

THE EXPERIENCES OF RACE RELATIONS AMONGST STUDENT LEADERS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

by

**Hlengiwe Selowa**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts (Research Psychology)

in the

Department of Psychology

Faculty of Humanities

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

MAY 2019

Supervisor: Dr B. Motileng

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God for my life and for the opportunity to study at this level. I would like to thank my husband whose unwavering support keeps me strong, unafraid and in the full knowledge of who I am. To my mother whom I regard as my first teacher, thank you for always believing in my dreams and encouraging me to reach for the stars. To my father whose life lessons preceded his death, *repetitio est mater studiorum*. To my sisters whose support for me has guided me throughout my entire life, I am because you are; thank you for your love and support. To Bongani, thank you for believing in me. I would also like to thank my mother-in-law for loving me so fiercely and supporting me. To my aunt, Kopela and Malome Sabelo, thank you so much for everything you have done towards my education.

To my supervisor, Dr Benny Motileng, thank you for keeping me focused on what matters and guiding me through this very difficult topic. You were my coach on many occasions and sometimes a therapist. I really appreciate that when I thought I could no longer keep going, you showed me that I could. I would like to thank the Department of Student Affairs for the opportunity they gave me in accessing the student leaders. To Dr Madiba and Ms Mzikazi Noholoza, your support for this enquiry has made a meaningful difference to my study. I would not have had the courage to pursue postgraduate study had it not been for the influence of Prof. Jill Bradbury and Prof Peace Kiguwa. I can never thank you both enough for helping me to unlock my voice and trust it.

To the participants, thank you so much for your time, for your openness and your willingness to talk to me about your experiences. Without you, there would not have been a study, without your contributions, the research question would not have been answered. Thank you so much for the work that you do as student leaders and for your contribution towards my education.

## DECLARATION

I, **Hlengiwe Selowa**, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and that, where applicable, every effort has been made to correctly reference the work of other authors.

Furthermore, I declare that this dissertation is to be submitted to the University of Pretoria and has not previously been submitted to this university or any other tertiary institution.

Signed this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2019

## Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
DECLARATION .....	iii
List of tables.....	viii
Abstract .....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Justification, Aim and Objectives .....	3
1.2.1 Justification.....	3
1.2.2 Aim.....	5
1.2.3 Objectives .....	5
1.3 Research question .....	5
1.3.1 Primary research question .....	5
1.3.2 Secondary research questions.....	5
1.4 Theoretical framework.....	5
1.5 Description of research methodology .....	6
1.5.1 Participants .....	6
1.5.2 Method of data collection.....	7
1.5.3 Data Analysis.....	7
1.6 Outline of chapters.....	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
2.1 Race relations.....	9
2.2 Race relations in higher education .....	13
2.3 Students’ experiences of race relations in higher education.....	16
2.4 Conclusion .....	23

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	24
3.1 Research design .....	24
3.1.1 Qualitative research approach .....	24
3.1.2 Participants .....	25
3.1.3 Method of data collection.....	26
3.1.4 Data Analysis.....	27
3.2 The role of the researcher .....	28
3.3 Measures to enhance the quality of research .....	29
3.3.1 Credibility.....	29
3.3.2 Transferability .....	29
3.3.3 Dependability .....	30
3.3.4 Confirmability .....	30
3.3.5 Reflexivity .....	30
3.4 Ethical Considerations .....	31
3.4.1 Voluntary and informed participation .....	31
3.4.2 Right to privacy and confidentiality .....	31
3.4.3 No harm or injury to participants .....	31
3.5 Conclusion .....	32
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .....	33
4.1 Participants.....	33
4.2 Themes.....	34
4.2.1 Theme 1: South African history .....	35
4.2.1.1 Apartheid and Democracy .....	35
4.2.1.2 Equality .....	37
4.2.1.3 Space .....	39

4.2.2 Theme 2: Racial integration .....	41
4.2.2.1 Racial discrimination .....	41
4.2.2.2 The us versus them phenomenon.....	46
4.2.2.3 Trust.....	47
4.2.2.4 Interracial friendships .....	50
4. 2. 3 Theme 3: Culture.....	52
4.2.3.1 Representation.....	52
4.2.3.2 Language.....	53
4.2.4 Theme 4: Intersectionality .....	57
4.2.4.1 Class and race relations.....	57
4.2.4.2 Complexity versus reductionism.....	62
4.3 Conclusion .....	64
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	65
5.1 Discussion.....	65
5.1.1 South African history .....	66
5.1.2 Racial integration.....	70
5.1.3 Culture .....	72
5.1.4 Intersectionality .....	74
5.2 Limitations .....	76
5.3 Recommendations.....	76
5.3.1. General recommendations. ....	76
5.3.2. Recommendations for future research .....	77
5.4 Personal reflections.....	77
5.5 Conclusion .....	81
REFERENCES .....	82

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet .....	91
Appendix B: Interview Consent Form.....	92
Appendix C: Questions for semi-structured interviews.....	93
Appendix D: Permission to use student leaders.....	95
Appendix E: Preliminary Table of Contents.....	98
Appendix F: Debriefing research participants .....	99
Appendix G: Permission to use student leaders.....	101
Appendix H: Ethics approval.....	103

## **List of tables**

Table 1: Themes.....	34
----------------------	----

## **List of Abbreviations**

HSRC	: Human Science Research Council
IPA	: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
IRR	: Institute of Race Relations
UCT	: University of Cape Town



## **Abstract**

The advent of democracy opened learning opportunities for all students and racial segregation no longer characterizes institutions of higher learning in South Africa. The racially diverse student body confronts universities with the challenge of racial tension amongst students as well as staff. Recent protest movements such as #Rhodesmustfall and #FeesMustFall have highlighted uneasy race relations in South African universities. Although such incidents are crucial, equally important are the everyday realities of race relations that continue to define the lives of students in these institutions. The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth understanding of student leaders' experiences of race relations at a South African university. A qualitative research approach was adopted to shed light on these experiences. Purposeful sampling was employed to recruit six student leaders of various races. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The analysis of the interview material revealed that the history of South Africa as a racially segregated, unequal society affects race relations. Racial discrimination and distrust hamper racial integration in the student body and external factors such as politics also affect student leaders' experiences of race relations. Even though friendships afford opportunities for good race relations, they are largely class dependent. It is recommended that the university invest into personnel diversity training and the creation of platforms for intercultural and interracial exchanges within the university.

**Key terms:** Race relations, higher education, student leaders, universities

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Race relations within the university environment have been well documented in South Africa (Ahluwalia & Zegeye, 2001; Govinder, Zondo & Makgoba, 2013; Taylor & Taylor, 2010). Furthermore, race relations continue to form much of the dialogue when transformation relating to institutions of higher learning is considered (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010; Portnoi, 2009). The purpose of the present study was to examine student leaders' experiences of race relations at a South African university. In this chapter, the study is introduced in seven subsections. In the first subsection, the background of the study is provided; the historical context of race relations in South Africa and how this has been experienced over time, is given. In the second subsection, the justification, aim and objectives of the study are presented. In the third and fourth subsections, the research questions and the theoretical framework, respectively are explained. A description of the research methodology is outlined in the fifth subsection. The sixth subsection includes an outline of the chapters in this dissertation and finally, in the seventh subsection, the chapter is concluded.

### **1.1 Background**

In this study, race relations are defined as the interaction between people of various races; in other words, how people of different races behave towards each other (Collins Dictionary, 2016). The apartheid government of South Africa classified its citizens into four distinct categories: Black, Coloured, Indian and White. The divisions across race during apartheid ensured minimal interracial contact; furthermore, power and privilege rested with the White race (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010). To ascertain and maintain white supremacy, the former administration systematically violated the human rights of other races, thus, creating feelings of

hostility across racial groups and distorting race relations (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010; Seekings, 2008).

Although interracial contact has increased since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the transition has not proceeded without racial interaction collisions (Jansen, 2013). These collisions have resulted in much debate about the state of race relations in South Africa. In response to the race relations dialogue, the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) (2016) released survey results indicating that race relations in South Africa have been improving since democracy in spite of persistent inequality. However, improved race relations do not necessarily mean good race relations (Seekings, 2008). A report of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) indicated that although South Africans enjoyed improved race relations, mistrust across racial lines was prevalent among the population (Roberts et al., 2016).

Educational institutions provide an opportunity for interracial contact in post-apartheid South Africa (Seekings, 2008). In particular, institutions of higher learning serve as cosmopolitan hubs that reflect racial diversity (Sheenan, 2009). Universities have been challenged by the change in student demographics, which has resulted in racial tension amongst staff as well as students. Furthermore, race relations have been hindered by the universities' inability to translate policies of equity into everyday business practice (Govinder, Zondo & Makgoba, 2013; Portnoi, 2009). Student protest action calling for the removal of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at the University of Pretoria (Ngoepe, 2016) resulted in racial tension amongst predominately Black student organizations such as the EFF that supported its removal and predominantly White student organizations such as Afriforum that were opposed to the removal of the language. Incidents that are of a racial nature in universities usually bear the face of Blacks as victims of discriminatory practices and Whites as the perpetrators (Taylor & Taylor,

2010). Although these incidents are significant, the everyday realities of race relations that continue to define the lives of many South Africans are equally important (Stevens, Duncan, & Sonn, 2013). Stevens et al. (2013) added that blindness to the past injustices on current interracial relationships disables South Africans to deal with the effects thereof on current and future affairs. Therefore, by exploring the experiences of race relations amongst student leaders, light will be shed on the current state of race relations and the effects of history as experienced by student leaders will be highlighted. In the following subsection, the justification, aim and objectives of the study are presented.

## **1.2 Justification, Aim and Objectives**

### **1.2.1 Justification**

The recent hashtag movements in South African universities such as #RhodesMustFall (Muller, 2016), Open Stellenbosch (Mortlock, 2015) and the nationwide #FeesMustFall (Baloyi & Isaacs, 2015) have highlighted difficulties students face in institutions of higher learning. According to Baloyi and Isaacs (2015) a need to transform and decolonise higher education in South Africa was at the centre of these movements, thus, highlighting challenges of a racial nature. Students have highlighted the manner in which apartheid patterns of race relations remain intact within institutions of higher of higher learning; consequently, non-White students have been alienated (Mortlock, 2015).

The discontentment that student leaders raised in the various movements affect the larger student body as well as their leadership. Student leaders across the various hashtag movements expressed frustration with their everyday realities with regards to race relations and racial discrimination, this resulted in escalated protest (Baloyi & Issacs, 2015; Mortlock, 2015). The protest movements across universities in South Africa have led to the imprisonment of some of

the student leaders, the suspension and disruption of teaching within university as well as deepen the racial divide as noted in the #Afrikaansmustfall protest. Therefore, the manner in which race relations affect student leaders is pivotal to explore.

The views of student leaders were of critical importance in this study as they are the drivers and implementers of the mandate from the group they represent. Student leaders refer to students who are part of a student organization that is regulated by the Department of Student Affairs in an elected position. The student leaders who participated in this enquiry had been registered at the study's university for more than a year and were currently university students. Historically, student leaders in South Africa have played a very crucial role in mobilising students and the greater society (Chapman, 2016). The ideas of prominent student leaders such as Steve Biko are still alluded to decades after his death (Ahluwalia & Zegeye, 2001). The 1976 Soweto uprising in which student leaders mobilised the student community to stand against injustice bears testimony to the pivotal role student leaders play in South African society (Chapman, 2016). Student leaders are important stakeholders in institutions of higher learning as evidenced by their ability to influence the manner in which education is managed and the trajectory of society at large.

Although strides have been made in higher education in relation to transforming institutions (Portnoi, 2009), the outcry from various student movements has highlighted that more needs to be done with respect to race relations. Understanding race relations is therefore of cardinal importance in transforming institutions of higher learning so as to accommodate all racial groups and reduce racial tensions. It is hoped that this study will provide beneficial information to inform interventions that address race relations within student leadership and the broader student body.

### **1.2.2 Aim**

The principal aim of this study was to provide an in-depth understanding of student leaders' experiences of race relations at a South African university.

### **1.2.3 Objectives**

The objectives of the study were two-fold:

- To shed light on the experiences of race relations by student leaders at a South African university; and
- To explore the manner in which race relations affect student leadership at a South African university.

## **1.3 Research question**

### **1.3.1 Primary research question**

What are student leaders' experiences of race relations at a South African university?

### **1.3.2 Secondary research questions**

The secondary research questions are as follows:

How do race relations affect the everyday experiences of student leaders at a South African university?

How does the experience of race relations within a South African university affect student leaders in their roles?

## **1.4 Theoretical framework**

As the study sought to understand the experiences of student leaders within a specific context as well as time, phenomenology was employed as the theoretical framework. Phenomenology is concerned with phenomena as experienced in various ways by various individuals (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015; Willig, 2013). Phenomenology acknowledges that

phenomena within a given context can be experienced differently by individuals within the same context (Willig, 2013). Therefore, various experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university were explored in this study.

Central to the phenomenological perspective is the assertion that a phenomenon has to be studied within its natural settings as opposed to an artificial or laboratory setting (Willig, 2013). Human experience is understood as an interaction between an individual and his/her environment (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2016). Interpretive phenomenology holds that the description of a phenomenon is not separate from the interpretation thereof, but rather constitutes it (Willig, 2013). Interpretive phenomenology makes sense of the whole by understanding the parts; similarly, it makes sense of the whole in order to gain a better understanding of the parts (Willig, 2013). It was deemed that the interpretive phenomenological perspective was best suited to offer a better understanding of student leaders' experiences of race relations at a South African university on the basis of robustness of this perspective as explained above.

## **1.5 Description of research methodology**

### **1.5.1 Participants**

Purposeful sampling was employed to recruit six participants. Accordingly, the researcher decided what kind of individuals to include and subsequently, targeted that specific group (Palinkas et al., 2015). The Department of Student Affairs assisted the researcher to send emails to student leaders. Student leaders, as noted previously, are those in elected positions in a student organization that is regulated by the Department of Student Affairs. The participants who volunteered met the following criteria:

- The participants had to be student leaders in elected positions at the South African university; and

- The participants had to have been registered at the particular university for more than one year.

### **1.5.2 Method of data collection**

Semi-structured interviews served as a data collection tool. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to learn about the participants' perceptions and experiences of race relations as student leaders in a South African university. Although semi-structured interviews are not rigid (Galletta, 2013), the researcher's questions drive the interview (Willig, 2013). Semi-structured interviews gave the participants the opportunity to redefine the topic by illuminating aspects of which the researcher was not aware (Willig, 2013). After receiving consent from the participants, the interviews were audio-taped. This assisted in capturing the participants' views as well as in the analysis of the interview material. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The audio tapes will be kept at the university of the study for 15 years.

### **1.5.3 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. Clarke and Braun (2013) described thematic analysis as a flexible data analysis tool. Furthermore, it may be classified as interpretive (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) and was thus, suitable for the chosen methodology in this study. The conclusions that were reached were in accordance with the responses given in the interviews. The data analysis steps proposed by Willig (2013) were undertaken. First, interviews were transcribed by the researcher from the audio tape. Second, the transcribed data were classified into themes according to the research questions, and relationships between each of the themes were established. Subsequently, the themes were given appropriate names. When conclusions regarding the students' experiences and perceptions of race relations at the study's university were made, the themes related to this issue were used.



## **1.6 Outline of chapters**

In this section, an outline of the chapters that follow Chapter One of the mini-dissertation is provided. The contents of each chapter are thus summarized.

In Chapter Two, a review of the literature related to student leaders' experiences of race relations is discussed. In particular, students' experiences of race relations in higher education in South African are discussed.

In Chapter Three, the methodology employed in the study is discussed. The discussion includes the number of participants, the manner in which participants were sought and the criteria used to find participants. In addition, the method of data collection, data analysis and the measures that enhanced the quality of the study are explained in this chapter.

The results in relation to the research aims and objectives are presented in Chapter Four. The findings are presented in the themes, which emerged from the data analysis.

