Do Equality Regimes change Inequality Regimes? A study of the implementation and impact of the Race Equality Charter in UK universities

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Abstract

The Race Equality Charter (REC) extends existing work on institutional gender inequality in Higher Education in the UK to the domain of institutional racism. About half the UK's universities are presently engaged so. This paper presents the findings of a national survey investigating the extent to which the REC is challenging institutional racism in UK universities. The data is sobering. It shows that managerial engagement with, and commitment to, structural reform is compromised by the need to prevent acknowledgment of such change from affecting public perceptions of their universities. It is also affected by elite intellectual disengagement from the meaning and consequence of institutional racism, and from an inability to recognise senior managerial roles in perpetuating institutional racism through such incapacity or ignorance. The data also shows that the most senior management levels are aided in protecting institutional reputation at the expense of authentic engagement with the REC process by other divisions of the university, with Human Resources being particularly problematic. The research thus identifies a Colour-Power Matrix comprised of elite White managerialism and its allies protected by a lack of accountability prioritizing institutional reputations above honest racial accounting, constraining the extent to which inequality regimes may be disturbed. It proposes further research on elite conscientization to overcome fear and prejudice in university senior management.

Keywords: Inequality regimes; Race Equality Charter; racism; University Senior Management Teams; institutional racism; Colour-Power Matrix

> *I do not know what "decolonisation" means… Because the university [is]*
>
> *managed from the bottom up.*
>
> Dr Anthony Freeling, acting head of the University of Cambridge, October 2022
>
> *The world is not white. It can't be. Whiteness is just a metaphor for power.*
>
> James Baldwin, American writer, 2016

Introduction

The United Kingdom (UK), a self-described 'tolerant' society, is increasingly being forced to recognise the wide-ranging normality of institutional racism in the early 21st century (Warikoo and Allen, 2020). The West Midlands Chief Constable declared institutional racism still a problem in his force, and his Metropolitan counterpart went the same way, while the judiciary in England and Wales was found to be correspondingly aligned (Monteith et al., 2022), with the verdict on the UK Court system following suit. The healthcare system is also now found to harbour institutional racism, as is UK mental healthcare, the National Heralth Service (NHS) and the Fire Brigade. Institutional racism is normal in the United Kingdom.

Higher Education

The Higher Education (HE) system is similarly afflicted. A particularly telling and public instance is Oxford university's ongoing refusal to remove a statue valorizing Cecil Rhodes, an imperial magnate noted for recognizing that, as a consequence of imperial domination globally, 'to be born an Englishman was to win first prize in the lottery of life'. Such elite university resistance is emblematic of the racial identity of university leadership in the UK. The Higher Education statistics body, HESA, found that of all the 'managers, directors or senior officials' in UKHE, 475 identified as white, 25 as Asian or other and none as black.

Such dominion concentrates institution-wide decision-making in spaces lacking racial diversity. The most senior managers charged with leading the reform of racist institutions show no public record of researching, recognising, or changing the role of management in racism (Ash et al., 2020; Mirza, 2018). However, they lead because of their *ex officio* status, despite facing a 'challenge they do not recognize' (Erickson, Hanna and Walker, 2020: 5) or comprehend, and are not equipped to undertake. This dominance shapes the structure of power in UK Higher Education.

Joan Acker calls such power structures 'inequality regimes', defined as institutional processes that perpetuate systemic inequality (2009). To challenge them, instruments like the Race Equality Charter (REC) have been introduced into university environments to create a 'framework through which institutions work to identify and self-reflect on institutional and cultural barriers' to People of Colour (PoC). The REC is part of Advance HE's initiative to help improve HE in the UK. The REC acts as an equality regime, designed to help UK universities challenge institutional racism and reward them with public recognition for doing so. The intention is to undermine and remove institutional racism from UK universities.

Meaning of institutional racism

The Macpherson Report refers to institutional racism as 'the way institutions may systematically treat... people differently in respect of race', as the institutional outcome of racist state ideology. Institutional racism is 'the reproduction within institutions of [historical] practices of power which discriminate against people on the grounds of their perceived "race"' (Patel, 2021: 91). It is systemic, not random. It is the product of ideological beliefs about racial superiority, the values they produce and reproduce, the institutions created to project and maintain those values, and the policies and practices the institutions dictate. Institutional racism is an organized reproduction of racial injustice and inequality, institutionally resistant to challenge and change, formed around agreed codes that give rise to inherited and reproduced social instructions, in the forms of regimes of injustice and inequality. It is an alignment of beliefs about race and racial superiority developed by academics, projected across Empires, endorsed by government, sanctioned in law, reproduced in the homelands, and expressed in prejudice, hatred and fear. It is a regime: a system, an organised way, of doing things that follows rules set by dominant ideologies and projected through state and social institutions that legitimate and project the values, beliefs and rules of bigotry.

Institutional racism as an inequality regime

Joan Acker is widely respected for her work in identifying the character and role of such regimes in perpetuating gendered inequality. Acker's work is widely established and synonymous with structural inequality (Nkomo and Rodriguez, 2019). Her work is readily transferable to additional inequality regimes like institutional racism. According to Healey et al (2019: 1750), a key contribution of Acker's work has been to critique 'reductive, individualistic understandings [of] employment experiences to pivot the explanation for… inequality to the level of structure' and power. Indeed, for Nkomo and Rodriguez (2019: 1925), Acker helped 'concretize the abstractness of structural barriers to gender equality in the workplace'. Acker's work has also helped scholars by acting as a lens through which to view a specific issue, whether theoretical, contextual or empirical. It has, for example, been used to examine academia as a structurally gendered body (Manchester, Leslie and Kramer, 2013). Acker's work describes inequality regimes as comprising 'systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes' (2006: 443). But she also identifies a 'steepness of hierarchy', wherein 'disparities in authority are the greatest at the higher levels' of an organization. This asymmetry is compounded by an 'absence of broad social movements outside organizations agitating for change' (2009: 214).

This paper applies Acker's inequality regimes and 'concretizing [of] the abstract' to racial inequality regimes in UK universities. It examines the interaction between the existing inequality regimes presided over by almost exclusively White USMT's, and the equality regime putatively instigated through the REC. The research question is: how has the REC equality regime affected the inequality regime of institutional racism?

