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Article

# The Inclusive University: A Critical Theory Perspective Using a Recognition-Based Approach

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## Abstract

This article offers a conceptual exploration of the inclusive university from a Frankfurt School critical theory perspective. It does not seek to define the inclusive university, but to explore aspects of its nature, possibilities and challenges. Critical theory eschews fixed definitions in favour of broader understandings that reflect the complexities of human life. I propose that we consider questions of inclusion in terms of mutual recognition and use the debate between critical theorists Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth to explain the implications of this approach. Central to Frankfurt School critical theory is the idea that we achieve our individuality through our interactions with others. Anything which prevents an individual leading a fully realised social life, within or outwith the university, undermines inclusion. Thus, I offer a broader, more complex and holistic understanding of inclusion than traditional approaches within the university such as widening participation. While such approaches can be helpful, they are insufficient to address the full challenge of an inclusive university, understood in these terms of critical theory and mutual recognition.

## Keywords

Alex Honneth; critical theory; higher education; mutual recognition; Nancy Fraser; social justice; university

## Issue

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## 1. Introduction

This article takes the opportunity of this exploration of the inclusive university to consider a holistic understanding of inclusion, based in Frankfurt School critical theory. The Frankfurt School gave name to ‘critical theory’ in the 1930s, and has since then pursued a particular project of immanent critique of late capitalism, along with an emancipatory commitment to social change. A particular concern of the Frankfurt School is the growth in instrumental forms of rationality that degrade human creativity and worth. They look not only at obvious expressions of power, but equally at obscure, hidden and everyday forms of oppression. In this article I bring this same lens to the question of what might constitute an inclusive university. Identifying as a critical theorist in the Frankfurt School tradition I have used Adorno, Horkheimer, Honneth and Fraser to explore issues of

social justice within higher education, finding their work enables me to go beyond the obvious, every day, procedural or mainstream which can tend to dominate educational discourse.

The foundation for this holistic understanding of inclusion is the critical theory paradox of valuing both autonomy and co-operation, best summarised by Honneth as intersubjective self-realisation:

What is just, is that which allows the individual member of our society to realize his or her own life objectives in cooperation with others, and with the greatest possible autonomy. (Honneth, 2010, p. 13)

For Honneth this builds on the Hegelian notion of mutual recognition which Honneth extends to critique modern society as being formed by a number of forms of misrecognition. Thus, for Honneth, recognition is the

fundamental issue for critical theory, and any other aspects such as economic deprivation follow on from this. Recognition, I suggest, is a helpful way to understand inclusion in a holistic way because it is necessarily about both the whole person, and about their place in society. Inclusion within the university shifts from being about *categories* of people to become about the full realisation of everyone within the university as both an individual and a social being.

But the issue of recognition has also framed one of the most crucial debates in third generation critical theory, with Honneth's position being challenged by Nancy Fraser who argues that both recognition and redistribution are foundational aspects of social justice (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). In this article I find strength in different parts of Fraser and Honneth's arguments. But it is important to focus also on the debate itself in order to underline that recognition, and inclusion, are contested ideas—and likely always will be. In keeping with critical theory, we move the debate on the inclusive university forward by not seeking to simplify it through definition, but by embracing its complexity through contested ideas. Fraser and Honneth struggle with the normative and empirical foundations of how we understand who is prevented from living a fulfilled social life, and why: their common aim is a society inclusive of everyone as both flourishing individuals and members of that society. I suggest that the same theoretical rigour needs to be applied to our understanding of the inclusive university, and that it is not based on procedural approaches alone—such as widening access policies—but in a broad and ongoing re-examination of what it means to take part in, and contribute to, university life and the role of the university in broader social life.

Moreover, the university, like any social institution, is not benign. Critical theory asks us to rethink the very nature of marginalisation and inclusion/exclusion and to focus on forms of oppression that may not be easily seen, and the solutions to which involve change in us all as social beings, and not just change to university institutions, policies and practices or the situation of easily identifiable groups. Let us not forget that the term inclusion was once associated with the idea of 'mainstreaming' (Bacon, 2019) and was thus not so much inclusion as forced identity readjustment to fit some mythical norm.

