

**THE AIR ALLOWED FOR HAIR: CULTURAL INCLUSIVITY IN CAPE
TOWN PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

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In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my youngest sister, Enrike Richter, whose identity transcends conventional racial categorisations in South Africa. May this research inspire you to develop an identity that is authentically your own, free from external impositions.

ABSTRACT

This study explored how parents with children in a sample of Cape Town private schools experience values that shape cultural inclusivity around hair rules, particularly concerning Afrocentric hairstyles. In post-apartheid South Africa, significant efforts have been made to reform the education system, yet hair policies in schools remain a contentious issue, reflecting broader challenges in creating truly inclusive educational environments. However, challenges remain, and inequalities are particularly evident in some private schools where traditional practices may conflict with cultural expression.

Using the metaphor of ‘air allowed for hair,’ this research examined the space granted for Afrocentric cultural expression within different private school environments. Through a constructivist paradigm and qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 parents from diverse backgrounds whose children attend nine private schools and one elite Model C school in Cape Town. AI-generated photos were used as interview tools to facilitate discussions about diverse hairstyles. The study also analysed publicly available data from school websites collected using Python-based web scraping tool. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was employed to examine how school values influence hair experiences.

Three distinct categories of schools emerged: faith-based, academic-focused, and Steiner schools, each allowing different degrees of “air” for Afrocentric hair expression. The findings revealed a clear spectrum of inclusivity: faith-based and traditional academic schools typically offered the least “air,” maintaining restrictive environments that limited self-expression, while Steiner schools consistently provided the most “air,” creating settings that actively welcomed diverse hairstyles. This variation in ‘air allowed for hair’ directly reflected each school’s underlying value system, with conformity and tradition values correlating with restrictive policies, and self-direction and universalism values enabling greater cultural expression. Parents’ experiences highlighted tensions between maintaining traditional school cultures and fostering inclusive environments, while also revealing the complex trade-offs parents navigate during school selection.



This research contributes to understanding how private schools in post-apartheid South Africa navigate cultural inclusivity through the lens of hair policies. It demonstrates that while some progress has been made, many institutions still struggle to fully accommodate and celebrate diverse cultural expressions, including Afrocentric hairstyles. These findings have implications for school policy development, parent-school relationships, and broader efforts to decolonise education in South Africa.



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANSSSF	Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding
CAGR	Compound annual growth rate
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CoCT	City of Cape Town
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
GPA	grade point average
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
IPA	interpretive phenomenological analysis
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Plus
NEPA	National Education Policy Act of 1996
NSC	National Senior Certificate
PTAs	parent-teacher associations
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAHO	South African History Online
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SASA	South African Schools Act of 1996
SGBs	school governing bodies
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SMTs	school management teams
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
ToS	terms of service
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USD	United States Dollar
ZAR	South African Rand

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

South Africa's current public and private education system, at primary and secondary school level, has been shaped profoundly by its colonial and apartheid past, which has left enduring legacies of racial inequality and division (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Smit, 2020). Significant efforts have been made to reform the education system in post-apartheid South Africa, while promoting racial integration (DoE, 2001; Meier & Hartell, 2009). However, challenges remain, and inequalities are particularly evident in some private schools¹, impacting the experiences and identities of Black² learners³ (Feldman & Wallace, 2023; Khanyile, 2023; Mujulizi, 2022; Simpson, 2012).

In 2020, the head girl of a private, all-girls high school in Cape Town, henceforth referred to as Elite Girls Only⁴, eloquently captured the ongoing struggles faced by Black female learners in what are predominantly White private schools in her open letter to the school and media:

I write to you as a Black student and your head girl. Being Black means that even in places where we should feel safe and welcomed, we feel alienated and isolated. As a Black girl, we carry this baggage, which distorts our perception of how life should really be, and this is just exhausting. This along with the societal responsibility and pressure to continuously advocate and protest that my life matters, and that I deserve the same treatment as my White peers. We cannot still be learning in environments that appreciate and praise Eurocentric ways. It cannot be that young girls in our school are

¹ While the South African Department of Education use the term "independent schools," this study employs the more internationally recognised term "private schools". A detailed definition and discussion of this usage follows in section 1.6.1 (p. 14).

² A detailed explanation of this study's use of racial classifications, alongside a critical discussion of race as a social and identity construct, and the process of racialisation in South Africa (Erasmus, 2017) is provided in section 1.2.2 (p. 7)

³ In this research, the terms 'learners' and 'students' are used interchangeably to refer to individuals attending primary and secondary school levels. This usage reflects both the South African educational context, where 'learners' is often the preferred term in policy and literature, and the diversity of sources consulted in this study, which employ both terms.

⁴ The name "Elite Girls Only" is a pseudonym created by the researcher to protect the identity of the institution. From this point forward, all school names in this document are anonymised, including those reported in the media, literature review, findings and discussion. This anonymisation convention applies to all schools mentioned throughout the rest of this study. This approach is in accordance with ethical considerations and standard practices in research to ensure confidentiality and to minimise potential harm to participants or institutions involved in the study.

the centre of attention during break because they have an afro and the White kids think their hair is 'cute'. Why should we give up our comfort for the sake of White kids? - (Ngwenya, 2020)

The head girl's open letter underscores the cultural and identity-based challenges that persist in private schools across the Western Cape, Cape Town. Despite policy changes aimed at promoting inclusivity⁵ (DoE, 2001; Meier & Hartell, 2009), some schools often continue to uphold Eurocentric⁶ standards that marginalise Afrocentric⁷ identities (Feldman & Wallace, 2023; Khanyile, 2023; Oyedemi, 2016; Simpson, 2012). This persistence of colonial influences on school cultures and policies across South Africa has been noted by several researchers (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Mujulizi, 2022), particularly in relation to issues such as hair policies and language practices (Alubafi et al., 2018).

The aim of this study was to explore the role of values⁸ and how they guide the prevailing school culture in private schools' choice in Cape Town, with a specific focus on the regulation and understanding of Afrocentric hair and hairstyles, and to build on the scholarly conversation in this field. The study drew on publicly available data and interviews with parents to examine: (1) how values shape parents' preferences for and selection of private schools (Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015; Nault, 2021), (2) how differences in access to cultural, social, and economic resources influence parents' ability to meet their school choice preferences and transmit cultural and social advantages to their children (Blake & Mestry, 2020; Motala & Dieltiens, 2008), and (3) the role of value alignment in schools and how these

⁵ Inclusivity in the context of this study relates to school-level learning environments that welcome diverse cultural expression when it comes to Afrocentric hairstyles. This framing aligns with the context provided to research participants and their subsequent discussions. A more comprehensive definition and discussion of inclusive education within the South African context follows in section 1.6.4 (p. 16).

⁶ Eurocentrism refers to a perspective that prioritises European and Western cultural norms, values, and knowledge systems. In South African schools, this often manifests as the dominance of English as the language of instruction, curricula that emphasise Western histories and knowledge, and cultural practices aligned with White, Western traditions. This approach tends to marginalise African and other non-Western perspectives and experiences (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Epstein, 2014; Khanyile, 2023).

⁷ A detailed description of what constitutes Afrocentrism, Afrocentric hair, and Afrocentricity is provided in section 1.2 (p. 4) and 1.2.1 (p. 5). Throughout this study, 'Afrocentric hair' refers to both the physical properties of the hair and the various styling practices associated with it. Whenever the term 'Afrocentric hair' is used, it may refer to either the natural hair texture or to hairstyling practices, or to both aspects simultaneously, depending on the context.

⁸ Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (2012) forms the foundation of this analysis, offering a lens through which to examine the motivations behind parental school choices, which in turn impact their children's school hair experiences. This theory identifies 10 core values: conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, benevolence, and universalism.

may perpetuate an unequal past and, in turn, may restrict Afrocentric identity development (Berson & Oreg, 2016; Feldman & Wallace, 2023; Khanyile, 2023; Simpson, 2012).

This research employed semi-structured interviews with 13 parents whose children attended nine private schools and one semi-private (former Model C⁹) school. AI-generated photos were used as an interview tool to facilitate discussions in Cape Town to understand which Afrocentric hairstyles are permitted and which are not, and how this impacts learner experiences. By means of a qualitative research methodology and through the interpretation of the values expressed in the interviews and from publicly available website data, the study highlights how these are central to parents' school choices. The findings indicate that certain private schools in the Cape Town are perceived to still uphold values reflective of South Africa's pre-democratic past, which may restrict the individuality and cultural identity of their learners.

Through the application of Schwartz's (2012) Theory of Basic Values in the findings chapter, this study interprets publicly available website data from school websites alongside the values expressed by parents in qualitative interviews. It demonstrates how certain value systems may restrict or encourage learner individuality in terms of expressing and embracing their Afrocentricity. This, in turn, influences learners' identity formation and cultural orientation, and in some instances pressures them into forced cultural assimilation. Finally, the discussion chapter use the language of decolonisation¹⁰ to argue that decolonising private schools in Cape Town will require a shift in their value systems to embrace shared values that are reflective of racial diversity and cultural expression. This shift in values is essential to address, at least partially, the complex racial legacy that remains in South Africa's education system,

⁹ In pre-democracy South Africa (between 1990 and 1993), Model C schools that had formerly been Whites-only public schools received less state funding in return for increased autonomy of their governance (Soudien, 2010). Today, they operate as semi-private institutions by charging lower school fees than private schools but higher than other public schools and self-governing through School Governing Bodies (Soudien, 2010). In this study, the Model C school included in the research also represents a site of privilege similar to that of elite private schools. For simplicity, at certain points in this document, all 10 schools (including the semi-private Model C school) may be collectively referred to as 'private schools'. However, in the findings and discussion chapter, the distinctions between fully private and semi-private schools will be unpacked and analysed in greater detail. This collective terminology is used for ease of reference whilst acknowledging the differences that exist between these institutions.

¹⁰ Decolonisation in the context of South African education refers to the process of dismantling colonial legacies in knowledge systems, curricula, and institutional practices. It involves challenging Eurocentric perspectives, integrating African knowledge and experiences, and creating more inclusive educational environments that reflect the diversity of South African society. This process aims to address historical inequalities and promote a more equitable and culturally responsive education system (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Ndlovu, 2017).

while fostering a learning environment that encourages, rather than suppresses, Afrocentric identities and cultural values.

This racial legacy is evident in persistent resource disparities, instructional language policy debates, cultural assimilation pressures, socioeconomic barriers to access quality education, and the gap between inclusive policies and actual practices (Gruijters et al., 2024; Simpson, 2012; Smit, 2020; Soudien, 2023). This legacy may continue to be perpetuated in private schools due to their private nature and the elite status they cultivate (Ball, 2003; Gruijters et al., 2024; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016). This study aimed to understand what could foster a more equitable educational environment within some of Cape Town's private schools (Andrews et al., 2021; Walton et al., 2009).

In this study and more specifically in the discussion chapter, I employ the metaphor of 'air' as a concept to analyse the complex dynamics of the choice of private schools and how these are linked to hair experiences. I used this metaphor, drawn from Auerbach's (2022) study of class in Angola, to explore the powerful social, cultural, and economic factors that shape educational environments and personal identities within some private schools in Cape Town. In this context, the metaphor of 'air' is applied to the space, freedom and everyday thought given to Afrocentric hairstyles at various Cape Town private schools. This metaphor helps illuminate how different schools allow varying degrees of '*air for hair*', reflecting broader issues of identity, social mobility, and cultural expression. By applying this metaphor, I unpack the nuanced ways in which socioeconomic privilege, identity, and cultural expression intersect within the private school environment, particularly in relation to the interpretation and experiences of the parents who buy this space for their children. Furthermore, it explores the risks and trade-offs parents navigate during the school selection process. This exploration sheds light on how parents attempt to secure a particular future for their children.

1.2 Afrocentric hair

To define Afrocentric hair and hairstyling, I drew upon Asante's (2017, 2020) Afrocentric framework, which considers Afrocentricity not just as a physical characteristic, but as a

cultural element that is deeply rooted in African heritage, identity and agency. Asante (2017, p. 155) stresses the importance of "the defence of African cultural elements," which includes hair as a significant aspect of African cultural expression and identity.

This necessitates acknowledging the cultural significance, historical context, and the agency of African people¹¹ in defining and expressing their own hair identities. Asante's (2017, p. 155) call for "lexical refinement" underscores the importance of employing language and definitions that strive to respect and accurately represent African perspectives throughout this study.

While a comprehensive scientific definition of the properties of Afrocentric hair and style includes Type 3 (curly) and Type 4 (coily/kinky) on the Andre Walker Hair Typing System¹² (Chaves & Bacharach, 2021; Simeon, 2021), it is crucial to approach this definition from an Afrocentric perspective that includes its culture significance. A detailed definition of the physical characteristics of Afrocentric hair and hairstyles is presented in the literature review (p. 81), grounded in scientific research and viewed through an Afrocentric lens, thus maintaining the integrity of African agency in the discourse surrounding Afrocentric hair and styles.

1.2.1 Positionality in Afrocentric paradigm

The Afrocentric paradigm, as defined by Asante (2017, p. 152), is "a quality of thought, perspective, and practice that perceives Africans as subjects and agents of phenomena in the context of human experience". This framework provides a critical approach for analysing issues related to African people and culture by focusing on African perspectives and

¹¹ While this study focuses specifically on South African private schools, the term "African" is used here to acknowledge the broader continental and diasporic significance of Afrocentric hair. It encompasses the diverse peoples and cultures of the African continent and diaspora that have influenced South African hair practices and identities. However, when discussing "African perspectives" in this study, we primarily refer to South African perspectives on Afrocentric hair.

¹² Walker's Hair Typing System classifies hair as Straight: Type 1; Wavy: Type 2 (2a, 2b, 2c); Curly: Type 3 (3a, 3b, 3c); and Coily or Kinky: Type 4 (4a, 4b, 4c). Each letter represents a different pattern of wave, curl or kink, from the looser pattern (a) to the tightest pattern (c) (Chaves & Bacharach, 2021). Whilst presented as a scientific classification system, it is important to note that such typing systems reflect particular cultural perspectives and may oversimplify the rich diversity of hair textures. These categorisations can potentially reinforce problematic hierarchies of hair types and fail to capture the complex genetic, environmental, and cultural dimensions of human hair variation.

experiences. For the purpose of this research, the Afrocentric paradigm enabled the examination of the topic from the standpoint of African agency and cultural values rather than as objects of the study.

With an awareness of the historical and contemporary implications of race and representation in scientific inquiry, I drew on Boswell et al. (2019) in their article *The Burden of Black Bodies and Minds* and recognised the ethical imperative to approach this research with a heightened sensitivity to the cultural and personal significance of Afrocentric hair and hairstyles. Boswell et al. (2019) critique studies that perpetuate harmful stereotypes, while epistemic violence underscored the need for my research to be grounded in a deep respect for and mindfulness of the lived experiences and cultural practices of the individuals who participated in my study and the schools on which I report here. By consciously engaging with the historical context of racialised science and its impact on Black and racialised communities, my research methodology and interpretations were attentive to the nuances represented and embodied by Afrocentric hair and styles according to the Afrocentric paradigm and its role in personal and collective identity.

As a male racialised as a White South African, I am mindful of my positionality, while striving to centre African perspectives and "the defence of African cultural elements" in my approach and analysis (Asante, 2017, p. 155). This aligns with Asante's emphasis on conscientisation, which involves critical self-reflection throughout the research process. Furthermore, Asante (2017, p. 151) argues that "location is the fundamental source of difference," underscoring the importance of understanding the cultural and historical context of hair in South Africa.

My position as a hair professional with two decades' experience working with a diverse range of hair types brings with it a deep understanding of hair texture, the needs of different hair types, and their cultural significance. Despite my cultural background, my experience of having a bi-racial sibling allows me to approach the research with sensitivity and some personal insight.

Throughout the study, I aimed to ensure that African voices and perspectives are centred, adhering to Asante's (2017, 2020) emphasis on African agency. I adhered to the principle of "lexical refinement" by using as much as possible culturally appropriate language (Asante, 2017, p. 155). This study aims to challenge Eurocentric narratives and contribute to a more inclusive representation of Afrocentric hair in school-level educational settings, aligning with Asante's (2014) critique of cultural terrorism¹³ that dislocates Africans from their own narratives.

1.2.2 Racialisation

The South-African population is racialised into five racial groups: Black (81.4%), Coloured (8.2%), White (7.3%), Indian/Asian (2.7%), and Other (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA], 2023). The Western Cape province, where this study is situated, is the third most populous in South Africa, with 7,433,019 residents as of 2022 (StatsSA, 2023). The Western Cape's officially recorded racial distribution differs significantly from the national average, with people classified as Coloured forming the largest group (42.0%), followed by those classified as Black (38.8%), White (15.6%), and Indian/Asian (1.1%) (StatsSA, 2023). The City of Cape Town, the focus of this research, closely mirrors these provincial demographics.

It is important to note that despite widespread acknowledgement of race as a social construct rather than a biological reality (Erasmus, 2017), governmental and social systems in South Africa continue to employ these racial categories. Due to the nature of this research, I had to, at times, make use of racial categories for analytical purposes. However, I wish to clarify that I do not view race as a biological reality nor did I aim to categorise people according to biological differences (Erasmus, 2017). Rather, following Erasmus (2017), I understand race as a culturally, socially and politically constructed concept that has profound real-world impacts due to processes of racialisation.

¹³ Cultural terrorism, in the context of Afrocentricity, refers to the systematic displacement of African perspectives from their own historical and cultural narratives. This concept, introduced by Molefi Kete Asante, argues that imposing Eurocentric interpretations on African history and culture constitutes a form of intellectual violence, undermining African cultural identity and self-concept.

As Erasmus (2017, p. 53) argues, race is better understood as "a web of socio-political, cultural and historical relations (woven by humans) that demarcates humanity in terms of the categories fully human, not quite human yet and not human". Race categories emerged from specific historical contexts of colonialism and oppression, not from biological realities. The meanings attached to and associated with racial categories shift over time and with context.

Importantly, Erasmus (2017, p. 53) emphasises that the processes of racialisation are evident in "everyday thought, action and institutional processes that (re-)make the idea of race and imbue it with cultural and political meaning". This encouraged me to refrain from viewing race as fixed or inherent, and towards examining how racial meanings are actively produced and reproduced through social practices (Erasmus, 2017).

I refer to the widely-used racial categories including "Black," "White," "Coloured," "Indian," and "Asian" critically and with an understanding of their constructed nature. My aim was not to reify these categories, but to analyse how they function in South African society.

1.3 Background of the study

The issue of hair experiences, cultural and religious expression across South African schools has been a recurring source of controversy and debate (Alubafi et al., 2018; Christie & McKinney, 2017; Parker, 2019).

In 2015, an investigation at one of the Corporate School's institutes, ensued after it had been "reported for a number of racially suspect practices, including segregating classrooms by race, hiring all-white teaching staff, and not including African languages as part of the school's curriculum" (Franklin, 2017, p. 360). The tension between school policies and learners' rights to cultural expression came to the forefront in 2016 when Black pupils at Girls High, protested against demands to chemically straighten their hair to comply with the school's dress code (Alubafi et al., 2018). Another protest ensued at the same school in 2020 and 2024 after learners reported that nothing had changed (Grobler, 2020; Ngcobo, 2024).

In a 2017 incident, Jo'burg High, faced criticism for issuing concession cards granting female Muslim learners permission to wear headscarves – a practice many likened to apartheid-era discrimination (Jadoo, 2017). As noted earlier, in 2020, the head girl at Elite Girls Only highlighted the ongoing struggles faced by Black female learners, noting how their afros became objects of fascination for their White peers during breaktime (Ngwenya, 2020).

More recently, in 2023, Crown College, removed a 13-year-old pupil from class due to her dreadlocks (Patel, 2023). That same year, Lerato Radebe of Welcoming High, was barred from attending classes for refusing to cut her dreadlocks, which she wore as an expression of her Rastafarian faith (Equal-Education, 2024). All of these incidents collectively underscore the complex intersection of cultural identity, educational policies, and individual rights in South African schools, particularly in private institutions.

These institutional challenges reflect the personal struggles many Black South African, particularly female, learners have faced. Recognising the gravity of these issues, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) conducted an inquiry in March 2022 with associations representing private schools, labour unions, tertiary institutions and parents, concluding that certain school uniform and appearance policies infringe on pupils' rights to dignity (Nemakonde, 2024).

Parker (2019) conducted research about hair and appearance rules across a variety of South African schools, which revealed that many traditional¹⁴ policies and regulations remain in place. She noted, "we did a round-up of the most common hair regulations we found, followed by a few exceptions we spotted. Here then we present the State of the School Nation's Hair Rules" (Parker, 2019, para. 13).

For boys, Parker (2019, para. 15) found "hair must not be coloured, dyed or styled. [It] must be clean and neat and always brushed or combed." She detailed the length requirements:

¹⁴ The use of "traditional" in this context refers to longstanding practices that have been normalised in many South African schools, despite their origins in colonial and apartheid-era standards that privileged Western/European appearances. Parker suggests that these "traditional" rules are increasingly viewed as problematic and in need of reform.

"Hair may not be too long or have too much volume: it may not reach the collar of their shirts, touch their eyebrows (some schools specify the hair should be 2 finger widths above the eyebrows) or their ears. Sideburns may only extend halfway down the ear." Parker (2019, para. 15) also noted further restrictions on hair styling for boys: "No braiding, plaiting, spiking, mullets, mohawks, undercuts, steps, zigzags or shaved-in paths are allowed. No extensions are allowed. Gel or mousse is not allowed either." She added in her findings that boys must always be clean-shaven.

For girls, Parker (2019, para. 16) found that school policies were equally restrictive. "Girls may not alter the colour of their hair in any way. Few schools allow braids, dreads and afros, but the schools that do also specify it should be in the natural hair colour of the learner." She noted that some schools permitted braids under specific conditions: "Some say hair may be braided, but it should be in straight lines, flat against the head, with the ends not exceeding 2cms in length." Parker (2019, para. 16) also highlighted rules about hair length and accessories for girls: "Hair that touches the shoulders must be tied up. No extensions are allowed. Hair accessories must be plain black or brown to match the colour of the hair, or the dominant uniform colour".

These detailed and restrictive hair policies, as reported by Parker (2019), illustrate the extent to which schools regulate learners' appearance, particularly in ways that can disproportionately affect learners with Afrocentric hair and hairstyles. Such policies raise important questions about cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and the preservation of individual identity within educational institutions.

Scholastic rules of conduct regarding Afrocentric hairstyles in South African schools are situated within a broader context of racial integration, cultural assimilation, and the lingering effects of colonialism in the post-apartheid era (Khanyile, 2023; Mujulizi, 2022; Simpson, 2012). Research on school desegregation in South Africa has predominantly documented an assimilationist process (Khanyile, 2023; Mujulizi, 2022; Simpson, 2012). (Soudien, 2004, p. 104) argues that "assimilationism is overwhelmingly hegemonic as a practice of integration in

schools." This process often requires learners from non-dominant groups to adapt their behaviours and cultural expressions upon entering previously White institutions. The challenges faced by Black learners in these integrated spaces extend beyond overt discrimination.

1.4 Research aim and objectives

This research aimed to address this literature gap by examining Black learners' experiences around Afrocentric hairstyle requirements within the context of the 10 sampled private school across Cape Town. It explored how these experiences intersect with broader issues of cultural identity, opportunity hoarding¹⁵, and the persistence of historical racial and cultural influences in education. By focusing on this specific aspect of cultural expression and identity as manifested through *'the air allowed for hair'*, this research aims to contribute to an understanding of the challenges and opportunities for creating inclusive educational environments in post-apartheid South Africa.

The primary aim of this study was to examine how hair, as a significant marker of identity, serves as a lens through which to explore broader issues of inclusivity, inequality, and cultural expression within the 10 sampled private schools. This research builds upon previous studies that have identified persistent challenges in fostering truly inclusive environments¹⁶ in elite South African schools.

Due to the ethical concern raised by working with children, this study focused on parents' perspectives and experiences regarding hair rules within the school environment that relate to learners with Afrocentric hair. It also made use of self-reported, publicly available information from the sampled schools' websites. In this way, this research sought to make

¹⁵ Opportunity hoarding refers to the process by which dominant groups in society maintain their privileged status by limiting access to valuable resources, including high-quality education. In educational settings, this can manifest through selective admissions processes, high tuition fees, and cultural norms that favour learners from particular backgrounds, potentially perpetuating social and racial inequalities (Tilly, 1998; Diamond & Lewis, 2022). It is important to note that in the context of private schools, this process is often not deliberate but rather a result of broader economic inequalities and the operational necessities of these institutions.

¹⁶ A truly inclusive school environment, according to the authors, transcends mere physical desegregation to foster genuine integration and cross-cultural interactions. It transforms institutional culture to embrace multiculturalism, allows for fluid cultural identities, provides equal opportunities regardless of race, engages critically with issues of power and inequity, and promotes democratic dialogue inclusive of diverse perspectives.

sense of the underlying values¹⁷ that may drive cultural and identity practices in these educational institutions.

This study aims to build on previous research by employing Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (Schwartz, 2012) as a framework to analyse the motivations behind different approaches to hair regulations enforced by private schools in Cape Town. This perspective, which is applied specifically in the findings chapter, aims to provide a deeper understanding of the complexities reported in earlier studies, such as the tension between assimilation and cultural expression (McKinney, 2010; Soudien, 2004) and the persistence of racially charged practices despite stated commitments to transformation (Epstein, 2014; Khanyile, 2023). The subsequent discussion chapter draws upon additional theoretical frameworks to further explore and contextualise these findings.

The objectives of this study were:

1. to investigate how parents with children in private schools across Cape Town experience school rules related to hair, particularly those governing Afrocentric and naturally textured hairstyles, while building on research that has highlighted the importance of such cultural expressions in school settings (McKinney, 2010);
2. to examine, by using Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values, how the sampled schools publicly marketed their values, and how these align with or differ from parents' lived experiences of these values;
3. to address the disconnect between schools' self-disclosed values and practice when it comes to implementing codes of conduct, according to parents' lived experiences and as identified in previous research (Khanyile, 2023);
4. to analyse the values that underpin school practices and how these impact approaches to hair regulations;

¹⁷ Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (2012) forms the foundation of this analysis, offering a lens through which to examine the motivations behind parental school choices, which in turn impact their children's school hair experiences. This theory identifies 10 core values: conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, benevolence, and universalism.

5. to better understand the factors that contribute to the upholding of Eurocentric norms and school practices in private schools in Cape Town, as discussed by Hunter (2016);
6. to provide recommendations for fostering more inclusive environments in private schools in Cape Town, with a particular focus on encouraging diverse cultural identities as expressed through hair.

By exploring these objectives across a number of private schools in Cape Town, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on racial equality and cultural inclusivity in education. The research focused on the experiences of Afrocentric hair and hairstyles in private schools in Cape Town as a microcosm that is representative of larger societal issues across South Africa.

The research intends to offer insights that could inform future school experiences and practices that promote more equitable and culturally sensitive approaches to cultural and identity expression in educational settings.

By comparing findings across multiple schools, each with a diverse set of values, as defined by Schwartz's framework, this study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that drive complexities reported in previous research in the context of education studies in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.5 Research questions

The research was guided by the following primary and supplementary research questions that were formulated to address the gap in the literature concerning hair policies and cultural expression within Cape Town private education setting (Khanyile, 2023; Mujulizi, 2022). These questions have been designed to elicit rich, qualitative data that will contribute to the understanding of how school experiences of learners, as reported by their parents, and school policies intersect with issues of identity, culture, and inclusivity.

Main research question:

- How do parents with children in a small sample of Cape Town private schools and one Elite Model C school experience values that shape inclusivity around hair rules, particularly the cultural expression of or styling related to Afrocentric hair?

Further questions:

- According to the parents, do any of these schools suppress or encourage cultural identities, particularly related to hair?
- How and why have some parents chosen certain private schools over others or public schools?
- What trade-offs might impact parents' choice to accommodate their choice of private school?

1.6 Definition of terms and concepts

1.6.1 Independent schools / Private schools

For the purposes of this study, private schools in South Africa are defined as educational institutions, at primary or secondary school level, that operate independently of direct government control, as will be defined below, and are primarily funded through student fees rather than state subsidies. While these are officially termed 'independent schools' in South African policy documents, this research uses the more internationally recognised term 'private schools' for clarity and consistency.

Private schools in South Africa are characterised by their autonomy in areas such as: admissions policies, curriculum choices, staffing decisions and fee structures (Gruijters et al., 2024; Soudien, 2010). These institutions cater to approximately 5% of South Africa's student population and often serve middle- and upper-class families seeking alternatives to the public school system (Gruijters et al., 2024). It is important to note that within this definition of private schools, there exists significant variation in terms of fee structures, resources, and prestige (Gruijters et al., 2024).

1.6.2 Elite private schools

Elite private schools in South Africa represent a distinct subset of private education institutions that are often rooted in pre-democratic traditions that reflect Eurocentric ideals (Gruijters et al., 2024). They are characterised by their exceptionally high fees, even in relation to private schools, prestigious reputations, and historic tradition of reproducing social and racial privilege. These schools charge annual fees ranging from ZAR 132,000 to ZAR 300,000 (approximately USD 9,000 to USD 21,000 at the time of writing) for day learners, with boarding fees reaching even higher (Gruijters et al., 2024). Elite private schools typically offer extensive facilities, highly qualified teaching staff, and a curriculum that often includes international qualifications¹⁸ (Gruijters et al., 2024).

Despite South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, these institutions remain predominantly White in their student composition, with Gruijters et al. (2024) reporting that White learners occupy 55% of spaces in elite private schools, despite comprising only 3.8% of the country's total student population. This overrepresentation reflects the continued role of these schools in maintaining and reproducing class and racial privileges (Epstein, 2014). While elite private schools often present themselves as pioneers of transformation and diversity, research suggests that their practices of admission, curriculum, and school culture often reinforce rather than challenge existing social hierarchies (Khanyile, 2023; Mujulizi, 2022; Soudien, 2012; Teegeer, 2015).

1.6.3 Model C schools

Model C schools occupy a unique position in South Africa's education landscape, straddling the line between public and private institutions. These schools, formerly Whites-only under apartheid, were granted significant autonomy in the early 1990s, allowing them to charge fees and govern themselves through school governing bodies (SGBs) (Soudien, 2004).

¹⁸ In South Africa, students primarily encounter three main exit-level examinations. The most common is the National Senior Certificate (NSC) curriculum, administered by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Many private schools offer the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) exit examination which, while based on the same national curriculum as the NSC, employs a different examination board. Some international and private schools also offer the Cambridge International Examinations as an alternative to the NSC, providing learners with a pathway that potentially opens doors to international universities and global opportunities. For a more detailed discussion of these qualifications and their perceived differences, see section 2.3 (p. 43) in the literature review.

The Model C school in this study, Elite Boys C, is a boys-only institution established in the late 1800's. It exemplifies the elite social status that many elite private schools maintain. Despite charging similar fees to private schools and lower fees than elite private schools, it operates in a manner akin to semi-private schools, with considerable control over learner admissions, staffing, and curriculum (Jansen & Kriger, 2020). The school's long history contributes to its social prestige and positions it as a site of privilege similar to elite private schools (Epstein, 2014).

While governed by a feeder zone¹⁹ that ostensibly democratises access for learners from lower social classes by limiting access to schools within a defined geographical area, research suggests that such zoning can be used strategically to maintain socio-economic exclusivity (Hunter, 2016; Hunter, 2010). The school's elite status, coupled with its unique governance structure and reputation as a result of its historical significance in society, justifies its inclusion in this study alongside private schools. It represents a critical case study of how social privilege is maintained and reproduced within South Africa's nominally public education sector (Soudien, 2012; Teeger, 2015).

1.6.4 Cultural inclusivity and inclusive education

Cultural inclusivity in education refers to the creation of learning environments that recognise, respect, and value diverse cultural identities, practices and expressions of all learners. This includes accepting and accommodating diverse cultural elements such as language, dress, hair styles, customs, and ways of knowing as integral parts of learners' identities (Teise & Alexander, 2017; Vandeyar, 2008). In the South African context, cultural inclusivity involves moving beyond mere integration of diverse cultural groups to fostering a climate where all cultural backgrounds are appreciated and can thrive (Alexander, 2011; Loader & Hughes, 2017).

¹⁹ A feeder zone refers to a geographic area from which a school is expected to draw its students, typically based on proximity. While intended to ensure local access, Hunter (2016) argues that schools can strategically enforce or ignore feeder zone policies to selectively admit desirable students and exclude others, often maintaining socioeconomic exclusivity. For example, he notes that some schools selectively enforce(s) zoning to push undesirable students to other schools, while making exceptions to admit influential or wealthy families from outside the zone.

Inclusive education addresses and responds to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation, reducing exclusion, and transforming educational systems and practices to accommodate differences (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2009). In South Africa, inclusive education aims to overcome the legacy of apartheid by restructuring schools to remove barriers to learning and provide equitable access and support for all learners, regardless of race, language, ability or other factors (DoE, 2001; Walton, 2011). This involves developing inclusive school cultures, policies and practices that celebrate diversity as a resource rather than a problem (Engelbrecht, 2006; Vandeyar, 2010).

For the purpose of this study, cultural inclusivity encompasses practices and experiences that allow learners to express their cultural identities, including through Afrocentric hairstyles, without discrimination or pressure to conform to Eurocentric norms. This aligns with Soudien's (2004) critique of assimilationist practices in South African schools and calls for a more culturally responsive approach to inclusion.

This definition acknowledges the importance of cultural expression in inclusive education, as highlighted by scholars such as McKinney (2010) and Vandeyar (2008), who have examined issues of identity and belonging in South African schools. It also reflects the broader goals of inclusive education to create equitable learning environments that respect and value diversity in all its forms.

1.6.5 Conceptual underpinnings

This section outlines the theoretical frameworks that guided the research into parental choices of schools for their children and how these relate to the basic values that govern hair experiences in the sample of private schools in Cape Town. These conceptual underpinnings provide a structured approach to understanding the complex interplay of values, culture, and identity within educational settings.

1.6.5.1 Introduction of theoretical frameworks

The primary framework employed in the findings chapter is Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (2012). This is then contextualised in the discussion chapter through the lenses of Cultural Capital Theory and Social Mobility Theory (Bourdieu, 1987, 1998), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974) and Decoloniality Theory (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007). Each of these frameworks contributes unique insights to our understanding of how parents make choices of schools for their children, how schools develop and implement policies that shape learners' hair experiences, and how these decisions impact student identity and cultural expression. The discussion chapter explores the interplay between these theories to provide a discussion of the findings.

1.6.5.1.1 Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values

Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (Schwartz, 2012) underpins the analysis in the findings chapter, offering insight into parental school choice motivations and their impact on children's hair experiences. This theoretical framework identifies 10 core values: conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, benevolence, and universalism, each representing distinct goals and motivations (Table 1). The application of this theory in the findings chapter provides a structured approach to understanding the complex interplay of values influencing decisions and experiences related to hair regulations in the sampled Cape Town private schools.

Table 1: Defining goals of motivational values according to Schwartz (Schwartz, 2012)

Universalism:	understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.
Benevolence:	preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group').
Power:	social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.
Achievement:	personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.
Hedonism:	pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself.
Stimulation:	excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.
Self-direction:	independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring.
Conformity:	restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
Tradition:	respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides.
Security:	safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.

This model's universal applicability is evidenced by extensive cross-cultural research spanning 82 countries (Schwartz, 2012). The theory's consistency across diverse cultural, linguistic, and demographic groups strongly supports its global relevance (Schwartz, 2012). In most cultures studied, these 10 values are recognised as distinct, with broader value orientations universally discriminated, reinforcing the theory's postulation of a universal motivational continuum of human values (Schwartz, 2012).

Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values extends beyond individual analysis, offering a framework for evaluating actions, policies, and people within broader contexts. The theory has been applied across various fields, including sociology and education, demonstrating versatility. Notably, Schwartz asserts that values can characterise cultural groups and societies, a concept that logically extends to institutions within those societies, as well as to the individuals interacting with these institutions.

This application makes the theory particularly relevant for analysing both educational institutions like schools and the parents who engage with them. It provides a structured approach to understanding the underlying value systems of schools as reflected in their public communications, as well as the values influencing parental decision-making in school selection. By applying this framework, we can gain insights into how institutional values align with or diverge from parental values, particularly in the context of hair regulations and cultural expression.

Schwartz arranges these basic values in a circular structure, representing their interrelationships and potential conflicts or compatibilities, as seen in Figure 1 below.

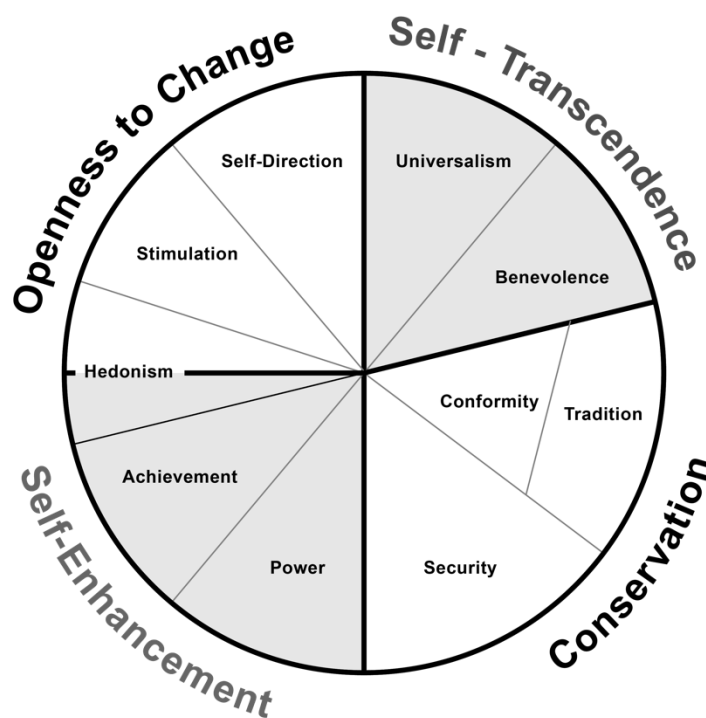


Figure 1: Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values (Recreated from (Schwartz, 2012))

Figure 1 is organised along two main dimensions: 'openness to change' versus 'conservation', and 'self-enhancement' versus 'self-transcendence'. This framework proved relevant to the study of Afrocentric hair and hairstyles in the sample of private schools in Cape Town, as it allows for the analysis of how basic values such as conformity and tradition might conflict with self-direction and universalism in the context of hair experiences at school, for example.

The study employed Schwartz's abovementioned theory to guide the analysis and interpretation of publicly available data found on the websites of the sample schools alongside interviews with parents. This analysis, presented in the findings chapter examined how these aligned with or conflicted with experiences regarding Afrocentric hair and hairstyles in the sampled private schools in Cape Town. This allowed for the visual mapping of the value landscapes of each school and parental decision-making process, providing a deeper understanding of the factors influencing hair experiences in the sampled private schools in Cape Town. The discussion chapter then discusses the values in conjunction with the other theoretical frameworks following below.

1.6.5.2 Cultural capital and social mobility

The concepts of cultural capital and social mobility, developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1987, 1998), are crucial to understanding the educational dynamics at play in the sampled private schools in Cape Town, particularly concerning hair experiences and parental choices of schools. Bourdieu's (1987, 1998) theoretical frameworks provide insight into how social and cultural resources influence educational experiences and outcomes.

1.6.5.2.1 Cultural capital

Cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility in society beyond economic means. It encompasses knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that give individuals higher status in society. Bourdieu (1987) identifies three forms of cultural capital:

1. Embodied: Knowledge, skills, and dispositions acquired through socialisation and education.
2. Objectified: Cultural goods like books, artworks, and instruments.
3. Institutionalised: Educational qualifications and academic credentials.