Research Methods

This research set out to ask how the new Race Equality Charter equality regime has affected racial inequality regimes in UK universities. It uses a multimethod online survey that captured statistical data and qualitative commentary on the development of REC practices at institutions applying for recognition. The survey was disseminated through 14 professional academic networks within the UK. It was also disseminated in blogs, Twitter and Facebook, through network contacts on LinkedIn, and through the author's University alumni.

Ethics

Following the prescriptions of Arnold (2021) and Bell and Bryman (2007), and per the author's University's prescriptions for ethical research, respondents' names were not sought, and the widely-recognized academic survey platform used is password secured. The usual standards of care, broadly agreed across UK universities and aligned with the Data Protection Act and the Mental Health Act, were provided throughout the research process, and internal review was twice provided in the initial design and dissemination stages.

Participants and questions

72 academics at 38 UK universities submitting to the REC process responded out of 63 institutions applying for REC status (60.3%), including 11 of the 24 elite Russell Group institutions. 98.6% of respondents were PoC. 1.4% were White. The survey attracted responses from 6 members of lower-level Senior Management Teams (SMT): 1 Dean and 5 associate Deans. The remaining 66 respondents were Lecturers and Senior Lecturers. No University Senior Management Team (USMT) representatives took part.

The survey questions were synthesized from existing racism research survey practices (DeCuir-Gunby, Chapman and Schutz, 2019) and past research surveys, and further developed according to ongoing debates in the wider literature on capturing data on institutional racism (Joseph–Salisbury, Connelly and Wangari-Jones, 2021; Caveney et al., 2020). The questions explored tensions between the grandiosity of virtue-signalling rhetoric and meaningful acts of regime change; academics' experiences of prejudice in the workplace; institutional racism; effectiveness of the REC in shifting regime, and acts of anti-racism undertaken to challenge institutional racism. The survey was content- and face-validated though voluntary local and network peer review.

Analytical approach

The multimethod survey adopted for data collection has two components. First is a quantitative element which sought to gather descriptive data on the extent of institutional racism in participating UK universities, along with the extent of satisfaction with various USMT approaches to the REC process. Quantitative data was measured using 6-point Likert scales. Second, a richer qualitative element used open-ended questioning to capture experiences of working with USMT actors. Several themes emerge from both quantitative and qualitative data, and these are discussed in turn.

Analysis and Findings

Descriptive statistics

The core questions focused on matters of University Senior Management Teams' engagement with process and participants, participants' trust in institutional governance and process, and the relationship between input and outcome, in the process of seeking accreditation for the REC. The data is in broad alignment with a recent survey that found median satisfaction with USMT averaging 10.54% (Erickson, Hanna and Walker, 2020).
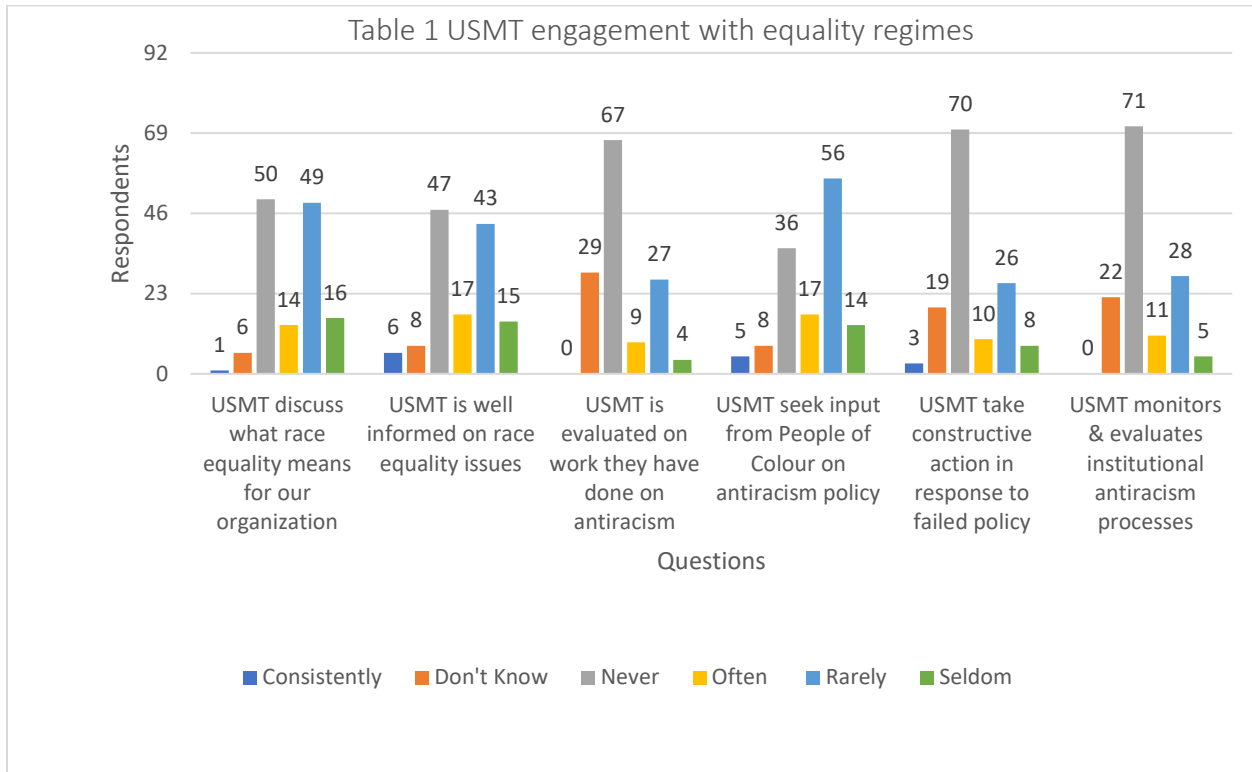
Table 1 USMT engagement with equality regimes

