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**An exploration of Black African students' experiences of
Whiteness on their Black African racial identity in a South
African University.**

Masters Dissertation

By

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ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS

Racial identity issues have gained significant attention globally, posing ongoing challenges for individuals across different racial backgrounds in different settings, and higher education has not been an exception. Although prior research has addressed race and identity, there is a need to expand the existing literature by examining the specific dimensions of race and identity that impact students in South African higher education. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the experiences of Black African students in a South African university and their encounters with Whiteness, a key aspect of their racial identity. By focusing on the unique context of South African higher education, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding race and identity within this specific setting.

The study examined the experiences of Black African students with Whiteness and its impact on their Black African racial identity within a South African university. The research aimed to explore their encounters with Whiteness, their experiences of African racial identity, and their coping mechanisms and recommendations related to issues of Whiteness and Black African racial identity challenges. Using a qualitative design and interpretive research paradigm, 15 social work students were interviewed. Interviewees included undergraduate, postgraduate Masters, and Ph.D students. To analyze the interviews thematic data analysis was employed.

The findings highlighted that Black African students' experiences with Whiteness encompass multiple dimensions and pose challenges to their adaptation, mentally, economically, socially, emotionally, and academically, within the university context. These experiences often lead to the normalization of Eurocentric standards and the suppression of their Black African racial identity. The study also underscored the interconnection between Whiteness and other social categories, such as race, class, and gender. Hence the study recognizes a need for additional research to explore the impact of the intersectional interplay between the experiences of racial issues and other social categories on Black African students within the university environment.

Key terms: Black African, Racial identity, Historically White Universities (HWU), Whiteness, South Africa, Higher education.

DECLARATION

I, Masimbonge Shozi, solemnly declare and affirm the following:

1. This study is a product of my own original work unless otherwise stated and duly acknowledged.
2. It has not been previously submitted to any other university for examination or any other academic qualification.
3. Unless acknowledged, the data, information, sources, pictures, graphs, or tables included in this study are solely my own and do not incorporate the work of any other individuals.

.....

Masimbonge Shozi

.....

Signature

.....

Date

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my late mother, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to her. During our last conversation, while she was in the hospital before her passing, she said, “Good luck ke mfana wami,” which translates to “Good luck then my boy.” I firmly believe that the power of these words is the driving force behind my current achievements and stands as the legacy she has bestowed upon me in the pursuit of a meaningful life. I wholeheartedly accept and cherish this legacy and today, I consider myself truly blessed. Ngiyabonga Mama!

I also dedicate this dissertation to my brother, Sphamandla Dlamini, who was unable to complete his degree at this institution due to financial challenges. Despite his circumstances, he ensured that I could complete mine. He supported me throughout the application and enrolment process after matriculation. Most importantly, he served as my unwavering support system throughout my undergraduate journey. He encouraged and guided me to apply for financial assistance through NSFAS; provided both academic and emotional support; and also provided financial assistance where possible. My dear brother, I am immensely grateful for your care, mentorship, and for always being there for me when I needed a shoulder to lean on. Ngikufisela okuhle nomusa!

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First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank God, my ancestors, and the ever-living spirit of my mother. Their divine presence, guidance, and protection have been instrumental in my academic journey. I am truly grateful for their blessings and answered prayers.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

CRT	Critical Race Theory
HWU	Historically White Universities
SA	South Africa
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Services Professions
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
US	United States
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, or Asexual, and more.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This is the introductory part of this study and its context. It begins with the introduction; followed by background and rationale; problem statement; location of the study; aims; objectives; research questions; underlying assumption of the study; clarification of terms; and the structure of the dissertation.

1.1.Introduction

I am a ‘born free’ Black African that grew up in deep rural areas where I was not exposed to multiple races. As a result, I did not experience the harsh realities of apartheid and the dilemmas of being in a multiracial context the same way as those who were exposed to multiracial settings on daily basis. However, I knew very well that multiple races existed by virtue of travelling, learning about them from school, and seeing on different media platforms. I also knew from high school that our South African past was characterized by a volatile era called apartheid. The era that identified people according to their racial differences including amongst them: Whites, Indians, Blacks, and Coloreds (Steyn 2001). Generally, this racial hierarchy system was grounded on the belief that some races are superior to others. As a result, Whites were ranked at the top (Indians and Coloreds in the middle) and Blacks at the bottom (Moodley and Adam 2000). This ranking and privileging of Whites associated their sociocultural and sociopolitical stance with favorable perceptions of racial identity and was conceptualized as Whiteness (Lindner 2018).

On the other hand, the Black Africans’ race, identity, culture, society, and socio-politics were associated with unfavorable perceptions and were termed Blackness (Lindner 2018). One can agree that even in the post-apartheid era these concepts have not been challenged and dismantled entirely and are therefore seen as the legacy of the post-1994 era (Mtose 2008). Hence, it raises questions as to whether Whiteness, as an ideologically constructed power and institutional system that has historically conferred benefits and privileges upon the White racial group, continues to exert dominance and influence? (Webb 2006; Helms 2017; Matias & Newlove

2017). Additionally, it raises the question of whether the Black African race has unwillingly assimilated to the withholding and ignorance of their language and racial identity as result of the influence of Whiteness? Lastly, to what extent has Whiteness as a racial identity influenced and shaped the Black Africans identification process? The aim of this study, therefore, was to explore the experiences of students in relation to these issues.

1.2. Background and Rationale

This thesis commences by sharing my personal educational experiences, shaped by the socio-cultural context in which I grew up from the dusty streets of KwaQoloqolo. As previously mentioned, my upbringing occurred in a deeply rural area, where I attended local schools and encountered with numerous challenges arising from the post-1994 era. These challenges encompassed financial constraints, academic difficulties, as well as issues surrounding language and identity. However, amidst these trials, I found solace and empowerment in my cultural and religious identity, which served as a knowledge system that provided me with guidance, strength, and a sense of pride in the face of societal pressures, labeling, and stereotyping based on my identity. Drawing upon my cultural and religious identity as a source of resilience, I navigated the challenges encountered during my high school years. Despite the familiar environment of high school compared to the university, it too presented me with distinct challenges that tested my religious and cultural identity in various ways. One notable instance was the school policy that mandated the cutting of our hair, a practice conflicting with my religious beliefs. Although some fellow students and I objected to this policy on religious grounds, our educators, without our consent or parental approval, normalized the forced haircutting process and if we did not do it ourselves, they would normally do it forcefully in front of our peers.

This is how my experiences of conforming to societal norms and expectations related to appearance began and have significantly impacted my personal journey as a student. Specifically, during my time in high school with the haircutting issue, I encountered instances where only a portion of my hair would be cut, leaving the rest intact, which subjected me to ridicule from my peers. Consequently, I found myself altering my appearance not out of personal choice, but rather to seek acceptance within the school environment. Reflecting on these

experiences, I thought about the implications this had on myself, my friends, and my parents. It raised a question of whether was the school policy and the manifestation of cruelty by teachers a consequence of Black Africans internalizing and perpetuating the legacies and harsh realities of the post-apartheid era? It took time for me to comprehend that such norms and ideologies are not inherent from birth but rather acquired from society, ingrained in our consciousness, and shaping our behavior.

Throughout my high school years, conforming to certain grooming standards became a norm in order to fit in and align with the prevailing expectations of others. However, as I transitioned to university, I encountered further experiences that heightened my interest in exploring identity. I observed that some individuals, grappling with feelings of inferiority and embarrassment regarding their own racial identity, sought to emulate and project an image that aligned with the normalized Whiteness as a societal ideal (Hattam and Prosser 2008). As a student of Black African descent, I personally encountered a sense of exclusion and shame that compelled me to conform to the dominant culture, norms, and standards prevalent within the university context.

In my previous educational experiences, particularly during high school, I observed a sense of unity among students despite differences in religious beliefs. Our collective engagement in various activities such as cultural practices, dance, performing arts, singing, and moral teachings fostered a shared bond, particularly grounded in the concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu represents a philosophical and ethical worldview prevalent among Black communities, emphasizing the interconnectedness of humanity and highlighting the core values of compassion, empathy, communal harmony and it serves as a guiding principle for Black people, shaping their values, politics, and moral perspectives (Dladla 2017). However, the transition to a historically White university presented a stark contrast to the inclusive and Ubuntu-centered environment I had experienced before. I felt a sense of detachment in an academic setting where interests and priorities seemed divergent from unity, Ubuntu, and the affirmation of African racial identity. The university environment, which had a historical predominance of White students, appeared to lack the nurturing of ubuntu principles. Moreover, the content, language, and curriculum

employed in the university did not adequately acknowledge or reflect the lived experiences of Black individuals and failed to foster a sense of Ubuntu. Instead, the curriculum seemed to prioritize and perpetuate Whiteness, neglecting meaningful engagement with our African context and knowledge systems.

Furthermore, I encountered language barriers that hindered my learning experience, as the primary mode of instruction was conducted in English. Despite the existence of language policies in higher education, such as the 2002 Policy of Language in Higher Education and its revised version in 2017, which establish English as the predominant language of instruction, its increasing usage among Black students provides compelling evidence of the dominant and normalized nature of Whiteness. This phenomenon seems to influence Black students to conform to and accept Whiteness as the prevailing norm. Moreover, the university's physical environment and structural elements, such as symbols, statues, and other campus features reminiscent of the historical dominance of White culture, further contributed to feeling marginalized. These elements serve as a reminder of the enduring legacy of White domination within the institution.

The experience of feeling marginalized was attributed to several factors, including the university's architectural design, geographical placement, and the presence of statues that failed to reflect the Black identity of individuals like myself. Furthermore, the prevailing university culture diverged significantly from the rural culture in which I, as a Black student, was raised and shaped. Moreover, the higher education system's methods of teaching, learning, practice, theories, knowledge systems, and academic sources were predominantly westernized, reflecting the dominance of European modes of theory and practice, as noted by previous research conducted by Dladla (2012). Additionally, the university environment itself, characterized by differences in appearance, attire, language, and behavior, contributed to a sense of being marginalized and less accommodated, which in turn had a significant influence on shaping my identity toward the normative identity. Within the context of racial dynamics, the normalization of the English language as a marker of intelligence further perpetuated the perception that White individuals possessed inherent intellectual superiority. This phenomenon underscored the

privileging of English language proficiency as a determinant of intellectual competence, thereby reinforcing the notion that White individuals were intellectually more capable.

Hence, drawing from my personal experiences, as well as my encounters in secondary school and university, and considering the broader lived experiences of being an African Black individual in a historically White university setting, which is characterized by its origins as an educational institution primarily designed and intended for the White population, with limited inclusion of other racial groups (Brunsma, Brown, and Placier 2012), my curiosity and engagement with issues of identity have been shaped. Specifically, I have been motivated to explore the impact of Whiteness on the racial identity of Black African students. In the context of this study, the term “Black African racial identity” refers specifically to the identity of individuals of Black South African descent, excluding individuals of Indian and Colored descent, and encompassing the shared cultural and historical experiences that constitute an indigenous African heritage (Mtose 2008:14).

1.3. Problem Statement

The history of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) indicates that the university was exclusively for Whites and that it has now been dominated by Black African students making it a historically White university (HWU), which is a multiracial university that was previously designed by Whites, for whites at the exclusion of Black Africans (Brunsma et al. 2012). The study therefore focused on Howard College as one of the historically White campuses of this university (Ruggunan 2010). Howard college is also a campus of the UKZN institution that has developed towards repositioning itself as the premier university of African scholarship. “With its mission to be the Premier University of African Scholarship, the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal draws inspiration from African identity and takes seriously its responsibilities towards the development of the African continent” (UKZN Research Office 2005:1). As indicated in its transformation charter, UKZN’s mission includes prioritizing the interests of Africans. UKZN has therefore engaged in campaigns for the decolonization of education – i.e., confronting education that historically marginalized and still marginalizes Africans (Langa, Ndelu, Edwin, Malabela, Vilakazi, Meth, Maringira, Gukurume, and Kujeke 2017). UKZN students have also

protested during the FeesMustFall campaign and defaced the King George statue that was splattered in white paint, covered in Black cloth, and had “End White privilege” written on it (Langa et al. 2017). These events relate to the study in the sense that they imply that staff and students felt that the imposed colonial education does not reflect African experiences, and students felt that their affordability of higher education fees is disregarded while their identity is also misrepresented.

On that note, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) have previously conducted a literature review study of the experiences of African Black students in universities. They argue that universities should be sensitive to African Black students’ identities; their challenges arising from identity; and how these affect their learning at both the levels of material and discourse. Moreover, they point out the need for research “...that will inform programs that will help integrate Black students into historically white universities” and regulate policy and program development (Bazana and Mogotsi 2017:11). Similarly, Swartz, Mahali, Arogundade, Khalema, Rule, Cooper, Molefi, and Naidoo (2017) focuses on structural and personal challenges in their study on Black students in higher education. While the aforementioned authors have looked at the experiences, and structural and personal challenges of Black students, none of these studies have focused on Black African students’ experiences of Whiteness on their racial identity. As a way of bridging this gap, this study, therefore, aimed to build on this existing literature by focusing on Black students’ experiences of Whiteness in their Black racial identity.

1.4. Location of the Study

The study was conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Howard College located in Durban. This is because the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal is a historically White university (Brunsma et al. 2012). The university was formed in 2004 after the University of Natal and Durban Westville merged into one university (Ruggunan 2010). To date, the university has five campuses (Howard, Westville, Pietermaritzburg, Edgewood, and Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine) all of which are historically White except for Westville which is historically Indian (ibid). The Institutional Intelligence (2020) shows the university has a growing number of Black

African students from 2004 to 2020 compared to other races. In 2004 it was reported to have enrolled 20, 025 Black Africans, 1, 278 Coloreds, 211 Indians, and 6, 580 White students (Institutional Intelligence 2020). In 2020 it reported 37, 731 Black Africans, 788 Coloreds, 6, 944 Indians, and 897 White students. Black students therefore constitute the majority of students at UKZN, and statistics show a great decrease of White students in the post-apartheid community of UKZN campuses (ibid). The above reports also give support to a great need for developing and accommodating the needs, interests, and experiences of the vast majority of students population. The study therefore selected Howard College because it is one of the historically White campuses of this university and the Black African students are currently constituting a majority of this campus.

1.5. Aim and Objectives of the Study

1.5.1. Aim:

This study aimed to explore Black African students' experiences of Whiteness on their Black African racial identity in a South African university.

1.5.2. Objectives:

- To explore Black African students' experiences of Whiteness in a HWU.
- To ascertain Black African students' experiences of black African racial identity in a HWU.
- To determine Black African students' coping mechanisms and recommendations in terms of issues of Whiteness and Black African racial identity challenges.

1.5.3. Research Questions:

- What are Black African students' experiences of Whiteness in a HWU?
- What are Black African students' experiences of Black African racial identity in a HWU?
- What are Black African students' coping mechanisms and recommendations in terms of issues of Whiteness and Black African racial identity challenges?

1.6. Underlying Assumption

Whiteness in South African historically White universities dominates; suppresses; misrepresents; and consequently, affects the Black African racial identity of Black African students when they enter; begin to learn; and live within these institutions.

1.7. Clarification of terms

Black Africans - in the context of this study, it is a term that refers to Black native persons of African ancestry in South Africa who have been racially classified as Black for political and enslavement reasons (Mtose 2008). Not all Black Africans are “black”, for example, Indians and Coloreds are considered black when compared to so-called White South Africans (ibid). In this definition, such populations are excluded, and the term is exclusively used to refer only to indigenous Black South Africans including Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Pedi, Tsonga, Tswana, Swati, Venda, and Sotho people.

Black African racial identity - refers to the social construct regarding the collective sense of self, cultural affiliation, and social identification of individuals who identify as Black Africans within a racialized social context (Helms et al. 2005). It encompasses the unique experiences, historical and cultural backgrounds, and social realities that shape the understanding and perception of one’s own Black African identity (ibid). The term is used in the study to refer to the identity of Black Africans that are referred to in the definition of Black Africans.

Historically White universities – these are institutions of higher education whose histories, traditions, symbols, stories, icons, curriculum, and processes were all designed by Whites, for Whites, to reproduce Whiteness via a White experience at the exclusion of other racial groups (Brunsma et al. 2012).

Racial identity - refers to both the individual’s self-concept and a collective group’s concept of identity and how they have been socialized to think of themselves as a racial group and the perception of their own racial group membership (Cokley 2007). It encompasses the recognition

and understanding of one's racial classification, as well as the significance and implications of that racial categorization within a given societal context (ibid)

Whiteness - ideological construction of power and the institutional system that has benefited the White racial group economically, ethnically/culturally, educationally, socio-politically, racially, institutionally, and the continued legacy of these privileges at the expense of other races (Webb 2006, Helms 2017, Matias and Newlove 2017). It encompasses social constructs, norms, beliefs, and practices, that designate a set of privileges, normative standards, and power dynamics associated with individuals who are perceived as White within a racialized society (Webb 2006).

White Supremacy - “A political, economic and cultural system in which Whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, and in which White dominance and non-White subordination exists across a broad array of institutions and social settings” (Wilson 2018:3)

Education system in the university - in the context of the study the education system in the HWU may be understood as the university culture of teaching and learning and may include language, pedagogies, policies, curriculum, traditions, and more other elements that may contribute in educationally advantaging one race (Whites) while disadvantaging others (Africans) (Govender, 2005).

Structural environment of the university – within the context of this study, the structural environment of the university encompasses various aspects such as the physical layout, geographical positioning, architectural features, symbolic representations, historical elements, the names of buildings, and other tangible components that have historically been intended to uphold and reinforce the primacy of the White race and its associated identity in relation to other racial groups (Brunsma, Brown, and Placier 2012).

Intersectionality - refers to gender, class, race, and other social identity characteristics that interact with one another and are dependent on the intersection and reproduction of systematic, racial, patriarchal, and political power inequities (Davies 2008).

Colonizer – is defined as an individual, group, or nation that establishes and maintains control over a foreign territory or people through various means, including military conquest, political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural imposition (Wilson 2018). In the context of this study, the definition of this term is used when quoting authors from the US.

Racism – refers to a system of power and privilege that operates at various levels, including individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels which involve prejudiced attitudes, discriminatory actions, and unequal distribution of resources and opportunities based on race (Bivens 2005).

Multiculturalism – is defined as a policy or ideology that promotes the equal recognition, respect, and accommodation of cultural diversity within a society and seeks to foster an inclusive social environment that values and appreciates different cultural backgrounds and encourages interaction, dialogue, and cooperation among diverse groups (Carter 1996).

Diversity – is defined as a valuable and enriching aspect of human society that acknowledges that individuals bring unique perspectives, talents, and strengths that can contribute to the overall well-being and success of a group or institution (Dladla 2017).

1.8. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: This is the introductory part of the study and its context. It begins with the introduction; which is followed by background and rationale; problem statement; location of the

study; aims, objectives, and research questions; underlying assumption of the study; clarification of terms; and finally, the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2: (Literature review) This chapter provides a review of the literature in relation to the study. It begins with the introduction, and continues with a disclaimer about the contested, controversial, non-existent, and socially constructed aspects of race; which is followed by racial identity; development of racial identity, Whiteness, and Blackness in the context of racial identity; the effect of HWU on the Black African racial identity; Black African racial identity problems in higher education; and then conclude.

Chapter 3: (Methodology) This chapter outlines the methodological approach of the study which is a qualitative approach. It continues to outline the research paradigm; sampling strategy; data collection methods; data analysis methods; and finally, the ethical considerations that guided the study.

Chapter 4: (Presentation and Discussion of findings) This chapter entails the presentation and the discussion of the findings of the study. It comprehensively discusses the findings and themes that emerged from the data collection. It, therefore, consists of the introduction; demographic profile of participants; presentation of findings; results of the study; and conclusion.

Chapter 5: (Conclusion) This chapter provides the summary and conclusions of the study in line with the aims and objectives of the study. It consists of the summary of the study; a discussion of the findings; a conclusion; and recommendations.

This Chapter has covered the introduction of the study; background and rationale; problem statement; location of the study; aim; objectives; research questions; underlying assumption of the study; clarification of terms; and the structure of the dissertation. Following is the second chapter of the study which takes us through the review of the literature and the theoretical framework that guided the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

This chapter provides a review of the literature in relation to the study. It begins with the introduction, continues with a disclaimer about the contested controversial, non-existent, and socially constructed aspect of race; the context of racial identity; Whiteness and Blackness in the context of racial identity; the effect of HWUs on the African racial identity; Black racial identity problems in higher education; and then concludes.

2.1.Introduction

In 1994 South Africa became a democratic country after decades of battling against the apartheid political system (Webb 2006). This political system favored and normalized Whites as superior and as the base on which all other races should identify (Helms 2017). According to Helms (2017), it is this kind of historical normalization and privileging of Whites that gave birth to the concept of Whiteness. As a result, in the post-apartheid era, the concept of “Whiteness” has been a matter of discourse and an academic concern both nationally and internationally. This is because, in the past, the issues and discourses of race were only focused on ‘other races’ while Whiteness was seen and assumed as a norm (Webb 2006). Helms (2017) further contends that Whiteness historically exerted dominance.

It is important to clarify that an exploration of Whiteness in this study did not seek to reinforce its power dynamics but rather aimed to explore its evolving boundaries (Webb 2006). This study was not intended to reproduce the power of Whiteness but endeavored to challenge the system that normalizes it and its shifting positions in a South African academic institution. On these grounds, the organization of my literature review therefore consisted of the introduction; the disclaimer about the contested, controversial, non-existent, and socially constructed aspect of race; racial identity; Whiteness and Blackness in the context of racial identity; the effect of HWUs on the African racial identity; Black racial identity problems in higher education; and then concluded.

2.2.A disclaimer about the contested, controversial, non-existent, and socially constructed aspects of race

It was important for this study to note that race is a contested and controversial concept, as some scholars like Maraganedzha (2013), Nyborg (2019), Zack (1993), Du Bois (1987), Appiah, (1992) argued that it is a social construct with no biological basis, while some of them are of the view that it is biological and is informed by sociology and history. Nyborg (2019: 94) claims that “a belief of separating people went sometime unchallenged and was held by many people.” It is for this reason that people have believed and normalized that the genetics of human beings are different and far apart. Hence the belief and the norm that race is biological as opposed to being a social construct. Maraganedzha (2013:4) is of the view that “...from the biologists’ literature this seems not to be the case.” Appiah (1992:35) supports this assertion by arguing that “what most people in most cultures ordinarily believe about the significance of racial difference is quite remote from what the biologists are agreed on, and, in particular, it is not consistent with the doctrine of racialism”. Racialism in this context refers to the opinion that “there are heritable characteristics possessed by members of our species which allow us to divide them into a small set of races, in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race” (ibid 1992:35). Furthermore, according to Nyborg (2019), this is still not true as biology literature has accepted and scientifically proven that the genes of people from different races are not far apart.

“Most cultures believe that there are racial differences among people, and that these differences are significant” which is scientifically not true Maraganedzha (2013:11). As a result, Zack (1993) as cited in Mraganedzha (2013:4) warns that “Black and white distinctions are in themselves racist because the concept race does not have an adequate scientific foundation.” Therefore, the study has considered that there are no clear or universally accepted definitions of race, and the way in which race is conceptualized and defined can vary widely across cultures and societies. It is also in the attention of this study that the ways in which race is used and understood can have significant implications for individuals and communities, including issues related to power, privilege, discrimination, and social inequality. It is therefore important to approach discussions about race with sensitivity, awareness, and a willingness to engage with

different perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, it is equally important to recognize that some aspects of race are non-existent, such as the notion of biological superiority or inferiority based on race. Such ideas have been discredited by scientific research and perpetuating them can have harmful consequences (Cokley 2007).