In Chapter Five, the results in relation to the themes that emerged during the analysis of the interview material are discussed. Moreover, this discussion is related to the literature, and aims and objectives of the study. Furthermore, the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for further studies are outlined.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, an overview of the study was presented. The background of the study, justification thereof, aims, objectives, research questions, theoretical framework and research methodology were outlined. In addition, a brief outline of each chapter was presented. Literature related to race relations amongst student leaders at South African universities is reviewed in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, the literature related to race relations in institutions of higher education in South Africa is reviewed. The reviewed literature focuses on race relations generally, race relations on university campuses and students' experiences thereof. Furthermore, the historical context in which the observations of race relations were made is discussed and the manner in which institutions of higher education serve to reinforce patterns of race relation is considered.

### **2.1 Race relations**

An understanding of race is contextual. Different societies ascribe different categories to people in relation to race and classify them as such (Roberts, 2011). There are contradictions across contexts of what constitutes a given race and what race is (Adhikhari, 2013; Strauss, 2013). For example, in South Africa, a Black person is understood to be a descendent of Black parents whereas in America, a person with one Black parent is said to be Black. In South Africa, such a person would be referred to as Coloured (Roberts, 2011). In Brazil, race has to do with skin lightness and is not attributed to ancestry; thus, a person can self-identify as Black or White on the basis of the lightness of their skin (Fransis-Tan & Tannuri-Pianto, 2015). The different comprehension of race categories leads to different experiences of race relations across contexts.

In South Africa, race was classified as follows during apartheid: Black, Coloured, Indian and White (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010; Posel, 2001). However, the Population Registration Act of 1950 referred to four distinct races in South Africa, namely, Bantu (now referred to as African), Coloured, Indian and White (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010). The race categories in post-apartheid South Africa are Black, which includes Africans, Coloureds and Indians, and White. This study used four race categories; African, Coloured, Indian and White.

The apartheid government enacted the Group Areas Act of 1950 as well as the Immorality Act of the same year among other legislations that separated people according to

race. The Group Areas Act of 1950 designated areas according to race: Whites were assigned the most developed areas and non-Whites were forcibly removed from those areas and moved to remote areas. The Immorality Act of 1950 made it illegal for a non-White and a White person to engage in sexual intercourse. Various tests such as the pencil test were used to determine a person's race and in some instances, families were separated from one another in accordance with the outcome of these tests (Posel, 2001). These Acts were the basis upon which people were separated and their standard of life was determined as per the race they were assigned.

The divisions across race during apartheid ensured minimal interracial contact. Moreover, power and privilege rested with the White race (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010). In order to ascertain and maintain White supremacy, the apartheid administration systematically violated the human rights of other races, thus, creating feelings of hostility across racial groups and distorting race relations (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010; Seekings, 2008). When examining race relations, the definition of race becomes important as race is understood differently across contexts. Taking into consideration that race was conceptualized on the basis of physical characteristics by the apartheid government and racial segregation was based on this, this view on race was adopted in this study.

Racial segregation has resulted in the various groups experiencing one another in a stereotypical manner (Walker, 2005). The discriminatory practices of the apartheid government also reinforced the stereotypes through policies that dehumanised and dispossessed other races to the advantage of the White race. Policies enacted by the apartheid government of South Africa ensured that there was minimal contact across races and in instances where there was contact, Black, Coloured and Indian people found themselves in an inferior position to White people (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010).

In accordance with the socioeconomic design of apartheid, the most privileged people were the Whites followed by Indians, Coloureds and Blacks who were the least privileged (Sehoole, & Adeyemo, 2016). This was evident in the manner in which the government distributed resources across races; the most resourced facilities were for Whites only and the least resourced for non-Whites. The varying degrees of privilege accorded across races not only created uneasy race relations between Whites and non-Whites, but also resulted in skirmish encounters among the various non-White groups (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010). Therefore, the skewed power relations evident between Whites and non-Whites were also experienced between various non-White groups where Indians were the most privileged and Africans were the most disadvantaged.

Although interracial contact has increased since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the transition has not proceeded without collisions (Jansen, 2013). Many of the collisions have occurred from undoing past laws and giving every South African citizen equal opportunities to thrive. Penny Sparrow, a White woman, referred to Black people as monkeys on a social media post because they had filled up the Durban beachfront, which historically had been reserved for Whites to enjoy; this post has created much debate about the state of race relations in South Africa (Dyke-Beyer, 2018). Another incident that highlighted the unease in race relations in South Africa was the protest by Coloured parents who shut down a school as they were dissatisfied with the appointment of an African person as the principal of the school their children attended. The parents insisted that they wanted a Coloured principal as the school was in a traditional Coloured area (Macupe, 2017).

Both the Penny Sparrow and the school incidents indicate the manner in which race relations patterns are reminiscent of the apartheid era in South Africa. In response to the race

relations debate, the IRR (2016) released results from a survey, which indicated that race relations in South Africa have been improving since democracy in spite of the persistent inequality. However, improved race relations do not mean good race relations (Seekings, 2008). Although the HSRC also released a report dated 12 May 2016, which suggested improved race relations, mistrust across racial lines has been found to be prevalent among South Africans (Roberts et al., 2016).

Attempts at remedying race relations in post-apartheid South Africa started with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was set up in accordance with The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No 34, of 1995. The TRC was set up to “promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past” (The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No 34, of 1995, p.5). Because truth commissions such as the TRC are often a result of a negotiated settlement between an old administration and an incoming one such as was the case in South Africa, they may be unable to realize proper retribution. One way in which this was evident throughout the TRC was the missing data and the dependence on people who had served under the previous administration for such data (Van der Merwe & Chapman, 2008).

The TRC, being the first of many attempts by the democratic government of South Africa to improve race relations, did not deliver unity across racial lines, but may be viewed as the beginning of the conversation on race relations in post-apartheid South Africa. To help build social cohesion across racial lines, the South African government has also used major sporting events as an opportunity to encourage hearty race relations. The euphoria that comes with sporting events is often perceived as a catalyst for racial unity. However, although this racial unity is usually evident before and during major sporting events, it does not translate to everyday

life post the major sporting event. Clark and Worger (2016) asserted that all sectors of society have been affected by racial segregation in South Africa. The manner in which racial segregation has affected and continues to affect race relations in higher education is subsequently discussed.

## **2.2 Race relations in higher education**

During apartheid, resources were unequally spread across the race spectrum; the government spent the most on the education of White children and the least on that of African children (Van Schalkwyk, 2007). This had a negative impact on race relations as it enforced White supremacy and dehumanised other race groups. This approach to education meant that positions of influence in society as determined by one's education were reserved for Whites, thus, creating unequal grounds for race relations (Van Schalkwyk, 2007). While White children could aspire to be anything, Indian, Coloured and African children were limited in their career choices on the basis of inferior cognitive abilities that were deemed to be entrenched in their DNA (Dalal, 2013).

In line with apartheid policies, higher education was also divided across racial lines. There were universities for Whites only and universities for Blacks only, now referred to as historically White and historically Black universities, respectively (Heleta, 2016). Historically Black universities were set up as administrative wings of the apartheid government to produce servants for the state (Ramoupi, 2014) whereas historically White universities served to entrench and maintain White supremacy (Zezeza, 2009). Consequently, education served as an objective tool to naturalise racial identities and thus, uphold White supremacy (Steyn & Foster, 2008).

Over time, even before the end of apartheid, historically White universities began admitting students of other races. However, Black students who had access to these universities had a restricted student life; for example, in various universities, Black students had separate

examination halls from those of their White peers, were not allowed to stay in the university residence and/or not allowed to take part in extra-curricular activities (Nicholas, 1993). To gain access to White universities, non-White students needed to comply with the extension of the University Education Act 59 of 1959, which stated that it was illegal for a non-White student to register at an open university without the written consent of the Minister of Internal affairs. The restrictions put in place by segregation policies ensured that non-White students experienced White universities in an alienating way because of the ‘special treatment’ to which they were subjected (Nicholas, 1993). Given all these injustices and restrictions, students were inhibited in how they related to each other across racial lines as equals.

Although the end of apartheid initiated widespread integration at all levels of higher education, the integration of other races into historically White universities has not proceeded without a race relations crisis. Popular incidents that reveal the crisis around racial issues in higher education include the Makgoba affair at the University of the Witwatersrand (Mamdani, 1997; Statman & Ansell, 2000; Taylor & Taylor, 2010) and the Reitz incident at the University of the Free State (Jansen, 2010). After his appointment as a deputy vice chancellor at the University of the Witwatersrand, Professor Makgoba set out to transform the university from a dominant Eurocentric institution to one that speaks to and of Africa. In his quest, he discovered that there was no commitment to the Africanisation of the institution, but resistance to change (Taylor & Taylor 2010). His attempts at change did not last as 13 senior staff members questioned the credibility of his accolades in different versions of his curriculum vitae. In response to the accusations that were levelled against him, Professor Makgoba released details, which implicated the 13 staff members of tax evasion as well as deceptive ways in which they had acquired the information they were using against him (Statman & Ansell, 2000). This

incident was highly publicised and featured prominent figures such as the former president Thabo Mbeki because it was soon recognised to be fuelled by race. The incident revealed that the rainbow nation that many South Africans had hoped they had transitioned into post-1994 was a mere smokescreen and that deeply rooted conflicts underlay nation-building (Steyn & Foster, 2008). This phenomenon was noted by Sheenan (2009) in relation to the existence of a multicultural student body in an institution that paid tribute to a British imperialist through the presence of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, thus, upholding White supremacy and disabling equality when relating across racial lines.

The Reitz incident earned its name from a university male residence in which four White male students humiliated Black female workers in an initiation ritual at the University of Free State in 2007 (Grobler, 2011). The four males had urinated on food, which they had the workers eat. The Reitz incident shook university administrators, leading them to question whether efforts that they had made since the dawn of democracy in fostering non-racial campuses were effective (Fourie, 2008).

Even though university student bodies throughout South Africa are reflective of the diverse South African population, institutional cultures remain an alienating factor for non-Whites in historically White universities (Portnoi, 2009). Structures that administered apartheid have remained intact in South African higher education (Heleta, 2016). Madiba (2014) asserted that structural inequalities in higher education have persisted as various stakeholders within and outside higher education have reinforced them. Heleta (2016) also noted the infiltration of curriculum that was taught during apartheid as problematic in addressing the skewed race relations on university campuses. The Makgoba affair and Reitz incident have demonstrated the complexity of racial integration and relations, the alienating manner in which non-Whites



experience higher education institutions and the extent to which historically White university environments can be hostile to non-Whites.

### **2.3 Students' experiences of race relations in higher education**

Educational institutions provide an opportunity for interracial contact in post-apartheid South Africa (Seekings, 2008). In particular, institutions of higher learning may serve as cosmopolitan hubs that reflect racial diversity (Sheenan, 2009). Van Schalkwyk (2007) stated that the university environment is foreign to all first-year students; furthermore, students have to adapt their ways of engaging to be successful. He further maintained that success within institutions of higher education require a particular way of acting, talking and writing, which is often passed down from older academics to younger ones.

The democratic dispensation saw an increased uptake of Black students into historically White universities with Eurocentric ways to which all students had to adapt. Walker (2005) declared that not only do Black students have to adapt their study methods in order to own the academic spaces within higher education institutions, they have had to adapt to the language, residence culture and value propositions embedded in universities. Unlike their White peers whose culture is part of the institutional culture of higher education institutions, Black students have often had to acculturate or face alienation. In some cases, Black students have attested to either assimilating into Whiteness or facing exclusion from institutions of higher education (Portnoi, 2009; Walker, 2005). This disparity across race in the experience of the University by students fosters racial segregation.

In a documentation of experiences and perceptions of race and racism in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Erasmus and de Wet (2011) found that Black students had to decide whether to assimilate or consider the consequences of not doing so.

They further found that racialized relations of power persist in the Faculty of Health Sciences at UCT. The persistent manner in which Blackness and Whiteness are constructed contributes to the skewed power relations between Black and White students (Bradbury & Kiguwa, 2012). Black students have reported feelings of insecurity and intimidation when relating to their White counterparts, but the opposite when relating to other Black students (Albert, 2014). White students have also noted that Black students tend to be silent in academic settings and have advised that they ought to participate more in classes (Erasmus & de Wet, 2011). Heleta (2016) asserted that the curriculum with which students engage, silences and belittles Africa and its people while upholding Whiteness. Consequently, the silence of Black students in class can be viewed as a product of the environment.

Fanon (2008) related the different response of a Black medical student to the overwhelmingly White institution in which he was training. The anguish of the Black medical student lay in his belief that he would never be recognised by his White counterparts and patients as a physician as Blackness and the profession that he was pursuing contrasted with his environment. His anguish drove him to working in White environments exclusively to have White men working under him to redeem himself, be a boss and be respected (Fanon, 2008). Allport (1954) referred to this kind of behaviour as a defence mechanism against the prejudice to which minorities are subjected. Allport further noted that Black American soldiers would dress more neatly than their White counterparts to compensate for the belief that they were inferior. A student attested to this feeling of inferiority when interacting with his white counterparts when he stated:

In my daily interactions with white people, I used to be very afraid of how they will look at me if I say something that is not right or always wanted to sound intelligent

because in my mind there is that issue that I am not intelligent, and I am inferior. When I interact with another black person whether they are intelligent or articulate, I speak my mind without having that inner fear but when it comes to white people, it is different (Albert, 2014, p.14).

The feelings of insecurity experienced by the Black student can be partly attributed to the spatial arrangement put in place by the apartheid government that still remains in South Africa. The majority of the poor population is Black and the minority of the country, which is predominantly White, enjoy the wealth of the country (Seekings, 2008). Patterns of wealth and the lack thereof are generally linked to one's skin colour (Fanon, 2008). The majority of Black students attend schools where resources are limited while their White counterparts largely attend well-resourced schools. The outcry about textbooks not being delivered to schools in rural Limpopo is one such an example (Madiba, 2014). The death of a primary school pupil as a result of falling into a long-drop toilet at his school is another example of the disparities in infrastructure across contexts in South Africa. Furthermore, these disparities have resulted in limited interracial interaction.

Such differences in basic education mean that when the majority of Black students or non-White students enter higher education, it is generally accepted that they are not as well prepared for higher education as students who have attended well-resourced schools (Madiba, 2014). The acknowledgment of this disadvantage by various stakeholders in higher education has ensured that programmes that will guarantee entry for students from such backgrounds into higher education are implemented. However, the manner in which this disadvantage is perpetuated by higher education institutions has not been examined (Madiba, 2014). Consequently, there is a discrepancy between the reality of White students and that of Black

students even though they may be in the same class. Accordingly, students tend to gravitate towards the familiar and have separate social spaces according to race on university campuses as witnessed in the Bradbury and Kiguwa (2012) enquiry.

Walker (2005) noted that Black students congregated around certain buildings on campus while White students gathered on the lawn. Such practices on university campuses ensure that interracial contact is limited and further, thwart opportunities for interracial interaction. Discriminatory practices in the university environment that remain defiantly intact in the face of inclusive policies (Portnoi, 2009) and familiar socioeconomic conditions enable these practices to prevail on university campuses (Bradbury & Kiguwa, 2012). Erasmus and de Wet (2011) also revealed that students did not intentionally relate only with their race or exclude those from a different race, but were attracted to their groups because of the similarities they shared with the people with whom they mix.

Language plays a vital role in relation to how students experience university environments (Seabi, Seedat, Khoza-Shangase & Sullivan, 2014; Walker, 2005). In a documentation of the life history of Black and White students at a previously Afrikaans university, Walker found that Black students who could speak Afrikaans reported good race relations experiences while those who could not speak the language reported negative race relations experiences. Black students who could speak Afrikaans stated that they had learned that their ability to speak the language improved their experience of service in the university. Fanon (2008) asserted that the better Blacks spoke the 'Master's' language, the more human they were regarded and were held in higher esteem than other members of the group that did not grasp the 'Master's' language.

Fanon (2008) argued that a Black person had to learn to bifurcate themselves so that they present part of themselves to their fellow Blacks and the other part to Whites. Fanon further asserted that to speak is to exist and the manner of speaking carries with it structure and a way of living that enforces your being. Consequently, language as an integral part of a person's identity was also used to further subdivide people during apartheid with each indigenous group being allocated a homeland. The White race was also subdivided by language: There were two distinct groups of White students in historically White universities, namely, Afrikaans and English students who were taught in their mother tongue. Walker (2005) revealed that White students who attended lectures in Afrikaans did not experience race relations on campus as they were only exposed to their own kind. On the contrary, White students who enrolled in English classes shared that they were faced with having to adjust their minds when relating to other races.