Table 1 (USMT engagement with equality regimes) suggests that USMT presented to respondents as having decided what race equality meant ahead of discussing this with PoC, whilst appearing quite ignorant on the subject. Furthermore, respondents declared, USMT would not be held accountable for failure to engage or understand since they were mostly not evaluated on their work in this domain.
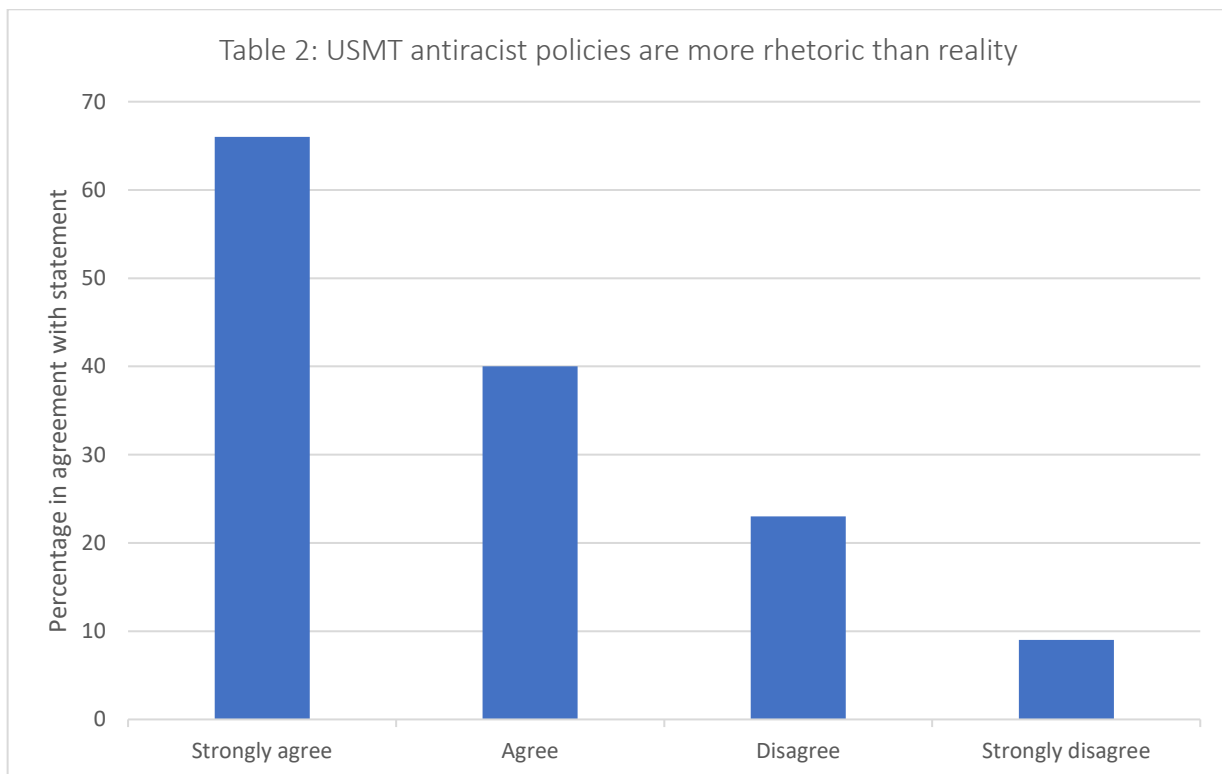

Table 2: USMT antiracist policies are more rhetoric than reality

Table 2

(USMT antiracist policies are more rhetoric than reality) demonstrates respondents' perceptions of statements regarding commitment to a racial equality regime. All the data came from those below Dean level, and the greater the disagreement with the statement, the higher the rank of the person disagreeing. A lack of commitment to a meaningful, reflective process was widely reported, with a preference noted for 'slogans and marketing strategies to align with the righteous demands of protestors and citizens, [at the expense of] the critical steps of institutional reflection and fundamental paradigm shifting' (Barceló and Shadravan, 2021: 45). USMT officers were perceived as presenting only a passing engagement with, and understanding of, racial equality regimes. Nor did USMT monitor, self-evaluate or acknowledge such failings, and they could not be held accountable for these failures.
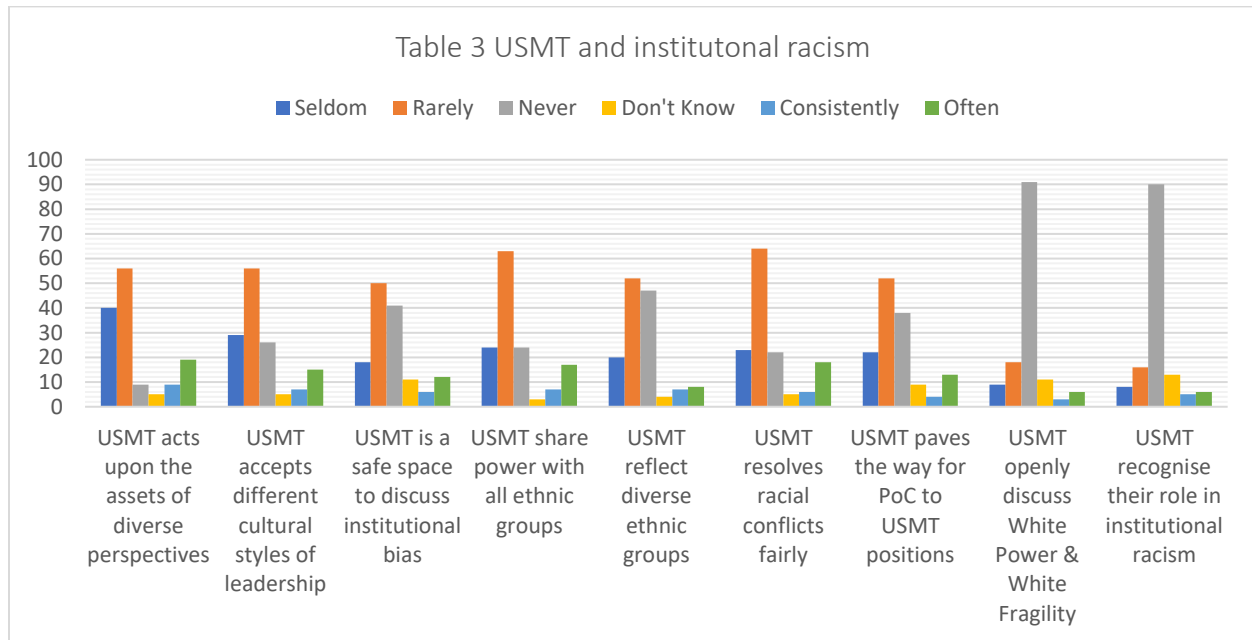

Table 3 (USMT and institutional racism, above) suggests a combination of a lack of consciousness of the role of power in the reproduction of institutional racism, likely explained by the lack of racial diversity in those ranks, and the evident asymmetry of power and influence in decision making strata of UK universities. Furthermore, were conversations to be allowed, they did not present to respondents as safe spaces in which to do so. This meant that USMT were less likely to be properly conscious of the nature of institutional racism, and the subtle and less subtle means through which it is perpetuated. Voices have already been excluded, and the space in which to have them heard is not considered safe, securing the racial power asymmetry, and providing the first evidence in the survey data of a matrix of power (below).

