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EMPLOYEE OF COLOR FOCUS GROUPS: REPORT
AY 2020-2021

Submitted by:

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to

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Executive Summary

In the 2020 – 2021 academic year, forty-four Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) employees of Central Washington University (CWU) participated in a focus group on workplace engagement, belonging and mentoring. The purpose of conducting focus groups was for the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (ODEI) to engage the BIPOC community; to learn about and document their experiences as a CWU employee; and to learn about actions ODEI can take so that BIPOC faculty and staff have positive personal and career experiences and outcomes while they are at CWU. The focus groups were facilitated by Sigrid Davison and Dr. Michel O'Brien. Each focus group was based on self-identified ethno-racial identity groups.

Focus group participants were recruited via email and through CWU's campus news platform. Approximately 70 people responded, not all were included due to scheduling; a few reconsidered their participation in a focus group either by informing the facilitators or by not attending the focus group. Focus groups comprised of three to six BIPOC employees. Facilitators observed academic research ethics. Focus group participants responded to eight questions about their ethno-racial experiences in terms of belonging, workplace engagement and mentoring. There were two broad thematics emerging from the focus groups: (1) Status quo climate and change; (2) needs and inclusion of minoritized faculty and staff. Within these two categories, four themes emerged along with subthemes.

Mentoring. Participants described their current experiences with mentoring at CWU, mentoring outside CWU, and mentoring they wished they had access to here at CWU. Overall, faculty and staff participants conveyed they had no, little, or poor mentoring here at CWU. However, they are very interested in mentoring if it is based on collective and contemporary models.

Community and community building: Addressing inclusion of minoritized peoples. Participants understood their individually lived ethno-racial experiences structurally (social), institutionally, and as a CWU/Ellensburg community member. Overall, they identified CWU organizational structures and interpretation of inclusion as problematic and intertwined with their experiences. Participants had a desire to feel connected to and within the wider CWU and Ellensburg communities, while also desiring access to affinity groups and spaces. This was the only theme in which there were notable differences in the responses from the varying ethno-racial focus groups.

Supervision and its relationship to climate and suppressing opportunities. Descriptions of participants experiences with and appraisals of supervisors and leadership are explicit and candid. CWU's interpretation of academic culture has created a deeply hierarchical organization, for which participants see as contributing to their experiences with supervisors and leadership. Participants articulated nine different desired positive leadership and supervisory qualities and skills.

Education of colleagues about identity and inequality as exhausting and alienating. Participants described multiple experiences with oppression, where they are exploited, marginalized and positioned to be powerlessness. CWU's superficial efforts to advance diversity equity and inclusivity contribute to the homogenization of their ethno-racial group and are exemplified in the delegation of equity and inclusion to middle management. Experiences of racial suspicion require participants to hide their self, strategize, cautious and not too different until they feel sufficiently safe.

Thematic overlap occurred demonstrating the complexity of the experiences of institutional exclusion and inequality. This report ends with suggested next steps.

Introduction and Procedure

In the 2020 – 2021 academic year, forty-four Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) employees of Central Washington University (CWU) participated in a one hour and 20 minutes focus group on workplace engagement, belonging and mentoring. The purpose of conducting focus groups was for the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (ODEI) to engage the BIPOC community; to learn about and document their experiences as a CWU employee; and to learn about actions ODEI can take so that BIPOC faculty and staff have positive personal and career experiences and outcomes while they are at CWU. The focus groups were facilitated by Sigrid Davison and Dr. Michel O'Brien. Each focus group was based on self-identified ethno-racial identity groups. There were twelve focus groups: three African American/ Black[1], three Asian American, three Latina/o/x, two Multiracial, and one Indigenous/ Native American. The groups were also broken down over gender lines.

Procedure. Focus group participants were recruited via email and through CWU's campus news platform. The notice was sent twice via the Employees of Color Equity Council (ECEC) group email and four announcements in Central Today over a two week period (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to complete a short Qualtrics survey to indicate their interest, the ethno-racial identity group they preferred and their availability (Appendix B). Approximately 70 people responded, not all were included due to scheduling, and a few reconsidered their participation in a focus group either by informing the facilitators or by not attending the focus group. Focus groups comprised of three to six BIPOC employees. If fewer than three attended a focus group, the session was cancelled.

While this work was not considered academic research, research ethics were observed. Focus group participants were assured of confidentiality, such that no specific comment made by any participant would be included in the finished report (see Appendix C). Focus group participants were asked to and did offer verbal agreement to not discuss the details of nor identify the participants in the conversation with anyone outside the focus group. Focus group participants were also asked to and all did offer verbal agreement to record the focus group session. Each focus group was recorded to make sure focus group facilitators did not overlook any of participants concerns and ideas, and so that they could be as accurate and comprehensive as possible for the analyses. The recordings were then deleted after analysis was complete.

