

**BLACK STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF TRANSFORMATION AT UCT:  
A PHOTOVOICE STUDY**

Josephine Ruth Cornell

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree.

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## ABSTRACT

South African higher education has faced much structural transformation since the end of apartheid, and yet remains a racialised space. It is clear that despite a stated commitment to transformation in university policy nationally, in reality there is much ambivalence around transformation. In debates around transformation, black students are frequently represented in stigmatising ways. These negative representations are part of a discourse that holds the increasing numbers of black students responsible for lowering university standards. When black students encounter these discourses it can affect their self-esteem and academic performance. This study thus explores black students' experiences of transformation at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Over six months, 10 black African and coloured UCT students participated in a photovoice research project. They participated in focus groups and produced personal reflections, photographs and written stories representing their experiences and perspectives on transformation in higher education in a previously white University. This data was analysed using thematic analysis, within a critical psychological framework, specifically decolonising psychologies. The participants' everyday experiences of UCT were explored, and four themes were evident: the narrowness of UCT's transformation focus; the prevalence of racial stereotypes on campus; the Eurocentric focus of the university; and the racialisation of space on campus. Ultimately, it appears that whiteness is dominant at UCT. This detrimentally affects many black students who are required to learn within this often unwelcoming white space, and who internalise the negative stereotypes they encounter. Nevertheless, many black students succeed. The participants in this study employed a variety of coping mechanisms to help them navigate through life at UCT. They were also able to employ strategies to resist the dominant discourse of black inferiority, and to re-present themselves and transformation on their own terms.

*Keywords:* transformation; black students; South Africa; higher education; race; photovoice

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## **Chapter One: An Introduction**

South African higher education has faced a great deal of structural transformation since the end of apartheid; however, it remains a highly racialised space (Jawitz, 2012; Robus & Macleod, 2006). Often, the lived experiences of black students in higher education institutions do not reflect the aims of the transformation policies. This study is concerned with documenting the experiences of black (black African, coloured and Indian) students at the University of Cape Town (UCT), an officially transforming, historically “white only” university.

### **1.1 South African Higher Education During Apartheid**

Before 1994, the South African higher education landscape was skewed to “entrench the power and privilege of the ruling white minority” (Bunting, 2002, p. 52). By law, all higher education institutions were racially segregated and designated as being exclusively for students of one of the four apartheid race categories (black African, coloured, Indian and white). This resulted in division of the higher education landscape into the two broad categories “white only” or “black only” universities and technikons. It was illegal for historically “white only” institutions, such as UCT, to admit black students; to employ black academic staff; or to teach course content which the apartheid government considered “subversive”. Despite this, during the 1980s, the four English-medium “white only” institutions (the University of Cape Town, Rhodes University, the University of Natal, and the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS)) attempted to enrol black students and objected to the apartheid government’s higher education policies. They had some success although the numbers of black student were relatively low. By 1990, only 28% of the students registered at these universities were Indian, coloured or black (Bunting, 2002). Conversely, historically “white only” Afrikaans-medium universities (such as the University of Pretoria, the University of the Orange Free State, and Stellenbosch University), fully supported the apartheid government’s ideologies and rigorously implemented the apartheid higher education racial policies. Consequently, by 1990 96% of the total students enrolled at the six Afrikaans-medium universities were white (Bunting, 2002). The “black only” institutions (such as the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the University of Zulu Land, and the University of Fort Hare) were generally established with the apartheid government’s support, to educate black people who would then be “useful” to the government. Typically, these were black school teachers or black civil servants. However, by the late 1980s, the apartheid government began to lose their control over some of these institutions and many of

them became sites of strong anti-apartheid resistance (Bunting, 2002). Overall, despite resistance from some universities, the apartheid higher education landscape was deeply segregated and unequal.

## **1.2 South African Higher Education Post-Apartheid**

**1.2.1 Transformation of higher education.** With the introduction of democracy in 1994, there were significant changes made to higher education (Cloete, 2002a). Transformation was a central focus, and there was a significant drive to formulate policies to redress the inequalities of the past and to expand the South African higher education system. In the first few years after 1994, the focus was on creating new higher education policies which resulted in a report from the National Commission on Higher Education in 1996. Out of this came the Department of Education's (1997) *White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* and the new Higher Education Act implemented in 1997. This White Paper highlighted the issues facing the higher education system in South Africa and made suggestions for how the system should be transformed. In particular, this report drew attention to the need to increase the access to education for a more diverse student population (black, women, disabled, and mature students) by focusing on equity and redress. However, there was little implementation of these policies; in fact, the first few years have been described as an "implementation vacuum" (Cloete, 2002a, p. 105). A report published by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in 2000, entitled *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape*, described how many of the problems with higher education in South Africa persisted despite the many transformation policies.

It has been argued that the biggest post-apartheid transformation success has been the increase in the diversity of student bodies (in terms of both gender and race) (Cloete, 2002b). The numbers of black African, Indian and coloured students in higher education have increased dramatically since the apartheid era. For example, the statistics for 2011 show that 78% of the total number of fulltime students enrolled at universities in South Africa are black (although these numbers are lower at historically white universities, such as UCT (51%) and Stellenbosch (32%)) (DHET, 2013). However, although these statistics are promising, and certainly demonstrate a significant change from pre-1994 figures, they do not tell the full story. Firstly, although the numbers of black African, coloured and Indian students have increased drastically, the actual participation rates of people from these population groups in higher education is much

lower than for the white population group. The 2011 statistics show that the participation rates (as a percentage of the population) for black people in higher education is 14.1%, with coloured people at 14.0%. This is considerably lower than for the white (57.4%) and Indian (47%) population groups. This means that a significant percentage of the black African and coloured people in South Africa are not accessing higher education (CHE, 2011). Secondly, although the numbers of black African, coloured and Indian students have increased, the actual retention and graduation rates of these students are significantly lower than those of white students, and are still cause for concern (Akojee & Nkomo, 2007; Petersen, Louw, & Dumont, 2009).

**1.2.2 Transformation at UCT.** At UCT there has been a strong focus on transformation in university policy. The UCT website devotes a section to outlining its transformation policies, practices and goal. The transformation goal has four specific components listed. These are as follows:

- “Making the university a more representative institution in terms of its academic and support staff, and its student body
- Promoting enhanced intellectual diversity,
- Transcending the idea of race,
- Improving institutional climate and having an enhanced focus on our intellectual enterprise on African perspectives” (UCT, 2014).

Student equity has perhaps been one of the key transformation focuses at UCT. The university makes use of an affirmative action or so-called “race-based” admissions policy, which takes into account the race of the applicants when selecting students. This is an attempt to redress the inequalities of the past by using race as a proxy for disadvantage for acceptance into UCT. Thus, the entrance requirements are different for students from different race categories. The five categories are: “black African”, “Chinese”, “coloured”, “Indian” or “white”; with students in the “white” category needing the most points (calculated from their Matric scores) to be accepted; followed by the “Chinese” or “Indian” categories, then “coloured” and finally students in the “black African” category needing the lowest number of points (UCT, 2015a). However, in May 2014, a proposal to change the current admissions policy was passed in a meeting of the UCT senate, which will take effect in 2016. This new admissions policy will not consider race only but will look at the schooling and background of potential applicants (UCT, 2014). With this new policy, depending on the faculty, approximately 75% of student intake

could be based on marks alone, while 25% may be race-based (Price, 2014a; Price 2014b)<sup>1</sup>. In terms of increasing the numbers of black African, coloured and Indian students, UCT has been fairly successful. Recent statistics for 2013 show that of the total 26,166 students enrolled at UCT, 6,199 students are black African (23.7%), 3,573 are coloured (13.7%), 1,714 are Indian (6.5%), and 8,434 are white (32.2%) (UCT, 2015b).

**1.2.3 Transformation debates.** Along with the focus on the transformation of higher education in national policy has come much attention, controversy and debate. At UCT in particular, this debate has focused on the issue of affirmative action (Favish & Hendry, 2010; Soudien, 2010). There has been a variety of responses to transformation policies at university, with many contrasting perspectives. Some theorists propose that affirmative action policies are still necessary (Favish & Hendry, 2010; Mangcu, 2013; Price, 2013) while others have argued that these policies are “morally indefensible” (Benatar, 2013, p. 258) and that they re-institutionalise apartheid divisions (Erasmus, 2010). Similar arguments have been reported on extensively in the media, both nationally and internationally: for example, it has been claimed that such policies unfairly disadvantage and discriminate against white students (Magome, 2012; Sapa, 2007); create a sense of entitlement among black students (Kelto, 2011); and demotivate black students (Buchanan, 2012). The titles of the many newspaper articles and letters to the editor that have been published over the years illustrate how vehement the opposition to these transformation policies is, such as: *UCT will lose status* (Smith, 2011); *Interference lowers standards* (Groenewald, 2013); *Perpetuating racism* (de Villiers, 2013); *A return to racism* (Coppens, 2011) and perhaps most shockingly, *Hitler’s policy at UCT* (Owen, 2011).

It is clear that despite a stated commitment to transformation in government policy nationally, and in university policy at UCT, in reality there is much ambivalence around and resistance to transformation in higher education in South Africa. This view is in line with findings in the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions* (Soudien et al., 2008), which was commissioned by the then Department of Education. This report concluded that although many institutions of higher education had clear transformation policies, this was not reflected in the everyday experiences of many students and staff. There is a “disjunction between policy and practice”, perhaps due to a lack of awareness of these policies or a “lack of

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, the specific details of the new policy are somewhat unclear and unconfirmed. Please consult the UCT website for updated information (<http://www.uct.ac.za>).

institutional will” (p. 14). However, the *Transformation and Student Life at UCT Report* (2005) which explored UCT students’ perceptions of the campus climate and transformation, concluded that it is not the failure of implementation, but the policies themselves which fail to address the “self-perpetuating apartheid legacies that pollute the institutional climate” (UCT, 2005, p. 21). This ambivalence and resistance to transformation indicates how contentious the debates and politics around transformation in higher education in South Africa currently are.

### **1.3 Representations of Black Students**

**1.3.1 Representations of black students in South Africa.** In debates around transformation in higher education in South Africa, black students are frequently represented in negative ways. Through the media, academic literature, institutional practices and policy documents, black students are often portrayed as greatly disadvantaged academically (Perry, 2003; Economist, 2010; Newling, 2012); unprepared for work once they have graduated (Economist, 2010); and using apartheid as an excuse for underachieving (Fihlani, 2012). These negative representations are part of a discourse that holds that the increasing numbers of black students are responsible for lowering “white” university standards (Spillius, 2013). Conversely, so-called black institutions are seen as improving in status when they can attract white students. Robus and Macleod (2006) have labelled this type of discourse the “white excellence/black failure” discourse.

This discourse is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it places the responsibility for transformation with black students, rather than with higher education institutions. As opportunities to succeed are supposedly readily available to students, if they fail it is often seen to be due to some stereotypical characteristic attributed to the black student. This ignores the ways that institutional practices may contribute to student failure and does not acknowledge the detrimental effects of negative representations and other difficulties that black students face in supposedly transformed higher education environments (Leach, 2002). Secondly, this discourse can result in students blaming themselves for difficulties that they experience at university, and not taking into account other factors in their learning environment. The supposed racial transformation of higher education spaces may actually make it difficult for black students to locate the reasons for their discontent at historically white universities. Students may be aware that the university has a policy of transformation which is apparently in place, and yet this is not reflected in their daily experiences on campus. These official transformation discourses

admit more black students and yet work to subtly exclude them (Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson, & Strauss, 2003; Walker, 2005). Consequently, these representations can have negative effects on students' success in higher education.

**1.3.2 Global representations of black students.** Stigmatising representations of black students in education are not restricted to a South African context, or to debates around transformation. In fact, the stereotyping and marginalisation of black students within education appears to be a relatively universal occurrence. These representations of black inferiority have a long history, with roots in colonialism. Colonial representations of blackness depicted black men and women as crudely sexual, and animal-like; whereas the colonisers (and thus whiteness) were represented as civilised, intelligent, controlled and superior. These kinds of representations served the ideological function of justifying imperialism and slavery (Boehmer, 1993; Garner, 2007; Glăveanu, 2009; Steyn, 2001, 2005). As Bhabha (1994) suggests, colonial discourses were necessary to bind the range of differences that inform racial and cultural hierarchisation. Bodies needed to be invested with race and difference, to legitimise the colonial nations that have been founded on this difference; as well as the resulting racial hierarchy and social disadvantage that black people face (Glăveanu, 2009; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2005; Steyn, 2001). Current representations of blackness and whiteness are perhaps not as explicitly racist as before. They have become more subtle, which is arguably more dangerous. They maintain and legitimise economic privilege, social capital and power that come with being white.

The US researcher Shaun Harper (2009, 2013), whose research focuses chiefly on black males and education, suggests that there is an extensive focus in popular discourse, the media and research on black male educational underperformance which reinforces a derogatory caricature of young black men. He describes a “master narrative that amplifies black male underachievement” (2009, p. 708), which overshadows the experiences of many black male students. Perry (2003) similarly describes how the myth of intellectual inferiority of black people is still a commonly held, taken-for-granted assumption by many individuals. She suggests that black people continually face “a pervasive, persistent, well-articulated, and unabated assumption of mental incompetence” (p. 1). Other researchers have commented on how images of deficiency and educational inferiority are communicated to black children from a young age (Howarth, 2002; 2004; Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003) and how society in general, and schools in particular, frequently construct black children as inadequately skilled and underachieving, particularly in disciplines such as mathematics and science (McClain, 2014). Cokley (2003) describes the “anti-intellectual myth” that frequently dominates

discourses around education, which presupposes that black people are lazy, unintelligent and undeserving of places within higher education. Additionally, within dominant educational discourses the ideal student is typically represented as white, middle-class and male, causing those who fall outside of those categories to question their belonging within educational spaces (Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003). These kinds of discourses inevitably affect black students and can detrimentally impact their educational outcomes.

#### **1.4. Outline of Thesis**

This thesis is concerned with exploring and exposing such discourses and examining how they affect the lives of black students in higher education. Chapter One has contextualised higher educational transformation within South Africa, and at UCT in particular. It has introduced issues of educational transformation, and explored the negative representations of black students that emerge out of discourses around affirmative action in South Africa and at UCT specifically. It has also discussed global representations of black students in higher education. Chapter Two reviews the extensive literature that focuses on the experiences of black students in higher education in South Africa and internationally, and the damaging effects of stigmatising representations and stereotypes. It also explores the growing body of research that examines the experiences of high-achieving black students, and the coping mechanisms they employ in the face of stereotyping and marginalisation in educational institutions. Chapter Three outlines the research design of the project, providing a detailed description of Photovoice methodology, as well as the theoretical framework used: decolonising psychologies. It also provides details about the participants, the data collection methods, procedure and data analysis. It covers some of the ethical considerations and concludes with a discussion of issues around reflexivity. Chapters Four and Five present the findings of this study. Chapter Four documents how black students experience UCT daily, and the concerns they have around the state of transformation on campus. Chapter Five examines how the difficulties described in Chapter Four affect the participants, and what coping mechanisms and resistance strategies they employ as a result. Chapter Six concludes the thesis with a summary of the findings; a discussion of their overall implications; an outline of some of the study's limitations and some recommendations for ways to improve the experiences and educational outcomes of black students at UCT. The thesis ends with suggestions for future research.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Much has been written over the last 50 years about the experiences of black students in higher education (Harper, 2013). This chapter will provide a review of this extensive body of literature, both international and South African. Firstly, the chapter will explore literature which focuses on documenting and exploring the “achievement gap” between black and white students. It will look first at the “deficit theory” research which explains black student underachievement as a consequence of biological intellectual inferiority; family and background; oppositional black peer culture; and/or inadequate school preparation. The chapter will then look at research which shifts from viewing black students themselves as the cause of underachievement, to problems and barriers within the higher education environment. Specifically, these are the prevalence of stereotyping and lowered expectations from teachers and academic staff; and the hostile and alienating campus environments at many higher education institutions. Secondly, this chapter will examine the literature that has changed the focus of research from black students’ failure and the so-called achievement gap, to the success and achievement shown by many black students despite marginalising conditions. The focus will be on studies that have shown the different coping mechanisms and resistance strategies employed by black students.

### 2.1 Research on Black Students and Underachievement

Much of the research on black students in higher education, particularly studies that concentrate on historically white institutions, has focused on exploring the “achievement gap” between black and white students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Within this extensive body of research there appear to be two broad categories of explanations for black underachievement. The first category accounts for underachievement by looking at issues around black students themselves and their backgrounds. The second explores problems within the actual higher education institutions which may explain black student underachievement.

**2.1.1 Student deficit research.** Some studies place the blame for the so-called achievement gap on black students and their communities. These studies fit into what has been termed the “student deficit” framework, and typically focus on black students’ “internal shortcomings (e.g. cognitive or motivational) or external weakness (e.g. cultural or familial background)” (Smit, 2012, p. 370).

***Intellectual inferiority.*** Within this framework, some of the reasons proposed by researchers for the academic underachievement of black students in higher education have amounted to scientific racism, such as the idea that black people are innately and biologically inferior to white people (Jensen, 1969). A notorious example of this is the book *The Bell Curve* by Herrnstein and Murray (1994) who suggest that there are natural differences in intelligence between white and black people. Although this book was widely criticised and this type of race and IQ research has been publically vilified, some contemporary theorists continue to draw on these problematic and racist ideas when explaining the achievement gap, for example Robert Weissberg in his book *Bad Students, Not Bad Schools* (2010). Weissberg claims that “group related variations in intelligence are real, are at least partially genetic...they do not reflect unequal resources, even American blacks from wealthy families generally have lower IQs than Whites from poorer families” (p. 15). He goes on to suggest that, rather than “wasting millions” trying to overcome unequal achievement rates by transforming the educational system, the “unequal ability” between races should be admitted and the focus should be shifted to imparting “Calvinist virtues...strong work ethic, strict discipline” in majority black schools. One suggestion he gives is making young black males “run wild for 10 minutes between classes...to blow off steam” or prescribing Ritalin (p. 16).

***Pathological family and culture.*** Other, perhaps less explicitly racist but nonetheless problematic, studies propose that black student educational underachievement results from the “culture of poverty” within black communities and largely blames black families for the achievement gap (Ford, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2006). This type of research, which was prominent in the 1960s in the US, suggests that “black culture” does not value education and that there is a lack of family tradition of education (Gibbs, 1973). These cultural deficit studies propose that black families and communities are characterised by antisocial cultural behaviours and practices; absent fathers and a lack of positive male role models; high levels of poverty and crime; and disorderly home environments (Deutsch, 1963; Hess & Shipman, 1965; Wilson, 1989). As Ford (1993) notes of these cultural deficit studies, “black children were seen as growing up in a web of social pathology and inadequate life experiences” (p. 48).

***Oppositional culture hypothesis.*** Another more contemporary argument relating to “black culture” is the “oppositional culture hypothesis” that holds that because of discrimination within employment, many black young people view achievement and effort in school as pointless (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2003). According to this perspective, black youths have developed a peer culture oppositional towards academic achievement and effort, and

become academically disengaged. Working hard and achieving academically is seen as “acting white” and thus avoided by many black students, who do not want to face criticism from their peers. This is said to account for the achievement gap between black and white students. However, this view has been criticised and disputed by other researchers. Other studies have found black and white students to have similar levels of engagement with education, and have challenged the idea that black students who achieve well academically are sanctioned by their peers (Cook & Ludwig, 1997; Downey & Ainsworth-Darnell, 2002; Ferguson, Ludwig, & Rich, 2001; Harris, 2006; Horvat & Lewis, 2003).

***Inadequate schooling and preparation.*** Some studies have pointed out the inequality in schooling between black and white children that can result in the poor school preparation for higher education of many black students (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2000; Gibbs, 1973; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Although this research has been conducted in a variety of contexts and countries, it is pertinent in South Africa where the legacy of apartheid means that the most black school children still attend under-resourced schools. Since the end of apartheid there has been limited progress in addressing the imbalance in resources between formerly white only and the formerly black and coloured only schools (Van der Berg, 2008). The combination of school fees and transportation costs means that the majority of black students continue to attend the underprivileged schools that they were restricted to under apartheid, rather than the better resourced, formerly white schools. These schools typically have inadequate facilities, underqualified teaching staff, and textbook shortages (Fiske & Ladd, 2006). A consequence of this unequal schooling is that many black students are academically underprepared and struggle once they enter higher education (Steyn, Harris, & Hartell, 2014).

This inequality in schooling is certainly a significant concern and should be addressed; however, Smit (2012) cautions against focusing exclusively on this as an explanation for black student failure. The positioning of black students as disadvantaged and underprepared strengthens stereotypes about them. Implicit in these types of explanations is the idea that black students need to change to fit the dominant culture of higher education. This allows higher education institutions to avoid responsibility and critical examination of their practices. It has been suggested that the focus should shift from the lack of preparedness of black students to the lack of preparedness of higher education institutions for the changing student population (Malefo, 2000; Smit, 2012).

The deficit thinking framework with its focus on black students' inadequacies has been criticised by other researchers (Smit, 2012; Valencia, 1997). Biggs (1999) refers to the deficit model as the "blame-the-student" theory. These victim blaming explanations for black students' underachievement do not consider the many problems and inequalities within the higher education system (Codjoe, 2006; Feagin & Sikes, 1995).

**2.1.2 Research on issues within the higher education system.** Much other research explores issues within the actual educational environment that need to be addressed and changed. This type of research shifts the focus from the students to characteristics of the higher education landscape that may in fact be a barrier to success for many black students (Smit, 2012). Feagin and Sikes (1995) suggest that for many black students in higher education there is a daily struggle to determine the official and unofficial "rules of the game". Often, these rules work for white students and against black students. It is clear from the literature that even within institutions that are officially committed to transformation and diversity, black students still frequently encounter stereotypes of their ability; lowered expectations from academic staff and their white peers; and hostile campus environments with an alienating culture of whiteness.

*Stereotypes and lowered expectations.* As has already been discussed in Chapter One, stereotypes about black students are widespread. Many black students interviewed by researchers have described encountering stereotypes of their ability within educational settings (Bourke, 2010; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Gillborn, Rollock, Vincent, & Ball, 2012; Harper, 2009, 2013; McClain, 2014; Phoenix, 2009; Sedlacek, 1999; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Woods, 2001). These include being treated as though they were unintelligent and lazy (Cokley, 2003); mocked for their accents and use of English (Woods, 2001); and on the more extreme end, being seen as criminals and facing heightened surveillance from campus police (Smith et al., 2007). A consequence of these stereotypes is that black students consistently face lowered expectations and doubt about their academic ability from their lecturers, tutors and teachers as well as their white peers and fellow students. Harper (2013) uses the term "niggering" to describe how stereotypes about black males in the US come to shape people's low expectations for their educational success (p. 191).

These stereotypes are pervasive and continuous. Research has shown that many black students face this type of questioning of their intellectual competence even at postgraduate level (Feagin & Sikes, 1995). Students in Solórzano et al.'s (2000) study described instances when faculty maintained low expectations of them even when faced with evidence to the contrary.

One student gave the example of how he had achieved a high mark for a mathematics test, and was then accused of cheating by his professor and made to retake the test.

Often, lowered expectations and doubt are linked to affirmative action policies, with students in numerous studies reporting that many of their white peers made them feel as though they did not deserve their places within the university and that they had only received them because they were black (Harper, 2009, 2013; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; McClain, 2014; Smith, 1980; Solórzano et al., 2000). In particular, participants in many studies describe how their white classmates displayed reluctance to work with black students in group work tasks (Harper, 2013; McGee & Martin, 2011; Davis et al., 2004). Davis et al. (2004), for example, interviewed black undergraduate students about their experiences at a predominantly white US university. The participants in their study described negative experiences of group work with white students, with one participant stating: “When we are just forming ideas and working on something, it’s kind of like for the first 30 minutes I’m ignored until I prove to them that, yes, I know what I’m talking about” (p. 433).

This marginalisation and stereotyping that many black students face once they are in higher education institutions can greatly undermine their success and restrict their opportunities (Howarth, 2004; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012), and this can help to explain the achievement gap between white and black students. Many studies have reported instances where their participants internalise the negative stereotypes that they encountered and silence themselves within academic settings and have lowered academic performance (McClain, 2014; Woods, 2001). Some of these studies, from different contexts, on the effects of stereotyping will be discussed below.

***International research on the effects of stereotypes.*** There has been much research on the effects of stereotyping on black students’ academic performance within educational settings in the United States. Most of this US research has centred on the concept of “stereotype threat” (e.g. Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, & Green, 2004; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Osborne & Walker, 2006; Solórzano et al., 2000; Steele, 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stone, Harrison, & Mottley, 2012). This concept, proposed by Steele and Aronson (1995), holds that when black students fail to perform as well as their white peers it has less to do with their innate ability or preparation and more to do with stereotypes about black students. Stereotype threat is a social psychological predicament that arises when an individual is aware of negative stereotypes about their group. For example, black students are inevitably aware of the

widespread stereotypes about black intellectual inferiority. Thus, when they are in situations that test their intellectual capacity, such as a university classroom, the fear and anxiety around confirming the stereotype may interfere with their intellectual functioning and lead to lowered performance.

Other US studies have explored the effects of stereotyping on black students, although not within the stereotype threat model. White (2011) explored the self-silencing of black students in educational settings. The students in White's study made conscious decisions not to participate in class and to censor themselves because they felt intellectually inferior to their classmates. They were also concerned that because they spoke differently to their white peers, their contributions would not be taken seriously. Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, and Pietrzak (2002) had similar findings in their study of black American students' college experiences. They demonstrated that when students felt that they did not belong, their engagement and trust in the academic institution was reduced. This led to self-silencing by the students, which undermined their academic success. Thus, they suggest that academic institutions must move beyond looking at transformation in solely demographic terms and work at ensuring that students feel a sense of acceptance, belonging and trust in the institution. Walton and Cohen (2007) drew almost identical conclusions in their above-mentioned study. They discovered that when students encountered negative stereotypes and thus felt that they did not belong on campus, their academic motivation was seriously undermined. They assert that although students of all races may experience feelings of uncertainty about their belonging in higher education, black students who face negative stereotypes worry about their belonging more pervasively. They found that these students, who had encountered stereotypes, interpreted feelings of loneliness and criticism from their lecturers (which other students could brush off as a normal part of the experience of being at university) as signs that they did not belong on campus. When they implemented an intervention aimed at improving students' sense of belonging, they found that it benefited black students' academic achievement.

In the British context, researchers have similarly explored the effects of stereotyping and marginalisation within education on black students. Howarth (2002, 2004), Gillborn et al. (2012) and Phoenix (2009), for example, have done comparable studies in school (rather than tertiary education) settings which have explored the experiences of black children with stereotypes about their ability. Phoenix (2009) interviewed Caribbean women who had come to school in the UK as children. As schoolgirls, these women had been constructed as lacking

and inferior within the British school system. They described how at times they would silence themselves in response to their British teachers' low expectations of them as Caribbean girls; because high performance would be met with disbelief. Similarly, Howarth's studies (2002, 2004), demonstrate that representations of black students as underachievers cause students to engage in self-negating behaviour such as sitting at the back of the class, and not participating fully in classroom discussions. Gillborn et al. (2012) found that even middle-class children of Caribbean parents in the UK underperformed in schools despite the greater cultural capital and material resources that their parents had. The researchers described how despite these students' reasonably affluent backgrounds and high expectations from their parents, they faced powerful barriers to their educational success. The British educational system has largely stereotyped and stigmatising views of black students (regardless of social class) as troublemakers and underachievers, which results in low expectations from their teachers, and extensive criticism and surveillance at school. This all inevitably undermines these students' performance (Gillborn et al., 2012).

A Swedish study by R athzel (2010) which had similar findings, involved interviews with young people of non-Swedish (typically Middle-Eastern) decent. When she first interviewed one of her participants he was in his last year of high school, and achieving distinctions for all his subjects. He was confident and described feeling more at home with white, middle-class Swedes than his fellow immigrants. However, at the time of the second interview he had entered business school and "his story was less assertive" (p. 544). He described a tension between his desire to be seen as Swedish and the rejection he faced from his majority Swedish fellow business students who refused to see him as such.

***South African studies on the effects of stereotypes.*** In a South African context, De Beer, Smith and Jansen (2009) found that black university students who perceived themselves to be second-class students (regardless of their actual academic ability) had lower academic performance than those who did not. Similarly, Vincent (2008) asked students in her Sociology course to describe their experiences of race at a historically white university. Black students in her course expressed feeling unwilling to talk in certain tutorials because they felt that "black people are considered stupid" (p. 1435) and that there was a perception that "they do not think as a white person" (p. 1441). One student described the "cloud of stereotypes" (p. 1441) that is constantly with black students. This student felt that negative stereotypes contributed to lowering students' success, by causing students to feel uncomfortable in lectures and tutorials. Additionally, Higham (2012) interviewed students at UWC and UCT. From the interviews, it

emerged that some black students felt unwilling to ask questions in lectures because they were worried that if they asked a question incorrectly their peers would laugh at them. Similar findings have been demonstrated at WITS in Woods' (2001) study of the experiences of black students. The black students whom Woods interviewed felt that their white peers and lecturers consider them unintelligent and they felt isolated on campus. Thus, they consciously censored any of their behaviours in class that might lead to more alienation: they did not ask questions in class, or contribute to class discussion.

