# The (un)equal university

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# The (un)equal university: Training programmes and the commodification of race

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**Abstract**

There is a plethora of evidence to suggest that academics of colour remain under represented in higher education; they are less likely to be professors and occupy senior managerial roles compared to White groups and report regular incidents of overt and covert racism. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives such as training programmes to progress the position of academics of colour into senior roles have been used to address their under representation. Drawing on Critical Race Theory this paper examines how within the neoliberal marketised university, such training programmes are used for the benefit of White groups to perpetuate White privilege.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the brutal murder of a Black man, George Floyd by a White police officer in the state of Minneapolis, USA resulted in global protests under the banner of #BlackLivesMatter. These protests worldwide signified the reaction to everyday events of racism not just in the United States but around the world. As a result, society was made to confront its own failings in dealing with racism and racial harassment in all sectors, including higher education. Universities were forced to address racism in their own institutions such as addressing the lack of professors of colour and the awarding gap.[1] Consequently, race became a headline issue that needed to be addressed or *seen* to be addressed to the outside world.

Just before the run up to the 2020 US presidential election, then President Donald J Trump overtly attacked anti-racist teaching (specifically CRT) and ant-diversity training. He released a memo from the Office of Budget and Management (2020) which specifically banned diversity training and blocked funding for anything remotely resembling training such as this, or 'racial sensitivity training' for federal contracts. The same memo

characterised CRT as 'un-American propaganda'. As of 2023, a total of 49 states have banned the teaching of CRT (Alexander, 2023). More recently, the fragility of race relations in the United States has come to surface in the recent appointment and then resignation of Claudine Gay as Harvard's 30th president in September 2023. She was the first Black president of Harvard and only the second woman to take on this role. However, following controversies around her supposed racism and antisemitism and attacks on her scholarship she resigned in early January 2024. Some accused her of being appointed as an equality, diversity and inclusion candidate, rather than on the basis of her academic qualifications (Streeter, 2024).

One of the ways in which the lack of academics of colour in senior roles has been addressed is the introduction of training programmes designed to provide support and mentoring in order that academics of colour can progress to senior roles. This article explores the views of academics of colour[2] who attended training programmes after the #BlackLivesMatter protests. It argues that such training programmes and a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives (such as unconscious bias and diversity training) were only introduced as a response to the #BlackLivesMatter protests. Such initiatives do little to change the structural, institutional and everyday individual racisms experienced by academics of colour, instead they work for the benefit of the institutions and White groups so that universities can sell themselves as inclusive to fee paying students. Race then becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, used to keep academics of colour in their place and reinforce systems of white hegemonic practice.

## 1.1 | Racism, racism, racism

There is a significant amount of research to show the prevalence of racism in higher education (Ahmed, 2012; Bhopal, 2018, 2023, 2024; Myers, 2022; Pilkington, 2018). However, when addressing inequalities, race has continued to take secondary priority compared to other inequalities such as gender and there has been little attention on addressing ethnic inequalities (Ahmed, 2012; Bhopal, 2018, 2024).

Recent data suggest that the staff workforce in UK higher education has become more ethnically diverse with a rise in the Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff (BAME).[3] However, despite this increase inequalities continue to persist; BAME staff are more likely to be on open-ended contracts, less likely to be in senior management roles and on higher salary bands compared to White staff (Advance HE, 2023). The proportion of White academics who are senior managers is almost double that of BAME academics (0.9% compared to 0.5%) and a larger proportion of White academic staff are more likely to be on the highest pay spine of £62,728 or more compared to BAME staff. Furthermore, there are 14,335 White professors compared to 1570 BAME professors (Advance HE, 2023). This statistical evidence is supported by the vast literature which demonstrates the racism experienced by academics of colour on a daily basis, experiencing both overt and covert micro-aggressions (Ahmed, 2012; Bhopal, 2023, 2024; Myers, 2022; Universities UK, 2020). Academics of colour continue to be 'othered' in the White space of higher education in which their credibility and scholarship is questioned. Recent research suggests that academics of colour are less likely than their White peers to have access to a 'network of knowns', gatekeepers who hold the keys to knowledge needed to pursue successful career trajectories (Bhopal, 2018). In addition, the racism they encounter on a daily basis is dismissed and not addressed adequately, allowing a system of White privilege to flourish (Bhopal, 2018, 2023; 2024; Myers, 2022).