In the Seabi et al. (2014) enquiry, the researchers found that both Black and White students were challenged by language in their studies. The enquiry included students who were enrolled for professional degrees and as part of their studies were required to attend practical lectures. White students experienced frustration at the language barrier they had to navigate during these practical lectures as there were no interpreters and they had no knowledge of a native South African language. Black students, on the other hand, declared that the use of English in the academic setting hampered their academic excellence as it was not their first language. Language is a barrier to learning when misunderstood. Furthermore, the language skills of writing, speaking and reading are embedded in culture (Chen & Yang, 2014). Therefore, language can enhance or hinder the students' learning experience.

With respect to how they relate across racial boundaries, White students expressed sentiments of having to share their culture with their peers, being forced to make new friends

across race and colour-blindness by referring to everyone as the same people (Erasmus & de Wet, 2011). The notion of reverse discrimination was alluded to by some White students who stated that they did not have access to the kind of support that their Black peers were afforded such as extra tutorials and mentorship. Others spoke of the unfair nature of the quota system as they believed that there were people who deserved to be in medical school, but because they were White, had been denied this opportunity. As such, these students indicated their oblivion towards the historical and socio-political context (Erasmus & de Wet, 2011), thus, affecting race relations negatively as they believed that there were better qualified White students who could have been their colleagues.

Both Black and White students stated that they had minimal interracial contact in the Erasmus and de Wet (2011) enquiry. Both groups of students referred to them and us when referring to people from other races. Thus, when relating to each other, they easily stereotyped other races; for example, Black students assumed their White counterparts had superior intelligence and White students perceived Black students to be underprepared for university (Erasmus & de Wet, 2011). Walker (2005) found that both Black and White students oscillated around the difficulty that is associated with relating across race and denied experiencing difficulties when doing so.

White students tend to speak of their experiences of race relations differently from Black students. Van Schalkwyk (2007) noted that White students did not have much to relate about race relations in their everyday life and were very guarded about what they said (Walker, 2005). Similar to their Black counterparts, most of the White participants in the Erasmus and de Wet (2011) study alluded to having no negative race relations experience. However, Black students had more to say about it. The common theme that emerged when White students spoke about

race relations was the notion that apartheid is in the past and that people ought to move on (Byrd, 2017; McKinney & van Pletzen, 2004). In a desire to avoid confrontation with the apartheid past, White students tend to detach their present experiences from the past. Young South Africans who are White struggle with navigating their identity as Whites. This stems from the apartheid past, which generations before them had implemented and upheld policies that are now vilified for their gross human rights violations (McKinney, 2004). This struggle often hinders race relations because Blacks tend to base their realities on the apartheid past.

The merit-based notion that is prevalent across higher education institutions enables the denial of race in academic performance (Bryd, 2017). Focusing on individual abilities and performance enables blindness to systemic and structural issues that are related to race relations (Bryd, 2017). The focus on individualism and its resultant colour blindness is perceived as a coping mechanism by Whites in post-apartheid South Africa (Straker, 2011). Historically White universities are elite in that they are better resourced and sought after by prospective students. Therefore, admission into these spaces is attributed to individual excellence as is the ability to navigate such spaces. This hyper individualism enables students to deny practices of racial inequality and poor race relations entrenched in universities. White students find it difficult to negotiate their identity in post-apartheid South Africa (Long, 2013) and tend to gravitate towards individual merit and performance (Bryd, 2017).

Black students who gain access to historically White universities often benefit from the opportunity to change their lives and of those around them. Such privilege can blind or make them overlook the structural inequalities that limit people's access to the same opportunities they enjoy. Thus, with respect to race relations, such students often work hard at assimilating into the culture of the institutions in which they find themselves. This, in turn, makes them believe that

an individual's ability to perform is the only factor that determines success. It is a complex puzzle of how students rationalize their position in elite spaces with the colorblind conceptions of merit and individualism they hold dearly, and the prospects that racial inequality can often be the result of something other than a person's efforts (Bryd, 2017).

The process of racialization is believed to occur even before people of different races encounter each other (Albert, 2014; Hooks, 2013). Hooks asserts, the logic of White supremacy is embedded in all of society as it permeates our actions and thoughts from a young age. In an enquiry about racism at UCT, one student spoke about how he understood his position in relation to Whites even before coming to the university and having to interact with them. He learned this from his grandmother who used to tell him that White people were better than him and who was proud to be cooking White food (Albert, 2014). Therefore, conditioning in terms of race in society at large influences race relations in institutions of higher learning (Albert, 2014). Thus, institutions of higher learning are a microcosm of society and the experiences of race relations in higher learning interact with other structures outside higher education.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the literature related to the experiences of race relations in university campuses in South Africa was reviewed. The historical context of South African universities was explained and the manner in which this context affects students' experiences has been elaborated. The literature has revealed that race relations at historically White university campuses is a challenge for both students and university personnel. Accordingly, student leaders' experiences of race relations in a South African university is explored in this study. The research methodology that was employed in this study is discussed in the following chapter.



## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology that guided this study is discussed in this chapter. A qualitative research approach was employed as the basis upon which this study was designed. Consequently, the method of data collection included semi-structured interviews during which the participants and the researcher interacted and influenced the discourse. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the material from the interviews. Measures to ensure the credibility of this study as well as ethical considerations are also explained in this chapter.

### **3.1 Research design**

#### **3.1.1 Qualitative research approach**

The researcher considered it best to employ a qualitative research approach to pursue an understanding of student leaders' experiences of race relations. Qualitative research may be viewed as an alternative and a critique to positivism or a quantitative research approach in which phenomena are quantified. Qualitative research approaches are based on the assertion that reality is determined by an individual and is contextual as opposed to an external objective reality (Willig, 2013). Furthermore, the qualitative research approach ensures meaning can be brought to the surface through deep reflective dialogue between the researcher and participants (Sciarra, 1999). Therefore, the participant is viewed as a co-constructor of the reality or realities that emerge from the researcher-participant interaction. This was particularly important in this enquiry as the researcher sought to understand student leaders' experiences of race relations in a South African university.

Qualitative research has its roots in the work of Kant (Hamilton, 1994). According to Hamilton, Kant asserted that:

Human perception derives not only from evidence of the senses but also from the mental apparatus that serves to organize the incoming sense impressions ...human claims about nature cannot be independent of inside-the-head processes of the knowing subject (p. 63).

This assertion highlights the importance of subjectivity in conceptions of reality. Dilthey's (1977) work greatly influenced qualitative research as we understand and practice it. He made a distinction between human science and natural science: Human science seeks understanding while natural science is concerned with scientific explanation. The focus on understanding phenomena as opposed to only explaining them scientifically encouraged the use of different methods of enquiry in the human sciences (Ponterotto, 2005).

Qualitative enquiry allows for the exploration of concepts beyond measuring and describing. Rather, it provides insight on how and why given phenomena exist and the manner in which they are experienced (Guest et al., 2012). Since the focus in qualitative research is to understand human experience, it was deemed to be relevant in this study to afford an in-depth understanding of student leaders' experiences of race relations.

### **3.1.2 Participants**

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit six participants. Purposeful sampling is used when a researcher decides what kind of individuals to include and subsequently, targets that specific group (Palinkas et al., 2015). Because this study was focused on a specific student population, this sampling approach empowered the researcher to exclude participants that would not serve well in answering the research questions (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In addition to the identification of specific research participants based on the research questions, the prospective research participants had to consent to participate in the study. The researcher was

assisted by the Department of Student Affairs to send emails to student leaders to invite them to participate in the study. The prospective participants were given information about what participation in the study entailed. Student leaders who responded positively were contacted to make arrangements for the interview. They were interviewed at a time and place that was convenient to them. Because purposive sampling focuses on a specific group of individuals who are able to engage with the researcher in relation to the research questions, the following inclusion criteria were employed:

- Participants had to be current student leaders in elected positions at a South African university.
- Participants had to have been registered at a South African university for more than one year.
- Student leaders were not excluded from participating because of race, gender and age.

### **3.1.3 Method of data collection**

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Semi-structured interviewing is not rigid, and the researcher's questions drive the interview (Galletta, 2013; Willig, 2013). According to Barriball & While (1994), semi-structured interviews are "well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers" (p. 330). The researcher is allowed to use probes during semi-structured interviews (Barriball & While, 1994). The use of probes empowers the researcher to clarify concepts that participants experience as unclear. When sensitivities are encountered, the researcher can reword and explore the particular sensitivity further. Probing can assist in bringing forth important information that would otherwise have remained unknown (Barriball & While, 1994).

During semi-structured interviews, participants are able to redefine the topic by illuminating aspects, which the researcher may have not been aware of before the interview (Galletta, 2013). The participants were interviewed at a time and place that they found convenient. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each participant. Consent was obtained from each participant to have his/her interview audio-taped. This allowed the researcher to capture the participants' views accurately and analyse the interview material accordingly. Each interview was approximately one hour. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcripts will be kept for 15 years at the university where the study was conducted.

#### **3.1.4 Data Analysis**

IPA was employed to analyze the interview material. IPA focuses on context and an individual's meaning-making within a specific context (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It was deemed suitable for this study because it seeks to ask questions to particular individuals within a specific context. IPA has two primary aims: To examine how someone makes sense of life experience in detail and to provide a detailed interpretation of the account to understand the experience (Toffour, 2017, p.1). The researcher had her own preconceptions about the research, which IPA recognizes. Pietkiewicz and Smith's (2014) steps were followed in the analysis of the interview material; they are as follows:

- Multiple reading and making notes: This stage assisted the researcher to immerse herself in the data, somewhat relive the interview and acquire enhanced insight into the interview material by going over the audio tapes and making notes.
- Transforming notes into emergent themes: Once the researcher had gone through the interview material several times, she was able to use her notes to generate themes.

- Seeking relationships and clustering themes: Connections between various themes were made. Similar themes were clustered together. Furthermore, this stage involved the establishment of relationships across themes.
- Writing up: The identified themes are presented in the findings. Moreover, quotations are used to substantiate the themes. The participants' accounts as well as the interpretation thereof are presented (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

### **3.2 The role of the researcher**

According to Smith and Osborne (2008), the research process in which the researcher assumes an active role may be regarded as dynamic (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Both the researcher and the participants shaped the findings of the study through the manner in which they interacted with each other and with the interview questions. The researcher's objective was to acquire an insider's perspective through the interview process. However, her own preconceptions did not allow this to occur completely (Tuffour, 2017). The researcher acknowledged that her subjectivity may have influenced the manner in which she interpreted the responses she received from the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

IPA was used on two occasions in the interpretation of the findings: First, in the manner the participants conveyed their perceptions and second, in the manner the researcher received this information. Thus, during IPA, a double hermeneutic was at play (Tuffour, 2017), namely, empathic hermeneutic and questioning hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Empathic hermeneutic is concerned with the lived experiences of the participant while questioning hermeneutic is concerned with asking critical questions. From this perspective, a person is viewed as cognitive, physical, emotional and linguistic being. People are, therefore, complicated beings who have an array of affect and ideas. Accordingly, difficulty expressing certain

sentiments or concepts was expected and the researcher had to be aware of the mental and emotional state of her participants throughout the interview process (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Furthermore, the researcher considered these emotional and mental states when analyzing and interpreting the participants' statements.

### **3.3 Measures to enhance the quality of research**

To ensure the quality of the study, credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability and reliability were observed.

#### **3.3.1 Credibility**

Credibility is the extent to which data presented is accurate and reflective of the participants' descriptions (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey, 2016). In this study, it was the participants' experiences of race relations. To achieve this, referential adequacy was used. Referential adequacy is the use of different sources to document research findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The researcher made use of the audio recordings as well as notes made during the interviews.

#### **3.3.2 Transferability**

Transferability is "the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings" (Trochim et al., 2016, p. 72). Even though qualitative research is sensitive to context, generalizability is unlikely as no two contexts are the same and are subject to change over time; consequently, transferability is the responsibility of the reader (Trochim et al., 2016). However, to ensure that the reader has the ability to discern the extent of the transferability of this study, the researcher provided details of the context in which the study occurred as well as the assumptions that were central to the study.

### **3.3.3 Dependability**

Dependability is concerned with whether the observation of one phenomenon twice will yield the same result; in other words, one determines whether there is consistency (Willig, 2013). Obtaining the same results in qualitative research is difficult as it is subject to context and time, which are ever-changing (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Thus, to ensure dependability, the researcher accounted for the changes to the context and how these affected the research findings by keeping notes on each aspect of the research process.

### **3.3.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability is the extent to which the research findings can be confirmed by others (Trochim et al., 2016). To ensure confirmability in this study, the researcher applied data reconstruction by using notes as well as the transcribed material from the interviews to generate themes.

### **3.3.5 Reflexivity**

The researcher's value propositions and intellectual rationalizations were accounted for through personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity. Reflexivity is an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process as well as the acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining outside of one's own subject matter while conducting research (Willig, 2013, p.10). Personal reflexivity involves the manner in which the researcher's perspective on life influences the research process and how this perspective is altered as a result of the research (Treharne & Riggs, 2014). Accordingly, in the present study, the researcher's perceptions of race relations were reflected on in a manner that influenced this study. Epistemological reflexivity refers to the scope of the design of the research in answering the research question. In other words, one may ask how the design of the study

affected the answers that were found and if there could have been different answers if a different design had been used (Willig, 2013).

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

In conducting research, psychologists adhere to guiding principles to ensure that areas of concern for participants and researchers are addressed (VandenBos, 2010; Willig, 2013) In this study, the anticipated areas of concern related to ethics follow.

#### **3.4.1 Voluntary and informed participation**

Participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the study before the commencement of the interviews. Participation was voluntary; prospective participants' willingness or lack thereof did not benefit or disadvantage them in any way. Participants were informed of this when they were recruited and given an informed consent form to sign (see Appendix A). Furthermore, the participants were told that should they feel uncomfortable at any point in the study, they could withdraw from the study without incurring any penalties.

#### **3.4.2 Right to privacy and confidentiality**

The privacy of participants was upheld; the research results are reported in such a way so as not to reveal their identity; for example, pseudonyms were used. The researcher was responsible for transcribing the interviews to ensure the participants' confidentiality. The only persons who have access to the transcripts are the researcher and her supervisor.

#### **3.4.3 No harm or injury to participants**

Rubin and Babbie (2014) maintained that research should never injure or psychologically harm participants, and researchers should be aware of and guard against this. In an event that the participants experienced any distress, they would be debriefed by a clinical psychologist (see Appendix F).



### **3.5 Conclusion**

The research methodology employed in this study has been presented in this chapter. The researcher used a qualitative research approach as it was deemed suitable to answer the research questions; details thereof have been outlined in this chapter. In the following chapter, the findings are presented.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university. To arrive at this understanding, the position of student leaders on race relations was explored. In addition, how student leadership was affected by race relations was examined through the experiences of the student leaders who were interviewed. Seven superordinate themes and 13 sub-ordinate themes emerged from the analysis. A short description of each participant is provided before an enumeration of the themes. The themes speak to the experiences of race relations among student leaders in the university environment.

### **4.1 Participants**

The participants of this study were all student leaders who studied at the same South African university. As per the inclusion-exclusion criteria of this study, the participants were elected in the positions they held and had been students at the university for more than a year. Although the participants were from various race groups found on the university campus, they were not representative of every race group on campus. The participants were from three race groups, namely, African, White and Coloured. Attempts at securing an interview with an Indian participant who initially volunteered failed as the potential participant cancelled at the last minute on more than 3 occasions. Other potential Indian participants did not volunteer. Thus, the researcher could not secure an interview with an Indian participant. Each participant was interviewed at a time and place most convenient to them. A brief description of each participant follows; as noted previously, each participant was given a pseudonym.