***Hostile and alienating white campus environment.*** Researchers also often focus on the campus climate or environment. A positive campus climate is repeatedly mentioned as an important factor in black students' success. Solórzano et al. (2000) reviewed much of the research in this area and concluded that a positive racial campus climate has at least four features, namely: a diverse representation of students, faculty and administrative staff of colour; a curriculum that is not Eurocentric but includes the experiences of black people; support programmes to aid the retention and graduation of black students; and finally a commitment by the institution to transformation beyond just policy. When these elements do not occur, they suggest that it is likely that black students will experience the university climate as negative and unwelcoming. Many studies on the experiences of black students in higher education do indeed report hostile, negative campus environments (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Smith, 1980). Participants in Feagin and Sikes' (1995) study, for example, report feeling as though they were "at sea in a hostile environment" (p. 97). Similarly, Solórzano, Allen and Carroll (2002) conducted focus groups with students of colour (African-American, Asian-American and Latino/a students) at the University of California, Berkley. Their findings suggested that there was a negative campus racial climate which caused black students to feel undermined and isolated.

Typically, this hostility is characterised by the pervasive "whiteness" of higher education spaces. As, Sedlacek (1999) states, "black students have had to deal directly with a system run by whites for whites" (p. 538). Some specific examples of this whiteness are the low numbers of black academics (Davidson, 2012; Harper, 2013; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007); a Eurocentric focus within campus activities and curricula (Duncan, 2012; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Harper & Hurtado, 2007); and campus traditions based on whiteness (Bourke, 2010). For example, in Woods' (2001) study of the experiences of black students at WITS, her participants complained that white lecturers referred mainly to cultural references which were aimed only at white students. Many researchers have suggested that the dominant culture within academia

is white, and often, higher educational institutions will seek to preserve this status quo and elitism (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Read et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2007; Woods, 2001). Bourke (2010) argues that this means that black students are often relegated to peripheral spaces on campus. All this can lead black students to feel isolated, lonely, alienated and “othered”, which can have detrimental consequences for their educational outcomes.

***Black students in the majority versus minority.*** Much of this research, in fact most of the studies done within the United States, are conducted at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), namely universities and colleges with black students in the minority. Many theorists suggest that being a minority on campus causes these difficult and marginalising experiences. Thus, one way to challenge this is to increase the diversity of the student body (Harper, 2013; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; McClain, 2014; Sedlacek, 1999). However, other researchers disagree with these claims. Read et al. (2003) suggest that many academic practices can be alienating and isolating to students even when they are in the presence of significant numbers of other students of the same race and class. While a diverse student body is, of course, important, it is not a guarantee that many of the issues black students face will improve. For example, for the participants in Read et al.’s (2003) study, who were students from what they termed “non-traditional” backgrounds (i.e. mature, working-class or black students) who entered higher education in the UK, the dominant experience was one of isolation rather than belonging. Students felt alienated even when they were in institutions with many other students of the same race and class. For these students, it was the dominant academic culture which they found isolating. The studies from South Africa (e.g. Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Higham, 2012; Sennet et al., 2003; Steyn & Van Zyl, 1999; Vincent, 2008; Woods, 2001) also demonstrate this. Black students in South Africa are often alienated and stigmatised even though the student bodies of most South African universities, including those that were historically for whites only, are now relatively diverse. In some instances, black students may even be in the majority (as can be seen in the already mentioned student population statistics).

## **2.2 Research on Black Students’ Achievement and Agency**

Some of the research on black students in higher education has been criticised for focusing too heavily on black student underachievement and failure. Gutiérrez (2008) describes the prevalence of research on the achievement gap as a “gap-gazing fetish” that it is imperative to move beyond. Critics have suggested that some of these studies may even reinforce the

stereotypes of black students as lazy and intellectually inferior (Codjoe, 2006; Gutiérrez, 2008; James, 2012). Even studies which hold the effects of stereotyping responsible for underachievement have been criticised for the lack of emphasis on black students' agency. Wiggan (2007), for example, suggests that research that focuses on teachers' or lecturers' low expectations as a cause of black student underachievement assigns all the power to teachers, views black students as passive and does not acknowledge how some black students may actively resist oppression in educational spaces. The research into the negative effects of stereotyping on black students' academic achievement raises valid points; however it is also important to consider the agency many black students display.

As Harper (2013) points out, black students' difficulties within higher education are one side of the story, and a growing body of research which Harper terms the "anti-deficit achievement framework" has begun to explore how many black students successfully navigate their way through university and achieve well academically despite the many difficulties they face. Many studies explore the experiences of high-achieving black students in both school and higher education settings (e.g. Codjoe, 2006; Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Grantham, 2004; Griffin & Allen, 2006; Harper & Davis, 2012; Lee, Winfield, & Wilson, 1991; Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000; McGee & Martin, 2011; Moore et al., 2003; O'Connor, Mueller, L'Heureux Lewis, Rivas-Drake, & Rosenberg, 2011). These studies generally acknowledge that stereotyping of black students does occur; however, rather than focusing on how black students are damaged by this, they explore how many black students can succeed despite these stigmatising experiences.

**2.2.1 Coping mechanisms and resistance strategies.** Many of the studies that explore black student academic achievement focus on the coping mechanisms and resistance strategies that successful black students employ in the face of the marginalisation and stereotyping they encounter (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; McClain, 2014; McGee & Martin, 2011; Moore et al., 2003; Nghe & Mahalik, 2001; Read et al., 2003). For example, Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007), in their study of the experiences of black American high-achieving university students, described the stereotypes that black students encounter as creating a "black box" that students constantly resist (p. 510). Students' coping mechanisms are varied and sometimes contradictory, with some more successful than others. Firstly, those coping mechanisms which have limited success as well as problematic repercussions for students will be discussed, specifically: assimilation; ignoring stereotypes and racist encounters; and disproving

stereotypes. Secondly, those strategies which appear to be the most effective will be explored, namely: black peer support and resistance.

**Assimilation.** Assimilating into white culture on campus, or “acting white”, is one of the coping mechanisms that has emerged in the literature (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; McGee & Martin, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2002). For example, Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) describe how the black students they interviewed felt pressure to “behave in ways that are considered “non-Black” ” (p. 514) to try to dispel some of the stereotypes that they encounter from other students and lecturers. Similarly, Feagin and Sikes (1995) found that their participants experienced a dominance of white culture on campus which led them to feel pressure to “conform to white standards of dress, language and group behaviour” (p. 92). The *Transformation and Student Life at UCT* Report had similar findings. Many of the students surveyed described experiencing a strong pressure to act and speak in a certain way when at UCT, which they summed up as “acting white”. One of the participants interviewed gave the following explanation: “There is a suggestion that if you are white, you are somewhat better. You will try to be white like so that you can be better...” (UCT, 2005, p. 15).

Assimilation or “acting white” is seen by some as a useful skill. For example, Shorter-Gooden (2004), in her study of the coping mechanisms that black women employ when faced with stereotyping and prejudice, described how her participants could use it adaptively to their own advantage. She used the term “role flexing” to describe how many of her participants altered their speech or presentation to fit with the dominant group they were in and to reduce the impact of negative stereotyping: this generally took the form of acting “more white” or “less black”. The participants in her study felt that far from being ashamed of making use of this coping mechanism, they were proud that they could draw on this adaptive survival mechanism when few other options were available to them.

Despite the potential usefulness of this coping mechanism, it is problematic as it leaves the higher education environment untransformed and requires that black students are the ones who have to change. This concern is raised in Malefo’s (2000) article on academic performance of African women at predominantly white universities in South Africa. She highlights the idea that rather than expecting black students to adapt to white university environments, universities should change to accommodate the diversity of their student bodies. Similarly, Read et al., (2003) feel that when students have to adapt to the culture of the university, it is problematic because it leaves the dominant institutional culture unchanged

***Ignoring stereotypes and racist encounters.*** Additionally, some black students cope by ignoring the stereotyping they encounter on campus (Solórzano et al., 2002). Gildersleeve et al. (2011), for example, examined the experiences of black and Latino/a doctoral students in the US. One participant described how, because of the significant amount of work and stress associated with his PhD, when he encountered negative stereotypes and hostile experiences on campus, he often preferred to simply let it go. As he stated, “I really don’t want to deal with it, so I just choose to ignore certain negative situations” (p. 103). Some researchers have questioned the long-term sustainability of this coping mechanism. Gildersleeve et al. (2011) suggest that if students are “constantly quieting their reactions to powerful and racialised occurrences, then students may compromise their own well-being in the name of education, which appears contradictory to education’s broader purpose” (p. 103).

***Disproving stereotypes.*** Perhaps the most common coping mechanism noted and discussed in depth in the literature was proving stereotypes wrong with consistent high academic achievement (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; James, 2012; McGee & Martin, 2011; Moore et al., 2003; O’Connor et al., 2011; Solórzano et al., 2002). McGee and Martin (2011), for example, suggested an alternative to Steele and Aronson’s (1995) “stereotype threat”. They documented how academically successful Mathematics and Engineering students were resilient in the face of stereotypes by engaging in what they term “stereotype management”. Students were motivated to achieve well academically from a desire to disprove stereotypes about blackness. Similarly, Moore et al. (2003) described the “Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome”, in which many black students became more committed and determined when their academic ability was doubted. The student in Rätzl’s (2010) study described how getting the high marks he did at his business college was as much about proving people wrong, as getting “revenge” on those who underestimated his abilities because of his migrant origin. It appears that far from discouraging students, stereotypes and lowered expectations from their teachers can at times academically motivate students to prove them wrong. As one participant in Mehan, Hubbard and Villanueva’s (1994) study stated about his teacher, “We know that the teacher is not doing what’s right. He is a real racist jerk, but if you work hard, you will succeed. If you get good grades he can’t hurt you” (p. 113).

Nonetheless, what most researchers were careful to note was that the pressure to disprove stereotypes is not without a cost for black students. Many researchers described how it became emotionally distressing, exhausting and distracting for students and was depicted as a burden (Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2009; McGee & Martin, 2011;

Moore et al., 2003; Solórzano et al., 2002). The participants in Fries-Britt and Griffin's (2007) study felt that the high level of effort that went into proving themselves and attempting to dispel stereotypes was stressful and came at a high emotional cost. Similarly, the participants in McGee and Martin's (2011) study described how they felt burdened by the pressure of proving these stereotypes wrong, and found it to be tiring and emotionally debilitating at times.

**Resistance.** Some other studies have explored how instead of trying to disprove stereotypes, black students resist these negative stereotypes by re-presenting themselves in other, more positive, ways. Black students in some studies were documented as developing a strong sense of pride in their black identity (Codjoe, 2006; Horvat & Lewis, 2003). For example, as adults the Caribbean women that Phoenix (2009) interviewed recognised the representations that constructed them as inferior as schoolgirls in the UK. Through the process of reflection, they managed to disrupt and reject these kinds of "remembered relational experiences" (p.112) by using their collective experiences to counteract the racism and sexism they experienced. In a South African context, Parkinson and Crouch (2011) held focus groups with black science students at an English-medium South African university. Some of the students expressed feelings of shame at being part of the academic development programme, and many students felt that the university constructed them as "disadvantaged" and thus inferior. Conversely, some students consciously rejected this construction. They preferred to view themselves as proud to be at university and strongly rejected the implication that previous disadvantage was necessarily associated with inferiority. The researchers found that when students managed to reject and reconstruct negative representations of themselves, then these negative identities had less effect on their academic performance. Similarly, McGee and Martin in their (2011) study in the US context, found that when students could define blackness in their own terms; they could "triumph over situational suggestions of black inferiority" (p.1349). Mehan et al. (1994) also found that instead of unthinkingly assimilating into the dominant institutional culture of their schools, their participants could succeed by developing an academic identity that affirmed their cultural identities; was reflective and critical of the ideology of their school; but simultaneously acknowledged the necessity of academic success.

**Black peer support.** Some studies have documented that support from other black students is another useful strategy and protective factor for many black students (Aries, 2013; Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Some studies have documented how even in hostile campus environments, black students can join together to create counter-spaces on campus where a positive racial climate can be maintained. This can

be done, for example, by joining black student organisations and forming study groups with black peers (Solórzano et al., 2000).

*The limits of coping mechanisms and resistance.* It is important to note that although it may be possible at times for students to resist stereotyping and cope with alienation in higher education, it can also be difficult due to the power that these stereotypes have. Some students may be able to resist and challenge stereotypes and be motivated to achieve well academically. However, many students, even though they may be acutely aware of the stigmatising effects of stereotyping, may find them difficult to resist (Howarth, 2004). Howarth's (2004) study illustrates how the behaviours that students sometimes employed to resist stereotypes were then seen as confirmation of the stereotypes. For example, when students attempted to confront teachers about their attitudes towards black students, they were often labelled as "confrontational" and "aggressive", whereas students who attempted to avoid the stigmatising gaze of their teachers by sitting at the back of the class and not talking, were labelled as "disengaged". Consequently, students remained locked in those stereotypes. Thus, besides "creating knowledge" about black students, these stigmatising discourses can control students' responses. It is important for students to find ways of resisting and disrupting these stereotypes, without inadvertently confirming them.

In summary, this section of the chapter has reviewed the literature on the experiences of black students in higher education. Firstly, it has examined studies which explore the achievement gap between black and white students. Within this "achievement gap" research, the "student deficit" studies explain black student underachievement by looking at factors relating to students themselves, such as innate intellectual inferiority; pathological families and culture; oppositional black peer culture; and inadequate school preparation. Other researchers have problematised this "victim-blaming" approach and shifted the focus to issues within the higher education environment itself that detrimentally affect black students. These include the prevalence of stereotyping and lowered expectations of black students, as well as the alienating, often hostile, whiteness of the higher education environment. These studies have raised valid concerns about the need to address aspects of the higher education system. However, other research has highlighted the need to focus less on black student failure and has shifted attention to the experiences of the many high-achieving black students, and the coping mechanisms and resistance strategies they employ in the face of marginalising experiences. Given the strength that stigmatising discourses have, it is also important not to underestimate how difficult they can be to cope with and resist at times. Ultimately, what many of the studies of the experiences

of black students, higher education and transformation call for, is an engagement with black students themselves, allowing for their voices to be heard and their experiences to be central to these debates (Davis et al., 2004; Wiggan, 2007).

### **2.3 Rationale for Study**

It is clear from the introduction and literature review that the current discourses around transformation in South Africa and the related stigmatising representations of black students are negatively affecting many students' chances for success in higher education. Although the laws that denied black students admission to historically white universities during apartheid have been abolished for more than twenty years, there are now subtle practices that prevent many black students from succeeding in this environment (Woods, 2001). This may help to explain why, although the numbers of black students registered in South African universities are increasing, far fewer students are graduating within the required time and continuing to postgraduate study (Akojee & Nkomo, 2007; Petersen et al., 2009). Understanding the impact of stereotyping discourses is thus vital for understanding the role that higher education practices and policies play in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of students. It is also important to consider the way black students respond to these discourses, and the coping mechanisms and strategies they employ which can lead to positive outcomes.

Much contemporary research on black students' experiences in higher education focuses exclusively on overarching conceptual issues, which further marginalises the voices of black students (Wiggan, 2007). More research is needed that gives voice to black students, and make their experiences central to this debate. This study aims to focus on a "resistant" rather than "victim" approach to the negative experiences of black students in higher education. This is possible through the participatory action research (PAR) methodology, Photovoice, which is a strategy of resistance. With this research methodology, the participants themselves are active in the research process and can construct and document their experiences on their own terms (Brydon-Miller, 1997).

Although there have been many excellent South African studies on some of these issues, it is important to continue exploring higher education and transformation from black students' perspectives. There is a need to add to the growing body of research that explores black university students' experiences from a qualitative perspective, particularly in relation to

transformation. Thus, this Photovoice study aims to contribute towards research into black students' experiences of transformation in higher education, and to give voice to some black students at the University of Cape Town.

## **2.4 Research Aims**

The research project aims to address representations of black students in academic discourses, policies and practices within higher education from a critical social psychological perspective. It has two main aims. Firstly, this study aims to explore the ways in which stigmatising representations of black students impact on their experiences of higher education, and to examine what coping mechanisms and resistance strategies they employ. Secondly, the study aims to engage students in the issues surrounding transformation in higher education, and to encourage students to resist and challenge negative representations and produce alternative re-presentations<sup>2</sup> of themselves.

## **2.5 Research Questions**

1. How do black students experience transformation at UCT?
2. What effects do stigmatising representations of black students have on their academic success and self-image?
3. How do black students cope with or resist these marginalising experiences?
4. Can participation in a photovoice project on experiences of transformation assist students to resist these representations and to re-present themselves in alternative ways?

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<sup>2</sup> The term "re-presentation" is used here rather than "representation" to describe how students found ways to depict themselves and transformation on their own terms (see Kessi, 2011 and Howarth, 2004).

## **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology**

This chapter will outline the research design and methodology used in this research project. It will start with an overview of qualitative research. It will then explore the theoretical framework underpinning this research: critical social psychology with a particular focus on decolonising psychologies. After this, the participatory research methodology used (photovoice) will be described. Details of the participants and recruitment will then be outlined, and a detailed description will be given of the four phases of data collection and the data analysis. Ethical considerations will then be discussed, and finally reflexivity issues will be explored.

### **3.1. Qualitative Research Design**

This study is located within the qualitative research paradigm. This research methodology allows researchers to investigate and understand participants' perspectives and experiences in an open-ended way, and thus to generate novel ideas and complex understandings (Creswell, 2007; Terre Blanche, Kelly, & Durrheim, 2006; Willig, 2008). Qualitative research is concerned with exploring interactions and experiences in everyday contexts rather than in artificial laboratory settings (Flick, 1998). It focuses on studying constructions of meanings and establishing themes and patterns rather than objectively testing variables (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2008). It acknowledges that there will be a variety of perspectives and experiences in one field, because of the different subject positions and backgrounds of the participants (Flick, 1998).

Within the qualitative research process, the voices of the participants are very important, particularly those who are often silenced. The focus is on learning the meanings that participants attach to issues in their lives, rather than giving the researchers' interpretations. It aims to empower participants to share their stories (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative research design is appropriate for this topic because the voices of black students often go unheard in discussions of transformation, and so it is important to make their voices central.

### 3.2 Theoretical Framework: Decolonising Psychologies

The framework for this study is a critical social psychological approach. There is no single critical psychological theory, rather a range of concepts and practices with shared objectives and focuses. One key commonality in the variety of critiques is a concern with disrupting imbalances of power. In particular, critical psychology is focused on critiquing the oppressive use of power by psychology itself (Hook, 2004a). This critique has particular relevance for this study, because the discipline of psychology has been responsible for perpetuating many of the stigmatising discourses of blackness discussed in the previous two chapters. Historically, psychologists have been (and in some cases still are) fixated on documenting the supposed lower IQ and intellectual incompetency of black people in comparison to white people (Glăveanu, 2009; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Richards, 1997). This has contributed to current stereotypes of black students' academic inferiority. In fact, there have been comparable studies done by contemporary psychologists as recently as 2005. Rushton and Jensen (2005), for example, published a paper claiming that the differences in IQ points that separate white and black people are still evident and are a result of genetics rather than test bias. This paper was published from within the mainstream of the discipline, in the journal *Psychology, Public Policy and Law*, which is peer-reviewed and published by the American Psychological Association. Thus, critical psychology with its call to problematise these aspects of the discipline and examine its relevance, is a useful framework in which to situate this project.

The particular form of critical psychology that frames this project is decolonising psychologies, usually referred to as "postcolonial psychology". In this study I have chosen to use the phrase "decolonising psychologies" because the "post-" implies that the colonial era has now passed. The findings of this study suggest that a colonial mentality is still in operation. Decolonising psychologies examine how present day power relations have their roots in colonial history. The role of the mind in maintaining power relations between the coloniser and the colonised is of particular importance (Bhabha, 1994; Biko, 2004). The experiences of marginalised groups are centred, and set against the hegemony of Western systems of knowledge. Attention is paid to the relationships of domination and/or resistance that emerge when one culture controls another (Hook, 2004b; Macleod & Bhatia, 2007). Thus, unlike many other social psychological approaches to understanding racism, decolonising psychologies acknowledge the complex and often hidden imbalances of power that are present. Furthermore, this theory has explicit liberatory intentions. Processes of resistance and change are a key part of decolonising psychologies (Hook, 2005a; Macleod & Bhatia, 2007). This is an appropriate

framework for this study as the key aim is to examine the ambivalent effects of racism on transformation processes in higher education in South Africa and on black students' strategies for resistance to marginalising representations of themselves. Within decolonising psychologies, the concepts of *ambivalence* and being *unhomed* (Bhabha, 1994), *internalisation*, *lactification* and *projection* (Fanon, 1967), *double consciousness* (Du Bois, 1999) and *black consciousness* (Biko, 2004), were useful in exploring black students' responses to these negative representations and the possibilities for resistance and re-presentation.

### 3.3 Photovoice Methodology

The data for this project was collected using Photovoice methods. Photovoice is a participatory action research (PAR) methodology. PAR can be defined as “a process of research, education, and action” (Brydon-Miller, 1997, p. 658). Photovoice provides participants with the opportunity to document and reflect on elements of their lives using photography. Participants are given cameras and receive some basic photography training. They are then asked to use the cameras to document their experiences and perspectives on a specific issue in their lives. They are later required to use the images they produce to construct a story around a theme. These photographs and captions, or “photo-stories”, are then exhibited to the public and to policy makers (Foster-Fisherman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005; Wang, 2006).

Photovoice methodology has three main influences: feminist theory which holds that the individuals who can best understand a particular issue are those affected by it; Freirian conscientisation which proposes that individuals should become agents for change in their communities; and documentary photography with its focus on social issues (Strack, Magill & McDonagh, 2004; Wang, 2006; Foster-Fisherman et al., 2005). Photovoice methodology aims to promote critical dialogue and engage people in active discussion. It seeks to empower participants, to promote social change and to reach policy makers through photographic exhibitions (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006; Strack et al., 2004; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Photovoice methodology is appropriate for use with university students, as they often feel powerless to reach influential decision makers within the institution. This methodology provides students with the opportunity to have their voices heard and potentially influence

university policy (Goodheart et al., 2006). This is important for this area of research, as one of the criticisms of many of the studies on the experiences of black students is that the voices of actual black students have been marginalised (Wiggan, 2007). There have been calls for research that shifts the power balance between the researcher and black students, and acknowledges the role of the black student as a “knower” and not merely a subject of research. It has been suggested that because this area of research is about the daily lives of black students, they should be involved in the research process (Wiggan, 2007, p. 342). Photovoice is thus a very appropriate research methodology as it enables participants to take on the role of researchers and become active in bringing about change in their communities (Strack et al., 2004).

Photovoice also works well within the theoretical framework of decolonising psychologies. This methodology is useful in bringing out the above-mentioned concepts such as internalisation that are of interest in decolonising psychologies. This happens through the story telling that is part of the photovoice process, which helps to give insight into the participants’ affective and mental states. Furthermore, participation in photovoice projects is a way to develop a critical consciousness, as it provides participants with the opportunity for critical thinking and reflection and can thus inspire a desire for social action (Carlson et al., 2006). It also helps to raise students’ consciousness about the impact of racialisation (Kessi, 2011; 2013). All of these are key goals of decolonising psychologies.

Photovoice projects have been used before with young people in South Africa to explore a variety of issues. Moletsane et al. (2007), for example, examined HIV/AIDS stigmatisation in a school in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Grade 8 and 9 learners were asked to document stigmatisation in their communities. The project aimed to explore and raise learners’ awareness of HIV- and AIDS-related stigmatisation. Learners could recognise and identify possibilities for personal agency in intervention against HIV/AIDS stigmatisation. Other photovoice projects with youth in South Africa have focused on empowerment, social solidarity, social change (Kessi, 2011), and issues of identity. For example, Langa (2010) explored constructions of masculinity, by asking adolescent boys in Alexandra Township to take photographs documenting “my life as a boy”. These studies demonstrate that photovoice can be used successfully with young people in a South African context.

For this research project, UCT students were asked to construct a story around their experiences of transformation at UCT, using photography and writing. This Masters’ thesis

forms part of a larger research project by researchers in the Psychology Department. Each researcher is responsible for their own group of participants. All participants followed the same procedure as described below. This is an ongoing three-year project, from 2013 to 2015.

### 3.4 Participants and Recruitment

The participants in my group of the study were 10<sup>3</sup> black full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students from UCT, four male and six female, drawn from three faculties (other faculties were represented in the groups run by the other two researchers). The term “black” in this project is used to refer to individuals from the designated groups “black African”, “Indian” and “coloured” in South Africa. However, the participants in my group were only “black African” and “coloured”. (There were some Indian participants in the groups run by the other researchers). Regarding nationality, eight participants were South African; one was Nigerian but her family had moved to South Africa when she was a child; and another was Namibian, but she had attended boarding school in South Africa. The participants came from a variety of backgrounds. Some participants were middle-class, coming from affluent backgrounds and upbringings, whereas others grew up in informal settlements or working-class suburbs or came from remote rural areas. Participants were also from different levels of study (from first-year through to postgraduate honours level): this was essential to allow for the difference in experience between a new student and an established student. The following table provides some demographic details about the participants at the time of participation in the study. The participants were assigned pseudonyms but they have not been linked with the data in the table to prevent possible identification.

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<sup>3</sup> One student only participated in phase three and subsequently dropped out. The final data set includes the personal reflections and photo-stories from nine participants.

Table 1  
*Participants Details*

|    | <b>Faculty</b>                              | <b>Degree</b>                          | <b>Year of Study</b>        | <b>Gender</b> |
|----|---|--|-----------------------------|---------------|
| 1  | Engineering and the Built Environment (EBE) | BSc (Civil Engineering)                | 1 <sup>st</sup>             | Female        |
| 2  | EBE   | BSc (Civil Engineering)                | 1 <sup>st</sup>             | Female        |
| 3  | Humanities                                  | BSocSci (Social Work & Sociology)      | 2 <sup>nd</sup>             | Female        |
| 4  | Humanities                                  | BSocSci Honours (Psychology)           | 4 <sup>th</sup> (postgrad.) | Male          |
| 5  | Humanities                                  | BSocSci (Anthropology & Psychology)    | 2 <sup>nd</sup>             | Female        |
| 6  | Humanities                                  | BA (Psychology & Philosophy)           | 3 <sup>rd</sup>             | Male          |
| 7  | Humanities                                  | BSocSci (Org. Psychology & Psychology) | 3 <sup>rd</sup>             | Male          |
| 8  | Health Sciences                             | BSc (Occupational Therapy)             | 1 <sup>st</sup>             | Female        |
| 9  | Health Sciences                             | MChB (Medicine)                        | 3 <sup>rd</sup>             | Male          |
| 10 | Health Sciences                             | BSc (Occupational Therapy)             | 1 <sup>st</sup>             | Female        |

Participants were recruited through the Department of Psychology's Student Research Participation Programme (SRPP)<sup>4</sup>, or by word of mouth. Participants were sent a letter that clearly detailed the aims of the study and the level of commitment required.

### 3.5 Data Collection Methods and Procedure

**Phase 1: Focus groups.** At the start of this project, focus groups were held with participants on their understanding of the meaning of transformation in higher education and their experiences as students at UCT. This involved the interaction of participants with each other and the researcher. Focus groups were a useful starting point for this project as they provide the opportunity for participants to engage and debate, and thus elicit a range of views. Participants could expand upon, challenge and support each other's contributions (Willig, 2008;

<sup>4</sup> SRPP is a points system used to promote and facilitate student involvement as participants in the research activities of the Psychology Department. Undergraduate students are required to sign up as participants for a certain number of research studies per course, for which they receive points which go towards their final course grades.

Wilkinson, 1998, 1999). The aim was to encourage participants to start reflecting on transformation, in particular how it affects them and what should be done about it. There were two separate focus groups: the first was 70 minutes long, and the second was approximately 50 minutes long. Each participant attended one focus group only, and there were five participants in each focus group. The focus groups were heterogeneous in terms of gender, with three females and two males participating in each focus group. In each focus group there were also students from different levels of study (first-year through to third-year for the first focus group and third-year through to honours level for the second focus group). This allowed for an interesting engagement between students who had been at UCT for a long time and those who had only been there for approximately six months at the time of the focus groups. A series of questions was used to stimulate and guide the discussion (see Appendix A for the interview schedule). Each focus group was digitally-recorded and the recording was transcribed in full (see Appendix B for transcription information key).