Similar research has been found in the United States in which academics of colour are held to different (higher) standards compared to their White colleagues (Corrigan & Vats, 2020), are positioned as 'outsiders' because of their race (Reason & Evans, 2007) and regularly experience racism and microaggressions from their colleagues (Cheshire et al., 2021). In addition, academics of colour earn tenure at lower rates compared to their White peers (Nyunt et al., 2022). Such issues have shown an increase in the current continued pervasiveness of racism in the local and global political climate (Saad, 2020). In addition, academics of colour are more likely to receive

lower ratings from their students despite dedicating more time and effort to their teaching and advising students (Villalpando & Delgado, 2002). They are also expected to take on more committee work which affects their career trajectories (Gasman et al., 2015). Recent research suggests that in order for real institutional change to take place, universities must consider diversity as being central to their mission and use it to inform inclusive practices resulting in real strategic practices with greater accountability (Smith, 2016).

## 1.2 | Equality and diversity policies

The business case for equality and diversity policies has been focussed on the need to create inclusive cultures in the workplace (Bell & Berry, 2007), their impact on organisational structures and processes (Kalev et al., 2006) as well as performance related outcomes (Bramer et al., 2009). Diversity management has been introduced as, 'valuing heterogeneity in organisations with a view to improve organisational performance' (Ozgiblin & Tatli, 2011, p. 1231). However, it has been argued that such equality and diversity policies do little to address inequalities in the workplace or demonstrate a commitment to progressive change (Tatli et al., 2015). Furthermore, the inclusion of such policies may be based on the commitment of individual managers, rather than as compliance to legal requirements. There is also evidence to suggest that the reporting and bureaucracy associated with equality and diversity work results in a tick box exercise (Ahmed, 2007; Bhopal, 2023; 2024) in which employers address such issues for their own benefits such as the reputation of their organisations. Similarly, in the United States, the presence of equality and diversity policies can result in people of colour being perceived as 'token' hires or as representatives of their racial group (Niemann, 2016). This can have a significant impact on people of colour, if they do not meet the expectations of their White colleagues (Hall, 2016). Furthermore, White colleagues are more likely to oppose equality and diversity policies because they think people of colour are underserving of equitable treatment (Yi & Todd, 2021). In UK higher education, one of the ways in which racial inequalities have been addressed has been the recent introduction of targeted training programmes.

## 2 | TARGETED TRAINING

There is evidence to suggest that training programmes aimed at specific groups can be beneficial in addressing inequalities in higher education. Such programmes have traditionally focussed on gender inequalities (Manfredi et al., 2014) and have shown to be beneficial for advancing the careers of women, which have led to an increase in leadership skills, career networking and a focus on career goals (Arnold et al., 2016). Such training programmes have been criticised, however, for not addressing the needs of academics of colour, particularly issues of structural racism and exclusionary practices (Fook et al., 2019).

However, more recently there has been a focus on targeted training for academics of colour to advance into senior roles, with a focus on diversity. The focus has been on introducing appropriate training which considers the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion for marginalised groups, particularly in relation to positive role models, mentoring relationships, advancing career trajectories and targeted support (Bryman & Liley, 2009). There is little research which has explored the impact of training programmes for academics of colour. This paper provides original research on the views of academics of colour after the #BlackLivesMatter protests. It argues that such training programmes (and others focussed on addressing racial inequalities) were in fact a response to #BlackLivesMatter and did little to address structural, institutional and individual racisms in higher education. The paper argues that consequently, racism is only addressed during particular historical moments (such as the murder of George Floyd and the murder of Stephen Lawrence in the UK[4]). This focus is short lived and racism continues as business as usual.

## 3 | CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s to address racial injustices from a legal perspective. CRT works from the premise that racism is central and endemic to everyday life based on the historical and continued experiences of people of colour in the United States (racial realism). This takes place both through policy making, practice and everyday experiences (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Other principles of CRT include a critical focus on Whiteness as property and White supremacy (Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2009), interest convergence (Bell, 1992) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). The concept of Whiteness has been examined as a marker of difference, particularly in relation to significant advantage and oppression (Hurtado, 1996; McIntosh, 1992). Frankenberg states, 'Whiteness has a set of linked dimensions. First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "Whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed' (1997, p. 1). DiAngelo goes further to argue that Whiteness is not a skin colour, instead, '… a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e. skin color alone). Whiteness is dynamic, relational and operating at all times and on myriad levels. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, practices and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people' (2011, p. 56). Whiteness then, is the normal way of doing things, it shapes actions and cultural practices.

