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**Abstract:**

**‘Unwitting prejudice’?: Borders created by institutional racism in UK Higher Education**

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Evidence has shown that the workforce in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) becomes whiter the further up the hierarchy one looks. Although the differential outcomes of degree attainment and student experience of racially minoritised students, when compared to white students, have been recognised, explored and discussed (Gilborn, 2008; Higher Education Academy, 2008; Higher Education Academy/Equality Challenge Unit, 2011) there is relatively little written regarding the differential outcomes of the staff who supply and support the education of those students. Indeed, with regards to the outcomes of staff in higher education the attention has come later and with less emphasis than has been placed on the outcomes of the student population (Pilkington, 2011; Philips, 2012). Nonetheless, several studies have highlighted that racially minoritised staff in UK higher education are less likely to be recruited (Pilkington, 2011), are more likely to experience micro-aggressions and be isolated, ignored, racially stereotyped and micro-managed (ECU, 2011; Pilkington, 2013; University and College Union, 2016; University and College Union, 2017).

Following the Macpherson Report (1999) many organisations have become aware of the notion of ‘institutional racism’ but interestingly there has been limited research on institutional racism within the context of UK higher education, although a recent report (ECU, 2011) did suggest that institutional racism does exist in UK higher education and it drew upon earlier studies to support this (Carter et al. 1999; Blackaby and Frank 2000; Law et al. 2004; Jones 2006). Despite this recognition, however, the finding was not advanced further within the report, nor did it offer specific recommendations to the higher education sector about dealing with the issue of institutional racism. One has to question why this might be the case. It is also important to consider the extent to which ‘institutional racism’ is a nebulous concept and whether it is something that is wittingly or unwittingly perpetuated within HEIs.

Drawing upon empirical research from a wider qualitative study which explores differential outcomes for black staff in HEI, this paper considers the notion of institutional racism as viewed by those who work in a variety of institutions across the UK. It provides an insight into the meaning and understanding of ‘institutional’ racism to those who work in the sector and demonstrates how for them institutional racism is a very real occurrence in their working lives.

To help explore the impact of institutional racism on employees in UK higher education, the paper draws upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu, (1977; 1990; 1991; 1998). Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capitals and symbolic violence in particular allow us to consider the inter-relationship between structure and agency and institutional racism for those striving to cross borders (real or perceived) within the context of Higher Education Institutions in the UK.

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