In the context of this study, cultural capital plays a significant role in how parents navigate school choices and how schools shape student identities. Mujulizi (2022) argues that learners in elite private schools in Cape Town develop a "genuine common culture" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81) through active socialisation. This culture encompasses not just academic knowledge, but also "the imponderables of manners and deportment, the typical expressions, school slang, the shared turns of phrase, the particular kinds of jokes, and the characteristic ways of moving, speaking, laughing, and interacting with others" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 83).

The acquisition and expression of cultural capital is particularly relevant to the examination of Afrocentric hair and hairstyles in private schools. Hair experiences, as experienced by learners, can be seen as a manifestation of the cultural capital valued by the school community. Schools that embrace diverse hairstyles foster a form of cultural capital that values multiculturalism and individual expression. Conversely, schools with more restrictive school policies perpetuate a form of cultural capital that could be rooted in colonial or Eurocentric norms.

1.6.5.2.2 Social mobility

Bourdieu's theory (1987, 1998) also emphasises how cultural capital influences social mobility. In the context of this study, parents' decisions to send their children to a particular school may be interpreted as an attempt to facilitate their children's upward social mobility through the accumulation of specific forms of cultural capital. However, this process is not without tension. For Black learners, restrictive hair policies around Afrocentric hair and hairstyles may create a conflict between the cultural capital of their home environment and that of the school. This tension highlights the complex interplay between cultural capital, identity formation, and social mobility in the context of the sampled private schools in Cape Town.

As Mujulizi (2022, p. 76) notes, there is a perception of becoming rich "by proxy" through the symbolic capital of classmates and alumni networks. This underscores the potential long-term impacts of parents' school choices, as the cultural capital acquired in these elite environments can translate into significant advantages in future social and professional spheres.

The application of Bourdieu's framework of cultural capital and social mobility to this study's discussion chapter allows for an understanding of the subtle ways in which hair experiences in private schools contribute to the reinforcement or the challenging of social hierarchies and influence learners' future trajectories. This perspective enables a critical examination of how these hair experiences may perpetuate or challenge existing social structures in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.6.5.3 Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Decoloniality Theory

This study employed Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1974) and Decoloniality Theory (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007) to provide a theoretical framework for analysing hair experiences in the sampled private schools in Cape Town.

1.6.5.4 Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1974) examines how individuals' self-concept is influenced by their membership in social groups (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012), thus offering insights into identity formation within educational contexts. This theory posits that people derive a significant part of their identity from the groups they belong to, leading to intergroup behaviours that are distinct from interpersonal interactions (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).

There are three key psychological processes at the core of Social Identity Theory:

1. Social categorisation: This is the cognitive process by which individuals classify themselves and others into various social categories (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). In the context of this study, social categorisation could manifest in how learners or parents perceive and categorise different schools based on their hair experiences, or how schools categorise learners based on their hairstyles.
2. Social comparison: Once social categorisation has occurred, individuals compare their groups with other groups, evaluating the relative standing of their in-group (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). In this research, this process may be evident in how parents and

learners compare schools with more restrictive hair policies to those with more inclusive policies, or how learners with Afrocentric hair and hairstyles compare their experiences to those of learners with other hair types.

3. Social identification: This process involves individuals incorporating their group membership into their self-concept (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). For this study, social identification could be observed in how learners with Afrocentric hair and hairstyles internalise their school's policies towards their hairstyles, potentially affecting their sense of identity, social belonging and self-esteem.

By looking through a lens of Social Identity Theory, the aim in the discussion chapter was to understand how hair experiences in the sampled private schools in Cape Town influence learners' identity formation, group dynamics and membership, and the broader social context of post-apartheid education.

1.6.5.4.1 Decoloniality Theory

The broad contents that now comprise decoloniality theory (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) provide a critical framework for examining the persistence of colonial power structures and Eurocentric thinking in postcolonial contexts. This perspective is relevant to this study of Afrocentric hair and hairstyles in the sampled private schools in Cape Town, as it interrogates how pre-apartheid legacies might continue to shape educational policies, practices and experiences in post-apartheid South Africa.

Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 240) conceptualises the "coloniality of being" as encompassing the lived experience of colonisation and its impact on language, identity, ontology and subjectivity, including the naturalisation of racial hierarchies, the denial of full humanity to colonised peoples, and the normalisation of violence in colonial contexts. This concept is crucial for understanding how hair experiences in some private schools in Cape Town may reflect deeper pre-apartheid attitudes that devalue Afrocentric expressions of identity. The theory encourages the examination of how certain hair and hairstyle experiences might

perpetuate what Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 247) calls the "non-ethics of war," where the cultural expressions of colonised peoples are delegitimised or suppressed.

Decoloniality Theory emphasises the importance of centring marginalised voices and knowledge. As Dussel (1993, p. 75) argues, "The 'realisation' of modernity no longer lies in the passage from its abstract potential to its 'real,' European, embodiment. It lies today, rather, in a process that will transcend modernity as such, a trans-modernity, in which both modernity and its negated alterity (the victims) co-realise themselves in a process of mutual creative fertilisation." In the context of this research, this translates to prioritising the experiences and perspectives of parents navigating predominantly White private school spaces²⁰ so that private schools in Cape Town can develop more inclusive environments that celebrate cultural diversity, particularly in relation to Afrocentric hair, thereby fostering students' positive identity development and sense of belonging.

Furthermore, Decoloniality theory suggests that Afrocentric hair and hairstyles can be viewed not just as personal expression, but as acts of resistance against cultural assimilation. The "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 2007, p. 171) explains how colonial racial hierarchies continue to influence social structures inherently, including educational institutions, even in a post-colonial context. By examining hair experiences through this lens, the study analyses how the sample schools continue to perpetuate or challenge these hierarchies.

In this manner, the study's discussion chapter aims to contribute to broader conversations about decolonising education in South Africa. It examines how hair experiences can reflect deeper structural inequalities and uphold colonial ideologies in educational settings, as highlighted by Christie and McKinney (2017) in their critique of persistent Eurocentric biases in South African education.

²⁰ The findings chapter will show that the majority of institutions examined in this study exhibited a demographic composition skewed towards White learners. Moreover, the teaching staff and administrative bodies were found to be predominantly or mostly comprised of White individuals.

1.7 Research design adaptations

This study was significantly adapted in response to unforeseen challenges. The study's focus and methodology underwent substantial revisions due to access limitations in gaining direct collaboration with private schools, likely owing to the sensitive nature of hair policies in educational settings. The evolution in the research approach highlights the sensitive nature of the topic and underscores the importance of flexibility in terms of qualitative research.

As Maxwell (2013) notes, qualitative research design is often a reflexive process that operates throughout every stage of a project. The following sections detail the initial aim of the study and subsequent revisions to ensure the research could proceed with ethical considerations, while maintaining its focus on understanding cultural inclusivity and identity expression in private school settings, particularly concerning Afrocentric hair and hairstyles. This shift from an institutional perspective to one that is centred on parents' experiences ultimately provided a valuable lens to examine these critical issues.

1.7.1 Initial aim

The initial aim of this study was to collaborate with private schools in Cape Town to explore their policies and practices regarding Afrocentric hair and hairstyles (Appendix 6). Two elite private schools had in principle agreed to participate once the proposal had been approved and ethical clearance was granted. The research intended to work directly with private school teachers to examine the subject of inclusivity around hair rules. The original research questions were:

Main research question:

- How do diverse perspectives on Afrocentric hair and beauty intersect with institutional cultures at elite private schools in Cape Town?

Further questions:

- How can elite private schools in Cape Town develop more inclusive policies and practices that respect and celebrate diverse hair textures and styles?

- What factors have enabled some elite private schools in Cape Town to create more culturally affirming environments for Black learners, particularly regarding hair and appearance?

The initial aim of the study was to gain insight into how schools navigate issues of cultural expression, identity and transformation through their approaches to hair policies.

1.7.2 Revised scope

Given the challenges in gaining access to private schools, the scope was revised to focus on the experiences and perspectives of parents whose children attend private schools in Cape Town, rather than on school policies and/or the schools themselves (Appendix 7). The schools that had initially agreed in principle to participate likely withdrew due to the sensitive nature of the study topic, coupled with the privacy restrictions of private educational institutions. This shift in focus allowed for an exploration of hair experiences and practices from the viewpoint of those directly affected by them.

The revised scope and research question, as outlined in section 1.5 (p. 13), maintained the study's core interest in understanding inclusivity and the experiences of the parents of learners in private schools, whilst adapting the methodology to overcome access limitations. This adaptation involved a shift to recruiting participants from the researcher's network at the University of Cape Town, as will be discussed in section 1.8.1 (p. 29).

The primary data collection method became interviews with parents. It must be noted that the researcher did not have access to any school policies other than those the parents had with them during the interview process. Following the interviews, to supplement this primary data, the study analysed publicly available information from school websites²¹. This secondary

²¹ The website analysis was conducted through web scraping, a technique for automated extraction of data from websites. Web scraping involves using software to simulate human web browsing to collect and record public-facing qualitative data efficiently. This method is recognised as a valid approach for collecting publicly available online data for research purposes and all the risks were considered (Krotov et al., 2020). A detailed discussion of the web scraping methodology employed in this study is provided in the methodology chapter (p. 105).

data provided additional context for understanding each institution's stated values and approaches.

This approach, including the use of publicly available website data, was carefully considered in light of research ethics, weighing factors such as research value, public accessibility, non-commercial use, anonymisation, and robots.txt permissions²² against considerations of explicit consent, terms of service²³, and privacy statements²⁴. Additionally, potential harm to individuals or organisations was carefully evaluated, as was the technical impact of data collection on the websites' servers. This ethical framework aligns with best practices in web scraping for research purposes (Krotov et al., 2020; Munzert et al., 2014). The balance between the potential benefits of the research and these ethical considerations was thoroughly assessed to ensure responsible data collection, use and storage. A detailed discussion of these ethical considerations is presented in section 3.8 (p. 113).

1.8 Context of study location

South Africa is a nation characterised by diverse linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. This study focused on Cape Town, the legislative capital of South Africa, located in the Western Cape province.

²² A robots.txt file is a text file placed on a website's server that provides instructions to web crawlers and scrapers. It indicates which parts of the site should not be processed or scanned. It's considered an ethical standard for scrapers to respect these instructions (Krotov et al., 2020). In this study, all robots.txt files were carefully inspected and respected, and no data was collected, analysed or interpreted that was disallowed by these files, and therefore the decision-makers and gate-keepers of school's digital platforms.

²³ Terms of service (ToS) are rules by which one must agree to abide in order to use a service (Krotov et al., 2020). In this study, all terms of service were respected and no data was interpreted that was prohibited by these terms.

²⁴ A privacy policy is a statement or legal document that discloses how a website collects, uses, shares, and protects user data. It often includes information about data retention, user rights, and compliance with data protection regulations. Privacy policies can indicate the website owner's expectations regarding data use (Krotov et al., 2020). In this study, all privacy policies were respected, and no data was interpreted that was prohibited by these policies.

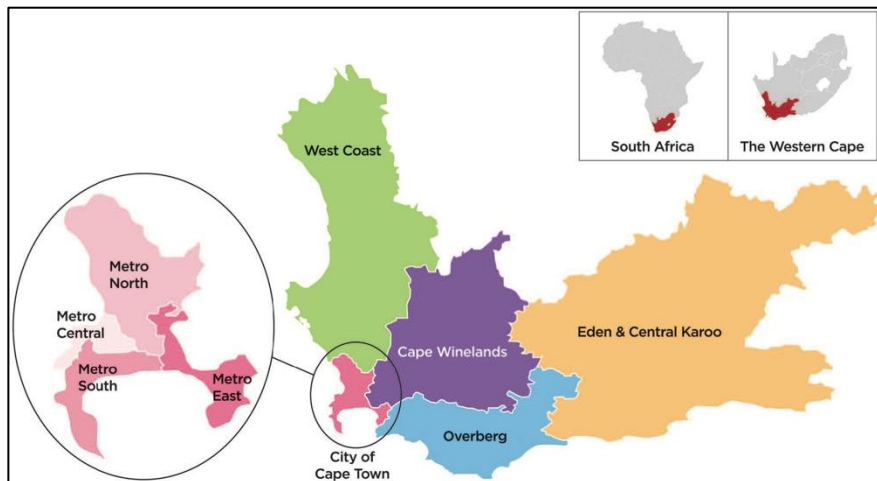


Figure 2: The Western Cape province educational district (Pillay et al., 2021).

The Western Cape Educational District seen in Figure 2 comprises eight educational districts, four of which are urban and four of which are rural (Pillay et al., 2021). This study concentrated on schools within the Metro Central, East, and South districts of Cape Town.

1.8.1 Participants and schools

All the research participants, displayed in Table 2, are employees of the University of Cape Town (UCT), an institution that found itself at the epicentre of the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF)²⁵ movement. This movement, which swept across South African universities in 2015-2016, profoundly impacted UCT's campus life and institutional discourse. After initial attempts to work directly with private schools were unsuccessful, the research approach was revised. With permission from the UCT Department of Staff Affairs, an invitation was sent out (Appendix 1) early August 2023 to Academic, Senior Academic, and Senior PASS²⁶ staff in pay classes 10 and 12²⁷, seeking volunteers with children in private schools. While not initially planned, this approach resulted in a purposeful sample²⁸, as UCT's direct experience with the Rhodes Must

²⁵ Rhodes Must Fall was a protest movement that began in March 2015 at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. It called for the removal of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes and advocated for the decolonisation of education in South African universities (Ndlovu, 2017)

²⁶ PASS Staff refers to Professional and Administrative Support Services staff at universities. This category includes non-academic employees who provide essential support functions across various university departments, such as administration, finance, human resources, IT, and facilities management.

²⁷ Pay classes 10 and 12 refer to specific levels within UCT's employee classification system. These classifications typically indicate senior positions within the academic and professional support staff structures, reflecting higher levels of responsibility, expertise, and compensation compared to lower pay classes.

²⁸ Purposeful sampling, as described by Patton (2002) and Suri (2011), involves selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. In this research, the sample became purposeful as UCT staff, having experienced the Rhodes Must Fall movement, were likely to offer valuable insights into transformation and decolonisation in education. This aligns with Patton's concept of selecting participants who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest.

Fall movement meant that staff members were likely to have valuable insights into issues of transformation and decolonisation in education, including within their insights and experience into private school contexts.

Table 2: Introduction to parents as participants (Author’s own compilation)

Participant	Gender	Highest Qualification	Self-described Racial Category	School	Nr. of children attending school
Participant 1	Female	Master's Degree	Coloured/Asian	Steiner South	2
Participant 2	Female	Bachelor's Degree	White	Steiner South	1
Participant 3	Female	Doctorate / PhD	White	Steiner South	1
Participant 4	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Coloured/Mixed	Steiner Central	2
Participant 5	Female	Master's Degree	Mixed Race	Steiner Junior	1
Participant 6	Female	Master's Degree	White	Elite Girls Cape	1
Participant 7	Female	Diploma	Coloured	Elite Girls Cape	2
Participant 8	Male	Doctorate / PhD	White	Elite Boys C	1
Participant 9	Female	Doctorate / PhD	Black	Corporate School	1
Participant 10	Female	Master's Degree	White	Winelands Elite	1
Participant 11	Female	Master's Degree	White	Hebrew Institute	3
Participant 12	Female	Doctorate / PhD	Black	New Private	1
Participant 13	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Khiosan	Private College	2

The University of Cape Town community, which includes students, staff, and faculty, as described by Ndlovu (2017), has been deeply engaged with questions of cultural expression and institutional transformation. She observes that learners, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, have had to navigate spaces where their cultural expressions were often misunderstood or devalued (Ndlovu, 2017).

1.9 Chapter outlines

This dissertation unfolds across five chapters which includes this introduction chapter, each building upon the last to explore the complex interplay of values, cultural expression, and hair experiences in the sampled Cape Town private schools.

The literature review follows, exploring the historical roots of South African education and the unique dynamics of private schooling. This chapter critically examines existing research on

inclusivity, identity formation, and cultural expression in educational settings, with a particular focus on the cultural significance of Afrocentric hair.

In the methodology chapter, I detail the research design, explaining my choice of a constructivist paradigm and qualitative approach. The use of interpretative phenomenological analysis is justified, and I outline data collection methods and ethical considerations.

The findings chapter presents a thematic analysis of website data and parent interviews through the theoretical lens of Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values. Here, I explain how I explored how school values shape hair experiences and cultural expression across different types of private schools in Cape Town, revealing patterns, contradictions and successes in approaches to cultural inclusivity.

Finally, the discussion and conclusion chapter interprets these values through the theoretical lenses of Cultural Capital Theory, Social Mobility Theory, Social Identity Theory and Decoloniality Theory. I reflect on the implications for inclusivity in private education and suggest avenues for future research.

Through this structure, the dissertation aims to provide an examination of *'the air allowed for hair'* in Cape Town private schools, contributing to broader discussions on cultural inclusivity in South African education.

1.10 Summary and conclusions

This study examined how values influence cultural inclusivity around hair experiences in a sample of Cape Town private schools, with particular attention to Afrocentric hair and hairstyles. The introduction has provided context for the complex landscape of post-apartheid South African education, where efforts to promote inclusivity often face challenges from established practices.



By proposing to analyse parent experiences and school communications through Schwartz's theory of basic values, this research sought to understand how different value systems may affect learners' cultural expression. The introduction has suggested that this approach might offer insights into the dynamics of cultural assimilation and institutional practices within these educational spaces.

It has also introduced the key concepts and theoretical frameworks that guided the study. It has also outlined the potential for this research to contribute to our understanding of how school policies and practices relate to learners' identity formation and cultural orientation.

Through this examination of learner experiences in Cape Town private schools, the study aims to add to the ongoing conversation about creating more inclusive educational environments in post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review provides context for understanding the complex landscape of Afrocentric hair experiences in Cape Town private schools. It explores the historical foundations of South African education, from colonial times through apartheid to the present day, illuminating the inequalities and cultural tensions that continue to shape the educational environment.

The review examines the growth of private schooling in South Africa, including issues of affordability and the complexities of scholarship programmes. It then explores the formation of identity in school settings, with a particular focus on elite private institutions and their impact on learners' sense of self.

An exploration of the cultural significance of hair across certain African societies follows, alongside an examination of some properties of Afrocentric hair and the evolution of hair care practices and industries. This context provides a foundation for understanding why hair policies in schools are often a sensitive and significant issue.

2.2 History of schooling in South Africa

The history of schooling in South Africa is marked by significant shifts in policy and practice, from colonial times through apartheid to the present day. These changes have profoundly shaped the educational landscape, including approaches to cultural expression within schools. The following account from Zulaikha Patel in a recent interview with Aya Chebbi (2023), describing her experience during the 2016 protests against discriminatory hair rules at Girls High, illustrates how this history continues to impact learners in contemporary South African schools:

We planned a peaceful protest where the first day we just wore all black and had placards. The institution responded with hiring additional security that was armed. We decided to continue with our protest into the second day. On the second day, the private

additional security team that was hired was armed with guns and dogs. We were threatened with arrest, where the security tried to get us to disperse and applied what I call an apartheid tactic by saying, 'I'm going to count to three, and on the third count, you should disperse, and if not, we're taking further action.'

I thought about it as I have two options. To allow for this to continue and just die being silent and allow for this war with my identity to continue and remain silent, or resist and then see what happens. I decided to pick the latter and choose to resist. Through this action, we were able to change the policies, able to have one of the first ever large-scale inquiries into racism launched at a school. It even went and influenced an integrated youth development strategy in the country for 2030 that states that by 2030, all public schools should have policies that are anti-racist, and all schools should teach a minimum of one indigenous African language, and hair policies should be anti-racist hair policies.

Patel's experience illustrates how Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974) operates in educational settings, where group categorisation based on physical attributes like hair creates powerful in-group and out-group dynamics that students must navigate daily. Figure 3 below of the protest brought global attention to the widespread persistence of racialised hair policies in South African schools. This incident highlights the complex historical, cultural, social and economic factors that continue to influence the current educational environment. The following sections examine the evolution of South African schooling from the colonial era through apartheid to the present day, including public, Model C, and private schools.



Figure 3: Zulaikha Patel with her hands up in an X (Flanagan, 2016)

2.2.1 Pre-apartheid colonial history of schooling in South Africa

The foundations of South Africa's current educational landscape, including its private school system, can be traced back to the colonial era. This period established key patterns of racial segregation, cultural assimilation, and unequal access to education that continue to influence contemporary debates around inclusivity and cultural expression in schools (Smit, 2020).

2.2.1.1 Dutch colonial era (1652-1805)

Education during this period was primarily decentralised and church-controlled. The Dutch Reformed Church provided education for White children, whilst Malay servants introduced madrassas for Muslim children, including some enslaved individuals (Davids & Waghid, 2021). This early segregation based on race and religion set a precedent for future educational policies. The 'inboekstelsel' system, which enforced San child slavery under the guise of apprenticeship, further entrenched racial hierarchies in education (Adhikari, 2010).

2.2.1.2 *British colonial era (1806-1852)*

The British colonial period centralised and Anglicised the education system, making English the primary language of instruction. This period saw the establishment of a hierarchical structure with schools serving specific racial and social groups, laying the groundwork for future segregation policies (Smit, 2020). The emphasis on English and British cultural norms during this time contributes to the ongoing debates about language and cultural expression in South African schools, including issues surrounding Afrocentric hairstyles.

2.2.1.3 *Missionary schools (1806-1953)*

Missionary schools played a crucial role in providing education to African learners, blending Western education with religious indoctrination (Gibbs, 2014). Whilst these schools trained generations of African leaders, they also required cultural assimilation, a tension that persists in contemporary discussions about inclusivity in private schools (Cross, 1986; Meier & Hartell, 2009). The missionary school era ended with the Bantu Education Act of 1953, marking a shift towards more explicit racial segregation in education (Thobejane, 2013).

2.2.1.4 *Boer Republics and Union Era (1845-1947)*

The establishment of Boer Republics and later the Union of South Africa further entrenched racial segregation in education. The Anglo-Boer War and its aftermath shaped Afrikaner identity and nationalism, contributing to the development of apartheid ideology (Schmidl, 2007). During this period, English became the official language and primary medium of instruction, threatening Afrikaner language and culture (Swart, 2009). This linguistic tension foreshadows current debates about language policies and cultural expression in schools.

2.2.1.5 *Afrikaans-Dutch era (1904-1924)*

The creation of autonomous Afrikaans schools opposing English instruction during this period highlights the historical roots of language and cultural identity issues in South African education (Smit, 2020). The development of Christian National Education, emphasising Christian-Nationalist ideals and White racial superiority, laid the groundwork for future

educational policies that would reinforce cultural divisions and racial identity in South African schools (Tatz, 1961). The development of Christian National Education during this period exemplifies Bourdieu's (1987) concept of institutionalised cultural capital, as it established educational structures that would preferentially transmit cultural advantages to White South Africans for generations to come.

2.2.2 Apartheid-era schooling

The apartheid era marked a significant intensification of racial segregation in South African education, with profound implications that continue to shape the current educational landscape, including private schools (Soudien, 2023). The 1950s saw the introduction of apartheid legislation, including the Bantu Education Act, which aimed to enforce racial segregation in all domains of education (Greenberg, 1980). This led to the creation of 19 separate educational departments based on race, language, and area (Naicker, 2005; Smit, 2020). The Bantu Education system represents perhaps the most explicit form of racialisation within South African education, as it deliberately constructed educational institutions around the premise of racial difference and hierarchy. As Erasmus (2017) argues, racialisation operates through institutional processes that give political and cultural meaning to the concept of race, a process clearly evident in the deliberate underfunding and curricular restrictions imposed on Black schools during this period.

Hendrik Verwoerd, as Minister of Native Affairs, articulated the motive behind Bantu Education in a 1954 speech, stating that education for Black Africans should be rooted in their own communities, preparing them for limited roles in society: "There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour" (South African History Online [SAHO], 2016, para. 18). Funding disparities were stark: in the 1960s, the government spent ZAR 12.46 per African pupil annually compared to ZAR 144.57 per white pupil annually (Soudien, 2023). Adjusted for inflation, this equates to approximately ZAR 1,422.96 vs ZAR 16,510.71 in today's currency (South Africa Inflation Calculator, 2024; Inflation Tool, 2024). Christian National Education (CNE) was implemented to instil Afrikaner Calvinistic beliefs and maintain racial hierarchy (Davids & Waghid, 2021; Tatz, 1961). This system acted as both an

academic curriculum and a hidden curriculum, shaping learners' worldviews and racial identities.

Educational resistance to apartheid took various forms in South Africa during the latter half of the 20th century. Following the 1976 SOWETO Uprising, there was massive political resistance among youth, who opposed state-prescribed educational goals and regulation throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Vally et al., 1999). The 1980s saw the emergence of 'alternative schools'²⁹ in response to the state's inability or unwillingness to admit Black children, providing educational opportunities outside the state-controlled framework (Vally et al., 1999). This resistance to state-prescribed educational goals represents what Maldonado-Torres (2007) would identify as a decolonial stance, a rejection of the 'coloniality of knowledge' that attempted to position European epistemologies as inherently superior to African ones.

Pressure for desegregation intensified towards the end of the 1980s, particularly in major urban centres. In 1989, there was increased pressure to open White schools in major centres like Cape Town and Johannesburg. This led to limited integration, with White schools being permitted to admit Black students under specific conditions from 1990 onwards. These conditions included that the school remain 51 percent White and that the ethos and character of the school be maintained (Vally et al., 1999).

The legacy of apartheid-era education continues to influence contemporary debates about inclusivity, cultural expression, and identity in South African schools, including private institutions. The historical suppression of African cultural expressions and the emphasis on Eurocentric norms during this period help contextualise current struggles for recognition of Afrocentric identities, including issues surrounding hair policies in Cape Town's private schools (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Oyedemi, 2016).

²⁹ Alternative schools emerged in the 1980s to absorb increasing numbers of children who were not accommodated by the state system. These schools varied widely in their fees and standards, as well as in their ability to sustain themselves. They arose in response to the inability or unwillingness of state schools to admit Black children, particularly those who had failed matriculation examinations and were not reabsorbed into the system due to age restrictions imposed in the early 1980s.

2.2.3 Creation of Model A, B and C schools

And so, growing up, because of my parent's experience with education, my mom is a product of a segregated education system, what was known as the Bantu education system under apartheid. My mom is a product of that, and my dad, being an immigrant, never got the chance to get a formal education, right? So my parents deemed going to formally segregated schools what would be called white schools. They deemed that as a privilege, and because it was a privilege that was not afforded to them, they saw it as almost like this mark in your life that shows you've kind of, like, you made it. - Zulaikha Patel (Chebbi, 2023)

The creation of Model C schools in South Africa originated in the early 1990s when the De Klerk government introduced three models (A, B, and C) to desegregate White schools. Model C allowed schools to convert to semi-private status, with teacher salaries paid by the state and other operational costs covered by the school community (Carrim, 1998). In March 1992, the government unilaterally declared almost all White public schools to be Model C schools, initiating an era of cost-recovery and cost-sharing in South African education that continues today (Carrim, 1998).

The South African Schools Act of 1996 reclassified most Model C schools as 'public' schools, subjecting their policies to national regulations and constitutional mandates prohibiting racial discrimination in admissions. However, they retained significant autonomy through their governing bodies and the ability to set certain non-racial selection criteria (Carrim, 1998). This system primarily benefited middle-class families who could afford the fees, doing little to improve access to quality education for the majority of the school-going population.

Hunter (2016) highlights the pivotal role of Model C schools in the desegregation process, particularly in the province of Natal. Teachers were instrumental in this process, forming steering committees and promoting desegregation among parents. The integration of Model C schools allowed for the selection of the most talented black pupils, illustrating the complex racial dynamics in the post-apartheid education system.

2.2.4 Post-apartheid era schooling

The end of apartheid in 1994 marked a significant turning point for South Africa's education system, ushering in an era of reform aimed at addressing the deep-rooted inequalities of the past. In 1994, the new democratic government inherited a fragmented education system consisting of 19 separate departments, which it sought to consolidate into a single, unified national system (McKay, 2015). This massive undertaking achieved near-universal enrolment, bringing millions of previously out-of-school children into the formal education system, representing a crucial step towards educational equity.

2.2.4.1 *Post-apartheid era (1994—present)*

The post-apartheid education system is characterised by a blend of centralised policy-making and decentralised administration. While the national government sets overarching policies, provinces oversee the day-to-day management of schools. A key feature of this new system is the establishment of school governing bodies (SGBs), which grant local communities significant control over various aspects of school management, including admission policies, teacher selection, and language of instruction (Bell & McKay, 2011; McKay, 2015; Meier & Hartell, 2009).

Legislation such as the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) and the National Education Policy Act of 1996 (NEPA) laid the groundwork for desegregation and equal access to education. These laws theoretically allow learners to attend any public school regardless of their social or geographical background. However, the implementation of these policies has faced numerous challenges, with many schools struggling to achieve genuine racial and socioeconomic integration (Jansen, 2004; McKay, 2015).

One of the most persistent obstacles to educational equity in post-apartheid South Africa has been the uneven distribution of resources and funding. Despite government efforts to rectify historical funding discrepancies, significant disparities remain between schools in affluent

areas (often formerly White schools) and those in economically disadvantaged communities (Hunter, 2015). To address these funding disparities, the South African government implemented the quintile ranking system as part of the Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding (ANSSSF). This system ranks schools into five quintiles based on the poverty level of the community in which the school is located, with Quintile 1 representing the poorest schools and Quintile 5 the most affluent (DoE, 2015). The intention was to provide more funding to schools serving impoverished communities, with Quintile 1-3 schools receiving the highest per-learner allocations and designated as no-fee schools.

The decentralisation of school management, while promoting local democracy, has had unintended consequences. In many cases, it has allowed schools in economically advantaged areas (Quintile 5) to maintain their privileged status, perpetuating rather than alleviating educational inequalities (Meier & Hartell, 2009). This is particularly evident in the way catchment areas and feeder zones are defined, which often reflect and reinforce existing patterns of racial and socioeconomic segregation (Bell & McKay, 2011).

The quality of education and subsequent opportunities for social mobility continue to be closely linked to the historical racial and class divisions of the apartheid era. Schools that traditionally served White, middle-class communities tend to produce middle-class graduates, while schools in predominantly Black townships often struggle to break the cycle of working-class outcomes (Robins & Fleisch, 2014). This perpetuation of inequality underscores the need for more comprehensive reforms to ensure that all learners have access to high-quality education, regardless of their background.

Despite efforts to promote integration in post-apartheid schools, desegregation often leads to assimilationist practices. Soudien (2004, p. 104) notes that "assimilationism is overwhelmingly hegemonic as a practice of integration in schools," meaning learners from disadvantaged groups are expected to conform to the dominant school culture. This perpetuates inequalities and hinders integration, failing to value diverse cultural backgrounds and posing significant challenges for truly inclusive education in post-apartheid South Africa.

In conclusion, while post-apartheid South Africa has made substantial strides in reforming its education system, the legacy of historical inequalities continues to shape educational outcomes. The tension between centralised policy-making and decentralised administration, coupled with persistent socioeconomic disparities, presents ongoing challenges to achieving true educational equity. This context sets the stage for understanding the growth of private schools in South Africa, which will be explored in the next section.

2.2.4.2 Protest during the post-apartheid era

Christie and McKinney (2017) outline a sequence of student demonstrations that occurred in 2016, two decades after the South African Schools Act abolished the racially segregated education system. The protests were instigated by learners at Girls High, who utilised social media to demonstrate against instances of racism, such as school regulations that governed their hairstyles and prohibited the usage of African languages. They highlight the protests rapidly extended to other educational institutions, including Cloudy Mountain High in Cape Town, where learners likewise expressed grievances with the allocation of demerit points for speaking isiXhosa both inside and outside the classroom. These student protests against school regulations governing hairstyles and language use highlight what Erasmus (2017) terms the 'web of socio-political, cultural and historical relations' that constitutes racialisation. By challenging these seemingly neutral policies, students exposed how everyday school practices continue to reproduce racialised understandings of appropriate appearance and expression, long after the formal end of apartheid.

Christie and McKinney (2017) suggest that these protests marked a culmination of years of efforts to combat prejudice in "Model C" schools nationwide, where regulations governed many aspects such as attire, hairstyles (for both genders), head coverings, and the observance of non-Christian religious customs. Additionally, there were conflicts with the choice of

language used for teaching, the selection of personnel, and “overt bullying³⁰” of learners in these educational institutions (Christie & McKinney, 2017, p. 2).

2.2.4.3 Parental involvement

Parental involvement in education encompasses a wide range of activities through which parents support their children's learning, both at home and at school. As defined by Epstein (2010), this involvement can take various forms, including communicating with teachers, attending school events, volunteering, helping with homework, and participating in school decision-making. In the South African context, the importance of parental involvement has been recognised in policy documents such as the South African Schools Act of 1996, which provides for formal power to parents in school governance.

The importance of parental involvement is well-established in research, with numerous studies demonstrating its positive effects on student outcomes. Fan and Chen (2001) and Jeynes (2005) have shown that parental involvement is associated with improved academic achievement, while Henderson and Mapp (2002) found it leads to better school attendance and behaviour. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) noted increased student motivation and self-esteem as additional benefits. Beyond individual student outcomes, Epstein (2010) observed that parental involvement contributes to improved teacher morale and school climate.

However, despite these clear benefits, implementing effective parental involvement strategies remains challenging for many schools, particularly in South Africa. Van Wyk (1996) points out that while many schools theoretically embrace the idea of parent-principal partnerships, few have translated this into concrete action plans. Barriers to involvement include time constraints for working parents, lack of familiarity with curriculum, communication difficulties, and schools' inadequate training on parent engagement. In the

³⁰ Christie and McKinney (2017) discuss various forms of discrimination and conflict in 'Model C' schools, citing Deacon et al.'s (2016) compilation of education law cases. The conflicts extend beyond bullying to include disputes over language policies, cultural practices, and racial discrimination.

South African context, these challenges are compounded by the legacy of apartheid, which has left many parents feeling alienated from the education system (Mbokodi et al., 2003).

These challenges are often exacerbated for families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and historically disadvantaged racial groups. McGrath and Kuriloff (1999) highlight how efforts to involve parents can inadvertently favour wealthier families while creating obstacles for working-class parents. Lareau and Horvat (1999) further elaborate on this disparity, noting that middle-class parents often possess more "cultural capital" aligned with school expectations, while working-class parents may face greater challenges in engagement. In South Africa, these disparities are particularly pronounced due to the country's history of racial segregation and ongoing socioeconomic inequalities (Van der Berg, 2008).

Barriers to parental involvement in South Africa can include language differences, cultural misunderstandings about educational roles, lack of transportation or childcare, and feelings of intimidation based on past negative experiences with schools. Koki and Lee (1998) highlight specific challenges faced by parents from diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa, noting that many traditional African cultures view education as the domain of schools rather than parents.

To address these disparities and maximise the benefits of parental involvement, schools must implement culturally responsive practices and actively work to remove barriers for all families. As Kruger (1996, p. 37, as cited in Ngongoma, 1996) recommends, schools should actively propagate the importance of nurturing a harmonious partnership between parents and principals by promoting mutual trust, respect, loyalty, frankness and understanding for each other. In the South African context, this may involve initiatives such as parent education programmes, community outreach efforts, and the development of school-based support teams to facilitate parent-school partnerships (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004).

By taking these steps, South African schools can harness the power of parental involvement to improve educational outcomes for all learners, regardless of their background. This is

particularly crucial in the context of South Africa's efforts to overcome the educational inequalities of the past and create a more inclusive and effective education system for all its citizens. Parental involvement can play a vital role in shaping school culture towards a more inclusive understanding of diverse cultural expressions, including Afrocentric hair. As parents engage more actively with schools, they can advocate for policies and practices that recognise and celebrate the cultural significance of Afrocentric hairstyles, contributing to a more inclusive educational environment that respects and values all aspects of learners' identities.

2.3 Demand for private schooling

In post-apartheid South Africa, education has become a focal point for aspirations of social mobility and economic advancement. South Africans view access to well-funded schools not only as a means to rectify the injustices of apartheid but also as a fundamental human right and a potential solution to unemployment (Maile, 2004; McKay, 2015). The prevailing belief is that enrolment in a well-equipped school equips individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to enter the formal workforce, command higher earnings, and gain admission to further education institutions (Bhorat, 2004; McKay, 2015).

In this context, private schools have emerged as a significant alternative to public education. Gravett and Look (2014, p. 183), citing Hofmeyer and Lee of the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa (HSRC), define private schools as: *"...all formal schools that are not public and may be founded, owned, managed and financed by actors other than the state, even in cases where the state provides most of the funding and considerable control over these schools."* This broad definition encompasses a wide range of institutions, from entirely private schools to those receiving partial state funding. Supporters of private education argue that a thriving private schooling market assists the state in fulfilling the constitutional right to basic education and in addressing the 'learning crisis' in public education (Languille, 2016).

Private schools, along with former Model C schools, have become attractive options for parents seeking enhanced educational prospects for their children. McKay (2015) notes that these institutions are often perceived to offer superior resources and a higher standard of

education compared to many public schools. This perception has fuelled a trend of student transfers to these schools, as parents seek to secure what they believe to be better educational opportunities for their children.

This perception of private and former Model C schools as superior educational options echoes the sentiment expressed in Zulaikha Patel's reflection at the beginning of section 2.2.3 (p. 37). Her parents' view of attending formerly segregated White schools as a "privilege" and a mark of success aligns with the current trend McKay (2015) describes. The migration towards these schools reflects a broader societal belief in their ability to provide better educational outcomes and future opportunities.

The post-apartheid era has seen successive education ministers implement various reforms as part of a broader policy to transform society, increase access to historically privileged schools, and promote fairness and equality in the education system (Smit, 2020; Woolman & Fleisch, 2006). These reforms, coupled with the introduction of open school choice options, have led to significant shifts in student enrolment patterns across South Africa.

Smit (2020) observes that many regions have experienced a substantial migration of learners from underperforming schools to more effective ones. This migration has taken various forms, including movement from rural schools to township schools, and from township schools to suburban schools. Concurrently, there has been a notable decrease in middle-class student enrolment in public suburban schools, as these learners increasingly opt for private schools (Smit, 2020; Woolman & Fleisch, 2006).

These trends reflect the complex interplay between historical inequalities, educational reform efforts, and parental aspirations in shaping the landscape of South African education. The growing popularity of private schools, in particular, highlights both the ongoing challenges in achieving equitable access to high-quality education within the public school system and the perceived role of private education in addressing these challenges.

Over the period 2012 to 2022, Table 3 below illustrates, the number of private schools increased and or decreased with date drawn from the Department of Education (DoE, 2023).

Table 3: Private school change from 2012 to 2022 (Author's own compilation from Department of Education (DoE), 2023)

Province	2012	2022	Loss/Gain	% Change
Gauteng	566	935	369	65.19%
Western Cape	190	302	112	58.95%
Eastern Cape	196	265	69	35.20%
KwaZulu-Natal	221	220	-1	-0.45%
Limpopo	143	201	58	40.56%
Mpumalanga	113	135	22	19.47%
North West	54	100	46	85.19%
Free State	68	83	15	22.06%
Northern Cape	20	41	21	105.00%
South Africa	1 571	2 282	711	45.26%

The greatest addition of private schools was in the Northern Cape, with a total increase of 105%. The largest decrease in private schools was in KwaZulu-Natal, with a reduction of 0.45%. Incidentally, KwaZulu-Natal is the only province in South Africa that lost both public and private schools. The two provinces with the most private schools are Gauteng, Western Cape. The concentration of private schools in Gauteng and Western Cape can be attributed to several factors. According to Smit (2020), these provinces have experienced high rates of urbanisation and migration from rural areas, creating increased demand for educational options. Additionally, Smit (2020) notes that Gauteng saw a 91% increase in private schools between 2000 and 2015, whilst the Western Cape experienced a 77% growth over the same period³¹. This growth correlates with the influx of migrants and workers to these economically active provinces, reflecting a trend towards private education in urban centres (Smit, 2020).