**Phase 2: Personal reflections.** After they had attended the focus groups, participants were asked to write a personal reflection (of approximately 500 words) about their experiences at UCT. This was to get students to continue reflecting on transformation by relating it to their own experiences at university. These personal reflections were emailed directly to me by the participants.

**Phase 3: Training and production planning.** The participants attended a one-day training workshop with two professional photographers who provided them with basic training in the use of cameras, lighting, framing and composition, as well as more theoretical issues such as how to use visual representations to tell a story. The training was interactive and participants were given opportunities to practise their skills through practical exercises. The participants then discussed their ideas for their photo-stories as a group, and by the end of the session, all the participants had begun to develop ideas for their stories and had a clear plan of action. (They were allowed to deviate from this plan for their final photo-stories.) The participants were then each loaned a camera to create their photo-stories on their own.

**Phase 4: Productions and exhibitions.** The participants had approximately one month to take their photographs and construct their stories. During this process, participants were encouraged to approach fellow students not involved in the project and to speak with UCT staff about transformation, thus deepening their own perspectives on the subject in the course of photo-story production. For the exhibition, participants were limited to five photographs per

person to allow for printing costs and space restrictions. The photographs were printed and mounted on photo-story boards with captions and headings. The participants were asked to suggest potential exhibition titles, with a prize awarded for the chosen title, which was: “The Land of Milk and Hani” (please see Appendix E for exhibition invitation). The exhibition opening was held on 10 October 2013, in the foyer of the Graduate School of Humanities at UCT. The launch was open to the public and was attended by the participants, students, faculty and members of the public. It was then moved to the foyer of the Psychology Department where it was on display for three weeks. A year later, it was put on display for a second time as part of the UCT Student Representative Council’s (SRC) Race Dialogue event on 8 October 2014, which was organised by one of the participants who has since become a representative on the SRC.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

A variety of data was gathered during this project, namely: focus group transcripts, personal reflections, photographs, and captions. A thematic analysis was used to explore the participants’ experiences of higher education and the meanings of transformation. Thematic analysis involves searching for recurring patterns of meaning and common themes across a broad data set. It focuses on the content of what was said, and describes the data in full detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was appropriate for the analysis of the data, as I was interested in identifying broad categories of meaning, in particular whether these meanings disrupt the racialising aspect of transformation and contribute towards alternative representations. Thematic analysis suits this type of data as it searches for common themes across a broad and varied data set, such as that generated by this project.

There is not one specific, uniform list of instructions for thematic analysis; however, I followed the guidelines set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). Firstly, I carefully read and re-read the focus group transcriptions, the personal reflections and the captions, and examined the photographs. I then coded the entire data set. This involved assigning specific words and phrases to extracts within the data set that illustrated the focus or topic of that piece of data. The coding was repeated, and sometimes the codes were adapted and made more general or more specific. An example of this can be seen in the following extract taken from the personal reflections of one of the participants:

First day of lectures and the class is split almost perfectly by race. All the white students sat in one section we coined “Camps bay”. All the Indian students sat in another. Most of the coloured and Muslim students either sat next to the Indian section or at the back of the class or “Mitchells Plain”. The Upper middle class black students congregated in a small area and finally the rest of the black students populated the remainder of the class “Khayelitsha”. I was **in shock** (Kopano, personal reflection).

This whole extract was first coded as “segregation”. Specifically, the first part of this extract which I have underlined, was coded as the experience and the last line of extract (in bold) was coded as the participant’s emotional or affective response to the experience. I then compiled a list of the more general as well as the specific codes I had assigned. I noticed that certain codes seemed to occur more often than others, and some were inter-related. I then searched for patterns and contradictions within the coded list. This helped to inform the themes that I eventually chose. For example, with reference to the extract above, I noticed that there were other pieces of data which were also coded as “segregation”. However, by contrast, I had coded other pieces of data as “integration”. Although these two codes were contradictory, they both involved the use of space on campus by students. When I grouped together the “integration” and “segregation” extracts from the different focus groups, personal reflections and photo-stories, I realised how they could fit into the theme of “the racialisation of space”. Once I had decided upon my themes in this manner, I analysed them within the framework of decolonising psychology.

I identified three areas of interest in the data set, which I divided into three interconnected sections. The first section focuses on students’ experiences of the UCT space and the different issues that students face daily, which I separated into four themes. The second section examines the effects that these experiences have on students, and the final section explores the coping mechanisms and resistance tactics that students employ in this higher education space. The following tables give a detailed breakdown and description of the three sections with the themes, and subthemes where applicable.

The first table below (Table 2) outlines the four themes that relate to the participants' lived experiences of transformation at UCT.

Table 2  
*Outline of Themes and Analysis From Chapter 4*

| Theme                                  | Subtheme  | Description   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Narrow transformation focus         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of support for black students</li> <li>2. High attrition rate of black students</li> </ol>   | UCT's transformation goals are focused too narrowly and rigidly on demographic change. The participants feel there is not enough attention given to supporting students once they arrive, and addressing the high attrition rate of black students. |
| 2. Racial stereotypes on campus        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stereotypes of innate ability</li> <li>2. Stereotypes of work ethic</li> </ol>  | These stereotypes cause students to feel undeserving. Underpinning the stereotypes is the <u>positioning of blackness as inferior within the university space.</u>  |
| 3. Eurocentric focus of the university | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Westernised curriculum</li> <li>2. Dominance of academic English</li> <li>3. Academic staff and race</li> <li>4. Eurocentric symbolism</li> </ol> | Whiteness positioned as dominant and normalised within the university space.  |
| 4. Racialisation of space              | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Segregation</li> <li>2. Integration</li> </ol>  | Dominance of whiteness and denigration of blackness is reflected in the use of space and interactions between students.   |

The next table (Table 3) outlines the consequences of the four themes listed above for black students' identities.

Table 3

*Outline of the Impact of the UCT Environment on Black Students' Identities*

| <b>Effects of a racialised campus experience</b> | <b>Description</b>   |
|--|--|
| Affective experiences of blacks                  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lowered self-esteem and confidence</li> <li>2. Damaged sense of belonging</li> </ol>                   |
| Academic consequences for black students         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-silencing and disengagement</li> <li>2. Distraction, inner struggle and emotional cost</li> </ol> |

The final table below (Table 4) details black students' responses to experiences detailed in Table 2, and the effectiveness of these different responses.

Table 4

*Outline of the Coping Mechanisms and Resistance Strategies Employed by Black Students*

| <b>Strategy</b>       | <b>Effectiveness</b>  |
|-----------------------|---|
| Coping mechanisms     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Personal transformation ("becoming white")</li> <li>2. Distancing</li> <li>3. Proving their worth</li> <li>4. Suppressing and ignoring</li> </ol> |
| Resistance strategies | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critical consciousness</li> <li>2. Resistance</li> <li>3. Re-presentation</li> </ol>  |

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

**3.7.1 Consent and confidentiality.** Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Cape Town. Informed consent was obtained from each participant for the study as a whole, as well as for each focus group (see Appendix C and D for these informed consent forms). Participants were encouraged to participate in the entire study; however, they were informed that they would be allowed to withdraw from the study at any point (one of the 10 participants withdrew after the focus group stage – unfortunately I was unable to ascertain why as she did not respond to emails). Participants were informed at the beginning of the focus groups that the discussions would be recorded, and that the recordings would be transcribed. To protect their anonymity, the participants have been given pseudonyms and any references to potentially identifying information (such as their degrees, departments or specific lecturers) have been removed from the extracts quoted in the analysis. They were assured of this beforehand in order to enable them to feel comfortable speaking openly and confidentially. This was important as some participants spoke about their experiences of UCT in an uncomplimentary and critical way. Considering that this research has been presented to senior UCT officials and has been exhibited publicly, it was important to ensure that participants were unidentifiable. With the participants' permission, their names were displayed together in a single list at the exhibition. However, there was nothing linking each participant to his/her specific photo-story on display. Only one participant created a photo-story in which he was easily identifiable in the photographs, and these photographs were not included in the final public exhibitions.

**3.7.2 Ethical issues relating to secondary participants.** Issues around the ethics of photography were discussed in the training session. As the photographs taken by the participants were exhibited publicly, the participants were required to obtain verbal consent from individuals who feature prominently in their photographs. Although there were no photographs of this nature, it was made clear that photographs of minors and any photographs that might endanger or compromise the dignity of the subjects would be excluded.

**3.7.3 Incentives.** Those participants who were recruited through the SRPP system were awarded 6 SRPP points for their participation. This is the standard number of points for a study that requires a high level of commitment and time. Besides this, no other incentives were offered. The digital cameras that were loaned to the participants were returned to me at the end

of the study. A competition was held to come up with the name of the exhibition, and the student whose suggestion was chosen was awarded a digital camera as a prize.

**3.7.4 Risks and benefits.** The risk to the participants in the study was minimal. However, it was possible that some students would become distressed in talking about and exploring their personal experiences of transformation in higher education. Although none of the participants made use of the service, they were given the option of being referred to the appropriate UCT support service for counselling. Potential benefits for participants included developing their photography skills; and being able to have their stories and experiences heard by senior members of the UCT staff (for example, Dr Max Price, the university's Vice-Chancellor, attended a presentation of some of the findings of this study).

### 3.8 Reflexivity

Qualitative research methods draw attention to the role that researchers play in research. The concept of reflexivity highlights the fact that the researcher is not neutral but rather has a participatory role in the research process. It is important for me to consider and remember the part that I played, as the focus group facilitator, and researcher, in contributing to and shaping the data. A researcher's demographics can influence the information elicited from and the stories produced by the participants (Burr, 1995; Eagle, Hayes, & Sibanda, 2006; Hiles & Cermák, 2007). For example, the fact that I am a *white* UCT student could have affected the way that my participants who were black and coloured students spoke about issues of transformation and race at UCT in front of me. For example, in her study of staff experiences of transformation at a previously white South African university, Ismail (2011) found that most participants appeared to consider her an "insider" as she is a black researcher and thus felt comfortable discussing their experiences with her. Because I could be viewed as an "outsider" I was careful to ensure that the participants felt comfortable enough to talk about their transformation experiences openly in front of me. I think part of what helped with this is that the project started with focus groups in which, in terms of race, the participants outnumbered me as the white researcher (five in each group). In fact, the participants appeared to be comfortable being fairly critical of white students at UCT even though I (a white UCT student) was conducting the focus groups. At times, I think some participants saw this as an opportunity to educate me as a white person about their experiences as black people. For example, at the end of the focus group, one of the participants addressed me directly:

Josie: *Want to add any last things?*

Mpho: *Can I give you a project?*

Josie: *Yes*

Mpho: *Whenever – and please do not take offence to this – whenever you see an elderly white old male or female person, see a black person, watch how they smile [Mimics the smile, laughter from the group]. It is like I swear (...) It's okay, I'm not going to take your bag. You're safe.*

In this exchange, it was clear that my race had some impact because Mpho was worried that I might take offence at what he was saying. However, he was still willing to make his point, and he wanted to give me a task that he felt would help to demonstrate his experiences as a black person. It was interesting to me, firstly that he thought that this was something that I might be offended by and secondly that he thought it would come as a surprise or shock to me. I found myself wanting to reassure him that I had already noticed this, and that I was not offended by it.

I think what also helped in making the participants comfortable was that my two co-researchers were black (specifically black African and Indian), and except for the focus groups, they were both present for all the interactions with the participants, such as the training and the exhibitions. In fact, one of my co-researchers and my supervisor for this project, Dr Kessi (who is a senior lecturer in the Psychology Department) ran the section of the workshop where the participants discussed and finalised their ideas for their photo-stories. I think that having a black academic from a senior position within the university discuss these issues with the participants helped to validate their experiences and ensure they felt secure voicing their perspectives.

Finally, as a white, postgraduate student, I am privileged to occupy a secure and comfortable position within this institution and not experience the difficulties and stigmatisation that many black students face. Thus, I wanted to avoid furthering the marginalisation of black students by speaking on their behalf. For this reason, a PAR methodology was particularly important, as this methodology enabled the participants to take an active role in the research process which minimised my role, voice and possible influence (Brydon-Miller, 1997).

In summary, this chapter has outlined the research design of this project. This qualitative photovoice study was conducted within a critical social psychology, decolonising psychologies

framework. The details of the participants and their recruitment have been discussed, along with the data collection method and procedures. The data analysis used, thematic analysis, has been outlined and a detailed overview of the themes has been provided. The ethical considerations have been listed. Finally, issues concerning reflexivity and my role as the researcher have been considered.

## Chapter Four: Black Students' Lived Experiences of Transformation at UCT

This chapter explores the participants' daily experiences at UCT. It is divided into four themes which each examine a different aspect of these experiences (please see the theme outline in methodology section for an overview of this chapter and the themes and subthemes). These four themes are:

1. Narrow transformation focus
2. Racial stereotypes on campus
3. Eurocentric focus of the university
4. Racialisation of space.

UCT is transforming demographically but the experiences reported by participants demonstrate that it remains a "white" place in the view of many of the participants.

### 4.1 Narrow transformation focus

Some of the participants in this study were ambivalent about transformation at UCT. They agreed that some important transformation policies are in place but they felt that UCT's commitment to transformation was too narrow. They felt it was mostly concerned with admissions and did not reflect their everyday reality:

*Transformation here is very choreographed and the policies (...) are to say, "there's this percentage of this, and we're all mixing together and everything's perfect". And it should be, but it isn't (...) it's very far from what's happening now (...) we can debate and argue as to what the determinates are but what the reality is (...) and what's there in theory are quite far apart (Kopano, FG1).*

In this quote, Kopano highlighted how transformation at UCT is implemented according to a specific agenda (i.e. increasing the numbers of black students). The narrowness of this agenda means that the reality of transformation for students can be different from the institution's official interpretation.

Mpho had a similar but more cynical perspective in his photo-story. Like Kopano he highlighted the ineffectiveness of some of the university's transformation initiatives, but he suggested that there was an element of intent behind this ineffectiveness:

Photograph 1: *The Wall of Beautiful Distractions*



*Caption: I pass that wall so often and can't help but stop to admire the physical beauty that is the graffiti and reflect on the metaphorical sense of smokescreens where UCT/SRC are concerned (how effective is the help or are the energies for transformation misguided?)*

(Mpho, Photo-story 1)

His use of the terms “smokescreen” and “distractions” hinted at his sense of the policy’s deceptiveness. It suggests that these policies hide the real experiences on campus and the actual state of transformation in his experience.

**4.1.1 Lack of support for black students.** A key issue that participants felt the transformation policies failed to address, was the fate of many black students once they were accepted into UCT. They were concerned about the lack of support black incoming students received. This was disturbing and discouraging to many participants who felt that this explained why a disproportionate percentage of the students who get academically excluded<sup>5</sup> or who drop out of their degree without graduating, are black. Mpho and Lerato raised this issue in the focus group discussion:

Mpho: *They don't get enough resources to black kids here at UCT. “Sure we'll get you in with the admissions policy but as soon as you are in, good luck!” Assuming you are in the EDP (...) you have more of a starting chance, but other than that, it's still quite a struggle because*

<sup>5</sup> Academic exclusion is the refusal of readmission on academic grounds. This means that a student has not passed the minimum number of courses required to be allowed to register for the next academic year.

*the majority (...) of kids that do get excluded are of colour and mostly black.*

Lerato: *I feel like they are trying but sometimes the effort is (...) half way, for example if you struggle with writing they always say, “Go to the Writing Centre”. But the Writing Centre is for people who already know what to do, it’s more like to enhance your skills rather than if you really don’t know anything. They’re not really much help in my opinion. So, I feel like they are trying but it seems like their efforts are just that (...) They try but they don’t like go back into what they’ve tried, and try improve it*

Mpho: *(...) I think what they really have done is more than transform, they’ve just like bridged the attrition gap as opposed to transform. So, you can come in here, but what does that mean? (FG2).*

In this extract, Lerato and Mpho mentioned two support programmes for students: the Extended Degree Programmes (EDPs) and the Writing Centre. The EDPs have slightly different structures depending on the faculty, but generally they give places to students who do not meet the university’s entrance requirements but whom the university feels have demonstrated the potential to succeed with academic support (UCT, Faculty of Humanities, 2015). EDP Students must meet the same course credit requirements as other students but their degree is planned to take four years rather than three. They also receive additional support from mentors, supplementary tutorials and workshops. EDPs are certainly one way that the university supports students. The problem is, as Mpho pointed out, EDPs only supports a portion of the black students accepted into UCT. It can be difficult for black students to adjust to and succeed at UCT (for reasons that will be outlined later in this chapter) and many students outside of the EDPs are left to cope on their own. Similarly, the Writing Centre<sup>6</sup> is a great resource for helping students improve their writing skills, but it requires students to have a written essay to work with in the appointment. As Lerato pointed out, those appointments focus more on enhancing existing skills than building skills.

**4.1.2 High attrition rate of black students.** It was clear that some participants believed this lack of support was responsible for the high attrition rate of black students. Mpho saw this as a failure of the transformation policies:

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<sup>6</sup> The Writing Centre is a service on campus which employs trained postgraduate students to assist students with improving their writing. Students make an appointment and bring an essay they need help with. It is not an editing service but focuses on aiding the students with issues around structure and organisation, as well as some clarification regarding grammar and spelling (UCT Writing Centre, 2015).

*The majority of students who get excluded are often found to be black and least among the races, are whites. With an exclusion rate of 1 in 3 students and having the minority (black students) being the leaders in this exodus is rather concerning, when such a reality exists at the ever transformative UCT. I am failing to understand how the great admission's policy does not have a means for addressing the high attrition rate South Africa faces. Surely a university of such a nature would have done an analysis to determine if any other measures needed to be taken, other than admittance of black people. Instead what I see is a max influx of Black, Coloured, Chinese and Indian students who get in and yet never get out, or worse yet, get excluded. It is hard to accept that transformation is evident other than that on the words of policy makers, their time consuming dossiers, Education Development Units that are clearly overworked, understaffed and/or unorganised and the writing centre for the above average student (Mpho, personal reflection).*

Again, his cynicism and disillusionment was evident in his sarcastic tone: "I am failing to understand how the *great* admission's policy does not have a means for addressing the high attrition rate South Africa faces". Mpho was clearly deeply conscious of the racialised achievement gap between students at UCT. He was not the only participant who raised this. Mareka stated in the focus group: "UCT, the throughput of black students is 25%" (FG2). Their detailed awareness of this achievement gap at UCT is unsurprising, considering how much it dominates public debate (as has already been discussed in Chapter One and Two).

Their concern is not misplaced. A five year cohort survival analysis of the 2006 undergraduate student intake (completed in 2011) found: After 5 years (from 2006 - 2011) 81% of white students completed their undergraduate degrees and graduated, compared to 48% of black African students (Indian and coloured students were in between with coloured students at 65% and Indian Students at 70%). Looking at the same 2006 intake, only 5% of white students were refused admission on academic grounds (i.e. were academically excluded), whereas the percentage of black African students was almost six times that, at 29% (the numbers of coloured (17%) and Indian (13%) students excluded after 5 years was similarly high) (UCT, 2011).

This imbalance in academic performance is demoralising for black students. Sean remarked in the focus group: "But it's still, it's very demotivating to know that (...) white students are doing so well and black students in your class are not performing as well as they do" (FG1). Mareka, who volunteers with school children in rural areas, mentioned how he felt

as though he was lying to black high school students when he encouraged them to come to UCT:

*Whenever I come this side and I see the amount of black people who are struggling economically, socially and all those things. Especially the fact of adapting to the social environment and now you have to go to a rural place and say, “come to UCT! UCT’s great” (...) Sometimes it feels like I’m actually lying to them because I know with the majority of them (...) they are really going to struggle (...) most of the black students (...) they come to UCT to collect debt and they get excluded (Mareka, FG 2).*

These issues clearly concern him greatly as he thought that some black students would be better off not coming to UCT. He added:

*And I think what is really unfair is those kids who come here and really work hard but can’t really pass. For those who are really determined and really want to get somewhere in life, they find that they get here and (...) no matter how much they push, they really can’t survive. **That’s something that really goes to my heart** (Mareka, FG2).*

He highlighted the fact that many black students may work hard and be determined to succeed, but face insurmountable barriers to their success. This quote illustrates that black student failure affects not only the students themselves, but also other students around them. Despite his own success, Mareka was saddened by the experiences of his black peers.

It is clear, in both the perceptions of some the participants in this study and in official university statistics, that black students are more likely to be academically excluded than white students. Participants attributed this to the narrowness of the university’s transformation policy, with its focus on changing student demographics instead of programmes to support incoming black students (besides a few programmes such as the EDPs). The 2004 *Transformation and Student Life at UCT* Report came to a similar conclusion (UCT, 2005). This report suggests that demographic transformation is only one aspect of transformation and that the problems highlighted by the students they surveyed require a multi-pronged approach to transformation.

Interestingly, despite these participants’ pessimism about black UCT students’ academic outcomes, the discourses that they drew on to explain this high attrition rate deviated from the discourses that typically dominate these debates. In their focus group discussions and personal reflections they shifted the responsibility for this issue from black students themselves to the university. In this way, they started to resist the dominant negative discourse of black

students' inferiority, by drawing attention to the inferiority of the university's transformation policy.

The UCT environment is fraught with difficulties for black students which (contrary to dominant discourses) are unrelated to their innate abilities or learned skills. Without proper support, it is unsurprising that many black students drop out or are academically excluded. The next three themes explore some of these difficulties.

## 4.2 Racial Stereotypes on Campus

Many participants were concerned about the prevalence of racial stereotypes on campus. As was discussed in the literature review, the dominant public discourses around transformation represent black students in pejorative and stereotyped ways. It was clear from the way that race was discussed by participants that they experience stereotypes on campus. Sometimes participants felt being black was seen as generally negative: "There's also this thing of what black means (...) and all those negative connotations" (Mareka, FG2). Often there were specific negative qualities they felt were associated with black students. These specific stereotypes – about students' innate ability or their work ethic - were similar to those mentioned in the literature review as abounding in the media and public discourse on black university students. These stereotypes result in the idea that black students do not deserve to be at UCT because they only receive their places through affirmative action.

**4.2.1 Stereotypes of innate ability.** A common stereotype was the perception of black students as unintelligent, as Mareka remarked:

*The incoming to outgoing UCT, in terms of black people, the people who get excluded are the majority. Now this, whether you are one of the lucky black people who still get to advance in your academics it still does affect you, because you have "black people are stupid" or something like that, "why do we actually allow them to come to universities" and so forth. Now with all these debates, race-based policies and all sorts of things, even if you try not to think about it they still really affect you (Mareka, FG2).*

In this extract it is clear how the disproportionately high number of black students academically excluded, as discussed in the previous theme, reinforces negative stereotypes. This is problematic because the comparatively low throughput of black students is not seen as a consequence of the lack of support that black students receive and the struggles they face on

campus, it is seen as confirmation of the stereotype that black students are unintelligent. Mareka described academically successful black students as “lucky”. This shows the strength of his association between black students and failure, because he considered academically successful black students as lucky exceptions. In his personal reflection, Mareka raised this stereotype again:

*By far the most difficult year for me at UCT was my first year, not only because of the increased academic workload but the fact that I was in a diverse environment caused a lot of internal conflicts and one was also constantly faced with stereotypes about how one is bound to fail and how one's race is looked down upon (Mareka, personal reflection).*

This extract highlights how difficult UCT can be for first-year black students. The burden of an academic workload is compounded by stereotypes and an unfamiliar environment.

**4.2.2 Stereotypes of work ethic.** Some participants encountered stereotypes of their work ethic, particularly that black students are lazy. This example was given by Xolela in the focus group: “She [a white student] said that they [black students] were lazy and that it wasn't fair that they were given a preference over (...) those who weren't of colour” (Xolela, FG1). Interestingly, in this extract the “she” that Xolela referred to is a *friend* of hers. Possibly, this white student did not see Xolela as “black”, because she knew her on an individual level, or she considered Xolela to be different to the “other” lazy black students. The fact that this friend felt comfortable making the remark in front of Xolela illustrates how normalised and undisputed these stereotypes are.

**4.2.3 Affirmative action and black students as “undeserving”.** Many of the stereotypes that the participants described encountering on campus were directly linked to UCT's admissions policy. These stereotypes of laziness and unintelligence are used to attack the policy and undermine its legitimacy. This is done by suggesting that because black students are lazy and unintelligent, they could only have got into UCT through affirmative action, and they did not work as hard as white students, nor are they as smart so they do not deserve to be at UCT: “Now the general assumption on the campus halls is that ‘people of colour’ don't deserve to be here” (Mpho, personal reflection). Many participants described experiencing this. Lerato explained how race-based admissions are spoken about as unfair: “People do talk about it a lot and they do say, ‘You know they should find another way to get black students in because it's not fair’” (Lerato, FG2). It was also evident in Lihle's photo-story; where she described her interpretation of the admissions policy. Her photograph depicted a UCT application form and

the entrance requirements for her degree. She highlighted the fewer matric points needed for black students (480 points), in contrast to the 540 points needed for the “open” student category (white or international students).

Photograph 2: *No Title*

|              | MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED |                               |   | ADMISSION PROBABLE (BUT DEPENDS ON LEVEL OF COMPETITION) |                        |                          |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
|              | NSC score (out of 600)                | NBT score (each out of 100)   | Subject requirements  | NSC score (out of 600)                                   | NBT score (out of 300) | TOTAL MARKS (out of 900) |
| <b>Black</b> | 420                                   | AL: 42<br>QL: 38<br>Maths: 31 | At least 50% for Mathematics, Physical Sciences and English. PLUS a pass in the next 3 best subjects excluding Life Orientation | 480  | 180                    | 660                      |
| Chinese      |                                       |                               |   | 530  | 220                    | 750                      |
| Coloured     |                                       |                               |   | 500  | 180                    | 680                      |
| Indian       |                                       |                               |   | 530  | 220                    | 750                      |
| Open         |                                       |                               |   | 540  | 225                    | 765                      |

Caption: *“You’re only here because you are black”- being consistently reminded that your skin colour rather than your brain got you into UCT.*

(Lihle, Photo-story 1)

When Lihle looked at this form, she felt reminded that she did not deserve to be at UCT, but this form is not intended to imply that. This form is a product of UCT’s transformation policy, which officially states that these entrance requirements are in place because black students are generally economically and educationally disadvantaged due to the legacy of apartheid. Therefore, lower matric marks for a black student are directly comparable to higher matric marks for a white student, and are entirely justified (UCT, 2015a). This illustrates the power of these stigmatising discourses. Lihle was reminded of the stereotypes rather than the official intended meaning of the policy. The speaker she quoted is anonymous, and she described being “consistently reminded” but did not mention by whom. This hints at the dominance of this discourse, which makes it harder to confront and resist.

Nokuthula suggested that race-based admissions cause people to think black students do not deserve their places:

*If I think of socially trying to bring in people of colour to UCT (...) it [affirmative action] kind of has that reverse effect, because then there's that stereotype of you didn't work as hard to get in, and we don't (...) deserve to be here (Nokuthula, FG1).*

As can be seen in the above extract and in Lihle's photo-story, some participants blamed the admissions policy for the existence of these kinds of stereotypes. This view is problematic because it lets those that hold these stereotyped views off the hook. It implies that the admissions policy should be changed, not attitudes towards it, whereas the stereotypes and assumptions themselves need to be challenged and the people who hold them educated on the importance and relevance of the admissions policy. This shows the extent to which these anti-affirmative action views have become normalised and the strength they have within transformation discourse and discussion on campus. As was discussed in the literature review, these kinds of anti-affirmative action views and the resulting stereotypes are exceptionally common in the experiences of black students in higher education, and not just in South Africa (Harper, 2009, 2013; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; McClain, 2014; Solórzano et al., 2000).

The participants described their fellow students as the chief originators of these stereotypes:

*I do think whatever stereotypes are coming (...) I don't know, I can't think of any that I've personally experienced, but they mostly come from the students. I wouldn't say it's the institution. It's not like the lecturers (...) It's basically just the students in my opinion (Lerato, FG2).*

Although, Lerato stated that she had not experienced stereotypes herself, she was aware of them, and she pointed to other students as being their main source. She did not feel that these stereotypes came from the institution; however, students do not come to hold these stereotypes in isolation. These stereotypes are prominent in the media, and in the debates around transformation that happen within the UCT community. These stereotypes are then drawn upon by other students on campus. Robus and Macleod (2006), for example, described and demonstrated how the discourse of "white excellence/black failure" is maintained and reproduced by people's everyday practices and talk. This is done in part through comments and conversation, such as the white student whose remarks Xolela recalled above. However, these stereotypes are not only expressed in words, but in the actions and practices of other white students, and the way that they behave towards black students.