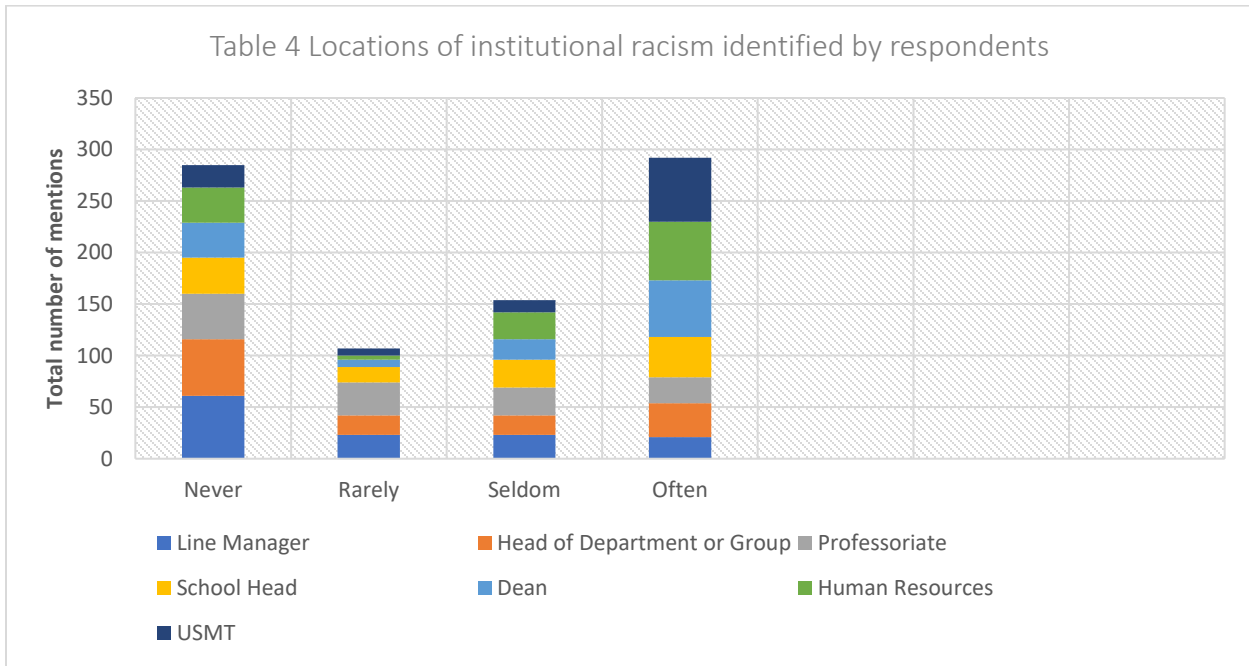Table 4 Locations of institutional racism identified by respondents

Table 4 (locations of institutional racism) expands upon the loci of such power, based on the *number of mentions* of institutional racism in the survey, and where respondents saw it occurring, coded by Nvivo. It also demonstrates how institutional racism is organized and maintained through a diverse range of actors. The second most significant engine of institutional racism (after USMT) was Human Resources (HR). Institutional racism was least apparent further down the ranks, in line with Ackers' 'steepness of hierarchy' formula (above), stating that racism is greatest where power is least diverse.

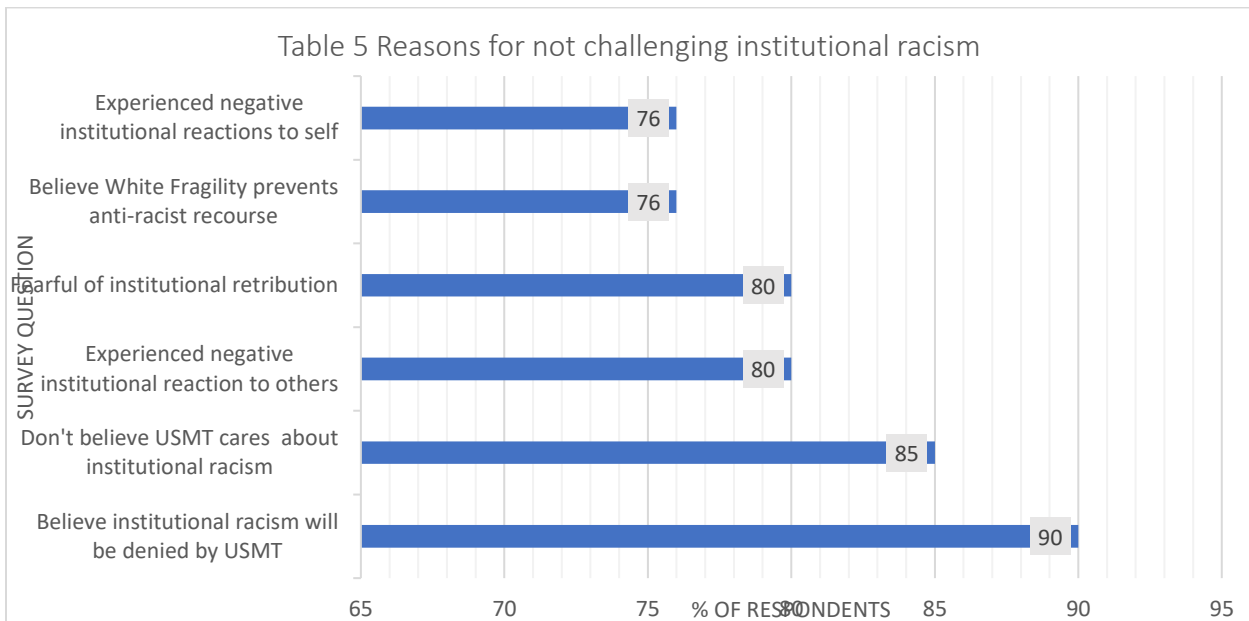Table 5 Reasons for not challenging institutional racism

Table 5 (Reasons for not challenging institutional racism) suggests a correlation between this power dynamic, and the reasons some PoC do not resist a power matrix dominated by mainly White people who are protected by the Human Resources disciplinary arm of the institution (see below for fuller discussion of power and Human Resources). This was amplified by the sense that USMT and their HR allies mutually self-protected and were largely unaccountable (see Table 6).