Focus group participants were given the purpose, essential definitions, and questions in advance of their session (Appendix D). Specifically, the purpose of the focus groups was to understand BIPOC employees' ethno-racial experiences in terms of belonging and workplace engagement. Belonging was described as

> the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group or place. A commitment to belonging is "to not simply [tolerate] and [respect] difference but to [ensure] that all people are welcome and feel that they belong in the society" (b. power & Menendian, 2017, n.p.). A sense of belonging among employees is connected to greater performance, motivation, positive feelings toward the organization and decreased financial impacts to the organization (Carr et al., 2019).

Because the focus groups were based on the participants ethno-racial experiences, the first question facilitators asked was about the participants ethno-racial identities. This question was meant to ready their thinking to focus on their experiences, perceptions, and reflections through their lived

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[1] There was an additional African American focus group that we were unable to host as only two of the people attended the zoom meeting. However, they were asked the questions about mentoring.

ethno-racial experiences and frameworks. The first three questions were about belonging. The next two questions were about workplace engagement, and the last two questions were about mentoring.

Each focus group closed with thanking the participants, a review of the expected next steps, and an offer to contact us with any questions, concerns, updates, or additions they might have. The offer also included the option for their information to not be included in the report, if for some reason they were concerned or had second thoughts. No participant requested their information be redacted from this report.

Many of the participants extended their appreciation for the care and thoughtfulness involved conceiving and accomplishing these focus groups. They were energized and encouraged to be invited to participate and share their experiences knowing the information would be listened to and be the seeds of change. Focus group participation was an unprecedented opportunity for them, which further heightened their sentiments.

The following analysis is based on all focus groups, where there were differences between the groups these are delineated.

Analysis and Discussion

There were two broad thematics emerging from the focus groups:

- Status quo climate and change
- Needs and inclusion of minoritized faculty and staff

Within these two categories, four additional themes emerged:

- Mentoring
- Community and community building: Addressing inclusion of minoritized peoples
- Supervision and its relationship to climate and suppressing opportunities
- Education of colleagues about identity and inequality as exhausting and alienating

There is overlap within the above themes, which demonstrates the complexity of the experiences of institutional exclusion and inequality.

Mentoring

Three subthemes emerged related to participants responses to mentoring: their current experiences with mentoring at CWU, mentoring outside CWU, and mentoring they wished they had access to here at CWU.

Current experiences at CWU. Each focus group reported receiving no mentoring. A few for whom perceived they have mentoring describe it as inadequate or even hostile, as:

- a mentor is assigned for which is not based on a relationship nor is a relationship encouraged to develop,
- mentor does not mentor or does mentor in conventional ways with commonplace information easily found on the internet,
- mentor disregards or withholds support for mentees interests, skills, needs and goals,
- mentor compels the mentee to fit in a racial/gender social identity or academic identity box,

- mentoring experience feels patronizing and demeaning,
- mentoring is a one-way hierarchical relationship of mentee taking initiative, following-up constantly and asserting self.

Some participants have had previous experiences or mentoring that has prepared them to identify colleagues who are supportive and who will, based on the mentee's experience, respond professionally, truthfully, and effectively when asked for advice. However, participants acknowledged it is sometimes hard to know who to ask and it is effortful to decide on the person, the time, how to ask, for each occasion. Such occasions are sporadic and do not facilitate developing relationships. Further, there is no pathway to learn what you don't know about adequate mentoring, so that one knows what precisely to ask.

The lack of relationship with mentors creates stressful and awkward interactions, and anxiety about knowing and meeting their expectations. Consequently, participants avoid finding mentors of their own accord. Participants also avoid accepting unsolicited offers to be mentored because the offers are not grounded in commonalities, such as background or shared community, roles, responsibilities, professional needs or goals, nor connected to expertise or relationships. The offers therefore feel self-serving and benevolent (racist) upholding status quo hierarchy and whiteness (power relationships).

A small number of participants indicated they have mentorship through their supervisor or equivalent, and they recognized this was due to happenstance as they see their colleagues in situations that are not as supportive.

Participants indicated their interests and experiences mentoring others, including students. Participants found satisfaction in these relationships and are motivated to mentor in order to participate in leading change for those who come after.

Mentoring outside of CWU. Generally, satisfying mentor relationships have come from combinations of previous positions, graduate school, professional field or disciplinary organizations. This outside mentoring was attributed as the reason why participants were successful in their roles and responsibilities.

Desirable mentoring. Participants articulated an interest in a structured-informal programmatic approach that allows mentees to find mentors who want to be mentors and are a good fit for need. Participants want to be able to engage in mentoring combinations beyond traditional hierarchical pairs, such as peer and group mentoring and sponsorship. Further, participants expressed an interest in having mentors outside of one's department or unit to

- be exposed to different ways of thinking, perspectives and ideas
- support opportunities to take professional risks
- be candid and honest without worrying about retaliatory outcomes
- build relationships that cross boundaries.

Shared experiences related to common communities or minoritized status were also mentioned as desirable attributes so the mentee is not taking on the additional labor of educating their mentor about oversights and biases at the institution; this does not mean that, for instance, an Afro-Latina LGTBQ+ cisgender woman could only be mentored by someone from the same identity groups, but that someone with similar lived experiences would be more suitable than someone from dominant identities alone.

