De-Employability amongst Black South Africans through Gender skewed Social Policy:
An AGIL Sociological Model analysis

Phiwani Athi

Department of Sociology, University of ZuluLand, KwaDlangezwa, South Africa
Corresponding authour: phiwanidavid@gmail.com, phiwaniathi@outlook.com

Abstract: This paper is exploring *De-employability* both as a concept and process using sociological theory of AGIL modelling. With South Africa celebrating more than 30 years of democracy, a lot has been achieved especially in terms of affirmative action particularly racial and gender disparities redressing, even though this view is contested. Women empowerment through social policy is one of the trademarks that make South Africa different from her continental counterparts, over the past 03 decades we have seen female representation in fields that were previously male dominated. Mining, engineering; and general to executive management is evident in this regard. These achievements can be attributed to the conflict school of thought through the feminist frameworks. During apartheid in South Africa, Black South African males were disadvantaged, like other disadvantaged groups and were hoping for improved living conditions. Affirmative action aimed to address past inequalities, but the introduction and implementation of gender-based social policies among Black South Africans are causing a crisis that will require attention in the coming decades. For example, the Employment Equity Act applies to all types of employment, including internships and entry-level jobs, where black male students directly from university are at high risk of unemployment because of policies that prioritise black women over black men. This paper employs a qualitative research systematic review using the analytical realism paradigm. The paper discusses the structural de-employability of Black South African male graduates, arguing that de-employability is a concept rooted in understanding causal mechanisms. The argument is that theoretical models, like Parson's sociological theory, should reflect true causal structures related to the unemployment of these graduates, rather than just simplifying phenomena through models with unrealistic assumptions. This paper integrates analytical realism with grounded theory to offer a precise and abstract sociological concept of de-employability, critiquing instrumentalist approaches for their lack of realism. It contrasts with other scholars who use grounded theory purely as a paradigm, whereas this paper uses it as a research design to produce the new idea of de-employability based on Parson's AGIL model. The academic literature has not yet paid attention to the negative impact of this social policy on the employability of black South African men, despite their qualifications. Findings suggest that the latent function of the gender skewed social policy has failed to deliver the democratic gains for black South African males, the anomie of the same person remains unaccounted for. This study therefore recognises the systematic exclusion of Black South African Males from employment opportunities as De-employability and should be addresses using AGIL sociological model.

Key Words: De-employability, Social Policy, Black South African Male, AGIL Model.

Introduction

South Africa is often regarded as a prime example of post-colonial democracies in Africa and, to some extent, a global phenomenon. The nation's constitution is highly esteemed and ranked among the best in the world, as it comprehensively addresses a wide range of social ills and phenomena (Madlingozi, 2018 & Shai, 2019). This progressive legal framework promotes equality, protects human rights, and ensures justice for all citizens. It reflects the country's commitment to overcoming its historical challenges and building a more inclusive and equitable society. The South African constitution is not only a cornerstone of its democratic governance but also serves as a model for

other nations striving to achieve similar ideals (Madlingozi, 2018 & Shai, 2019). Its provisions encompass various aspects of social justice, including gender equality, anti-discrimination measures, and the protection of vulnerable groups. Consequently, South Africa's constitutional framework is celebrated for its forward-thinking approach and its potential to inspire positive change both within the country and beyond (Madlingozi, 2018 & Shai, 2019).

South Africa's social policies have been crafted to address the entrenched inequalities and systemic injustices inherited from its apartheid past. These policies serve as a mechanism for acknowledging the historical misfortunes and structural imbalances that remain embedded within the nation's socioeconomic fabric (Mtapuri and Tinarwo, 2021). Among the array of initiatives introduced to promote equity is affirmative action, a policy framework aimed at fostering equality and redressing disparities across various sectors of society, including employment, education, and leadership(Mtapuri and Tinarwo, 2021). A notable component of affirmative action in South Africa is the emphasis on women's empowerment, particularly within historically disadvantaged black communities. These policies prioritise young black women in terms of opportunities, aiming to counteract the gender disparities that have persisted because of historical marginalisation and patriarchy (Levy et al., 2021). By doing so, these initiatives seek to create a more inclusive society where women can fully participate in economic and social activities. This has led to great improvement, especially regarding financial and development opportunities previously considered more male-exclusive. Looking at engineering, security personnel and mining, Black women's representation is significantly noticeable(Nattrass and Seekings, 2001; Govender, 2022).