The inclusive university I refer to in this article is a construct, a thought-experiment, rather than any particular university. The issues of holistic inclusion that I raise apply to any university, regardless of elite, teaching-led, research-led, civic or community college. The realisation of this inclusion, however, may differ and the paths taken be diverse. A community college, for example, may see itself as closer to the realisation of holistic inclusion than a university which has based its identity on being elite, although again, hidden and less understood forms of oppression must be considered. Who, for example, decides the core values of a community college? For some other universities to embrace a genuinely inclu-

sive character may well mean rethinking other aspects of their identity, particularly those grounded in notions of elitism and prestige.

It is also important to acknowledge that globalisation significantly influences the nature of a recognition-based idea of inclusion because it so greatly expands the range of identities under consideration and thus vulnerable to misrecognition. Without a robust, critical and recognition-based understanding of inclusion, the changes brought by globalisation can perpetuate a superficial idea of diversity, and of inclusion. Rather than transformative change, we perpetuate the cycle whereby we bring one group in and this further marginalises another. While our universities become more internationally and ethnically diverse, they are not necessarily becoming more socially and economically diverse if fee and entry structures privilege mainly wealthy overseas students. This article can only be one contribution to a larger conversation.

The article builds its argument in seven sections. After this introduction, the next section provides a brief overview of the general nature of Frankfurt School critical theory and how it broadly shapes my approach to understanding the inclusive university. The third section then considers the concept of inclusion itself, and how some more common understandings of it are challenged by this critical theory perspective. Having established these foundations I turn to the main part of the article in which I use the debate between Fraser and Honneth about the nature of recognition within critical theory to consider how a critical theory/recognition-based idea of inclusion might work. Here I favour Honneth's approach using a plural notion of recognition, and do not accept Fraser's concern that this necessarily neglects economic factors. On this basis I can then move into the next section which discusses the nature of change towards this inclusive university, and here I favour Fraser's arguments which contend that change must involve transformative and holistic change and not simply individual initiatives or a focus on particular groups. The penultimate section then brings together this idea of a recognition-based approach to the inclusive university and the transformative change required to realise it. This includes an example of inclusive and transformative change as well as a discussion about the boundaries or legitimate exclusions within our inclusive university. I conclude with a brief summary looking towards ongoing debate about the inclusive university.

## 2. A Critical Theory Perspective

Over three generations of the Frankfurt School the approaches to its core beliefs have had different emphases. The first generation of Horkheimer and Adorno focus on the role of culture. The second generation, featuring Habermas, takes a linguistic turn, focusing on the ideal conditions for democratic participation. The current third generation could be said to have been part of a general recognition turn among social theorists,

to which they bring a particular critical theory perspective. But there are key commonalities that help us understand what distinguishes critical theory in the Frankfurt School tradition:

- It rejects the organisation of late capitalist society as either inevitable, necessary or benign;
- Human society can only be understood through an interplay of economic, cultural, social and historical lenses;
- Individual and social wellbeing are dialectically inter-related: one does not exist without the other;
- It rejects both absolutist and relative epistemologies: we can know what is just, but such knowledge is complex and provisional;
- Its focus is on hidden distortions and pathologies that prevent people living just and fulfilling lives.

Taken together these elements help us to transcend the dichotomy of inclusion versus exclusion and to think holistically of inclusion being about the whole person as an individual, and the inclusive university as a social entity, framed and formed both within its precincts and in wider society. The inclusive university is therefore as much about looking out to society as looking in on its own community and practices.

As I have outlined, this article uses the debate between Fraser and Honneth about the nature of recognition to lay the foundation for a recognition-based approach to inclusion. But there is clearly a paradox here: how can we use recognition as a basis for the inclusive university if, as the debate between Fraser and Honneth demonstrates, we cannot agree a definition? To answer this is to understand the particular nature of Frankfurt School critical theory: which is not to define, but to understand (McArthur, 2012). It means we reject audit driven imperatives to tie down definitions and measure everything. Adorno's critical theory is particularly important in demonstrating how efforts to fix meaning often distort: and he uses examples from the prosaic about how we know what is meant by the colour red (Adorno, 2001) to the profound as in how we understand freedom when the Gestapo come banging on our door at 6 am (Adorno, 2006). Adorno is not arguing that all knowledge is relative, but rather than we can have a shared understanding without a fixed definition (McArthur, 2013). Adorno encourages us to focus on the processes and experiences of knowing rather than a fixed point captured in a single term or definition. Thus Adorno said: "Whoever tries to reduce the world to either the factual or the essence comes in some way or other into the position of Münchhausen, who tried to drag himself out of the swamp by his own pigtails" (as cited in Jay, 1996, p. 69). Which is why it is the debate between Fraser and Honneth that helps give meaning, not simply the final conclusions either draw.