Maraganedzha (2013) is of the view that race is not a biological or innate characteristic; rather, it is a product of historical, cultural, and social processes that have shaped our understanding of human diversity. However, even though the biological existence of race is discredited, the reality of the social construction of race and its effects on the lived experience of humanity is real. Nyborg (2019) support this statement when he says that the reality of the social construction of race is a profound aspect of human existence that significantly impacts the lived experiences of individuals and communities worldwide. Throughout history, various societies have developed distinct systems of categorizing people based on physical characteristics, ancestry, and cultural practices. These constructed racial categories have been used to assign social significance, power, and privilege to different groups, leading to the formation of racial hierarchies and inequalities (ibid). As a result, individuals are often assigned specific roles, opportunities, and treatment based on their perceived racial identity.

Furthermore, the social construction of race has broader implications for society as a whole. It influences public policies, institutions, and cultural norms, perpetuating systemic racism and perpetuating racial disparities (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). In this way, the social construction of race not only shapes individual experiences but also impacts entire communities and social structures. Therefore, recognizing the social construction of race is essential for understanding and addressing racial injustices and inequalities. It prompts us to critically examine the historical roots and ongoing manifestations of racism (Marx 2004). By acknowledging that race is not an inherent characteristic but a socially constructed concept, we can challenge racial prejudices and work towards dismantling systems of oppression.

2.3. Racial identity

This study holds an assumption that to understand racialized Whiteness, Blackness, and racial identity in particular, one needs to understand the concept of race itself, and then racial identity could be explored and explained thereafter. As corroborated by the scholarly sources reviewed, race is regarded as a social construction with different meanings that evolve and transform over time (Cokley 2007). With that said, “the concept of race has long been hotly disputed in science, with many social scientists believing it to be a social construct and nothing more than fiction, whereas other social scientists believe it to be a biological fact” (ibid: 225). For this study, it is a social construct, that affects and challenges Black African racial identity while benefiting the privileged White identity.

Along similar lines, “being socialized in a society as a member of a racial group has psychological, educational, and political consequences that have largely fueled the scholarly interest in racial identity” (Cokley 2007:225). This substantiates the perspective adopted by this study, which posits that regardless of whether race is regarded as a social construct or a biological element, racial issues persist. The influence of race extends beyond cognitive processes, educational pursuits, and sociopolitical dynamics within affected racial groups, extending to the sphere of racial identity (ibid). In this study, race is understood yet not exclusively as a social construct that is based on factors like the physical features of the individuals and their skin color (Helms et al. 2005). Further, it will refer “... to a characterization of a group of people believed to share physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, and other hereditary traits” (Cokley 2007:225). These will be biological and socially constructed characteristics of both Black African and White racial identities.

Given the different types of identities and the intersection of race and identity, “...when researchers are more interested in how individuals construct their identities in response to an oppressive and highly racialized society, racial identity is the more appropriate construct to study” (Cokley 2007:225). Similarly, this study endeavored to investigate the manifestation of Whiteness as an institutionalized system within the realm of higher education and its influence

on the construction of racial identities among marginalized groups. Consequently, the primary focus of this research centers around the concept of racial identity. Racial identity is defined “...as the collective identity of any group of people socialized to think of themselves as a racial group” (ibid: 225). It is a sociopolitical construct that is dynamic and is based on how a person from a given racial group views himself towards that group and in relation to other racial groups (Helms et al. 2005; and Cokley 2007).

Moreover, it facilitates individuals in cultivating a sense of affiliation and gaining diverse perspectives related to their membership within a specific racial group, while also fostering comprehension of racial distinctions (Carter 1996). These definitions underscore the fundamental significance of comprehending racial identity as a prerequisite for grasping racial disparities. Carter (1996) contend that racial identity is not solely regarded as a form of group affiliation, but rather as an essential construct that holds profound significance, serving as a highly probable indicator of an individual’s behavioral tendencies. This assertion once again underscores that individuals coming from different racial groups are exposed to disparate life experiences, thereby prompting varying attributions and cognitive processes pertaining to their racial affiliation. The researcher maintains that this imperative emphasizes the necessity for comprehending racial distinctions and divergences in racial identity, thereby warranting the current study.

While the concept of racial identity encompasses an individual’s self-perception within a racial group and the associated implications of race therewith, conversely collective identity pertains to the shared heritage as perceived by members of a given racial group (Helms et al. 2005). The elements that make up the constructs inherent in the meaning of racial identity include one’s subjective interpretations of a racial group, the associated meanings attributed to that group, a sense of identification among group members, the salience of race in one’s self-definition, and the long-term perception of race (Carter 1996). Considering the aforementioned arguments, the researcher contends that at the core of racial identity lies an individual’s introspection of self and affiliation with a racial group. Accordingly, racial identity theories are primarily concerned with addressing the psychological development of racial identity, positing that an individual’s description of their racial identity can be influenced by their experiences and the passage of time

(Carter 1996). Furthermore, Carter (1996) argues that the development of racial identity is viewed as an ongoing process and is intricately connected to an individual's interpretation of societal communications pertaining to racial groups. This assertion underscores the significance of formative events and educational programs that can serve as catalysts in the journey of racial identity development, thus emphasizing the potential value of this study.

2.4. Development of racial identity

It has been posited that “Early in life, children seek to define themselves based upon characteristics such as personality, physical attributes, ethnic orientation, and other distinct traits (Harper 2007:231). This cognitive process signifies the development of identity and is “manifested in the introspective examination of life goals, belief systems, and a sense of individual purpose” (Harper 2007:230). Identity development is widely recognized as a central concern during adolescence, wherein individuals undertake exploration and experimentation with attitudes that contribute to the formation of their identity. Furthermore, this process unfolds divergently for the Black African racial group compared to the White racial group. On the other hand, Harper (2007) contends that the Black African group should strive to construct an identity that authentically reflects their individual personalities, rather than relying on external ethnic groups to define their identity. Additionally, he emphasizes that the environmental conditions prevalent in urban areas also play a role in shaping the identity of the Black African racial group. Conversely, authentic racial identity development is believed to instill a sense of pride and belonging within individuals (Carter 1996). This argument aligns with the rationale behind this study, as it underscores the importance of educational institutions reflecting African identity in order to influence the proper development of racial identity.

As previously defined, racial identity encompasses the cognitive processes through which individuals perceive and interpret racial contexts. Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that the racial context operates as a worldview and filtering mechanism through which individuals, regardless of their racial background, seek understanding of racial information. Building upon this notion, Carter (1996:195) introduced the term “ego” where he contended that, “The ego is

the psychological structure that holds and transforms racial identity information” that is obtained and filtered from role models of the same racial group. He further stated that “Racial identity involves one’s psychological interpretation of the meaning of his or her race and the race of others” (ibid: 195). Helms (1990) corroborates this viewpoint by suggesting that the development of racial identity is influenced by an individual’s emotions, attitudes, thoughts, behaviors, and interactions within their racial group as well as in relation to the dominant racial group. Additionally, he asserts that socio-political context, societal factors, and familial influences play significant roles in shaping an individual’s perceptions of racial identity (ibid). Given the above considerations, the theoretical framework has discussed the concept of racial identity development, which will be further explored and elaborated upon in Chapter 4.

2.5. Whiteness and Blackness in the context of racial identity

2.5.1. Whiteness

2.5.1.1. A brief historical context of Whiteness

As previously mentioned, the concept of Whiteness encompasses a socially constructed framework that also gives rise to racial identity concerns. Consequently, comprehending the historical underpinnings of Whiteness becomes imperative in order to gain insight into the associated racial identity issues. During the earlier centuries, religious affiliation held central importance in Europe, particularly in the interactions between Moors, Jews, and the tolerance of polytheism (Distiller and Steyn 2004). However, there came a point when Muslims sought to expand their religious influence by invading parts of Europe, subsequently encountering opposition from Christian leaders in northern Spain who eventually triumphed (ibid: 17). Nyborg (2019) claims that this incident failed to diminish the influence of the Moors, as they maintained dominance over certain coastal regions. These religious disparities ultimately caused division, fracturing the relationship between the religious groups, and introducing a racial dimension to the existing tensions (Roediger 1991). This observation suggests a correlation between the hierarchies of superiority and power that were initially rooted in religious distinctions, ultimately contributing to the emergence of physical differences, and subsequently causing racial tensions within the historical context.

The transition from attributing differences solely to religious affiliation to the association of physical attributes with racial superiority is underscored by historical evidence. Passmoor (2009) posits that these religious disparities became markers for physical characteristics, leading individuals of White complexion to perceive their Whiteness as an indicator of superiority. This perception was reinforced by the prevalent refusal among most White individuals to engage in intermarriage with Moors and Jews, resulting in the elevation of White skin as a symbol of purity (ibid). Consequently, the focus shifted from religion to physical attributes, with Whiteness becoming closely linked to notions of superiority. In this regard, Mtose (2008) asserts that this period marked the inception of the modern racial order, particularly the emergence of the concept of Whiteness. The present study draws upon these historical accounts to highlight that Whiteness has persistently remained a racial issue, retaining its dominance and exerting influence over disadvantaged groups. Stevens (2007:427), argues that the beginning of the concept was a defense of “normativity that was perceived to be under threat from the ‘heathen’, the ‘barbarian’, the ‘Saracen’, the ‘primitive native’, and so forth.” Consequently, this further reinforces the entrenched norms associated with White racial identity that pose significant challenges to dismantling its power.

The aforementioned section provides indications that Whiteness emerged as a dominant entity within hierarchical structures, its significance rooted in the perception of racial distinctions based on physical differences. Building upon this premise, it is reasonable to assert that the advent of the concept of Whiteness brought about a novel framework for comprehending and evaluating human dissimilarities, ultimately crystallizing into the construct of race. The objectives associated with this transformative phase encompassed the economic exploitation of resources, the restructuring of religious systems to favor the interests of White individuals, and the establishment of racial hierarchies that laid the groundwork for the onset of slavery in various regions across the globe (Mtose 2008). This argument highlights the genesis and manifestation of European superiority alongside the enslavement of others, elucidating how these dynamics were perpetuated, intensified, and ultimately contributed to the current reality of perceived racial inequalities.

Moreover, Jordan (1974), as cited in Mtose (2008), posited that the advent of the new racial order caused the emergence of novel forms of self-identification, transcending the realms of religion to encompass categories such as Christian, English, and free. As mentioned earlier, after a lengthy period wherein religion served as a primary source of self-identification, a novel source of identification emerged, Whiteness, thereby marking the beginning of racial identity issues. This concept and understanding gradually gained traction and became institutionalized to the extent that it permeated “the public’s understanding of the other” (Roediger 1991:17). In addition, Allen (1994:32) continues to argue that “the hallmarks of English racial oppression were by now obvious and constituted the assault upon the tribal affinities, customs, laws, and institutions of the Africans, American Indians and the Irish by English/British and Anglo-American colonialism.” They also “reduced all members of the oppressed to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class within the colonizing population” (ibid: 32).

The expansion of racial exploitation transcended borders and extended to South Africa, where it manifested as a system characterized by the exertion of power, control over resources such as wealth, land, and labor, and the imposition of racial hierarchies (Roediger 1991). Upon its arrival in South Africa, Whiteness initially manifested as a clash between Afrikaans and English subjectivities (Steyn 2004). Subsequently, it became widely acknowledged that the Afrikaner government, which assumed power in 1948, established and institutionalized apartheid, thereby perpetuating severe racial injustices and facilitating the abuse and consolidation of state power (ibid). However, in irony, one could argue that interpreting this entrenched racial dominance as originating from a population group secure in its position would be a misunderstanding. “The early settlers of mixed Europeans, though primarily Dutch, ancestry unified in a common identification as Afrikaners, people of Africa, and retained little actual or sentimental attachment to their European homelands” (Steyn 2004:148). Consequently, this implies that they had permanently become citizens of South Africa, lacking any compelling ties to their ancestral lands, and being motivated by their notion of Whiteness.

Moreover, a significant influx of immigrants from certain regions of Europe, particularly North America, converged in South Africa with the objective of establishing a White racial population. This demographic composition is not an outcome of genetic inheritance but rather a deliberate political decision made by the architects of the White race (Steyn 2004). Consequently, a substantial body of scholarship has emerged, exploring the techniques and mechanisms of Whiteness within the interconnected realms of rhetoric, communication, language, ideology, and discourse. This assertion seeks to comprehend how Whiteness is communicated, preserved, and perpetuated through these channels (ibid). The construction of the Whiteness system during the colonial era went beyond the establishment of systems of oppression and power; it also served as a profound influence on our psychological processes, which continue to shape our lived experiences in the postcolonial era. It is crucial to acknowledge that “there is a relationship between exposing whiteness and decolonizing the imagination of both the oppressed and oppressors” (Steyn 2004:146). Thus, it is essential to recognize that these intertwined processes are not employed to perpetuate racial conflicts but instead form an integral part of the endeavor to dismantle Whiteness.

As previously mentioned, the exploitation of other races and countries expanded and extended into South Africa, where Black individuals were subjected to exploitation for the purposes of attaining power, wealth, land, and labor, solely based on their racial classification (Roediger 1991). This reconfiguration of hierarchical structures was predicated on the prevailing norms within the new social context, and the concept of race provided the foundation for the pursuit of these exploitative objectives. It is these goals of exploitation that introduced a political policy of apartheid and “enforced segregation of Black and White people of South Africa into different areas” (Christie and Collins 1982:59). This policy also entailed the introduction of a new educational system guided by the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which enforced the isolation of Black individuals, racial segregation, and inferior education for Black communities. Furthermore, the White ruling class sought to erode Black identity by physically relocating Black Africans from urban to rural areas and culturally isolating them by promoting White culture as the sole dominant and valuable culture (Christie and Collins 1982). Consequently, it is

unsurprising that historically White universities (HWUs) in South Africa, as well as the education system in general, continue to perpetuate disadvantages for Black South Africans.

In light of the newly established societal framework, the concept of race assumed paramount importance as a means of differentiating individuals based on perceived differences, ultimately became a normative construct. Rowe and Atkinson (1994:17) note that due to this new racial order "...humanity comprised of three races; 'white', 'yellow' and 'black', with 'white' at the apex and 'black' in the "lowest position." This historical context demonstrates the inception and proliferation of the racial construct of Whiteness, its subsequent dissemination to Africa, and its subsequent dominance within the political and educational systems, thereby exerting a profound influence on issues pertaining to racial identity.

Given the above, it is worth noting that the history of Whiteness is of crucial importance in this study due to its role of providing insights through shaping racial hierarchies and power dynamics throughout history. It also provided an understanding of the construction of Whiteness as a social and cultural identity which provided this study with valuable insights into the ways in which race has been historically constructed and maintained.

2.5.1.2. Analysis of Whiteness

Helms (2017:718) offers a comprehensive definition of Whiteness as "the overt and subliminal socialization processes and practices, power structures, laws, privileges, and life experiences that favor the white racial group over all others." Moreover, Schooley, Lee, and Spanierman (2019) assert that Whiteness constitutes a focal point from which economic, political, and racial advantages are ascertained. The work of Helms (2017) and Schooley et al. (2019) appears to converge in perceiving Whiteness as synonymous with White privilege, a construct that exerts control and shapes the social distribution of economic resources, laws, and policies. Hence, these definitions collectively underscore Whiteness as a social construction that bestows structural, experiential, and socio-political benefits and privileges upon the White racial group while marginalizing other racial groups. Similarly, the structural framework and educational system

within higher education have proven advantageous for the White racial group, contributing to the disadvantages faced by the Black African racial group. On the other hand, Steyn (2000:1) emphasizes Whiteness as “an extremely successful ideological construction of power: Whites as the privileged group take their identity as the norm and the standard by which other groups are measured”. Such assertions underscore the need to interrogate and challenge how this normalization of Whiteness affected Black African identity.

Furthermore, Matias and Newlove (2017:317) introduce the term ‘Institutionalized Whiteness,’ characterizing it as a systemic and institutionalized allocation of benefits in favor of White individuals over African people. This construct is upheld, perpetuated, and administered by White individuals, thus conferring advantages upon Whites at the expense of Black Africans. Expanding upon this notion, Helms (2017) asserts that within the framework of Institutionalized Whiteness, White individuals hold such profound influence that they assume the authority to determine the existence of racism, as well as the conditions under which it operates. Moreover, they possess the power to decide when it is necessary to supersede discussions on race and racism with initiatives such as multiculturalism or diversity (ibid). By incorporating these insights into our understanding, the previously discussed definitions of Whiteness provide a comprehensive comprehension of the concept in a broader context, while the insights of Matias and Newlove (2017) direct our attention to the phenomenon of institutional Whiteness. This refers to the normalized system and privileges bestowed upon the White racial group within organizational or cultural settings (Matias & Newlove 2017; and Helms 2017). This research study was motivated to explore and challenge such a system of privilege and normalization of Whiteness within a South African institution of higher education.

The provided definitions have indicated the nature of Whiteness as a socially constructed concept, shaped by institutional organization of meanings and ideologies, with inherent fluidity and contestability. These aspects align with the objectives pursued in this study. Webb (2006) finds support in the scholarly discourse, emphasizing that studies concerning Whiteness should not ascribe a normative status, treating it as an immutable scientific truth. Such an approach allows for a departure from notions associating Whiteness solely with “power and privilege”

(ibid:10). As demonstrated in the preceding sections, the concept of Whiteness is multifaceted, lacking a uniform and exclusive definition, as authors may interpret it differently in distinct contexts. For the purposes of this research, Whiteness is comprehended as an ideological construction of power, encompassing an institutional system that has historically favored the light-skinned racial group in economic, ethnic/cultural, educational, socio-political, racial, and institutional realms, perpetuating the legacy of these privileges at the expense of Black Africans (Webb 2006; Helms 2017; and Matias & Newlove 2017). This conceptualization is used interchangeably with Steyn's characterization, where Whiteness is depicted as "an extremely successful ideological construction of power: Whites as the privileged group take their identity as the norm and the standard by which other groups are measured" (2001:1).

2.5.1.3. Global perspectives of Whiteness

In the context of South Africa and the broader African context, Whiteness assumes a global characterization as both a physical skin color and a system of practices that safeguard, perpetuate, and bestow privileges upon individuals of White racial background (Steyn 2001). While the scope of this study centers on South Africa and focuses solely on university students, it acknowledges the global ramifications of Whiteness. Lindner (2018:43) lends support to this assertion by positing that "Given the global history of colonization of generally lighter peoples over darker, discrimination on the basis of skin color and other manifestations of prejudice have played a pivotal role in shaping the world." Similarly, issues pertaining to Whiteness within higher education have not only impacted the experiences of South African students but have also shaped the experiences and formation of identities among students globally, as depicted in the preceding section.

The preceding discussions on racial classification have led to the concept of postmodern racism, a term coined by Distiller and Steyn (2004). He uses this term to characterize a situation in which ethnic and racial discrepancies "become incommensurable and subjects fail to address the important issue of equality in the face of difference" (Leonardo 2002:36). Distiller and Steyn (2004) further contend that modern racism emerges when the pursuit of integration

unconsciously imposes the dominant culture's norms upon diverse racial groups, particularly impacting the Black race. Consequently, it is reasonable to assert that Whiteness represents a pervasive global issue that continues to influence Black students and other racial groups through its dominance, which is perceived and upheld as the norm. This view aligns with Leek's (2014) perspective as cited in Lindner (2018:55), wherein it is acknowledged that "Whiteness is not a monolithic formation—it is constantly made and remade through its participation in other unequal social relations." Moreover, postcolonial racial issues tied to Whiteness in higher education have not been eradicated but instead have undergone modernization or adaptation to align with the prevailing governance systems of the contemporary world (Shizha 2013).

The world has normalized the fact that Whites do not negotiate about identity as their own has been normalized by the world regardless of the racial situation they may be in (Leonardo 2002). It is further stated by Leonardo (2002) that White individuals embrace this norm as a distinct advantage and extend it across various domains of their lives. For example, an older White student who is also a mother declares that she is too busy to think about race, and therefore "exempts herself from being preoccupied with issues of cultural identity" (ibid:49). This pattern of behavior reflects both consciously and unconsciously held sense of entitlement and suggests a tendency to avoid the obligation of negotiating cultural identity, as they fear that such negotiation might entail relinquishing their privileged position in the long run (ibid). Similarly, Lindner (2018:55) states that "often, whites make decisions concerning race not out of an understanding of people of color's needs, but out of a desire to protect themselves from the guilt induced by conversations about race." This further highlights a critical aspect of entitlement and existence of power imbalance within racial interactions, further indicating that these power imbalances have resulted from the decisions about race having not considered the lived experiences of Black African people contributing to the ongoing injustices faced by Black Africans. Hence the need to challenge the racial injustices.

The kind of entitlement and protection behaviors have played a significant role in perpetuating the belief that certain people's methods and ways of life are natural, while others are not. Subedi (2013:621) corroborate this notion, highlighting that "the belief that some societies are of less

intellectual significance results in a situation in which the school curriculum portrays Third World societies as having inferior histories and cultural systems.” Consequently, one-sided preconceptions and biased perspectives on global occurrences emerge as a consequence. Subedi (2013) emphasizes the pivotal nature of this issue, noting that the exposure of Black students to such one-sided and ethnocentric knowledge impedes their capacity to challenge stereotyped views of the social world. Moreover, this reinforces distorted notions of culture and identity, perpetuating the deficit framework, which fervently upholds Whiteness and Eurocentric approaches to knowledge transmission (ibid). Consequently, Black culture and other African racial groups find themselves depicted as imperfect and inferior through the continued perpetuation of colonialism and White ideological constructs. This perpetuation of a biased worldview effectively sustains racial inequalities and inhibits a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures and identities (Lindner 2018). It therefore becomes challenging to build meaningful societal progress towards greater inclusivity, equity and appreciation of diverse cultures and identities hence the importance of this study.

The biased approach to knowledge transmission extends to the global curriculum, which disproportionately favors White individuals, histories, and experiences while deliberately silencing the perpetuation of Whiteness (DiAngelo 2012). It rather focuses on proving the purity and truthfulness of the White perspectives that have shaped the current world and imply the universalism relevance of their perspectives to all races in the world (ibid). Consequently, culture, race, identity, and history are predominantly narrated “from the perspectives of the colonizer”, further reinforcing a skewed and Eurocentric understanding of the world (Subedi 2013:624). This perpetuation of a one-sided narrative hinders Black African students from critically evaluating their position and agency in the global context. This is also caused by the social injustices and the curriculum that marginalizes the issues of the Black African race. “For this reason, students who are socialized into the dominant curriculum become unaware, reluctant, or opposed to learning about global issues that raise questions about racism, oppression, and inequities” (Subedi 2013:626). Thus, the normalization and reinforcement of Whiteness through these educational and social injustices underscore the necessity for the development of

progressive and contemporary approaches to address racial and identity issues, as was envisioned in this study.