This paper raises numerous questions, one of which concerns the merits of South African policy, particularly in its focus on the nuanced dimensions of social policy. The aim is to examine the extent to which these measures address the complex and multifaceted challenges associated with promoting social justice, economic inclusion and social welfare. Even though Talcott Parsons was not focusing on Social Policy by his analogy of the social systems can be seen in the nuances of Social Policy. The nuances of social policy range from multidimensionality, interconnectedness, diverse stakeholders, cultural and contextual factors, equity and justice, and dynamic and evolving nature, to implementation challenges. These nuances highlight the unique challenges facing social policy in the country, particularly in addressing gender disparities and unemployability. Social policy is not an isolated phenomenon but operates within a network of overlapping cultural, economic and political dimensions.

By questioning these policies' underlying principles and practical implementations, the discussion aims to assess their effectiveness in responding to South Africa's social, economic and political realities. In addition, it will be examined whether these measures adequately address the population's diverse needs, considering historical injustices, structural inequalities and current socio-economic dynamics. In doing so, the paper situates its investigation within the broader framework of social policy analysis and emphasises the importance of context-sensitive and evidence-based approaches to policymaking.

Problem statement

While these policies have undoubtedly played a significant role in advancing gender equity, they are not without their critiques, particularly when it comes to their unintended consequences. For instance, the prioritisation of young black women in employment and educational initiatives, while essential in redressing historical and structural gender imbalances, may inadvertently create new challenges for other marginalised groups. Specifically, young black men, who also face systemic barriers and socio-economic disadvantages, may find themselves further sidelined in the pursuit of opportunities. This unintended outcome risks exacerbating the difficulties they already encounter within an increasingly competitive and resource-constrained labour market.

South African Young black men often navigate a host of obstacles, including limited access to quality education, high unemployment rates, and societal stereotypes that further marginalise them. By focusing resources and opportunities primarily on young black women, there is a danger that these young men may feel excluded, fostering feelings of frustration and alienation. Such a scenario not only deepens their existing struggles but also risks perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage that the policies themselves were designed to break. This paper is arguing that the current social polices especially those that are gender based do not consider adaptation, goal orientation, Integration, and latency; as proposed by Talcott Parsons. This issue points to the complexities inherent in addressing deeply entrenched inequalities. While targeted interventions are necessary to uplift specific groups who have historically been disadvantaged, they must be implemented with care to avoid inadvertently disadvantaging others who are equally in need of support. Policymakers, therefore, face the delicate task of balancing equity with inclusivity. The failure to adopt a more comprehensive approach has created a zero-sum game in which the advancement of one group comes at the expense of another. There is a pressing need for nuanced and intersectional approaches to policymaking to mitigate such outcomes. The current existing approaches do not recognise the intersecting dimensions of race and gender.

Materials and methods

This paper employs qualitative research systematic review, through analytical Realism paradigm which argues that an explanation is the principal epistemic aim of Science, as such sociological theories should not be seen as merely intellectual constructions that can be used for purposes of prediction and control of social events but rather their purpose is to represent casual processes that generate observable phenomena such the structural *de- employability* of Black South African male graduates as argued in this paper. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines offered a structured framework for documenting each phase of the literature selection process, from the initial identification and screening of sources to the application of eligibility criteria and the final inclusion of studies in this review. This systematic documentation enhanced transparency at each stage, making explicit the rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of specific studies or data. By clearly articulating the reasons for inclusion and exclusion at each step, researcher reduced the risk of arbitrary motivated decisions, thereby mitigating selection bias. PRISMA's emphasis on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria ensures that sources are selected based on objective considerations, such as relevance to the methodological rigor of the study. Given the sensitivity and complexity of exploring intersections of race, gender, and employment policy in post-apartheid South Africa, such methodological rigor is particularly important. Furthermore, PRISMA encourages a balanced representation of viewpoints by requiring consideration of both supporting and dissenting evidence. This method aids in countering confirmation bias, compelling reviewers to engage with contrary findings or interpretations and thus enriching the analysis. This produced a nuanced, critical systematic review by concentrating on studies aligned with the same theoretical and methodological framework.

