BLACK PARENTS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF RACE(ISM) IN HIGH-FEE-PAYING INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN JOHANNESBURG

by

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Declaration

I, Rosemary Picas, declare that this research is my own unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Community-based Counselling at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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The 23rd day of October 2022 in Modderfontein.

Abstract

South Africa has a long history of racial segregation and discrimination. Transformation and diversification have been central to the national agenda in all spheres of life post-1994, including schools which have been integrated for many years. However, the recent spate of public complaints against independent and Model C schools, as well as calls for the Human Rights Commission (HRC) to investigate state schools, suggests that many schools are still struggling with systemic racism. High-fee-paying independent schools have been slower to transform and remain predominantly white spaces and pockets of privilege in society. This hermeneutical phenomenological study explored black parents' experiences and perceptions around race, racism and discrimination within their children's high-fee-paying independent schools. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis to explore common threads in their lived experiences from an interpretive stance. The themes identified elucidate parents' subtle, and difficult-to-articulate, racialised experiences, as well as their psychological and behavioural responses. Parents' perceptions of their children's experiences are also discussed. Their perceptions of the school's management of race-related matters are explored and appeared to be strongly related to proactive communication from the school. The racial dynamics that emerged during the interviews are explored to understand parents' experiences at school. Finally, other social identities, such as gender, class, and nationality, which act as proxies for race or intersect with race, are discussed. The parents' experience of racism in these white liberal spaces was found to be extremely subtle and yet pervasive. Black parents were found to occupy a precarious position in white schools where they may be compelled to tolerate, assimilate, or reproduce racist narratives to maintain their privileged position. While race was difficult for them to confront on an individual or interpersonal level, parents were active in challenging racism at a structural and systemic level. These findings aim to contribute towards the goal of dismantling systemic racism within schools and in South Africa.

Keywords: Black Parents, Discrimination, Education, Independent Schools, Johannesburg, Race, Racism

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List of Abbreviations

BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
BLM	Black Lives Matter
Covid-19	Coronavirus Disease-2019
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
DoBE	Department of Basic Education
DoHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EAP	Economically Active Population
HRC	Human Rights Commission
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
NDoE	National Department of Education
NEPA	National Education Policy Act
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SASA	The South African Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SMT	School Management Team
USA	United States of America

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Chapter One: Introduction

South Africa is a divided country and one that continues to experience the most profound levels of social inequality in the world (Sulla et al., 2022). Much of this inequality is racialised with a strong social and geographical dimension due to South Africa's history of racial classification during apartheid (Sulla et al., 2022). Substantial social change since the 1994 democratic dispensation has had a profound effect on the social transformation of South African society. With the rise of the black elite and middle-class, the previously racialised order within the schooling system has shifted to take on an increasingly class-based texture (although still significantly racialised) (Badat & Sayed, 2014). South Africa is still characterised by enclaves of social interaction where privilege and prejudice are juxtaposed, where changes in the racial composition of the middle class are met with continued injustice and inequality, due to tensions between groups who have previously been classified in different social categories (Matentjie, 2019). Contemporary dynamics of race and racism continue to exist, even in spaces of privilege, and this makes the study of the dynamics of race and racism in these contexts especially important. One of the neglected areas of study in education is the dynamics of race in high-fee-paying schools. High-fee-paying schools have become more racially integrated over the past 20 years, but there are still important questions as to the extent to which these schools are socially and ideologically transformed. Therefore, this study sought to explore the racialised experiences of black parents at high-fee-paying independent schools.

Reflexive Preface

As a white, middle class South African woman, I do not have to engage daily with my racial identity in the way millions of black South Africans do. My privileged location within this country's racial history allows race to be decentred from my experience, creating blindness, or a sense of insularity, that serves to protect my privileged position. However, I have experienced that my whiteness is involuntarily connected to the racist regime of South Africa's past, which causes me feelings of shame and guilt, as reflected on by Straker (2004). One of the contexts in which I have experienced this tension and discomfort is in my daily life as a parent of children attending an independent high-fee-paying school. My curiosity around black parents' experiences within this context has, to a degree, undoubtedly stemmed from a self-serving position of managing my own sense of guilt (Steele, 1990). Questioning how I am experienced

by others and seeking awareness of my own blind spots and enactments in my children's school space, may be a means to escape guilt-inducing situations (Steele, 1990). However, it is also, hopefully, an attempt to develop an awareness, and openness to, different experiences of race that are beyond my shameful feelings, as well as a desire to immerse myself in the complexity and challenges of being both racist and antiracist (Suchet, 2007).

Within the school context, I have observed parents grouping along racial lines and other subtle micro-aggressions. I have perceived, what seemed like possible withdrawal, or attempts at withdrawing, or staying in the side-lines, by black parents. This has triggered guilty feelings where I've wondered if I have ever contributed to their experience. Yet it felt too difficult to talk about as my own white fragility and the avoidance of talking about race prevented discussion (DiAngelo, 2018; Moon, 2016). I even wondered if I was imagining these tensions as a defence to my discomfort.

These dynamics left me wondering about the experiences of black parents in predominantly white schools in general, and specifically, how this may impact on their willingness to get involved at school. Are experiences of school culture racialised, and if so, in what ways? In what ways could I as a white researcher, use my position to interrogate the dynamics of race and racism within a familiar context to uncover how these dynamics continue to permeate spaces of privilege in South Africa? These experiences and thoughts led me to this research topic: Black parents' experiences and perceptions of race(ism) in high-fee-paying independent schools in Johannesburg.

Focus of this Study

South Africa's long history of racial segregation and discrimination continues to infiltrate the daily lives of its citizens (Durrheim & Murray, 2021). Transformation and diversification have been central to the national agenda in all spheres of life post-1994. Schools have been integrated for many years and were considered sites for social transformation (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). However, the recent spate of public complaints against independent and Model-C schools suggests that many schools are still struggling with systemic racism (Zulu, 2020). This research offers insight from the black parents' perspective on race, racism and discrimination within their

children's high-fee-paying independent schools. The findings contribute towards the goal of dismantling systemic racism within schools and in South Africa.

Aims

This research aimed to critically explore black parents' experiences of race(ism) in the context of high-fee-paying independent schools in South Africa, and how they perceived race, racism, and discrimination to be navigated in their school.

Rationale

South Africa has a long history of differentiated education based on race which sought to subjugate the black majority. Today, education is seen by many as a means to economic mobility and a way of redressing disparities caused by the apartheid system (Mckay, 2015). Independent schools in South Africa, particularly the traditional high-fee-paying schools, are perceived to offer a higher quality education than under-resourced state schools (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008). However, these schools also embody pockets of privilege which were originally modelled on British public schools that exemplified "white, European, Christian, capitalist values" (Randall, 1982, as cited in Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). Twenty-eight years into democracy, transformation within this relatively small sector has been slow. However, the growing black middle class continues to seek quality education for their children in these spaces.

The eruption of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in 2020 resulted in the public "naming and shaming" of many independent and other schools, by past pupils, for discriminatory treatment during their school years (Zulu, 2020). This has led to investigations and attempts to tackle discrimination within these schools with a focus on the curriculum and learners (Dall, 2020). Incidents of racism are not isolated to independent schools as demonstrated by recent calls for the Human Rights Commission (HRC) to investigate several state schools and their commitment to developing a code of conduct to rein in racism within schools (Patrick, 2022). However, this study focussed on the independent sector as this provided an opportunity to delimit the influence of class in a study on race. Furthermore, the literature suggests that the nature of racism in liberal spaces may be of a different texture (Straker, 2004).

There is substantial literature supporting the significant role parents play in the education of their children internationally and in developing countries (Caño et al., 2016; Won Kim, 2018;

Mncube, 2010; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004). However, there is limited research on parents' socio-emotional experiences of the school context in South Africa, and how this may impact their public participation. Black parents' racialised experiences in predominantly white independent schools may impact the degree of their involvement at their child's school. In-depth exploratory research provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences without assumption or prejudice based on their shared lived experiences (Mack et al., 2005).

This research raised the question of what black parents' experiences of discrimination are within the privileged, independent school context. This research invited a dialogue with parents to share their experiences and perceptions of race and racial discrimination within their children's schools. Educators and policymakers could use this research to inform more effective interventions at independent schools aimed at advancing the agenda of transformation and equality.

Conceptual Definitions

The following section describes the conceptual definitions that guided the study, including a discussion of what is meant by terms such as "black" and "white", "parent" and "high-fee-paying independent schools" in this research report.

"Black" and "White"

South Africa's history of discrimination based on racial classification understandably renders the naming of groups a matter to be considered critically and with due consideration to the fact that race is a social construct which has no scientific basis (DiAngelo, 2018; Hylton, 2012). Nonetheless, racial categorisation was the basis of social inequality and oppression in South Africa during the apartheid years. Racialised social divisions and inequality continue to permeate all aspects of South African society today. In addition, it is a common experience in South Africa for race to be used as a means for reform, which requires the grouping of people for restorative purposes. An example of this is the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (No. 53 of 2003). This research examined parents who were targets of discrimination based on their race, and therefore the definition of "black" included any participants who were marginalised on this basis. The term "black" was used in this study to describe all persons of

colour, including those who would historically have been categorised as “Black African”, “Coloured” or “Indian” (Posel, 2001), as well as Black African Foreign Nationals. The primary purpose of the study was to explore the experience of those who had been historically marginalised and were still subject to racial discrimination in contemporary South Africa. The term “white” was used to describe persons who would historically have been classified as “White”, “European” or “Caucasian” under apartheid (Posel, 2001). This term “white” was used to explore the dynamics of oppression concerning those who are historically socially privileged in South Africa by virtue of their race.

“Parent”

It is important to acknowledge that the role of educating a child does not necessarily only fall upon the biological parents. Therefore, a definition of “parent” was required for the inclusion criteria of this study. A parent was any person who undertook the responsibility for a learner’s education in their capacity as either the biological parent, adoptive parent, guardian or legal custodian (The South African Schools Act, 1996). This definition encompassed any adult in a child’s life who was directly involved with their schooling, and who would therefore have the most experience and interaction with the child’s school. These participants were best positioned to provide the in-depth information required for this study.

“High-Fee-Paying Independent School”

Some context needs to be provided for South Africa’s current educational landscape in which to locate this study and define “high-fee-paying independent” schools. It is helpful to clarify the meaning of “public”, and “private” or “independent” schools. Public schools are state-owned and operated institutions and independent schools are generally non-profit schools, privately owned and run by boards of governors.

Private schools do not receive any government subsidies, follow an independent curriculum, and are primarily funded through fees and donations, whereas public schools are funded by the National Department of Education through provincial education departments. Public schools follow the national curriculum and have substantially lower fees, while also accommodating children who are unable to pay school fees. In reality, these represent the two extremes on a continuum of degrees of independence across South African schools. Independence varies based on who founded the school, which syllabus is followed, the land on

which the school is situated, who manages the school and how it is financed (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). The governing legislation rather vaguely defines independent schools as those registered as independent with the Head of Department (The South African Schools Act [SASA], 1996).

Traditionally, independent schools in South Africa were faith-based schools modelled on British public schools and they embodied "white, European, Christian, capitalist values" (Randall, 1982, as cited in Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). However, there are now many types of independent schools. Kitaev (1999, as cited in, Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004) offers a useful way of distinguishing types of independent schools based on the purpose for which the school was established, namely community-based, religious, profit-making, spontaneous, and expatriate. However, as Hofmeyr and Lee (2004) point out, an economic distinction can also be made between independent schools, thus opening alternative or sub-groups based on the fees parents pay to send their child to the school. This study focused on schools considered high-fee-paying schools.

Chapter Organisation

This research report comprises five main chapters: introduction, literature review, research methods, findings and discussion, and conclusion.

The rationale behind the research has been introduced here, in Chapter 1. Some key definitions were also provided to assist with clarity. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 aims to provide a detailed background of the historical and current social context of education in South Africa so that a clear picture is drawn of the context for this research. It discusses parents' role in education and school culture and summarises the relevant literature and identifies the gaps which the research sought to fill. It also provides a brief overview of the theoretical frameworks used in this research, namely social psychology, and critical race theories, as well as, touching on post-colonial psychology and white fragility.

The methodology used for the study is presented in Chapter 3 and puts forward the research questions, followed by a detailed description of the design and execution of this research. The rationale used to establish the quality of the research is also explained in this chapter. Finally, ethical considerations and reflexivity are explored.

The findings and discussion presented in Chapter 4 detail the outcome of the reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) that was conducted for this research. The discussion links the findings to the literature using the interpretative lens discussed in the theoretical framework. The conclusions of the study and recommendations for future research and intervention are presented in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a reflexive preface which described the original formulation of this research concerning the positionality of the researcher. It then elaborated on the focus of the study, its aims and rationale. Some important definitions were provided to ensure there was clarity on key concepts. The structure of the report was then laid out before concluding the chapter and moving on to the literature review.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the literature in the area of study and has several goals. It seeks to give a succinct, but clear, background into the historical and current social context of education in South Africa. This provides a contextual framework in which the research and its findings can be located. It also discusses the important role parents play in their children's education and the formation of school culture. An overview of the relevant literature gives details of similar research conducted into discrimination in educational settings, both locally and internationally. Gaps in the literature, which this research aimed to fill, are identified. The chapter then provides some detail on the theoretical frameworks that form the conceptual lens for this research, discussing, in brief, the benefits and limitations of social psychology. Important insights from critical race theories, including post-colonial psychology and white fragility, which link to the research findings, are discussed, before concluding the chapter.

The Historical Context of Race and Racism in South African Education

The Legacy of Apartheid

The formal education system in South Africa was originally dominated by British colonial influences and remains so in many ways (Kallaway, 2002). After 1910, under the Union of South Africa, the education of white South African children was managed by the state and black children were still primarily educated in missionary church schools (Kallaway, 2002). In 1948, the newly elected National Party began introducing a series of discriminatory laws which resulted in legalised segregation and discrimination based on race. This was known as apartheid. They also established separate schools for English and Afrikaans white South Africans (Kallaway, 2002). Many white South Africans began establishing private schools to avoid the intense government control and secularisation of schooling (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004).

The Group Areas Act of 1950 imposed regulations on land ownership designating specific areas to the different races (Mabin, 1992). Race-specific schools were provided in race-specific areas under the misnomer of modernisation (Ajam, 1987). Following this, and the Eiselen Commission Report, the Bantu Education Act (1953) was promulgated and enabled the state to take control of the education of the black majority forcing many missionary schools to

close (Kallaway, 2002). The purpose of this act was to administer different curricula to different racial groups to promote the advancement of white South Africans within certain sectors, and also create a black labour force that would support a capitalist social order (Christie & Collins, 1982). This was done by teaching black children that their culture was subordinate to white, particularly Afrikaner culture, and that their natural role was to provide cheap, non-competitive labour. The socioeconomic development of black South Africans was therefore intentionally manipulated through the careful development of the Bantu Education System (Christie & Collins, 1982). Ultimately, the management of black education was assigned to homeland authorities with significant inequality in the distribution of funds and resources (Kallaway, 2002). Resistance to apartheid gained momentum within schools in the 1970s and, in 1976, hundreds of black students were killed in the Soweto uprising (Gerhart, 1994). This uprising was a protest against the grossly unequal education of black youth and the inclusion of Afrikaans as a compulsory language subject. Following this uprising, new "black" private schools began to emerge in response to apartheid (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). The National Party had not engaged with white independent schools until many schools began defiantly admitting black learners in the 1970s. The Private Schools Act (1986) was promulgated to regulate registration and subsidies for these schools (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004).

Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa

The 1994 elections heralded a new democracy, and many educational policies were introduced that aimed to address the numerous inequalities in the South African education system (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013; Vally & Dalamba, 1999). For instance, Sayed and Kanjee (2013, p. 7) note that "between 1994 and 2007 alone, 7 white papers, 3 green papers, 26 bills (of which 17 are amendment bills), 35 acts (of which 22 are amendments of existing laws), 11 regulations, 52 government notices and 26 calls for comments covered the whole education sector from basic to higher education." To a large extent, these legislative changes successfully dismantled the policy structure of apartheid education and they significantly expanded access to schooling. However, the inequality in growth and development has persisted and often there has been a substantial disjunction between policy and its implementation (Amnesty International, 2020; Jansen, 2002; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). This has led to the suggestion that the policies are more symbolic than transformative and have not managed to address apartheid inequalities which

persist today (Jansen, 2002; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Some of the relevant shifts and criticisms are discussed below.

During apartheid, there were over a dozen racially stratified education departments and the distribution of resources was substantially unequal between these (Mouton, et al., 2012; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). The curricula and assessments were also significantly racially biased. Therefore, the main goal of the state in the first decade, post-apartheid, was to consolidate the education departments (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Mouton, et al., 2012; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013; Gumede & Biyase, 2016). This restructuring saw the establishment of national and provisional boards of education, as well as other authoritative bodies (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Structures for these were put in place and the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) mandated the minister of education to determine national policy and promoted cooperative governance between these departments (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Furthermore, issues such as early childhood education and inclusive education were also included in the concerns of the Department of Education (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013).

In 2009, the National Department of Education (NDoE) was divided into the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET), each with a dedicated minister (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Some argue that this structural change divided responsibility for redressing disparities of the past, a responsibility which was further avoided by shifting responsibility to the local level through the establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) (Black et al., 2020).

The South African Schools Act (SASA, 1996) sought to provide uniform systems for the organisation, funding, and governance of schools (Bush & Glover, 2016; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Funding and governance were legislated in this act for both independent and public schools (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). The act promoted access to schools and enabled the establishment of School Governing Bodies with the aim of decentralising power within schools (Mestry, 2006; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). The many functions of a SGB included: determining admissions policy, making recommendations for appointments for staff, and levying school fees (subject to parent approval) (Mestry, 2006; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). The regulations exempt parents from paying school fees but do allow supplementary funding from the community, including user fees (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Concerns have been raised relating to the

demographic composition of SGBs as more well-resourced schools (usually "white" and middle class) have a substantial influence on aspects of schooling that can further marginalise previously disadvantaged children (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Additionally, the SGBs in many less well-resourced schools are not functioning well (Mestry, 2018; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). The complexity of governance, parents' level of understanding of the legal and structural nuances, micro-politicking, and mutual mistrust, among other factors, contribute to the poor functioning of SGBs (Bush & Glover, 2016). In addition, by not ensuring that SGBs are representative, in many ways, they re-enact the historical exclusions of the past (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013).

In terms of funding education, the national norms and standards for school funding provided a positive shift when published in 1998 (Mestry, 2018; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Schools were divided into five quintiles based on their relative poverty, and disproportionately more funding was allocated to poorer schools (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). This was refined over time to include the designating of "no-fee schools" (Mestry, 2018; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013) which accommodate approximately 75% of all learners, who are mainly poor and black (Soudien et al., 2021). However, the legislation did not take into consideration the existing levels of inequality and conditions at poorer schools which were not able to use the new management dispensation to support the development of their schools in the way the better schools could (Mestry, 2018; Hoadley et al., 2009). For example, despite changes in policy and access to "free education", the "rich, white" learners continue to have more spent on their education through raising fees (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013; Spaull, 2019). This is supported by research that shows per capita education expenditure (total fees paid for children, including user fees) is still disparate between "race" and "class" groups (Motala, 2006, 2009; Spaull, 2019). Furthermore, low-income households continue to pay a significant amount of their income towards schooling in the form of transport, clothing, books etc., suggesting that "no fees" is not truly representative of what is happening on the ground (Machard, 2015; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Thus, the policy discourse of pro-poor provides a thin veil over the increasing privatisation of public education (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013).

This neoliberal approach to education is an example of institutionalised racism as the system is set up to sustain the advantage of white people. The ongoing user fee for schooling in South Africa perpetuates the racial social divide vis a vie economic access which is rooted in historical injustices (Roithmayr, 2003). Access to "better" state or private schooling requires

having the financial means to afford these schools or to live in more affluent areas considered "feeder zones" for these schools (Spaull, 2019). Even if a school's admission policy is equitable, which some argue are often not (Spaull, 2019), economic factors restrict access for those who were economically excluded for generations. It has been argued that school fees in state schools were not abolished in 1994 because of the high switching costs, however, the consequence is that institutionalised racism is perpetuated and remains entrenched (Roithmayr, 2003). In the case of independent schools, rules around prioritising the admission of children of alumni was another example of a barrier to access for black parents. Perceived high switching costs may be the reason for sustaining many school policies or structures which are discriminatory. The 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa upholds the right of South Africans to challenge actions that were not intended to discriminate but nonetheless do (Roithmayr, 2003). Thus, it is acknowledging that racism is systemic. Exploring these sometimes-subtle barriers is important for understanding how independent school systems may perpetuate exclusion and discrimination based on race (regardless of any intention).

It would be remiss not to mention that major curriculum amendments were also legislated in dozens of policies (Gumede & Biyase, 2016; Jansens, 1999; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). These sought to replace the biased historical curriculum with a more flexible one that was relevant to a diverse society and encouraged democratic values (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). A shift in focus to an "Outcomes Based Education" (OBE) system was thought to ensure quality assurance and standardisation of knowledge and skills across the country (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013; Gumede & Biyase 2016). The aim was to be more learner-centred and respectful of learner differences while accelerating access to, and progress within, education and further training (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013; Gumede & Biyase 2016). The hope was to redress to some degree the historical discrimination in education, training, and employment (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). However, numerous technical and political dilemmas have been raised around the OBE curriculum (Jansen, 1998) and a criticism that "education for transformation" has not really featured in the restructuring of the curriculum (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013).

Finally, despite the number of new policies on teachers and teaching, which provide a standardised system for the employment conditions and management of teachers, the major issues of teacher transformation and competence have received less attention (Sayed & Kanjee,

2013). Teachers are insufficiently trained in implementing the new curriculum, training routes remain racially divided and teachers lack adequate support to achieve the aims of the policymakers (Amnesty International, 2020; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Teachers' mandate to be socially just educators who challenge privilege and power is rarely implemented in practice (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). They need support in this important role as discrimination is a deeply embedded systemic injustice, not an individual one.

The Role of Education in Social Transformation

Schools have been identified as possible "zones of mediation" (Carter et al., 2009; Losinski et al., 2019; Reygan & Steyn, 2017) for transformation and social change in the post-apartheid era. This has been a focus in local research which explores educators' and learners' possible roles in promoting social change in South African schools (Moloi, 2019; Pillay, 2017) and the progress, or lack thereof in state schools (Carter et al., 2009; Machaisa & Lebeloane, 2017; Mckay, 2015; Osman & Wilké, 2018; Roithmayr, 2003). This is clearly an area that requires ongoing research to really understand the ongoing dynamics within South African schools, and how they can be shifted to successfully meet the goals of integration.

There is an ongoing debate on the role of independent schools in the perpetuation of inequality in South Africa. It is held, constitutionally, that South Africans have a right to establish or run independent schools which advance specific "linguistic, cultural and religious" understandings, as long as there is no discrimination in the admissions process (Pretorius, 2019; Woolman, 2007). However, it is questionable whether that is acceptable if some schools become pockets of privilege, power, and discrimination. It is equally true that many areas lack sufficient state schools and that independent schools save the state a significant amount of money (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). It is beyond the scope of this research to debate the continued existence of independent schools, though some further reading on this topic can be found by Hofmeyer and Lee (2004), Motala and Dieltiens (2008) and Roithmayr (2003), but it warrants mentioning that for some, the very existence of these schools is discriminatory. Looking beyond this ideological debate, the fact remains that these schools exist, and it is important to understand how they are complicit, or not, in the goal of transformation.

The Current Context of Racial Disparities in South African Schools

The Black Lives Matter Movement

The issue of discrimination in South African schools came to the fore in 2020 with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement erupting in the USA, which highlighted concerns over systemic racial discrimination, particularly within local elite, private, and Model-C schools (Zulu, 2020). Many past pupils publicly shared stories of discriminatory experiences during their school years, which evoked substantial anger and criticism towards these institutions. Some of the schools exposed by the BLM movement have engaged in processes to understand discrimination within their schools with the aim of reform (Dall, 2020). While this is a crucial and overdue process, it is unclear whether they are also evaluating the school environment as experienced by black parents. This is relevant as the parent body contributes to the school culture and the attitudes of their children. Black parents' experiences may impact their engagement with the school, as well as the support they are willing, or able, to offer their children within the school context.

Children are protected by the right to equality as enshrined in Section 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). This right is violated when children experience discrimination at school. The protection of this right is not the sole responsibility of parents, as the state and academic institutions are also accountable. However, parents are "on the ground" so to speak and can use their power as adults to advocate for their children. This duty may be hindered by parents' own experiences of discrimination and powerlessness within the school and elsewhere. Research has shown that parental involvement in their child's education is likely to impact more than just their academic achievement, but also other elements of their school experience, such as bullying and discrimination (Jeynes, 2008). This study aimed to gain insight into some of the racial dynamics and power differentials black parents encountered in the independent school context.

The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Many South African schools chronically lack basic, safe infrastructure and resources (Amnesty International, 2020). The failure of post-apartheid policy to address South African educational realities has been illuminated and further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Black et al., 2020; Le Grange, 2021). The arrival of Covid-19 in South Africa precipitated a

hard lockdown which saw the closure of all schools for several months and ongoing platooning (a strategy of alternating on-site learning either daily or weekly to allow a reduced number of students on site) for almost two years. Students in middle and upper-class homes were able to continue with the curriculum online as they had access to the necessary digital devices, internet connectivity and data, as well as adult support and space for learning (Black et al., 2020). Notably, independent schools saw a relatively seamless move to online learning even during the initial period of hard lockdown. The ability to access education during the pandemic was based on class and race with many children not only having their learning disrupted but also their access to food security (Black et al., 2020). Reopening schools was subject to regulations that low quintile schools could not meet with respect to space, access to water etc., and thus the policy was designed based on the idea of an "ideal school" which is not a reality for many South African schools (Black et al., 2020). By allowing only those who had adequate space and resources to open, the divide in the equity of quality education has been further entrenched.

Independent Schools in South Africa

Although the number of independent schools is growing in South Africa, they still represent a small percentage of the country's total schools with only 2154 (8.7%) independent schools educating a small percentage (5.2%) of learners (DBE, 2022). The reasons for parents choosing independent schooling tends to be two-fold. First, the lack of access to alternative schools where there is insufficient space or access to public schools; second, the seeking out of a differentiated education (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). There is a perception that "private" schools offer a better-quality education due to small classes, relative independence from the state, and often being well-resourced (Matentjie, 2019; Motala & Dieltiens, 2008). There is substantial research supporting the argument that many state schools are under-resourced and unable to offer these benefits (Amnesty International, 2020; Legotlo et al., 2002; McKay, 2015).

Although the number of black learners has increased significantly across independent schools, this has not been the case in many of the high-fee-paying schools where there has been a slower rate of transformation. The reason for this may be primarily economic (Bell & McKay, 2011; Mckay, 2015). However, there is a growing number of black parents choosing to send their children to high-fee-paying schools (Hofmeyr & McCay, 2010), and the question remains, how do these parents experience the school context considering the current and historical context of

South Africa? Parents may feel a tension between wanting to provide their children with what is perceived to be a higher quality education and needing to contend with the culture of elitism and discrimination, with the associated consequences for their family's mental health (Zulu, 2020). This study sought to explore black parents' experiences and perceptions of race(ism) within such schools.

The Role of Parents in Education and School Culture

The Parents' Role in Education

There is extensive literature internationally and in South Africa emphasising the important role parents play in their child's education (Caño et al., 2016; Won Kim, 2018; Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004; Malatji et al., 2018; Mncube, 2010; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004). While Epstein's model of parental involvement has been argued to be less relevant in the developing world context due to the multitude of difficulties experienced by parents (Caño et al., 2016; Won Kim, 2018), many South African studies have found the model to be relevant in our context. The differences in context between developed and developing countries should not be oversimplified. However, many of the difficulties described by Won Kim (2018) would not necessarily apply to the parents in high-fee-paying schools, which may be more comparable to schools in developed countries on a micro-level.

Epstein (2009; 2018) acknowledged the important role parents play in education and developed a popular framework for parental involvement with six key elements: from *parenting* and *supporting homework* to more public involvement with the school, such as; *communicating with the school*, *volunteering*, *being involved in decision making* and *community collaboration*. More than half of these elements call for parents to interact with others outside of their homes and within the school context. Understanding how parents experience the school context is important to gain insight into levels of involvement that ultimately have an impact on educational outcomes.

A South African study found that parents preferred not to be publicly involved but rather to show interest and support for their children from home (Mncube, 2010). In predominately white schools, Matentjie (2019) suggests that black parents may choose to use child-focused strategies outside of the school to enhance their child's academic progress rather than engage

with the school. Others have argued that parent involvement in South African schools is often limited to assisting with the efficient operation of the school rather than true democratic involvement (Lewis & Naidoo, 2004). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) provide an extensive discussion around potential barriers to parents getting involved at school which include: child factors, parent-teacher factors, individual parent, and family factors, as well as societal factors. This study does not comprehensively explore all possible barriers but is focussed on conceivable historical and demographic factors while acknowledging that there will be individual differences and circumstances that impact parents' ability to participate in their children's school.