#### **Thabang**

Thabang, an African male student, had been a registered student at the university for three years. Furthermore, he had been a student leader for three years.

### **Paul**

Paul, a White male student, had been a registered university student for five years and in student leadership for four years.

### **Thandiwe**

Thandiwe, an African female student, had been a student leader for two of the three years she had been registered.

### **Justin**

Justin was a Coloured male student who had been a registered university student for four years and had served as a student leader for two years.

### **Glen**

Glen, a Colored male student, had been registered university student for two years and a student leader for a year.

### **Lethabo**

Lethabo, an African female student, had been a student leader for two of the three years she had been registered as a student at the university.

## **4.2 Themes**

The superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged from the interviews are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

### *Themes*

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes
South African history	Apartheid and democracy Equality Space

Racial integration	Racial discrimination Us vs. them Trust Interracial friendships
Culture	Representation Language
Intersectionality	Class and race relations Complexity vs. reductionism

**4.2.1 Theme 1: South African history**

The history of South Africa still permeates much of the lived experiences of South Africans to date (Portnoi, 2009; Van Schalkwyk, 2007). This theme emerged as student leaders referred to the history of race relations in South Africa in their present-day experiences. The manner in which the participants spoke about their experiences of race relations and its historical effects on their lives was revealed through three subordinate themes: Apartheid and democracy, equality, and racism.

***4.2.1.1 Apartheid and Democracy***

When relating their experiences of race relations at a South African university, the participants drew parallels between apartheid South Africa and democratic South Africa. The participants spoke of the various ways in which the country’s history of apartheid still dictated race relations in the university environment. Some spoke of it in terms of the historical context of the university and some spoke of it in general terms as it applied to South Africa. One participant

explained how the history of the university in relation to racial discrimination resulted in racial conflict:

*I think at this university, it is inevitable and wherever you are, I think within this institution you are gonna face certain racial conflict with people. Whether it be from White people or from Black people, but I think at this institution, given the fact that it is, it was an Afrikaans White institution, I think that it is inevitable that you will be confronted with race situations, with problems like that. - Justin (Coloured male)*

Another participant noted that racial division was based on the history of apartheid and was entrenched by student political parties. He asserted that there was a fixation with apartheid:

*The notion of, if I can go back, the notion of apartheid, if I can put it like that. We are still hung up on that even today if you look at student political parties on campus. You look at the (names political party) political party, last year with the entire student elections, how they went on. So, everybody, they made it a race thing, when a White representative came up, they started booing her. When a Black representative came up they were cheering. So, that is all I can say about that, that is all I can say. - Glen (Coloured male)*

Another participant believed the issue of race relations was linked to the manner in which South Africa transitioned from apartheid to democracy. She thus voiced her opinion:

*For me, one of the biggest problems is the transition between apartheid to your democracy. That period for me is very problematic because what we failed to understand then is the people were still hurt. People were still living with the impact of apartheid and it has affected us till now. But, we wanted to act as though it doesn't exist, we wanted to act as though we have forgiven, and everything is okay. I am not*

*opposing forgiveness, but I am saying is we failed to acknowledge pain when we should have acknowledged it, we failed to look at things for what they were at a particular point in time and it is only now that we are starting to see the ripple effect of all of that. - Thandiwe (African female)*

Thandiwe questioned the freedom that democracy bought to the people of South Africa. She pointed out that the victims of apartheid continued to live under the same economic conditions they were subjected to during apartheid in democratic South Africa. She further expressed her view as follows:

*Because, we literally moved from oppression to freedom, but what freedom are we talking about when we are still not particularly equal? But you're selling me the idea that we are equal, but, if I look at where I find myself economically, it doesn't make sense. - Thandiwe (African female)*

#### **4.2.1.2 Equality**

Given the unequal society South Africa was during apartheid, much of the work in post-apartheid South Africa has been and continues to be about creating equal opportunities for all South Africans. The participants related how, in their experience, working towards achieving equality, affected race relations. Lethabo, an African student leader, believed that because equality served Black students, White students were not concerned with it:

*Again, what we must understand is this whole thing of equality doesn't serve them, them being White people. They don't need equality, like people don't, it's Black people that need it. Because we come from a position of disadvantage; so, we need the equaliser, we are the ones who need a step up. - Lethabo (African female)*

The notion of certain issues being prevalent in a given race group was also noted by another participant. His experience thereof was different to Lethabo's experience in that he was White. Contrary to Lethabo's observation, Paul, a White student leader demonstrated concern for equality such that in his election campaign, he declared that his work would focus only on helping Black students:

*I think because many of my policies are tailored, I said in my election campaign that all my fundraising is gonna look at helping Black students because I don't feel like White students need to be helped. I feel they have thousands more opportunities and available options to exhaust whereas black students have one or two. - Paul (White male)*

Paul related how he was treated like a sell-out among White students for wanting to work towards equality. He thus related this experience:

*I have been coined the term sell-out in the White community. They call me things like chameleon, that I can just blend into other groups just to make sure that they like me. - Paul (White male)*

Thabang alluded to empathising more with Black students in his work as a student leader. He understood the Black students' financial difficulties were part of historical injustices. Therefore, he was of the view that giving a Black student financial assistance was a way of empowering the larger community from which the student came. He explained his view as follows:

*It stems from a historical perspective that is why for me when I see a Black student sitting in my office, it is most likely a lineage of a build-up of financial problems. White students you might find that over the last generation or two, financial problems might have erupted in the family. So, in a situation like that, and then you*

*also consider things like black tax that many Black students are subjected to after qualifying here and getting their degrees. You see, I always see, controversial but I will say it, I always see for example helping a Black student as helping a lineage and a family of people. That is why I always empathise more with Black students that I usually deal with because I know that, for example, poverty in general is a Black problem in South Africa. Even the stats say themselves that Black women and Black men are still the lowest paid in the country. - Thabang (African male)*

#### **4.2.1.3 Space**

The participants referred to spaces in the university campus and outside in racial terms. Certain spaces were understood to be for a given race while others were understood to be for another race as was the case during apartheid in South Africa. Lethabo explained it as follows:

*Ja, there are predominantly Black spaces and I don't know if we are unwelcoming or uninviting to White people, but I know, for instance, even with me and my circle of friends if we were to chill somewhere, we are not going to actively invite White people because they are White into our space. But, we don't mind if they come right, we are accommodating for the most part. - Lethabo (African female)*

A similar observation was made by Thandiwe when she pointed out that various race groups kept to themselves and were found on given spaces on campus:

*You then have your Indians at this university if you go to (mentions public space at the university) you will notice that there is a whole culture at this university, where there is your Indians, there is your Blacks, there is your Whites and it's just some of your Coloured people that try to alternate within the system and it's because of what they particularly associate with because of their growth. - Thandiwe (African female)*



An understanding of space in racial terms hindered optimal race relations because certain groups avoided given spaces because of race. Paul gave an example of this:

*I am quite a diverse individual and most of my friends are also Black students and everything. So, I have that ease there, but then it's always that when I am walking with that bigger group or when I am at a party and everything and my White friends see me, and I am like "Don't you guys wanna come to this party with me" it is "No we don't wanna go to Yamies, they don't play nice music." But, I know that it's not that they don't play nice music, it's that there are too many Black students there. - Paul (White male)*

The notion of spaces being understood in terms of race reinforced discriminatory racial patterns of the past. The following quote exemplifies this:

*Commonly, you are black, you are poor, these spaces were not built for you to begin with and the fact that you are here already agitates White people. - Thandiwe (African female)*

Space led to racial segregation and alienated those that wanted to be part of a given community:

*It was a very, very White residence and it was a very, very White space and Black people were coming out and saying they that don't feel included in that space. - Thabang (African male)*

One participant asserted that the space in which students find themselves can affect their academic performance in that they feel excluded from the space. He thus explained this idea:

*If every day, uhmm, for example, I am going to a campus and it is a very Afrikaans campus and you feel excluded, it is not a space you would want to be in. It is not a space, I would submit, you would want to thrive in due to the lack of uhmm, for*

*instance, you would feel excluded from the university space. So, these are the things that as a university, as a leadership, you want to see a neutral space, where all students can feel included and it will help them strive for their best potential. - Thabang (African male)*

#### **4.2.2 Theme 2: Racial integration**

The multiracial student population in university campuses in South Africa presents opportunities to relate across race. The participants of this study related their experiences of race relations in relation to the aspects that challenge and promote racial integration. Racial integration involves the removal of barriers that separate people according to race as well as the implementation of equity practices (Wray, 2014). Such practices are concerned with redressing past imbalances and creating equal opportunities for all. This theme is discussed through four subordinate themes: Racial discrimination, the us versus them phenomenon, trust and interracial friendships.

##### ***4.2.2.1 Racial discrimination***

Some participants explained how racial discrimination thwarted race relations at the university. They further described the difference in treatment students received based on the colour of their skin:

*When you are a White student there is some level of respect that you are given; when you are a Black student you are treated with impatience, you are disregarded. It is as though you are less of a human being. - Lethabo (African female)*

*Like, for example, if a Black student would approach a White lecturer, they will sort of be short with the student and say, "I said do 1, 2, 3" and that is it. But then when a White student approaches a White lecturer and they start speaking in Afrikaans,*

*you can see that there is more favouritism and there is bias between the two students. So, often White people would come out with the lecturer speaking Afrikaans and it's like they are friends and stuff like that, but when a Black student is in the same situation, it's completely different. There is just like "ok what do you want, this is what you need ok", it's done. - Justin (Coloured male)*

One participant described the difficulty that is associated with being accused of racial discrimination when students were simply doing their job:

*I believe in call out culture and you would often find that some of the Black SRC members would think I am calling them out because they are Black, when I am calling you out because they are inefficient. That kind of situation where the race card does get pulled more often than it should as a defence against you, you are possibly not doing your job. So, why is the White guy calling me out when I am not doing my job, is it because I am a White guy, or you are just not doing your job? - Paul (White male)*

Lethabo noted that race relations were improving at the university even though there were instances of racial discrimination occasionally; she explained:

*At the university, I think they are getting better, even though we have every once in a while, those weird upsurges where usually it's the White kids who do and say the worst things. - Lethabo (African female)*

The response of the university across race was, in various ways, related to how it affected the student leaders' experiences of race relations at the university. From his experiences, Paul perceived that the university's management felt differently about the various race groups:

*But largely I personally feel that the management feels that White SRC members are far more competent and knowledgeable and hardworking than the Black SRC members. - Paul (White male)*

The other participants shared that the kind of response they got from management was indeed different from that their colleagues of a different race received. They related their experiences as follows:

*I think it's that same thing of when I say something it's not heard, when someone White says the exact same thing: "Wow brilliant!" I literally just sit back, things like that and you are like "Kanti what is happening here?" Or they say it in Afrikaans and you are listening, you are like "I understand Afrikaans, and this is legit what I just said." She literally just said what I said, and I know you heard me say it because you nodded and then you are like "Ja, but there are other things you need to consider" and then she says it and it's fine. So, maybe it's Afrikaans, maybe she is White, I don't know, ja. - Lethabo (African female)*

*You will find yourself sitting in a meeting and you look at the responses that will be given to the White person sitting next to you versus to yourself, it's shocking. It's something that will literally make you like, you will sit there and for a couple of seconds you will be like, "Is it the fact that I don't understand this language that they are speaking, or is something here just, not right?" So, in terms of the treatment that you will be given, oh guys, this university will take you through a lot. When it's Black bodies I don't want to lie to you, you guys will see flames, you will see flames. - Thandiwe (African female)*

Participants also shared that when it came to transgressions, the university was harsh towards Black offenders and showed leniency towards White offenders. They thus testified:

*That difference, preferential treatment, one man uses the word, nigger gets away with a warning and apologising on Facebook. The other, a Black student leader has to go through uhhh, community service and all these other things, but one would dare argue that both these things are the same, if the university's argument could be seen as hate speech. Why is there different treatment for the Black student leader as opposed to the White one who uses hate speech per se. - Thabang (African male).*

*She was a student activist that believed that White kids have an unfair advantage in the system. As a student, as a Black female, she was beaten up by White males and no action followed that. Look at your things like (mentions event) whereas women were being violated, whereas we were seeing things of a very violent nature, things that men had to say towards women, but because it was White boys, what action followed? But, as a Black student you then look at (mentions name) who said that he hates White people, he was taken to an entire court guys, he was suspended for a whole year. - Thandiwe (African female)*

Thandiwe further stated that the difference in treatment across race was not unique to student transgressions, but that it extended to how students received services around the campus as well as in class:

*And slowly but surely you become conscientised by the treatment that you are given by how lecturers will speak to you. From things like a complaint being sent to the lecturer, when your surname is Van Staden and when your surname is Mathebula, you will be given different treatment. - Thandiwe (African female)*

In his work in the readmissions committee, Justin noted that there was a difference in the treatment Black applicants received in comparison to their White counterparts. He said:

*Just to give you a typical example, when I was doing for example appeals in the beginning of the year and I sit on the senate committee doing exclusions and readmissions. And the rate at which White people are readmitted into the institution is shocking, but when it comes to a Black applicant because obviously you'd see it with their names, their names obviously show you. And you'd see the sort of biasedness in that, I remember we had one student and the lady was like "Oh, but no it's..." I am just gonna make an example, I am not gonna use the actual student's name. So, the lady, one of the ladies was like "Oh no, but it is Sanmarie guys can we just be a little bit lenient" and stuff like that. But like when you are confronted with Black applications there is none of that. So, you'd see, you actually see it and you are exposed to it. So, that is what it is. - Justin (Coloured male)*

From Thandiwe's experience in relation to responses towards the various races, the state was also guilty of treating Whites students differently from their Black colleagues. Thandiwe attested that in the absence of White students in a protest, the response was brutality. However, she perceived when Whites were present, there was a level of care applied. She explained:

*And if you look at demographics specifically, you'll begin to understand that there is, should I say a form of care that is applied or rather a form of diplomacy that the state, even the state will apply when White children are there. But the minute it is Black bodies, they have no fear whatsoever of being trigger happy. - Thandiwe (African female)*

Student leaders acknowledged because of their exposure to the different responses towards the various races, they fought harder for the race group, which they felt was being marginalised:

*Even when we are sitting in appeals, we go there with one mandate and that is to try and fight for Black people to get readmitted; not to go there and try and make friends with these people. So, we go there, we get into a meeting, we get out and we leave so... - Justin (Coloured male)*

*So, when it comes to representing and fighting for the student, I will do all that is necessary to do to represent that student, because of the fact that as a Black person, I can empathise with what the problem is. Which per se, senior White leaders in the university, or senior White staff members who usually are in charge of these academic and financial exclusions, might not understand. - Thabang (African male)*

#### **4.2.2.2 The us versus them phenomenon**

The us versus them phenomenon was voiced by some of the participants in that race loyalty played a role when relating across race and in race. Paul explained a situation in which he was made aware of this phenomenon when he supported protest action that was largely driven by Black students:

*And then the white friends are often just like “No, he is not like one of us really anymore, he is not liking our elitist kind of way.” And I found out very quickly what they were like “(participants name)”, they got very angry with me, they were like “(participants name) why are you assisting with them shutting down our campus? You are making me postpone my exam and you’re helping them.” - Paul (White male)*

Thabang also pointed out that during protest action it usually became an us versus them situation with respect to race. He added that race relations were usually hostile:

*So, it was interesting to see that racial divide and it is something that has stayed uhmm in every protest I have seen in this university including when I observed the fees must fall in 2016. It leads to a situation where on one side you had the White people and then you had a line of security and then the Black people were on the other side. - Thabang (Black male)*

Glen explained that the racial divide was an everyday occurrence and not necessarily unique to protest action:

*It is already done you can see it in the university, when you walk around you see, you don't see a lot of mixed groups. You see a lot of groups of Indians, groups of Whites, groups of Blacks. - Glen (Coloured male)*

Justin made the following observation:

*From what I have experienced, I'd say that the integration within this institution is almost non-existent and that is the problem. - Justin (Coloured male)*

#### **4.2.2.3 Trust**

One of the major challenges that students identified for proper race relations was trust.