Participants are interested in learning about

- unspoken conventions in and navigating within postsecondary education organizations, namely CWU
- unspoken conventions to be success in the promotion process
- navigating the institutional political climate and structure (based on one's identities)
- getting support for career transitions and journeys, for example, moving
  - from faculty position to an administrative one
  - from an administrative position to a faculty one
  - to an executive or senior leadership position
- learning from each other and be exposed to ideas and opportunities
- having the space to develop innovative practices and work within a community to do so

Participants want mentoring that considers the whole person, and mentors that see, hear, and value the mentee. That is, sees their assets, hears what the mentee is interested in and values and respects the mentee and those interests such that the mentor works with the mentee to find ways to be successful at CWU that are informed by those asset and interests. Participants are interested in mentoring that

- integrates contemporary approaches like coaching
- provides spaces to advocate for each other
- is built into one's roles and responsibilities
- allows one to be authentic and reflective
- and creates relationship cohesion and unity

Community and community building: Addressing inclusion of minoritized peoples

Four subthemes emerged related to participants responses to community: organizational structures and interpretation of inclusion; being looked at with trepidation and feeling bullied or disregarded; desires to feel connected to and within the wider CWU and Ellensburg communities; desiring affinity groups and spaces. There were differences in the responses from the focus groups which are described last.

Organizational structures and interpretation of inclusion. The CWU culture and organizational structure affect building of community and feelings of belonging. Academic fields and disciplines create a natural silo for which little effort has been made to bridge. Siloing has extended throughout the organizational structure to include the divisions and units outside the academic colleges. These silos exacerbate divisions within and between identity groups by restricting knowledge flow, limited interaction, hard to get connected and leaving little opportunity for natural relationships to develop. Participants considered the Tuesday Talks as an example of interrupting siloing through the sharing of knowledge and feeling connected to CWU.

The "whole person," the personal-professional and their ways of being, thinking, and doing are ignored by the institution in hiring and bringing people to the university, which is a critical difference for BIPOC, and the fundamental reason diversity is a valued characteristic within organizations. That is, the focus is on "hiring greater diversity" without considering the experiences, perspectives and needs of BIPOC employees – with a disregard to their humanity. The sole value for the person as a unidimensional employee is further worsened by CWU's and Ellensburg's lack of knowledge, homogenizing ethno-racial identities and enacting their assumptions about ethno-racial identities of color and ignorance of their own white identity. This disregard and willful ignorance creates

experiential and exocogitative barriers resulting in additional alienation, from awkward conversations to practices that maintain inequality. These problematic and self-serving actions maintain a culture of whiteness by interpreting inclusion as

- tokenizing behaviors to indicate they see you, hear you, value you (singling someone out),
- being condescended to due to ethno-racial background and other minoritizing identity elements
- performative words and not actions.

Participants experiences of not feeling valued curtail feelings of belonging and community and foster a culture of exclusion. Perfunctory and fragmented belonging can feel contingent on how long one has been employed by CWU (and Ellensburg) or on the importance of their position and educational attainments. Some semblances of belonging can also be achieved by some participants who are able to make connections in spite of and not because of CWU. For those at the Ellensburg campus, CWU employees are a major contributor to the diversity of Ellensburg, there is no clear indication that CWU attempts to bridge connections between the city and the employees and their families.

Looked at with trepidation and feeling bullied and disregarded. Participants from the Ellensburg campus have experiences of people in the campus and Ellensburg community watching them, while trying to appear as though they are not watching. Participants try to make sense of these experiences by thinking their colleagues and community members perhaps haven't seen many or any other people who look like them racially or otherwise and that the watchers are unsure and need to have additional information about the participant to develop comfort. Participants are unsure if they are having these experiences because they are outsiders, because of their race, or both. Because these types of racist interactions are based on experiential feeling, they are hard to make visible or have them taken seriously by others who don't share in these experiences.

Desire to feel connected to and within. Participants have feelings of loneliness and isolation and are uncertain as to the reason why, is it their inability to settle into the environment, dissatisfaction at work or some other issue. Participants articulated a strong interest in being accepted, trusted, and feeling safe enough to be their authentic selves, that is, to be the same person at home as they are at work. They want to feel that they are a cultural and intellectual add to their department, unit and CWU. A large part of perceiving they are trusted and have connection is for participants to be respected for WHO they are and WHY they were hired, specifically their skills and expertise. Consistent microaggressions and outright racism alongside the unwillingness of supervisors to address them reify marginalization and block connection and indicate distrust. While some participants felt professional respect and connection in their departments, this was not regularly the case, and participants had awareness and felt lucky to be in their department. Some participants have had a hard time finding their place at CWU and consider the possibility that they have made a mistake taking the position.

Participants communicated the importance of relationships, working as a team, being seen, validated, valued. They wanted for themselves so that they could give to others, for example have a mentor so that they in turn would be an effective mentor to their colleagues and those that come after.

Desire for affinity groups and spaces. Participants expressed a strong desire for affinity spaces based on their identities and for intentional relationship-building, where they can be authentic and real, work on activism projects, and not have to explain and justify who they are. They thought of

these spaces as true learning communities where there was shared leading and passions, taking risks, making mistakes, caring, respect for knowledge, skills, expertise, and accomplishments.