Table 4 below shows an overall decrease in the number of public schools in South Africa between 2012–2022 from date drawn from the Department of Education (DoE, 2023). While public school numbers decline, private school numbers are on the increase.

³¹ It should be noted that while Smit (2020) reports similar trends of increase in private schools for Gauteng and Western Cape, the specific percentages differ from those presented in Table 3. This discrepancy can be attributed to the different time periods under consideration: Smit's data covers 2000-2015, while Table 3 presents figures for 2012-2022. Despite the variation in exact figures, both datasets corroborate the overall trend of substantial growth in private schools in these provinces.

Table 4: Public school change from 2012 to 2022 (Author's own compilation from Department of Education (DoE), 2023)

Province	2012	2022	Loss/Gain	% Change
Gauteng	2,045	2,056	11	0.54%
Western Cape	1,435	1,452	-1	-0.07%
Eastern Cape	5,558	5,046	-512	-9.21%
KwaZulu-Natal	5,995	5,801	-154	-2.59%
Limpopo	3,935	3,646	-289	-7.34%
Mpumalanga	1,807	1,649	-158	-8.74%
North West	1,591	1,448	-143	-8.99%
Free State	1,351	946	-405	-29.98%
Northern Cape	560	545	-15	-2.68%
South Africa	24 255	22 589	-1 666	-6.87%

All of this is at the time when the population in South Africa is growing at a substantial rate, as listed in Table 5 below, in comparison to the availability of public schooling.

Table 5: Population growth in South Africa from 2011 to 2022 (Author’s own compilation from Department of Education (DoE), 2023)

Province	2011 Population	2022 Population	% Change
Gauteng	12,272,263	15,099,422	23.0%
Western Cape	5,822,734	7,433,019	27.7%
Eastern Cape	6,562,053	7,230,204	10.2%
KwaZulu-Natal	10,267,300	12,423,907	21.0%
Limpopo	5,404,868	6,572,720	21.6%
Mpumalanga	4,039,939	5,143,324	27.3%
North West	3,509,953	3,804,548	8.4%
Free State	2,745,590	2,964,412	8.0%
Northern Cape	1,145,861	1,355,946	18.3%
South Africa	51,770,560	62,027,503	19.8%

The South African public school system faces significant challenges despite an overall increase in the number of schools. Between 2012 and 2022, the total number of public schools in South Africa decreased from 24,255 to 22,589, representing a 6.87% reduction (DoE, 2023). This occurred even as the country's population grew by 19.8% from 2011 to 2022 (StatsSA, 2023).

These figures suggest a complex landscape where public school provision is not keeping pace with population growth. The challenges in the public education sector are multifaceted, with ineffective instructional leadership by principals identified as a prominent issue, alongside problems such as budget constraints, flawed recruitment processes, lack of teacher commitment, and difficulties in managing educational change (Mthiyane et al., 2014).

2.3.1 Inequality in Cape Town in contrast to growth in private schooling

South Africa grapples with extreme levels of wealth concentration, as revealed by Chatterjee et al. (2020). Their findings paint a stark picture of economic disparity: the top 10% of the population owns approximately 86% of total household wealth, while the top 1% controls around 55%. This inequality becomes even more pronounced at the highest echelons of wealth, with the top 0.1% (about 35,000 individuals) possessing nearly one-third of the country's wealth, and the top 0.01% (around 3,500 individuals) owning about 15% of household net worth.

This high level of inequality permeates all forms of assets, including housing, pension funds, and other financial assets. In stark contrast to the wealth concentration at the top, the bottom 50% of the population faces negative net worth, with their debts surpassing their assets. The middle 40% of the population owns a mere 17% of the total wealth, further highlighting the severe economic imbalance.

Perhaps most concerning according to Chatterjee et al. (2020), is the persistence of this inequality. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, wealth inequality in South Africa has remained remarkably stable at these high levels, with no clear evidence of reduction. In fact, there are indications of a slight increase in inequality within the top 10% wealth group. When compared globally, South Africa's level of wealth concentration surpasses that of any other country for which comparable data are available, including both emerging economies and developed nations.

This national context of extreme wealth inequality sets the stage for understanding the specific challenges faced by South African cities, particularly Cape Town, in addressing economic disparities and promoting inclusive development.

Cape Town has experienced substantial population growth in recent decades, with the number of residents increasing from 2.6 million in 1996 to approximately 4 million by 2016 (CoCT, 2018). This growth, while significant, has shown signs of deceleration, with annual growth rates dropping from 3.3% in the early 2000s to 1.5% post-2010 (CoCT, 2018). A considerable portion of this expansion can be attributed to migration, with nearly 40% of population growth between 2001 and 2011 coming from outside the Western Cape (StatsSA, 2011).

Alongside this demographic shift, Cape Town grapples with profound socio-economic disparities, earning it a reputation as one of the world's most unequal and racially segregated urban centres (Turok et al., 2021). This inequality is starkly reflected in the city's spatial organisation, with densely populated, low-income areas concentrated on the Cape Flats contrasting sharply with the spacious, affluent neighbourhoods of the inner city, Atlantic

seaboard, southern suburbs and northern suburbs (Scheba et al., 2021). Average house prices in 2015³² were over ZAR 4.7 million (USD 285,000) in the inner city and Atlantic seaboard, compared to ZAR 400,000 (USD 24,000) for the cheapest new houses in poorer parts of Cape Town (Scheba et al., 2021).

The city's unique "inverse density gradient," where population density increases with distance from the centre, is a lingering consequence of apartheid-era policies (Turok et al., 2021, p. 2). This spatial inequality is further evidenced by the vast disparity in housing prices, with homes in prime areas commanding prices over 20 times higher than those in poorer districts (CoCT, 2018). Cape Town's topography has exacerbated these effects of historical racial segregation policies, resulting in an urban landscape that remains deeply divided along socioeconomic lines (Polus et al., 2020).

This geographical segregation, as illustrated in Figure 4, has significant economic implications, particularly for non-white residents who often face disproportionately high living costs. The spatial distribution of schools mirrors this segregation, with Quintile 5 schools (the best-resourced) typically located in affluent areas that are difficult to access for many, while Quintile 1-3 schools are predominantly found in poorer areas. This educational disparity exacerbates the broader spatial mismatch between residential areas and job centres, leading to substantial transportation expenses for many low-income workers and effectively creating an "implicit tax on the poor" (Polus et al., 2020, p. 300). These elevated work and living-related costs can sometimes approach or even surpass wage levels, potentially discouraging employment among disadvantaged groups. Despite the end of apartheid over two decades ago, Cape Town continues to be characterised by some as "a paradise for the few," highlighting the persistence of economic disparities (Wainwright, 2014, as cited in Polus et al., 2020, p. 311).

³² It is important to note that these prices have increased significantly since 2015, driven by economic growth and migration patterns in Cape Town.

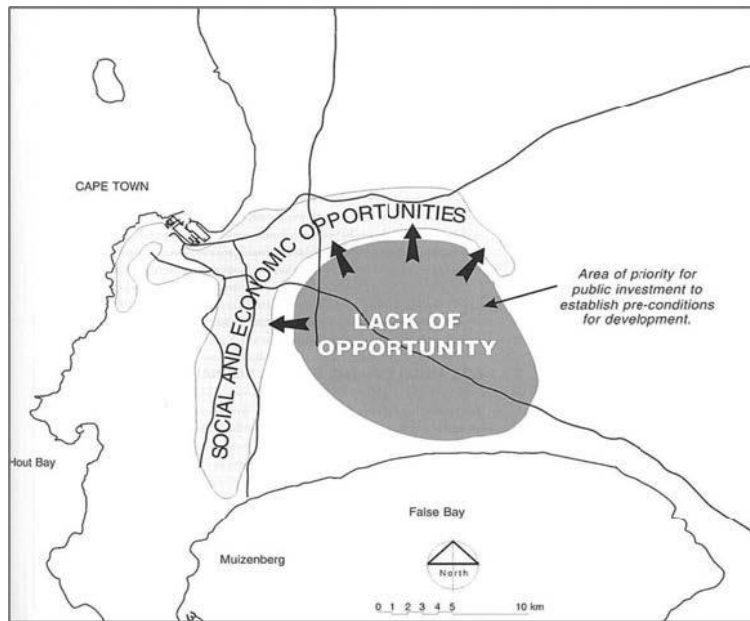


Figure 4: Cape Town's uneven development. (Turok et al., 2021)

This spatial inequality directly influences educational access through what Bourdieu (1987) would recognise as the uneven distribution of economic capital, which in turn affects families' ability to accumulate the educational and cultural capital offered by schools in more affluent areas. These deep-rooted economic and spatial divides continue to shape Cape Town's urban landscape, presenting significant challenges for inclusive development and social cohesion. All the schools in this study are located in the inner city, southern suburbs and northern suburbs of Cape Town, which shows their positioning within the more affluent areas of the city, potentially reinforcing existing patterns of educational inequality and socio-economic segregation.

2.4 Private schooling

The private school landscape in South Africa is characterised by increasing demand, particularly among families who can afford it. According to Blake and Mestry (2020, p. 1047), there is "an evident flow of mainly white learners from suburban schools to private schools". This trend is part of a broader pattern of educational migration in South Africa, driven by parents seeking better quality education for their children (Blake & Mestry, 2020).

Private schools in South Africa are generally perceived to be superior to public schools. Blake and Mestry (2020, p. 1051) note that “private schools are perceived to be 'better' than government schools in almost all dimensions”. As a result, many South African parents who are dissatisfied with the public education system and have the financial means choose to send their children to private schools.

However, the choice of private schools is largely limited to middle and upper-class families. Blake and Mestry (2020, p. 1048) cite research (Carnoy & McEwan, 2003; Plank & Sykes, 2003; Walford, 2003) indicating that "well-off parents seek strategies to maintain their children's privileges while aspiring parents seek strategies to escape from the schools to which their children are assigned in the quest for better opportunities". This suggests that access to private education in South Africa is closely tied to socioeconomic status.

The preference for private schools seems to be driven by perceptions of higher-quality education, including factors such as curriculum delivery. In South Africa, students primarily encounter two main exit-level examinations, with a third option available to a smaller subset of schools. The most common is the National Senior Certificate (NSC) curriculum, administered by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and followed by public schools and some private schools. Many private schools offer the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) exit exams which, while based on the same national curriculum as the NSC, employs a different examination board. A small number of international and private schools also offer the Cambridge International Examinations as an alternative to the NSC, providing learners with a pathway that potentially opens doors to international universities and global opportunities.

While the underlying content of these curricula is similar, they differ in their assessment methods and approach to learning. A study by Hill (2019) in Cape Town focused on the two most popular options - the NSC and IEB examinations. Hill found that IEB exams are perceived as more challenging and encouraging of critical thinking. The study also revealed that IEB students tend to perform better at university, with higher GPAs and pass rates compared to

their NSC counterparts. However, interestingly, IEB students tend to receive lower final matric marks than NSC students for a given ability level (Hill, 2019). These findings suggest that the differences in curriculum delivery and assessment between NSC and IEB may indeed have tangible impacts on student outcomes. Blake and Mestry (2020, p. 1053) argue that "parents perhaps associate the quality of curriculum delivery as a school choice factor rather than the curriculum itself," indicating that the perceived difference in how the curriculum is taught and assessed may be a key driver in school choice.

2.4.1 Racial makeup of private schools

Grujters et al. (2024) conducted an extensive analysis of school segregation in post-apartheid South Africa, including a focused examination of private schools. The researchers identified 30 top-tier private schools based on their 2021 fee structures, with annual costs for day learners ranging from approximately ZAR 132,000 to ZAR 200,000 (roughly USD 9,000 – USD 14,000) and data from the 2019 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) school survey.

In their assessment of these private schools, the authors found patterns of racial representation that, while still demonstrating significant imbalances, showed marginally more diversity compared to elite public schools (former Model C schools). The study revealed that White learners, despite comprising only 3.8% of South Africa's overall student population, accounted for 55% of enrolments in these prestigious private institutions. Conversely, Black learners, who make up 87.2% of the country's student population, were notably underrepresented, constituting just 27% of the student population in these schools. The research also highlighted that Indian learners, representing merely 1.5% of the total student population, were disproportionately represented in elite private schools at 13%. Coloured learners, on the other hand, were slightly underrepresented, making up 5% of elite private school enrolments despite constituting 7.5% of the overall student population.

These findings, according to Grujters et al. (2024), underscore the complex relationship between race, socioeconomic status, and educational access in contemporary South Africa.

While elite public schools exhibit somewhat more racial diversity than their private counterparts, they continue to reflect substantial racial disparities that largely mirror the country's broader socioeconomic inequalities.

2.4.2 Choice and values

The factors influencing parents' choice of private schools are multifaceted and can vary across different contexts. Research from South Africa, Canada, and other international studies provides valuable insights into this complex decision-making process, highlighting both practical considerations and value-based motivations.

In South Africa, Immelman and Roberts-Lombard (2015) conducted a study with 669 respondents, primarily parents or guardians of Grade 1 children at private schools in Gauteng. Their research identified several key factors influencing school choice, ranked from most to least important: class size, organisational factors, school characteristics, school leadership, academic factors, sport and cultural factors, school appearance, and situational factors. Class size emerged as the most crucial factor, with parents valuing individual attention and smaller classes, likely due to the perceived link with better learning outcomes. Organisational factors, including the overall learning environment, safety, and quality of educators, were also highly rated. School characteristics, encompassing discipline policies, traditions, and religious ethos, were similarly important. School leadership, focusing on the reputation of principals and board members, was another significant consideration.

While academic factors, including curriculum standards and performance metrics, were important in the South African study, they ranked slightly lower than overall school quality and environment. Sports and cultural factors, school appearance, and situational factors (such as transport and fees) were ranked lower but still played a role in parents' decisions. Interestingly, Immelman and Roberts-Lombard (2015, p. 7) noted that “parents with different academic qualification levels differ in the importance they attach to different choice factors in their independent school choice. Parents with a matric or undergraduate or diploma

qualification rated the importance of situational factors and school appearance higher than parents with a postgraduate qualification.”

In contrast, research conducted by Nault (2021) provides a different perspective, emphasising the critical role of values in parents' school choice decisions. Nault's (2021) findings suggest that values are often more significant in shaping parents' preferences than previously recognised in the literature. Nault (2021) discovered a strong correlation between parents' personal values and the values they hoped schools would foster in their children, indicating that school choice is seen as a means of intergenerational cultural transmission. In a conjoint survey experiment, values emerged as the most important factor influencing parents' preferences for school profiles, outweighing other considerations such as distance, tuition, curriculum, and recommendations.

Parents in Nault's (2021) study were more likely to select schools that aligned with their own personal values, particularly in areas related to self-transcendence, self-enhancement, openness to change, and conservation. Notably, while academic success was important, it often ranked lower than values like respect for others, independence, and the desire to explore new things. The importance of different values varied among parents, reflecting diversity in the cultural content they sought to transmit through school choice. Religious values, while polarising³³, generally ranked lower in importance compared to other values.

Further supporting the importance of values in educational settings, Berson and Oreg (2016) study provides compelling evidence for the significant role that schools play in shaping children's values. Over a two-year period, they found that children's values became increasingly similar to those of their school principals, suggesting a strong influence of school leadership on value formation. This influence was primarily mediated through the school climate for three of the four value categories examined: self-transcendence, openness to change, and self-enhancement. Specifically, principals' values in these areas were associated

³³ Nault notes that religious values were polarising among parents, with 22.8% rating them as 'not at all important', an equal 22.8% rating them as 'extremely important', and 21.5% finding them 'neither important nor unimportant'

with corresponding school climates (supportive, innovative, and performance-oriented, respectively), which in turn led to increases in children's corresponding values.

Berson and Oreg's (2016) findings highlight that principals' personal values have far-reaching effects beyond just academic achievement, shaping children's fundamental values and identities. Their study underscores the importance of schools as mechanisms for cultural transmission and value socialisation, complementing the role of parents in this process. Moreover, it demonstrates that the impact of leaders' values can extend beyond their immediate followers to have broader effects on the entire organisation.

These studies (Berson & Oreg, 2016; Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015; Nault, 2021) highlight the complex and context-dependent nature of school choice decisions. While practical considerations like class size and organisational factors play a significant role, the research emphasises the need to consider cultural and value-based motivations alongside these more traditional factors. This combined perspective suggests that parents are not just seeking academic excellence or practical convenience, but are actively trying to shape their children's cultural and moral development through their choice of school. Understanding this interplay of practical considerations and personal values is crucial for comprehending the nuanced process of private school selection across different cultural contexts.

These studies collectively demonstrate that school choice is a multifaceted decision influenced by both practical factors and value considerations. They provide an important foundation for understanding how Schwartz's (2012) Theory of Basic Values, with its dimensions of self-enhancement versus self-transcendence and openness to change versus conservation, can illuminate the motivations behind parents' educational choices in the South African context. They emphasise schools as key institutions for value socialisation, working alongside family influences to shape the next generation's value systems. This research contributes significantly to our understanding of how organisational values, particularly in educational settings, can have profound and lasting impacts on individuals within those

systems, and how parents consider these factors when making schooling decisions for their children.

2.4.3 Affordability

The affordability of private schooling in South Africa remains a significant challenge for the majority of the population. Since the end of apartheid, the private schooling sector has seen significant growth, but private education continues to be inaccessible for most South Africans, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008; Smit, 2020).

The fee-based structure of private schools inherently favours families with greater financial means. This system tends to reinforce existing socioeconomic disparities by restricting access to potentially higher-quality education to those who can afford it. A survey of private schools highlighted the extent of this financial barrier, with only a small fraction of schools offering fees in the lowest category, while a significant portion charged fees that would be prohibitive for the average South African family (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008).

The growth of the private education sector in South Africa highlights a stronger demand. Unlike in some other developing countries where private schools have expanded to fill gaps in public education provision, South Africa's private schools have not significantly increased access to education for lower-income or out-of-school youth. This indicates that the sector's growth is driven more by differentiated demand from those who can afford it, rather than by excess demand across all socioeconomic levels (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008).

The affordability of low-fee private schools in South Africa presents another complex picture. Unlike other developing countries, where low-fee private schools charge minimal fees, South African private schools considered "low-fee" charge significantly higher amounts. For instance, while Indian low-fee schools charge below ZAR 2000 per year, South African schools charging up to ZAR 12,000 annually are categorised as low-fee (Draper & Hofmeyr, 2015). This higher cost structure is attributed to the more stringent regulatory environment in South Africa, which imposes greater administrative compliance costs on private schools (Draper &

Hofmeyr, 2015). As a result, while these schools are more affordable than their high-fee counterparts, they remain out of reach for the poorest segments of South African society (Hofmeyr et al., 2013).

The parents of low-fee private schools in South Africa primarily consist of families from less affluent areas who nonetheless have stable employment, such as police officers and public school teachers (Schirmer et al., 2010). This limited market naturally constrains the growth potential of such schools.

The financial viability of private schools is further complicated by the subsidy structure. While registered private schools are eligible for state subsidies, the formula is not particularly favourable when compared to the funding received by public schools. This disparity in resources could potentially hinder the growth of low-fee private schools, especially if they aim to compete with public schools and high fee private schools (Draper & Hofmeyr, 2015).

In conclusion, while there is a growing private school sector in South Africa, affordability remains a significant barrier to its expansion. The regulatory environment, subsidy structure, and overall cost of operation create a challenging landscape for low-fee private schools in the country.

2.4.4 Scholarships

Jennifer Wallace's (2020) study, *"The Gift of Scholarship,"* offers insights into the experiences of learners from historically disadvantaged communities who receive scholarships to attend elite schools in post-apartheid South Africa. Wallace explores the complexities and challenges these learners face as they navigate the transition from primary schools in disadvantaged areas to elite secondary schools. The study highlights the significant culture shock, pressure to perform, material and socioeconomic differences, and the need for assimilation and identity negotiation that scholarship learners encounter.

Wallace (2020) mentions instances where racial tensions and discrimination played a significant role in the experiences of scholarship learners at elite schools. For example, one participant discussed the perception that the scholarship programme at her school was a means of diversifying the student body by increasing the number of black learners to meet diversity quotas. Despite these challenges, Wallace also emphasises the active agency and resilience of these learners, who often view their experiences as necessary and worthwhile for achieving upward social mobility.

A similar study by Abigail Simpson (2012), titled "*Experiences of historically disadvantaged bursary/scholarship recipients attending private South African high schools,*" aimed to understand the unique experiences of bursary and scholarship learners within the private school environment. Utilising a phenomenological approach, the research involved semi-structured interviews with eight participants from four different schools. Key findings revealed that these learners faced significant pressure to perform academically and behaviourally, often feeling the need to represent their entire race or socio-economic group.

Prevalent racial stereotyping and challenges related to cultural differences and financial difficulties were also reported. Despite these challenges, the participants often sought support from various sources, indicating their resilience and the importance of acknowledging and addressing these issues to enhance their educational experiences. Simpson's (2012) study underscores the need for more inclusive and supportive environments for historically disadvantaged learners in private schools.

2.4.5 Marketing

Private schools employ various marketing strategies to distinguish themselves from public education options and justify their tuition costs. One common approach is to emphasise their ability to provide a "higher quality" education compared to public schools. This often includes highlighting smaller class sizes, more individualised attention for learners, specialised programmes or curricula such as IEB and Cambridge exit-level examination, and superior academic outcomes (Lubienski, 2007). Many private schools also market themselves as having

a strong culture and sense of community, emphasising shared values, close relationships between teachers and learners/families, and opportunities for parental involvement (Srivastava, 2006).

The promotion of superior facilities and resources is another key marketing strategy for private schools. They frequently tout up-to-date technology, well-equipped science labs, comprehensive arts programmes, and state-of-the-art sports facilities as advantages over public schools (Davies & Quirke, 2005). Some private schools also market their ability to provide a safer, more disciplined environment, appealing to parents concerned about issues like bullying or violence in public schools (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006).

Religious or faith-based private schools often market their ability to provide an education aligned with particular religious or moral values (Sander & Krautmann, 1995). Additionally, many private schools emphasise university preparation and high university acceptance rates as key selling points (Sander & Krautmann, 1995). Some institutions position themselves as more innovative or progressive in their teaching methods compared to the perceived 'one-size-fits-all' approach of public education (Lubienski, 2003).

Private schools may also highlight their ability to offer specialised programmes like language immersion, STEM focus, or arts integration that may not be available in local public schools (Schneider et al., 2000). For certain elite institutions, the exclusivity and selectivity of the school itself serves as a marketing point for families seeking a prestigious education (Ball, 1993). Finally, private schools often market directly to affluent families who can afford tuition, positioning themselves as a premium educational option (Gruijters et al., 2024).

2.4.6 Management

School management structures in South Africa have evolved significantly since the end of apartheid, with the aim of creating more democratic and inclusive educational institutions. For public schools, the South African Schools Act of 1996 mandated the establishment of SGBs, which play a crucial role in school governance and policy-making (Bush et al., 2011). These

bodies typically include representatives from various stakeholder groups, including parents, teachers, non-teaching staff, the principal, and in secondary schools, student representatives.

Within the day-to-day operations of schools, school management teams (SMTs) are responsible for the practical implementation of policies and the overall management of the institution. The composition of SMTs can vary, but they generally include the principal, deputy principal(s), and heads of department (Bush & Glover, 2016). The principal, as the head of the SMT, is tasked with the professional management of the school and is accountable to both the SGB and the education department.

For private schools, particularly in urban areas like Cape Town, management structures may differ from those in public schools. These institutions often have more flexibility in designing their governance structures (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2004). Instead of SGBs, private schools may have boards of governors or directors to whom the principal reports. They may also incorporate additional management positions such as business managers, marketing directors or trustees, reflecting their more autonomous nature and market-driven approach (Msila, 2016).

It's important to note that the specific management structures can vary based on factors such as school size, type, and context. Private schools, in particular, may have more latitude in determining their management structures compared to public schools, which must adhere more closely to government regulations (Bush, 2007).

While these structures provide a framework for school management, research has shown that effective leadership and management practices are crucial for school improvement and student outcomes (Bush et al., 2011). As such, ongoing professional development for school leaders and managers remains a key focus in South African education policy and practice.

2.5 Steiner education

Steiner education, founded on Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical philosophy³⁴ (Steiner, 1994), offers a holistic approach to nurturing the child's intellectual, artistic, emotional, and spiritual development (Goldshmidt, 2017). This educational model emphasises imagination, creativity, and hands-on learning, particularly in the early years, with academics introduced gradually and artistic activities integrated across all subjects (Rawson, 2021). Instead of traditional textbooks, learners create their own main lesson books, which claims to foster a deeper connection with the material (Rawson, 2021). A unique feature is the practice of a single teacher staying with a class for multiple years, ideally from grades 1-8, to build strong teacher-student relationships (Goldshmidt, 2017).

Steiner schools aim to cultivate 'reverence', 'wonder', and 'respect' for nature and the spiritual world, incorporating regular festivals and rituals throughout the year (Goldshmidt, 2017). The use of technology is limited, especially in lower grades, with a preference for natural materials and hands-on experiences (Rawson, 2021). Steiner teachers undergo specialised training in Steiner's educational philosophy and are expected to engage in spiritual self-development and meditation on Steiner's works (Goldshmidt, 2017). These schools strive to create a strong sense of community among learners, teachers, and parents (Goldshmidt, 2017).

While rooted in Steiner's spiritual ideas, Steiner schools maintain that they do not teach anthroposophy to learners or require adherence to any specific belief system (Goldshmidt, 2017). The overarching goal of Steiner education is to educate the "head, heart, and hands," fostering free, creative, and morally responsible individuals through an approach distinctly different from mainstream education in both philosophy and methodology (Goldshmidt, 2017, p. 362).

2.5.1 The College of Teachers

³⁴ Anthroposophy is a spiritual philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) that posits the existence of an objective, intellectually comprehensible spiritual world accessible to direct experience through inner development (Steiner, 1994). It aims to apply a scientific methodology to spiritual investigation and is the basis for practical applications in various fields, including education (Steiner schools), agriculture (biodynamic farming), and medicine (anthroposophical medicine) (Steiner, 1994).

The College of Teachers is a key leadership structure in Steiner schools, embodying the collaborative and spiritually oriented approach of this educational philosophy. As described by Goldshmidt (2017), Steiner teachers engage in regular meetings that serve multiple purposes. These gatherings allow teachers to study and reflect on the works of Rudolf Steiner and his followers, connecting spiritual principles to their practical educational work. Additionally, these meetings foster a shared spiritual atmosphere and pedagogical orientation among the teachers.

The organisational structure of the College of Teachers reflects Steiner education's non-hierarchical approach. According to research on Steiner schools, "The College of Teachers comprises committed members from the staff who are willing to carry the day to day running of the school. The College members work together without a headmaster. They meet weekly: the chairperson is elected each year" (Randoll & Peters, 2015, p. 34). This collective leadership model, operating without a principal, allows for collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility for the school's operations and educational direction.

Through these regular meetings and shared responsibilities, the College of Teachers embodies the spiritual and pedagogical principles of Steiner education. It serves as a forum for ongoing professional development, collective decision-making, and the cultivation of a unified educational vision based on anthroposophical principles.

2.5.2 Criticisms of Steiner education

Steiner education, while popular in many countries, has faced various criticisms and controversies. One major concern is the potential influence of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual philosophy, anthroposophy, on the curriculum. Critics argue that this may lead to the introduction of pseudoscientific concepts in the classroom (Staudenmaier, 2010). The academic preparation of Steiner learners has also been questioned. While some studies show Steiner learners performing well in standardised tests (Larrison et al., 2012), others suggest that there may be gaps in certain subject areas, particularly in the sciences (Jelinek & Sun, 2003). The Steiner approach to technology has been another point of contention. The schools'

general avoidance of electronic media and computers in early education has been criticised as potentially leaving learners unprepared for the modern world (Oppenheimer, 1999). The class teacher system, where one teacher stays with a class for up to eight years, has both supporters and critics. While it can provide continuity and strong relationships, concerns have been raised about the breadth of expertise required from a single teacher (Woods et al., 2005).

There have also been discussions about the diversity and inclusivity of Steiner schools. Steiner schools have been criticised for elitism, despite their intentions to be socially inclusive and some studies suggest that Steiner education may be more appealing to families from certain socio-economic backgrounds, potentially leading to a lack of diversity in the student population (Dahlin, 2017).

Despite these criticisms, it's important to note that Steiner education also has many supporters and positive outcomes reported in various studies. The holistic approach to education and emphasis on creativity are often cited as strengths of the Steiner method (Easton, 1997).

2.5.3 Steiner education in Cape Town

Rawson (2023) examines the adaptation of Steiner education to the South African context, focusing on a Steiner school in Cape Town. The report highlights the challenges of localising Steiner pedagogy to meet the needs of modern South African children, particularly in curriculum development and festival celebrations. Teachers at the Steiner school in Cape Town are actively working to incorporate more African cultures and experiences into their practices, recognising the tension between the European-influenced Steiner traditions and the diverse cultural landscape of South Africa (Rawson, 2023).

Rawson (2023) further notes that the school has evolved significantly since the apartheid era, when it was registered as a private school for White children only. Now, it strives to reflect the multicultural society of post-apartheid South Africa. The teachers are supported by a

collegial mentoring system, emphasising personal growth and professional development (Rawson, 2023).

This case study of the Steiner school provides valuable insights into how Steiner schools in Cape Town are navigating the complexities of adapting a European-based educational philosophy to the unique cultural, social, and historical context of South Africa.

2.6 Elite private schools

Elite private schools function as what Ball (2003) and Bourdieu (1987) would identify as sites for the reproduction of privilege, where specific forms of cultural capital are not only transmitted but legitimised through institutional prestige and historical continuity. In the South African context, several factors contribute to classifying a school as elite. Elite schools are often characterised by their selectivity and exclusivity, maintaining high academic standards and outcomes (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016). These institutions typically charge substantial fees, making them accessible primarily to wealthy families (Ball, 2003). Many elite schools in South Africa have a long history, often dating back to colonial times, which contributes to their prestige (Symes & Meadmore, 1996).

Superior facilities, resources, and influential alumni networks further distinguish these schools (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). An international orientation, often manifested through offering curricula like Cambridge exit level examination, is increasingly common in elite South African schools (Resnik, 2012). These institutions also emphasise the development of cultural and social capital valued by elite groups (Bourdieu, 1984).

A wide range of high-quality extracurricular activities and the ability to attract highly qualified teachers are additional hallmarks of elite schools (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2014). In the multilingual landscape of South Africa, schools that primarily use English as the medium of instruction may be perceived as more elite (Probyn, 2005).

Furthermore, the location of these schools in affluent urban areas, such as certain neighbourhoods in Cape Town, often reinforces their elite status (Fataar, 2015). It's important to note that while these factors contribute to a school being considered elite, the concept is complex and can vary depending on specific contexts and perspectives.

2.6.1 Dominating white student, teacher and management

The challenges faced by Black learners in predominantly White private schools extend beyond overt discrimination and can be understood through the lens of cultural capital mismatches (Christie & McKinney, 2017). Carter (2005) and Lewis (2019) have explored how the disconnect between the cultural capital valued in elite educational institutions and that possessed by learners from non-dominant groups can reinforce racial boundaries and impact learners' experiences. Carter (2005) introduces the concept of "non-dominant cultural capital," highlighting how Black learners may possess valuable cultural resources that are undervalued or misrecognised in predominantly White school settings. Lewis (2019) further expands on this, examining how these mismatches can lead to feelings of marginalisation and exclusion among Black learners, affecting their sense of belonging and academic experiences. These cultural disconnects can manifest in various ways, including differences in communication styles, behavioural expectations, and even perceptions of appropriate hairstyles. In the context of South African private schools, these dynamics may be particularly pronounced given the country's history of racial segregation and the ongoing process of integration in elite educational spaces.

2.6.2 The concept of opportunity hoarding

The concept of opportunity hoarding, introduced by Tilly (1998) and further explored in educational contexts by Diamond and Lewis (2022), provides a valuable framework for understanding how elite private schools may inadvertently perpetuate social inequalities. Opportunity hoarding describes the outcome where dominant groups in society maintain their privileged status through access to scarce resources, including high-quality education. In the context of elite private schools, this manifests not through intentional gatekeeping, but as a result of broader societal structures, economic realities, and geographical factors.

Diamond and Lewis (2022) argue that opportunity hoarding in education goes beyond mere exclusion; it involves institutional structures that systematically advantage certain groups while disadvantaging others. This can include practices such as the valuation of specific forms of cultural capital, policies that implicitly favour dominant groups, or curricula and teaching methods that reflect particular cultural perspectives. These practices often emerge from the schools' operational necessities and their aim to provide high-quality education within existing societal constraints, rather than from intentional exclusionary tactics.

In the South African context, where the legacy of apartheid continues to shape educational access and outcomes, the concept of opportunity hoarding provides a critical lens for examining how elite private schools may unintentionally contribute to the reproduction of social and racial inequalities. While these schools often strive to provide opportunities to as many students as possible within their operational constraints, the end result can still be a form of opportunity hoarding due to broader societal inequalities in access to such institutions.

2.7 Inclusivity in schools

Around the world, children are excluded from schools because of disability, race, language, religion, gender and poverty. Inclusive education means that all children are in the same classrooms, in the same schools. When all children, regardless of their differences, are educated together, everyone benefits - this is the cornerstone of inclusive education. Inclusive education systems recognise the unique contributions that learners of all backgrounds bring to the classroom, and allow diverse groups to grow side by side to the benefit of all.

The challenge for education systems is to make sure that schools provide effective ways to give all children this fair chance. Unfortunately, the inequality that is prevalent in our society and schools makes this difficult. And with overcrowded classrooms and overstretched or inadequate support systems, effective inclusion isn't possible.” – Mark Potterton (2024), Principal at Sacred Heart College

The quote from Mark Potterton (2024), Principal at Sacred Heart College, offers a practitioner's perspective on inclusive education, encapsulating its core principles and challenges in the South African context. Potterton's insights align closely with the fundamental shift in South African educational philosophy and practice that this section aims to discuss.

Inclusive education in South Africa represents a fundamental shift in educational philosophy and practice, moving away from the segregated and special needs-focused approach of the apartheid era towards a more holistic and equitable system (DoE, 2001). This transformation is aligned with the country's constitutional values of equality, human rights, and non-discrimination (RSA, 1996). The constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 section 29(1) states: *"Everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education and to further education, which the state through reasonable measures must make progressively available and accessible."* The core principle of inclusive education in South Africa is the recognition and respect for learner diversity, coupled with a commitment to building on commonalities among learners (DoE, 2001).

The South African model of inclusive education extends beyond merely integrating learners with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. It encompasses a broader understanding of barriers to learning and participation, acknowledging that these can arise from various factors including socioeconomic conditions, language differences, inflexible curricula, and inadequate support services, as well as impairments and illnesses (DoE, 2008). This comprehensive approach shifts the focus from 'fixing' individual learners to addressing systemic barriers that hinder effective learning for all (Engelbrecht, 2006).

In practice, inclusive education in South Africa aims to transform mainstream schools into responsive institutions capable of meeting the diverse needs of all learners in their communities (Walton, 2011). This involves providing appropriate access, support, and accommodations to enable full participation in the general education curriculum for all learners (Landsberg et al., 2005). The emphasis is on supporting not just learners, but also

educators and the entire education system to develop the capacity to respond effectively to a wide range of learning needs (DoE, 2001).

Importantly, the South African conceptualisation of inclusive education goes beyond the classroom, viewing it as part of a broader social transformation process (Waghid & Engelbrecht, 2002). It calls for collaboration between schools, families, and communities to create an inclusive society that values diversity and promotes equitable opportunities for all (Walton et al., 2009). This holistic approach to inclusion reflects South Africa's unique historical context and its aspirations for social justice and equality in the post-apartheid era.

2.7.1 Fostering belonging

Fostering belonging in schools requires a multifaceted approach addressing various aspects of the educational environment. At its core is the creation of an inclusive school culture and ethos, involving policies and practices that respect diversity and promote inclusion of all learners (Engelbrecht, 2006; Walton, 2011). Critical components include providing adequate teacher training and support, implementing inclusive pedagogical practices, addressing barriers to learning, promoting positive peer relationships, involving families and the broader community, focusing on social-emotional learning, and adopting a whole-school approach to inclusion (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020; Makoelle, 2012; Sparling, 2002; Walton et al., 2009).

These strategies for fostering belonging align with Social Identity Theory's (Tajfel, 1974) emphasis on positive group identification, where inclusive environments allow learners to maintain cultural distinctiveness while developing strong school affiliations. They create an environment that values diversity, meets individual needs, and provides all learners with opportunities to participate and succeed. In the context of hair experiences, fostering belonging means creating an environment where diverse hair textures and styles are not only accepted but encouraged as integral to learners' identities. This approach recognises that hair is a significant aspect of cultural expression and personal identity, particularly for learners with Afrocentric hair and hair styles.

2.7.2 Calls to open dialogue about race, identity and hair

Teeger's (2015) research in two racially diverse South African secondary schools reveals how school staff often address racial issues in ways that hinder meaningful discussions about racism. Teeger (2015, p. 226) notes that "a normative climate limited pupils' abilities to label racially charged incidents as racist", illustrating how institutional practices can silence important conversations about race and inequality. This silence could extend to issues of hair discrimination, as Teeger (2015, p. 226) observed that "teachers often denied that young children can engage in racist acts". The study found that educators frequently downplayed contemporary racial inequality (Teeger, 2015), an approach that could potentially silence discussions about how hair discrimination intersects with broader issues of racial inequality in schools. Teeger's (2015) work highlights the interplay between inclusivity policies and pupils' lived experiences, underscoring the need for approaches that acknowledge historical inequalities and provide spaces for open dialogue about race and identity, including aspects such as hair texture and choice of styles.

2.7.3 Inclusive leadership in schools

Leadership approaches for promoting inclusion in schools have been a subject of significant scholarly interest. Drawing from various perspectives, researchers have proposed several strategies to enhance inclusive practices through effective leadership.

One key aspect highlighted by scholars is the importance of asset-based approaches in leadership for inclusion. Myende (2014) argues that leaders should first identify the inherent strengths and resources within marginalised groups before analysing their needs. This approach, he contends, avoids perpetuating deficit models and empowers those being included. Building on this, Tronto (1998) emphasises the need for leaders to demonstrate attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness in addressing inclusion, framing these leadership qualities within an ethics of care perspective.

The development of context-specific inclusion policies is another critical leadership strategy. (Bhengu, 2012) and Satimburwa (2015) advocate for school leaders to craft home-grown inclusion policies that are responsive to their unique contexts, rather than blindly adopting generic policies. This approach ensures that inclusion efforts are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of each school community.

A significant shift in leadership style is also proposed by several researchers. Miron-Spektor et al. (2011) argue for dismantling conformist leadership practices, while Abrahamsen and Aas (2016) suggest adopting more transformational leadership approaches. These perspectives are complemented by Grant et al. (2018), who emphasise the importance of distributed leadership, viewing leadership for inclusion as a fluid and shared activity rather than the sole responsibility of formal leaders.

The concept of re-culturing schools features prominently in discussions of inclusive leadership. McMaster (2013, 2015) argues that leaders must work to change attitudes, norms, values, and beliefs to create a culture supportive of inclusion. This involves creating collaborative teams, building capacity for inclusive practices, and ensuring that inclusion is reflected in the school's vision. DeMatthews et al. (2020) further emphasise the importance of inclusive visioning processes that involve all stakeholders.