In conjunction with the aforementioned considerations, it is crucial to acknowledge the significant role of White supremacy in shaping universal issues related to race and identity. White supremacy is understood as a “political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, and in which white dominance and non-white subordination exist across a broad array of institutions and social settings” (Wilson 2018:3). This concept intersects with various other social identities and issues, providing a foundation for White individuals to reinforce erroneous beliefs about marginalized racial groups (Lindner 2018). The study recognizes the need for White individuals to be cognizant of the ramifications of their hierarchical privileges, which adversely impact the lives of underprivileged racial groups worldwide. As emphasized earlier, White supremacy represents only one of the multifaceted factors influencing racial issues, intersecting with other social issues not limited to identity, gender, and class. The inclusion of White supremacy in this study serves to underscore its significance as a universal issue that demands consideration and examination when addressing matters of racial identity at both global and local levels.

2.5.1.4. Perceptions of White racial identity

The preceding historical overview of Whiteness and racial identity underscores the emergence and normalization of Whiteness as a racialized concept. Gibson (2006:41) concurs with this notion, highlighting that “Whiteness was idealized as an ‘extraordinary’, almost superhuman identity; an identity developed in the main by and for the bourgeoisie”. This historical dominance, now a lasting legacy, positioned racially White groups distinctively based on their skin color, effectively differentiating them from African races in many countries since ancient times. As Gibson (2006: 41) further contended, “Whiteness was a valued physical attribute and was incorporated into dominant groups’ collective identities.” Consequently, this phenomenon marginalized non-White populations and gradually erased them as Whiteness took on racialized characteristics from early centuries. This progressive exclusion of non-White individuals

stemmed from pre-modern legacies that simplified development and facilitated the normalization of Whiteness's racialization. It became closely associated with religious purity, devotion, and elevated social status (ibid). Thus, Whiteness became a divisive factor between Whites and non-Whites, linking it with aristocracy, pale skin possession, and a leisurely lifestyle. This narrative illuminates how Whiteness evolved into a dominant and influential racial issue, subsequently establishing a paradigm for class hierarchy (ibid).

In the context of South Africa, race served as the defining factor, with socially constructed racial terms positioning 'Blacks' as inferior and 'Whites' as superior (Steyn 2001). "As a native South African, I cannot remember a time when I was not aware of being "white", (ibid: X). This acknowledgment reflects how the system of Whiteness conditioned the White racial group's perceptions and contributed to the normalization of their racial identity. As a result, being categorized as "White" bestowed economic, political, and societal privileges upon White individuals (ibid). These privileges encompassed living in well-appointed urban residences, accessing quality education and esteemed employment opportunities, exercising political influence, and retaining their cultural values, all of which contrasted with the experiences of the Black community (ibid).

In alignment with the preceding assertions, Shokane, Makhubele, and Blitz (2018) contribute to the discourse by contending that African values underwent distortion during the colonization of South Africa by Western powers. Additionally, Steyn (2001) emphasizes that Black Africans were predominantly relegated to laborer and maid roles and confined to rural areas. "During the weekends most, dark-skinned men would disappear into the townships, and we would enjoy the white beaches, the white cinemas, the white parks, and our private swimming pools, while maids would prepare our food" (ibid: X). This evidence underscores the attitude and mindset that normalized White racial identity while inadvertently undermining the sense of racial identity among Black Africans. Moreover, it highlights how the legacy of Whiteness still lingers, particularly within historically White institutions, perpetuating the normalization of White racial identity and, inadvertently, impinging upon the development of Black African identity. These

dynamics were subject to further exploration within this study, with the perceptions of Black African racial identity expounded upon in Chapter 4.

2.5.2. Blackness

As opposed to Whiteness, Blackness, on the other hand, is perceived as the skin color of the Black African population group and unfavorable perceptions such as racial stereotypes including the use of Black color to symbolize negative things, subjugation of Black people as racially inferior, unintelligent, and incalculable social constructions that are associated with Blackness and that form the basis from which race has been historically justified (Lindner 2018). Blackness “is a collective identity that intersects with many other collective identities that in turn intersect with one another, such as gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic class; spiritual and other performative subcultures, professions, trades, ethnicities, or religious denominations; lifestyles or dietary choices—the list is endless” (Wright 2015:3). Hrabovský (2013) posit that race theories have historically conceptualized Blackness to encompass both the intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of the Black racial group. Consequently, individuals with racist inclinations and researchers have been prone to automatically ascribe a spectrum of stereotypes, prejudices, and inferior standings to members of the Black racial group. This phenomenon can be traced back to the historical enslavement of Black individuals by those belonging to the lighter-skinned race. As argued by Hrabovský (2013), since the inception of the transatlantic slave trade in 1441, black skin has been stigmatized, associated with a sense of condemnation, and regarded as a root cause for enslavement. It has also been linked to notions of inherent inferiority and considered as inherently disadvantageous (ibid). This proposition indirectly highlights the normalized notion that individuals with darker complexions are intrinsically predisposed to psychological inferiority based on their external physical appearance.

The system of enslavement was fundamentally constructed upon the negative narratives surrounding both the external and internal characteristics of Black individuals. In this context, black skin was perceived as an outward manifestation of inferior internal traits, encompassing personality and mental capacity, attributing negative connotations to the notion of Blackness.

Consequently, Blackness became an instrument of prejudice and humiliation directed at Black individuals based on their physical appearance. Within the discourse of racial and identity issues, the racial categories of Whiteness and Blackness transcend mere color descriptors, as they signify broader implications concerning political economy and social order. “This was an “invention” of the “black race” as something considered inferior to the whole story of Western civilization, which had discovered “whiteness” not only as a color “but [as] a regime of political and economic power” (Hrabovský 2013:84). This power structure was instrumentalized for the purpose of enslavement by the Western civilization, shaping a collective story wherein Black individuals were marginalized and excluded from belonging (ibid).

Contrary to the satisfaction derived from the enslavement of Black people by White individuals, the concept of “Black” has also proven detrimental to African communities. This perspective finds support in Modood’s (1994:862) argument, in which he posits that “my argument is that whatever strengths and flaws, good and harm, there may be in the hegemony of the concept of ‘black’, it has at least one critically undesirable aspect: it harms British Asians. I am aware that other groups too claim that it harms them. For example, cultural Africanists reject the term ‘black’ because they believe it strips members of the African diaspora of their African roots.” In addition to this, Sifunda (2019:13) in her book titled “I Refuse to be called black, unapologetically African”, puts forward that “I was born umuntu, but pronounced and classified black the moment I emerged from my mother’s womb - in fact, I acquired this label by default way before I was born. Simply put, when my mother was pregnant with me, she was officially registered as a black female at Home Affairs, and she went to a hospital designated for black people for antenatal check-ups. I could not escape this label and the burden that came with it.” The label of “Black” is viewed as burdensome by some Black African individuals, who would prefer to be referred to as African. These perspectives underscore the complexities surrounding the use and implications of the term “Black” within African communities.

Moreover, the artificial division between White and Black racial categorizations is shown to bestow power on the former while disadvantaging the latter, leading to significant psychological harm as it becomes internalized by individuals, resulting in Black identity issues (Sifunda 2019).

In light of these considerations, the term “African” has gained widespread global acceptance among descendants of Africa, in contrast to the term “Black”. Therefore, in this study, the target population is referred to as Black Africans, specifically those from South Africa, as previously defined. Additionally, the term is used to encompass Black Africans both within South Africa and across the Diaspora. Understanding Whiteness and Blackness as central elements of racial issues in this study leads us to explore the impact of HWUs on the Black racial identity, which will be discussed further in the following sections.

2.6.The effect of HWU on the Black racial identity.

The origin of the concept of ‘Historically White universities’ can be traced back to the United States of America in the early 90s (Brunsma et al. 2012). The concept “...has become widely used in the scholarly literature to refer to an institution of higher education whose histories, traditions, symbols, stories, icons, curriculum, and processes were all designed by whites, for whites, to reproduce whiteness via a white experience at the exclusion of others” particularly the Black African races who have since been granted admission to these institutions (ibid: 3). The institution under investigation shares many characteristics with typical HWUs, maintaining a system that excludes Black Africans. Evidently, this institution was founded on principles rooted in White supremacy, and these principles continue to endure as a lasting legacy. Despite the transformations and changes that have occurred in historically White universities following the dismantling of apartheid and the laws enabling such institutions, their legacy remains noticeable. In agreement with this notion, it is argued that the structures, hegemonies, ideologies, education, and demographics of these universities continue to mirror the influence of Whiteness (Davies 1996; Brunsma et al. 2012). Although the demographics have undergone alterations in the post-apartheid era, the same legacy continues to exert a profound impact on the identity of students in the institution studied by this research, which is precisely the aspect this research aimed to explore.

According to Helms (2017), HWUs have, and continue to, uphold Whiteness as the underlying basis for various educational aspects, including teaching, learning, research, scientific practices,

and instructional methods. Conversely, Brunσμα et al. (2012:5) contend that, “Ideologically, many universities’ missions today advocate a striving toward critical thinking, searches for truth, self-exploration, diversity, and multiculturalism; yet the structure of the university offers a different interpretation – there is a mismatch.” This incongruity persists because of the legacy of White privilege, which continues to exert its influence within HWUs, affecting racial minorities and necessitating systemic changes (ibid). The authors further argue that historical remnants of Whiteness manifest in the names of buildings, statues, symbols, and language employed within these institutions, perpetuating the influence of Whiteness (ibid). Brunσμα et al. (2012) assert that education in HWUs tends to reinforce and amplify a sense of superiority among White individuals, instead of fostering transformation and a shift towards an anti-racist appreciation of Black African culture. Consequently, students entering HWUs often harbor unexamined and distorted notions of Whiteness, which are reinforced by the university’s systems that favor Whiteness, resulting in the perpetuation of such mindsets even upon graduation. This highlights the need to examine such privileges and was a central focus of exploration within this study.

It was indicated earlier in the problem statement of this study that most of the historically White institutions are mostly occupied and controlled by White individuals because, throughout history, they have been mainly made up of White people (Brunσμα et al. 2012). This is further contended by arguing that “Some significant spaces that have been racialized for white students (and thus, perpetuated by these white students, perhaps unknowingly) are neighborhoods, friendship patterns, schools, playgrounds, present, and future occupations, and, most crucially, the media.” (ibid: 9). It therefore corroborates the presence of White identity role models and actors embodying Whiteness within these spaces, reinforcing the construction of Whiteness while simultaneously suppressing the racial identity of Black Africans. Such confirmatory evidence indicates that the principles of Whiteness and its social manifestations are perpetuated and structured, particularly through these tangible facets. Conversely, the experiences of Black Africans are marginalized and silenced within these geographies, the educational curricula, and the institutional social life (ibid).

In accordance with Brunsma et al. (2012) findings, the aforementioned experiences condition a state of ‘habit of Whiteness’ within individuals, wherein they are exposed to and internalize behaviors, thoughts, and preferences associated with Whiteness. This process involves the “internalization of culture, history, or objective social structures through the experience of an individual or group” (ibid:6). Consequently, the standpoint of Whiteness is reinforced and perpetuated. Moreover, this research aligns with these arguments, positing that the environments in which HWUs are situated and their curriculum, which tends to reflect a White-centric perspective, contribute to the cultivation of White students and Black African students to the cognitions fostering a normalization and acceptance of Whiteness. Brunsma et al. (2012:6) further agrees by indicating that this White habit towards the world “is a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates whites’ racial tastes, perceptions, feelings, emotions, and their views on racial matters so that they seem natural.”

On the other hand, Brekhus, Brunsma, Platts, and Dua (2010) argue that the geographical context and positioning of historically White universities encompass more than mere simple mapping and representation; rather, they are deliberately designed to exert cognitive effects, particularly on our perceptions, perspectives, and communicative exchanges. Hence, what we see has a bearing and an influence on how we live our lives which when simply stated means “we live what we see, and we see what we live” (Brunsma et al. 2012:5). From the researcher’s standpoint, this assertion posits that the manifestation of Whiteness as perceived and experienced within South African universities has a profound influence on the development and construction of individuals’ sense of identity. Moreover, it intimates that the resultant social constructs can condition White students to embrace distorted racial norms, further fortified by the prevailing system of White supremacy. Brunsma et al. (2012:2) also concur that these unchallenged structures perpetuate Whiteness through various means, including “curricular and extracurricular experiences, residential and disciplinary segregation, institutional symbols, cultural reproduction, and routine practices such as grading and classroom interactions”, thus reinforcing the hegemony of Whiteness. Consequently, this highlights the need to explore how these dynamics affect the Black African students in the study.

The education system employed in HWUs has predominantly adhered to Western paradigms, often neglecting the inclusion of African indigenous knowledge and perspectives (Hart 2010; and Shizha 2013). Consequently, it can be contended that the marginalization of African knowledge persists, leading to the exclusion of racial minorities and reinforcing the hegemony of whiteness. Shizha (2013) also affirms that this dominance of Whiteness has contributed to heightened colonization and marginalization within these educational spaces, ultimately eroding and undermining African cultural practices, knowledge systems, and ways of life. Hart (2010) further supports this argument, noting that education in pre-colonial times was deeply rooted within African indigenous and cultural contexts. However, the arrival of colonization in the form of education subverted these indigenous knowledge systems, prioritizing Western culture in the absorption of knowledge among African learners. Thus, contributing to the relegation of their own cultural heritage and identity. Similarly, Shokane et al. (2018) concur that HWUs have marginalized traditional institutions of African knowledge due to cultural repression, misinterpretations, and devaluation. On the other hand, Shizha (2013:1) is of the view that “With the advent of colonization, traditional institutions of knowledge started disappearing due to cultural repression, misinterpretations, and devaluation”. These viewpoints resonate with the central theme of this study, asserting that Whiteness prevails as a dominant, suppressive force that distorts and impacts African racial identity. Consequently, an imperative to delve further into how African students perceive and experience these dynamics becomes evident and necessitated deeper exploration.

Education within HWUs is seemingly intended to contribute to the development of the Black African nation; however, contrary to this objective, it appears to perpetuate a system that marginalizes and dismisses the very essence of Black African identity, as highlighted by Moodley and Adam (2000). Their work posits that education in such institutions is underpinned by the hegemonic claims of the White group, leading to the exclusion of individuals whose characteristics do not align with the dominant group. This perspective serves to corroborate the notion that in all universities across South Africa, newly enrolled Black African students are confronted with the onus of acclimating to dominant ethnicities, expected to conform and assimilate to established norms. Consequently, there emerged an imperative to undertake further

exploration into the ways in which students perceive and experience the racial impact of Whiteness within a South African HWU.

2.6.1. The effect of HWUs on the Black African racial identity in the United States

Despite being a South African study, the significance of Whiteness in shaping the lives of Black Africans makes it essential to draw insights from HWUs in the United States (U.S.), where Whiteness deeply influences social dynamics. Dancy, Edwards, and Davis (2018:177) agree with this proclamation when they argue that “The history of U.S. higher education reflects a deep commitment to Black degradation as fundamental to the maintenance of a colonial order.” Much like South African history, the legacies of U.S. history have contributed to the structuring of Western society based on racial foundations (ibid), perpetuating the notion of White individuals’ full humanity while denying the same to Black individuals, thereby excluding them from active civic participation (ibid).

As a result of the White supremacy idea, “the experiences of Black people on historically White campuses are best understood as “continuities of colonial preoccupations” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989:2 as cited in Dancy et al. 2018:177). This colonial legacy is evident in the curriculum model and institutional nature that persist within the U.S. higher education system. U.S. publications reflect a discrediting of Black scholars and their academic contributions, particularly those advocating resistance and revolution against oppressive institutions (Samuels 2004). Dancy et al. (2018:190) maintain that “The only way to establish Black human agency is to exit the system that insists upon Black dehumanization”. It is on these grounds that the unrest of the Black Lives Matter Movement was incorporated, and it found resonance in certain U.S. HWUs, serving as a manifestation of shared calls for racial preservation, autonomy, and recognition of racial rights (Hailu and Sarubbi 2019). In the university context, the Black Lives Matter Movement signifies Black solidarity in protesting and resisting the privileges that disadvantage Black students in relation to their White counterparts (ibid). Considering the centrality of the issue of Whiteness in the U.S., it is crucial to recognize that Whiteness is a global concern impacting diverse societies in various ways. Consequently, comprehending

Whiteness at a global level becomes paramount before addressing it at the local level, allowing for effective engagement and solidarity in combating its pervasive influence.

2.7.Black African racial identity problems in a South African higher education

The entry of Black African students into HWUs is believed to significantly influence their development and the construction of new identities that differ from those instilled from where they come from (Chilisa 2012). Govender (2005:23) supports this statement by claiming that, students “...come with a feeling of urgency to educate themselves but achieve social mobility.” This argument gains further validation from Govender (2005), who elucidates that the process of assimilation within these institutions disregards the unique identities of Black African groups, pressuring them to conform and assimilate into the norms and values of the prevailing racial majority. With the assimilation technique Govender adds that affected racial groups of students “...are expected to discard their racial identity and values so that they can participate to a larger extent and achieve success at the institution” (2005:22). It is on these grounds that the researcher posits that the education system exerts a profound influence on Black African identity by subconsciously encouraging their assimilation into the ethos of the predominant racial group in pursuit of educational rewards. As such, this kind of education needs to be modified. Instead of enforcing assimilation, it should also recognize and respect the unique identity of Black African people. This transformative approach should promote equitable pedagogies and cultivate a democratic and non-repressive institutional culture.

Aligned with the perspective advanced by this study, Govender (2005) highlights that learners attending schools predominantly inhabited by a White racial group experience a conscious and subconscious relinquishment of their authentic selves to conform and adapt to the norms and patterns established by the dominant group within the school setting. His study further indicated that “... African learners sometimes felt that they had to abandon their own cultural styles and practices in order to fit into the ethos of the school” (ibid: 22). Hence, these preceding assertions support this study’s assumption that Whiteness has an influence on the identity of Black African people. Notably, this influence extends to both higher and lower educational settings, where

being dominated and coerced into assimilation poses challenges and results in consequences in the process of identity formation. The study by Govender (2005:22) also indicated that “Learners and students have to give up their own ways of doing things and their own identity in order to fit in with the dominant ethos of the institution.” Consequently, the education system can inadvertently dehumanize learners, negating their knowledge systems while inadvertently normalizing White epistemologies and ways of being. This line of argument supports this study, which sought to explore how such experiences may affect Black African racial identity.

It is contended that Whiteness has exposed Black African students to a culture of education that is westernized and conflicting concerning their own racial identity. As a result, some have tried to adapt and consequently lost the defining terms of who they are and have also let go of their Black African pride (Allen 1994). The brutal and forceful implementation of colonialism and apartheid further exposed Black Africans to the dominant culture of White people, resulting in the adoption and practice of westernized education and ways of life (ibid). Consequently, many have experienced emotional disturbances and psychic trauma as they grappled with the pressure to assimilate, inevitably abandoning their ethnic ways of being and racial identity (ibid). Okafor (2014) adds that HWUs have subjected Black African students to a range of emotions. These include a feeling of emptiness stemming from the need to adapt to an academic environment and course content that do not align with their understanding of reality, their parents’ aspirations, or the multicultural and multiracial nature of their heritage (ibid). Furthermore, such universities fail to foster a sense of awareness and self-confidence in Black African heritage, realities, and identity (ibid). These experiences reflect the profound impact of Whiteness on the development and cultivation of Black African students’ sense of self and cultural identity within the educational landscape.

The researcher posits that the aforementioned experiences, heritage, aspirations, and identity described do not align with Black Africans’ true racial identity; rather, they appear to reflect the influences of assimilation towards Whiteness. Consequently, there arise a crucial need to explore and comprehend the experiences of Black African students concerning Whiteness and its impact on their racial identity within the context of a South African historically White university. Such

an exploration was deemed essential to shed light on the complexities of how Whiteness operates within the university environment and its effects on the construction and evolution of Black African students' racial identity.

2.7.1. Black racial identity problems linked to Intersectionality in higher education.

An essential aspect in the discourse on race and its complexities involves exploring intersectionality (Motloun 2019). Intersectionality, particularly in relation to identity, establishes connections between an individual's lived experiences and the intricate web of oppressive and privileging social structures. This statement is supported by Wijeyesinghe and Jones (2013:14) when they argue that "As theorists and practitioners, we are faced with the following question: can identity truly be an individual experience when people embody social identities that carry meaning in society and result in differential access to resources and control of various domains that fundamentally influence a person's life, regardless of whether he or she acknowledges the existence or influence of those identities?" This question about identity emphasizes the need to understand how identity connects with other aspects of our lives, including but not limited to race, gender, and social class. Moreover, the literature reviewed above underscores the intertwined nature of Whiteness with race, culture, privilege, class, and other social identities. Consequently, recognizing the significance of intersectionality becomes imperative when engaging in discussions pertaining on race and identity within the context of higher education, as emphasized by Motloun (2019). This is also in line with the findings by Wright (2020:29) who suggests that "It is important for higher education and student affairs to understand the power of intersectionality when serving this student population."

Intersectionality, as a theoretical framework, acknowledges the complexity of a person's multiple social identities and enables a comprehensive depiction of human experiences (Wijeyesinghe & Jones 2013). Its widespread appeal within academic circles, particularly in higher education, stems from its capacity to shed light on the manifestations of inequality within tertiary institutions. Moreover, it emphasizes how individuals from diverse social groups encounter inequities even within social institutions that aim to promote social justice (ibid). Within the context of historically White institutions, employing the lens of intersectionality may

offer insights into the experiences of inequity and social disparities that may arise from the intersection of racial and cultural group differences.

Furthermore, “intersectionality attends to identity by placing it within a macrolevel analysis that ties individual experience to a person’s membership in social groups, during a particular social and historical period, and within larger, interlocking systems of advantage and access” (Wijeyesinghe and Jones 2013:11). This assertion holds significance in indicating that the interconnectedness of various social identities serves as a fundamental basis for comprehending the dynamics of privilege, systems of power, and the formation and evolution of personal narratives pertaining to identity (ibid). By adopting an intersectional perspective, the development of identity emerges as an outcome of intricate interactions between internal and external forces and patterns of growth (Davis 2008).

The incorporation of an intersectionality lens offers several advantages, enabling an examination of equitable policies and strategies within higher education institutions while also bringing to light and challenging concealed social identities (Wright 2020). Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that although official apartheid has ended in South Africa, racial issues continue to occupy a central position within the landscape of higher education. According to Brunsma et al. (2012), the impact of these racial issues has not been sufficiently interrogated, similar to other tiers of education, higher education also carries the legacy of discrimination shaped by the nation’s political, economic, and social context. Given this assertion, higher education has not been an exception on the intersection of social identities, economic issues, political issues, and their relationship with race issues. Therefore, a compelling argument can be made for the critical importance of integrating the intersectionality lens in the examination and analysis of racial issues across all tiers of higher education.

As evident from the preceding discussion, the connection of different social identities including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, and class constitutes a pivotal influence on identity formation within higher education. Intersectionality, as a conceptual framework, illuminates the

intricacies of how individuals experience the world by navigating the intersection of broader systems that respond to their multifaceted identities (Davis 2008). Within every social context and across larger systems, the simultaneous operation of race, gender, class, and sexuality is evident (Distiller and Steyn 2004). These social-hierarchical systems interconnect and become ingrained within social institutions at the societal level. Simultaneously, at the individual level, each person constructs their identity based on the unique amalgamation of dimensions they occupy, irrespective of whether they belong to dominant or subordinate groups (Distiller 2004).