Some participants have been able to find their own community and thrive outside of CWU such as with their ethno-racial group or through their faith community.

Differences expressed between identity groups. The community and community building theme was the only one for which there was a clear difference between ethno-racial identity groups.

The African American/ Black focus groups had strong racial affiliations and expressed the exhaustion they feel due to the constant code switching they are required to do.

The Asian American and Asian diasporic focus groups identified issues navigating model minority myth on campus, being treated as a monolithic group, the consistent overlooking of nationality and generation (e.g. 1st and 2nd generation) or not acknowledged thoughtfully, and the mistreatment of Asian diasporic people due to their accent or racist assumptions about their nation of origin.

Latina/o/x focus groups were more likely to find community outside CWU (particularly if Mexican). They also expressed more experiences based on assumptions about the physical features and attributes of Latina/o/x community founded on the media images of the Indigenous/ Mestizo phenotype Mexican immigrant. Participants expressed intersectional experiences increasing challenges. Some have departments that celebrate differences and Latina/o/x organizations are welcoming, strengthening their feelings of belonging.

The Multiracial focus groups expressed experiences in which they are faced with having to "choose" one identity rather than to embrace the complexity of their multiracial experiences and identities. Participants also have experiences of people trying to (1) figure out what ethno-racial identity they are or (2) to which single ethno-racial identity to pay attention.

The Indigenous/ Native American focus group felt invisible. More than other groups the colonization of the Americas devastated their cultural and ethno-racial identities. Further, Indigenous/ Native American participants (and a couple who chose not to participate) were challenged to connect as a person of color due to their white-facing reality and experiences, having to prove their ethno-racial identities as they are "not obvious" and increasing the struggles to balance the historical necessity to assimilate and pride for their cultures and identities. The generational ethno-racial trauma which remains a critical consequence of their histories has left themselves and their families with chronic health challenges increasing likelihood of isolation. This identity group was the most challenging to assemble, due to numbers on campus and the above mentioned struggles. While enough responded to the Qualtrics survey to create a focus group, only three responded to the first calendar invite and one attended the focus group. With the second calendar invite a new person attended, this participant had contacted and met with a facilitator to ask questions about the focus group and consequently shared some of her experiences including the lengthy time she worked here and the limited number of people who knew her identity as something other than white. The focus group facilitators then send a letter to all CWU employees who identified as Indigenous/ Native American. Four agreed to participate, three employees not a part of previous attempts attended.

Supervision[2] and its relationship to climate and suppressing opportunities

Four subthemes emerged related to participants responses to supervision and climate: incompetent and performative supervisors, senior and executive administration; deeply hierarchical organization; and desired qualities and skills of supervisors and leadership.

Incompetent and performative supervisors, senior and executive administration. Participants shared experiences where participants were often seen as lacking expertise, regardless of actuality, and treated as such by supervisors who sanctioned and sometimes enacted microaggressions and racist comments or practices that devalued and invalidated their educational and career achievements, their work and time, and their motivations and reasoning for accepting a position at CWU. Participants sometimes felt their supervisors did not understand the content and context of their work, sometimes the participant could not reconcile why they were hired, because they are challenged at each step in their effort to accomplish the work they were hired to do.

Participants question themselves, asking why am I here, and what do I have to offer? Because of extensive interview process for even non-supervisory positions, the participant comes to CWU expecting to be a preferred and valued employee yet supervisors and peers acknowledging their expertise and added value they bring is regularly absent. A participant's perceptions for the reason they were hired-- their professional skills, experiences, and expertise--are ignored, undermined, challenged and are not being utilized by supervisors. Sometimes participants came into a position without a clear job description either because none existed, or responsibilities evolved and job description remained unchanged, or supervisor delegation of work was inconsistent with job description. As a result, participants were not able to frame their responsibilities and expectations for their own quantifiable self-evaluation and assessment. Supervisors are not seen as invested in mentoring by the participants. When participants first arrive, they feel like they stumbled through navigating CWU's culture and unwritten codes. Participants were clear that they didn't want to be complicit with or differential of the culture, however they did want to be successful in it. Supervisors permanently tainted participants experiences and sense of safety and belonging because they sanctioned racism and racial animus by exacerbate racist experiences through

- inaction,
- not believing experiences of racism,
- dismissing the importance of their lived experiences.

Participants felt an enduring requirement to prove themselves to supervisors, subsequently being taken advantage of since participants felt they needed to comply in order to hold on to their position/ appointment, in some cases doing the work of their supervisor. Participants who were also supervisors have supervisees, who disrespect and ignore the participant, the participants reasoning is that it is probably related to racism. These participants noted they needed to intentionally hold on their values so as not to lose their sense of self and their integrity. Participants often feel like they are powerless and unsafe due to supervisors, who

- do not try to guide participants when they attempt to learn the academic and CWU codes and conventions, particularly so as to avoid making notable mistakes and missteps

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[2] For the purposes of this report supervision includes chairs even though they are considered faculty colleagues. This is one way in which we can maintain the confidentiality of the focus group participants. Interestingly, that (in)actions of chairs and administrative supervisors were similar so as not to need any differentiation for clarity or for informational purposes.

