'If it ain't broke, don't fix it': Challenges facing institutional transformation of historically white South African universities

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Abstract

Research on transformation of higher education institutions shows that the underrepresentation, recruitment and retention of blacks and women in senior posts is still the major challenge facing the project of transforming higher education, particularly in Historically White Universities (HWUs). Several South African universities have responded to this challenge by initiating programmes for the 'accelerated development' of black academic staff. In this project we were interested to examine the wider implications of such programmes for transforming/reproducing existing institutional cultures. Focusing on one particular HWU and the participants in its Accelerated Development Programme (ADP) we asked whether or not the programme could be thought to have contributed to the interruption or reproduction of the existing dominant institutional culture of the university. The paper is based on interviews with 18 black lecturers who entered the academic workforce through the university's ADP. Employing Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework of social and cultural reproduction, we discuss how difficult it is to interrupt the naturalised norms and values that form part of the existing institutional culture of a university.

Keywords: *transformation in higher education; institutional culture; 'accelerated development' programmes; academic inbreeding; belonging and alienation; cultural capital, habitus and field.*

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Résumé

La recherche sur la transformation des établissements d'enseignement supérieur montre que la sous-représentation, le recrutement et la rétention des noirs et des femmes dans les postes supérieurs constituent toujours le principal défi du projet de transformation de l'enseignement supérieur, en particulier dans les universités historiquement blanches (HWU). Plusieurs universités sud-africaines ont répondu à ce défi en lançant des programmes pour le «développement accéléré» du personnel académique noir. Dans ce projet, nous avons été intéressés d'examiner les implications plus générales de ces programmes pour transformer / reproduire les cultures institutionnelles existantes. En mettant l'accent sur un HWU particulier et les participants à son Programme de développement accéléré (ADP), nous avons demandé si le programme pourrait ou non contribuer à l'interruption ou à la reproduction de la culture institutionnelle dominante existante de l'université. Le document est basé sur des entretiens avec 18 conférenciers noirs qui sont entrés dans la main-d'œuvre universitaire à travers l'ADP de l'université. En employant le cadre théorique de la reproduction sociale et culturelle de Pierre Bourdieu, nous discutons combien il est difficile d'interrompre les normes et valeurs naturalisées qui font partie de la culture institutionnelle existante d'une université.

Mots-clés: *transformation dans l'enseignement supérieur; Culture institutionnelle; Programmes de «développement accéléré»; Consanguinité académique; Appartenance et aliénation; Capitaux culturels, habitus et champs.*

Introduction

Although there has been institutional reform in South African higher education institutions and changes in employment policies, the post-apartheid higher education transformation project is faced with the challenge of recruiting and retaining black[1] academics and other senior staff. During 2003 to 2009, the representation of black Africans in the academic staff of all 25 South African public universities increased from 21.3% to 28%, similarly for coloureds and Indians there has been a slight increase from 4.5% to 5.2% and 7.9% to 8.4% respectively, whereas, the percentage of white academic staff declined from 62% to 58% (HESA 2011 3; Mngomezulu & Ndlovu 2013 112).

In accordance with the Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF) that is implemented by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), a Historically White University (HWU[2]) on which this investigation is based has endeavored to train and retain the next generation of academics through two Programmes which offer a three-year mentoring system with the aim of assisting black and women South Africans to develop the research skills and teaching qualifications necessary for them to establish themselves as scholars, researchers and intellectuals. In total, ADP participants from 2001 to 2014 have occupied 44 academic posts. Currently, 18 (or 41%) are permanent staff members at the study site, while 15 (or 34%) individuals are currently on the ADPs lined up against permanent posts. The remaining ADP

recipients have either held a three-year contract or subsequently left the university after participating in the programme.

But as Soudien (2010: 4-5) has noted, transformation of South Africa's higher education institutions does not have to do only with becoming more representative of the country's population demographics:

> A particular problem is the degree to which representivity masks the continued presence of racism or sexism (or indeed any other form of discrimination) and the emergence of different manifestations of exclusion that representivity by itself is unable to resolve. It is also necessary to remain aware of how stigmatisation, especially racial stigmatisation can persist within a representative entity.