Paul related his experience in the following manner:

*Uhmm, for me I think the biggest challenge of race relations in student leadership is one, first of distrust. I think a large amount of the time especially in the election campaign that we have, it was concerns of "Can we trust this White man to be in a position of the (mentions position) where he in is charge of fund raising, financial*



*policies that are then going to...is this White person gonna want to benefit Black students?" - Paul (White male)*

Lethabo shared that a White-only SRC would not be as concerned about issues that affected Black students as a Black SRC would. She expressed fears of the past repeating itself when she spoke about her distrust in a White-only SRC:

*So, I don't know, I don't see a space where, with the attitude that some White people have displayed or continue displaying. I don't see a fully White SRC serving all students, including students of colour the way that might be necessary. That is just my personal view, ja that is like my deeply personal like yabo, if I had to take off all my leadership caps and all my political correctness and whatever, whatever, that is my most genuine, authentic standing. I don't think, in the social context of South Africa, we are not ready for that, we are not there yet. We can't go back to that. - Lethabo (African female)*

The lack of trust stemmed from the perception that White students were not affected by the same issues as Black students were. Consequently, they were unable to recognize such issues; Lethabo explained this as follows:

*These social issues that affect us don't affect them, they don't need to be concerned, they have the privilege to be comfortable in their spaces and know ukhuthi aaah even if taxis strike tomorrow I am fine, I have got my car, or I live very close I can walk, I can take a bicycle, I can you know, things like that. And it's not the same, Black people constantly will have to fight, we will have to talk about these issues because we are the ones that are affected, essentially. - Lethabo (African female)*

To gain trust across race, Paul had to consider his subjectivity and noted that having Black friends also aided him. He gave the following account of what happened to him:

*Then it's a large amount of introspection that you as a White person has to do. Thinking of how can I in my privilege, being in this kind of position, how can I acknowledge it, how can I be empathetic towards the situations of Black students that you have never faced and how can you relate to those levels and make sure that you deal with that kind of idea. - Paul (White male)*

*I was able to channel that distrust by saying I am genuine in what I do, my work has spoken for itself in terms of how I have approached things, what I aim to achieve and think largely I was able to manage the distrust because I also had relations, like friendships with many of the Black students who I ended up being part of the same group. - Paul (White male)*

Even when the student leaders gained perspective on issues that did not affect their own race, they experienced hostility from students of other races, they were not trusted to deal with matters that do not affect their race. Two of the leaders explained it as follows:

*I am a student leader, so I'd sort of sometimes be at the forefront of protests and I'd sometimes be at the front and speaking a lot and giving my input. And then you'd get certain individuals that would say "you are not even Black, and you don't even understand what is going on, I don't understand how you can be this person, you don't know what we experience" and stuff like that. - Justin (Coloured male)*

*You start seeing how affected Black students are in campus and then you start seeing how hostile they are a lot of the times to the responses I give when I am saying, "Listen, I can't help you now with this." And then the mere assumption is that "Oh*

*no you are a White SRC member, you just don't want to help me." So, it's not that I can't, it's that you don't want to, but then they get the same response from Black SRC members and then it's "Oh no you actually can't, and we are both from the same race so, I know that you just can't so, it's not like you don't want to." - Paul (White male)*

#### **4.2.2.4 Interracial friendships**

The students' accounts of interracial friendships were similar to their description of race relations as they experienced them on campus. Thandiwe perceived interracial friendships to be skewed in that White people were always determined to show Blacks that they were superior to them:

*I then say notice with simple things, even in friendships; look at your White friends and then your Black friends. Notice one thing, with your White friends, they are always okay with saying that we are equal, we are a rainbow nation, as long as you are a step behind them. The minute you and them are somewhat on the same level, or you want to assume the role of being at the same level with them, they will somewhat start to show traits of their supremacy and their privilege. - Thandiwe (African female)*

Other participants perceived that having an interracial friendship called for detachment from ones' own race group. They had to detach themselves from either their friends or completely from their own race group. They believed that their loyalty to their race group was questioned. In the first quotation the challenge of race loyalty is explained and in the second one the discomfort at knowing that one's race group is oblivious to challenges of other race groups is shared. Two participants shared their experiences:

*I had a White friend neh, I am still friends with her. And she was, she is very, she grew up in a foster home with lots of Black people. So, she understood certain things that we were not comfortable with and she understood why we were not comfortable with it. And now it became a thing of ok now she is for the Black people and not the White people and people like they treated her sort of like as a traitor or something like that. - Lethabo (African female)*

*One of my best friends is Black and I know that, that could possibly offend them and by right it should offend me that you have just said it. So then, I have never been able to keep up with how the Afrikaans culture, how it beliefs and the beliefs in the English culture and the beliefs of the elitist student who is sitting there. I know I come from a family of wealth, but I have never been able to sit around the table where everybody is enjoying a fancy dinner and they all like, "Oh no, did you see that truck protest, now how must I get to my beach house in Umhlanga." And then sit there and I am like, there is a bigger problem at hand. But then you almost sit there, and you are like, "I want to say something, but I don't want to, but I am also not comfortable being here anymore, so I sort of just wanna take myself out." - Paul (White male)*

Lethabo explained that having interracial friendships or attempting to have them exposed one to different cultures, which required adjustments, for example, changing the language used to accommodate someone of a different race. She explained:

*And as SRC or rather as individuals, we visit each other's spaces as friends so, (mentions colleague) is White he can come into our space, Black people and we will speak English and we will talk and you know it's, there are things that he will do that*

*you know we will make a joke about like “Hahaha White things.” Things that he will say like, “Iyooh Black people,” but it is just cultural differences. Like cultural shock I suppose whatever, but it’s fine, it’s not really problematic. - Lethabo (African female)*

#### **4. 2.3 Theme 3: Culture**

Culture involves an identity that people ascribe to in relation to everyday practices and various milestones in life (Van Dyk, Tlou, & Van Dyk, 2017). Culture may differ across contexts and is specific to a given time and space; consequently, culture is dynamic. Institutions have cultures that they practice. Accordingly, the participants spoke about the manner in which culture affected their experiences of race relations.

##### ***4.2.3.1 Representation***

One participant shared his experience in a specialised campus at the university. He spoke of the alienating way symbols can be to a given race group that did not represent them:

*It was just the statues, the pictures, the signs on the wall and the writings, they were not things that a Black student would find accommodating. I recall it, it was a very very White space. - Thabang (African male)*

Another student explained how the initiation processes in her residence represented the White race and did not resonate with her culture:

*Well I mean like, for instance, there were various expectations of us in res as first years that the White, let me say the Afrikaans students who were mostly White were comfortable with doing. And we just didn’t understand, “Why are we doing this, what does it mean?” Like, for instance, calling everyone, what was it? It was the Jevrou, Mevrouw, whatever calling people that and then there were other kinds of like*

*greetings that we would do when we were in the residences. And then they were like greetings that were tailored for the male residences right and for instance, in, in, like from a Black perspective or from a Black culture rather it's not really things you are comfortable saying. - Lethabo (African female)*

Some participants noted instances where there was representation of Blacks in the university. However, they added that Black people were not acknowledged until they acted in a particular way. Two participants shared their views:

*So, you will never acknowledge me; in essence, you are saying that I won't be human enough until I speak a certain way, until I walk a certain way, until I behave a certain way. So, I must disregard who I am, my culture, my experiences so that you are comfortable enough to tolerate me? Is that what you are saying in essence? - Thandiwe (African female)*

*So, I think that uhhh, and even if there are Black people within these upper structures of leadership within this institution, they are oppressed and suppressed by the White voice so, that is also what I have experienced at this place. - Justin (Coloured male)*

#### **4.2.3.2 Language**

All the participants spoke about the manner in which language affected and continued to affect race relations; particularly, because historically, their university was exclusively for Whites who spoke Afrikaans. One participant viewed language as a racial divider:

*I think language, it is always going to be a part of race, racial segregation and I think it's something that we can't avoid. I mean that is why we have been fighting for*

*the medium of instruction in the university to be English only so that we can avoid such things of favouritism. - Justin (Coloured male)*

Some participants declared that it was unfair that Afrikaans students had the choice to study in their mother tongue:

*English is not your home language, Afrikaans is not your home language either, so you need to learn these languages. So, not only are you somewhat learning, you are trying to develop yourself in terms of language and at the same time you are trying to acquire your degree. How are we then saying that we are even equal? Why are White Afrikaner kids being taught in their mother tongue? I have to come here and learn English. It's not as if I do psychology, I do politics, I do international relations in my mother tongue, and I don't. I am learning a different language and at the same time I am fighting to acquire my degree. - Thandiwe (African female)*

Language was a contentious issue: There was protest action calling for the removal of Afrikaans as medium of instruction at the university. The participants thus related their experience of race relations during and after the protest action:

*I think Afrikaans must fall was the climax, when pictures were released of literally the two different lines next to each other, of White students, Black students and then security in between them. You could see that, that was the moment where you would probably have Afrikaans students never wanting to integrate with Black students or integrate with predominantly Black political parties. - Paul (White male)*

The racial divide that was evident during the protest action was also witnessed after the protest action. One participant described race relations as tense afterwards:

*I lived in res and in 2016 and 2017, the race relations there were very tense if I could put it like that. Especially in 2016, just because of the whole protest that happened you know after Afrikaans must fall, so the house committee members, you could see it. Because at the end of the day it ended up being a race thing as opposed to a language thing. - Lethabo (African female)*

Another participant asserted that things had not changed with regard to race relations after the protest action calling for Afrikaans to fall:

*I don't think it's changed a lot after the movement because things are still the same with the institution at this university besides the fact that it will become an English medium of instruction only university. The current space is still the same, the university like nothing has changed, people are still segregated in terms of their race, and it's been the same. So, I think it was a win, the moment was a win and a loss at the same time. - Justin (Coloured male)*

The protest action calling for the fall of Afrikaans was not viewed through the same lens by all the participants. Some perceived it as a movement for equality:

*Afrikaans must fall is a movement for inclusiveness, it's a movement for a free space for diversity, it's a movement for equality, it a movement for ja, equalizing the playing fields. That whole of English is not my mother tongue, English is not your mother tongue, now we are equal, let's get this degree in the same language. - Lethabo (African female)*

It was also viewed as an attack on Afrikaans as a language:

*Like with #Afrikaansmustfall, it's never gonna happen, like you can't just take away an entire language that basically built part of the nation. Like Afrikaans is there,*



*Afrikaans will always be there, you can't take it away. If you want to take Afrikaans away in schools, Afrikaans will be somewhere else as well. So, you can't do that, if I can put it like that. - Glen (Coloured male)*

Some participants noted that the protest action calling for Afrikaans to fall did not affect students as much as it appeared to have. Thabang explained this as follows:

*I would say, people don't care, most people don't care, because of the apolitical nature of this university, most people don't care about the fact that Afrikaans must fall happened. That these group of students were for Afrikaans must fall, because people just want to get their degrees. In and out and that apolitical nature and that lack of conversation, in general people don't care and it's only the student leaders who were there who remember. - Thabang (African male)*

*I am studying in English and my home language is Afrikaans; so, whatever happens on campus doesn't concern me at all. So, as long as I can speak Afrikaans yes, but it won't affect me as a student on campus. - Glen (Coloured male)*

One's accent when speaking a language was highlighted as something that could alienate you in the university space:

*I was doing Juris prudence and White kids sent a complaint to the Deputy Dean of the Law Faculty saying that they don't understand the lecturer he has a Bantu accent. I've, like how many lecturers have an Afrikaans accent? We put ourselves through the process of saying that I will understand what he is saying. - Thandiwe (African female).*

The participants perceived the difficulties encountered with language fluency interfered with the work that they as student leaders had to do at the university. One participant thus explained it:

*We had an email sent back saying, “Oh, no this report was compiled in very bad English.” But we have Black students who can’t speak English as well as other students and then they must probably acknowledge that. You can’t discredit all the work that they have put in simply because they don’t speak good English. - Paul (White male)*

Even though language was perceived as being divisive with respect to race relations, it was viewed as an enabler of race relations:

*I find it easy, but I think like I said it’s because of my upbringing, the mere fact that I am able to understand elements of Sepedi, Setswana, I am able to understand the language. - Paul (White male).*

#### **4.2.4 Theme 4: Intersectionality**

The participants tended to intertwine their experiences of race relations with other aspects of their identity. They noted these factors and their race as determining factors of how they experienced race relations. The intersections between their race and other factors are examined through two subordinate themes, namely, class and complexity versus reductionism.

##### **4.2.4.1 Class and race relations**

The participants acknowledged their experiences of race relations were also affected by the class in which they found themselves. Paul noted that because of the class divide, students of various races had different experiences of the university. He explained his view as follows:

*I think the biggest thing is the class divide between the White students and the Black students. That it is almost an idea of, there is like a utopian, euphoria that White students live in, where there is no single problem, “My dad paid all my fees, I got my discount, I get to go to class, why don’t you want Afrikaans at the university like, I*

*am an English student I don't even have Afrikaans, but like my Afrikaans friend, she wants her Afrikaans class." And then it's all of those things of "Oh no it's parking, that is my biggest problem, it's parking on campus, my biggest problem is I don't want a Tribeca, or I want Tribeca just to lower their prices a little bit." And then you get the Black students saying, "I can't even get into university, I have been academically excluded." - Paul (White male)*

Lethabo asserted that the class divide was a reality across race in the student population:

*You talk about fees right, you talk about food prices, and look at ok who do these issues affect? And mostly it's a class thing, so the middle, lower, working middle class, if I can put it like that. And who is in that group? Black people, if you look at, for instance, helpdesk, at helpdesk almost everyone we helped from the SRC's perspective was Black, people of colour. - Lethabo (African female)*

The racial divide that resulted from class as observed by Paul led to those in higher classes being blind to the reality of those in a lower class. This blindness subsequently produced feelings of irritability among those that in a lower class, who were predominantly Black, towards Whites in a higher class. Paul thus shared his thoughts:

*And I think that, that is where the students have been like no, you can't say that because it's so easy for you to do these things, you have MacBook's in classrooms, but I have to go the labs to do the same assignment and it's just that reluctance to see the other side from White students. And Black students are getting fed up by White students just thinking that everything is easy and what do you have to complain about at this university type of stuff. - Paul (White male)*

Thandiwe explained that although her Black and White colleagues might share the same sentiments, their interpretation and perception thereof were different. She went on to explain how this was linked to the past as well as class:

*I think that some Black student leaders would share my sentiments also with some White student leaders, they would also share those sentiments, but then the only place where we would then differ is our perception and interpretation. Because what one perceives as barbaric, I might interpret as anger, you cannot police my anger, you cannot tell me how angry I should be about my reality and my past. You cannot expect me to sit down and have coffee with you whereas I am someone who stands the risk of falling back into poverty merely because I do not have the financial resources or any other form of resource; in fact, accommodation, food, resources that basically contribute to me performing academically, I don't have that. - Thandiwe (African female)*

Another participant spoke of the way in which race and class determine how you serve students. She spoke of how in the SRC, which was predominantly Black, helped students. She explained the difference between their work and previous SRCs, which were predominantly White. She declared the previous SRC's work was luxurious and aimed at rich people:

*For instance, you can even check the differences between, okay, this SRC, we did a food drive right. We did a food drive thanks to the work of uPhindile from RAG and it's been quite successful; whilst the food is not enough, we don't get enough, there is lots of students who are still on the waiting list for the SNAP programme. It's something and people are contributing, and we know uguthi it's helping right. Before then, the plans that we saw for serving students like included things like golf day, I*

*don't know like the weird luxurious sports days nje that were planned. And we are like okay, it's fine, who is your target market? Okay, it's rich people. - Lethabo (African female)*

Thabang noted that there was a quiescent way of relating across race at the university. He noted that race relations became tense when issues affecting Black students arose. He attributed this to White students' lack of understanding of the reality of Black students:

*On a normal day, nobody per se notices race relations, when it comes to issues of race, issues of that affect predominantly Black people such as finances, such as accommodation uhmm, that is where I would say race relations become uhmm, become tense. Uhmm, for example, there is a lack of understanding, especially at a higher level at this university of the things that affect Black students' academic performance. - Thabang (African male)*

Class did not only divide across race, it also united. Students who had interracial friendships often had similar backgrounds in relation to their socioeconomic standing. Paul gave an example of this:

*The race relations, you see some groups being extremely hostile, and then you see other groups being very homogenous, being very grouped together and like recognising their diversity. But normally it's because you will see that a lot of the Black students, we do get also students who are coming from model C schools, White schools, predominantly White schools and they have been socialised with the White students and they are coming here as friends. - Paul (White male)*

Thandiwe noted that class and race relations were so interwoven that even amongst a particular race, there were differences, which affected race relations to such an extent that there were race groups within a race group. Thandiwe thus explained this:

*So, with Black people you will find that even within ourselves there is groupings that exist. You'd find that you're a Black child that went to a model C school, your Black child that went to a private school, your Black child that went to a school eKasi, you guys are all different. The way that you relate to one another is different because then the culture of classism also comes into play because I come from a better society than you, I am better spoken than you, I articulate myself better than you, I therefore think that I am a better human being than you and your poverty and where you come from. - Thandiwe (African female)*

The inseparability of class and race relations was such that in certain instances there was distrust within one race as whose interest in relation to race, members of the same race group held.