The Role of School Culture in Education

A term that encompasses the institutional experience of a school is that of school culture. School culture develops over time as members of the school go about their daily work, solve problems, and manage tragedies and successes. It manifests assumptions about how things are done, and the social values held (Peterson & Deal, 2011). School culture encompasses:

> The beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity (Great Schools Partnership Organisation, 2013, p. 1).

A school's culture is rooted within all the stakeholders at the school (Peterson & Deal, 2011) and influenced by the involvement of the community, particularly parents (Hofman et al., 2002). It takes conscious effort, and careful reflection, from school leadership to positively influence the shape of a school's culture (Peterson & Deal, 2011). For Peterson and Deal (2011, p. 21) the key elements of culture are: "a shared sense of purpose and vision; the norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions; rituals, traditions, and ceremonies; history and stories; architecture, artefacts, and symbols". This study sought to explore how race interacts with some of these elements in the formation and experience of culture at independent schools. Of course, each school has its own unique culture; however, all schools are embedded in a social context which also impacts a school's culture.

Experiences and Perceptions of Racism in Schools

A review of the literature concerning the experiences and perceptions of race(ism) within schools, both locally and internationally, private and state, and at various user levels (students and parents) was conducted. There is an abundance of international literature theorising and discussing racism in education with respect to statistical outcomes, teaching, and policy (Howard, 2019; Milner, 2015; Noguera, 2016; Stratton, 2016; Willey, 2018). This section focuses on literature where participants were students and parents who described their own experiences of racial oppression in the schooling system. Several studies are discussed to highlight some of the issues revealed in the literature. It is important to note that studies which engaged teachers on the issue of discrimination were not included here because the narratives of those subjected to oppression as service users within schools were the focus of this research.

International Studies on Students' Racialised Experiences in Schools

The findings from several American studies provided some rich insight into students' direct and indirect experiences of race(ism) at school. Students report experiences of discrimination and prejudice, microaggressions, racial stereotyping, labelling, lack of support from staff, lowered teacher expectations of their academic ability and lower academic standards, as well as a lack of racial diversity in the curriculum, which was perceived as a lost opportunity for personal and collective development (Hope et al., 2015, Joesph et al., 2016, Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2017). Consistent with this, another US study found that students of colour felt significantly less connected to adults at their school in comparison to their white peers (Anyon et al., 2016). Botiani et al. (2016) also found that black students perceived the adults at school to be less caring and unfair towards them in comparison to their white peers. Educational outcomes of students of colour are negatively impacted by relational dynamics between the students and adults (teachers and staff) (Anyon et al., 2016). In addition, it was noted that some students made significant efforts to distinguish themselves from other black students who did not engage at school, citing their greater motivation or intelligence (Hope et al., 2015). This may be an unconscious response to experiences of assumed homogeneity.

International research has also shown that black students report not receiving the benefit of the doubt in situations, which resulted in them receiving relatively harsher punishments than their white counterparts (Hope et al., 2015). Connectedness was found to be inversely related to

racial disparity in discipline (Anyon et al., 2016) supporting the negative impact of their disproportionately harsh disciplinary experiences. This topic of exclusionary disciplinary tactics has amassed a substantial literature base in the USA (Hope et al., 2015).

Martin Romero et al. (2022) used focus groups with Mexican-origin adolescents and their parents to explore the broad range of coping strategies employed in response to racial/ethnic discrimination. It found that strategies were both individualistic and interdependent and included "(a) reframing (with pride) and ignoring an encounter, (b) standing up for oneself, (c) talking issues out, (d) problem-solving together, and (e) protection tactics" (Martin Romero et al., 2022, p. 1). These findings suggest a form of mutual support between students and parents when coping with racial-ethnic discrimination. This can be linked to other research findings that parental racial socialisation serves to strengthen a child's capacity to cope with discrimination (Hope et al., 2015).

Finally, an example to argue for the significance of intersectionality in the experience of discrimination is the finding that race is a critical factor in the lives of queer school-attending youth (Francis, 2021). This research found that sexuality and race intersect in complex and contradictory ways in students' experiences at school (Francis, 2021).

This brief overview provides some insight into the nature of racialised experiences for international students and how research has connected these experiences to negative outcomes. The role of parents in offering their children support and guidance is also imperative and explored in more detail below.

International Studies on Parents' Racialised Experiences in Schools

Much of the international research on parents concerning race and education looks at parents' experiences of discrimination outside of the school, as well as their racial identity and how both these impact the socialisation of their children (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). The following studies focus more on parents' experiences of discrimination at their children's schools.

Allen and White-Smith (2018) discuss how black mothers in the USA supported their sons' education through home-based care, expectations of high academic performance and encouraging involvement in external academic and leadership opportunities. This research found

that mothers experienced exclusion in the form of being ignored, differential treatment or being made to feel unwelcome when attempting to engage with the school (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). Further, the research found that the school failed to aid their sons' learning or to provide access to equal learning opportunities (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). The paper also reported that mothers experienced more barriers when they tried to engage the school about their children's education at the high school level. When raising issues of exclusion or failure on the school's part, they were met with reactionary responses (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). This paper demonstrated how parents' intention to support their children was hindered by their experiences of discrimination within the school.

McCarthy Foubert (2019) interviewed 16 Black parents and explored how they resisted racism in their children's schools, while at the same time acknowledging to themselves, that racism was ongoing and inevitable within schools. This research suggested that the theory, policy, and practice around parental involvement must be expanded to recognise the benefits and purpose of parental engagement for black families.

Another study by the same author focussed on 12 parents (mothers and fathers) who were involved in parent committees at their school (McCarthy Foubert, 2020). She found that despite progress in terms of inclusive practices, the ideas, and desires of involved parents of colour, were only engaged with, when they were consistent with the interests of the white parents and staff (McCarthy Foubert, 2020), thus demonstrating how white supremacy continues to operate in seemingly liberal spaces.

In her research with black parents in a white Wisconsin suburb, Posey-Maddox (2017) described the multiple racial microaggressions they experienced when engaging with community members and school staff when they sought to support their children's education. The research showed how these experiences were often gendered and class-based and experienced as cumulative (Posey-Maddox, 2017). The everyday microaggressions revealed included hypervisibility and invisibility, presumed homogeneity, presumed criminality, and the rebuffing or dismissal of attempts made by parents to engage (Posey-Maddox, 2017).

Racial stereotypes suggest that black parents are disinterested or minimally invested in their children's education when in fact, for many black parents, their full and meaningful participation is often precluded in the school space (Marchand et al., 2019; Posey-Maddox,

2017). There were cultural, structural, and contextual factors that mediated black parents' involvement at their children's school (Marchand et al., 2019). Marchand et al. (2019) called for the identification and naming of socially constructed dynamics within schools that perpetuated institutional oppression and suggested that parents' perceptions of race(ism) within the school impacted how they engaged and advocated for their children (Marchand et al., 2019). The authors suggested that black parent involvement required critical engagement with issues of race(ism) within the school to ensure their children's success.

These studies demonstrate, in the international context, the point that this research wished to explore in South Africa - how parents' experiences impact their ability to support their child at school, and that exploring their experiences, can assist with understanding these experiences. First, a review of South African literature on children's experiences provides some insight into school culture and what parents may engage with themselves.

Local Studies on Students' Racialised Experiences in Schools

Research conducted in both the USA and South Africa has shown that the actions of white learners and educators are often informed by "deeply embedded racialised meanings, [that] reinforce the strength and rigidity of racial boundaries" (Carter et al., 2009, p. 352). As discussed, South African high-fee-paying independent schools are often majority white and exist as pockets of economic privilege. Some research has attempted to explore levels of tolerance within South African schools from the perspective of black students which is discussed below.

Beginning at a more macro level, a qualitative study in 2018 explored the effectiveness of school governance structures in managing integration in public secondary schools by interviewing a sample of 8 learners and conducting a focus group with educators (Naidoo et al., 2018). The study found that the School Management Teams (SMTs) and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) struggled to manage and govern racial integration for the following reasons: issues related to policy, poor interrelationships between learners of different racial groups, as well as with their educators, inadequate capacity of educators themselves, and on-going overt racial conflict including labelling and name calling (Naidoo et al., 2018). Moagi (2016) supports the argument of poor management of integration by schools in his research, which explored the experiences of black girls who attended predominately white public schools in Pretoria. The

research highlighted the intersection of gender and racial stereotyping and described the social exclusion and devaluing of black girls (Moagi, 2016).

Research by Machaisa and Lebeloane (2017) in their interviews with 20 high school learners also found that racial challenges persisted in South African public schools. Issues raised included teachers' incorrect pronunciation of black students' names, indirect and direct assumptions of lower intelligence, and preferential treatment being given to white students (Machaisa & Lebeloane, 2017). Assumptions of homogeneity concerning sporting preferences as well as dismissive body and verbal language were also identified as sources of racial tension (Machaisa & Lebeloane, 2017).

While the above-mentioned research was conducted in state schools, two articles were identified that raised questions about tolerance within independent schools. The first called for reasonable accommodation of religious diversity (Chetty & Govindjee, 2014), and the second, the revision of codes of conduct for inclusivity (Osman & Wilké, 2018). Both suggested that work needed to be done about pluralism and tolerance within these spaces.

Racialised experiences of black learners in high-fee-paying independent schools in South Africa were not identified in the formal literature, although much attention has been given to this group within school contexts and the media following the BLM movement.

Local Studies on Parents' Racialised Experiences in Schools

Meier and Lemmer (2015) explored the benefit of feedback from parents in the form of surveys at a public primary school in Johannesburg. The survey focused on parents' views of academic and logistical elements rather than socio-emotional ones. However, it did have a question about school culture. The study found a high rate of satisfaction with the school culture. However, it should be noted that less than half the parent body participated in the survey and the demographic of the whole parent body, in comparison to surveyed participants, was not explored. This raises the question of whether parents who felt less included in the school culture, were less inclined to participate in the survey. This highlights the risk of "colour blindness" when engaging in South African studies. This, and other studies of parental involvement in South African schools tended to focus on parents' perceptions of the school and its culture in the more concrete sense (physical structures, traditions etc.) or on the practical aspects of parental involvement. As such, they may have missed out on the subtle or nuanced experiences of

parents. In his research, Matentjie (2019) took a closer look at South African black parents' experience of racism within their children's schools.

Matentjie's (2019) research focussed on the strategies black middle-class parents employed to challenge the inequity in their children's schools. His participants had children at predominantly white public and private schools. He suggested that parents used their agency in a variety of ways that seemed strongly influenced by their own race-based trauma history (Matentjie, 2019). In clinical interviews with 13 mothers and 6 fathers, he explored the parents' choices and capacity to use their own cultural and material capital to advocate for their children (Matentjie, 2019). The findings related to racial integration in white-dominated schools (both public and private) suggested ongoing inequity is often expressed in subtle ways post-apartheid. The study also highlighted the difficulties around challenging inequality at a micro-level of the school and how, at times, the "very strategies they (the parents) employ unintentionally perpetuate white racial hegemony and continued inequality" (Matentjie, 2019, p. 284).

Some of the key findings suggested that parents used their own personal or material status to engage with the school and to be heard. This included how they presented themselves and advocated for other black children (Matentjie, 2019). In his research, Matentjie (2019) found that black parents regularly used null action by cautiously evaluating their child's experience and only acted if they deemed it necessary to do so. This was done to avoid rocking the boat or to use it as leverage when action was required. The author noted that at times this may have been strongly influenced by a sense of insecurity and powerlessness and the fear of a backlash (Matentjie, 2019). In the face of this, many parents elected to use child-directed strategies to assist their children's development (Matentjie, 2019). This involved providing opportunities outside of the school context when limitations were identified at school, with the consequence that parents were doing much "behind the scenes" and their limited engagement with the school was mistaken as disinterest (Matentjie, 2019). Finally, in his study, Matentjie (2019) revealed that parents employed response strategies to the school that were significantly gendered. Mothers generally played a gentle and mediatory role to avoid alienating the staff and reducing the possibility of victimization for the child, whereas fathers were considered the last resort when the situation had to be escalated (Matentjie, 2019).

Matentjie's (2019) study, and those discussed above, demonstrated how racial boundaries are a reason why parents avoided involvement at their children's school. This research aimed to

add to the limited literature around race, racism, and discrimination within the independent school context in South Africa with a focus on parents as members of the school community. It aimed to provide insight into black parents' experiences as a contribution to the dialogue on racism within independent schools, as there is limited research looking at the socio-emotional experiences of black parents at schools.

Synopsis of the Literature

The literature review gave a brief overview of the legacy of apartheid and education post-apartheid to provide a historical context for race and racism in South African Education. It briefly described the policy changes post-apartheid and explored how institutionalised racism perpetuates an advantage for white people. The current context of education was then described regarding the BLM movement and the Covid-19 pandemic. It discussed the origins and nature of high-fee-paying independent schools. Parents' role in education was introduced along with some local research related to the barriers and views around parental involvement. School culture was discussed briefly. Literature around the experiences and perceptions of racism in schools both locally and internationally was briefly explored. There is expansive literature on discrimination and race in educational settings, particularly in international research. However, the research tends to focus on the students' and teachers' experiences with minimal research on black parents' experiences of race internationally and only one paper identified locally.

International and local students raised issues that included: racial stereotyping, harsher punishment, lack of support or connectedness, low diversity in the curriculum, poor educational expectations, assumptions of lower intelligence, assumptions of homogeneity concerning interests, intersectionality, labelling/name-calling, mispronunciation of names, preferential treatment for white students and dismissive body language. Some of the experiences raised outlined in international research conducted with black parents, dealt with their approach to supporting their children being more home-based, due to feelings of being unwelcome at school, barriers to engagement at school, inclusion but without impact or influence, microaggressions, racial stereotyping, hypervisibility or invisibility, presumed homogeneity, presumed criminality and dismissal. One local study which was identified looked at black parents' experiences around racism at schools. Its focus was on predominantly white schools, state and private. It highlighted the subtle inequity and racial tension and explored the various strategies parents employed to

manage these. The findings supported the sense that racial barriers impacted parents' involvement at school.

Gaps in the Literature

Parents are children's primary educators and advocates, and yet are significantly underrepresented in literature around racism within schools. Therefore, it is an important area in which to grow our understanding. Notably, in the independent school sector in South Africa, which is characterised by liberal diplomacy, understanding black parents' experiences may highlight the less overt, but possibly insidious dynamics, which impact school culture and the experiences of black parents.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory

This study uses elements of Social Identity Theory (SIT) but attempts to address the limitations of this theory by including an emphasis on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and post-colonial theory. Social Identity Theory aims to understand how people identify with others in social contexts, how different groups relate to one another, and how society and group dynamics, impact individual behaviour (Schmid, 2017). The primary focus is on how the individual perceives themself in relation to the other. SIT suggests that individuals have personal and social identities and that at any point in time, they operate somewhere on the continuum between the two identities depending on how they interpret the context (Schmid, 2017).

Within SIT, discrimination is accounted for by three components: social categorisation, social comparison, and social identification (Schmid, 2017; Tajfel, 1974). Tajfel (1974) describes social categorisation as the practice of classifying different social groups and how individuals allocate themselves and others into such groups. SIT postulates that individuals then compare groups, and in doing so, actively seek understanding, and commonality, with those within their group. They emphasise differences with those outside of their group to maximise the distinguishability of the groups (Schmid, 2017). Social identification is a complex construct which accounts for how meaningful a group's identity is for an individual. There are several theories about what influences social identification, such as the self-esteem hypothesis, uncertainty reduction, or optimal distinctiveness between groups (Brown, 2000). This study may

help to reveal any group classifications and comparisons made by the parents and their social identity within the school context.

It is important to note that SIT does not suggest that ingroup favouritism or outgroup discrimination are inevitable but rather proposes conditions under which they are more likely to occur (Schmid, 2017). Discrimination is more likely when an individual identifies strongly with their group, is based on how they perceive the outgroup (its relative importance) and how the social context evokes intergroup comparisons (Schmid, 2017). The last point is particularly relevant in the South African context where there remains a high degree of intergroup comparisons based on race due to the history of apartheid and the ongoing need to redress historical injustices and inequality. This research seeks to provide insight into the contemporary social comparisons of parents within schools.

SIT proposes that individual beliefs concerning the nature of groups have an impact on how groups relate. Beliefs around the status of the ingroup relative to the outgroup, the stability of status difference, the perceived legitimacy of differences, and the permeability of group boundaries concerning the possibility of achieving an alternative status, are all said to play a role in inter-group behaviour.

Where SIT falls short is its oversimplification of individuals' experiences. Relating to this study, parents do not only occupy one role or group membership within the school context. Black parents may identify with other parents distinct from educators or with black educators on an ethnic basis but not with white parents. The SIT does not account for the intricacy of multiple groups or identify the complex functions these groups serve for an individual (Brown, 2000). Intersectionality is a key consideration in critical race theories, as discussed below.

Secondly, SIT focuses on ingroup enhancement rather than explaining the active denigration of the outgroup (Brown, 2000). This research focused on the experiences of the target, not the perpetrator, and therefore the questions will not be entirely answerable within an SIT framework. The participants' experience may not be understood within this framework, as SIT generally focuses on the processes of the ingroup, as opposed to the possible outgroup responses to a lower status. It may have more to offer in future studies which look at white parents' perceptions of race.

SIT has some potential for the identification of semantic themes around social identity and ingroup/outgroup dynamics but it is not likely to support the identification of latent themes of power imbalance which are essential to this research. A major critique of SIT is its neglect of the ideological influence on intergroup relations, and this creates the need for the application of critical race theory in this study.

Critical Race Theory

This study aimed to highlight issues of race and discrimination from a more critical perspective. Critical Race Theory (CRT) in particular offers a lens that puts identity and race(ism) at the focus of analysis in the study (Salter & Adams, 2013). The ongoing issue of racial discrimination in South Africa, despite policy and social efforts for transformation and social cohesion, demonstrates a need to look beyond the individual. Issues of race and racial power need to be challenged at a systemic level and to do this, social phenomena must be explored with the analytical lens of racial power (Salter & Adams, 2013). This is congruent with the objectives of the BLM movement to challenge systemic racism (Dall, 2020; Garza, 2014).

This can be done by creating a safe environment for stories to be told that describe the lived experiences of the storytellers followed by a critical analysis of their stories. The recording of stories offers a relatable "everyday" narrative that voices the experiences of oppression which may offer insight into themselves (Hylton, 2012). These would be the semantic themes identified in the study which give voice to the lived experiences of the black parents. The critical lens enhances the value of the research by offering a more profound understanding of the inter- and intrapsychic dynamics (Hylton, 2012). In this study, latent themes have been identified and explored through the lens of racial power dynamics and roles in the black parents' experience of school.

CRT provided a conceptual lens to explore the role of academic institutions, and social practices within these contexts, in perpetuating racial power within the educational context of South African independent schools (Salter & Adams, 2013). Academic institutions may have developed policies and adjusted practices to try and mitigate discrimination but there is a need for a closer look at power dynamics within the academic context. In independent schools, this may include but is not limited to assumptions of white "normativity", unspoken rules of

engagement, attitudes towards the economic advancement of black people, tolerance as a means of maintaining power, micro-aggressions, and assumptions of objectivity (Green et al., 2007).

In addition, CRT values the acknowledgement of intersectionality and how it contributes to the complexity of oppression (Hylton, 2012). This research aimed to explore race(ism), however, it endeavoured to maintain a non-essentialist position and thus engaged with themes that emerged related to gender and nationality and their intersection with race.

It was paramount that this research was undertaken through a critical lens so as not to be complicit in the propagation of oppression but rather demonstrate a commitment to social transformation and justice (Green et al., 2007; Hylton, 2012). A CRT perspective informed this research as it sought to critically explore black parents' experiences of race(ism) in the context of high-fee-paying independent schools in South Africa, and how they perceived race, racism, and discrimination.

White Fragility

While this research explored the lived experiences of black parents, their experience as school parents is often located in a predominantly white environment. Race and racism are often very difficult subjects for white people to engage with and can elicit intensely defensive or aggressive reactions (DiAngelo, 2018). Theories and writings on whiteness speak to how this serves (consciously or unconsciously) to maintain their privileged position and a positive sense of self (Carolin et al., 2020; DiAngelo, 2018; Steyn, 2005; Steyn & Foster, 2008). Importantly, this shift in discussion to whiteness is not intended to recentre the discussion of race and discrimination around whiteness (Carolin et al., 2020). Rather, it seeks to provide some context of the white "other" that black parents may experience and speak about in their narratives. These "white" narratives may be reflected in their interactions with others but may also be internalised or reproduced in their understanding of the school environment. Therefore, white narratives and defensiveness which aim to perpetuate white normativity and maintain the status quo are explored briefly in this section.

Discursive research post-apartheid revealed a form of *White Talk* that many white South Africans adopted as a way of resisting transformation while maintaining a positive sense of self (Steyn & Foster, 2008). It is often subtle or indirect to avoid criticism. For example, white discourses around colour blindness or non-racialism seek to construct a society that is not

divided by racial advantage and disadvantage and thus ultimately enables the perpetuation of past racial injustices (Castro-Atwater, 2016; Durrheim, 2017; Steyn & Foster, 2008). Furthermore, if race *is* spoken about, the status quo is still maintained by leaning heavily on democratic values of non-discrimination or fairness which imply an equivalence where there is in fact a profound difference in opportunity or access (Steyn & Foster, 2008). In other instances, *White Talk* focuses on, and condemns, overt discrimination and vicious or hateful racism. By doing this, it attributes racism to "evil" individuals thus rendering the perpetuation of systemic advantages, based on white privilege, minor by comparison (DiAngelo, 2018; Steyn & Foster, 2008). This is done while holding a position of authority as an advocate of tolerance and embodiment of the values of a democracy (Steyn & Foster, 2008). It can be seen how through either denying race, or by acknowledging it in strategic ways, the order of white superiority remains unchallenged and therefore enables the perpetuation of historical injustices.

White discourse uses other strategies to maintain a superior position. The discourse around those perceived as *good blacks* (the ideologically accommodating other) serves to discredit or chastise those whose ideology is more confrontational, and who are consequently positioned as *bad blacks* (Steyn & Foster, 2008). Similarly, behaviours that do not conform to the white norm are deemed bad and can suffer particularly punitive responses (George, 2015).

The accumulation of negative clichés, debates and topics in white discourse have also developed as legitimate and respectable counter-narratives to the social transformation which threatens the white supremacist order (Steyn & Foster, 2008). Persistent discourses around crime, economic decline, political greed, and incompetence served to reiterate a decline in social order post-apartheid, implying that these are more distressing than the social conditions that existed during apartheid (Steyn & Foster, 2008). It often goes as far as undermining alternative discourses that attempt to incorporate a more complex understanding of the enduring impact of the past on the present (Steyn & Foster, 2008).

Discourses that promote "upliftment" and "progress" in the form of cultural and linguistic assimilation also serve to minimise discomfort for white South Africans (Steyn & Foster, 2008). Terms such as "reverse racism" have been adopted from international spaces as a response to delegitimise attempts to redress historical injustices (Steyn & Foster, 2008). The black elite is viewed with indignation and suspicion and portrayed as incapable, corrupt or self-serving and

this acts as a distraction from the fact that most of the country's wealth remains in white hands. To achieve this effect, examples of mismanagement or corruption are over-generalised with a shared desire for "their fall" (Steyn & Foster, 2008).

Furthermore, the struggle for change and seeking social justice is often demoralised in white discourse by ridiculing those taking action as being self-righteous, crusading or lacking in humour (DiAngelo, 2018; Steyn & Foster, 2008). This seeks to prevent the counter-narrative from spreading and allows the current hierarchical order to be perpetuated (Steyn & Foster, 2008). In addition, positive self-representation in white discourse as being accommodating of transformation and displaying degrees of generosity that are taken for granted gives rise to feelings of indignation and a sense of needing to regroup among whites (Steyn & Foster, 2008). The regrouping is evident in emigrations and the move into gated communities (Steyn & Foster, 2008).

The subtly of racism in more liberal spaces can be understood by the guilt and shame many white people experience due to their involuntary association with a historically racist regime (Straker, 2004; Suchet 2007). These difficult feelings manifest a feeling of loss as one may begin to hate whiteness and yet be unable to act against the power dynamics while continuing to benefit from them (Straker, 2004; Suchet, 2007). These feelings are difficult and Straker (2004) suggests may be defended against through disavowal and fetish. Disavowal is the experience of knowing something but believing something else (Straker, 2004). To cope with this inconsistency, an object or the other becomes the focus of fetish to maintain disbelief. Also, the assumption of difference is projected into the other and stereotypes consolidate their assumed homogeneity while negating their individuality (Straker, 2004). Some of the fetishes identified by Straker (2004) include taking on black individuals as projects and unconsciously seeking validation as a good white. This is driven by a desire to overcome the lack of power on a systemic level and can result in enactments that are self-directed and patronising. Steele (1990) argues that this paternalism can make it difficult for black people to feel confident in their own abilities and removes opportunities for their personal development. Straker (2004) also identified the construction of the other as ideal and overly positive and in doing so generating stereotypes that ultimately deny individual subjectivity. Degradation by positive stereotyping is less common and more subtle but nevertheless carries similar impacts to negative stereotyping (Sayama &

Sayama, 2011). Black parents may experience these in the form of assumptions (positive or negative) about them or the feeling of being helped when not asked for.

Critical whiteness theory is important to understand and to dismantle the perpetuation of racism (van Zyl-Hermann & Boersema, 2017). It was incorporated here to help understand some of the parents' subtle experiences which they found difficult to explain, resulting in self-doubt around their experiences.

Post-colonial Psychology

As discussed, the historical and current socio-political context of the participants is relevant in trying to understand their lived experiences as black parents in historically white schools. Franz Fanon's analysis of psychopolitics could provide some valuable theory when unpacking black parents' psychological experiences. Importantly, his critical approach looks to examine the balances of power so that they can be challenged effectively (Hook, 2004). It also avoids trying to understand the parents' perspectives from a purely psychological framework that is embedded in Western culture, but rather in political terms that give credence to possible experiences of subordination, power, and violence (Fanon, 1967; Hook, 2004). However, Fanon (1967) also posited that many, although not all, psychoanalytic concepts help understand black experiences provided they take cognisance of societal issues such as racism. He believed psychoanalysis had the potential to tackle some of the psychological challenges caused by colonialism. He also asserted that black people have a "collective unconscious" which requires "collective catharsis" to heal from the damage caused by colonialism.

The legacy of colonisation and apartheid continues to impact individuals in society through pervasive imperialistic ideologies of cultural and economic dominance (Hook, 2004). The dominance of Eurocentric ideals and the assumption of white universality is a violent act which can manifest a sense of psychological alienation and thus a desire to lessen one's blackness by assimilation into the dominant culture (Fanon, 1967; Hook, 2004). Attaining wealth and the mastery of a white language and culture are examples of lactification which shift one's location on the hierarchy (Fanon, 1967; Hook, 2004). The findings in this research suggest that to fit into their environment, some black parents may have internalised, or chosen to reproduce, certain racist narratives typical of post-apartheid South Africa (Steyn & Foster, 2008). For example, the idea of non-racialism, "good blacks" versus "others" and other narratives that de-

moralise the struggle for change (Steyn & Foster, 2008). This may be the cost of obtaining and maintaining a position of privilege in high-fee-paying schools. This may be akin to the "queen bee" phenomenon in gender studies, where women in positions of power have been found to disassociate from their gender and unwittingly contribute to gender stereotyping as a means of maintaining mobility in their sexist work environments (Derks et al., 2011).

Fanon describes the experience of the "white gaze" as that which objectifies black people such that they are no longer subjective individuals making meaning for themselves but rather wholly predetermined by their race (Hook, 2004). For Fanon, this results in the "inescapability of one's blackness" and he argued that consequently individuals may have internalised predetermined stereotypes and objectified themselves in a similar manner to the racist environment in which they exist. Black individuals may hold views and narratives of themselves and other black people that are racist. Constant engagement with hostile or devaluing values and understandings of one's self and culture can lead to psychological alienation (Fanon, 1967; Hook, 2004). It is important to note that not all people will have this experience and in fact, Fanon emphasised consideration of the context in his analysis and the variability of human subjectivity (Fanon, 1967; Hook, 2004). However, it is valuable to explore narratives with this critical lens to understand the powers at play.