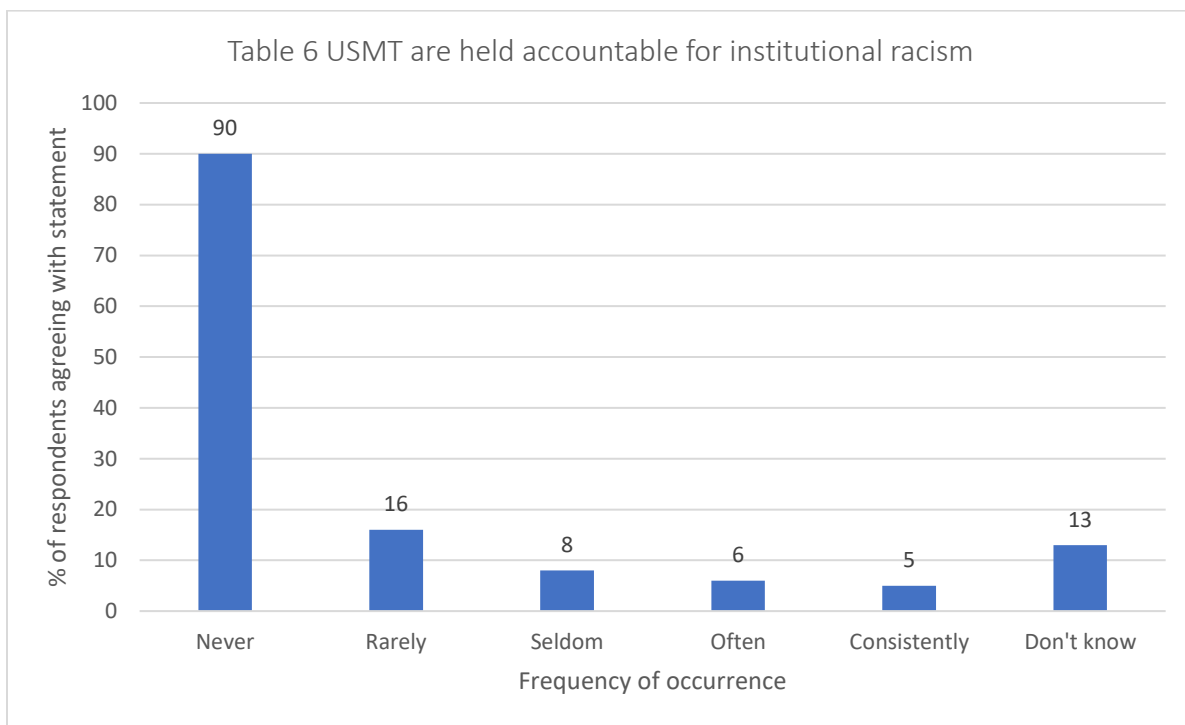**Table 6 USMT are held accountable for institutional racism**

Table 6 (USMT are held accountable for institutional racism) shows how PoC view USMT immunity from responsibility for a racial inequality regime. Further data maintained that the accountability 'loop' – that institutional circuit within which grievances are considered - got tighter and smaller the steeper in the hierarchy the failure. It is widely understood that quality control in HE elite accountability has not been applied as rigorously at the highest levels as it has lower down (Muller, 2022; Evans, 2000).

In sum, 85% of respondents saw University Senior Management work with Human Resources to fold the REC process into an exercise in institutional protection and promotion. 78% felt that although submission to the REC did not imply instant institutional transformation, nor would it lead to this in the longer term. 89% said that the process would only create the impression of change. There was an almost exactly inverse relationship between universities having a clearly written anti-racism policy, on the one hand, and on the other, that same anti-racism policy manifesting in those organizations' conduct. 3 out of the 4 White respondents denied institutional racism existed, complained they felt 'under attack', and demonstrated further aspects of White Fragility.

Qualitative data

The survey prompted 200 written ethnobiographical responses to open-ended questions, some of which are quoted anonymously where demonstrative; this is complemented by an agglomeration of anonymous responses. These are organized around themes that reveal trends and tendencies, developed in the coding process.