As was discussed in the literature review, negative stereotypes of black students have been reported in numerous other studies in both a South African and international context (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; McClain, 2014; McGee & Martin, 2011; Vincent, 2008). The *Transformation and Student Life at UCT* Report (UCT, 2005), which is an overview of all the student climate surveys, suggests that stereotypes are common at UCT and recommends that the university should focus on challenging them.

The prevalence of these stereotypes; the criticism of affirmative action; and the resulting idea that black students are undeserving of their places is detrimental for students. It creates an unhealthy classroom environment that is not conducive to learning: “Most black students were timid and not able to engage due to the hostile and judgemental environment that they found themselves in” (Kopano, personal reflection). The precise effects of these stereotypes on students will be discussed in Chapter Five.

### 4.3 Eurocentric Focus of the University

Many participants highlighted the Eurocentric focus of the university as a transformation failure: “I think that they’ve done well in trying to be an Afropolitan university but it’s still quite Eurocentric” (FG2). In particular, they were concerned with the Westernised focus of their curriculum; the dominance of academic English; the low proportion of black academics and their disrespectful treatment by some students; and the Eurocentric symbolism around campus.

**4.3.1 Westernised curriculum.** Some participants were troubled by the Westernised focus of their curriculum. As Mareka reflected in the focus group:

*What UCT has tried to do is just admitting more people of colour instead of actually having **real transformation** in the sense that you look at the academia that we do, our curriculum is still from a Western perspective (Mareka, FG2).*

In this extract, Mareka questioned the authenticity of UCT’s transformation. In his view, there has not been “real transformation” because the curriculum and research focus remain untransformed. Kopano had a similar concern:

*It is no secret that UCT has made a noteworthy, public undertaking to tackle issues of redress and social justice to ensure that we as a university play our part in reversing the ills of the past as well as plant seeds towards the kind of South Africa that most of us wish for. Its policies are geared towards the above objective and in theory we should already be seeing, not only a demographic, but*

*attitude change in the Eurocentric approach and outlook to academic excellence and student development. The truth is however, that we are far from this ideal* (Kopano, personal reflection).

Kopano once again highlighted the gap between UCT's official transformation policies and the experiences of many students. Much like Mareka, Kopano was interested in more than demographic change (which he acknowledged the university has achieved).

An exclusively Eurocentric curriculum is problematic because curriculum content affects students' ability to relate to the material. Relatable curriculum content facilitates students' learning experiences and improves their understanding (Nhlapo, 2011; Hickling-Hudson, & Ahlquist, 2003). An example of this was Sean's description of how much easier it was for him to remember non-Western authors' names:

*Coming back to that same place of familiarity, the readings that I read, if I have to see a reading that is not as Western as some of the others, I can remember (...) the authors' names that I read* (Sean, FG1).

These concerns are not limited to students in this study but have been documented in other studies that examine UCT students' experiences. The 2004 *Student Climate Survey* had similar findings. Many of the students surveyed complained about the North American focus of their curriculum. They were disappointed that all their textbooks were written by white males and they wanted to read articles by African academics (UCT, 2005). Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) had similar results in their study of students' perceptions of the institutional culture of UCT. They suggest that when UCT describes itself as "international" it actually means "white" and "Eurocentric". These two studies were conducted at UCT 10 and 15 years ago respectively. What is troubling is that these issues are still a concern for students more than a decade later.

**4.3.2 Dominance of academic English.** Although the official national language policy advocates multilingualism, many higher education institutions privilege colonial languages (English and Afrikaans) over indigenous African languages. This can disadvantage many black students, particularly those students not fluent English or Afrikaans (Greenfield, 2010; Steyn et al., 2014; Toni & Olivier, 2004; Van Wyk, 2008). This dominance of English in academic settings is another example of the Eurocentric focus of the university. It contributes towards maintaining the dominance of whiteness on campus. Sean stated:

*Just that for me, if you are familiar with this language and you speak it every day, all day. You were brought up; you were raised in this particular way, this manner of speaking. Don't you think you are going to find this space easier to be in? (Sean, FG1).*

This further highlights the imbalance between white and black students. Most (although not all) white students have the privilege of learning in their mother-tongue; whereas many black students do not (Ndhlovu, 2008). Furthermore, the issue is not only the dominance of English but the dominance of a particular type of academic English that is only accessible to certain students (Van Wyk, 2008). Even middle-class black students from more privileged backgrounds may sometimes struggle with the level of academic English required, as it is not their home language. (It should also be noted that some white students, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, may also struggle with academic English). As Lihle explained in the focus group:

*Obviously if you are black then English is not your first language, so the only time I've felt black was when I was writing a test, my first test this year, and the English it was written in was these huge bombastic words. It was so hard to understand the question, and if you can't understand the question how can you even answer it? So, it's just a language barrier for me (Lihle, FG2).*

Interacting in an appropriately academic style of English is essential for success on campus (Van Wyk, 2008). It enables students to navigate intimidating but necessary situations that would otherwise be inaccessible, such as one-on-one interactions with academics and supervisors, as Kopano described in the focus group:

*In order to do well you need to be able to express yourself, be eloquent, have that kind of confidence (...) it goes back to your background. If you are used to being in a family where (...) the medium of discussion is English already, in your schools you got used to communicating and then you get to a place where you speak in a "foreign language" and you need to compete with people on that same level (...) you need to be very close with your facilitator (...) who is overseeing your research that year (...) your social background will influence that quite a lot. Things like going for coffee, having dinner [laughter from others] for certain people that's a very foreign concept. Even just putting on that suit (...) sitting across the room from a white professor discussing your research project is going to be a very difficult thing as opposed to someone who does it with their dad on the weekend (Kopano, FG1).*

Black students' difficulties with accessing academic language have been documented in other studies (Toni & Olivier, 2004; White, 2011; White & Lowenthal, 2011). White (2011) points

out that higher education spaces are “discourse or speech communities” (p. 257) in which language usage is highly specialised. There are specific kinds of discourses and styles of communication that are promoted and expected within educational settings. Students who are not proficient in these discourses lack the “codes of power” with which to express themselves appropriately (White, 2011, p. 254). Similarly, Van Wyk (2008) describes how despite being granted physical access to higher education, many black students are denied “epistemological access” because they are unable to employ the accepted language (grammar, logic and rules). This is because the dominant and official discourse of the academy typically mirrors middle- and upper-class, Westernised, white discourse patterns (White, 2011). White and Lowenthal (2011) suggest that there is “narrowness” in what is considered academic discourse, and an at times oppressive imbalance of power between those who can draw on these discourses and those who cannot. This type of academic literacy is not explicitly taught, and often students are expected to learn this through exposure. This adds to the already heavy burden that many black students face. Consequently, many black students feel that their ways of talking are incongruent with the official discourses of the academy and thus silence and censor themselves. For example, White (2011) interviewed minority (Black, Latino/a) students at a college in the US, and found that many students were not familiar with the common discursive styles used in the classroom and were thus reluctant to participate in classroom discussions.

**4.3.3 Academic staff and race.** Participants were also concerned with the lack of black academic staff and role models on campus, and the disrespectful way that their few black lecturers were treated by some students.

*Low proportion of black academics and role models.* Although some participants did report having a few black lecturers, there were generally far more white lecturers in their experiences:

*You look at most of the lecturers we have, I’m a third-year student at UCT and I’ve not been taught by somebody who’s black or someone who’s of another colour. I think right now, with [subject], but before I had never been in a lecture where I am seeing someone who is black (Mareka, FG2).*

Mareka reached his third year at university before he was lectured by a black academic. Considering that Mareka would have done at least 16 different courses over first- and second-year (and there are generally many lecturers on one course), this is a significant number of academics to be lectured by before finally encountering *one* black lecturer. The skewed demographics of academic staff is a concern at UCT. In 2010, only 21% of UCT academics

were black South Africans (made up of 6% black African; 9% coloured; and 6% Indian); whereas 54% were white South Africans (UCT, 2011). The most recent statistics available (for 2012), focus on black *full professors*, and are shockingly low. According to these statistics, there is only one black African and one coloured female full professor at UCT, and there are five black African and four coloured male full professors (Price, 2014c). This does not only affect UCT, but is a national university sector concern. According to 2012 statistics, black African professors make up just 14% (303) of the total number of professors country-wide, with coloured professors at 4.5% (98), Indian at 5% (109) and white professors forming the majority at 75.6% (1643) (Van Wyk, 2014).

This is upsetting for students because they need figures that they can relate to in academia, who can be a means of support and encouragement:

*I don't have role models in the department that I can look up to and say, (...) "if they could do it, I can". How do I (...) perform so exceptionally if I don't even have those platforms of support? I mean getting me in, and now just leaving me to fend for myself. How do I do it? (Sean, FG1).*

Mareka felt that black lecturers are particularly important in first-year when black students are trying to adapt to an unfamiliar university environment:

*I don't think (...) as a matter of principle I want to have black (...) lecturers so to say, but you know sometimes it helps to have someone that you know definitely you will be able to understand them well, and when they speak you don't really have to find it that hard. I only had these problems like in first-year because you know you are really trying to adapt, and you are far from home (Mareka, FG2).*

Sean explored this issue in more depth in his photo-story:

Photograph 3: *Black Blurred Faces in White Privileged Environments*



*Caption: In taking this photo, I wanted to show the importance of acknowledging that the histories of white and black people are different and moving away from those differences, this early in our countries democracy perpetuates white privilege. This is because black rights are lost in discourse of non-racialism as moving forward without taking into account the historical marginalisation and oppression of black people in South Africa will continue to foster and promote inequalities between races. UCT's transformation policies are addressing this issue but more needs to be done for the representation of black people in historically 'white spaces'. As a postgraduate student, I became aware of my race and people in my racial identity not being represented in higher posts in academia. I also became aware of the power imbalance between white academics and black academics and how certain departments at UCT are not aligned with UCT's transformation agenda. This photo is of the struggles that black women face on campus as they do not have role models occupying higher positions in their departments to motivate and encourage them. Many fear their minority position and are intimidated by dominant and superior voices. These dominant voices continue to silence theirs.*

(Sean, Photo-story 1)

In this photo-story, Sean commented on the dynamics between lecturers in his department. He described how white lecturers have far more power than black lecturers in his experience. As he explained, this directly affected his identity as a black student and made him

more aware of his own race. He realised that he could not see himself represented in the higher positions in his department (in fact, because of this, Sean has since decided to move departments and pursue his postgraduate studies in a different faculty). This lack of representation can reinforce black students' sense of exclusion, in what is already, as Sean described, "a white space". It signifies a lack of opportunities for black students to gain access to careers in academia. Furthermore, it denies students the advantages of having professors of their own race. Some of those advantages are that black academics can often help to validate students' academic ability and belongingness, and serve as role models (Davis et al., 2004; Davidson, 2012; Harper, 2013; Sedlacek, 1999). Toni and Olivier (2004) suggest that black academics may come from similar background to black students and thus be able to share the coping mechanisms and strategies that helped them to succeed (although of course this may not be the case with all black academics). Exposure to black academics benefits not only black students; students of *all* races are enriched through the diverse perspectives of a multi-racial teaching staff. These advantages can be demonstrated in the experiences of the two participants who did report encountering some black academics, in senior positions:

Tshepo: *Okay, I'm in the [Name of faculty] and I kind of actually disagree with you [addressing Mareka], because-*

Lihle: *Exactly, me too.*

Tshepo: *Because our head of division is black. So, I think they're trying (...) it's not only on a Western perspective, but they are really trying to transform.*

Josie: *And do you think they are succeeding?*

Tshepo: *Well, they're getting there, they're not there yet. I think [pause] they're close now (FG2).*

Unlike Mareka who had to wait until third year before he experienced a black lecturer, these two participants encountered a black academic (and in a senior position) at the start of first year (they had only been at UCT for about six months at the time of the focus group). Consequently, their experience of UCT so far has been more positive than the experience of some of the older participants. They felt that UCT does not only focus on Western perspectives and that there has been some transformation success. This might reflect differences between faculties and departments; however, they have only been a short time at UCT and their perspectives may change. For example, in Sean's earlier photo-story (see Photograph 3 on p. 53), he described how he became fully aware of this issue at postgraduate level (his fourth year of study).

Furthermore, even though Tshepo shared a more positive experience, she was slightly hesitant. She was unwilling to admit to total transformation and qualified it with, “they’re not there yet”.

***Disrespectful treatment of black academics.*** Participants were also concerned that black academics who did lecture them were treated disrespectfully by students, particularly if they had a “black” accent:

Sean: *A black lecturer will (...) walk in, start talking and seem completely stupid based on the fact of his accent*

Xolela: [Subject 1], *right?*

Sean: *No, no, it was [Subject 2], the, the, what’s his name?*

Xolela: *Oh yeah, the last one.*

Sean: *Ja, but there was one particular guy who did brilliant work (...) and I thought he was stupid (...) boils down to hearing his accent because a lot of people just couldn’t hear his accent and we just made the assumption that he can’t teach*

Xolela: *I had a similar experience last year in a [subject] class. The one lecturer, he’s from [country] (...) He’s so intelligent. And I’ve spoken to him on like a personal basis (...) I remember the one time in class there were these white boys at the back, and he has a very strong [country] accent and the one boy screamed, “speak English” in class. And he heard it, and he had to carry on (...) And the thing is, he’s not stupid, he’s a good lecturer, because of his accent they immediately assume that he’s stupid and they won’t listen and in the forms about the course evaluation (...) they’ll put there that he’s a bad lecturer, but he’s not, it’s the accent and the immediate response to the accent that blocks them off from even giving him a chance to teach (...) I can hear what he’s saying because I am familiar with the accent so I give him a chance, but the other kids screaming (...) They were laughing, nobody ever said that it’s not okay, they thought it was funny (FG1).*

This was common in the participants’ experiences: Xolela initially thought she knew the lecturer Sean was talking about, when in fact these two participants had identical experiences with different black lecturers.

These examples demonstrate that the negative stereotypes of blackness are also attributed to black academics. The laughter and shouted comments that Xolela and Sean described highlight the element of mockery and derision in these situations. When white students explicitly question the competence of black academics, they position themselves as

superior and as more entitled to be in the UCT space than the black academics teaching them. It again sends a message to black students that “blackness” is not valued by many of their white peers. What was distressing for Xolela was not only that one student directly insulted the lecturer by shouting “speak English!” but that the other students in the class did not challenge this student and, in fact, laughed. However, it is not only white students who make these assumptions. Sean described how he also initially felt that his lecturer was “completely stupid based on his accent”. This highlights once again the power that discourses around blackness have, and the extent to which they can be internalised by black students.

The participants’ concerns here can be backed up by findings from the 2007 *UCT Institutional Climate Survey Report*, in which over 1000 UCT staff members were surveyed about their experiences of the UCT institutional climate (UCT, 2007). These survey results support the participants’ concerns about the lack of respect shown to black academics: 100% of black African female academics surveyed felt that they were discriminated against by students because of their race. Fewer but still a significant percentage of coloured, Indian (60%), and black African (63.6%) academics felt this way. The racialised hierarchy on campus thus clearly affects the academic staff as well as the students.

**4.3.4 Eurocentric symbolism around campus.** A final example that participants gave of the Eurocentric nature of the university space was the colonial symbolism around campus, in particular the statue of Cecil John Rhodes<sup>7</sup> which Sean reflected on in his photo-story:

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<sup>7</sup> Cecil John Rhodes was a British imperialist who was Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in the late 1800s. He implemented numerous laws to push black people off their land to make way for industrial development such as mining (South African History Online, no date). Consequently he is a fairly reviled figure among black South Africans. Despite this, many statues commemorating his memory remain around UCT and elsewhere in Cape Town. This is because he bequeathed the land on the slopes of Devil’s Peak (the site of Upper Campus) as the site for UCT (UCT, n.d.).

Photograph 4: *Power and Internalised Inferiority*



*Caption: This picture shows the main statue of Cecil John Rhodes on upper campus. As I took the picture standing in front of the statue, I thought about the internalized inferiority that is imbued in my psyche as a black student at UCT. These are unconscious process that dictates my relationships with others, my decisions, the way I speak and how I have come to perceive myself and people who are of my race. Standing in front of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, I still felt the power of the colonisers on my colonised forefathers and myself in contemporary South Africa. In taking the picture, I was still positioned in a lower position of both the statue and my white fellow students standing next to the statue. This elevated their position in relation to me and the Jammie stairs was a metaphor for the upward mobility of black people and how that meant that whiteness or the colonisers' position needs to be aspired to. The fact that I adjust my accent and continuously refine my English is reflection of this and the black person's positionality in this institution.*

(Sean, Photo-story 2)

The continued presence of and reverence towards symbols and figures from the university's white colonial past (such as statues and building names) can serve to undermine black students' confidence in their positions within this institution. These experiences have been echoed by students in other studies, in fact Steyn and Van Zyl's (2001) study of students' perceptions of UCT in 1999 directly refers to the Rhodes statue in its title ("*Like that statue at Jammie stairs*": *Some student perceptions and experiences of institutional culture at the University of Cape Town in 1999*).

#### 4.4 The Racialisation of Space: Experiences of Segregation and Integration on Campus

The hierarchical structure of race on campus, discussed in the previous two themes, also affects the actual physical use of space, and interactions between students. This theme explores the racialisation of physical space on campus, and participants' experiences of both integration and segregation. Dixon and Durrheim (2003) propose the theory of informal segregation to explain patterns of segregation in areas which are now formally and officially integrated in other words, an environment in which the official policies promote integration but in which there are "unofficial practices that collectively operate to reproduce racial barriers" (p. 2). This informal segregation was prevalent in the experiences of the participants in this study. Although historically UCT was a whites only university, it is now, at least theoretically, a racially integrated space. However, informal segregation persists on campus. When they were asked about their experiences of transformation, a key concern of many participants was the lack of integration amongst students of different races. This will form the first subtheme of this section. However, although this informal segregation appears to be the dominant experience of most of the participants, there were a few participants who told more positive stories of integration among students. These alternative experiences will form the next subtheme.

**4.4.1 Experiences of segregation.** There has been much research conducted on student segregation at universities internationally, particularly in the UK and the US (Clack, Dixon, & Tredoux, 2005; Thomas, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007), as well as in South Africa (Durrheim, Trotter, Manicom, & Piper, 2004; Woods, 2001). There have been some studies conducted at UCT specifically that have found the student body to be highly racially segregated (Alexander & Tredoux, 2010; Schrieff, Tredoux, Finchilescu, & Dixon, 2010; Schrieff, Tredoux, Dixon, & Finchilescu, 2005; Zuma, 2013). The experiences of most of the students in this study are in line with the findings of the literature on this topic. The participants spoke about racial segregation in many locations on campus, from public spaces such as the Jammie Stops<sup>8</sup> or Jammie Stairs<sup>9</sup>, to student residences and even spaces such as the lecture halls and tutorial groups where students would, to some degree, be forced to interact. In the following quote (cited earlier as an example in section 3.3 of Chapter Three) Kopano explained occurrences of segregation in his class:

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<sup>8</sup> The Jammie Stop is the bus stop for the student shuttle service, the Jammie Shuttle.

<sup>9</sup> The Jameson Stairs or "Jammie Stairs" are the stair leading up to Jameson Hall on Upper Campus. It is a common social gathering space for students

*First day of lectures and the class is split almost perfectly by race. All the white students sat in one section we coined “Camps bay”<sup>10</sup>. All the Indian students sat in another. Most of the coloured and Muslims students either sat next to the Indian section or at the back of the class or “Mitchells Plain”<sup>11</sup>. The Upper middle class black students congregated in a small area and finally the rest of the black students populated the remainder of the class “Khayelitsha”<sup>12</sup>. I was in shock (Kopano, personal reflection).*

In the above quote, the division in the lecture theatre space has been racialised, with certain areas in the room associated with different races. The student self-segregation that Kopano described was not only by race but also by class. The black students were not all seated together but separated into: “Upper middle class black students” and “the rest of the black students”. It appears that the racialised division of lecture theatre space is hierarchical: the phrasing of “finally the rest of the black students populated the remainder of the class ‘Khayelitsha’”, suggests that black African students’ seating was somewhat of an afterthought: they slotted into the areas left open to them rather than feeling confident enough to make an active decision about where to sit. Alexander and Tredoux (2010) draw similar conclusions in their spatial analysis of seating patterns in undergraduate tutorial groups at UCT over a full academic year. They found that even when seating choice was limited and there were no pre-existing norms, students sought to “re-establish and reproduce the prevailing social order through the racialisation of space” (p. 384).

This segregation described by Kopano above did not happen subtly or over time but from the very first time the students gathered together as a group, and as Kopano explained in the rest of his personal reflection, it persisted over the course of his degree. The other studies conducted at UCT have had similar findings. In their study mentioned above, Alexander and Tredoux (2010) found that the tutorial groups they observed were significantly segregated from the first day of class in February right up until the end of the academic year. Schrieff et al. (2010) had similar results when they observed seating patterns in a UCT residence-dining hall. They found that patterns of segregation were set up rapidly from the first time that students encountered each other in the dining hall, and that this space remained consistently segregated over time. Segregation in the classroom is revealing because these are spaces where students are theoretically forced to interact because they are often asked to join together to do group work tasks. However, often segregation persists. One explanation raised by some of the

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<sup>10</sup> Camps Bay is an affluent, mostly white Cape Town suburb.

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell’s Plain is suburb on the Cape Flats, a coloured township.

<sup>12</sup> Khayelitsha is a black African township which includes informal settlements.

participants was that white students actively avoid joining with black students for group-work tasks because of the stereotypes associated with them. In this quote, for example, Kopano, who is in a faculty in which entrance requirements are often a source of much controversy and media attention, described how his classmates form groups directly based around entrance points (and thus by race):

*You'll find people who need to work together in a group and immediately the "47 point people", as in the white people, will get together to make sure they don't go with someone who's going to bring their marks down (...) and it just happens in that way (Kopano, FG1).*

This quote perfectly illustrates how the stereotypes discussed above affect interactions between students in the classroom, and can lead to the racialisation and segregation of space. The white students are known as "the 47 point people" because that used to be the number of points they needed to be accepted into this degree. The other students (i.e. the black students) need fewer points to be accepted, and thus it is assumed that they are lazy or unintelligent. As a result, white students will avoid them when it comes to group work because it is assumed that they will bring down the marks of the group. In a similar way, Nokuthula described how her course convenor felt the need to emphasise that their department does not have a race-based admissions policy, presumably due to group-work issues that had arisen in the past:

*We had this experience in one of our [courses] - it was during O-week<sup>13</sup> - in one of our lectures we get split up into groups, and apparently in one of the previous years, people would like try to apply for like different groups and try put their own groups together because (...) of the people they were grouped with, and she thought it was necessary to mention that even though with the UCT policy, but our policy kind of overrides that in terms of [department] where to get into the faculty and to study [subject], everyone has to have the same criteria to get in, the same requirements (...) so for her to think there's a need to mention that, because of what's happened before, obviously she knows that there are people who sit there and think, "gosh, I hope I'm not put in a group with black people because they might not be as smart as I am because they didn't work as hard to get here" (Nokuthula, FG 1).*

These kinds of experiences are not unique to the students in this study. As was mentioned in the literature review, the reluctance of white students to work with black students

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<sup>13</sup> Orientation Week

in group-work projects has been documented in other studies, particularly in the US (Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt, & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2013; Solórzano et al., 2000).

Furthermore, far from this being an unconscious process, Kopano's example demonstrates that students are so aware of informal segregation that they label the different areas of the class. Similarly, as Xolela described in her photo-story, the participants saw segregation as an active choice that students make:

Photograph 5: *No Title*



*Caption: This narcissism of minor difference governs so many of our interactions (...) we see how people have chosen to group themselves according to their physical characteristics, both in race and in gender*

(Xolela, Photo-story 1)

Xolela's photo-story depicted another environment in which segregation is frequently reported to occur: the dining hall (Schrieff et al., 2005; Schrieff et al., 2010; Zuma, 2013). She described students as having purposely chosen to group themselves according to certain characteristics, such as race. Her assertion that this is a choice is echoed in Mpho's photo-story below. He described how, despite there being a diverse student body, his section of campus "refuses to take part in the alleged 'melting pot' that is UCT". His use of the term "refuses" implies that this is a highly conscious and active decision.

Photograph 6: *Living in Limbo*

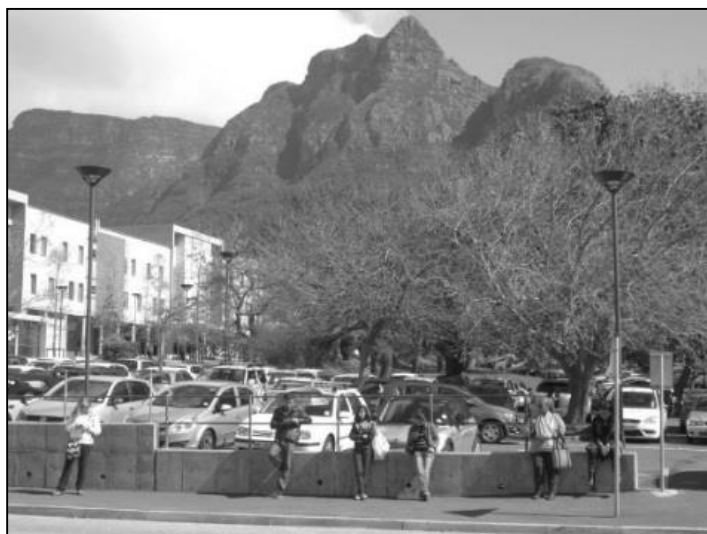


Caption: *Woolsack (my microcosm of UCT) is in the middle of Upper and Lower campus, with a reasonably diverse group of ethnicities, gender and races. However, you can find on any random day, a ghost town that refuses to take part in the alleged 'melting pot' that is UCT.*

(Mpho, Photo-story 2)

In this photo-story, Mpho questioned the discourse of UCT as a happily diverse environment with his use of the term “alleged” before the somewhat clichéd transformation trope “melting pot”. He also began to hint at the underlying loneliness and isolation that can result from this rigid segregation of students and the racialisation of space. He described Woolsack Drive as *his* “microcosm of UCT”, clearly a place that he spends much of his time, but which he then goes on to say is a “ghost town” and elsewhere he used the phrase “living in limbo”. This area of UCT is literally in limbo, being placed half way between Upper and Lower Campus; but it is also symbolic of Mpho’s feelings of exclusion: being in a supposedly diverse and mixed university and yet feeling as though he is in an isolated, ghost town. This sense of isolation and exclusion on campus is hinted at in other photo-stories, for example, in Nokuthula’s photo-story:

Photograph 7: *No Title*



*Caption: The third picture is of people waiting for a Jammie in isolation. It shows the resistance to interaction on a surface level. Places such as the Jammie stop should be a hub for people to interact as a pass time, however, most people do not use this opportunity and stick to what they know and are comfortable with.*

(Nokuthula, Photo-story 1)

In Nokuthula's photo-story above, she purposely changed the photograph of the students waiting for the Jammie Shuttle to a stark black and white and through her caption, draws the viewers' attention to the isolation and lack of interaction. Much like Xolela's photo-story above, Nokuthula's highlighted the idea that this segregation is an active choice, with her use of the phrase "resistance to interaction".

The slight contradiction evident in Nokuthula's photo-story is interesting. She described the lack of interaction between students as a form of "isolation" and yet also as "comfortable". If isolation can at times be seen as preferable to integration and even comfortable, it raises questions about the nature of interracial interactions on campus. Other literature supports the link between segregation and comfort. Schrieff et al. (2010) suggest that one of the reasons for the informal segregation at UCT is the "comfortability" of staying in intra-racial groups. In an earlier study of dining hall segregation, Schrieff et al. (2005) referred to the "zone of comfort" that students preferred to remain in. One explanation for this comfort, with reference to black students, might be the racial stereotyping discussed in the earlier theme.

