Performative or Authentic? Assessing the Status of Transportation Equity Work in California

Sarah Rebolloso McCullough, Feminist Research Institute, UC Davis
C. Sequoia Erasmus, UC Davis Alumnus
Land Acknowledgement
Today’s Trajectory

- Background & Context
- Performative vs. Authentic Equity Work
- Case Studies
- Recommendations
Background & Context
Project Overview

- How is the transportation sector in California doing on equity, particularly as it relates to sustainability and active transportation?

- Grounding Frameworks:
  - Critical Race Theory
  - Mobility Justice
  - Feminist Science & Technology Studies
Who did we talk with?

- Female: 64%
- Male: 25%
- Nonbinary: 11%

- Latinx: 36%
- Black: 21%
- Asian/PI: 14%
- Mixed: 21%
- Middle Eastern: 4%
- White: 4%
Project timeline

2020

First COVID Case in California

First Round of Interviews

Breonna Taylor Murdered

Statewide Shelter-in-Place Order

Ahmaud Arbery Murdered

Second Round of Interviews

George Floyd Murdered

Wildfires Rage across the State

Mask Mandate Begins in CA

Rolling Blackouts due to Heat Wave

164 Black people Killed by Police in 2020 so far

15,006 Deaths & 755,634 Cases Reported in CA

9,205 Deaths & 504,368 Cases Reported in CA
Double Vision

W. E. B. Dubois
Principles of Mobility Justice
Design Justice

1. We use design to sustain, heal, and empower our communities, as well as seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems.

2. We center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process.

3. We prioritize design's impact on the community over the intentions of the designer.

4. We view change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process, rather than as a point at the end of the process.

5. We see the role of the designer as facilitator, rather than an expert.

6. We believe that everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience, and we all have unique and brilliant contributions to the design process.

7. We share design knowledge and tools with our communities.

8. We work toward sustainable, community-led, and controlled outcomes.

9. We work toward non-exploitative solutions that reconnect us to the earth and to each other.

10. Before seeking new design solutions, we look for what is already working at the community level. We honor and uplift traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and practices.

Jan 2021
Performative vs. Authentic Equity
What is Equity?

“....having the freedom to define what health and thriving is for you and your family. Equity is being invited to the process or the process coming to you, but also there being a real sense of agency attached to your voice, not performative inclusion... I think equity, really equity in this field is going to have to mean intentionally removing power from where it is within transportation field and redistributing it or recreating it collectively”

- Research Participant
“I think that equity...starts with a transparent and honest reflection of where we've been as a field. Equity includes dignity. So, me not having to explain or make anyone privy to my trauma in order to qualify for equity.”

- Research Participant
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matrix of Domination Levels</th>
<th>Performative Equity</th>
<th>Authentic equity</th>
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| Individual to Interpersonal | From...Defensiveness  
Guilt  
Comfort  
Emotional isolation | To...Collective Support  
Honesty  
Discomfort  
Collective support |
| Interpersonal to Cultural   | From...Tokenism  
Hiring  
Voice disregarded  
Identity as reductionistic  
Position with no power | To...Dignity  
Retention  
Voice amplified  
Identity as intersectional  
Dignity-Infused workplace |
| Cultural to Institutional   | From...Checklist Approach  
Retrofitting or downscaling equity  
Under-investment  
White-led | To...Long-Term Engagement  
Equity-led agendas  
Fully resourced  
Community-led |
Examples of Performative Equity

- Defensiveness
- Not looking at full history or institutional racism
- Just “outreach”
- Retrofit
- Under-resourced
Examples of Performative Equity

- Not working with community most affected
- Tokenism or check-box approach
- “Equity-washing” (grand goals, no follow through)
- Industry-driven and consumer behavior-based
Examples of Authentic Allyship

- Prioritizing most historically disinvested communities
- Increasing access AND shifting power imbalance
- Redistributing power
- Driven by the community
Examples of Authentic Allyship

- Increasing community agency
- Accountable to communities
- Transparent and honest
- Maintains dignity of the community
- Well-resourced
Case Studies
New Mobilities: equity an afterthought

Performative:
- Driven by profit models
- Equity partners not there at the start of projects

Authentic:
- Bring in equity advocates from the beginning
- Flexible rollout to meet needs and demographic abilities
- Reinforce the need for public transit
“…as an organization [we] wanted to be ahead of this new mobility revolution. After seeing what happened with Lyft and Uber, they just hit the streets, no one was prepared, no one knew what to do, the cities are just like, it's just very reactive as opposed to proactive. And we wanted to be sure that no matter what technology comes up, we have a response and a process that embeds equity and community needs at every step of the way. Yeah, it's something that's adaptable to whatever comes next.”
“...But I think what's interesting.. after three years of researching new mobility, autonomous vehicles, the equity impacts and policy responses, I think our main takeaway is that in urban areas, public transit has to be the core. All these new mobility technologies can help fill the gaps, but I think that's just been the main takeaway. And it's no surprise at all. Things we all knew but we almost, we had to go through this evolution in the work to now come to the, this is what we're going to work on from a policy perspective.”
Recruitment vs. Retention

Performative
- Only focusing on recruitment
- Devaluing voices of BPOC and those working on equity
- Ignoring mental and emotional stressors of equity work

Authentic
- Changing culture for better retention
- Giving BPOC and equity professionals decision-making power
- Listening and responding to BPOC voices and BPOC-centric spaces
“One thing is the hiring, but the retention, I think it's even more critical because you can get drained. You can get drain out so easily. Some of the women of color that I knew or just people of color that I knew on my job have left because, one, they were either not offered a permanent position, they were own contracts. Two, they got tired of just listening the equity talk and not actually seeing that in action. Three, not being able to get leadership positions. Four, having to justify everything that they do because their supervisors don't understand the importance of community-based planning.”
Policing

- Performative
  - Safety = More Police
  - Maintains a narrow definition of safety

- Authentic
  - Decouple Policing and Safety
  - Decriminalize Poverty
“They weren’t trying to say, “let’s increase police presence.” No, it was like, let’s increase our own presence and police ourselves. Just our presence alone will deter people from acting a fool.”
Recommendations
To Do List

- Know history
- Maintain an ongoing relationship
- Integrate community and equity experts into projects early on
- Show humility
- Respect expertise
- Give communities more power in decision-making processes
- Increase budgets for equity-related work
Process Matters

- Targeted
- Transparent
- Measurable
Dignity-Infused Community Engagement

Destiny Thomas at the Thrivance Institute
“Instead of being in other people's spaces and see if we're invited, we're just creating our own tables and we're telling folks to come to our tables. Instead of feeling that we must be invited, I'm like, "No. I need you to come to our table and we'll invite you and we'll facilitate that process, but we don't have the time to see and help people come along to understand what diversity, inclusion and equity means we're just going to do it."
Thank You

Sarah R. McCullough, PhD, Feminist Research Institute, UCD, smcc@ucdavis.edu

C. Sequoia Erasmus, UCD, caerasmus@ucdavis.edu