- do not take responsibility for departmental or unit climate
- do not perform their supervisory responsibilities (e.g. removing barriers to doing work, advocating for and safeguard supervisees)
- organize their team so that participants do not have effective backup support from another team member or from the supervisor
- increasing the stress of being the only one able to do job, including occasions when the task requires protecting overt bigoted behaviors that historically and directly are targeting their ethno-racial identity(ies).

Antiracist actions on the part of supervisors including senior and executive leadership are evaluated to be performative. The language used by supervisors and leaders sustains inaction (words convey taking action without requiring action to be taken) which is then substantiated by a clear lack of supporting claims of racism by _their_ supervisors which in turn increases distrust and exacerbates harm experienced by the participants. Executive leadership in particular is observed to first protect the interests and status of CWU over identifying challenges for improvement and change. These decisions wipe away the antiracist rhetoric and engender feelings of frustration and hopelessness for possible change increasing the participants disassociation and distrust of CWU.

Deeply hierarchical organization. Higher education itself is hierarchical, preferencing those with doctoral degrees and leadership positions. The hierarchy at CWU is further entrenched as not only are there silos of field and discipline there are also lateral silos. Supervisors are not well supervised by their own supervisors. Consequently, there is little recourse or opportunity to self-advocate for abusive experiences or mistreatment, in fact there are instances of retaliation for doing so. Participants described clear instances of physical and psychological exclusion, of being barred from contributing fully to CWU and of reorganizations that were unmistakably used to exclude individual(s) due to their race and ethnicity and not for the progress and enhancement of CWU. The many degrees and types of mistreatment are ignored because either they do not rise to legal standard or are not legally protected. It is very unclear how to handle alienation, and how participants can to shift their experiences so that they are valued at work. Experiences of aleination are distinctive for those who have come from other institutions or have other professional and personal activities outside CWU. Participants spoke about how it can feel safer to not be seen.

Participants shared actions of the ways supervisor devalued them and their work. Experiences like

- being delegated a project where nothing is used and the effort is ignored,
- times when work is disconnected from mission and students in that it is against the interests or not the best choice for positively changing the student experience
- not being able to speak from their own expertise, such as not representing the department on a committee when it is their work and expertise that are needed and used.

These activities result in implying to the leadership an expertise and integrity on the part of the supervisor that is false. Furthermore, communication pathways are shadowy and

- communication breakdowns happen regularly
- the existing communication pathways are used to signify power and exclusion
- sharing career opportunities is limited to a subset of employees
- these individuals are tapped regularly causing them to be overextended, unable to participate effectively in the work, or not be an effective representative.

These experiences have led to disengagement, low motivation to contribute meaningfully and attrition.

Desired qualities and skills of supervisors and leadership. Participants shared a number of examples of behaviors they would like to see in their supervisor and leadership. Participants want to be

- professionally appreciated and supported in work aimed at career progression
- professionally respected and rewarded for the demonstration of their knowledge, insights, and work
- validated for what they do and who they are
- validated for what they have done outside CWU (theoretically the reason they were hired)
- being seen, heard, valued as a whole person, that is for their talents and for their SELF
- desire to be a part of a team that has a shared positive change approach to focus and goals.

In addition to addressing the harms described above, participants want supervisors and leadership who

- aid individuals to effectively navigate CWU as it is
- recognize who they are so they can be themselves at work as they are at home
- acknowledge their added value and additional labor taken on as minoritized faculty and staff (such as peer education, translation, acting as an ad-hoc cultural competency resource, etc)

Education of colleagues about identity and inequality as exhausting and alienating

Three subthemes emerged related to participants responses to educating colleagues: Experiences with oppression; superficial efforts to advance diversity equity and inclusivity; and racial suspicion from colleagues.

Experiences with oppression. Participants described experiences with oppression where they were exploited, marginalized and positioned to be powerlessness. Participants shared (historical) hardships and generational struggles that CWU's climate and culture reifies, and exacerbated while also making them invisible. These experiences occur in team and departmental meetings where they

- have to continually standup for themselves
- have to excessively explain and justify ideas and actions
- feel like they can never do enough to be a peer because the finish line continues to move

Participants are implicitly asked to mobilize identity in certain spaces without recognition of the cost: emotional labor, reexperience racial traumas, the additional time needed to get work done. Participants

- are asked to be "native informants," translators, and paying the "brown tax"
- are treated as foreign
- are used for the other's racial lens, by being the "tokenized Other" and expected to "perform" one's ethno-racial identity
- have their identity denied or discounted or unseen
- experience prevalent implicit and explicit bias

Diversity and distinction of individuals matters, addressing how folks survive and thrive is vital.

Superficial efforts to advance diversity equity and inclusivity. CWU often celebrates difference and diversity but fails to foster this with intentionality and care nor engages the differences and diversity. People are welcoming, but do not get to "know" you, sometimes called Pacific Northwest nICENESS. Executive leadership's discourse feels hollow and exploitive of social (in addition to ethno-racial) identities for the benefit and reputation of CWU.