The research employed a rigorous methodological approach to ensure objective analysis whilst mitigating potential internal biases. Literature selection followed the PRISMA protocol, establishing a structured and replicable evidence base that prevented arbitrary inclusion of sources. This systematic approach ensured that all conclusions were grounded in methodologically sound, comprehensively gathered data rather than selective evidence. The analytical framework was anchored in Parsons' model, with four predetermined functional themes guiding the investigation: Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency. This theoretical scaffolding provided a functionalist lens that enabled examination of deeper sociological dynamics typically overlooked in purely descriptive reviews. The predetermined nature of these analytical categories reduced the risk of confirmation bias by establishing clear parameters before data analysis commenced. The researcher's professional positioning as an academic sociologist, rather than an activist practitioner, was instrumental in maintaining analytical objectivity. This disciplinary stance facilitated critical distance from the subject matter, enabling systematic evaluation of evidence without advocacy-driven interpretation. The combination of PRISMA's methodological rigour and AGIL's theoretical structure created a multilayered analytical framework that enhanced explanatory power whilst minimizing subjective bias. This dual approach enabled the study to transcend mere reporting of findings, instead situating them within broader systemic contexts through theoretically informed interpretation.

The second tenant of analytical realism in this paper is that I do not consider theoretical terms to be illegitimate, but rather that I use Parson's sociological theory in reference to non-observable entities and processes. In the debate over de-employment as a new sociological concept, it is impossible to present a general casual knowledge as permanent empirical fact. The point that this article makes is that de-employability, both as a concept and as a process, is part of a body of social science knowledge that is based on understanding the causal mechanisms that underlie observable patterns.

In this paper explanations provided here are factive, meaning that is enough that theory or Model in this case the Agil model saves the phenomena, but it should represent the essential features of actual causal structures that gives rise to the unemployment of Black South African males. This paper does not accept the instrumentalist approach, whereby assumptions are tools that can be freely manipulated until simple and elegant models emerge. Parsimonious models with clear analytical solutions are worthy of praise only if they are not achieved at the expense of unrealistic theoretical assumptions. Using this research paradigm, this paper seeks to provide a relevant sociological concept which is abstract, realistic and precise, and to explain this specific social phenomenon through explicitly formulated theories of action and interaction.

In contrast to Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills and Usher, (2013); Johnson, (2015); Corbin, 2017); who employed grounded theory as a paradigm, this study uses it as a research design. These scholars contend that this design is most effective when it comes to producing a new theory. In this paper, I contend that analytical realism and grounded theory ought to be integrated to establish and produce a novel idea of de-employability which can founded on Talcott Parson's AGIL

modelling theory. Grounded theory reveals trends in which black male graduates, despite their qualifications, are disproportionately unemployed by examining policies and labour market outcomes.

Discourse and Debate

The discourse of this paper will start with unemployment as phenomena that has its roots in social institutions.

Social Policy Discourse

Isabela Mares and Matthew E. Carnes 2009, define social policy as a set of state interventions aimed at providing social protection and economic security to citizens, particularly in areas such as pensions, healthcare, unemployment insurance, and income support. They focus on how these policies are shaped by political, economic, and institutional factors, especially in developing countries, where access to welfare is often fragmented and unequal. Rather than viewing social policy as a universal welfare model, they emphasise that its form and effectiveness vary across countries depending on labour market structures, political regimes, and fiscal constraints. Their analysis explores why some developing nations expand welfare protections while others maintain exclusionary or limited social policies.

Mares and Carnes (2009) argue that social policy in developing countries is highly contingent on economic structures, political institutions, and external influences. Unlike the universal welfare states seen in Europe, many developing nations experience fragmented and selective welfare policies that often reinforce existing inequalities.

Jonathan Dickens (2010) defines social policy as "the principles, guidelines, legislation, and activities that affect the living conditions conducive to human welfare" (Dickens, 2010). His perspective emphasises the role of social policy in shaping societal well-being through governmental and institutional interventions, particularly in areas such as health, education, social security, and housing. Jonathan Dickens elaborates on his argument by exploring how social policy functions as both a theoretical framework and a practical tool for addressing societal needs. He emphasises the dynamic nature of social policy, illustrating how it evolves in response to social, economic, and political changes. His work is particularly focused on social work and welfare policies, linking broader social policy principles to their practical implementation in social care settings.

Peter Dwyer and Sandra Shaw (2017) define social policy as the principles, actions, and legislation implemented by governments and institutions to promote social welfare and address societal needs. In their work, they emphasise that social policy is not just about government intervention but also involves a range of actors, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private sector entities, and communities. Dwyer and Shaw (2017) define social policy as a broad and evolving field that reflects power relations, economic priorities, and societal values. They argue that while social policy aims to enhance welfare and well-being, its implementation is often contested, shaped by competing interests between state, market, and civil society.