Through the analysis of conversations with black South Africans, Boswell (2014) demonstrates how those subject to racism constantly reflect upon, and adjust themselves, particularly in "white" spaces. This is done to gain a sense of respect, status, and belonging in the face of omnipresent whiteness (Boswell, 2014). Engaging with aversive racism is disconcerting and requires the occupation of unfamiliar social spaces and seems to require the assumption of new or alternative identities (Boswell, 2014). This appears to be easier for younger and more "globalised" South Africans to navigate, who have access to multiple forms of blackness (Boswell, 2014). In this research, it was also found that black South Africans have built a degree of tolerance to the micro-level, everyday acts of racism. It is suggested that "Self-care, then, involves a range of seemingly contradictory actions and impulses. On any given day, one might be required to assimilate, resist, forget, remember, distance, or draw close to whiteness or blackness." (Boswell, 2014, p. 13). Many independent schools are still primarily white spaces

where acts of aversive racism appear to be far more common than overt racism. This research hopes to offer some insights into ways that black parents might (need to) navigate these spaces.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief review of the literature relevant to this research project. It provided some background to the historical and current social context of education in South Africa. This gave a contextual frame in which the research and its findings can be located. The important role parents play in their children's education and the school culture were discussed. An overview was given of research conducted with black students and parents on their experiences of racism and discrimination in educational settings both internationally and locally. Gaps in the literature, which this research aims to fill, have been identified and discussed. The chapter described the theoretical frameworks used as the lens for this research. This included a brief discussion around the benefits and limitations of social psychology and then the important insights from critical race theories including post-colonial psychology and whiteness research. How these can be linked to the research findings was discussed before concluding the chapter.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive description of the research methods used in this study. First, the research questions that have guided the study are presented. Then the motive behind the qualitative nature of the research design and the selected paradigm is explained. These directly informed the selection of participants and the sampling procedure used, which is described next and includes a brief description of the participant group. The method of data collection, namely semi-structured interviews, is also discussed and the procedures followed are provided for transparency and replicability. Then, the selected method of data analysis, reflective thematic analysis, is also described to demonstrate how the themes reported were established. Finally, credibility, ethical considerations and reflexivity are discussed as they are essential elements in the process of producing qualitative research.

Research Questions

This research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of black parents at high-fee-paying private schools with regard to race, racism, and discrimination?
2. How do black parents navigate issues of race, racism and discrimination with other parents, staff, and their children at high-fee-paying independent schools?
3. How do black parents perceive their children and others in the school community to experience race, racism, and discrimination?
4. What are black parents' perceptions of the school's engagement with race, racism, discrimination, and transformation?

Research Design

This research was exploratory as it sought to study *experiences* and *perceptions* of race. A qualitative study was ideal for gathering the rich data needed for an in-depth exploratory study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In particular, a phenomenological study was conducted to explore the common lived experiences of black parents (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). A hermeneutical phenomenological perspective allowed for an interpretive stance which made meaning of the parents' lived experiences in context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tomaszewski et

al., 2020). Therefore, the data collected was held as the parents' truth. Common threads have been extracted and interpreted for shared meaning. The interpretive research design also used a critical lens that sought to understand parents' experiences within the context of the broader dynamics of race and racism in South Africa.

Participants

A purposive, convenience sample of participants was obtained by contacting principals at local high-fee-paying private high schools. A purposive sample ensured that participants were best positioned to provide data on the research topic as they had lived the experience of the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Access and time constraints also motivated the use of convenience sampling for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). School principals were asked to invite parents from their schools to participate in the study. Two schools agreed; one circulated an invitation to all parents of colour in the high school. The other school elected to send the invitation only to specific parents of colour indicating sensitivity around the topic. Several other schools were approached via email and either declined to participate or did not respond to the request. Only five participants were sourced through the initial two schools, School A and School B in the table below.

Taking into consideration the multiple stressors parents may have been experiencing at the time of data collection, such as a Covid-19 wave, hard lock-down and a rise in civil unrest, it is possible that individuals did not have the capacity to volunteer their time. However, the low response also raised the question as to whether receiving the invitation to participate via the school may have raised concerns about a conflict of interests. Parents may have felt reluctant to speak about their experiences while their children are still part of the school system. During the interviews, parents sometimes offered cautious responses, requested not to be video recorded and sought confirmation of confidentially mid-interview which supports this theory. The interviews also offered some insight into the shift in parents' roles and involvement at a high school level which may have impacted the willingness of parents to participate. Finally, suspicion around a white researcher's motives for the research or difficulty speaking about issues of race may also have influenced low response rates from both schools and parents.

To gather more data, a snowball approach was used, and public advertisements were placed on social media to invite participants who met the inclusion criteria. Through these channels, a further five participants were interviewed from four other schools. The participants' children all attended monastic, single-sex (except for one) high-fee-paying independent high schools. Table 1 below provides a summary of the participants in this research.

Table 1

Research Participants' Information

No.	**Pseudonym**	**Participants' gender (Nationality)**	**Child's school (Their grade, gender)**
1	Lerato	Female (South African)	School B (10, M)
2	Bongani	Male (South African)	School B (11, M) & C (8, F)
3	Katlego	Male (South African)	School A (9, F)
4	Palesa	Female (South African)	School Z[1] (11, M)
5	Nandi	Female (Zimbabwean)	School D (8, F)
6	Mandla	Male (South African)	School B (9, M)
7	Thabo	Male (South African)	School B (9, M)
8	Shani	Female (Kenyan)	School E (11, F) & School B (8, M)
9	Asha	Female (Kenyan)	School F (9, F)
10	Zanele	Female (South African)	School E (10, F)

The inclusion criteria for this research were that the participants be black and are parents, per the above-stated definition, of at least one child who currently attends a high-fee-paying private high school in Johannesburg. Most participants' children had attended their school for a minimum of two years, often longer, having moved through the school's primary school section. This suggests that the parents had sufficient exposure to various aspects of the school system, including the time before Covid-19 restrictions which appears to have significantly impacted parents' contact with schools. The group was heterogeneous with respect to gender (of

[1] This participant's child is currently in high school in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Although this is outside of the scope of the research, she, like many of the parents, referred to her child's whole schooling career. Her son attended an independent primary school in Johannesburg and therefore her discussions pertaining to this school have been included in this research.

participants and their children) as well as nationality. The three individuals who identified themselves as foreign nationals, currently live in South Africa and have been living here for between four and 18 years. Of the ten parents interviewed, six were female and four were male.

Data Collection

This study used original data collected from the above-mentioned research participants. The data was collected by the researcher in individual semi-structured interviews (Adams, 2015; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The interviews ranged from 33 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes. Semi-structured interviews were used as they are ideal for obtaining complex and detailed data about the phenomenon of interest (Mack et al., 2005) while minimising the influence of the researcher, as may be the case in more structured interviews. Open-ended questions encouraged the participants to explore and share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Adams, 2015) around race in their child's school environment. Furthermore, there was an opportunity for follow-up questions to gain clarity or more detailed information, which allowed for a greater depth of understanding of the participant's view. The sensitive nature of the topic, and pursuit of nuanced experiences and perceptions of the individuals, aligned with semi-structured interviews rather than focus groups (Mack et al., 2005).

Ten participants were interviewed, with nine and a half hours of interview data collected, which provided sufficient data saturation (Sandelowski, 1995). The date and time for the interviews were arranged between the researcher and each participant. The interviews were all conducted over the Zoom digital platform, due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. This was the most ethical means of interviewing as it held the lowest risk for transmission of Covid-19.

Before the interview, the researcher emailed each participant the information sheet (Appendix B) and consent form (Appendix C) to be signed and returned via email. This included consent for recording the interview and for using data in future research. Before proceeding with the interview, the researcher confirmed that the participants had read and understood the information sheet and consent forms. Two participants did not return the consent forms and in those instances, the form was read out before starting the interview to obtain recorded verbal consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were discussed including an explanation that the participant's data would be recorded anonymously, so they and their school are not identifiable.

During this process, the researcher aimed to develop a rapport with the participants before inviting them to share their experiences (Mack et al., 2005). This was challenging over a digital platform, particularly with parents who elected to keep their video off, however, the researcher felt that rapport was generally established and that the participants became more relaxed and open during the course of the interviews. As stated, the interview was semi-structured to allow the participants to freely explore and express their experiences and perceptions but also to allow for follow-up questions, thus gaining data that is both relevant and rich (Adams, 2015).

The interview schedule can be found in Appendix A and was self-developed with the objective of gathering data around the research area, namely, experiences of racism and discrimination, how race is navigated, school culture etc. Participants' experiences were investigated in their role as parents and not as scholars so that remained the focus during the interview. In line with this, parents rarely reflected on their own schooling experience but did often compare and contrast their children's experiences at different schools or the differences between primary and high schools. It was held in mind that a parent's experience of their child's school will inherently reflect both their experience and their child's experience of the school due to the nature of the relationship.

Data Analysis

Once all the interviews were conducted and securely stored in a password-protected file, both the researcher and a third-party service transcribed the interviews. The researcher checked the transcriptions to ensure accuracy and to allow the researcher to become thoroughly acquainted with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017).

RTA is a practical and versatile method of data analysis that can be used with various theoretical frameworks to identify both semantic and latent themes and to analyse data both inductively and deductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). It is well positioned for analysis looking for patterns of shared meaning as required in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Therefore, RTA was used as described by Braun and Clark (2006). The process of analysis began with the researcher reading the data multiple times to obtain greater familiarity with it. Initial observations were noted during this phase including reflexive

observations. Then, the researcher worked through each interview coding the data for statements that offer insight into how black parents experience the phenomenon in question. Patterns were initially coded on a descriptive level (semantic meanings) and then for latent meanings. The codes were grouped and collated in ideas or meanings, and themes were generated. Importantly, the themes were reviewed by peers and the researcher's supervisor to enhance the credibility/trustworthiness of the interpretations. The themes were then defined and used to draw up a thematic "map" which provided an overview of the findings and informed this research report which aims to explore the essence of the parents' experiences.

Establishing Quality - Credibility and Trustworthiness

The importance of rigour was considered at the outset of this research through the careful selection of a conceptual framework and alignment of all research methods within the framework (Johnson et al., 2020; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Furthermore, the rigour of qualitative research is also determined by its measures of trustworthiness (Cope, 2014; Johnson et al., 2020). This research addressed the need to achieve trustworthiness throughout the research process by considering five elements of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985 and 1994) and cited in Cope (2014, p. 89); "credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability" and the authenticity of the research.

Klopper (2008) expands on these elements by providing some specific criteria, some of which were used in this study. Credibility was established by the lengthy engagement with the research material and peer inspection of the data analysis. The transferability of this study is limited due to the specific context; however, the saturation of data and detailed description of the context could contribute to its transferability to similar contexts. To provide confirmability, research decisions and interpretations were recorded in detail for audit purposes. In addition, participants' quotations have been used in this research report which supports the authenticity of the research (Cope, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles underscored all decisions and actions throughout this study. The research topic was established with beneficence and non-maleficence as was all engagement with research participants (Pietilä et al., 2020). For example, participants were assured of their right to

participate or discontinue participation and their preference to participate in a manner most comfortable for them was supported (video off/on). Close attention was paid to their experiences and sensitive responses were provided. These ensured that the well-being of participants was respected throughout the interview process. The respect shown to participants acknowledged their autonomy (Pietilä et al., 2020). Furthermore, the participants' autonomy was affirmed through their voluntary participation, confirmation of informed consent and by providing assurance that their confidentially would be maintained, thus also affirming their dignity (Pietilä et al., 2020).

In terms of participant selection, this was done in a just manner with fair access for participants to volunteer, and no volunteers were excluded. However, the extent to which individuals may have known about the research was limited to distribution decisions by the schools and access to social media.

The researcher demonstrated integrity during the research interviews by being honest and open to the participants while protecting their rights and dignity (Pietilä et al., 2020). Ethical principles guided the processing of data which included expectations of social value with a favourable risk-benefit ratio and respect for participants (Pietilä et al., 2020). Furthermore, in maintaining a standard of professional competence, the researcher was honest in her work and open to review by colleagues and supervisors while engaging in ongoing learning (Pietilä et al., 2020). The researcher remained aware of her social responsibility to act ethically so that the research and its findings benefit broader society with due consideration for the impact on any members of society, beyond just the research participants (Pietilä et al., 2020).

The complexity of human experience is difficult to capture and is influenced by many factors including the researcher's lens. The ethicality of a white researcher conducting research with black participants is discussed below in the reflexivity section of this report.

Ethics clearance was obtained from Wits non-medical ethics committee under protocol number MACC/21/10. Permission to conduct the study was also sought from the principals of the two schools who shared the invitation with their parent body. Written or recorded verbal consent to participate in the research and record the interviews was obtained from each participant.

The researcher has a personal connection to the primary schools associated with the high schools from which some of the participants were sampled. There was no conflict of interest as the researcher does not know any families in the high schools and there was a low risk of her encountering any of the parents after the interview.

Security of the online platform was managed by using password entry and the waiting room function in Zoom. This was to protect the participants' confidentiality by eliminating the risk of a hack. In addition, the recordings of the interviews are stored in password-protected files to ensure security. Anonymity may not be secured with the use of pseudonyms alone and it was considered essential that neither the participants nor the schools be identifiable by the data included in this final report.

An important ethical consideration was the nature of feedback given to participating schools. Participants were informed that the report would be made publicly available but that all information was anonymous with no identifiable names or events. Both the schools and participants will have access to the final report once published.

While this group was not considered a vulnerable group, the sensitive nature of racism and discrimination means there was a risk that participants may experience distress or discomfort. Contact numbers were provided for free counselling services (Lifeline), if needed, after the interview.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a central tenet of qualitative research due to the fundamental role of the researcher in the research process (Gough, 2016). This section describes my thoughts and consideration of reflexivity for this study.

Literature on whiteness echoes the sentiments of the Black Conscious Movement that white people should not be authors of black history nor construct black identity in the process of knowledge generation (Biko, 2017; Green et al., 2007). However, it is also essential that research is conducted in this field so that the counter-narrative, which brings awareness of privilege and dominance, can be constructed, and strengthened (Salter & Adams, 2013). There is also the meaningful distinction of doing research *with* participants rather than *on* them (Hylton, 2012). Holding these tensions in mind, I pursued this research with respect and aimed to do justice to

the voices with whom I co-constructed this knowledge. This required me to be extremely reflexive of my position as a white South African and to hold in mind the reality that society is racially constructed and stratified (Hylton, 2012). There were inherent advantages and disadvantages of my positionality that I observed during the process.

For example, at times it felt that participants may have thought I could not understand their perspective as I had not experienced it. This may have impacted what was shared with me. To mitigate this, I tried to gently probe passing comments which seemed to hold more meaning or to seek clarification for nuanced experiences I did not understand. With some parents, I also felt untrusted as though they were testing the water with me by being tentative about what was acceptable to talk about. This made me reflect on white fragility and how, despite me having invited the conversation around race and racism, the parents appeared to anticipate some resistance, reaction, or judgement from me. I recognise that in these moments I became more affirming in my gestures or responses, as I sought to counteract the perception that I would not be able to hear their story.

In most interviews, I felt that I was experienced as relatable to a degree, particularly as we share common socio-economic and parent status. I was also sufficiently outside of the participants' racial reference group, so they shared thoughts or experiences they might not have shared with an insider. However, this became uncomfortable at times as some of the narratives bordered on seeking my approval or agreement with what may have been interpreted as racist narratives. It is unclear if these were internalised racist narratives, a measure of appropriation, or even possibly performative as the participants positioned themselves for a white audience. In other words, they may have defensively reproduced racist narratives for my approval.

In addition, as a white parent with children attending high-fee-paying independent schools, I obviously have my own experiences and observations which colour the lens through which I undertook this research. It was imperative that I avoided influencing the data collection process by perhaps being leading in the interviews or when looking for themes. I kept a research journal and enlisted the support of my peers and supervisor for regular reviews and input at all stages of the research (Gough, 2016) – from the construction of the interview schedule to data analysis and interpretation.

Most, if not all, of the parents, were older than me and of a similar (or higher) socio-economic status, which countered to some degree the inherent power imbalance created by my position as a white psychology researcher. I maintained a humble and tentative approach to the sensitive issue of race, particularly as a white person. I believe this allowed, to a degree, an openness around their racialised experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter described the research methods used in this study. It laid out the research questions that guided the research. The qualitative research design was discussed, and the selected paradigm was explained. Research decisions around the selection of participants and sampling procedure were described and a brief description of the participant group was provided. In the data collection section, the value and applicability of semi-structured interviews used in this research were discussed. The procedures that were followed were described. The selection of reflective thematic analysis as the method of data analysis was explained and the process followed was described. This demonstrates how the themes that are reported were established. The chapter ended with three critical aspects of producing quality qualitative research, those being credibility, ethical considerations, and reflexivity.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings taken from a reflexive thematic analysis of the interview data gathered with black parents. The five primary themes include semantic data that provides a direct description of the experiences and perceptions of black parents in the independent schooling context. However, they also contain discussions about academic literature and interpretations within the theoretical frameworks discussed previously. These provide some additional depth and understanding of the research questions. My voice is also presented in the critical commentary during the discussion.

The first theme centres around the parents' own racialised experiences and responses. This theme explores their narratives of racial incidents and undertones as they grapple with what are often subtle tensions. Parents have also described and demonstrated a range of responses and defences aimed at managing their experiences. This theme speaks directly to the research question about parents' experiences and how they navigate race at school.

The second theme explores parents' perceptions of their children's racialised experiences at school and thus directly engages with the third research question. While most parents felt their child was minimally impacted, they described reasons why their child might be different to other black children. However, a sub-theme emerged around shifting friendships in high school suggesting that racial tensions may also be at play in their children's social dynamics.

The third theme explores how parents perceive race(ism) in their school system and responds to the fourth research question. Firstly, some insights are offered on parents' own willingness to be involved at school and their perceptions of other black parents' willingness to participate in school life. Parent involvement in school has certainly been impacted by Covid-19 but many also expressed a substantial shift in their involvement, as their child moved into high school. Parents provided their perception of the school's attitude towards race and diversity and a strong sub-theme of communication from the school emerged. The presence, or lack of, communication was an indicator to parents of the school's engagement with racialised matters. The subtlety of racial tension was grappled with but also accompanied by expressions that racism was worse elsewhere. Parents offered a range of views on how they saw the diversity in staff and pupils to be changing, and in some cases not. Policies and reporting of grievances were

unpacked, and at times there was a sense of them lacking meaning when they were not clearly communicated or appropriately managed. Parents offered thought-provoking views on the management of race-related matters.

The fourth theme engages with observations around the interpersonal dynamics between the research participants and the (white) researcher as they discussed race(ism) in the schooling environment. Some parents had anxiety about confidentiality and were curious about the researcher's motives for conducting the research, both suggesting a degree of mistrust. Several parents appeared to use minimising language, which may have been an unconscious attempt to manage the researcher's assumed white fragility. At times, there was a sense that parents felt they were representing all black people and did not want to risk being positioned in a poor light. Thus, they continuously sought agreement to gauge the researcher's position on issues. These interactions provide some insight into the anxieties that black parents may face when engaging with white parents or staff at school on matters of race and discrimination.

The final theme is a brief exploration of the discussions that emerged around the intersectionality between race, the current topic, and language, nationality, class, gender, age, and sexuality. These multiple aspects of social identity appeared to add to the complexity of parents' understanding of their own experiences of subtle discrimination.

Theme 1: "We're civil towards each other." - Parents' Racialised Experiences and Responses

This section unpacks the research participants' racialised experiences at their children's school. It explores their psychological and behavioural responses to experiences of racism and subtle racial tensions. Parents' engagement with other parents was most frequently the focus of their experiences and the unspoken rules of engagement have been described. At times, the parents appeared to have appropriated racist narratives, and these are discussed.

Racialised Experiences

Unpacking parents' racialised experiences during the interviews was a complex process. Most parents declared up front that they had never experienced any racism at their child's school when asked directly. For example,

I've never experienced nor has my child come to me and complained about anyone being racist towards him. (Lerato)

We haven't experienced it at the school. (Bongani)

In my own experience no, definitely not. (Katlego)

I'd be lying if I said I did, I haven't. (Nandi)

I've not experienced a problem on that front, and I have not heard. (Mandla)

No, they are very careful, I think they are very, very careful. (Shani)

Only one parent, Palesa, expressed that racism was a common experience for her in the school context.

I mean I experienced it quite a lot. (Palesa)

However, as each interview proceeded, parents described subtle tensions and experiences of othering that they faced. This may suggest that their experiences of racism were possibly difficult to articulate due to the subtly of them. Furthermore, they may unconsciously defend against these experiences to prevent them from being processed as racist experiences. This is congruent with Boswell's (2014) assessment of aversive racism in liberal spaces. Parents may have developed a level of tolerance for micro-aggressions that allows them to distance themselves from the experience making it difficult to recall. Most parents provided accounts of feeling othered in some way, however, there is a sense that parents have quite different experiences at the different schools and that their encounters appeared to mirror their views on how proactively the school is engaging with racial issues. This is explored in the next section. This section provides some examples of being othered as experienced by the parents in this research, and as such, provides insight into some manifestations of racism in liberal spaces. Perhaps one of the most prominent forms of othering was in the form of social exclusion and discomfort, which at times led to a sense of not belonging. Asha described feeling frustrated at white parents for mistaking another black child for hers.

That question of, you know, mistaking your child with someone's else's child. (Asha)

Asha defended her frustration by explaining how long their family had been at the school and that there were not many black children. Asha experienced her, or her child's subjective identities being stripped, as he was seen as one of the black children, rather than as an individual with his own individual mother. This extreme form of assumed homogeneity was described by Straker (2004) as one of the subtle racist actions in liberal spaces. Shani described an uncomfortable realisation when white parents, whom she was friendly with before, no longer acknowledged her, because their children had moved up and were no longer in the same class.

> *Our boys are so such good friends, we move on…to high school… I go looking for them and ja, I don't know, you just feel like, okay, I don't think I'm wanted here, we're no longer in the same class anymore.* (Shani)

Shani had felt accepted by the white mothers, but it turned out to be contingent on their sons being in the same class. It is possible that the other parents were being tolerant as a means of maintaining the power dynamics (Green et al., 2007), and therefore Shani's value beyond her role as a classmate's mother was not recognised. This led to her feeling dismissed.

A couple of parents described feeling more excluded in group contexts. For example, Lerato described talking comfortably to a white mother and how the dynamics shift when another white parent joined the conversation. She felt she became the dispensable person in the conversation as the other mothers talk in a manner that excludes her from the conversation.

> *At the sports event, you'd be standing with the white parent chatting and then suddenly another white parent appears, then after a greeting, they forget about you, and they carry on their own.* (Lerato)

There was a sense of courtesy driving white parents' engagement with black parents, rather than a meaningful interest or curiosity, which diminished when there were other white parents around. Lerato's experience may speak to white parents' social identity being heightened in group settings where individuals outside of the ingroup are alienated (Tajfel, 1974). Her experience is consistent with studies where black parents feel ignored, unwelcome, and invisible at times (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017). This was supported by the views of Mandla, Nandi, Asha and Katlego, that at times there was an intangible sense of not belonging or feelings of discomfort in the company of white parents at school.

> *Sometimes you will see that fake smile… you are smiling and everything but you're not comfortable, maybe I'm also not comfortable.* (Mandla)
>
> *I'm gonna be on the edge feeling like, oh my gosh, I don't belong here, you know, and they may not necessarily pay attention to me.* (Nandi)
>
> *It's like you're constantly trying to prove or justify why you deserve a seat on the table, you know, why your child needs to be part of that circle, why you need to, so the sense of belonging is something that is a very big issue.* (Asha)
>
> *Even if I try and engage with parents that have white kids, they will try to be accommodating but you can also feel that even in the air there is an aura of some level of discomfort in the sense that they may not necessarily be able to talk about the things they wanna talk about, the way they would otherwise talk about because they are trying to go over, above and beyond to accommodate me.* (Katlego)

These parents described a subtle feeling or tension which alludes to feeling on the outside of a group. Many parents articulated an awareness that their own life experiences would impact their experience. This is likely to prevent them from fully engaging with these experiences or raising them with the school because it is difficult for them to untangle the dynamics and projections. Palesa was able to articulate her experience of being othered more concretely. She feels she experiences racism when other parents make assumptions about the heterogeneity of black people, based on stereotypes, or their limited experience of black people. This is consistent with Straker's (2004) argument about white people's assumptions in liberal spaces. Palesa described assumptions around her ignorance/knowledge, status, and occupational roles. For example, attending an elite school exposed her to assumptions that she was staff rather than a parent or that she was much less worldly and intelligent than white parents.

> *I realised, is that a lot of parents would automatically assume that you don't know much with a whole lot of things and that's the racism.* (Palesa)
>
> *Oh, do you work here? you know, those are the things that that, those are subtle things that are there.* (Palesa)
>
> *So, the racism that comes is people assuming that you are lower than what you are. So, a person sees a black parent and they firstly assume that you're a helper or they just assume you're a, someone that works at the school, you know, it's not automatic that you're a parent.* (Palesa)

Once again, it was through subtle comments that parents such as Palesa were stripped of their subjective identities. White parents' assumption of difference of the other and stereotyped

assumptions are likely defences which lead to patronising and self-directed actions (Straker, 2004). Another defence that Straker (2004) spoke of was liberal whites taking on black individuals as projects to seek validation as good white people. This may be what Shani and Nandi experienced when they described being seen as incapable, not taken seriously, or needing extra assistance. Shani described a sense that her blackness suggested she needed extra help or compensation, which failed to acknowledge her competency and autonomy.

> *So, what I think I've experienced is that the sense that you need to be helped… like they… sort of overcompensate.* (Shani)

For Nandi, it was not knowing whether she was being merely tolerated and a sense that if she were not black, she might be taken more seriously. This suggests that engaging with the white space of her child's school evoked Nandi's reflections on herself and her positionality as described by Boswell (2014).

> *There's always that feeling of, you know, maybe if I were of a different colour, you know, they would take me little bit seriously.* (Nandi)

Another assumption that two parents from different schools described was the sense that certain teachers had lower expectations of their children. For Shani, she felt the teacher was willing to accept a lower standard from her daughter than she felt her daughter was capable of. Similarly, Asha felt there was a tacit acceptance within her son's school that black children did not make the top ten list and therefore she should lower her expectations of her son.

> *I'm like… hey, she's capable of much more.* (Shani)
>
> *It's almost like a decision's been made, wrongly… this is his full potential and I'm happy with that and you should be, so, you know, just let it be and I find that wrong.* (Asha)
>
> *We don't get too many black boys in our top ten list… so I do feel there's that subtle acceptance that you know there's a glass ceiling…* (Asha)

This is consistent with international and local experiences of racism within schools where there is a tacit assumption that black children will achieve lower than white children (Hope et al., 2015; Joseph et al., 2016; Machaisa & Lebeloane, 2017). Interestingly, a couple of the other

parents described feeling slightly disappointed with their child's academic performance but seemed to accept it as related to their child's ability and did not link it to any racial barriers.

Asha spoke the most explicitly about barriers at her son's school and described the issue of access to the school as a barrier to black families. She explained that historical placements (prioritising alumni and siblings) made it very difficult for black families to access her son's school, resulting in them being a minority.

> *So, entry to the school is already a barrier and then once you do get in, you then are the minority and it's in your face from the get-go.* (Asha)

This is an example of how institutional policies can be a structural factor which perpetuates exclusions and influences the social dynamics within a school (Marchand et al., 2019). Similarly, there are barriers for black teaching staff as mentioned by Thabo, one of the parents who happens to be a high school English teacher. He described applying for jobs at Model C and private schools for many years and has got the sense that he is not wanted in those spaces.

> *White schools, I think they still look at, who is this guy, that wants to invade our territory.* (Thabo)

It is possible that he experienced prejudice as a black man wishing to teach English, which highlights the role language can play in exclusion or inclusion. This is addressed further later in this chapter.

It is important to recognise the tone and manner with which parents offered their experiences, described above. In many cases, the parents were very tentative and cautious when linking the above-mentioned experiences to race. It seemed difficult for parents to discern if the feeling was based on race or due to other social or individual factors. Asha and Zanele expressed that both parents and children may have a difficult time connecting their experiences to race. Katlego articulated that it is something that one cannot really put one's finger on but is present. Nandi explained that it would never be explicit and therefore one could not defend against it, but she was still left with the feeling of being othered. Palesa connected this experience to diplomacy and how it took time to cognitively process the uncomfortable feelings and label them as racism.

That's why I'm not sure whether it's necessarily linked to race. (Asha)

They (children) don't understand really if they, you know, have been victimised or not. (Zanele)

Racial undertones are exactly that, they're just undertones, it's something in the air, you can't really put your finger on it (Katlego)

When it comes to parents, I don't think anyone has been called the N word or the K word or you know there isn't anything that you can overtly say oh this was racism but the experience of the othered parent would say otherwise. (Nandi)

In these private schools, racism is very subtle… it comes diplomatically… for some of us it takes us time to get it, to say, oh jeez you know this is what it is. (Palesa)

These parents described an experience of subtle inequity that Matentjie (2019) also described in his research with South African parents in predominantly white schools. In trying to make sense of the subtlety of racism and to defend against it, parents appeared to enlist a range of psychological and behavioural defences. The next subtheme explores both the described and observed defences.

Defences and Behavioural Responses to Race(ism)

As parents discussed their experiences, it became apparent that several psychological defences were being enlisted to manage the uncertainty and anxiety around racism. Defences serve to reduce psychological pain and may be adaptive and helpful unless they are used to avoid reality (Freud, 1937). They may also inadvertently perpetuate the status quo and prevent individuals from engaging to create change. The psychological defences that surfaced in this research are discussed below, followed by the parents' descriptions of their own behavioural defences when engaging at school and those they have observed in others.