If black students believe that other students view them in negative ways (and have this reinforced whenever they are required to do group work in class), then it is perhaps unsurprising that they would be wary of interacting with white students and breaking that isolation. For example, Alexander and Tredoux (2001) describe how to some extent their participants viewed racially homogenous spaces on campus as offering a sense of belonging, security and acceptance where they could express themselves freely without fear of judgment. For example, they mention the “coloured billiards area”, where coloured participants described feeling at ease and that they could laugh and be loud, unlike the space of Jammie stairs where people would look at them and they would have to know their place. However, homogenous spaces also create a sense of isolation and exclusion for other students coming into those segregated spaces (Alexander & Tredoux, 2010). For example, Lerato and Tshepo described their hesitation around violating the segregation of seating patterns on campus. Tshepo explained how witnessing segregation was actually the first time that she felt black on campus. She described the hostility she experienced from white students when she tried to sit somewhere that challenged the strict seating segregation of her lectures:

*When I felt black it's actually in lectures. They say it happens unconsciously but it actually doesn't. Coloured kids will sit on the other side, and then black kids will sit on the other side, and the white kids will sit on the other side. And then when you sit on the white kids' side, they will look at you like, “okay, what is she doing here? She's not supposed to be here”. So, that's the time when I actually felt black (Tshepo, FG2).*

In this quote, Tshepo described seeing herself as black through the eyes of her white peers. It is a blackness that carries those negative stereotypes discussed earlier. It involved a dawning awareness of how she is seen by other students because she is black. So, whether students want to or not, they will observe the segregated seating because they assume that if they do not they will be unwelcome and rejected by other students. Some participants in Alexander and Tredoux's (2010) study described a similar fear of rejection if they tried to enter a racially homogenous space on campus. In this study, Lerato gave a similar description of the dining hall of her residence:

*I stay in res (...) and it's the same scenario in the dining hall. There'll be these clusters of colour (...) You don't know what to think, because let's say you go sit at a table where there's white people, like that kind of hesitance, you don't know whether it's because they don't know you, or whether it's because you are black. Because you don't want to add your own assumptions. So, it's kind of like this*

*huge confusion. So, ja. [Pause] and at the same time you don't want to be like, "oh no! UCT's going to be awesome" (Lerato, FG2).*

In these examples, hostility is subtly communicated to the black students. Tshepo described it as being looked at in a particular way, Lerato as a hesitation. In a similar way, Alexander and Tredoux's (2010) participants felt that segregation was not explicitly discussed between students, but that there were "unspoken rules of space" that govern who belongs in which space on campus. The subtle hostility that Tshepo and Lerato described could be examples of these unspoken rules, which then serve to police the boundaries between the racialised spaces on campus.

The subtlety of these rules of space can have implications for students' self-doubt. As Lerato demonstrated, because she was aware of stereotypes and the assumptions that many people have about black students, when she experienced white students' hesitation at her sitting with them, she was torn between assuming that it was because she is black (and all the associated stereotypes) or, more innocently, because she is a stranger to them. There was no way for her to know for sure, so she was left in a state of self-doubt and confusion: as she stated, "you don't know what to think".

This concept of unspoken rules that govern spaces on campus problematises the suggestion made by some participants that segregation is a free choice. Thomas (2005), in her study of racial segregation in a high school dining hall in the United States, holds that students' interactions are constrained by an "inherited normative legacy" of segregation. The extract from Kopano's personal reflection, mentioned above, supports this suggestion. In Kopano's description of the segregation of his lecture theatre space, the naming of the different racialised areas ("Camps Bay", "Khayelitsha", and "Mitchell's Plain") mimics exactly the segregation of the broader Cape Town area, which is UCT's context and setting and is a legacy of apartheid spatial segregation.

Ultimately, the racialisation of space on campus maintains the hierarchical relations of the dominant and marginalised groups on campus (Dixon, Tredoux, & Clack, 2005). It both reflects the broader power relations between races in South Africa and maintains those relations on campus. As Thomas (2005) suggested in her study, in their everyday practices of sticking to homogeneous racial groups on campus, students internalise and then repeat the inherited norm of segregation, which reiterates and further normalise this segregation.

**4.4.2 Experiences of integration.** Although the dominant story told by participants in this study was of a racially divided campus, a few of the participants, particularly the first-year students, had more positive and integrated experiences to share. Most of the instances of integration that participants described were about working together with students of other races in classroom settings, as mentioned in the photo-stories by Alice and Nokuthula:

Photograph 8: *No Title*



*Caption: The second picture is of people in my class doing a lab practical. In the picture it shows people of different race groups working together with a mutual objective. In the working place there should be no discrimination that bases a person's ability to perform on their culture or race group.*

(Nokuthula, Photo-story 2)

This is Nokuthula's second photo-story that focuses on interaction between students. Her first photo-story as described above (see Photograph 7, on p. 63) explored instances of isolation and a lack of interaction between students at the Jammie Bus Stop. Her next photo-story described an instance when students of different races worked together constructively in a classroom setting. The difference between these two photo-stories from a single participant highlights the diversity of experiences on campus. It is important to note that although there are similarities in the experiences of black students on campus, their experiences are not uniform or constant. As is demonstrated in Nokuthula's photo-stories, it is possible for one individual to experience something in different ways when in different times and spaces on campus. One factor that might account for this difference in her photo-stories is the setting. In the Jammie

Stop setting of her first photo-story, there is nothing forcing students to interact and thus they remain in isolation but in photo-story 2, students are forced into interaction by the classroom setting and their academic task. Alice's example of integration took place in a similar way:

Photograph 9: *Crossroads*



*Caption: I see an image where there is a transition to a point of interracial work environment. In this image we see the representation of 3 different races, cultures and 2 discernible genders. They might be facing opposite directions possibly have opposing views, but still they are seen working on the same academic task towards a common end goal.*

(Alice, Photo-story 1)

Alice acknowledged that the university has not yet reached a point of successful integration, but she suggests that there is progress towards that point with her use of the word “transition”. Much like Nokuthula, Alice believed that working towards a common goal will aid this transition, although the title “Crossroads” implies that this is not certain but that there are a number possible outcomes. This photograph is also somewhat contradictory, as Alice appears to tell a story of both interaction and isolation in a single photo-story. The subjects of her photograph may be united in working towards the common goal of a specific academic task, in a shared space; however, they are working on this task alone, and her photograph contains no evidence of actual interaction.

Although they were the majority, not all the examples of integration given by participants took place in a structured classroom or academic environment. There were a few examples of integration in social contexts. Nokuthula's final photo-story, for example, featured inter-racial couples in the Food Court<sup>14</sup> on Upper Campus:

Photograph 10: *No Title*



*Caption: This shows friends of mine that are in inter-racial couples. It shows that there are people willing to cross the boundaries of their cultural differences and embrace each other with love and understanding.*

(Nokuthula, Photo-story 3)

This again highlights the diversity of Nokuthula's experience of a single issue at UCT. However, her phrasing highlights that this is an exception to the norm. Being in an interracial couple is described as "crossing a boundary", which requires willingness and intent to cross and does not occur easily and commonly on campus. The word "boundary" also hints at the unspoken rules of interaction on campus that were discussed above.

Although the experiences of the participants in this study were not exclusively of segregation, it is clear that the often hierarchical racialisation of campus space supports the racialised hierarchy on campus more generally (Alexander & Tredoux, 2005).

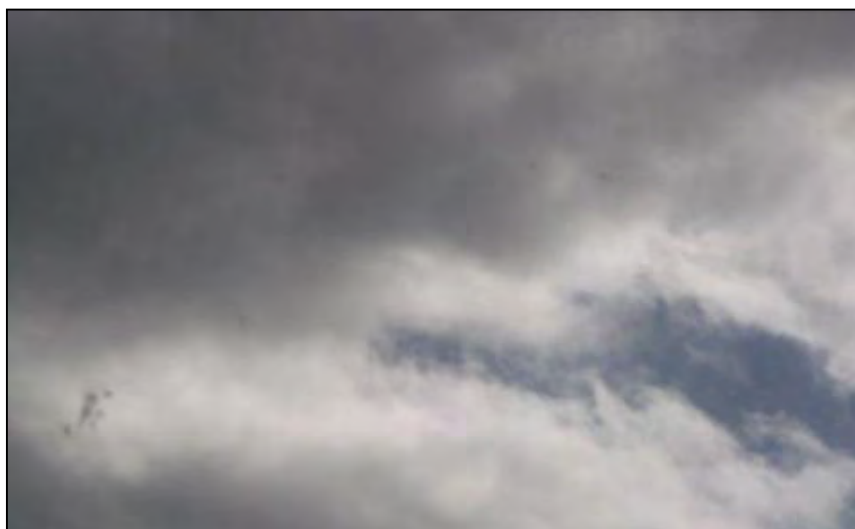
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<sup>14</sup> The Food Court is an area on Upper Campus to buy food and socialise.

#### 4.5 Discussion: “It’s Just So White!” The Culture of Whiteness at UCT

The themes discussed in this chapter, namely: the narrowness of transformation focus and practices; the prevalence of racial stereotypes on campus; the Eurocentric focus of the university; and the often hierarchical racialisation of space on campus demonstrate that there is a culture of whiteness at UCT. However, it is not just that whiteness is overrepresented on campus, but that whiteness has power. In the experience of many of the participants in this study, whiteness on campus is associated with superiority and success and blackness is denigrated. Lerato, for example, reflected in her photo-story on the historic meanings she perceives as attached to whiteness:

Photograph 11: *No Title*



*Caption: In the beginning there was ‘white’. (Being white was considered the superior and proper race).*

(Lerato, Photo-story 1)

Lerato’s first photo-story was a symbolic whitewash of clouds, representing her perception of the widespread and historic dominance of whiteness. More specifically, she was commenting on the dominance of whiteness at UCT. This photograph is of a bank of clouds in the sky above the Rugby field. This literal blanket of white clouds over UCT represents the symbolic blanket of whiteness over the campus. In this, the first part of her story, Lerato spoke about the superiority of whiteness as something from the past (“being white *was* considered...”). However, her subsequent photo-stories suggest that she views this dominance as continuing. In

this next photo-story, for example, she asserted that “the other races are trying to catch up with them”:

Photograph 12: *No Title*



*Caption: Where they go, we shall follow. (White people have left a legacy by apartheid. They are in the lead in terms of privilege in this Western world. The other races are trying to catch up with them. Even though ones gets some success and wealthy black (including Indian and Coloured) especially here at UCT, the gap is still not bridged. Black people are most of the time playing catch up.*

(Lerato, Photo-story 2)

Whiteness is still seen as a position of superiority that black people need to try (but ultimately fail) to reach. Lerato’s use of an emergency exit sign to illustrate her caption hints at the urgency and panic that is associated with attempting to bridge this gap. Other participants also raised the association of whiteness with success and power at UCT. Sean, for example, linked the path to success on campus with whiteness. He described the voice he chooses to use when speaking to his lecturers: “speaking to my lecturers, having a sense of ‘ok, I’m speaking to my lecturer now, it’s going to be very like sophisticated, very white’“. In this quote, “sophisticated” and “white” are conflated. At another point in the focus group, Sean described whiteness as the “top of the hierarchy” at UCT. The normalisation of this hierarchy means that many black students who seek to change their position will attempt to climb the hierarchy by taking on markers of whiteness, instead of working to dismantle it. It is clear that in addition to

facing negative stereotypes about blackness, students also perceive the university as sending out the message that only whiteness will lead to success.

This is similar to what the theorist Jemima Pierre (2013) found in her research on the racialisation process and representations of race in urban Ghana, in which she spoke to Ghanaian university students about their perceptions of whiteness. She asserts that the construction of blackness was only one side of the racialisation process; the other side was the consolidation of whiteness. She found that there was a series of meanings attached to whiteness, which helped whiteness to retain a position of power. The students she spoke to drew on certain “tropes of whiteness” that they saw as representing success, advancement and superiority (p. 74).

UCT is clearly, in the experience of many of the participants, a “white space”. As, Mpho lamented in the focus group: “UCT, it’s different, it’s really hard (...) It’s that disparity that irks me. It’s just so white! It’s not cool”. This is similar to the concerns raised by the participants in Harper and Hurtado’s (2007) qualitative study of campus racial climates at five US universities. Their participants describe a pervasiveness of whiteness in space, curricula and activities. Much like the participants in this study, they perceived white interests as privileged over others, which they saw as inconsistent with their universities’ institutional claims of inclusiveness. In this study, Sean raised similar concerns about the favouring of white activities. In his photo-story below, he explored the dominance of rugby, a predominantly white sport, over other sports:

Photograph 13: No Title



*Caption: This picture is a picture of the rugby fields at UCT. There has been a great emphasis on the focus on the progression of rugby as a sport in South African Universities. Rugby is known to be a historical white sport (at least in the community where I am from). To me, rugby has been used as medium to facilitate integration in South Africa especially during the time that South Africa transitioned from the apartheid regime to a newly democratic country. South African rugby has progressed since then. In comparison to rugby, soccer has been perceived as a black sport because of the representation of black players. South Africa's soccer team have not flourished as did rugby. Many students (black and white) speak of these differences and whether it can be attributed to the differences in race. One of my friends posed the following question: What if white people played soccer and black people rugby, would rugby have flourished? Posing a question like this is problematic in many ways. However, I cannot understand the importance placed on Rugby at UCT and how soccer and other sports (including female sports) have been marginalised in terms of marketing/branding, funding, sponsors and so forth. UCT have invested a lot in maintaining the standards of the rugby field, but I am not confident in saying the same for the soccer field which is not situated on upper campus. UCT's representation and emphasis on rugby, in my opinion maintains white privilege and this is a deterrent in the process of inclusivity and transformation at UCT.*

(Sean, Photo-story 3)

In this photo-story Sean described how, in his view, the university has privileged rugby (and the men's rugby team in particular) over other sports which have a more diverse following

and participation. Sean believed that UCT Rugby has been given more money and attention than many of the other sports. UCT has a strong culture of rugby, and is known for its rugby team, the *Ikey Tigers* which even has an extensive entry on Wikipedia, which the other sports teams do not. The privileging of rugby over other sports sends a message to students about what the university values, and although of course black students are welcome to play rugby and many do, the historical association in South Africa between rugby and whiteness is clear. Dolby (2002) in her study of a previously white high school in Durban which has now become predominantly black, describes how the school authorities tried to use a strong emphasis on rugby to cling to their identity as a white school and connect themselves to other white schools in the area (despite black students being the majority).. Thus, black students playing rugby are still black students coming into a white space.

Another example of the dominance of whiteness is evident in one of Lihle's photo-stories. The photograph below depicts the stand of notebooks that are available in the campus merchandise shop. The notebooks have been personalised with various names, allowing students to buy a notebook branded with their name.

Photograph 14: *No Title*



Caption: *Thandeka or Sipho wouldn't have enough money to buy these books, only white people can afford them.*

(Lihle, Photo-story 2)

In her caption, Lihle suggested that these notebooks are exclusionary because they are expensive and so only white students, whom Lihle viewed as having more access to wealth, would be able to afford them. However, the associations of whiteness and privilege here go beyond material wealth. With Lihle's photo-story, what is also evident upon examination of the photograph is the imbalance in the representations of names on the notebooks: all the names visible here are Western, typically white names such as "Jennifer", "Helen", "Fiona", "Heather" and "Jessica". Thus, even if they could afford these notebooks, Thandeka or Siphon would not be able to find their names represented. This might seem somewhat small or irrelevant in the greater picture of student concerns but it is one more example of how whiteness is taken as the norm and standard on campus.

For many white students, the UCT environment is already familiar, because they have siblings, parents and grandparents who attended this university. For most black students, because their parents would be unlikely to be UCT alumni, it is an initially foreign space, as Sean remarked:

*I think that me coming to an institution like UCT is very foreign (...) if I compare to my classmates (...) whose parents went to UCT, whose siblings went to UCT, there's a sense of entitlement. This is like home for them. I think there's a big disparity (Sean, FG1).*

This already unfamiliar space is made more alienating by the clear dominance of whiteness. Black students, unlike white students, are denied the privilege of feeling at home on campus:

*At UCT the context here, the mobility and the sense of privilege that white people have for me at this institution is completely different from that of black people (...) white people for me, at least not all but majority white people, this is home, comfort, this is like where they are supposed to be (...) and you, this is not where you are supposed to be, and you're sitting there and you're questioning when you open your mouth, your accent (...) you know that you can contribute so significantly to this work and this discussion but you are holding back because your accent is going to create a reaction from the rest of the class (Sean, FG1).*

The whiteness of the UCT space means that white students are privileged in ways which are denied to black students. Whiteness is a shared social space and a position of structural advantage that grants privileges to those who occupy this space or position and denies them to those who do not (Frankenberg, 1993; Garner, 2007; Steyn, 2005). As Peggy McIntosh (1990) first explored in her seminal essay, *Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege*, there are inherent, but often unacknowledged privileges attached to whiteness. In South Africa during

apartheid, the privileges attached to whiteness were entrenched in law. In post-apartheid South Africa the “master narrative of whiteness” has taken a form which still influences relations within this country. Although whiteness no longer ensures political dominance, it still largely guarantees economic privilege, social capital and power, and Western cultures are still held in high esteem and seen as essential for internationalism (Steyn, 2005, 2001). These privileges of whiteness are evident in this chapter and include (among many other examples) the privilege of being taught in your mother tongue; being taught by a lecturer of your own race; being confident that your classmates will believe that you received your position at university through merit; being able to relate to the content of the curriculum; and having an accent which is taken seriously and respected. Many of these privileges may, in fact, be invisible to white students; however the lack of these privileges is certainly felt by black students (Garner, 2007; McIntosh, 1990). This can have highly detrimental consequences for black students on many levels (which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). As McIntosh (1990) states, it is not a matter of denying white students these privileges (many of which are essential for a successful academic career at university) but of ensuring that black students are also able to benefit from them. In fact, Frankenberg (1993) suggests that the term “privilege” in this context is a misnomer, because the benefits that come with whiteness are basic human rights rather than privileges.

In exploring the lived reality of these black students at UCT it is clear that imbalances of power relating to race underscore their experiences. This suggests that a critical analysis of these experiences using decolonising psychologies is necessary. The following chapter will use concepts from decolonising psychologies to unpack the effects of the hierarchical structuring of race on black students. Additionally, it is evident that many of the participants in this study were conscious and critical of these imbalances of power. As is evident in the quotes included in this chapter, the participants highlighted the discourse of whiteness to explain the stereotypes that they experienced. They problematised the dominance and privileging of whiteness, and shifted the discourse away from seeing blackness as inferior to seeing whiteness as the problem. This is the part of the earlier mentioned discourse of resistance that black students can offer. Photovoice is a methodology that helps to promote this type of race consciousness and resistance. The next chapter will further examine the role of this methodology in the development of the students’ consciousness about the hierarchisation of race.

In summary, many of the participants in this study felt that transformation at UCT is focused too narrowly on demographic change and that in other ways transformation is lagging. They were concerned that once black students are accepted into UCT there is little to support

them and ensure that they graduate. This is problematic because UCT can be a difficult place for black students. One reason for this is the racialised hierarchy on campus, in which negative stereotypes of blackness are prevalent and whiteness is the path to success. There is a lack of black academic staff and role models in the experiences of many students; and the few black lecturers there are may be disrespected by other students" a further indication to black students of the lack of respect given to blackness on campus. In addition, the university has a Eurocentric focus, in the experience of many of the participants. Finally, space on campus is racialised. Although some participants have experiences of integration between students of different races on campus, the dominant experience appears to be separation, isolation and at times exclusion. Thus, the dominant culture at UCT is white and blackness is denigrated. This detrimentally affects many black students studying in what is often an unwelcoming white space and helps to explain the disproportionately high academic exclusion rate of black students. The following chapter will examine precisely what these effects are and how students respond to them.

## **Chapter Five: The Impact of the UCT Environment on Black Students and How They Respond**

The previous chapter explored how the participants in this study experience UCT, and concluded that UCT is a white space in which blackness is placed low on the racialised educational hierarchy. The first half of this chapter draws on decolonising psychologies to explore the effects that these experiences have on students. In particular, it uses the concepts of internalisation, ambivalence, lactification, projection, hybridity, being unhomed, black consciousness and double consciousness to examine students' experiences of being black in the UCT space. It is important to acknowledge that although these experiences can be powerfully detrimental, students are not passive and they react in a variety of ways. It was evident in this study that students draw on different coping mechanisms and resistance strategies to navigate daily life on campus, amidst these many concerns. The second half of this chapter will explore these coping mechanisms and resistance strategies in detail. (Please see the theme outline in the methodology section 3.6 in Chapter Three for a detailed overview of this chapter).

### **5.1 The Effects of a Racialised Campus Experience**

As was discussed in Chapter Four, it is clear that many black students experience UCT as a racialised space. The dominant discourse on campus is that blackness is not valued and whiteness is the path to success. This has detrimental consequences for black students, who often internalise these discourses. This section will use decolonising psychologies: firstly, to explore how students affectively experience this environment (with reference to their self-esteem and confidence; and their sense of belonging and inclusion on campus) and secondly, to examine what the consequences are for students (i.e. self-silencing and disengagement, inner struggle, distraction and emotional cost) and how their academic performance is affected.

**5.1.1 Affective experiences.** Fanon's concept of internalisation can be defined as the process through which "external, sociohistorical reality is assimilated into 'internal' and subjective reality" (Hook, 2004b, p. 101) and individuals are shaped by the context and environment in which they are situated. In postcolonial environments (such as a historically white university like UCT) where stereotypes of blackness are still pervasive despite official changes in policy, black individuals may internalise these stereotypes, which results in feelings

of inferiority. There are many examples of this internalisation throughout the data set. In the quote below, for example, Sean described how he felt as a black student in his class:

*I feel it in my [subject] class all the time (...) I'm just occupying a space that was actually meant for another white person that did better than me. So, (...) I do feel, all the time! (...) I am very aware of the fact that (...) I'm occupying a space that wasn't actually meant for me (Sean, FG 1).*

Here, Sean has internalised the discourse of “black students do not deserve their places at UCT”. He was not just aware of this discourse but he actually *felt* it and started to believe that it was true. What is notable is that this discourse is so powerful that Sean felt this way even though there is a minimum requirement of an Upper-Second Class pass (70%) for *all* students regardless of race in his department. Thus, to get his place in this postgraduate programme he had to achieve well academically in his undergraduate courses, and yet he still felt that he took a more deserving (white) student’s place. Lerato expressed a similar concern about not deserving her place at UCT:

*I mean it does affect you because you are also thinking if it wasn't for the admission's policy would I really be here? So, you also think, “did I take someone's spot?” So, it's not like it completely flies over your head, of course. You hear it (Lerato, FG2).*

In the above quote, it is clear that the comments that Lerato heard about the admissions policy have affected her. Before this statement, Lerato described the comments she had heard people make about the admissions policy (as mentioned in Chapter Three on p. 45, “people do talk about it a lot”) but as she then stated, it goes beyond hearing: “it does affect you and it’s not like it completely flies over your head”. Such discourses are powerful, and can be difficult to ignore, even if students try hard to ignore them, as Lerato remarked here. Similarly, in reference to stereotypes of blackness, Mareka states: “Even if you try not to think about it they still really affect you” (FG2). Students internalise what they hear and the effects can be detrimental. One such effect of internalising stereotyping discourses is the guilt some black students feel at the thought that they are taking a white student’s place, which is evident in both Lerato and Sean’s quotes above.

Additionally, in environments where stigmatising discourses of blackness are prevalent, many black people may exist in a state of “double consciousness”. This is Du Bois’ (1999) term for the contradictory experience of simultaneously viewing yourself through the eyes of a culture that stigmatises you and yet wanting to view yourself positively. This appears to have

happened with some of the participants in this study, who upon entering this racialised campus space have firstly realised that they are black, and secondly (after encountering stereotypes of blackness) have realised that this is a problem. As Mareka remarked:

*The first time I actually ever felt black was actually at UCT (...) Only now I came to UCT the issue of me being black was like shoved in my face (...) The major challenge was having to be in a different environment and having to question my own identity (...) It really felt like I was climbing a huge hill, because in first year I really questioned about, “who are you? (Mareka, FG2)*

In Mareka’s quote above from the focus group, he indicates that it was when he came to UCT he first became aware of his “blackness”. In the presence of these stereotypes and the pervasive whiteness of UCT, suddenly being black became an “issue” that he was confronted with. As UCT is in many ways still a very white space, for black students entering this space, as Du Bois (1999) suggests, their blackness is suddenly brought into focus. Furthermore, the prevalence of negative stereotypes means that their blackness is brought into focus as something negative. For some black UCT students, this creates a struggle between the desire to see themselves positively as legitimate black UCT students, and the awareness of their so-called problematic blackness in the eyes of the dominant white campus culture: Hence, a state of double consciousness. As Mareka described in the above quote, this then forces students into difficult questioning of their own identity – a struggle he compares to “climbing a huge hill”. There are many affective experiences black students undergo because of the processes of internalisation and double consciousness.

***Self-esteem and confidence.*** One of the most harmful consequences of internalisation and double consciousness is that students doubt themselves and question their own ability. This is evident throughout the data set when some participants expressed feeling insecure; demotivated; intimidated (by white students and academics); and unconfident in response to stereotypes of blackness and the dominance of whiteness. For example, Lerato explained the effect that encountering stereotypes of blackness has on her self-esteem:

*It then clashes with your self-esteem (...) because it’s then like, “okay I took a white student’s place who probably is smarter than me” and it’s like, “okay, am I smart enough?” And now it’s like all interlinked with just who you are. So, I guess it sucks. You don’t want to think, “Okay, I’m here because people felt sorry for me.” You want to know, “okay, I worked hard and because my matric results in my opinion are good enough to get me here”, but then it’s like you’re second guessing it because of the fact that I’m black (Lerato, FG2).*

Lerato described how these stereotypes resulted in feelings of inferiority, which then led to self-doubt and undermined her confidence in herself and her place at UCT. Similarly, Sean explained how demotivating these experiences are for him:

*But it's still, it's very demotivating to know that (...) white students are doing so well and black students in your class are not performing as well as they do. It's evident, it's always evident, that black students bring the class average down, and (...) that contributes to you feeling even more insecure (Sean, FG1).*

Sean's wording here, with his emphasis and repetition of the phrase "it's evident", suggested that this was something that was deeply troubling for him. Sean went on to examine this further in his personal reflection:

*Privilege and power is still very much associated with whiteness and when the white individual are a source of subtle racism in the most casual form, it becomes apparent that ideas of superiority, entitlement, privilege prestige and dominance over others are inherent to them and that is what is most intimidating and what triggers the black person's sense of inferiority and constantly the black individual seek their approval (Sean, personal reflection).*

The process of double consciousness was clearly at play in Sean's experience. Sean has simultaneously internalised the discourse of black inferiority and developed an acute awareness of the processes that led to his feelings of inferiority. Sean could speak insightfully about white privilege and institutional racism and the consequences for black people's sense of inferiority, yet despite this awareness he still felt insecure.

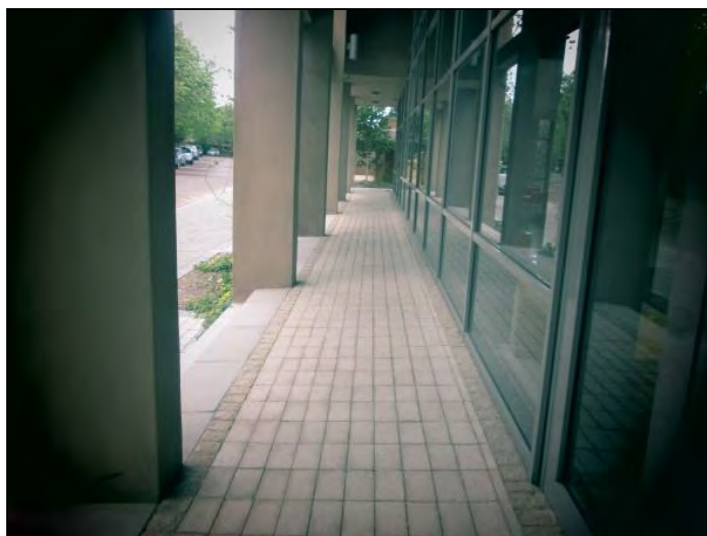
***Sense of belonging.*** In addition to feelings of insecurity, many black students struggle with feelings of alienation at UCT. Some participants described how difficult it was for them to feel at home on campus, and how they often felt as though they did not belong. Both Mareka and Sean linked this to the university's institutional culture: "the culture that's here, it does not have any African flare to it (...) I feel like I'm in some European university" (Mareka, FG2). Sean described a "disconnect" between black students and the nature of the UCT environment:

*I think it is that this institutional culture here is very different from the average black person's culture, and I think that's where the disconnect is (...) obviously not all black people are all the same, but I think in terms of our institutional culture here, I think that it is not representative of the black people of South Africa (Sean, FG1).*

Sean's use here of the phrase "average black person's culture" is interesting because it suggests that there is a common cultural experience of being black that is at odds with the dominant cultural experience of campus and that it is this incompatibility of cultures that causes black students to feel alienated at UCT. However, in the other focus group Mpho described how he grew up in what would be viewed as an atypical environment for a black child: "I speak like this [referring to having a 'white-sounding accent']. It's how I grew up, the environment that I come from. The things I did are probably a bit different from others [black people], but that's life" (FG2). Yet despite not growing up in the "average black culture" (that Sean suggested is the cause of feelings of alienation) and having the white sounding voice that should make fitting in easier, Mpho still felt alienated at UCT. This alienation could perhaps have arisen out of Mpho's state of double consciousness. Mpho was brought up in a self-described "white way" and has a "white" accent; but regardless of this *he is still black*. As a result, he is in a conflicting state of seeing himself simultaneously through the eyes of both a "black culture" and "white culture".

