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**An exploration of sociocultural adaptations of Black students in  
South African private high schools**

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## DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I, **Boitumelo Mogoboya**, declare that this dissertation is my original work. This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed and has been cited and referenced in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria.

Signature.....

Date.....

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the sociocultural adaptations of Black students in South African private high schools. The specific objectives of the study were to: (1) explore the positive and negative sociocultural experiences of Black students who attended private high schools in South Africa; (2) explore how Black students who attended private high schools navigate their negative experiences; (3) explore how the experiences-both negative and positive- shape young Black South Africans' sense of identity; (4) provide with recommendations for policy and practice. This study used a qualitative interpretive research paradigm to achieve its objectives. The study used data gathered from in-depth interviews conducted with 25 Black former students aged between 18 and 24 years. An interview guide was developed to collect information on the participants' positive experiences, negative experiences, coping mechanisms, and sense of identity. The study also used media reports from online newspaper articles published since 2015.

The study adopted the decolonial approach because it points to coloniality and other systems of oppression in terms of institutional practices, values, attitudes, and behavioural expectations, which have an impact on the experiences of Black students in private high schools. The salient findings that emerged were that: positive experiences in private schools included experiences of diversity, inclusive policies, and a space to build strong social network relationships. The negative experiences include experiences of racial insensitivity, privileged white standards of beauty, binary constructions of gender and sexuality, erasure of cultural significance, and cultural isolation. Based on the findings of this study in relation to institutional practices, attitudes and behavioural expectations, I argue that some features of coloniality are evident in some South African private high schools through the privileging of Western ideologies and perpetuation of ideas of whiteness which impact the ways in which Black students experience and adapt in these Westernised spaces. These experiences have a potential to impact social and cultural identity negatively.

The study concluded with recommendations for policy and practice: 1) Private high schools should consider implementing anti-racist training programmes that make students and staff recognise and appreciate diversity to reinforce cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. 2) Private schools should implement programmes to encourage Black students and parents to speak out about any type of discrimination or prejudice to eradicate silencing and minimisation. 3) The government should play a proactive role in monitoring educational institutions to encourage

transformation programmes. The government should not use monitoring as party political expediency.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the study

South Africa has a complex and lengthy history of colonialism which includes being colonised under the Dutch and then the British rule (Christie & McKinney, 2017). Apartheid, a system of institutionalised racial<sup>1</sup> segregation that existed in South Africa from 1948 to the early 1990s, continued and entrenched educational inequalities through overtly racist policies aimed at ensuring that Black people<sup>2</sup> in the country received a poor-quality education that would limit their human capital and keep their labour force participation in the working class (Ocampo, 2004; Fiske & Ladd, 2005; Gruitjers et al. 2022). For example, Apartheid fragmented the schooling system through the Bantu Education Act No. 47 of 1953 (Black Africans today), Coloured Persons Education Act No. 47 of 1963 (Coloured people), Indian Education Act No. 61 of 1965 (Indian people), and the National Educational Policy Act No. of 1967 (White people).

One of the major tasks of the post-Apartheid government which came into power in 1994 was to promote racial equality in the education system. Specific pathways to achieve this included putting in place constitutional provisions and an enabling legislative and policy framework aimed at ensuring equal treatment, equal opportunity, and adequacy in the education system (Fiske & Ladd, 2005). For example, the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) – the key educational legislative instrument has the mandate to create and provide for a uniform system for the organisations, governance and funding of the country's schools. While available evidence suggests that much has been achieved at the policy level in these three aspects, the state education system in South Africa, “for better or worse, retains important continuity with the past” (Gruitjers et al. 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> Race refers to the distinction between groups based on genetically passed on differences (whether imagined or real) linked to whether they possess or lack socially relevant characteristics or abilities (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> In this study, the reference to Black people includes Black Africans, Coloured and Indians. Of course, there were differences between these groups in terms of how apartheid policy structured social life.

There are two categories of schools in the country's national schooling system: public and private<sup>3</sup> (ISASA, 2022). Private schools are established, owned, or run by private individuals or entities. As in other parts of the world, such as in the United States (Choy, 1997; Ingersoll et al. 2021) and India (Srivastava & Divakaran, 2019), private schools are usually supported by tuition payments and sometimes by funds from other non-public sources such as religious organisations, endowments, grants, and charitable donations (Boland, 2012). There are also different types of private schools such as religious, for profit, expatriate, amongst others (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). In South Africa, state subsidies to private schools are permitted, but not guaranteed (ISASA, 2022). In 2021, there were 2154 private schools compared to 22740 public schools in South Africa (National Department of Education, 2022). Compared to the public sector, private schools are a numerical minority in South Africa.

Public, "state" or "government" schools are generally owned, controlled, and funded by the state. Public schools can be further differentiated between those historically serving Black people or White people. The increasingly diversifying public schools are the so-called Model-C<sup>4</sup> schools. These are public schools that are funded by the government (Christie & McKinney, 2017) but charge increasingly exorbitant fees<sup>5</sup>. The government subsidy usually covers 80 percent of the expenses for operating the Model C schools (Christie & McKinney, 2017: 9).

Much of the extant literature on the private-public school dichotomy in South Africa tends to focus on inequitable access to private schools due to high fees, inequitable access to resources, and different learning outcomes or academic performance. With regards to fees, the main contention tends to be around the high school fees<sup>6</sup> charged by private schools as these essentially exclude the majority of Black parents who remain in the low socio-economic strata of society (Franklin, 2017). It has been argued, for example, that the high school fees in private schools are used to enhance the infrastructure and sports facilities, as well as to pay for additional and better-qualified teachers, better curriculum resources, and extra teaching support materials (Franklin, 2017: 356). Caution is required because private schools are

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<sup>3</sup> To avoid the use of private and independent, which is the same category, in this dissertation private is used.

<sup>4</sup> Model-C schools are historically White-only schools.

<sup>5</sup> For example, schools such as Pretoria Boys High School charge fees upwards of R70 000 per annum (see their website indicating their 2024 fees: <https://boyshigh.com/fees/>)

<sup>6</sup> There are newer private schools with comparatively lower fees catering to a growing number of parents seeking options that they see as better than the public system that serves the majority of Black people.

differentiated - some are located and serve poor areas such as townships, and others serve wealthy areas (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008: 127). In terms of academic performance, it has been argued that largely due to poor resources in some public schools, the academic achievement of students in some under-resourced public schools is consistently lower compared to better-resourced public schools and private schools (Franklin, 2017). For example, following a somehow established trend in the country's matric results, it was reported that in 2022 the public schooling system attained an 80.1 percent pass rate, while independent schools achieved a 98.4 percent pass rate (McClean, 2023)<sup>7</sup>.

It can be argued, therefore, drawing from Gruitjers et al. (2024) that there prevails a portrait of a 'quasi-market' in which access to private schools remains predominantly White and much better resourced, in virtually all aspects, compared to public schools. Cognisant of this, many Black parents go to great lengths to enrol their children in private schools with socioeconomic status, specifically being middle or upper class, playing an important role in this process (Gruitjers et al. 2022; O'Regan, 2022). Indeed, the post-apartheid era has seen a notable increase in the number of Black middle-class South Africans who enrol their children in private schools and a significant portion of the Black student body that has moved to the historically white educational system (Chisholm, 2004: 89; Gruitjers et al. 2024). According to scholars such as Selod and Zenou (2003) in South Africa, Lewis-McCoy (2014) in the United States and Ohikware (2013) in the United States, Black parents have increasingly enrolled their children in private schools. O'Regan (2022) reported that 54.4 percent of Black students enrolled in private schools compared to 29.4 percent of White students in South Africa. This is in contrast to the apartheid era where many private schools were largely White and constructed for White children (Pretorius, 2019). For example, Hilton College (located in KwaZulu-Natal), St John's Diocesan School for Girls (located in KwaZulu-Natal), among other schools (Pretorius, 2019).

A somehow neglected aspect in the scholarship in the South African private-public school dichotomy is the social and cultural experience of Black students in typically White-dominated private schools. This is despite widespread increasing accounts and media reports suggesting Black students attending private schools often face various forms of racial

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<sup>7</sup> The matric results should be read carefully because public schools are differentiated in that the majority of schools serve poor areas and a minority serve a diversifying minority. Private schools are differentiated as already indicated. The differentiation includes performance amongst public and private schools.

discrimination and inequality enabled by institutional contexts that embrace the generation or perpetuation of racialised ideas reflected in, among other things, discriminatory hair, dress, cultural, and language policies as well as in various other forms of racial prejudice and stereotypes (Payne, 2020; Khanyile, 2020; Masweneng, 2020).

Attention to student experiences is important as such discrimination has the potential to undermine the academic, social, and emotional well-being of Black children attending these schools (Leath et al. 2019; Ohikuare, 2013). The purpose of this study was therefore to explore the social and cultural adaptations of twenty-five Black South African students who attended private high schools in South Africa. The research question is: **How do Black students socially and culturally adapt in private high schools?** For the purpose of this study, sociocultural adaptation refers to the extent to which Black students are able to navigate a school context and freely express their culture, beliefs, and religion, among other things.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

In 2015 and 2016, there were newspaper reports based on student school protests that indicated Black students in public former Model-C schools were discriminated against because of their hair, language, amongst other thing (Ngoepe, 2016; Williams, 2016; Nicholson, 2016). Some of the schools changed their codes of conduct to be inclusive of Black students.

In recent years, private schools have become part of public debates because of news reports. Although the increase in the number of Black students attending private schools in South Africa implies racial diversity, numerous mainstream media reports indicate that many Black students experience social and cultural challenges in private schools as seen by the negative experiences of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping. For example, Black students in some private schools in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Kwazulu-Natal reported being subjected to discrimination and prejudices (Payne, 2020; Khanyile, 2020). Among other things, Black students felt that their blackness and African-ness were not acknowledged or accepted (Masweneng, 2020). For instance, St Martin's code of conduct (located in Gauteng) was found to be discriminatory and unfair against Black students, in that it was not inclusive of Black students' hair (Masweneng, 2020). Furthermore, the school culture at Hilton College

was argued to have made some Black students feel alienated from African aesthetics and speaking their home languages (Macupe, 2017). Some teachers at St Anne’s Diocesan College were found to have used derogatory names to refer to Black students (Khanyile, 2020). In consequence, Black students in these private schools felt that they were outcasts (Masweneng, 2020). Given these reports, there is a need to understand students’ social and cultural adaptation in discriminatory institutions. The work of understanding students’ experiences in schools can also be read in the context of higher education debates (and student protests) about institutional transformation<sup>8</sup> since basic education feeds into higher education.

### 1.3 Research objectives

The **broad objective** of the study was to explore the socio-cultural experiences and adaptations of 25 Black students who attended private high schools in South Africa. The **specific objectives** of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the positive and negative sociocultural experiences of Black students who attended private high schools in South Africa
2. To explore how Black students who attended private high schools navigate their negative experiences.
3. To explore how the experiences-both negative and positive- shape young Black South Africans' sense of identity.
4. To propose with recommendations for policy and practice.

### 1.4 Significance of the study

While there is much research on diversifying public schools (former Model-C schools), there is a paucity of research on how Black students in South Africa socially and culturally adapt in private school settings. Against the above background, this study aims to contribute to closing this research gap by bringing about awareness of the experiences of students in diversifying educational spaces. Furthermore, given the importance of “enabling children from all backgrounds to learn together” for promoting mutual understanding and achieving the post-apartheid vision of a multicultural, “de-racialized ” society (Nkomo et al. 2004 cited in Gruijters et al. 2022 :2), studies focused on young people’s voices such as the current one can contribute to challenging discriminatory institutional practices towards the realisation of

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<sup>8</sup> See Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) where the author historicises South African universities to give context to the higher education student protests which started in 2015.

South Africa's ideals of a cohesive society as outlined in the *National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and a Cohesive South African Society* (2012). This strategy aims to contribute to a society based on, among other things, equality and inclusion, shared values and symbols, and unity and diversity. In terms of practice, the study's findings and recommendations reveal the persistent discriminatory practices in some schools as well as the work required for transformation to occur.

## 1.5 Theoretical framework

This study is influenced by decolonial thought in working with its key objectives. Although there are important debates about decolonial approaches, it is impossible to consider them here because of the scope of this project. This study restricts its focus to some key pillars that are useful for thinking about everyday experiences in historically discriminatory educational contexts and institutions developing in a historically racialised society. Some of the key writers on decolonial approaches are Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Maria Lugones, Walter Dignolo, Anibal Quijano, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. As a start, decolonisation, as a response to colonialism, is the societal, economic, political, and intellectual work aimed at restoring land and life after the end of colonial eras (Ashcroft 2006 as cited in Mohamed et al. 2020). As a critique, Lemos (2023: 22) argues that decolonisation gave rise to different types of nationalisms rather than aiding in the emancipation of former subaltern populations which reinforced coloniality. Coloniality is an important concept for thinking about everyday experiences in historically racialised societal institutions such as education.

Coloniality describes persisting power structures that resulted from colonialism, but which go well beyond the precise bounds of colonial governments to shape labour, culture, intersubjective relationships, and knowledge production (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 487; Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243 as cited in Christie & McKinney, 2017: 4). Over three decades ago, the influence of colonisation was noted as significant because Africa's politics, economy, and cultures continued to be controlled by imperialism (Wa Thiong'o 1986: 4). According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015: 487), colonialism is survived by coloniality. To confront coloniality, scholars point to decolonial approaches.