A defence of denial or repression appeared evident in the narratives of some parents. Palesa described a process of unconscious denial where subtle racist experiences are not even consciously registered. For Asha, it was a more conscious process of suppression that parents may undertake when they choose to forget or block out a painful experience. She also demonstrated possible denial when she expressed the hope that her son's experiences were character-building rather than harmful to him. It seemed Katlego may be denying the hostility of

the other and/or the systemic nature of racism when he asserted that subtle racism is sometimes a function of interpretation.

> *Because it happens so much and especially with the subtle ones, some you just get to, you don't even record.* (Palesa)
>
> *Also, sometimes things are not always top of mind because they've either chosen to forget it, it's an incident that happened and we kind of try to block away some of the stuff.* (Asha)
>
> *Hopefully, it's water off a duck's back but who knows, maybe there's been some scarring, I hope it's building character.* (Asha)
>
> *You must also understand that racism can also be a function of interpretation through he or she who is on the receiving end and sometimes it's a choice, if you choose to interpret it as that sounds a bit racist then it's racist to you.* (Katlego)

Colour blindness is also a form of denial that is particular to racism (Steyn & Foster, 2008). The assertion that one does not see colour is often used to deny the ongoing impact of historical racial injustice and, for white people, an unwillingness to engage with blind spots. The narrative of colour blindness appears to have been adopted by some of the parents. Katlego, Thabo and Zanele stated that they had not raised their children to recognise race. Perhaps the denial of their children's ability to recognise difference serves to minimise their anxiety that others would define their children by their race and the institutional racism they might face in their primarily white schools. For Asha, she felt her lived experience in Kenya meant race was never at the forefront of her mind. She had similar hopes for her children and had possibly denied the realities of living in South Africa with its past.

> *So, from a very early age, she's never ever been able to see race that way.* (Katlego)
>
> *My son really does not see… these things because he has been in a white school from age 3 or so.* (Thabo)
>
> *I've never raised my kid's to be aware of skin colour.* (Zanele)
>
> *I always say that I never realised I was black until I came to South Africa, it was never an issue for me I mean I, I'm Kenyan and went to school with kids from all over… I was hoping that my kids also would see other kids as just… a classmate, not a, he's not black he's not white, you will not play with him because he is you know of this colour.* (Asha)

It is possible that some parents grappled with their decision to send their children to a predominantly white school by adopting a colour-blind narrative. Almost all the parents drew on the common interests argument when trying to make sense of their racialised experiences in the school context and generally. For Lerato and Nandi, the school represented an existing community of people who had a shared history and wondered if this, rather than racism, was the reason for their lack of a sense of belonging. Lerato, Katlego, Palesa, Mandla, Asha and Zanele all indicated a belief that both black and white parents preferred to associate with "their own" because they had more in common. This speaks directly to the parents' social identity and that through social comparison they may actively seek commonalities within their ingroup and emphasise differences between groups (Tajfel, 1974)

> *It's a function of, we have we have different interests.* (Lerato)
>
> *Private schools are a certain community and they've been in that community for a long time and parents of colour who are coming into the community are already on the outside.* (Nandi)
>
> *Most people are not inherently bad people right, they just don't even recognise their own blind spots because they are naturally inclined to want to associate with people that are like-minded.* (Katlego)
>
> *So, the other things is that it's natural to be comfortable with your kind you know, you, for me it's, it would be easy for me to gravitate towards black parents and sit with them.* (Palesa)
>
> *You know certain groupings that get along better together.* (Mandla)
>
> *I think as human beings we'll always look for ways to either, I don't want to say it's human nature but the, there's just that need to stick to… whatever we have in common, is what brings us together.* (Asha)
>
> *There's white music and there's black music.* (Asha)
>
> *She's now tryna identify with the same girl(s) who've got the same interests and the same hair problem.* (Zanele)

For Asha, this was tricky for her son who associated himself with "white" interests. This resulted in him having no place of belonging since he did not share interests with the black boys based on assumed stereotypes. But he also did not share race with the white boys from a social categorisation perspective. This left him without an ingroup with whom to identify and associate.

> *Even amongst the black boys there's this view of this is what black folk do and you're not operating in that space, so you're really not one of us you, you do the white things, you do tennis, you do swimming, you do water polo*. (Asha)

Asha's experience offers insight into how racial stereotypes inform many of the common interests used to justify the division of individuals into racial groupings. Of course, there is comfort in the familiar, and painful feelings of being othered are minimised when they are attributed to someone you choose (with your interests) rather than something you cannot change (your skin colour). However, the adoption of a common interest narrative to understand social groupings inadvertently perpetuates racial stereotyping and social divisions based on normative assumptions that are racialised, which negate the subjectivity of all individuals.

It is possible that a few parents introjected the negative feelings or actions directed at them to manage their anxiety about a possible breakdown in the relationship with the school or parts thereof. For example, Lerato linked her sense of not belonging at the school to her role as a stepparent. She placed a degree of distance between herself and the school by delegitimising her need for belonging. This allowed the family to maintain the necessary relationship for her stepson to attend school while minimising her discomfort. Nandi normalised and internalised the role of othering by describing it as a universal trait. This reduced her anxiety that she was being rejected personally, but rather she was just experiencing a social process where anyone could enact the othering, even herself.

> *Maybe it was also my issue because I was coming in as a stepparent maybe I didn't feel like I belong there, you know.* (Lerato)

> *I mean we all do that, if I go to my old school, I'm gonna cluster with my old friends… I'm not gonna notice the other person who's not part of me simply because I'm with my group and also because it would be predominantly black.* (Nandi)

Some of the parents demonstrated a degree of contempt towards the other by viewing racists as less than, but also those who experienced racism as weak or lesser. These defences may serve to reverse the feelings of disempowerment experienced when being made to feel less than themselves and to project out any feelings of shame onto those who are "weaker". Bongani and Katlego ascribed a sense of mental weakness or lack of robustness to those who experienced racism. Palesa and Nandi attributed the characteristics of naivety, lack of education, reduced

intellectual capacity and ignorance to racist individuals and Shani expressed feeling pity for them. Mandla offered the same view from a different angle when he suggested that there was less racism at these schools than elsewhere because the parents had more money, and therefore must have high reasoning or analytical skills to afford this type of schooling. What all the parents shared was the view that intellectual prowess was associated with a reduction in the experience of prejudice.

> *We need to know how to be mentally strong to… significant challenges we face you know in terms of racism today cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them.* (Bongani)
>
> *She comes from a fortunate background where both myself and her mom are extremely strong characters and have had the benefit of dealing with this kind of system and she has got the mental strength in support from home from when she was young anyway to, to see beyond, um to see beyond race.* (Katlego)
>
> *One has to understand that these people are naïve.* (Palesa)
>
> *Some parents in all honesty haven't reached that level of education where they think certain things through, or they learn to analyse situations before they act or say something. And I realised it's fine you might have money, but you might not be intellectually sound.* (Palesa)
>
> *Genuine lack of awareness of what they've actually been doing that impacts on the other racially, so it's… ignorance, … Their lives have been one dimensional you know up to now in terms of their experiences.* (Nandi)
>
> *Those that frequent or whatever the independent schools… by virtue of affording it means you have some strong source of income and to have that source of income all leads to you having reasoning power, analytical power.* (Mandla on why there is less racism at school)
>
> *I feel sorry for them sometimes.* (Shani)

As mentioned, the discussion of a painful topic such as racism can elicit intellectual defences against the difficult feelings that are evoked. This was observed with a few of the parents who offered generalisations and intellectualisation in defence of the racism they observed or described. This included a rational argument for the bias in humans and difficulty in recognising blind spots made by Katlego. For Nandi, it was the rationalising of the low rate of transformation in their school due to the demographics in their catchment area. Mandla defended against the pain of racism by appealing to a universal fear. Shani attempted to intellectualise

reasons for feeling excluded by other parents by thinking of alternative narratives that explained their actions.

> *I think all people have some degree of bias in them.* (Katlego)
>
> *Most people are not inherently bad people right, they just don't even recognise their own blind spots.* (Katlego)
>
> *So, even if they were to say… we want our school to have half black families… The reality is that the catchment area will not support that.* (Nandi)
>
> *We have fears, I have my fears, the white ones have their fears and in that drives how we behave so and the other one is they said it's fear of unknown or not knowing the other side.* (Mandla)
>
> *Maybe they've already made their friendships and they don't wanna widen the circle.* (Shani)

The first part of this sub-theme looked at the psychological defences that parents use against the experience of racism. These defences are likely to impact parents' behavioural responses to racism at the school. A few parents spoke about their own and other parents' behavioural responses to racism which will be discussed below. These seemed to fall into the following categories of response: reaction, null action, investigation, and influence. Some parents observed other parents reacted quickly and emotionally to situations that they thought may be racist. Palesa ascribed this response to the parents' own history and experiences, which is consistent with findings from Matentjie (2019) that parents' agency is strongly influenced by their history of racial trauma. Palesa acknowledged the rise of anger and hurt she felt but had come to realise that an emotional response was not usually met well. She described having to regulate herself to be heard. Shani described an incident at her child's school that was escalated to the press because the parents felt unheard, which is an example of parents using their social standing to advocate for their child. Interestingly, it was a father who intervened which again supports Matentjie's (2019) findings that the responses to racism are gendered with mothers being less confrontational. Nandi and Zanele described their responses when they felt their voices were not being heard and these were respectively, active and passive. Nandi escalated an email that she felt had not been dealt with within an appropriate time frame. For Zanele, she demonstrated an example of a passive-aggressive response when she described telling her

daughter not to respond to teachers who mispronounced her name after several requests that they do so.

> *It was a big deal cos a parent went public because he felt that his issue was not addressed, he wanted an apology from both the school and the parents and child.* (Shani)
>
> *I find that parents that have been to former Model C schools have experienced quite a lot of racism and they react quite quickly, they have different experiences.* (Palesa)
>
> *In most cases you become angry about it first… but I realise that anger leaves a lot crying… You need to explain in a calm way, in a nice way, you know, then that's when they get it.* (Palesa)
>
> *I think lack of urgency in responding to me and then I just had to escalate it.* (Nandi)
>
> *I even went ahead and told my daughter that don't respond because that is not your name* (Zanele)

Zanele offered her perception of black parents in predominantly white schools, that their agency was dominated by null action. She felt parents adopted an attitude of gratitude because there was a sense that any criticism or complaint could compromise their own or their child's relationship with the school. Matentjie (2019) suggests that null action is strategic as it avoids rocking the boat and at times can be leveraged. However, he acknowledges Zanele's perspective that it may be out of fear of rebuke or a sense of powerlessness. Palesa stated that some parents talked about racial inequities within their social groups but did not want to confront it at school. She felt this may be because it took a lot of work to confront and had the potential to blow up. Palesa shared her view that some black people grew up watching their parents in submissive roles and found it difficult to "talk back" to a white person. She translated an expression in the vernacular that says, "black people are just afraid of white people". She also attributed null actions to this experience. Palesa also felt that in high school the children navigated this themselves without involving their parents.

> *Most black parents are, have an attitude of I'm happy to be here kind of thing so it's keep your head under the sand kind of syndrome and not rock the boat. So, you know, we've been accepted here, let's just keep quiet and not destabilise stuff.* (Zanele)
>
> *Some parents, as well, they don't want to deal with it, they talk about it… in our social gatherings… and every time you say but send the headmaster an email, address it, some black parents don't. They just don't want to confront it.* (Palesa)

> *It takes a lot of work to confront these things and I, I sometimes understand why some parents just keep quiet because it ended up being a huge thing.* (Palesa)
>
> *You learn to choose your battles, you know.* (Palesa)

Bongani and Palesa both discussed how they engaged with suspicions around potential racism by fact-gathering. Their view was that they needed to investigate by gathering more information to understand the situation before they drew a conclusion.

> *I tend to try and look past that and try to understand exactly what the issues are, speak to other parents and see what's in common. And I spoke to black parents and white parents, and they had the same situation with their boys.* (Bongani)
>
> *I'm more tolerable in a way, not that I leave it, I just take time in doing it and when I do it at least I manage to look at the facts and if something is missing, I can ask the questions to say but I don't understand this before I come to those conclusions.* (Palesa)

Parents also used their own power to try and influence others. This was overtly spoken about by Palesa who described actively engaging black parents to participate in volunteering to create a diverse volunteer list. This is an example of a black parent advocating for other black children, also observed by Matentjie (2019). Palesa felt that white parents responded quickly or included their friends and so she took an active role in involving the black parents.

> *So, when I say thank you for, all for volunteering, these are the names, I know that it's a transformed list basically.* (Palesa)

The act of using influence was also illustrated by many of the parents' involvement in the PTA or other committees at the school, as well as, by participating in this research. These behaviours suggested that parents were using their influence to advocate for their own and other children.

The behavioural responses described above are responses to experiences of racism or suspected racism. In other words, the behaviours are evoked in the face of violent acts and, to a degree, can be aligned with fight or flight responses. However, black parents also discussed social dynamics and behavioural modifications they engaged in when operating in white spaces that are not specifically in response to racism. This confirms that white spaces are not neutral but rather have unspoken rules of engagement (Boswell, 2014; Green, 2007). This intersects with

group dynamics and many of the examples provided related to engaging with white parents specifically who, in the schooling context, would be black parents' peer group.

One of the behavioural adjustments that some of the parents referred to was avoiding certain topics of discussion with white parents. Lerato expressed that conversation was very matter-of-fact and polite with white parents. She felt her jokes would be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Katlego took it further, describing engagements at school in a more formal tone of professionalism. Palesa described something similar as she responded to parents in a collegial manner. She also felt that any potentially controversial conversations were avoided with white parents but spoken openly about among black parents, even if there was disagreement. Nandi felt race was a taboo and uncomfortable topic with white parents, and therefore was avoided. Thabo and Shani had similar feelings about race being a sensitive topic and described a risk existing that one might inadvertently offend another. It seemed the parents' experience of white fragility within the school context was ever present making it difficult to engage naturally or to challenge without the risk of the other becoming defensive (DiAngelo, 2018).

> *One is always conscious of, you know, white people, we've got to be polite, the jokes are not the same.* (Lerato)
>
> *I can assure you that even today my interactions with the school are professional. (Katlego)*
>
> *Let me treat her like, you know, we are colleagues in a business or I'm a manager in a way.* (Palesa)
>
> *You know race is not openly talked about because one, it's taboo and two, it's uncomfortable.* (Nandi)
>
> *White parents, race is never part of the conversation.* (Shani)

Nandi described a feeling of self-consciousness under the white gaze which elicited different behaviours from her. She described arriving at a parent gathering dressed differently from the other mothers and this heightened her awareness of her racial difference and made her feel intensely self-conscious. This hyper-visibility is the opposite of the sense of invisibility discussed earlier but also created discomfort (Posey-Maddox, 2017). This experience resulted in her avoiding similar functions going forward. She also described needing to "be extra" in every way and to present her best self in front of white parents. This is consistent with Boswell's

(2014) findings that black South Africans in white spaces felt they needed to adjust themselves to attain respect or inclusion.

> *When I got to the meeting everybody else was dressed in what I call… the white middle-class winter uniform… and I from that minute I was so self-conscious.* (Nandi)
>
> *Trying to always be 100% so being extra punctual, being extra polite, being you know just being, you just arrange yourself so that your best, you are your best self so to speak.* (Nandi)

Shani offered a contradictory experience where she felt that white parents made a significant effort to make her feel comfortable. While she has not processed these experiences as being racist, she acknowledged differential treatment by white parents. Even though it is a positive statement, it may have the more subtle effect of negating individuality (Straker, 2004).

> *I think they really bend over backwards.* (Shani)

Three parents alluded to the dynamics being quite different in one-on-one engagements versus group settings, and Asha suggested that she intentionally avoided groups and sought out individual parents at school functions. There was a sense that the white parents changed in a group setting and it was much easier to engage with them one-on-one. This, once again, highlights the powerful role of social comparison within groups (Schmid, 2017), where the commonalities between white parents were heightened and the differences from black parents emphasised to the point of exclusion.

> *Other parents are really trying to, like white parents, to be inclusive but once their white friends come it's easy to just forget about you.* (Lerato)
>
> *I think we still have to navigate our ways cautiously when we are together as a group, you only begin to be comfortable when you are with the people that you know.* (Thabo)
>
> *Where I have to drop my child and go off those are issues that you will always be conscious of, and you need to navigate with caution.* (Thabo)
>
> *So, my preference actually is for one-on-ones because that then becomes a lot easier.* (Asha)

Other than one-on-one engagements, a couple of the parents acknowledged that they intentionally sought out groups of black parents. The pull towards one's own ingroup is

illustrated in this behaviour, which is potentially heightened by the feelings of exclusion from white groups (Schmid, 2017).

> *Even if I try and engage with parents that have white kids, they will try to be accommodating, but you can also feel that even in the air there is an aura of some level of discomfort in the sense that they may not necessarily be able to talk about the things they wanna talk about the way they would otherwise talk about because they are trying to go over, above and beyond to accommodate me, for example, so I don't do it anymore, I'll just find other black parents and we'll sit around and chat and have a braai and enjoy what we enjoy with the kids and that's that.* (Katlego)

> *It's not to say that we're not civil, we'll be civil with other parents, parents are parents.* (Katlego)

> *Moms would stick together, or they will just stop and go, you know, they'll just not stick around because, oh, that conversation's just going to be tedious.* (Asha)

These quotes suggest there are distinct sub-groups within the parenting group along racial lines and that the interracial dynamics are heightened in the group setting. As SIT posits that individuals have personal and social identities, and they shift on a continuum between these two depending on how they interpret the context (Schmid, 2017), it is possible that in one-on-one contexts, white parents feel freer to engage with black parents. However, in the presence of other white parents, white parents shift to a social identity which emphasises their differences with the black parents and inhibits their willingness to engage with them.

Racist Narratives

A latent theme observed when reviewing the research data from a critical race perspective is evidence that some black parents appeared to reproduce racist narratives. The reason for this is uncertain with a few possibilities being considered and discussed here. Some parents may have internalised racial stereotypes due to repeated exposure to racist narratives, resulting in a form of psychological alienation from one's own blackness (Fanon, 1967). However, it is important to consider that these parents occupy a precarious position as one of the few black people to successfully enter into privileged white spaces. Therefore, they may feel compelled to appropriate, comply with, or at least, project racist narratives that they perceive to be expected for their context to preserve their position (Derks et al., 2011). In some instances, parents were conscious of these and challenged their own thinking, and in others, they appeared to be unquestioned. For example, Lerato grappled with racial stereotypes when she explained

how she felt black people entered into white spaces and ruined them. She described black people seeking out white spaces for what they had to offer, and then, imposing themselves rather than conforming. Racial stereotyping around white people being structured and orderly (an idealising of whiteness), and black people being destructive and disruptive, reflected her ambivalent feelings towards the black in-group. She could recognise some difficulty in her thinking but is undecided on the issue of transformation within the school context. This may be because she feels compelled to protect her exceptionally privileged position within a privileged environment where there is only space for a few exceptions (Derks et al., 2011). Her use of the word "their" supports this as it implies that if she wants what "they" have, then she needs to do things "their" way.

> *That sometimes us as black people, when we go to environments, we find them functioning, we just come and mess them up… that is why we would rather have your child in a structured environment where we know that things will be done orderly. I'm like but you can't leave your comfortable place, where you can exercise your culture the way you want and then go to people's environment and want to impose yourself in how they do things, you know? I as a black person, I'm still having that those issues to say, if we don't like how the white people do things in their schools, we go there and we don't want to abide by their rules, we want our own rules. We want to mess up this beautiful thing of theirs, that is working, we want to come in, change it, why are we not creating our own where we'll do as we want, I don't know if you understand. I have mixed feelings about this, whole thing to say, ok, give it to make it 50% black and 50% white and let's see what happens. Or, leave it as white with a sprinkle of black and see what happens. You see.* (Lerato)

Zanele alluded to similar internalised or assimilated racial stereotypes in other parents. She described other black parents as being passive to avoid acting out the stereotypes of being noisy and disorderly. There is a sense that engaging in any disagreement would render them meeting these expectations. Therefore, their desire to move away from what is perceived as "more black" in the school environment, suppresses their ability to express themselves.

> *We've been accepted here, let's just keep quiet and not destabilise stuff.* (Zanele)

Two parents raised the idea of reverse racism and wished to avoid being racist themselves. Bongani described reverse racism as a trap one may fall into when experiencing racism. Thabo felt that if one was not cautious, one may come across as racist. It seemed these

parents had internalised the idea that a response to racism, or other unintentional comments, may render them racist in the view of white people.

> *Not to fall into the trap of reverse racism… of yourself becoming a racist.* (Bongani)
>
> *Maybe you say something without being careful that actually sounds, like, racist to someone else.* (Thabo)

The concept of reverse racism is contested because of the structural elements that support racial discrimination against people of colour which do not exist in the reverse (Green, 2007). It is argued that although all people have their biases, black people cannot be racist towards white people (Steyn & Foster, 2008). These parents reproduced a white narrative that developed as a means to delegitimise any attempts at challenging racist narratives (Steyn & Foster, 2008).

Some parents may have internalised an idealisation of whiteness which may lead to lactification observed in the comments below (Fanon, 1967; Hook, 2004). However, it is also possible that the narratives are purely reproductions of racist narratives for the benefit of the white researcher. This would allow the parents to appear balanced in their views and avoid vilifying white people. In doing this, they may be justifying their position as fitting into the school environment. Nandi described needing to be her "best self" in the presence of whites so as not to feel less than others. She also described grappling with her daughter's natural hair when the school rules changed, and she was no longer expected to conform to white ideals of neatness. She felt she had internalised these white ideals or perhaps that appearance or behaviour that is not white normative is "bad" (George, 2015), and had to consciously prevent herself from inhibiting her daughter. When discussing diversity in staff, Mandla expressed a meritocratic view which he justified by saying he just wanted the best for his child. Implicit in this, was a view that white teachers were more likely to be better, and by taking a democratic stance, the disparities that do exist are not challenged or corrected (Steyn & Foster, 2008). Zanele echoed this in her view that many black parents considered white staff and principals as key to a good school. She believed this view was extended to the students who, she believed, were dismissive of black teachers. This may speak to the psychological alienation Fanon (1967) spoke of. Mandla offered a view of integration that saw both black and white people coming together in a compromise. However, considering our history, and the existing structures at schools, it seems his view of the compromise may be based on white normativity. The assumption of white universality is likely

to sustain structures in favour of whiteness and may lead to individuals lessening their blackness to fit into white spaces (Hook, 2004). One way of doing this was through the mastery of "white" languages, which Katlego raised when speaking about how the ideal of speaking English well, makes some children who moved into independent schools feel subpar.

> *Subconsciously, you just rearrange yourself, and then afterwards, you feel like oh, but why was I doing like you know, because there's always, this feeling of wanting to be your best self so that you don't appear less, that kind of situation.* (Nandi)

> *I've had to get used to it myself. You know as a black parent you know because there are standards of neatness that we were raised to adhere to, uh which are ultimately white. So even me as her parent, as a black mom, I'm like, in my head, that hair is a little bit of a nightmare. But, then I'm like, according to who? You know, I ask myself that, like according to who? Then, I actually then allow myself to breathe and allow her to be and I think I've seen her grow in confidence cos now even when we go to the shops we're out and about she'll have fellow black women saying ooh I love your hair.* (Nandi)

> *I think when you've got skin in the game you tend now to say… let's more focus on meritocracy.* (Mandla)

> *I care more about having the top maths teacher. You know (if) he's yellow, green or whatever, but he's the best maths teacher, he's the best rowing coach, the first aid rowing coach at School B for the past few years, he's a black coach, and he's the best in the country, and School B beats everyone.* (Mandla)

> *I guess the sentiment still remains amongst um the parent body that if the school has white teachers and a headmaster and stuff then it still must be a good school.* (Zanele)

> *These kids that have been raised in these private schools and most of them don't even speak their African languages and stuff, when they come across a black teacher who pronounces a word like this, it's seen as hilarious, you know. I mean you've got a professor in maths who's (a) professor… and, well not that he mispronounced it's just his accent… and these kids would laugh instead of getting the grain of knowledge that you're supposed to be getting, because they've been at these schools for the longest time, and their accents are you know along the same wavelength as everybody else's… They don't take the black class teachers as serious as they would the white teachers and maybe it comes from home as well; you know this thing of putting a halo around white teachers rather than black teachers.* (Zanele)

> *The black kid will feel like they're maybe not at the right level because English, their English is weak, is maybe not at the right level or because the accent is not right.* (Katlego)

> *Unwritten that we we're all trying to be, to come to this middle, uh come to the middle, we're going to co-exist, but then, if you are lying there and you're saying no you must accept me and take me as I am, then definitely, you will then experience things differently, uh because I think also what you're saying is maybe you are expecting the others to cross the middle and come to you.* (Mandla)

Possibly an extension of the idealisation of whiteness are views that speak to an internalisation of the inadequacy of black people. Nandi and Shani expressed a view that it was difficult to get the right calibre of black teachers due to the unequal history in South Africa. While the literature supports that the quality of teacher training remains racially unequal to a degree (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013), it is difficult to believe that such a low rate of transformation in staff is solely due to this. It is plausible that the low level of transformation is due to white narratives which resist transformation.

> *Black professional teachers are very hard to come by, so it's very difficult to actually secure um to secure them, so which was I think a pretty now that I've been in the school for a few years, and I've also been quite involved with the DEI process there is, uh there is uh weight to that uh to that argument.* (Nandi)

> *Maybe it's harder… takes a while to get an experienced teacher given the schooling was not equal before... I mean we don't have; in the senior school, we don't have anybody who's had less than say 20 years of experience.* (Shani)

> *I think transformation a little bit slower in private institutions simply because the catchment areas have predominantly been um been white and the influx of black families into those areas is not as um escalated as expected.* (Nandi)

Asha holds the internalised narrative that racism is individual rather than systemic, which prevents the more insidious, and self-perpetuating, systemic racism from being acknowledged and dealt with (Steyn & Foster, 2008). Almost all the parents engaged in the discussion of racism on an individual level suggesting this may be a common experience among the parents.

> *I guess what I'm saying is that it probably is an individual, it's more to do with the individuals and less to do with the community.* (Asha)

This section described the research participants' racialised experiences at their children's schools. It explored psychological defences and behavioural responses to their experiences of race(ism). It was observed that parents' engagement with other parents was most frequently the focus of their experience with certain unspoken rules of engagement. Some of the reproduced racist narratives that were observed in the data were also discussed. Having explored the parents' experiences, this chapter moves to discuss a theme that emerged around their perceptions of their children's experiences.

Theme 2: "She hasn't experienced it directly herself." - Perceptions of their own Children's Experiences

The second theme that emerged from the data was parents' perceptions of their children's racialised experiences at school. This section describes these perceptions but also explores latent themes that emerged around black identity and intergenerational dynamics. Most parents felt their child was minimally impacted by racism and they spontaneously offered reasons why their child might be different.

Children's Experiences from the Parents' Perspective

Most of the parents stated that their children did not experience racism at school or at least they had never reported such an experience to their parents. Katlego and Shani mentioned that their daughters shared they had heard from others about discrimination, but they assured their parents that they had not experienced this themselves.

> *Nor has my child come to me and complained about anyone being racist towards him.* (Lerato)
>
> *My children, they don't seem to have experienced any sort of racism, either of them, you know, at their respective schools.* (Bongani)
>
> *I certainly haven't had any feedback from my daughter, for sure, in her personal capacity.* (Katlego)
>
> *Her view was no, I've never experienced this. I see what these guys are talking about, I've seen other people complaining about this thing, I've certainly never experienced it at school. I'm happy at school...* (Katlego)
>
> *She hasn't experienced it herself directly, so much to say to me, Mom, I experienced this at school. I can, as a parent, maybe, I can say ooh that, there's some racist undertones.* (Nandi)
>
> *No, no, no, no.* (Mandla)
>
> *No, no, he hasn't.* (Thabo)
>
> *No nothing, nothing, as I said, nothing overt.* (Shani)
>
> *So, my daughter hasn't mentioned, I mean when she first joined, she, the group that she had tried to make friends with would talk about undertones that my daughter never saw.* (Shani)

Palesa, Asha and Zanele, expressed a different perspective on their children's experiences at independent schools. Palesa described how her son was impacted by a primary school teacher who used to call only black children stupid. Although it was never directed at her son, he picked up on this teacher's discriminatory attitude and it caused such anxiety that he was referred for counselling. It was at counselling that the source of this issue was discovered. In high school, he has mentioned other subtle experiences, such as teachers knowing the names of the white children and not the black children, which is consistent with other South African research (Machaisa & Lebeloane, 2017). Also, teachers would look directly at the black boy when a group was being reprimanded for being noisy. This description suggests black children experience harsher punishment (Hope et al., 2015). She described that now that he is older, he tends to deal with these experiences on a peer level directly himself but felt it could be there with the teachers.