Homogenization of all ethno-racial identities is palpable at CWU, and individuals from dominant groups consistently make assumptions about participants backgrounds based on ethno-racial identity and phenotype. The diversity and complexities within any ethno-racial group are often ignored to the peril of staff, faculty, and students. It is apparent the CWU and Ellensburg communities have difficulty distinguishing background and identities, and because there little attempt to learn the different knowledges these identities bring they are not valued. Participants are conscious of the ways data and demographic information is deployed institutionally, in essence reifying homogenization (e.g. Latina/o/x for what is actually Mexican no distinction with other groups such as Puerto Rican and Guatemalan).

The lift of diversity, equity and inclusion is left to middle management who do it poorly (see above supervisor). As leadership is not participating in the lift, communications about equity and inclusion are received by participants as platitudes and are seen as hollow efforts that will not be and have not been sustained. Participants suggests CWU start conversations about the complexities of ethno-racial and nationality identities and provide opportunities for self-identification.

Racial suspicion from colleagues. In our hiring practices aphorisms are used to avoid hiring BIPOC faculty or staff (i.e. a BIPOC person is not going to want to come/ feel comfortable here/ Ellensburg). It is possible these beliefs spill into the experiences of the participants through questioning and implied comments in which participants described experiences where in a context of questioning their rationalness and competence they were obliged to respond to why they took the position. These suspicions require participants to hide their self, strategize, be HIGHLY adaptable, cautious and not too different, wear a mask until they are sufficiently safe so that they believe and that their ethno-racial identity is seen as a covariate and not the basis for their success.

Moreover, ignorance of historical knowledge of US actions and how they have transpired to our current racial dysphoria and structural racism, particularly for our African American/ Black and Indigenous/ Native American colleagues, contributes to the experiences of those who are not "X" enough to be identified as and by their ethno-racial group. Further, participants experienced instances that normalized their BIPOC experienced, that is, where one BIPOC's experiences are assumed to be the same as another BIPOC experiences. CWU environment creates angsts within ethno-racial groups such that there is within group demand to conform and to reveal where loyalties lie: with us, against us, or for self-interest. Resulting in light complected (white facing) participants are perceived by darker complected colleagues as acceptable to whites, as has happened historically and continues to happen, and this fosters resentments.

Summary and Next Steps

The focus groups conducted met the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity intentions; the focus groups have been a strong beginning to engaging Central Washington University's BIPOC community and we have a deeper, more credible and descriptive understanding of their experiences as a CWU employee. The participants were deeply appreciative although recognized the paradoxical space of

the focus groups, because should not the knowledge about effective actions to take to tackle inequality come from the communities the actions are intended to affect? However, these opportunities had not occurred previously at CWU. Overall, facilitators discovered participants are interested in mentoring activities particularly if they include opportunities for connection, advancing their learning and supports their vision of success. The barriers to community and community building encourage alienation and isolation, for which there are few impediments. Contemporaneously, participants perceptions and understandings take into account the complexity of the mechanisms within CWU that not only maintain but reify inequality, sustain a culture and climate of exclusion, abuse and mistreatment, and leave the lift of CWU's espoused aspiration for the equity and inclusion of BIPOC employees _on_ BIPOC employees who are 17% of CWU employees. These intentionally rooted mechanisms include (1) siloing throughout CWU vertically and laterally, (2) pronouncements supporting social justice inaction, (3) lack of social justice professional development to advance CWU's knowledge about structural inequality, social identities, social justice approaches to leadership, management, as a start, (4) hiring employees for their expertise and then ignoring said expertise maintaining the status quo, (5) self-serving efforts for inclusion, using BIPOC employees for the white racial lens (6) no mentoring program for staff and capriciously implemented, poorly executed mentoring for faculty, (7) executive and senior leadership delegating the responsibility of equity and inclusion to middle management, and (8) lack of management or mentoring by supervisors whose direct reports supervise others. The mechanisms listed are reflective of the content of the questions. The facilitator expect expanding the areas of inquiry will likewise expand the list of mechanisms maintaining, reifying and nurturing inequality.

This effort has identified actions our office and CWU can begin to foster positive personal and career experiences and outcomes for BIPOC faculty and staff, while also ameliorating the harms. Serendipitously, the recent actions of President Jim Wohlpart, initiating a new mission, vision and strategic plan process and supporting the implementation of University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education[3] Equity Scorecard, and of the Washington State Legislature Bill 5227 create a matchless opportunity we must not squander. With these underlying supports we can implement a unique mentoring program that meets the needs and interests of our BIPOC staff and faculty, develop quality and consequential professional development that can meet our employees where they are, strategize to provide communities that feed the heart and mind, and make thoughtful, intentional and effective progress on mitigating inequities experienced by our minoritized colleagues and students.

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[3] As of 1 July 2020 the Center for Urban Education merged with USC's Race and Equity Center lead by Dr. Shaun Harper.