The root of social class and social identity has underlined the importance of intergroup dynamics and group membership views in determining identity (Baumeister 1997). Wijeyesinghe and Jones (2013:10) add that “social identity is that part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. They further contend that seeing identities as social constructs suggests that their worth is derived from what they have become as a result of social and historical events, rather than any natural state (ibid). On that note, intersectionality is therefore important in helping us visualize how distinctions in our identities, class, and unique social practices intersect (Motloun 2019). It could further help us understand the social constructions of race that are in all aspects tied to privilege and desperation to identify with the distorted notions of race, class, and the privileges that are therewith.

2.7.2. Black African Racial identity problems linked to structural; historical; and systemic racism in higher education.

In alignment with the framework of intersectionality, this study contends that issues pertaining to race and identity warrant comprehensive examination from multiple perspectives due to their multifaceted nature. Within the context of higher education, race-related concerns encompass structural racism, which manifests through evident disparities exemplifying systemic racism. Such inequalities are rooted in and perpetuated by racist attitudes, values, policies, and resource allocation (Webb 2012). Moreover, racially hostile educational environments and anti-inclusive design contribute to the adverse experiences faced by Black Africans residing in the United

States. Race issues in higher education also stem from historic and systemic racism, as elucidated by Brunsma et al. (2012) when he argues that historically White universities were initially designed to cater exclusively to White individuals, leading to the contemporary educational history and systems within these institutions being influenced by the enduring legacies of the colonial era. Consequently, these legacies significantly shape the experiences, lives, and identities of African students in higher education. It is on these grounds that the study argues that it is these legacies that shape the experiences, lives, and identities of African students in higher education. Perhaps also looking at race from these angles and in conjunction with intersectionality could also help us understand racial identity issues much better.

In the context of the United States, structural racism entails the normalization and legitimization of cultural, historical, interpersonal, and systemic dynamics that consistently favour White individuals while imposing detrimental consequences upon Black racial groups (Leek 2014). This hierarchical and inequitable system perpetuates White supremacy, power, and privilege, thereby disadvantaging marginalized racial groups. Additionally, it encompasses the historical, cultural, and policy dimensions that perpetuate racism within higher education, establishing the foundation for White supremacy and perpetuating racism's existence within the academic sphere (ibid). It is on these grounds that most scholars in the world argue that the maintenance of the legacies of these universities reflects Whites' reluctance to accommodate non-White students in the higher education system and the eagerness towards the establishment of a divided education system, hence the relevance of this study (Brunsma et al. 2012).

The literature review has discussed the contested, controversial, non-existent, and socially constructed aspects of race; racial identity; Whiteness and Blackness in the context of racial identity; the effect of HWUs on the African racial identity; and Black racial identity problems in higher education. The second section of this chapter, which is the theoretical framework of the study, follows. The section takes us through the two theories that have guided the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed two theoretical frameworks: Critical race theory and Racial/Cultural identity development theory. Critical race theory was important in understanding and explaining the construction of Whiteness while racial identity development theory was intended to provide understanding in explaining the identity development of students.

2.8.Critical Race Theory

This theory evolved in the 1970s as an academic movement and a body of knowledge by civil rights activists and scholars in the U.S. including Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crinshaw, Cheryl Harris, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Charles Lawrence, and Patricia Williams (Delgado 2009). The theory examines and interrogates race while also advocating for racial justice (ibid). This study was employed to shed light on how Whiteness is constructed, maintained, and how it affects the identities of African students in a HWU. The theory assists in explaining how Whiteness is constructed, maintained, and normalized in the areas where it has and continues to dominate (Marx 2004).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), this theory aims to study and transform the point where race, racism, and power meet, and the relationship therewith. This statement bears significance as it sheds light on the construction, perpetuation, and interplay of Whiteness with racial identity, a topic that this study has undertaken to investigate in greater depth. Marx (2004:32), adds that the central tenet of this theory is “...that whiteness — along with all other racial categories — is an imprecise and often shifting racial consortium, one that is influenced by time, space, and relations of power and processes of struggle.” These assertions hold significance within the scope of this study as they contribute to our understanding that Whiteness is a dynamic racial phenomenon that transforms over time. The understanding then serves as a guide for identifying and describing its evolving manifestations, as well as developing more effective strategies for addressing it. Furthermore, recognizing that Whiteness in HWU has also evolved

necessitating the exploration of evidence-based approaches that are attuned to the present context, spatial dynamics, and power relations.

The theoretical framework employed in this study aligns with the argument that Whiteness operates as a systemic construct that confers racial privileges and advantages upon individuals belonging to the White racial group. Furthermore, it emphasizes how these advantages and disparities are often normalized and perpetuated within society (Marx 2004). In addition, Delgado and Stefancic (2001:3) argue that the theory looks at Whiteness from “a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious.” Equally so, the researcher’s understanding of the significance of examining participants’ experiences regarding the impact of Whiteness on their identity was informed by a combination of conscious and unconscious emotions, historical racial disadvantages, and economic perspectives of Black African students. These factors played a crucial role in shaping the researcher’s comprehension of the subject matter.

The theoretical foundation posits that race is a social construct rather than a biological determinant, emphasizing that racial dynamics are shaped by individuals’ cognitive processes, discursive practices, and attitudes (Marx 2004). Hence, Delgado and Stefancic (2001:17) insist that “we may unmake it and deprive it of much of its sting by changing the system of images, words, attitudes, unconscious feelings, scripts, and social teachings by which we convey to one another that certain people are less intelligent, reliable, hardworking, virtuous, and special than others.” Aligned with the above goal, the primary aim of this study was to explore Black African students’ experiences of Whiteness on their Black African racial identity in a South African university. The theoretical framework employed in this study thus facilitated an enhanced comprehension of the structure of Whiteness within the historically White South African university, which is believed to pose challenges to the African racial identity.

2.8.1. Critique of Critical Race Theory.

Critical Race Theory has the potential to uncover the social imbalances existing inside higher education’s framework. It is argued that even though many researchers agree with CRT’s

framework of analysis, academia is nonetheless wary of it (Hiraldo 2010). One could claim that this criticism stems from CRT's anti-racist viewpoint. This is because the theory was founded in the United States (U.S.), as a result when many individuals are striving to demolish and struggle against racism, thinking about it as a basic element of the U.S. societal framework is disconcerting (ibid). It is further argued that because of its focus on race, critics contended that CRT ignores socioeconomic class and gender in its framework (Delgado and Stefancic 2001).

The theory has also been criticized for the fact that an individual cannot consider race, class, sexuality, or gender in isolation from one another (Hiraldo 2010). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) support this argument by claiming that recognizing the interconnectedness of these identities adds to the intricacy of these social creations, which, if neglected, leads to unresolved social issues. CRT however puts race at the core of the paradigm, but it does not imply other identities are not taken into account (Hiraldo 2010).

2.9.Racial/Cultural Identity Development Theory

This theory was coined by Sue and Sue in 1990-1999 as a Racial/Cultural identity development theory (Arumugham 2017). It “defines five stages of development that oppressed people experience as they struggle to understand themselves in terms of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures” (Arumugham 2017:23-24). This study used this theory to explain the development of racial identity and to understand the perceptions and experiences of participants on racial identity.

According to Helms (1990:3), “racial identity development theory concerns the psychological implications of racial group membership that is belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential racial-group membership.” This assertion highlights the significance of this theory in comprehending the psychological processes that contribute to the formation of students' racial identities and their subsequent interactions with individuals belonging to other racial groups. According to Cokley (2007), this theory conceptualizes racial identity as a collective identity shared by a community of individuals who have been socialized to view themselves as belonging to a particular racial group. From this perspective, the theory played a

crucial role in comprehending the perceptions of the collective racial identity of Black African students, which constituted the central focus of the study.

In accordance with this theory, the development of racial identity for Black African and White individuals is delineated separately, with each racial group exhibiting distinct stages of identity development (Carter 1996; and Tatum 1992). The stages outlined in the theory primarily pertained to the progression of White individuals from a racist to a non-racist White identity; however, this progression is not addressed because it is not the primary focus of the study. Instead, the study is centered on the progression of Black African individuals away from assimilation and the pursuit of acceptance within White culture, towards the cultivation of a conscious and non-racist Black pride (Tatum 1992). The study specifically examined the five stages of racial identity development within the Black African context:

Pre-encounter - is the first stage where one's idea is that race does not have or has very little social and personal meaning (Carter 1996). Further, it is suggested that this idea of race having little or no personal meaning is expressed in two passive and active ways: where in the passive an individual shows the reflection of the dominating racial group in their society and how they view race in general (Helms 1990). On the other hand, the active phase is characterized by an attitude of an individual consciously idealizing White culture and Whiteness. As a result, individuals strive towards assimilation as they seek to be welcomed and accepted in the White culture, and White society and they may do it unconsciously (Helms 1990). "One accepts the negative attributions associated with blacks as a group and sees blacks in traditional societal or stereotypic ways" (Carter 1996:196). This particular stage of racial identity development illustrates the phenomenon wherein Black individuals begin to disassociate themselves from other members of their racial group while simultaneously gravitating towards historically White institutions.

Encounter - a second stage where something changes an individual's feeling in relation to their view of self as a Black African racial member (Carter 1996). It includes emotional traumas

against them as non-White people that have the power to destroy their identity resolution by breaking and weakening them and they begin to question and examine the meaning of race and its seriousness (Helms 1990). In support of this assertion, Carter (1996:196) is of the view that “Initially, as is true when one’s defenses are ineffective, these experiences are wrought with confusion and emotional turmoil.” It is therefore a second stage emphasizing the breach and weakening of the Black identity particularly for students in the context of this study. However, it may also be chronic or acute leading to the view of self-racial identity in a positive way and they begin to strive towards learning about their unique cultural and racial value (Carter 1996).

Immersion-Emersion - After developing an interest in learning about Black African identity from the encounter stage, in this stage, they begin to involve themselves in the process of discovering their Black African heritage and idealized emotions that are strong regarding their Blackness (Carter 1996). Moreover, one possibly develops hostile feelings and anger towards Whites while idealizing everything that has to do with Black identity. “As a consequence, the individual immerses himself/herself in Black experiences (e.g., clubs, groups, political organizations, etc.) and withdraws, physically when possible, and when not, psychologically, from White society as a means of discovering and affirming his/her Black identity” (Carter 1996:197). It is also said that in this stage an individual’s “...Black pride is strong and unquestioned, and he/she devalues anyone and all things that are associated with White culture or society” (ibid:197). He further contended that their motive for racial development is to embrace their history and culture that was previously withheld and denied. They begin to not only idealize their Blackness but develop a fair understanding of Blackness and its experiences (ibid).

Internalization - At this stage, an individual achieves a sense of pride and motivation concerning their racial/cultural identity and heritage but may keep this positivity private (Carter 1996). “The person has found resolution of conflicts between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ worldview; ideological flexibility, psychological openness, and self-confidence about one’s Blackness are evident in interpersonal transactions” (Cross, Parham, and Helms 1991:32). They further revealed that this is when an individual let go of feelings and hate of Whites and renegotiates

their friendship and their association with Whites (Cross, et al. 1991). As a result, their perspective moves from a racist to a non-racist one.

Internalization-Commitment - is the final stage of the Black racial identity development during which a person adopts socio-political activism. The stage is referred to as the active form of the previous stage (Carter 1996). Through this final stage, the study highlights how Black African students engage in a process of redefining their interactions with individuals from the White racial group, fostering a sense of confident Blackness that is devoid of racial prejudice.

2.9.1. Critique of racial/cultural identity development theory.

Racial/cultural identity development theory has been criticized or found to have limitations when it comes to explaining the stages of racial development (Rowe and Atkinson 1994). Critics argue that the linear interpretation of the stages may not accurately reflect the fluid nature of individuals' racial identity development, suggesting the need for a more flexible model (Rowe and Atkinson 1994). This perspective acknowledges that while the stages present a sequential progression, individuals may navigate through them in a non-linear manner, influenced by their unique racial and cultural experiences (ibid). It is important to note that not everyone will follow these stages, and as the critique suggests, some individuals may fluidly traverse them. Nevertheless, the stages remain valuable in enhancing our knowledge and comprehension of racial dynamics, providing a framework for better understanding cross-cultural interactions at an interpersonal level (Helms 1990) as cited in (Rowe and Atkinson 1994).

2.10. Significance of combining both theories

Carter (1996:195) insists that "Each status or level of racial identity consists of its own constellations of emotions, beliefs, motives, and behaviors, which influence its expression." This underscores the significance of comprehending these stages to gain insight into these intricate patterns and their impact on the development of Black African students' racial identity. Additionally, the construction of Whiteness finds better elucidation and comprehension through

the lens of critical race theory, highlighting the value of integrating both theories. Consequently, the study delved into the distinctive unfolding of racial identity development stages for Black African students, recognizing the nuanced nature of this process for each individual.

2.11. Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive analysis of the study's literature review and the theoretical framework that informed the research. Chapter 3 will subsequently delve into the methodological approach employed in the study, addressing key aspects such as the research paradigm, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and the limitations inherent in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach of the study which is a qualitative approach. It also outlines the research paradigm, sampling strategy, data collection methods, data analysis methods; and the ethical considerations that guided the study.

3.1. Research approach and paradigm

The study aimed to explore Black African Students' experiences of Whiteness on their racial identity in a South African HWU. The study, therefore, utilized the qualitative approach to best serve the purpose of the research. This is the kind of approach that produces findings not arrived at through statistical procedures or other means of quantification, instead, it produces findings arrived at from real-world settings where the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally (Golafshani 2011). It entails looking at a phenomenon or an event from the perspective of the people and trying to understand, describe, and define the event from the personal experiences of the people (Kumar 2014). Shokane et al. (2018) add that the information gathered from participants includes indigenous knowledge and it shapes the values and behavior of other individuals. As a researcher, I found this approach suitable as I intended to dig deeper and explore Black African students' experiences of Whiteness on their Black African racial identity. Therefore, as a researcher, I approached the study using the interpretive paradigm which focuses on the premise "that reality should be interpreted through the meaning that research participants give to their life world" (De Vos et al. 2011:310). It helped me understand how students interpret their experiences regarding racial identity.

4.1. Research design

"A research design is a plan, structure, and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problem." (Kerlinger 1986:279). It constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (Forché, Strydom, and Roestenburg 2021). This study used the descriptive research design. According to Forché et al. (2021), a descriptive

research design aims to describe the sample in broader terms. It assisted the researcher to arrive at general conclusions about the African phenomenon they are studying. Forché et al. (2021) further maintained that this kind of design is also useful in exploring situations, hence its purpose is to give the researcher a broader understanding of the topic being studied. The researcher was guided by critical race and racial identity development theory to explore the topic and enable its participants to describe their understanding of their experiences of Whiteness in a HWU; their experiences of Black African racial identity in a HWU; and their coping mechanisms and recommendations in terms of dealing with issues of Whiteness and Black African racial identity challenges. Hence the choice of the design was descriptive.

4.2.Sampling strategies and study population

The study utilized a non-probability purposive sampling and snowball sampling procedure. Purposive sampling; judgmental; selective; or subjective sampling – refers to the form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their study (Kumar 2011). This sampling method requires a researcher to have prior knowledge about the purpose of their studies so that they can properly choose and approach eligible participants (ibid). A researcher will use this kind of sampling when they want to access a particular subset of people, as all participants of a study are selected because they fit a particular profile. As a researcher, I intended to study Black African Social work students in a HWU, hence the choice of this sampling strategy. Moreover, snowballing refers to another form of non-probability sampling where the researcher relies on the primary participants to assist in identifying other eligible participants (ibid). This recruitment technique helped me as a researcher to ask for the primary participants to help me reach other social work students who qualify in the sampling criteria. I specifically selected social work students that I knew and then asked them to refer their colleagues who qualified in the study's sample criteria.

As indicated by Kumar (2011), the study population can be understood as a complete set of people with a specialized set of characteristics while the sample is the subset of the population. The researcher therefore proposed the population of the study as the University of KwaZulu-

Natal Howard College Black African students. The sample included only registered social work students from undergraduate level three (3rd year) to postgraduate (Masters and Ph.D.) students. The sample criteria for participating were as follows: 7 males and 8 females for gender balance between the ages of 18 and 35. However, this was not the case as the researcher ended up interviewing 7 males, 7 females, and 1 student who identified as queer. It was strictly Black African students between the ages of 18 and 35 years which is most probably the age group of the sampled group of students. 15 participants were selected as a minimum, and there were no more participants added as the researcher reached the point of saturation. The purpose of selecting them was to allow them to self-reflect as they have been in this institution for a minimum of three years. This marked a prolonged experience and duration of being in the university for them compared to students from lower levels. They were therefore considered to have more experience and able to relate to their experience and understand the contents of the topic much better than those in the lower levels. The reason for self-reflection was to share their experiences as black African students in the HWU and how being in this university for a mentioned number of years has affected their black consciousness towards the normalization of whiteness. The researcher made sure to maintain the data saturation principle by engaging in a free flow and prolonged study to a point where no new information was negligible. Data saturation is a term used in research to indicate that no new information is expected to be added that will enhance or change the findings of the study (Kumar 2014).

4.3.Data collection instruments

The study utilized in-depth semi-structured individual interviews, which “are usually undertaken in a natural setting to understand participants’ lives, experiences, feelings, perceptions or situations from their point of view in their own words” (Forché et al. 2021:356). Further, it was maintained that in-depth interviews are usually employed for exploring the new phenomenon with little or no existing literature, and for describing the lived experiences of the studied phenomenon (Forché et al. 2021). As a researcher, I used this data collection instrument to understand the topic from the participants’ point of view. The interview schedule was used with the set of questions divided into three sections. Section “A” established the identifying particulars, section “B” establish confirmation questions, and Section “C” answered the research

questions. However, the schedule was only a guide, and not the sole reference of questions. Other relevant questions arose during the interview sessions and follow up questions were also used.

Black African students were interviewed individually enabling them to express their experiences, feelings, and perceptions regarding Whiteness and its influence on Black African racial identity. The effectiveness of the interview process was guided by the semi-structured interviews which enabled the participants to provide in-depth insight on the subject of the study. The researcher also used open-ended questions. This assisted the participants to provide in-depth insight and the researcher was able to seek clarity where necessary. The researcher also took notes and tape-recorded the interviews and consent was sought from the participants. Because of the lockdown restrictions, 14 interviews were held virtually, and 1 was done physically. Each interview session was recorded and also made available to the supervisor. This helped the researcher in ensuring that all the required information is recorded and not lost after the interviews. After the final interview, the researcher reviewed notes, listened to the tape recorder, and prepared a written report. The interviews were 45 to 60 minutes long.

4.4.Methods of data analysis

Data analysis refers to a systematic way of organizing, integrating, and examining the data by searching for patterns and relationships among the specific details (Neuman 2014). This is done by connecting data to broad trends and themes which allows for the improvement of understanding, expanding theory, and advancing knowledge (ibid). This study used the thematic data analysis method. Thematic data analysis refers to a process and the method of “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” Braun and Clarke (2006:79). During the question-and-answer session, the researcher documented the responses and also used tape recording as an alternate way of showcasing the reliability of the acquired information from the participants. The recorded data was transcribed from field notes and audio records to written or printed form. The researcher made it a choice for participants to respond in the language they are

comfortable with. Most participants chose to respond in isiZulu, hence during data analysis, translations were made from isiZulu to English, and the information was grouped into codes.

The study followed the six steps of thematic content analysis adopted from Braun and Clarke (2019). Guided by these steps, the researcher familiarised himself with data; generated initial codes; searched for themes; reviewed themes; defined and named themes; and then produced the report. The steps are not strictly a linear process as they sometimes force an individual to move back and forth (ibid). The same occurred for this study.

Familiarization and immersion with data – is the first and a common step when analysing qualitative studies. It occurs when the researchers intimately engage, immerse, and familiarise themselves with the collected data (Braun and Clarke 2019). This is done through thoroughly reading data, re-listening to audio records, and taking notes of information data that have been missed during the first engagement with data (ibid). As a researcher, I familiarised myself with data by listening to the recorded audio, transcribed the audio records and field notes to transcripts, and thoroughly read the transcripts before data analysis.

Generating of initial codes – this is the second step which however may not always be the case as it has been alluded earlier that these steps are not strictly a linear process. Like the first step, this step is also important and common when analysing qualitative studies. The step entails creating succinct names for key aspects of data that are relevant to the topic that guides the analysis of the study (Braun and Clarke 2006). It also entails reducing and analysing data; therefore, codes are important in capturing conceptual and semantic interpretations of data. After the researcher has coded all important items of data, they compile the codes and the important data extracts (ibid). As a researcher, guided by this step I created names (codes), highlighted, and reduced the less relevant data from the most relevant data to the study.

Searching for themes - In this context a theme may refer to a consistent and meaningful pattern in relation to the studied topic (Braun and Clarke 2006). It is further stated that the process of finding themes is more similar to coding data with the aim of similarities (ibid). However, the process of finding themes is proactive as the researcher does not find themes in the data but

rather creates them guided by the consistent and meaningful patterns in the collected data (ibid). This step concludes with the compilation of the data pertaining to each theme. In line with this step, the researcher used the most meaningful patterns of data that kept coming consistently during the data collection as the themes that structured the analysis of data.

Reviewing themes – this is the process of ensuring the correlation between generated themes, coded extracts, and the entire data (Braun and Clarke 2006). The aim is to create a clear and convincing narrative in relation to the data to then be able to describe each theme and how it relates to other themes (ibid). In this regard, the researcher reviewed the generated themes to ensure that they contribute towards the flow, consistency, and the relevance of each theme and its meaning to other themes and to the study.

Defining and naming themes – is the process where a researcher does a full examination of the themes created with the aim of producing a report on each theme (Braun and Clarke 2006). It entails giving context of what story is being told by the theme and the correlation or the role that the theme plays in the broader data story (ibid). The researcher then determines each theme's essence and creates a brief, snappy, and meaningful subject. As opposed to the previous step, in this step, the researcher created meanings of how each theme relates to the broader analysis and to the study.

Producing the report – This according to Braun and Clarke (2006) is a very important part of the analytical process. It entails a process of giving meaning to the data extracts with the aim of giving a persuasive tale of the collected data and its relation to the reviewed literature (ibid). The researcher finalized the complete analysis of data, the context of the themes in relation to data, and the whole meaning and relevance of the entire analysis narrated via themes to the study.

4.5.Ethical considerations

4.5.1. Permission for the study

The approval to conduct the study was sought from the UKZN Ethics Committee and the Gatekeeper letter for permission to conduct the study was obtained from the university registrar, see Appendix 1. The researcher has done this process because “it is important to gain permission

to enter the field that has been decided on and it is of prime importance to get permission before the study may be started” (Ndaba 2020:47)

4.5.2. *Informed consent*

According to this principle, participants should not be coerced into participating, but they should be informed and allowed to consent to voluntary participation. They should know the basic details of the research, be aware of their rights, and sign a written informed consent (Neuman 2013). To ensure this ethical principle, the researcher began each interview by informing participants of all the details of what they should know before participating in the study. They read and signed the declaration form to participate in the study and the informed consent. The researcher also allowed their participation to be voluntary.