Social Policy Discourse in a South African Context

Conradie, (2018) examines social policy as the array of governmental principles, actions, and legislation designed to promote social welfare and address societal needs within the South African context. She highlights that, unlike Western trends where welfare services have been expanding, African welfare regimes, including South Africa's, face unique challenges related to poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. South Africa's history of apartheid has led to deep-seated inequalities that persist in contemporary society. These inequalities manifest in limited access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for marginalized communities. She critiques what she calls neoliberal economic policies adopted post-apartheid, arguing that they have not sufficiently addressed the socio-economic disparities. Conradie suggests that these policies often prioritize economic growth over social equity, leading to inadequate social welfare programs. Conradie defines social policy in South Africa as a multifaceted approach aimed at addressing the historical and structural inequalities that perpetuate poverty and exclusion. She argues for a shift towards more inclusive and comprehensive social policies that prioritize the needs of the marginalized and promote social justice.

Gumede's, (2019); analysis of social policy in post-apartheid South Africa offers a critical examination of the nation's efforts to address historical injustices and promote inclusive development. Gumede underscores the persistent challenges of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion that continue to affect the majority of South Africans, despite the end of apartheid. Gumede highlights that, despite political liberation, significant segments of the population still experience poverty and inequality. He argues that social policies have not sufficiently transformed the socio-economic landscape to benefit all citizens equitably. He critiques the economic strategies adopted post-1994, suggesting that they have not effectively addressed the structural inequalities rooted in the apartheid era. Gumede advocates for economic policies that prioritize social inclusion and equitable wealth distribution. Gumede emphasizes the

importance of a developmental state that actively intervenes to promote social welfare and economic development. He calls for a state apparatus that is both capable and committed to implementing policies that address the needs of the marginalized. He identifies gaps between policy formulation and implementation, noting that well-intentioned policies often fail due to inadequate execution. Gumede stresses the need for effective governance structures to ensure that social policies achieve their intended outcomes. Gumede views social policy as a critical instrument for societal transformation, aiming to redress past injustices and create a more equitable society.

He advocates for comprehensive social policies that go beyond economic growth to encompass social justice and human development. Gumede's 2019 perspective on social policy in post-apartheid South Africa is thus calling for a more robust and inclusive approach to policymaking. He emphasizes the need for policies that not only stimulate economic growth but also ensure that the benefits of such growth are equitably shared among all South Africans, thereby addressing the enduring legacies of apartheid. Govender highlights that, although apartheid officially ended, racial inequalities remain deeply entrenched.

These disparities are evident across various socio-economic indicators, including income distribution, employment rates, and access to essential services. Govender illustrate significant income gaps between racial groups. For instance, as of 2015, approximately 64.2% of Black Africans lived below the upper-bound poverty line, compared to just 1% of Whites. Additionally, unemployment rates in 2017 were markedly higher among Black Africans (30.10%) than Whites (7.90%). Govender argues that post-apartheid social policies have been insufficient in addressing these systemic inequalities.

He suggests that without significant structural changes, such as land reform and equitable access to quality education and employment opportunities, social policies alone cannot rectify the deep-seated disparities. The persistence of racialized inequality poses substantial barriers to genuine social transformation in South Africa. Govender emphasizes that these ongoing disparities hinder national unity and the development of a cohesive society. Govender's 2022 analysis underscores the critical need for comprehensive and transformative policies that go beyond traditional social interventions to effectively address and dismantle the enduring structures of racial inequality in post-apartheid South Africa.

Scholars such as Ina Conradie (2018) and Govender (2022) emphasise that social policy plays a crucial role in addressing historical injustices, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa. However, they argue that despite progressive policies, deep-rooted racial and economic inequalities persist, suggesting that social policy alone is insufficient without broader structural reforms (e.g., land redistribution, labour market reforms). Vusi Gumede (2019) critiques post-apartheid economic policies, arguing that while South Africa has pursued economic liberalisation, these policies have not translated into significant social improvements for the majority. Levy, Hirsch, Naidoo, and Nxele (2021) highlight the paradox of strong democratic institutions coexisting with severe socio-economic inequality, demonstrating that economic growth alone does not guarantee equitable social development. This reflects broader debates in social policy theory, where market-driven policies often conflict with welfare objectives, particularly in developing economies.

Across available literature, a common theme is the gap between policy design and implementation. Mares and Carnes (2009) highlight how political and economic constraints limit the expansion of social protection in developing countries. Govender (2022) and Gumede (2019) argue that while South Africa has progressive social policies, corruption, weak governance, and economic constraints undermine their effectiveness. This suggests that policy intent must be matched with strong institutional capacity and political will to be effective. Peter Dwyer and Sandra Shaw (2017) discuss how neoliberal economic policies have reshaped social welfare, leading to a shift from universal welfare to targeted, conditional social support. In the South African context, this means that social grants, while providing relief, do not address the root causes of poverty and exclusion, as Conradie (2018) and Govender (2022) highlight.