> *When my son was in Grade 5 the teacher would call some boys stupid, so boys knew, you know which boys he liked and which ones he didn't… I could see that something is not right. Then there's a bit of wetting of the bed in Grade 5, you've never done that. So, then I took him to a counsellor, that's when we actually realised, no, he started talking about it. So, his stance was that he's in the middle, most of these things are not happening to him but he's very angry at the teacher for doing certain things. Why is there that favouritism, why is it, why is it just so glaring? And the racism is just there, and he would say but he does that to all the black boys, you can say stupid. I'm like, but he's not supposed to say anyone is stupid.* (Palesa)
>
> *I think with other boys they are quick to deal with it and I think with most boys they have these; he says they have these talks… but from the teachers yes, he has.* (Palesa)
>
> *Or she will say when she says you guys are making noise, she'll look directly at him and not at the other ones, you know.* (Palesa)
>
> *If a teacher remembers everyone else's name but not yours.* (Palesa)

Asha described her son as having experienced racism primarily on a peer level and in sporting selections. She felt that there were no specific incidents that he could give directly but rather subtle exclusions.

> *Team allocation is viewed very differently, so, I think that's one thing that I'd say has affected him directly.* (Asha)
>
> *Well, I mean you can't impose, or you can't force people to be friends with you if they don't want to be… but the reality is there, is that subtle, what can I say, exclusion.* (Asha)

> *I don't think there's been any direct incident where he can say, ah, this was done to me, or this was my experience.* (Asha)
>
> *You don't do Zulu? You know you're actually very white.* (Asha)

Zanele's daughter has had her name forgotten or mispronounced, and she had told her daughter not to respond if she was not addressed correctly. She also felt her daughter was overlooked in sporting opportunities which, when challenged, had been overturned, thus raising her suspicion about the original decision. For her, there is a sense of favouritism among white people at the school.

> *To be overlooked like that, with no justification or explanation.* (Zanele)
>
> *There's a bit of favouritism and broedeskap.* (Zanele)

Lerato expressed that her son has not experienced any racism but did comment on his form class being primarily black and wondered how the children were being divided into classes.

> *I was surprised when my son told me that his class is predominantly black, I was like, I wonder what potentially they are thinking, but I never asked anyone about it. I wonder what criteria they use to group kids in different classes.* (Lerato)

These descriptions of discrimination appear to be primarily due to assumptions of black homogeneity concerning sporting preferences and language (Machaisa & Lebeloane, 2017; Straker, 2004).

It is possible that the parents or their children had developed a degree of tolerance to microaggressions (Boswell, 2014), or that incidents were downplayed to try and minimise their impact. This was evident with some parents spontaneously reflecting on how things were different for their child in comparison to the child's siblings, for the parents themselves or even between different schools. Asha described a higher degree of acceptance of subtle racism by her son, which she ascribes to his nature. Lerato described an incident with her older stepson and said there were few boys of colour when he was at school and despite having friends, she wondered about him not maintaining any white friends after school. She also described her stepdaughter's reflection on her high school where she could now see that subtle distinctions had been made.

> *If I compare the two children, he's more accepting of the fact that subtle racism is there and it's almost, it's okay, you know, which is fact. (Asha)*
>
> *When Ben started school. There would be two boys in a class, boys of colour, everyone else white… He had his white friends but as soon as he got to university, those white friends, they no longer friends.* (Lerato)
>
> *Looking back, she says… the school… they bubbled her and this girl as being the different type of black. And like almost making them feel special and better; they were the posh ones.* (Lerato)

Katlego mentioned going to a Model-C school where he would regularly report racist incidents. He felt it was much more explicit then and by implication, easier to report.

> *I used to have to report it (racism) a lot when I was at school myself. But in my day, it was a lot more explicit, and people didn't really care too much about hiding it or pretending.* (Katlego)

Palesa commented on attending a black school and suggested that she did not have the racist schooling experiences that parents who went to Model-C or private schools had. She felt this makes her more tolerant. This supports the idea that a parent's agency when dealing with racial discrimination at school is strongly influenced by their race-history trauma (Matentjie, 2019).

> *I went to a… black school, the only time I mixed was at varsity. So, but my baggage wasn't that much compared to other parents that went to former Model C schools or private schools as well. So, I find that I'm more tolerable to situations than them, you know, they are quick… to just tackle it, this is racism, I know it's racism.* (Palesa)
>
> *And there were a lot of white kids, but I just did what I had to do, there was no, I mean varsity is different to school, varsity is just about what you're doing academics, outside of that you socialise differently.* (Palesa)

Asha and Shani compared their children's schools. Asha felt her daughter's school (School E) was much more engaged about race and racism than her son's school (School F). One is left wondering if her son's tolerance (discussed above) was a defence against his environment, rather than part of his nature. Shani felt her son's school (School B) was more tolerant than her daughter's school (School E). These kinds of reflections demonstrated that parents were actively aware of the schools' actions.

> *The difference I see between my son's school and my daughter's school is like night and day, especially when it comes to dealing with race relations or race matters or diversity.* (Asha)

Several parents raised the issue of false accusations of racism, which perhaps highlights an internal dilemma they experience around challenging subtle racism or discrimination within the school. Some parents may fear being the one to falsely accuse another of racism. They may choose to ignore certain incidents to avoid having to unnecessarily endure the anticipated defensive or aggressive responses borne of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018). Black parents may also draw closer to perceptions of whiteness when they perceive the black other to be overly emotional or irrational. These dynamics prevent dialogue, progress, and reparations. Bongani shared a story about his son defending against punishment by saying the teacher was racist, which Bongani investigated himself and discounted. Nandi described an incident in her daughter's school where a group of black children were reprimanded by a white teacher who was then accused of being racist. After a thorough investigation, it was found that the teacher had acted appropriately. Mandla felt some parents occupied rigid political stances, which impacted their children, and then the parents complained about racism. Palesa, Nandi, Shani and Asha mentioned that at times parents may read a situation incorrectly, because of their own past racialised experiences.

> *Their fallback position, to try and defend themselves is, oh, no, just the teacher doesn't like me or the teacher's being racist.* (Bongani)

> *It was taken seriously, obviously, the matter was investigated thoroughly, the children were brought in to speak to the social worker and the school psychologists, and the parents were also brought in and then ultimately, in the end it was concluded that it wasn't an issue of race. They happened to be black, the staff member happened to be white, but they were actually contravening the protocol.* (Nandi)

> *You occupy this section of the spectrum, your child actually takes a knock on their self-confidence, self-worth, and everything, you know, because of that and then you scream racism. I think, at times, it's not even racism, it's the inability to want to move to the middle or ja, want to, willing, or maybe not even able to, not even aware that I need to move to the middle.* (Mandla)

> *I used to fight people's battles and then you realise that some are not exactly battles for you to fight, and some people are just scarred, you know. You can't really help, because it's coming from a scarred place, you know, from experience, a bad experience.* (Palesa)

> *I think that they tend to go overboard, and you know what, you can't.* (Shani)

> *When, you know, black South African parents have expressed themselves and you can hear the emotion behind the hurt… Whereas, if somebody doesn't respond to an email from me for 2 days, I'm gonna send another email and say, hey, why haven't you? I'm not gonna be emotional about it, I'm gonna be like, why haven't you responded to me? I pay my money, you need to, you owe me a service.* (Nandi)

> *Part of the corridor talk was, oh no, the bullying incidences, you know, she was targeted because she was black… I didn't buy that story or that… reason for why she took her life, but so I guess, what am I trying to say here, sometimes incidences happen and people either read into it incorrectly because it's an easy answer to give, you know.* (Asha)

Parents had different perceptions of their children's experiences; however, it was difficult for parents to articulate their children's experiences because they were subtle. This subtlety also made it possible to forget, ignore, or downplay experiences as not so bad, or not to worry about engaging with them for fear of falsely accusing someone. Parents may assume a range of alternative identities or positions in the face of aversive racism to successfully navigate the micro-level acts of racism in school spaces (Boswell, 2014).

Black Identity

A notable subtheme that emerged from the parents' narratives around their children's experiences was that of their children's black identity within the white space of their children's school. More than half of the parents made statements that either directly or indirectly differentiated their children from other black students at school. It is possible that they, or their children, had internalised a narrative around being a "different kind of black person" where their children's nature or studiousness immunised them from racial discrimination or conflict. They appeared to hold the position of an ideologically accommodating other (Steyn & Foster, 2008). For example, Zanele described her daughter as "the good little black girl, different from the noisy one". She felt her daughter was studious and was unlikely to be the target of discrimination. Similarly, Katlego described his daughter as a "super performer" and "a great kid" and indirectly suggested that these were reasons she was unlikely to be impacted by racism. As mentioned, Palesa stated that her son was not the one being impacted by his teacher's racism. Nandi wondered about family factors or the personality of the child impacting their experience of racism, which shifted the responsibility of the harm onto the victim and their lack of resilience. In talking about parents, she also described how some "elite" black families were accepted, once again pointing to a narrative of the "good" or "acceptable" black. Shani described her daughter

settling in well when her white peers were able to look past her blackness and see her for her capabilities.

> *She's very studious, so, I don't foresee her getting into any crossfires, but she has experienced some comments being thrown in the classroom to other girls, or whatever, and she's like, but that just does not sound right.* (Zanele)

> *So, she's the good little black girl, different from the noisy one, you know, you'd get those, and, I mean, she would say it's those girls in the classroom who play music and dance on the tables and chairs*. (Zanele)

> *So, although she will have those kind of examples, she's a super performer herself, so she won't. When they are making those kind of examples, she is always going to be in the top 10, she's going to be competing in the top 3, so she may not necessarily identify with, I'm not sure that there's any academic discrepancy between us and them but, ja, if you're going to complain maybe you should study harder, type thing, but that's just, that's just her.* (Katlego)

> *He's in the middle, most of these things are not happening to him, but he's very angry at the teacher for doing certain things.* (Palesa)

> *I guess it depends on, I don't know, I think maybe family factors or the personality of the child, as well.* (Nandi)

> *Few black parents, who've been part of the school for quite a long time, but again they are then considered to be part of the elite group.* (Nandi)

> *Once she found her place and they saw what she was capable of, there was no longer a question of them trying to fit you into a little box, so that was there.* (Shani)

Asha raised a similar point from a different perspective when she spoke about how her son's black peers accused him of trying to separate himself as superior or position them as inferior. It is possible that among the black students, there is a desire to resist the polarisation into "good" and "bad" black, however, this required complete homogeneity within the group. This negated the students' individuality, and in the case of Asha's son, where he was left without an ingroup, because he was not accepted as white or black.

> *And on the black side, it's just the other extreme, are you trying to show that we're not good enough?* (Asha – on comments from her son's black peers)

Perhaps this idea of unifying as a group can also be used to understand the shifting of friendship groups in high school. These racial tensions may converge with the children's psychosocial stage of development and social identity to impact children's social dynamics as

described by four of the parents. Lerato, Asha and Zanele described their children's friendships shifting in high school away from white friends and towards black friends. They attributed this to their children identifying with people who were more like them, although Asha felt her son was subtly pushed out of old "white" friendship groups. It may be suggested that commonalities, such as language, influenced the grouping of children; however, Thabo shared that his son was raised speaking English and learned the vernacular through socialising with children of the same race at primary school. This suggests that the dynamic is far more complex than just that of identifying with those with common interests and experiences. The complexity of social dynamics is illustrated by Shani and Asha who described their children struggling to fit in with the black circles. Shani said her daughter gravitated towards black children under the assumption that they would be like her, but that did not work out, and now had primarily white friends. Asha's son had a strong preference for "white" sports and as mentioned, was stuck between groups and his mother reported him as having two Asian friends.

> *Now, he's gravitating towards blacks. He's now becoming self-aware. He's 16, so he's becoming self-aware that there's other people like me here.* (Lerato)
>
> *Especially in high school, when they are all going through that actual identity crisis trying to understand who they are… You can see his circles are also changing and I don't (think) they're changing because he's chosen, or he wants them to change, but it's because people are now moving on, and he's the one who's been shed off… So, he's getting more black friends, which I don't have a problem with, I actually think it's great.* (Asha)
>
> *She'd be the third black, the only third black child in the group. This was for the longest time in middle school. High school, she only started changing late this year, hanging around with more black girls and not because of any racial tensions she didn't tell me of, but I don't know, maybe she's realising her identity now… I guess she bloomed quite late if you call it blooming, where she's now tryna identify with the same girls who've got the same interests and the same hair problem you know… My son, he's only going to high school next year, but his, call it his eye-opening, happened 2 or 3 years ago.* (Zanele)
>
> *So, he started picking our language up in his primary school, where he began to interact with a lot of children of colour that were coming from the township that were not very comfortable in speaking English and they are using their own language. That's when he started picking our language, he actually picked it from school more than from the house.* (Thabo)
>
> *Of course (she) gravitated towards the black girls first because that's, we come from Nairobi, it's predominantly black and so you look for people who are similar to you and that didn't work… Then she found the very friendly girls who, once they got past the barrier, she's actually normal, she wouldn't get upset by small little things. I don't think*

> *that they insult her because she doesn't understand that's an insult… So, she's made very good friends and like, gosh, you do not have any black friends, you know.* (Shani)
>
> *So, he's then caught up in almost this no man's land where the black boys will not hang out with him because he's not South African. The white boys won't hang out with him because he's black, so right now he's got a Chinese friend who, also you know, the two Chinese boys, so therefore, his friend basis has kinda evolved.* (Asha)
>
> *Swimming is not deemed to be something that black South Africans do, and he swims very well, he actually swims at provincial level. So, he's been attacked by the black boys because they're like, oh, that's not something we do, hey, we don't swim, swimming is a white sport.* (Asha)

Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development involves conflict between identity and role confusion (Erikson, 1968). During adolescence, children test and integrate different roles to form their identity, and if they are not successful, they remain confused about themselves (Erikson, 1968). As discussed, social categorisation in South Africa has played a significant role in our past and present. It is plausible that because of this, many children would identify their allocated racial ingroup and perhaps how meaningful this group identity was. Social identification might escalate during the period of psychosocial development where establishing an identity is their core task. Children may then actively seek common interests with their perceived ingroup and emphasise the differences with other groups through social comparisons (Tajfel, 1974). The social comparisons are likely to be exacerbated by the racial tensions described above. For example, to defend against the white-manufactured subgroups of "good" black or "bad" black, children may expect high levels of homogeneity within their ingroup, thus emphasising social identity above individual subjectivity. Other children may unconsciously separate themselves from black children in response to the (possibly black and white) expectations of black homogeneity (Hope et al., 2015). This may leave some children feeling extremely excluded from a black ingroup but find it difficult to overcome barriers to entry into white groups.

Intergenerational Dynamics

The last subtheme that emerged as parents reflected on their children's experiences related to how parents engaged with their children around matters of race and discrimination. Research has shown that parents' racial socialisation can impact children's ability to cope with discrimination (Hope et al., 2015). Furthermore, parents' perceptions of their own children's

experiences were most likely impacted by if and how the families engaged in discussions about race(ism) at home. A couple of parents expressed that at the very least there was some discussion about racism at home when there was something in the media. Bongani was the only parent who mentioned discussing how to deal with racism. Nandi spoke as though there was a degree of consciousness in her home. In most other homes, it was not made clear if there was any open discussion and parents appeared to operate under the assumption that their child would raise it with them if there was a problem.

> *We speak about racism and about, you know, dealing with it.* (Bongani)
>
> *The kind of engagement we have is largely driven by what they read in the media, see on social media, you know, so the whole Black Lives Matter last year was a big thing. And we spoke all about it, you know, and basically, it's really just to understand from them how they understand racism and to, you know, so we have the discussion about what do you understand about it and what do you think is bad about it? What do you do if you experience it?... We discuss about the about history and how things have evolved about apartheid in South Africa and what that did to the country, to us as a people*. (Bongani)
>
> *The discussion was quite simple, it was around what are her feelings, has she experienced any of what these guys are talking about, etcetera to get a sense of A), as a parent are we missing something, and B), is she potentially being bullied. I mean, remember my analogy of racism is a form of bullying.* (Katlego)
>
> *I have been very involved with, you know, social justice and standing up for black people. Like, they like to tease me, like, "Mom, you're always saying black power."* (Nandi)
>
> *You know, my kids, they never raised it, but the school runs some programmes… But at the dinner table it never came up, remember my kids have never experienced (it).* (Shani)
>
> *He doesn't talk about it but, and I guess being a boy he won't either. He's I'm sure he's figured it out, I'm sure he has, but he just won't talk about it, and I probably have to respect that.* (Asha)
>
> *I mean, we do speak.* (Zanele)

It appeared that parents' perceptions were generally gleaned from what they observed, such as shifts in their children's social groups, and what their children spontaneously brought to them. Their perceptions were likely to be influenced by many psychological and social processes that parents engaged in to make sense of, and defend against, the anxiety-provoking thought that their children may be discriminated against at school. While parents recognised the subtlety of their children's experiences, at times they appeared to downplay them by differentiating their children, making comparisons to worse situations, or referencing false accusations.

Theme 3: "It's when they communicate and how they communicate." Parents' Perceptions of Race(ism) in the Institution

This research has focussed on racism within the institutional setting of independent schools. It follows, then, that the largest theme relates to the parents' perceptions of race(ism) and its various subthemes within these institutions. Relevant to parents' perceptions was the degree of their involvement at school. Although parent involvement in school has certainly been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, many parents described a substantial shift in their involvement as their child moved into high school. Some insights were offered by the parents on their willingness to be involved at school, and their perceptions of other black parents' willingness to get involved. The parents' perception of the school's attitude towards race and transformation, as well as the significance of communication from the school around these matters, emerged. For the parents, the presence, or lack of communication, appeared to be an indicator of the school's engagement with race-related matters. Parents offered a range of views on the diversity of staff and pupils in their schools with some applauding shifts and others acknowledging stagnation. The subtlety of racial tension was grappled with but was accompanied by expressions that racism was worse elsewhere. Policies and procedures for reporting grievances were unpacked. At times there was a sense that these lacked meaning, were not clearly communicated, or procedures were not appropriately managed. Parents offered some thought-provoking views on the management of race-related matters.

Parent Involvement at School

Parents offered some relevant context to their involvement at school. Some mentioned that since the Covid-19 pandemic, there had been fewer interactions with the school. Some parents also suggested that their interactions also lessened in high school due to their children's increased independence. They tended to rely on their children's earlier years when talking about school experiences.

> *I wouldn't attribute it to race, because I don't see what's happening, because we are hardly at school now with Covid.* (Lerato)

> *If there is something at School B, at this stage, it's still hard to pinpoint. I think that's my point, and probably maybe because they have really smoothened those issues so much, or it's because of the interaction that was so limited by Covid.* (Thabo)

> *The parents, with Covid, we didn't meet much and at high school, you don't really meet as parents. There are very few opportunities to meet as parents in high school.* (Shani)
>
> *I'm not on the PTA and we've not met with other parents.* (Shani – when asked about her son's school)

In the interviews, the parents shared their degree of involvement at their children's schools. Of the ten participants, three sat on the transformation committee, four were members of the PTA, one parent was currently on the board, two parents offered extensive volunteering (e.g., class mom) and four described being involved in activities directly related to their children (e.g., helping with sports). None of the parents stated that they were not involved at all.

> *I would participate in everything they invite, when need help, I will be there to participate. … I got an invitation from Mr Smith to be in the diversity committee.* (Lerato)
>
> *I participate when I can, the school, the parents' meetings with the schools, I meet with the teachers, but I'm not directly involved in any of the governance committees.* (Bongani)
>
> *I've been involved in the transformation committee for the school and I'm also a board member of the school.* (Katlego)
>
> *Whenever I'm a class mom… After my experience being on the transformation committee and the issues that we dealt with and being on the PA.* (Palesa)
>
> *Anything and everything that I can give my time to, so, the usual volunteer activities that moms get to do, like for the fundraisers and all of that. I'm also quite an involved parent in terms of advocating for my children… or tried to hold the school accountable to, you know, equality.* (Nandi)
>
> *Not the traditional sense where you find that maybe there's parents' committees and this, no, I am not in their like governing body.…We even offer our time to go volunteer for cleaning or doing things, so on that front, yes, I, we are active.* (Mandla)
>
> *Not any big activities, we have been offered opportunities from my son's rowing but every time... I think the other problem is that I am a schoolteacher as well, so sometimes when I want to help and then you find that I've got some commitments at work.* (Thabo)
>
> *The rowing department is the one that has consistently offered us opportunities if we'd like to come and help. Other than that, there is no other department that I can think of that have, that has invited us to come and help. I would be willing to help if they would ask me and that suits my programme.* (Thabo)
>
> *I joined the PTA earlier this year…. We live in [suburb] and being on the PTA at School B might be a trek, I think once my daughter is finishing Grade 12 next year, we are still in School B, I shall apply to join the PTA or at least join executive for the PTA.* (Shani)

> *No, when he was in prep school, yes, but in high school, no, so I'm just a parent.… So, there's a lot of parental involvement required at that level and so I happily did that, but I think in high school now there's, the boys kind of need to run with it.* (Asha)

> *I tend to have a very, a lot going on, from a work point of view, so I don't have the flexibility that perhaps some have to be a lot more involved in the PTA and those kinds of things.* (Asha)

> *I was part of the PTA for five years and I was also the vice chairperson of the PTA for my last two terms.* (Zanele)

It is clear that this group of participants, comprised mainly of parents highly motivated to participate at their children's schools. Asha and Thabo introduced the idea that there were barriers that limited their ability to be more involved, such as work commitments and resources (in Thabo's example, not owning a tow bar). There is a perception that black parents' limited engagement at their child's school is a sign of disinterest (Matentjie, 2019). Four of the participants shared their perceptions about why other black parents were less involved at school and they highlighted several factors as to the reasons. Palesa held the view that white mothers tended to include their white counterparts by either recruiting them directly or using strategies that inherently favoured white mothers. For example, sending a WhatsApp asking for first volunteers favours parents who are not working which, in her experience, are more often white mothers. Palesa and Zanele shared similar feelings that black families were more likely to be dual-income homes who felt they were paying the school a lot of money and could not offer more of their time. They also offered that perhaps, when dealing with all their responsibilities, parents did not always realise how important it was for their children to see them being involved. Nandi also raised a point that, in her view, black families had fewer support structures in the form of grandparents (who live nearby and can drive) or au pairs, while trying to juggle children and work, which made it impossible to give the extra time needed for volunteering. Finally, Nandi and Asha expressed a view that parents could feel uncomfortable or judged when they were the only black parent, or in the minority, and tended rather to "drop and go" to avoid this discomfort.

> *You know sometimes you would wonder why are only white people volunteering for these things and I got to realise it's because they just push their friends.… I would mix it up basically… because a lot of black moms, by the way, are working moms, so they don't respond to these SMSs as quickly.… If they don't volunteer, I would phone, because these*

boys take pride in seeing their moms here… so I would negotiate those things with them. (Palesa)

They spend ten hours doing work, you know.… Most can't drop off their kids at school, they go to work, and they go back home. They become mothers and then some have to do work afterwards when the kids are sleeping, you know, so it's a lot of work, … so until you explain why, sometimes, it's good just to do it for their, for our boys. (Palesa)

We don't get that much participation from the black parents, not at all. As long as they come and drop their child off at school, and pick them up later, and don't be sending us too many functions that we need to come to.… We pay your fees, now you're asking for too much. (Zanele)

Most of black women are not housewives. … It's always been a running joke that most white women are actually housewives. That's why they've got time for this, but obviously, times have changed, most white women have gone back to work.… But, you know, history dictates that most of them have been housewives, and that's why they can come to the school and our tea.… We've always had to have a two-income household because that also goes back to the income disparities between a black and a white person. (Zanele)

Black parents don't often avail themselves to volunteer as much because I think… It is quite disorienting to be the only person of colour in a group and you're trying to work on something, and people know each other, they know the system. (Nandi)

What I have discovered, being in a private school as an immigrant family, but it's also true for other local black families, is the fact that we don't have enough of a supportive structure within the system to cater for the time demands that volunteering within a private school entail… We don't have the luxury of an au pair, we don't have the luxury of grandparents who live nearby, or… can drive.… It's the time, the support structure, and then also the reluctance to always stick out, so it's quite a few factors. (Nandi)

Black parents are less open to participating in a lot of social or school activities, because one, they're the minority, and two, there's already judgment being passed just because, you know, so you'll find that, and even amongst the blacks, there are also cliques.… Honestly, I'm just here for my kid to get an education and he's fitting in and it's working for him, so they don't then get involved in school life as actively as they should. (Asha)

Moms would stick together, or they will just stop and go. They'll just not stick around because oh, that conversation's just going to be tedious. (Asha)

There was certainly a range of individual factors that influenced parents' willingness to be involved at school, and this discussion is not likely to be exhaustive. However, it is evident that there are structural factors that may exclude black parents from being able or willing to participate (Marchand et al., 2019). It is also clear that feelings of discomfort may discourage parents from participating, as they wish to avoid the experiences of hypervisibility (Posey-Maddox, 2017), feeling unwelcome, or being ignored (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). Structural,

contextual, and cultural factors, therefore, contribute to parents' degree of involvement (Marchand et al., 2019). These are influenced by the school's culture which includes attitudes towards race and transformation.

Parents' Perceptions of their School's Attitude and Communication around Race(ism)

Parents shared their perceptions of their children's schools' attitudes towards race(ism) and transformation. The schools' attitudes, or thoughts and feelings, appeared to be surmised through the parents' observations of the school's actions and communications. General communications from the school appeared to be an important guide for parents on how the school was managing, as well as if the parents' communications around issues were heard and responded to.

Only one parent from School A participated in the research, namely Katlego. He felt the school was on the right track because he was aware of training programmes that were being implemented at the school to enhance cultural understanding and challenge unconscious bias at the staff level. He appeared to manage his own expectations in two ways, by stating that it would take time for progress to be visible, and by stating that their school was ahead of others in this process.

> *I do think that in the current trajectory, the school certainly has an opportunity, and they are trying to a degree to try and deal with a lot of those subconscious biases and implement, do training regimes, and cultural understandings of people from different backgrounds.… I certainly think it's in the right path but I, to be fair to you, this sort of thing is not the sort of thing that gets done overnight. You're not going to see change tomorrow. You can't change people, it's not very easy to change people overnight. You can certainly put some views across, and make sure that people are a little bit more conscious, and it's a process. It will take easily, in the, at least in my view, anything between 5 to 10 years to get to where it really should have been already.… As much as School A has got its own issues, they are certainly working on them, and they are a lot further in the journey than most other schools, at least in my opinion.* (Katlego)

Five of the parents had children at School B: Lerato, Bongani, Mandla, Thabo and Shani. All five parents felt that the school was proactive in its engagement in race-related matters. Lerato felt that the management is intentional in conscientising the school. Similarly, Bongani felt they were proactive and took issues of racism, inside and outside, of the school seriously. Furthermore, he experienced the school as open and communicative of the school's stance, and

of difficulties they encountered. Mandla supported the view that the school was aware, and communicated, and believed that the school held anti-racism and transformation as core values. Thabo had been impressed by the level of conscientisation in the school's communication. Shani felt the school was representative of South Africa and reported not feeling any tensions or undertones at her son's school. It appears that for this group of parents, the openness and communication from the school were central to their perception that the school was handling race-related matters proactively.

> *I see a lot of effort to be inclusive. Mr Smith is doing a great job in driving diversity…. I must be honest, like I say, I see the school putting in a lot of focus on dealing with issues of racism and really, really making each child to feel included and belonging.* (Lerato)

> *School B's is very, very proactive, you know, around issues around race, racial discrimination or racism, transformation.… I've admired how they, as a school, are very proactive and very direct in how they understand that the impact of race, you know, the goings on of racism outside of the school, and how it impacts inside the school.* (Bongani)

> *They (School B) are very, I find them, much more open. I think they communicate a lot about the non-tolerance of racial discrimination. They communicate when they have challenges regarding if there's been a racial incident at the school. They communicate it, they communicate what they have done about it.… With School C, I've not actually heard of any communication of the sort, maybe because they don't have it or don't experience it, or they (are) just not comfortable addressing it, or not comfortable communicating about it.* (Bongani)

> *This is what this school stands for, these are their core values, these are the principles that we try to live by, so if ever we have these issues, we will be guided by these core values and by these principles. So, my feeling is that it's dealt with, because of being aware and deliberate about it, so, it's at the forefront.* (Mandla)

> *I think the executive headmaster put down a detailed newsletter about their stance on racism and how they are looking at it, which was impressive to me. … I would like to think they are very conscious of racial issues, and they are making a concerted effort to tackle them (in) the right direction.* (Thabo)

> *I chose School B, and I chose it because, … it's more representative of South Africa, so it's very homogeneous.* (Shani)

> *They give each boy, I felt, equal treatment, no one is given favour, more favourable treatment because of their colour. I didn't feel that at all.… I haven't felt any undertones or any tension at School B.* (Shani)

Two parents referred to their perception of School C's attitude towards race and transformation. Bongani's daughter was in Grade 8 and Palesa's son attended School C for

primary school. Bongani had found it very difficult to gauge the schools' position on matters of race and transformation because he said there had been no communication around this. The lack of communication had left him wondering if there was nothing to be concerned about, or if there were concerns that were not being dealt with. Palesa was intimately involved in the school, acting on the transformation committee and PTA, and in her experience, School C did not communicate about race. She felt they lacked understanding around issues of race, and responded inappropriately, and reactively, to situations. For example, when she challenged the school about racist treatment from her son's teacher, the school's response was to offer to move her child to a different class rather than addressing the problem with the teacher. She also felt they made excuses around transformation by stating they could not find black teachers who fitted the school's culture and were not willing to risk losing students. The implication was that black teachers would be wholly evaluated by their race and that the school culture did not tolerate black teachers who had not sufficiently lessened their blackness to be aligned with white normativity (Hook, 2004).