4.5.3. *Right to know versus Right to withdraw*

Right to know refers to the researcher not putting the interest of the study above the interest of participants or the organization conducting the study (McConnel 2010). Right to withdraw advocates that participants should know that they have a right to withhold confidential information and can withdraw participation at any time should they feel uncomfortable to proceed (ibid). The study was explained in detail and informed participants of their rights before participation. The researcher also respected and valued participants who wished to withdraw or withhold some details. Participants’ best interests were put first in the whole research process. As a researcher, I allowed one participant who expressed her concern to withdraw from participating.

4.5.4. *Confidentiality and anonymity*

Anonymity refers to the protection of the participants’ identity and advocates that the participants’ characteristics (including names, location, address, etc.) should remain anonymous. The researcher during the research report altered these identifying particulars and used pseudonyms to protect participants’ anonymity (Neuman 2013). On one hand, confidentiality

“means that we may attach names to information, but we hold it in confidence or keep it secret from the public” (ibid:155). The author has described these two points as fundamental to the protection of the privacy and identity of participants after data collection. As a researcher, I protected the participants’ information by not disclosing their names in any process during and after data collection. I also conducted interviews on virtual platforms which I believe was a private and comfortable space for participants. The collected data was locked and protected in electronic devices that required passwords that only the researcher had access to.

4.5.5. *No harm*

This ethical principle refers to the fact that a researcher should not cause harm to participants and should recognize risks and safety concerns before they even begin the research (Neuman 2013). The researcher ensured that every data collection process is not only in the best interest of the researcher but also protected participants from any harm and victimization. As a qualified social worker, I was prepared to provide relevant support and referral services where discomfort was detected at any stage of the interviews. However, it was not needed throughout the interviews.

4.5.6. *Honesty and integrity*

This ethical principle refers to the truthfulness of the process and product of the study (Kumar 2011). In this study, the researcher ensured honesty and integrity firstly by explaining the study to participants in a truthful manner. The interviews were conducted with honesty and the production of the study findings was guided by trustworthiness and by the ethics governing the social work profession. Interviews were recorded and made available to the supervisor as proof.

4.5.7. *Utility and futility*

Incorporates using and relying on selected relevant methodology when acquiring the desired results (Kumar 2011). This study followed the detailed guidance of qualitative research methods of data collection. It also relied on literature for sound knowledge in an attempt to refine the topic and also sought the supervisor’s guidance.

4.5.8. *Vulnerability*

It advocates that participants should be offered protection and that risks to participation should be minimized (Gordon 2020). As a qualified professional, I made sure to recognize any potential vulnerability and applied informed skills to protect and deal accordingly with those whom I found in the state of being vulnerable.

4.6. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness answers the question of whether the findings of the study are valid and reliable, and it is answered through terms that are used to describe trustworthiness in qualitative research namely: Credibility (which ensures internal validity); transferability (ensuring external validity); dependability (ensuring reliability); and conformability (ensuring objectivity) (Chilisa 2012).

4.6.1. *Credibility (trust value)*

Occurs when the findings of the study are believable/credible. This is given evidence by Chilisa (2012:145) when he argued that “research evidence is therefore credible if it represents as adequately as possible the multiple realities revealed by the participants. The participants should also be able to recognize the descriptions and interpretations of their human experience as accurate and true.” In an attempt to assure the credibility of the study, the researcher embarked on a prolonged field experience. The researcher further ensured that he verifies the field experience by reviewing the literature and embarking on persistent observations.

4.6.2. *Transferability (applicability)*

Transferability comes into place when there has been a selection of a representative sample to generalize the findings. It, therefore, refers to the degree that the findings of the study can be transferred/generalized to a similar situation or population (Chilisa 2012). The researcher ensured transferability by providing a database that is sufficient enough for the reader and in a manner that makes it possible for potential appliers to judge the result as solid enough to be

applied in the same context. The researcher also provided reliable findings that are evidence that the study would apply to a similar population.

4.6.3. *Dependability (consistency)*

This term answers the question of whether the result is consistent with the data that is collected (Chilisa 2012). The measures that were taken to assure the dependability of the study included the researcher reaching a point of saturation where no new information was discovered. This was done through prolonged study, ensuring not to miss anything in the study and not to be misguided in the final report.

4.6.4. *Confirm-ability (neutrality)*

“It refers to the extent to which findings in a study can be traced to data derived from the informants and the research settings, and not to the researcher’s biases. Some of the strategies for enhancing confirm-ability are reflexivity and triangulation” (Chilisa 2012:149). The readers were assured conformability through means of honesty; integrity; and data collection that is performed in an unbiased manner. The collected data was not manipulated to the researcher’s own biases as he ensured to collect data exactly from the targeted population and did not change the findings to suit his interests.

4.7. Limitations of the study

Following the implementation of a nationwide lockdown, universities introduced online learning as a means for students to continue their studies from home. This transition presented challenges in terms of participant availability and network connectivity. Nevertheless, virtual interviews were conducted, with the exception of one interview that took place in person. To ensure the authenticity of the data, all interviews were recorded, and detailed field notes were taken during the interview process.

Certain participants expressed discomfort in responding in English, prompting the study to offer them the choice to communicate in isiZulu, facilitating a more natural and uninhibited exchange. This approach aimed to mitigate any potential hesitancy or inhibition caused by the researcher's presence and the dominant culture of the institution. To ensure the integrity and comprehensibility of the collected data, the researcher enlisted the assistance of a professional translator to accurately translate the interviews from the participants' vernacular languages to English while preserving the intended meaning.

The study experienced a suspension for one year as the researcher was engaged in professional training, leading to a temporary detachment between the researcher and the study. Consequently, this interruption resulted in the loss of certain crucial data that was initially intended to enhance the study's overall value. Nevertheless, the researcher was committed to rectifying this setback by diligently recovering some of the lost data and conducting further comprehensive research, thereby ensuring the attainment of the study's objectives.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach that the study used which was a qualitative approach. It has also discussed the research paradigm of the study which was interpretive; and the sample of the study which included 15 social worker students from both undergraduate and postgraduate as part of the sample. As discussed in the chapter, the study interviewed 6 undergraduate, 4 postgraduate master's students, and 5 Postgraduate Ph.D. students. The chapter further discussed the data collection method that was used which was the in-depth semi-structured interviews, and the use of thematic data analysis steps as the data analysis method that the study incorporated. The chapter finally discussed when and how the study was conducted and also the ethical considerations that guided the study. The following therefore focuses on the discussion and evaluation of findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The current chapter provides a detailed presentation, analysis, and discussion of the findings obtained from the study. It follows the methodological approach outlined in the preceding chapter, which describes the data collection process. This chapter presents a comprehensive examination of the findings and the emerging themes derived from the collected data. It begins by presenting the profile and biographical information of the participants, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the individuals by using pseudonyms. Subsequently, the chapter delves into the analysis and interpretation of the identified themes, as discussed from the perspectives shared by the participants. To aid clarity and organization, the sub-themes are presented in italics, along with the corresponding responses and perspectives expressed by the participants. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarizing the key findings derived from the analysis and discussion.

4.2. Profiling of participants

In this section, the demographic details of the participants involved in the study are provided. The data collection method employed for this study was semi-structured interviews, which allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives. The demographic information gathered included the participants' pseudonyms, ages, gender, nationalities, registration statuses at the university, degrees pursued, levels of study, and racial backgrounds. The inclusion of this demographic information serves two primary purposes. Firstly, it demonstrates the appropriateness of the participant selection process in relation to the study's initial target population. Secondly, it showcases the relevance of the selected participants in relation to the aims and objectives of the study. By presenting this information, the study ensures transparency and aligns the participant characteristics with the specific focus of the research. The participants in this study consisted of African Social Work students, encompassing individuals at various stages of their academic journey, including those in their third year, fourth

year, master's, and Ph.D. levels of study. The demographic details are presented in the following table for clarity and ease of reference:

4.2.1. *Table 1: Table showcasing the demographic information of the participants.*

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Age	Gender	Nationality	Registration Status	Degree	Level of study	Race
Likuwe	25	Female	South African	Registered	Social Work	Undergraduate level 4	African
Lizi	28	Female	South African	Registered	Social Work	Postgraduate Masters level	African
Akhona	24	Female	South African	Registered	Social Work	Postgraduate Masters level	African
Lethu	25	Female	South African	Registered	Social Work	Undergraduate level 4	African
Lungani	23	Male	South African	Registered	Social Work	Undergraduate level 3	African
Thabani	25	Male	South African	Registered	Social Work	Postgraduate Ph.D. level	African
Mzokhona	33	Male	South African	Registered	Social Work	Postgraduate Ph.D. level	African
Sandla	26	Male	South African	Registered	Social work	Postgraduate Masters level	African
Mzi	27	Male	South African	Registered	Social Work	Postgraduate Ph.D. level	African
Zamani	26	Male	South African	Registered	Social Work	Postgraduate Ph.D. level	African
Sandiswa	26	Male	South African	Registered	Social Work	Postgraduate Masters level	African
Phila	25	Male	South African	Registered	Social Work	Postgraduate Ph.D. level	African
Thando	25	Female	South African	Registered	Social Work	Undergraduate level 4	African
Sphekahle	22	Female	South African	Registered	Social Work	Undergraduate level 3	African
Lerato	23	Female	South African	Registered	Social Work	Undergraduate level 4	African

4.3. Presentation of findings

This section of the study presents the themes that were generated by the researcher in the findings after the transcription of data collected from the participants. Through this process, a number of themes were generated, which provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences. The themes that emerged from the analysis are presented below.

4.3.1. *Table 2: Presentation of Themes and Sub-Themes.*

OBJECTIVES	THEMES	SUB-THEMES
To explore students' experiences of Whiteness in a HWU.	Experiences of Black African students with Whiteness in the institution.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding of Whiteness.2. Black student's experiences of Whiteness.
To ascertain Black African students' experiences of Black African racial identity in a HWU.	Experiences and factors affecting Black African Students' racial identity.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How students define being African.2. The Eurocentric education system as a hinderance to African students' learning and African identity development.3. Language as a hinderance to both verbal and written communication.4. Structural environment as a hinderance to adaptation, inclusion, and representation of African identity.5. Lack of representation in curriculum, language, structural environment, and in the university education system.6. Locating Black identity in the institution.
To determine students' coping mechanisms and recommendations in terms of issues of Whiteness and Black African racial identity challenges.	Coping and dealing with Whiteness and Black African racial identity issues.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Importance of inclusion of gender, social class, social learning, and culture in addressing identity and race issues.2. Preserving African identity as a student.3. Coping with racial and identity issues.4. Importance of working toward transformation.5. Recommendations

5.4. Results of the study

5.4.1. Theme 1: Experiences of Black African students with Whiteness in the institution.

Sub-theme 1: understanding of Whiteness.

In addition to the previously provided definition of whiteness, the participants in this study were specifically asked to articulate their understanding of whiteness within the context of a historically white university. The following were their responses:

“I will say Whiteness is the enemy of every Black child in this institution. For me, when we say challenge, we make it sound very little, very minimal.”
[Thabani]

“As for my understanding and experience, I have come to look at Whiteness as more or less of the educational system, language, and structural presentation of the university that is disadvantaging us as Black students while favoring the White students.” [Lungani]

“Whiteness especially within the higher institution, in my perspective, it does not only refer to as you alluded before, to being White. It just refers to the systems that are there in the higher institution which are the result of Whiteness that we have experienced before.” [Zamani]

The responses provided by Thabani, Lungani, and Zamani demonstrated their individual perspectives on the concept of Whiteness, which were shaped by their own understanding and experiences. These perspectives were considered crucial by the researcher in order to ensure a comprehensive grasp of the participants’ viewpoints and to engage them in a critical manner that aligns with their understanding of Whiteness and its implications for their identity as black Africans. Their comprehension of Whiteness evoked strong emotional responses, as exemplified by Thabani’s touching statement that “Whiteness is the enemy of every Black child.” This emotional reaction underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of the subject matter. Additionally, Lungani and Zamani’s experiences further illuminate the disadvantages faced by Black students, as they attribute these challenges to the normalized influence of Whiteness. Such mixed emotions are to be expected within the context of the encounter stage of racial identity development, as described by Helms (1990). This stage involves emotional memories that can

hinder the process of identity resolution, causing individuals to question and critically examine the meaning and significance of Whiteness. The participants' varied perspectives and emotional responses contribute to a valuable understanding of the negative effect of Whiteness within the HWU context, particularly for Black African students. By acknowledging and exploring these multifaceted perspectives, this study was able to enlighten on the complexities surrounding the concept of Whiteness and its impact on individuals' racial identity development.

Sub-theme 2: Black student's experiences of Whiteness.

Participants were further asked to share their experiences of Whiteness in the HWU. The following were their responses in relation to the question.

“So everyday life of the university, we are exposed to Whiteness with the culture that is being there within the institution where for example even when you went face to face, people will not greet you and you are not aware it is the western culture. When you try to greet you are seen as someone not normal, it the Western culture. So everyday life of higher institution is the experience of Whiteness.” [Zamani]

Zamani's experience highlights the existence of not only academic obstacles arising from Whiteness but also the presence of broader challenges stemming from the racial dynamics within a historically White university. African students frequently encounter stereotypical perceptions that are influenced by preconceived notions and biases related to race as observed by (Brunsma et al. 2012). To further substantiate this assertion, the following narrative accounts are presented:

“We were in the exam when a White guy had a cell phone in his possession and then the invigilator came closer. He decided to throw the phone under my desk. I was caught and I told them it was not my phone and showed them the owner of the phone, but they didn't believe me, and they were even asking why a White intelligent person would copy such an easy exam and at the time I couldn't even defend myself. As a result, the case was taken seriously, and we were taken for a trial at the university. It was suggested that fingerprints

should be taken. Only then it was proved that the phone was not mine.”
[Lethu]

The aforementioned observation highlights the manifestation of stereotypes in which White students are regarded as intellectually superior to their Black peers, as exemplified by the question posed to Lethu regarding “why a White intelligent person would copy such an easy exam”. This instance illustrates the perpetuation of distorted thought patterns that associate positive behaviors with White students, while ascribing negative or unethical behaviors to Black students. These stereotypes reflect a skewed and biased perspective, causing unfair assumptions and judgments based on race. This sentiment aligns with Heleta’s argument (2016:2) that South African higher education “... remains largely Eurocentric and continues to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege while at the same time being full of stereotypes, prejudices and patronizing views about Africa and its people.” Furthermore, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) identify these prejudices as “negative connotations” contributing to the portrayal of Black African students as inferior. Participants concurred with one another, acknowledging that these stereotypes and prejudices placed them at a disadvantage within the university context, as further evidenced by the perspectives of additional participants:

“it also happened to me while I was a student in psychology, we will pick up our assignments in the Psychology department packed together and you know, you would want to really understand why do I have 50% and there are students who scored 80%. I was very shocked when I was doing third year when I picked up an assignment by the White person and they had written very minimal, very minimal thing and I written a whole extra page of the assignment because of the passion that I had but I got a very low score.”
[Thabani]

This quote indicates the manifestation of prejudicial experiences faced by students within the context of Whiteness at a HWU. Thabani’s account indicates the perception that despite the Black African students’ dedicated academic efforts, the systems of education consistently favour and confer advantages to their White peers. The incident also underscores concerns pertaining to potential biases and unequal treatment within the grading and evaluation procedures employed at the HWU. It further serves as a touching reminder of the crucial examination of prevailing

assessment practices, along with the development of inclusive evaluation criteria that duly acknowledge and incorporate diverse perspectives. It can be noted that such endeavours are essential to foster equitable treatment and opportunities for all students, irrespective of their racial background.

“My experience in my first year, I remember people were speaking English more especially people who were supposed to assist us. They would come and assist you but communicate with you in a very deep English while you are still new from the environment coming from rural areas with poor English language and you would hardly understand what they are communicating to you. Even people of your same skin color and language would speak in English very fast and they would shout at you.” [Lizi]

The entire context of the result in relation to this sub-theme indicated that the experiences of Whiteness with African students have varied in many ways. On the other hand, previous research has consistently demonstrated that Black students, their behavior, and their academic potential are subject to more negative evaluations compared to their White counterparts (Brunsma et al. 2012). Consistent with these findings, the shared experiences narrated by Lethu regarding an incident during an examination where she was wrongly suspected of possessing a cellphone that actually belonged to her White colleague, as well as Thabani’s account of unfair grading in comparison to his White counterparts, shed light on the prevailing negative perceptions directed towards the participants. These incidents can be seen as reflective of the influence of Whiteness, which permeates such interactions and engenders biased treatment. These experiences characterize the exclusion and alienation, hindering the development and expression of their Black African identity within the university environment. The impact of these experiences and negative views is far-reaching, affecting the participants’ sense of belonging as Black African students in terms of their social identity, language, culture, self-concept, and consequently self-esteem (Bazana & Mogotsi 2017:1). This observation is also evident in Zamani’s account of his everyday experiences, wherein he highlights the pervasive presence of Whiteness within the institution’s culture. The predominance of White culture can be seen as a contributing factor to the negative experiences expressed by the participants, which in turn create challenges in terms of their navigation of space, well-being, and adjustment within the university setting. These

challenges, in turn, lead to academic disadvantages. Consequently, the enduring legacy of historical oppression manifests in the lived experiences of the participants.

5.4.2. Theme 2: Experiences and factors affecting Black African students' racial identity.

Sub-theme 1: How students define being African.

Chapter 2 of this study highlighted the concept of race as a social construct that varies in its construction for different racial groups and individuals within those groups. As indicated in chapter 2, these social constructions play a significant role in shaping individuals' self-identification within their racial group and contribute to the social issues surrounding racism. Supporting this notion, Nyborg (2019) argues that while race may have little significance biologically given the lack of scientific basis qualifying its existence, racism as a social phenomenon is real and problematic. Considering the historical and ongoing challenges of racism within the HWU, the participants in this study shared their collective perceptions of what it means to be a Black African in terms of racial identity.

“For me when I define a Black person, I don’t align it to the skin color. I do not align it to the languages that we speak because there are various languages, but what tells me that you are an African is when your values speak to me as a Black person, is when you respect me more than just me being a human being. When you respect me because you believe that there is value for me, there is a purpose for me to live and I need to contribute. Your values for me determine who you are as an African.” [Thabani]

“You can be Black but not consider yourself as a Black person or as an African and you also can be White and consider yourself as an African because it is not linked to race, it is not linked to sex, it is not linked to gender. It’s an emotional thing.” [Mzi]

“I think being a Black African for me has to do with how I look at myself, and it speaks to who I actually am as a Black person.” [Likuwe]

“It is based on collectiveness, it based on ubuntu, it based on having moral principles that are guiding us more having values and also practicing rituals which is the way or our way for us to have...” [Zamani]

“We as Black African people or people who identify as Black Africans believe so much in the concept of ubuntu, we believe in the saying that it takes a village to raise a child, we believe in collectiveness as opposed to individualism, we don’t look at the person as an individual, but we look at all the characteristics and circumstances that really makes one identity as a Black African” [Lizi]

“Based on how I view myself it is very rare to see even a child going to bed hungry because it is communal. It is easy for you to go and ask neighbors about that you don’t have food. I think it is because we subscribe more to the saying that it takes a village to raise a child, so it is really a traditional indigenous way of living.” [Lungani]

The participants in this theme collectively conveyed the understanding that Black African identity surpasses superficial characteristics like skin color or language, extending into more encompassing dimensions such as culture, as emphasized by Zamani. Thabani, on the other hand, underscored the connection between Black African identity and historical values, emphasizing a collective sense of identity. Lizi and Lungani, in their respective viewpoints, positioned Black African identity within the framework of collectivism rather than individualism. In discussing what being a Black African does not entail, certain participants articulated their perspectives, shedding light on elements that are not deemed intrinsic to their conceptualization of Black African identity.

“For me when someone is showing the signs of individualism, it excludes being African.” [Mzi]

“Not helping each other, and for someone to look at him or herself individually as if they are only concerned about themselves and don’t care about others.” [Lizi]

“For me when I define a Black person, I don’t align it to the skin color, I do not align it to the languages that we speak...” [Thabani]

“In this institution, individualism is perpetuated. It’s every man for himself which is opposed to our African philosophy of ubuntu.” [Lerato]

In conjunction with the other participants’ conceptualizations of African identity presented in the preceding paragraph, the viewpoints expressed by Lizi and Lerato exhibit a remarkable resonance with the notions of collectivism, ubuntu, and the adherence to African values and principles. In line with what was said by other participants in the previous paragraph, they also framed their responses within the context of the African ways of personhood, emphasizing the philosophy of ubuntu. From their viewpoints, the university environment seemed to impose a socialization process that prioritizes individualism, which they perceived as contradictory to the principles of ubuntu and the essence of being African. They implied that this type of social education fails to define their identity or cultivate their desired self as Black Africans. Corroborating these perspectives, Abdi (2006) argues that the prevalence of individualism in education perpetuates Eurocentric biases and neglects the collective experiences of other racial groups. Hence, aligning with the perspectives of fellow students, Lerato’s perspective that “In this institution, individualism is perpetuated, it’s every man for himself, which is opposed to our African philosophy of ubuntu,” elucidates the ongoing deconstruction of their identities within the realm of university experiences and social education. This deconstruction is facilitated through educational mechanisms that undermine the values of collectivism, a holistic approach to understanding, and ultimately, the students’ agency in defining their own identities.

Sub-theme 2: The Eurocentric education system as a hinderance to African students’ learning and African identity development.

In general, education has long been recognized as a crucial means for individuals to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate and thrive in the global context. Considering the significance of education, participants in this study were invited to express their perceptions regarding the education system within the HWU and its impact on their identities. The aim was to gain insights into how the education system shapes their experiences and self-perceptions as

students. By exploring their perspectives, the study sought to understand the extent to which the education system supports or hinders their development, both academically and personally. This question was guided by the recognition that education plays a significant role in shaping one's identity, as it influences not only cognitive growth but also socialization processes and the acquisition of cultural values and beliefs.