Coding

The qualitative data was coded by the author, using Nvivo, an industry standard 'subjective idealist approach to knowledge where iteration is achieved at the coding and synthesis stages of the process' (Elliott-Mainwaring, 2022: 37), and then by hand. The material was organized into categories of meaning recognizable in the literature (Ash et al., 2020; Bhopal, 2021; Miller, 2019). It was grouped (from right to left, below) according to respondent quotes, overlaps of which formed themes, from which aggregate concepts were discerned.
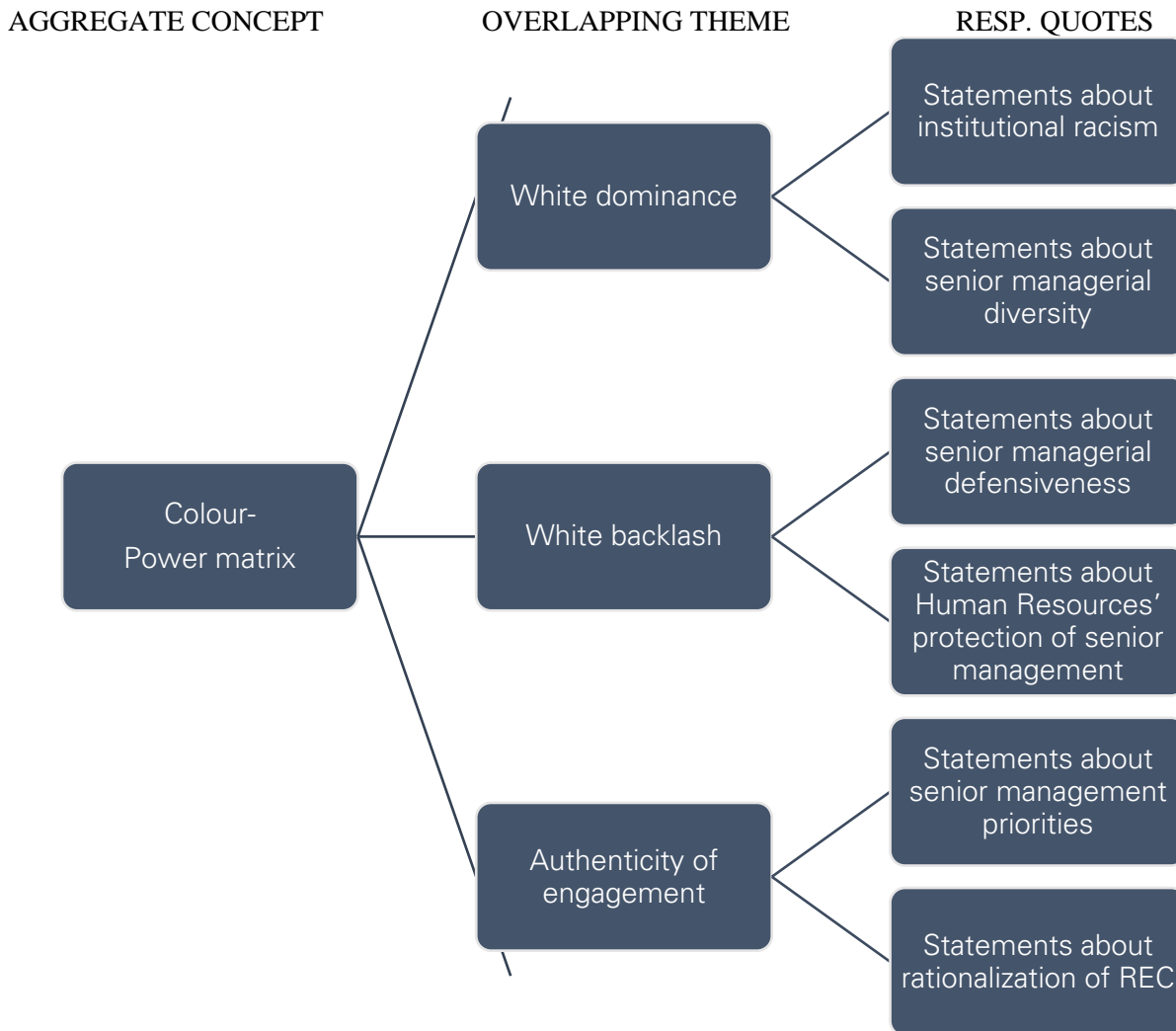
AGGREGATE CONCEPT   OVERLAPPING THEME   RESP. QUOTES

	White dominance	Statements about institutional racism
		Statements about senior managerial diversity
Colour-Power matrix	White backlash	Statements about senior managerial defensiveness
		Statements about Human Resources' protection of senior management
	Authenticity of engagement	Statements about senior management priorities
		Statements about rationalization of REC

Table 7 Coding examples: responses, themes and concepts

Theme 1 White dominance

The first theme concerns the Colour of Power. Acker (2009: 203) proposes an organizational 'steepness of hierarchy', wherein 'racial… disparities in authority are the greatest at the higher levels' of the organization. In the UK in 2018 there was only a 'handful of BAME vice-chancellors and deputy or pro-vice-chancellors, compared with 530 White ones' (Arday, 2018: 192). Respondents describe a power cascade dominated by senior White males presiding over a racist regime. Decisions on Colour are directed primarily by White people. Said one respondent, the 'mainly White' leadership is 'trying hard to engage without understanding or seeing how they cause such dysfunctionalism in a process aimed at the idea of equality'. No respondents saw this as wilful. The problem was that White Management cannot see racism [and] seems to see nothing at all incongruous in more White Masters dictating how they will deal with their own racism. This is another venture by White Managers for White Managerial purposes'.

Theme 2 USMT White backlash and HR complicity

A second theme was White managerial backlash to challenges from PoC. This is a broader phenomenon also seen in the UK government's attitude towards institutional racism, from banning Critical Race Theory in schools to public denials by ministers of the notion itself (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Respondents were clear that the REC process raised questions that USMT is ill-equipped to respond to. One respondent remarked that REC had 'made White people very defensive, which has made resistance and speaking up more consequential. They're acting out of fear, hostility, entitlement and anything that challenges their … historical stability'.

8

Respondents commented on 'White resistance from too many White managers'. One remarked that she had 'seen [PoC challengers] get eviscerated, demeaned, disciplined, humiliated and punished, for doing the very things the REC process seeks of us - enable change'. Resistance:

results in intimidation, normally using the hint of 'informal action', bullying, public humiliation by powerful institution-level actors and the constant fear that they will take any path to getting rid of you… if your legitimate challenges result in their ignorance being displayed and humiliating them.

USMT was not the only source of concern. Human Resources (HR) were identified as part of the problem, as well as putatively and paradoxically being the bodies responsible for legal equality obligations. Respondents identified a contradiction wherein on the one hand, institutional rhetoric encouraged anti-racist challenges but, on the other, the mediation of such challenges through HR processes made for unsafe spaces for acts of resistance. Respondents reported a lack of comprehension on the part of HR to their complaints about institutional racism. Respondents repeatedly reported senior HR staff with no understanding of institutional racism. In one example, a White Head of HR declared she had worked in equality and diversity for 20 years but rejected any notion that sexism and racism were anything other than a few cases of a few rotten apples in an otherwise healthy cart.

HR 'was totally ill-equipped to support women challenging institutional sexism and even less equipped for supporting Black women challenging institutional sexism', one respondent claimed. Another remarked that 'the [HR] institutional tool cast as the impartial arbiter frequently endorses higher level management's defence of mid- and higher-level management racism'. Another respondent echoed this perspective, saying that:

We are told that HR is a safe space to air grievances, but it's just not the case… because HR is a management tool. Its task is to create order out of management direction and manage disorder that results from resistance. It always sits on their side of the table.