Transformation is thus also an ideological process, which needs to interrogate the nature of privilege, the distribution of power in society and the processes through which social exclusion is maintained (Soudien 2010: 4). The long term success and wider impact of accelerated development programmes in the academy is dependent on the transformation of institutional cultures as the academics recruited through these programmes are more likely to leave the university – in what has been termed the 'revolving door' syndrome -- if they experience the institutional culture as discomforting and alienating. Further, although ADPs may improve the demographic composition of active agents in the university, the processes through which decisions are made are shaped by historical and cultural realities deeply instilled within the institution. Existing literature focuses on the need to change the racial composition of academic staff, but the extent to which these programmes address the institutional cultures that make it difficult to retain black staff once recruited, has not been widely addressed.

This paper tries to look beyond demographic change alone to whether ADPs have the potential to contribute to changing dominant institutional cultures, particularly at HWUs. Our contention is that the reproduction of naturalised norms and values that form part of the existing culture of an institution are difficult to shift, even when a university succeeds in changing its demographic makeup. According to extant literature, a major obstacle preventing black and women academics from thriving and reaching their full potential in South African higher education are alienating and exclusive institutional cultures, especially at HWUs (see, for example, Badat 2010; HESA 2011; Canham 2013). Given this, in this paper we are interested in what the experiences of a particular cohort of ADP academics can tell us about what enables or constrains the ability of those recruited through such programmes to make an impact on the culture, values and practices of an institution.

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Theoretical Framework

In this paper, we draw on Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of social and cultural reproduction to critically investigate the practices by which racialised and gendered power relations come to be reproduced through the naturalised cultural and knowledge production processes. The education system, Bourdieu argued, is a tool for the cultural conservation and ideological reproduction of the interests and values of the dominant classes (see, for example, Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1973; 1984; 1986; 1988; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). A wide literature has taken up this idea to focus on the ways in which the ideology and interests of socially dominant classes are reproduced in and through education systems (see, for example, Huber 1990; Kingston 2001; Demaine 2003; Hoadley 2006; Macris 2011; Gaddis 2012; Hlengwa 2015).

Bourdieu (1986: 17) explains the components of social and cultural reproduction through the relationship between economic, cultural and social forms of capital. Bourdieu (1986: 17) posited that 'cultural capital' can exist in three interrelated forms: in the 'embodied state' (i.e., attitudes, preferences, and behaviour), the 'objectified state' (i.e., cultural goods or resources), and the 'institutionalised state' (i.e., educational qualifications). The acquirement of different forms of cultural capital is a process of socialisation as the agent appropriates various kinds of knowledges and obtains educational qualifications that situate the individual in a privileged position within particular fields. Bourdieu (1998) employs the notions of 'habitus' and 'field' to theorise how middle-class embodied cultural dispositions reproduce themselves in different contexts (see, also DiMaggio 1982; Messner 2000; Crossley 2003; Lareau & Weininger 2003; Naidoo 2004).

Each field prescribes its own values and set of rules, informed by historical and familial relations, which are embodied by the agents that occupy it. The field can be seen as a meaningful framework of social relations, values and cultural norms that serve the interests of dominant agents within it (Bourdieu 1998: 44). As agents possess varying forms and degrees of social and cultural capital, power struggles emerge between the agents who attempt to either disrupt or preserve the regulative principles within specific fields (Bourdieu 1998: 44). It is clear that agency is shaped by the structuring principles and opportunities provided by the field. While some agents are in a position to use the field's possibilities to realise their own drives, others are forced to adapt to the structures of the field by sublimating themselves. The dominant cultures within the field are reproduced by silencing and suppressing different ways of being that do not reflect the dominant cultural dispositions (Bourdieu 1986: 27).

