaces often fail to reward or comfortably sustain racially marginalized students and employees, who have much to offer (Yosso 2005). Racialized equity labor will remain essential until universities fundamentally rework how they support racially marginalized populations.

Notes

1. We use the term "racially marginalized" to refer to groups who are historically excluded in the academy. The terms people of color and BIPOC are broader and encompass those who do not identify as white. Although racial groups are often associated with multiple ethnic traditions, when we refer to Black, Latinx, Asian, or white, we are referring to ascribed racial categories. We capitalize these racial categories (but not "white") to emphasize the political agency, collective identity, and solidarity of these communities in a racist society. We use Latinx when gender is unspecified, nonbinary, or to mask the gender identity of respondents to reduce identifiability.
2. For Hispanic-Serving Institutions, this threshold is 25 per cent. For Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, this threshold is

10 per cent. Both designations also include additional eligibility requirements for economic disadvantage in the student body.

3. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Boards at UC-Merced and UC-Riverside. Participants provided informed consent.
4. We mask the gender of employees with gender-neutral pronouns to reduce identifiability.
5. In this section we do not identify the race of UCR center staff, to preserve anonymity.

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