Decoloniality refers to the process of divorcing oneself from colonialism (Lemos, 2023: 22). It considers the consequences of colonialism that are still felt today when the features of

colonialism link with contemporary practices (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2007; Maldonado-Torres as cited in Mohamed et al. 2020). A decolonial approach enables us to place ourselves within and detach ourselves from the colonial power matrix that characterises the world system and creates social and geographical hierarchies (Lemos, 2023: 28). The four domains that form the colonial matrix of power are as follows (Mignolo, 2009: 9 as cited Christie & McKinney, 2017: 5): control of the economy such as the control of natural resources, land dispossession, and labour exploitation; the control of authority such as the army, control of knowledge and subjectivity; and the control of gender and sexuality such as in education. In that, the colonial matrix of power can positively or negatively impact the experiences of people in society (Christie & McKinney, 2017). Therefore, the decolonial theory challenges the matrix of power. Other scholars use decolonial theorising and decolonial work to explain the overlapping characteristics that make up a person's identity such as race, ethnicity<sup>9</sup>, class, sexuality and gender which influence how they experience institutions in society in the intersectionality framework (de Saxe & Trotter-Simons, 2021; Gouws, 2017).

In education spaces, decolonial work provides a theoretical guideline to understanding systems of power and oppression and how status quo is sustained by subordination and privilege (Kayi-Aydar et al. 2022). Decolonial theoretical thinking challenges the idea of seeing society through a Western European lens. This study uses decolonial framing to explore the socio-cultural experiences and adaptations of Black students in South African private high schools. The study finds the decolonial theorisation fruitful for the function of structural decolonisation which challenges the legitimacy and source of prevailing forms of knowledge production, norms, values and assumptions in attempt to dismantle colonial systems of power, language, culture, economics and ways of thinking that influence our contemporary lives (Mohamed et al. 2020: 664).

## **1.6 Structure of the dissertation**

The dissertation comprises five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction which comprises the study background, statement of the problem, research questions, research objectives, the significance of the study, as well as the theoretical framework. A literature review is provided in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology used. Chapter 4 presents the key

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<sup>9</sup> Ethnicity refers to an identity of a group of people who share cultural backgrounds such as language, values, among other things.

findings of the study. Chapter 5 summaries the main findings and presents recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of global and South African literature on the sociocultural experiences and adaptations of Black students in private high schools. The reviewed literature is presented in terms of themes relevant to the study. The literature is based on studies in private schools and public schools. The discussion reflects South Africa's history of oppression from colonisation and apartheid. The literature highlights both negative and positive experiences of Black students and how the experiences shape their sense of identity. In this study, I argue that some features of colonisation persist in South African schools through privileging Western ideologies which impact the ways in which Black students adapt in these Westernised spaces. The chapter is structured in themes as follows: it discusses privileged languages and accents; colonialism and beauty standards; teaching staff; pronouncing African names; and social connectedness and inclusive policies. Thereafter a conclusion summarising the review is presented.

### 2.2 Privileging Languages and Accents

Decolonial theory posits that the ideologies of positioning monolingualism privileges a European language over othered languages (Christie & McKinney, 2017). Controlling what people created, how they generated it, and how they dispersed it entails the true nature of colonisation; thus, controlling the whole domain of real-world language (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 16). A word, a sentence, a phrase, or a name can convey a people's social norms, values and attitudes (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 8). According to Grosfuguel (2017) as cited in Christie & McKinney (2017: 5), the hierarchies in the colonial matrix of power include a global ethnic/racial hierarchy that privileges European people over others and also privileges European languages (especially English) by a cultural and linguistic hierarchy.

One's language ability has a crucial influence on the way they experience diverse spaces because their linguistic ability can intersect with other identities such as their ethnicity or race to inform the way others treat them. Previous research illustrates that some societies do not recognise diverse linguistic features as important compared to those that were dominated during the colonisation of different nations worldwide (Edwards, 2016). This means that

colonialism enforced Western languages as markers of status and power. Wa Thiong'o (1986: 15) argues that language transmits culture from one generation to the next. This means that one's home language is not only their means of education but also their carrier of culture (Wa Thiong'o 1986: 13). Privileging Western languages over others can perpetuate practices of inequality. The consequence is that the possible choice to use mother-tongue evokes expressions such as betrayal and guilt whereas foreign languages are embraced positively (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 7).

Research shows that American English is rated higher in terms of status and solidarity (Zhang, 2013 as cited in Edwards, 2016: 198). When one speaks with an American English accent it is assumed that it shows their social status, and level of education, type of school they attended, and their economic status. In South Africa, the Afrikaaner nationalists enforced policies that elevated the status of Afrikaans following their ascent to political power in 1948 (Hunter, 2019: 209). Although the Bantu education allowed students to be taught in one of the African official languages, the languages were discredited in wider society (Hunter, 2019: 209). While students have their home language as a subject, English as the medium of instruction in all other subjects. Hence, the social dominance of English in South Africa and the wider community today. This is because the promotion of multilingualism by the post-apartheid state resulted in the addition of nine African languages to Afrikaans and English, with “White English” holding the highest prestige (Hunter, 2019: 210).

### **2.2.1 Privileging Accents**

Linguistic prestige can lead to stereotyping against those who do not have the desirable English accent. Kinzler et al. (2007, 2009) showed that accent discrimination is more prevalent than racial discrimination. With reference to America, John and Almeida (2023) conducted a study on the benefits of switching the Ghanaian English accent to ‘Ghanaian American-Accented English’ which showed that an American accent is preferred over Black African English accent. Furthermore, individuals with Ghanaian and Nigerian accents face challenges because of accent discrimination when they enter different environments globally (John & Almeida, 2023). Therefore, this means that American English accents are perceived as more prestigious than African English accents in certain settings.

Research conducted in Hong Kong showed that as a former British colony, Hong Kong citizens have shown to favour traditional British accents wherein the accent is associated with high prestige in Hong Kong (Edwards, 2016). A study conducted in Canada showed that international teaching assistants face microaggressions as they are criticised for having an ‘unintelligible’ accent for professional interactions in English-medium universities in the Global North (Ramjattan, 2023). Therefore, this means that preferring an American English accent reinforces linguistic discrimination and cultural bias. As shown above, the dominance of versions of American and British accents travels across the world.

The ‘standard’ and dominant language in South Africa is English which is seen as the main indicator for being an educated person (Christie & McKinney, 2017: 7). According to McKinney (2017: 80) as cited in Christie & McKinney (2017), the ideology of the main language is referred to as Anglo-normativity. This means that there is the expectation for people to have proficiency in English and if they do not then they are identified as ‘deficient’ or ‘deviant’ (McKinney, 2017: 80 as cited in Christie & McKinney, 2017). For example, these expectations can be seen in private schools that only allow students to use either English or Afrikaans. Similarly, Wa Thiong'o (1986: 12) shows that in Kenya, English was rewarded and developed as a measure for intelligence and proficiency in the sciences, the arts, and every other field of study whereas mother tongue was punished. Furthermore, when one was caught speaking a Gikuyu language instead of English in the school or surrounding area they would be subjected to humiliating experiences like corporal punishment or expensive fines they could not afford to pay (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 11). This means that the language of their culture was different from the language of their education (Wa Thiong'o, 1986).

Although prioritising English reinforces historical inequalities of language, this also positively influences the experiences of students in private schools. This is because the school values a “white English accent” which is also preferred in the workplace (Hunter, 2019). As such, parents send their children to these schools because they understand the social value of “white English” for their children to have better future employment opportunities. As such, Hunter 2019 (211) argues that racial and class disparities become part of prestige boundaries when students from prestigious schools are connected to the highest ranked jobs. In that, the highest paying call centres in South Africa prefer to employ workers who speak fluent white South African English than those with an African accent (Hunter 2019; Hunter & Hachimi,

2012). However, it is important to note that not everyone equally benefits from white English privileges because they have access to it (Hunter, 2019: 211).

Seekings & Nattrass (2008: 337) as cited in Hunter. (2019) indicate that in India or Pakistan an employee may be required to neutralise their accent in order to please Western clients they communicate with. This implies that individuals with non-American accents are often marginalised and excluded from accessing certain job opportunities. In contemporary South Africa there is a system that continues to devalue African languages and places significance on English skills and accent thus perpetuating existing inequalities (Hunter, 2019: 211).

According to Soudien (2007) as cited in McKinney (2010: 193), assimilation agendas in South Africa often portray 'white' middle-class methods as superior or as norms that are not questionable. Students from non-dominant groups interact with contexts that make them adopt the dominant group's identity (McKinney, 2010). Wa Thiong'o (1986: 12) illustrates how language can alienate people from themselves to other selves, discount them from their own world and place them in others' world. This shows that language can impact people's identity negatively. Black students adapt to the pressure of English dominance by learning how to speak and use English fluently as expected by their schools and wider society.

### **2. 3 Colonialism and beauty standards**

Discrimination can be defined as an unfair treatment of a group of people based on categories such as ethnicity, race, gender, language, and age or other markers (Fibbi et al. 2021). As such, discrimination in schools, according to the principle of the decolonial approach, is whereby some students are excluded or marginalised over others because of their race or ethnicity and other social markers. Council of Europe (2023) indicates that in school settings, discrimination can be seen through attitudes to code of conducts, expectations of teachers to school rules, teaching methods and materials, career guidance, grouping and selection practices, physical school environment, and canteen food, amongst other things. According to Matsheka and Garutsa (2022), cultural and institutional discrimination are rooted in learning institutions' structures, academic curricula, and practices, impacting the social and academic experiences of Black students negatively. Prejudice and discrimination are based on hierarchies, with certain situations demonstrating the one-sided subjugation of a racial group by the dominant group (Matsheka & Garutsa, 2022). For example, Black students in private

schools may be subjected to discrimination based on their hair and language (Ngoepe, 2016). Writing on the politics of hair in United States schools, Tribble et al. (2019) argue that African American girls in schools are told how they should wear their hair according to the definitions of what is acceptable according to ‘White Eurocentric ideals’. Similar findings were noted by others such as Joshua (2021), Londberg (2020), and Bailey-Fakhoury (2014), with the latter showing that mothers whose African American children are enrolled in independent schools which are predominantly white face the challenge of advocating for their daughters to embrace their natural hair. Such school-based discrimination can lead to, among other things, poor school experiences and educational outcomes (Fibbi et al. 2021).

Studies have consistently shown that discrimination can also affect one’s self-identity as well as their mental well-being (Emery, 2020; Williams, 2018; Bencosme, 2017). Although how Black people wear their hair can be a form of identity claim and expression of their culture according to these researchers, prejudice and discrimination based on the length, texture, and style of their hair may negatively impact their self-identity. Furthermore, recent research on black hair discrimination has found that discrimination against black hairstyles can result in feelings of shame, inferiority, and a loss of connection to one’s cultural identity and heritage (Lewis et al. 2016; Emery, 2020). Drawing from Mohamed et al. (2020) according to the decolonial approach, requiring Black students to adopt policies that discriminate against them is requiring them to follow the identity of the dominant group thus erasing their own identity. It, therefore, can be argued that discrimination can deprive Black people of autonomy regarding their hair. For example, Bencosme (2017) found that in the United States, because in some cases black individuals’ hair is degraded and seen as unacceptable and bad, discrimination impacts the black community negatively because it erases the black identity culture and distances them from their cultural roots. Black women who feel compelled to maintain their hair in accordance with Eurocentric standards of beauty internalise feelings of unattractiveness and undesirableness (Bencosme, 2017). In support of this, some studies show that discrimination against one’s culture in schools can affect the mental health of stigmatised and stereotyped groups in a negative way such as contributing to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Mbilishaka & Apugo 2020; Perry et al. 2016; Williams 2018; Kumar et al. 2022).

In South Africa, one of the adaptive strategies Black students used included resisting discriminatory practices and finding different ways of being, students have used protests to elevate their voices. The 2015 student protests which were led by Pretoria High School for

Girls are an example. In that case, hair politics at the school spilled into protests because the school said students with afro hair should chemically straighten their hair (France-Presse, 2016).

## 2.4 Demographics of Staff

Decolonisation of education has been a major focus in discussions about formerly white South African institutions to date (Hunter, 2019: 213). Freire (1996: 202) indicated that education was suffering from the way teachers narrate material. The role of the teacher was to govern how the world “enters into” the students (Freire 1996: 57). Freire (1996: 54) argued that the banking approach to education fosters practices and attitudes that reflect the oppressive society at large such as that students have to adapt to the program content that the teacher chooses because they are not consulted about it. Accordingly, the concept of banking education sees people as manageable and adaptable (Freire, 1996: 54). However, Freire (1996: 54) argued that the narrations of teachers in the banking education system are purposefully designed so that the more students strive to store the deposits given to them, the less critical consciousness they develop from their engagement in the world as transformers (Freire, 1996: 54). This means that the more students passively store the contents presented by their teachers without questioning them, the more they see the world through a flawed perspective that does not need to change. The easier they adapt, the easier they are dominated by the situations that oppress them (Freire, 1996: 55).