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 16) explain that habitus is inscribed in the bodies of social agents by their socialisation and lived experiences. In other words, agents possess dispositions that reflect their socially made (valued) bodies which will continue

to influence their practice and new forms of action within various fields. Such bodily dispositions are raced, gendered and classed and thus play a significant role in the reproduction of exclusion and inclusion in the academy. The acquisition of culturally exalted habitus eases an agent's passage into understanding the regulative principles of middle-class fields -- such as historically white and elite universities -- while reproducing the cultures of dominant social groups, the elements of which are perceived as most desirable. For instance, white male professors are likely to enter a field from a position in which they are automatically respected. On the other hand, "[w]hen women professors and/or professors of color enter the field, they do not immediately or obviously display all of the signs of authority that are "necessary" for a smooth and unquestioned reproduction of the unspoken assumptions underlying academic hierarchy" (Messner 2000: 460). It is noteworthy that although education is commonly perceived as a class leveler, enabling upward mobility; this is possible only for a 'selected few' (Ndletyana 2014: 11) who are able, or willing, to mimic the dominant culture with its implied rules of the game, and be assimilated within that hegemonic culture.

Social capital as institutionalised networks and relationships also facilitates entry into particular fields. It is likely that middle class and white agents entering the university field would already have established relationships from which they could make capital withdrawals to better position themselves within the field of play. Bourdieu (1986: 21) explains that social capital may be guaranteed by virtue of one's family name, class, type of school etc. For instance, the networks established by families through social class are intergenerationally transmitted and when these children enter university, they already have access to established durable networks and they are perceived to be 'trustworthy' due to their mutual familiarity with other members of the institution who share that class position. In contrast, it is a 'social risk' to form social relations and networks with people outside that class because they are perceived to be unfamiliar strangers and untrustworthy, regardless of their institutionalised cultural capital achievements and accreditations. Even when such outsiders are given access to the network, through employment opportunities for instance, they are expected to fit into an already existing classed social space in order to gain trust and to succeed in their careers.

In the context of neoliberalism, globalisation and financialisation, cultural and social capital have increasingly become "disguised forms of economic capital [which is] at the root of their effects" (Bourdieu 1986: 24). The practices of 'new managerialism' (Clarke & Newman 1997) in the global ranking industry are directed towards economic revenues which locks higher education into a competing field in which differently positioned institutions and agents compete in a constant struggle to realise their interests (Bourdieu 1986: 20). The field of higher education in a global competitive environment acts as a mirror to a social space "that permits the realization of social classification in guises that allow it to be accomplished invisibly. In this way, universities contribute to the "misrecognition" and therefore "naturalization" of structures of domination" (Naidoo 2004: 460). The

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normalisation and legitimisation of rankings, which serves the interests of dominant white middle class actors, are represented as equal opportunity for all. However, agents do not compete on a level playing field as their socially made (valued) bodily dispositions are raced, gendered and classed. For instance, Naidoo (2004: 463) has noted that, in South Africa, academic excellence is associated with the 'intrinsic' dispositions of individuals from private schools and former Model C schools[3] (i.e. white schooling system).

We have argued elsewhere that the 'paradox' of commitment, to equity in the measured university but not to diversity as central to academic life, is maintained by a politics of 'quality' and 'excellence' which have emerged as discursive practices, invoked by HWUs, to reproduce social class differences and maintain their position as leading higher education institutions globally (Booi, Vincent & Liccardo 2017: 499). The preservation of old existing normalised traditional practices in HWUs serve to reproduce the status quo and marginalise black students and academics, particularly from working class backgrounds. However, the normalised practices and sedimented traditions of knowledge in South African universities has been interrupted by the current fallist student movement for free education and decolonisation of the African university (Heffernan & Nieftagodieen 2016). We will now discuss the findings which suggest that the racialised and classed habitus of HWUs generate practices of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) in that it provides black academics access to its field by selecting them for the ADPs but simultaneously blocks their everyday participation in its field through implicit or exclusionary practices masked as 'the University's way of doing things' thus contributing to the 'revolving door' syndrome.