Implementing these leadership approaches requires a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by different groups within the school community. Msibi (2012) and Mashishi and Makoelle (2014) highlight the specific issues of exclusion faced by LGBTQ+ youth and pregnant learners, respectively, underscoring the need for leaders to address diverse forms of marginalisation. Similarly, Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) draw attention to the unique challenges faced by rural schools, emphasising the need for context-sensitive leadership approaches.

In conclusion, effective leadership for inclusion in schools requires a multifaceted approach that combines asset-based thinking, context-specific policy development, transformational

and distributed leadership styles, and a commitment to re-culturing school environments. By adopting these strategies, school leaders can work towards creating truly inclusive educational spaces that cater to the needs of all learners and stakeholders.

2.8 Identity in schools

Becker and Becker (2021) explain that identity is formed by a collection of cultural and social interpretations that help individuals comprehend their experiences in the world and their interactions with others. Identity development is shaped by collective cultural ideas, values, forms of knowledge, social customs, and ideals. Therefore, it is a product of social construction, yet it also maintains a high degree of adaptability and susceptibility to modification. The process of comprehending and deriving significance from our encounters in the world profoundly influences our identity and the way each person characterises themselves. These understandings specifically shape our perception of self from the perspective of others.

Building on this perspective, Woodward (2005) emphasises the multi-faceted nature of identity, highlighting how various dimensions such as gender, class, and national identity intersect to create unique individual experiences. Woodward argues that identity is not a fixed attribute but rather a dynamic construct that is continually shaped and reshaped through social interactions and personal reflections. This view challenges essentialist notions of identity and encourages a critical examination of how societal structures and power dynamics influence identity formation (Woodward, 2005).

2.8.1 Identity development in elite schools

The literature on identity development in elite schools reveals several key themes regarding how these institutions shape learners' understanding of themselves and their place in society. Research suggests that elite schools often serve as sites for the reproduction of privilege and the formation of class-based identities (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Howard, 2013). The homogeneous, wealthy student populations typically found in these schools limit exposure to

diverse perspectives and experiences, reinforcing elite norms and values (Aries & Seider, 2007).

Within these exclusive environments, learners undergo a process of socialisation, which Little (2016) defines as the means by which people learn to become proficient members of a society. This process involves learning societal norms, expectations, beliefs, and values. In the context of elite schools, socialisation plays a crucial role in shaping learners' identities and worldviews. Learners tend to develop a shared elite identity through various socialisation processes, including learning and internalising elite cultural norms, behaviours, and ways of speaking that distinguish them from those outside their social circle (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016).

Little (2016) emphasises that socialisation occurs through multiple agents, with schools being a primary influence. In elite institutions, this socialisation is particularly potent due to the immersive nature of these environments. The school, acting as a socialisation agent, transmits not only academic knowledge but also implicit messages about social status, privilege, and expected behaviour. This process is further reinforced by peer groups within the school, another crucial agent of socialisation identified by Little.

As a result of this intense socialisation, many learners at elite schools remain what Marcia (1966, p. 522) would term "foreclosed" in their class identity, not critically examining it due to the lack of exposure to different perspectives and life experiences. This aligns with Little's (2016) observation that socialisation can create a collective memory bank of experiences, shaping individuals' sense of identity and their place in the social world.

Elite schools reproduce privilege through both explicit means, such as high tuition and legacy admissions, and implicit lessons about elite cultural norms (Ayling, 2015). Learners internalise elite values and expectations about appropriate careers, universities, and life paths, often without questioning these assumptions (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). Family connections to the school can further strengthen the reproduction of elite identities across generations (Maxwell & Maxwell, 1995).

To truly develop learners' critical consciousness around privilege and identity, scholars argue that elite schools would need to significantly diversify their student bodies and revamp superficial community service programmes (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2013). Without such changes, these institutions are likely to continue playing a powerful role in shaping learners' class identities and reproducing privilege, often in ways that limit critical examination of systemic inequalities.

2.8.2 Complexities with identity formation in predominantly white private schools

McKinney's (2010) ethnographic study in a desegregated South African girls' school provides insights into the complex ways learners negotiate their identities in these newly integrated spaces. The research reveals the multifaceted nature of identity formation in post-apartheid school settings, where Black learners often feel pressure to assimilate into a predominantly White school culture. McKinney observed that while some learners attempted to conform to the dominant cultural norms, others found ways to subvert their positioning through performances of hybrid identities. This demonstrates the agency of Black learners in navigating these complex cultural landscapes, even as they face institutional pressures to conform. The study highlights how language practices, in particular, became a site of identity negotiation, with learners strategically employing different linguistic resources in various contexts. McKinney's work underscores the dynamic and often contradictory processes of identity formation in desegregated schools, where learners must balance their home cultures with the expectations of their new educational environment.

Mujulizi (2022) observes that this ongoing struggle with identity can lead to a "double consciousness³⁵" (Black, 2007) where learners are constantly negotiating between their home culture and the school's expectations. While exposure to elite education was generally seen as providing valuable cultural capital for future success, it often came at the cost of some

³⁵ Double consciousness refers to the psychological experience of viewing oneself through two conflicting perspectives simultaneously - one's own self-defined identity and the identity imposed by the dominant society. W.E.B. DuBois first articulated this concept to describe how African Americans must navigate both their Black identity and how they are perceived by White American society. Frantz Fanon expanded on this idea, showing how colonised peoples also experience a similar split consciousness between their indigenous identity and the identity imposed by colonial powers (Black, 2007)

cultural alienation (Feldman & Wallace, 2023). The experience of being a Black student in an elite private school with a predominantly White student body can have lasting impacts on learners' sense of self, aspirations, and ability to navigate different cultural spaces (Feldman & Wallace, 2023; Khanyile, 2023; Mujulizi, 2022). The complexities of identity formation in predominantly White private schools can be understood through Maldonado-Torres' (2007) framework of 'coloniality of being', where Black learners must navigate educational spaces that often implicitly privilege Eurocentric ways of being and knowing.

2.9 Afrocentric hair

The preceding sections have explored the landscape of South African education, from its colonial roots through apartheid to the present day. This historical context has illuminated the persistent challenges in creating truly inclusive educational environments, particularly in private schools. As we've seen, issues of cultural expression and identity formation remain at the forefront of discussions about equity and inclusivity in these institutions.

One significant aspect of cultural expression that has become a focal point in debates about inclusivity in South African schools is hair, particularly Afrocentric hair. The following section delves into this topic, examining the cultural significance, societal perceptions, and practical considerations surrounding Afrocentric hair in South Africa. To introduce this discussion, we begin with a recent anecdote that illustrates the ongoing challenges and conversations around hair diversity in South African society:

Rachel Kolisi, the wife of South African Springbok captain Siya Kolisi, shared a meaningful experience on her public Instagram profile on 2 August 2023. She posted a photo of herself with her children and Siya's half-sibling after they had had their hair done at a salon (Kolisi, 2023). This post provides insight into the diverse hair textures often found within South African families, and the challenges they may face in finding inclusive hair care services. Rachel's commentary highlights these issues:

The first time EVER we could all have our hair done at the same place. I forgot to post this a few months ago, but something that I've been thinking about for some time, is why so many hair salons in SA specifically, only offer services for "either or". We had gone to a few places this day trying to get a haircut for Nic after being told 3 times "we can't cut hair like that" found a spot where all of our hair was celebrated, and my goodness we loved it! [I] generally, just feel salons could do better, and diversify

The concept of Afrocentric hair encompasses more than just texture; it represents a complex interplay of history, culture, identity, and societal perceptions. In the following sections, the study delves into the historical context of hair in South Africa, moving from its problematic use as a tool for racial classification to its current status as a form of cultural expression. The study explores the physical properties and care requirements of more tightly coiled hair textures, examine societal perceptions and challenges, investigate hair care practices and industry responses, analyse representations in media and popular culture, and consider relevant legal and policy considerations. Through this comprehensive review, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of Afrocentric hair as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon in contemporary South Africa, with a particular focus on the practical and social implications of hair texture.

2.9.1 Historical context of hair in South Africa

Hair has played a significant role in South African history and culture, often reflecting broader societal issues around race, identity, and politics. Zulaikha Patel, the South African scholar cited earlier in this literature review (sections 2.2, p. 32) and 2.2.3, p. 37), highlights the ongoing impact of colonial language in describing hair, particularly in educational settings. Patel's personal experience exemplifies how hair becomes a focal point for cultural and racial tensions in South African schools:

The types of adjectives used to describe people's hair... that language of oppression. Like how there's a term that's been used a lot when there would be back and forth

around my identity... Your hair is not soft and silky enough for you to be Indian, but you classify as black. You've still got a soft curl pattern, but there's a term in Afrikaans called 'kroes hare', like, your hair is 'kroes', it's curly, and it's a bit tight. - (Chebbi, 2023)

Terms like "kroes" in South Africa or "nappy" in the United States are considered offensive due to their historical use in denigrating natural African hair textures. These words carry the weight of racial oppression and continue to impact how Black individuals perceive their hair and identity.

During the apartheid era, hair texture was one of the criteria used to classify people racially (Erasmus, 2017). The infamous "pencil test" involved inserting a pencil into a person's hair. If the pencil fell out, the person might be classified as White or Coloured, but if it stayed in, they were likely to be classified as Black (Powe, 2009). This crude method had far-reaching consequences, determining where individuals could live, work, and attend school under apartheid laws.

The apartheid system led to the devaluation and stigmatisation of natural African hair. As Erasmus (1997, p. 12 & 13) notes, there was significant pressure to conform to European beauty standards: "Kroes hair, round buttocks, a round nose and thickish lips were not what the boys looked at or for. You had to have (naturally) straight hair (everybody knew the difference), flat buttocks, a sharp nose and thin lips." This environment often compelled Black women to chemically straighten their hair for social acceptance, a practice that could be physically harmful and psychologically damaging.

Western and European hair standards became dominant during the apartheid period, leading to a widespread devaluation of natural African hair textures. This shift in perception had profound effects on Black South African women's self-image and cultural practices (Alubafi et al., 2018). The internalisation of these beauty standards created a complex relationship between Black South Africans and their hair, often resulting in feelings of inadequacy or shame about natural hair textures.

Oyedemi (2016, p. 1) argues that "the process of attaining the hegemonic ideology of 'beautiful' hair, often defined as a European and Asian³⁶ texture and style of hair, is a violent journey" involving both physical and cultural violence. This violence manifests not only in the harmful chemicals used to straighten hair but also in the erasure of cultural identity and the psychological toll of constantly striving to meet unattainable beauty standards.

In post-apartheid South Africa, there has been a gradual revival of natural African hairstyles as a way to reclaim Black identity and culture. This change is part of a broader movement to embrace Black heritage in the new South Africa. However, tensions persist, particularly in formerly Whites-only schools where hair policies have sometimes clashed with expressions of African hair (Alubafi et al., 2018).

Today, there is more diversity in hairstyles worn by Black South Africans, reflecting complex negotiations of identity and aesthetics in post-apartheid society. As Fuh and Nyamnjoh (2014, p. 54) observe, African women use hair as "a platform from which [they] seek to participate in and contribute to the global economy of meanings and things." The authors note that many women now alternate between various hairstyles, including natural styles, weaves, braids, and chemically straightened hair. This diversity in hair practices demonstrates how "Africans have cultivated a collective gaze that sees beyond appearances in their everyday understanding and articulation of reality" Fuh and Nyamnjoh (2014, p. 54).

The history of hair in South Africa reveals how personal appearance became deeply intertwined with politics, race, and cultural identity through colonialism, apartheid and post-apartheid. In the democratic era, hair continues to be a potent symbol and a focal point for ongoing debates around heritage, beauty standards, and self-expression for Black South Africans. The journey towards fully embracing natural African hair textures is ongoing, reflecting the broader struggle for cultural recognition and equality in South African society.

³⁶ Asian texture hair typically refers to hair that is straight, smooth, and often thick. It is generally characterised by its sleek appearance and ability to grow long. This hair type is often contrasted with the more tightly coiled or kinky textured hair.

2.9.2 Hair as cultural expression

Scott Lowe's (2016) work provides a global perspective on the cultural significance of hair across various societies and throughout history. He emphasises that hair has held profound cultural importance far beyond its biological function. He notes that "hair and nail clippings are widely, maybe universally, believed to provide a powerful link to the person from whom they were cut; many cultures believe they contain the person's spiritual essence" (Lowe, 2016, p. 18). This belief underscores the deep spiritual and personal significance attributed to hair in many cultures worldwide.

The cultural importance of hair is further evidenced by its role in rituals and life transitions. As Lowe (2016, p. 18) observes, "the self-renewing quality of hair makes it especially suited for removal in coming-of-age rituals, mourning observances, and other dramatic intervals of transition, sorrow, and rebirth." This highlights how hair serves as a powerful symbol in marking significant life events across diverse cultures.

Lowe (2016, p. 19) also points out the social and identity-related aspects of hair: "Hair grows in places where most people desire it-head and face for men, heads for women - places where its aesthetic value is debatable - armpits, tops of toes, pubic regions - and places where some people wish it wouldn't - buttock clefts, women's chins, old men's ears, noses, and more." This observation underscores how hair contributes to personal and social identity, often reflecting cultural norms and individual preferences.

Lowe (2016, p. 36) also highlights how hair has been used historically to create social distinctions: "Societies actively employ hair to manufacture the 'Other,' often by labeling the antagonists' hair as fur or by seeing it as primitive, savage, unruly, outlandish, or wild". This observation reveals how hair can be a tool for social categorisation and, sometimes, discrimination.

Lowe's (2016) work demonstrates that across cultures and throughout history, hair has been much more than just a physical feature. It has served as a canvas for cultural expression, a

marker of identity, a symbol of spiritual beliefs, and a tool for social categorisation. This global perspective provides a rich context for understanding the specific cultural significance of hair in various societies, including Africa and South Africa.

2.9.2.1 The global significance of hair: A Western perspective

While much of this study focused on Afrocentric hair in South Africa, it was important to consider the global significance of hair across different cultures. In Western and Eastern societies, hair plays a crucial role in defining femininity and identity, albeit in ways that differ from African contexts.

Mahdawi (2014) argues that in Western cultures, women's hair functions as a type of 'veil,' drawing parallels with the literal veils worn in some Muslim societies. She notes the considerable time and financial investment Western women make in their hair: "Studies have found that the average woman in the UK spends GBP 26,500 (roughly ZAR 620,000.00 at the time of writing) on her hair over her lifetime, with 25% of respondents saying they would rather spend money on their hair than food" (Mahdawi, 2014, para. 6).

This emphasis on hair extends beyond mere aesthetics. Mahdawi (2014, para. 8) points out that hair is deeply intertwined with perceptions of femininity and sexuality in Western culture. She writes, "In the semiotics of female sexuality, long hair is (hetero)sexual, short hair is non-sexual or homosexual, and no hair means you're either a victim or a freak". This observation underscores how hair serves as a powerful signifier of identity and social status. The significance of hair is further emphasised by the traumatic impact of hair loss. Mahdawi (2014, para. 6) describes hair loss as "pulling out clumps of your identity," highlighting the deep personal and emotional connection many have with their hair.

Critically, Mahdawi (2014, para. 11) argues that the time and resources Western women devote to their hair isn't simply a matter of personal preference. Rather, it's "part of a broader cultural performance of what it means to be a woman; one that has largely been directed by

men." This perspective invites one to consider how hair practices, even in seemingly free societies, are shaped by cultural expectations and gender norms.

This Western perspective on hair provides an interesting counterpoint to the experiences of Black women in South Africa. While the specific cultural meanings and practices differ, both contexts demonstrate how hair is deeply intertwined with identity, femininity, and broader societal expectations. As I delve into the specifics of Afrocentric hair in South Africa, it's important to keep this global context in mind and the varying ways in which hair serves as a cultural signifier across different societies.

2.9.2.2 Afrocentric hair in Africa and South Africa

Hair in Africa has held profound cultural importance throughout history, serving as a key marker of identity, spirituality, and social status across various societies.

Scholars have noted that in precolonial Africa, hairstyles were intricately linked to tribal affiliations, age, wealth, and familial backgrounds (Schildkrout et al., 1990; Sieber & Herreman, 2000). The spiritual significance of hair was evident in beliefs that connected it to the soul and supernatural powers, leading to protective practices around hair clippings (Sieber & Herreman, 2000). In West African traditions, hair was often equated with the essence of a person's being (Ephirim-Donkor, 2015).

Hairstyles also played crucial roles in life stage rituals, from puberty to mourning (Sagay, 1983; Sieber & Herreman, 2000). The aesthetic and symbolic value of hair was reflected in elaborate styling techniques and adornments, particularly for ceremonial occasions and among high-status individuals (Arnoldi & Kreamer, 1995). Rather than being merely decorative, these hairstyles conveyed complex cultural knowledge and societal values. The multifaceted significance of hair in African cultures underscores its role as a powerful medium of cultural expression and communication, deeply embedded in the fabric of social life.

This rich cultural heritage of hair in Africa has continued to evolve and adapt in response to historical changes and contemporary influences. As Sieber and Herreman (2000, p. 56) further elaborate, "the way one wears one's hair may also reflect one's status, gender, ethnic origin, leadership role, personal taste, or place in the cycle of life." This multifaceted role of hair in African cultures emphasises its importance beyond mere aesthetics, serving as a complex system of social communication.

The complexity of hair as a cultural expression in Africa is further illustrated by the diverse range of hairstyles and their meanings. For example, among the Mbalantu women of Namibia, elaborate eefipa³⁷ hairstyles made of sinew and other materials are worn by young women as part of initiation rituals (Sieber & Herreman, 2000). Such practices demonstrate how hair can be integral to important cultural rites and life stages, reinforcing its role in marking transitions and social status.

However, it's important to note that the cultural meanings attached to hair are not static. As Erasmus (1997, p. 15) observes in the South African context, "the meaning of 'good hair' for some black women is slowly beginning to shift from its colonial-racist content - straight and shiny - to the notion that 'good hair' is healthy hair whatever the texture". This shift reflects broader changes in how African cultures are negotiating their identities in a postcolonial world, challenging historical notions of beauty and embracing diverse expressions of African heritage.

Le Roux's (2020) research further emphasises the enduring cultural importance of hair in African societies. Her work highlights how hair continues to be a powerful medium of cultural expression and identity formation in contemporary African contexts. Le Roux notes that even in post-apartheid South Africa, hair remains deeply intertwined with issues of race, beauty, and social acceptance. Her findings suggest that while there has been a shift towards

³⁷ Eefipa refers to the elaborate hairstyles made of plaited sinew worn by young Mbalantu women of the Wambo group in Namibia. These hairstyles are created using plaited extensions from previous coiffures, with additional plaits attached to lengthen them until they hang to the ankles. They are specifically worn by young women participating in the ohangongo initiation ceremony. (Sieber & Herreman, 2000, p. 65)

embracing natural African hair textures, the legacy of colonial beauty standards still influences perceptions and practices.

Le Roux's (2020) study also reveals the complex interplay between traditional South African hair practices and modern global beauty trends. She observes that many African women navigate between these influences, often creating hybrid styles that reflect both their cultural heritage and contemporary aesthetics. This dynamic demonstrates the ongoing evolution of hair's cultural significance in South Africa, as it continues to serve as a site for negotiating identity, resisting oppression, and expressing individuality in a globalised world.

Hair in African cultures serves as a rich text, embodying personal, social, and cultural narratives. From traditional practices to contemporary styles, hair continues to be a powerful medium through which Africans express their cultural heritage, navigate social norms, and assert their identities in a rapidly changing world. The ongoing evolution of hair practices in Africa and South Africa reflects the dynamic nature of culture itself, adapting to new influences while maintaining connections to deep-rooted traditions and values.

2.9.3 Properties of Afrocentric hair

Hair is a defining characteristic of mammals, including humans. As Lowe (2016) explains, hair grows from roots deep within the skin, with the visible portion composed of dead protein filaments. The average human has between 100,000 to 150,000 hair follicles on their head, with about 90% of these in a growth phase³⁸ at any given time.

Lowe (2016) describes how hair grows in cycles, typically lasting two to seven years, which allows most people's hair to reach lengths of around 46 cms. Interestingly, hair covers almost the entire human body, with a few exceptions like the palms, soles of feet, and eyelids. Humans have different types of hair, including terminal hair (the thicker hair on the head,

³⁸ Human hair growth occurs in three distinct phases: anagen (growth phase), catagen (transitional phase), and telogen (resting phase). The anagen phase, which typically lasts 2-7 years, is the active growth period where hair follicles produce new hair cells. About 90% of scalp hairs are in this phase at any given time. The catagen phase, lasting 2-3 weeks, is a short transitional period where hair growth stops and the follicle shrinks. The telogen phase, lasting 2-4 months, is the resting period where old hairs are shed to make way for new growth. This cycle ensures continuous hair renewal throughout life.

body, and pubic regions), vellus hair (fine, colourless "peach fuzz"), and lanugo (soft hair that develops on fetuses) (Lowe, 2016, p. 20).

Afrocentric hair is characterised by its distinctive curl pattern, which ranges from loose curls to very tight coils. This variation in texture is often categorised using the Andre Walker Hair Typing System, which includes Type 3 (curly) and Type 4 (coily/kinky) hair. These categorisations help to describe the diverse range of curl patterns found in this hair type, acknowledging the spectrum of textures that exist (Chaves & Bacharach, 2021; Simeon, 2021). The degree of curvature can be objectively measured and quantified, with some hair exhibiting high curvature. As Cloete et al. (2019, p. 4) note, "hair curliness is measured by counting the number of waves per centimetre of fibre length".

Structurally, these hair fibres often have an elliptical cross-sectional shape, as opposed to the more circular cross-section seen in straighter hair types which include Type 1 and Type 2 on the Andre Walker Hair Typing System. Cloete et al. (2019, p. 4) explain that "curly fibres tend to have a more elliptic cross-sectional area and unique 3D form". This elliptical shape influences how the hair behaves, including its tendency to form tight coils or spirals.

At the biochemical level, this hair type has a unique arrangement of proteins and molecular structures. The distribution and organisation of cortical cells within the hair shaft play a crucial role in determining its physical properties. As Cloete et al. (2019, p. 7) describe, "in the curly fibre, the cell types were bilaterally distributed approximately perpendicular to fibre curvature direction".

Mechanically, curly hair often exhibits distinct properties in terms of elasticity and response to tension. It may have a different stress-strain curve compared to straighter hair types. These combined characteristics result in a hair type that is highly textured, voluminous, and often requires specific care practices to maintain its health and appearance. Understanding these properties is crucial for developing appropriate hair care products and styling techniques for this hair type (Cloete et al., 2019). The structure of tightly coiled hair makes it difficult for the

natural oils produced by the scalp to travel down the length of the hair shaft (Dawson et al., 2019). As a result, curly hair is more prone to dryness and breakage compared to straighter hair types (Dawson et al., 2019). This characteristic necessitates specific care routines and products designed to maintain adequate moisture levels in the hair (Dawson et al., 2019).

The combination of its curl pattern, tendency towards dryness, and unique structural properties can make this hair more fragile and prone to breakage. This is particularly true when the hair is frequently manipulated or styled. The fragility of curly hair is an important consideration in hair care practices and has been noted in the scientific literature (Khumalo (2005, as cited in Cloete et al., 2019).

One of the defining features of this hair type is its volume and density. Compared to other hair types, Type 3 and Type 4 tend to have a fuller, more voluminous appearance. This characteristic contributes to its unique aesthetic and often requires specific styling techniques to manage effectively. The density of this hair can vary from person to person, but it generally presents a thicker, more robust appearance than other hair types (Cloete et al., 2019).

2.9.4 Afrocentric hair in media and popular culture

The representation of Afrocentric hair in media and popular culture has evolved significantly over time, reflecting changing societal attitudes and the complex interplay between Eurocentric and Afrocentric beauty standards. Madlela's (2018) study on the representations of Black African women in *True Love* magazine³⁹ provides a foundational understanding of this dynamic. The research revealed that while the magazine increased the visibility of Black African women and promoted some African beauty standards, it simultaneously reinforced Eurocentric ideals. Madlela (2018, p. 267) noted, "True Love featured more Eurocentric hairstyles and promoted the notion that black hair is only beautiful when altered, though it did feature both Afrocentric and Westerncentric styles".

³⁹ True Love is a popular South African women's magazine targeted primarily at Black African women readers. Founded in 1972, it was one of the first mainstream magazines in South Africa to feature Black women on its covers and in editorial content. True Love has played an important role in representing and shaping ideals of Black African femininity and beauty standards over the decades, including depictions of natural and styled Afrocentric hair. The magazine's evolution reflects broader shifts in societal attitudes about Black identity and aesthetics in post-apartheid South Africa.

Importantly, Madlela's (2018, p. 268) work challenged assumptions about the unilateral influence of media on its audience. The study found that "Black African women readers showed agency in how they interpreted and sometimes rejected the magazine's representations". This finding underscores the complex relationship between media representations and consumer interpretations, suggesting that audiences actively engage with and sometimes resist media-promoted beauty standards.

Building on this understanding, Le Roux's (2020) more recent research provides insights into generational shifts in perceptions of Afrocentric hair. Le Roux's study of DRUM Hair magazine⁴⁰ revealed the construction of a hybrid identity for African women, presenting a variety of hairstyles encompassing both natural and artificial options. This media representation encouraged women to embrace diverse hairstyle choices and create multiple identities, moving away from solely Eurocentric beauty standards.

Crucially, Le Roux (2020) identified a generational divide in attitudes towards hair and identity. Colonial-born participants, both Black and Coloured, largely adhered to Eurocentric ideals of beauty, particularly valuing straight, long hair. In contrast, born-free participants displayed more flexibility in their hairstyle choices, embracing both natural and artificial styles. This younger generation placed individual preferences at the centre of their choices rather than adhering to a single beauty standard and tended to negate the past's influence on their current hairstyle decisions.

The shift in attitudes observed by Le Roux (2020) appears to be further amplified by the rise of social media, particularly among younger generations. Recent research by Chivandi et al. (2023) highlights the significant influence of social media on Afrocentric hair care and product consumption. Their study found positive and significant relationships between social media

⁴⁰ DRUM is a popular South African magazine that covers news, entertainment and lifestyle topics. DRUM Hair is a special annual edition focused specifically on hairstyles and hair care for African women. The study analyses cover stories from DRUM Hair magazine editions from 2014-2019 to examine how it represents and constructs African women's hair and identity.

innovation and brand awareness, brand preference, and the adoption of new hair cultures for hair care products.

Chivandi et al. (2023, p. 21) note that "social media has become the new word of mouth and reference point for many women in cosmetic buying decisions". This finding is particularly relevant to understanding the experiences of children in private schools, as it suggests that social media plays a crucial role in shaping trends and practices in Afrocentric hair care among younger generations.

The evolution from print media representations to social media influences reflects the changing landscape of how Afrocentric hair is perceived and promoted in popular culture. This progression from Madlela's (2018) findings on magazine representations, through Le Roux's (2020) observations of generational shifts, to insights by Chivandi et al. (2023) on social media's impact, provides a framework for understanding the contemporary context of Afrocentric hair in media and popular culture. This context is significant for interpreting the experiences of children and teenagers with Afrocentric hair in private school settings and hints toward the shift in generations where younger consumers are embracing Afrocentricity and expression of culture through hair on their current hairstyle decisions. These younger generations appear to align more closely with the hybrid identity concept proposed by Le Roux (2020).

2.9.5 Hair care industry and practices

The hair care practices and industry in South Africa have undergone significant changes in recent years, reflecting broader shifts in societal attitudes towards Afrocentric hair (Le Roux, 2020; Madlela, 2018). These changes are particularly relevant in understanding the experiences of Black learners in private school settings.

The informal sector plays a crucial role in meeting the hair care needs of the majority of the population, particularly in providing services for Afrocentric hair types. This is partly due to

the historical bias in the formal hair sector towards Caucasian hair care⁴¹, as evidenced during the 2010 Soccer World Cup when many international visitors with Afrocentric hair types struggled to find formal salons catering to their needs (DHET, 2018).

The hair industry's significant economic contribution is underscored by employment figures. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training & Services SETA (DHET, 2018, p. 2) report, "the hairdressing industry employs approximately 1,180,224 people (in both the formal and informal sectors), and its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is approximately 0.62%". This highlights the industry's importance not only in terms of cultural expression but also as a source of employment and economic activity.

The hair industry in South Africa is characterised by a division between formal and informal sectors, with a growing demand for Afrocentric hair care services, particularly in the informal sector and a lack thereof in the formal, as reported by Kolisi (2023). As noted by Bierman (2023, para. 21), "the informal beauty sector is definitely one to keep an eye on over the next few years as demand for these services increases and their establishment makes it all the more convenient and accessible". This growth is evidenced by the estimated 34,000 informal hair salons operating in South Africa, although the actual number is likely much higher due to the lack of comprehensive data on informal sector establishments (Bierman, 2023).

The economic impact of this growth is substantial. Bierman (2023, para. 18) reports that "haircare is one of the fastest growing categories of products sold in South Africa, with sales climbing by almost 40% between 2010 and 2015". This surge in demand reflects a shift towards embracing natural African hair textures and styles, a trend that has gained momentum since the end of apartheid (Le Roux, 2020).

⁴¹ The study found that the NATED hairdressing qualifications offered at TVET colleges were "perceived as being biased since they focused predominantly on Caucasian hair, despite the majority of the population having 'ethnic' hair care needs" (DHET, 2018, p. 2). This bias in training contributed to the formal sector being less equipped to serve clients with Afrocentric hair types. It should be noted that the researcher considers the term "ethnic" hair to be outdated and suggests that policy documents should use more sensitive and inclusive language when referring to diverse hair types.

However, challenges persist in the industry, particularly in terms of skills development and regulation. The DHET & Services SETA (2018) report identified critical skills gaps among hairdressers, especially in the informal sector. This points to the need for more inclusive and comprehensive training programmes that address the specific requirements of Afrocentric hair care.

The evolution of hair care practices in South Africa reflects broader societal changes and efforts to reclaim and celebrate Afrocentric hair. However, as the experiences in private schools demonstrate, tensions persist where institutional policies may not always align with the evolving attitudes and needs related to Afrocentric hair care. This disconnect underscores the importance of ongoing dialogue and policy revision to ensure that educational institutions keep pace with societal changes in hair care practices and cultural expression.

2.9.5.1 Afrocentric hair care practices

The hair care practices of Black consumers have undergone significant changes in recent years, marked by a shift from chemically relaxed hair to embracing natural textures. This transition is evidenced by the decline in relaxer sales in the United States market. Alexander (2011) reported a decrease across multiple relaxer kit brands over a 52-week period ending November 2, 2014 in the US multi-outlet distribution channels. Simultaneously, there has been a growing trend of Black consumers wearing their hair in its natural state. In the US market, Mintel (2015) reported that about 75% of Black consumers say they currently wear or have worn their hair natural.

This shift has necessitated changes in product needs and hair care routines. Natural hair often requires more moisturising products, as well as curl-defining and styling products. In the US context, Mintel (2016) noted that the natural hair trend supports the need for products that can be used for curl control. There's also been an increased demand for chemical-free and natural ingredient-based products, reflecting a desire for healthier hair care practices.

In the South African market, similar trends are emerging. Euromonitor (2017) reported that Black consumers in the South African haircare market were increasingly asking for products that cause less damage to their hair; women are increasingly moving towards natural hair care products that do not contain chemicals and will promote growth of their natural hair.

To navigate these challenges, many women turn to social media platforms for information and guidance. Ellington (2014) found that blogging, vlogging and posting to sites such as Facebook, enables creators to associate and converse with thousands of women across the world wearing natural hair. This trend appears to be global, with online natural hair communities and groups becoming valuable resources for sharing tips, product recommendations, and support.

In South Africa, the hair care market is projected to reach USD 496.64 million (ZAR 8.82 billion at the time of writing) by 2024, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 1.36% over the period 2019-2024, according to Mordor-Intelligence (2019). The study notes that the natural movement in the South African Afrocentric hair care sector is increasing, primarily due to a large number of Black consumers moving away from harsh chemical relaxers in favour of less harmful products to manage their hair.

Thomas (2020) and Matjila (2020) specifically examined hair care routines among participants with natural hair in South Africa. Their studies revealed a diverse approach to hair care, with participants using a variety of products including shampoos, conditioners, and treatments. The financial aspects of natural hair care were discussed, with some finding it cost-effective while others considered it a significant investment (Thomas, 2020).

Motivations for wearing natural hair varied, encompassing personal confidence, cultural identity, and self-expression (Thomas, 2020). For some, natural hair held deep cultural and spiritual significance, symbolising ancestral connections and personal identity (Matjila, 2020). Participants demonstrated a commitment to maintaining hair health through personalised routines. These routines often incorporated a mix of modern products and traditional

practices, reflecting an evolving approach to natural hair care. The studies again highlighted the importance of community and shared knowledge in shaping these practices, with many participants learning from social networks and family traditions. These evolving hair care practices represent more than mere aesthetic choices; they embody what Asante (2017) would recognise as expressions of Afrocentricity, conscious efforts to centre African agency and perspectives in personal presentation and cultural expression.

2.10 Conclusion

This literature review provides a foundation for understanding the landscape surrounding Afrocentric hair in Cape Town private schools. The broad historical, social, and cultural context explored here is necessary to fully appreciate the multifaceted nature of this field of inquiry.

The historical overview of South African education, from colonial times through apartheid to the present day, illuminates the deep-rooted inequalities and cultural tensions that continue to shape the educational landscape. This history is essential for understanding the unique position of private schools in South Africa and the ongoing challenges of creating truly inclusive educational environments. The examination of private schooling in South Africa, including its growth, affordability issues, and the complexities of scholarship programmes, provides insight into the socioeconomic dynamics at play. This context is vital for understanding the experiences of learners racialised as Black in these predominantly White, elite spaces.

The exploration of identity formation in schools, particularly in elite private institutions, underscores the profound impact these environments can have on learners' sense of self. This is especially relevant when considering how learners navigate their cultural identity, including expressions of that identity through their hair, in these settings.

The in-depth look at the cultural significance of hair in some African societies, the properties of Afrocentric hair, and the evolution of hair care practices and industries provide an essential



background for understanding the deep personal and cultural importance of hair for learners. This context is crucial for appreciating why hair policies in schools can be such a sensitive and significant issue.

Finally, the discussion of inclusivity in schools and the challenges of implementing truly inclusive practices sets the stage for examining how private schools in Cape Town are addressing (or failing to address) issues related to Afrocentric hair.

Providing this broad context, allows for a better understanding of the complexities surrounding Afrocentric hair in Cape Town private schools. This issue is not merely about hairstyles or school dress codes, but touches on deeper questions of cultural identity, racial dynamics, historical legacies, and the ongoing struggle for inclusivity in South African education. This background allows for an understanding and informed analysis of the specific experiences and challenges related to Afrocentric hair in Cape Town private schools, situating these experiences within the broader societal and historical context of post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology utilised in the study. It includes a comprehensive overview of the philosophical framework that guided the investigation, an explanation of the ethical considerations associated with the study, and a detailed description of the specific steps taken to conduct the research.

This research centred around the primary question of how parents with children in a small sample of Cape Town private schools and one Elite Model C school experience values that shape inclusivity around hair rules, particularly the cultural expression of or styling related to Afrocentric hair.

In this research, interviews were conducted with 13 parents of children attending nine private schools and one semi-private (former Model C school⁴²) in Cape Town to understand which Afrocentric hairstyles are permitted and which are not and meaning behind that. The participant list, previously introduced, is displayed again in Table 6 below for reference. This overview provides context for the findings that follow, offering a snapshot of the diverse perspectives represented in the interview data.

⁴² Model C schools: Former Whites-only public schools granted significant autonomy in the early 1990s. They operate as semi-private institutions, charging fees and self-governing through School Governing Bodies, while maintaining lower fees than elite private schools. In this study, the included Model C school represents a site of privilege reproduction similar to elite private schools.

Table 6: Participants in this research study (Author’s own compilation)

Participant	Gender	Highest Qualification	Self-described Racial Category	School	Nr. of children
Participant 1	Female	Master's Degree	Coloured/Asian	Steiner South	2
Participant 2	Female	Bachelor's Degree	White	Steiner South	1
Participant 3	Female	Doctorate / Ph.D	White	Steiner South	1
Participant 4	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Coloured/Mixed	Steiner Central	2
Participant 5	Female	Master's Degree	Mixed Race	Steiner Junior	1
Participant 6	Female	Master's Degree	White	Elite Girls Cape	1
Participant 7	Female	Diploma	Coloured	Elite Girls Cape	2
Participant 8	Male	Doctorate / Ph.D	White	Elite Boys C	1
Participant 9	Female	Doctorate / Ph.D	Black	Corporate School	1
Participant 10	Female	Master's Degree	White	Winelands Elite	1
Participant 11	Female	Master's Degree	White	Hebrew Institute	3
Participant 12	Female	Doctorate / Ph.D	Black	New Private	1
Participant 13	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Khiosan	Private College	2

The research also explored several related questions:

- According to the parents, do any of these schools suppress or encourage cultural identities, particularly related to hair?
- How and why have some parents chosen certain private schools over others or public schools?
- What trade-offs might impact parents' choice to accommodate their choice of private school?

The central aim of this research was to probe the viewpoints of parents with children in Cape Town private schools and one Elite Model C school, displayed in Table 7, delving into their experiences and perceptions regarding the values that shape hair policies and practices. This investigation sought to understand how these values and resulting policies impact learners, particularly those with Afrocentric hair textures and styles. The study aimed to capture parents' perspectives on the current educational environment in the sampled schools, specifically regarding hair-related values and practices. This approach aligns with recent research highlighting the importance of understanding parental perspectives in school choice and experiences (Blake & Mestry, 2020; Nault, 2021).

Table 7: Schools in this research study (Author's own compilation)

School	Type of school	Location	Year Established	Fees per annum ⁴³
Corporate School	Private (Christian)	Cape Town CBD	1998	ZAR 84,000.00
Elite Boys C	Elite Model C	Cape Town South	1897	ZAR 75,000.00
Elite Girls Cape	Faith Based Private	Cape Town CBD	1871	ZAR 160,000.00
Elite Girls Cape	Faith Based Private	Cape Town CBD	1871	ZAR 160,000.00
Hebrew Institute	Faith Based Private	Cape Town CBD	1940	ZAR 162,000.00
New Private	Private (Christian)	Cape Town North	2019	ZAR 64,000.00
Private College	Faith Based Private	Cape Town South	1918	ZAR 91,000.00
Steiner Central	Steiner Education	Cape Town South	1962	ZAR 92,000.00
Steiner Junior	Steiner Education	Cape Town South	1998	ZAR 50,000.00
Steiner South	Steiner Education	Cape Town South	1959	ZAR 102,000.00
Steiner South	Steiner Education	Cape Town South	1959	ZAR 102,000.00
Steiner South	Steiner Education	Cape Town South	1959	ZAR 102,000.00
Winelands Elite	Private (Christian)	Somerset West	1997	ZAR 127,000.00

This study also gauged parents' comprehension of school values and processes related to hair; evaluated how these values may suppress or celebrate what they describe as cultural identities; and sought to understand the factors influencing parents' school choices, including any trade-offs they may have considered. This exploration was particularly relevant given the ongoing challenges in fostering truly inclusive environments in South African schools, as noted by researchers like Soudien (2004) and Andrews et al. (2021).

Given the small sample size of this study, caution has to be exercised in drawing broad conclusions. While this research provides valuable insights into the experiences within the sampled schools through the perspective of participating parents, further research with larger samples, the children themselves, and the school representatives would be needed to determine if these findings represent wider trends in Cape Town or beyond.