According to the Council of Europe (2023), factors underlying racial and cultural discrimination in schools include the existence of negative stereotypes about minority groups among teachers; historical and other structural factors in wider society; and minority groups being under-represented on school staff. Teachers who hold negative attitudes and/or prejudice toward minority groups and their cultural identities can negatively affect the motivation of these students and their academic outcomes (Allen & Webber, 2019; Costa *et al* 2021). For instance, in New Zealand, Maori and Pacific Island students from ethnic minority groups who experienced stereotyping by White teachers were found to have low academic performance, heightened levels of anxiety, and a high likelihood of being disengaged in school (Rubie-Davies, 2006; Weber, 2015; Allen & Webber 2019). Similar observations were noted in other countries such as Germany (Lorenz, 2021) and the United States (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013).

The under-representation of ethnic minority school staff can also impact the sociocultural adaptability of ethnic minority students in schools. Demie and Huat See (2023) argue that in England, there is a disproportionality of ethnic minority school staff wherein the population of the student does not match that of the teachers in the schools. The study found that there were only 15 percent of ethnic minority classroom teachers and 85 percent of White British classroom teachers (Demie & Huat See, 2023). Demie and Huat See (2023) argue that to create an inclusive and culturally diverse school that has more ethnic minority teachers is significant to foster better cultural tolerance and critical understanding.

According to Redding (2019) having teachers from the same cultural backgrounds in the United States would allow the student to relate to the learning environment and thrive academically. An environment that is inclusive in culture and identities. Furthermore, Lewis-McCoy (2014: 118) indicates that students make connections between the material they learn in their classrooms and their prior knowledge and their social environments. As such, it is significant that teachers are culturally competent in order to help make it easier for students to understand and relate better to the texts they learn in classrooms (Lewis-McCoy, 2014: 118). Therefore, by being culturally conscious, teachers can avoid cultural bias in the techniques they use to teach and detach from the racist idea that Black people do not have historical and societal contributions.

The negative impact that discrimination and isolation in schools has on students is well documented. This includes the impact on students' academic achievement through the isolation of certain social groups from engaging fully in academic activities (Leath et al. 2019). For instance, when teachers are culturally blind, class privileges can affect student participation due to students facing the challenge of making connections between their lived experiences and the material being taught, thus creating unequal experiences in the classrooms (Lewis-McCoy, 2014: 122). Freire (1996) argued that teachers narrate reality as if it were unchanging, motionless, divided, and predictable. The teacher's narration is divorced from reality and the contents are not linked to the totality that caused them which gives them significance (Freire, 1996). The lower the connection students have with ingroup individuals the more they face issues with fitting in (Perry et al. 2016). This can impact on students' psychological well-being which can lead to experiences of anxiety and depression and feelings of not being accepted (Perry et al. 2016).

The most adaptable person is the educated individual because they ‘fit’ better with the world (Freire, 1996: 57). This means that the individuals who are considered educated are those that do not question the aims of the oppressors, thus they are better suited for the society that has been built for them to assimilate to as the oppressed individuals. Therefore, if students feel unaccepted in a space, they are likely to have negative psychological adaptations to the environment. Although the narration of the educator may be detached from the students’ experiences, they are not able to think for the students or force their opinions on them (Freire, 1996: 58). Therefore, students can exercise their agency against the teacher’s way of teaching. For example, in South Africa, one of the adaptive strategies used to resist subtle racism in their private high school was publicising the practices in the media (Masweneng, 2020). Students resist problematic teachers by protesting the practices. For example, Black students protested when a student was told they are “too smart for a Black person” (Kgosana, 2021). The school principal then apologised for the microaggression incident on behalf of himself and the school (Kgosana 2021). This means that some Black students recognise connotations that are racist but are used in a subtle manner to deny direct racism as illustrated in (Bonilla-Silva 2018).

## **2.5 Pronouncing African Names**

Culture is an expression of communication that is created by communities (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 15). In that, the way people see themselves impacts the way they perceive their culture (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 15). As such, culture can embody ethical, moral and aesthetic values wherein values provide the foundation of a people's identity and their sense of individuality (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 15).

Language transmits culture from one generation to the next (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 15). As such, someone’s name carries their history, heritage and identity. Therefore, it is important to pronounce names correctly in order to avoid changing their meaning and affecting one’s cultural identity. The most significant domain of dominance of colonisation was the colonised people's mental universe, which allowed it to dominate how people saw themselves and the society through culture (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 16). The effect of colonialism and erasure of African identity can also be seen in the significance of pronouncing African names. Therefore, in other words, people’s self-definition was controlled by colonisation (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 16).



Shah (2019: 86) defines whiteness as a system of racism that privileges European descent over others. For instance, Black people in America experience the exclusion that alienates their name. In America, it is common for an individual's name to be labelled a “funny name” (Bucholtz, 2016: 276). This illustrates how some White people avoid using direct racial terms to express their racial ideas (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This also relates to the mispronunciation or substitution of one’s name because they are deemed “too hard” or “too foreign” (Bucholtz, 2016). Shah (2019) indicates the privileges of whiteness to marginalised groups in America. Shah (2019: 89) argues that marginalised groups are aware that the oppression they experience is connected to the systems of racism and whiteness. However, they wish to be a part of the receivers of the accessories of whiteness in white America (Shah, 2019: 89).

Shah (2019) shows how individuals from African and Caribbean nations pronounce their own names to fit into American society. They submit their identity by acknowledging their otherness thus acknowledging their inferiority in the dominant society that has been created for them (Shah, 2019). In South African girls’ schools, the discourses of assimilation often portrayed girls as ‘outsiders’ who needed to either ‘fit in or leave’ the school (McKinney, 2010: 196). In South Africa, Hunter (2019: 11) writes that although people live in the Rainbow Nation, their experiences with whiteness as a system of power, teachers’ and classmates’ physical embodiment presents pain to students who are Black.

Shah (2019) highlights that Black people find themselves having to choose whether they should seek to be accepted in mainstream culture or form solidarity to counter the culture (Shah, 2019: 86). However, when marginalised individuals believe that their voices will be unheard thus, they keep self-silence (Datson, 2011). As such, one of the adaptive strategies that some individuals use when they want to be accepted in mainstream culture environments is being silent (Datson, 2011).

## **2.6 Social connectedness and Inclusive policies**

Vandeyar & Jansen (2008: 84) show that students who went to Diversity High school in South Africa received anti-bias and diversity training which resulted in students feeling that they respected the needs of others, realised some of their negative opinions, recognised and

respected other people's cultures, and not be racist. Diversity High replaced the traditional cultural events that were offered at every other Afrikaans-medium institution with events that allowed students from diverse cultural backgrounds to participate (Vandeyar & Jansen, 2008: 92). The fusion of cultures through drama, music, dance and movement showed humanity's interconnectedness in the school (Vandeyar & Jansen, 2008: 92). This allows for diverse students to have a sense of belonging. This change does not happen quickly because it is difficult to transform institutions.

Drawing from Khan (2013), students can prefer uniforms that do not indicate any kind of sexuality because they feel more comfortable in them. Khan (2013) shows that girls' clothing choices are not necessarily influenced by males or their way of negotiating a hierarchy but rather they create meaning to their lives and form relationships with one another. It allows an opportunity for girls to display their bodies and sexuality while being playful (Khan, 2013: 124). Therefore, it allows them autonomy over their bodies and the way they look.

However, school uniforms historically were used as a form of control to delineate between femininity and masculinity (Craik, 2003). Uniform is conceptualised as homogeneous and is significant for community, and control (Friedrich & Shanks, 2023.). Historically, former colonies such as South Africa adopted the English school uniforms (Craik, 2003: 139). European-style uniforms gained popularity in colonies and Third World countries due to their perceived ability to impart Western values and codes of conduct that would lead to strengthened successes (Craik, 2003).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

It is evident that sociocultural experiences are complex, revolving around power dynamics and coloniality. Therefore, it is significant to decolonise perceptions on languages, accents, constructions of beauty, pronouncing African names, teaching methods to enforce diversity and social inclusion. This study used the decolonial framework within the South African context to explore the sociocultural adaptability of Black students in private high schools.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the methodology used to achieve the study's broad and specific objectives. The chapter is structured as follows. The next section (Section, 3.2) discusses the research design. This is followed by a discussion of the data sources, the selection of study participants, data analysis, data triangulation and ethical considerations, and reflections from the study. A short summary section is presented to conclude the chapter.

### 3.2 Research design

This study used a qualitative research design. Such a design examines human experiences, it helps the researcher understand the world from human experiences and the meaning that are attached to things (Guest et al. 2013). Qualitative researchers often use the interpretative paradigm for a deep understanding of participants' contexts and experiences in their 'natural settings' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 cited in Guest et al. 2013: 3). This study adopted the interpretative paradigm for deep understanding of the experiences of twenty-five Black former students who attended private high schools in South Africa. This is in the sociology of education in the subfield of sociology interested in the ways in which individuals experience institutions.

Defined as a research paradigm that is focused on understanding the lived experiences or subjective accounts of people in society (Hennink et al. 2020: 328), the interpretive research paradigm was deemed appropriate for this study because the research question wanted to answer how Black students socially and culturally adapt in private high schools as well as to document their overall experiences in these schools. Overall, Creswell (2003 cited in Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012: 56) asserts that the interpretive research paradigm fits research questions that are not directional and are generally 'open-ended' such as in this study.

### 3.3 Data sources

To achieve its objectives, the study collected data using two qualitative methods: (i) document analysis and (ii) In-depth semi-structured interviews.

### **3.3.1 Content analysis**

A total of 15 newspaper articles were selected, using convenient sampling. Convenient sampling is a non-probability sampling method that selects the first available sources of data whereby sample elements are selected according to how they can be easily accessed (Elfil & Negida, 2017).

The newspaper articles were analysed using content analysis. According to Bowen (2009: 28), content analysis can be defined as a qualitative analytic method that involves finding (in this study, the researcher searched the websites of the newspapers and also searched the University of Pretoria library e-newspaper database), selecting (the researcher only selected newspaper articles that were written over the last 10 years), appraising (the researcher read the actual articles), and synthesising information (the researcher looked for similarities across the newspaper articles that are selected). In this study, the focus was on the types and themes that are reported in relation to racial and other forms of discrimination. The keywords that were used are: sociocultural adaptation in private schools, adaptations in South African private high schools, Black students in private high schools, private high school policies, Black students' adaptations in Gauteng/ Kwa-Zulu Natal (the researcher was changing the name of the South African provinces in each search) private high schools. The study targeted newspaper articles that did not have paywalls.

### **3.3.2 In-depth interviews**

In-depth interviews are a qualitative research approach to gather participants' insights on a phenomenon through a conversation while a researcher can probe to gain a deeper understanding of the views and experiences of participants (Limb & Dwyer, 2001). The aim of using in-depth interviews is that during the research process, in-depth interviews have the advantage of the researcher having greater clarity of the feelings, beliefs and feelings on social and personal matters as participants can give detailed narratives on their experiences (Crabtree & DiCicco-Bloom, 2006).

#### ***Study participants***

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 25 young South Africans aged 18-24 years who had attended private high schools in any part of the country. The 18-24 years age range was meant to ensure that the young people had relatively recent memories of their high

school experiences to be able to contribute to the achievement of the study objectives. Other inclusion criteria were that the participants should have:

- Completed Matric since 2018
- Attended at least one type of private high school (e.g., faith-based schools, single-sex schools, co-ed schools, among other schools.)

Of the 25 young people interviewed, 15 identified as male and the other 10 as female. There were ten participants who attended private high schools in the Gauteng province, four attended in Kwa-Zulu Natal, three attended in Limpopo, three in the North West, three attended in Mpumalanga, and one each in the Free State and the Eastern Cape. Of the twenty-five participants, ten attended co-ed schools, six attended faith-based and co-ed schools, five attended faith-based schools, four single-sex and faith-based schools. Appendix A shows other characteristics of the study participants. Furthermore, in terms of the schools the students attended, they were established before Apartheid (1850s-1945), during Apartheid (1953-1987), and after apartheid (1993-2005).

### ***Study setting***

The in-depth interviews were conducted in Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa. The history of Pretoria is marked by the racial discrimination and segregation of the apartheid regime with the city marked by symbols such as museums and statues to signify nation building (Bornman, 2014). The city has a sociocultural diverse population and several higher education institutions attracting young people from across the country. As this study focused on participants who have completed their Matric, Pretoria is a hub for businesses, research centres, network opportunities and other empowerment initiatives that Grade 12 graduates can look into pursuing to advance their careers. The choice of Pretoria as a setting helped to locate individuals who come from diverse races, ethnicities, cultural identities, and have different linguistic backgrounds.

The study participants were selected using snowball sampling, which is a sampling method where initial participants provide information to help obtain additional participants (Acharya et al. 2013: 333). The first few participants were recruited using the researcher's social networks and were asked to refer to other participants. One of the widely documented disadvantages of using snowball sampling is that there is a risk of bias due to sampling participants of similar socio-economic and other characteristics. To avert this, the recruitment

strategy was purposely designed to ensure that the sample included participants of different gender identities, cultural backgrounds, and ethnicities.

### ***Data collection***

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B) designed to collect information on how Black students socially and culturally adapt in private high schools, how the experiences - both negative and positive - shape the students' sense of identity, and how students navigate negative experiences. The interviews were conducted in English, a language spoken by all the participants. On average the duration of the interviews was 45-60 minutes. With the consent of the participants, all the interviews were audio recorded.