Method

In this paper, we examine how participants in one particular ADP experience the contribution of this programme to transforming or reproducing the existing dominant institutional culture at the study site. In-depth interviews were conducted with 18 black lecturers who entered the university academic workforce through an ADP. Thirteen participants were women and twelve were graduates of the study site who had no prior work experience at other universities. The individual interviews elicited information concerning participants' experiences of participating in the ADP and entering the academic workforce through the ADP. The interviews were approximately one hour in duration, audio-recorded, and transcribed.

Data analysis

Interview transcripts were coded and participants were assigned pseudonyms. Biographical features which might have identified participants were changed without

changing the meaning of the data. Given the volume of data, the NVivo qualitative data analysis software was employed to facilitate the coding process. The interview data were subjected to a theoretically directed qualitative content analysis that unfolded in three broad stages. First, descriptive information about each participant was recorded while reading segments of the data. Second, the data were coded and grouped into overarching themes that related to Bourdieu's key concepts of habitus, field, social and cultural capital. Third, themes were further reduced based on their similarities and the data were re-analysed in relation to the question of how the participants had experienced the contribution of the programme to interrupting or reproducing the existing dominant institutional culture as they perceived it.

Findings

Drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical framework of social and cultural reproduction, the two over-arching themes that emerged from the data were: (1) 'reproducing white-middle-class habitus through academic inbreeding' and (2) 'our way of doing things'. The first over-arching theme was interpreted using the concepts of cultural capital and habitus whereas the second over-arching theme was interpreted using the concepts of rules of the field and institutionalised cultural capital. The findings indicate that academic inbreeding and the tendency to want to recruit the 'right' kind of black academic who is most likely to embody, adopt and adapt to, existing ways of doing things lead to ADPs changing institutional demographics but not institutional cultures.

The reproduction of white-middle-class habitus through academic inbreeding

In the extract below, Kathrin points to an alienating and exclusive middle-class culture where lecturers and students from working class backgrounds, feel a sense of not belonging to the university culture:

> **Kathrin:** I would not exchange that experience of being a working-class student for anything because that is what helps me even today. You know if that particular [working class] student I was back then, feels the same thing that I have experienced then, it means there is something we are not doing right, not only am I talking about the matric stuff but within the university, whereby you feel you don't belong and you feel like an outcast. This is a very nice environment for students who are familiar with a certain culture because we know that this university is

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> a Westernized, liberal and very middle-class kind of university. But now when you've trained from that particular background for a while, even if you are a black person, for instance, if you have been to [a private school or a former Model C school] and you have been cultured in that way and you get here and you would be like I do not know why are these [working class] people complaining. You do not understand the person who is coming from [a township] high school, a person who has never seen a computer or touched a computer before, who does not even know how to do research and you'd be like 'oh my God, these are so basic'. So the university favours middle class students one way or the other that is why we need transformation in terms of teaching staff members for those working class students. That is what we are here for: to create a mirror for the students to say 'actually I can see myself in Siyanda, I can see myself in Simpiwe' so that students can feel like they are at home.

As the culture of middle-class families mirror the dominant cultural practices in the education system (Bourdieu 1973: 56), those individuals who attended private schools and former Model C schools are familiar with the everyday practices and routines of life in a middle-class environment due to their early family and school socialisation. Individuals from working-class backgrounds, who have not 'been cultured in that way' are expected to familiarise themselves with these cultural dispositions that predominate and are taken to be the norm and which are alien to them. It is these individuals who are more likely to be agents of transformation because, as Kathrin explains, when you are part of the dominant culture you take its ways to be the norm and it is difficult to 'see' the university from the perspective of someone who does not find those values, routines, practices and expectations familiar at all. Having a habitus that is different to, and possibly at odds with, that of the dominant groups allows such individuals to identify and therefore potentially to disrupt exclusionary cultures. On the other hand, these individuals do not necessarily occupy positions of power and influence in the field from which to effect such disruptions.