“On one of the courses I did online, there was an experiment whereby White students in a multiracial school were taught Natural Science in isiXhosa. So, the lesson went on and even when they tried to answer and participate it was difficult because of the language barrier. They were not able to be as sharp as the African students because the African students were able to better understand and able to participate and answer what was asked. So, the White students were so frustrated and emotional because I feel like it was something that they knew but they could not even put it out there because they didn't know how to say it in isiXhosa and the questions that were asked were in isiXhosa and they couldn't understand it. Then after the class, there was an interview for the students to ask how did they feel in class today? what are the changes that they saw? and to be surprised, it was young kids from primary and they were better able to recognize that they are fortunate because everything is taught in their language compared to African children (Xhosas) that they have to first try to interpret and try to move the question or what is being asked in English. They try to move it to an African language for them to be able to first comprehend before they can be able to provide an answer for that, and with the answer as well they need to move it from isiXhosa to English. So, they understood the challenges that well they are privileged. They actually felt bad, and they understood how frustrating it is. So obviously White people will appear as smart people while it's the language that benefits them and it has been normalized to the extent that we as well including this university have adapted to it.” [Sphekahle]

The participant, Sphekahle, conveyed a perception that the university system has normalized the Eurocentric form of education and pedagogical approaches that excludes the experiences and concerns of Black Africans. This perception highlights a potential limitation in enjoying their

right to education, which, according to Abdi (2006), extends beyond mere access to encompass an inclusive and accommodating educational environment that respects diverse ways of knowing and being. Sphekahle's responses serve to highlight the detrimental repercussions of a Eurocentric imposition on Black African students, particularly in relation to their sense of identity. The adverse effects of this Eurocentric focus, leading to identity crises, were explicitly acknowledged by Lethu, who expressed that it "deprives us from our own history, of which we are losing it." This sentiment was further reinforced by Thabani, who observed that there exist substantial gaps in comprehending the African individual and the distinct challenges they face. Together, these viewpoints illuminate the profound impact of a Eurocentric approach on the identity formation and understanding of Black African students. This aligns with Brunsma et al. (2012) assertion that part of these identity problems is it negatively affects the achievements of Black African students by sometimes reducing their assessment scores and increase the disparities of performance to Black African students compared to White students. Consequently, Black African students find themselves compelled to conform and assimilate within an educational system that fails to acknowledge and support their unique identities as they further said the following:

"There are many gaps, there is a lot of gaps in understanding the African person and the problems of an African person as being unique." [Thabani]

"I would say it partly does in a way because you will get modules that are offered in indigenous languages which is isiZulu but if you delve deep, it is really really rare to find anything which reflects Black racial identity or Africaness in the curriculum." [Sandla]

"It does not reflect our identity as it deprives us from the sense of belonging, deprives us from our own history of which we are losing it. Maybe it is much better for us because we have parents who remind us about our history, but I feel like one day we will be parents who will fail to pass the history and the important elements of our identity because we know very less. We only have been told western history which is not benefitting us anything..." [Lethu]

"So, it limits you to practice even your own cultural beliefs. So, by that, I believe that it more like it a system that wants to distance you and you know that once

you are distanced with who you are, it means you don't have roots. It is more like you don't have a direction in life. So, you cannot practice fully. Perhaps it is only now that such things are taken into consideration, but the systems continue to be limiting.” [Zamani]

*“What I can say is that the education system of South Africa and its foundation is aimed at favouring White people and is rooted in the western worldview.”
[Lizi]*

Thabani, Sandla, and Lethu conveyed a collective understanding that the Eurocentric education system not only hinders their learning but also inhibits the development of their identities. They emphasized that the existing system neglects the integration of African epistemologies and ontologies, consequently leading to the systematic erasure of their cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems. This erasure is perceived to have profound consequences, as underscored by Zamani's assertion that the system actively aims to distance individuals from their authentic selves and disconnect them from their cultural roots. It also aligns with Abdi, (2006:15) who argues that “with the marginalization of African philosophies of education and epistemologies, for example, pre-colonial African systems of learning were portrayed as essentially useless in contributing to the development of local communities.” Consequently, the aforementioned participants felt disconnected from their roots and expressed concerns about losing their sense of identity and belonging.

Moreover, Zamani's observation that the education system restricts the ability to engage in their own cultural beliefs underscores the notion that this system deprives individuals of a holistic comprehension of their traditions, cultural practices, and ultimately their identity. As previously highlighted, Zamani further perceives the education system as deliberately alienating them from their African heritage, consequently fostering a sentiment of being misunderstood within this system. Abdi (2006:18) in support of the aforementioned assertions posits that “The expansion of Western formal education created a situation where traditional education in colonized societies was portrayed by colonial powers as ineffective in managing the lives and welfare of colonized peoples and communities.”

While Sandla acknowledged certain efforts to include elements of indigenous knowledge systems, when he mentioned the use of indigenous language isiZulu in education, he indicated the view of these measures as insufficient in addressing their overall exclusion and marginalization. This is also supported by Bazana and Mogotsi (2017:2) when they warn that “higher education should be careful that transformation and decolonization policies do not perpetuate the historical oppression of black students.” Further noted below from Phila and Lerato’s perceptions, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the slow pace of transformation and believed that historical patterns of oppression persist in the education system. Their views regarding whether the education system reflects their identity are presented below.

“Our university is very progressive in terms of that, you know they made isiZulu compulsory, we’ve got lecturers who are talking in isiZulu and again talking English, but that is not enough. That is why for me it is difficult to answer this question because that is not enough.” [Phila]

“As much as the progress is slow but in terms of curriculum transformation, I think we are moving towards the correct direction.” [Lerato]

It is noteworthy that, despite acknowledging progress in terms of language and academic transformation, Lerato and Phila conveyed through their responses that while the trajectory appears to be aligned with desired objectives, the pace of progress is considerably slow. In contrast, university policies, such as the bilingual policy and the institution’s aspiration to become a leading centre for African scholarship, coupled with the availability of research and literature, suggest that resource-related limitations do not appear to hinder the transformation process. Instead, the impediment seems to stem from inadequate implementation strategies. Similarly, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) argue that the lack of implementation of research in the transformation process hinders the effectiveness and sustainability of the transformation efforts as research provides valuable insights and evidence-based strategies in addressing systemic issues. It also contributes to the waste of resources, missed opportunities for meaningful change, lack of accountability, and ineffective policies and programs (Abdi 2006). By asking the participants’ perceptions of the education system within the HWU, this study was able to shed light on the multifaceted ways in which education intersects with their sense of self and identity formation. By understanding their experiences and perspectives, valuable insights were gained to

inform educational practices and policies that foster inclusivity, equity, and empowerment within the higher educational context.

Sub-theme 3: Language as hinderance to both verbal and written communication.

Students were questioned about the impact of the English language usage within the institutional context on their personal experiences and identity, their responses unfolded as follows:

“The meaning gets lost; people misinterpret what you say and you consciously need to always try and justify what you are saying.” [Sandiswa]

“Yes, it is a challenge to Black African students more especially during first years because it becomes difficult participating in class, choosing friends, communicating at important offices.” [Phila]

“I think as a Black person, that is my everyday struggle. There are certain things that when I explain them in isiZulu, I can see that this thing is ... the idea is there, it has meaning but when I need to translate it into the academic work that I do in the institution, even the reports that we write in any platform, whether you are a student, tutor, or whatever anything that you have to write in a language that does not speak to the language that is familiar to you and the language that you have really known from home.” [Thabani]

“...even if someone is asking something and you wish to share your views, but you end up not sharing them because even talking becomes a challenge in the foreign language. Sometimes you don’t give an answer even if you have it, because structuring and voicing it out also becomes a problem.” [Likuwe]

“So, the language barrier, it is actually very limiting and very disturbing towards your learning. And that obviously would affect your identity in the institution. Some people actually lose their own identity, some people even go to the extent of losing self-esteem because they cannot express themselves in their own language.” [Zamani]

Sandiswa, Phila, Thabani, Likuwe, and Zamani in the above thread, expressed that the English language poses a persistence challenge in their daily experiences at the university, hindering their proficiency in both verbal and written communication. In contrast to this, Akhona, Mzokhona, and Sandla have expressed themselves as follows:

“When I am writing, I am fine. Maybe we can say that when I am expressing myself, maybe because I am not that used to English. Maybe when we are talking but when I am writing I don’t have a problem because I feel like English is easy in writing than speaking if you are not used to it.” [Akhona]

“I have not really found any issues when using or writing in the English language. This is mainly because I went to all Black school, and they taught us English well and the English that we found in the institution it is simple English unless you do any module that is strictly just English where you delve deep into the English language as a module. So, I would say I didn’t find any issues when it comes to writing and expressing myself.” [Sandla]

“...but in terms of English speaking, I told you I am obliged to speak it, it either I speak English, or I then don’t survive the university. I can’t go to an office of somebody who is not speaking isiZulu because the majority and many of the people who are in the university offices are actually speaking in English. So, I have to speak English despite my identity.” [Mzokhona]

Akhona and Sandla expressed that they have not encountered significant difficulties with the English language, highlighting their proficiency and comfort with it as indicated from the thread of their responses above. Conversely, it is important to note that Mzokhona acknowledged a sense of compulsion to adopt and embrace English as the primary medium of communication within the academic setting, despite their personal preferences or linguistic backgrounds.

“I actually learned that during my Ph.D. era that the university has had a bilingual university policy or language policy. I was shocked because I have never benefited from the isiZulu being one of the languages of teaching and learning.” [Mzokhona]

“Even though we see that this current institution goes with bilingual language, but you will see that English continues to be dominant because even the lectures that be it Blacks or be it any race, the lectures that are there the way they teach will always be in English and everything that they will articulate is in English.”
[Zamani]

It has also appeared from Mzokhona and Zamani’s above responses that the participants acknowledged the existence of a bilingual system as part of the transformation efforts at the university. However, they expressed a collective sentiment that this system has not provided them with significant benefits or advantages. Despite the inclusion of indigenous languages alongside English, Mzokhona and Zamani perceived that the bilingual approach has not effectively addressed their specific needs, benefited them, or facilitated their academic success. This suggests a perceived gap between the intended goals of the bilingual system and its actual impact on the experiences and outcomes of Black African students at the HWU.

Building upon the preceding paragraphs within this sub-theme, the obtained insights reveal a collective consensus among participants regarding the substantial hindrances posed by the English language to both verbal and written communication. Mzokhona’s remark, “It either I speak English, or I then don’t survive the university,” highlights the overarching nature of these challenges. This observation underscores that despite the difficulties encountered, the normalization of English within the university environment and potentially within society necessitates individuals to acknowledge these barriers and adopt proactive measures aimed at improving their proficiency in the English language. The need of emphasizing on the importance of promoting inclusivity and understanding across different languages and cultures as a means to address these communication barriers can therefore be noted. This also suggested that rather than perpetuating the normalization of English, efforts should also be made towards creating an environment that values and respects African languages and cultural backgrounds. By doing so, communication can be improved, and the advantage currently afforded to White individuals through the English language can be mitigated, thus fostering a more equitable and inclusive educational environment for Black Africans.

Sub-theme 4 - Structural environment as hinderance to adaptation, inclusion, and representation of African identity.

Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) assert that the enduring structural environment within HWU, which bears the imprints of colonial history, serves as a significant impediment to the adaptation, inclusion, and representation of African identity. It is, therefore, crucial to acknowledge and confront these structural barriers to foster a more inclusive and equitable society that recognizes and appreciates diverse identities and experiences. Participants were asked if the structural environment represents their identity. The responses provided by student participants align with this perspective as follows.

“The structures that are already existing within the higher institution, they are defined by Whiteness. For example, you will get to the higher institution, what is there first, you will face challenges regarding the language, which is a colonial language where you have to express yourself in English. If you cannot express yourself in English, then you have found yourself in real difficulties especially to try and convey the message for people or for other students that are not or maybe do not understand a particular language that you are using.” [Zamani]

“Ok the institution is old we can never change that, but it should not exclude us, our African history and the current time. We need to be all represented in the university because I guess the structure is one of the things that makes it looks like we are not accommodated as Black students compared to White students.” [Akhona]

“If you walk around Howard College, you will see statues of White persons and the names of buildings they still reflect the colonial times in which the institution was built, but it does not acknowledge the so-called democratic transition. It does not accommodate us.” [Sandla]

“The environment itself is intimidating for me, it is alien for me contributing to the issues of adjusting to the university.” [Thando]

Akhona and Sandla voiced their concerns regarding the inadequate representation and accommodation of individuals of African descent within the historical structural environment of the university, which in turn leads to their sense of alienation within this academic context. By addressing these structural challenges, educational institutions can create a more nurturing and empowering environment that supports the flourishing of diverse cultural and racial identities, thus contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society at large. Abdi (2006) agrees with Thando's experience who contends that the university is alien for her when he states that the structural environment and Eurocentric curriculum can leave little room for the representation and inclusion of African history, culture, and contributions, creating a sense of alienation for African students. Participants further responded as follows:

"With regards to the statues, from my understanding, I understand that a statue is something that is erected to honor somebody for their good work, so I really don't understand that in a postcolonial, in a post-apartheid South Africa, we still have those statues of King George, I don't know what he is and who is he, and why we have such a big statue of him at this university."
[Mzokhona]

"When we are talking about the structures, the structures actually represent the oppressive systems that started from slavery and the sad part about these structures is that they were backed by our own people, perhaps during that time it was through exploited labor and force. So, these structures that are there they don't represent where I come from." [Zamani]

Mzokhona and Zamani articulate their discontent with the persistent existence of statues within the university campus, which serve as symbolic vestiges of a bygone era characterized by systemic oppression. They question the relevance of honouring individuals associated with apartheid during a post-apartheid era, expressing their inability to comprehend the purpose behind such commemoration. This perspective underscores how these statues, as integral components of the university's structural environment, contribute significantly to their dissatisfaction, as they perceive them as indicative of the institution's failure to authentically represent their identity as Black Africans. These frustrations align with Carter's (1996) description of the immersion-emersion stage of racial identity development, wherein individuals

may experience hostility and anger towards the dominant group while seeking to explore and understand their own Black identity.

Thando and Sandla underscore the notion of alienation and the absence of inclusivity experienced by individuals of African descent, highlighting how the structural environment perpetuates a sense of otherness and exclusion towards them. This sentiment is reinforced by Mzokhona and Zamani, who express hate towards statues, arguing that they symbolize an oppressive system. Their perspective underscores how statues serve as tangible reminders of historical injustices and persistent inequalities. Therefore, their continued presence within the university environment seems to exacerbate feelings of frustration and discontent among Black African students. With their responses, a desire for the removal or recontextualization of these statues was therefore indicated, emphasizing the need for the university to actively address its historical legacy and create a more inclusive and affirming environments for all students. Furthermore, a strong desire for greater inclusivity and representation that recognizes and values their unique history and identities as Black Africans was indicated.

Sub-theme 5: Lack of representation in curriculum, language, university structural environment, and in the education system.

Lack of representation in the curriculum and language has had negative implications on Black African students.

“You will see someone within a higher institution finding it difficult to adjust. A rural student finding it difficult to adjust because of this Whiteness, and some of the students you will see they are coming from grade 12, they were bright, doing very well but it affects their academics because even the way of teaching as I have alluded before, the way of teaching within the higher institution is predominantly White. The decisions that are being made are based on the assumption that they are supposed to have these things, they supposed to have this knowledge, not taking into consideration the past oppressive systems that we have undergone through.” [Zamani]

“I am fortunate that I am not just a Ph.D. student but I have also been in the field, I remember one day when I was in a court of law, I was a social worker there, the magistrate was Black and isiZulu speaking, the accused was Black isiZulu speaking, the victim was Black isiZulu speaking, the prosecutor was Black isiZulu speaking, but they had to translate. We needed a language interpreter, but we were all Black and Zulu speaking, we were all fluent in isiZulu, but we had to speak in English, and it made me realize that even if the university would want to intellectualize isiZulu but it really does not help me...” [Mzokhona]

Mzokhona’s response highlights the absence of isiZulu usage among the Zulu community both within and outside the university as the portrayal of English not merely as a conventional means of communication but rather as a tool that inflicts psychological distortions upon the Black African community, while undermining the relevance of their native language. Mzokhona further supports this perspective by suggesting that conforming to the English language is not a matter of choice, stating, “it made me realize that even if the university would want to intellectualize isiZulu, but it really does not help me.” Furthermore, the structural environment of the university, which appears to favour the White racial group, fails to reflect the identity of Black African students. This sentiment is expressed by the students in the following manner:

“...on the extent of self-identity, you will see a lack of confidence especially when you need to deal with counselling in your own African language, and that on its own it will affect you, your mentality, and even the counselling relationships that you have with the person and also when you looking at the issues around identity and the curriculum you will see that when you are not represented in the curriculum and your issues are overlooked.” [Zamani]

“It westernizes us.” [Lethu]

“There is disconnection and whenever you try to actually fit within this context it is very much difficult. So, to some people, it even results in identity confusion where people are caught between two identities, and they don’t know which one they should assume because of the knowledge that they are being fed.” [Phila]

Lethu and Zamani's response posits that the representation and visibility of the African individual within the educational curriculum serves as a mechanism for their assimilation into western culture. This assimilation manifests in a manner whereby, even after completing their university education, African practitioners encounter challenges when attempting to apply Eurocentric theories to African contexts, thus impacting their professional relationships with clients. Phila further contends that this situation contributes to a sense of identity confusion stemming from the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems. Consequently, it becomes imperative for universities to acknowledge the intrinsic value of the distinctiveness of the African person, their lived experiences, and their cultural diversity. To this end, universities should proactively devise and implement policies that not only endorse and celebrate these unique experiences but also safeguard all knowledge systems and cultures.

Sub-theme 6: Locating Black Africans and their identity in the institution.

Given the responses of participants from the above sub-themes the historical context of HWUs is indicated as a design that systematically excluded and marginalized Black Africans. This exclusion and marginalization took various forms, encompassing aspects such as curriculum, language, affordability, and racial segregation. Affordability in particular played a significant role as "apartheid led to both social and economic inequalities" Withnall (2016) as cited in Bazana and Mogotsi (2017:1). This contributed to the location of Black African students in marginalized areas with limited financial resources compared to their White counterparts. Given that, participants were asked if they perceive their identity as inferior or superior to the White identity and where they would position themselves in the institution.

"We are disadvantaged more especially financial wise because we are not the same. White students do have financial means and they afford while us as Black Africans, most of us depend on financial aid." [Akhona]

"So, this is how we have less benefits, most of us as Blacks, we come from poor backgrounds. So financially we are disadvantaged." [Sandla]

Both Akhona and Sandla have positioned themselves in terms of matters pertaining to financial considerations and the process of adapting to circumstances that favor White racial groups.

Sandla recognized the enduring impact of coming from poor backgrounds as a contributing factor to their unaffordability of fees. His response indicated that these financial challenges continue to hinder their educational pursuits which could also be a contributing factor to their socioeconomic adjustment, mental well-being, and social integration within the university environment, particularly in light of existing racial and social class disparities. The financial burden resulting from the historical system of oppression places limitations on the student's ability to fully engage in academic endeavors and navigate their position among their peers, further highlighting the complex interplay between race, socioeconomic status, and educational opportunities (Brunsma et al. 2012). In terms of adjusting, "Adjustment issues are reported to be worse for students whose culture is too different from the culture in these universities" Bojuwoye (2002) as cited in Bazana and Mogotsi (2017:1). This was evident from participants' responses as they had to express themselves as follows.

"So everyday life of higher institution is the experience of Whiteness." [Phila]

"This university is still operating under system of Whiteness, it is operating under the structure of demeaning Black people and actually envisioning them out of this institution. I think this institution it represents more, and it works more on the White person, although they have got a mask. That is just my own experience." [Thabani]

"You need to divorce certain parts of yourself in order to assimilate and adjust in certain contexts in order to fit in being a "UKZN student." [Lungani]

"I cannot practice who I am fully just like if someone for example when you say that you go to live at residence when you experience the ancestral calling, you are distanced from others, it more like you going to dilute others with your own cultures and tradition." [Mzi]

"So based on my observations, what normally happens is that students who are African, once they are in the institution, they tend to assimilate to the Whiteness or the White culture that is found in the university in order to survive." [Sandla]

“I think when you look at the Black identity within the university you will see already it is being suppressed. So, when something is being suppressed or marginalized it becomes inferior. However, the individuals at their own individual level and because of the level of activism that you can engage in and the level of self-awareness that you can develop, and read about your Africaness at the individual level, then it cannot become difficult for you to see yourself as someone who is being inferior.” [Zamani]

The prevailing theme among Lungani, Sandla, and Zamani suggested that the higher education system continues to suppress Black Africans, compelling them to assimilate and to compromise certain aspects of their identity in order to conform. On the other hand, Phila and Thabani expressed a sense of oppression and marginalization. In contrast the following participants acknowledged incremental progress and changes aimed at accommodating Black Africans within the system:

“So, with the bilingual system, isiZulu you speak it, and you write it. I, more especially as a social worker, we used to mix even in our presentations, you would speak isiZulu and mix it with English.” [Akhona]

“It only recent that when I go to a higher institution, the letters from... for example if you missed the test, one could not come and just say that I had gone to isangoma, they want you to say you have been to medical doctors and that connotation on its own should give us another context to say that, so this is the only proof? The only valid proof should be related to western medicine that I was sick? They do not take into consideration that someone was sick for cultural issues.” [Zamani]

“Last time I checked there was a traditional healer (isangoma) which also proves that even though there is still a long way to go but there is progress.” [Thando]

“I can say there is progress even though it is very slow, but you can see that slowly a Black person is being recognised. Why am I saying this? Firstly, it’s because we have buildings that are named after Black people, for example,

Mazisi Kunene. When you look at the language as well, isiZulu is now an official language at UKZN, it's just that we don't get to use it like English."
[Lizi]

Thando and Zamani highlighted the gradual recognition of their identity through efforts such as the acceptance of sick notes from traditional healers as the means to value their unique ways of life. Although the pace of transformation may be perceived as slow. Lizi and Akhona also acknowledged the modest steps taken towards creating a more inclusive educational landscape for Black Africans when they spoke about the use of isiZulu and the Black person being slowly recognized.

The prevailing sentiment among the students such as Lungani, Sandla, and Zamani as mentioned in the third paragraph of this sub-theme is that their identity as Black Africans continues to be suppressed within the university context. Conversely, a smaller group of students such as Thando, Lizi, and Akhona from the preceding paragraph indicated a belief that the institution is making efforts to acknowledge and recognize their Black African identity. However, these students also indicated to acknowledge that the progress towards full transformation is very slow and falls short of their expectations. They further indicated a desire for more significant and comprehensive changes that would truly reflect and embrace their identity as Black African students within the university environment.

5.4.3. Theme 3: Coping and dealing with Whiteness and Black African racial identity issues.

It was noted previously from this study that effectively navigating the challenges and complexities associated with Whiteness and Black African racial identity necessitates a continuous process of self-reflection. Carter (1996) agrees by adding that this journey entails embracing traditional and non-traditional indigenous educational practices, as well as taking action to address the existing disparities. Engaging in this journey requires a genuine willingness to learn, expand one's understanding, and confront personal biases and prejudices. Moreover, it demands a commitment to fostering a learning environment that is characterized by fairness, justice, and equal opportunities for all individuals involved (Carter 1996). Given the challenges

that Black African students face and the historical foundations of the HWU Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) states that the welfare of Black African students within HWU continues to be a matter of concern. This theme therefore comprises of students' perceptions with regard to coping and dealing with Whiteness and Black African racial identity issues in an environment that poses a threat to their Black African identity.

Sub-theme 1: Importance of inclusion of gender, social class, social learning, and culture in addressing identity and race issues.

Participants were asked about the importance of other identity factors in addressing identity and race issues. The subsequent analysis presents the students' perceptions regarding the interplay of other identity factors within the context of a higher education institution.