> *I've never heard them speak about it in any of the communications they send to us as parents, and neither have I experienced it at the school or from my daughter, who's there. I'm not really sure what to think about it.* (Bongani)
>
> *Somehow, the issues that we got at School C, I got to realise that they don't get it.* (Palesa)
>
> *It was a question of, do you want us to change, remove him from that class? I'm like no, just to be fixed because I'm not only fighting for one boy you know.… The following year another parent complained about the same thing.* (Palesa)
>
> *Excuses to say we can't find good teachers; we can't find black teachers that match our culture.… Even if they are good at, in maths, they don't meet our culture, or they are not eloquent in English, they are going to lose some of the boys you know.* (Palesa)
>
> *When it comes to issues around us, I remember at School C, then, it's not something that would be talked about.… I think the difference basically, in summary, it's when they communicate and how they communicated.* (Palesa)

Nandi was the only parent representing School D. School D was also the only co-educational school represented in the data. Nandi reflected that since they entered the school in 2016 there had been visible efforts by the school to engage on matters of race and transformation. She described committees at each level (management, parents, students), parent

dialogues and pupil engagement with a memorandum of understanding. She was also aware the school had been looking at the curriculum critically to remove racist elements. In her view, the school could introspect. She felt this was demonstrated in their response to the BLM movement and also in personal feedback she received when taking up a matter. She acknowledged that the school had an issue with transforming its staff body, but felt the school was conscious of it and was trying to overcome barriers in this regard. It seemed to Nandi, that the school's willingness to engage and communicate, despite ongoing difficulties, signalled that they were not operating from a defensive position that served to maintain the status quo (DiAngelo, 2018). Her perception was that the school was trying their best to engage.

> *They would set up a discussion and parents were invited to come and engage around the topic on hand and then ask the school management or the board's representative any concerns that they have… so they were, they haven't been shy about engaging around those issues.* (Nandi)
>
> *So, they are making an effort and it's quite visible.… They are trying to proactively work within that sort of challenges to ensure that there is representation and that there is transformation, in that it's not enough to say, we can't find the right black talent, so we're just gonna settle for the easily because the white talent is abundant*. (Nandi)
>
> *They are relooking at the curriculum, they are looking at ways of equipping the teachers to engage around difficult, or possibly, controversial topics, within the curriculum. The pupils also now have an active DEI committee that they run so that they are free to voice issues of discrimination.* (Nandi)
>
> *I gave that feedback to the school, and I gave it to our church as well, and they actually said, oh, actually I can see how a child can perceive that, you know, and they started making an effort.* (Nandi)

Shani and Zanele were parents of daughters at School E. Shani felt that race and transformation were a focus at her daughter's school with an element of hypersensitivity that appeared to leave her unsettled. She acknowledged the school's efforts at the junior school level to work on integrating the girls. Zanele had a more negative perception of the school's engagement stating that the school was reactive and tried to manage race-related matters in isolation. In her roles as parent or vice-chairperson of the PTA, she was not engaged in issues that emerged, but rather heard them via the school grapevine. These parents' experiences suggested that School E had matters of race at the forefront, but was approaching them from a defensive position while trying to maintain a positive school image as accommodating

transformation (George, 2015; Steyn, 2005). This dynamic appeared to leave parents questioning the school's openness to dialogue and created a tense environment where people were waiting to be accused or to accuse.

> *(At School E) it's front and centre, the main thing, the transformation committee is public.… So, they now started the programme of transformation in junior school on accepting different races.… They are having this session where they try to get the kids to integrate and not, and to be sensitive to the races of other people.* (Shani)

> *They played boardroom politics, so to speak, you know, there was no proactive or reactive kind of sorting out of the situation. You know, they didn't engage the parents, it was just letters that went out to the parents, and secret meetings with the people involved.… They tried to contain it without dealing with the issues at hand and in that case, that's why there were repeated incidents of racial mishappenings so, ja, I don't think they deal very well with it. It's just like, oh, you know, let it just end now, you know.* (Zanele)

> *(School E is) not realising that everyone, the whole school body, should be involved and should be notified on a day-to-day basis and solutions need to be found by everyone involved, and especially, everyone who experienced, or who had an experience with this kind of thing.… I mean, even when I was the vice chairperson, it was contained, it never even reached the PTA. it reached the PTA via, you know, the grapevine…* (Zanele)

Asha was the only parent whose son attended School F. From her experience, the school did not appear to have engaged with matters of race at all. She recalled that a charter was mentioned a couple of years ago, but she had not received any communications requesting parent engagement nor had she received any information since. It appears that School F was disengaged from race-related matters, which only served to maintain the status quo by operating under historical assumptions of white normativity (George, 2015).

> *(At School F) I think there's room for improvement.… I think there's a lot more the school needs to do.… I don't think there's active engagement, I, or necessarily deliberate action being taken, to say that you know what, this is our view, this is our philosophy on this, so that's where I feel there's a gap.… So, I think they just deal with issues when issues happen.… In his school, there is that conversation is just not happening, like not happening at all.* (Asha)

> *In his school (School F), if at all they do have it, they certainly are not the most vocal... Two years ago, there was mention of putting a charter together or something like that, but it certainly did not. They did not elicit views from parents of all races, and if they did put something together, then they certainly did not communicate what had been put together. So, from, in terms of the written policy, I think, ja, I don't think there's much.…*

> *For me, the disappointment is they're not in your face so, ja, so I don't know, I'm sure if I went to the directory, I'd find someone to call.* (Asha)

The parents who volunteered for this research represented a small group of parents from a range of independent schools in Johannesburg. While there appeared to be significant variation in the degree of active engagement on race-related matters from the different schools; in all instances, the parents were either pleased with the communication, or disappointed at the lack thereof. The school's attitude was primarily gauged based on this. It appeared that the challenge for historically white schools was to engage with the difficult conversations around race without their white fragility eliciting defensive or aggressive responses, which ultimately served to shut down dialogue and maintain the status quo while preserving their positive image (DiAngelo, 2018; Steyn, 2005).

Perceptions of Diversity of Staff and Students

Concerning the transformation of the staff and student bodies, the parents offered a range of views from the different schools, suggesting the schools were at different stages in the process of transformation. There was also an overarching sense that the schools were achieving more transformation at the student level than the staff level, which should be explored.

Katlego indicated that all the staff at a managerial level in his daughter's school (School A) were white. Palesa felt School C made excuses for its untransformed staff body. Nandi also said that at School D there were primarily white teachers and management, with the black staff only teaching vernacular languages. Shani said that School E had tried transforming upper management, but that the majority of the teaching staff was white. Zanele agreed that the majority of staff at School E were white but disagreed with Shani's statement about the upper management being transformed because she felt they were not representative of *black South Africans*. Asha felt that black staff at School F taught "soft" subjects or were very junior. She also felt that the school had not invested enough in finding a balance of representation in the staff.

> *The whole infrastructure that supports the school, at an aspirational level, meaning the headmaster, teachers etcetera, are white, so there isn't anywhere where a normal black kid would feel like, I could go there and I'd be okay type of thing, right?* (Katlego)

Excuses to say we can't find good teachers; we can't find black teachers that match our culture; those are the excuses we were getting at School C. (Palesa)

I think the usual is like, why are there no black teachers in the school, or why are there only black teachers there for vernacular languages, or why is the management all white you know? (Nandi)

Our board chair is black, and our PTA chair was black, but she left so I don't know who we're gonna to get in now. So it is, I think the transformation at that level has been spectacular you know. (Shani)

The management they've just brought in a black headmistress from (a neighbouring African country). Is that transformed? I don't know, you know… they've got an Indian COO, so those are the two executives, but as long the BEE box is ticked, right? (Zanele)

Then the staff, well, the Zulu teacher obviously has to be black.… The science teacher has left, God, no there's no transformation. (Zanele)

From a head count point of view, if you talk about teachers, a lot of the junior, you know, your interns, I'd say is a 50/50 split. So, boys of colour then get to see, you know, boys who look like them in the teaching staff, but again I think they are, they need to earn their stripes, so they're in very junior positions. (Asha)

The core subjects you'll have are predominantly white male teachers, you will have a few white female(s), but they're predominantly white male teachers. The lighter subjects, you know, like Zulu, specifically, you'll find that has to be taught by a Zulu guy, you know. So, I mean, kids pick this up, are you telling me there's no black smart maths teacher that the school could hire? (Asha)

While there is some evidence suggesting that teacher training routes have not been sufficiently deracialised (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013), the independent schools form a small elite percentage of the South African school population which has access to top teachers of all races. The parents' perceptions of black teachers as holding softer or lower positions may suggest a degree of tolerance as a means of maintaining power within schools (Green et al., 2007). Schools are likely to be interrogated about their transformation, and this expectation may be managed by hiring individuals in lower positions. The scrutiny over transformation may also have influenced employment, based on a hierarchy of blackness, where foreigners or other races, are seen as "less black" or "more white", and therefore preferred over black South Africans.

The four parents from School B had a more positive view of transformation at the staff level in their school. Lerato had seen a change in her son's school and reported seeing more black teachers teaching subjects like Accounting and Science. She felt more was needed but

acknowledged the progress. Mandla agreed, saying he felt it had been handled adequately and Shani felt it was well-mixed. Thabo said there were black staff members, but felt the staff was not as transformed as the student body, which raised suspicions for him about the commitment to transformation.

> *It's no longer a situation when my other kids were still younger, and they were still at school. The Zulu teacher, the black teachers were teaching Zulu. But I see the change now where even teachers of colour are teaching things like Accounting and Science, you know. So, that to me is very encouraging… They could do better in terms of representativity with regard to the EAP targets of the country, of the Department of Labour. It's a journey, but I see progress there.* (Lerato)
>
> *So, maybe I'm biased, I bring in my bias on this transformation…. It's been, it's handled okay from my liking.* (Mandla)
>
> *A mix of the teachers, black and white, they are mixed up, and Indian, all very well mixed up.* (Shani, contrasting her son's school to her daughter's school)
>
> *Makes me still feel a bit suspicious about what I see on the student body… does not correlate with what you see on the staffing side, do you understand?* (Thabo)
>
> *The teaching staff is still mainly white, but he has a teacher of colour, Indian I think teaching him, so it's fine, I think I'm happy with what I've seen there.* (Thabo)

Thabo's observation raised an interesting point about differences in levels of transformation which is discussed in detail below. Mandla offered a more sceptical view on transformation as an ideology within the school. He suggested that with his son in the system, he was more concerned with meritocracy than transformation. Mandla may be reproducing white narratives of non-discrimination and white normativity which suggest that transformation compromises quality education.

> *It's your child's future and whatever I think, when you've got skin in the game, you tend now to say, ooh I'm more, let's more focus on meritocracy. (Mandla)*

On the parents' perceptions of transformation in the student body, Lerato, Thabo and Shani felt School B's student body was well transformed. Asha felt there had been an improvement in the representation of black boys at School F in high school in comparison to the primary school. For Zanele, School E was multi-racial but not representative of the national

demographic in terms of black students, favouring children from other races to improve the school's demographics.

> *In terms of the student body, it's very, very transforming. They have a lot of black kids coming in.* (Lerato)
>
> *I can see an effort in the transformation area, if I see in the boarding house, I can see a lot of the boys there are students of colour.* (Thabo)
>
> *I chose School B, and I chose it because it is more, so I don't know how to say this nicely, but it's more representative of South Africa, so it's very homogeneous.* (Shani)
>
> *There's a stark difference in the numbers of black and coloured boys in high school compared to the prep school. So, in the prep school, I think he was one of five, you know, but in high school the numbers are certainly, I mean, the numbers are a lot higher. So, you've got a higher percentage of black and coloured boys in high school, which is great.* (Asha)
>
> *The student body, they have to because there's a quota that needs to be adhered to, so but there're more Indians and Chinese than blacks and coloureds if you understand what I mean.* (Zanele)

For other parents, questions about the degree of transformation within their school elicited spontaneous thoughts on the possible consequences of poor transformation in school for black children. For Katlego, a majority white staff body meant that there was not a safe space for a black child to approach someone. Furthermore, Katlego, Asha and Palesa all shared the sentiment that there was a psychological impact on black students who only saw black people holding subordinate positions within the school, such as cleaning staff or those in very junior roles, and white people holding more senior roles. Asha pointed out that the incorrect message was not only given to black children but also to white children. Zanele also felt that black students do not necessarily take black teachers seriously, and she speculated that perhaps this was because, in her view, black parents themselves gave more respect to white teachers.

> *The only black adults that they are likely to see hovering around at school is gonna be the cleaning ladies. It's gonna be the groundsmen, that's doing the lawn there and all of that. So already in their head, you're planting the seed that this is a level of where black people are at, and that's the other level, where white people are at, subconsciously.* (Katlego)
>
> *So, they're in very junior positions and, therefore, from an impact point of view, I don't even think the boys particularly give them as much, what you call it, take them seriously, unfortunately.* (Asha)

> *If all the boys see is support staff as being black, and the Zulu teacher as being black, they don't see themselves in that class. They don't see, you know, I meant the Chaplin is black, I mean, half the boys sleep during chapel, you know, they don't take (him seriously).* (Asha)
>
> *It sends a message to everyone, not just the black boys, but also the white boys, that there's only too far you can go. You're the exception to the rule if you break that glass ceiling and I think that's wrong, I think the school can consciously do a lot more.* (Asha)
>
> *When they see black people or black men at the school being cleaners only, it, I think there's a level of inferiority, as well, that they feel.* (Palesa)
>
> *These kids would laugh, instead of getting the grain of knowledge that you're supposed to be getting, because they've been at these schools for the longest time, and their accents are along the same wavelength as everybody else's.… They don't take the black class teachers as serious as they would the white teachers, and maybe it comes from home, as well, this thing of putting a halo around white teachers rather than black teachers.* (Zanele)

These parents' observations speak to the power imbalances and the subordination of black people in white spaces, which can result in psychological alienation and even the internalisation of racist narratives (Fanon, 1967; Hook, 2004). It may also lead to a sense of invalidation and devaluation, and ultimately, a damaged sense of self-esteem. Importantly, as Asha pointed out, it also reaffirms for white children the assumption of white universality and dominance (Green et al., 2007; Hook, 2004). These findings are seemingly in contradiction with many of the parents' earlier reflections that they and their children had not experienced racism at school. It is possible, that talking about racism at a systemic level felt safer for the parents, as it put some distance between themselves and other school stakeholders. In this way, they avoided having to point fingers. Furthermore, it illustrates how difficult racism is to name and yet, there was a definite feeling of intolerance and racism that only emerged with deeper reflection. The sophistication of racism in liberal spaces seems to make it extremely difficult to change. Therefore, parents are left with little option other than to resign themselves to their reality and use different strategies to maintain their perceived privileged position of being at the school.

It appears from this research, that the parents perceived the schools to be more transformed within the student body in comparison to the staff level. The relative power of students versus staff may play into this dynamic, once again, those in lower power positions are used to transform the school. Therefore, the tolerance of black students is used as a means of

maintaining white racial power over the school and its culture. It may also speak to the admissions processes being more egalitarian than the recruitment processes. The former is generally managed by objective criteria such as affordability and position on a list, therefore, provided a parent meets these criteria[2], their child will be admitted. If the school was not to admit them then questions would easily be raised about racial discrimination. In the latter, there are subjective influences and unconscious biases that influence the outcome when a person is interviewed for a staff position, over and above the objective qualification requirements. Without consciously interrogating these biases the schools may continue to employ staff that maintain the status quo and resist transformation.

Perceptions of Racial Issues in the School

The parents reported very few racist incidents at their schools, with a few parents saying it was unfair to talk about hearsay experiences that may not be true. Some incidents mentioned are described below. Lerato described an interaction she had with another black parent who was not included in the outgoing parents' party for the school's rowing team. She described how she, and this mother, tried to make sense of the mother's exclusion (her not being made aware of the party). They rationalised that such an event would have been organised on the team WhatsApp group which the other mother was on. This led them to conclude that she was intentionally excluded. To manage the uncertainty around their conclusion, Lerato mused that even if it had been accidental, if she was a white parent, they would have intentionally included her.

> *Something like this would be in the WhatsApp group, that she didn't miss it. She went and checked; it wasn't there. So possibly they have another group? … Having said that, I think if she were white, they would have gone out of their way to include her.* (Lerato)

> *Not personally, and I don't want, think it would be good for me to give you by-the-way stories because that's not, it's not factual, it's not, it's not fair.* (Katlego)

> *I'm not aware, to be fair, of any that have been reported.* (Katlego)

> *I think if there are incidences, they definitely managed those, but I'm not aware of any that I can say, oh, this they didn't do, or they did a lousy job at.* (Asha)

[2] It is important to acknowledge that historically and currently many black families are not able to meet the "objective" admissions criteria into such schools. The point being made here is that black families who can meet the financial criteria are likely to have their child admitted.

Shani and Zanele spoke about a highly publicised racist incident at their children's primary school that involved a white child referring to a black child as a monkey.

> *There was an incident in the Grade 3 class…. I think it was a big deal because the girls informed the other girls, the girl who was naming someone else was white and…. I think it was even on the radio.* (Shani)
>
> *I think the saddest one where a, I think these kids were in Grade 2 or something, the one called the other one a monkey on the video.* (Zanele)

Zanele also shared an anecdotal story about a teacher making racist remarks in a private conversation with a white parent. She commented on black children's behaviour in class, as well as, dismissing the quota system. The teacher assumed that the parent held the same racist views and felt comfortable sharing them on that basis. The parent was friends with other black parents and had shared with them what the teacher had said. The white parent may have wanted to distance herself from her involuntary association with her whiteness which led the teacher to disclose her racist thoughts.

> *This was outside of school by a teacher…fortunately, the woman that she was speaking to, the daughter went to School E, and she was friends with one of the black parents and the teacher made a very bad racial comment about how the kids… behave like monkeys or something in the classroom… and this whole quota system is all nonsense and stuff like that. (Zanele)*

While very few overt incidents of racism were reported by participants in this research, there was substantial deliberation around undertones and experiences of subtle racism. The nature of subtle racism is that it is often intangible and difficult to describe, yet the sense of being othered based on race is there. The parents provided some descriptions that give a sense of this phenomenon within their schools' context.

All the participants interviewed either implied or stated directly, that racism in the independent school setting was very subtle. This is consistent with the expectation that racism will be more subtle in liberal spaces (Straker, 2004). In Palesa's view, this was why there were few reported incidents, which made it difficult to articulate. Both Shani and Katlego expressed the subtlety of racism as not being able to "put a finger on" it. Mandla stated this was a common experience in liberal spaces and speculated on how much his experience of the subtleties was due

to the lens from which *he* was operating. Nandi and Asha shared the view that the experience of the excluded or othered person was evidence enough that there was racism, despite there being no clear racist act. Zanele referred to the internal dialogue that happened as she tried to unpack an experience that felt racist but was difficult to call racist.

> *The one thing I've learnt that's common with these children, with these boys, and especially at these private schools, is that racism is very subtle, they experience it subtly.* (Palesa)
>
> *Maybe that's why there aren't a lot of cases or incidents that are reported, in a way, at school, because it comes in a very subtle way. It comes so subtly that you can't, you know you can't just pick it and say this is what, you know, you have to explain it and I guess you have to experience it, as well, to see that it is that racism.* (Palesa)
>
> *Nothing that you can actually put your finger on.* (Shani)
>
> *Those kind of little things when you really can't put your finger on, but you know, you know it's there, in the air, but you actually can't put your finger on it.* (Katlego)
>
> *I mean it happens, again in most of these, ja in these liberal environments, like in this church, whatever, environment. It will be subtle and… because of my lived experiences… the glasses that I've been wearing all along, how I see things, and, maybe, then I'm able to pick up any subtle signs.* (Mandla)
>
> *You know what, this would be purely speculation, but I don't think from what I have seen and what I have heard there could be issues. But you know what, issues of race in South Africa will always pitch up in one form or another but at the moment I don't think I can have something tangible that I can point out.* (Mandla)
>
> *I don't think anyone has been called the N word or the K word or, you know, there isn't anything that you can overtly say, oh, this was racism, but the experience of the othered parent would say otherwise.* (Nandi)
>
> *Again, it's real or perceived, you know, so there's always that.* (Nandi)
>
> *That subtle, what can I say, exclusion, so it's not in your face.* (Asha)
>
> *You know, it's that kind of underlying kind of racism where the child actually sits back and says, but is it racist, you know, to do that?* (Zanele)

One element of this research was to document some of the racialised experiences and feelings that black parents encountered in independent schools. When these experiences reoccur frequently, they are likely to impact feelings of self-worth and belonging (Fanon, 1967). In their encounters, some parents described feelings of discomfort, feeling diminished, feeling othered, feeling spoken down to and feeling passive aggression. Without explicit content driving these

feelings, they may be a product of interpsychic dynamics between themselves and the liberal white people they encountered. Research shows that white people make assumptions of black homogeneity that are self-directed or patronising (Straker, 2004). These experiences also elicit intrapsychic conflict, as some parents are not sure of how to make sense of their experiences and feelings. Some describe having internal dialogues such as "if I were white would it be different?" Or questioning their own observations, such as Lerato wondering why her son's class was majority black, or Shani wondering about the white head girl who stepped down and was replaced by a black head girl. It is clear that without explicit racist content, there are still social and internal dynamics that racialise the experiences of black parents.

> *There have been murmurings with some of her friends and stuff, where they've also felt like maybe they are lesser than, purely because they are black.* (Katlego)
>
> *Yes, other parents do feel like there's a bit more discomfort.* (Katlego)
>
> *I'm sure there are parents who've experienced feelings of being othered and, you know, being responded to in, you know, the question, if I were White maybe they would have responded differently, you know, those kinds of feelings.* (Nandi)
>
> *(The) head girl we voted in is this year is white.… After having all the celebration and receiving the badge and everything on her first day, she said she's stepping down. So, there was a big question amongst, my daughter was like, why did she step down, oh mental health. Mental health issues, which is okay, I mean, she probably thought it looked odd because then immediately after the girl who became head girl is a black girl. And so, I don't know what that means. I thought given the kind of connotations we have, the undertones, this does look, didn't look right.* (Shani)
>
> *If it's a black South African parent, you know, making a follow-up to a white service provider or a white staff member, then already feelings are in there, you know, like you haven't responded to me because I'm black and then it becomes escalated from that. In that way and sometimes it's because there are, you know, we can't deny the fact that there are feelings of security within the white sector.* (Nandi)
>
> *I think in private schools it becomes escalated because again it's, it's a closed community and it's people who have been in that community for quite a long time. And now they're dealing with an equal other, whereas in their personal circles, you know, they deal with the other from a point of service. But now they have to deal with them from a point of equality, and then if introduce them to the fact that now they're dealing with this person in terms of them being in authority. So, if it's your child's teacher who's black or Indian because you know they also more or less experience the same or coloured, you know it, the white, it takes, I think it takes a while for the white people to actually see that they are talking up, instead of talking down, which they are used to.* (Nandi)
>
> *The environment is more like what we, it's a, is it called a liberal left?* (Mandla)

> *So, where I have heard complaints, or this unhappiness or whatever, it's mainly there, based on, I'm here in this sort of section of the spectrum and I am not willing or prepared to inch to the (middle).* (Mandla)

> *In this place, I see more of the subculture and… has less oxygen for racism. It doesn't mean that it doesn't exist, but there's, it's sort of less conducive, there aren't proper nutrients.* (Mandla)

> *I think passive aggression, in terms of between pupils, like that has also been an issue with past pupils of colour and present pupils of colour, expressing the fact that they weren't satisfied with how that was handled, you know. It wasn't properly acknowledged, it was kind of like swept under the carpet, and you know, the college could have done a little bit better in terms of pointing out explicitly some of these passive acts of racism, and actually making a stand against it, and ensuring that, you know, it doesn't happen, and that pupils and staff and parents are held accountable.* (Nandi)

> *I haven't heard, no.… So, what they experience in the high school is… what do they call it, the systemic racism.* (Zanele)

> *I don't know whether it's got to do with race or this thing of they all are friends.… I don't know that it is a race issue, or it was just a dominant family.* (Lerato)

> *Whether or not the these are genuine concerns, I mean, I wouldn't really know.* (Bongani)

> *It's that kind of underlying, kind of racism, where the child actually sits back and says but is it racist, you know, to do that… where they don't understand really if they, you know, have been victimised or not.* (Zanele)

Some of the discernible examples of racial othering that parents provided are discussed here. One related to black parents noticing the uneven distribution of academic and community awards. The assumption of objectivity (Green et al., 2007) in the academic realm made it difficult for them to make sense of these observations.

> *Her friends will complain about the fact that maybe academically they are not given the same kind of opportunities, maybe the awards are being skewed more towards the white kids, maybe even the teachers don't treat them in the same way they would other white kids.* (Katlego)

One possible explanation for the disparities was raised by Nandi, who discussed the role of access, and support needed, for achieving things such as community hours. Asha also raised the issue of racialised access in terms of school admissions. She felt that due to historical disadvantage their school's admissions policy, which prioritises past pupils and siblings, made it more difficult for black parents to gain access to the school. This is an example where perceived

fairness, or historically accepted rule of engagement, serves to resist transformation (Green et al., 2007; Steyn & Foster, 2008).

> *I had a discussion with the leadership about, you know, because also, you know, the community hours for pupils. You find that a lot of white pupils will get the community hours in their awards and stuff, and few, if any, black children who get that. And it's simply because of the dedication that's required to volunteer at a charity or to do sports, and add on another external club so that you're excellent, you know. It's those little, small things that have become a natural part of succeeding in a private school, you know, that are easily ingrained within the white community that aren't so necessarily available for the parents of colour, who will become part of private schools.* (Nandi)

> *Getting access into the school, there's already a lot of, there are a lot of hurdles just to get in… because those, you know, the 30 odd places that were already available in the class have already been taken up by old parents, so entry to the school is already a barrier.* (Asha)

Nandi raised questions about elements of the curriculum that, in her view, needed updating. This speaks to assumptions of white normativity in the content of the curriculum (Green et al., 2007; Hook, 2004) and a lost opportunity for all pupils to learn about black cultures or history (Hope et al., 2015).

> *I think it's been acceptable for the longest time because the people in charge of the curriculum have been of a certain, you know, colour.… It's not good enough to for your school to say, well, this is the way it's been for the past 20 years, so, we're just gonna teach it, you know. There has to be more impetus on institutions to actually engage with, ultimately, whether it's the independent schools association, or if it's the department of education, to engage at that level, to say, you know, we cannot be responsible for imparting harmful texts or harmful words within the classroom context to our pupils. So, there's a need for structural change at that level. (*Nandi)

Shani mentioned the initial imbalance of representation of different races in marketing media and how this was challenged by the PTA at her school. The marketing department argued that it was an alumni-based campaign and that most past students were white. By not consciously noticing and adjusting the representation of the school, the marketing department was taking a colour-blind approach which ultimately resists transformation (Steyn & Foster, 2008).

> *The most recent one, I think, this had a lot of the past students were white, so most of the children on the ad or the marketing preview was with white people.… You should have seen the PTA was so cross.* (Shani)

Zanele observed that black parents were more "friendly" with Zulu teachers and white parents with white teachers. This suggests that in-group and out-group dynamics across race may be stronger than across parent/teacher roles. This may also feed into the narrative that black teachers are taken less seriously by black parents because they see them as peers.

> *I've heard that (other parents) speak about being friendly with the Zulu teacher. It goes back to the same race thing, I guess, other black parents are very friendly with… the science teacher, who was black, you know. So, you'd never hear them speaking about being friendly with a white teacher.* (Zanele)

As discussed before, Palesa and Zanele referred to selective criticism by teachers who, for example, targeted noisy black children but appeared to ignore the noisy white children. They both also raised a concern about teachers not knowing or mispronouncing black children's names. All these experiences are subtle, and it was difficult to isolate their origin purely based on race. This left students and parents with questions about the teachers' bias but without sufficient certainty to be able to take it up with the school.