Appendix A: Email/ Announcement to Recruit Participants

Good Afternoon,

Michel O'Brien and I invite you to participate in a focus group to discuss belonging, employee engagement and your experiences as an employee at CWU. In order to understand experiences in terms of identity groups and to schedule the focus groups, Michel and I would appreciate it if you would complete this quick survey (3 minutes) ECEC Focus Group Participation Interest. *The survey will be open until midnight Dec 1.*

Please encourage your colleagues of color to participate, and contact Michel (m.obrien@cwu.edu) or myself (sigrid.davison@cwu.edu) if you have questions or would like more information.

Happy holidays!
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"It's not greater wealth but greater equity that will make us all feel richer."
~ Elizabeth Kolbert (2018) The Psychology of Inequality, The New Yorker

Appendix B: Qualtrics Form to Participate in Focus Group

Thank you for demonstrating your interest in participating in a focus group about your experiences with belonging and engagement at Central Washington University. The groups will include three to six participants. We, Sigrid Davison and Michel O'Brien, expect the discussion to be up to 80 minutes. We will share our questions with you in advance so that you have time to consider them and participate as strongly as possible. If you have any questions or concerns our contact information is offered below, and you can ask any questions when we contact you about your focus group time or before, during or after the focus group itself. This is not official academic research and outcomes of the focus groups will not be published. However, ethics of academic research will be observed, such that your participation will be confidential and steps will be taken to maintain confidentiality when the focus groups have been completed. The information derived from the focus groups is meant to inform the Office of Inclusivity and Diversity about the experiences of CWU employees so that our priorities and efforts are grounded in your experiences and interests.

1. A focus group with a specified racial/ethnic will meet to discuss your belonging and engagement experiences at CWU. Racial/ethnic group delineation is imperfect and you may identify with more than one category. Choose all groups for which you would be an active participant.

☐ Middle Eastern/North African, Arab American

☐ Asian, Asian American

☐ Black, African, African American

☐ Indigenous, Native American, Pacific Islander

☐ Latina/o/x, Chicana/o/x

☐ Multiracial

2. Which of the above groups would be your first choice or the one with which you most identify.

○ Middle Eastern/ North African, Arab American

○ Asian, Asian American

○ Black, African, African American

○ Indigenous, Native American, Pacific Islander

○ Latina/o/x, Chicana/o/x

○ Multiracial

3. The focus groups are scheduled on consecutive Thursdays beginning January 21, if however you would not be able to make either of the days indicated and remain interested, respond as indicated. Choose as many as appropriate.

    ☐ Afternoon, Thursday January 21

    ☐ Afternoon, Thursday January 28

    ☐ Afternoon, Thursday February 4

    ☐ Not available during times indicated, although I remain interested

We will need to contact you to inform you about the focus group time and location. Please share your name, preferred pronouns, email and phone number.

4. Your (preferred) name: _____

5. What are your preferred pronouns.

    ○ He, him, his

    ○ She, her, hers

    ○ They, them, theirs

    ○ Other, please indicate _____

6. Email address: _____

7. Phone number: _____

8. Does this number accept text messages?

    ○ Yes

    ○ No

Thank you for completing this survey. We will contact you via email by January 19th with the specific day and time of your focus group, along with the questions we intend to ask and a Zoom link. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. You can reach Sigrid Davison via email (sigrid.davison@cwu.edu) or phone (509.963.1855, voicemail is sent via email); you can reach Michel O'Brien via email (m.obrien@cwu.edu).

Appendix C: Script for Focus Groups

Hi, thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group on belonging and engagement among _____ID Group_____ (do not say gender). This focus group is based on our ethno-racial experiences, whether that's nationality, community, shared language, religion, social history, or migratory experience. Our ethnic and racial identities play crucial roles in how we engage with our work and also inflect the different barriers we might face with engagement. These focus groups are grounded in these shared backgrounds or experiences but we also acknowledge that other parts of our identities are also key determiners of our relationship to workplace engagement.

Before we get started there are a couple of things we would like to make clear. This is not official academic research and outcomes of the focus groups will not be published. However, ethics of academic research will be observed, such that your participation will be confidential. Confidentiality in focus group activities requires your participation and support. We ask that each of your maintain the confidentiality of this focus group and not discuss the details of nor identify the participants in the conversation with anyone outside this focus group. Is anyone uncertain about what we are asking of you? [pause] Do you agree to keep the focus group confidential? [pause] The information derived from the focus groups is meant to inform the Office of Inclusivity and Diversity about the experiences of CWU employees so that our priorities and efforts are grounded in your experiences and interests. We do not wish to overlook any of your concerns and ideas, to be as accurate and comprehensive as possible of the discussion, we would like to ask each of you if it would be ok if we record our conversation. Do you give us permission to record this?

For this focus group we are interested in your ethno-racial experiences in terms of belonging and engagement. A sense of belonging is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group or place. An commitment to belonging is "to not simply [tolerate] and [respect] difference but to [ensure] that all people are welcome and feel that they belong in the society" (b. power & Menendian, 2017, n.p.). A sense of belonging among employees is connected to greater performance, motivation, positive feelings toward the organization and decreased financial impacts to the organization (Carr et al., 2019).

Acknowledge raising of emotions and traumas.