Many of the scholars advocate for a more inclusive and transformative approach to social policy, which integrates, Economic inclusion (e.g., job creation, wealth redistribution). Education and skills development to address long-term unemployment. Stronger state intervention to ensure equitable resource distribution. Community participation and grassroots movements in shaping policies, as Conradie (2018) suggests. Social policy is not just a technical intervention; it is a political and ideological battleground that reflects power struggles between state, market, and society. For social policy to be truly transformative, it must go beyond welfare provision and tackle systemic barriers that reinforce poverty and inequality.

Discourse on Gender affirmative Action and Social Policy in South Africa

Sadie, (1995); analyses affirmative action in the context of the post-apartheid South Africa and highlights its role in addressing historical inequities and promoting equality. It is likely that affirmative action policies are necessary to redress the imbalances created by decades of institutionalized discrimination. Sadie underlines the importance of these policies in creating opportunities for marginalised groups, increasing diversity across sectors and fostering social cohesion. However, there may also be increased challenges and criticism of the effectiveness and implementation of affirmative action, including concerns about reverse discrimination and the need for wider social reforms.

Naidoo and Kongolo, (2004); recognise the contribution of affirmative action to achieving gender and racial equality but argue that its current formulation is insufficient. Authentic transformation requires confronting structural inequities--such as education and rural poverty--not just symbolic representation. Without systemic change, affirmative action risks perpetuating tokenism rather than promoting substantive equality for South Africa's most marginalized women. The effectiveness of affirmative action in South Africa, and particularly its impact on women, as a tool to redress historical inequities rooted in apartheid, is being analysed. They argue that affirmative action, while helping to promote equity in the workplace, lacks rigour in its implementation, and that black women, despite being the main beneficiaries, continue to face systemic obstacles in education, employment, and career advancement. Apartheid deeply entrenched racial and gender discrimination, excluding black women from education, skilled employment, and equal pay. Affirmative action, institutionalized in the Employment Equity Act of 1998, has been designed to remove these obstacles by mandating equal representation of black men, women, and people with disabilities at all levels of employment.

Leonard, (2005); examines affirmative action in South Africa and highlights the historical injustices of apartheid as the basis of this policy. He details legal frameworks such as the Employment Equity Act, which aims to ensure equal treatment of workers. It reviews the various affirmative action strategies, considering their achievements and criticisms, and focuses on equity in employment, education and skills development for disadvantaged groups. It also assesses the overall social and economic impact, and notes successes and areas for improvement.

Burger and Jafta, (2010); argue that affirmative action has had limited success in reducing employment and wage gaps between men and women. The improvement has been mainly due to broader factors, such as access to education and economic growth, rather than to affirmative action itself. Race-related issues have taken precedence over gender issues, and wage differences between racial groups persist or have increased. Despite equal or superior education, African and white women faced wage discrimination more severely than men(Phiwani Athi, 2024).

For Obiter, (2011); affirmative action in South Africa should be developed to benefit the most disadvantaged members of designated groups (black people, women, and people with disabilities) rather than perpetuating the capture of the elite. It criticised the rigid apartheid policies that prioritised race over other forms of disadvantage, as seen in the case of Solidarity Obo Barnard v SAPS, where a qualified white woman was denied police promotion solely on the grounds of race, despite the existence of gender barriers. He stressed the tension between representativeness and efficiency, stressing that the Agency should balance demographic objectives with merit-based appointments to avoid undermining the effectiveness of the public service.

Comparing the South African group-based approach (based on substantive equality) to the empirical focus on socio-economic disadvantages in India and the individual merit-based approach in the US requires a nuanced, cross-cutting approach. Key recommendations include recognizing the different degrees of disadvantage within defined groups (e.g. poor black women versus wealthy black men), avoiding blanket racial quotas that exclude qualified candidates, and adapting AA to socio-economic changes so that it does not monopolize benefits. Finally, it argues that AA must remain a dynamic instrument of substantive equality, addressing both historical and current inequalities, while promoting inclusive employment(Obiter, 2011).