> *If you have two groups of like a black girl here, a group of black girls, a group of white girls, and the black girls are laughing, and the white girls are laughing, if a teacher walks past, she'd literally go to the black girls and say, keep it down.* (Zanele)
>
> *Another incident, well this one is ongoing obviously, where they pronounce the girls' names wrong, the black girls' names wrong.* (Zanele)
>
> *And issues about hair, about, it's just those kinds of things.* (Zanele)

About half the parents offered thoughts about racism being part of the world we live in, and/or that it is generally worse elsewhere. Lerato even positioned her family as being more fortunate than others for not experiencing racism as badly. This may be true of this parent group's particular schools and would be supported by the recent spate of calls for the Human Rights Commission to explore racism in state schools (Patrick, 2022) and other research on South African schools (Machaisa & Lebeloane, 2017). However, it is also possibly a defence to suppress difficult feelings parents faced, as they reconciled their wish to provide their children with a good education while feeling guilt for exposing them to racism at the school they chose

(Zulu, 2020). This highlights the dilemma some black parents face when sending their children to school.

> *I must say, we are fortunate that at School B, we haven't experienced it as bad, as we see it in other schools, where kids are forced to cut their hair, or they are told they are this and the other.* (Lerato)
>
> *We're not going to be able to find places where it's not going to happen. Yeah, we can find places where it's probably least likely. But still, this is, you know, how we are. I mean, this is the generation we're living in.* (Bongani)
>
> *I think racism is everywhere right, and I do think there are some schools that are probably worse than us. In my opinion, certainly, you know, and some that I'd never take my kid to at all, even if they had 100% matric exemption pass rate with all distinctions. I still wouldn't take (her) cos at the end of the day; kids are going to spend 60-70% of their time at school. You want them to be in a fun, warm, loving environment, where they feel valued, and they feel like they belong.* (Katlego)
>
> *There's this notion that, okay I'm looking for (the) best education for my kids and sometimes expensive is the best.* (Mandla)
>
> *I've seen the reluctance in state schools… so what I'm trying to say is you have less evils at independent schools.* (Mandla)
>
> *I would say, yes, issues of race could still be there. It's just that my son came from a former Afrikaans school which was really divided in terms of racial terms, even though it would look like it has integrated. So, I think when it comes to School B, then I can see, if I compare with the primary school that he was in, School B has moved so many strides ahead in integrating boys of colour at the school.* (Thabo)

Asha and Zanele raised sports politics as the main area of concern for their children and Bongani reflected on hearing this from other parents at his son's school. It is possible that with more subjectivity in perceived sporting ability, there is more room for acting out racism in a masked manner, but also for selections to be perceived as racist. Asha discussed provisional quota systems and how white boys would encourage her son to try out because he was "definitely going to get in because he is black". She talked about how this stripped him of his achievement because his effort and skill were not recognised. This resulted in her son choosing to participate in individual sports. However, even in swimming, he was chastised by other children for being in a "white" club and by the black boys for doing a "white sport". Zanele described her daughter playing provincial hockey, but she did not get selected for the first team. When she and her husband queried this, they were asked for their daughter's name, and she was

put on the team. They felt their daughter was overlooked and then put in to avoid a scene. Zanele also mentioned finding it unclear how sports scholarships were awarded. Bongani mentioned hearing other parents complain about the preferential treatment being afforded to white students in rugby and cricket, but he had not experienced this directly. Subtle preferential treatment given to white students was observed in Machaisa and Lebeloane's (2017) South African study.

> *The requirement for the Gauteng team is that at least two boys of colour (are selected) … so friends would make comments like, oh, you know what, just show up, you're definitely going to get in because you're black. And so, there are unintended consequences there. I can get what the sporting authority is trying to do in terms of compelling schools or increase the participation of black boys in certain sports, but then for the black boys, they don't quite feel then that they are there on merit... it then also creates some tension amongst the boys.* (Asha)
>
> *He enjoyed water polo but chose to pull out because he felt that, no, I mean they don't, they're not, they don't see me as an equal anymore. They see me as (a) guy who's here because he's black and yet he was just as good as them.… So, the view then is to focus more on individual sports.* (Asha)
>
> *He, again, was the only black boy in the soccer team. Why, in the A team, which doesn't make sense, but anyway… so there's that token black kinda comment that comes through.* (Asha)
>
> *He does swimming at a provincial level. He goes into the bathrooms, the boys who walk up to him are like, dude, do you realise you're the only black boy in that club? I mean what are you doing there?* (Asha)
>
> *Her being overlooked for the first team and five or four white girls going to the first team and I write, my husband and I write, an email and we're like, but this girl has been playing hockey since grade school and she's been representing provincial, and you're not, why is she not in the first team? Oh no, sorry, what's your daughter's name?* (Zanele)
>
> *only really on the sporting side, I think where, you know, where I've experienced, where I've heard the other parents mention these things. I've not, I have not seen or heard of any discrimination or perceived discrimination in other aspects like in the classroom or, you know, in the broader schooling community environment.* (Bongani)
>
> *I've heard parents who have complained that their son has not been brought into the team because they are black and that the school wants to keep the rugby team all-white.… I certainly heard some of my fellow black parents complain about their children not being given the opportunities to be in the rugby team, the cricket team, and things like this.* (Bongani)

Consistent with the literature on white liberal spaces, parents in this research identified subtle or aversive racism at school. Some parents may defend against the anxiety of their child experiencing racism at school by holding the view that it is inevitable and worse elsewhere. The area of school and provisional sport seems to be one of particular contention, but issues of access, and dismissive or harsher interactions, were also discussed.

Policy, Reporting Grievances, and Management of Race-Related Matters

Among the six schools whose parents participated in this research, there was a diverse range of views on the schools' policies related to race(ism) and transformation. Nandi (School D), Mandla and Thabo (School B), felt that their schools had made good progress in terms of their policy and structures around racism and transformation. Nandi stated that School D had a revised anti-racism policy, and an anti-racism pledge, which was printed in the front of the pupils' annual school diary. All pupils signed the pledge and code of conduct, which explicitly dealt with racism. She said the hair and uniform policy had also been revised, so as not to infringe on the rights of black children. Mandla and Thabo did not offer specific details about their school's policy, but both expressed that they were clear and encouraging.

> *I think the school had intentionally changed its policies to try and attract or accommodate or enrol more families of colour, particularly black families, to ensure that they would have more diversity.* (Nandi)
>
> *You find that maybe the policies that have been in place for a long time, particularly, let's say, I think the easy one to point out would be the hair policy.* (Nandi)
>
> *They are actually making good progress… for the college. They had to revise their anti-racism policy and they had to incorporate a pledge, anti-racism pledge… The beginning of the year the pupils have to sign the pledge and sign the pupil's code of conduct that explicitly outlines that racism is not allowed and the use of racial tones or name calling and all of those things. So, it's now explicitly… and everybody is held accountable to it and the pupils have to sign, as well as the parents have to acknowledge. So, it's a community approach.* (Nandi)
>
> *The hair and uniform policy has been changed to make sure that it's doesn't infringe on the rights of children, particularly the children of colour.* (Nandi)
>
> *The school realised that this is something real that exists, so being aware and proactive and deliberate about it also means having those structures and, you know, whatever, in place.* (Mandla)
>
> *I think they; their policies are quite clear…. I think they are really moving so many strides in trying to clear these shackles on racism. We had a meeting with the headmaster*

> *when our children started at the school and the policies that were put forward were really convincing to me, and I think they are very much realistic in a holistic approach with all these issues of racism and other things.* (Thabo)

Lerato (School B) had a slightly different view and stated that School B was in the process of getting its anti-racism policy, which she had read, formalised. Katlego acknowledged that School A did not have any policies in place, but that the school was in the process of developing them. Shani stated that School E was also in the process of developing a transformation policy. Zanele agreed with Shani's statement that School E was in the process, but she felt it was not being managed well and she believed it was not nearly as extensive as their bullying policies.

> *That's starting, so I've been seeing the policy, like I've read that... This is the beginning of the journey, for things to be documented.* (Lerato)
>
> *No, they don't. We are still trying to put them together now.* (Katlego)
>
> *I think so, and there are. They put in a new transformation policy; I can't say that I'm familiar with it but it's still under development.* (Shani)
>
> *They only put in… the R & D (research and transformation) group about 2 or 3 years ago. They didn't have any in place.… All they do is sit and sit and talk and talk… The guidelines are quite clear on bullying but not so much on racism, right, no documentation, you're not signing anything because I think we don't understand what race is, especially when it comes to kids, you know I mean, a child can be jumping up and down and one walks past, and he think it's a joke by saying stop jumping up and down like a monkey and the issue is the black child receiving that.* (Zanele)
>
> *I think that's where the policies and guidelines are a bit sketchy.… They don't know how to deal with it.* (Zanele)

Palesa felt that School C did not have a concrete policy on racism or transformation, but rather acted reactively to what was happening in the environment by amending or updating existing policies ad hoc. For Asha, School F had not publicised any policy despite some talk about putting a charter together a couple of years ago.

> *School C, it was changing on the fly, like it was guided by what's happening on the news or in the environment or in, like the hair, the black hair thing, the things, you know the policy had to be updated to include, you know, so it was more reactionary.* (Palesa)
>
> *In his school, if at all they do have it, they certainly are not the most vocal. I don't even, I'm not even, I do know two years ago there was mention of putting a charter together or*

> *something like that, but it certainly did not, they did not elicit views from parents of all races. And if they did put something together, then they certainly did not communicate what had been put together, so in terms of the written policy.* (Asha)

It is clear that the level of urgency for formalising policy and addressing racism and transformation at schools, differs between schools. Leadership's willingness to actively engage with the process of transformation, and curbing racism, appears to be manifest in their policy making or lack thereof.

Several parents spoke specifically to the reporting of grievances related to discrimination. Katlego spoke about how difficult it was to report such, especially if it was not explicit. He stressed the importance of having a transformation officer that was black, so children felt comfortable reporting to them. Thabo stated that he knew the channel he could follow at School B, but recognised that being a teacher himself, he was likely to be more comfortable than most with engaging the school directly. Bongani felt School C and School B had well-publicised grievance processes. However, Palesa said she was not aware of the channels for reporting incidents at School C. Nandi said that School D had many different channels for reporting racism, which made it easier for parents, as they were able to report in the manner most comfortable for them. From her view, parents and children mainly used email. Asha felt certain that School F had channels for reporting, but did not know them, nor had ever used them. Zanele felt that laying a complaint put one at risk of being seen as a "violent" black parent, which may then jeopardise one's children. She echoed Katlego's sentiment that there was a fear of being victimised after reporting.

> *It's also not easy to report it hey... you've also got to be careful of how you would otherwise try and report something, because even if you were trying to report something it could be quite tricky, you know. It's got to (be) so explicit that it's either black and white for you to feel comfortable to talk about… a factual thing that you can literally lean on, and it's a lot easier if there's a group of you dealing with it.* (Katlego)

> *It's little things, like how recruitment is done, that would certainly be able to, to cover for some of those aspects. It's things like, potentially having, let's call it, a transformation officer with teeth… by that I mean whether it's like a lady or a man, if it's a black lady or an Indian lady or somebody who the kids can relate to who. They would probably be in a position to go and complain to, or talk to, if they have issues.* (Katlego)

In terms of channels, no. I think for both schools, I would say, not really, because right now if I were to experience racism, or my son experiences racism, I wouldn't know where to start. (Palesa)

That's why you don't get a lot of things reported, because they are very subtle, they come in different, they come in subtle ways, they come in diplomatic ways. (Palesa)

There's a parent's advisory committee that is also active in the community that the pupils and the parents can also engage with directly, you know. There are channels, many channels, that are available for the community, but the most popular one is emails. Parents or pupils generally email when they're uncomfortable and then it's addressed that way. (Nandi)

I am aware of the channels, my son is at boarding school, so if it happens from the boarding side, I know I will address it from that boarding side. (Thabo)

I'm sure there are structures, I just, I think fortunately, haven't had to test them to be able to say they work, or they don't. (Asha)

I think both schools got a very, you know, very well-publicised grievance, if you want, mechanism. You know, where, you know, if there is a problem, they're very, very clear, transparent channels in which you can present a grievance or a complaint. (Bongani)

The kids are scared of being victimised, so, if you speak out then you know… I mean the only grade, which is Matric, where the marks are not marked at school. You find that your child's marks come back and they're not what it should be. (Zanele)

When a black person comes up and becomes vocal, you are seen as… violent, you're an instigator, you're unruly and then you get called for meetings, you get to that your child would be expelled because you owe on fees. (Zanele)

The discussion around reporting racism in general and the procedures specifically, highlighted the significance of racial power. Parents highlighted the issues of power dynamics in the ability to voice concerns with white staff. They suggested that possible ways of mitigating this, were having black transformation officers, and offering multiple platforms for reporting. What still remained was the fear of repercussions from the person, and possibly others, who were being reported.

Finally, through the parents' discussions, half of them directly, or indirectly, shared some of their learnings on how things had been poorly managed at their schools, or their thoughts on how challenges could be managed better. Katlego felt it was important for staff to develop an awareness of their unconscious bias and that this required training and ongoing awareness. He also stated that recruitment procedures should be reviewed.

> *As long as they are conscious of the fact that they need to manage their own self-conscious bias towards others, then you've got a winning formula.* (Katlego)

> *As you're trying to migrate the school forward, you are also accepting of your blind spots as a school, and for me that would include a lot of training for current teachers so that they can know what to watch out for, and how kids from different races are gonna feel, based on things that are perhaps normal to them, but not necessarily normal to others.* (Katlego)

For Palesa, it was imperative that the schools engaged proactively rather than being reactionary. She noted that one diversity placement on the School C board was insufficient, as the person was not supported, and that if their ideas were inconsistent with the majority, they were side-lined (McCarthy Foubert, 2020). This is also a clear example of tokenism where tolerance of one or two people of colour is used to maintain power (Green et al., 2007). Palesa criticised the school for dealing with her complaint about a teacher as an isolated interpersonal incident without engaging in some process with the teacher, instead they offered to move her son. She also described engaging directly with black parents to encourage their involvement, and at times favouring them, to ensure the volunteer group was representative of all the boys. Finally, for Palesa policy only had meaning if it was understood and internalised by the teachers, parents, and children. She felt this required individual training or work. Palesa also noted that their needs to be visible impact, otherwise discussion around transformation is not helpful – the proverbial, practice what you preach. She offered an example of herself at school functions having to try to socialise across different racial groups.

> *You can't just introduce one role black person, that's not even a parent there. Yes, she's experienced in that, you put her on the board and, but your board is not transformed. Obviously, whatever that she suggests you are not going to take it in, until an incident happens at school or in South Africa or somewhere, then they go to her, and she would say, but I told you. You know, so everything was just reactionary.* (Palesa)

> *Schools can say we're working on something but if you're not seeing one thing that shows you that they are working towards, then it does, there's nothing to show for it. (Palesa)*

> *I would phone some black parents to say don't you want to do this… because these boys take pride in seeing their moms here all the time… Can't you take a half day? … So, I would negotiate those things with them.* (Palesa)

> *Policies and all of those things will be there to try and change, but it's the people that are supposed to live, to implement those policies.… If parents don't get it, if teachers don't*

> *get it, if admins don't get it, then you know, so for me it's basically having programmes that deal with that first.* (Palesa)

> *You just give up because I learnt that he (a teacher) changed more towards him (her son) because he knew that the mother was, you know, you can't play around with this mother. He started becoming nice, yes, he tried to change, but it was still there, because the following year another parent complained about the same thing and said (to her) someone says that you went through that.* (Palesa)

> *It starts with each person understanding why they have to transform, you know. Yes, schools need transformation, but if the people that are running the school, don't understand why, you know, they don't understand why they are doing it… it's a lost cause, because everything that's been done, yes, will be reactionary, or you look at one thing and then you forget about the rest.* (Palesa)

Like Palesa, Nandi felt that education, and a willingness to reflect on inclusivity, were important for policy to be meaningful. She felt open discussion around race and racism was imperative, in the same way that financial and sexual education were previously taboo but are now recognised as crucial. She was positive about School D's active approach to solving challenges around recruiting for transformation. The school had implemented mentor programmes to groom young black professionals. However, she said some teachers were being "poached" by bigger private schools. She wished to see more engagement from the schools on making changes to curriculum, as parents did not have much direct influence in that regard. For Nandi, it was important that black parents and staff were consulted and involved in decision making to ensure true inclusivity rather than failed attempts at it. White staff should not assume a position of objectivity, or knowledge of matters of which they had no first-hand experience. She provided an example of white blindness being used as an excuse for misrepresentation.

> *I think what we're able do with the school was to say, it's not an excuse, you actually have to go the extra mile.… I wouldn't say compromising, even if it means, you know, like settling for getting newly qualified black young teachers within the school, setting up sort of mentoring programmes, so that they can find their footing within the college community as well, and grow within their roles. That would be the only way, because I think the black qualified teachers, in terms of who've got experience, in terms of the sought-after subjects Maths, Science and English, they get easily snapped up. Like our college has lost quite a few black teachers, whom they have groomed for a few years, to say you know, this is the future black leadership that we want in these departments, but then they get head hunted by bigger private schools who can offer them more, and you know, so it's a bit of a struggle, but I think the huge difference now is that at our college they are aware that okay these are the challenges and they are trying to proactively work*

> *within that sort of challenges to ensure that there is representation and that there is transformation....* (Nandi)
>
> *I think when it comes to racism, I think the best apology is a change in behaviour, right, you know so, and a change in perception.* (Nandi)
>
> *I don't have as much power to engage with the DBE or the IEB at that level, so I can only agitate the school, and the school has to acknowledge its responsibility and then agitate higher, and together, I think as a country, we will make the necessary changes and make sure that the classroom is, I mean we will never be free of it all but at, I think, if we have people who act with consideration and intent not to do harm to others, I think we'd all benefit.* (Nandi)
>
> *Policies are great to guide and to provide a reference point, but I think over-all education and a willingness to learn, and adapt, within the broader community, is what's needed, because what we think is an inclusive policy may not necessarily be inclusive in the eyes of the parents or the eyes of the pupil.* (Nandi)
>
> *I think you know making sure that race is talked about openly and the fact that, you know, I think we forget that many years ago sex was considered taboo, you know, but now, even money, talking about money, was considered taboo, but now financial education and sexual education are considered… as critical and something that should be done intentionally and consistently at school and at home.* (Nandi)
>
> *You get a response from an all-white marketing team to say, we didn't realise and it's true, they wouldn't have realised, you know, because the other is not at the table.* (Nandi)

Like Nandi, Shani felt school policy related to race and transformation should be written by a black person. She shared feelings of frustration by overly lenient hair regulations made by white people trying to be politically correct without the relevant experience.

> *I think the policy could have been written by an African so, you know what, their hair needs to be combed at least, it should be neat when you come to school…. The braids are fine, you can plait braids, but once they've lasted for two months, they need to go. I mean there should be something, some policy around neatness.* (Shani)
>
> *I mean if it's written by someone who has the same kind of hair… as opposed to having a white person trying to put a politically correct statement about hair, they do not have experience.* (Shani)

Zanele also felt all stakeholders within the school should be involved and engaged for solutions, especially those who have experienced the issues to which the policies relate. Zanele shared some scepticism about parents and teachers being willing to engage, saying, "How do you teach not to be a racist."

> *Not realising that everyone, the whole school body, should be involved and should be notified on a day-to-day basis…. Solutions need to be found by everyone involved and especially everyone who experienced, or who had an experience, with this kind of thing.* (Zanele)
>
> *People who are versed in these kind of things are not involved, you know. I mean you take people who, who don't know anything about transformation or racial issues, or anything like that, and you plug them in there and you like, handle it please, don't let it go.* (Zanele)
>
> *They tried to do a conversation, a what do you call them, a conversation with parents tryna teach them racism and I don't think that pulled through. It was supposed to be in an evening or something where we get someone who's versed in transformation to come talk to parents, but how do you teach racism?* (Zanele)
>
> *The teachers need, I don't know, they need to have started it from when they were young, because I mean how do you teach not to be a racist?* (Zanele)

This subtheme engaged with parents' thoughts about their schools' policies and general management of race and transformation. Sentiments around policies being collaboratively developed, and actively communicated within the school, were echoed. Some parents offered specific thoughts on how schools might better manage race-related matters.

Theme 4: The "White Gaze" of the Researcher

Fanon described a phenomenon experienced by some black people as being under the "white gaze" where their subjectivity is removed, and they feel that somehow, they represent all black people (Fanon, 1967). This theme explores some of the observations around the dynamics between the research participants and the white researcher as they discussed race(ism) in the schooling environment. By reflexively examining the *process* of enquiry there was a unique opportunity to explore the relational nature of this research topic (Russel & Kelly, 2002). Interaction with the subjectivity of the white researcher may have caused the participants to evaluate and mediate their understanding of the world (Russel & Kelly, 2002). If beliefs and perspectives are fluid depending on the interpersonal relationships (Russel & Kelly, 2002), then this theme may offer insight into what the presence of a "white gaze" may elicit for black parents when discussing the difficult topic of racism within the schooling context. The researcher's subjectivity also plays a role in the process, which is discussed in the reflexivity section. Furthermore, unconscious emotional dynamics between researcher and participant are intrinsic to

qualitative research and both parties may attempt to avoid and control this (Rizq, 2008). This was evident to the researcher in her difficulty in reporting on this theme, because of a sense of discomfort when making interpretations based on our interactions in the interviews. For the participants, there was possibly a sense of wanting to avoid their negative feelings towards the researcher and their children's schools and to control their perceptions of themselves.

In various ways, many parents expressed anxiety around confidentiality or were curious about the researcher's motives for conducting this research, which suggests a degree of mistrust in the researcher. Most parents used minimising language, which may have been an attempt to manage the researcher's assumed white fragility and/or to avoid conflict. At times, there was a sense that parents felt they were representing all black people and did not want to risk being positioned in a poor light, thus they continuously sought agreement to gauge the researcher's position on the matter being discussed. It is worth noting that participating in research about "black parents" would likely have exacerbated the sense of representing all black people. However, it is possible that this research still provided some insight into the anxieties black parents faced when engaging white staff or parents at school particularly around issues of race, discrimination, and transformation. In a sense, this theme acknowledges the inherent dynamics created by a history of discrimination, which should be taken into consideration when trying to engage parents or establish policy, for example, around reporting racism.

Lerato and Nandi asked for their videos to be turned off once the interview started and that the interview not be used in future research. Zanele sounded mildly sceptical when confirming her understanding that the interview would remain confidential. Later in the interview, Shani double-checked that the interview was confidential. Bongani and Asha were curious about the white researcher's motives for choosing this topic. Asha was open in discussing her reservations about the data gathered in this research, stating that many black people may struggle to trust a white person enough to talk openly on this topic. Lerato also shared some mixed feelings about participating in the research stating that she was curious about the outcome. Questions around confidentiality, the desire not to be visible to the researcher, and wondering about the motives for the research, all speak to an ambivalence towards the research(er) and possible feelings of mistrust. The parents were willing participants, and a good

level of rapport was developed in the interviews, which suggests that this mistrust may be a deep-seated feeling towards white people in general.

> *No video and that you marked a preference for the research not to be used in future studies.* (Lerato nodded in confirmation of her indicated preferences)
>
> *What will happen to the video recording?* (Nandi)
>
> *I'm comfortable with you using it for your own purposes, I'm not comfortable with it being passed on to any other parties.… And once the questions start, I would like to switch to no video.* (Nandi)
>
> *So, I said… (pause) this is confidential?* (Shani)
>
> *Maybe… why did you choose such a topic? What was your motivat- yeah, well, what's your motivation behind such a... and I'm not saying so in terms of... I'm just saying because it's a very interesting topic. And I think it's very, um, can be a very sensitive one.* (Bongani)
>
> *My question is, what's the problem statement? What is it that you are, what are you, what's behind all this? The why behind the research and do you already have, as my son would say, what is the hypothesis?* (Asha)
>
> *You'll find that, unfortunately, people tend to be more comfortable with having these kind of discussions with their own, do you get what I mean? … So, I might find it easier, okay for me it's probably different because I mean, I'm not white, I'm not South African, so I can't, you know, so a black parent might think "Mm I don't know whether I'm really comfortable opening up to Rose," so there could be stuff that they want to say or can say but because the question's being raised by Rose.* (Asha)
>
> *I'm not saying that's a limitation, it is what it is, because it is your research and there's probably no way around it really, no there's nothing you can do. You can't paint yourself, no to, ha ha, to get it right, or to get information out of them, but it's probably something that I think maybe you and your supervisor need to, need to realise that you might struggle to get people open and talking about certain things because they're not very sure, you know, can I trust, it's a trust, it's a trust thing.* (Asha)
>
> *I'm quite interested to see what it's gonna be the outcome of this because I have mixed feelings about this.* (Lerato)

At times parents represented themselves, their group and even the research in a positive light, which is aligned with the possibility that they were attempting to avoid, or control, uncomfortable feelings (Rizq, 2008). Many of the parents used minimising language, which suggested that sharing their negative feelings was difficult, and raised the question of whether they were offering measured responses, because of being in the presence of a white researcher. This may have served several purposes such as, avoiding conflict, and maintaining a positive

self-image, and group image. Statements such as “those kind of little things” used by Katlego or “a little bit discriminatory” by Nandi, to describe racist actions are clear examples of minimising language. Mandla avoided the term racism by referring to “issues” but later commented on “some racism or whatever” suggesting it was difficult for him to label something as racist. Shani felt compelled to defend an incident she had described by adding, “I think quite innocent”. Asha described feelings of being excluded as “very unfortunate” and described a situation as her probably “not reading the situation right”. Zanele spoke about someone “who had an experience with this kind of thing… of racial um mishappenings”. Race is a difficult topic, but parents mentioned having these discussions openly among black parents, which supports the argument that these minimisations may have been for the benefit of the white researcher. This may be due to her assumed white fragility, and fear of a defensive, or aggressive, response, but also, may be due to a deep mistrust in the researcher’s ability to accurately hear and represent, their views.

Some parents used language that appeared to seek the researcher’s agreement or to soften comments that may have been perceived as criticisms. Many of the parents used the statement “you know” or “I mean, you know”, throughout their interviews. Palesa said to the researcher, “you really get it”. Nandi cautiously preceded a criticism of the white sector with a defensive statement that “we can’t deny the fact that…”. Shani appeared very self-conscious about her statements, once preceding a statement with the caveat “I don’t know how to say this nicely…” and on other occasions following with “I hope you don’t mind if…” and “This is my perspective, I could be wrong.” Mandla also qualified a statement with “you know, given our past whatever.” Katlego described “reaching out” and empathising with the white headmistress at his school at the beginning of the interview. This seemed to be a way of setting the tone for the interview where the researcher could feel safe. He would also seek agreement and once said, “it’s the same with you” looking for common ground in his narrative. After sharing her view that black people may not be open to a white researcher, Asha offered encouragement and defensive reasoning for sharing what she said.

> *To encourage you, if you feel that, you know, things are not, you’re not getting information out of people, it’s just to understand that maybe that’s why.* (Asha)

Shani expressed not being sure if she had anything useful to contribute to this research. She said this was due to her status as a foreign national.

> *Are you sure she's (the researcher) gonna find what I have to say useful, I don't know.* (Shani)

Valuing the research may have played a similar role as minimising negative feedback in this research. Three parents offered positive statements about the research, which may have been them unconsciously feeding into the researcher's positive self-representation as accommodating transformation, rather than them specifically finding it valuable.

> *This is great. I mean, interesting, interesting research, and I'm looking forward to reading your publication when it's done.* (Bongani)
>
> *I just think the research is really good, I think it will help for a couple of reasons.* (Katlego)
>
> *It starts with each person like it starts in here, it starts with each person understanding why they have to transform.* (Palesa)

Some parents illustrated in their description of interactions, or their narrative in the interview, a sense that they were representing all black people. While this is understandable considering the research topic involves interviewing "black parents", at times there was a sense that the subjectivity of black individuals was lost. Nandi made direct reference to this by stating that black people are always conscious that they are representing their whole race. She expanded on how much pressure this caused in interracial interactions which made her prefer to "stick to her kind." This is consistent with SIT theory which suggests that individuals will actively seek commonalities with their ingroup and emphasise differences with outsiders (Schmid, 2017), which may explain her desire to be closer to her identified group. She described a self-awareness of adjusting herself when interacting with white people, wanting to show the best of herself. This is consistent with literature which suggests that in unfamiliar social spaces, black people tend to reflect on themselves, and adjust themselves in several ways, to be respected (Boswell, 2014; Fanon, 1967). Palesa regularly used collective terminology such as "our" and "us" when talking about black people in general, which demonstrated a degree of internalised assumed homogeneity.

> *At the back of your mind, as a black person, you are always thinking that you represent the entire race when you come into a situation.* (Nandi)

> *It's like, if I don't present the right way, then I have done a disservice for everybody else, so I'd rather not, you know, I'd rather stick to my kind because we understand each other and, you know, not necessarily have to put myself in that situation.* (Nandi)

> *I think as a black person you always arrange yourself differently, you know, when you enter in a situation, particularly if you're going to be, you know, with white people so to speak…subconsciously you just rearrange yourself, and then afterwards, you feel like, oh, but why was I doing like, you know, because there's always, this feeling of wanting to be your best self so that you don't appear less, that kind of situation.* (Nandi)

Each participant brought to the interview their own racialised history, and subjective life experiences, which interacted with the subjectivity of the white researcher. This interaction offered an opportunity to explore the social and unconscious dynamics that may play out in interracial encounters within school environments (Rizq, 2008; Russel & Kelly, 2002). The fact that the research explored "black parents" would have impacted the parents' sense of representing all black people by heightening their social identification based on race. However, some observations have been made about the participants' experiences of discussing race with a white researcher. There was evidence of mistrust which may have been emphasised by the research inviting social comparisons, which may have left the parents with the emphasis on difference, and a fear of possible aggressive, or defensive responses due to the researcher's white fragility. The use of minimising language, caveats, actively seeking agreement, and valuing of the research, are possibly all outcomes of racial dynamics where positive self and group representation is heightened.