## **3.4 Data analysis**

### **3.4.1 Document analysis**

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and interpreting documents (both hard and electronic) in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009:27). In this study, document analysis entailed reviewing some online mainstream newspaper articles published between 2015-2023. The titles below are the news outlets that were used for this study:

- News24: <https://www.news24.com/>
- The Citizen: <https://www.citizen.co.za/>
- The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/international>,
- Mail & Guardian: <https://mg.co.za/>, and
- The Sunday Times: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/>

Particular focus was on articles that reported on social, cultural, racial, and other forms of discrimination in South African private high schools. The articles explored and showed the alleged dimensions and dynamics of such discrimination.

### **3.4.2 In-depth interviews**

When the data collection process ended, the audio-recorded in-depth interviews were transcribed. A thematic analysis was then used to analyse the data obtained. According to

Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic approach that identifies, analyses, and reports patterns of data using six basic steps:

- i. familiarisation with data (the researcher familiarises themselves with the data by listening to the audio recordings and noting relevant observations);
- ii. coding (analysing the data and developing codes);
- iii. developing themes (identifying similarities in the data and constructing themes);
- iv. reviewing themes (reflecting on the relationship between the themes);
- v. defining and naming themes (formulating informative analysis about each theme);
- vi. writing up (reporting the data and placing it in the context of the literature).

In this study, the themes that emerged were related to the study's research question and showed some representation of the participants' responses. The researcher interpreted the findings to the themes that emerged.

### **3.5 Data triangulation**

The researcher triangulated the two data sources using constant comparative analysis. This analytic method entails coding data and comparing it with other data to identify patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 as cited in Bowen, 2009: 37). It helped the researcher identify consistent patterns that emerged from the newspaper articles and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Data was coded and compared to evaluate if there was a consistent or pattern between what was in the documents and how the participants responded in the interviews. Therefore, by triangulating the data, the researcher aimed to ensure credibility and lessen the impact of potential bias (Bowen, 2009: 28).

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to the basic principles of ethical research. This included being transparent and protecting the human rights of the human subjects such as ensuring respect and dignity. The researcher also took into consideration participants' informed consent, confidentiality, and no harm to participants prior to conducting the study and ensured that all parts of the research were sensitive to these ethical considerations. The recruitment strategy was designed to ensure that participants did not share private information about other individuals (such as their contact details) with the researcher, but rather ensured that participants passed on the researcher's contact details to potential participants. The study was granted ethical approval

by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (see Appendix C).

### **Informed consent**

Using the informant sheet and consent form in Appendix D, the researcher ensured that the participants were informed about what the research entails and were transparent about all components of the study. The researcher also explained the procedure of the interviews. The participants will be asked to fill in and sign consent forms prior to the researcher collecting data from them. The researcher also allowed the participants to ask questions about what they did not understand prior to signing the forms. Following the ethical standards in research the participants were allowed to withdraw from the research at any given time that they may wish to (Gajjar, 2013).

### **Confidentiality**

In social science research, confidentiality means not revealing who the participants are (Monette et al 2013: 58). The researcher treated the names and identities of the participants with strict confidence. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms are used. Furthermore, the audio recordings are kept safe and accessible by using a password only known to the researcher and the supervisors. The interview records and consent forms will be kept in a safe at the Department of Sociology for a period of 10-years.

### **No harm to participants**

The researcher was sensitive and ensured that the participants were not harmed in any way. To avoid any risk of harm including psychological or physical harm, the study ensured a friendly environment that was convenient for the researcher and the participants especially. The study took into consideration the convenience of the participants; thus, the participants did not need to spend any time or costs travelling to meet the researcher for interviews.

The study did not anticipate any harm; however, the researcher was aware that asking participants about their experiences concerning stereotyping and discrimination may provoke memories that are triggering to them. As such, the researcher followed the steps for debriefing. Debriefing is an ethical process of eliminating any discomfort and negative feelings from participants. Debriefing helps provide reflections on the findings (McMahon & Winch, 2018), and closure to participants after participation. The researcher encouraged open



communication where the participants asked any questions or clarity regarding their participation, which would be addressed transparently and honestly. Participants were also allowed the opportunity to give feedback on their experiences in terms of participating in the study. For emotional support, the participants were given contact details of Lifeline South Africa. Lifeline is a 24-hour toll-free number that offers counselling nationwide. Their number is 0861 322 322. The participants indicated that they did not need to contact Lifeline South Africa. The researcher left the contact details of Lifeline South Africa with the participants to use them should they ever feel the need to contact them.

### **3.7 Reflections from the field**

This section presents my positionality in the research journey. Rowe (2014) contends that positionality is a researcher's stance in their research study relating to political and social contexts of their research study. It requires the researcher to examine their identity relation to the research topic, study population and research process (Wilson et al. 2022). I reflect on how my educational status, race, ethnicity, shared language, gender, and age may have influenced my data collection process.

My age had a positive effect in establishing trust between my participants and I because I am a 23-year-old, and my participants were aged between 18 to 24 years old. As the participants were my age peers, they trusted that I could relate to them more. I am multilingual. I can speak 10 South African languages and the participants used SeSotho, Setswana, Sepedi, isiZulu, and isiXhosa phrases which I could understand well. Our shared language also made it easy for me to converse and understand them because I could understand some of the phrases that they used to express their feelings of sadness, worry, or happiness. My race and ethnicity played a positive role and how they viewed me as an interviewer in their space. They welcomed me and shared their lived experiences without hesitation because we have a shared race.

Considering the principles of reflexivity, I am a Black masters' student who previously studied at Monash South Africa University and now at the University of Pretoria. I view myself as a resilient, critical thinker, and a Black feminist. I am at an advantage of understanding oppressive practices such as patriarchy - a system that can inhibit the autonomy of Black women to fully embody themselves. Therefore, it was important when interacting

with the students that I do not make attempts to project my own understanding of oppressive structures nor judge them on their views. I had to acknowledge the significance of lived experiences. For example, during an interview with Lakshmi, a 21-year-old female from a co-ed school, she said:

*“I was always taught to dress very modestly. To always cover up. To always think that my image is a reflection of them. [...] As a woman, always look after your reputation. Do not do anything that will give you a bad name. Also do not do anything that will give my parents a bad name. That is always what I was taught, growing up on how to conduct myself. I think it also ties with modesty, always conducting myself modesty in line with what the religion states.”*

As a young Black woman with 4C afro hair (4C afro hair is curly hair with tight stands), I was at an advantage of understanding the participants that shared about their challenges with afro hair, especially with it being accepted in society. Growing up, I received constant opinions, judgements, and stares whenever I had my hair in an afro puff. Coming from a community that perceives chemically relaxed hair as more good-looking than natural hair, Black people are sometimes complicit in the discrimination and prejudice against Black people's hair due to situated knowledge. I grew up hearing words such as ‘afro hair looks like a steel wool scourer.’ When I cut my hair, I received comments such as: “Why did you cut your hair? You look like a little boy.” This constant hair policing I received made me question whether I was ‘woman enough.’ My gender identity was identified with my hair, as if my hair made me who I was. The notion that your hair needs to be relaxed and slick for it to be identified as beautiful polices Black women's bodies.

Since I was young, stylists in hair salons have coerced me into straightening my hair, ignoring my concerns about the fact that hair relaxers burn my scalp. They mentioned how my hair was too ‘rough’ to style. Considering that I have attempted to have my hair styled in different salons in Limpopo, Johannesburg, and Pretoria, this leaves me pondering how it is that Black people find it difficult to style Black people's hair without using chemical hair relaxers first. This indicates how we still live in a society that values European appearance above African appearance.

While body policing can impact on how one views themselves, it also illustrates how Black people have been socialised to view one standard of beauty as better than others. As some people may believe that the dark skin is ugly, they make use of skin lightening products. When interacting with the Black students, I made the conscious effort to not interject with my opinion or experiences because I recognised that my interjection could distract them from sharing more. For example, Bukonzo, a 19-year-old from a co-ed school shared experiences I could relate to:

*“Growing up, especially being Congolese, the standard of beauty was to be fair skinned. I do not know if you know about the product Caro Light. Growing up, I would constantly have my aunt telling me that this is the standard of beauty. ‘Why did you get so dark, stay out of the sun.’ So, that is one thing I did not like. I feel that it still affects me today. I am still trying to unlearn that.”*

As a 23-year-old Black female from a rural area in the Mopani district, I am an individual who has never attended a private school. I also do not have the experience of attending the same class, grade or even school with students who were not of my race. Therefore, as a researcher coming into this field, the experiences of the Black students made me aware of things I did not know existed. Doing research observations from outside-in rather than inside-out, I had to be reflexive, and allow myself to listen very attentively when my participants were talking. I was interested in finding out things I never knew. This influenced my access to information positively.

As an African person, I related with some of the participants because some experiences were similar to what I encountered at university. For the participants that expressed the frustration and offence they felt their names were pronounced wrong, I understood when they expressed that pronouncing someone’s name incorrectly can alter the meaning of their name. I connected with their feelings of humiliation, hurt, anger, and shock. My name is Boitumelo (a Tswana name), and I have had encounters where some people who are Nguni (Zulu, Xhosa or Ndebele) said they could not pronounce my name and asked if they could call me Tumelo instead. Boitumelo and Tumelo are two distinct names. Boitumelo in Tswana denotes happiness whereas Tumelo means faith. Not only is their suggestion changing my name, but it is also changing its originality, meaning, and significance. This influenced the way I listened to interviewees. I was listening for meaning to connect the relationship between what they were saying, my experiences, and the prevalence of notions of coloniality such as

pronouncing African names wrong which runs across different races and ethnic groups that serve the function of erasing meaning, cultural significance, and the identity of African people.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the study's methodological process used to conduct the study. The chapter outlined and justified the research design used. It also discussed data sources, study setting, data analysis, ethical considerations, and reflections from the field. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

## Chapter 4: FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study findings based on evidence obtained from select media reports issued since 2015 on the experiences of Black students in private high schools in South Africa as well as from data collected from twenty-five in-depth interviews with young individuals who attended private high schools in South Africa. The study's specific objectives are used as the presentation framework for the findings. As such, Section 4.2 engages with data from media articles that indicate the experiences of Black students in private high schools. In section 4.3 the positive and negative experiences of Black students are presented, respectively. Section 4.4 outlines and discusses how Black students navigated negative experiences. Section 4.5 discusses the perceived impact of the participants' experiences on their sense of identity. The chapter ends with a concluding section, Section, 4.6.

### 4.2 Media reports on Black students in private high schools

Table 4.1 overleaf presents a summary of the issues from the newspaper articles reporting on Black students in South African private high schools. The newspaper articles demonstrate the continuation of discrimination, prejudice, and racism within private schools. These were expressed in a number of experiences. First, there were specific experiences of discrimination which included issues of hair appearance and hairstyles, where discrimination against Afrocentric looks like natural hair was prevalent. Second, emphasis on binary school uniforms that exclude non-gender conforming students was an issue. Third, language such as students being barred from speaking their African home languages was noted. In literature, it is argued that these experiences of discrimination distance individuals from their cultural roots which can contribute to the erasure of their Black identity (Bencosme, 2017). The newspaper articles highlighted microaggression in the negative perceptions and attitudes towards Black students such as Black students being considered "too smart to be Black", and attitudes that Black students lack positive role models. Such perceptions and attitudes are based on racist colonial constructions of Black people. The newspaper articles also demonstrated explicit racism in that the K-word was used to describe Black students, teachers were said to be openly racist towards Black students, and Black students were told not to play

hard in sports to not outshine White students. The experiences reported in the media overlap with findings from the interviews.