Hopefully this reference to contestation and disagreement allays any fears that this is a utopian exer-

cise. Instead, a critical theory approach frames the inclusive university as an ongoing project that is shaped by its own attempts at realisation, including vigorous debate and critique. This reflects the critical theory commitment to both the immanent and the transcendent (Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

### 3. The Challenges of Inclusion

The problem with any concept like inclusion is that it risks being a 'feel good' idea that lacks conceptual robustness and thus serves very little purpose. It can cause confusion or well-meaning acts in the name of inclusion that might do more harm than good. But as I have explained, the solution, from a critical theory perspective, is not to seek remedy in ever more precise definitions, but rather through a broad and dynamic analysis.

The conceptualisation of inclusion which I offer goes beyond existing governmental understandings of social inclusion (Saunders, 2011) often driven by a desire to define inclusion (or exclusion) in some clear set of characteristics so that we can then measure the effectiveness of policies. Inclusion, from a critical theory perspective, is—like most other concepts of note—difficult to pin down, inherently messy and likely to become more meaningless the more we seek to simplify (McArthur, 2012). My understanding also goes beyond literature on educational inclusion which tends to equate inclusion largely with disability (e.g., Koller, 2017) which can assume a mainstream, able norm (Nguyen, 2019). Similarly, the university sector often equates inclusion with widening access (e.g., O'Sullivan et al., 2019) which can again assume a benign process of bringing those excluded into the socially-acceptable mainstream. In fact, considerable damage can occur to cultural groups' identities if they are forced to separate their home identity and their university identity in order to fit in to each place (Brayboy, 2005).

Furthermore, critical theory is committed to looking beyond the surface. An initiative or policy with key words of inclusion, social justice, equality, equity may in practice contribute to none of these endeavours. The modern university has become skilled at writing wonderful mission statements while simultaneously pursuing a neoliberal agenda of commodification and marketisation (McArthur, 2011).

The clearest and most important example of this empty rhetoric can be found in the neoliberal commitment to individual autonomy. One might assume that neoliberalism takes the commitment to individualism in classic liberalism and adds value—boosts it and nurtures it even further. But Honneth (2004) argues, neoliberalism brings with it a 'paradox of individualisation' that leads to enhanced conformity. While the language and dogma of neoliberalism suggests it is liberalism-plus, with an enhanced emphasis on the individual, the truth is rather different, particularly once we take account of the relentless pressure of popular and celebrity culture:

The boundary between reality and fiction may well become blurred in particular instances... we might perhaps speak of a certain tendency where *individuals follow standardized patterns of searching for an identity* precisely in order, however, to discover the core of their own personalities. (Honneth, 2004, p. 472, emphasis added)

This provides a chimera of inclusivity based on enforced sameness rather than celebrating difference. And the university as a social institution is not immune from this pressure. Not only are many of our students the product of this popular/celebrity culture, but the university itself has often sought to standardise its pedagogy and processes, while doing so in the name of the ‘student experience.’ Many universities have become ‘brands’ that compete for popularity and prestige, and yet so many seem to do so by offering strikingly similar rhetoric about excellence, student experience and, indeed, inclusion and diversity.

It does not matter how many groups we encourage ‘in’ to the university if we are not prepared to fundamentally rethink ‘what’ the university is. Otherwise, the pressures to conform to standardised identities—such as where working-class students feel they need to act like middle class students—remain strong and unchallenged. The term ‘the inclusive university’ does not imply only one model or route, but rather a coalescence of core values and practices, that may necessarily manifest differently depending on context and time. It is also an ongoing project.

#### 4. The Debate: Recognition or Redistribution

I therefore want to use the debate between Fraser and Honneth to work towards a more holistic, engaging and enabling alternative understanding of the inclusive university, in contrast to that which focuses on under-represented groups in the university, whereby the inclusive university focuses on ensuring equal access, and equivalent treatment. Such groups may identify or be identified with certain identity labels such as black, BAME, disabled, working class or non-traditional. In broad terms this might be described as a recognition-based approach to inclusion and social justice because it recognises the specific nature, history and circumstances of these groups. It does not, however, accord with either Fraser or Honneth’s critical theory approach to recognition, which involves a more complex sense of recognition and moves inclusion to consider a person as a whole being in a social context, and not an identity category. To understand why we need to go beyond simply defining some groups as included or excluded from the university, we need to go deeper into the Fraser–Honneth debate.