While black lecturers recruited through ADPs might successfully embody the characteristics that are approved in an HWU (such as accent, disposition, pedagogic approach and so on) these lecturers also routinely report feeling 'belittled', 'silenced' and alienated. Brian for example spoke about being labeled 'one of the ADP people' whose place in the university is owed to affirmative action rather than merit.

> **Brian:** The academic environment at [HWU] label the accelerated academics as some sort of development programme which simply implies that they are just here on equity purposes just because they are black and it's just about affirmative action. There is a need for it given what is happening in the institution and we should be proud of that but it is then demeaning when someone tries to belittle you, by positioning you and try to silence you by saying you one of the '[ADP] people' then it becomes emotional in that sense.

While lecturers recruited through the ADP constitute a potentially powerful resource from which the university can draw in being able to see, and therefore to change, what is alienating and excluding about its culture, the stigmatisation, 'belittling' and 'silencing' of black academics means that existing practices are reproduced rather than interrupted.

Many of the participants reported feeling the need to constantly prove their worth to the academic community, as Brenda for example, explains:

> **Brenda:** In terms of being a student and a staff member, while I was on the [ADP] it was difficult because everyone knows what the [ADP] is about: it is about employing staff members who are black and women in order to transform what the university looks like. I spent a lot of time trying to prove to other academics in my department and the university that I did deserve the position. I might be a woman but that is not the only reason I got this post, that I actually deserve to be here and I was going to contribute something more than just window dressing.

One of the ways in which historically white South African universities have sought to meet the challenge of changing academic staff demographics is captured in the telling moniker, 'grow your own timber'. Himself an alumnus of this study site, Mlungisi criticised the idea of HWUs 'growing their own timber' – that is to say, recruiting and appointing mainly their black alumni and being leery of 'outsiders':

> **Mlungisi:** I am quite disturbed if this is how [this HWU] is going to transform by only employing people who have studied at [this HWU] and it is too comfortable in a way. We know how things work here and there is something very dangerous about that and I hope that departments do not fall into that trap. And I know someone who is being pressured to take a lecturer post because he is going to fit in because he knows how things go. I think there is a good part in 'growing our own timber' but I think we must not

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> take it too far. I do hope that we get people that come from outside the department - young scholars that do not have a history with [this HWU] - then you can really see how things are.

Mlungisi, like Kristin, highlights the fact that those who are bred within the system find it difficult to 'really see how things are'. Those most likely to bring in fresh ideas, to see what is excluding and alienating about the existing culture and to have a material interest in changing it, are most likely 'people coming from outside'. Another ADP alumnus, Amanda Hlengwa, has called timber grown and then recruited from within the milieu of historically white educational settings, 'safe bets' (Hlengwa 2015: 152) for the institution because these individuals possess embodied cultural dispositions that are similar to those of the dominant groups and thus are seen as more likely to safeguard than to threaten the reproduction of those dispositions. On the other hand, to appoint 'young scholars that do not have a history with [this HWU]' is seen as risky because such people do not easily 'fit in' or 'know how things work'.

By retaining its own graduates through the ADP, HWUs recreate its own likeness, thus sustaining and reproducing its own (white, middle-class) image. Lesego describes how unequal power relations which stultify the potential for agency to effect transformation on the part of a new black staff member are an adverse effect of academic inbreeding:

> **Lesego:** So that transition on its own has had a bearing on my voice to influence transformation, the fact that you were a student in the department for years can be used against you. I am not saying that people are anti-transformation but it is that sense of paternalism that they treat you like you are still a student so it is the paternalistic attitude that kind of hinders you from being a full member who participates on equal scale as anyone else.