Practically, this research creates understanding how values shape experiences and processes in private schools through the perspective of parents and the interpretation of publicly available website data, using the insights and understanding of parents. It is hoped that the recommendations and values expressed in this study can be used to strengthen the inclusivity of private schools in Cape Town, with the aim of creating more accommodating environments that encourages cultural diversity, particularly in relation to Afrocentric hair. This aligns with

⁴³ The fees presented in this column represent the annual tuition for Grade 12 students. It should be noted that fee structures may vary for lower grades, with slight differences in amounts. This Grade 12 figure is used as a standardised point of comparison across institutions.

calls for decolonising education in South Africa and promoting more equitable and culturally sensitive approaches in educational settings (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Walton et al., 2009).

3.2 Philosophy

The relationship between research philosophy and methodology is crucial in shaping the overall approach of any empirical study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A researcher's philosophical stance influences how they perceive and interpret reality, which in turn guides their choice of research approach, methods and strategies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). There are several key aspects to consider when establishing an appropriate research philosophy, though selecting the best fit can be a complex task. To help navigate this, many researchers make use of conceptual frameworks like the 'research onion' (Saunders et al., 2019).

The 'research onion', depicted in Figure 5 below, represents the layers of research design that a researcher must consider and 'peel away' as they move from broad philosophical assumptions towards more practical methodological choices (Saunders et al., 2019). This model encourages researchers to work from the outside in – first considering their overarching philosophical position before moving to approach, methodology, and specific methods (Collis & Hussey, 2014). While not the only framework for conceptualising research design, the research onion provides a useful structure for systematically considering the key elements that shape a study's overall methodology (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

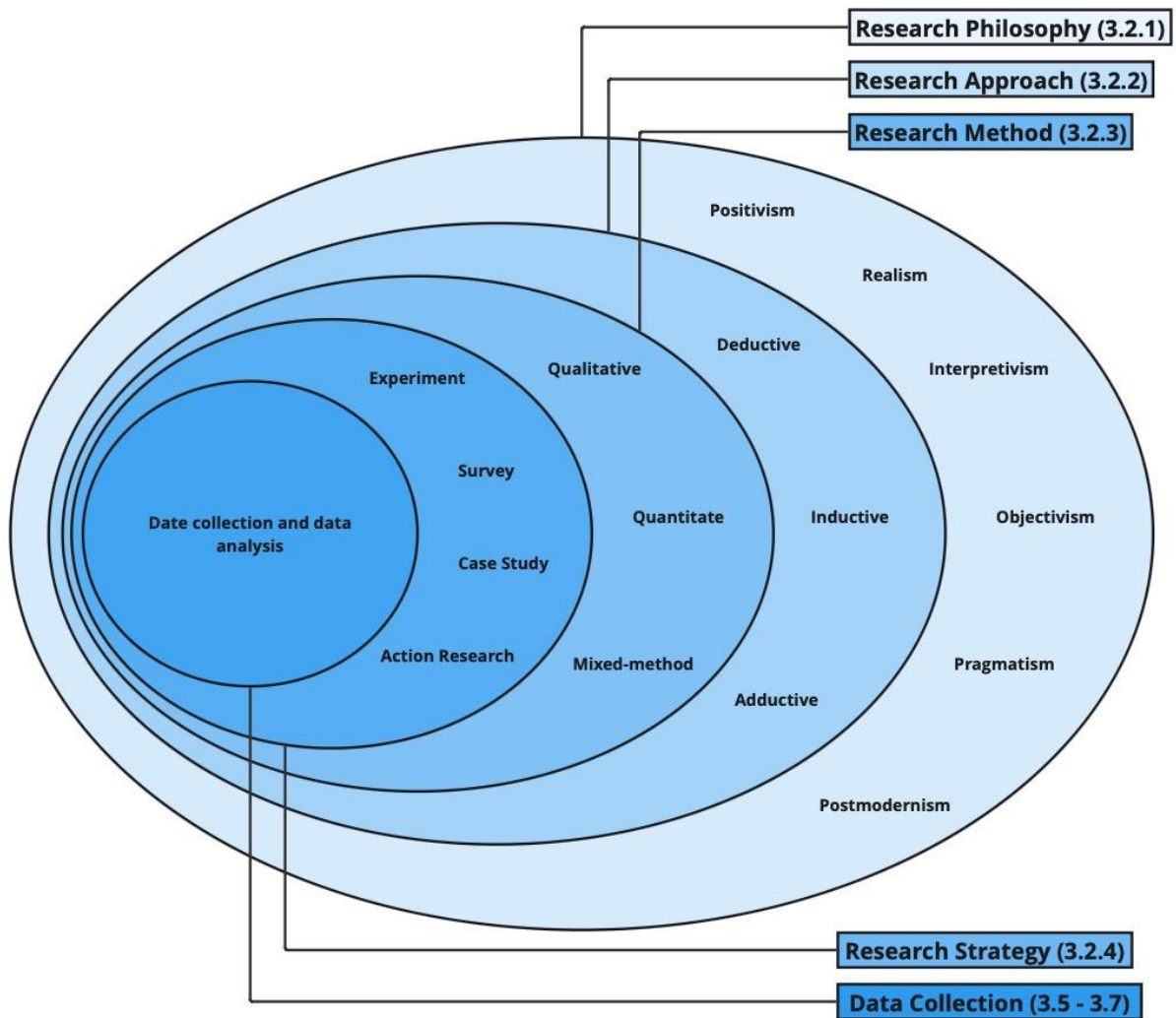


Figure 5: The research onion (Adapted from Saunders et al., 2019, p. 130)

Each layer of the research onion represents a different aspect of the research process, which this methods chapter explores in detail. This structured approach ensures a comprehensive overview of the methodology, with each aspect thoroughly examined in its corresponding section. The outermost layer addresses the Research Philosophy (3.2.1, p. 96), underpinning the entire approach. Moving inward, we examine the Research Approach (3.2.2, p.97), followed by the Research Method (3.2.3, p. 98). The fourth layer delves into the Research Strategy (3.2.4, p. 100), whilst at the core lies Data Collection and Analysis (3.5 to 3.7, p. 105).

3.2.1 Research philosophy

This study adopted a constructivist paradigm, which posits that realities are shaped by social and experiential factors, manifesting through diverse mental constructs (Guba, 1990). Constructivism suggests that our understanding of the world is not just a reflection of an external reality but is shaped by how we interact with it (Jenner et al., 2004).

The choice of a constructivist approach is particularly relevant for this study, which explored parents' experiences and perceptions of values shaping inclusivity around hair experiences in the sampled Cape Town private schools. This paradigm allowed for the examination of multiple, socially constructed realities that parents may hold regarding hair policies, cultural expression and experiences in their schools of choice.

Given the importance of the subject in a constructivist paradigm, it's crucial to recognise the researcher's role in shaping the research process and outcomes (Yin, 2011). As a man racialised as White researching a culturally sensitive topic, I had to carefully consider my positionality and its potential impact on the research process and participants' responses. To maintain reflexivity, I kept a journal throughout the research, making notes after each interview to track my reflections and maintain awareness of my own biases and interpretations.

To address the potential obstacles posed by my positionality, I employed creative methods to build rapport with participants, such as using AI-generated photo cards as an interview tool. Additionally, I analysed publicly available website data to provide context for the schools' stated values and approaches. By adopting this constructivist approach and maintaining reflexivity about my positionality, I aimed to produce insights that accurately represent the diverse experiences and perspectives of parents regarding hair experiences in the sampled Cape Town private schools.

3.2.2 Research approach to theory development

This study, conducted within the context of a business school, employed an inductive approach to theory development. This approach is particularly well-suited to qualitative research in management education and business studies (Saunders et al., 2019; Yin, 2011). The choice of an inductive approach was deliberate and aligned with the study's objectives for several reasons:

1. **Exploration of lived experiences:** The primary aim of this research was to understand parents' experiences with hair policies in Cape Town private schools and the values that guide them. An inductive approach allowed for a deeper immersion into these lived experiences without the constraining lens of pre-existing theories (Maxwell, 2013). This was crucial for capturing the nuances and complexities of parents' perspectives on inclusivity and cultural expression in schools.
2. **Context-specific understanding:** The educational landscape in Cape Town is unique, shaped by historical, cultural, and social factors. An inductive approach enables the development of theories that are grounded in this specific context, rather than imposing potentially ill-fitting external frameworks (Yin, 2011).
3. **Flexibility and openness to emergent themes:** Inductive reasoning offers more flexibility than deductive⁴⁴ approaches, allowing specific processes and events that occur during the research to shape the development of broader concepts (Yin, 2011). This was particularly valuable given my background as a hair professional, as it allowed me to approach the topic with an open mind and let new insights emerge from the data.
4. **Alignment with constructivist paradigm:** The inductive approach complements the constructivist paradigm adopted in this study, as both emphasise the importance of participants' perspectives in shaping our understanding of reality (Guba, 1990).

⁴⁴ Deductive research begins with a theory or hypothesis and tests it through systematic observation, moving from general principles to specific conclusions. In contrast, inductive research starts with specific observations and moves towards broader generalisations and theories.

5. Potential for novel insights: By prioritising data over pre-existing theory, this approach increases the potential for discovering unexpected patterns and generating novel insights in the field of inquiry (Yin, 2011).

The inductive nature of this research was evident in the reflexive process that characterised the study. As Maxwell (2013) notes, qualitative research often involves simultaneous data collection, analysis, theory development, and refinement of research questions. This non-linear approach allowed for the research to evolve and adapt based on emerging findings, leading to some changes in the research proposal, questions, and participants, which were detailed in 1.7 (p. 25) scope and limitations⁴⁵, in the introduction chapter.

By adopting an inductive approach, this study aimed to develop a theoretical framework that genuinely reflects the reality of parents' experiences with hair policies in Cape Town private schools, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of inclusivity and cultural expression in these educational settings.

3.2.3 Research method

This study made use of a qualitative as opposed to a quantitative approach. The reasons for this are straightforward. Quantitative research focuses on examining numerical relationships between variables through statistical and graphical analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). It emphasises using controls to validate data (often evident in their experimental design), and employing probability sampling techniques to achieve generalisability (Saunders et al., 2019). Quantitative research is further characterised by its meticulously defined and structured data collection methods, yielding standardised numerical results (Saunders et al., 2019). This study primarily collected and analysed qualitative data, focusing on in-depth exploration of experiences and perceptions rather than statistical comparisons. While some findings were later visualised using heat maps with numerical representations, these were derived from

⁴⁵ As detailed in Section 1.7 (p. 25) of the Introduction, this study underwent significant adaptations due to access limitations. Originally conceived as a collaborative effort with private schools, the focus shifted to parental experiences. This change, while challenging, ultimately provided a unique perspective on inclusivity and identity expression in private school settings, particularly concerning Afrocentric hairstyles. The evolution of the research approach underscores the importance of flexibility in qualitative research, as noted by Maxwell (2013)

qualitative interpretations of the data. The core methodology and data collection remained qualitative in nature, making a quantitative approach unsuitable for the primary research objectives.

The qualitative approach was selected as it aligned with the research problem: understanding parents' perceptions and interpretations of inclusivity regarding hair rules in Cape Town private schools. Yin (2011) characterises qualitative research by five key features. It is useful to demonstrate precisely how the present research lines up with each of Yin's five features.

Firstly, Yin (2011) argues that qualitative research involves studying the meaning of people's lives in real-world conditions, allowing for natural expressions and interactions. In terms of this study, the real-world conditions are the private school environments, while the focus was on parents' experiences and perceptions within these settings. Secondly, qualitative research aims to represent the perspectives of the participants, capturing their views and experiences. In this study, it is the narrative perspective of parents that was studied, with the aim of understanding their perceptions of hair experiences in private schools and how these relate to 'inclusive environments'. Thirdly, qualitative study ought to cover contextual conditions, such as social and environmental influences, which may impact human events. In the present example, the contextual conditions are the private schools that were under examination, and the study utilised website analysis to contextualise these schools, which added significant research value by providing an understanding of the institutional environments. Fourth, qualitative research should contribute insights into existing or emerging concepts to explain social behaviour, going beyond the mere documentation of events. In this investigation, I examined parents' perceptions of how private schools develop and implement hair-related rules and processes, and how these impact their children's ability to express their cultural identity. This approach provided insights into how school policies may influence social behaviour from the perspective of parents. Lastly, qualitative research strives to use multiple sources of evidence to enhance credibility and trustworthiness, often involving interviews, observations and document analysis. For the present research, this was achieved through multiple interviews with parents from different private schools in Cape Town, complemented

by analysis of public website data from these schools. This combined approach yielded insights into a variety of school cultures and environments. This approach allowed for an understanding of a spectrum of value systems that drove different experiences.

3.2.4 Research strategy

According to Saunders et al. (2019), a research strategy refers to a plan of action that a researcher will use to answer their research question and provide a link between the researcher's philosophical stance and the methods they use to collect and analyse data. When choosing a research strategy, it is important to consider the research question(s) and objectives that the study aims to address.

For this study, the main strategy selected was qualitative interviewing with a focus on parents' experiences and perceptions. This approach was chosen because it aligns closely with the research objectives of understanding how parents with children in Cape Town private schools experience values that shape inclusivity around hair rules, particularly those related to Afrocentric hair.

The strategy of this research project was to have in-depth conversations with parents of children in various private schools in Cape Town. These conversations centred around their experiences and perceptions of school values and practices related to hair experiences, and how these impact inclusivity and cultural expression. This approach allowed for a rich exploration of diverse perspectives across different school environments.

The choice of this strategy was driven by several factors:

1. Alignment with research questions: It provided a direct way to address the main research question about parents' experiences of values shaping inclusivity in schools.
2. Access to diverse perspectives: By interviewing parents from different schools, the study could capture a range of experiences and school cultures.
3. Depth of understanding: In-depth interviews allowed for a nuanced exploration of parents' thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to hair rules and inclusivity.

4. Flexibility: This approach provided the flexibility to explore emerging themes and adapt to the sensitive nature of the topic.
5. Pragmatic considerations: Following the necessary shift in research focus, the strategy of interviewing UCT employees who were parents of children in private schools represented a pragmatic solution to access constraints. This approach allowed the study to proceed by leveraging an available and relevant participant pool, thereby balancing research objectives with practical limitations of access and time. The selection of UCT employees in pay classes 10 and 12, who are considered high-income earners in the South African context, provided a unique perspective on private school choices and experiences. This demographic alignment was particularly relevant given the study's focus on private schools, which typically cater to higher-income families. Furthermore, these employees' likely engagement with issues of inclusivity and transformation in higher education settings added an additional layer of insight to the research. This aspect inadvertently transformed the sampling approach into purposeful sampling, as the participants' professional context aligned closely with the study's focus on inclusivity in educational settings. Purposeful sampling, as defined by Patton (2002) and Suri (2011), involves selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study, which these UCT employees represented due to their dual perspectives as both education professionals and parents of children in private schools.

In the context of this qualitative interview-based study, the research design focused on:

- Formulating open-ended interview questions that would elicit rich, detailed responses.
- Purposeful sampling which in the end resulted in a racially diverse sample of parents from various private schools in Cape Town.
- Developing a framework for analysing and interpreting the interview and publicly available website data to identify key themes and patterns.

This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the complex issue of inclusivity in private schools, particularly as it relates to hair rules and cultural expression, from the valuable perspective of parents and public facing website data.

3.3 Research questions

Main research question:

- How do parents with children in a small sample of Cape Town private schools and one Elite Model C school experience values that shape inclusivity around hair rules, particularly the cultural expression of or styling related to Afrocentric hair?

Further questions:

- According to the parents, do any of these schools suppress or encourage cultural identities, particularly related to hair?
- How and why have some parents chosen certain private schools over others or public schools?
- What trade-offs might impact parents' choice to accommodate their choice of private school?

In this study, inclusivity primarily relates to learning environments that welcome diverse cultural expressions, particularly Afrocentric hairstyles. Participants were briefed on this specific framing of inclusivity before their interviews. This approach ensured that parents understood the context of the questions and could provide relevant insights into their experiences with hair rules and cultural expression in their children's schools.

3.4 Unit of analysis

Yin (2011) discusses the importance of selecting an appropriate unit of analysis in qualitative research. The unit of analysis refers to the level of society that is being studied, such as the individual, group, organisation or community. The choice of unit of analysis can have a significant impact on the research findings and the ability to generalise the results to other

contexts. Yin (2011) notes that qualitative research can involve multiple levels of analysis, and that the relationship between the levels of analysis and the research topic should be carefully considered.

It's important to note that the initial intended unit of analysis for this study was private schools in Cape Town. However, due to challenges in accessing these institutions directly, the research design had to be adapted (Appendix 4, 5, 6 & 7). This shift in approach was a critical juncture in the study, highlighting the dynamic nature of qualitative research and the need for flexibility in research design. As a result of these access limitations, the unit of analysis became twofold: primarily, the parents of children in private schools, and secondarily, the schools' public-facing websites. This dual focus provided complementary perspectives on the research questions, with parental experiences offering lived insights that necessarily reflect their subjective interpretations of school environments, while the website analysis contextualised the institutional environments in which these experiences occurred.

This study made use of interpretive phenomenological analysis (hereafter 'IPA'). IPA is a qualitative research method that originated from the philosophical traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). It emphasises the study of subjective experiences and the interpretation of meaning (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Initially developed in psychology, IPA has been applied in various fields and is valued for its adaptability and flexibility in understanding human experiences and perceptions (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

IPA has several potential limitations and challenges in research, including its reliance on a generally small sample size; its time-consuming and subjective nature; the complexity of interpretation involved; the need to adapt its methods; and the overwhelming quantity of data it produces (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). It is therefore recommended that researchers remain aware of these challenges of IPA and adapt its method to suit their specific research needs (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

Moving from the abstract principles of IPA to the particularities of this study, the research process unfolded in a manner that diverged from the initial plan. Rather than a carefully curated selection, participant recruitment relied on purposeful sampling due to the challenges in accessing private schools directly. Parents from various private schools in Cape Town were included in the study based on their willingness to participate and their connection to other participants. This approach, allowed for the gathering of diverse perspectives from different school communities.

It's important to note that the selection of schools was not predetermined or systematic. Instead, the schools represented in the study were those attended by the children of parents who agreed to participate. This resulted in a sample that, while diverse, was not strategically chosen to represent specific types of private schools in Cape Town.

The recruitment of participants was initiated through an invitation (Appendix 1) sent out early August 2023 to the University of Cape Town Academic, Senior Academic, and Senior PASS staff. This invitation asked for volunteers who had children attending what they considered to be private schools in Cape Town. This approach led to a diverse pool of volunteers, including parents whose children attended various types of schools that they perceived as private.

It's important to note that this method of recruitment resulted in some variability in the definition of "private school" among participants. For instance, one male volunteer whose child attended an Elite Model C school was included in the study, as the parent considered this school to fall within the private school category due to its fee structure and governance model.

Initially, all volunteers who responded to the invitation were included in the study. However, as the research progressed, a decision was made to limit the number of participants from Steiner schools after the fifth interview due to data saturation.

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Website data collection

The collection of website data for this study followed an emergent design, aligning with the purposeful sampling method used for participant recruitment. As parents from various schools were interviewed, it became apparent that a deeper understanding of these institutions was necessary to contextualise the parents' experiences and perceptions.

To systematically gather information about the schools represented in the study, a data collection process was implemented to analyse the official public-facing websites of these institutions. This approach was chosen to gain insights into how the schools present themselves publicly, particularly in terms of their values, policies, and operational structures.

After careful consideration of the ethical implications, a Python-based web scraping tool (Figure 6) was developed to extract publicly available qualitative data from the school websites.

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web_scraper.py x
47 def export_to_pdf(scraped_data, filename='scraped_content.pdf'):
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49     try:
50         doc.build(story)
51         print(f"PDF report generated: {filename}")
52     except Exception as e:
53         print(f"Error generating PDF: {e}")
54         print("Falling back to text file export...")
55         export_to_text(scraped_data)
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This decision was not made lightly, and several ethical considerations were taken into account:

1. **Public Domain:** The data collected was limited to information that schools have made public on their websites. However, it is acknowledged that whilst this information is publicly accessible, the schools may not have anticipated its use for research purposes (Krotov & Silva, 2018).
2. **Anonymity and Consent:** In line with ethical research practices, all schools have been given pseudonyms in this study and none of the data was presented in a way that directly links a quote or sentence to a specific school. However, it is important to note that explicit consent was not obtained from the schools for the use of their website data in this research.
3. **Minimal Harm and Legal Compliance:** The web scraping process was designed to be non-intrusive, with measures taken to prevent any disruption to the schools' websites or servers (Krotov et al., 2020). The data collected does not include any personal or sensitive information. Importantly, all robots.txt files⁴⁶ were strictly respected and recorded, ensuring compliance with each website's crawling and scraping preferences. Additionally, the terms of service for each website were carefully reviewed and respected, and all privacy policies were recorded and strictly adhered to throughout the data collection process. The data was only interpreted by the researcher and expressed thematically, with visual illustrations of the interpreted values.
4. **Research Value:** The use of this data provides valuable context to the study, enhancing the understanding of parent experiences in relation to school environments. This aligns with the principle of maximising research benefits whilst minimising risks (Buchanan, 2017; Heise et al., 2019).
5. **Data Handling:** All collected data has been stored securely and in accordance with the UCT Data Management Policy (Appendix 2) and will be used solely for the purposes of this research.

⁴⁶ A robots.txt file is a text file placed on a website's server that provides instructions to web crawlers and scrapers. It indicates which parts of the site should not be processed or scanned. It's considered an ethical standard for scrapers to respect these instructions (Krotov et al., 2020).

6. Reporting: The website data reporting was conducted in a manner that discussed schools in themes and groups rather than individually. No direct quotes were used, and sentences or specific features that could be linked to a particular school were avoided. This approach ensured that the analysis maintained a level of anonymity for the institutions involved while still providing meaningful insights into the broader themes and patterns observed across the sampled schools.

Whilst this approach allowed for a systematic collection of textual information, including mission statements, value propositions, policy documents, and descriptions of school activities, it is crucial to acknowledge the ethical complexities involved. The researcher recognises that this method exists in a grey area of research ethics (Luscombe et al., 2022; Snell & Menaldo, 2016), and that there are ongoing debates about the appropriate use of publicly available online data in research contexts. This study aims to contribute to these discussions by transparently reporting the methods used and critically reflecting on their implications.

The inclusion of this website data analysis complements the parent interviews by offering an additional perspective on the schools' approaches to inclusivity and cultural expression. It also aligns with the study's constructivist paradigm by acknowledging the multiple realities constructed by different stakeholders in the educational environment.

This approach to data collection exemplifies the adaptive nature of qualitative research, as described by Maxwell (2013), where the research design evolves in response to emerging findings and the need for deeper contextual understanding.

3.5.2 Parent interviews

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents of children attending private schools in Cape Town (Saunders et al., 2019). The participants, as detailed in Table 8, were staff members from UCT, including Academic, Senior Academic, and Senior PASS staff in pay class 10 and 12.

Table 8: Participant demographics (Author’s own compilation)

Participant	Gender	Age range	Self-described Racial Category	School	No. of children
Participant 1	Female	35 - 44 years	Coloured/Asian	Steiner South	2
Participant 2	Female	45 - 54 years	White	Steiner South	1
Participant 3	Female	35 - 44 years	White	Steiner South	1
Participant 4	Female	55 - 64 years	Coloured/Mixed	Steiner Central	2
Participant 5	Female	45 - 54 years	Mixed Race	Steiner Junior	1
Participant 6	Female	45 - 54 years	White	Elite Girls Cape	1
Participant 7	Female	35 - 44 years	Coloured	Elite Girls Cape	2
Participant 8	Male	45 - 54 years	White	Elite Boys C	1
Participant 9	Female	35 - 44 years	Black	Corporate School	1
Participant 10	Female	35 - 44 years	White	Winelands Elite	1
Participant 11	Female	35 - 44 years	White	Hebrew Institute	3
Participant 12	Female	35 - 44 years	Black	New Private	1
Participant 13	Female	45 - 54 years	Khiosan	Private College	2

As Ndlovu (2017) highlights, the UCT community has been deeply engaged with questions of cultural expression and institutional transformation. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was narrative in nature, allowing participants to share their experiences and perspectives in depth (Jenner et al., 2004). Interviews took place on the UCT campus in various locations such as offices, libraries, and meeting rooms, chosen for their accessibility and comfort for the participants (Maxwell, 2013).

Prior to each interview, participants completed a consent form (Appendix 8) and agreed to have the interview recorded (Jenner et al., 2004). A predetermined list of themes and key questions guided the interviews (Appendix 9), but flexibility was maintained to allow for follow-up questions and detailed responses (Saunders et al., 2019).

The data collection also involved the use of photo cards, shown in Table 9 below, to set the tone of the interview and keep the conversation on topic. This strategy was implemented to facilitate discussions about diverse Afrocentric hair types and styles, ensuring that all participants, regardless of their racial background, had a common reference point (Yin, 2011).

Table 9: Photo cards as interview tool (Author's own compilation)



As a researcher racialised as White investigating issues of inclusivity that often disproportionately affect non-White communities, I was acutely aware of the need to create a comfortable and open dialogue. The face-to-face format was chosen for its advantages in establishing rapport, observing non-verbal cues, and allowing for immediate clarification of questions and responses (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

This study, by a combination of good fortune and the diverse nature of the UCT staff community, included participants from various racial backgrounds, as shown in Table 8. This diversity in the participant pool allowed for the capture of a wide range of experiences and views on inclusivity that may vary across different racial backgrounds. However, it is important to note that there was a significant gender imbalance among the participants, with only one male participant. This limitation will be discussed further in the limitations section of the study.

While the sample size was limited, which may affect the generalisability of the findings, the study provides valuable insights into parents' experiences with hair policies in Cape Town private schools. The combination of a racially diverse participant group and the use of visual aids in interviews allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of hair experiences in these educational settings.

3.6 The use of AI-generated photos

To facilitate discussions about diverse hair types and styles, AI-generated photo cards were created using MidJourney, an AI art generation tool. This approach was chosen to produce images specifically tailored to the study context, depicting children in school uniforms with various Afrocentric hairstyles. The use of visual tools in interviews can result in a fully integrated visual, oral and aural production of participant meanings (Vermaak & De Klerk, 2017).

The image generation process involved inputting specific prompts into MidJourney, a tool that operates using textual 'prompts' to produce photo-realistic digital visual outputs (Radhakrishnan, 2023). These prompts were carefully crafted to produce a range of hairstyles and skin tones representative of diversity. A table detailing the prompts used for each image is provided in Appendix 3.

To ensure the sensitivity and appropriateness of the images, I consulted with two students racialised as Black from the MPhil Inclusive Innovation programme cohorts of 2022 and 2023. This step was taken in recognition of potential biases in AI-generated images, as highlighted by Fraser et al. (2023) and Ding (2023). Their feedback (Appendix 3) was valuable in refining the prompts and selecting the final set of images. This collaborative process helped to address potential biases and ensure that the images were respectful and representative.

Table 10: Photo cards with numbers (Author's own compilation)

					
1	2	3	4	5	6
					
7	8	9	10	11	12
					
13	14	15	16	17	18
					
19	20	21	22	23	

The final selection of images, as shown in Table 10, was numbered for reference during the interviews. These photo cards served as visual prompts throughout the interviews, facilitating discussions about hair experiences in private schools. This method aligns with photo-elicitation techniques described by Spencer (2010) where participants interpret photographic images to construct meanings related to the research topic. This approach allowed for the creation of visual aids specifically tailored to the South African private school context.

3.7 Theme generation

The process of generating themes was a key part of the analysis for both the website data and interview data in this study. As Braun and Clarke (2006) describe, thematic analysis involves

searching across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning. For the website data, themes were developed inductively by examining the content across the different school websites and looking for common elements and distinguishing features. This process resulted in three main themes emerging:

1. Faith-based schools
2. Traditional academic-focused schools
3. Steiner schools

These themes captured the key types of private schools represented in the sample based on their ethos, values and educational approach as presented on their websites.

For the interview data, theme generation involved a more in-depth process of coding the transcripts, grouping similar codes, and identifying overarching themes that addressed the research questions. As described by Miles et al. (2014), this involved condensing the data, displaying it in ways that aided analysis, and drawing conclusions. Through this iterative process, three main themes emerged from the interview data:

1. Racial distribution in schools
 - Student population
 - Teachers and management
2. Values and school choice
 - Academic excellence and achievement
 - Individual attention and support
 - Holistic development and self-expression
 - Religious and cultural alignment
 - Inclusivity and diversity
3. Hair experiences and cultural expression
 - Views on "neat" and "tidy" hair
 - Restricted self-expression

- Structured settings with some personal choice
- Welcoming diverse hairstyles

These themes encapsulated the key areas that parents discussed in relation to cultural inclusivity around hair experiences and cultural expression in the private schools. The themes provided a framework for further analysis of the nuances and variations in parents' perspectives and experiences across the different school types.

The theme generation process was not linear, but involved moving back and forth between the data, codes and potential themes to refine and define the key themes that best captured the essence of the data in relation to the research questions. This approach aligns with the flexible and recursive nature of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

3.8 Ethical approval and consideration

This study was conducted with a firm commitment to ethical research practices, recognising the sensitive nature of exploring hair experiences and cultural expression in private schools. Ethical approval was initially granted on 27 October 2022 (Appendix 4), with a subsequent approval on 30 May 2023 (Appendix 5) following modifications to the research design, and data collection started in September 2023. The UCT Ethics Committee emphasised the importance of data anonymisation and secure handling of all recordings, guidelines which were strictly adhered to throughout the research process (Appendix 2).

Participant confidentiality was ensured through anonymisation procedures. All identifiable information was removed from transcripts, and pseudonyms were used for both participants and schools. However, it is important to acknowledge that the complete anonymity of schools in educational research is often challenging to achieve without compromising the contextual richness of the data (Walford, 2003). While steps were taken to anonymise schools, it is possible that those familiar with the Cape Town private school landscape may make informed guesses about the schools involved. This approach maintains a principle of 'plausible

deniability' for schools, balancing the need for contextual understanding with ethical considerations.

The potential identifiability of schools was carefully considered against the benefits of the research. Following Smette's (2019) approach, I made a distinction between internal and external anonymity⁴⁷, focusing on minimising the risk of harm rather than achieving perfect anonymity. This decision was informed by the understanding that the benefits of the research in addressing important issues of inclusivity and cultural expression outweigh the minimal risks associated with potential school identification. Moreover, this research has the potential to catalyse broader societal change; by shedding light on these issues, it may encourage other schools to reflect on and revise their experiences, potentially leading to a wider transformation in educational practices and cultural inclusivity. This ripple effect could contribute to meaningful, long-term changes in how schools approach diversity and cultural expression, ultimately fostering a more inclusive educational landscape.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear explanations provided about the study's purpose, potential risks, and the right to withdraw at any time (Saunders et al., 2019). Throughout the research process, I remained cognisant of the power dynamics inherent in academic research and the responsibility to contribute to the discourse on inclusivity in education. This study aimed not only to produce knowledge but to do so in a manner that respects and empowers the communities it seeks to understand (Maxwell, 2013).

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach and specific methods employed in this study examining parents' experiences of values shaping cultural inclusivity around hair rules in a sample of Cape Town private schools. The research design was guided by a constructivist

⁴⁷ Internal anonymity refers to the protection of identities within the research setting itself, where participants and schools may be able to recognise each other or their own contributions. External anonymity pertains to the concealment of identities from those outside the immediate research context. In educational research, achieving perfect internal anonymity is often challenging, whilst external anonymity can be more readily maintained (Smette, 2019; Walford, 2008).

paradigm and utilised an inductive, qualitative approach centred on semi-structured interviews with parents.

The study's evolution from its initial conception to its final form demonstrates the flexibility required in qualitative research, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics. The shift from directly studying schools to focusing on parental perspectives provided a unique vantage point on issues of inclusivity and cultural expression in private educational settings.

Key methodological decisions included:

- Adopting a constructivist paradigm and inductive approach
- Utilising IPA for data analysis
- Employing purposeful sampling for participant recruitment
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with 13 parents from diverse backgrounds
- Using AI-generated photo cards as interview tools to facilitate discussions
- Collecting supplementary data from school websites to contextualise the schools

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, with particular attention paid to issues of confidentiality, informed consent, and the researcher's positionality. The use of AI-generated images as interview tools and website scraping represented an innovative approach to navigating sensitive discussions around hair and cultural expression.

While the study's small sample size limits generalisability, it offers insights into parental experiences and perceptions of inclusivity in Cape Town private schools. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on cultural expression and identity in educational settings, particularly in the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which explored parents' experiences and perceptions of values shaping cultural inclusivity around hair experiences in selected Cape Town schools. The findings are presented using a narrative reporting style, which aligns with the study's constructivist paradigm and IPA methodology (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Narrative reporting allows for rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences, effectively capturing the complexity and nuance of individual stories (Riessman, 2008). This approach is particularly suitable for the sensitive and personal nature of the research topic, enabling the presentation of multiple, socially constructed realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The use of narrative reporting in this chapter serves several purposes. It maintains the context and coherence of participants' accounts, understanding the intersection of factors such as school choice, cultural identity, and inclusivity in parents' experiences (Bold, 2012). Furthermore, it allows for the inclusion of researcher reflexivity, an important consideration given the researcher's positionality as discussed in the methodology chapter (Finlay, 2002).

In presenting the findings, this chapter uses Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (2012) as a framework for analysis and interpretation. This theory provides a comprehensive structure for interpreting the values expressed by parents and those evident in school policies and practices. By applying Schwartz's value framework (Table 11) in this study, it was possible to examine how different value orientations influence parents' experiences and perceptions of inclusivity in private schools, particularly concerning hair rules and cultural expression. Table 11 is displayed again below for ease of reference, as this chapter makes frequent reference to these core values.

Table 11: Defining goals of motivational values according to Schwartz (Schwartz, 2012)

Universalism:	understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.
Benevolence:	preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group').
Power:	social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.
Achievement:	personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.
Hedonism:	pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself.
Stimulation:	excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.
Self-direction:	independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring.
Conformity:	restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
Tradition:	respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides.
Security:	safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.

It is important to note that while Schwartz's theory guides the organisation and initial interpretation of the findings, other theoretical approaches mentioned in the introduction chapter (such as Cultural Capital and Social Mobility, Social Identity, and Decoloniality Theory) are more extensively applied in the discussion chapter. This approach allows for a focused presentation of findings in this chapter, followed by a more comprehensive theoretical analysis in the subsequent discussion.

The narratives presented throughout sections of the chapter have been drawn from in-depth interviews with 13 parents whose children attend nine private schools and one former Model C school in Cape Town. These accounts provide a window into the diverse experiences and perspectives of parents navigating the complex landscape of private education in post-apartheid South Africa, particularly regarding issues of inclusivity and cultural expression as manifested through hair experiences and practices.

4.2 Overview of the data sources

This study drew upon two sources of qualitative data to explore the values shaping inclusivity around hair experiences in selected Cape Town private schools: the primary data, which comprised in-depth interviews with parents, and secondary data, which comprised publicly available website content. Each source provided a unique perspective on the research questions, allowing for an examination of both institutional narratives and lived experiences. The website data was used to frame the schools and identify common themes among them, while the interviews were used to directly address the research questions.

4.2.1 Website content

This data source comprised publicly available information from the websites of the schools represented in this study. The analysis of this website data is presented first in this findings chapter, beginning with section 4.3 (p. 122). This approach provides essential context for understanding the school environments and their stated values before delving into the parent interviews.

The researcher analysed the following elements from each school's website:

- Mission statements and core values
- Descriptions of educational philosophies and approaches
- Information about academic programmes and extracurricular activities
- Statements on school culture and community
- Highlights of facilities and resources
- Details about student support and development initiatives
- News articles and announcements

The original data and full analysis were accessed and interpreted solely by the researcher. To visually represent the values emphasised by these schools, a heat map was created based on the analysis of available public website data. This heat map, displayed in Figure 7, uses colour

intensity to represent the prominence of each value from Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (2012) across the sampled schools. In this heat map, and all subsequent heat maps presented in this chapter, darker shades indicate a stronger emphasis on a particular value, concept, or characteristic being measured. Conversely, lighter shades suggest less emphasis or prevalence of the measured attribute. This colour-intensity principle applies consistently across all heat maps in this chapter, regardless of whether they represent values, demographic distributions, or other analysed factors. In Figure 7 each row represents a school, and each column represents one of Schwartz's ten basic values. This visual representation allows for quick comparison across schools and values.

Interpretation of this data through the lens of Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (2012) revealed three broad categories of schools, which are demarcated in the heat map. These categories emerged based on similarities in value emphasis across schools, as indicated by similar patterns of colour intensity.

This approach ensures that the raw data remained confidential and that the analysis was conducted exclusively by the researcher, while still providing a meaningful overview of the findings.

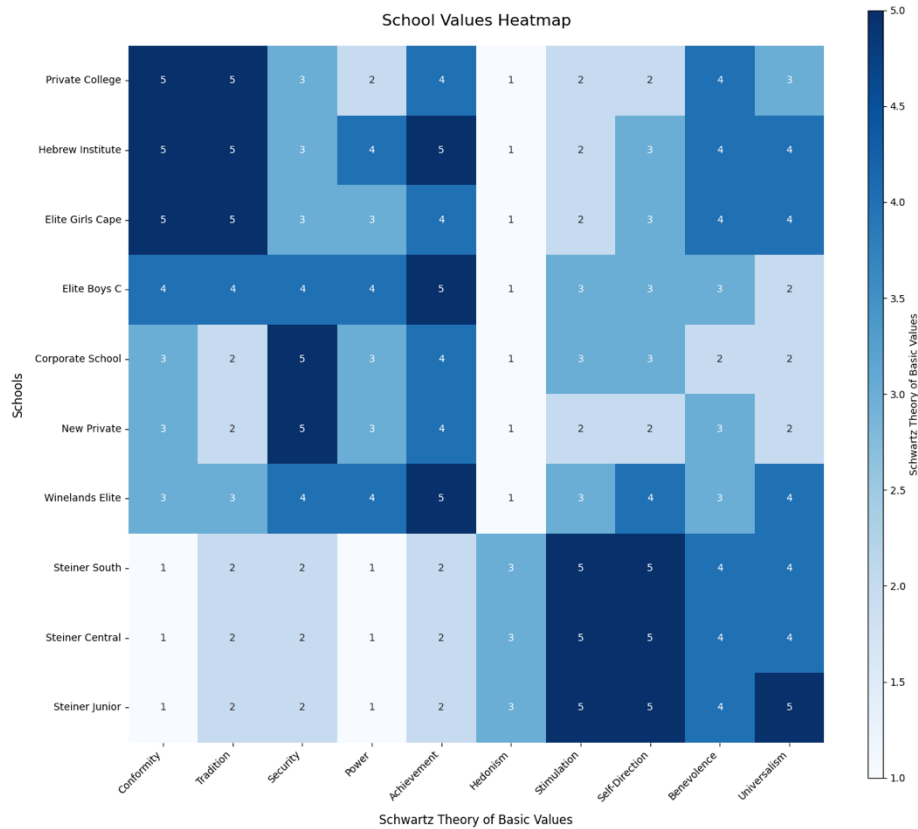


Figure 7: Overview of website data interpreted through Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (Schwartz, 2012)

1. Faith-based schools: Private College, Hebrew Institute, and Elite Girls Cape emphasise strong religious identity and values, academic excellence, character development, and ethical formation. While most of the schools in this study do include some form of religious affiliation, background or spiritual philosophy, these three schools stood out as explicitly faith-based institutions, with their traditional religious identity playing a central role in their educational philosophy and school culture.
2. Academic-focused schools: Elite Boys C, Corporate School, New Private and Winelands Elite prioritise academic excellence, well-rounded education, character development, and preparation for future success. They often highlight modern facilities and strong extracurricular programmes.
3. Steiner schools: Steiner South, Steiner Central, and Steiner Junior focus on a comprehensive Steiner curriculum, emphasising holistic education, child and student

development through artistic and creative teaching methods, and connection to nature.