**Table 4.1: Summary of key issues in articles**

Year published	Province off incident	Findings and arguments
2023	Eastern Cape	<p><b>News24: <i>Strict school uniform and appearance policies infringe on pupils' dignity, says SAHRC</i></b>  <a href="https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/strict-school-uniform-and-appearance-policies-infringe-on-pupils-dignity-says-sahrc-20231020">https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/strict-school-uniform-and-appearance-policies-infringe-on-pupils-dignity-says-sahrc-20231020</a></p> <p>The regulation of students' hair length, treating the violation of uniform appearance of students as a disciplinary problem, and implementing uniforms that are gender- stereotypical has been found to infringe on the dignity of students in the Eastern Cape by the Human Rights Commission.</p>
2023	Gauteng	<p><b><i>The Sunday Times: Crawford college substitute teacher seen writing racist phrases on board removed</i></b>  <a href="https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2023-07-26-crawford-college-substitute-teacher-seen-writing-racist-phrases-on-board-removed/">https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2023-07-26-crawford-college-substitute-teacher-seen-writing-racist-phrases-on-board-removed/</a></p> <p>A short-term temporary substitute teacher was removed after writing discriminatory phrases on the board. Crawford International College issued a statement to the Gauteng education MEC Matome Chiloane saying that they 'denounce any form of prejudice or discrimination in any capacity.'</p>
2021	Western Cape	<p><b>News 24: <i>Uproar at private Cape Town school after teacher tells pupils black children have no role models</i></b>  <a href="https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/uproar-at-private-cape-town-school-after-teacher-tells-pupils-black-children-have-no-role-models-20210615#:~:text=Parents%20and%20pupils%20of%20private.and%20their%20mothers%20are%20prostitutes%22.">https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/uproar-at-private-cape-town-school-after-teacher-tells-pupils-black-children-have-no-role-models-20210615#:~:text=Parents%20and%20pupils%20of%20private.and%20their%20mothers%20are%20prostitutes%22.</a></p> <p>A schoolteacher said that the Black pupils do not have role models because their mothers are 'prostitutes and their fathers are in jail.' The headmaster, Alexander P Kirmse conceded that the remarks were discriminatory, and the teacher was suspended and faced disciplinary proceedings.</p>

2021	Gauteng	<p><b><i>The Citizen: ‘You’re too smart for a black person’: One of many shocking racism claims at Cornwall Hill</i></b></p> <p><a href="https://www.citizen.co.za/news/youre-too-smart-for-a-black-person-one-of-many-shocking-racism-claims-at-cornwall-hill/">https://www.citizen.co.za/news/youre-too-smart-for-a-black-person-one-of-many-shocking-racism-claims-at-cornwall-hill/</a></p> <p>Students said they were experiencing micro-aggressive racism at the school. A Black student said that a teacher said she was “too smart for a Black person” after she won an Academy Award. The principal of the primary school, Maurice Dicks apologised on behalf of the school for the delay in transformation after receiving the addendum with testimonies by present and former students in 2020.</p>
2021	Gauteng	<p><b><i>The Sunday Times: Cornwall Hill College has become stuff of nightmares, says black pupil</i></b></p> <p><a href="https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-05-31-cornwall-hill-college-has-become-the-stuff-of-nightmares-says-black-pupil/#:~:text=Cornwall%20High%20College%20pupil%20SIngo.a%20teacher%20at%20the%20school.&amp;text=A%20pupil%20at%20the%20prestigious.negative%20experience%20at%20the%20school.">https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-05-31-cornwall-hill-college-has-become-the-stuff-of-nightmares-says-black-pupil/#:~:text=Cornwall%20High%20College%20pupil%20SIngo.a%20teacher%20at%20the%20school.&amp;text=A%20pupil%20at%20the%20prestigious.negative%20experience%20at%20the%20school.</a></p> <p>Parents and pupils said racism was blatant at the school. Students protested holding placards. Education MEC Panyaza Lesufi said that discriminatory acts are unacceptable and ‘it ends here’ after hearing about the incidents.</p>
2021	Gauteng	<p><b><i>News 24: Racism is not about a black child rising but white parents also standing up – parent</i></b></p> <p><a href="https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/watch-cornwall-hill-college-racism-is-not-about-a-black-child-rising-but-white-parents-also-standing-up-parent-20210531">https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/watch-cornwall-hill-college-racism-is-not-about-a-black-child-rising-but-white-parents-also-standing-up-parent-20210531</a></p> <p>Parents handed a memorandum to the Cornwall Hill College school which called for the school to transform its culture and make it inclusive and supportive of different races and cultures.’ This is because past and present students have alleged that they experienced and are experiencing microaggression, racism, and discrimination at the school.</p> <p>Gauteng education MEC Panyaza Lesufi was present when the parents handed the memorandum which included concrete steps to transformation.</p>
2020	Gauteng	<p><b><i>The Sunday Times: Johannesburg school called out for racism, says it is deeply saddened</i></b></p> <p><a href="https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-06-17-johannesburg-private-school-called-out-for-racism-says-it-is-deeply-saddened/">https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-06-17-johannesburg-private-school-called-out-for-racism-says-it-is-deeply-saddened/</a></p>



		Former students at St Martin's private school levelled complaints that the school enables racism. Some of the students explained how they received discriminatory jokes about their hair and that the school code of conduct on hair was unfair.
2020	Western Cape	<p><b><i>The Sunday Times: Protest against 'racism and discrimination' at top SA boys' school</i></b>  <a href="https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-06-05-protest-against-racism-and-discrimination-at-top-sa-boys-school/">https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-06-05-protest-against-racism-and-discrimination-at-top-sa-boys-school/</a></p> <p>Grade 12 pupils at a private boy's school, Diocesan College were protesting against discrimination and racism in their school. They presented their school administration with a list of demands to eradicate prejudice and discrimination.</p>
2020	Gauteng	<p><b><i>Mail &amp; Guardian: What is the future of black lives in historically white, elite schools?</i></b>  <a href="https://mg.co.za/education/2020-07-19-what-is-the-future-of-black-lives-in-historically-white-elite-schools/">https://mg.co.za/education/2020-07-19-what-is-the-future-of-black-lives-in-historically-white-elite-schools/</a></p> <p>As most independent schools in South Africa were founded by European missionaries, their practices echo the subjugation of people and the conquering of native subjects' minds.</p>
2020	KwaZulu-Natal	<p><b><i>The Citizen: Racism furore engulfs KZN's top private schools</i></b>  <a href="https://witness.co.za/news/2020/06/10/racism-furore-engulfs-private-schools-20200610/">https://witness.co.za/news/2020/06/10/racism-furore-engulfs-private-schools-20200610/</a></p> <p>Private schools in KZN have been called out for being racist. The students were called derogatory names at school.</p>
2017	Gauteng	<p><b><i>Mail &amp; Guardian: Ivy League schools fail black parents' grade</i></b>  <a href="https://mg.co.za/article/2017-08-11-00-ivy-league-schools-fail-black-parents-grade/#:~:text=Creative%3A%20Pupils%20at%20schools%20such,a%20path%20for%20their%20children.">https://mg.co.za/article/2017-08-11-00-ivy-league-schools-fail-black-parents-grade/#:~:text=Creative%3A%20Pupils%20at%20schools%20such,a%20path%20for%20their%20children.</a></p> <p>Parents expressed that they did not expect their children to be indoctrinated in a culture that is not their own. Lebone II College and Hilton College are becoming the two private high schools that parents opt to take their children to. They not only offer a good education, but they also allow students to embrace their culture.</p>
2017	Gauteng	<p><b><i>Mail &amp; Guardian: Gauteng private schools try frank talk on racism</i></b>  <a href="https://mg.co.za/article/2017-09-13-gauteng-private-schools-try-frank-talk-on-racism/">https://mg.co.za/article/2017-09-13-gauteng-private-schools-try-frank-talk-on-racism/</a></p> <p>Parents alleged that Curro School segregated white and Black students. St John's College chair of the board said that he was</p>

		reprimanded by the MEC after a teacher said that Black students received good marks because they were sitting next to white students. The education MEC, Panyaza Lesufi spoke about the importance of transformation in private schools to counter discrimination.
2016	Gauteng	<p><b><i>Mail &amp; Guardian: Several state and private schools have bans on dreadlocks, Afros, and braids</i></b></p> <p><a href="https://mg.co.za/article/2016-09-02-00-several-state-and-private-schools-have-bans-on-dreadlocks-afros-and-dreadlocks/">https://mg.co.za/article/2016-09-02-00-several-state-and-private-schools-have-bans-on-dreadlocks-afros-and-dreadlocks/</a></p> <p>The school code of conduct restricts some hairstyles such as afros, dreadlocks, and braids which are worn largely by Black students.</p>
2015	Gauteng	<p><b><i>The Guardian: Why call myself a 'coconut' to claim my place in post-apartheid South Africa</i></b></p> <p><a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/24/south-africa-race-panashe-chigumadzi-ruth-first-lecture#:~:text=We%20all%20k%20now%20what%20a,children%20entered%20formerly%20white%20schools.">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/24/south-africa-race-panashe-chigumadzi-ruth-first-lecture#:~:text=We%20all%20k%20now%20what%20a,children%20entered%20formerly%20white%20schools.</a></p> <p>Due to pronouncing her name wrong, she moved from being called Panache, Spinasië to being called Gloria. Panashe indicates that for her, in private high school racism was not articulated or recognised until they found the anti-racist language to name it.</p>

### 4.3 Sociocultural experiences of Black students who attended private high schools.

It emerged from the in-depth interviews that Black students who had attended private school have both negative and positive experiences in relation to social and cultural adaptations in the schools. The positive experiences can be broadly categorised into three: inclusive policies, strong community relationships, and valuing diversity. Negative experiences, on the other hand include, in no order of priority, racial profiling, gender issues, discriminatory hair policies, language restrictions and cultural insensitivity.

#### 4.3.1 Positive sociocultural experiences

##### 4.3.1.1 Inclusive policies

Drawing from Chisholm (2004), policy is important because it guides what schools do. Existing literature on public schools show that inclusive uniform policies can allow students autonomy over their bodies and sexuality (Khan, 2013). This is demonstrated in the interviews. Some of the Black former students interviewed for this study found appearance policies and rules at their schools to be part of their positive experiences. For example, Qinile, a 20-year-old female from a co-ed, expressed that her school was lenient on uniform policy. Qinile said:

*“We had what we would call a multiform. So, it was not standardised, not everyone wore the same uniform. But for the girls you could wear a khaki short. There was also a dress that you could wear with a golf shirt. You could come and pair whatever, as long as it had the school logo on it. And if it did not it had to look like what was on the multiform. Shoes, any black shoes. You could wear sneakers, but they had to be all black. You could wear pumps but all black or sandals but all black.”*

From the above quote it can be seen that allowing students to have some autonomy over their school uniform can create a sense of individuality as students come from unique backgrounds. The multiform flexibility challenged the gender binary around school uniforms that limits self-expression and acceptance. It can be argued that the multiform promotes sensitivity, a sense of belonging, and respect for diversity. The multiform can also benefit the students who

come from homes where they cannot afford the expensive school uniform, especially considering that some are middle-class students, with some only being able to access the schools through bursaries and scholarships such as sports scholarships. Thus, the multiform can create inclusivity in the schools.

#### **4.3.1.2 Strong community relationships**

In the literature review, Vandeyar & Jansen (2008) argued that anti bias and diversity training can yield respect and recognition of other people's culture thus fusing their cultures in the school can create social connectedness. In the interviews this is demonstrated through interviewees expressing that because private schools can have smaller numbers of students, students are able to interact on a more personal level and form strong friendships. This can reinforce strong community relationships in the schools. For instance, Rhulani, a 20-year-old male from a single-sex and faith-based school expressed that he was able to make personal connections with others which helped in high school and is still helping him now that he has graduated from Matric. Rhulani said:

*“The respect it teaches you, teaches you dignity, teaches you self-moral code. The people you meet, the connections you make. It is a networking school basically.”*

Rhulani adds that he still has the social networks that he had in is high school to this day:

*“All of them. We still have that dorm group. We still have that social media group. They help. Even on the social media thing, you can sign up to be mentored by a guy who is successful because a lot of our old boys are successful. I mean the one that I was talking to on social media, he is part of the management of Standard Bank. So, it is like having those opportunities to meet guys like that and be mentored by guys like that will get you fired up by it.”*

A personalised learning environment is one of the experiences found to be positive about their high schools. Having classes where there is a smaller number of students allows students to receive individualised help from their teachers when they ask for clarity on a subject in class. Errol, a 22-year-old male from a faith-based and co-ed school said:

*“I think it has a good learning environment [...] It was a very small school. So, people were contracted.<sup>10</sup> The classes were small too.”*

From the remarks above it can be seen that creating a sense of community in some private schools can foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity. Some private high schools allowed students the platform to expand their social networks. This can allow students to have social capital wherein the students can have access to opportunities and resources beyond the school environment. Having a smaller number of students in classes creates a personalised learning space for the student and teacher as well as a platform for the students to make stronger relationships that they draw from beyond the school context.

#### **4.3.1.3 Racial diversity**

In the literature review, learning about different cultures and embracing diversity can positively impact how people from different backgrounds interact with one another (Vandeyar & Jansen 2008). This can be seen in the interviews where some former Black students demonstrated that they appreciated racial diversity in their private schools especially with the social and friend groups they could form. For instance, Tinashe a 20-year-old male from a faith-based school said:

*“The school was mixed. So, we had different kinds of races there. [...] This school would have one Black friend, one Coloured, one Indian, one foreigner or whatever together. It’s a group. There were no four Coloureds, four Blacks separated. We were mixed. Every group was mixed in race. We were seeing each other as the same.”*

Lloyd, a 21-year-old male from a co-ed school also had a similar experience in his former private high school. He said:

*“It was very mixed. It was mixed. But it was mostly Black students. We also had Indian students, we had Asian students, and we had some Portuguese students.”*

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<sup>10</sup> Here contracted means the number of students in the classroom was very small.

The above expressions indicated a positive experience. For example, Tinashe's face looked more joyful, and he kept long smiles throughout his remarks. From the remarks above it can be seen that when students respect and appreciate each other's diversity their interconnectedness can improve. This can allow students to have a sense of belonging in the private school spaces. This can impact positively on their social and cultural identity because they can fully embody themselves.

### **4.3.2 Negative sociocultural experiences**

This section outlines and discusses the negative sociocultural experiences of Black students in private high schools. The main findings in this section include cultural insensitivity, the erasure of cultural significance, cultural isolation, and the pressure to conform to expectations.