“When you are Black and when you are gay, it double oppression, it more because you are experiencing exclusion in multiple dimensions, when you are Black and you are a woman, you experiencing multiple oppression, so there is an intersectionality and an array of intersection that when you look at us as Black African people because we are also, we have diversity in our Africanism, we have diversity in us being Black people by mere of our skin, so you have got Black as, like I said, Black people who are gay, Black people who are women, they might be oppressed more than just a person who is just oppressed because of their skin color.” [Thabani]

Thabani's experiences have indicated the phenomenon wherein students who may be identifying as one of either Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, or Asexual and more (LGBTQIA+) may encounter what is commonly characterized as double oppression. This is because they face discrimination and marginalization based on both their sexual orientation and their race. He indicated a perception wherein students who may have the same experience as him, experience homophobia and transphobia from their peers, lecturers, and other members of the university. In order to escape oppression, racism and prejudice which may manifest in a variety of ways, his response indicated feeling pressured to hide their true selves or conform to traditional gender norms to fit in. The combination of these forms of oppression is particularly

challenging for students who are LGBTQIA+ and Black. Similarly, with social class, social learning, and culture, the experiences are the same as students further highlighted the need for these issues to be incorporated in both material and discourse. Their perceptions are as follows:

“There is a lot of value. The issues of social cohesion are really important. Issues of transformation are really important. If you want to be a rainbow nation, then a lot needs to be done in particular and a lot can be done...”
[Mzokhona]

“At school or maybe at the university, the social education forms part of the curriculum and the social education is the education that one knows, the education that is there within the African communities. So, if you do not bring it up in the curriculum that means then we are not included, we feel excluded.”
[Zamani]

The responses from Zamani and Mzokhona underscored the significance of incorporating social cohesion, social education, and other social categories into the curriculum. They felt that the inclusion of these elements should be highlighted as crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. In support of this statement, Abdi (2006) is of the view that by addressing topics related to social cohesion, students can develop a deeper understanding of societal dynamics, cultural diversity, and the complexities of social interaction. Heleta (2016) further says that incorporating social education into the curriculum enables students to acquire critical skills such as empathy, respect for others, and effective communication, which are essential for building harmonious relationships within diverse communities. In line with these assertions, the participants such as Zamani’s response emphasized the necessity of considering dimensions in curriculum design and implementation to promote holistic development and prepare students to navigate complex social realities.

“I feel like these issues are very important because when we talk about the identity of a Black person, we include the body, mind, and the spirit, which means once there is an imbalance between them then the identity of the Black person is disrupted.” [Lizi]

“It is very much important for us to know that even if one takes a decision to associate themselves with White identity, but it be a personal and an informed decision. One must take that decision while they have been well informed of what it means to be a Black African, of what is a Black person, and what are the values of a Black person.” [Thando]

In this sub-theme, Lizi contributed significant insights regarding the significance of considering the intersection of other elements that makes up a person’s wellbeing and the understanding of their identity-related concerns. She indicated support to Thabani’s view and acknowledgement that their experiences of race are intricately intertwined with other dimensions of their identity which may include gender, social class, and sexuality. They both shared understanding of these intersecting identities as influential factors shaping their encounters with Whiteness and African racial identity. These identities are often imperilled by the pressure to conform to White standards, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and a sense of not belonging to their African heritage. Considering this, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017:2) posit that universities need to be cognizant of the manifestations and complexities of the social identities assumed by Black students upon their entry into higher education institutions, alongside efforts to broaden access and implement transformation policies. The university is thereby challenged to acknowledge the intricate and multifaceted nature of their Black identity indicating the importance of creating spaces and opportunities for them to explore and affirm their African cultural identity. Additionally, to consider also safeguarding their African cultural heritage which Whiteness appears to be a potential threat to its preservation. Such encounters should be challenged to address difficulties encountered in navigating their African identity within a system that prioritizes and values Whiteness. Thus, it becomes imperative to integrate these social and identity issues into both material and discourse.

The findings of this theme underscored the significance of also considering intersectionality in comprehensively addressing matters pertaining to identity and race. This acknowledgment stems from the recognition that individuals may possess multiple intersecting identities that collectively influence their experiences and perspectives. Specifically, the experiences of Thabani in relation to race and gender are shaped by the interplay of his Blackness and his gender identity,

necessitating a holistic understanding that transcends the examination of either identity in isolation. Consequently, the study highlights the importance of incorporating intersectionality as a framework to appreciate the multifaceted nature of identity, address various dimensions of identity, and amplify the voices of marginalized individuals (Heleta 2016).

Scholarly investigations have demonstrated that the degree of marginalization experienced by Black Africans is not uniformly distributed. Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) have presented evidence supporting the notion that a middle-class Black African identity is often regarded as distinct and, in many instances, more socially acceptable when compared to the identities of Black students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Consequently, the dynamics of racial identity extend beyond interactions solely between different racial groups, as intra-group differentiations based on social class hierarchy emerge, necessitating the inclusion of social class considerations. Therefore, the incorporation of social class, social learning, gender, and culture becomes equally imperative when addressing issues surrounding racial identity.

Sub-theme 2: Preserving African identity as a student.

It is said that preserving racial identity as a student allows one to maintain a strong sense of self and cultural pride, which can help to navigate the challenges and pressure of academic and social life (Haleta 2016). In addition, Grosfoguel, Osos, and Christou (2015) are of the view that staying connected to your racial identity helps to draw on the wisdom and traditions of your roots to help face adversity and overcome obstacles. Furthermore, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) argue that preserving your African identity as a student is a powerful act of resistance against systemic oppression and cultural erasure. This study recognizes the significance of Black African students preserving their Black African identity as a crucial step towards addressing entrenched stereotypes and biases prevalent within the higher educational system.

By embracing and affirming their identity, Black African students can challenge and counteract the negative narratives and misconceptions that perpetuate systemic inequities. Moreover, fostering a deep understanding and appreciation for diversity, as well as cultivating an inclusive

environment, are essential objectives that can be achieved through the active preservation of Black African identity. Given the social, academic, and structural issues at the university that students face as a challenge to their Black African identity, the following were their perceptions on how to preserve Black African identity as a student.

“You should not allow yourself to be intimidated by White people, and not to look down upon yourself and your identity for others to respect it. You must tell yourself that this is reality, but it won’t shake who I am.” [Lethu]

“I also think it is some of the curriculum that is liberating, that has actually made me realize that being Black is also important, it is also valued, and it must be embraced.” [Mzokhona]

Aligned with the conceptual framework of racial identity development theory, which elucidates the psychological processes that shape individuals’ perception of racial identity and their subsequent interactions with other racial groups, both Lethu and Mzokhona demonstrated characteristics indicative of the internalization stage of development. During this stage, individuals attain a conscious mindset towards a non-racist Black pride regarding their racial identity, although they may choose to keep these sentiments private (Carter, 1996). Their responses reflect an evident awareness and attentiveness towards the complexities surrounding race and racial identity matters. They expressed the belief that preserving their identity entails resisting intimidation from other racial groups and actively engaging with liberating content, such as a curriculum that promotes liberation. Furthermore, certain elements of the curriculum is perceived to possible equip them with knowledge pertaining to their Black pride. The subsequent section presents the respective responses of other participants.

“Blackness within the institution is being suppressed, so it is inferior but at the individual level maybe to do self-studies you develop a sense of resistance to the marginalisation and oppression that is imposed by these White systems that are there and the level of activism goes a long way to try and achieve that, but from the day to day basis if you do not fight then you continue to be suppressed.” [Mzi]

“I read, a lot of reading I do and the reading that I do most of the times are the readings that are inspired by the Black prescribed by the curriculum and those readings, they will enlighten you on to who you are and also to keep value, to believe in your own roots.” [Zamani]

“What protects me mostly is to go home more often because when I go home, I always remember the teachings of my parents regarding being a Black African and to associate myself with what happening in my community. That also protects one’s identity.” [Lizi]

Mzi highlighted the significance of self-studies as a crucial means for individuals to uphold their student identity. Likewise, Zamani’s response aligned with Mzi’s viewpoint, emphasizing the importance of engaging in extensive reading focused on African-related content. Furthermore, Lizi mentioned regular visits to her home as a means of reinforcing her sense of self and identity, valuing the teachings imparted by her parents and her involvement within the community.

The responses indicated that to promote confident in Blackness while rejecting oppression, activism should not be left out and it can take a form of a continuous and individualized endeavor that can be practiced daily. It also indicated the importance of activities such as reading, writing, engaging in dialogues, and actively participating in their community. Furthermore, the participants’ insights demonstrate that the preservation of Black African identity takes on diverse forms, influenced by individual interests, experiences, and stages of racial identity development. These manifestations encompass a range of activities, including exploring African history and culture, forging connections with ancestral roots and other African students, self-identifying as a Black African, and deepening of African knowledge.

Sub-theme 3: Coping with racial and identity issues.

Racial identity holds significant implications for students’ overall experiences, interpersonal relationships, and opportunities within the university community and beyond. When Black African students encounter racial discrimination and marginalization, it detrimentally affects various aspects of their lives, including their academic pursuits, mental well-being, overall sense

of belonging, and their ability to cope with these challenges. The participants in this study substantiated this claim by sharing their personal strategies for coping with racial identity issues.

“So, one thing that I normally use or try as a coping mechanism sometimes is to write poetry in my language isiZulu and just to ensure that I keep in touch and not lose the vernacular or what really enjoy doing and writing.” [Mzokhona]

“The only thing that I do have is that I can lean on is other African people that when we are alone, and we are outside the classroom we tend to go back into our nature of living.” [Phila]

“So, I will say identifying the people that belong to you, the people who link up to you, the people who share the same values as you, as much as it allows us to cope in this institution.” [Sandiswa]

“It is purely focusing on the mandate that this is the mandate, this is what we are here to do and let’s allow things to be smooth.” [Thabani]

“The only way that I cope is I keep to myself and my beliefs. Also, as I have said that I believe in African spirituality as well as religion, so I try and keep to myself and also, I follow content which is African based, and I know that the content found at the institution is just a means to learn but not to take seriously in the real life as it does not promote in any way my identity as an African.” [Sandla]

“To go home and stay with parents and they remind me of my values and that I should not forget that I am a Black African and where I come from.” [Lethu]

“I believe in my own roots, I believe of where I come from, I believe of what I have learned as a child. So based on that I think that is how I try on my own and also, I write about these issues. I try to write about them and even in my own work I try to do it around the African curriculum or Africaness, African cultures, indigenous people and indigenous cultures.” [Zamani]

“On my personal capacity, I think reading, writing about these issues and also affiliating with people who believe in what I believe in then I am able to resist the challenges that are caused by Whiteness.” [Zamani]

The aforementioned participants, namely Mzokhona, Phila, Lethu, and Zamani, expressed that coping with racial identity issues entails several strategies, including engaging in expressive writing, reconnecting with their ancestral heritage, maintaining a clear focus on their academic goals, establishing connections with individuals who share similar racial experiences, and actively preserving their African cultural identity, including the use of their vernacular language. They perceived these practices as helpful in navigating the challenges associated with racial identity. The findings align with Carter's (1996) conceptualization of the third stage of racial identity development, wherein individuals strive to reclaim and embrace their suppressed history and culture. During this stage, they not only idealize their Blackness but also cultivate a nuanced comprehension of Blackness and its associated experiences (ibid). The narratives of Sandla and Zamani illustrate their awareness of the exclusion of indigenous knowledge and ways of being in their educational experiences at university. Consequently, self-emancipation emerges as a crucial starting point at the individual level, involving a process of revisiting African content and modes of existence, before progressing towards broader activist efforts.

Sub-theme 4: Importance of taking actions towards transformation.

According to Abdi (2006), enacting meaningful and transformative change requires active engagement in tangible actions rather than solely relying on scholarly discussions and research that remains dormant in archival spaces. As a result, students shared their views on the importance of taking actions towards transformation:

"So, we are still struggling, and that our slow progress is affecting us in numerous ways as Black students." [Mzokhona]

"The foundation of the university must begin by knowing the heritages of KwaZulu-Natal, histories, teachings of Black person, and then the other ways of doing and knowing especially those that are grounded in western knowledge systems must support what we have as KZN or Black people, not that we as Black people must assimilate to the foreign ways of doing, learning, and knowing." [Lizi]

“...there is a lot that we should do especially in trying to transform the curriculum. We are talking about big terms such as decoloniality but what is being done regarding that? Very little is being done. We are talking about big terms such as transformation of education, it has been introduced I don’t know since South Africa gained democracy or since it became a democratic country, but that transformation has not been achieved till today.” [Zamani]

“...there is a long fight ahead and, in this fight, the systems that are already existing will need to be dismantled, there needs to be long and difficult engagements and debates regarding the systems that are there. So, with the debates and actually doing, not only talking. We know that there is research documented on such issues but it just that there are no interventions.” [Zamani]

“It cannot reflect Whiteness in the structural environment, in the languages, the curriculum, and in the methods of teaching and learning. It needs to balance.” [Sandla]

“We should see changes being implemented not only hearing about them, but we should also see African history being incorporated. It was better to have colonial statues when the university was still predominantly White, and to any other universities where White people dominate, but this is KwaZulu (KZN) and the university should reflect the majority equally as it does to the Whites.” [Lethu]

Mzokhona, Sandla, and Lethu in the above sub-theme expressed their dissatisfaction with the HWU’s slow progress in acknowledging and prioritizing the recognition of Black individuals within the decolonial and transformative processes. Their perspectives align with the sentiment that simply discussing and theorizing about decolonization and transformation is insufficient without concrete implementation strategies.

Overall, in this subtheme, the participants articulated that while considerable attention has been given to discussing and engaging in dialogues regarding the challenges faced by Black Africans, there has been a dearth of concrete implementation. They expressed dissatisfaction with the

transformation efforts, highlighting the prevailing structural environment, language policies, curriculum content, and pedagogical approaches that appear to confer advantages to the White racial group. They contended that true transformation should entail a balanced, equitable, and inclusive approach that extends equal opportunities and accommodations to Black Africans as it does to White individuals. This sentiment aligns with Carter's (1996) notion of the immersion stage of racial development, wherein individuals may harbour feelings of hate and anger toward Whites while idealizing aspects related to Black identity. Similarly, within the context presented, certain participants expressed hostile sentiments and frustration towards Whiteness and the perceived lack of substantive actions in implementing university transformation and decolonization endeavours.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive and evidence-based examination of the study's findings obtained from the participants. It encompasses a thorough discussion of the emerged themes and subthemes identified through the process of data collection and subsequent thematic analysis. The subthemes and participants' responses were presented in italics to convey their perspectives. The data analysis revealed three overarching themes: 1) Experiences of Black African students associated with Whiteness within the institutional context, 2) Experiences and factors influencing the racial identity of Black African students, and 3) Coping mechanisms and strategies employed to navigate issues pertaining to Whiteness and African racial identity. The discussion and analysis of these themes are substantiated by relevant theoretical frameworks and existing literature that support the participants' perceptions and experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings and themes that emerged from data analysis were thoroughly covered in the preceding chapter. As a result, this chapter provides the final section of the study which outlines the summary, discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study in line with the aims and objectives of the study.

5.1. Summary of the study

The issue of racial identity has emerged as a global concern, as individuals of various racial backgrounds grapple with the complexities and challenges associated with their own racial identities. This issue is particularly prominent within the context of higher education, where students from diverse racial backgrounds converge and navigate an environment that often shapes their sense of self and belonging (Arumugham 2017). Racial identity issues in higher education have profound implications for individual well-being, educational experiences, and broader social dynamics (ibid). Understanding and addressing these concerns was crucial for fostering inclusivity, promoting equity, and cultivating a supportive educational environment for all students. This study was conducted to set the stage for exploring the intricate dynamics of racial identity within the context of higher education and it highlighted the significance of this topic in today's diverse and multicultural societies.

While considerable research has been conducted on the topics of race and identity, there remained a critical need to further explore and expand the existing literature, particularly within the specific context of South African higher education. South Africa, with its unique historical legacy of apartheid and its subsequent transition to democracy, presents a distinct backdrop against which racial dynamics and identity formation unfold (Bazana and Mogotsi 2017). Students within South African higher education institutions face a myriad of challenges related to race and identity, including issues of racial inequality, cultural assimilation, and the negotiation of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (ibid). By delving deeper into the multifaceted dimensions of race and identity within the South African higher education

landscape, this research sought to shed light on the nuanced experiences of students and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved.

This study aimed at exploring the Black African students' experiences of Whiteness on their Black African racial identity in a South African university. With the following objectives:

- To explore students' experiences of Whiteness in a HWU;
- To ascertain Black African students' experiences of Black African racial identity in a HWU; and
- To determine students' coping mechanisms and recommendations in terms of issues of Whiteness and Black African racial identity challenges.

In relation to these objectives, the literature has examined and acknowledged the complex and multifaceted nature of the topic under investigation. It was important to note that the concepts of race, racial identity, Whiteness, and Blackness have been subjects of ongoing debates and controversies. Scholars have highlighted the contested nature of race as a social construct and have emphasized the need for critical examination and deconstruction of its meanings and implications (Ruggunan 2010). Similarly, the concept of racial identity is a dynamic and evolving construct influenced by various factors such as historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts. Understanding the complexities and nuances of racial identity was crucial for exploring the experiences of individuals within specific racial groups. The literature of the study has also addressed the significance of examining the role of HWUs in shaping African racial identity. These institutions, which according to Dladla (2012) were originally designed for and by White individuals, have had a profound impact on the experiences and perceptions of Black African students. The study explored the ways in which HWUs have influenced African racial identity, including the challenges and issues faced by Black students in navigating their identities within these spaces. It further recognized that higher education institutions play a crucial role in shaping the values, beliefs, and experiences of students, and their impact on racial identity cannot be overlooked.

Furthermore, the literature has delved into the specific problems faced by Black students in higher education, particularly within the context of racial identity. It highlighted the existence of systemic inequalities, racial biases, and discriminatory practices that perpetuate unequal power dynamics and hinder the development and affirmation of Black racial identities. Understanding these problems was essential for identifying strategies and interventions that can address the issues faced by Black students and promote inclusivity and equity within higher education. Overall, it provided a comprehensive exploration of the contested nature of race, the complexities of racial identity, the influence of HWUs on African racial identity, and the challenges faced by Black individuals in higher education. This foundation of knowledge was important to set the stage for this study to contribute further insights and understanding in these critical areas of research.

The theories used were aimed to provide a comprehensive exploration of the study and have guided the research process, offering a conceptual framework through which to analyze and interpret the empirical findings. By grounding the study in these theoretical perspectives, the research was positioned to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on racial identity and its implications in the context of higher education. The study was guided by the critical race theory and the Racial/Cultural Identity Development Theory as a frame of reference on theoretical perspectives. The significance of the racial identity development theory, as emphasized by Carter (1996:195), lies in the recognition that each stage or level of racial identity encompasses its own unique configuration of emotions, beliefs, motives, and behaviors that shape its expression. This notion underscored the importance of understanding these stages to gain a deeper understanding of the intricate patterns that influence the development of Black African students' racial identity. By delving into these stages, the study was able to unravel the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the formation and expression of racial identity among Black African students.

Furthermore, critical race theory offered a valuable framework for comprehending the construction of Whiteness, providing insights into the ways in which power, privilege, and systemic inequalities operate within racial dynamics. Integrating critical race theory allowed a more comprehensive examination of the interrelationship between Whiteness and racial identity,

enabling the researcher to examine the impact of dominant ideologies and structures on the experiences of Black African students. By combining these theories, the study sought to offer a nuanced understanding of the unfolding of racial identity development stages specific to Black African students, acknowledging the unique and multifaceted nature of this process for each individual.

The research study achieved its aim using a qualitative design, and the interpretive paradigm. The sample included 15 social work students which included 6 undergraduate students, 4 postgraduate Masters students, and 5 Postgraduate Ph.D. students who were interviewed. The findings of the study revealed that the experiences of Black African students in relation to Whiteness encompassed various dimensions. These experiences were found to hinder the students' smooth adaptation mentally, environmentally, and academically within the context of the HWU. It has also subjected them to assimilation to the White standards of knowing and being by causing them to normalize Eurocentrism while unconsciously suppressing their Black African racial identity (Hattam and Proser 2008). The study further pointed out that the issues of Whiteness are more severe when they intersect with other social categories such as race, class, and gender. This observation highlights the potential necessity for research to prioritize the examination of intersectionality, specifically exploring how Whiteness intersects with other social categories within a higher education institution, thereby investigating the consequential effects that arise from such intersections.

5.2. Discussion of findings

5.2.1. Experiences of Black African students with Whiteness in the institution.

The objective of exploring students' experiences of Whiteness in a HWU was realized in this first theme. When participants were asked about their understanding of Whiteness, the study found that they demonstrated an understanding of Whiteness and were able to relate this understanding to their personal experiences. The participants' comprehension of Whiteness elicited emotional responses, evidenced by their reported emotional experiences in the previous chapter. This emotional engagement led them to perceive Whiteness as a formidable adversary to every Black child and as a source of disadvantage for Black students. Within the university

context, the problematic nature of Whiteness is perceived among Black Africans due to factors such as the educational system, language utilization, and structural presentation. These elements collectively contribute to the marginalization of Black students, while simultaneously conferring advantages upon their White counterparts. The findings underscore the role of the university systems as manifestations of Whiteness, which participants had encountered in the past. Moreover, the findings indicated that such systemic manifestations subject Black African students to academic challenges, as well as experiences and stresses stemming from the inherent difficulties of being in a HWU.

The question about the Black student's experiences of Whiteness was answered through students' responses. The study found that participants consistently encounter Whiteness in their everyday lives within the institution, suggesting that the university experience itself is intertwined with the presence and influence of Whiteness. These encounters with Whiteness manifest in various ways, including the perception of White students as more intellectually capable than their Black counterparts, also perpetuating distorted notions of purity associated with Whiteness and immoral behaviors associated with Blackness. The participants' experiences further highlight concerns regarding potential biases and inequitable treatment within grading and evaluation processes employed at the Higher Education institution. Moreover, participants expressed feelings of exclusion and alienation, as their encounters with Whiteness resulted in the neglect of nurturing their Black African identity within the university environment. Consequently, these negative experiences and perceptions of their identity profoundly affect their social identity, encompassing traditions, heritage, language, culture, self-concept, and self-esteem (Arumugham 2017). The study's findings ultimately underscore how these adverse experiences contribute to the challenges participants face in negotiating their space, well-being, and adjustment within the university, while also impeding their academic excellence.

5.2.2. Experiences and factors affecting Black African students' racial identity.

Through this theme, a second objective of ascertaining Black African students' experiences of Black African racial identity in a HWU was realised. Initially, the participants were asked about

their understanding of what it means to be Black African. Their responses revealed that being Black is not solely associated with skin colour or language diversity, but rather encompasses values aligned with African identity, such as respect, a non-judgmental attitude, and the opportunity to live a purposeful life. The study highlights that, according to the perspective of Black African students, one can be Black without identifying as a Black person or as an African solely based on race. Instead, it was understood as more about self-perception and embracing a collective identity rooted in principles of collectivism, ubuntu, and moral guidance. The participants emphasize the importance of cultural heritage, historical values, and communalism over individualism. They perceive being African as a holistic concept that extends beyond the individual, recognizing the interconnectedness of circumstances that shape their Black African identity. The participants express a belief in the traditional indigenous way of life and the proverbial notion that it takes a village to raise a child.

Furthermore, the participants associate the sense of being African with cultural expressions, historical values, and collectivism, contrasting it with individualism. They express a sense of exclusion from their African identity when they witness signs of individualism, such as a lack of willingness to help others or a self-centred attitude. The findings indicate that individualism is prevalent within the university context, where the “every man for himself” mindset often prevails, contradicting the principles of ubuntu and communal harmony inherent in African philosophy. The university experiences expose them to a social learning environment that prioritizes individualism, deviating from their understanding of African identity rooted in ubuntu (Dladla 2012). Consequently, this social education fails to define and nurture their aspirations as Black Africans, depriving them of a sense of collectivism, holistic perspectives, and the defining terms that shape their identity.