Respondents offered evidence of maltreatment after engaging with HR. Examples ranged from a failure to recognize or understand an act of racism, to a rejection of the notion of institutional racism, through procedural failings and treatment of race grievances with inappropriate statutes and deliberate misrepresentation of offences as non-offences. HR colluded with USMT when the latter created racist practices challenged by survivors of such practices. Respondents also remarked on being 'gaslit' by HR leaders when they challenged them on collusion. One respondent referred to the sense that 'nothing can be done because [USMT] … is too fragile to withstand public condemnation [but has] HR to ensure it doesn't have to'. They added: 'It makes me feel sick and I know others have taken sick leave and disguised the reasons so as not to anger management here'. USMT and HR were, for these respondents, an axis of malpractice.

Seventeen cases were identified in the survey where, 'despite clear cases of USMT racism having occurred', formal challenges by PoC were negated through alignments between senior managers in HR and USMT members who had been challenged as racist or as contributing to institutional racism. One respondent wrote that USMT 'are backed by HR … they are always declared innocent or, where they are not, the charge is misrepresented as something far less serious'. The tables are then turned and the victim is blamed, gaslit or otherwise putatively discredited and silenced. In another case, a very senior member of HR was unable to see institutional racism herself, failed to understand the terms of the grievance, misrepresented the case in internal communications, privately gaslit the complainant and then complained that she felt racially abused by the PoC reporting the racism. Such extremes of institutionally-racist behaviour were statistically copious.

Theme 3 authenticity of engagement

A third theme concerns authenticity of USMT intention. Superficially, respondents noted, the REC process is about institutional racism. But respondents did not 'doubt that [REC] is strategic in the corporate sense'. One explained that USMT wanted 'the REC award to compete [with other universities] more than [for] inclusive norms'. Another declared that 'the only objective was a satisfactory submission', adding that their university would not 'go for Silver or Gold' unless Bronze was 'devalued' by everyone having it.

This is not to suggest that becoming antiracist was not a goal of leadership. It is to suggest, however, that institutional racism is more complex than an almost exclusively White USMT understands.

Where it exists, it requires the identification and stripping of unconscious and denied prejudices embedded in assumptions of White superiority and legitimacy over decades, generations and centuries. Instead of this, there is 'a top-down push to achieve a tick box exercise' motivated by degrees and boundaries of genuine concern and commitment'. One respondent believed 'concern and commitment are different things and regulated by different forces'. She continued:

The concern seems to be about completing an exercise in audit conformity: achieving minimum benchmarks. Commitment should be to the goal of acknowledging and eliminating institutional racism, as opposed to being able to say you plan to.

There was a sense that the greatest challenge to the capacity for the REC process to achieve its ends was in those ends being subverted to USMT market priorities through grandiose proclamations masking *ex officio* incompetence protected by institutional allies like HR.

Discussion

The liminal space between the REC as an equality regime and institutional racism as an inequality regime brings into sharp relief the existence of a [Colour-Power Matrix](#) that defines the contours of relations between the two regimes. This Colour-Power Matrix refers to how USMTs deploy their institution's bodies (corporeal and procedural) to control the extent to which the REC challenges its priorities. It involves an array of processes which project USMT dominion to manage and manipulate Colour challenge throughout the REC process. The Colour-Power Matrix organizes the various forms of power continuously enjoyed and deployed primarily by White senior managerialism to decide the fate of institutional racism. This Colour-Power Matrix is broadly indifferent to or ignorant of the racial power it wields, and how this impacts PoC. It is composed of four overlapping, interlocking elements. These elements were common across the survey and suggest a generalisable phenomenon, since concordance with the characteristics of this matrix were uniform and statistically significant (>80%) in the responding institutions.

1. White Dominion

The term is chosen because it both refers to control over a country or people and contains in its language notes of the imperialism from which contemporary UK racism is most recently descended (Andrews, 2021). White Dominion is in part an inheritance and consequence of imperialism. Universities were built on and in turn sustained Empire, from the construction of the buildings themselves from plundered resources, by way of the scientific gains made from studying materials in the colonized worlds and cultural appropriation (Pietsch, 2015), to the creation of a discipline (anthropology) to help universities and empire understand, control and oppress the subjects of imperialism (Gough, 1968; Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre, 2020).

The term reflects the comprehensive preponderance of White USMT power at the top of UK universities, creating an asymmetry that reflects and reproduces historical structures of racial power in the UK. USMTs are mostly drawn from the Professoriate, which in 2021 was [86% White](#). The HE statistics body, [HESA](#), found that of all the 'managers, directors or senior officials' in UKHE, 475 identified as white, 25 as Asian or other and none as black. The other 35 were not known but do not alter the colour of this picture. Such dominion concentrates institution-wide decision-making in spaces lacking racial diversity that are concerned with creating a managed impression of working towards ending regime inequality, whilst at the same time that White dominion is unable honestly and openly to recognise, admit and acknowledge the existence of such regime inequality when it is revealed.

USMTs have almost no experience of ending racism or being on the receiving end of it, have rarely engaged with relevant critical literatures on race and power, and have even less commonly published on race, racism and racial reform. It is clear that 'many university Vice Chancellors fail to grasp the significance and power of racism in their own organizations and practices', and furthermore 'lack the motivation and creativity necessary to respond to this challenge' (Law, 2017: 1). Consequently, Evans notes, USMTs are 'often unprepared for the increasingly expansive academic leadership roles that they are expected to fulfil' (2015: 123).

This inadequate, elite White minority defines, shapes and structures a largely homogeneous managerial space reflecting its own experiences, values and identities. Those tasked with ending institutional racism are *ex-*

officio actors, rather than having been chosen for competence, relevant skills and experience. This status creates internal parameters of a Colour-Power Matrix which are reinforced by external public government attitudes.

2. USMT performance priorities

A second element of the Colour-Power Matrix concerns the tension between being seen to commit to the REC process, whilst simultaneously not suffering any reputational harm because of doing so. This tension leads to USMT resistance, to protect its reputation and its priorities. Bhopal (2022: 2131) refers to a 'pretence of equality which [is] portrayed as part of the public image of the university' and a way of managing an external social priority in relation to an internal economic agenda.