Interest convergence works from the basis that White groups will only support racial equality (in policy making for example), as long as they benefit *more* from the advances and their own positions of power remain unthreatened (Gillborn, 2005, 2010). Bell argues, 'The interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated *only when* that interest converges with the interests of whites in policy making positions. This convergence is far *more* important for gaining relief than the degree of harm suffered by blacks or the character of proof offered to prove that harm' (2004, p. 69, my emphasis). In the United Kingdom, CRT was developed in understanding racial inequalities in education (Gillborn, 2008; Preston, 2010; Warmington, 2014). Gillborn has used CRT to specifically examine how policy making in education works intentionally to discriminate against people of colour (2008, 2010). He argues that, '… although race inequity may not be a planned and deliberate goal of education policy neither is it accidental. The patterning of racial advantage and inequity is structured in domination and its continuation represents a form of *tacit intentionality* on the part of white powerholders and policy makers' (2005, p. 485 my emphasis). This article specifically focuses on racial realism, Whiteness and interest convergence to argue that training programmes exist within a framework of White privilege and a normative culture of Whiteness and do not address structural, institutional and individual racisms.

### 3.1 | The study

The research was conducted in 2021, after the murder of George Floyd and the #BlackLivesMatter protests. The main focus of the study was to explore whether both events had an impact on introducing targeted training programmes (and other initiatives) and whether they specifically addressed the needs of academics of colour (in the light of global recognition of racial discrimination and the need to address it in all arenas). A total of 23 interviews were conducted with academics of colour who had recently attended a targeted training programme for academics of colour in England. The programme specifically focussed on addressing issues of equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to increasing the numbers of academics of colour in senior roles (such as professors, deans, heads of department and above). The programme is aimed at those intending to apply for a senior role in the next two years. Individuals are recommended by their organisation to attend the programme and there is a cost attached to each programme who is paid for by the university.

Respondents were contacted via the programme organisers. Contact details were obtained via each programme's webpages and each organiser was contacted first via email and then via a telephone conversation

when the study aims were discussed. Once programme organisers agreed to participate in the study, respondents were introduced to the researcher. Each respondent was given a consent form and participant information sheet and asked to provide their contact details if they were interested in participating in an interview. They were told they could withdraw from the study without any repercussions. Forty respondents originally expressed an interest to participate in the study, but 17 declined. Respondents were from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds; 5 were Black British, 4 were Black African, 4 were British Indian, 2 were British Bangladeshi, 3 were British Pakistani, 3 were mixed heritage (Black/White) and 2 were mixed heritage (Indian/White). Interviews are used to gain a specific understanding of how respondents subjectively interpret the social phenomena around them (Kvale, 1996); in this case their experiences on targeted programmes to address racial injustices in higher education. Interviews encouraged participants and gave them the space to share their feelings and opinions in order to explore how they attributed meaning to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The interviews focussed on examining whether the training programmes addressed specific challenges faced by academics of colour in higher education and whether the programmes had any impact on future senior leadership roles. The interviews were piloted to ensure clarity, correct order and wording of questions. Interviews were conducted face to face and via skype. All of the interviews were audio-taped and the data transcribed. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 min. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data by identifying patterns or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This includes interpreting and making sense of the data. Two levels of themes are identified; semantic and latent. Semantic themes consider, '... within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written.' (2006, p. 84). In contrast, the latent level, '... starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (2006, p. 84). An advantage of thematic analysis is that it is a method, rather than a methodology which means that it is not tied to a particular theoretical perspective, hence making it a flexible method of analysis. Data analysis was an iterative process which consisted of six steps; becoming familiar with the data set; generating codes from the data set; generating themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming the themes and locating exemplars. The generation of themes were indexed and categorised under specific headings. The data were ordered to generate codes which were further organised into themes. Interview analysis was cross checked by researchers to ensure consistency across the study. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The aims of the project were to:

- Examine whether respondents' felt the programmes addressed the challenges faced by academics of colour;
- Explore whether the programmes had an impact on their future roles and
- Assess the value of the programmes.