They were also asked about the imposed education system and how it affects them. They indicated that the imposed education system poses significant obstacles to African students’ learning and the development of their African identity. It is found that the university system, by normalizing the imposed education and Eurocentric approaches to teaching and learning, fails to

consider the impact on the emotional well-being of Black African students. This finding aligns with Brunσμα et al. (2012), who asserts that this educational approach negatively affects educational achievements to Black African students as it sometimes reduces their assessment scores and exacerbate the disparities in performance of Black African students compared to White students. The study identifies a substantial gap in understanding the African experience and the unique challenges faced by African individuals, as the curriculum lacks representation of Black racial identity and African content. Instead, it deprives them of a sense of belonging, erases their own history, and solely focuses on Western history, which offers them no benefit (ibid). This educational system restricts the practice of their cultural beliefs and aims to detach them from their roots (Shizha 2013). The study posits that the South African education system, rooted in a Western worldview, perpetuates an advantageous position towards White individuals, thereby limiting the academic and excellence opportunities available to Black African students.

It became evident that this type of education not only fails to equip students with the necessary skills but also erodes African ways of knowing and being. The absence of African knowledge systems in education devalues their relevance, hindering the students' ability to develop their identity and understand their cultural heritage (Brunσμα et al. 2012). The study finds that education deprives students of their sense of identity and belonging, leading to a loss of self as their history, traditions, cultural practices, and identity are ignored and omitted from the educational process. African individuals are misunderstood within the education system, as their unique challenges were not taken into account during the development of the existing education system (Dladla 2012). Consequently, the systemic advantage of White students persists, as they are more likely to be perceived as academically proficient due to the alignment of their identities with White constructs.

While the study acknowledges some efforts to include elements of indigenous knowledge systems, such as the utilization of indigenous languages in education, participants express a prevailing sentiment that these efforts fall short of addressing their perceived exclusion within broader transformation initiatives. Although some progress has been observed in curriculum

transformation, the findings highlight the slow pace of change and the perpetuation of historical patterns of oppression. Despite the recognition of advancements in language and academic transformation, the study indicates a significant gap between the desired objectives and the pace of progress.

They were further asked about how they have experienced the language used at the university and the study reveals that language serves as a significant hindrance to verbal and written communication for Black African students in a HWU. Participants consistently expressed that the English language posed ongoing challenges in their daily experiences at the university, impeding their proficiency in both verbal expression and written communication. When attempting to convey their thoughts and ideas in a foreign language, the intended meaning often gets lost, leading to misinterpretations and the need for constant justification of their statements. This difficulty in articulating themselves in class, forming social connections, engaging with important administrative offices, and even composing reports across various platforms, whether as students or tutors, hinders their participation and engagement. The challenges extend to sharing personal viewpoints, as the linguistic barriers impede their ability to structure content and effectively voice their thoughts (Dancy et al. 2018).

For Black African students, language goes beyond being a mere tool of communication; it is seen as an essential pathway to accessing and expressing their identity (Dladla 2017). The result indicates the inability to express themselves in their own language as leading to a loss of personal identity and self-esteem issues. On the other hand, the language barrier is perceived as highly limiting and disruptive to their learning experiences. While the study acknowledges the bilingual system as part of the university's transformation efforts, participants feel that it has not adequately benefited them. Consequently, it recommends that promoting inclusivity and understanding across different languages and cultures should be prioritized to break down these barriers and enhance communication. Instead of solely normalizing the use of the English language, which disproportionately advantages White individuals at the expense of Black

Africans, a more comprehensive approach is needed to ensure linguistic equity and empower students to fully express their thoughts and experiences.

Furthermore, on the question of their experiences towards the structural environment, the study finds that the structural environment plays a role as a hindrance to the adaptation, inclusion, and representation of African identity within the higher education setting. Further, the existing structures within the institution are found to be deeply rooted in Whiteness, which poses challenges for Black African students seeking a sense of belonging and recognition. Participants acknowledged that while they understood that the institution and its symbols of Whiteness are deeply entrenched and unlikely to change, they believed that this should not preclude the inclusion of African history and contemporary experiences. They expressed a strong desire for equal representation within the university, as they perceived the current structural environment as favouring White students over their Black counterparts. Evidently, the presence of statues depicting White individuals and the naming of buildings that still reflect the colonial era further perpetuating the exclusionary nature of the university. These symbols do not acknowledge the democratic transition and fail to accommodate the diverse identities of Black African students (Hailu and Sarubbi 2019). The alien and intimidating nature of the environment exacerbates the challenges of adjusting to university life. When coupled with the Eurocentric curriculum, the structural environment is found to leave little room for the representation and inclusion of African history, culture, and contributions, resulting in a sense of alienation for African students.

Participants acknowledged that statues and symbols may be erected to honour individuals for their achievements but failed to comprehend the relevance of colonial symbols in post-apartheid South Africa. The structures within the university represent oppressive systems that originated from the era of slavery and do not reflect the diverse African identity. The absence of representation of Black Africans within the structural environment perpetuates biases and prejudices, further deepening the sense of otherness and exclusion experienced by these students (Hailu and Sarubbi 2019). The study concludes that the structural environment within higher education institutions plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of Black African

students. The lack of representation and accommodation of African identity within the existing structures is found to perpetuate feelings of exclusion and alienation. It is therefore imperative for institutions to critically evaluate and transform their physical spaces to foster a more inclusive and representative environment that recognizes and respects the diverse identities of all students.

They were also asked about the lack of representation in various aspects, including curriculum, language, structure, and the system itself, that has significant negative implications for their African identity. The findings demonstrate that the English language, beyond its role as a means of communication, imposes psychological distortions on the Black African community and undermines its rich linguistic and cultural heritage. Simultaneously, the structural environment of the university, which perpetuates advantages for the White racial group, fails to reflect the identity of Black African students (Rowe and Atkinson 1994). They perceive this as a process of westernization, leading to deep frustration and causing emotional and mental distress. The impact extends beyond the university context, affecting their ability to provide counseling in their African language after completing their studies. This linguistic challenge negatively impacts their mental state and the therapeutic relationships they establish with clients (Marx 2004). Moreover, the absence of representation in the curriculum further exacerbates the disconnect they feel. Their concerns and issues are overlooked when they are not adequately represented, contributing to a sense of difficulty in fitting into the educational context. For some students, this even results in identity confusion, as they find themselves caught between two identities and struggle to determine which one to assume due to the information they are exposed to.

In terms of ascertaining their experiences of Black African racial identity in the university, they were finally asked to position their identity within the institution, the participants expressed a sense of disadvantage, particularly in terms of finances. They observed that White students generally have better financial resources and can afford more, while many Black Africans rely on financial aid. This financial disparity was seen as a significant factor contributing to their

perceived disadvantage. The findings highlight the historical financial constraints faced by Black Africans due to oppressive systems, which continue to affect their current economic situation. These financial challenges often impede their ability to pursue further studies, hinder their socio-economic adjustment, and pose obstacles in navigating their position among other students, given racial and social class differences (Harper 2007). Consequently, the participants viewed the everyday life of the higher institution as an embodiment of Whiteness, wherein the university operates within a structure that marginalizes and excludes Black individuals.

They expressed the belief that the institution prioritizes and caters more to White individuals. This necessitates the need for Black students to dissociate certain aspects of their identity to assimilate and adapt to the university environment (Hattam and Prosser 2008). The participants recognized assimilation as the sole means of survival within the university setting, as the Black identity is already suppressed, contributing to feelings of marginalization and inferiority. The study reveals that the higher education system continues to suppress their identity, leaving them with no choice but to conform and sacrifice certain elements of their true selves to fit in. Despite recognizing some progress in transformation, the participants emphasized the slow pace of change and the insufficient level of transformation achieved thus far in addressing the concerns of Black African students.

5.2.3. Coping and dealing with Whiteness and Black African racial identity issues.

This theme contributed to the realization of the third objective of the research which was to determine students' coping mechanisms and recommendations in terms of Whiteness and Black African racial identity challenges. It was realised through the findings of the study which highlighted the importance of including gender, social class, social learning, and culture in addressing issues of identity and race. The recognition of intersectionality appeared as crucial in understanding the complex interplay of multiple identities and how they collectively shape individuals' experiences and perspectives. The study emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that goes beyond examining race or gender in isolation, acknowledging that Black Africans' experiences are influenced by the intersection of their racial and gender identities. Incorporating

intersectionality as a framework allows for a comprehensive understanding of identity, addressing various dimensions and amplifying the voices of marginalized individuals (Wijeyesinghe and Jones 2013).

Moreover, the study underscores the significance of incorporating social learning, gender, and culture in discussions surrounding racial identity. It reveals that the experiences of Black individuals facing racial and other social identity issues, such as gender and culture, result in compounded oppression. The intersectionality of these issues leads to exclusion and discrimination in multiple dimensions, both within and outside their racial group (Wijeyesinghe and Jones 2013). These students face marginalization based on their race, sexual orientation, and other social identities, often encountering discrimination from their peers, lecturers, and other members of the university community. The study emphasizes that these combined forms of oppression pose unique challenges for students who experience intersecting social identities alongside racial issues.

Similarly, social class, social learning, and culture play significant roles in shaping individuals' experiences (Idang 2015). The study reveals that issues of social cohesion are crucial for fostering a "rainbow nation" ethos. Participants highlight the importance of including social education, which is embedded in their African communities, in the curriculum. The absence of such inclusion is perceived as exclusionary, hindering the participation of African individuals (ibid). The study emphasizes the need to consider these dimensions in curriculum design and implementation to promote holistic development and prepare students to navigate complex social realities in an equitable educational environment. Participants view intersecting identities as influential factors in their encounters with Whiteness and African racial identity. The study stresses the importance of integrating intersectionality into addressing the challenges faced in navigating African identity within a system that prioritizes and values Whiteness.

The objective was further realised when the participants of the study were also asked about strategies, they employ to preserve their African identity while being students at the university.

They emphasized the importance of not succumbing to intimidation from other racial groups and maintaining a sense of self-worth and pride in their identity. They expressed the need to remain resilient in the face of the challenges and harsh realities experienced within the university environment. The findings highlighted the significance of a liberating curriculum that recognizes and values the importance of being Black, thus fostering a sense of belonging and readiness for engaging in activism to promote non-racist black pride. Despite the participants' acknowledgment of the suppression and inferiority of Blackness within the institution, they emphasized that individuals can undertake self-studies and develop a sense of resistance against marginalization and oppression perpetuated by the White-dominated systems. This individual-level activism was seen as a starting point that could have a lasting impact. The participants emphasized the necessity of fighting against oppression on a daily basis, which could involve engaging in relevant readings that illuminate their identity and the value of their cultural roots.

The study also highlights the significance of reconnecting with one's home, embracing parental teachings, and engaging with African communities as means of safeguarding one's identity. It encourages and recommends active engagement with African history and culture, as it fosters a connection with ancestral roots, reinforces self-identification as a Black African, and enhances knowledge of African languages and cultural diversity. These activities are seen by participants as important steps towards preserving and valuing one's African identity within the university context.

When further asked about their coping strategies, the participants exhibited a range of approaches to dealing with racial and identity issues, highlighting the individuality of such strategies. The study observes that some students turn to writing as a coping mechanism, expressing their thoughts and experiences through compositions centred on African curriculum, cultures, indigenous peoples, and even composing poetry in their native languages, thus maintaining a connection with their vernacular. Others seek solace in the presence of fellow Africans, forming relationships with individuals who share similar experiences and values, allowing them to find support within the university environment. Furthermore, some participants

stressed the importance of staying true to themselves and their beliefs, concentrating on the purpose and objectives that led them to pursue higher education, which facilitates a smoother navigation through challenges.

The significance of African spirituality, religion, parental teachings, and reconnecting with one's roots emerged as coping strategies. These approaches were seen as empowering individuals to resist the obstacles posed by Whiteness. Self-emancipation was identified as a critical initial step at the individual level, involving a process of revisiting African content and ways of life, leading to broader engagement in activism. The findings underscore the notion that through individual activism, self-awareness, and a deeper exploration of African heritage, individuals can overcome feelings of inferiority and reclaim their sense of worth and identity.

Participants in the study expressed their recognition of the ongoing transformation efforts within the university yet expressed dissatisfaction with the slow pace of progress and the perceived lack of meaningful actions taken. They emphasized that they continue to face struggles as Black students and that the sluggish rate of transformation has far-reaching implications for their experiences. Moreover, they noted a disparity between the extensive research and discussions conducted on their challenges and the lack of tangible interventions implemented to address these issues effectively. The study thus concludes that while there has been considerable attention given to documenting and discussing the obstacles faced by Black Africans, there remains a significant gap in the practical implementation of measures to address these concerns. Participants voiced their discontent with the prevailing structural environment, language policies, curriculum content, and pedagogical approaches that appear to perpetuate advantages for the White racial group while marginalizing Black students.

5.3. Major conclusions

The study concludes that the university systems serve as manifestations of Whiteness, leading to various challenges and stressors for Black African students. These challenges stem not only from

the inherent difficulties of being in a historically White university but also from the adverse experiences associated with Whiteness itself (Hiraldo 2010). As a result, Black African students face obstacles in navigating their space, well-being, and adjustment within the university, which can hinder their academic excellence. The social education provided by the university fails to recognize and nurture the aspirations of Black Africans, thereby detaching or disconnecting them from their sense of self and personal identity, depriving them of a sense of collective identity and holistic perspectives that shape their identity (Governder 2005).

Moreover, the study concludes that there is a significant gap in understanding the African person, their experiences, and their unique challenges within the university curriculum. The lack of representation of Black racial identity and the exclusion of African ways of knowing and being appeared to contribute to the alienation and marginalization of Black African students. Although the bilingual system is recognized as part of the university's transformation efforts, the study concludes that it has not adequately benefited Black African students. The structural environment within higher education institutions also plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of Black African students (Dancy et al. 2018). The absence of African identity representation and accommodation within existing structures perpetuates feelings of exclusion and alienation. Consequently, Black African students may feel no choice but to assimilate and sacrifice aspects of their authentic selves to fit into the dominant culture.

Despite acknowledging some progress in transformation efforts, the study emphasizes the slow pace of change and the insufficient level of transformation achieved thus far in addressing the concerns of Black African students. The researcher is of the view that to effectively address racial identity issues can also be supported by recognizing the intersecting dimensions of identity and their impact on individual experiences. It is further highlighted that the lack of practical implementation of measures to address the concerns of Black African students, despite the extensive documentation and discussion of the challenges they face. Implementation therefore becomes important as Whiteness continues to dominate within HWU, suppressing and misrepresenting the Black African racial identity of Black African students. The study findings underscore the systemic nature of Whiteness within higher education institutions and its harmful

effects on Black African students. The study calls for comprehensive transformation efforts, including curriculum representation, structural adjustments, and practical measures to address the unique challenges faced by Black African students and promote a more inclusive and equitable higher education environment.

5.4. Recommendations of the study

5.4.1. Recommendations to the University

Based on the findings of the research, the study identified several key recommendations for addressing the issues related to racial identity and inclusivity within the university context:

1. The development of inclusive evaluation criteria: It is crucial to establish evaluation criteria that consider and incorporate diversity, ensuring that the assessment process recognizes and values the experiences and contributions of all students, regardless of their racial background.
2. Promoting an accommodative university environment: Efforts should be made to provide equal treatment and opportunities for all students, irrespective of their race. This involves creating a fair and supportive environment that allows every individual to thrive academically and personally.
3. Acknowledging the unique challenges faced by African students: The university should strive to bridge the gaps in understanding the experiences and problems specific to African students. This can be achieved by actively engaging with their perspectives, narratives, and concerns to foster a deeper understanding and support system.
4. Inclusion and representation in structural symbols and history: It is crucial to improve the inclusion, accommodation, and representation of the African identity within the university's structural symbols and historical narratives. This can help create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for African students.
5. Implementing programs to support student coping and adjustment: Universities should establish programs that help students cope with the challenges they face and adjust to the university environment. These programs can provide support, resources, and guidance to

facilitate a sense of inclusivity, which can ultimately contribute to improved academic performance and overall well-being.

6. Creating platforms and opportunities for African students to explore and affirm their African cultural identity can contribute to their overall well-being and academic success.

By implementing these recommendations, universities can work towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment that recognizes, values, and supports the diverse racial identities of their students.

5.4.2. Recommendations for the social work practice

The study also provides specific recommendations for social work practice in addressing racial identity issues and promoting inclusivity:

1. Including African content and theories in the social work curriculum: The social work curriculum should be designed to reflect and address the unique experiences and needs of Black individuals. This includes teaching in African languages and incorporating practical approaches that are relevant to the African context, considering that most social work clients are African people with specific African problems. Therefore, it is essential to develop a social work curriculum that takes these factors into account.
2. Addressing Eurocentrism in social work studies: Social work education should consider focusing more on Afrocentrism than Eurocentrism, as it can hinder the establishment of effective counselling relationships with Black African clients. The curriculum should recognize and incorporate the experiences and perspectives of African people in theory and practice, ensuring that the African person is duly acknowledged and represented.
3. Facilitating discussions on social education can be vital. By engaging in these conversations, students can gain insights into the interconnectedness of various social factors that may either have positive or negative effect on their racial identity to help them develop a deeper understanding of racial identity and issues therewith.

Overall, by implementing these recommendations within social work practice, universities can better prepare social work students to address racial identity issues, positively support diverse client populations, and foster a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to social work practice.

5.4.3. Recommendations for further research

The findings of the study underscore the presence of intersecting identities among individuals, wherein multiple dimensions converge to collectively mould their experiences and viewpoints. Specifically, within the context of Black Africans, the interrelationship between their racial identity and gender identity can significantly impact their lived experiences in terms of race and gender dynamics. This highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding that goes beyond analysing each identity in isolation. Additionally, the dynamics of racial identity extend beyond interactions between different racial groups, as intra-group differentiation based on social class hierarchy also plays a role, necessitating the inclusion of social class considerations. The study emphasizes the significance of adopting an intersectional framework to fully address issues related to identity and race. Such a framework that acknowledges and appreciates the multifaceted nature of identity, enabling a comprehensive exploration of various identity dimensions and amplification of marginalized voices. By recognizing the interconnectedness of different social categories, including race, gender, and social class, the study underscores the importance of incorporating intersectionality in research and interventions.

To further advance understanding, the study recommends future research that specifically focuses on intersectionality and explores how Whiteness intersects with other social categories to negatively impact Black African students in a higher education institution. This research would shed light on the complex dynamics at play and their implications for the experiences and well-being of Black African students in their academic journey. By examining these intersections, the means will be made to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Black African students and inform the development of targeted interventions and support mechanisms.

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Appendix 1: Gatekeeper Letter



5 October 2021

Masimbonge Shoji (SN 215068988)
School of Social Work
College of Humanities
Howard College Campus
UKZN
Email: 215068988@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Masimbonge

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"An exploration of black African students' experiences of whiteness on their African identity in a South African University."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews and/or focus group discussions with students at UKZN (Taking in account the regulations imposed during the lockdown ie restrictions on gatherings, travel, social distancing etc. ZOOM, Skype or telephone interviews recommended).

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance approval letter;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the PAIA and POPI Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely



Dr K Cleland
Registrar

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 2: Ethics Approval Letter



09 December 2021

Masimbonge Praisegod Shoji (215068988)
School Of Applied Human Sc
Howard College

Dear MP Shoji,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003625/2021

Project title: An exploration of black African students' experiences of whiteness on their African racial identity in a South African University.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 04 December 2020 to our letter of 01 December 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid for one year until 09 December 2022

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours faithfully



.....
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form

School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Howard College Campus.

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Masimbonge Shozi. I am a Master of Social Science (Social Work) student studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus, South Africa. I am interested in exploring the Black African students' experiences of Whiteness on their Black African racial identity in a South African University. I intend to interview participants from this institution to gather information, I am interested in asking you some questions. The study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Ethics Committee (Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003625/2021).

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview will be held virtually and may last for about 30 to 60 minutes.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will **not** be penalized for taking such an action.
- The research aims at exploring the Black African students' experiences of Whiteness on their Black African racial identity in a South African university.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Interview and Audio recording		

I can be contacted at:

Email: 215068988@stu.ukzn.ac.za/masi.shozi@gmail.com

Cell: 065 339 6543

My supervisor is Dr. S. Motloun from the Department of Social Work at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She can be contacted on 031 260 1341.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I..... (full names of participant) hereby
confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I
consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

.....

DATE

.....

Appendix 4: Interview guide

MASIMBONGE PRAISEGOD SHOZI INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (Draft)

An exploration of Black African students' experiences of Whiteness on their African racial identity in a South African University.

SECTION A: IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS

- What is your age
- What is your sex
- What is your citizenship

SECTION B: CONFIRMATION QUESTIONS

- Are you a registered student at this university?
- Are you doing undergraduate or postgraduate?
- If undergraduate, what level of study are you doing?
- What degree are you doing?
- What is your race?

SECTION C

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF WHITENESS IN A HWU

- What is your understanding of Whiteness?
- Do you have any experience, or have you seen or heard someone else experiencing the issues of Whiteness in this institution?
- Do you personally think that Whiteness is a challenge to Black African students in the university?

BLACK AFRICAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF BLACK AFRICAN RACIAL IDENTITY IN A HWU.

- How do you define your African racial identity?
- Do you think the structural environment of the university reflects your identity?
- Do you think the education system in this university reflects Black African racial identity?
- How does the English language use in this institution affect you and your identity?
- How does the structural environment in this institution affect you and your identity?
- How does the education system in this institution affect you and your identity?

- Have you ever found language to be an issue when expressing yourself?
- Do you perceive your Black African identity as inferior or superior to White identity in this institution?
- Do you think there is value in addressing racial identity issues?

STUDENTS' COPING MECHANISMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN TERMS OF ISSUES OF WHITENESS AND AFRICAN RACIAL IDENTITY.

- Do you believe in finding resolutions to racial identity problems?
- What guides and protects your identity in this institution?
- What are your coping mechanisms regarding issues of Whiteness and racial identity challenges?
- How would you recommend resolutions to racial identity problems?

Appendix 6: Turnitin report

11/14/23, 10:29 AM

Turnitin - Originality Report - An exploration of black African students experience of whiteness on their black African racial id...

Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 14-Nov-2023 9:32 AM CAT
ID: 2227713124
Word Count: 43969
Submitted: 1

An exploration of black African students
experience of whiteness on their black African
racial identity in a South African University By
Masimbonge Shoji

Similarity Index

10%

Similarity by Source

Internet Sources: 10%
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[Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal on 2018-06-16](#)

< 1% match ()

[Singh, Tasmeera Rajcoomar, "Race, class, gender and sexuality: a case of a South African university campus.", 2019](#)

< 1% match (Internet from 26-Aug-2021)

https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10413/19613/Matswetu_Vimbai_Sharon_2019.pdf

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[Makhanya, Thembelihle Brenda, "Exploring the students' experiences of \(de\)coloniality: a case study of Social Work programme at a South African university in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.", 2020](#)

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[Motloung, Sphiwe Maneano, "Analysis of race and racism discourse by academics in post-apartheid Higher Education.", 2019](#)

< 1% match ()

[Mhlono, Favourite, "The role of pervasive skills in the academic and professional preparation of Accounting students in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Iqhaza lokwandiswa kwamakhono emfundo ephakeme kanve nokulungiselelwa ngobungcweti kwabafundi abafunda isifundo esibhekene nezezimali eNyuvesi yaKwaZulu-Natal.", 2022](#)

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[Odoro, Sylvester Elvis, "Exploring the role of teacher learning community in accounting education in the context of rurality: a case study.", 2023](#)

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