#### **4.3.2.1 Historical racial insensitivity**

Although diversity may be emphasised in some private high schools, some of the experiences that Black students had included not feeling accepted or represented in the schools. As outlined in existing literature on negative stereotypes about minority groups among teachers, which can negatively affect the motivation of marginalised students, this can include cultural stereotyping wherein the students experience prejudice or discrimination because of their racial or cultural characteristics (Allen & Webber, 2019; Costa *et al* 2021; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Weber, 2015). This aligns with the newspaper evidence illustrating that one of the common issues Black students have been experiencing in some private schools since 2015 are prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping against their ethnicity and race. The interviews showed the same issues, participants in the study expressed that they felt discriminated against and marginalised. The findings from the study showed that Black students experienced biases or stereotypical portrayals associated with their race from teachers. For example, Bonita, a 20-year-old female from a faith-based school expressed that she experienced stereotyping from her sports coach. She said:

*“The water polo coach that I had called me a gangster, which is a stereotype that comes with coming from the Cape because of the Cape flats and gangsterism. [...] Those types of stereotypes that I am gangster and I have a knife, I will stab you, that was the stereotype with being Coloured.”*

From the above expression, these are stereotypes that circulate unchallenged about Coloured people. These stereotypes come from a history of Coloured people being perceived as drunks and gangsters which continue in contemporary society. These problematic constructions of Coloured people as drunks can be connected to a history of a violent system called the “dop system” where Coloured people were paid with alcohol as wages especially during the apartheid era (Williams, 2016). The stereotypical construction of Coloured people as gangsters stems from the Cape Flats that existed from the start of the construction of townships through the Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950 enforced by the apartheid regime (Du Toit, 2017). The negative constructions of Coloured people continue in some private school spaces as demonstrated by the interview report above.

#### **4.3.2.2 Constructions of beauty, gender and sexuality**

The aesthetics and notions of beauty that are connected to Black people are marginalised with the kind of obsession with fair skin, straightened hair, and some African hairstyles said to be unprofessional. The framing of dominant beauty ideas can be linked to whiteness. Literature shows that there are constructions that European beauty is more attractive than Afrocentric beauty which can make Black people internalise feelings of being undesirable or unattractive (Tribble et al. 2019; Joshua, 2021; Londberg, 2020, Bailey-Fakhoury, 2014; Khan, 2013; Bencosme, 2017).

Newspaper evidence highlighted that one of the main issues since 2015 included discrimination against African natural hair and other Afrocentric looks. The same issue is demonstrated in the interviews as well. The findings from this study show that a common point of discrimination towards Black students is having dreadlocks - associating dreadlocks with words like “unpresentable,” “dirty,” and “crazy.” The interviews demonstrated that this can be seen perpetuated by the schoolteachers and Black students towards former Black students interviewed for the study. The emphasis that dreadlocks are not neat and short hair is neater on students shows stereotyping and prejudice towards one's choice of hairstyle. For instance, Tanaka, a 20-year-old male from a faith-based and co-ed school said:

*“The hair policy was, for boys, the hair should not be too big. But they had a whole measure with a ruler thing. They wanted short hair. If you have short hair, excellent. Honestly, I thought it was unnecessary. I mean when my principal explained it to us as*

*to why, they were mostly gravitating to the means of the hair being neat. [...] If you came into the school with them, they would ask you to remove them. Except there were a few cases where parents would interject. If the parents could convince the school, which rarely was the case, then the kid could have dreadlocks, especially the kids who had dreadlocks before.”*

James, a 22-year-old male from a faith-based and co-ed school, had similar experiences at his former school. He expressed:

*I feel like my school was a bit too strict because boys had 2 or 3 hairstyles that they were allowed to put on whereas girls had more hairstyles they were allowed to put on. But still, they were less hairstyles allowed in terms of what they would have wanted to do with their hair. For boys they just wanted you to have short, neat hair. Haircuts. Dreadlocks were not allowed.*

The above expression indicated a negative experience because the participant chuckled disturbingly before giving his remark. Then his face appeared more serious and firmer as he continued to share his experience. From the remarks above it can be seen that some Black students experienced restrictions in terms of the hairstyles they could have particularly because of the stigma attached to the type of hair a Black man should wear in order to look ‘neat’.

Negative constructions of beauty can continue to manifest when students are limited from embodying themselves fully. For instance, the findings in the study show that questions about constructions of masculinity come up when male students are restricted from embracing the culture of braiding hair. The interviews showed that former male students interviewed for this study experienced gender policing when the rules and code of conduct of their schools enforced gender stereotypical expectations. For example, George expressed that males were not allowed to have cornrow hairstyles because it was deemed a hairstyle that is supposed to be done only by girls. George a 20-year-old male from a single sex and faith-based school said:

*“No. It was strictly a boys’ cut. It was boys and girls. Boys play with cars, girls play with barbie dolls, like that.”*



From the expression above it can be seen that the schools the participant attended reinforced patriarchal notions of masculinity. The policies oppress various expressions of masculinities through hair autonomy. As such, the school practices can potentially limit students' self-identity. This reflects how gendered ideas about hair are not seen as concerns for male students. Males should also have the autonomy to make decisions about their hair because leaving them out can cause them to suppress their emotions thus affecting their emotional and psychological wellbeing. It can be argued that some private high schools can challenge their views about gender dynamics and masculinity.

While from the study's findings a male student that has long hair can be seen as going against the norms of what a man should look like in certain communities and spaces, Bukonzo also indicated that Black female natural hair was not necessarily embraced when asked what she was taught about how to take care of hair at home. She said:

*“Not that much was taught. I was the one who preferred to move from relaxing my hair to having natural hair. Relaxing my hair gave me a lot of problems like chemical burns. Maybe it is because natural hair was not necessarily embraced.”*

Bukonzo added that her negative experience at school was the hair policy. She expressed:

*“Negative is the fact that right around high school that is when I started growing natural hair and I had pretty big hair. They made a valid point that now you will be obstructing the kids' view from the board. That made a lot of sense to me. But there was another girl who also had natural hair and her hair was very long. She was sitting at the back of the class, but she was told that she should tidy up her hair. There was a lot of anti-Blackness in the school.”*

One student expressed that even though she did chemically relax her hair, her hair was still an issue at the school. She said:

*“Wooh! Yah no you see this one! My hair has always been a problem to the schools I attended, especially when I let my hair down. I loved letting my hair down because sometimes tying up my hair gave me a headache. You cannot tie up your hair to a*

*point where it is a bit loose because it messes up the hairstyle. If you tie it, you need to tie it tight, so it stays intact. So, I would sometimes let my hair down and it was a matter of: ‘Your hair is too long. It touches your collar. You should tie it up. You cannot let your hair down.’ When I tried to explain to them that my hair is sore, for example, sometimes as you relax your hair, it sometimes burns your scalp. So, you cannot be tying up your hair with your scalp burnt, it needs some air. But they would not understand. I always received attacks on tying up my hair no matter how much I tried to explain.”*

Similar to the remarks above, it also emerged in the newspaper reports that Black students' hair was a point of discrimination. A student's hair was compared to the steel wool used to scrub pots. It was also suggested to one student that she straightens her hair chemically because it looks messy and unpresentable. This can impact negatively on the self-esteem of the Black students. It can make them feel that their hair is not beautiful and to have beautiful hair they need to use chemicals regardless of how painful it is. Demanding that students straighten their hair can be seen as part of erasing their identity and cultural practices in the case of dreadlock prescriptions for spiritual reasons.

Restricting appearance can have negative experiences in school. Tshifhiwa, a 21-year-old male from a co-ed school, expressed that he did not like the hairstyle that he had to have in private high school, but he did not have much of a choice because the policy was that males were only allowed in that high school. Tshifhiwa explained:

*“The style that I have right now is vintage. They did not really like it at school. They said we are at school. It will affect your studies. We had to get a brush hairstyle<sup>11</sup>. For the parents it is good, they would say you are on the right path. [...] Back then it was bad because sometimes you just want to do you. You are just trying to look nice and do something that you really like.”*

However, Tshifhiwa added that he thought the hairstyle was better because it helped people save money. He also explained that the hair is deemed as good by society. Tshifhiwa said:

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<sup>11</sup> In this study, a brush hairstyle is a type of haircut that is cut evenly but very low as if it is fading. Looking at it, you can slightly see the scalp.

*“But now I see that they were trying to groom me to be a better boy. [...] It is not costly. It is not expensive. The way that society defines it is that if you have brush<sup>11</sup> you look good. People will see that you have manners.”*

The above remarks reflect the normative ideologies in society that a man should have short hair and that a haircut shows that they have ‘manners’ whereas different hairstyles imply that they are rebellious. In some instances, the school can cut the hair of the student if the student is not following their policy. This can be seen in the comment that Bukonzo, a 19-year-old from a co-ed school, gives regarding a male student whose hair was cut at school because it was long. Bukonzo expressed:

*“...I remember there was this one boy who would constantly have his hair very long. I remember this one time he was walking around with his head covered in a scarf on his head. Apparently, they said that it is because they called him to the office, and they cut his hair with a scissor. [...] Yes, they cut his hair at the school.”*

In addition to beauty and gender, sexuality came up as a point of contention in relation to identity. Some South Africans, even with the progressive constitution protecting human rights, still express narrow and discriminatory attitudes when it comes to sexual orientations. The findings of the study show that schools are not excluded from the homophobic attitudes since they reflect society. For instance, Rhulani, a 20-year-old male from a single sex and faith-based school indicated that in his school they felt that students’ sexuality was not respected. He expressed that his friend experienced discrimination because of social norms of Matric dance practices - the expectation that a male should bring a girl partner to matric dance, and he should be ‘masculine’:

*“I was close friends with a lot of them. Their experience was hard, very hard. I had a friend... He wanted to bring a man to his Matric dance, and they told him to get lost. He was not allowed to express that side of himself. And things like wanting to wear makeup, there is some norms that they want to stay preserved.”*

#### **4.3.2.3 Erasing cultural and religious significance.**

The findings from the study demonstrated that some of the challenges that students faced in private high schools included discrimination due to culturally significant markers such as

music. It emerged in the newspaper reports that a Black student was told by their teacher to not use isiZulu language because their school is not a “township school.” The interviews showed similar encounters. For example, Banele, a 20-year-old male from a co-ed school experienced discrimination from a fellow White student against the music he and his friends were playing at his school wherein they were told they were playing “township music”. Banele explained:

*“I think the highest level of conflict that I have ever experienced was in the boarding house where me and a few friends were playing Amapiano<sup>12</sup>. A Caucasian person came down to us, and he was like: ‘Can you please turn that Township music off?’ So, that was a bit off. That rubbed us the wrong way, but obviously we did not go into means of violence, actions, or anything. We just asked him, what does he mean by Township music, and he could not explain. But I think we had all known that he was in a sense racially profiling us. So yeah, that was the highest level of any racial conflict or discrimination that I had ever experienced with my friends but apart from that, no.”*

From the above statement it is shown that there are subtle racially discriminative words that are used to perpetuate racism against Black students. It can be argued that discriminating against a Black student's choice of music which is connected to their cultural identity can cause cultural erasure, implying the devaluing of one's music preferences and marginalisation of their cultural background.

In the literature, Black students are often under pressure to assimilate to be accepted (McKinney, 2010; Ritchey, 2014). This is demonstrated in the findings of the study that Black Students are often expected to meet particular religious expectations, social norms, and academic expectations. For instance, former Black students interviewed for this study indicated that they had to form alliances to exercise their agency against the date of the Matric dance which was contradictory to their religion as it was put on the same date as a religious holiday. Bonita, a 20-year-old female from a faith-based school said that they had to battle with their school in negotiation to move the date. However, it was a big challenge:

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<sup>12</sup> Amapiano is a genre of music which emerged in the 2010s in South African townships. It has elements of deep house, soul, kwaito, afrobeats, jazz, and afro-house music.

*“They ended up moving it, but it was a whole fight with meetings after meetings after meetings with the Deputy Head. I even got friends of mine that were Jewish who also had an issue with making dates, like important dates, especially Matric dance where you want to attend, during religious holidays. So, we all came together and told them that it cannot happen.”*

#### **4.3.2.4 Cultural isolation**

A common experience of cultural isolation can be due to language restrictions. Existing literature contends that language is important because it carries culture (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 15). As such, restricting students from using their home language alienates them from their culture thus impacting negatively on their social identity and self-concept. This aligns with the newspaper evidence showing that one of the main issues that Black students have been experiencing is being barred from speaking their home language such as isiZulu in the vicinity of some private schools. This can also be seen in the interviews. For example, Radhika, a 19-year-old from a co-ed school, expressed that no other languages were allowed to be spoken in the school except English and Afrikaans. Radhika said:

*“English and Afrikaans, and if you spoke a vernacular language they were like, no, this is an English and Afrikaans school, so please only speak those two languages. During break we could speak whatever. [...]. You know, but it was just we are a dual medium school. Please speak those languages during class.”*

Not only did the Black students interviewed for this study experience alienation, but some students also expressed that they had to constantly look over their shoulder to ensure nobody was hearing them speak their language. For example, although isiXhosa is one of the dominant home languages that are spoken in the Eastern Cape, one student expressed that they were told not to speak it:

*“It was an English-medium school, and we were forced to speak English. If you do not speak English or you were found to be speaking your language, you had to pay some amount. We were forced to speak English all the time. Inside and outside of class. [...] Most people in the Eastern Cape are Xhosas. So, of course we would speak Xhosa and watch if someone were around. Otherwise, the rule was “do not speak your language in the yard.”*

The expression above shows that some private high schools consider European languages above African languages. This aligns with the existing literature on preferring and valuing European languages (Christie & McKinney, 2017, Wa Thiong'o, 1986)). The above remarks raise the point of how schools, in the findings of the study, did not allow Black students to speak their African language. For example, Dembe, a 22-year-old male from a co-ed school also explained that his school population was predominantly Black students. Dembe said:

*“It was mainly Black. Then about 10 to 15% Indian. [...]No, Coloured, you could count how many of Coloured people are in the school. Same as White, you could count. So, there were mainly Black students.”*

Tsholofelo, a 19-year-old female from a co-ed school expressed how she felt about the language restriction rules:

*“I felt angry because they made exceptions for those who spoke Afrikaans. If they made all of us speak English, then I understand that it is a universal language. But now why specifically we could not speak our home languages. You understand that we go to family functions, and they are speaking your home language, but you do not know your home language anymore because you are constantly speaking English or Afrikaans. I felt like they were trying to kill our culture.”*

Nelisiwe, a 19-year-old female from a faith-based school expressed how she feels that not being able to speak your own language well can make you lose connection to your cultural roots. Also, Nelisiwe points to the importance of language in everyday relations.