The Hegelian concept of recognition, has, in the words of Fraser and Honneth (2003, p. 1) “become a keyword of our time.” Their debate rests on whether the fundamental focus of critical theory should be a

dualistic approach of recognition and redistribution or whether we must begin with recognition as a primary category. Honneth argues that recognition is the foundational concept from which other aspects of social life, justice and ethical being emerge. Fraser, in contrast, argues that both redistribution and recognition are foundational, and neither can be given priority over the other: They reflect different social phenomena and thus cannot be reduced in any way, one to the other.

As critical theorists, Fraser and Honneth (2003, p. 202) share the “distinctive dialectic of immanence and transcendence.” Fraser states “both of us seek a foothold in the social world that simultaneously points beyond it” (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 202). This requires that there be some empirical reference point—some immanent grounding—to which critical theory makes reference and gains validity. The nature of such empirical grounding is key to their debate. For this article, it is important to understand how an inclusive university would make decisions based on a holistic sense of inclusion: what counts as inclusion and where, if at all, can we justly draw the boundaries of participation or belonging? I suggest that inclusion is about minimising experiences of social injustice which arise from misrecognition and associated maldistribution. We need a robust understanding of inclusion to do the conceptual heavy-work towards change and greater social justice. Without this, we may continue to tinker at the edges or make things worse, despite the best intentions.

##### 4.1. Points of Disagreement

There are two inter-related aspects in the debate between Fraser and Honneth, which I tease apart here for clarity, but which are intertwined in their discussion. The first is about the nature of recognition and how we decide or discern who suffers misrecognition. The second is about the relationship between recognition and redistribution. This discussion is important, I argue, in order to understand what the inclusive university seeks to achieve.

On the key question of what counts as misrecognition, Fraser and Honneth accuse each other of insufficiently inclusive understandings arising from the different empirical reference points that each use to ground their analysis, remembering that this empirical grounding is an essential feature of Frankfurt School critical theory. The key point of difference is the visibility of suffering or misrecognition in each theorists’ approach. This link between visibility and inclusion is an important part of a critical theory critique of traditional approaches to inclusion due to critical theory’s commitment to hidden or obscure forms of oppression. Traditional forms of inclusion have already gone a little way down this path, recognising for example that unseen forms of disability, such as mental health issues, can be harder to resolve. But critical theory takes this notion of visibility much further because the university itself is seen as both

a solution to, and a product of, an oppressive society with multiple, entrenched forms of misrecognition.

While Fraser acknowledges this issue of hidden suffering, she is also unsure how we can claim any empirical reference point other than through that which is known and visible. She, therefore, grounds her approach in existing social movements such as feminist movements, labour organisations or cultural groups. Fraser's position appears to be that we know of hidden and obscured forms of oppression when they are able to coalesce into this form of political (as in public) social movement. This position, on one level at least, is closer to the traditional university approach to inclusion where specifically recognisable groups are identified as needing particular opportunities or support.

Honneth, however, disagrees. Honneth argues that Fraser's reliance on already public social movements leaves too much potential to miss other forms of injustice: In other words, it is insufficiently inclusive. He argues that we may miss that which is invisible, or which has not coalesced into a movement: Fraser's approach "neglects the everyday, still unthematized, but no less pressing embryonic form of social misery and moral injustice" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 114). This leads to Honneth's argument that even distributional forms of injustice must be firstly understood as the product of institutionalised social disrespect. The problem, he argues, "is an unintended reduction of social suffering and moral discontent to just that part of it that has already been made visible in the political public sphere by publicity-savvy organizations" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 115). This, I suggest, is also the problem with a purely widening access approach to inclusion within the university: We look to obvious failures of inclusion but there may also be other subtle, hidden or marginalised forms of experience that limit individual flourishing.

Fraser characterises Honneth's empirical reference point as grounded "in a moral psychology of pre-political suffering" and questions whether it is possible to locate pre-political forms of suffering that are "really untainted by publicly circulated vocabularies of normative judgement" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, pp. 202, 204). As a consequence, according to Fraser, Honneth risks confusing his own normative position with an actual empirical reference point. Fraser sees no way in which these pre-political forms of suffering provide a stronger reference point for critical theory than the social movements on which she focuses. She argues that there should be no single reference point for any claims within critical theory and she instead looks to multiple social movements in order to empirically ground her view of social justice as recognition and redistribution.