While Naidoo and Kongolo, (2004); further present a nuanced and critical analysis of affirmative action in South Africa, framing it as a controversial but crucial tool for social redress and transformation in the post-apartheid era. It highlights the dual nature of AA, recognising its role in promoting demographic representation, while also criticizing its unintended consequences, such as reinforcing racial identity and perpetuating the perpetuation of the status quo. These authors argue that AA is deeply rooted in the socio-political landscape of South Africa, shaped by historical injustices such as apartheid, colonialism and systemic inequality.

However, they caution against simplistic implementation that favours racial quotas over substantive equity, which may exacerbate social fragmentation and fail to address cross-cutting disadvantages (e.g. gender, class, disability). The tension within Affirmative Action (AA) between its moral justification for correcting historical wrongs and its

objective of creating a representative labour force. It criticises rigid policies that neglect qualified candidates from outside the designated groups and advocates a balanced approach between representation, merit and effectiveness. The authors stress the need to tackle structural inequalities such as education and economic exclusion, which cannot be solved by abstinence alone(Naidoo and Kongolo, 2004).

The observations from Malaysia and the US suggest that South African apartheid should be locally adapted, not copied from elsewhere. The document calls for coherent policies, enforcement and dialogue to ensure that Aids evolves with society and highlights the role of intersectionality in the context of the layered disadvantage. The AAR is seen as a dynamic instrument for achieving equality and needs to be integrated into a wider transformative agenda to reconcile the past with the aims of justice(Naidoo and Kongolo, 2004).

AGIL model and Gender affirmative action Social Policy

Adaptation of Gender Affirmative Action (Inclusivity)

The concept of adaptation pertains to a society's capacity to adjust to its environment and fulfil its essential needs, including food, shelter, and security. The adaptation function can serve as a tool to evaluate a society's primary challenges by assessing the effectiveness of its infrastructure, resource management, and economic system. Talcott Parsons posits that all systems must withstand external conditions, necessitating an ability to adjust to both environmental and intrinsic requirements (Rusydiyah and Rohman, 2020; Fernández de Velazco, Carpinteyro Lara and Rodríguez Luna, 2021). Within the context of social policy, particularly South Africa's gender-based social policy, this entails adapting to evolving social structures, notably the employment and economic frameworks of the republic. It is imperative for the system to acclimate to environmental changes, including modifications in members' behaviours to align with prevailing circumstances. The system's capacity to adequately distribute its resource requirements internally while satisfying environmental needs is also encapsulated within this framework (Rusydiyah and Rohman, 2020; Fernández de Velazco, Carpinteyro Lara and Rodríguez Luna, 2021).

Goal Orientation of Gender of Affirmative action Social Policy (Unemployment eradication amongst minority groups)

To achieve its primary objectives, the system should be able to define objectives and to enlist the help of other components of the system. The aim of the South African Equal Opportunities Act is to reduce unemployment among historically disadvantaged groups, especially black women. In the view of Evi Fatimatur Rusydiyah (2021), this system function means that it should support and mobilise the efforts and efforts within the system to achieve its objectives, which are collective rather than individual objectives. To achieve these objectives, it means setting targets, deciding on the way to proceed and allocating resources. Adaptation to diverse environments, whether social or non-social is crucial to achieving these objectives. Furthermore, effective use of both human and non-human resources is required, tailored to the tasks at hand. The political system and decision-making processes of a society are largely linked to this role. By examining the level of political participation, the effectiveness of the political system, and the extent to which societal goals are being met, one can use the goal attainment function to analyse significant issues.

Integration of Gender of Affirmative action Social Policy

Integration refers to the system's social capacity to maintain bonds and solidarity by involving the components in the control, maintenance and prevention of disruption of the system. Each system must be able to control or regulate the interaction between its components, thus controlling the relationship between other functional imperatives. This integration function can take the form of policies and rules to maintain the balance in the system. The social system functions as a complex web of integration, in which individuals navigate their lives on their own terms. Rather than the society, it is often specific groups or sub-groups that command the attention and loyalty of individuals. According to Durkheim, the individual is profoundly shaped by the society in which he or she lives; emotional and historical bonds are so strong that detachment is almost impossible. Preferential treatment of Black women over Black men in South Africa's Employment Equity Act can be explained using Émile Durkheim's sociological insights. Durkheim believed individuals are profoundly shaped by their societal groups, with strong attachments to these groups. His view supports an intersectional approach to equity and affirmative action. Black women face compounded disadvantages from systemic racial and gender-based discrimination, placing them under multiple oppressions. Durkheim's focus on social structures justifies targeting internal disparities within broader groups. The Act allows for measures ensuring equitable representation and does not exclude justified intra-group differentiation. Preference for Black women aims to address unique historical exclusions and aligns with the Act's goal of substantive equality, supported by Durkheim's understanding of group influences. Therefore, preferring Black women in certain contexts refines affirmative action to acknowledge and correct layered disadvantages.