In fact all Mpho's photo-stories seemed deeply troubled and dealt with his concerns around belonging (two have been included below but there were others):

Photograph 15: *Masingene Where? (Where Do We Enter?)*

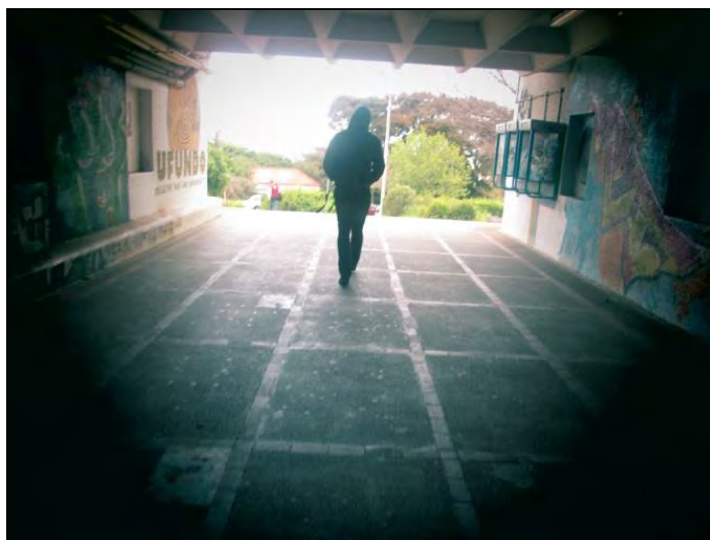


*Caption: The (in)famous Masingene is known for hassles and worries when it comes to the administration of being registered at UCT. I've heard, seen and experienced enough challenges in those offices to have myself asking, so where exactly do we enter in this building to belong, or did I read/translate Masingene wrong?*

(Mpho, Photo-story 3)

In the above photo-story, Mpho described the administrative hassles associated with acceptance into UCT, but his photo-story went beyond the literal administration issues. It questioned where exactly he was accepted into, and how real his acceptance was. The *Masingene Building* is the UCT admissions building, where potential applicants go to submit their applications. Mpho's photograph shows the many entrances to the building, but he is questioning where exactly one enters into (*Masingene* translated from *isiXhosa* to English means "Let's enter"). In this photograph the entrance to the building is camouflaged. It is secured shut and indistinguishable from the windows. Black students are allowed to enter UCT, but official admission into UCT does not guarantee a sense of belonging once they have arrived. He explored a similar issue in his next photo-story:

Photograph 16: *As Loud As Alone*



*Caption: Living in Woolsack requires that I go through that passage way quite a lot and it's often a walk that has numerous people on it as well. Yet, the feeling of being alone can't quite be shaken off. I've witnessed countless people walking alone in a university of over 25 000. A strange sense of transformation I'd say.*

(Mpho, Photo-story 4)

In this photo-story, it is clear that Mpho did not feel a sense of belonging to the broader UCT community. Despite walking among masses of other UCT students he felt alone. Mpho's photo-story hints at feelings of exclusion from other students but also from the university in general.

The difficulty for black students in developing a sense of belonging in higher education has been documented repeatedly in studies in Europe and the US (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Solórzano, et al., 2002; Read et al., 2010; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Yeager & Walton, 2011) as well as in a South African context (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001; Woods; 2001). In contrast, many white students have what has been termed a "taken-for-granted" assumption of participation in higher education and rarely question their right to belong in a university environment. In particular, studies have found that black students' sense of belonging is greatly influenced by the extent that they feel welcomed and supported by the institutional racial climate of their campus (Read et al., 2003).

**5.1.2 Academic consequences for students.** Once students doubt themselves, feel insecure and question their belonging within an institution, it can have detrimental consequences for their educational outcomes (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Firstly, it can lead some students to silence themselves and disengage from classroom discussion, and secondly it can be distracting for students and comes at an emotional cost.

***Self-silencing and disengagement.*** Some participants described how once they began to doubt themselves and their belonging within UCT, they began to silence themselves and to hold back in class. Sean gave the following explanation of why he was wary about contributing in class:

*You're sitting there and you're questioning when you open your mouth (...) you know that you can contribute so significantly to this work and this discussion but you are holding back because your accent is (...) going to create a reaction from the rest of the class (Sean, FG1).*

In this quote, Sean knew that he had a valuable contribution to make to the class, but because his accent is a marker of his blackness, and because of the stereotypes associated with that blackness, he refrained from contributing. In a similar way, Kopano described how he felt unable to ask questions in class because he was worried about being negatively perceived by his classmates once he had decided to sit in the “black section” of his racially segregated classroom:

Kopano: *Because it was already so well demarcated, so according to the colour of my skin maybe that was going to work for me [explaining why he decided to sit with the other black students] and immediately from there, you can already tell (...) how people perceive you and from then on I couldn't ask questions in class because I felt as though people around me spoke in a particular way-*

Xolela: *The black way*

Nokuthula: *Differently*

Kopano: *And if I spoke I'd give that away. And if white people see me asking a question, "who's he who thinks he is?" (...) And also in my mind I'm thinking they got higher marks than me, so obviously my question's going to be stupid. And you always second guessing yourself (...) literally, because I couldn't ask a question in the class I doubted my entire ability and it affected my ability to get good marks (FG1).*

Here Kopano described how from the first day of class (which was divided along racial lines), he chose to sit with the other black students. Upon doing this, he knew he would be perceived as a “black student” (with all the associated connotations) and this had a serious impact on how much he felt able to participate in class. Like Sean, he was unwilling to speak in class because he was worried about how his classmates would respond. However, with Kopano the damage was more profound, because whereas Sean knew that he had something valuable to contribute but felt incapable of doing so, Kopano did not believe that he had knowledge worth contributing. This is perhaps an indication of the varying levels of consciousness different black students may have. What is also interesting here is that Kopano was concerned that he would be judged by the white students for his blackness, but also by the other black students around him because he does not speak in a “black way”. This sense of being both too black and yet not black enough will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Additionally, it is evident in the extract how easily others in the focus group could relate to the scenario Kopano described. Xolela and Nokuthula did not know Kopano before meeting him in this focus group and they are in different departments, yet they knew the direction his anecdote was going and could finish his sentence accurately.

Kopano elaborated on his experiences in first year in his personal reflection, in which he described how, despite doing well academically at school, he struggled when he arrived at UCT:

*I applied for and got accepted into [degree] at UCT, based on what I regarded as merit. I was amongst the top achievers from my school both academically and in almost all other spheres of achievement. I believed not that I deserved to be in UCT, but that I had worked hard and achieved enough (objectively) (...) My perception and self-belief soon changed as the very segregated climate of my first year class formed itself (...) In tutorial groups (...) I noticed a sense of arrogance and entitlement from many of the white and some of the upper middle class coloured and black students. Most black students were timid and not able to engage due to the hostile and judgemental environment that they found themselves in, which obviously affected confidence and understanding of work.*

*Lecturers seemed to make an effort to remember only the names of white students and address them directly in lectures. In tutorials with educators, the white students would seem so comfortable speaking up and trying procedures. The educators (most of them white) seemed to relate better with them and it seemed like a fight as a black student to be seen as equal. I could go on with such anecdotes forever but I'll leave it there for now (Kopano, personal reflection).*

In this quote Kopano explained the changes in his self-perception from high school to university. He described the environment in his tutorials which he perceived as being hostile to black students, but comfortable and accommodating for white students who received more attention from lecturers (even as simply as having their names remember more easily). This further illustrates the dominance of whiteness in UCT classroom spaces. Kopano also described how he was affected by this. He felt that although he performed well academically in high school, he struggled once he came to UCT. After encountering the UCT campus environment he went from being confident in himself and his academic ability to doubting himself and his work and his place at the university. He held his mostly white lecturers and classmates directly responsible for this. The final sentence of this extract where Kopano stated that he could “go on with such anecdotes for ever”, highlights that far from being isolated incidents, these events are commonplace in Kopano’s experience. This situation is similar to the participant in Rätzzel’s (2010) study who changed from being confident in school to insecure and less assertive once he moved on to higher education. What is interesting in Kopano’s personal reflection is that he *now* displays high levels of consciousness of the processes that were at play when he arrived and how they were affecting him and his black classmates. This suggests not only that different students may have varying levels of consciousness, as discussed above, but that individuals’ own levels of consciousness may change over time.

These descriptions from Sean and Kopano are similar to the findings of the studies discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two (de Beer et al., 2009; Gillborn et al., 2012; Higham, 2012; Howarth, 2002, 2004; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Phoenix ; 2009; Rätzzel, 2010; Vincent, 2008; Walton & Cohen, 2007; White, 2011; Woods, 2001). The self-silencing and disengagement displayed by the participants in this study, as well as the other studies mentioned, can have a direct effect on students’ understanding of their work, and thus their academic performance (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Woods, 2001). As Kopano remarked in the extract quoted above, when he was unsure about something, instead of asking a question and approaching his lecturers and tutors, he kept quiet, whereas a white student would probably have felt comfortable and able to voice his/her doubts and thus been able to learn from the experience. This might go some way to explaining why many black students are academically excluded or drop out before graduating, as was discussed in the previous chapter.

Beyond affecting students' academic success, this type of self-silencing has other problematic consequences. Firstly, it can inadvertently reinforce the negative stereotypes around black students. When black students refrain from contributing to class discussions, they are unintentionally reinforcing the idea that they have nothing to contribute (Howarth, 2002, 2004; Woods, 2001). Secondly, the class as a whole loses out on the potentially valuable input from black students.

***Distraction, inner struggle, and emotional cost.*** A further consequence of these affective experiences of a racialised campus is that they make demands on students' emotional energy. They require inner struggle and debate, which can be distracting and take students' focus away from their academic work. For example, Mareka described the effect that encountering stereotypes had on both his academic performance and his worldview:

*By far the most difficult year for me at UCT was my first year, not only because of the increased academic workload but the fact that I (...) was also constantly faced with stereotypes about how one is bound to fail and how one's race is looked down upon. Having to reflect on such questions not only affected my studies but also my outlook on life (Mareka, FG2).*

This quote illustrates how the stereotypes he encountered forced Mareka into a process of difficult self-reflection (evident in his use of the phrase "having to reflect"), which in turn affected his academic work and general worldview. Kopano expressed something similar in the extract from his personal reflection quoted above. Towards the end of the anecdote Kopano stated that it "seemed like a fight to be seen as equal". This need "to fight" could detrimentally affect his understanding of his work because it would presumably be tiring and distracting, taking his focus away from his academic work and inevitably affecting his performance. This finding is supported by other studies in the literature. Smith et al. (2007), go so far as to suggest that black university students, particularly male students, experience severe and traumatic psychological stress responses (e.g. anger, frustration, physical avoidance, exhaustion), symptomatic of "racial battle fatigue" because of their experiences of being black at historically white universities (p. 552). The experiences that black students undergo on campus are difficult to gloss over and require personal reflection, debate and inner strife. As Harper (2004) argues, many black students are unable to relax and just be students, which naturally affects their academic performance.

It is clear that the experiences many black students undergo at UCT can negatively affect them. However, black students are not passive in these situations, and they react in different ways which will be explored in detail in the next section.

## 5.2 Coping Mechanisms

It was evident in the data that although many of the participants had internalised stereotypes of blackness which affected their self-esteem, sense of belonging, and academic performance, they had also developed ways of dealing with the racialised experiences they encountered when coming to UCT. As Mpho remarked in his personal reflection:

*Now the general assumption on the campus halls is that “people of colour” don’t deserve to be here. That thought haunted me for a while and then I realised that all actions have reactions, and one must always be prepared for them, whether they be kind or not (Mpho, personal reflection).*

As was documented in the literature review, to restore their self-esteem and develop positive student identities, many of the participants described how they do indeed “prepare” for these experiences by developing coping mechanisms. The students in this study appear to draw on four different coping mechanisms, listed here, some of which are similar to those found in other studies (e.g. Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; McClain, 2014; McGee & Martin, 2011; Moore et al., 2003; Nghe & Mahalik, 2001; Read et al., 2003; Solórzano et al., 2002). These coping mechanisms will be explored in detail below (see methodology section 3.6, Chapter Three, for an overview of this section):

Coping Mechanisms:

1. Attempting to transform themselves (“becoming white”)
2. Distancing themselves from other black students and the label of disadvantage
3. Attempting to prove their worth
4. Suppressing these issues and refusing to engage with these issues

Interestingly, a few of the participants appeared to be fully aware that they were making use of these different coping mechanisms, and could engage in debate and discussion around them. Participants appeared to draw on more than one, sometimes contradictory coping mechanism, at different times and in different situations, with varying levels of success. As

Solórzano et al. (2002) point out, some of these coping mechanisms can be useful for students; however, there are also those that can be maladaptive. This will also be explored.

**5.2.1 “You have to become white”:** Transforming themselves. Some participants described feeling pressured to “become or act white” to be successful or even simply to get by on campus. This need to act in ways associated with whiteness is a direct consequence of the internalisation of the stereotypes of black inferiority discussed above:

*The environments in which we find ourselves, in order to succeed are white-dominant, Western and for you to become (...) successful (...) you have to become white, it's like a specific kind of black that becomes now successful (Sean, FG1).*

As is evident in Sean’s statement above, this can be linked directly to the dominance of whiteness on campus and the associations between whiteness and success. As Sean said below, whiteness is “the top of the hierarchy”, and thus “becoming white” is a potential way of climbing that hierarchy:

Sean: *It happens on a very self-conscious level, it's not something that we are aware of, but we do things in order to get this cultural institution's, um-*

Alice: *Approval?*

Sean: *Ja! And to get it because that's (...) the top of the hierarchy. You have to speak in this way and in order (...) get a specific-*

Nokuthula: *To be taken seriously*

Sean: *Ja! To be taken seriously, to get your presence known you have to perform in a way that is accustomed to the environment (FG1).*

As was seen in the literature review, this sense of having to become or act white has been documented in other studies of black students’ experience in higher education (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; McGee & Martin, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2002) and in another study conducted at UCT (UCT, 2005).

In the UCT study, some participants described feeling pressured to change to be in line with what UCT finds acceptable (i.e. whiteness). Sean and Kopano both gave examples of how they changed to be accepted. Kopano described how he got over his feelings of being inferior to his white classmates by becoming involved in a predominantly white sport:

*The way I got over it, very embarrassing, I decided to start playing rugby with the white guys, 'cause we have a rugby team and it's primarily white. I decided to start playing to become friends with them so that I know that I can interact on the same cognitive level, to get in my mind that we can think the same, so that in class when I talk they know that we've the same brain, thinking (...) and lo and behold it improved my mark by about 8 percent (Kopano, FG1).*

As was discussed in the previous chapter, sports teams at UCT are often divided along racial lines. Rugby is a “white” sport in the perceptions of many black students (see Sean’s photo-story, Photograph 13, in Chapter Four, p. 72). Furthermore, it is not just that Kopano joined a sports team to get to know his fellow classmates better; it is that he played a “white” sport so that his white classmates would accept him as their equal. Being accepted by white students is the underlying condition here. Additionally, this clearly elicited some anxiety and unease for Kopano because he described his motives for joining the rugby team as “very embarrassing”.

Sean described how he felt he had to change his “coloured” accent to a “white” accent when coming to UCT:

*How you have to change, and it's something that I struggled with especially going from a government school, a model C school, being with coloured friends. Acquiring a sense of coloured accent which was part of my home (...) I'll always keep my coloured accent, and then moving to a private school where you obviously have to change and then moving to UCT and taking it up another notch. That sense of disconnect of speaking to (...) speaking to my lecturers, having a sense of “okay, I'm speaking to my lecturer now, it's going to be very like sophisticated, very white”, but, (...) seeing a Supercare lady<sup>15</sup> there, and I can't (...) swap into my coloured accent because I don't feel comfortable in how my lecturer's going to perceive me. How am I going to get to a point at UCT where I'm actually going to be able to speak with a group of people no matter who they are and still see a coloured person and identify with them on a coloured level, and be able to swap my accent to actually (...) relate to them better? (Sean, FG1).*

Although the pressure to change his accent began when he went to a private school, it was amplified when he arrived at UCT. Sean felt he needed to replace his coloured accent with a white one in the presence of his white lecturer. White (2007) suggests that this is a dilemma many black students face in higher education environments. However, White does not refer to accents, but rather to academic discourses and styles of communication. He suggests that the style of communication accepted in academic spaces is typically western and “white”, and thus

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<sup>15</sup> *Supercare* is the cleaning company employed by UCT. The majority (possibly all) of the *Supercare* cleaners are black.

black students who can employ these discourse styles must choose between code-switching to the dominant and accepted discourse or having their contributions disregarded because they are not expressed in a way that their institution finds acceptable. The problem arises when, as Sean described, he became stuck in his white accent or institutionally approved communication style. Even with an individual he might actually feel more comfortable speaking to in his coloured accent, he felt he could not do so in the presence of his white lecturer.

This process of attempting to become white is what Fanon (1967) refers to as lactification. According to Fanon (1967), as black individuals internalise negative stereotypes about blackness, they develop feelings of inferiority which lead to lactification. Lactification is a desire and an attempt by black individuals to lessen their blackness and become whiter (Hook, 2004b). Examples would be Kopano's taking up a sport typically associated with whiteness and Sean's use of a white accent. In fact, Sean made a comment at a different point in the focus group which further illustrates the link between internalisation and lactification. He described the negative perceptions his classmates had of lecturers with black accents: "a lot of people just couldn't hear his accent and we just made the assumption that he can't teach" (FG1), which offers further insight into why he felt pressured not to use his coloured accent in class. If students see their black lecturers' accents treated with such disdain, it is not hard to imagine that they might be wary of being treated the same way for their own accents, and thus take on white accents when speaking in class. Hook (2004b) points out that Fanon's concept of lactification challenges the idea that there are distinct categories of "black" and "white". Rather, there are "degrees" of blackness, with the lighter degrees of blackness being most valued. This is evident in one of the comments Sean makes in the focus group, when he states "it's like a specific kind of black that becomes now successful" (FG1).

***Individual transformation: The cost of "becoming white"***. At one point in the focus group Kopano suggested that the ability to transform is beneficial, and places students who can do this at an advantage over those who cannot:

*Although it may seem like a turmoil of some sort (...) but it's advantageous to you because you now have that ability to make that transition so when you interact with people that will take you further because you have that ability. I was thinking for people who don't have that (...) for instance people in my class, they have standard accents (...) whoever they speak to. Sometimes it can get embarrassed like "oh my word, people can't understand him" and it's a bit tough in that scenario because (...) the people you change your accent for (...) you can*

*physically see the difference in the way they interact with them or the way they interact with someone who can change (Kopano, FG1).*

Similarly to Shorter-Gooden's (2004) participants, as mentioned in the literature review, in this quote Kopano highlights the potential benefits of assimilation. Although he admitted that the process of changing an accent can be a "turmoil", he described how students who can "lactify" their black accents in a university setting can achieve more in an academic environment, and are treated differently from students who cannot. For Kopano, at times this assimilation was an adaptive skill. Despite its potential usefulness, it is illustrative of a form of white privilege where white accents, and forms of dress, are taken as the standard for the university classroom and for interactions on campus. Students whose accents deviate from this so-called standard are expected to change or to risk continuing being misunderstood by their classmates and lecturers. There is no sense that other students and lecturers should make an effort to understand accents that they are unfamiliar with. While it may be true that students who choose to assimilate into whiteness are more readily accepted, the question is why the onus to change should be on black students in the first place. As raised in the literature review, this unbalanced approach leaves the university in the clear, and the exclusionary culture remains unchanged (Malefo, 2000; Read, 2003). This imbalance was discussed by Xolela and Kopano in the focus group:

Kopano: *And the challenge for them [Referring to the university, and white students and lecturers] is just acceptance. Like, "ok fine, I'll let them"- kind of thing. And for the other one [referring to black students] it's trying to get to a place of acceptance as opposed to having a common place we are all trying to change our minds towards. For me, that's scary already because now when I start checking my thinking (...) I believe I'm pretty transformed. But that my mind-set already starts, my mind-set is already trying to as opposed to, you know what I mean? Ja. It's a bit scary actually*

Xolela: *So is there a place, okay, this is a question for everybody, is there a place that we can reach where we're not struggling for whiteness as success? Or is there a way to get where speaking English and doing all this and whiteness, isn't associated with success? (...) Because I don't feel like there is (FG1).*

Xolela and Kopano were both fairly pessimistic about the future of transformation in higher education. Xolela could not imagine this racialised hierarchy not existing. Kopano hinted at his own internalisation of these problematic ideas around transformation. He described himself as "pretty transformed" (he was involved with transformation initiatives on campus, and as head

student of his residence, he was pushing for more transformation and integration). However, he still found that at times his thinking was affected by the dominant discourses of transformation and the idea that it is black students who need to change, so much so that he described the effect they have on his thinking as “scary”.

It is effort that black students need to go through, that white students do not, as Sean remarked:

*All I'm saying is that our challenges are different as black people, and I think that we should acknowledge it and see that the institutional and cultural context that we have to mould ourselves and merge ourselves and stretch ourselves, is a bit more harder than for the average white person (Sean, FG1).*

Kopano's earlier example of joining the predominantly white rugby team had the positive outcome of his classmates seeing him as equal (or perhaps Kopano at least then felt confident that they did). However, he was the one who had to put himself in the predominantly white space. Sean pointed out this imbalance to Kopano in the focus group: “The fact that you have to choose to play rugby in order to communicate with white people”. The effort here was on the part of Kopano, as he chose to play a sport he would not normally choose to play so that he could achieve some transformation in his class.

After all the effort black students expend on assimilating into the dominant campus culture of whiteness, often students will still not be white enough. As Fanon (1967) explains, this process of lactification can never be successful. As Lerato said in her earlier photo-story (Photograph 12 on p. 93), “black people are most of the time playing catch up”. What she implied was that they never actually catch up, and the gap will never be breached. In a similar way, one of the participants in Rätzl's (2010) study who speaks about his experiences as an immigrant student at a business school in Sweden describes how, although he now fulfils the criteria necessary for acceptance in this environment (changing how he speaks and so forth), he is still not granted the status that was supposed to come with that change.

In addition to never being “white enough”, many black students will face instances where they are now no longer “black enough”. What became evident in the study is that when black students act in ways that are associated with whiteness, they at times face criticism and rejection from their black peers on campus, or from their families and communities when they go back home. Thus, they are stuck in what Lerato described as a “tug-of-war”: never seen to be “white enough”, and yet also never seen as “black enough”. Lerato described her experience

of being a black student from the townships who has attended a Model C school and then a historically white university:

*I went to a model C school (...) but I grew up in a township. So, (...) you don't really know where you fit in because your friends at school (...) you're not really white enough because you are not white, but yet at home, you're kind of, not black. So, it's like a constant tug-of-war type thing. But I think (...) for me, I have black friends now but it took a while for them to warm up to me as a person, just seeing how I speak or my interests (...), because I think people always categorise things. Like, reading Harry Potter, that's a white thing to do and you know, eating pap, that's a black thing to do. So, it's always trying to break the categories and the (...) stereotypes (Lerato, FG2).*

Lerato has dealt with a constant struggle to try to “fit in” with both white and black groups of friends. Mareka described a similar feeling to Lerato’s “tug-of-war” struggle:

*There are those black people who talk, (...) what we would call the coconuts<sup>16</sup> [laughs] and so you find that sometimes with your black group you don't want to seem too white. [Laughs]. Ja, you want to make sure that you hold your ground, and again with your white groups you don't want to seem too black [all laugh]. You are always trying to balance out what to actually be (Mareka, FG2).*

Mareka explained the careful balance he navigates between how he needs to act to be accepted by his white friends and how he needs to act to be accepted by his black friends. In a similar way, Mpho described the reactions he gets to his apparently “white” way of speaking. He is seen as “too white” or as a “coconut” by other black people, and yet he is treated condescendingly by white people:

Josie: *And what's too white?*

Mpho: *Ah me! Every day of my life apparently.*

Mareka: *Ja! You are! [Laughing, nodding in agreement with Mpho]*

Mpho: *[pulls open mouthed blank stare]. Those are the stares I get like, “but you're black! I didn't notice” (...) I speak like this. It's how I grew up, the environment that I come from. The things I did are probably a bit different from others, but that's life. You have difference, regardless of my culture as a black person, I have my own as a person. You know? And people don't see that, you know, and then you get into spaces where you are among your own*

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Coconut’ is a derogatory term used to describe black people who are perceived to act in “white ways”, and thus be black on the outside but white on the inside, like the fruit.

*black people and people are like, “oh coconut! Look at you!” and I’m like, I’m a human being who happens to speak English this way, it’s just how I’m speaking. It’s me! And then obviously you get white people who are like – ah, that’s the biggest pet peeve, it literally arouses all the emotion in me – “you speak so well” [pause]. For a? I don’t mind if you are going to say, “I love the sound of your voice, I like the way that you raise your voice or I like the way that you speak, you know, you are articulate”. “You speak so well!” For what!? (FG2).*

In the extract above, Mpho described how what may be intended as a compliment is offensive to him. Being told that he speaks well and is articulate upset him because it implies that because he is black he should not speak well. Furthermore, in the above interaction Mareka directly confirmed part of what Mpho was describing when he animatedly agreed with Mpho (albeit jokingly) that he *is* “too white”. In the other focus group, Sean described a similar encounter when he went back home during the holidays:

*I think my personal problem is going back home and now suddenly you find that no one can relate to you, and you can’t relate to them because suddenly you find that (...) you’re an ‘intellectual’ now. You are, “you don’t speak like us anymore” and I struggle to now go back into that mode or relating to my family and my friends and home (Sean, FG1).*

The cost for Sean of taking on a “white accent” is evident. As has been discussed previously, for Sean this accent was essential for being taken seriously on campus; however, it is not without repercussions. He now feels as though relating to his family and friends is a struggle.

Comparable findings have been documented by Bangeni and Kapp (2005) in their longitudinal case study of 20 black undergraduate students’ experiences at UCT. Many of their participants described similar experiences of facing rejection and hostility from their communities when they returned home for the holidays. Bangeni and Kapp (2005) draw on Bhabha’s (1994) concept of being “unhomed” to explain this. Bhabha uses this term to explain the experience of colonial hybridity in which an individual is stuck in a “doubling dissembling image of being in two places at once” (p. 44). As Bangeni and Kapp (2005) describe with their participants, when black students come into the university space they straddle multiple and conflicting desires (This is the tug-of-war feeling Lerato describes). They are caught between wanting access to the dominant university culture (which is that of the former oppressor), and a desire to preserve their solidarity with the communities and cultures from which they come. As a result, students become “unhomed”. For some black students this might cause them to feel

that they do not belong in either place (their home environment or UCT), and in some instances they experience a loss of identity. As Sean poignantly remarked about changing his accent: “obviously it’s part of adapting, but to what extent are we actually disconnecting from who we are?” (Sean, FG1). However, as Bangeni and Kapp (2005) point out, being “unhomed” does not necessarily suggest homelessness but rather symbolises the ambivalent space that black students inhabit as they straddle these varied and conflicting discourses. They argue that the experience of being “unhomed” does not lead as much to a loss of identity or disconnection for black students (as Sean suggests above) but rather to a continual and fluid repositioning of themselves and their identities in relation to the different discourses they encounter. This is reflected with the participants in this study, summed up perhaps in Mareka’s comment: “You are always trying to balance out what to actually be”. This hints at the agency that black students have, to an extent, when adapting their identities to the academic environment. In many ways Bhabha’s concept of being unhomed is similar to the process of “double consciousness”, with the sense of moving between two contradictory spaces.

**5.2.2 “For me it was very different”: Distancing.** Besides leading students to want to “become white”, the internalisation of stereotypes of black inferiority can also cause some students to distance themselves from other black students and the label of “disadvantaged”. For example, all of the participants thought that affirmative action was necessary; however, some tried to distance themselves from it, by describing it as something that *other* black students need and benefit from. For example, in the following quote, Nokuthula was careful to separate herself from other black students whom she perceived as disadvantaged:

*I don’t know. I never felt that way. [Referring to a comment another student made about feeling insecure] I think because I knew that as well as I did, regardless of whether I was classified as previously disadvantaged or not, I would still have got in! And I think I got to the stage where I knew I could prove it. And that self-assurance as well, also carried me through (...) for me it was very different. I came from a model C school and when I got here (...) you kind of group into your own when you compare yourself to other black students who might of not come from model C schools. I know you mentioned your colleagues who were excluded from rural Eastern Cape [addressing Mareka] (...) and if they fall into that category then perhaps I should, not distance myself from them, but be aware of the fact that I know I would have done well, but looking at someone else I can understand their situation. I don’t know for me, it’s different, I guess it goes back to the, my background at home and stuff (...) I’m not so sensitive to that kind of stuff (Nokuthula, FG1).*

Although Nokuthula stated that she was not trying to distance herself from black students who fall into the category of disadvantaged, she ended up doing that with her suggestion that that unlike other black students (such as those who come from rural Eastern Cape), she would have been accepted into UCT and done well regardless of whether the current admissions policy was in place or not. Similarly, Xolela stressed how she did not benefit from the race-based admissions policy because she is a foreign student:

*I had this issue before is I think there is a complacency in the ignorance about what disadvantaged means and what UCT is trying to do to address that (...) like the assumption that because I'm brown, I was given a somewhat easier route to get into. I'm a foreigner! So, I'm basically the same as a white male. So I have no privileges at all. It was basically harder for me to get into UCT than most people. So to assume that, like just to assume that because I'm black and that I (...) got in easy and someone else who isn't at UCT deserves to be here more (Xolela, FG1).*

It could be said that in the above quotes the participants are constructing a counter argument to the negative discourse and accompanying discourse of “all black students are only here because of the admissions policy”. These participants re-presented themselves as receiving their places through merit and hard work. However, although they attempted to challenge and resist the ambivalent discourses for themselves, they have left them unchallenged for other black students. For example, with Xolela’s statement above there is an implication that, although she did not unduly benefit from the admissions policy, other black students do.