The following sections outline the findings from the study.

## 3.2 | Addressing the challenges faced by academics of colour

Whilst the majority of respondents praised the development of programmes that were designed to specifically meet the needs of academics of colour, many felt that whilst this was acknowledged, in practice the programme did not specifically address specific ways in which universities needed to change. Byron[5] (Black British male, Associate Professor) said,

> It is a good thing that there are specific programmes that address our needs. They are designed to
> do this by saying this is for us, but at the same time they don't do anything that is different to other

programmes. So they acknowledge racism, but then dismiss it and then go on to sell the programme as something that has specifically focussed on this. But in reality, it's barely touched upon.

Smita (British Indian female, Professor) felt the same,

> When I was nominated to go on this course, I was really excited. But when I came on it, I was thinking is this it? They talked about how difficult it is for us as minority ethnic people, but then did nothing to address those difficulties. I think you could take out those words and the programme would apply to anyone.

Many respondents felt the programme was too generic in its focus and was deliberately designed to be so. Anton (Black African male, Professor) said,

> These sorts of training programmes are too generic, they don't address the real issues and they skirt around issues of the ways in which the university is and always has been white. They work from the assumption that nothing can change and it's always been this way. So I am left thinking what's the point of them. Our universities send us on these training programmes but what do we get out of them?

Similarly Freya (mixed heritage White/Black female, Associate Dean) felt that the programmes were designed to change individuals and their ways of working so that they had to adapt to White structures.

> It feels as though there is something wrong with us because we are not White, so we have to conform and be socialised into what that means. The university is designed by and run by White groups and this means we have to adhere to those ways if we want to be accepted and more importantly if we want to move up the career ladder to be accepted.

Other respondents specifically outlined how they had to adhere to a White sense of being, particularly in relation to what was considered the correct ways of performing leadership. Jenni (mixed White/Indian female, Associate Professor) specifically identified this in terms of gender.

> I feel as though the programmes don't address different experiences, they look at one thing like race and focus on that – but without really focussing on it – they just mention the word. They don't think about how gender and class also affect our experiences, so that intersectional experience is really important I think. As a Black female, my race is important but my gender and class are also important and determine my experiences.

Whilst the programmes did have some focus on race, this was only at the surface level. They did not specifically address the racism, exclusion and marginalisation faced by academics of colour in the white space of higher education. Such programmes are designed to fit in with the White hegemonic ways of being and doing which adhere to identities of Whiteness. From a CRT perspective, such programmes are designed by White senior managers who offer a 'quick fix' to the solution of racism. Instead of confronting racial inequalities, the programmes simply reproduce White normative practices in higher education, such as centring and valuing Whiteness as a particular type of identity and behaviours. White normative practice can also take place through recruitment and promotion practices and Eurocentric teaching and curricula. Consequently, a racial deficit approach is taken which reinforces the position academics as outsiders in the White space; that it is the individual themselves who lacks the knowledge, skills and experience to succeed, rather than an examination of the university structures and the racial discrimination that they perpetuate.

The programmes are designed to benefit White senior managers and their institutions so that they can be seen to be addressing racial inequalities, when in reality they work to benefit the organisations themselves and work as a tick box exercise.

## 3.3 | Impact on future senior roles

Whilst many respondents did feel that the training programme offered them different strategies in terms of applying for promotion or senior roles, they said these were practical and enabled them to prepare for senior roles in the future. One key issue to emerge from the study was that the programme itself was run by White trainers—with the exception of one Black female—and many respondents felt this was problematic. Tina (British Pakistani female, Professor) said,

> I found it uncomfortable because many of the trainers were actually White and I wasn't expecting this – given it is targeted to BAME academics. Do they really understand the struggles we have? How can they identify with me and know that I will be treated differently to them. On the one hand it's good that they are here, but what can they change? On the other hand, I question how much do they really understand?

Valerie (Black British female, Associate Professor) did not feel the programmes challenged the structural and institutional aspects of racism.

> The programmes can give you the skills of what you need to do to get promoted, they do talk about that a lot. But I think they do that in isolation, they ignore the bigger aspects of our experiences. For example, what about the structural racism and the way institutions are working – what are they doing to challenge that? I wanted to tell us what the university was doing to address those bigger issues, but I feel they were side stepped and there was an assumption that you are on this course and that is what we are doing about it and how we are addressing it.