Latent function of Social Affirmative action

The central role of social systems is to maintain patterns and to manage tensions. Without a focused focus on this task, the continuity of social order will be in doubt. By their very nature, each social system has mechanisms for achieving this objective (Ormerod, 2020). The system must provide, maintain and restore incentives to individuals and the cultural fabric around them. Individuals and groups assimilate these models by internalizing norms and values. Respect and attitudes towards these institutions and standards are developed through socialization (Tumtavitikul, 2013; Duhamel and Niess, 2024). However, merely instilling these patterns is insufficient; the social system must continue to work to ensure adherence to maintain effective social control. Notwithstanding these initiatives, internal or external conflicts could still occur and put society in danger.

Sociological Narratives in South Africa on Graduate Employability

Obioha and Sotshangane, (2022); emphasizes the disconnect between the skills graduates possess and those demanded by employers. Through a survey of employers in the Eastern Cape, the study identifies 13 critical employability skills, with communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and ethical awareness ranked as most essential. Surprisingly, employers placed less emphasis on leadership and quantitative skills for entry-level roles, suggesting that graduates often lack foundational competencies despite their academic qualifications. They claim that their findings align with global literature which critiques higher education for prioritizing theoretical knowledge over practical, transferable skills.

Tertiary institutions must collaborate with industries to align curricula with labour market needs, integrate work-integrated learning (WIL), and foster partnerships to ensure graduates are "workplace-ready." This reflects the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which posits that education should directly enhance productivity, yet current systems fail to deliver this outcome in South Africa(Sotshangane and Obioha, 2024).

While (Obioha and Sotshangane, 2022) focused on skills gaps, (Sotshangane and Obioha, 2024) shifts to structural barriers preventing graduates from securing employment, even when skilled. It highlights South Africa's alarming unemployment rate (35.3% in 2021), particularly among graduates, and explores cooperatives as an alternative livelihood strategy. They advocate for policy interventions, including targeted financial support and capacity-building programs, to harness graduates' potential as job creators rather than job seekers. This resonates with the People-Centred Development Theory, which emphasizes grassroots solutions to unemployment(Obioha and Sotshangane, 2022; Sotshangane and Obioha, 2024).

South Africa's graduate unemployment crisis stems from both a skills mismatch and systemic labour market inefficiencies. While education reforms can enhance employability, complementary strategies like cooperative development are vital to absorb graduates into the economy. The studies advocate for a dual approach: refining higher education to meet employer demands while creating enabling environments for graduate entrepreneurship. This holistic perspective addresses immediate skill gaps and long-term economic inclusion, offering a roadmap for policymakers to tackle unemployment through education and grassroots economic empowerment (Obioha and Sotshangane, 2022; Phiwani Athi, 2024; Sotshangane and Obioha, 2024).

South African Higher Education and Affirmative action From Talcott Parsons Sociology

(Zwelendaba, 2024); analyze affirmative action in South African higher education through Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism, framing universities as social systems that must maintain equilibrium by addressing historical inequalities. Their argument hinges on Parsons' view that institutions function like organs in a body, each contributing to societal stability.

Parsons' theory posits that institutions must fulfill "functional prerequisites" to ensure stability. Zwelendaba applies this to universities, arguing that affirmative action policies are mechanisms to rectify systemic dysfunctions specifically, the underrepresentation of women and Black individuals in leadership due to apartheid-era exclusion (Zwelendaba and Obioha, 2024). By integrating marginalized groups, universities restore balance, ensuring all "parts" (e.g., staff, policies) work harmoniously. Making an example historically white universities like Nelson Mandela University (NMU) have successfully increased women's representation in senior roles, demonstrating how affirmative action stabilizes the system by correcting past imbalances(Zwelendaba and Obioha, 2024).

The intended goal of affirmative action increasing women's representation in leadership is achieved in historically white universities like NMU and Rhodes University (RU), where women now dominate some executive tiers. Unintended consequences emerge, such as reverse discrimination against men or tokenism, where women are

appointed without adequate support. For instance, historically white universities risk creating a new imbalance where men become underrepresented, potentially sparking conflict (Zwelendaba and Obioha, 2024).

Historically Black Universities lag Historically white University in gender equity due to entrenched patriarchy and lack of targeted policies (e.g., WSU focuses on disability inclusion but neglects gender). This creates "strains" in the system. Opponents argue affirmative action undermines meritocracy, but the study counters that the policy ensures merit is not conflated with historical privilege (Zwelendaba and Obioha, 2024).