Furthermore, it is problematic that the participants felt the need to defend their positions at UCT and distance themselves from other black students. Nokuthula’s self-assurance, for example, only came from believing that she was not one of the black students who benefited from the admissions policy because she was from a different background. Considering the prevalence of the stereotypes associated with affirmative action and the subsequent judgement that black students’ experiences, it is unsurprising that so many of the participants wanted to stress how they did not benefit from the admissions policy. However, black students should not have to be defending why they were admitted into UCT in the first place. For example, it is unlikely that a white student would feel the need to defend their university acceptance. It appears that when black students are given a place at UCT it is assumed to be because of the admissions policy, and when a white student is given a place it is assumed to be purely a result of merit. Similarly, when a white student is denied a place, it is thought to be due once again to the admissions policy, as Lihle remarked: “I have a friend who (...) got 9 A’s in Matric and she

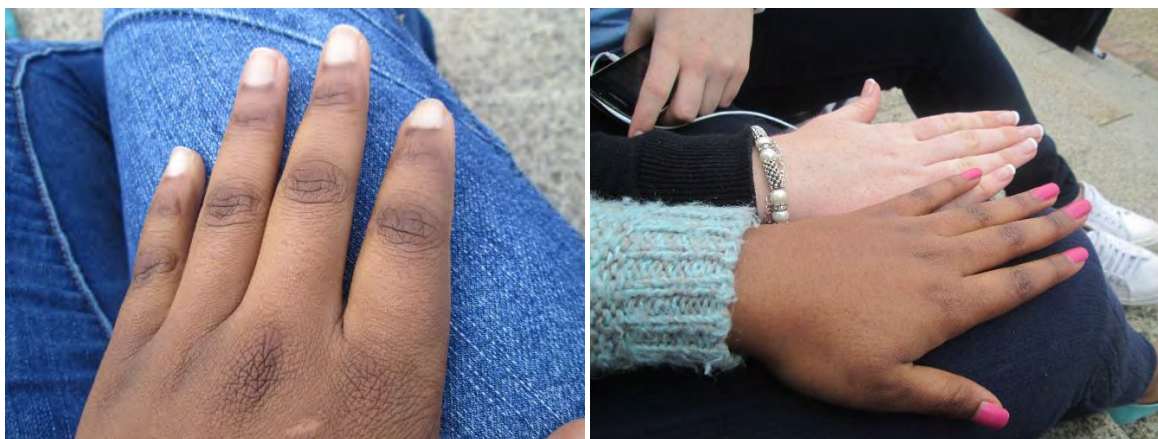
wanted to do Medicine but she couldn't get in. I don't know, probably because she's white or something" (FG 2). As can be seen in the following quote from the focus group, it is also clear that some participants did not like to think of themselves as previously-disadvantaged, even though they officially were (that is, during apartheid they would have been denied certain privileges due to the colour of their skin):

*Previously disadvantaged (...) takes away from the meaning (...) I went through a very rigorous scholarship process last year, and a lot of the time it was mentioned that it was targeted for previously disadvantaged people and you just assume they are black. I know personally in another sense that I'm a lot more advantaged than people that didn't get it, we were both black so it was just a matter of picking. So, I feel like in terms of defining what that means, it becomes a problem because then everyone assumes one thing, whereas there are so many different things that can pull under that category (Nokuthula, FG 1).*

The above quote helps to explain why Nokuthula would want to distance herself from that label. She mentioned that "then everyone assumes one thing". She did not want to be seen as a disadvantaged black student, because of the negative assumptions and stereotypes around that label.

This can also be seen in Lihle's first photo-story which looked at the application forms for her department and the different point requirements per race. In her caption she questioned whether she only got her place due to her race (see Photograph 2 on p. 46). She followed that photo-story up with the one below:

Photographs 17 and 18: *No Title*



Caption: *Other than that, only the colour of my skin makes me black*

(Lihle, Photo-story 3)

In this photo-story possibly Lihle wanted to draw attention to the fact that the only differences between her and her friend in the photograph is their skin colour. However, there are hints of something beyond this. In her caption she stated that only the colour of her skin makes her black, which suggests that other aspects of herself (presumably things like her personality, ability, background) do not “make her black”. However, this implies that there is something wrong with “being black” in ways beyond just the colour of her skin. Considering the prevalence of negative stereotypes about black students, it is unsurprising that she felt this way and wanted to assert this. It appears that this is a subtle distancing from the negative representations associated with being a black student. This student did not want to see herself as black perhaps in terms of the ways that black is represented on campus, suggesting the double consciousness that Du Bois (1999) refers to. What Lihle expressed here is similar to what some participants in Feagin and Sike’s (1995) study explain. One of their participants described encountering stereotypes about black students’ writing ability from one of his lecturers which made him “not want to be black” (p. 94). Feagin and Sikes (1995) suggest that one of the most serious consequences of encountering these kinds of stereotypes for black students is the rejection of their “own group” and ultimately of themselves. Rätzzel (2010) found something similar in her interviews mentioned earlier. One of the two young men interviewed actively sought to distance himself from other students with whom he shared the experience of being labelled as an “immigrant” (or being of non-Swedish descent).

In some instances, what appears to go hand in hand with this distancing is projection onto other black students. According to Fanon (1967), projection is a process in which some black people manage their feelings of inferiority by projecting them onto others. This also enables them to avoid confronting feelings of guilt (which arise from internalisation). In the face of negative stereotypes, individuals may attempt to construct a positive self-concept by viewing themselves in relation to (supposedly inferior) others (Gibson, 2003; Hook, 2004b). As Sean described himself doing in the following quote:

*Sometimes I’ll find myself projecting onto others. I’ll find someone who is worse than me. I’ll find that black girl who feels more insecure than what I am [laughter] and try and project my insecurity onto her (...) I don’t do it directly, I do it very subtly, I do it in my own mind, “no, it’s fine, can I help you?” (Sean, FG1).*

As Sean explained here, finding someone else who was struggling more than he was, and then offering to help them eased his insecurities. In this way, Sean's projection helped to distribute the guilt he feels about taking a white student's place (Hook, 2004b). Again, this may have helped to make Sean feel more secure in the moment but it did not target the underlying causes of these insecurities. Through the process of projection many black students may unintentionally sustain and contribute towards the ambivalent discourses of transformation and thus their own marginalisation. The problematic racialised campus hierarchies are left intact; Sean has merely changed his group of comparison from other white students to struggling black students. This is similar to the experiences of the student in Rätzzel's (2010) study: he distanced himself from the label of "immigrant" and so certain spaces in Swedish society were opened up to him that remained closed to some of his peers. This individualising strategy came at a cost because he had to work constantly on the image he presented.

**5.2.3 "You have to prove yourself!" Attempting to prove their worth.** Some of the participants felt that they needed to prove themselves in order to overcome the stereotypes associated with being black and to be taken seriously on campus. They felt that if they achieved academically and worked hard, then they might finally be seen as deserving of their place at university (as opposed to having got it in "unfairly" through the admissions policy). This was raised by Nokuthula:

*No, I think you have to prove yourself! (...) At the end of the day, if you work well and you understand what's going on, you can work with people and communicate your ideas clearly, people will see your worth, whatever was written on paper. You have to step into it. I think there's some sort of assistance in getting us this far but if you can move forward to proving yourself to be worthy of such a place at UCT, then it should be fine! (Nokuthula, FG1).*

Here, Nokuthula asserted that black students should prove themselves worthy of their places at UCT. In her view, if they can manage to do this, then they will be "fine" or presumably not fall victim to the self-esteem doubts, insecurity and self-silencing that many black students experience. This is in line with the findings of other studies from the literature review that have documented how many black students in higher education attempt to prove themselves academically in the face of stereotypes (Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Griffin, 2006; McClain, 2014; McGee & Martin, 2011; Moore et al., 2003; Solórzano et al., 2002).

However, there are difficulties with this coping mechanism. Firstly, as Xolela pointed out in the quote below, it is unlikely that students proving themselves will be able to change a firmly held stereotype about black students in general:

*But I think that the issue is the initial encounter you have with them [people who hold the stereotypes]. I think often they have the initial encounter and they decide who you are and what you are, from that. And it's very hard to change their minds, I mean, it can happen but it's not likely that you proving yourself will change (Xolela, FG1).*

In McGee and Martin's (2011) study, for example, participants describe how they had initially thought that they would be able to make stereotypes about their ability disappear through consistent high achievement; however, the participants began to realise that no matter how much they achieved, the stereotypes have "unlimited durability and longevity" (p. 1364). Secondly, some participants describe how, as high-achieving black students they were seen as an anomaly, and the stereotypes were left intact. Similarly, in Feagin and Sykes' (1995) study, in which they interviewed black students in predominantly white universities in the US, one participant described pain that came with academic achievement: becoming viewed as a "strange bird among your own people" (p. 93). Their academic achievement was seen as something remarkable, out of the ordinary, and atypical. The numerous newspaper articles, the heated media debates, and the discussions on campus that negatively represent students mean that stereotypes are in place long before students arrive on campus. Thus, students are already "black" students with all the attached stereotypes before they have had a chance to be students.

An explanation for the durability of stereotypes and the futility of attempting to prove them wrong can be drawn from decolonising psychologies, particularly in the writing of Homi Bhabha. Bhabha (1994) describes stereotyping as a process of identification which moves between the assumption that something is already known and the assumption that it needs to be repeated. A stereotype is never fully stable, and thus it constantly needs to be reiterated, which goes some way in explaining why stereotypes are so prevalent on campus. According to Bhabha (1994), stereotypes are paradoxical in that they serve to exaggerate the distance and difference from the "other" or the object of the stereotype, yet they rely on a framework of similarity which enables them to be fixed and reliably known. Thus, stereotypes are innately contradictory. The concept of disavowal illustrates how attempts to challenge racist logic are met with a re-statement of that same formula. Disavowal is a means of managing contradictory beliefs and attitudes that are held simultaneously, usually with the formula of "I believe x, I just

choose, every once in a while, to believe not x anyway” (Hook, 2005b, p. 18). This clarifies how racism and discrimination can persist despite being critically challenged and disputed and helps to explain the difficulty black students may encounter when attempting to prove stereotypes wrong.

For example, if an individual holds the stereotypical view that all black students are lazy and unintelligent, when they encounter a black student who is proving otherwise, they will not change their stereotyped belief but will instead think, “I believe that black students are lazy and unintelligent, except for this one case in which I don’t believe it”. One of the comments that Sean made in the focus group illustrates this process:

Sean: *I get it all the time at UCT, “[Name], you are not that kind of coloured”. Always, always!*

Josie: *What is “that kind of coloured”?*

Sean: *Exactly. That is my question too but obviously I understand what they are alluding to. That kind of coloured is one that fits the stereotype of coloured (FG1).*

Sean does not fit the stereotyped image of a “coloured” person that some of the people he encounters on campus hold, and thus instead of revising and correcting their stereotypes, they position Sean as a different “kind of coloured”, and leave their stereotypes intact.

***The cost of proving their worth.*** It is also vital to consider the cost to students of putting so much effort into proving themselves worthy of a place at UCT. Some critics have focused on the positive aspects of this coping mechanism. There are many black students who are motivated to work hard and achieve well academically by these stereotypes (Griffin, 2006); however, using stereotypes as a motivation is a “tenuous balance” that can come at an emotional and psychological cost for students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 521; Solórzano et al., 2002). Even the phrase that Nokuthula used above, to describe what she feels black students need to do when they arrive on campus, hints at the effort required (“You have to step into it”). Kopano raised this concern in the focus group discussion:

*Living in that kind of environment, every day you wake up to go prove yourself, as opposed to the person who’s going to learn. (...) Your outcomes are going to be very different. The person who is going to learn is just going to be free. Free to ask questions (FG1).*

As Kopano said, black students, unlike white students, are not free to be students. They are required to take on the stressful burden of (futilely) attempting to disprove the stereotypes attached to blackness. This is in line with the findings of numerous other studies (Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; McGee & Martin, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2002). Proving stereotypes wrong can lead to great academic success for black students but it is also important to consider, as Solórzano et al. (2002) point out, that many black students who devote their time and energy to disproving stereotypes often “push themselves to exhaustion and still are not able to reap the fair rewards for their work” (p. 67).

**5.2.4 “Ignorance is bliss”: Suppressing and ignoring.** Another coping mechanism that students in this study sometimes make use of is refusing to think about or respond to these often upsetting issues. It takes significant effort and hard work for students to get by on campus. There is much requiring their attention and energy: coping with the academic workload, maintaining their grades, ensuring they receive Duly Performed (DP)<sup>17</sup>; often being away from home for the first time; being in an unfamiliar environment; money concerns; relationship and friendship issues; the adjustment and difference between school and university (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Sennet et al., 2003). In the face of so much else competing for their attention and time, it is understandable that many students would prefer not to engage with the often distressing issues around transformation. Often, students may not have the emotional energy left over to deal with these issues (Solórzano et al., 2002). It is easier to suppress their emotions and concerns, particularly at a first-year level, as Lihle said: “I’m just focusing on my studies; I’m just trying to find my feet” (FG2). This echoes the findings of other studies, such as that of Gildersleeve et al. (2011) whose participants often found it easier to ignore racist stereotypes than to expend energy that could be focused on their academic work in confronting them. This approach was shared by other participants in this study. For example, Sean had the following to say about how he could focus on his work:

*There’s all these systems at play and (...) at the end, as much as you’re trying to prove yourself, you’re here to learn and I think what Kopano said, so nicely, you come here and you learn and especially at this level you really want to engage with the work and you forget all about it [referring to the transformation issues] and I think that’s how in terms of performance you try do your utmost best (Sean, FG1).*

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<sup>17</sup> Students are required to attend a certain number of tutorials and lectures and to submit all their assignments before they will be given DP and allowed to write their exams.

As Sean said here, the main focus of university students should be to learn, and thus for some students this coping mechanism might be a lifesaver. If students were not able to disengage and suppress these issues then they would spend all their time at university in a state of conflict and frustration (Solórzano et al., 2002). Kopano described how this attitude is dominant in his class:

*I just look at my class now and you're bothering someone. They don't need that issue in their life, they need to graduate and get their degree and make money and go off into their corner and be comfortable by themselves and let the world sort itself out (Kopano, FG1).*

However, it might not always be possible to “forget all about it”, as Kopano said. It is important to consider how sustainable this means of coping is and what effect suppressing these issues and refusing to engage with them may have in the long term. For example, in the above quote, Sean suggested that forgetting about these issues is essential for being able to focus on his work; however, he immediately follows up this sentence by describing the demoralising dynamics in his class:

*But it's still, it's very demotivating to know that you, white students are doing so well and black students in your class are not performing as well as they do (Sean, FG1).*

The fact that Sean raised this immediately after stating that he could forget these issues brings into question how easily he can forget. Similarly, the following discussion highlights how difficult suppressing these issues is in the long term:

Lerato: *I'd say we all sit in class and we kind of shove it just somewhere deep, deep down and lock it away and then we just kind of function, and then-*

Mpho: *That's what they tell you, what they try to teach you*

Lerato: *yeah, and like there's other things to help you cope as well. There's academics and you're trying to get DP and you just- [laughter from group]*

Mpho: *Gotta hustle! Dude!*

Lerato: *And you keep shoving and you keep shoving and you've just kind of go on this (...) ignorance is bliss type thing; whereas it's there! I think all of us feel it, I really do. Like, even white students, like everybody. Everybody feels it we just kinda-*

Mpho: *It's whether or not you want to acknowledge it*

Lerato: *Yeah, and we're just polite and you know, we're UCT students. We are all equal and so we act on it, you know we act on that statement but it's there. It really is (FG2).*

What Lerato suggested here is that although it may be possible to suppress these feelings for a time and to continue with university life in a state of “ignorance is bliss”, these issues will still be there, “underneath the surface” as Mpho stated, whether they are acknowledged or not. Lerato described how students on campus act on the assumption that they are all equal, that transformation has been achieved, but inequality underpins their experiences and interactions. At another stage in the focus group discussion, Lerato raised a similar issue:

*You expect to find some racial tension but at the same time you almost don't want to. So, it's kind of like an internal battle (...) fighting this Utopic view of racial integration and happiness, but at the same time a very real psychological mind-set (Lerato, FG2).*

These issues are evident on campus; as Lerato has suggested, they are expected. However, students do not want this to be the case. Buying into the vision of a transformed campus is easier and less painful. However, maintaining this utopian perspective is difficult, as Lerato explained. It is an internal battle in which presumably the reality will eventually become too obvious to ignore.

In her personal reflection, Lerato explored this issue again and further explained why many black students would prefer to remain silent about and suppress these issues:

*I also feel that there are feelings that stirred by talking about apartheid that are not addressed because we all “should” have moved on from this and it is in a way frowned upon to have an emotional response to these kind of things because it will look like you are still dwelling in the past. So people do not deal with their feeling and pretend that everything is fine and it ends up seeping through in subtle ways, one of them being (...) a kind of self-segregation. I feel that a lot of black people are still angry and a lot of white people feeling guilt but these feeling are pushed deep down into the self (Lerato, personal reflection).*

There is little space or opportunity to talk about these issues on campus, or, as Xolela suggested in the focus group, these discussions happen but only in certain spaces:

*There is a space but the ones who are discussing it are not the ones who need to hear about it (...) but they [referring to those people who do need to hear about it] are not necessarily going to be in the places where it is allowed to be discussed. That's the problem (Xolela, FG1).*

Often when these kinds of issues are raised, black students are accused of being over-emotional, hypersensitive and focusing on the past. “The past” in this instance refers to apartheid. This does not acknowledge the continued legacy of racialised inequality that is felt today. As Lerato stated, she was made to feel like she “should have moved on” and reacting in any other way is “frowned upon”, which served to undermine her experiences on campus. This ties into what Gildersleeve et al. (2011) refer to as the “Am I going crazy narrative?” in which their participants described being made to feel crazy because their negative experiences as black students were unacknowledged by their white peers and lecturers. Here, it is interesting to look at one of Mpho’s remarks in the focus group exchange with Lerato above. In reference to Lerato’s comment about shoving down her emotions, he stated “that's what they tell you, what they try to teach you”. It is unclear who “they” are but it is evident that Mpho felt that not reacting to issues on campus and suppressing feelings was strongly encouraged and reinforced. Perhaps “they” are other white students and academic staff, which would be in line with Lerato’s comments in her personal reflection. Perhaps, “they” refers to the institution as a whole and the discourses that are dominant on campus. At any rate, it appears that Mpho felt that not reacting and maintaining the status quo was something that is encouraged by outside forces.

Considering the many stresses involved with being a university student (never mind being a black university student), as well as the reaction black students may face when they do try to raise these issues, it is understandable that many students would prefer not to engage with issues around transformation or confront negative stereotypes, and would prefer to suppress these issues (Solórzano et al., 2002). Students’ primary focus at university should be on learning. Unfortunately, suppressing these issues may not always be possible in the long term, and over time, as Lerato stated, “It ends up seeping through in subtle ways”. This suppression and silence can often have detrimental consequences for students (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Although it should not be their sole responsibility, black students *do* have a role to play in engaging with transformation issues and making their voices heard, and hopefully changing their university for the better. As Xolela remarked in the focus group: “I don’t think we are the ones who need to hear about it. I think we are the ones who need to go and tell people”. Perhaps the important thing here is developing the critical skills necessary to know when to suppress and ignore these issues and when to confront and engage with them (Solórzano et al., 2002).

### 5.3 Resistance Strategies

Coping mechanisms typically help black students survive university life *within* the framework of the negative discourses that seek to marginalise them. The coping mechanisms discussed above can be problematic because they leave the ambivalent discourses around transformation and stereotypes about black students unchallenged, and at times they are even complicit in these very discourses. Another perhaps more effective way that black students respond is through resistance strategies. These include active engagement with issues around their own identity and transformation; and re-presenting themselves and their university spaces (Read et al., 2003). Such strategies seek to resist and change negative discourses. However, before students can actively engage with these discourses and their marginalising effects, they need to be aware of them. When students are made conscious of and understand how these processes can undermine their experiences, it is far easier for them to feel solidarity with other black students on campus and hopefully to develop ways of resisting and re-representing themselves.

**5.3.1 Critical consciousness.** The importance of awareness can be explained using Biko's concept of black consciousness. Black consciousness holds that political freedom can only be achieved once black minds are psychologically and culturally liberated (Hook, 2004b). Biko (2004) emphasises the need to overturn years of negative black self-image and instil in black people a sense of pride in themselves, their culture, their values, their religions and their worldviews. Black consciousness is essentially a form of solidarity and shared experience amongst black people, where people rally together and develop a sense of hope and community feeling. In doing so, individuals and groups can move towards self-determination and empowerment. An important aspect of black consciousness is the development of a critical consciousness (Hook, 2004b; Manganyi, 1973). Consciousness is a heightened awareness of "oppressive political conditions of existence" (Hook, 2004b, p. 105) and a "mutual knowledge" of black suffering under white domination (Manganyi, 1973, p. 19). By gaining an awareness and realistic understanding of the oppressive obstacles in their lives, individuals can see how to overcome these obstacles. This critical consciousness is developed through recurring cycles of action and reflection (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Campbell, 2004).

It was clear in this study that the development of a critical consciousness is an important step for black students in developing a positive identity about themselves and resisting the stereotypes that they encounter. In the process of participating in a photovoice study, and

sharing their experiences with other black students, some participants began to develop more of an awareness of these issues than they had had before, which illustrates how the photovoice process itself can be a strategy for developing consciousness. For example, at the end of the focus group when participants were asked if they would like to add anything, Lihle, who was a first-year student at the time, made the following comment:

Lihle: *Well, I could say that this discussion has been informative for me. I wasn't really aware of all these things going on. I think I've been in the dark for quite a while now (...)*

Josie: *But you've only had a semester here.*

Mpho, Lerato, Mareka: *Ja!*

Mpho: *Don't worry!*

Lihle: *Maybe I'll experience this or, next year-*

Mpho: *Hopefully*

Lihle: *Hopefully not!*

Josie: *How do you feel having heard all of this?*

Lihle: *Oh well it's a pity (...) that all of this is happening (...) back home, people talk about UCT like, "Oh my gosh! This diverse place, I mean amazing place! There's no racism there whatsoever! People there are equal. You'll find white people learning Zulu and Xhosa. That place is amazing, guys you know!" and that's the mentality I had coming here. I didn't really want to, I don't know maybe I didn't want to find out about this, but I just I don't know, I ignored whatever came my way, whatever racism thing that came my way. Um, I don't know [sighs]. It's sad! But hey, it's happening (FG2).*

This extract from the focus group illustrates how many students coming into UCT are unaware of the issues they may face on campus, and during first year some of the concerns (such as those expressed by the older students) might not be immediately obvious. However, they will become conscious of these issues as they progress through their degrees. For example, Sean described the development of his consciousness as he progressed through his undergraduate degree:

*I mean I used to feel so confident. These things I weren't aware of, and then you become aware of them and you become your insecurity. I can speak about it because I'm able to deal with those insecurities, that's why I'm so open about it (...) when I came into first year I was all about, "I'm here because I have a reason to be here and chosen because, hello!*

*I'm clearly doing well" [laughs] (...) but when you become aware of these things its (...) the internal process of transformation (...) because I've been grappling with it for such a long time now, I'm able to speak about it quite freely (...) insecurities (...) don't play a role on me now, because if it did, I wouldn't have been able to speak about it (Sean, FG1).*

Sean depicted how confident he was in his first year when he was unaware of these issues, and how they began to affect him once he became aware. It could be said that continuing in a state of ignorance may be better for students' self-esteem and self-image; however, it is clear from the discussion above of students' attempts at suppressing these issues that the ignorance cannot be sustained. In fact, although developing a consciousness around these issues may initially be difficult and painful for students (certainly Lihle's comments above seem somewhat demoralised and confused), only once they are aware of what they are facing can they develop constructive ways of engaging with and resisting these issues. As Sean stated, the awareness may have initially damaged his confidence but it also enabled him to grapple with these debates and to get to the point where he can speak openly about what he has experienced. Thus, his insecurities do not affect him as they once did. Again at a later stage in the focus group, Sean described how important developing a consciousness was for him, in particular for enabling him to understand his need to project onto other students:

*Where are you projecting your insecurities to? I think it's something that you have to be aware of, and once you're aware of it you can really take it and you can tell yourself, "(...) it's not my fault (...) that I feel this way" (Sean, FG1).*

As Sean's quote here demonstrates, a critical consciousness enables students to let go of the guilt that comes with the internalisation of discourses of black inferiority and the idea that they are undeserving of their places at UCT. It also enables students to offer resistance to the stereotypes they encounter and the dominance of whiteness in this institution.

**5.3.2 Resistance through re-presentation.** As was indicated in Chapter Four, in their focus group discussions and personal reflections the participants in this study had begun to offer alternative discourses in resistance to the dominant "black inferiority stereotype" by problematising the whiteness of the institution. This section will explore the participants' resistance in more detail, looking at how they used the photovoice process and their photo-stories to re-present aspect of their experience and identity and to take back the discourse around transformation.