*“You need to know where you come from. As a Black person, it is important to know your language. Those kids could not speak their languages. It is embarrassing. They don't know how to speak isiZulu. The reason why I was closer to the lower staff is because I can be humble as a Black person. They don't want you twanging. When you leave school, you will meet a lot of people from different backgrounds, and you may need to understand that this person cannot speak English as fluently as I can. Secondly, in the Zulu culture they teach you respect. If you don't know your culture, how will you respect other people? Being in that school and seeing how kids are not in*

*touch with their roots is very sad. Those kids don't know how to socialise outside of their own arena. It is very sad. “*

### **4.3.2 Black students' navigation of negative experiences**

This section outlines and discusses the different methods Black students who attended private high schools used as coping mechanisms and to navigate negative experiences. The main findings in this section include silencing, minimization, and isolation.

#### **4.3.2.1 Silence**

In the literature, Bonilla-Silva (2018) shows that over a period of time racism makes Black people start doubting themselves. As such, they use silence as a way to navigate their negative experiences (Dotson, 2011). This can be seen in the interviews where a common method that Black students used to navigate their negative experiences was silence. Former Black students interviewed for this study did not often report or confront issues in their private high schools because they feared their schools would make the problem bigger than it was or that they would not take them seriously. They would rather keep quiet than voice out what they are experiencing in school.

Dotson (2011) identifies two types of silencing which are testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering. Testimonial smothering is the type of silencing where one is afraid to speak out against something because they are intimidated (Datson, 2011: 253). This can also happen when marginalised individuals believe that their voices will be unheard thus, they keep self-silence (Datson, 2011). This is demonstrated in the interviews. For instance, Bongani, a 22-year-old from a single sex and faith-based school mentioned that students faced the challenge of segregation in his school, however, when asked how he navigated the challenge he said:

*“By sticking to myself. I do not like confrontation. Most of the time confrontation is met with resistance. If I went to the school and told them I do not like the segregation of the school, the school would be very defensive because they do not want to be seen as a school that segregates kids.”*

It emerged in a News24 report in 2021 that when the students reported their teacher for being racially discriminative towards them, the teacher was suspended and then reinstated with her absence blamed on “sickness”. The school never openly acknowledged their suspension and the real reason for it. This shows lack of accountability from the school and the teacher. This is what Datson (2011) called testimonial questioning, the students voiced out their challenges, but they were dismissed. This can make students feel discouraged to report experiences of discrimination, stereotyping, or prejudice. Thus, it can be argued that this is a form of silencing that students can experience in private high schools. They keep quiet about the injustices that they encounter at school because they see how their schools have been suppressing similar matters.

#### **4.3.2.2 Minimisation**

The findings from the study showed that Black students can use minimisation as a coping mechanism in navigating the challenges that they face. That is, instead of acknowledging confronting issues directly people can downplay them or reduce their significance. This can be done by laughing offensive matters off to avoid the discomfort of addressing them. For example, Kutlwano, an 18-year-old male from a faith-based and co-ed school expressed that he experienced stereotyping because of being a Zulu person. He navigated the experience by laughing it off. He said:

*“Coping mechanism – make stereotypes about them. It is either you fight back or sit back and laugh along because at the end of the day it is just jokes. So, make jokes about them. There are no hard feelings.”*

Minimisation can also be when one avoids confronting issues because they may not yield immediate results. As such, they may just accept the policies that are put in place because that is what is ‘expected’ of them. This can make them docile and meek. These reflect the characteristics of an archetypal Black student in society. Some Black students cope with negative experiences according to what they were taught at home about how to deal with negative experiences at school. George expressed that his father guided him on how he should cope with not being allowed to have the hairstyle that he wanted at school. George said:



*“My dad once told me that I must entertain things that will benefit me. So, me fighting to keep my hair is not going to benefit me because I could still fail the year and still be in the same grade next year.”*

From the above expression, Black students are expected to adapt and accept the society that has been constructed of them. This resonated with the notion that Black people are resilient and thus should be strong and assimilate to the standards that have been set for them because their views do not matter. Tsholofelo, a 19-year-old female former student from a co-ed school expressed the things that she loves about Black people. She said:

*“We make life what it is. Even in the worst-case scenario, Black people just find ways to make it work for them. Sometimes it is good, sometimes it is bad but Black people just have this thing of winning and creating. [...] We can adapt to whatever that comes our way.”*

### **4.3.3 Experiences and young Black South Africans’ sense of identity**

Drawing from the findings above this section presents the key findings on Black students’ experiences and their sense of identity. The salient findings are that their cultural and social identity may be affected when students must adapt to the norms and values of the mainstream culture in their school. This is important because it aligns with the decolonial theory in that, the decolonial theory challenges the legitimacy and source of prevailing norms, values and assumptions in an attempt to dismantle colonial systems of power (Mohamed et al. 2020). Socioeconomic status and racial grouping have been found to impact the experiences of Black students in private high schools psychosocially.

#### **4.3.3.1 Cultural identity**

In the literature, practices and beliefs influence the way people see themselves (Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Perry et al. 2016; Shah, 2019; Emery, 2020). As the mainstream norms of some private schools may not be identical or aligned to Black students’ cultural norms, they find strategic ways to navigate the diverse cultural contexts. The Black students in this study often had to conform to the values and norms of the schools, possibly leading them to suppress their cultural identity. This is demonstrated in the interviews. For example, Banele a 20-year-old

male from a co-ed school, expressed that some students felt that their sense of identity as Black people was lost:

*“When I would have conversations with other students, they would talk about how they felt as if because they have gone to a private school, now they have lost their sense of Blackness. Because now they have gone to a White school and it is about the White man, they did suffer with issues of identity.”*

Ethnic and racial minority students often must subvert or assimilate into the mainstream culture because they find it difficult to maintain a sturdy cultural identity that is connected to their racial identity (Harper and Queye, 2007 as cited in Ritchey, 2014: 103). While assimilation into mainstream cultural norms may be one of the experiences of Black students in private schools, they can also experience issues of identity linked to their African names. For instance, Thuso unhappily expressed that there were times where teachers mispronounced his name, and they asked to use an easier name in place of his original name. Thuso, a 20-year-old male from a co-ed school expressed:

*“I feel like that is racism, when as a White teacher asks me what is my name, and I tell you my name then you are like ‘I cannot pronounce that. Can I please call you that?’ I feel like that is a kind of racism because we have to learn their White names. No matter how much we may struggle with them, we have to learn them and get them right, but they want the easy way out. So, I know it is more like White privilege because that name that you want to give me is not my name. My parents did not give me that name [...] At the end of the day everybody’s name deserves to be respected.”*

From the above extract it can be interpreted that pronouncing one's name shows respect for their cultural identity. Similarly, it can be seen in the newspaper evidence that Black students' self-identity can be affected as their names get replaced with White names which are preferred by White people because they ‘cannot’ pronounce African names. African names typically have specific meanings that are attached to them. In that, mispronouncing the name does not only change the name but it changes the meaning of the name and its purpose. In the literature, this can create feelings of shame, inferiority, and a loss of connection to one's cultural identity and heritage (Lewis et al. 2016; Emery, 2020). It can be argued that incorrectly pronouncing African names or asking to give Black students replacement names

can make them feel estranged from their cultural background (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). This can cause alienation of their cultural heritage and identity. Thus, students can develop feelings of shame and inadequacy which can negatively affect their confidence and self-esteem.

#### 4.3.3.2 Social identity

The findings from the study showed that the way in which students view themselves and how they are viewed by others can be seen in how students interact with each other. For instance, they may sit in racial or ethnic groups during lunch time, class discussions or school projects. This can reflect which social groups they feel comfortable in. Their sense of belonging in the group can be influenced by elements such as cultural background, socioeconomic status, experiences of marginalisation, personal preferences. For example, although this could also be vice versa, some Black students in the interviews indicated that they did not have White friends and could not understand Afrikaans. For instance, Ababalwe, a 20-year-old female from a faith-based school shared that students grouped themselves in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. She expressed this while shedding tears:

*“We were not really associated with them. We were just Xhosas alone. You would see Coloureds on their own corner. This race in their own corner.”*

Ababalwe added:

*“When I got to the school, I had not adapted to the rich kids’ environment because I am from a public school. Although they were Xhosa people that I became friends with, I still felt like I was beneath them. I felt they had more money because they lived in that place while I am from the rural areas. [...] I was being excluded because they did not see me as a part of them. They did not expect someone from my area to be in that school and to be their friend. I was very hurt.”*

The above expressions show that Black students interviewed in this study experienced social exclusion because of their socioeconomic background. This can impact on their self confidence and self-esteem thus impacting on the way in which they form relationships with others in their schools.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The key issues that emanate from this chapter using the two data sources (newspaper outlets and in-depth interviews) are the dissatisfaction with uniform and hair policies, the pressure to conform, cultural isolation and erasure. The interviews demonstrated that Black students still experience the same issues that the literature points to, they are the same over time. This means that there may be changes but it also means that there are things that are refusing to change. The chapter that follows will present a summary of the study's main findings, overall contribution of the study, and will conclude by outlining recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

## Chapter 5: Summary, conclusion, and recommendations

### 5.1 Introduction

The principal aim of this study was to examine the nature of the experiences of Black students in diverse private high school spaces. The specific objectives were:

1. To explore the positive and negative sociocultural experiences of Black students who attended private high schools in South Africa
2. To explore how Black students who attended at private high schools navigate their negative experiences.
3. To explore how the experiences, both negative and positive, shape young Black South Africans' sense of identity.
4. To come up with recommendations for policy and practice

Methodologically, the study used qualitative design and drew data using two methods of data collection: (i) media report analysis and (ii) In-depth interviews. Data was analysed through document analysis and thematic analysis approaches. The overall key findings are summarised in the next section in line with the study's specific objectives and before the chapter concludes with recommendations.

### 5.2 Summary of key findings

#### 5.2.1 Positive and negative sociocultural experiences of Black students who attended private high schools in South Africa

The results showed that the positive experiences of Black students include community relationships, experiences of diversity and inclusive policies. Due to classes being small, students are able to get personalised learning with the teacher attending to the academic needs of each student. Through the school relationships, some students develop social capital through which they can access opportunities and resources in their future. The findings also revealed that while some Blacks students had negative experiences with the school hair and uniform policies, others found the policies at their schools to be inclusive. They illustrated that the uniform policy allowed them to wear anything that was associated with the colours of

the school. They also indicated that they had autonomy over the type of hairstyles they could wear regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality.

The findings revealed that the negative experiences of Black students included racial insensitivity, the erasure of cultural significance, cultural isolation, and pressure to conform to mainstream culture. Black students felt that the stereotyping they received from their teachers and sports coaches as well as the discrimination and gender stereotyping embedded in the hair policy indicated how their schools were insensitive to their backgrounds. Black students reported that their schools showed ways of erasing the importance of their culture by making them inferior. Black students reported that they were not allowed to speak their home languages and were discriminated against when they played their indigenous music. They were pressured to conform to the dominant standards that were created for them as Black students. The Black former students socially and culturally adapted to their private high schools by using different forms of adaptations including assimilating, self-silencing (by not questioning or challenging the practices in their schools, publicising their experiences in the media (such as in the news), and protesting. A decoloniality approach helps to show that the challenges that students faced were linked to everyday experiences in historically discriminatory educational contexts and institutions developing in a historically racialised society. Therefore, they illustrate practices of coloniality in schools and broader society (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Christie & McKinney, 2017).

### **5.2.2 Black students' navigation of their negative experiences.**

A salient finding was that Black students navigated their negative experiences by silencing and minimising. Black students can be discouraged to not report their negative experiences because they think they will not be heard. It emerged that some Black students were afraid of the consequences of reporting. The findings also revealed that some Black students minimised the severity of their negative experiences because they believed that the resolution would not help them in any way. Some Black students indicated that their parents told them to not report matters such as hair discrimination because it would not benefit them or improve their marks. In general, the navigation of the negative experiences was to suppress Black students' voices. Of course, beyond silencing and minimisation, there are other ways that Black students have directly confronted discriminatory practices. Some Black students used protests as forms of their adaptive strategies. For example, in 2015, students from Pretoria High School for Girls protested publicly about their experiences at the school. Those protests resulted in a broader

national debate about the policies and practices in schools. Therefore, some of the adaptive strategies that some students used, as seen in the news reports, include publicising their experiences in an effort to change the institutional cultures of their schools.