Fraser positions Honneth's argument as a dangerous psychologization of critical theory, where all focus is on individual self-realisation, and thus we risk blaming individuals for their situation rather than focusing on social structures. This misunderstands the ways in which Honneth is using language (McArthur, 2018)

and thus while terms such as self-respect may chime with psychological or even self-help literature, they are being used within a "specifically philosophical vocabulary" by Honneth (Alexander & Lara, 1996, p. 1) and in a particular critical theory context of intertwined individual and social wellbeing. Fraser's failure to look collectively at all three aspects of Honneth's theory of recognition leads to misunderstanding.

Honneth's plural theory of justice is firmly based on mutual recognition and is thus never about the individual in isolation. Honneth's three realms of recognition are: love (or care) recognition, respect (or rights) recognition and esteem (or merit) recognition. Understanding these realms of recognition enables us to see how Honneth's approach can be helpful in ensuring any approach to inclusion goes beyond perceived problems that are easily visible. We may indeed find that there is far more misrecognition, and far less inclusion, than previously assumed.

Love recognition refers to the basic recognition of our human existence, often most powerfully associated with the love of a parent: We exist, we matter, because we are recognised by others to do so. This is the essential Hegelian point. But while Honneth says that love recognition is the basis for the other two forms, it does not mean that any exist in isolation or are more or less important. Respect recognition is universal in character because it refers to equal treatment under the law. Important here is not just that everyone has the same legal rights, but that they are understood and actively used. We need universal rights, even for those we abhor, because without this we are all at the mercy of the goodwill of others (Zurn, 2015). Finally, esteem recognition refers to the traits, abilities or dispositions through which an individual can make a positive contribution to society and be recognised for doing so. Fraser is wrong to argue Honneth's concept of esteem becomes meaningless because it encompasses everyone. Honneth does not claim that everyone is equally good at everything, but rather that everyone needs something which they are good at and which is recognised as socially useful. To be clear, socially-useful should not be conflated with purely economically useful or the concept of employability (although critical theory clearly does recognise the link between the economic realm and wellbeing, it does contest the disarticulation of the economic and social). This is a broader and more inclusive sense of social usefulness which includes, for example, the joy brought by creative arts or the solidarity of supporting one's fellow citizens.

This issue of the economic nature of both justice and injustice is the second main thread in Fraser and Honneth's debate. As already stated, it should be clear that Frankfurt School critical theory, emerging from Marxism, does regard the economic realm as vitally important, but not in isolation. And the nature of this importance can be contested, as it is between Fraser and Honneth.

As discussed above, for Honneth we must begin any discussion of oppression at the point of misrecognition

because to do otherwise risks only focusing on already public and acknowledged forms of social injustice. This leads Fraser to assert that his approach risks a lack of emphasis on economic forms of injustice by relegating them to a secondary position. This matters to our inclusive university if, for example, it meant we focused only on issues of identity leading to apparent ‘exclusion’ and did not see the actual economic cause. In practice, Fraser argues most forms of injustice feature both maldistribution and misrecognition in some way. It matters in theory, however, to distinguish them because understanding the different root causes is necessary in order to find solutions that alleviate injustice, or in our university, to enable greater inclusion. Something caused by misrecognition is likely to need a different solution to something caused by maldistribution. Fraser calls her approach a two-dimensional form of social justice, where neither element can simply be reduced to the other. For example, gender is a hybrid category that is based in both economic organisation and the status order which underlies her view of recognition. Any movement towards greater gender justice requires both distributive and recognition solutions.

There is a danger that Fraser and Honneth are talking past one another and amplifying differences that conceal how much they actually agree with each other—which is that both recognition and redistribution issues will impact on experiences of inclusion. On balance I lean towards Honneth’s plural theory of justice and believe it does offer an inclusive approach to understanding the rich mix of human differences and commonalities. His critique that Fraser relies too much on disadvantage that can be easily seen holds some truth. And it is particularly important for how we rethink the inclusive university beyond quotas or metrics for this or that recognised group. Taking account of all three of Honneth’s realms of recognition/misrecognition provides a framework for expanding the nature of inclusion, and the challenges for a genuinely inclusive university.

I am thus proposing that we base our holistic understanding of inclusion in understandings of a tripartite sense of mutual recognition. The university fails to be inclusive when it allows or enables misrecognition to occur, in terms of relationships, universal rights and opportunities for achievement. But we acknowledge that these forms of misrecognition often intersect with economic issues. For example, Honneth is clear that legal recognition is not just to have rights, but to use and understand them (Honneth, 1996) which may be very difficult if one does not have recourse to paying for legal advice or indeed basic education opportunities.

