

**Maintaining Plausible Deniability:
Detecting Mechanisms of Subtle Discrimination
in a South African Higher Education Institution**

Dionne van Reenen

Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice, University of the Free State, South Africa

E-mail: VanReenenD@ufs.ac.za

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ABSTRACT This paper considers some material manifestations of subtle discrimination at a historically Afrikaans South African university and attempts to make sense of what its outcomes are on institution members, especially in terms of “felt response” or “affect”. These responses have pronounced and negative effects on students to the point that institutional mistrust and student withdrawal is becoming problematic. Interfaces between aspects of Habermasian critical theory, organisational theory and affect theory will be applied to a published student article and relevant university policy documents, in order to show how these phenomena might be connected within the interactive (constitutive and constituting) relationship between university members, the institution itself and society. An alternative grounding of policy and practice in rights, justice and solidarity is suggested as a means to overcome persistent institutional divisiveness.