These materials offer insight into how schools present themselves to the public, articulate their values, and communicate their approaches to education. The analysis of this data provides context for understanding the institutional frameworks within which parents and students navigate issues of cultural expression and identity, as well as the different educational philosophies available in the sampled Cape Town private schools.

4.2.2 Parent interviews

The second, and primary, data source consists of in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 13 parents whose children attend the sampled private schools in Cape Town. The analysis of this interview data is presented in sections 4.4 (p. 128), 4.5 (p. 132), and 4.6 (p. 148) of this chapter. These sections are structured to directly address the research questions, providing insights into parents' experiences.

To provide context for the findings that follow, Table 12 below summarises the key characteristics of the study participants. This overview serves as a reference point for understanding the diverse perspectives represented in the interview data.

Table 12: Overview of study participants (Author’s own compilation)

Participant	Gender	Age range	Self-described Racial Category	School	No. of children
Participant 1	Female	35 - 44 years	Coloured/Asian	Steiner South	2
Participant 2	Female	45 - 54 years	White	Steiner South	1
Participant 3	Female	35 - 44 years	White	Steiner South	1
Participant 4	Female	55 - 64 years	Coloured/Mixed	Steiner Central	2
Participant 5	Female	45 - 54 years	Mixed Race	Steiner Junior	1
Participant 6	Female	45 - 54 years	White	Elite Girls Cape	1
Participant 7	Female	35 - 44 years	Coloured	Elite Girls Cape	2
Participant 8	Male	45 - 54 years	White	Elite Boys C	1
Participant 9	Female	35 - 44 years	Black	Corporate School	1
Participant 10	Female	35 - 44 years	White	Winelands Elite	1
Participant 11	Female	35 - 44 years	White	Hebrew Institute	3
Participant 12	Female	35 - 44 years	Black	New Private	1
Participant 13	Female	45 - 54 years	Khiosan	Private College	2

The interview data provides accounts of parents' lived experiences, offering a window into how school values and policies impact families in practice. This data source is particularly valuable for understanding the complex interplay between institutional policies and personal experiences of cultural inclusivity.

4.3 Three broad categories of schools

The analysis of school websites revealed three distinct categories of private schools in this study, each with its own unique approach to education while maintaining a strong academic focus. This categorisation is crucial for understanding the diverse landscape of private education in Cape Town and provides essential context for interpreting parents' experiences and perceptions.

These distinct school categories not only represent different educational philosophies but also reflect processes of racialisation (Erasmus, 2017) and cultural capital transmission (Bourdieu, 1987) in post-apartheid South Africa. How these schools position themselves, through their stated values and educational approaches, reveals the subtle ways in which institutions may perpetuate or challenge racialised understandings of education. Simultaneously, these categorisations signal to parents the specific forms of cultural capital each institution promises to impart, whether religious values, academic credentials, or alternative educational philosophies, illustrating Bourdieu's (1987) concept of schools as sites where cultural advantages are systematically transmitted.

While all schools in this study are institutions committed to academic excellence, they differ significantly in their philosophical approaches, values, and educational methodologies (Blake & Mestry, 2020). This spectrum of schools, ranging from faith-based to academically-focused to Steiner schools, offers a unique opportunity to examine how different educational philosophies within the private school sector shape parent experiences and school experiences.

The analysis of school websites was necessary to establish this context, as it provided insights into each school's self-presentation, stated values, and educational approach (Nault, 2021). This background information is vital for understanding the environment in which parents are making choices and students are experiencing education. The following sections describe the characteristics of each category: faith-based schools (4.3.1, p. 122), academic-focused schools (4.3.2, p. 124), and Steiner schools (4.3.3, p. 126), highlighting their distinctive features and approaches to education.

4.3.1 Faith-based schools

The following information was derived from a combined analysis of the publicly available website content of Private College, Hebrew Institute, and Elite Girls Cape. According to their websites, these faith-based schools are distinguished by their strong religious identities, each representing a different faith tradition – Catholic, Jewish, and Anglican respectively. These schools place a significant emphasis on their traditional religious values and ethos, integrating them into various aspects of school life (Sander & Krautmann, 1995).

A key feature of these faith-based schools, as presented on their websites, is their commitment to academic excellence. They strive to provide high-quality education and maintain rigorous academic standards. This focus on academic achievement is balanced with a well-rounded approach to education, aiming to develop confident individuals.

Character development emerged as another central theme across these schools' online presentations. They emphasise the importance of moral and ethical formation, seeking to instil values that align with their respective religious traditions. This often includes a focus on social responsibility and community service. The schools' websites also share a strong community focus. They describe aims to create supportive, nurturing environments that foster a sense of belonging among students, staff, and families. This community aspect often extends beyond the school gates, with connections to the broader religious community.

While maintaining their distinct religious identities, these schools also demonstrate a commitment to preparing students for the challenges of the modern world, according to their online presence. They often integrate contemporary educational approaches and technologies with their traditional values. Interestingly, despite their faith-based nature, these schools' websites often indicate that they welcome students from diverse backgrounds. They describe efforts to balance their specific religious teachings with respect for other beliefs and cultures, aiming to create an inclusive environment within the framework of their faith tradition.

To closely examine these three faith-based schools, a focused heat map visualising only Private College, Hebrew Institute, and Elite Girls Cape is presented below (Figure 8). This heat map offers a comparative view of how different values, as defined by Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (2012), are prioritised across these faith-based institutions. The visual representation allows for a quick understanding of the value orientations of each school, highlighting similarities and differences in their approaches to education and character formation.

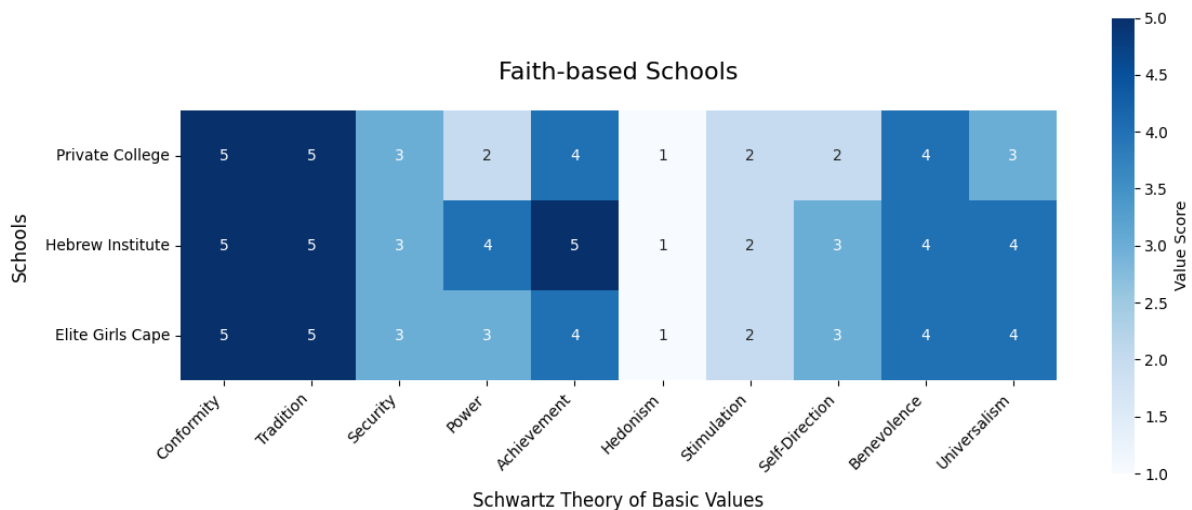


Figure 8: The faith-based schools' values heat map interpreted from website data (Author's own compilation)

4.3.2 Academic-focused schools

The following information was derived from a combined analysis of the publicly available website content of Elite Boys C, Corporate School, New Private and Winelands Elite. According to their websites, the academic-focused schools in this study, including Elite Boys C, Corporate School, New Private and Winelands Elite, share several common themes and characteristics that distinguish them from the other schools in this study.

These schools' websites place a strong emphasis on academic excellence as their primary focus (Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015). They are known for their rigorous academic programmes and high standards, often highlighting their track records of outstanding examination results and university placements. This commitment to academic achievement is presented as a cornerstone of their educational philosophies.

While academics are at the forefront, these schools' online presence also stresses the importance of a well-rounded education approach. They aim to develop confident individuals by offering a balance of academic, sporting, cultural, and leadership opportunities. This comprehensive approach to education is described as designed to nurture students' diverse talents and interests. Character development and leadership skills are prominent themes across these institutions' websites. They often mention programmes and initiatives specifically designed to foster personal growth, ethical decision-making, and leadership capabilities in their students (Lubienski, 2007).

These schools frequently highlight their focus on 21st-century skills⁴⁸ (Stauffer, 2020) on their websites. They emphasise the importance of preparing students for future success in a rapidly changing world, often incorporating technology, innovation, and global perspectives into their curricula. Modern facilities and resources are often showcased as key selling points on these schools' websites. They advertise investments in state-of-the-art classrooms, laboratories, sports facilities, and technological infrastructure to enhance the learning experience.

⁴⁸ 21st-century skills refer to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important for success in today's rapidly changing, digital world (Stauffer, 2020). These typically include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, and social skills (Stauffer, 2020)

Strong extracurricular programmes are another common feature mentioned on these schools' websites. They offer a wide range of sports, arts, and cultural activities, recognising the value of these pursuits in students' overall development. Many of these schools also emphasise their community focus on their websites. They describe efforts to create supportive environments that foster a sense of belonging and often encourage parental involvement and community engagement.

To closely examine these four academic-focused schools, a focused heat map visualising only Elite Boys C, Corporate School, New Private, and Winelands Elite is presented below (Figure 9). This heat map offers a comparative view of how different values, as defined by Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values, are expressed across these academically-focused institutions.

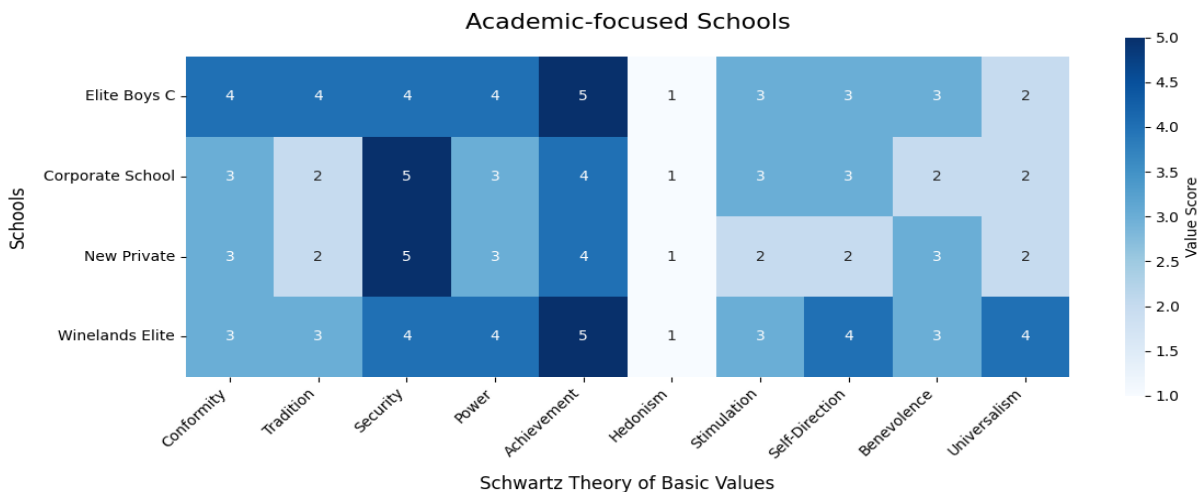


Figure 9: The academic-focused schools' values heat map interpreted from website data (Author's own compilation)

4.3.3 Steiner schools

The following information was derived from a combined analysis of the publicly available website content of Steiner South, Steiner Central, and Steiner Junior. According to their websites, the Steiner schools in this study, including Steiner South, Steiner Central, and Steiner Junior, share distinctive characteristics that set them apart from the other sampled schools in this study. These schools adhere to the educational philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner, offering what they describe as a unique alternative to mainstream education.

A defining feature of these Steiner schools, as presented on their websites, is their commitment to a comprehensive Steiner curriculum. This curriculum is described as designed to nurture the whole child – intellectually, emotionally, and physically – at each stage of their development. The Steiner approach, as outlined on these websites, emphasises age-appropriate learning, integrating academic subjects with artistic activities and practical skills.

These schools' websites place a strong emphasis on holistic education. Rather than focusing primarily on academic achievement, they aim to develop well-rounded individuals by giving equal importance to intellectual, artistic, and practical capabilities (Goldshmidt, 2017). This approach is reflected in their described integration of arts, crafts, and movement into all aspects of learning (Rawson, 2021). Child development is presented as a central focus in Steiner education on these websites. The curriculum and teaching methods are described as carefully tailored to match the developmental stages of children, with a belief that certain subjects and skills should be introduced at specific times in a child's growth.

Artistic and creative teaching methods are highlighted as hallmarks of the Steiner approach on these schools' websites. They describe using various artistic activities – including painting, drawing, music, dancing and drama – as integral parts of the learning process across all subjects (Rawson, 2021). This emphasis on creativity and imagination is presented as essential for holistic development.

Connection to nature is another key theme in Steiner education, according to these websites (Goldshmidt, 2017). They often mention incorporating outdoor learning, gardening, and environmental awareness into their programmes, fostering a deep appreciation for the natural world (Goldshmidt, 2017). Steiner schools' websites also place importance on practical and creative skills. Handwork, woodworking, and other practical arts are described as crucial for developing fine motor skills, problem-solving abilities, and a sense of accomplishment.

To closely examine these three Steiner schools, a focused heat map visualising only Steiner South, Steiner Central, and Steiner Junior is presented below (Figure 10). This heat map offers a comparative view of how different values, as defined by Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values, are prioritised across these Steiner institutions.

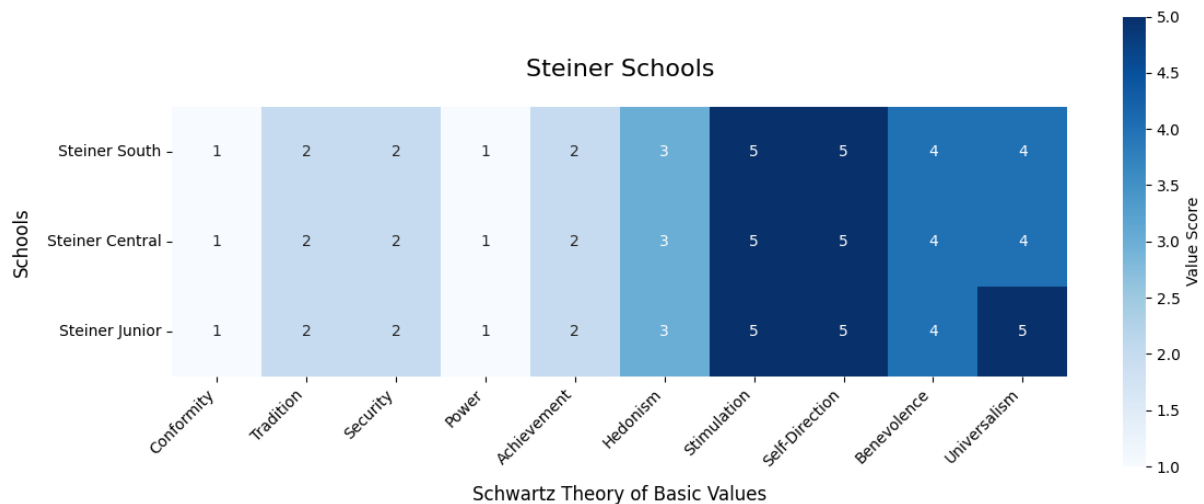


Figure 10: The Steiner schools' values heat map interpreted from website data (Author's own compilation)

4.4 Racial distribution in schools

This section examines the racial composition of the student bodies and staff in the sampled private schools, based on parents' observations and experiences. The information presented here is based on the interviews conducted with parents, marking a transition from the website analysis presented earlier. The following demographic information is based entirely on parents' observations and perceptions rather than official school data. As this chapter proceeds, there is reference to the values interpreted from the website data to provide context and comparison with the lived experiences shared by parents. This shift in focus enables exploring how the stated values and demographics of these schools align with or differ from the perceptions and experiences of the parents whose children attend them.

The demographic patterns observed across these schools illustrate both the persistence of racialisation (Erasmus, 2017) in educational spaces and the uneven distribution of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) in post-apartheid South Africa. The overrepresentation of White students and staff in some of these institutions reflects what Erasmus (2017, p. 53) describes as the ongoing processes that 'demarcate humanity' along racial lines, even in the absence of explicit racial policies. Meanwhile, the concentration of educational resources, prestigious networks, and specific forms of cultural knowledge in these spaces demonstrates Bourdieu's (1987) concept of how cultural capital becomes institutionalised in ways that can reproduce social hierarchies across generations.

4.4.1 Student population

The interviews with the parents revealed a spectrum of racial diversity across various sampled private schools in Cape Town, as visualised in Figure 11.

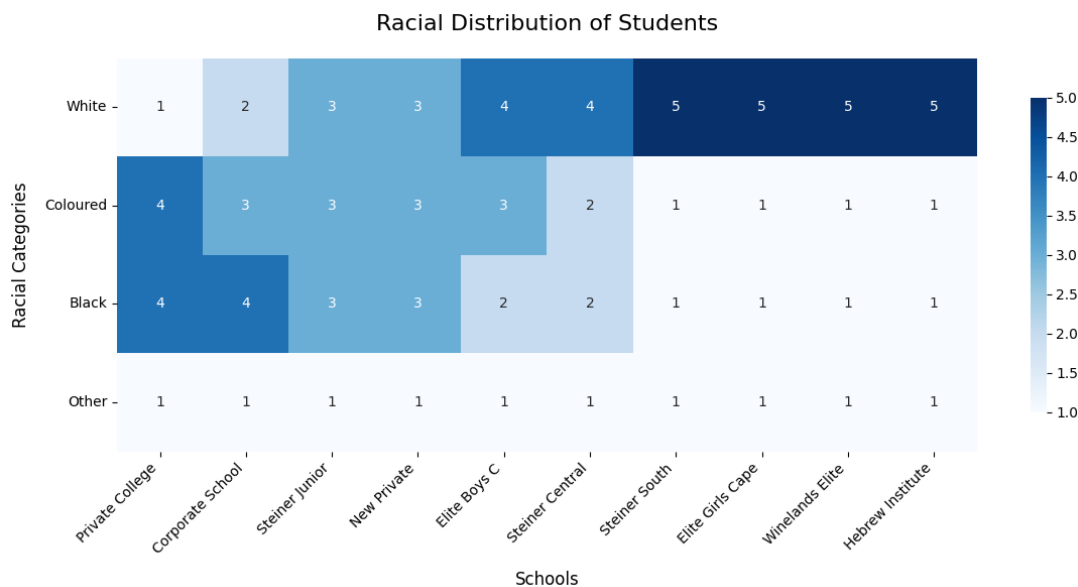


Figure 11: Racial distribution of students according to participants⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The 'Other' category is consistently represented with a value of 1 across all schools in this visualisation. This uniform representation is due to the limited reporting in the original data, which primarily focused on White, Coloured, and Black racial categories. The inclusion of 'Other' at a constant low value acknowledges the potential presence of additional racial groups not explicitly mentioned in the reports, while maintaining the integrity of the reported data. This approach allows for a more comprehensive representation of racial diversity, albeit with the caveat that it may not fully capture the nuanced racial composition of each school.

At one end of the spectrum, Participant 13 described her children's school, Private College, as having a student body composed mostly of Coloured and Black students, with very few White students. Corporate School was described as mixed, with Participant 9 emphasising that Black students were not a minority but rather represented a high proportion of the student body. This was followed closely by Steiner Junior, which was characterised by Participant 5 as having "quite a nice mix of different racial groups." New Private was described by Participant 12 as having roughly equal thirds, White, Coloured and Black students.

Moving towards less diverse compositions, Elite Boys C was described by Participant 8 as having a 60% White students body, 15% Black students and a "significant number of Coloured and Muslim students". Steiner Central was reported to have an even split between White and non-White, described as "pretty mixed ... 50/50" by Participant 5.

Steiner South showed a more pronounced White majority, with Participant 1 saying "White would probably be 80%, others 20%. And of that, 20%, 15% is Coloured" and Participant 2 saying "90% White" students. This trend continued with Elite Girls Cape, which was reported to have a 90% White student body, with few Coloured students and very few Black students.

At the other end of the spectrum, both Winelands Elite and Hebrew Institute were simply described as "Predominantly White," suggesting the least diverse student bodies among the schools discussed. This range of racial compositions highlights the varying levels of racial diversity within the sampled Cape Town private school system, from schools with majority Black and Coloured students to those that remain predominantly White.

4.4.2 Teachers and management

The interviews with parents also provided insights into the racial composition of teaching staff and management across the sampled private schools in Cape Town, hinting at patterns that sometimes differed from the diversity observed in the student body visually displayed in Figure 12.

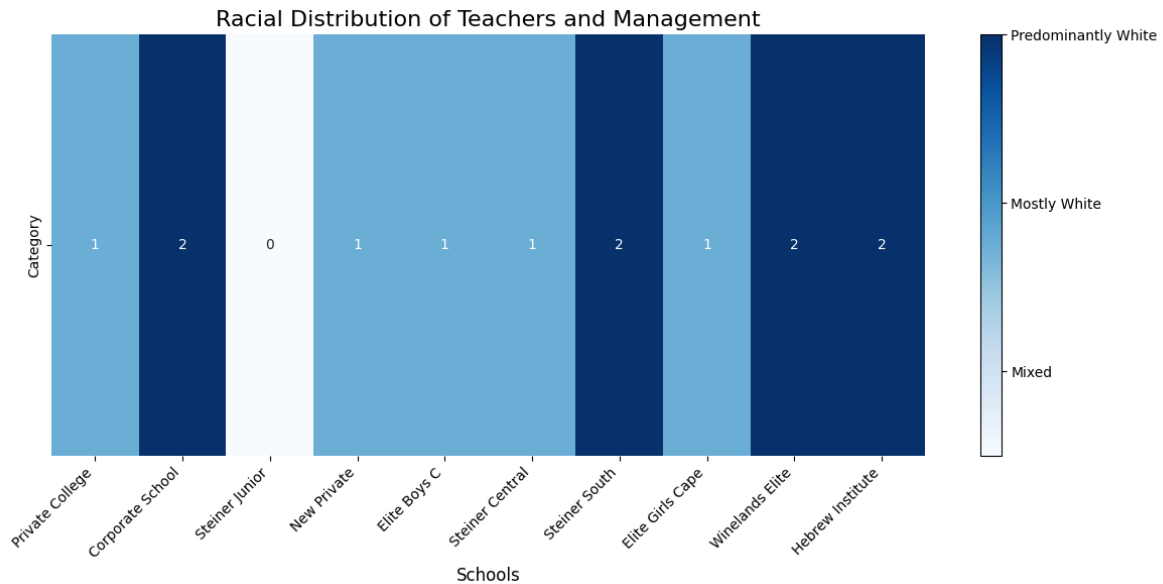


Figure 12: Racial distribution of teachers/management, according to participants⁵⁰

At Private College, Participant 13's account suggested a "mostly White" teaching staff, with the remaining teaching complement split between Coloured and Black staff. Corporate School appeared to have limited diversity in these roles, with Participant 10 describing the teachers and management as "mostly White". In contrast, Steiner Junior stood out in Participant 5's description of "quite a nice mix of teachers in terms of ethnicity," potentially indicating a more diverse teaching staff compared to other schools in the sample.

New Private's case, as described by Participant 12, suggested mostly White teaching staff, estimating "70% White, 30% Coloured" among teachers, with administrative staff being mostly "Coloured". They noted an absence of Black staff members in meetings over the past year. Elite Boys C seemed to show slightly more diversity, with Participant 8 estimating the racial makeup of teachers and management to be "slightly less" diverse than the student body,

⁵⁰ The term 'Mixed' is used here to reflect the specific language employed by one participant who described the teaching staff as having "quite a nice mix of teachers in terms of ethnicity". This usage indicates a diverse composition of teaching staff and management. It is important to note that this was the only instance in the data where such diversity was reported, contrasting with other participants' descriptions of staff as either "mostly White" or "predominantly White".

which was reported as 60% White. Steiner Central's case might suggest a transition over time. Participant 4 noted that while there are "more White teachers," parents had raised this issue, and the school is "changing". Steiner South appeared to maintain a predominantly White teaching staff, with Participant 1 noting that "they are all White" teachers at the school.

Elite Girls Cape's case might indicate some progress in diversifying its staff. Participant 7 noted that while initially all teachers were White, the school has evolved to about "80% white" teachers. The appointment of a Coloured principal at the primary school and an Indian principal at the junior school could suggest changes in leadership diversity. Winelands Elite, based on Participant 10's estimate of "about 90% White teachers and management," appeared to have less diversity among teaching staff. Hebrew Institute was also described as having "predominantly White" teachers and management by Participant 11, which could indicate limited racial diversity in these roles.

This overview hints at a tendency towards less racial diversity among teaching staff and management compared to the student body in many of the sampled schools (Khanyile's, 2023; Soudien, 2004; Walton et al, 2009). While some institutions show signs of progress in diversifying their staff, particularly in leadership roles (Berson & Oreg, 2016), many still appear to maintain a predominantly White teaching force (Vandeyar, 2008; Gruijters et al., 2024). These observations might indicate an area for potential growth, change, and transformation within the sampled Cape Town private schools. A more racially diverse teaching and management staff could potentially foster a better understanding of cultural inclusivity, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience for all learners (Dussel, 1993).

4.5 Values and school choice

The selection of a private school for a child is a multifaceted process that reflects families' core values and aspirations (Nault, 2021; Immelman & Roberts-Lombard's, 2015). In Cape Town's diverse educational landscape, parents consider various factors aligned with their beliefs and goals for their children's future. This theme examines the relationship between parental

values and school choice, based on the experiences and perspectives shared by 13 parents across nine private schools and one semi-private school in Cape Town.

These findings can be understood through Schwartz's (2012) Theory of Basic Values, which provides a framework for interpreting how different value orientations influence parents' educational choices. As parents describe their school selection processes, we see clear tensions between what Schwartz identifies as 'conservation' values (tradition, conformity, security) and 'openness to change' values (self-direction, stimulation). Similarly, the contrast between 'self-enhancement' values (achievement, power) and 'self-transcendence' values (universalism, benevolence) emerges as parents navigate their hopes for their children's futures. The following themes reflect these value dimensions in action, revealing how abstract value orientations manifest in concrete educational decisions.

Each interview began by exploring the reasons behind parents' school selections or their decisions to change from a previous school. This approach provided insights into the primary motivations driving school choice. The following sections present these findings, arranged from the most frequently highlighted factors to the least mentioned considerations.

Throughout the interviews, several key themes emerged as central to parents' decision-making processes. These included academic excellence and achievement, individual attention and support, holistic development and self-expression, religious and cultural alignment and inclusivity and diversity.

4.5.1 Academic excellence and achievement

The study reveals that academic excellence and achievement are paramount considerations for many parents when choosing private schools in Cape Town. This theme was particularly relevant among participants from faith-based and academic-focused schools. This emphasis on academic performance reflects a strong value placed on educational outcomes and future prospects for their children (Immelman & Roberts-Lombard's, 2015).

Several participants explicitly cited academic reputation as a primary factor in their school selection process (McKay, 2015). Participant 9, for instance, chose Corporate School due to its perceived higher standards compared to government schools (Motala & Dieltiens, 2008). She stated, "I don't like what's going on in the government schools as well. I think the standard just keeps on dropping and not improving." This sentiment underscores a perception among some parents that private schools offer superior academic preparation.

The research also indicates that parents often associate academic excellence with future success (Hunter, 2016). Participant 6, in discussing Elite Girls Cape, emphasised the school's track record as "there's data, there's track record, this is what happened", giving a sense of security to the parents. This focus on academic outcomes suggests that parents view strong scholastic performance as a pathway to better opportunities in higher education and careers.

Furthermore, the study found that some parents equate academic rigour with personal development. Participant 10, while expressing concerns about Winelands Elite not being "progressive enough,⁵¹" still acknowledged the school's strong academics as a positive attribute. She noted, "they're quite strong on academics," indicating that even when seeking private educational approaches, academic strength remains a crucial factor for some parents.

The research also found that the emphasis on academic achievement can create pressure within the school environment. Participant 6, reflecting on her daughter's experience at Elite Girls Cape, commented on the intense academic expectations, stating, "you have to achieve a certain thing and the pressure they put on you yeah, it's not nice, but it does get results." This observation suggests that the pursuit of academic excellence can have both positive and negative impacts on students' experiences (Howard, 2013; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009).

However, the study also uncovered differences in how parents perceive academic excellence. While some prioritise traditional measures of academic success, others seek a balance

⁵¹ Participant 10 used "progressive" to refer to the school's approach to academics and learning. Specifically, she felt the school lacked adequate extension opportunities for advanced students, relied too heavily on worksheet-driven instruction rather than grouping like-minded children, and did not sufficiently accommodate different learning paces and styles. Her concerns centred on the school's teaching methods and curriculum design rather than social or cultural progressiveness.

between academic achievement and self-direction (Goldshmidt, 2017; Rawson, 2021). Participant 1, in choosing Steiner South, valued a "holistic approach" that was "less focused on academics at young ages." This was supported by Participant 3 who commented "so you'll have some children who are reading in grade one or grade two and other children that are only sort of comfortable reading by the time they're in grade three, and the school is fine with that." This indicates a spectrum of views on how academic excellence and achievement are defined and pursued.

These findings align closely with the values analysis derived from school websites. Parents who chose faith-based and academic-focused schools consistently emphasised achievement and security values, mirroring these schools' public messaging (Nault, 2021). In contrast, parents who selected Steiner schools expressed views that align with the self-direction and universalism values prominent in Steiner schools' public communications. This congruence suggests that schools are effectively communicating their core values, and parents are selecting schools that align with their own educational priorities and value systems.

4.5.2 Individual attention and support

The parents who were interviewed consistently highlighted the unique educational approach of Steiner schools, which they felt places a strong emphasis on individualised learning and holistic development. This approach seemed to stand in contrast to their experiences with more traditional or mainstream educational models.

Participant 3 mentioned that Steiner schools might operate on a "much more relaxed timeline" regarding academic milestones. Unlike conventional schools that often push all children to meet the same benchmarks at the same time, Steiner schools appear to be "comfortable that each child will reach those milestones at a different point." This flexibility might allow children to progress at their own pace, potentially reducing unnecessary pressure and anxiety (Goldshmidt, 2017).

Participant 5 echoed this sentiment. She appreciated that at Steiner Junior, there is "not even a rush with the learning." She chose to transfer her son from Corporate School to Steiner Junior because he couldn't "fit into the box that the kind of mainstream system wants children to fit into." For Participant 5, Steiner Junior's approach to "nurture your soul, your spirit, your learning" was a welcome change from the more rigid structures she had encountered elsewhere.

Individualised attention seemed to extend beyond the pace of learning. Participant 3 noted that even homework at Steiner schools⁵² is "very tailor made for the child" based on their individual needs and abilities (Goldshmidt, 2017). This personalised approach to education appeared to be a recurring theme in the parents' accounts.

Participant 2 described Steiner South's educational philosophy as an "Anthroposophical⁵³ study of the person, who they are," suggesting that the school's approach to understanding and nurturing each child as a unique individual might be distinctive. This holistic approach to education seemed highly valued by the parents, who felt that their children were seen and supported as whole persons, not just as students.

Another unique aspect of Steiner's education that all parents seemed to appreciate was the practice of teachers staying with the same class for several years. Participant 5 explained that this might allow teachers to get to know each child well over time, enabling them to provide more appropriate and personalised educational support. The parents also noted that Steiner schools encourage significant parental involvement in the child's education. This collaborative approach between teachers and parents might create a more supportive and cohesive learning environment for the children (Goldshmidt, 2017).

⁵² Participant 3 had experience with both Steiner Junior and Steiner South, providing insights into practices at both institutions.

⁵³ Anthroposophy is a spiritual philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) that posits the existence of an objective, intellectually comprehensible spiritual world accessible to direct experience through inner development (Steiner, 1994). It aims to apply a scientific methodology to spiritual investigation and is the basis for practical applications in various fields, including education (Steiner schools), agriculture (biodynamic farming), and medicine (anthroposophical medicine) (Steiner, 1994).

For Elite Girls Cape, Participant 6 suggested a well-staffed classroom environment: "In Elite Girls Cape, you have a class of 25 and you have one teacher and two assistant teachers, and I don't know how many other support structures and a psychologist and whatever." This description points towards a setup with one main teacher, two assistant teachers, and additional support staff, including access to a psychologist (Maxwell and Aggleton, 2016; Lubienski, 2007).

Hebrew Institute, on the other hand, appears to offer strong support for students with diverse learning needs. Participant 11's experience indicates this: "...my eldest son, with learning difficulties and their support team is strong." This statement suggests that Hebrew Institute may have effective systems in place for supporting students with learning challenges (Lubienski, 2007).

Private College seems to take a different approach to personalised learning. As Participant 13 explained, "My son has been there since grade one and he's currently in grade four. He's in the Montessori⁵⁴ stream at the school." The mention of a Montessori stream points towards an educational approach that may allow for more individualised learning experiences (Lubienski, 2003).

The interview with Participant 9 suggests that Corporate School offers a supportive environment through smaller class sizes (Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015) and responsive communication with parents. Participant 9 indicated that this was part of the school's appeal, stating, "When they advertised it, they said smaller classes, they would pay good attention to him." The school appears to prioritise prompt communication about student issues. Participant 9 noted, "If there's something I'm not happy about with my child... Or if the teacher notices something, they engage with me directly on the day. It's immediate." This communication occurs through multiple channels, including apps, email, SMS, and WhatsApp.

⁵⁴ At Private College, the Montessori stream is offered from Pre-Primary to Grade 6, featuring mixed-age classrooms, specially designed learning materials, and a prepared environment that allows children to learn at their own pace through discovery and hands-on exploration. This method is integrated with the school's broader curriculum and Catholic values, providing a unique educational experience that fosters independence, critical thinking, and a love for learning. (extracted from the website data)

These findings revealed varying degrees of alignment between schools' stated values and parents' experiences of individual attention and support. Steiner schools demonstrate the strongest consistency, with parents emphasizing the self-direction, stimulation, and universalism values identified in the website analysis. Faith-based and academic-focused schools show alignment, with some aspects (like comprehensive support structures and smaller class sizes) aligning well with their stated values of achievement and security.

4.5.3 Holistic development and self-expression

The theme of holistic development and self-expression emerged strongly from the interviews, particularly among parents who chose Steiner schools (Rawson, 2021; Goldshmidt, 2017). One of the most noticeable differences in Steiner schools is their approach to student attire. Unlike almost all the schools in South Africa, Steiner schools typically allow students to wear casual clothes to school every day, eschewing formal uniforms. These parents consistently emphasised the value they placed on educational environments that nurture the whole child – intellectually, emotionally, and creatively. This hints toward the stronger values of stimulation and self-direction.

Participant 1, a mother with two children attending Steiner South, articulated this perspective clearly. She stated, "I've elected to send my children to a school, where self-expression is critical to their development." This parent appreciated that the school's only criteria for appearance was that "their hair is neat and clean," allowing children to "wear their hair however they like." This approach aligns with the Steiner philosophy of allowing children to express themselves authentically, allowing self-direction, through their appearance.

The emphasis on holistic development extends beyond mere appearance, embodying universalist values of understanding, appreciation, and protection for the welfare of all people and nature. Participant 1 noted that "the whole schooling system is, is very much in a no waste, uhm, non-materialistic kind of culture." This comment reflects the Steiner schools' focus on developing not just academic skills, but also values and a particular worldview that

prioritises sustainability and global consciousness. This holistic approach to education seeks to cultivate a sense of interconnectedness with the world at large, reflecting the universalist ideal of broadmindedness and concern for the welfare of all humanity and the natural world.

The appeal of Steiner education for children who may struggle in more traditional uniform settings was highlighted by several parents (Goldshmidt, 2017). Participant 5 said, "I always knew when we had children one day, I was going to send them to a Steiner school. I just personally identify with the values of the school." She also recalled a moment when her child was in preschool before they went to Steiner "But the reason I was convinced that I wanted to send my children to this school was because I was dressing in a school uniform one day. And she didn't like wearing a uniform. And I remember saying to her one day, I lost my cool, actually, and I shouted, and I was like, if you do not wear this uniform, you are going to be different to everyone else. And the penny drop for me in that moment." This parent saw Steiner education as a way to provide a more suitable environment for her child's unique needs and learning style.

This sentiment was echoed by Participant 5, who appreciated the school's flexible approach to clothing: "My son asked me why is he wearing a uniform when he went to Corporate School⁵⁵. And then I said something and then I thought, wow, what am I telling him? I tell him you can be anything you want to be. You are perfectly you right, nobody's like you. Then I told him you wear uniforms so that you can be like everyone else." Similarly, Participant 3 contrasted Steiner's approach with more traditional schools: "[Public School name] obviously is much more traditional in terms of kind of school uniform and all of the kind of rules and guidelines around that. And my child is very expressive in terms of the way they dress and their hair and all of that."

However, it's important to note that this approach to education is not without its challenges. Participant 2, a European-born parent with a child at Steiner South, while appreciating the school's philosophy, expressed some reservations. Her comment, "I think that they could have

⁵⁵ Participant 5 chose to transfer her son from Corporate School to Steiner Junior because he couldn't "fit into the box that the kind of mainstream system wants children to fit into."

just a few more rules," suggests that even in an environment that encourages self-expression, some parents feel that additional structure or guidelines might be beneficial. This highlights the delicate balance between fostering self-expression and maintaining a structured learning environment, a challenge that Steiner schools may continually navigate (Woods et al., 2005).

Overall, parents who chose Steiner schools consistently valued the emphasis on holistic development and self-expression. They saw this approach as essential for their children's overall development and future success. As Participant 1 put it, "it's not the rules. It's a way of life. You go there because you want this way of life for your child." This sentiment encapsulates the depth of commitment these parents feel towards the Steiner approach to education and child development.

In contrast, the faith-based and academic-focused schools in this study all maintain uniformed environments where a degree of self-expression, particularly in terms of hair, is limited. However, it is important to acknowledge that uniforms play a significant role in instilling and reinforcing the values these schools aim to cultivate in their students (Howard, 2013; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). While restricting individual expression to some extent, uniforms serve to promote unity, discipline, a sense of belonging within the school community and have the possibility to hide class differences.

School uniforms play a significant role in shaping school culture and community identity, particularly in traditional faith-based private schools like Elite Girls Cape. Participant 6 provided an insightful observation about the unifying effect of uniforms (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016): "Generally, [the uniform] adds like a sense of belonging. I suppose you kind of fit in with the group. And I remember when they were little, go to the gym and at the gym they used to have childcare centre where you can leave your kids for like an hour while you're training. And they might not know each other, but when they see another child with that same uniform, they'll automatically gravitate towards it and they'll sit down and be together. Because we are Elite Girls Cape girls. They have something in common." This anecdote illustrates how uniforms can create an instant sense of community and belonging, even

outside the school environment. The uniform becomes a visual marker of shared identity, helping students recognise and connect with their peers.

The unifying effect of school uniforms is a sentiment echoed by another participant in this study. Participant 8, a parent of a student at Elite Boys C, a traditional boys' school, offered a perspective that aligns closely with the observations made about Elite Girls Cape. He emphasised the role of uniforms in fostering unity and team spirit, using the Afrikaans word "gees"⁵⁶ to describe the shared sense of belonging that permeates across racial lines when students wear the same uniform.