At the workplace, these relationships can be extended to the organization and its values and to the work itself. Whereas, institutional engagement for employees as the connection, motivation and commitment, pride and endorsement a person feels for the place they work and their colleagues.

In this first part of the focus group we will get to know each other, and then we will begin with the questions about belonging and engagement.

Start recording.

A little warm up so that we can get to know each other. **Please state your name and respond to...**

> (If you could be any musical instrument or musical genre what would you be? If you could choose anyone, who would you choose as a mentor? Who is your celebrity look alike? If you could have any celebrity for a best friend, which celebrity would you pick? What is your life theme song? If a movie was made of your life what genre would it be, who would play you?)

As you are aware we are interested in your sense of belonging and your engagement here at CWU, however we would also like to learn if and in what way different identity group understand and

experience this similarly or differently from other identity groups. So to get us thinking about this, **What is one thing you wished others knew about your identity group?**

Now we are ready to ask the questions we shared with you about belonging and engagement. So, first, **what metaphor would you use to describe what belonging is when it comes to the workplace**?

Now, please **describe spaces where you feel like your identity and/or background are included and valued, and where do you feel like they're suppressed or misunderstood**?

Tell a story about a time you felt you belonged or did not belong?

These next questions are about engagement in the workplace. **Tell a story about a time when you felt engaged and then when you did not feel engaged as an employee at CWU**?

Prompt: What do you think enhanced your engagement or damaged your ability to be engaged? …, that is the connection, motivation and commitment, pride and endorsement a person feels for the place they work and their colleagues

Describe for us **an image or metaphor you have that describes what an effective engaged professional community looks like to you**?

In the last two questions we would like to ask you about your mentoring experiences. **What mentoring do you currently have within or outside CWU?**

What kind of mentoring is valuable to you?

Thank you for participating. We are deeply appreciative of the time and trust you offered by sharing with us your experiences at CWU. Our next steps are to complete these focus groups, which will go into January. We will then transcribe and code the transcripts to identify themes and patterns. We hope to have a preliminary summary of the focus groups by the next ECEC meeting in Feb/Mar and a full summary report by the end of the academic year. The report will include recommendations for next steps and will inform our ongoing efforts to improve CWU experiences.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, concerns, updates, or additions you have.

Appendix D: Email to Focus Groups

Dear Focus Group 1,

You have been scheduled to participate in a focus group at 9 am on Friday, December 4th. The Zoom link is ZOOM LINK. If this time is not convenient, please let me and Michel know as soon as possible, and we will schedule you for another time.

The aim of the focus groups is to learn about the experiences of employees of color at CWU for the purposes of strategically developing programs and opportunities to mitigate negative and challenging experiences and capitalize on positive and empowering experiences. To frame your thinking, we would like to offer a couple of definitions on belonging and employee engagement.

➢ A sense of belonging is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain community or group. An unwavering commitment to belonging is "to not simply [tolerate] and [respect] difference but to [ensure] that all people are welcome and feel that they belong in the society" (b. power & Menendian, 2017, n.p.). A sense of belonging among employees of color is connected to greater performance, motivation, positive feelings toward the organization and decreased financial impacts to the organization (Carr et al., 2019).

➢ In the workplace, belonging is extended to the organization and its values and to the work itself. Employee engagement is thus the connection, motivation and commitment, pride and endorsement a person feels for the place they work and their colleagues. For employees of color, belonging may also entail the institution's commitment, connection, pride, and endorsement of their diverse experiences and ethno-racial background.

The focus groups are scheduled for an hour and 20 minutes. To make the most of our time and so that you can share your best considered response, we present the questions we intend to ask to you. In preparation, please take the time to reflect on these questions. The focus group questions are:

- What is one thing you wished others knew about your identity group?

- What metaphor would you use to describe what belonging is when it comes to the workplace?

- Tell a story about a time you felt you belonged or did not belong?

- Please describe spaces where you feel like your identity and/or background are included and valued, and spaces where you feel like they're suppressed or misunderstood.

- Tell a story about a time when you were motivated or felt engaged, and when you were not motivated or did not feel engaged as an employee at CWU. Prompt: What do you think enhanced your engagement or damaged your ability to be engaged?

- What is an image or metaphor you have that would describe what an effective engaged professional community would look like to you?

- What mentoring do you currently have within or outside CWU? What kind of mentoring would be valuable to you?

We would like to audio record the focus group so that we do not miss any part of what you share and can accurately report and summarize data from the focus groups. The transcriptions of the recording

will identify speakers as Speaker 1, Speaker 2, and so on. After the audio recordings have been transcribed, we will delete/destroy the recordings. Before we begin recording we will ask you if you give us permission to do so. Michel and I will also write a report summarizing the focus groups, but the report will not include any identifying information, such as who participated in the focus groups or a singular distinctive experience. If you have any questions or concerns about audio recording or the final report, please contact me or Michel before the focus group meets. If you'd like any specific examples or revealing language excised from the report, please do reach out to us after the focus group concludes.

With great appreciation,

Sigrid & Michel

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CWU is located on the traditional and ancestral territory of the Yakama N

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