Theme 5: "It's really not just Black or White" – Intersectionality and Proxies for Race

This theme emerged with the majority of participants raising issues of intersectionality between race and other social identities such as nationality, class, gender, language, age, and sexuality. In some instances, these social categorisations appeared to operate as proxies for race, and in others, they compounded the experience of discrimination. This discussion explores how these add to the complexities of the parents' experiences and their attempts to understand their own experiences of the dynamics within the school setting.

Six of the parents mentioned language in their discussion around race. Katlego tried to explain why some black children may experience an independent school differently from his daughter. He talked about children who had an accent possibly feeling less accepted and more

self-conscious. Palesa also mentioned eloquence in English as a factor influencing how black people may be seen and how at times, she felt it was assumed that she cannot speak English well. She appeared to link this to an assumption about her ability to think, which may be the experience of one's perceived intelligence being measured on one's ability to speak English. Thabo and his wife chose to raise their son speaking English at home, which in the interview he described as going "overboard". He described how his son learned their home language at school because of spending time with black children at his Afrikaans primary school. It appeared for his son to be able to fit into his social group, it was necessary to learn a vernacular language. Asha and Shani talked explicitly about language being used as a tool to exclude or include. For Shani, who did not speak a local African language, it felt as though the black parents were less willing to change to English, so she could understand the conversation than white Afrikaans parents were. Contrary to Shani's experience, Asha felt that white Afrikaans parents would not change to English, and this left her feeling uncomfortable and excluded. Asha also noted that her son had been ridiculed by black peers for taking Afrikaans to Grade 12. Zanele mentioned language as one of the commonalities that she thought shifted her daughter's social group towards black friends.

These parents' views suggested that language was used in a range of ways to exclude and include. In the South African context, language is often linked to race and therefore may act as a proxy for race (Hino et al., 20218). Mastery and/or exclusive use of a white language such as English may result in a person being seen as more educated and whiter, thus shifting them on the social hierarchy (Fanon, 1967; Hook, 2004). This may have been seen as favourable, or encouraged, in white spaces such as the independent schools, which was supported by Katlego's comment, and Thabo's decision to raise his son as English-speaking. However, speaking in the vernacular also appeared to be a boundary used by black children (and parents) to secure belonging in their ingroups within the schools. Therefore, supporting the view that language, as a proxy for race, is used to exclude and include.

> *It sometimes is the little things, maybe the way you speak English, how you pronounce it, your accent, you know, there isn't that "I feel good vibe about you" per se.* (Katlego)
>
> *I think he is someone who is very much free of his culture. We are, we have raised him in sort of a modern way. We have allowed him to assimilate, as we have said unconsciously, even from our side because he did not even understand our Zulu language until late in*

> *Grade 5 or 6 because we accommodated. We spoke to him in English, so that he doesn't struggle when he gets to school.* (Thabo)
>
> *Yes, at the sports meets you'll see they stand separate groups and initially I was very upset with the blacks because they'd sit together and speak in Zulu. And I said, this is a language I would not learn, (inaudible) and the (Afrikaans) white parents would make an effort to speak in English.* (Shani)
>
> *For the parents, it's a bigger issue, because they then are not able to connect, because language is now being used as a tool to exclude.* (Asha)
>
> *Oh, you're one of the boys who do Afrikaans. You don't do Zulu, you know, you're actually very white.* (Asha)

Nandi, Shani, and Asha spoke about their experiences as black foreign nationals. Nandi felt that race was easier to call out because it is obvious, but in fact, other social factors also raised issues of discrimination. She felt she had a strong sense of black identity and so she tended to interpret discrimination based on her nationality and gender, rather than race. She also shared that it was disconcerting for her to realise that "being black represented some sort of deficiency here in South Africa." Shani shared how she experienced black South Africans as sensitive, and she, herself, feared offending others. On the other hand, there were times she was unsure if the patronising treatment she received from the white staff was due to her being new or black. She described white parents as not having a sense of how to gauge her because she was foreign and black. Similarly, she is unsure if the treatment her daughter received was because of being black or foreign. Shani gave the sense that it was difficult to discern at times if the different treatment was due to race or nationality. Asha recognised that her experience of being black in South Africa might be different to black South Africans. In her view, she was more likely to be accepted than black South Africans in the school environment. She based this on experiences where she had been identified by white parents as foreign, based on her accent, and after confirming this, white parents had commented "you're not like them." It is through comments such as these, that black people of different nationalities (or religions or ethnicities) are encouraged to feel superior towards one another, with the sole intention of maintaining a white supremacist power order (Fanon, 1967). Zanele, a black South African, questioned the transformative validity of the school hiring a black foreign national in a management position. She felt preference was given to black foreign nationals which supported Asha's view of black foreign nationals being more acceptable in white spaces. Nationality brought another element of

difference which, it seemed, might endear one to white South Africans but alienate one from black South Africans. It is possible that despite parents coming from other African countries, their foreign status, language and possibly class, rendered them "more white" or less threatening to white parents.

> *Voice issues of discrimination, not just racism, because I think racism is the easy one or the most obvious one simply because of, you know, it's black or white, but we know that's it's really not* just *black or white.* (Nandi)
>
> *I came from a predominantly, from an empowered black nation. It was a little bit disconcerting for me to actually realise that being black represented some sort of deficiency, here in South Africa.* (Nandi)
>
> *I'm not South African, so I don't have experience in South African people, so I will not understand some of the way they do things. So, the people (inaudible) are very sensitive to this.… It takes a bit of getting used to and also now, thinking through what I say so that I don't offend anybody's sensibilities.* (Shani)
>
> *It's like you like you need to be handheld to go through stuff. I don't know if it's because I'm black or because I'm new, I don't know what it is, but it can be irritating.* (Shani)
>
> *I'm a foreigner… so, I feel sorry for them (white parents) sometimes cos they don't know where to pitch the conversation, and whether or not to have it, and sometimes they just completely avoid it.* (Shani)
>
> *I'm not South African so there are also things that I probably cannot relate to that a black South African would perhaps, you know, would be struggling with.… There's also that disconnect between what my issues would be vis-a-vis what a black South African's issue would be.* (Asha)
>
> *Because we are not black South African, we probably have been accepted a little more than the black South Africans.* (Asha)
>
> *(He) gets excluded from the black boys because the black boys almost like, oh, dude, you're really not one of us.* (Asha)
>
> *South Africans have got this illness of looking outside our borders as long as they're black, but they're outside of our borders.* (Zanele)

Both Shani and Asha raised the issue of class in their discussion of racial discrimination. Shani felt discrimination in Nairobi was much more class-based and this shaped how she interpreted discrimination. For example, she viewed her daughter's school as more upper-class (School E) and her son's school as a more middle-income school (School B) and felt this impacted the racial tensions in the schools differently. She felt the middle-class school was "getting on with it" and less concerned with race but also more representative. Asha raised class

in her discussion around the social "cliques" at school. For her, powerful black parents were more accepted because of networking opportunities. South Africa's history has resulted in social classes being divided strongly along racial lines, despite a strong emergent black middle class post-1994. It seems that, once again, attaining wealth and power may be associated with being "more white" which in turn results in greater acceptance (Hook, 2004). Mandla felt that race was a by-product of political cultures and advocated for both black and white people to move towards a middle ground or new social class. He expressed a view that some wealthy black people entered independent schools without a willingness to "move to the middle".

> *School B, you don't get that feeling of undertone and I think it's cos it's middle income, people who are just getting on with it.* (Shani)
>
> *The discrimination we have in Nairobi is class discrimination.* (Shani)
>
> *They (whites) are more accepting of that Sandton crowd because, oh, he's a CEO of, you know, this that the other, so it works in their favour to include him in their network, so it can be toxic.* (Asha)
>
> *The ones that you know they're all from the black side, the ones that get the tenders, they work, I don't know if it's clean tenders or whatever, but money, it's not an issue to those, so those are people that can pay five years in advance. So, you have your child and you even paid five years in advance but because you belong or you are in, you occupy this section of the spectrum, your child actually takes a knock on their self-confidence, self-worth, and everything, you know, because of that. And then you scream racism. I think at times it's not even racism, it's the inability to want to move to the middle.* (Mandla)

Four of the parents mentioned gender as another social factor that impacted discrimination. For Nandi, as mentioned, she read situations from a gendered perspective before considering them racial. She felt she grew up in a patriarchal society and that influenced her experience. She felt that perhaps race compounded her gendered experiences in South Africa. Nandi's view is supported by the feminist theory which suggests that sexism and racism may be related but are also distinct phenomena, and therefore, interact to compound the discrimination experience (Sidanius & Veniegas, 2013). The exact outcome of the interaction between the two is debated, with some arguing that the impact is additive and others suggesting some form of multiplicity (Sidanius & Veniegas, 2013). Nandi also described advocating for gender equality within school sports and trying to get girls' soccer and cricket established in the lower grades. Shani raised gender in respect of trying to make sense of social dynamics for her daughter (at an

all-girl school) and herself in the PTA (majority female). Perhaps these cases illustrate how when gender difference is removed from the dynamic, other social identities, such as race, are brought to the fore. It certainly demonstrated that for her the power dynamics were more complex than just race. Asha felt that the fathers at school were more relaxed and inclusive than the mothers which are consistent with literature that suggests black (American) woman are more likely to use avoidance strategies in response to (potential) individual racism than black men (Jacob et al., 2021). Matentjie (2019) also noted gendered differences in response to racism in South African schools. Perhaps fathers appeared more laid back to Asha because they allowed the mothers to mediate the school relationships and only engaged if the situation escalates (Matentjie, 2019). Asha also felt her daughter's school was more active in engaging with race-related matters than her son's school. Both observations pointed to a possible gendered approach to managing racial tensions and relationships. It is worth noting that School B had very favourable feedback on openness and communication around race matters, suggesting factors beyond gender-influenced levels of engagement. However, it does demonstrate how gender was regularly part of the consideration in social dynamics. While offering his view on racial dynamics and discrimination, Katlego suggested that there were other social identities, such as gender, and sexual orientation, that impacted social groupings. He used these as examples of groups who shared common interests and therefore "naturally" grouped together. Katlego appeared to be referring to the SIT principle of ingroup favouritism, and acknowledged, but struggled to articulate, the complexity of holding multiple social identities, for which SIT cannot account (Brown, 2000; Schmid, 2017). Nandi also mentioned sexuality as another discussion their school is currently engaging with. The implication being that there are social identities, other than race, that impact experiences of discrimination.

> *I was raised in a patriarchal society and then South Africa is also a patriarchal society and it's like, you know, so I respond to a situation as a woman who's being othered rather than, you know, black as a first-hand experience.* (Nandi)

> *We did have a bit of hard time fitting in, and I don't know if it's because it's a girl's school and girls are a bit, a bit more cliquey, or because it's just School E, I don't know.* (Shani)

> *The PTA is almost relying on females…. From where I was before, there was a mix of men and women, here it's mainly women, and you can feel the undertones of people looking to see if someone is discriminating against someone else.* (Shani)

> *Conversations around the sports field, again the dynamics are very different between men and women. So, you'd find… men in general are a lot more open and inclusive.… I think it's more around the moms where you'll find that. Then what will happen is that the black moms would stick together, or they will just stop and go.* (Asha).

> *For me it was a function of this thing goes beyond necessarily race, it also goes towards gender, etcetera. It's not very often that you're going to find gay people too comfortable around heterosexual people or vice versa, you know. People will naturally be with people that are like minded in that way.* (Katlego)

> *For an institution like ours, that has started the journey of, you know, incorporating uncomfortable discussions around race and, bubbling under, is your sexuality, you know it's progressive.* (Nandi)

Even age surfaced as an identifying social characteristic that could compound discrimination and which impact power dynamics. Shani explained that School E only had teachers with over 20 years of experience, and this was a factor influencing the eligibility for qualified younger black teachers. Asha felt that young black staff were not taken seriously by all the children. Palesa mentioned that her son was better able to handle discrimination when he was older. She also made a statement about teachers needing to be made aware of racial matters from a younger age, implying that either most older teachers were racist and/or it would be difficult for them to learn or change their perspectives.

> *In the senior school, we don't have anybody (teachers) who's had less than say 20 years of experience.* (Shani)

> *If you talk about teachers, a lot of the junior, you know, your interns, I'd say is a 50/50 split. So, boys of colour then get to see, you know, boys who look like them in the teaching staff, but again I think they are, they need to earn their stripes. So, they're in very junior positions and, therefore, from an impact point of view, I don't even think the boys particularly give them as much, what you call it, take them seriously, unfortunately.* (Asha)

> *At School C unfortunately, maybe because they (her son) were young, and they couldn't confront (racism) there, now they are big, they are in high school, they can confront it.* (Palesa)

> *The teachers need, I don't know, they need to have started it from when they were young because I mean, how do you teach not to be a racist?* (Palesa)

For most of the parents (eight out of ten) the discussion around race and discrimination brought to the forefront a discussion around intersectionality which illustrated how oppression is

complex and multifaceted (Hylton, 2012). Social identities such as nationality, class, and language appeared to act as proxies for race that were more socially acceptable means for racial discrimination. Other social identities such as gender, age and sexuality could compound racial discrimination, making the oppression more intense and more difficult to challenge. The parents raised these issues suggesting it was important that all policies and thinking around oppression within schools should be intersectionality-informed, otherwise there was a risk of operating under pretences, which resists transformation (Cho et al., 2013).

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research findings in the form of five primary themes. Firstly, parents' racialised experiences and responses were explored revealing a sentiment that racism is present but subtle and difficult to name. The parents' behavioural responses and psychological defences were also explored. The second theme looked at parents' perceptions of their children's racialised experiences at school and found that most parents felt their children were not significantly impacted by racism. Subthemes emerged around black identity and social groupings in high school, as well as intergenerational communication. The third theme discussed parents' perceptions of race(ism) in their school system which appeared to be significantly impacted by communication from the school. Various subthemes emerged around parental involvement, transformation, and the management of race-related matters. Parents were able to discuss systemic racism more openly. The fourth theme took an interpretive stance by looking at the white gaze of the researcher and how this may mirror interracial dynamics at school. Finally, a latent theme emerged around intersectionality and proxies for race which appeared to add to the complexity of the parents' experiences. These themes were discussed and linked to the academic literature. The next chapter concludes with a synopsis of the major findings and provides an overall theoretical discussion of emerging issues from the study and their implications.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Introduction

This concluding chapter provides an overview of the research findings which seek to give insight into the lived experiences of black parents in high-fee-paying independent schools. The value of the research is also explored here by discussing the study's strengths and limitations. This provides insight into its contributions but also where future research should be directed. A final comment on the research is also offered.

Overview of the Findings

This research looked at the experiences of black parents at high-fee-paying private schools with regard to race, racism, and discrimination and how they navigate these issues. The following findings were made.

The research found that the parents' experience of racism in these white liberal spaces is extremely subtle, and yet, pervasive. This is consistent with literature that reports on aversive racism in liberal spaces (Boswell, 2014; Straker, 2004). Most parents initially reported that they had not experienced any racism at their children's school, however, during the interviews they revealed subtle racial tensions that, at times, were difficult to articulate. Most participants also stated that their children were minimally impacted by racism, and they spontaneously offered reasons why their children might be different. However, once again their narratives provided evidence of racialised experiences that also appeared difficult to articulate. There were few incidents of overt racism described by the parents. The subtlety of racial tension and the often, intangible feeling of being othered, was grappled with. Yet, when talking about structural racism, parents appeared more comfortable expressing negative views about the challenges faced in their schools. It appears contradictory that the school could be seen as having racist elements and yet the parents and children do not experience racism. However, it may actually provide useful insight into how difficult it can be for parents to express their individual experiences of racism. Talking about it systemically may have provided some distance for them to be able to do so, without having to blame someone and risk rebuke. The following paragraphs briefly summarise the findings related to the parents' racialised experiences, their perceptions of their children's

racialised experience, and their perceptions of the school's management of race(ism) and transformation.

From their own experience, parents described subtle social exclusions, superficial politeness in social encounters, feelings of discomfort, feeling lesser than, feeling othered, feeling spoken down to, passive aggression, a sense of overcompensation, and assumptions based on assumed homogeneity of black people, much of which is consistent with the literature (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017). Some parents reported confusion around the uneven distribution of academic awards, and a sense that teachers had lower expectations of their children, or black children in general, which is also consistent with local and international research (Hope et al., 2015, Joesph et al., 2016; Machaisa & Lebeloane, 2017). The issue of structural barriers to entry for black families was also raised, supporting Marchand et al.'s (2019) discussion about factors that perpetuate institutional oppression. Parents criticised elements of the curriculum and raised racism in sports. However, much of this discussion was accompanied by expressions that racism was part of life, or worse elsewhere.

Concerning their children, some parents discussed instances of micro-aggressions, such as not knowing, or mispronouncing, the names of their children, or looking at them when reprimanding a whole class. It appears that the more subtle findings from other South African research were observed here (Machaisa & Lebeloane, 2017; Naidoo et al., 2018) which is consistent with Matentjie's (2019) observations that inequity in white spaces is expressed in subtle ways. Subtle exclusions were also mentioned in relation to peers. Tolerance of microaggressions and the potential downplaying of experiences may serve to minimise the harmful impact of these experiences for both the children and their parents. Several parents raised the issue of false accusations of racism, which highlighted their internal dilemma around challenging subtle racism or discrimination (towards their child or themselves) within the school.

An interesting subtheme emerged around parents' perceptions of their children's black identity. More than half of the parents made statements that either directly, or indirectly, differentiated their children from other black learners at school, which may have served to represent themselves as the ideologically accommodating other (Hook, 2004). At times there was evidence of polarisation between "good" and "bad" black people. It is possible that these racial tensions converged with the children's psychosocial stage of development (Erikson, 1968) and

their social identity (Schmid, 2017) to impact the children's social dynamics which parents described as a shift away from white, towards black friends in high school. Children with a strong sense of identity outside of race, that conflicted with the racial stereotypes, found themselves in a space of in-betweenity (Sonn & Fisher, 2003), or no man's land. This highlighted how SIT oversimplifies the understanding of inter-group dynamics by failing to consider the impact of multiple ingroup identifications (Brown, 2000).

Some interesting observations were made about the intergenerational dynamics between the parents and their children. This is an important consideration as research suggests parents play a role in their children's ability to cope with discrimination (Hope et al., 2015; Martin Romero et al., 2022). There was notable diversity in parents' engagement with their children around issues of race and discrimination. Some parents actively engaged with issues that emerged in the media. Others seemed to operate on the assumption that their children would raise the issue if there was a problem. This meant many of the parents' perceptions reported here are based on what they observed, and occasional discussions, rather than on regular engagement with their children around their racial experiences.

Black parents' perceptions of the school's engagement with race, racism, discrimination, and transformation appeared to be significantly impacted by the schools' general communications around race-related matters, and their specific responses to parents' communications. The research participants represented 6 different independent schools and demonstrated a notable diversity in their approach to managing racial matters. Most schools appeared to be actively engaging with the issues, but with varying degrees of effectiveness, while one school appeared restricted and avoidant of engagement. The schools whose engagement was considered successful appeared to be associated with lower degrees of defensiveness. This is aligned with Steele's (1990) view that white policymakers need not be so consumed by their innocence, that they are preoccupied with selfish escapism or paternalism. Rather, they should focus on the practicalities of developing policies that are fair to all, taking into account a history of inequity.

Parents' involvement at school was discussed including how factors such as Covid-19, and perceptions around children's independence, had reduced the parents' involvement at school. Consistent with the literature, several different factors appeared to contribute to parents'

involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The parents challenged the perception that black parents did not engage with the school because they were disinterested. They offered counter-narratives such as having fewer resources, fewer support structures and certain racial barriers. It was raised that some parents may not know the importance, or impact, of being more involved. The parents were able to express how racial tensions played a role in volunteering as parents may have felt uncomfortable and avoided "unnecessary" contact, which may be a product of racialised in-group and out-group dynamics that developed among the parents (Schmid, 2017).

Parents offered a range of views on the diversity of staff and pupils in their schools with some applauding the shifts they had observed, and others acknowledging stagnancy. This suggested that the schools were at different stages in the process of transformation. There was an overarching sense that there was more transformation at the student level in comparison to the staff level. Specific issues were raised about the tendency for black teachers to fill positions with lower power or status and also the representation of black *South African* teachers. These may all represent forms of tolerance as a means to maintain the status quo (Green et al., 2007; McCarthy Foubert, 2020). Black students and lower-ranking staff have relatively less power to influence a school. Black foreigners may be considered "more white" and therefore used by schools to appear tolerant. This raised discussions related to white dominance, assumed universality and the impact of biases on employment equity.

Policies related to race and procedures for reporting grievances were discussed and it appeared that the level of urgency for formalising policy and addressing race-related matters differed significantly between schools. There was a sense that policies and procedures lacked meaning when not clearly communicated, or appropriately managed, which paralleled much of the literature on the transformation of South Africa's education system post-apartheid (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). The message being, that a good policy without action is meaningless. The complexity around reporting grievances, particularly to white staff members, was also discussed with the risk of rebuke being raised.

Participants offered some thought-provoking views on the management of race-related matters based on experiences from their schools. They focussed on the need for white staff and parents to develop an awareness of their unconscious bias and that understanding, internalising, and putting policies into practice is required for them to be effective. There was an emphasis on

the schools' need to proactively engage with these matters. Inclusive representation in the decision-making and active communication of the policies was suggested. A recommendation was made to review recruitment procedures and for creative strategies to progress transformation on a staff level. Parents also wished for schools to engage with policymakers more actively around curriculum transformation. What parents were raising is the fact that without active and conscious engagement, the white supremacist order will ensure the system remains unchanged (DiAngelo, 2018).

Another key finding in this research was the precarious position black parents found themselves in at white schools. Their guarded narratives provided insight into how they may have managed experiences of racism. It also reflected their uncertainty around the racialised nature of their experiences due to its subtlety but also how their narratives might be received by a white researcher. It seemed that the parents held a privileged position by being some of only a few black families who have succeeded to gain entry into their schools. This position and the education of their children were held to be most important, and they may have been compelled to maintain this position in several ways. They might have reproduced racist narratives due to habituation or assimilation into an oppressive environment that they felt expected such responses. This was related to gender literature where a similar phenomenon was observed in women who achieved positions of power in male-dominated work environments (Derk et al., 2011). Some of the findings related to parents' engagement with race are discussed below.

To cope with their experiences, parents demonstrated certain psychological and behavioural defences. Psychologically, they appeared to manage the uncertainty and anxiety around racism by using denial and suppression, colour blindness, identifying a common interests argument rather than racism, introjecting painful feelings at times, experiencing feelings of contempt towards those who were racist but also those who experienced racism, and intellectualising, which kept some distance from the feelings. At times, the parents' narratives revealed views that included racial stereotyping, the concept of reverse racism, the idealisation of whiteness, and the issue of racism being seen as an individual act rather than systemic. The parents' narratives demonstrated different degrees of awareness and questioning around these internalised, appropriated or reproduced racist narratives.

Concerning the parents' behavioural responses to acts of racism, they were categorised and discussed as null action, reacting, investigating, and acting to influence. These findings were highly congruent with the findings from Matentjie's (2019) study. Null action appeared to be motivated by the fear of retaliation or further alienation, exhaustion at continuously having to address something, and possible learned submissive responses. Matentjie (2019) suggested that null action could be leveraged later when action was required. At a high school level, parents may also have expected their children to manage racial issues themselves. Investigating is a strategy that was motivated by the desire to be "objective" and may attempt to remove the emotion from the experience. Many of the parents in this research tended to be actively involved in advocating for their children (and other children) by exerting influence at their school, thus using their personal status to advocate (Matentjie, 2019). Parents also described their own behavioural modifications to cope with the unspoken rules of engagement in white spaces. Parents mentioned avoiding certain topics of discussion and maintaining a collegial manner. A parent shared about her self-consciousness due to her hypervisibility in her child's school (Posey-Maddox, 2017) and how she was constantly adjusting herself (Boswell, 2014). Others talked about avoiding groups of white parents or actively seeking out black parents consistent with ingroup and outgroup behaviours (Schmid, 2017). It was also noted, how at times, defences may perpetuate the status quo, suggesting how difficult it may be to challenge entrenched but subtle forms of racism in spaces of white privilege (Matentjie, 2019).

The understanding of inter-racial dynamics was deepened by exploring the interpersonal dynamics between the researcher and the participants in this research. This provided additional insight into how parents may navigate race, in general, and the topic of racism within a school, with a white other. There was evidence of anxiety related to confidentiality and the researcher's motives. This suggested a degree of ambivalence about the research, possibly due to mistrust or fear of reproach from the white researcher. It was also observed that parents regularly used minimising language, caveats, actively sought agreement and valuing the research. It was thought that these served to manage the racial dynamics in such a way that a positive self and group representation were achieved. This was potentially at the expense of complete openness.

Finally, the complexity of the parents' experience was revealed through the emergence of discussions around intersectionality and proxies for race. In an environment where racism is

subtle, other social identities, such as nationality, class, gender, language, age, and sexuality seemed to add to the complexity of parents' experience making it more difficult to understand and express their experience of discrimination. At times, these identities were used simply as proxies for race, and at other times, they compounded the discrimination. The discussion raised complex issues around language, with the general sense that language was a proxy for race in South Africa (Hino et al., 20218) and can be a powerful tool to include or exclude (Fanon, 1697). This study also explored how foreign nationals may be rendered "more white" based on their nationality, language and possibly class, and how this serves to sustain a white supremacist order (Fanon, 1967). There was a discussion around gendered differences in managing racial tension, which is consistent with the literature (Jacob et al., 2021; Matentjie, 2019), but also how gender compounds experiences of discrimination as black women experience the interacting effect of both sexism and racism (Sidanius & Veniegas, 2013). The fact that these issues emerged supports the view that policies and thinking around oppression within schools need to be intersectionality-informed to avoid operating under pretences which in fact resisted transformation (Cho et al., 2013; Hylton, 2012).

Study Strengths and Limitations

A key strength of this study was the methodology used to obtain and analyse the data as it allowed for a deeper exploration of the parents' experiences. While remaining on topic, it was sufficiently non-directive to allow data to emerge naturally. The research has also highlighted areas for consideration or concern and thus invites further exploration by educators in independent schools. However, the nature of the study was such that the findings are not necessarily generalisable as only a few parents, from a limited number of independent schools, were interviewed. However, the study provides a depth of exploration into the complexities of race in spaces of white privilege.

The parents were aware in advance that the research involved perceptions of race as it was essential that they were fully informed about the sensitive nature of the discussion before consenting to the interviews. This did not appear to have influenced rehearsed responses as none of the parents appeared to offer pre-prepared content. In fact, many spoke in a broad or generalised sense and struggled to elicit specific examples at the time of the interview. Another risk identified before conducting the research was that of attracting volunteers who were

particularly belligerent and looking for a platform for propagating personal agendas. This did not appear to be the case with any of the participants, although one parent appeared particularly disgruntled with their school on multiple fronts. On the other end of the spectrum, there was also a concern that many of the participants may have been particularly unconflicted about issues of race within the school environment. This may have been the case with several of the participants in this research, however, their narratives still provided valuable insight as they grappled with the topic.

The researcher being white acted as both a strength and limitation to this research, as discussed in the Reflexivity section above. The voices of the participants were filtered through the researcher and therefore, for increased credibility, future research could be enhanced by involving the participants in the analysis of the research data (Hylton, 2012).

The significance of this study was that it presented an opportunity for black parents to share their experiences around race in the school context where white liberalism possibly limited such conversations. It has highlighted some areas of progress in independent schools and others of ongoing concern. Educators could use this research to inform policy and practices within their schools to advance the national agenda of transformation and diversification.

Directions for Future Research

Future research could explore the perceptions and experiences of white parents or a mixed group analysis to try and better understand the dynamics between black and white parents in high-fee-paying independent schools. It may also be useful to analyse patterns of relating among school children over time to understand the racialised social dynamics among peers and the drive to racial grouping in high school. Educators' unconscious bias towards black students may also be a topic to understand and promote the conscientisation of South African educators.

Final Comment

I hope that this research honours the diversity of the voices and experiences of the individuals that participated in the interviews, while still gathering some relevant insights into the collective experience of black parents at some Johannesburg independent schools. Many schools are making great efforts and progress, but the work is ongoing. Some schools need deep self-reflection about how to begin. Hopefully, this research will be useful to both.

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