Participant 8 highlighted how uniforms serve as an equaliser, reducing visible socioeconomic differences among students (Carter, 2005; Lewis, 2019). He noted, "it's cheaper, by the way. I think I've spent far less money on school uniforms than I would have spent on casual clothes." This economic aspect is particularly important as it prevents divisions that might arise from disparities in students' casual clothing. "Because a poor kid going to school with the same clothes all the time, rich kid coming with a new outfit, that'll have an effect, that'll cause a division. Where if they got the same uniform, that division goes away," Participant 8 explained. This perspective on uniforms as social equalisers raises interesting questions about the Steiner school environment, where students are typically allowed to wear their own clothes. In Steiner schools, the absence of uniforms might make it more challenging to conceal class differences. Participant 1's earlier comment about Steiner South being a "more privileged type schooling" hints at this potential issue.

Furthermore, Participant 8 emphasised how uniforms contribute to a shared identity within the school community. "Whether you rich or poor, you wear the same. I think it serves a good purpose," he stated, echoing the sentiment of belonging described by the Elite Girls Cape parent. This shared identity extends beyond mere appearance, as Participant 8 suggested that

⁵⁶ "Gees" is an Afrikaans word that translates to "spirit" or "ethos" in English. In the context of a school, it refers to the collective spirit, enthusiasm, and sense of pride shared by the school community. It encompasses the overall atmosphere, values, and traditions that define the school's character and unite its members.

the uniform policy is designed "to introduce uniformity, to do away with individualism. So that is not a ground for contention among students in a school."

These findings demonstrate a strong alignment between the values communicated by Steiner schools and the priorities of parents who chose these institutions. The emphasis on holistic development, self-expression, and a non-materialistic worldview directly corresponds to the values of self-direction, stimulation, and universalism identified in the website analysis of Steiner schools (Rawson, 2021; Goldshmidt, 2017). Parents consistently articulated appreciation for these values, seeing them as crucial for their children's development.

In contrast, the faith-based and academic-focused schools in this study all maintain uniformed environments where a degree of self-expression, particularly in terms of hair, is limited. However, it is important to acknowledge that uniforms play a significant role in instilling and reinforcing the values these schools aim to cultivate in their students. While restricting individual expression to some extent, uniforms serve to promote unity, discipline, and a sense of belonging within the school community. Additionally, they have the potential to obscure class differences among students.

4.5.4 Religious and cultural alignment

The interviews revealed a spectrum of religious and cultural alignment across different private schools in Cape Town (Blake & Mestry, 2020). Steiner schools emerge as relatively secular environments that accommodate diverse backgrounds while promoting nature-based spirituality. Steiner South and Central schools seem to attract families seeking a holistic, earth-conscious education. Participant 1 and Participant 4 described the student body as diverse in terms of financial backgrounds, united by values of care for the environment and a focus beyond materialism. Participant 2 highlighted the celebration of seasonal festivals tied to solstices and equinoxes, appealing to those looking for nature-based spiritual orientation in education.

Interestingly, Participant 1's decision to send her children to Steiner South suggests a deliberate strategy for cultural assimilation over time (Dussel, 1993). Despite coming from a Cape Malay background, Participant 1 chose an educational environment that would expose her children to different cultural norms. She observed how this choice manifests in her children's behaviour (McKinney, 2010): "They automatically know we're going to get popcorn and it's healthier and they will ask for water" when visiting friends from different backgrounds.

This adaptation might reflect Participant 1's long-term vision for her family's cultural evolution. She explicitly considered how this educational choice might impact future generations, stating, "so they've just, they adapting. And I can see by the time they have kids, they will be a little bit closer to that lifestyle. And their kids might be a little bit closer. And by the time they have grandkids, they will be more health conscious and more caring about the planet and they'll make better choices. They will embody it, it'll be like in the psyche. It's generational." This quote potentially illustrates Participant 1's aim for a gradual shift in cultural identity across generations (Dussel, 1993). Participant 1's approach highlights the complex decisions some parents may make, consciously choosing to expose their children to different cultural practices in favour of what they perceive as more advantageous cultural norms for their children's future. This deliberate cultural navigation raises questions about the preservation of cultural heritage versus the perceived benefits of assimilation in a diverse society.

The research also explored cultural and religious alignment in other schools. Participant 12's son's school, New Private, celebrates African Day, which might suggest an effort to incorporate African cultural elements. Similarly, Participant 9 shared an invitation from Corporate School for a "Cultural Extravaganza" event celebrating the school's 10th birthday with music, which could potentially demonstrate Corporate School's commitment to showcasing cultural diversity (Figure 13 below).



Figure 13: Cultural Extravaganza Event (received from Participant 9)

In contrast, Participant 8 chose Elite Boys C partly for its strong traditions and "old boys" culture, aligning with his family's history at the school (Howard, 2013; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016). He emphasised the value of these traditions, stating, "there's a reason these schools have been so strong for so long. There's a reason people want to go there. And it's that stability, that continuity that's provided by generations of old boys devoted and sending their sons back and being a part, making community." However, Participant 8 also acknowledged the potential challenges these traditions might pose for non-White students (Christie & McKinney, 2017), suggesting that change should be approached cautiously. He expressed concern about rapid changes, stating, "I prefer change to happen slowly and organically, and I want change to be very well motivated, because the grass is seldom greener on the other side." This perspective highlights the tension between maintaining long-standing traditions (Christie & McKinney, 2017) and adapting to a more diverse student body, reflecting the complex dynamics at play in schools with strong historical identities. These examples might illustrate how different schools approach cultural integration and celebration in their own unique ways, while also grappling with the challenges of balancing tradition and inclusivity.

Some schools appear to maintain strong religious identities. Participant 11 chose Hebrew Institute specifically because of its Jewish orientation, with Hebrew being part of the

curriculum. Elite Girls Cape, as described by Participants 6 and 7, maintains its Anglican identity with compulsory chapel attendance, though it accepts students of other faiths.

However, this religious alignment can potentially create challenges for families with different beliefs, which suggests that they might feel left out in faith-based schools. Participant 13, who has adopted Khoi-San spirituality, found her children's Catholic-oriented school potentially lacking in inclusivity when it came to religious studies. The school's suggestion that children of other faiths could "sit out or play outside" during religious instruction might highlight the difficulties some schools face in truly accommodating diverse spiritual backgrounds.

These findings revealed varying degrees of alignment between schools' stated values and parents' experiences of religious and cultural alignment. Steiner schools demonstrate the strongest consistency, with parents emphasising the universalist, self-direction, and stimulation values identified in the website analysis. Faith-based schools maintain a strong alignment with tradition and conformity values, though this can create challenges in accommodating diverse beliefs. Academic-focused schools show a more complex picture, with some (like Elite Boys C) strongly aligning with tradition and achievement values, while others (like Corporate School and New Private) appear to be incorporating more universalist approaches. Interestingly, Corporate School and New Private, both relatively young institutions established within the last two decades, present similar narratives on their websites that appear to resonate with more contemporary South African parents (Gruijters et al., 2024). This combination may appeal to Black parents seeking private education for their children, as it potentially offers a balance between academic excellence and cultural inclusivity (Gruijters et al., 2024).

4.5.5 Inclusivity and diversity

Some of the parents interviewed highlighted inclusivity and diversity as factors in their decision to choose Steiner schools for their children. These schools were seen as environments that embrace individual expression and celebrate diversity in various forms (Randoll & Peters, 2015).

Participant 1, a parent at Steiner South, for instance, emphasised the importance of a school where children could be “themselves”: "It was important to me that they were allowed to be seen as individuals, and accepted for who they are. And they were allowed to express themselves in a manner in which they feel comfortable." She appreciated the school's non-materialistic culture (Dahlin, 2017), noting, "The whole schooling system is, is very much in a no waste, uhm, non-materialistic kind of culture. So the people who go to these schools, they embody that way of life."

Participant 4 echoed this sentiment, stating she chose Steiner Central because "it was a diverse school, and I wish I had a school like that." She highlighted the school's inclusive nature, explaining, "There's a range of financially, people with money that don't ride around in fancy cars their kids do not dress up with brand names are not actually allowed in the school. You can't have Nike shoes. And those people with money, you feel like you want to donate clothes to them. That's what I like about this school. They don't flash it.⁵⁷" This emphasis on branded clothing was echoed by Participant 1, who described the clothing guidelines at her children's Steiner school: "So again, clothing. But there are certain boundaries. So for instance, they can't wear branded stuff," she explained.

Participant 5 emphasised the diverse makeup of the Steiner Junior: "I think it's quite inclusive. It's diverse based on these categories that we use for people. So I think there's quite a nice mix of different ethnic groups." She also noted the diversity among staff: "There's actually quite a nice mix of teachers in terms of ethnicity" (Randoll & Peters, 2015).

These testimonies hint that Steiner schools are environments that not only tolerate but celebrate diversity and individual expression as long as it abides by Steiner values. The parents

⁵⁷ According to the dress code policy extracted from the school's website, Steiner Central does not enforce a uniform but maintains a dress code aligned with Rudolf Steiner's philosophy. The policy emphasises neat, clean, and comfortable clothing without large logos or offensive imagery. It provides specific guidelines on clothing coverage, length of garments, and appearance. The dress code prohibits dyed hair, excessive jewellery, make-up, and smartwatches. For sports, a simple uniform of plain shirts and specific coloured bottoms is required. Overall, the policy promotes simplicity and practicality in student attire, aiming to create an environment focused on learning rather than fashion or branded items.

consistently viewed this inclusive approach as a significant advantage, seeing it as beneficial for their children's personal development and self-esteem.

At Elite Girls Cape, on the other hand, Participant 7 noted a significant shift in the school's approach to diversity under new leadership. She stated, "The person that is there now is all about diversity." Participant 7 elaborated on the new principal's background, saying, "So she comes from what's the school called... it's actually how she made a name" for herself. This implies that the new principal came from a school where she had established a reputation for her work in diversity and inclusion (Andrews et al., 2021). Participant 7 added, "Definitely. That's their whole focus at the moment. It's been a lot about that," highlighting the increased emphasis on diversity at Elite Girls Cape under the new leadership.

The Hebrew Institute appears to embrace some level of diversity. Participant 11 noted that the school has "children that join the Hebrew Institute system that aren't Jewish or the parents aren't kind of based on any religious ethic." Recalling a specific instance, she mentioned, "there's a boy in one of my son's year groups, and he's one of only a few names that I know of, but it is multicultural." This suggests that while the school maintains a specific religious focus, it is also open to students from various backgrounds.⁵⁸

Somerset College, on the other hand, shows a different approach. Participant 10 mentioned that the school has "a bit of a diversity drive at the moment. So they are offering quite a few bursaries they're going to surrounding farm school and really trying to find children who excel." This suggests an active effort to increase racial diversity in the student body. However, Participant 10 also noted challenges with this approach: "But once again, it does cause social difficulty when they integrate the system. So some of the bursary holders have kind of decided to go back to their original schools because I think it's just the social emotional becomes tricky." This indicates that while the school is making efforts towards inclusivity, there might

⁵⁸ It's important to acknowledge the complexities surrounding diversity in Jewish educational institutions. Judaism has specific traditions regarding who is considered Jewish, often based on matrilineal descent. Additionally, Jewish communities are diverse, encompassing various ethnic and racial backgrounds. The presence of non-Jewish students or those from interfaith families in Jewish schools further complicates the discussion of diversity. This study's limited data doesn't allow for a comprehensive analysis of these nuances at Hebrew Institute. Therefore, claims about the school's diversity should be interpreted with caution, recognising the complex interplay of religious, cultural, and ethnic factors in Jewish educational settings.

be challenges in fully integrating students from different backgrounds (Simpson, 2012; Mujulizi, 2022; Feldman & Wallace, 2021; Khanyile, 2023).

These findings revealed varying degrees of alignment between schools' stated values and parents' experiences of inclusivity and diversity. Steiner schools show the strongest alignment, with parents consistently emphasising the universalist and self-direction values identified in the website analysis, although conformity to a non-materialistic environment and boundaries around a dress code hints towards conformity that is not explicitly stated. Other schools, such as Elite Girls Cape and Somerset College, appear to be evolving towards greater emphasis on diversity. However, the challenges noted in implementing these changes highlight the complex nature of translating stated values into lived experiences within school communities (Andrews et al., 2021).

4.6 Hair experiences and cultural expression

This section discusses the complex interplay between hair policies, cultural expression, and student experiences across the sampled Cape Town private schools. Drawing on parent interviews, it explains how different institutions approach hair regulations, particularly concerning Afrocentric hairstyles. The following accounts represent parents' understandings and interpretations of their children's experiences with hair policies, rather than direct analysis of official school regulations. This section covers perceptions of what constitutes "neat" and "tidy" hair, specific experiences with Afrocentric hairstyles in various schools, and the broader implications for cultural identity and self-expression (McClintock, 2013; Vasudevan, 2021).

Among the 13 parents interviewed, clear patterns emerged regarding their experiences with school hair policies. Eight parents (62%) reported experiencing or observing restrictive hair policies that limited the expression of Afrocentric hairstyles, with these accounts primarily coming from parents with children in academic-focused and faith-based schools. Three parents (23%), predominantly those with children at Steiner schools, described highly inclusive environments that actively welcomed diverse hairstyles. The remaining two parents

(15%) reported mixed experiences, noting that while their children's schools had made efforts to become more inclusive, certain limitations on hair expression remained. This distribution reflects the spectrum of approaches to hair policies across the sampled Cape Town private schools, ranging from highly restrictive to actively inclusive, with most falling somewhere in between these extremes.

The experiences shared by parents regarding hair policies and practices can be understood through multiple theoretical lenses. Through the concept of racialisation (Erasmus, 2017), we can see how seemingly neutral hair standards continue to categorise and differentiate students along racial lines, with particular implications for those with Afrocentric hair textures. The varying approaches to cultural inclusivity across schools reveal institutional stances toward cultural diversity, from assimilation to celebration, that directly impact students' sense of belonging and identity expression. Furthermore, these hair experiences offer a microcosm for examining what Maldonado-Torres (2007) terms the 'coloniality of being,' where Eurocentric standards of appearance persist in post-apartheid educational spaces. Schools that actively welcome diverse Afrocentric hairstyles engage in what might be considered decolonial practices, challenging historically entrenched beauty norms and creating space for African aesthetic expressions. The spectrum of approaches outlined below illustrates these theoretical dynamics in action.

4.6.1 Perceptions of "neat" and "tidy" hair

The interviews revealed a range of perspectives on what constitutes "neat," "clean" and "tidy" hair in school settings. Participant 8, from Elite Boys C, framed neatness within a formal dress code rather than as a beauty standard. He described the school's policy for boys as "Short, not touching the collar, not touching the ears, not going over your eyes." This indicates a more traditional and strict interpretation of neat hair that relates to masculinity.

Participant 9, whose child attends Corporate School, offered a more flexible view. She questioned whether neat refers to cleanliness or a specific style (McClintock, 2013), stating, "neat should not be about the order or the texture." She also noted that the definition is

questionable saying "sometimes when they say neat, you question yourself, are they talking about, like, orderly or dirty?"

Participant 10 and Participant 11, with children at Winelands Elite and Hebrew Institute respectively, provided insights that focus on functionality. Participant 11 mentioned that "seeing the child's face is important," while Participant 10 emphasised the importance of eye contact, especially for neurodiverse children. This might indicate that some schools prioritise practicality in their hair policies rather than adhering to strict aesthetic standards. The same practicality was noted by Participant 9 from Corporate School, saying "the hair must not obstruct the student behind them in the classroom."

Participant 11, whose child attends New Private, offered a hygienic definition of neatness. She stated, "how hair looks like, as long as it's not visibly dirty, that doesn't matter what race you are." This perspective suggests a shift towards hygiene-based definitions of neatness rather than style-based ones⁵⁹.

Participant 7 also noted that neatness doesn't necessarily mean a specific style, saying of Image 12 (Figure 14) (which shows very curly/textured hair): "it's still very well groomed. You can see if this hair over here has product in it and it's taken care of. The quality of that hair is being taken care of. It's not like it's not been done for weeks and weeks." Participant 7, also described neat as hair that is "brushed" and meets "hygiene standards". She noted that all the images look neat to her, regardless of hair type or style. For Participant 7, neatness is about the hair being "taken care of" and well-maintained, not about conforming to a specific style.

⁵⁹ The intersection of smell, class, and race has historical roots in social stigmatisation (McClintock, 2013). Vasudevan (2021) discusses how in the early 20th century, certain smells began to be labelled as repulsive and linked to specific spaces and people, notably the lower classes and their surroundings. This process was part of what sociologist Norbert Elias termed the civilising process, where controlled personal etiquette gradually became a marker of social status. Vasudevan's work highlights how these associations between smell, cleanliness, and social worth continue to shape perceptions and experiences of marginalised groups today, demonstrating the enduring nature of olfactory-based discrimination.



Figure 14: Image 12 (AI-generated Image)

Participant 1, a Steiner South parent, emphasised a markedly different approach to hair policies: "The only criteria is that their hair is neat and clean. And they⁶⁰ can very much wear their hair however they like." This sentiment was echoed by other Steiner parents, with Participant 3 describing a "completely relaxed attitude to hair," allowing for a wide variety of styles including "boys with long hair, natural hair, Afros, braids, no problem." This open approach stands in sharp contrast to the more rigid standards often found in other schools. Participant 4 reflected on her own school experience, recalling strict rules about keeping hair neat, tied back, and conforming to certain standards regardless of gender or hair type.

The subjectivity of these standards was highlighted by Participant 5, who questioned, "if hair must be neat, what does neat mean to you? Because maybe that's not neat to the next person." She shared a personal experience of being told she looked "wild" at work due to her natural hair texture, illustrating how Eurocentric beauty standards often inform these judgments (Oyedemi, 2016).

Steiner South seems to sidestep many of these issues by focusing on the child's overall well-being rather than adhering to strict grooming standards. As Participant 1 noted, "we don't discuss hair at all, it's not a topic of discussion. You are who you are, and that's okay." This approach appears to create a more inclusive environment where diverse hair textures and styles are accepted and encouraged, rather than regulated and controlled.

⁶⁰ "They" in this context refers to the student population at Steiner South

However, it's worth noting that while Steiner South may be more relaxed about hair policies, they do enforce other aspects of their educational philosophy. Participant 1 mentioned receiving "long cheeky voice notes" regarding the school's enforcement of a healthy diet, suggesting that conformity to the Steiner philosophy itself is still expected, even if it's not specifically about hair.

Overall, the responses reveal a spectrum of interpretations, from very specific length requirements to more general cleanliness standards. This variety might reflect evolving attitudes towards hair in school settings, with some institutions maintaining traditional policies while others adopt more flexible approaches. Several participants questioned overly rigid definitions of "neat" that don't account for natural hair textures, indicating a growing awareness of the need for more inclusive hair policies in schools.

4.6.2 Experiences with Afrocentric hairstyles in schools

The interviews provided insights into the evolving landscape of Afrocentric hairstyles in several Cape Town schools. There appears to be a gradual shift towards greater inclusivity, though challenges remain.

4.6.2.1 *Restricted self-expression*

The experiences of students with Afrocentric hairstyles in some of the sampled Cape Town private schools reveal a pattern of restricted self-expression. Traditional faith-based schools like Elite Girls Cape and Hebrew Institute, as well as academically-focused institutions such as Elite Boys C and Winelands Elite, tend to prioritise conformity and tradition over individual expression. This approach often results in policies that, whilst not explicitly targeting Afrocentric hairstyles, effectively limit their expression.

Elite Boys C exemplifies this approach with its stringent hair policy. As Participant 8 noted, the school requires hair to be "short, not touching the collar, not touching the ears, not going over your eyes." This uniform standard applies to all students, effectively limiting the expression of Afrocentric hairstyles. The school's focus on preparing students for professional life through

these grooming standards suggests a prioritisation of perceived future success presumably in restrictive corporate environments over cultural expression. Participant 8 supported this view, believing that these standards "help instil discipline and prepare students for professional life." This perspective highlights how traditional grooming policies are often justified as beneficial for students' future prospects, despite their potential to suppress cultural identity.

Hebrew Institute maintains similarly strict hair rules, particularly for primary school boys. Participant 11 explained that boys' hair "needs to be around their ears and can't go down the neck." Whilst these rules relax in secondary school, they still represent a significant restriction on personal expression during formative years. The school's policy that "all hair needs to be tied up" for girls, while seemingly neutral, can pose challenges for students with certain Afrocentric hairstyles that may not easily conform to this requirement.

Elite Girls Cape's journey towards cultural inclusivity illustrates the challenges faced by traditional institutions in adapting to changing societal expectations. The school's previous requirement for French plaits on special occasions highlighted the difficulties faced by students with Afrocentric hair textures. Participant 6 recalled a significant issue: "I remember there was a whole issue about, like, why is your daughter's hair not like this?" She described the difficulty of trying to straighten her daughter's hair to conform to this rule. Although this policy has been adjusted, with Participant 7 noting, "They have changed things. So on Elite Girls Cape Day, every girl had to come to school with a French plait. And now they've changed that because they are busy with a lot of diversity," it demonstrates how seemingly neutral grooming standards can disproportionately affect students with certain hair types.

Winelands Elite presents a case of attempted compromise that still results in restricted expression. Participant 10 indicated that whilst the school tries to accommodate different hair types and styles, certain rules are still in place. She noted, "I think they've tried to find some middle ground." However, her personal experience with her daughter's bob haircut reveals the limitations of this approach: "my daughter has bob hair, and we've now had to start putting it up because it's touching her collar, which irritates me a bit because it's neat and

tidy." This example shows how even schools attempting to be more inclusive can still maintain policies that restrict natural hair expression.

These restrictive policies often stem from deeply ingrained values of tradition and conformity (Khanyile, 2023). As Participant 8 suggested, such standards are believed to "create unity and reduce individualism among students." However, this approach can inadvertently marginalise students whose natural hair doesn't conform to these Eurocentric standards, potentially impacting their sense of belonging and cultural identity within the school community.

The experiences shared by parents highlight the ongoing struggle between maintaining established school cultures and embracing diversity. Participant 6's criticism of Elite Girls Cape's reactive approach to policy changes underscores this tension: "Like I said, the code of conduct was made centuries ago, never brought up again until there's like a problem where I can't actually French plait my child's hair. Then it comes up, then it's discussed and then changed." This reactive rather than proactive approach to cultural inclusivity is a common theme among schools with more restrictive policies.

The impact of these policies extends beyond mere appearance. They can affect students' comfort, self-esteem, and sense of cultural identity (Khanyile, 2023; Mujulizi, 2022). As Participant 9 from Corporate School pointed out when discussing the ambiguity of "neatness" requirements, "Neat should not be about the order or the texture. Because sometimes when they say neat, you question yourself, are they talking about, like, orderly or dirty?" This comment highlights how grooming standards can be subjectively interpreted, potentially leading to unintended discrimination.

In conclusion, whilst some schools are making efforts to become more culturally inclusive, the experiences shared by parents reveal that some Cape Town private schools still maintain policies that restrict the expression of Afrocentric hairstyles. These policies, rooted in traditional Eurocentric values of conformity and professionalism, can create challenges for

students with natural Afrocentric hair, potentially impacting their educational experience and sense of belonging within the school community.

4.6.2.2 *Structured settings with some personal choice*

While some sampled Cape Town private schools maintain strict policies on hairstyles, others have adopted a more flexible approach, creating structured settings that allow for a degree of personal choice. These schools attempt to balance traditional academic values with a recognition of cultural diversity, resulting in policies that, while still regulated, offer students some freedom in expressing their identity through their hair.

Corporate School exemplifies this approach. Participant 9's experience suggests a relatively flexible stance on Afrocentric hairstyles. She noted, "I've seen other kids also, like, with Afros," indicating that natural hairstyles are permitted. However, there are still limitations in place. "They don't want extensions," she added, highlighting that not all hairstyles are allowed. The school's policy emphasises neatness rather than specific style requirements, with Participant 9 explaining, "they just want the hair to be neat as well." This focus on neatness, while potentially allowing for more diversity in hairstyles, also introduces some ambiguity.

New Private school demonstrates a similar approach, with Participant 12 describing a wide variety of accepted hairstyles. She mentioned seeing "almost all of them, probably except 14 and 21," (Figure 15) referring to the images of various Afrocentric hairstyles shown during the interview. This suggests some level of acceptance for different hair textures and styles. The school's policy appears to focus on neatness rather than specific hair lengths or styles, with Participant 12 explaining, "They don't necessarily prescribe how long, how short, how it should. Like, they just emphasise the neatness." However, some limitations still exist,



particularly regarding hair accessories: "They probably could fuss about the colour [of accessories] that you're using, for example in 2." This indicates that while the school allows for personal expression through hairstyles, it still maintains some control over the overall appearance to align with school colours.

14

21

Figure 15: Images 14 and 21 (AI-generated Image).

These are the hairstyles indicated to be disallowed at New Private School.

The experiences at these schools highlight a growing awareness of the need for more cultural inclusive practices, balanced against traditional academic priorities (Andrews et al., 2021). This approach allows for some expression of cultural identity through hairstyles, whilst still maintaining a sense of uniformity and adherence to school standards.

However, challenges remain in implementing these more flexible policies. The subjective nature of terms like "neat" can lead to inconsistent application of rules. Moreover, the requirement to modify certain hairstyles (such as tying up long hair) may still pose difficulties for students with certain Afrocentric hair textures.

Participant 12 from New Private school attributed the more open-minded approach partly to the diverse student body and young teaching staff (Andrews et al., 2021), saying, "I think maybe that also counts, because I always felt in the school where my son was in Tzaneen, the staff was mostly towards 50, beyond 50. That might have something to do with the way they perceive neatness as well." This observation suggests that the composition of the school community and staff can play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards diverse hairstyles.

These schools represent a middle ground in the spectrum of hair policies in Cape Town private schools. They demonstrate an attempt to balance Eurocentric traditional academic values with a recognition of diverse students' needs for cultural expression. While not offering complete freedom, these structured settings with some personal choice provide students with

more opportunities to express their identity through their hair compared to schools with more restrictive policies.

4.6.2.3 *Welcoming diverse hairstyles*

At the most culturally inclusive end of the spectrum in terms of hair, according to the participants in the study, some of the sampled Cape Town private schools have adopted policies that actively welcome and encourage diverse hairstyles, including Afrocentric ones. These institutions, primarily represented by Steiner schools in this study, demonstrate a commitment to fostering environments where individual expression through hairstyle is not just permitted, but encouraged.

Steiner South exemplifies this approach, with Participant 1 emphasising that "self-expression is critical to [pupil's] development." The school's hair policy is remarkably relaxed, with the only criterion being that hair is "neat and clean." Participant 1 noted that students "can very much wear their hair however they like," indicating a high degree of freedom in personal expression. This sentiment was echoed by Participant 2, who simply stated, "They treat everyone equally," suggesting that no particular hairstyle is singled out or treated differently.

Participant 3 provided more specific examples of the diverse hairstyles welcomed at Steiner South, describing the school as having a "completely relaxed attitude to hair." She listed various Afrocentric styles she had observed: "natural hair, no problem. Afros, no problem. Braids, no problem." This inclusive approach extends beyond mere tolerance to active celebration of diversity, with the only restrictions being practical concerns such as not obstructing vision.

Steiner Central takes a similarly inclusive approach. Participant 4 enthusiastically responded that she had seen "all of them! And more" when asked about the hairstyles present at the school. She described seeing various Afrocentric styles, including locks on both boys and girls. Participant 4's experience suggests that the school's approach to hair is part of a broader

philosophy of inclusivity and self-expression, noting that "Steiner kids' families tend to be more relaxed. We allow our kids to embrace themselves."

Steiner Junior also demonstrates a highly welcoming attitude towards diverse hairstyles. Participant 5 identified many Afrocentric hairstyles as being present at the school, noting, "definitely locks. Quite a few kids who have locks." The school's code of conduct regarding hair is minimal, with Participant 5 stating, "there's not much on hair. The only thing they say is that coloured or highlighted hair is not allowed." This indicates a focus on natural hairstyles rather than artificial alterations.

The welcoming attitude in these schools extends beyond hair to overall appearance and individual expression (Goldshmidt, 2017). None of these schools have formal uniforms, meaning that hair is not the only part of personal presentation that is unrestricted: students largely choose how they will present themselves at school. As Participant 5 noted, "it's almost like all children get a chance to shine," suggesting an environment where diversity is truly embraced. This stands in stark contrast to more uniformed traditional school environments (Christie and McKinney, 2017), as highlighted by Participant 5's reflection on her own school experiences: "I always wondered why, when I was in secondary school, we had this Miss Valentine's⁶¹, every year, I noticed it would be girls with straight hair."

The Steiner schools' approach to hairstyles appears to be deeply rooted in their educational philosophy. Participant 4 described how Steiner Central encourages children to explore their identity from a young age, stating, "if kids don't get a chance to do it, they're going to eventually do it at a stupid age, like 20 or 30 when you should have been 10 or 15." This perspective sees diverse hairstyles not just as a matter of appearance, but as an important aspect of personal development and self-expression.

⁶¹ Miss Valentine's refers to a beauty pageant or competition traditionally held in some South African schools around Valentine's Day. In this context, Participant 5 is highlighting how these events often favoured certain beauty standards, particularly those associated with straight hair. This observation underscores the cultural bias present in some traditional school environments, where Eurocentric beauty standards were often prioritised or celebrated.

It's worth noting that while the Steiner schools in this study consistently demonstrated the most inclusive approach to hairstyles, they are not representative of all private schools in Cape Town. However, their policies and practices offer a model for how educational institutions can create culturally inclusive environments in terms of hair that celebrate diversity.

In conclusion, these schools represent the most inclusive end of the spectrum in terms of hair policies among Cape Town private schools. By actively welcoming and celebrating diverse hairstyles, including Afrocentric ones, they create environments where students feel free to express their cultural identities (Becker and Becker, 2021). This approach not only allows for personal expression but also contributes to a school culture that values and showcases diversity, potentially fostering greater understanding and acceptance among students from different backgrounds.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from an analysis of website data and in-depth interviews with 13 parents whose children attend nine private schools and one former Model C school in Cape Town. The research aimed to explore how parents experience values that shape inclusivity around hair rules, particularly concerning Afrocentric hair and hairstyles.

The analysis of school websites revealed three distinct categories of private schools: faith-based, academic-focused, and Steiner schools. Each category demonstrated unique value orientations, as interpreted through Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (2012). Faith-based schools emphasise tradition and conformity, academic-focused schools prioritise achievement and security, while Steiner schools highlight self-direction and universalism.

Interviews with parents provided insights into the racial distribution of students and staff across the sampled schools. The findings indicated varying levels of diversity, with some schools showing a more balanced racial composition while others remained predominantly White. Notably, the teaching staff and management in most schools were reported to be less

diverse than the student body, suggesting a potential area for future development in terms of representation.

Parents' school choice decisions were influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including academic excellence, individual attention, holistic development, religious and cultural alignment, and inclusivity. The study found that parents often sought schools that aligned with their personal values and aspirations for their children's education and future success.

The research revealed a spectrum of approaches to hair policies and cultural expression across the sampled schools. These ranged from highly restrictive environments that limit self-expression to more inclusive settings that welcome diverse hairstyles. Steiner schools consistently emerged as the most accommodating of diverse hair textures and styles, aligning with their emphasis on individual expression and holistic development.

Perceptions of what constitutes "neat" and "tidy" hair varied among parents and schools, reflecting broader societal debates about cultural inclusivity and identity expression in educational settings. Some schools maintain traditional, Eurocentric standards, while others adopt more flexible approaches that recognise and celebrate diverse hair textures.

The experiences shared by parents highlighted the ongoing challenges and complexities in fostering truly inclusive environments in Cape Town private schools, particularly concerning Afrocentric hair. While some institutions have made strides towards greater cultural inclusivity, others continue to grapple with balancing traditional values and practices with the need for more diverse and inclusive approaches.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how parents with children in a sample of Cape Town private schools experience values that shape cultural inclusivity around hair rules, particularly concerning Afrocentric hair. The research's evolution from a school-specific focus to a broader, parent-centred approach across ten diverse schools yielded insights into the landscape of private education in post-apartheid South Africa. This shift, while initially challenging, ultimately provided a richer, more nuanced understanding of the interplay between parental values, school choice, and student hair experiences.

The study's methodology, combining parent interviews with analysis of schools' public-facing website content, offered a unique perspective on the diverse educational philosophies and value systems within Cape Town's private school sector. This approach allowed for an examination of how different types of schools – faith-based, academic-focused, and Steiner – approach cultural inclusivity, particularly regarding Afrocentric hair, hairstyles and cultural expression.

By focusing on parental perspectives, especially those of educated professionals from the University of Cape Town, this research provides valuable insights into how cultural capital, as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1987), influences school choice and experiences in the Cape Town context. The findings reveal a landscape where issues of academic excellence, social mobility, cultural expression, and cultural inclusivity intersect, challenging simplistic narratives about private education in post-apartheid South Africa.

While Nault's (2021) study found that academic factors were the second most important consideration for parents in school choice, the findings in the sampled Cape Town schools indicated that academic excellence was a primary consideration for most parents. This discrepancy likely reflects the unique historical and social context of South Africa, where education is often viewed as a pathway to social mobility. As one parent noted, "I don't like what's going on in the government schools as well. I think the standard just keeps on dropping and not improving" (Participant 9). This sentiment underscores the perceived link between

private education and future opportunities in the South African context, and that diversity and inclusion are important areas for many parents, but can't be separated from considerations such as academic excellence.

The emphasis on academic excellence in the Cape Town context can be understood through the lens of cultural capital and social mobility. Parents' focus on academic achievement reflects their understanding of education as a form of institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) that can be converted into economic and social capital, facilitating upward social mobility.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) offers a lens through which to interpret these parental perspectives on school choice. Tajfel (1974) posited that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their group memberships. In the context of this study, parents' school choices can be seen as reflecting their desire to align their children with specific social groups that embody particular values and identities.

The parent who chose a Steiner school, emphasising self-expression, may be seeking to associate their child with a group identity that values individuality and creativity. This aligns with SIT's concept of positive distinctiveness, where individuals strive to maintain or achieve a positive social identity through group membership

Conversely, the parent opting for a traditional school, valuing stability and continuity, appears to be prioritising what SIT terms in-group favouritism. By sending their child to a school with a strong "old boys" or "old girls" network, they are facilitating their child's entry into a well-established social group with clear norms and traditions. This choice reflects the SIT principle that individuals seek to enhance their self-esteem by identifying with prestigious or positively valued groups (Tajfel, 1974).

These contrasting choices demonstrate how parents use school selection as a means of social categorisation for their children, aligning them with groups that reflect desired values and

identities. This process of school choice, viewed through the lens of SIT, reveals how educational decisions can be deeply intertwined with identity formation and the pursuit of positive social status.

The application of Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (2012) to interpret schools' publicly marketed data provided insights into the underlying value systems guiding different educational approaches. A notable finding was the strong link between conformity and tradition values in older, and sometimes predominantly White schools. This correlation aligns with Bourdieu's (1987) concept of cultural capital, particularly in its institutionalised form. These schools, through their emphasis on conformity and tradition, may be seen as repositories of a specific type of cultural capital that reflects and reproduces the values of the historically dominant White middle and upper classes in South Africa.

This dynamic raises important questions about cultural inclusivity, as the overarching culture in these environments may not align with the experiences and identities of students from diverse backgrounds. As Bourdieu (1987) argued, educational institutions play a crucial role in legitimising and reproducing certain forms of cultural capital. In the context of the sampled Cape Town private schools, this process may inadvertently create what Bourdieu termed 'symbolic violence' against students whose cultural capital differs from the school's dominant culture. For instance, the strict hair policies reported by some parents in traditional schools could be interpreted as a manifestation of this symbolic violence, privileging Eurocentric standards of appearance over Afrocentric ones.

Moreover, the findings suggest that parents' school choices are influenced by their understanding of the cultural capital these institutions offer. As one parent noted, "There's a reason these schools have been so strong for so long" (Participant 8), indicating an awareness of the enduring value associated with these traditional institutions. This perspective aligns with Bourdieu's (1987) assertion that families invest in education as a strategy for maintaining or improving their social position, recognising the convertibility of cultural capital into economic and social capital in the future.

The study found that Black and Coloured participants made careful, strategic choices in their selection of schools. It's important to note that all participants in this study were educated professionals employed at the University of Cape Town, suggesting a level of informed decision-making and financial stability that may not be representative of all parents. This aligns with Blake and Mestry's (2020) observation that well-off parents often seek strategies to maintain their children's privileges through school choice. The parents' high levels of cultural capital, as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1987), likely influenced their ability to navigate the private school landscape effectively.

While all parents in the study expressed satisfaction with their chosen schools, some reported past challenges and evolving school environments. For example, one parent noted the gradual changes in hair policies at their daughter's school: "They have changed things. So on Elite Girls Cape Day, every girl had to come to school with a French plait. And now they've changed that because they are busy with a lot of diversity" (Participant 7). This observation highlights the ongoing process of adaptation and negotiation within Cape Town's private schools as they strive for greater inclusivity.

The parents' experiences reflect Soudien's (2004) findings on the complexities of integration in South African schools, where assimilationist practices often prevail. However, the parents in this study demonstrated agency in their school choices, actively seeking environments that aligned with their values and aspirations for their children. This supports Nault's (2021) argument that parents often choose schools based on value alignment rather than solely on academic offerings.

5.1 School categorisation

This study revealed that private schools in Cape Town are not a homogeneous group, but rather a diverse landscape of educational institutions with distinct philosophies, values, and approaches. The findings identified three primary categories of schools: faith-based, academic-focused, and Steiner schools. Each category not only differed in how they presented

themselves to prospective parents but also attracted distinct types of families based on their educational priorities and values.

The categorisation of schools aligns with previous research indicating that parents perceive private schools as superior to government schools "in almost all dimensions" (Blake & Mestry, 2020, p. 1051). However, the findings suggest that this superiority is not uniform across all private schools, but rather manifests differently depending on the school's category and focus.

The study found that faith-based schools emphasise strong religious identities, academic excellence, and character development. This aligns with the historical role of religious institutions in South African education (Davids & Waghid, 2021) and reflects the ongoing importance of faith-based education for many families. These schools often attract parents who value a combination of academic rigour and moral or ethical formation rooted in specific religious traditions.

Academic-focused schools, including elite institutions, prioritise academic excellence, modern facilities, and preparation for future success. This category aligns with Maxwell and Aggleton's (2016) description of elite schools as selective, exclusive, and maintaining high academic standards. These schools often appeal to parents who prioritise academic achievement and perceive it as a pathway to future opportunities, reflecting Blake and Mestry's (2020) observation that parents associate curriculum delivery quality with school choice.

Steiner schools stand out as a distinct category, offering an alternative educational philosophy based on Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical approach. As described by Goldshmidt (2017), these schools emphasise holistic development, creativity, and a connection to nature. The findings suggest that Steiner schools attract parents who prioritise individual expression, artistic development, and a less conventional approach to education and later career trajectories.

The emergence of these distinct categories underscores the complexity of the private school landscape in Cape Town. It suggests that parents with many options are not simply choosing private education as a monolithic alternative to public schooling, but are making nuanced decisions based on specific educational philosophies and approaches. This diversity in school types reflects the varied educational priorities and values within the parent population.

Moreover, the categorisation reveals how different schools position themselves in the educational market. As Resnik (2012) noted, many elite schools are adopting an international orientation, often through curricula like the Cambridge examinations. The findings suggest that this trend extends beyond just elite schools, with various institutions across categories adopting different strategies to distinguish themselves and attract specific types of families.

The distinct categories also highlight the potential for segregation within the private school sector. Each school type may attract families from particular socioeconomic, cultural, or ideological backgrounds, potentially leading to homogeneous school communities. This raises questions about the role of private schools in promoting or hindering social integration in post-apartheid South Africa.