Dalgit (British Indian female, Assistant Dean) on the other hand focussed more on individual acts of racism.

> The issue of racism was discussed briefly but only in a generic way. It was discussed in relation to the wider higher education sector, rather than what's going on in individual universities. I think that's problematic because there is always the assumption that it's happening somewhere else to someone else so it can then be ignored. A key issue for this is not just addressing the institutional aspect of racism, but the individual aspect, like everyday microaggressions. Institutional racism is used as an explanation of individual racism and so individuals who are racist can hide behind that and say, it's not me, it's the structures and institutions. So, they can get away with being racist.

Many respondents felt that attending the training programme would address issues of racism and how to address it, instead the training programme only acknowledged racism and offered little attempts on how to move forward to address real practices of racism (such as microaggressions) which affected the everyday lives of academics of colour. A key aspect of CRT is to acknowledge racial realism. Respondents discussed how racism impacted their careers at all stages and attending a specific training programme would not mitigate for the everyday realities of racism they would continue to face. In higher education, systemic racism takes place through discriminatory and oppressive structures used to perpetuate a system of White hegemony. Feagin argues that these oppressive structures perpetuate a White racial hierarchy in which the dominant White

racial frame exists to 'rationalise and insure White privilege and dominance' (Feagin, 2020, p. 4). Feagin refers to this process through the White racial frame which includes '… a broad and persisting *set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, conceptual ideologies, interlinked interpretations and narratives and visual images*'. (2020, p. 5 original emphasis). This dominant frame consists of an overarching *White* view of the world. The White racial frame through the system of White privilege is used to perpetuate, reinforce and justify Whiteness and White supremacy. White behaviours become the norm through which the White racial frame works, and this takes place through training programmes designed and delivered (primarily) by White senior managers and trainers.

## 3.4 | Attending programmes

Respondents were asked if they would attend the training programmes again. The majority of the respondents were unsure about attending the training programmes again, many said they would only attend if the training programmes were significantly changed. Jamal (British Pakistani male, Associate Professor) said he would not attend again.

> I even wonder whether it was worth my time coming to this training now. What exactly have I learnt from it? It takes a lot of my time and I am left wondering if I needed to come. What have they taught me? Only strategies in terms of what I need to do about promotion, but much of it was quite patronising. I wanted it to touch more on aspects of racism so that we had a space to discuss that and what we should do about it. But those sort of things were only briefly mentioned.

Junior (Black/White mixed heritage male, Associate Professor) said he would attend, but only if changes were made.

> I did see the value of attending but I would only attend again if they made changes to the programme. There's some things that I think you just don't need, like the homework element we don't need to do that. We need more interaction and we need to include more BAME trainers who can empathise and know what racism feels like. I think that would give t programme far more credibility.

Valerie (Black British female, Associate Professor) also echoed this.

> In order to run these kinds of training programmes you need to have more empathy and an understanding of the impact of racism in people's lives and sometimes that doesn't come across if you have trainers who are all White and middle class. There needs to be more trainers who look like us, who can empathise and who have experienced racism themselves and who understand those daily microaggressions that are very hard to explain to people who haven't experienced them.

Respondents felt that empathy about racial discrimination was important. A CRT perspective would argue that the centrality of racism should be recognised in the experiences of academics of colour in universities. From this perspective, training programmes are not necessarily used to empower academics of colour or challenge the dominant racial structures, instead they are used by White groups to control and reproduce their own sense of Whiteness and White privilege (Morifn et al., 2006). This also adds to producing a racial deficit discourse of achievement and further disadvantages academics of colour (Donahoo, 2008).

## 3.5 | The value of the programmes

When respondents were asked about the value of the programmes, the majority suggested that these training programmes were new in their universities and were only recently introduced. A significant theme to emerge was that the training programmes were introduced as a response to global events such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement in addressing racial injustice. Valerie (Black British female, Associate Professor) said,

> My university never had anything like this and when they were asked they said they couldn't afford it, and then they suddenly invest in it. I think in reality it's a response to what has been happening in the USA with George Floyd and the BLM movement. Universities have to do something, or they have to be seen to be doing something. If they don't do anything then they will be directly accused of being racist and they don't want that. I think it's more about their own public image and how they are seen to the outside world and to students who they want to come here. Since I went on the training programme I don't see what has changed in my institution – it's just that they can say we have this training programme and we have done something [original emphasis].