The transition from being a student to becoming a staff member in the same institution with the assistance of the ADP was 'used against [Lesego]' in the sense that it 'hindered' his agency or 'voice to influence transformation' as a legitimate faculty member 'who participates on equal scale as anyone else'. The 'sense of paternalism' experienced by Lesego could be described as an orientation strategy that older agents in the field use to reproduce the lecturer-student relationship once a student becomes a colleague and thus sustain their own position of privilege, power and influence over the field.

'Our' way of doing things

The HWUs in South Africa often present themselves as being associated with a tradition of academic excellence and prestige. For example, when the HWU study site celebrated its centenary, the theme was one of celebrating a history of 'excellence':

> [Our HWU] has a history that has made us proud. The achievements of old [alumni] bear testimony to what we strive for: – the pursuit of excellence in all areas ... Your support will see [our HWU] into its second centenary of excellence.

This claim to excellence can act as a bulwark against change. If something is 'excellent', the argument for changing it is rendered moot. When Sinazo first arrived at the HWU she found herself situated in a subordinate position within the university by virtue of her outsider status, as someone whose prior working experience had not been at a HWU. She was told to familiarise herself with the 'HWU way of doing things' which was presented to her as the 'best' way:

> **Sinazo:** I am never sure how it should work, on one hand I thought I had to come here and learn a different way of doing things and I think that was necessary. On the other hand, I felt sometimes especially at the beginning my experiences from elsewhere were not particularly important, I had to learn the '[HWU] way' and a lot of people in the department didn't want things to change and they didn't want a new way of doing things and they believed the '[HWU] way' of doing things was the best. And especially at the beginning quite often I would say, 'what about this and this is how we used to do it at [my former university] and it worked' and they will say yes but that is not the '[HWU] way' you know.

Sinazo describes the 'HWU way of doing things' as a set of rules that operate in the field of HWUs which serve to maintain existing (inherited) institutional practices. The 'HWU way as the best way' discourse served to delegitimise Sinazo's prior experience because she was made to feel that her 'experiences from elsewhere were not particularly important'. Sinazo's experience gained from another university with 'a different way of doing things' is perceived to be of no value or potential to contribute to the existing 'best' practices at a university with a reputation for academic excellence and high-quality teaching. In other words, changing existing 'best' practices is constructed as self-evidently counter-productive.

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The field of a higher education institution is thus an arena for power contestation amongst social agents who occupy dominant-subordinate positions. These durable conflicting interests among agents are a manifestation of unequal distribution of power or the valuation of particular kinds of cultural capital in the field in ways that reflect the interests of the socially dominant groups (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 13; Naidoo 2004: 458). Whereas Sinazo attempts to interrupt the established rules 'of doing things' at the HWU, her colleagues have a vested interest in preserving and reproducing particular values, orientations and institutional practices.

Similarly, Lesego was not encouraged, as a new staff member, to 'see things in a different way'; instead he was told to 'sit quietly and watch how we do [things the HWU way] and follow our examples'. Lesego also feels that people lowered their expectations of him because he had come through the ranks of an ADP:

> **Lesego:** For the [ADP] the kind of impression given is that, these are people that can possibly be good academics in the future but right now they need handholding and guidance. So as an independent person who is quite sure of what I am capable of and things like that, that was a little bit difficult so my mentor will often tell me you are going too fast just slow down a bit and lower your expectations and goals. This kind of idea that you still have a lot to learn, so sit quietly and watch how we do it and follow our examples later on, which I don't deal well with that kind of thing. I think when a new staff member comes in there is an opportunity to see things in a different way because of new eyes and a fresh [perspective] who doesn't have all that baggage of ten years being an academic and disillusionment and all of that.