Zwelendaba's functionalist lens reveals affirmative action as a vital "repair mechanism" for South African universities, aligning them with egalitarian norms. However, disparities between Historical White Universities and Historical Black Universities highlight uneven integration, underscoring the need for context-sensitive policies. By addressing both manifest goals (representation) and latent tensions (resistance), universities can achieve Parsons' ideal of a stable, adaptive social system (Zwelendaba and Obioha, 2024).

Discussion of Findings and Recommendations

The theoretical basis of these women empowerment policies can be traced from the conflict school of thought within the feminist movement. While the Author of this paper acknowledge and appreciate the important work from the scholars of this conflict perspectives, with the same breadth and depth this school of thought has not been able to predict or address the latent functions of this policy. The most under-studied latent function of these policies is what this paper introduces as the *de-employability* of black male graduates. This paper employs Robert K. Merton's sociological framework to critically assess the unintended consequences of affirmative action policies in South African higher education, particularly their impact on Black male graduates. While these policies were designed to redress historical inequalities, empirical evidence suggests they have not uniformly benefited their intended beneficiaries, as unemployment among Black graduates especially males continue to escalate at an alarming rate. The scholarly contributions of Obioha and Sotshangane in the field of graduate employability have been instrumental in highlighting systemic and educational barriers, yet their analyses lack a gendered lens that explicitly examines which demographic is most adversely affected by these structural challenges. Furthermore, while their work identifies broad policy shortcomings, it does not delineate the specific mechanisms through which these policies exacerbate disparities in employability between male and female graduates. Nevertheless, the significance of their research remains undisputed, as it provides a foundational understanding of the intersection between higher education and labour market dynamics.

In a complementary study, Obioha and Zwelendaba (2024) utilize Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism to analyze affirmative action in South African universities, offering a groundbreaking theoretical framework for understanding institutional redress. However, their analysis does not extend to the post-graduation experiences of students, particularly the differential impact of these policies on male graduates. The Employment Equity Act (EEA), while promoting gender and racial representation, inadvertently creates an asymmetrical labour market were Black South African male graduates face disproportionate barriers to employment. This phenomenon can be understood through Merton's concept of latent functions the unintended and often overlooked consequences of social policies. While the manifest function of affirmative action is to correct historical imbalances, its latent function has been the systematic de-employability of Black male graduates, a process wherein their preparedness for the labor market is undermined by policy-driven hiring biases that favour other designated groups.

From a functionalist perspective, this de-employability can be interpreted as a dysregulation within the social system. Parsons argued that institutions must maintain equilibrium by fulfilling specific functional prerequisites, yet affirmative action policies, in their current form, disrupt this equilibrium by failing to integrate Black male graduates into the workforce effectively. The EEA's emphasis on gender equity, while commendable, has led to a paradoxical exclusion of Black men, who are now disproportionately represented among the unemployed despite possessing comparable qualifications. This systemic oversight suggests that while affirmative action has succeeded in increasing female representation particularly in senior and mid-level positions it has neglected the unique structural barriers faced by Black male graduates, including employer perceptions, skills mismatches, and diminishing access to entry-level opportunities.

This paper contends that sociologists have largely overlooked the de-employability of Black South African male graduates a process wherein systemic redress mechanisms, rather than empowering them, inadvertently marginalize them further. Functionalist theory provides a useful lens to accept this latent dysfunction, as it acknowledges that policies designed to stabilize a system can also generate unintended destabilizing effects. The dearth of empirical research on this demographic's employability crisis underscores a critical gap in the literature, one that necessitates

urgent scholarly attention. Future studies should investigate how affirmative action policies can be recalibrated to ensure equitable outcomes for all historically disadvantaged groups, rather than perpetuating new forms of exclusion.

Merton's sociology reveals that affirmative action, while transformative in many respects, has latent dysfunctions that exacerbate unemployment among Black male graduates. Functionalist theory helps contextualize this as a systemic imbalance requiring policy refinement. Moving forward, researchers must adopt an intersectional approach to graduate employability, one that accounts for gender, race, and policy interplay to ensure that redress mechanisms do not inadvertently reproduce the very inequalities they seek to eliminate. The contributions of Obioha, Sotshangane, and Zwelendaba remain pivotal, but the field must expand to address the emergent crisis of Black male graduate de-employability, a challenge that demands both theoretical and policy-oriented solutions.

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