The decolonial perspective makes it possible to see the ways Black people adapt to influence contemporary lives (Mohamed et al. 2020). Black student's navigation of negative experiences illustrated how the cultural identity of marginalised people is decentred versus the centring of the culture of the colonial. The decolonial perspective helps us see that minimisation of discriminatory experiences reinforces the idea that the views of Black people do not matter (Bonilla-Silva (2018). Over time, people become psychologically affected by these practices. In that, some experiences are no longer seen in a negative light by Black people because they have assimilated to the ideas, or they do not feel confident to oppose them. This is one of the ways some Black former students socially and culturally adapted to their private high schools - by assimilating and not questioning or challenging the practices. This is how you find Black people asking questions such as why you are not relaxing your hair, thus keeping alive Eurocentric beauty standards and ideas of whiteness.

### **5.2.3 Experiences and the shaping of young Black South Africans' sense of identity.**

Due to adapting and conforming to the mainstream culture Black students found that their sense of identity was affected. By adopting the values of alienating Black culture, they suppressed their cultural identity. It also emerged that students experienced mispronunciation of their names with some named different names to replace their original names. This highlighted the insensitivity of the significance of African names and showed the emphasis of Eurocentric names as superior. Black former students adopted by protesting and publicising the practices of microaggression and discrimination against their names in the media. The decolonial perspective helps us see that institutions reinforce Western superiority, which illustrates that the issues of subverting African knowledge and culture persists and becomes difficult to eradicate in institutions that favour European practices.

## **5.3 Overall contribution of the study**

This study outlined and discussed findings obtained from in-depth interviews focusing on how Black students socially and culturally adapt in some private high schools. Though private high schools are a good place to enhance human capital, some private schools have persisting

Western ideologies and culture that impacts on the experience of Black students. It was evident from the in-depth interview findings that while students can have positive experiences which include personalised learning and social networks that can last a lifetime, this can be at the cost of the loss or erasure of their cultural identity.

The decolonial framework helps to show how one's identity can be impacted by structures that do not favour them. What this tells us about the project of decolonisation in the schools is that educational institutions take time to transform but also there is a resistance to that transformation, because the people whom coloniality privileges, do not want to lose the privilege that they have. The experiences of Black students were similar across private schools established before, during and after apartheid. I align myself with the points that are made by these authors from the literature (Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Vandeyar & Jansen, 2008; Edwards 2016; Bencosme, 2017; Williams, 2018; Shah, 2019; Emery, 2020) and theoretical framework (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Lemos, 2023); because the evidence demonstrates that practices of coloniality and the emphasis on maintaining mainstream culture shape the experiences of Black students in some private school spaces.

## **5.4 Recommendations for policy, practice, and further research**

Based on the overall study findings the following recommendations for policy, practice and further research are made.

### ***5.4.1 Recommendations for policy***

One of the main challenges that South African students have been facing in schools since 2016 is the uniform and hair policy. The study reveals that Black students feel that the uniform policy can restrict their individuality. They feel that the hair policy discriminates against their race, is placed to erase their cultural identity, and affects their self-esteem. Students have voiced out how they have reported discrimination and their concerns about policies but have found the matter is dismissed. It therefore leads to some students resorting to self-silencing. Datson (2011) indicates that when marginalised people believe that their voices will be unheard, they become afraid or reluctant to report their concerns. It is important to consider changing the uniform and hair policies in private schools to be inclusive of students who come from different backgrounds and to have policies that are not gender stereotyping.



#### **5.4.2 Recommendations for practice**

While it is important to report forms of discrimination, this study reveals that there is a need to deconstruct the taken for granted norms of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and masculinity that suppresses female and male voices on the hair hairstyles and school uniforms. It is important to challenge and change the current normative ideologies and practices of private schooling (Christie & McKinney, 2017). As such, it is recommended that there is diversity training for teachers, other staff members, and students. These training would look like: workshops, seminars, training courses, among other training, that create a safe space for students and all staff members to openly reflect and discuss challenging topics regarding their experiences in the schools and the vicinity of the school. They will all share their perceptions on how to address the problems so that the individuals who may be victims can also be included in the solutions implemented. The training would emphasise that teachers recognise and teach diversity when teaching courses especially when making examples to explain the material, in order to allow students from different backgrounds to relate to the material being taught and to participate effectively. In that, teachers can counter their own biases by allowing students to share about their own real-life experiences. The training could highlight that private high schools address biases and stereotypes by putting an emphasis on care and respect for each other's culture as one of the values and code of conduct of the schools.

It is important that private high schools implement interventions that make all the students in the school have a sense of community and a sense of belonging. For instance, incorporate diversity groups in schools that can help bring transformation to the issues that are experienced by the students and work towards eradicating stereotyping. Thus, allowing a safe space for students from diverse cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, sexualities, socioeconomic status, among other things, to share their experiences and report any discrimination or prejudice against them. This can enhance representation and social cohesion.

#### **5.4.3 Recommendations for further research**

This study only addressed the experiences of Black students. In reality, their White counterparts are affected in one way or another. Further research to explore the experiences and views of White students as they navigate their friendships with Black students or see Black students socially and culturally adapting in private high schools. The study also focused on South African Black students who had attended private high schools in any part of the country who were aged 18 to 24 years.

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## Appendix A: Study Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Province, they attended their private high school at	Type of private high school	Grade they attended their private high school
Tinashe	Male	20	Gauteng	Faith-based	Grade 8 to 12
Tanaka	Male	20	Gauteng	Faith-based and Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
George	Male	20	Gauteng	Single-sex and faith-based	Grade 8 to 12
Bongani	Male	22	Gauteng	Single sex and faith based	Grade 8 to 12
Dembe	Male	22	Gauteng	Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
Errol	Male	22	Gauteng	Faith based and co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
Bukonzo	Female	19	Gauteng	Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
Bonita	Female	20	Gauteng	Faith based	Grade 11 to 12
Botshelo	Female	21	Gauteng	Single sex and faith based	Grade 8 to 11
Rutendo	Female	23	Gauteng	Faith based	Grade 9 to 12
Rhulani	Male	20	Kwa-Zulu Natal	Single sex and faith based	Grade 8 to 12
Nelisiwe	Female	19	KwaZulu-Natal	Faith based	Grade 8 to 12
Qinile	Female	20	KwaZulu-Natal	Co-ed	Grade 7 to 12
Lakshmi	Female	21	Kwa-Zulu Natal	Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
Thuso	Male	20	Limpopo	Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12

Tshifhiwa	Male	21	Limpopo	Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
James	Male	22	Limpopo	Faith based and Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
Kutlwano	Male	18	North West	Faith based and Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
Bokang	Male	21	North West	Faith based and co-ed	Grade 8 to 9
Tsholofelo	Female	19	North west.	Co-ed	Grade 9 to 10.
Banele	Male	20	Mpumalanga	Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
Tendai	Male	21	Mpumalanga	Co-ed and faith based	Grade 11 to 12
Lloyd	Male	21	Mpumalanga	Co-ed	Grade 8 to 12
Ababalwe	Female	20	Eastern Cape	Faith based	Grade 9 to 12
Radhika	Female	19	Free State	Co-ed.	Grade 8 to 12

## **APPENDIX B: In-depth interview guide**

### **Background characteristics**

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Last year of high school
- Province where you attended high school
- The highest level of education

### **School selection**

1. What type of school did you attend?
  - faith-based schools
  - single-sex schools
  - co-ed schools
  - Other, specify.
2. Who decided on the school you attended?
3. Why the specific school? Elaborate.

### **Home and school cultures**

4. What is your cultural background?
5. What were you taught about your culture by your family?
6. What were you taught about how to represent and carry yourself in school by your family?
7. What was your school's culture? Elaborate.
8. What were you taught about the school's culture by your school? Elaborate.
9. What were you taught about how to represent and carry yourself by your school?

### **Culture and Identity**

10. Was your culture embraced and incorporated into your school?
11. How was it embraced and incorporated in your school? Elaborate.
12. Did the school culture influence your social experiences at the schools? Elaborate.
13. Did the school culture influence your social experiences outside the school? Elaborate
14. Was your sense of identity affected by the school culture? Elaborate.

### **Ethnicity and school adaptations**

15. Did you experience any cultural stereotypes at your school? Elaborate.
16. How did you manage the stereotypes? Elaborate.

### **Gender and racial socialization**

17. What do you appreciate and love about your gender? Elaborate.
18. Were you treated differently because of your gender at your school? Elaborate.
19. If you were treated differently, how did you respond? Elaborate.
20. What do you appreciate and love about your 'race'? Elaborate.
21. Were you treated differently because of your 'race' at your school? Elaborate.
22. If you were treated differently because of your 'race', how did you respond? Elaborate.
23. Looking back, what would you have changed about your school culture? Elaborate.

### **General question**

24. Is there anything else you think is important related to this topic that we did not discuss? Please elaborate.

**Thank you for your time.**

## APPENDIX C: Ethics Approval



**Faculty of Humanities**  
Fakuleit Geesteswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Bomotho



11 August 2023

Dear Miss B Mogoboya

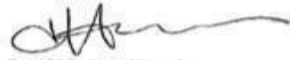
Project Title: An exploration of sociocultural adaptations in South African private high schools  
Researcher: Miss B Mogoboya  
Supervisor(s): Ms VD Bingma  
Prof ZS Mokomane  
Department: Sociology  
Reference number: 22888714 (HUM004/0723)  
Degree: Masters

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 11 August 2023. Please note that before research can commence all other approvals must have been received.

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 Karen Harris**  
Chair: Research Ethics Committee  
Faculty of Humanities  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
e-mail: tracey.andrew@up.ac.za

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof KL Harris (Chair); Mr A Bizos; Dr A-M de Beer; Dr A dos Santos; Dr P Gutura; Ms KT Govinder Andrew; Dr E Johnson; Dr D Krige; Prof D Maree; Mr A Mohamed; Dr I Noomé; Dr J Okeke; Dr C Puttergill; Prof D Reyburn; Prof M Soer; Prof E Taljard; Ms D Mokalapa

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## APPENDIX D: Informant sheet and consent form



### Faculty of Humanities

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Bomotheo



Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Boitumelo Mogoboya, a Masters student from the Department of Sociology at the University of Pretoria. Title of the study: An exploration of sociocultural adaptations in South African private high schools. The purpose of the study is to explore the socio-cultural experiences and adaptations of Black students in South African private high schools.

Please note the following:

- The study will prioritise confidentiality. Your personal information and responses will be treated with strict confidentiality. In using snowball sampling, participants will not share private information (such as their contact details) with the researcher, but rather participants will pass on the researcher's contact details to potential participants.
- Your participation is very important for the study. You may, however, choose not participate and you are allowed to withdraw from the research at any given time that you may wish to without any negative consequences.
- All data collected for this study will be stored in a safe and secure platform as governed by the University of Pretoria's Research Data Management Policy for a period of 10-years.
- The interview will take 45 to 60 minutes of your time. An audio recorder will be used to record the interviews. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible.
- Your interview transcripts will be kept safe and made accessible only by using a password only known to the researcher and the supervisors and stored securely at the Department of Sociology for a period of 10-years.
- The findings of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in academic journals, books/book chapters, popular news articles or further research. A summary of the findings will be provided to you upon your request.
- The benefits are the production of knowledge of a particular area of research. There are no immediate material benefits.
- You will not receive any payments for participating.
- There are no anticipated risks in the study.
- If emotional support is required, you will be given contact details of Lifeline South Africa. Lifeline is a 24-hour toll-free number that offers counselling nationwide. Their number is 0861 322 322.
- If you have any questions regarding the study, you may contact:  
Researcher: Boitumelo Mogoboya - on cell phone number 0611090494, or by email at [boitumelomogoboya24@gmail.com](mailto:boitumelomogoboya24@gmail.com)  
Supervisor: Prof Zitha Mokomane – telephone number 012 420 3744, or by email at [zitha.mokomane@up.ac.za](mailto:zitha.mokomane@up.ac.za)

Co-supervisor: Vangile Bingma – telephone number 012 420 4897, or by email at [vangile.bingma@up.ac.za](mailto:vangile.bingma@up.ac.za)

In a study of this nature, the supervisors may wish to contact participants to verify the authenticity of data collected by the researcher. It is noteworthy that any personal contact details that you may provide will be used **only** for this purpose.

Thank you.

Researcher's signature:

Date:



## Faculty of Humanities

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Bomotheo



### Informed Consent Form

Please sign the consent form to indicate that:

- You have read and understood the information sheet above.
- You give consent and voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

#### Consent for interview:

I understand my rights as a research participant, and I voluntarily consent to participate in the research.

Participants Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewers Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Consent to record interview:

- o I am willing for the interview to be taped recorded. My name will not be mentioned in

the tape recording.  Yes  No

- o I understand the purpose of the need for the interview to be tape-recorded.

Yes  No

Participants Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewers Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_