Lethabo explained her predicament in this regard as follows:

*But, ja, the political student leaders, they just, they don't think we have Black students' interest at heart. They think we have or we enjoy certain privileges or maybe because we are from a certain class or something. They just assume because you are (mentions student organisation) you enjoy the same, not the same, but nearly the same benefits White people generally enjoy. Like you don't have to worry about historical debt, you don't have to worry, you don't understand when a student comes to you and says, "I don't have food." Like you know things like that, they just think we don't empathise, we can't understand, or we don't care enough because we are (mentions student organisation) and (mentions student organisation) is for all*

*people, which includes White people. Which to their eyes are rich people so I don't know, that is why ngithi it gets weird. - Lethabo (African female)*

On the contrary, one participant perceived race was more powerful than class. She noted that even when a Black person was the same class as a White person, they would never be treated as equals. She thus explained:

*You might be a better black, you might be a coconut, you might, in your head somewhere, you might think that wena you have made it in life, you are part of the elites, even with your Black elites. Just because you have a fancy suit on, you have Jordan's on, you have an iPhoneX, it does not mean that you play at the same level as White people. White people will always be determined to show you that actually you are Black and your blackness, your existence in and of itself somewhat a societal inferiority. - Thandiwe (African female)*

#### **4.2.4.2 Complexity versus reductionism**

The participants perceived they were complex beings, and not just Black or White. Rather, their identity comprised many aspects. They shared how other aspects of their identity were overlooked and sometimes they tended to be addressed exclusively by their race. They experienced this type of tendency to be frustrating in their interactions across race. Lethabo related this as follows:

*Like it just has something to do with how I present it maybe, and even my Blackness maybe, it affects how I present what I know, but it doesn't inform, it's not the only factor of what I know. Does that make sense? Like I don't know Black things only right, so like, for instance, if you were to say something maybe let's say at a meeting and you are speaking, representative of students' rights, and then someone in*

*management from the other side will say something to the effect that what you said affects only Black students. And you are like, but that is not even true, it affects all students, just because I am Black doesn't mean the only thing in my mind is just Blackness like, it informs who I am, it's who I am, it doesn't inform what I know. - Lethabo (African female)*

This sentiment was also echoed by Paul who noted that there were certain student leader stereotypes that he was exempted from because of his race. However, he subsequently disproved them as he did not behave as expected from someone in his race. He thus explained:

*They thought I was gonna be another white SRC member who was just gonna keep their interests at bay, not gonna give them problems, not gonna instigate violence, not gonna cause them issues. Then all of a sudden, they were like, "Hold on! We need to reassess how we look at him and how we deal with him." - Paul (White male)*

Thandiwe pointed out that gender affected race relations. She declared that being a woman and Black meant a double disadvantage. She thus related this:

*Do you understand that being a Black woman is like being Black times two? So, you are just nje, you are the worst kind of violation that could possibly exist. So, you then look at how we treat one another, look at our gender relations; you'd find that White men over any women of colour as we are so classified, they will always act in a very supremacist manner. Do they actually have, do they have the same respect that they'd give to another White colleague, that they'd give to a Coloured woman, an Indian woman, a Black woman? So, when we start discussing those relations, gender roles come into play. - Thandiwe (African woman)*



Lethabo explained that race relations were complex. They went beyond race. She spoke of how language and class affected the treatment she received:

*Or some people treat you differently because you come from a private school or some people treat you differently because you can speak a different language, someone somewhere found out that you can speak a European language. - Lethabo (African Female)*

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the findings from the audio-taped semi-structured interviews with six student leaders were presented. Four themes related to student leaders' experiences of race relations at a South African university were discussed. The first theme, the effects of South African history on race relations comprised three subordinate themes, namely, apartheid versus democracy, equality and space. The second theme, racial integration included four subordinate themes: Racial discrimination, the us versus them phenomenon, trust and interracial friendships. Culture was the third theme and it included the subordinate themes of representation and language. The final theme was intersectionality; the subordinate themes included class and race relations as well as complexity versus reductionism. Race relations are complex and although universal themes emerged from this study, each participant's experience thereof was unique. In the next chapter, the findings are discussed in relation to the literature review. Furthermore, recommendations are made.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the themes identified in the previous chapter are discussed. The findings are linked to the literature on students' experiences of race relations; similarities and differences thereof are discussed and an analysis of the limitations of the current study is also provided. Recommendations regarding approaches to race relations in university campuses and future research in the area of student leaders' experiences of race relations are made. Furthermore, the researcher's reflections are shared. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

### **5.1 Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university. Accordingly, audio-taped semi-structured interviews were conducted with student leaders who volunteered to participate in the study. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as suggested by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) was employed to analyze the material from the interviews. The researcher immersed herself in the interview material by reading and re-reading the transcripts. The reading birthed notes, which led to the generation of themes. Relationships between various themes were established and the process of writing began. As noted in the previous chapter, the following themes emerged from the analysis:

- South African History
- Racial Integration
- Culture
- Intersectionality

### **5.1.1 South African history**

As echoed by the participants, the history of South Africa affects race relations in many ways. The division of education across racial lines during apartheid allowed an institution of higher learning to be identified according to the race group it served. The integration of various races into institutions of higher learning has resulted in challenges related to racial conflict (Mamdani, 1997; Statman & Ansell, 2000; Taylor & Taylor, 2010). In accordance with previous studies, this study also found that racial conflict resulted from having a multiracial student population at an institution, which had only accommodated one race during apartheid.

The university in the present study was historically white and adherence to its historical identity resulted in previously excluded race groups feeling alienated in the university space. The participants described various ways in which the historical identity of the university lingered. This included the residence culture, language and the different treatment that students received in the university, depending on their race. Such practices were found to hinder good race relations as they were based on the historical identity of the university, which had been racially discriminative. Although the university space reflected a cosmopolitan hub, the student leaders' experiences indicated an acknowledgement and validation of one race group over the others. Portnoi (2009) noted this where the everyday practices in a historically White university do not reflect the multicultural and multiracial community of the students it serves.

It was noted that as a result of the historical identity of the university, racial conflict was inevitable on the university campus. However, the challenge of racial conflict described in this study was not limited to the university space. In many ways, university space is a product of higher structures that have a significant influence on society, for example, the government. The government's response to various protest action differed; their response appeared to be

dependent on which race group was protesting. The participants perceived that the government responded with violence to Black protesters and was gentler towards White protesters. During protest action at UCT, White students formed a human shield to protect Black students from the violence instigated by the police (Wesi, 2015). Their action in shielding Black students was successful and highlighted the manner in which the South African state is perceived to discriminate along racial lines.

Structures outside the university environment, specifically, political parties, affected the student leaders' experiences of race relations. Race relations were also influenced by student political parties where race was used in a divisive manner to gain votes. The student political parties are branches of South African political parties. Although no political party is meant to be exclusively for a given race group, political parties are largely understood along racial lines. Loyalty to one's own race plays a significant role in South African politics because the racial discrimination during apartheid fostered distrust along racial lines. The participants of this study explained the manner in which their race loyalty was questioned based on the student political party to which they belonged. Race loyalty was not only used to question the motives of student leaders, but to discredit them and as such, gain votes. This tendency mimics the political landscape in South Africa in that members of parliament are often questioned about the extent of their loyalty to their race and at times, their race is used to discredit their intentions (Magubane, 2018).

The spatial arrangements of apartheid have persisted in post-apartheid South Africa and still affect how people relate along racial lines. Underdeveloped places are predominantly inhabited by the Black population while the White population largely lives in developed areas. The South African government has been working towards a more equal society and has

numerous policies in place to redress past imbalances (Portnoi, 2009). However, the reality is that such policies are yet to materialise and thus, many South Africans are living under the same conditions as they did during apartheid. Consequently, race relations remain relatively the same. Portnoi noted the disparities in policies and practice: Although, equality is upheld on paper discrimination thrives. The inequality that persists in democratic South Africa fosters uneasy race relations; this was also expressed by the participants in this study.

Apartheid was a gross human rights violation (Forsythe, 1985). Consequently, many South Africans have been physically, emotionally and mentally scarred. The (TRC) was set up to address some of the violations experienced and help the country forge a way forward as a non-racial country (van der Merwe & Chapman, 2008). As noted in this study, the pain of apartheid is still felt in post-apartheid South Africa. The lack of acknowledgement for the poor race relations that was created, and separate development has thwarted good race relations as patterns of the past have continued to persist. When the participants reflected about such inequality with students of other races, they noted that there were misunderstandings as most White students were not concerned about reparation. This proclivity has created division along racial lines and thus, race relations tend to mimic those experienced by student leaders during apartheid.

Most of the participants in this study explained how much of their work was concerned with creating equality considering the history of the country. The sole White participant stated that his commitment to reparations resulted in him being labelled a sell-out by the White community. The understanding of difficulties that students face such as financial problems also affected how student leaders perceived and in turn, addressed the issue. A participant explained that he empathized more with Black students while another declared that his work only focused on helping Black students as a result of historical imbalances. Being concerned with equality

affected the student leaders' experience of race relations; the White participant, in particular, was chastised by his own race group for the work he was doing.

The participants perceived there was a racial divide in the university where certain spaces were coined White, African, Indian or Coloured. One participant explained this tendency as harmless because although she kept to her racial space, there was no problem with having Whites in her Black space; she perceived the Black students would accommodate White students, but added there were no invitations extended to them. This inclination was also noted by Hooks (2013) as a defense by various racial groups. Hooks further asserted that Blacks kept together to defend themselves against the victimization they often suffered at the hands of Whites, while Whites kept together in an attempt to uphold their perceived innate superiority.

During apartheid, spaces were understood in racial terms. Public facilities such as beaches, public toilets and even benches were race coded; it was commonplace to see signs such as 'Europeans only' (Clark & Worger (2016). Consequently, good race relations were disabled, and race groups alienated from one another. The inclination of keeping to one's own race is embedded in the historical practices that sought to separate people. Although the university campus did not have signs that designate particular spaces to a given race or culture, the experiences the participants shared revealed the university mainly accommodated and protected the White Afrikaner culture.

The student leaders had to struggle with their own race identity while working towards serving a diverse student population. Their accounts of how history affected race relations highlights the difficulties the university faced in relation to being more inclusive not just on paper, but in practice as well.

### **5.1.2 Racial integration**

Racial discrimination was perceived as a challenge to racial integration in the university space; this resulted in strained race relations. Racial discrimination or the perception thereof hindered good race relations. The participants perceived that some university personnel tended to discriminate against Black students who were said to be treated with impatience and disregard. White lecturers tended to be friendlier towards White students and engaged with them more than their Black counterparts. The participants noted that while Black students were usually rushed out of lecture rooms, their White counterparts conversed about a given subject with the lecturer while they left the lecture room together. The participants perceived that this discriminatory practice alienated Black students while their White counterparts felt at ease in the university environment. This disparity fostered an unequal ground for race relations amongst students.

The manner in which the university management responded to students of various races was noted as a contributing factor to negative race relations. White student leaders were largely perceived as more competent than their Black counterparts by the university's management. Furthermore, the participants shared that when White student leaders made contributions in meetings they were acknowledged for their brilliance whereas when Black student leaders made the same contributions, they were ignored. This disparity in response fostered insecurities in the abilities of Black student leaders.

The participants also shared that the university management's response to the same transgressions depended on the student's race group. They related that when a Black student engaged in hate speech, he was subjected to lengthy legal proceedings, but when a White student engaged in hate speech he was simply instructed to issue an apology. The difference in response

and treatment from the university management across racial lines left non-White student leaders with the understanding that they were inferior to their White counterparts.

A White student leader spoke about being accused by his colleagues of racial discrimination in his duties as a student leader. He referred to this as “pulling of the race card” where Whites were accused of being racist simply because they were White. This may lead to White students withdrawing or hostility, which hinders race relations. The White participant explained that his work also included having to convince Black students leaders that he could be trusted even though he was White. Roberts et al. (2016) also noted that although race relations in South Africa were improving, they were characterized by a lack of trust across racial lines. The findings of this study demonstrated that the lack of trust along racial lines has led to the perpetuation of the us versus them phenomenon. It is the tendency of race groups to stick together and characterize those of a different race as opponents. Erasmus and de Wet (2011) found that students regarded each other as separate (us and them) and when student leaders were in agreement with a different race, they were often labelled, sell-outs or betrayers by their own race. In this study, the White student leader who supported protest action that was driven largely by Black students in the university was asked by fellow White students why he was helping ‘them’. The participants observed that the us versus them phenomenon escalated during protest action at the university. This concurs with the views of Ngoepe (2016) on an evident racial divide and tension during protest action at a South African university. This phenomenon revealed that the realities of students in university campuses are not similar across race and thus, issues that one race group fights to do away with, another group may fight to protect. The ‘Afrikaans must fall’ movement demonstrated this difference (Ngoepe, 2016). The groups’ lack of



similarities helped foster the us versus them phenomenon, which characterizes negative race relations.

Interracial friendships provide an opportunity to create good race relations. The participants shared their experiences of interracial friendships and the manner in which that affected their experiences of race relations. Having friendships across race resulted in an understanding of the realities and cultures of different races. Furthermore, these friendships have been beneficial in creating good relations with students from different races. One must consider one's own subjectivity in order to see the realities the different races experience. Consequently, the student leaders were able to be of service to those of different races. Having friends from different races not only broadens one's appreciation of different races, but highlights the notion that the racial divide does exist. The participants also shared the rejection that they and their friends had to endure from their race group at the university as a result of their interracial friendships. The implication of the results is that interracial friendships are important and should be encouraged as they foster racial integration and give one the opportunity to understand other race groups even though there are challenges associated with this such as rejection by one's own race.

### **5.1.3 Culture**

The findings of the study revealed that the culture of the university created an uneven ground to relate across race: White Afrikaans students adapted easily while their colleagues struggled to fit in the university environment. They further highlighted the problematic way one's culture and race was represented in the everyday practices of the university over the other cultures and races. Symbols in the university mainly resonated with White Afrikaans students. Most participants declared that those who were not White and Afrikaans, did not feel

accommodated. The initiation processes in residences alienated students who were not White Afrikaners. Feelings of discomfort were reported at the practices that students had to engage in during their initiation into the university. The students whose culture was that of the university's culture adapted with ease while those who were inducted into the Afrikaans culture adapted slower than their colleagues. Walker (2005) noted that White students adapted easier to a university environment because their culture was already incorporated into the everyday practices of the institution. The participants highlighted the need to assimilate into the university, which involved talking a particular way in order to be accepted. Bryd (2017) propounded that individuals from disadvantaged groups remove themselves completely from their group identity to be accepted in historically White universities. To overcome this, institutional culture must be interrogated in relation to how it excludes and includes given race groups. The implication thereof is that the everyday practices in the university space should be reflective of a diverse student body.

All the participants spoke of the manner in which language had either affected or continued to affect race relations as they experienced them at the university. They perceived the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction to be the cause of the racial divide among students. Consequently, the protest action that called for the fall of Afrikaans heightened the tension across racial lines. Some student leaders noted that the call for the fall of Afrikaans was a call for equality while others understood it to be an attack on the Afrikaans language and culture.