### 5. Affirmative or Transformative: The Nature of Inclusive Change

In the previous section I outlined how the debate between Fraser and Honneth can help us to understand the intricate and holistic nature of inclusion, when under-

stood through the lens of Frankfurt School critical theory. Now I draw particularly on Fraser to consider how change towards an inclusive university could happen.

Fraser distinguishes between approaches that seek to affirm justice and those which seek to transform. Importantly this is not a distinction between gradual and rapid change or between reform and revolution. Rather its focus is on the level at which the injustice has occurred. It also realises critical theory’s commitment to get to the roots of a problem, and not just the aspects easily seen. This is a distinction our university community must understand to fully realise the nature of a recognition-based approach to inclusion.

An affirmative approach focuses on the end targets and can often be fairly easily measured. A transformative approach focuses on the causes of injustice and works from that point up. Fraser gives the welfare state as an example of an affirmative approach to poverty, where society seeks to rectify some of the problems caused by its own workings, but does not fundamentally change that society. A transformative approach would not focus on the symptoms alone, but on changing the root causes and the underlying social and economic structures. She terms a transformative approach as “deconstruction” because it “would redress status subordination by deconstructing the symbolic oppositions that underlie currently institutionalized patterns of cultural value. Far from simply raising the self-esteem of the misrecognised, it would destabilize existing status differentiations and change *everyone’s* self-identity” (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 75).

The inclusive university cannot simply have policies to attract, enable or support BAME students, for example. This is the traditional view of bringing a group into the mainstream, where the mainstream remains supreme. It is therefore affirmative change and not transformative. The issue of BAME students, or indeed racial injustice in any forms, cannot be simply focused on ‘those’ students. It requires a more fundamental transformation and this is much harder to achieve. Consider the vicious treatment of a UK academic, Priyamvada Gopal, who tweeted: “White lives don’t matter, as white lives.” The clear point of this tweet, for those who read it in context, is that to redress racial inequality is not a ‘black’ problem but requires a rethinking of white identity too—such that the mythical norm or virtue of whiteness is challenged. Some people chose to deliberately misinterpret the tweet—and particularly to give a truncated version: “White lives don’t matter” (Waterson, 2020). Clearly, some among the white mainstream did not take kindly to the seemingly presumptuous—and yet wholly reasonable—suggestion that they too may have to change in order for greater social and racial justice. But to return to Gopal’s intention in her original quote, the challenge for an inclusive university therefore, is not simply to increase black student recruitment or retention. What about the white students and staff? If they see racial justice as simply extending the hand of friendship

to black or non-white peers, and not about reflecting on their own socially-created white identity and privilege, then change will be limited. Paradoxically they become victims of misrecognition in Honneth's terms because this lack of racial awareness will always truncate their capacity for esteem recognition because it necessarily limits the social value of what they do—where society is understood as racially diverse and inclusive.

An affirmative approach to the inclusive university might be to add resources and extra mentoring or tuition to help disadvantaged or non-traditional students bridge the gap between what they can do and what the so-called traditional students can do. A transformative inclusive university would challenge its own assumptions about norms, traditional/non-traditional and actively address the structural forms of misrecognition. This means that transformative change involves not just those who are welcomed into the university or who move from marginalised to inclusive spaces/positions, but a change in the identity and material reality of everyone involved, and in many cases of the university itself as an organisation. Decolonisation is an excellent example of change that can be superficial—add black names to reading lists—*or* transformative at a much deeper, structural and personal level, connecting too with the whole issue of white racial awareness previously mentioned.

## 6. Transformative Recognition: Towards the Inclusive University

Bringing the ideas from the two previous sections together—recognition-based inclusion and transformative change—what can we expect to see if we begin to realise this inclusive university? As I have argued, the measure of achievement is not simply how many students of a particular ethnic group are studying or what marks they gain, which are the typical metrics of a widening participation approach. In contrast, our focus moves to the fundamental idea of whether everyone within the university can realise themselves as a recognised and valued individual member of society. I am not suggesting that we no longer monitor figures as to the number of BAME students, for example, or their assessment outcomes compared with other students. Such information is important if viewed through a questioning and critical lens. I am saying that it is insufficient for a transformative approach. It is the full lived experience of the student within the university that matters, and this means more than grades. From a critical theory perspective, the student achieves self-realisation when they develop skills, understandings and dispositions that are socially useful and recognised as such. Such an approach does not make invisible cultural and identity distinctions of which groups are justifiably proud, such as black, BAME, disabled or working class. But it does ensure we avoid essentialism whereby an identity group becomes a cage imposed rather than a home owned.