In the REC process, where claims of institutional racism arise, the market and reputational priorities of USMT compromise the ability to allow it to be held accountable. The REC process both heightens and exposes publicly very volatile, contested and ugly relationships of racial power. The REC process can be a potential tinder box that showcases racial tensions in USMT spaces ill-equipped to acknowledge, comprehend or accept them, and the potential damage they represent to deeper USMT economic priorities. USMT resistance to challenge led 79% of respondents in the survey to consider spaces of REC conversations to be 'rarely', 'seldom' or 'never' safe places. This is because the processes used to make decisions or resolve conflicts were 'never', 'rarely' or 'seldom' perceived as *fair* by 79% of respondents. USMT understanding and acceptance of challenge was consistently weak, either through genuine incomprehension of the issue, procedural weakness or incapacity, or USMT defensiveness often manifesting in micro-aggressions, denial, abuse and non-participation by USMT actors. These tensions reveal a third element of the Colour-Power Matrix.

3. USMT-Human Resources axis.

The third element of the Colour-Power Matrix is another layer of institutional power that works with USMT to respond to its defence, cloak and misrepresent its ignorance and protect its priorities. Although some present Human Resources (HR) as a neutral entity, it is also seen as a tool to create conformity with elite rules and, where necessary, manage divergence (Huault, Perret and Spicer, 2012; Barratt, 2003; Roper, Prouska and Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, 2019).

A short example, corroborated several times from the same university, reveals the interplay between multiple elements of managerialism, and helps 'concretize' and make visible and more comprehensible the reproduction of this inequality regime when it is challenged. It involves a complaint (a grievance) raised when a Dean in a Business School in 2020 created an all-White Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity committee. The complaint was handled by the all-White USMT (because of the Dean's rank), which became defensive, passive-aggressive and professionally threatening to the complainant. HR, self-presenting as impartial, denied all USMT wrongdoing, endorsed a USMT argument that an all-White EDI was 'not necessarily wrong', and lied and misrepresented the situation in writing. The Business School then invited People of Colour to apply to join the EDI committee, but the terms of them joining were different from the White members. The former were all *ex-officio* self-appointments, the latter had to submit an explanation to the all-White, self-appointing EDI group for why those People of Colour should be permitted entrance, by the all-White EDI group, to the all-White EDI group. Four PoC applied but only one was accepted because to add more 'would have made the Committee too large'. The idea that some White members might surrender their self-appointed positions was absent. At no point was it recognized that a failure to understand the role of institutional racism in the creation of an all-White EDI, or in the institutional response to it, had transpired. Elite members of the institution then colluded to prevent the information being made known to other employees.

Throughout the process, the 'almost all-White HR team' supported the Dean and the multiple USMT members who intervened. The grievance ultimately succumbed to institutional power but USMT and HR made a statement that lesser issues had been raised that could be addressed. Conversations were held regarding changing committee formation processes, but no racial wrongdoing was acknowledged; only suppressed. Similar incidents - of far-reaching elite institutional collusion with Human Resources in the denial of elite racism - were identified in 6 other universities, and a dozen other incidents mirroring elite attitudes to racially-accommodating internal reform, made the matter of elite institutional resistance to change commonplace.

When the means to challenge USMT inequality regimes are compromised both by HR's own failures to recognise, acknowledge and comprehend complex institutional racism, and by its inherent Allyship with the highest levels of management, the former renders the latter impervious to serious challenge, often hearing serious allegations but downgrading them to lesser offences to suggest proper participation whilst ensuring no reputational harm results. This element of the Colour-Power Matrix, the USMT-HR axis, is compounded by a fourth dynamic in which accountability is corrupted by what amounts to a form of multi-level cronyism.

4. Accountability lacuna

The accountability lacuna is caused in large part by the partisan nature of HR outlined above. The alignment between the two elements seals USMT behind layers of enforced confidentiality, complicated procedural technicalities, and threats of reprisals managed on USMT's behalf by the very body to whom breaches of regulations are reported. Respondents described USMT as a 'hermetic' domain, self-sealing when challenge is perceived, yet needing simultaneously to present an outward aura of openness. USMT, Shore and Wright (2004: 109) note, is 'the one area of higher education that has not been … made accountable'. They add that 'management seems to occupy an unaccountable position', a problem 'compounded by… weak and ineffective governing councils'.

Racialized power is in this way reproduced and preserved by its own protected and unaccountable structures, rules and values, reinforcing the Colour-Power Matrix. The use of an equality regime to challenge an inequality regime has revealed the extent of the latter and the relative impotence of the former in the face of market priorities and multi-level managerial fragility and collusion. This reflects Derrick Bell's famous dictum concerning conditions for racial change being dependent on the extent to which the objectives of PoC are aligned with those of White power. The Colour-Power Matrix allows limited change that does not bring USMT and their institution into disrepute, but leaves foundational challenge stonewalled, misdirected, manipulated, denied and compromised. USMT has little interest in an honest accounting of its behaviours because it is White and because it protects its assets; and HR ensures that if challenged, accountability is not a possibility.

Conclusion

This work is concerned with the extent to which the REC as an *equality regime* changes institutional racism (an *inequality regime*) in UK universities. The paper contributes new primary material that follows and builds on Acker's tradition of 'concretizing' and revealing structural inequality. The data shows how an asymmetry of Colour power manipulates the REC equality regime agentically, subverting its primary purpose of racial power balancing into one that serves USMT neoliberal market priorities. It shows how this equality regime has been severely compromised, less so because of a weakness or flaw in its ambit, and more so because those who determine its *progress* ensure there is little *change*. None of this should be surprising; it is the story of efforts to remove structural, institutional racism in a country that once dominated one quarter of the world on the basis of its Colour, which has not until recently been publicly pushed to account for how the past prevails in the present.

The primary problem appears to reside in the fears and prejudices of USMT. Whereas a knee-jerk reaction might propose training for USMT as a response, training mainly reinforces existing beliefs, since it primarily involves acclimating people to prescription. Furthermore, since such training would be authorised by those in need of deeper transformation, its selective application would likely reinforce existing inequity. Further research might address conscientization, or the process of 'developing, strengthening, and changing consciousness' (Montero, 2014: 296). This is a method already used in Management Education (Perriton and Reynolds, 2004).

It is quite possible that such a potentially transformative process will also be subverted and reshaped agentically by the juggernaut of neoliberal education. This is perhaps less unsatisfactory than prevailing approaches to institutional racism in Higher Education that fail because the agents of change are neither conscious nor competent. The institutional racism so easily acknowledged at the general level by virtue-signalling elites cannot be undone without those who impose such structures becoming self-aware, since the course of change is defined from above. At its core, real change requires recognition that we cannot use the same means to dismantle oppression, that were used to create it.

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