Throughout the data set, there are instances of students offering resistance. For example, Xolela described how she performed resistance in white spaces: the example she gave was of being the only black person in a restaurant but she also brought this attitude to campus:

*It might be a consequence of my upbringing but I have a very defiant nature because (...) like the whole thing of going to a restaurant and you're the only black people there (...) I've always had that, my entire life (...) because I'm the only person who's black I'm going to show them that I belong there as much as they do, so, I'm going to sit there and we'll be loud (...) The way you treated me has now made me defiant (Xolela, FG1).*

She actively refused to be made to feel that she did not belong in a certain space because of the colour of her skin, or to change her behaviour to avoid perpetuating stereotypes. In the exchange below, Mpho offered resistance in his response to Lerato's concerns about the admissions policy:

Lerato: *You want to know, okay, I worked hard and because my matric results in my opinion are good enough to get me here, but then it's like you're second-guessing it because of the fact that I'm black, you know?*

Josie: *Has anyone else experienced that kind of second-guessing?*

Mpho: *Oh, I think it's the most – no offense [addressing Lerato] – it's self-defeating because they stole our whole people. So, you stole a spot? You're fine! You're fine! [Laughter] (FG2).*

Here Mpho re-presented an alternative view of the admissions policy. Instead of feeling unworthy, he re-presented the policy (albeit jokingly) as justified considering the history of inequality in South Africa. Part of students' resistance is in fact, re-presenting themselves and transformation on their own terms. Many participants used their photo-stories to do this, which illustrates how photovoice can be a resistance tool. Sean did this in the photo-story in which he hinted at his hope for the future, and his construction of how transformation and the admissions policy should be viewed:

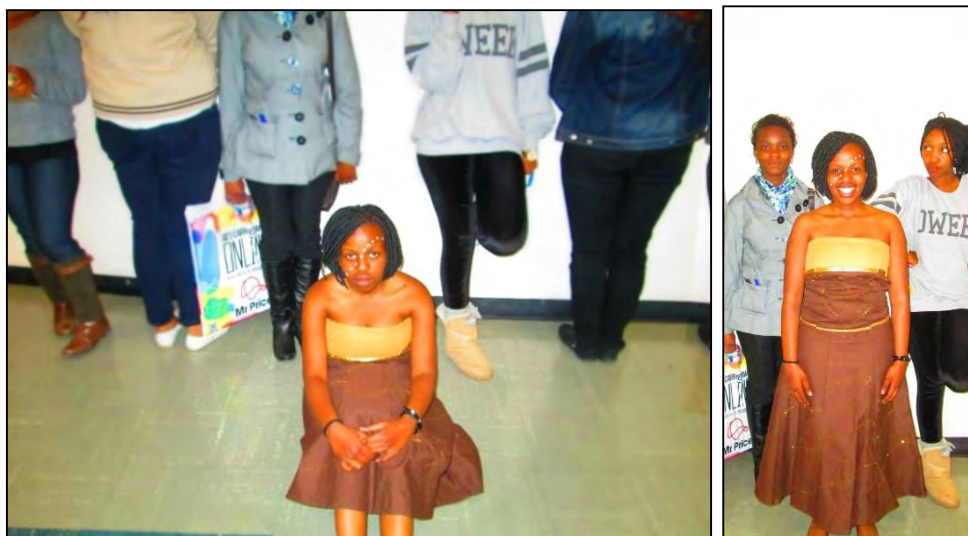
Photograph 19: *The Quest for Transformation and the Positive Changes that is Apparent*



*Caption: This picture was taken in the food court and this is my vision for a non-racialised UCT where colour will not dictate SES levels, mobility, class, status, access and opportunity but that difference will be embraced in a positive light.*

(Sean, Photo-story 4)

Sean has edited this photograph by applying the negative editing function which inverts the colours. In doing so the races of the students in the photograph are unclear (in fact, the inversion of colours makes all the students appear dark skinned). This photograph is not of Sean's current experience of transformation but of his hopes and wishes for the future. In this photo-story, Sean took charge of how he thinks that transformation should be represented. Xolela did something similar in her photo-story:

Photograph 20: *No Title*

*Caption: In the last two pictures, the contradiction is celebrated. Difference is sameness, in other words. The girl in the foreground, in revised-traditional Xhosa dress, is separated from the others behind her by her 'difference'. Theirs is more what would be considered modern attire. And the girl may choose to define herself by how different her outwardness makes her, or she may decide to use that difference as what makes everyone exactly the same – that is, that we are all different.*

(Xolela, Photo-story 2)

This is not an organic scene that Xolela has encountered on campus and decided to photograph, but rather one that she has posed and constructed to represent something she feels is important and to look at issues she wishes to explore. As opposed to an internalisation of the idea that Westernised dress is superior, Xolela has suggested an alternate view. She has placed the girl in traditional dress separate from those in Western dress but she has positioned her in the foreground, and in the second photograph she has represented her as smiling although separate. Xolela has actively engaged with her concerns around transformation issues, problematising the dominance of Western culture in the higher education setting. In his photo-story, Mareka chose to focus on positive transformation within the SRC:

Photograph 21: No Title



Caption: *When one looks at those pictures, he/she might be seeing transformation with regards to the representation of white female students and non-white students. Furthermore, one could also witness transformation with regards to the clothing style. But what I want to call upon is an aspect of transformation that cannot easily be seen, which is the ideology of a community. The fact that women could get into positions of leadership in 1906, where UCT was dominated by white male students showed that the values and principles of UCT were changing or had changed. As the years progress through 1916, we see an increase in female representation. The same can be said with regards to race. The fact that UCT in 2004/2005 had such an increased number of non-white students in relation to 1990/1991 student representatives reflected the change in ideology of UCT.*

(Mareka, Photo-story 1)

Mareka did not take photographs himself, but used the SRC's annual official photographs to show changes in the demographics of the university student leaders over the

years. In this photo-story, he took back the stigmatising inferior black student discourse (as well as commenting on gender transformation), by documenting the many successful black students who now hold positions of leadership and power within this institution. This was important to him as a member of the SRC.

In her photo-story, Alice challenged stereotypes with her depiction of an interracial group of students skateboarding together. There is a space on campus in which students regularly gather to skateboard and do bike tricks, and it is typically a white dominated space:

Photograph 22: *Skateboarding the Border*



*Caption: We see a typical barrier of skateboarding being a white interest, slashed by the multiple races of the subjects; and freedom of the skateboarders to associate with each other and not to fit a stereotype of race or 'culture'.*

(Alice, Photo-story 2)

In this photo-story, Alice drew attention to the stereotype that skateboarding is an exclusively white pastime, describing a racial “barrier” and “border” that dominates the hobby. She depicted students who challenge this barrier and interact on equal terms with students of other races. There could be similarities drawn between this photo-story and that of Kopano who joined the rugby team to engage with white students. However, as discussed earlier, Kopano came into an already white dominated space and although he was accepted, the whiteness of the space was left untransformed. In Alice’s photo-story, at least this small group skateboarding on the hill between Upper and Middle Campus is predominantly black.

The photo-stories discussed above have focused on re-presenting transformation and campus life in alternative ways. In additions, an important part of resisting stereotypes and asserting a positive identity as black students is re-presenting *themselves* in other ways. Although as was discussed earlier, Kopano's tactic of joining the rugby team to become friends with white students is problematic because it required effort from Kopano and not from the white students in his class, he did something interesting with the photographs he took. Kopano submitted two uncaptioned photographs of himself and some of his teammates posing in their official rugby team blazers:

Photograph 23: *No Title*



(Kopano, Photo-story 1)

Photograph 24: *No Title*



(Kopano, Photo-story 1)

In these photographs he re-presented himself as a self-assured member of the rugby team, staring directly and confidently at the viewer. In fact, there is almost an element of cockiness (eyebrow raised and lollipop stick protruding jauntily from his mouth) and he positioned himself in the most prominent places in both photographs (dead centre in Photograph 23 and in the foreground position in the Photograph 24), with his arms are folded confidently in Photograph 23. In these photographs he portrayed himself as a central and legitimate member of his department's rugby team, confident in his identity as a black, rugby-playing student. Thus, although his initial decision to join the rugby team was fuelled by insecurity and a need to be accepted by white students, he appears to have reached a point (in his third year) where he is assured of his place and he can re-present himself as central to the team. An important part of the ability to do this comes perhaps, as with Sean, from his consciousness of the process and insecurities that were riddling in him in his first year. Throughout his personal reflection and the way he discussed transformation in the focus group (as is clear in the extract from his personal reflection quoted on p. 85 of this chapter), it is evident that these are concerns he has grappled with and debated for himself.

The importance for students of developing an awareness of the racialised experiences they face, and the possibility for resistance and re-presentation, has been shown in other studies. Phoenix (2009) highlights the importance of theorising agency, in her study exploring the experiences of women of Caribbean origin schooled in the UK. In the interviews with these women, it was clear that although the dominant culture in British schools devalued them and positioned them as inferior, those power relations were not absolute. The women described how when they came into school environments, the pre-existing discourses that Caribbean girls were inadequate students affected them in many ways; however, they were able to negotiate these experiences and produce new identities for themselves. They could do this when they could recognise and be conscious of the Western representations that constructed them as inferior, and could use their agency to disrupt and resist those representations for themselves. Rätzl (2010) found something similar in her two interviews. Both participants described experiencing marginalisation; however, they employed different tactics when dealing with it. The first participant tried to escape the label "immigrant" by over-complying with the dominant values of Swedish society in the hope that he would prove the people who underestimated his abilities wrong. However, this concern with how the dominant society viewed him became paralysing. This young man was trying to escape a negative label but was aware that he would always be labelled negatively. The other participant interviewed did not feel the need to change

his positioning in Swedish society by obeying the dominant rules of that society. Instead, he problematised the social structures that positioned him this way. Because he had some political insight into the power relations in the country he lived in, he could position himself as an “immigrant” but without “subordinating himself to its demeaning connotations” (p. 551). In much the same way, when Sean became aware of the racialised hierarchy on campus, although it was initially a painful realisation it enabled him to work on ways of taking back the label of “black student”.

In summary, for many black students the experience of higher education is fraught with difficulties. This is evident with the participants in this study, who at times internalised the dominant racialising discourses on campus. They described feeling insecure and inferior in the face of stereotypes of blackness which they encountered, as well as feeling a sense of alienation and exclusion in relation to the institutional whiteness of the UCT environment. This led some participants to disengage from the academic environment and to silence themselves in class, which could have detrimental consequences for their academic success. Here you start the generalising – or one sentence earlier if you keep ‘students’ rather than ‘participants’: Additionally, coming into this campus climate forces many students into a difficult process of self-reflection which can take up energy and time that could be spent on academics. However, although these experiences can be difficult for students, they display agency and often draw on different coping mechanisms in the face of these experiences. Some of these coping mechanisms are perhaps more successful in the long term than others. Firstly, some students undergo lactification; that is, they take on markers of whiteness (such as changing their accents). This is understandable, considering the dominance of whiteness in the racialised educational hierarchy on campus. However, it is equally problematic because it places the burden of transformation on students and it leaves the racialising institutional culture of the university intact. Secondly, some students attempt to distance themselves from other black students and the label of disadvantaged, to separate themselves from the negative connotations that surround disadvantaged black students on campus. However, it is concerning that they feel the need to distance themselves in the first place. Thirdly, some students work hard to prove themselves academically in the face of negative stereotypes. However, as the theory from Bhabha (1994) illustrates, this tactic is problematic because stereotypes are innately contradictory and impossible to disprove in this way. Fourthly, considering all that requires their attention daily, some students initially find it easier to suppress their emotions around these issues and refuse to engage with their concerns. However, in the long-term, maintaining this ignorance becomes

difficult. Finally, while these other tactics discussed above still position black students as victims, students also draw on more empowering and resistant tactics. It was evident that once students began to develop an awareness of these racialising discourses, they could reflect on how they might be affected and engage with issues of transformation. This enabled them to represent campus life and themselves in more empowering ways that resist existing discourses and construct their own versions of transformation. Instead of placing the burden on students to adapt to campus environments, institutions should focus on understanding black students' perceptions of and experiences on campus, and on fostering an inclusive climate that can aid students' sense of belonging and help build a positive identity for black students.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the experiences of transformation that black students have at UCT. The findings suggest that although many black UCT students undergo marginalising and stigmatising experiences on campus, which can affect their educational outcomes, they also employ various coping mechanisms and resistance strategies to navigate successfully through life in this historically white institution. In this chapter, a summary of these findings will be presented. The contributions and implications of the study will then be discussed. This will be followed by a consideration of the limitations of the study. Finally, this chapter will conclude with suggestions for future research.

### 6.1 Summary of Findings

The findings of this study were discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. In Chapter Four, the participants' daily experiences on campus and their perceptions of transformation were explored. In general, it appeared that participants viewed transformation at UCT to be focused too narrowly on demographic change. They described a marginalising culture of whiteness at UCT which remains untransformed. Chapter Five was divided into two sections. The first section examined the effect that this marginalisation and the many experiences discussed in Chapter Four had on the participants and their academic success. The second section explored the different coping mechanisms and resistance strategies that the participants employed to counteract these experiences and succeed in this space.

**Black students' lived experiences of transformation.** As the *Soudien Report* (Soudien et al., 2008) has found, the transformation policies of many higher education institutions do not reflect the everyday realities of many of the students and staff on campus. This was echoed in the experiences of many of the participants in this study who described many failures of transformation. Looking firstly at the actual transformation focus and practices of the university, some participants felt that transformation at UCT was strictly a "numbers game". They acknowledged that there had been success in diversifying the student body in terms of race, but they were concerned that the transformation focus was too narrow and typically ended with admissions. They felt that there was little consideration given to supporting black students once they arrived at UCT or to transforming many aspects of life on campus that are problematic for black students. They believed that this accounted for the high attrition rate of black students

(Akojee & Nkomo, 2007; Petersen et al., 2009). There were many areas of UCT life the participants felt were problematic and needed to be transformed. Firstly, they were troubled by the prevalence of racial stereotypes on campus. Participants described encountering stereotypes of their ability and, their work ethic, and consequently doubts about their deserving of a place at UCT. Secondly, participants highlighted the Eurocentric nature of the university. Specifically, they were concerned with the Westernised focus of their curricula; the dominance of academic English; the few black academic staff and role models; the disrespect shown to the few black lecturers they were taught by; and the Eurocentric and colonial symbolism around campus. Finally, they described the racialisation of space on campus. There appeared to be some instances of integration in their experiences, such as interracial friendships, both platonic and less commonly romantic; however, these were exceptional and their dominant experience on campus appeared to be of racial segregation. The participants described subtle but strictly maintained racial boundaries in campus spaces which they felt anxiety crossing. In particular, this related to engaging in group work activities with white students. Some participants felt white students were reluctant to work with black students and were at times even openly hostile due to stereotypes about their intelligence and work ethic. Clearly, there are various ways in which the university environment is untransformed in the participants' experiences. What appears to be a commonality throughout these examples is the way that "blackness" was denigrated and positioned as inferior. Simultaneously, "whiteness" was positioned as dominant and taken as the standard for university life. This can have detrimental consequences for black students, who feel they have been relegated to the bottom of a racialised campus hierarchy. What was interesting was how many of the participants were conscious of these processes and could problematise these discourses around whiteness and blackness.

**The effects of a racialised campus experience.** Chapter Five explored how these experiences affected the participants. It appeared that at times some of the participants internalised these experiences and stigmatising discourses which resulted in feelings of inferiority. This had detrimental consequences for their self-esteem and confidence, with some students beginning to doubt themselves and their ability. It also affected their sense of belonging at UCT and led to feelings of alienation. This in turn can affect students' educational outcomes, because it can result in self-silencing and disengagement, and it can also be distracting and emotionally draining. Some participants explained how they were wary of participating in class discussions and avoided asking questions even when they were confused or needed help. Some

participants also described how constantly battling with feelings of inferiority distracted them from their academic work.

**Coping mechanisms and resistance strategies.** As has been raised extensively in the literature on black students in higher education, despite these stigmatising experiences many black students are academically successful. They employ different coping mechanisms and resistance strategies in higher education spaces (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; McClain, 2014; McGee & Martin, 2011; Moore et al., 2003; Nghe & Mahalik, 2001; Read et al., 2003). This was evident too, with the participants in this study who found ways of either coping with these experiences or actively resisting. It appears they would employ varied and sometimes contradictory methods in different situations and at different stages of their university careers.

**Coping mechanisms.** Firstly, some participants explained how they would assimilate into the dominant culture of the university by taking on markers of whiteness. This involved, for example, changing their accents to be “more white”. However, this is an individualistic form of transformation. It requires that black students change to fit into the university environment, rather than that the university change itself to fit a more diverse body of students. Also, as Fanon suggests, black students will never be white enough. A consequence of this internalisation, which was clear in the experiences of many of the participants, was that this “becoming white” meant that they faced rejection from their families and communities when they went back home in the holidays. Thus, they were stuck in this state of being “unhomed”, too black at UCT, and yet too white at home.

Secondly, some participants tried to distance themselves from other black students and from the label of disadvantaged. A clear example of this was how some participants spoke about how affirmative action was necessary for *other* black students. They were careful to describe how *they* did not benefit from it. It is unsurprising that they wanted to assert this, considering the stereotypes around and public ambivalence towards the affirmative action policy; however, it is problematic that they felt that they needed to defend their UCT acceptance in the first place. Furthermore, this coping mechanism may protect their self-esteem and positive student identity in the short-term, but it leaves these stereotyping discourses intact for black students overall.

Thirdly, a few participants described attempting to prove themselves and their worthiness of a place at UCT with high academic achievement. However, as Bhabha’s concept of disavowal illustrates, stereotypes cannot be proved wrong in this way. This coping

mechanism may motivate some students to work hard but it also comes at a cost and can be exhausting.

Finally, another coping mechanism that participants at times made use of was trying to ignore these stigmatising experiences and the stereotypes they encounter. They found this necessary, considering the significant number of other stresses involved with being a student that required their attention. However, they also suggested, as is supported by the literature (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Solórzano et al., 2002), that this can be difficult in the long term, and often the stereotyping experiences become too obvious to ignore.

**Resistance strategies.** In addition to finding different methods of coping with these experiences, many participants found ways of actively resisting the stigmatising discourses and marginalising encounters. It was clear, though, that before they could do this, they needed to develop a critical consciousness and awareness of the problems within the UCT environment and the processes that were undermining their success. Most participants, particularly those who had been at UCT for longer, had evidently been able to do this successfully. Some of the more junior students (especially the four first-years) had a more limited awareness; however, in the process of participating in the photovoice project and engaging with the older students about their experiences, they appeared to develop a consciousness about these issues. What was also interesting was that this consciousness process was described as initially painful but ultimately empowering because it freed students from the guilt and confusion that often resulted from stereotyping experiences.

Once students developed an awareness, they could resist stereotypes and re-present themselves and transformation in their own terms. Often, this was evident in the photo-stories in which they could re-present in more positive ways aspects of their lives on campus, their hopes for transformation, and their student identities.

## **6.2 Contributions and Implications of the Study**

Austin (2001) suggests, in *Apartheid No More*, that “transformation is not an event, it’s a process” (p. 31). It is hoped that this project can contribute in some way to the ongoing process of transformation in higher education in South Africa. What I think is perhaps the most important contribution of this project is that it focused on the voices and experiences of black students themselves. As is clear from the newspaper headlines documented in the introduction,

the transformation discourse is typically dominated by the voices and opinions of (often white) researchers, theorists, academics and even members of the public who speak *about* black students. However, the voices of black students themselves are often marginalised within this debate. This project has sought to contribute to the growing body of research which makes black students' experiences central.

In particular, it was the photovoice methodology which helped to bring out our participants' voices. These photo-stories were exhibited publicly on three separate occasions and they were also presented as part of a public seminar. As a result, they have been seen by the Vice-Chancellor of the university, as well as other high ranking members of staff. In this way, our project has been able to bring the experiences of our participants to the attention of people within this institution who have the power and ability to influence policy. Our participants' stories can now help to offer a competing perspective to the dominant and ambivalent transformation discourse.

Furthermore, as was discussed in the section on resistance strategies, the photovoice methodology enabled some students to begin developing a critical consciousness about transformation issues. This was possible as they engaged with other students in the focus groups and workshops and in the process of producing their photo-stories. In some ways this has gone beyond the anticipated scope of the project. One participant, for example, is now a member of the SRC and he organised for the photo-stories to be exhibited as part of a public "race dialogue", and many other black UCT students came together to share their experiences of marginalisation in that space.

Hopefully, what this project (along with others) has shown is that despite successful demographic change, there are many other aspects of the university which remain untransformed. It appears that black students are expected to transform and the University of Cape Town is not and this often has highly detrimental consequences for black students and contributes to their poor educational outcomes. It is imperative that steps are taken to improve the experiences of black students and to transform the university in ways beyond numbers. Based on the experiences of these participants, I would make the following recommendations:

- Firstly, effort should be made to include more of an African perspective within the curriculum, such as prescribing textbooks from South African and other African authors and textbooks and research that represent an African experience, as has already been recommended by other South African researchers (Goduka,

1996; Toni & Olivier, 2004). There are undoubtedly courses in which this already happens; however, as the experiences of the participants in this study show, this is not the dominant experience.

- Secondly, I echo the recommendations made by Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) and the 2004 UCT *Student Climate Survey* (UCT, 2005), which highlighted the need to challenge stereotypes of black students at UCT. White students need to be educated about the experiences of their black peers and university staff need to be made aware of the impact of their teaching practices.
- Thirdly, there is a need to increase the numbers of black academic staff so that all students may benefit from a diversity of teaching experiences and black students may see themselves represented in academia.
- Fourthly, attention should be paid to the colonial symbolism around campus (such as statues and building names), which often alienate black students.
- Finally, the ambivalent discourses of transformation need to be challenged. Control of this debate needs to be wrested away from those with whom it has little to do. Space must be made in this discourse for black students to make themselves heard.

### 6.3 Study Limitations

It should be noted that this study was conducted with UCT students only. There are many other higher education institutions in South Africa (both universities and technikons) in which the experiences of black students may be different. In particular, the experiences of students at historically black universities might diverge from the experiences of black students at historically white universities such as UCT (conversely, there might also be similarities). It is certainly important to acknowledge this divergence of experience but it is still valuable to explore the experiences of students at UCT. These findings may also be relevant for other historically white universities, such as WITS, that have similar institutional cultures.

Using the broad category “black” rather than looking at the distinctive experiences of participants from the different apartheid racial categories (i.e. black African, Indian and coloured) could be seen as a limitation in that it may homogenise the experiences of students who may be different. However, it is also important not to create further segregation and marginalisation, and having students participate in this photovoice study together was a way of

building solidarity between students. Furthermore, what is clear from the findings of the study is that there are many almost identical experiences between “coloured” and “black African” students. For example, Lerato, a “black African” student, and Sean, a “coloured” student, both described how they have second-guessed their positions at UCT because they felt they did not enter on merit. They both described feeling out of place when they returned home.

A similar potential criticism is that black students’ experiences may be influenced by other aspects of their identities, in particular their socio-economic status and class. It could be suggested that poorer, working-class black students may face more marginalisation and stigmatisation than their peers from more affluent, middle-class backgrounds. Certainly, there are a few instances in the study which do hint at this. However, as with the previous potential limitation, it is important to foster solidarity between black students from all backgrounds rather than creating further divisions. Also, the findings show that higher social class and economic status is **not** necessarily a protective factor against experiencing these issues. For example, Kopano and Mpho, who both come from middle-class backgrounds, have described the difficulties they faced when they first came to UCT. In fact, Mpho has since dropped out of the university without completing his degree. (I do not know why).

There are, of course, limits to the extent to which all students have been able to develop a critical consciousness through participation in this project. Even with students who have developed a critical consciousness, this (along with other long-term impacts) would be difficult to measure, considering the limited scope of this current project.

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the insights gained through this study have contributed towards a clearer understanding of black students’ experiences of transformation in higher education.

#### **6.4 Suggestions for Future Research**

Future research might look at the experiences of black students at other universities or technikons in South Africa: in particular, at how the experiences of black students at historically black universities differ, as they are in spaces which presumably are not dominated by ideological whiteness (except perhaps in curricula). It would also be interesting to examine the experiences of black students at Afrikaans-medium universities in which there may be other issues at play.

As has been discussed, this study focused purely on race as a factor in students' experiences. However, it would also be interesting to see how other aspects of students' identities intersect and affect their experiences (e.g. gender, sexuality and class). For example, there were two participants who identified themselves as lesbian and gay. There were also two female participants who were part of a male-dominated Engineering class. It was beyond the scope of this study but it could be valuable to see how these other factors influence students' experiences of higher education.

While it is also important that future research continues to focus on the experiences of black students, it would also be interesting to engage with white students on these issues as well. Perhaps a photovoice study that had both black and white participants would help to raise the consciousness of white students, who were often seen to be hostile, unwelcoming or uninterested in black students' concerns. In fact, when this exhibition was shown for the second time as part of the SRC race dialogue, a large number of black UCT students attended but only a few white students showed up.

Finally, it would be interesting to follow up on the participants of this and similar studies at later stages in their degrees. Future research might look at the long-term impact of participation in this type of photovoice project.

In conclusion, this project has explored the experiences of black students at UCT and how they cope with or resist stigmatisation and marginalisation in the university environment. It is clear from the project that greater attention needs to be paid to transforming these aspects of university life, and making the UCT space one that is welcoming and comfortable for *all* students. In particular, the ambivalent, stereotyping discourses of transformation need to be challenged and disrupted and black students' voices need to be brought into this debate.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Schedule**

- What you think transformation in higher education means? What does transformation mean to you at UCT?
- Could you talk about some of your own personal experiences of transformation as a UCT student?
- What's it like to be a black student at UCT?

## Appendix B: Transcription Information Key

- FG1: Extract taken from focus group one
- FG2: Extract taken from focus group two
- (...) Ellipsis in round brackets indicates that part of the participants' original speech has been omitted from the quoted extract.
- Underlined Words that have been underlined were emphasised in the participant's original speech
- [ ] Square brackets indicates additional information, such as laughter or non-verbal gestures.

## Appendix C: Study Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



Department of Psychology

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### Representing transformation in higher education through Photovoice methodologies

– Study Consent Form –

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#### 1. Invitation and purpose

You are invited to take part in a Photovoice research project on transformation in higher education. We are researchers from the Department of Psychology at University of Cape Town.

#### 2. Procedures

Participation in this study is voluntary.

If you decide to take part in the study you will be expected to do the following:

- Participate in two focus groups with the researchers as well as the other participants in the research project. During the first focus group, we will talk about the research theme, which is transformation in higher education, as well as your personal experiences at UCT. The second focus group will take place immediately after the project has ended to gather your impressions and feedback on the project. These will take place in the Psychology Department at UCT and will not last longer than 90 minutes. The meetings and discussions will be audio recorded but we will make sure that your identity is protected in any of the information that we use from these discussions.
- Participate in a story-telling exercise, which requires you to write a story of not more than 500 words about your experiences at UCT.
- Participate in a 1-day photography training workshop by a professional photographer who will teach you how to use a digital camera and how to take good pictures and/or films. This training will take place in the Psychology Department at UCT.
- Take still and/or moving images relating to your experiences as a student at UCT and construct a written or audio narrative to accompany the images. You will be given a camera to use for one week. Edit your work into a final digital story production.
- Display your work in an exhibition open to the public.
- Participate in one follow-up interview with the researcher/s six to twelve months after the project has ended. You will be asked to reflect on the impact that the project has had on you. The interview will be audio recorded.

#### 3. Inconveniences

We don't expect that you will be distressed by the research but if it does become distressing you may stop participating at any time without any negative consequences. If you become distressed by any of the procedures in this project we will refer you for counselling, if necessary.

You may withdraw from the study at any time.

#### 4. Benefits

You are given an opportunity to share your views and experiences and what you tell us is also likely to help in formulating other research projects and transformation activities at UCT or in higher education in general. You are given an opportunity to tell us and others what is important to you and for others who have similar experiences. You will also receive training in digital photography and exhibit your digital production in a public exhibition. Your work may also appear in other media and/or photography outlets.

#### 5. Privacy and confidentiality

We will take strict precautions to safeguard your personal information throughout the study. Your information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the principal researcher's office without your name and or other personal identifiers.

In the focus group discussions, what you say will be heard by other members of the group and we will ask participants to respect confidentiality in the groups. We have no control over what other group members will say outside the group – so be aware that full confidentiality of the group discussions cannot be guaranteed. The group discussions, meetings and interviews will all be digitally recorded and these files will be stored on the principal researcher's computer and will be protected by a password.

Some of this research may be published in academic journals but your identity will be protected at all times.

#### 6. Contact details

If you have further questions or concerns about the study please contact the Project Leader at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town:

Dr Shose Kessi 021 650 4606

If you have any issues or problems regarding this research or your rights as a research participant and would like to speak to the Chair of the Ethics committee, please contact Mrs Rosalind Adams at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town (UCT), 021 650 3417.

If you understand all the procedures and the risks and benefits of the study and you would like to participate in the project, please sign below:

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## Appendix D: Focus Group Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



Department of Psychology

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**Representing transformation in higher education through Photovoice methodologies**

**– Focus Group Consent –**

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### 1. Invitation and purpose

You are invited to take part in a Photovoice research project on transformation in higher education. We are researchers from the Department of Psychology at University of Cape Town.

### 2. Procedures

You have already agreed to take part in the larger Photovoice project and we are now asking you to participate in a focus group discussion as part of the larger project. This discussion will focus on *what transformation in higher education means to you*. It will take place in the Psychology Department at UCT and will last between 60 and 90 minutes. The group discussion will be audio recorded.

### 3. Inconveniences

We don't expect that you will be distressed by the group discussion but if it does become distressing or uncomfortable you may stop participating at any time without any negative consequences. If you become distressed, we will refer you for counselling, if necessary.

### 4. Benefits

You are given an opportunity to share your views and experiences and what you tell us is also likely to help in formulating other research projects and transformation activities at UCT or in higher education in general. You are given an opportunity to tell us and others what is important to you and for others who have similar experiences.

### 5. Privacy and confidentiality

We will take strict precautions to safeguard your personal information throughout the study. Your information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the principal researcher's office without your name and or other personal identifiers.

In the group discussions, what you say will be heard by other members of the group but we will ask participants to respect confidentiality in the groups. We have no control over what other group members will say outside the group – so be aware that full confidentiality of the group discussions cannot be guaranteed. The group discussions will be digitally recorded and

these files will be stored on the principal researcher's computer and will be protected by a password.

Some of this research may be published in academic journals but your identity will be protected at all times.

## 6. Contact details

If you have further questions or concerns about the study please contact the Project leader at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town

Dr Shose Kessi 021 650 4606

If you have any issues or problems regarding this research or your rights as a research participant and would like to speak to the Chair of the Ethics committee, please contact Mrs Rosalind Adams at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town (UCT), 021 650 3417.

If you understand all the procedures and the risks and benefits of the study and you would like to participate in the project, please sign below:

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_


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

### Agreement for Tape-Recording

I agree to have my voice tape-recorded in the focus group discussions.

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Exhibition Invitation



**PRESENTING:**

**UCT: THE LAND OF MILK  
AND HANI ?**

**Artworks by UCT Students**

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October at 17:30**

**The opening will be held at the foyer, Graduate School of  
Humanities Building, UCT**

Thereafter selected works will be displayed in the Department of Psychology, PD Hahn  
Building

A photography project by Josie Cornell, Joy Moodley & Shoshe Kessi