The divide that existed in the protest action calling for Afrikaans to fall was not only racial, but cultural as well. Not all students whose home language is Afrikaans are White. Afrikaans is spoken by approximately seven million people in South Africa; of these, over four million who speak Afrikaans are non-White (Ndebele, 2013). Whereas one Coloured participant was against

the fall of Afrikaans, another Coloured participant wanted Afrikaans to be excluded as a medium of instruction. Consequently, language divides as well as unites across racial lines and can be used to either improve race relations or impede them. This finding emphasizes the sensitivity and complexity of addressing language issues. It implies that the language issue may not be a simple one that affects student in the same race group in a unilateral way. Rather, it should be carefully navigated with input from all who are affected.

The ability to speak or to understand a given language enables a person to break cultural boundaries that hinder relations. The results of this study revealed that the ability to understand certain elements of the languages of other races affords favorable race relations. Walker (2005) also demonstrated that Black students' ability to speak Afrikaans in an institution that was historically White Afrikaner led to these students navigating relations easier than their peers who could not speak Afrikaans. The implication is that language presents an opportunity to foster good race relations. However, the researcher is of the understanding that no language should take priority over another as this tends to alienate certain groups.

#### **5.1.4 Intersectionality**

The findings of this study showed that the experience of race relations cannot be viewed only as a result of one's race group membership because other groups to which the participants belonged dictated the kind of experiences they had across race. Race and class are almost inseparable in a South African context given the history of inequality (Finschilescu & Tredoux, 2010). Therefore, race relations are also class relations. Furthermore, Fanon (2008) expressed the notion that the inseparability of class and race was equating being rich to Whiteness and being poor to Blackness. The participants of this study also asserted that what characterized race relations was the class divide. Students gravitated towards each other based on their class.

The findings of this study demonstrated good race relations among students from the same class. Uneasy race relations were noted between rich and poor students; the former were predominantly White students and the latter, predominantly Black students. Class not only determines relations across race, but informs them within race as well. It was apparent that the commitment of Africans from the middle class to advance issues that affected poor African students was questioned. Therefore, such students continuously had to continually prove their commitment and understanding of issues that affected students from a lower class.

According to Erasmus and de Wet (2011), the advantages that some students enjoy because of their class blind them to the disadvantages of students from a lower class. They further noted that White students' privilege tends to blind them to the history of inequality and thus, they are unable to acknowledge Black students' disadvantage. In this study, it appeared that Black students who make up the majority of the lower class were losing patience with White students who were oblivious to their reality. Therefore, class unites and divides across racial lines.

The participants related how their complexity was reduced to their race while other factors that made them who they are, were ignored. The student body's tendency to profile student leaders and management along racial lines frustrated the work that student leaders aimed to complete in that they were perceived as representing the race group to which they belonged when they believed they represented all students. This profiling extended to the treatment that student leaders received from management. A White participant explained that as a White student leader, he was approached differently from his Black colleagues until his actions demonstrated that he was not a "typical White SRC member." The profiling of student leaders along racial lines was based on the stereotypes of what constitutes a typical White or Black SRC member. Gender was also noted as affecting race relations where being a Black female resulted

in different experiences of race relations to that of males from the same race. Therefore, the implication is that race relations are complex in that the experience thereof is dependent on the many ways in which one's race intersects with factors such as class and gender.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Race was understood in accordance with the history of South Africa where there are four distinct races: African, White, Indian and Coloured. Not all four races groups were represented in this study because the participants who volunteered upon being invited were African, White and Coloured. The researcher's attempts at securing an interview with an Indian student leader were not successful.

The researcher was an African student; her experiences as well as views on race relations might have influenced what themes were identified. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the study might have yielded different findings should it had been undertaken by a different researcher. The researcher's race may have influenced the interviews; it is possible that the Black participants may have felt more at ease with the researcher and those of other races may not have been as relaxed as their Black counterparts.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

### **5.3.1 General recommendations**

Although the university environment was not the only factor that contributed to student leaders' various experiences of race relations, changes in the university space could affect student leaders' experiences of race relations. The findings revealed that university personnel and/or management treated student leaders' differently across race. This proclivity separates student leaders along racial lines. It is, therefore, recommended that the university invest in diversity training for its personnel.

Interracial friendships were found to demystify other race groups in that one got an opportunity to learn another race group's way of life. The participants reported that the knowledge they acquired from being in an interracial friendship led to positive race relations. Therefore, it is recommended that platforms for intercultural and interracial exchanges be created to foster better race relations.

The us versus them phenomenon was characterized by a racial divide amongst students, particularly when it comes to protest action. It is further recommended that during orientation, all first-year students be given a history lesson about the university structures over time, how they have changed, and where the institution sees itself in the future. The aim would be to foster a common understanding of the extent to which the inequalities of the past affect lives.

### **5.3.2 Recommendations for future research**

Race relations dynamics among African, Coloured and White students were explored in this study. Although a qualitative approach was employed, it is recommended that a study comprising both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and that includes participants from all four race groups be conducted to yield a holistic understanding of race relations.

The researcher found that participants of the same race as she were more relaxed than those of a different race. Therefore, it is further recommended that in a future study, participants are interviewed by a person from their own race.

### **5.4 Personal reflections**

This study was inspired by the work I was exposed to through the Department of Student Affairs when I worked as a research intern. One of the major challenges that student leaders faced was racial tension between themselves and there also seemed to be much distrust along

racial lines. I, thus, believed this study was imperative to aid in the understanding of race relations from student leaders' perspective.

Every step of this study was extremely challenging. On numerous occasions, I wanted to give up only to be convinced by a racially charged incident in society that I should keep going. I wanted to resolve the issue of race relations, I wanted to feel some hope for the future, I wanted to know that I am not alone, that someone else feels what I am feeling and sees what I am seeing. I wanted to get over my race and get on with life, but I have learned that my life has been largely determined by my race. The extent to which race is prevalent within our society has frustrated me; the more I have read, the more I have learned that race is everywhere, and race is nowhere.

There have been incidents that have inspired hope with regards to the decrease in racial discrimination which signals an improvement of race relations that I have witnessed since I started working on this paper. These include the interracial marriage in the British royal family, Siya Kolosi being appointed the first Black captain of the Springboks and being celebrated by all South Africans, and France winning the FIFA World Cup with a multiracial team. In the higher education landscape in South Africa, Professor Kgethi Phakeng, a Black woman, was appointed as the vice-chancellor of a historically White university in South Africa. All these incidences meant something to me as I worked on my paper. Furthermore, they afforded me the opportunity think about their significance to race relations if any.

The views of the participants in this study on race relations affected me in ways I did not imagine they would. I never expected that I would feel sad after the interviews, but I did. I remember after I had conducted an interview with Thandiwe, a Black female student leader, I went home and nursed a headache. She spoke of the injustices that were often perpetuated towards Black students on the university campus. She spoke about simple gestures that reminded

her that she was Black as she navigated the university space. She spoke about things I had chosen to forget that happened or are happening. I cannot say I have fully recovered from that experience.

My own ideas about race were challenged as I interviewed the student leaders. I did not expect a White student leader would be as sincere as Paul was with me. I expected that he would not want to hurt my feelings and tell me that all was well, but he did not. He was open about the challenges of race relations, the beauty of race relations and how he managed as a White person.

Two other participants, Glen and Justin who were both Coloured, both challenged my views on race relations. Justin identified more with African student leaders and spoke of race relations more in terms of the White race and the Black race. He explained that as a Coloured person in the university environment, he had to choose between Black and White students. However, he identified more with the Black struggle and has learned a great deal through his association. His experiences of race relations made me think a great deal about how the study of race relations is in many ways dichotomous. It made me realise that race, and race relations are complex and multifaceted. The more we explore race relations, the more we discover that we do not know much about it.

Glen was the least comfortable of the participants. He seemed to be both bothered and unbothered by race relations. He believed that race relations as he experienced them were human nature and that there was nothing that could be done to change human nature. I found it interesting when he spoke of his position on 'Afrikaans must fall'. He believed that the movement was against Afrikaans as a language and echoed that Afrikaans would never fall as it had built the nation. I had expected him to understand that the 'Afrikaans must fall' movement was calling for equality in the same manner that the Coloured participant before him did even



though it was his home language. I also found his position on the ‘Afrikaans must fall’ campaign peculiar because he had told me that in he was the only Coloured person in his Afrikaans class and the White lecturer struggled to pay him any attention. I had thought of Afrikaans as a language of Whites and it was eye-opening to look at this from Glen’s perspective. I began to appreciate that the Coloured race is unique. Until my interview with Glen, I had thought Coloureds identified as Black or White only and not as Coloured. I also learned that I know very little about the Coloured race.

Thabang had attended multiracial schools before coming to university. I had thought that his experiences would speak more about racial unity and that he would be unaware or underplay the disparities between the resources White students and Black students enjoyed. He did not play out the script that I had expected him to. His views on race relations were centered on justice and I became more aware of the way I profile students. It was the first interview I conducted.

The last interview I conducted was with Lethabo; thus, I was very relaxed because of the experience I had gained. I shared much in common with Lethabo throughout the interview. Her experiences of race relations as a student leader were very similar to Paul’s experiences, a White male. I had expected that her experiences would be more similar to Thandiwe’s experiences as they were both Black females.

Writing up the findings and the discussion for this dissertation has been challenging; at no point throughout this process, did I ever feel at ease. I took breaks during the process to enable me to reflect on what I was writing. This, in turn, enhanced my writing. This has been a very difficult encounter and I am very grateful to the participants of this study for trusting me with their experiences. I trust that my presentation of the findings accurately captures the messages they were conveying to me.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to shed light on student leaders' experiences of race relations. A qualitative research approach was employed as it allows for in-depth understanding of phenomena and not just a description thereof. The research question that guided the study was: How do student leaders experience race relations at a South African university?

One-on-one interviews were conducted with six student leaders from three groups on their experiences of race relations at a South African university. IPA was used to analyze the interview material. The results revealed that the history of South Africa as a racially discriminative country still affects race relations experiences. The results highlighted the manner in which the historical identity of the university, the personnel discrimination along racial lines, the us versus them mentality, existing racial mistrust, class perceptions and racial mistrust impede good race relations. Most importantly, the results suggest that interracial friendships and that learning another race's language can foster good race relations amongst the student body. Given the findings and limitations of this study, it is recommended that future studies using both qualitative and quantitative methods, and including participants from all four South African race groups be conducted to give a holistic and a more enhanced view of race relations.

## REFERENCES

- Adhikari, M. (2013). From narratives of miscegenation to post-modernist re-imagining a historiography of colored identity in South Africa. In M. Adhikari (Ed.), *Burdened by race: Coloured identities in Southern Africa* (pp. 1-22). Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Ahluwalia, P., & Zegeye, A. (2001). Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko: Towards liberation. *Social identities*, 7, 455-469.
- Albert, W.G. (2014). *Racism at the University of Cape Town: Black students' experiences 20 years after democracy* (Unpublished honours thesis). Cape Town: University of Cape Town, South Africa.
- Allport, G.W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. England: Oxford.
- Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. (2001). *The practice of social research*. Cape Town: Oxford. University Press.
- Baloyi, B., & Isaacs, G. (2015, October). South Africa's 'fees must fall' protest are about more than tuition cost. *CNN*. Retrieved from [http://: www.edition.cnn.com](http://www.edition.cnn.com).
- Barriball, L. K., & While, A. (1994). Collecting Data using a semi- structured interview: A discussion paper. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 19, 328-335.
- Bradbury, J., & Kiguwa, P. (2012). Thinking women's world. *Feminist Africa*, 17, 28-47.
- Bryd, W.C. (2017). *Poison in the ivy: race relations and the reproduction of inequality on elite college campuses*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Chapman, R. D. (2016). *Student resistance to apartheid at the University of Fort Hare: Freedom now, a degree tomorrow*. United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Chen, J. J., & Yang, S. C. (2014). Fostering foreign language learning through technology-enhanced intercultural projects. *Language Learning & Technology*, 18, 57-75.

- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The psychologist, 26*, 120-123.
- Clark, N. L., & Worger, W. H. (2016). *South Africa: The rise and fall of apartheid*. London: Routledge.
- Dalal, F. (2013). *Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization: New perspectives from group analysis, psychoanalysis and sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Dilthey, W. (1977). *Descriptive psychology and historical understanding*. Netherlands: The Hague.
- Dictionary, C. E. (1991). Glasgow. UK: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Dyke-Beyer, B. H. C. (2018). *#PennySparrow and the South African race conflicts online: Evaluating twitter as a democratic public sphere* (Unpublished Masters thesis), Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Erasmus, Z., & De Wet, J. (2011). *Not naming race: some medical students' perceptions and experiences of 'race' and racism at the Health Sciences faculty of the University of Cape Town*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics, 5*, 1-4.
- Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks*. London: Pluto Press.
- Finschilescu, G., & Tredoux, C. (2010). The changing landscape of intergroup relations in South Africa. *Journal of Social Issues, 66*, 223-236.
- Forsythe, D. P. (1985). The United Nations and human rights, 1945-1985. *Political Science Quarterly, 100*, 249-269.
- Fourie, F. (2008). Reflections on the Reitz incident implications. *University World News*.

- Francis-Tan, A., & Tannuri-Pianto, M. (2015). Inside the black box: affirmative action and the social construction of race in Brazil. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38, 2771-2790.
- Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*. New York: NYU Press.
- Germner, S. (2012). Tuks students angered by racist poster. *Eye Witness News*. Retrieved from <http://www.ewn.co.za>.
- Govinder, K. S., Zondo, N. P., & Makgoba, M. W. (2013). A new look at demographic transformation for universities in South Africa. *South African Journal of Science*, 109, 1-11. Retrieved from [www.scielo.org.za](http://www.scielo.org.za).
- Grobler, A. (2011, June). Reitz four wait on sentence appeal ruling. *Mail & Guardian*. Retrieved from: [www.mg.co.za](http://www.mg.co.za)
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M. & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hamilton, D. (1994). Traditions, preferences and postures in applied qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln. (Eds), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.60-69). London: Sage.
- Hammarberg, K., Kirkman, M., & De Lacey, S. (2016). Qualitative research methods: when to use them and how to judge them. *Human Reproduction*, 31, 498-501.
- Heleta, S. (2016). Decolonisation of higher education: dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1, 1-18.
- Hooks. B. (2013). *Writing beyond race: living theory and practice*. New York & London: Routledge
- IRR (2016). *Race relations in South Africa: reasons for hope*. Johannesburg. South African Institute of Race Relations.

- Jansen, J. (2010). Over the rainbow? Race and reconciliation on university campuses in South Africa. *Discourse*, 38, 7-11.
- Jansen, J. D. (2013). *We need to talk*. Northcliff: Bookstorm.
- Leedy, P.D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2015). *Practical research: planning and design* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Long, C. (2013). Transitioning racialised spaces. In G. Stevens, N. Duncan, & D. Hook (Eds.), *Race, memory and the apartheid archive: towards a psychosocial praxis*, (pp. 61-90). London: Pulgrave Macmillian.
- Macupe, B. (2017, August). We're not racist: just give coloureds a chance. *Mail & Guardian*. Retrieved from [www. mg.co.za](http://www.mg.co.za)
- Madiba, M. (2014). Student success as the number one affair in student affairs: A structural inequality outlook. In M. Speckman, & M. Mandew (Eds.). *Perspectives on student affairs in South Africa*, (pp 59-760). Somerset West: African minds
- Magubane, K. (2018 April). Why race politics could do immense damage to SA's reputation. *Fin24*. Retrived from [www.fin24.com](http://www.fin24.com).
- Mamdani, M. (1997). Makgoba: Victim of the 'racialised power' entrenched at Wits. *Social Dynamics*, 23, 1-5. doi: 10.1080/02533959708458629
- McKinney, C. (2004). "It's just a story": White students' difficulties in reading the apartheid past. *Perspectives in Education: Identity and Difference in Education: Special Issue 4*, 37.
- McKinney, C. & van Pletzen, E. (2004). ...this apartheid past, we've finished with it: student responses to the apartheid past in a South African English study course. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 9, 159-170.