The 'handholding' of junior staff members by senior academics is an institutional strategy to familiarise, socialise and 'guide' these new entrants into the existing institutional cultures so that they may act in the name of the institution as its legitimate representatives. Senior academics remind junior or new academics that they lack experience in academia in order to ensure that these new entrants conform to existing practice within their respective departments and the institution as a whole. Thus, in the process of becoming academic representatives of the institution, junior or new academics are reminded that they 'still have a lot to learn' and they must 'sit quietly and watch how' to excel at the existing ways of doing things. Lesego once again echoes the point made by Kristin and Sinazo that 'fresh eyes and a fresh perspective' are not being seen as a valuable resource from which the institution can learn if it wishes to embrace a culture of change. Rather, the impression is created that there is a need for (black) academics entering the institution from 'different' environments to learn to 'fit

in'. Far from welcoming 'fresh eyes' the institution gives the impression that learning to be a 'good' academic is synonymous with learning to see the world through the lens of existing practices and to come to embody those practices as closely as possible.

Tebogo explains, in the extract below, how qualification holders with cultural dispositions that are similar to those of the dominant white middle-class culture at the university are perceived to be 'a good fit':

> **Tebogo:** For me, transformation of institutional cultures here should not only be about race, we must not side-line gender and class you know. And changing staff representation through these [ADP] must not only benefit the so called black middle-class like me, the experience and representation of the black working class also matters you know but we both know [HWUs] prefers the right black.

According to Tebogo, the recruitment of 'the right blacks' from middle-class backgrounds serves to preserve and reproduce the 'HWU way of doing things' embedded in its racialised and classed assumptions about what is best and what counts as excellence. Lizole believes that ADPs as a result tend to be populated with the 'right kinds of black' because it is 'easy [for them] to gel with the HWU culture':

> **Lizole:** The people who are within the ADP are people who are from the middle-class background who accept the [HWU] norm, people who are easy to gel with the [HWU] culture. So for me it is not challenging to be with people who are from their privatised lifestyles within the programme.

According to Tebogo, in the process of retaining or recruiting black academics, the institution does not value the cultural capital, 'experience [or] representation' of the 'black working-class' despite the fact that these potential recruits possess the necessary academic qualifications to warrant their appointment. Tebego is pointing to the way in which a set of unstated, unacknowledged, and perhaps even unconscious, assumptions might underlie recruitment practices so that those who are 'not like us' – who seem foreign in some way to those schooled in white middle class values and dispositions – are seen as 'not quite right' and therefore overlooked for appointment. This in turn legitimizes the claim that as much as the university might wish to appoint more black academics, suitable candidates are simply not available.

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Conclusion

The transformation of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa will involve rethinking and reimagining all practices, institutions and values that existed in the apartheid system (Department of Education 1997: 3). What is needed is not only institutional restructuring, change in employment policies, demographic and curriculum transformation but also a radical change of institutional cultures and practices that are currently informed by racialised, gendered and classed assumptions inherited from the colonial and apartheid past. It is the intention of ADPs to recruit black academics who can contribute to the development of new, shared cultures and values in institutions currently experienced as alienating by many people. However, what we have suggested here is that while these programmes do make a contribution to changing the demographic composition of the academic workforce, when an institution, whether wittingly or unwittingly, populates such a programme with its own 'timber' or with those who are perceived to 'fit in', the reproduction of precisely those white-middle-class dispositions that perpetuate alienation, marginalization and exclusion is assured. The practice of academic inbreeding means that while new entrants recruited through ADPs may be black, their cultural dispositions, assumptions and ways of being, by their own admission, are not necessarily that different from the existing dominant institutional cultures. That is what makes these individuals 'safe options' who will sustain the institution's identity rather than seeing it with fresh eyes and questioning mores that are taken for granted by insiders and those who hail from similar institutions and educational backgrounds.

In this way, institutional racialised and classed unequal power relations are disguised as academic experience and 'excellence'. These in turn emerge as the rules of the field which sustain 'our way of doing things'. Black academics who emerge from ADPs report that as a result of practices of inbreeding and safe bet recruiting, the potential of these programmes to make a contribution to transformation that goes beyond demographic change and extends to questioning and interrupting business as usual practices, is blunted. An identity of that which is 'not broken', and therefore not in need of being 'fixed' serves to delegitimise the project of transformation and resurface existing power and privilege which is invested in maintaining existing practices.