Similarly, Troy (Black African male, Assistant Dean) was dubious about the number of different courses and training programmes that were introduced in his university.

> I don't know what has happened, but it really feels like there has been an explosion of different courses you can attend that are related to EDI [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion]. On the one hand I should think yes, it's a good thing but in reality I think it's just a reaction to what has been going on in the world with BLM. So it's kind of created this industry where everyone is able to teach about EDI and they offer these courses that are very expensive so they make money out of it. It reminds me of the pandemic when lots of companies made money from people's miseries. I think EDI is going the same way, because it's an industry and there's a new market for it now.

Other respondents also felt that courses focussed on different aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion had become a money making industry which worked only for economic gain, rather addressing racial inequalities. Kam (British Pakistani male, Professor) expressed this as,

> People see a gap in the market, because before BLM there were some courses but they were not very good and now there are so many and they are expensive and none of them are good. On the one hand they enable universities to have more choice in who they can select to run the courses and universities can say they are investing in them, but on the other hand they just become a tick box exercise and nothing changes.

From a CRT perspective, the training programmes work for the benefit of individual organisations. They are used to tick a box which says, we are addressing racial inequalities. Kam's comment shows how the investment of the university shows the economic value placed on delivering such training programmes. In the context of the #BlackLivesMatter protests, universities themselves are under increasing pressure to demonstrate their commitment to addressing racial inequalities. Consequently, they develop a business case for training programmes and equality, diversity and inclusion courses but this results in one course designed to address *all* the needs of academics of colour (despite their differences based on gender, class and the type of university they work in). By adhering to a White model of success and a White hegemonic framework, this creates an economy in which race is increasingly treated as a commodity; it benefits the status of the university rather than addressing individual and collective experiences of racism. Consequently, race is positioned as something that has real value for the university so they show their commitment to addressing racial

inequalities by providing more training on equality, diversity and inclusion. This becomes a process of racial capitalism, 'the process of deriving social or economic value from the racial identity of another person.' (Leong, 2013, p. 2153). Racial capitalism has been associated in academic contexts as an approach that, '... encourages white individuals and predominantly white institutions to engage in racial capitalism by deriving *value* from non white racial identity' (Leong, 2013, p. 2152, my emphasis). Within the neoliberal university, the development of policies and practices under the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion umbrella reinforces the commodification of racial identities. Institutional diversity is valued and allows the institution and its senior managers to make bold claims about their diversity in order to boost their external profile. White managers use 'diversity and equality' as a well-intentioned, rational ethos for actions that recognise and assign value to academics of colour. In doing so they commodify the experience of racism within the university as a commodity from which they themselves benefit. Leong argues that whilst the legal and social emphasis on diversity focuses on the need to address inequalities in society, it has instead achieved the opposite, '... it degrades non-whites by commodifying it and that relegates non-white individuals to the status of "trophies" or "passive emblems"' (2013, p. 2156). White groups have always benefited from their Whiteness through White privilege and a system of White supremacy, racial capitalism is an additional means to exploit the capital of academics of colour. Consequently, White groups gain and benefit from the racism experienced by academics of colour. Senior White managers and organisations participate in developing programmes and diversity training but, it only emphasises numbers and appearances and is concerned with improving the superficial appearance of diversity. By doing so it benefits White groups.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