- Mortlock, M. (2015, October). Open Stellenbosch releases racism documentary. *Eye Witness News*. Retrieved from [www.ewn.co.za](http://www.ewn.co.za).
- Muller, S. (2016, March). Tertiary institutions must initiate change, not pacify donors. *Mail & Guardian*. Retrieved from [www.mg.co.za](http://www.mg.co.za).
- Ndebele, T. (2013). Afrikaans and English no longer “White languages”. South African Institute for Race Relations. Retrieved from: [www.irr.org.za](http://www.irr.org.za).
- Nicholas, L.J. (1993). The response of student counsellors in South Africa to racism in higher education. *Psychology & Oppression*, 198-201.
- Ngoepe, K. (2016, February). Students clash over Tuks language policy. *News24*. Retrieved from [www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com).
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42, 533-544.
- Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal*, 20, 7-14.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 52, 126-136.
- Posel, D. (2001). What's in a name? Racial categorizations under apartheid and their afterlife. *Transformation- Durban*, 1, 56-82.
- Portnoi, L. (2009). Transformative change? Institutional formalities and institutional realities. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 23, 373-385.

- Ramoupi, N. L. L. (2014). African research and scholarship: 20 years of lost opportunities to transform higher education in South Africa. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 38, 269–286.
- Roberts, B., Gordon, S., Chiumbu, S., Goga, S., Struwig, J., Ramphalile, M., & Van Rooyen, H. (2016). The longer walk to freedom: making sense of race relations. Retrieved from <http://www.hrsc.ac.za>.
- Roberts, D. (2011). *Fatal invention: How science, politics, and big business re-create race in the twenty-first century*. New York: New Press/ORIM.
- Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. R. (2014). *Research methods for social work* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). United Kingdom: Brooks/Cole.
- Sciarra, D. (1999). The role of the qualitative researcher. In I.M. Kopala, & L.A. Suzuki (Eds.), *Using qualitative methods in psychology* (pp. 37-48). London/ Thousand Oaks/ New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Seabi, J., Seedat, J., Khoza-Shangase, K., & Sullivan, L. (2014). Experiences of university students regarding transformation in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 28, 66-81.
- Seekings, J. (2008). The continuing salience of race: Discrimination and diversity in South Africa. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26, 1-25.
- Schoole, C., & Adeyemo, K. S. (2016) Access to, and success in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa: Social justice analysis. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 1, 1-18.
- Sheehan, H. (2009). Contradictory transformations: observations on the intellectual dynamics of South African universities. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 7.



- Smith J. A., Flowers P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: theory, method, research*. London: Sage.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. Smith (Ed.). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 53-80). London: Sage.
- Statman, J. M., & Ansell, A. E. (2000). Rise and fall of the Makgoba a case study of symbolic. *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 27, 277-295.
- Stevens, G., Duncan, N., & Sonn, C. C. (2013). Memory, narrative and voice as liberatory praxis in the apartheid archive. In G. Stevens, N. Duncan, & D. Hook (Eds.), *Race, memory and the apartheid archive: towards a psychosocial praxis*, (pp. 25-44). London: Pulgrave Macmillian.
- Steyn, M., & Foster, D. (2008). Repertoires for talking white: Resistant whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31, 25-51.
- Straker, G. (2013). Unsettling whiteness. In G. Stevens, N. Duncan, & D. Hook (Eds.), *Race, memory and the apartheid archive: towards a psychosocial praxis*, (pp. 91-108). London: Pulgrave Macmillian.
- Strauss, H. (2013). '...[C]onfused about being coloured': creolisation and coloured identity in Chris van Wyk's Shirley, goodness and mercy. In M. Adhikari, (Ed.), *Burdened by race: Coloured identities in Southern Africa* (pp 23- 48). Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Taylor, Y., & Taylor, R. (2010). Academic freedom and racial injustice: South Africa's former 'open universities'. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24, 897-913.
- The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 1995* (34). (RSA)

- Tuffour, I. (2017). A critical overview of interpretative phenomenological analysis: a contemporary qualitative research approach. *Journal of Healthcare Communications*, 52, 1-5.
- Treharne, G. J., & Riggs, D. W. (2014). Ensuring quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative research in clinical and health psychology*, 57-73.
- Trochim, W. M., Donnelly, J.P., & Arora, K. (2016). *Research methods: the essential knowledge base*. Australia: Cengage Learning.
- VandenBos, G. R. (Ed). (2010). *Publications manual of the American Psychological Association*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Van der Merwe, H., & Chapman, A. R. (Eds.). (2008). *Truth and reconciliation in South Africa: Did the TRC deliver?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Van Dyk, A. C., Tlou, E., & Van Dyk, P. J. (2017). *HIV and AIDS: Education, Care and Counselling, a Multicultural Approach*. South Africa: Pearson.
- Van Schalkwyk, S. C. (2007). Crossing discourse boundaries-students' diverse realities when negotiating entry into knowledge communities. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 21, 954-968.
- Walker, M. (2005). Race is nowhere, and race is everywhere: Narratives from black and white South African university students in post- apartheid South Africa. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26, 41-54.
- Wesi, T. (2015, October). UCT protesters call for “White human shield”. *The Citizen*. Retrieved from [www.citizen.co.za](http://www.citizen.co.za).
- Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Education.

Wray, C. (2014). Racial integration in the Gauteng City-Region (GCR), South Africa. *Regional Studies, Regional Science, 1*, 79-81.

Zeleza, P. T. (2009). African studies and universities since independence: The challenges of epistemic and institutional decolonization. *Transition 101*, 110–13



## **Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet**

Dear Student,

You are hereby invited to participate in a study that forms part of my Masters degree in Research Psychology at the University of Pretoria. The aim of the study is to understand student leaders' experiences of race relations at a South African university.

### **Please note that:**

- Participation in this interview is voluntary
- The interview will be audio-taped.
- You may refuse to answer any question you would not prefer to answer.
- You may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.
- No information that may identify you will be included in the research report, and your responses will remain confidential.
- Interview data will be kept securely with restricted access.
- You will receive a summary of the final research findings upon request.
- The researcher will assist you in contacting relevant counselling services should you feel that you require such services as a result of your participation in this study.
- Should distress arise as a result of participating in this study debriefing sessions will be made available to you.

---

**Hlengiwe Selowa**

[hlengiie@yahoo.com](mailto:hlengiie@yahoo.com)

---

**Benny Motileng**

[benny.motileng@up.ac.za](mailto:benny.motileng@up.ac.za)



## Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

I have read the information sheet and I am aware of the nature of this study. I hereby voluntarily consent to being interviewed by Hlengiwe Selowa for her study on perceptions of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university. I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary
- The interview will be audio-taped.
- I may refuse to answer any question I would not prefer to answer.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time and there will be no penalties for withdrawing.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.
- Interview data will be kept securely with restricted access.
- Interview data will be re-used for research.
- I will receive a summary of the final research findings should I request it.
- The researcher will assist me in contacting relevant counselling services should I feel that I require such services as a result of my participation in this study.

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed:

Date:



### **Appendix C: Questions for semi-structured interviews**

Hello, my name is Hlengiwe [shake hands]. I am currently completing my Masters in Research Psychology and this research forms parts of my thesis. Firstly, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. The purpose of this research is to understand student leaders' experiences of race relations at a South African university. This interview serves as a tool to collect views on race relations from student leaders.

Before commencing with the interview, I would like to assure you that everything you say during this interview will be kept confidential, and only my supervisor and I will have access to the voice recordings. I want to remind you that you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time during the interview. You also have the right to refrain from answering any question you are uncomfortable with. Should you wish to view the results of this interview, please email me and I will forward these to you upon completion of this study. You can find my contact details on the information sheet provided to you prior to this interview.

**(Transition A:** questions on student leadership – 15 minutes)

1. How long have you been a student leader?
2. What is your experience of race relations as a student leader?
3. Has your experience of the university changed in comparison to when you were not a student leader?

**(Transition B:** questions on race relations at the university – 35 minutes)

4. How would you describe race relations at the University of Pretoria?
  - Probe: What factors contribute to the state of race relations at the university?
5. As a student leader, are there ways in which your race affects how you relate to other students?
  - Probe: e.g., Personally, how do you find relating to students of a different race to yours?
6. In your capacity as a student leader, does your race affect how you relate to university management?



- Probe: e.g., Please explain.

7. In which ways have the recent events (#AfrikaansMustFall and #AfrikaansSalBly) demonstrations affected race relations on campus?

8. Has your everyday campus experience changed after these event(s)?

9. What suggestions do you have to further improve or improve race relations at the university?

(**Transition C:** It has been a pleasure getting to know your experiences of race relations at the university. Thank you. Let me briefly summarise the information that I have recorded during our interview – 5 minutes)

11. Summarise to ensure correct understanding.

12. You are also free to contact me or my supervisor should you have further questions pertaining to the study or the results.

(**Transition D:** In closing the interview, I would like to capture the following demographic information: 5 minutes)

13. How old are you?

14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

15. How long have you been a student at University of Pretoria?

16. What are you studying?

Records race and gender (if unsure ask)

I appreciate the time you took to take part in my interview. I want to thank you for taking the time to help me with my research.



## **Appendix D: Permission to use student leaders**

13 April 2017

Dear Dr Madiba

### **RE: Research permission: The experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African University**

This serves as a formal request to undertake research with student leaders who are regulated by the Department of Student Affairs (DSA). My research topic is: The experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university. The research will be captured in a mini-dissertation in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria in which I am a Masters' student in research psychology. I was an intern for the Department of Student Affairs and have been exposed to the strategic goals thereof; hence, I am of the view that this research will benefit aspects of the transformative ideal of the department.

The proposed research will fall within the qualitative research paradigm; thus, the student leaders who participate in this study will undergo an audio-taped interview as part of data collection. Data collection will commence upon receiving ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria. The final draft of the research findings will be made available to you. Attached to this letter is a permission sheet to sign if you are in agreement with student leaders within the DSA being approached to participate in the study entitled: The experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university. Please note that the University of





UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Psychology

Pretoria will not be mentioned in the presentation of the results or findings of this study and the researcher will only be referring to a South African university in this regard. My research supervisor is Dr Benny Motileng and can be reached through email at [benny.motileng@up.ac.za](mailto:benny.motileng@up.ac.za).

Kind Regards,

---

H Selowa

Student: MA Research psychology.



### **PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH**

I have read Ms. Selowa's request to carry out research by using student leaders regulated by the Department of Student Affairs in which she will be investigating their experiences of race relations.

I hereby give Ms. Selowa access to student leaders regulated by the Department of Student Affairs at the University of Pretoria for purposes of her research. She can proceed with her study upon receiving ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. I would like a copy of the dissertation upon completion.

---

Dr M Madiba

Director: Student Affairs

Department of Student Affairs

RossMaryn Building, Room 1-21

012 420 4001



## Appendix E: Preliminary Table of Contents

### Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Preface.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Chapter 1: Research Objective.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Research Problem.....	3
Definitions.....	4
Chapter 2: Related Literature.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Race Relations.....	8
Students' experiences of race relations in higher education.....	9
Conclusion.....	10
Theoretical Point of Departure.....	11
Chapter 3: Research Methodology.....	12
Qualitative research.....	13
Participants.....	14
Method of data collection.....	15
Measures to ensure quality.....	16
Chapter 4: Results.....	17
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	18
Chapter 6: Summary and Recommendations for Future Studies.....	19
Summary.....	20
Recommendations for Future Studies.....	21
Conclusion.....	22
References.....	23
Appendices.....	24



## **Appendix F: Debriefing research participants**

09 November 2017

Dear Ms. Dlamini

### **RE: Debriefing research participants**

I am a final year Masters student in research psychology and part of the requirement of my qualification is that I undertake a research study. The proposed research study will fall within the qualitative research paradigm; thus, the student leaders who will partake in this study will undergo an audio-taped interview as part of data collection. As such, debriefing will be required as a result of any distress that might arise from participating in this study. This serves as a formal request for your availability to debrief research participants in a study entitled: The experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university.

The research participants will be chosen using the following criteria;

- Participants have to be current student leaders at a South African university in elected positions.
- Participants have to have been at a South African university for more than one year.
- Student leaders of all race, gender and age can participate in the research.

The research participants will be made aware that participation is voluntary. They will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient to them. They may refuse to answer a question if they want to and they may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties. My research supervisor is Dr Benny Motileng and can be reached through email at [benny.motileng@up.ac.za](mailto:benny.motileng@up.ac.za).

Kind Regards,

---

H Selowa



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Psychology

Woodhill Park Centre  
948 St Bernard Drive  
Garsfontein  
Pretoria  
0001

**RE: Confirmation of my availability to conduct debriefing sessions**

I hereby confirm my availability to debrief research participants in a study titled: The experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university. Ms. Selowa has explained the nature of the study to me and I understand the aim and rationale of the study. Should any distress arise as a result of participating in this study I will avail myself to debrief the participants. I am expectant of a final draft upon completion.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Dlamini', enclosed in a circular flourish.

---

Ms. Clementine Dlamini  
Clinical Psychologist (PR: 0654159 )  
Tel: 012 993 0626/7 Cell: 071 433 5122  
Email: clemzadlamini@yahoo.com



## **Appendix G: Permission to use student leaders**

21 May 2018

Dear Prof Nicholson

RE: Research permission: The experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university

This serves as a formal request to undertake research with student leaders who are regulated by the

Department of Student Affairs (DSA). My research topic is: The experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university. The research will be captured in a mini-dissertation for the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria in which I am a Masters' student in research psychology. I was an intern for the Department of Student Affairs and have been exposed to the strategic goals thereof; hence, I am of the view that this research will benefit aspects of the transformative ideal of the department.

The proposed research will fall within the qualitative research paradigm; thus, the student leaders who participate in this study will undergo an audio-taped interview as part of data collection. Data collection will commence upon receiving ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria. The final draft of the research findings will be made available to you. Attached to this letter is a permission sheet to sign if you are in agreement with student leaders within the DSA being approached to participate in the study entitled: The experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African university. Please note that the University of Pretoria will not be mentioned in the presentation of the results or findings of this study and the researcher will only be referring to a South African university in this regard. My research supervisor is Dr. Benny Motileng and can be reached through email at [benny.motileng@up.ac.za](mailto:benny.motileng@up.ac.za).



## **PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH**

I have read Ms. Selowa's request to carry out research by using student leaders regulated by the Department of Student Affairs in which she will be investigating their experiences of race relations. I hereby give Ms. Selowa access to student leaders regulated by the Department of Student Affairs at the University of Pretoria for purposes of her research with the understanding that she will not refer to the University of Pretoria in the presentation of the findings or results in any form. She can proceed with her study upon receiving ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. I am expectant of a final draft upon completion.

---

Prof Caroline Nicholson

Registrar: University of Pretoria

Administration Building, Room 4-23

012 420 4236



## Appendix H: Ethics approval



Faculty of Humanities  
Research Ethics Committee

24 May 2018

Dear Ms Selowa

**Project:** The experiences of race relations amongst student leaders at a South African University  
**Researcher:** H Selowa  
**Supervisor:** Dr B Motileng  
**Department:** Psychology  
**Reference Number:** 14283523 (GW20180411HS)

Thank you for the application that was submitted for ethical consideration.

I am pleased to inform you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 3 May and by the Dean of Humanities and the Registrar on 23 May 2018. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

**Prof Maxi Schoeman**  
**Deputy Dean: Postgraduate and Research Ethics**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**  
**e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za**

cc: Dr B Motileng (Supervisor)  
Prof T Guse (HoD)

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Bomotheo

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof MME Schoeman (Deputy Dean); Prof KL Harris; Mr A Bizos; Dr L Blokland; Dr K Gooyens; Dr A-M de Beer; Ms A dos Santos; Dr R Fasselt; Ms KT Govinder Andrew; Dr E Johnson; Dr W Kelleher; Mr A Mohamed; Dr C Puttergill; Dr D Reyburn; Dr M Soer; Prof E Tadjard; Prof V Thebe; Ms B Tsebe; Ms D Mokalapa