As expressed by the participants, the recruitment of the 'right' kind of black middle-class academics who are most likely to adopt 'our way of doing things' means that the university is not overcoming its main challenge. Recruitment and retention of black academics has been cited as one of the main challenges facing HWUs in South Africa. But if these institutions insist on recruiting only from among a thin stratum of black academics who are themselves products of these institutions because only these people are seen as having the capacity to 'fit in' and be successful, then it is perhaps unsurprising

that the challenge of finding 'suitable' black academics remains intractable. It is the idea of 'suitability' that needs to be challenged. Moreover, when it comes to the challenge of retaining those who are appointed, what is not recognized is the valuable contribution that those who can view the culture with fresh eyes could make to changing it from one that is perceived as antagonistic and alienating to one that is supportive and conducive to the professional development of black staff whose perspective and experience may be quite different to the existing practices and culture of the university.

While it may be that there is often no deliberate intent to exclude, what our research does is to surface hidden practices that go on unnoticed, produced unthinkingly by those in a position to influence recruitment processes. HWUs in particular, need to interrogate their assumptions about who will and will not 'fit in' when recruiting new black staff. On the one hand we often proclaim a commitment to transformation of our institutional cultures. But then on the other hand, when someone presents themselves to us as likely to offer a different perspective or set of skills or to have a different disposition than what is customary in the existing institutional milieu, we see the person as a 'risk' and, the statistics suggest, are likely to turn instead to the safety of 'one of our own'. Rather than celebrating the potential energy and impetus towards growth that difference and diversity can offer, the comfort of familiarity is difficult to resist. Those who occupy positions of status and privilege are those who have the most to lose from change. If *their* way is the existing way then a new way will mean a potential devaluing of the cultural currency possessed by these powerful agents. It is in the interests of these agents therefore to meet the demand for demographic change while at the same time managing the process in such a way that the institutional culture is left largely unscathed. A variety of strategies are employed in order to realize this goal – starting with the recruitment of 'right blacks' and extending to undermining black academics recruited through ADPs by labeling them affirmative action appointments and drawing on a discourse of academic excellence and achievement to present existing practices not as *a* way but as *the* way.

By focusing on Bourdieu's theoretical framework of social and cultural reproduction, we have not explored the possibilities for "pedagogic interruption" (Bernstein, 1996) or supportive social relations in disrupting and subverting the dominant institutional culture; this is an acknowledged limitation of the study. Further research could explore the following questions: How could black academics' lived narratives of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) reveal fault lines in the cultural reproduction in HWU? What are the conflicting values between traditional and organic intellectuals (Gramsci 1971) and how do these values inform cultural reproduction and transformation?

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Notes

1. We use the apartheid-era racial categories as redress measures. 'Black' is utilised in this paper as an overarching term for African, Coloured (mixed-race) and Indian individuals.

2. In the apartheid era, the differentiation of the higher education system along racial and ethnic lines not only resulted in HWUs and historically black universities (HBUs), but inequalities were also shaped along these lines. For instance, whilst HWUs (English and Afrikaans-speaking) were located in urban areas and positioned as institutions of research, HBUs were ethnic-based institutions that were marginalised by their rural locations and limited to being institutions of teaching. Robus and Macleod (2006) propose that this urban–rural divide has created 'white space as the desirable, urban centre and black space as the undesirable, rural periphery [which] dovetails with a discourse of "white excellence/black failure"' (p. 473). Currently, HWUs remain advantaged and elitist while HBUs remain disadvantaged and under-resourced.

3. Former Model C schools are schools that were reserved for white learners in South Africa under apartheid (Roodt, 2011). After political pressure in the 1990s, Piet Clase (Minister of Education) introduced reforms to allow previously disadvantaged groups to access white schools (Hofmeyr, 2000) in a limited and conditional way. The model system was dismantled after 1994 when a single unified state was created.

Acknowledgements

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