This article has explored the views of 23 academics of colour who attended targeted training programmes after the murder of George Floyd and the #BlackLivesMatter protests. Whilst respondents felt the training programmes were a good idea, they also felt they did not address specific issues of racial discrimination and racial inequalities. Many felt that structural, institutional and individual racisms were not addressed and the training programmes were for the benefit of the institutions. Furthermore, attending such programmes signalled the need to adhere to a White frame of reference and White normative practices. This article suggests, however, that the introduction of such training programmes is the result of a particular historical moment. Academics of colour who become collateral damage in the process are used for the benefit of universities through a process of racial capitalism, which works for the benefit of universities themselves. As DeCuir and Dixson state, 'remedies based on equality assume that citizens have the same opportunities and experiences. Race, and experiences based on race are not equal, thus, the experiences of people of color have with respect to race and racism created an unequal situation' (2004, p. 26). Training programmes designed to cater for academics of colour fail to address the ways in which race has impacted on the experiences of academics of colour and attempt to perpetuate deficit thinking and consequently reproduce existing inequalities (Iverson, 2007). If universities are serious about addressing racial inequalities, what is needed is a commitment to change that addresses structural, institutional and individual racism rather than focussing on a deficit model. Training programmes must focus on how they benefit individuals rather than the institutions. The focus on addressing equality, diversity and inclusion does not necessarily result in any meaningful change in organisations, it ignores how oppression takes place but instead highlights the need to tick boxes and comply with regulations (such as The Equality Act, 2010). Berrey states, '... the push for diversity entails, at once, a focus on race and a shift away from race ... in contracts to the logic of remedying racial disadvantage, which relies on a structural explanation of racial exclusion, the logic of diversity provides a cultural explanation of inclusion' (2011, p. 577). Equality, diversity and inclusion (and those that provide training programmes to address racial inequalities) become a rhetorical victory for universities; the conditions that precipitate the need for such training are replaced with assertions that recognising the issues equates to addressing racial inequalities and the creation of inclusive spaces. Inclusion becomes a narrative discourse within the university; one that is reliant

upon, 'a "politics of preference" through which representation in a context of "mosaic multiculturalism" is used as the epitome of positive change rather than a theory of social justice that could spur transformational change' (Byrd, 2019, pp. 156–157). In this context, race becomes a commodity, an asset that conceals the unequal relations of power underpinning university structures and processes. Consequently, universities invest in equality, diversity and inclusion programmes rather than redistributing power and resources in their own organisations. As a result, this investment keeps power focussed and concentrated in the hands of senior White managers and works to uphold a system of White supremacy.

## 4.1 | Study limitations and policy implications

This study has provided original data on the experiences of academics of colour who attended training programmes in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd and the #BlackLivesMatter protests. However, the study limitations include a small sample size and the respondents were only interviewed on one occasion. Further research could include several interviews before, during and after attending the training programmes and a comparison with a White group who have attended a generic training programme. Some of the challenges of conducting interviews over skype included some overlap between questions and responses, a time lag and in some cases poor connection. In order to address racial inequalities in universities, policy making must focus on specific meaningful changes that result from such training (rather than being a tick box exercise). In addition, when training is offered it must include a focus on intersectional experiences, structures and outcomes. The training itself cannot be a 'one off', but instead must be included as part of continued professional development for all staff (academic and administrative) on a regular basis. In addition, committees should be introduced which specifically focus on addressing racial inequalities in relation to equality and diversity. These must be representative of the university community to include student, staff, academic and non-academic (administration) representation. Furthermore, individuals must be compensated for their service on such committees with a recognition of the time commitment involved, to demonstrate that the university is serious in investing in equality initiatives which influence inclusive leadership practices.

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS

Evidence that training programmes and equality, diversity and inclusion training is simply the rhetorical position of institutions can be found in the moments when diversity becomes more significant and attempts to solve longstanding evidential problems around racism become more pressing. Following the 2020 murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, there was a global outpouring of support for the #BlackLivesMatter movement, including protests across the United Kingdom. In this moment, universities were forced to address racism. For a short period in the immediate aftermath of this moment there appeared to be much greater interest in the need for training programmes and equality, diversity and inclusion training and events about racism within universities. These, however, were short lived and worked only to benefit the universities themselves. Racism continues as business as usual in which universities work to perpetuate a system that continues to uphold White hegemonic structures of privilege.

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**Kalwant Bhopal**: Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data not to be shared.

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## ENDNOTES

[1] The awarding gap is the difference in the numbers of White students more likely to be awarded high grades in their degrees compared to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students.

[2] In this article, I use the term academics of colour to refer to individuals from non-White backgrounds. There are various different terms used to describe those from non-White backgrounds. I am aware of the complexities and problems associated with different terminology.

[3] Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) is the term used by Advance HE (2023) to define those from non-White backgrounds.

[4] Stephen Lawrence, a Black teenager was murdered in 1993 in a racially motivated attack in South East London. The William MacPherson Report (1999) resulted from a public enquiry which showed that the metropolitan police were institutionally racist.

[5] All names are pseudonyms.

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