But how could we know we are that moving towards this inclusive university? What would we see or experience differently? Going back to the mutuality at the heart of a critical theory approach to recognition, we would know change because we too would be caught up in that change. Inclusion is not something we as a university 'do' to others. Inclusion is an act of self-realisation in a social context. Students and staff include themselves into the university when given the genuine opportunities to flourish and achieve. All of our identities have to change if transformational change is to occur and we move that bit closer to the inclusive university. For some—those not previously thought of as 'excluded'—such changes can be painful and difficult, as highlighted in the response to Gopal's comment about white lives needing to change.

Next, I share two illustrative examples of this transformative approach to inclusion within higher education. I hope they prove helpful in suggesting how we need to rethink the issue of inclusion, ask different questions, and go beyond solutions suggested by policy or regulations alone. In my first example I have chosen assessment because recent work suggests that assessment is has been overlooked in terms of its role in working towards broad and inclusive social justice within and through higher education (McArthur, 2016, 2018). It is also an issue common to most universities regardless of type or place.

### 6.1. Anonymous Assessment

Many universities have moved to anonymous assessment, often in response to student lobbying, as a way to minimise conscious and unconscious bias (Pitt & Winstone, 2018). In critical theory terms, such an aim may appear inclusive because it suggests better recognition of the student as a person (not denigrated due to race, ethnicity or gender) and better recognition of their achievement if given a more accurate grade. Unfortunately, such a procedural approach to a problem within pedagogical relationships is likely to be ineffective and may even push the problem further underground (McArthur, 2018). Nothing has changed to stop the misrecognition inherent in a marker who values academic work in terms of the ethnicity or gender of the student, whether consciously or not. Nothing has changed in how that academic may interact in the classroom or other educational activities and relationships, or indeed their assumptions when setting assessment tasks. Indeed, evidence suggests that even when work is anonymised, people infer an identity onto the student and still make judgements based on perceived gender or ethnicity (Earl-Novell, 2001). A rule or procedure on its own, cannot change a flawed relationship based on misrecognition. But real efforts to challenge unconscious bias are more difficult than a new procedure, thus we must accept our inclusive university is never going to be a place of easy change.



The second problem with anonymised marking is that to be genuine it must add a barrier between student and academic. How can a student ask advice without giving away what they are writing on? How does the academic provide formative feedback? While this may not apply in all assessment situations, it does apply in many and particularly as students engage with more complex knowledge and thus are more likely to be doing work worthy of esteem recognition. If the price of anonymous marking is a poorer pedagogical relationship between student and teacher, and a reduction in what that student can achieve, then we have more misrecognition, not less. In this small illustrative example we can see that a recognition-based approach to holistic inclusion can never be achieved by a policy initiative or directive but rather by a cultural change in who we are and in how we treat each other.

### 6.2. Free Speech and Questions of Boundaries and Legitimate Exclusions

For my second example I turn to a broader issue that is regularly a topic of debate within higher education, and this relates to whether we should exclude certain views and people from the inclusive university? This is a far from hypothetical problem as many universities today still struggle with the balance between free speech and potential harm (Morgan, 2020). Should universities be inclusive of all ideas, however abhorrent some of us find them? To answer this, I believe takes us to the final point of breaking down the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy to rethink what inclusion really means from a critical theory perspective. While the previous example focused mainly on the distinction between affirmative and transformational change, this example shows how we can apply Honneth's plural theory of mutual recognition to work through an issue of inclusion within the university.

How should we decide, for example, whether to allow a proponent of white supremacy speak at our university? To return to Fraser's critique of Honneth, she argues that his focus on self-realisation means that claims of white supremacists who define their self-worth in terms of those they believe are inferior, are as legitimate as those of, say, women, disabled or ethnic minorities. There is, in other words, no filter according to Fraser in Honneth's approach. Again, this argument misunderstands the plural nature of Honneth's theory and particularly ignores the importance of respect and esteem recognition. A belief in superiority over others based on perceived race or ethnicity runs counter to the universal nature of respect/rights recognition. There is also fundamental misrecognition in the idea that race or ethnicity are the basis for esteem recognition rather than genuine achievement and social contribution. Honneth's concept of recognition does not extend inclusion to white supremacists because the nature of their ideology is the misrecognition of others. Honneth's theory is never only about self-recognition but always mutual recogni-

tion. If we bring in individuals or groups with systematic and entrenched beliefs grounded in misrecognition, then our whole concept of inclusion cracks, dissipates and fades into mist.

Fraser comes to a similar stance with her powerful concept of parity of participation. A white supremacist would need to demonstrate that it is their misrecognition that lies at the heart of their inability to participate on a par with others in the social realm. The test then lies in whether the changes promoted by such groups will clearly result in greater parity of participation—which clearly is not the case in terms of white supremacists because their whole identity is based on an entrenched sense of disparity: of their superiority—not equalness—to others.

There are other arguments about inviting white supremacists into the university. Some feel that banning means their abhorrent views don't see sunlight and critical examination. This is an interesting view and from Honneth's perspective we could argue that forcing abhorrent views underground does not minimise misrecognition but pushes it to a more dangerous and furtive place. In this way, a recognition-based approach does not provide an easy yes/no answer to allowing white supremacists on campus, but it does help frame a more complex debate. This dilemma highlights my argument that a critical theory idea of the inclusive university goes beyond the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy. This is why theory matters in practice. It provides moral structure to our decisions, while avoiding both moral certainty and moral relativism. Such decisions must engage with the possibilities for misrecognition of different paths taken such that even when a perfect decision cannot be made, we at least do so consciously and in order to minimise harm.

## 7. Conclusion

Critical theory does not provide a route map or recipe for the inclusive university, but it does provide one theoretical framework, which can be brought into dialogue with others, through which the inclusive university may begin to emerge through that very process of imagining what it might be. Honneth's plural theory of justice is useful as a framework to navigate complex and nuanced areas of human life. It does so, firstly, because the aspect of *particularity* in love recognition reflects the most basic way in which every person needs to have care and acknowledgement for themselves in order to be part of the social world. Secondly the aspect of *universality* in respect recognition brings in the things which we all must share to participate fully in a life as a responsible social being. Lastly, esteem recognition reflects *individuality* and the ways in which we can all contribute to the social good, but do so in our own individual ways based on our own traits, skills, dispositions and knowledge (for further explanation see Honneth, 1996). It is this web of different aspects and lenses, zooming in to the intensely personal and out to the shared universal, that enables a

framework for inclusion that is genuinely inclusive and not based on disparate features then disarticulated from the person as a whole or their place in the world. Fraser adds a vital element of how we might move towards this version of an inclusive university through her clear delineation of affirmative and transformative change.

If we focus on the inclusive university in terms of bringing one or other under-represented group into the mainstream, we risk ending up in an endless cycle of constantly reacting to the needs of individual identity groups, rather than the fundamental and diverse forms of injustice and exclusion. After many societies have rightly promoted the educational needs of women or ethnic minorities, newspapers now often report that the educational needs of poor or white men are suffering (Coughlan, 2021). But such reports reinforce the illusion that there is only so much justice to go around and to include one group means to marginalise another. This is a myth, and it is a dangerous myth that fails to recognise the interconnections at the heart of both inclusion and justice. Mutuality of recognition means, in the long run, it is always about all of us.

The inclusive university in a globalised world is not enacted simply by individual policies or practices. It is a connected tapestry of inclusive relationships and an ongoing project of seeking to minimise misrecognition and disrespect because they harm both individual and social wellbeing. The aim of this article is to contribute to a discussion of its complex nature, that in itself, is hopefully part of the realisation of that inclusive university. It is possible, however, to indicate some ways in which this work can be taken forward. Inclusion must cease to be about only who comes into university but what everyone within the university does. Again, drawing parallels with affective or transformative decolonialisation, the pursuit of the inclusive university cannot be constrained to only some parts of university life. The way student societies are run, the sports opportunities students have, the food outlets we allow on campus, the research we do, the books we ask students to read, the promotion opportunities for non-academic staff and the way we assess students are all aspects of the inclusive university. And these examples are but a small sample of the whole list. We must ensure everything from physical spaces to online documents are accessible, not because of legislative requirements alone, but because of a profound sense how the failure to do so makes real the injustices of misrecognition. While recognising legitimate boundaries between different forms of support for students, we also acknowledge that it is their interconnections—where pastoral, academic, physical, health and wellbeing meet—that determine whether a student or staff member is actually included in the inclusive university.

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