The categorisation of schools revealed in this study provides a deeper understanding of the private school landscape in Cape Town. It demonstrates that private schools are not a uniform alternative to public education, but a diverse array of institutions catering to different educational philosophies and parental priorities. This diversity offers choice but also presents challenges in terms of equity, integration, and the broader social impact of private education in South Africa.

5.2 Racial distribution: Changing patterns of inequality

The findings of this study revealed a striking pattern of racial distribution across the sampled Cape Town private schools, both in terms of student populations and teaching staff. This pattern not only reflects the persistent inequalities in South African education but also raises

critical questions about the role of private schools in perpetuating or challenging these disparities in the post-apartheid era.

This study found that many of the sampled schools, particularly those with the highest fees, demonstrated a predominance of White students and staff. This aligns closely with the findings of Gruijters et al. (2024), who reported that White learners, despite comprising only 3.8% of South Africa's overall student population, accounted for 55% of enrolments in prestigious private institutions. Conversely, Black learners were significantly underrepresented in some schools. This overrepresentation of White students and staff in private schools, nearly three decades after the end of apartheid, suggests that these institutions continue to function as sites of privilege reproduction. Maldonado-Torres' (2007) concept of the 'coloniality of Being' offers a framework for interpreting these persistent racial imbalances in the sampled Cape Town private schools. The overrepresentation of White students and staff could be understood as a manifestation of what Maldonado-Torres (2007) termed the 'sub-ontological difference', where certain groups are positioned as less-than-fully human within the colonial world order. This concept helps to elucidate how historical patterns of racial hierarchy continue to shape contemporary educational spaces. Additionally, the practical reality of intergenerational wealth plays a significant role in perpetuating this overrepresentation. The legacy of apartheid has resulted in substantial economic disparities along racial lines, meaning that White families are often better positioned to afford private school fees. This financial advantage, rooted in historical injustice, contributes to the ongoing racial imbalances observed in these educational institutions.

The racial composition observed in the study can be understood through the lens of opportunity hoarding, a concept explored by Diamond and Lewis (2022). The concentration of White students and staff in these schools suggests that access to high-quality private education remains largely restricted to historically privileged groups. This is not necessarily due to explicit exclusionary practices, but rather to institutional structures that systematically advantage certain groups while disadvantaging others. These structures may include high

fees, admission policies that favour alumni children, and cultural norms that align more closely with White, privileged values.

Moreover, the predominance of White teaching staff across many of the sampled schools raises concerns about the cultural capital valued within these institutions. As Carter (2005) and Lewis (2019) argue, the mismatch between the cultural capital possessed by non-White learners and that are valued in predominantly White educational settings can reinforce racial boundaries and impact learners' experiences. This mismatch may manifest in various ways, including differences in communication styles, behavioural expectations, and perceptions of appropriate hairstyles – a key focus of this study.

This correlation between conformity, tradition, and predominantly White schools can be understood through Bourdieu's (1987) concept of cultural reproduction. These schools, by emphasising certain values and practices, are reproducing a form of cultural capital that aligns with historically dominant groups in South African society. This process potentially contributes to the maintenance of existing social hierarchies, posing challenges for social mobility among students from diverse backgrounds.

The racial distribution findings also shed light on the challenges of achieving true integration in South African schools. As Soudien (2004, p. 104) noted, "assimilationism is overwhelmingly hegemonic as a practice of integration in schools." The findings suggest that this assimilationist approach persists in some private schools, where the demographic makeup implies that non-White students are expected to conform to a predominantly White school culture.

It is important to note, however, that this study did reveal some variation in racial composition across different school types. Some institutions, particularly those with more progressive educational philosophies, newer private schools or a history connected to missionary schools, demonstrated greater diversity in their student bodies and staff. This suggests that certain approaches to education may be more conducive to fostering inclusivity and challenging

historical patterns of segregation, and also that schools themselves do have agency in terms of their priorities, choices and recruitment practices of both students and staff.

The persistence of racial imbalances in these private schools raises critical questions about the broader impact of private education on social cohesion and equality in post-apartheid South Africa. While private schools often justify their existence as providing choice and quality education, the findings suggest that they may also be perpetuating historical inequalities and hindering the goal of creating a more integrated society.

The racial distribution patterns observed in this study reflect the complex and ongoing challenges of transforming education in South Africa. They highlight the need for more concerted efforts to increase diversity and inclusivity in private schools, not just in terms of student admissions but also in staff recruitment and the cultural values promoted within these institutions. Future research could explore strategies for making private education more accessible and inclusive, as well as examining the long-term societal impacts of these persistent racial imbalances in elite educational spaces.

5.3 Values: The interplay of personal values and educational priorities

This study revealed that parents' values aligned with their choice of private schools in Cape Town, aligning closely with Nault's (2021) findings on the importance of values in school selection. The research uncovered several key themes in parents' decision-making processes: academic excellence and achievement, individual attention and support, holistic development and self-expression, religious and cultural alignment, and inclusivity and diversity.

The emphasis on academic excellence, particularly among parents choosing faith-based and academic-focused schools, resonates with Immelman and Roberts-Lombard's (2015) identification of academic factors as a key influence in school choice. This priority reflects parents' association of private education with superior academic outcomes and future opportunities, as noted by Blake and Mestry (2020). However, the findings suggest that

academic considerations, while important, are often balanced against other values and priorities.

The attraction of Steiner schools for parents valuing holistic development and self-expression aligns closely with Goldshmidt's (2017) description of Steiner education's focus on nurturing the child's intellectual, artistic, emotional, and spiritual development. This preference demonstrates how some parents prioritise educational philosophies that extend beyond traditional academic metrics, seeking environments that foster creativity, individuality, and alternative approaches to learning.

The importance of religious and cultural alignment in school choice, particularly evident in faith-based schools, supports Nault's (2021) observation of a strong correlation between parents' personal values and the values they hope schools will foster in their children. This suggests that for many parents, school choice is indeed a means of intergenerational cultural transmission, as they seek educational environments that reinforce their own belief systems and cultural practices.

The findings also revealed a spectrum of attitudes towards inclusivity and diversity in school choice. While some parents actively sought diverse environments, others prioritised traditional or culturally specific educational settings. This variation reflects the complex landscape of post-apartheid South African education, where the desire for cultural preservation sometimes conflicts with goals of integration and multicultural education.

Interestingly, this study found that different school types tended to attract parents with corresponding value sets. For instance, parents choosing elite academic-focused schools often emphasised values aligned with what Schwartz (2012) terms 'achievement' and 'security', prioritising academic excellence and future success. In contrast, parents selecting Steiner schools typically expressed values more aligned with 'universalism' and 'self-direction', prioritising holistic development and individual expression.

This alignment between parental values and school types can be understood through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974). Parents' school choices may reflect their desire to align their children with specific social groups that embody particular values and identities. The parent who chose a Steiner school, emphasising self-expression, may be seeking to associate their child with a group identity that values individuality and creativity. This aligns with SIT's concept of positive distinctiveness, where individuals strive to maintain or achieve a positive social identity through group membership.

This alignment between parental values and school types suggests that the private school sector in Cape Town offers a diverse array of educational options catering to different value systems. However, it also raises questions about the potential for these choices to reinforce social stratification. As Ball (2003) noted, elite private schools are typically accessible primarily to wealthy families, suggesting that the ability to choose schools based on personal values may be a privilege not equally available to all.

Moreover, the strong influence of values on school choice has implications for social cohesion and integration in post-apartheid South Africa. If parents consistently choose schools that align closely with their own values and cultural backgrounds, it may lead to increased segregation along ideological and cultural lines, potentially hindering efforts to create a more integrated society.

The findings on values and school choice highlight the complex interplay between personal beliefs, educational priorities, and the broader societal context in shaping parents' decisions about their children's education. While the diversity of options allows parents to find schools that align with their values, it also presents challenges for achieving educational equity and social integration. Future research could explore how to balance respect for diverse values with the need for inclusive, integrated educational environments in South Africa's evolving social landscape.

5.4 Hair experiences: Negotiating identity in private school spaces

The findings on hair experiences and cultural expression in the sampled Cape Town private schools reveal a complex landscape where historical legacies, cultural identities, and institutional values intersect. This section directly addresses the main research question: How do parents with children in Cape Town private schools experience values that shape inclusivity around hair rules, particularly the cultural expression of or styling related to Afrocentric hair?

The study uncovered a spectrum of approaches to hair policies across different school types, ranging from highly restrictive to more inclusive. This variation reflects the ongoing negotiation between traditional school cultures and the push for greater cultural inclusivity in post-apartheid South Africa. The varied approaches to hair policies across schools reflect what Maldonado-Torres (2007) describes as the 'coloniality of Being'. Schools with more restrictive policies exemplify the 'naturalisation of the non-ethics of war' that Maldonado-Torres identifies as a key feature of coloniality, where certain bodies and forms of cultural expression are deemed less valuable or legitimate. Conversely, schools with more inclusive policies could be seen as engaging in what Maldonado-Torres (2007) terms 'decolonisation and des-generación⁶²', actively working to restore the dignity and full humanity of all students. This theoretical lens helps to situate hair policies within broader structures of power and oppression.

At one end of the spectrum, the study found schools with restrictive policies that limited the expression of Afrocentric hairstyles. These policies, often framed in terms of 'neatness' or 'tidiness', echo the historical devaluation and stigmatisation of natural African hair types noted by Erasmus (1997). Such approaches align with Oyedemi's (2016) argument that achieving hegemonic beauty standards, often defined by European textures and styles, can be a 'violent journey' involving cultural erasure.

⁶² Maldonado-Torres (2007) introduced the term "des-gener-acción" as a neologism combining Spanish and English elements. It can be understood as a play on words, merging "degeneration" with "gender" and "action". In this context, it refers to the process of deconstructing and challenging established gender norms and roles, particularly those reinforced by colonial and patriarchal systems. This concept is closely linked to decolonial thought, emphasising the need to address gender-based oppression alongside racial and cultural decolonisation efforts.

In the middle of the spectrum, we observed schools attempting to balance traditional values with recognition of cultural diversity. These institutions often allowed some freedom in hairstyles while maintaining certain regulations. This approach reflects a growing awareness of the need for inclusivity, but also demonstrates the difficulties in fully embracing diverse cultural expressions within established school cultures.

At the most inclusive end, particularly evident in Steiner schools, the study found policies that actively welcomed and encouraged diverse hairstyles. Parents with children in these schools reported a sense of cultural affirmation and freedom of expression. This aligns with Le Roux's (2020) emphasis on the enduring importance of hair as a medium for cultural expression and identity formation in contemporary South African contexts.

The metaphor of 'air' provides a useful lens through which to understand the varying approaches to hair policies across different school types (Auerbach, 2022). Steiner schools, with their emphasis on self-direction and universalism values, allowed for the most '*air for hair*'. These institutions created environments where diverse hairstyles were not just tolerated, but actively encouraged as expressions of individuality and cultural identity. In contrast, traditional faith-based and some academic-focused schools, which prioritised conformity and tradition values, allowed for less '*air for hair*'. Their more restrictive policies often limited the expression of Afrocentric hairstyles, reflecting a narrower definition of acceptable appearance. Schools in the middle of this spectrum, particularly newer academic-focused institutions, offered a moderate amount of '*air for hair*', attempting to balance traditional standards with recognition of cultural diversity. This variation in '*air for hair*' across school types underscores how institutional values directly shape the space available for cultural expression and identity formation within educational settings, ultimately determining '*the air allowed for hair*'.

The varied approaches to hair policies across schools reflect broader tensions in post-apartheid South African education. As Christie and McKinney (2017) noted, conflicts over hair regulations where schools allow less '*air for hair*' have been flashpoints for broader debates

about racism and cultural expression in schools. The findings suggest that while progress has been made in some institutions, some private schools in Cape Town still struggle to fully accommodate and celebrate Afrocentric hair as a form of cultural expression.

Importantly, this study revealed that parents' experiences of hair policies were closely tied to their overall perception of a school's values and commitment to inclusivity. Schools with more inclusive hair policies were often seen as more welcoming of cultural diversity in general, influencing parents' school choices and their children's sense of belonging within the school community.

The persistence of restrictive hair policies in some schools can be understood through the lens of what Soudien (2004) termed 'assimilationism' in school integration practices. These policies often expect learners from diverse backgrounds to conform to established norms that may not reflect their cultural identities. This approach not only impacts students' self-expression but also perpetuates broader societal inequalities by privileging certain forms of cultural capital over others.

However, the more inclusive approaches observed in some schools offer hope for change. These institutions demonstrate that it is possible to create educational environments that respect and celebrate diverse cultural expressions, including Afrocentric hairstyles. Such approaches align with the goals of transformative education in post-apartheid South Africa, fostering environments where all students can feel valued and represented.

The findings on hair experiences and cultural expression highlight the ongoing challenges and evolving nature of inclusivity in Cape Town private schools. While some institutions have made significant strides in accommodating and celebrating Afrocentric hairstyles, others continue to maintain policies that restrict cultural expression. These varied approaches reflect broader societal tensions between preserving traditional school cultures and embracing the diversity of post-apartheid South Africa. Moving forward, there is a clear need for continued dialogue

and policy reform to ensure that all students, regardless of their hair texture or chosen style, feel fully accepted and valued within their educational environments.

5.5 "Neat" and "tidy" hair: Navigating cultural norms in educational spaces

The findings on perceptions of "neat" and "tidy" hair in the study reveal the persistent influence of historically rooted beauty standards in Cape Town private schools. These perceptions, and their manifestation in school policies, directly address the research question by illuminating how values shape inclusivity around hair rules, particularly concerning Afrocentric hair.

The study uncovered a spectrum of interpretations of what constitutes "neat" and "tidy" hair across different schools. At one end, we found highly prescriptive definitions that closely mirror the restrictive policies documented by Parker (2019). These include specific length requirements, prohibitions on certain styles, and an emphasis on hair being "clean and neat and always brushed or combed" (Parker, 2019, para. 15). Such definitions often implicitly favour hair textures and styles that are more easily achievable with straight or loosely curled hair, reflecting the lingering influence of Eurocentric beauty standards noted by Erasmus (1997).

This narrow definition of "neat" hair aligns with what Oyedemi (2016, p. 1) describes as "the hegemonic ideology of 'beautiful' hair," which often defines neatness in terms of European and Asian hair textures and styles. The persistence of these standards in some schools suggests a continuation of the "violent journey" Oyedemi refers to, where achieving the prescribed neat appearance may require chemical treatments or heat styling that can damage Afrocentric hair textures.

However, this study also revealed more inclusive interpretations of neatness in some schools, particularly those with progressive educational philosophies. In these institutions, parents reported that neatness was defined more in terms of cleanliness and general grooming rather

than specific styles or textures. This approach allows for a wider range of hair expressions, including natural Afrocentric styles.

Interestingly, several parents in this study questioned the subjectivity of neatness standards, echoing critiques raised by scholars about the cultural biases inherent in such definitions. As one parent astutely observed, "If hair must be neat, what does neat mean to you? Because maybe that's not neat to the next person." This recognition of the subjective nature of neatness highlights the growing awareness among some parents of the need for more inclusive and culturally sensitive hair policies.

The varied interpretations of "neat" and "tidy" hair across schools reflect the broader tensions in post-apartheid South African education between maintaining traditional school cultures and embracing cultural diversity. Schools with more restrictive definitions often justify these policies as preparing students for professional life or maintaining discipline. However, as the findings show, these policies can also serve to marginalise students with Afrocentric hair textures and limit their ability to express their cultural identity.

In contrast, schools with more flexible interpretations of neatness demonstrate that it is possible to maintain high grooming standards while also accommodating diverse hair textures and styles. This approach aligns more closely with the goals of inclusive education in post-apartheid South Africa, creating environments where all students can feel valued and represented.

The persistence of narrow definitions of "neat" hair in some schools can be understood as a form of what Soudien (2004) terms "assimilationism" in school integration practices. By expecting students to conform to Eurocentric standards of neatness, these schools may be inadvertently perpetuating historical inequalities and reinforcing harmful stereotypes about Afrocentric hair.

However, the more inclusive approaches observed in some schools offer a path forward. By redefining neatness in terms of cleanliness and general grooming rather than specific textures or styles, these schools create space for diverse cultural expressions while still maintaining high standards of appearance.

The findings on perceptions of "neat" and "tidy" hair highlight the ongoing negotiation between traditional school cultures and the need for greater cultural inclusivity in Cape Town private schools. While some institutions continue to maintain narrow, Eurocentric definitions of neatness, others are adopting more flexible and inclusive approaches. Moving forward, there is a clear need for continued dialogue and policy reform to ensure that definitions of neatness in school hair policies respect and celebrate the diversity of hair textures and styles present in South Africa's multicultural society.

5.6 Limitations of the study

Whilst this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of parents with children in Cape Town private schools, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The small sample size of 13 parents limits the generalisability of findings to the broader population of private school parents in Cape Town or South Africa. Moreover, the study's parent-centric perspective, whilst offering rich, personal accounts, lacks direct input from pupils, teachers, and school administrators, which could have provided a more comprehensive view of hair policies and cultural inclusivity in schools. The demographic limitations of the participant pool, comprised solely of UCT staff members, may have skewed the sample towards a specific socioeconomic and educational background, potentially overlooking diverse perspectives.

Additionally, the notable gender imbalance, with only one male participant, means the study may not fully capture the perspectives of fathers or male guardians on these issues. The reliance on self-reported data, whilst valuable for understanding personal experiences, is subject to potential bias or inaccuracies in parents' perceptions and recollections. Finally, due to access limitations, the study had to rely on publicly available information rather than direct

access to school policies other than those the parents had with them, which may have provided a deeper understanding of official stances on hair policies and cultural inclusivity.

5.7 Future research

Building on the findings and limitations of this study, several promising avenues for future research emerge. An area for investigation would be to directly capture the thoughts, experiences, and perspectives of students themselves, particularly those with Afrocentric hair, in private school settings. This first-hand account from pupils could provide invaluable insights into their daily experiences, challenges, and coping strategies in navigating hair policies and cultural expression in schools. A study focusing on the direct experiences of pupils with Afrocentric hair in private schools could provide insights into the lived realities of hair policies, complementing the parental perspectives gathered in this research. A comparative analysis exploring hair policies and cultural inclusivity across public, private, and Model C schools could offer a more comprehensive view of the educational landscape in South Africa. A longitudinal study tracking changes in hair policies and cultural inclusivity practices in private schools over time could illuminate trends and the effectiveness of inclusivity efforts. Research exploring how hair policies intersect with other aspects of identity such as gender, religion, and socioeconomic status could provide a deeper understanding of inclusivity in schools. An examination of how written hair policies are interpreted and implemented by teachers and administrators could reveal important discrepancies between official policies and everyday practices. Investigation into how hair policies and cultural inclusivity (or lack thereof) affect pupils' academic performance and overall well-being could provide insights for educational policy. Finally, a study identifying and analysing schools with successful inclusive hair policies could provide models for other institutions seeking to improve their practices. These future research directions would not only address the limitations of the current study but also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural inclusivity in South African education, potentially informing policy and practice on a broader scale.

5.8 Conclusion

This study set out to explore how parents with children in a sample of Cape Town private schools experience values that shape inclusivity around hair rules, particularly concerning the cultural expression of Afrocentric hair. The research journey, however, was not without its challenges and adaptations.

Initially conceived as a collaborative effort with private schools, the study faced access limitations that necessitated a significant shift in approach. This evolution in research design highlights the sensitive nature of hair policies in educational settings and underscores the importance of flexibility in qualitative research. The study's focus pivoted to parental experiences, providing a unique lens through which to examine cultural inclusivity and identity expression in private school environments.

Methodologically, the study employed a constructivist paradigm and qualitative approach, utilising interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to examine the experiences and perceptions of 13 parents whose children attend nine private schools and one semi-private (former Model C) school in Cape Town. Semi-structured interviews formed the primary data collection method, supplemented by analysis of publicly available information from school websites. The use of AI-generated photo cards as interview tools facilitated discussions about diverse hairstyles, helping to navigate potentially sensitive conversations.

The findings revealed a complex landscape of private education in Cape Town, characterised by diverse approaches to inclusivity and cultural expression. The study identified three broad categories of schools, namely faith-based, academic-focused, and Steiner schools, each with distinct values and approaches to education. These categories not only differed in their educational philosophies but also in how they addressed issues of cultural inclusivity, particularly concerning hair policies.

A key finding was the persistent pattern of racial distribution across the sampled schools, with many institutions, particularly traditional ones, showing a predominance of White students

and staff. This pattern reflects ongoing challenges in achieving true inclusivity and transformation in South African education, nearly three decades after the end of apartheid.

The study also highlighted the significant role of parents' values in school choice, with different school types attracting parents with corresponding value sets. This alignment between parental values and school types raises important questions about the potential for private school choices to reinforce social stratification.

Perhaps most critically, the study uncovered a spectrum of approaches to hair experiences, ranging from restrictive to more inclusive. These varied approaches reflect broader societal tensions between preserving traditional school cultures and embracing the diversity of post-apartheid South Africa. The persistence of narrow, Eurocentric definitions of "neat" and "tidy" hair in some schools contrasts sharply with more inclusive interpretations in others, highlighting ongoing negotiations between traditional norms and cultural inclusivity.

This research contributes to the understanding of how private schools in Cape Town navigate the complex terrain of cultural inclusivity, particularly through the lens of hair policies. It reveals that while some progress has been made to allow more *'air for hair,'* some institutions still struggle to fully accommodate and celebrate diverse cultural expressions, including Afrocentric hairstyles.

The importance of this study lies in its illumination of the ongoing challenges in creating truly inclusive educational environments in post-apartheid South Africa. By focusing on *'the air allowed for hair,'* the research provides insight into broader issues of cultural identity, racial dynamics, and the persistence of historical inequalities in educational settings.

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APPENDIX 1

Shaping a More Inclusive Future Through Hair!

Dear UCT Staff,

Imagine a future where every child feels empowered to express their uniqueness without fear of judgment. Envision a world where beauty standards are diverse and freedom of expression is celebrated. We have the opportunity to turn this vision into reality, and I invite you to be an integral part of my research journey.

My research is a crucial component of my Master's degree in Inclusive Innovation at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business. The study aims to investigate the inclusivity of school code of conduct concerning hair policies, focusing on private schools in Cape Town.

My research is driven by a profound interest in understanding how schools shape agency from an early age, particularly in relation to beauty standards and freedom of expression. As part of this academic initiative, the study is under strict ethical guidance by the University of Cape Town, ensuring that all research procedures adhere to the highest standards of integrity, confidentiality, and respect for participants' rights. You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time, should you wish.

To take part in this study, I will conduct an hour-long interview with each participant. Your insights and experiences as parents of students attending private schools will offer valuable perspectives on the success and shortcomings of these schools' hair policies. Through these interviews, I seek to gather rich and nuanced information about your observations, concerns, and suggestions, which will contribute significantly to the development of more equitable and empowering school environments.

Confidentiality stands as the cornerstone of my research ethics. All information shared during the interview will be treated with utmost confidentiality, and your identity will remain anonymous in my research reports. Your cooperation will be invaluable in ensuring the rigour and validity of this study, further contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field of Inclusive Innovation. Lastly, as a gesture of appreciation for your valuable time and contribution, I am informing you that participants will be compensated for any costs incurred to participate in the study.

If you are willing to be a part of this meaningful research and lend your voice to shaping the future of inclusive school policies, I would be grateful to schedule a convenient time for an interview with you.

Please feel free to reach out to me at RCHNIC015@myuct.ac.za or Whatsapp me on xxxxxxxxxx to express your interest or seek any further clarifications. I look forward to collaborating with you in this research study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nic Richter

APPENDIX 2

The University of Cape Town Research Data Management Policy outlines the responsibilities of researchers, funders, the university, and data service providers regarding data storage during research. Researchers are expected to manage data in its original form before summary, analysis, and reporting, ensuring that the data is discoverable through appropriate persistent, unique, and resolvable identifiers. The policy also emphasises the need for long-term stewardship of data with acknowledged long-term value, depending on national data infrastructure provision and eligibility.

All data in this study was managed in line with the UCT Data Management Policy, and an Outline Data Management Plan (DMP) was created. UCT requires researchers to use a DMP to lay out their plans for how they will collect, share, and store data, helping researchers to think through the important aspects of dealing with data in their projects.

In keeping with this plan, all data collected was recorded on an encrypted, password-protected iPhone through voice recording. All recordings were then moved to an encrypted, password-protected 1TB external hard drive for safe keeping in a locked safe in my home and deleted from the iPhone. All recording transcriptions were saved on the same drive and only used on a password-protected desktop computer. All other data relating to this research, including the research report, were stored on this drive at all times, which was stored in a locked safe when not in use.

To ensure additional security and backup, secure encrypted cloud storage was used when data needed to be moved from the external drive while in use. This data was deleted from cloud storage once it was no longer needed, maintaining the principle of data minimisation.

In accordance with recommended practices for data retention, all collected data will be kept securely for a period of five years following the completion of this research project. After this period, all data will be securely deleted from any storage systems. This approach ensures compliance with data protection regulations.



HAIR CULTURE: WHERE AFROCENTRICITY AND EUROCENTRICITY MEET IN POST-APARTHEID PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN CAPE TOWN - Student Outline DMP

1. General guidelines

PURPOSE OF THIS TEMPLATE - The purpose of the Outline DMP is to indicate your initial plans for how your data will be collected, shared and stored, and to give you a chance to think about these data-focused aspects of the research process. As you begin doing your research, your data process may change, and it is perfectly acceptable to change your data management plan to accommodate the changes in your research process. Indicate below that you understand the purpose of completing this Outline DMP template.

- I understand the Outline DMP template is a projection of my anticipated data management planning requirements and should be updated as my project develops.

2. Authors and supervisors

PROJECT NAME - Replicate the title of your project, dissertation or thesis exactly as it appears in your proposal document.

HAIR CULTURE: WHERE AFROCENTRICITY AND EUROCENTRICITY MEET IN POST-APARTHEID PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN CAPE TOWN

PERSONAL DETAILS - Indicate the name(s) and student number(s) of the student(s) who will be involved in this project, dissertation or thesis.

Nic Richter (RCHNIC015)

SUPERVISOR(S) DETAILS - Indicate who will supervise this project, dissertation or thesis. If you do not yet have a supervisor, leave this section blank.

Assoc Prof Jess Auerbach GSB Faculty

3. Data Collection/Generation

COLLECTION OF ORIGINAL DATA - Indicate whether or not you intend to gather/produce original data for your study, and provide a brief description of the kind of data you think you will collect. If you are unsure at this time, indicate what you think you are most likely to collect. If you are not intending to gather or collect your own data, declare that here.

- I intend to collect original data (described below).

I intend to interview male and female adult parents whose children attend elite private schools in Cape Town. This sample is more likely to be exposed to the impact that a school code of conduct can have on grooming practices, particularly Black female grooming practices, so as to focus my research on their freedom (or otherwise) to embrace natural hair practices. Number of participants: 10 – 20. This will be qualitative data, recorded and transcribed. I anticipate my data will be between 1GB and 5GB.

USE OF EXISTING DATA - Indicate if you intend to re-use existing data, either from online searches or from datasets provided by your supervisor, lab, or funder. If you are not intending to re-use existing data, declare that here.

- I do not intend to reuse existing data.

I intend to use existing scholarly literature data from online sources.



DATA SHARING - Indicate whether or not you are intending to publish your research data. If you are, indicate where you are intending to publish your data and under what licensing conditions, such as Creative Commons. If you are not intending to publish your data, provide reasons and reference the appropriate ethical considerations, commercial applications/patenting ambition, or data re-use agreements that prevent you from publishing your data.

- I intend to share my data (details below).

My final dissertation, with findings will be available on a public database.

4. Data Storage

ANTICIPATED DATASET SIZE - Indicate the estimated size of your completed dataset, and indicate whether or not you will need to access additional data storage facilities. If such storage is not provided by your unit or department, you may need to factor in the cost of purchasing additional storage space.

- 20GB or less

I intend to use a password protected external 1TB Solid State Drive to store all data in locked safe at my home. The data will be processed on a password locked encrypted computer. Once I graduate, I will permanently delete all remaining data on the password locked computer, and any remaining data will be stored on a 1TB Solid State Drive in a locked safe.

DATA BACKUPS - Indicate how you plan to ensure your data is secure and retrievable in case of errors or hardware failure. Describe what procedures you will put in place to back-up copies of your data and where they will be stored.

- I intend to backup my data on my personal storage.

I intend to use a password protected external 1TB Solid State Drive to store all data in locked safe at my home.

5. Data Centre(s)/Repositories

DATA CENTRES/REPOSITORIES - Once your project, dissertation or thesis is complete, it is advisable to curate and archive your completed dataset with an established data centre or repository. Note that you should archive your data even if you are not intending to publish it. Check with your supervisor or funder if you are required to deposit your data in a specific repository, or declare that you will deposit the data in ZivaHub (see the Guidance section).

- At the end of my study, I will deposit my data on ZivaHub.

METADATA - Metadata is descriptive information that others will need to make sense of your dataset. Metadata includes things like study descriptions or abstracts, study instruments (sample collection schedules, codebooks for variables, survey instruments, etc.), subject codes, and keywords. Indicate what metadata will accompany your curated dataset.




Data will be not be shared, thus no metadata documentation required.

6. Budget

BUDGET - Indicate any costs specifically relating to the management and curation of your data, such as purchasing additional storage space, digitisation of physical media, data storage or curation charges, and data audits. Most student research will be able to make use of free options provided by UCT and will not have to budget for data costs.

- I do not anticipate any data costs as my data is less than 10GB, and I will be using my existing storage (e.g. an external harddrive) to curate my data.

APPENDIX 3

	Images	MidJourney Prompt		Images	MidJourney Prompt
1		Realistic photography style of a school child with afrocentric hair in an afro style	9		Realistic photography style of a black school boy in uniform with various hairstyles
2		Realistic photography style of a school child in uniform with afrocentric hair as dreadlocks	10		A black school child in uniform with cornrows as a hairstyle
3		Realistic photography style of a school child in uniform with afrocentric hair as microlocs	11		<this images> but in a school uniform with a black girl with straight long hair
4		A black school child in uniform with cornrows as a hairstyle	12		<this image> with the same hairstyle but as a black boy. the student must be in school uniform.
5		Realistic photography style of a school child in uniform with afrocentric hair as dreadlocks	13		<this image> with the same hairstyle as a black child. the student must be in school uniform and the hairstyle must be sisterlocks
6		Realistic photography style of a black school boy in uniform with braided hair	14		A black school boy in uniform, with dreadlocks, his skin tone should be very dark and his features should not be eurocentric
7		Realistic photography style of a black school boy in uniform with various hairstyles	15		A school child in uniform with an afrocentric hairstyle
8		Realistic photography style of a black school boy in uniform with various hairstyles	16		A school child in uniform with an afrocentric hairstyle

miro

Figure a: AI Photos with accompanying prompts version 1

The images above are part of the first batch of images that were created and selected for potential use. A further selection of images follow in figure b below. Based off of this first batch of images, I reached out to one of my colleagues in the MPhil programme. Their response was as follows:

I've been giving this some thought... I think these AI generated images are, I think, what you would, I guess from my perspective, conventionally (say are) attractive people, children. And so I think especially with the mix of the lighter skinned kids, a lot of that is sort of conventionally acceptable sort of standards of beauty, especially with them. I do think the representation of the hair and the hairstyles is quite diverse. So it is inclusive in that sense. And if that's the point or that's the perspective that you're trying to create, then that makes more sense. And I think also understanding the school uniform thing as well, also, for me, makes sense as well.

I'm just also wondering a little bit about the backgrounds, and some of them are blurred out, but you can sort of tell some of them are rural, some of them more urban. And so the uniforms also change with that. So I did notice that. And I don't know if that's something you wanted to be noticed or not, but, yeah, I did notice that.

I do think also that, I guess the mixture of the hair and the uniform and the background, sort of urban rural, also creates a different perception about who they are in their hairstyles. And so that's why I think also the mix of the different kinds of hairstyles makes sense in that context as well. Yeah, but I don't know. In terms of their appearance, they are quite attractive children... And then also, yeah, I don't know, it might be useful to maybe include a few more dark skinned kids. And I think also darker skin because even the light skinned one looked more mixed race than black.

And I guess also white people might not necessarily be able to tell as easily as I can that some of the lighter skinned kids look more mixed race than black. Or not in a bad way, but then, yeah, just black. I don't think it's (the images) crossing a line, necessarily. (Anonymous)

I came to realise at this point that *MidJourney* might indeed have some biases and explored alternative prompts. It will be noted that in image 14, when my prompt requested “A black school boy in uniform, with dreadlocks, his skin tone should be very dark and his features should not be Eurocentric”, *MidJourney* still produced a lighter tone of black skin. I continued exploring prompts on *MidJourney* and found that when the country name “Uganda” was used, a darker variation of Black skin colour was achieved. However, this prompt also caused *MidJourney* to generate a more rural background. In images 17 to 20 and 22 to 23, I included the word “Uganda” in my prompts but finally selected image 21 after exploring prompts with hair colouring, which didn’t result in much photo realistic success. It was also not my aim to produce images that might directly contradict rules, but rather to keep the images in line with typical grooming practices relating to schools.

Lastly, a useful feature of *MidJourney* allows the user to include the words “<this image>” before the description, along with an image upload that serves as a reference to guide *MidJourney*’s understanding. Image 11, 12 and 13 included the “<this image>” prompt in order to overcome a difficulty in getting *MidJourney* to produce results with straight hair (image 11); short hair on the side with much longer hair on the top (image 12); and a hairstyle with sisterlocks (image 13).








	Images	MidJourney Prompt		Images	MidJourney Prompt
17		School boy in uniform from Uganda	21		An african school child in private school uniform with hair that is lightened through a coloring process or hair colouring
18		School boy in uniform from Uganda with afrocentric hair styles that will be seen as unexeptable in terms of school rules	22		Black uganda school girl in private school uniform with straight hair in a ponytail
19		School girl in uniform from Uganda with a scarf around her head	23		Black uganda school girl in private school uniform with straight hair in a ponytail
20		School girl in uniform from Uganda with a scarf around her head			

Figure b: AI Photos with accompanying prompts version 2

After the final few iterations with *MidJourney*, and with the final selection of 23 photos above in Figure a and b, I approached another MPhil Inclusive Innovation student to give comment. This was the response:

I personally love these images but....

I think it would be more impactful if these hairstyles would be juxtaposed with a school rule and the equivalent Eurocentric style to illustrate the inequalities. For example, rules: natural hair colour only—the assumption that Black (afro) hair only comes in...well...Black, while Caucasian hair colours come in many natural shades which ultimately gives more choices to white learners. Example 2: short hairstyles for boys, male Africans can wear their hair long in dreadlocks and it is not unusual or eccentric.

The AI has also used some images which are ethnically ambiguous and "good looking" according to a western standard. I'm not seeing any wide, flat noses on skin as black as night with kinky hair.

Table 9 and 10 in the research study presents the finalised selection of AI-generated images.



APPENDIX 4



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@Commerce UCT



UCT Commerce Faculty Office

27 10 2022

Nic Richter

Graduate School of Business

University of Cape Town

REF: REC 2022/10/016

**HAIR CULTURE: WHERE AFROCENTRICITY AND EUROCENTRICTY MEET IN
POST-APARTHEID PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN CAPE TOWN**

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid until 31-Dec-2023 .

Your clearance may be renewed upon application.

Please be aware that you need to notify the Ethics Committee immediately should any aspect of your study regarding the engagement with participants as approved in this application, change. This may include aspects such as changes to the research design, questionnaires, or choice of participants.

The ongoing ethical conduct throughout the duration of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

We wish you well for your research.

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Jacques Rousseau
Commerce Research Ethics Chair
University of Cape Town
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Website: <http://www.commerce.uct.ac.za/com/Ethics-in-Research>

"Our Mission is to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society."





APPENDIX 5



2023/05/30

COM/00165/2023

RE: Research Ethics Committee Project Approval Letter

Dear Nicolaas Richter,

Your application for ethics review of your project titled

HAIR CULTURE: WHERE AFROCENTRICITY AND EUROCENTRICTY MEET IN POST-APARTHEID PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN CAPE TOWN

has been reviewed and evaluated by the
Commerce Research Ethics Committee.

You may proceed with your research project titled:

HAIR CULTURE: WHERE AFROCENTRICITY AND EUROCENTRICTY MEET IN POST-APARTHEID PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN CAPE TOWN

Please note that should:

- (i) any serious or adverse effects to participants occur and/or,
- (ii) aspect(s) of your current project change and/or
- (iii) any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project occur then you should immediately report this to the approving REC. You may be required to submit an amendment to this application, in order to determine whether the changed aspects increase the ethical risks of your project.

Based on the information supplied your application has been successful and is approved.

Please note the following additional conditions associated with this approval:

- (i) The data are low risk; PROVIDED that the data are suitably anonymised; with no data (on subjects / respondents) retained that would allow triangulation of the identity of the respondent. Audio recordings must be transcribed within a reasonable period of time after the interview, the audio files kept secure until the end of the project and then deleted; and the *anonymised transcriptions* (NOT the audio files, which may allow respondents to be identified) placed in a repository.

Regards,

Commerce Research Ethics Committee.



APPENDIX 6



MASTERS' BY DISSERTATION ONLY:

APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL

FULL NAME OF STUDENT	Nicolaas Jacobus Richter		
STUDENT NUMBER	RCHNIC015		
DEGREE REGISTERED FOR (Please circle)	MPhil X	MCom	MBusSci
DEPARTMENT	Graduate School of Business		
SUPERVISOR	Jess Auerbach		
*CO-SUPERVISOR/S	-		
DISSERTATION TITLE	HAIR CULTURE: WHERE AFROCENTRICITY AND EUROCENTRICTY MEET IN POST-APARTHEID PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN CAPE TOWN		

***Note:** Please indicate if your co-supervisor is external and from what institution/company or organization he/she is from.

SIGNATURE

Student:

Date: 15 September 2022

SIGNATURES

We confirm that the above candidate presented a seminar on [DATE]_____ in the [DEPARTMENT]_____ on the subject of this research proposal and we, the undersigned, recommend that the proposal be approved.

Presentation Panel

Title, Name, Surname	Position/Relationship to Student	Date of Presentation
Dr Latif Alhassan	Faculty Member	15 August 2022
Dr Annika Surmeier	Faculty Member	15 August 2022
Dr Caitlin Ferreira	Faculty Member	15 August 2022
Associate Prof Dr Jess Auerbach	Supervisor	15 August 2022

Supervisor(s): _____

Date: 16 Sept 2022

I hereby confirm that as Head of Department, I am of the view that the person(s) nominated as the Supervisor(s) is/are competent and has/have the time to supervise the this student.

Head of Department: _____

Date: 16 Sept 2022



APPENDIX 7



MASTERS' BY DISSERTATION ONLY:

APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL

FULL NAME OF STUDENT	Nicolaas Jacobus Richter		
STUDENT NUMBER	RCHNIC015		
DEGREE REGISTERED FOR (Please circle)	MPhil X	MCom	MBusSci
DEPARTMENT	Graduate School of Business		
SUPERVISOR	Jess Auerbach		
*CO-SUPERVISOR/S	-		
DISSERTATION TITLE	HAIR CULTURE: WHERE AFROCENTRICITY AND EUROCENTRICTY MEET IN POST-APARTHEID PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN CAPE TOWN		

***Note:** Please indicate if your co-supervisor is external and from what institution/company or organization he/she is from.

SIGNATURE

Students

Date: 28 April 2023

SIGNATURES

We confirm that the above candidate presented a seminar on [DATE]_____ in the [DEPARTMENT]_____, on the subject of this research proposal and we, the undersigned, recommend that the proposal be approved.

Presentation Panel

Title, Name, Surname	Position/Relationship to Student	Date of Presentation
Assoc Prof Jess Auerbach	Supervisor	15 August 2022
Dr Latif Alhassan	Faculty Member	15 August 2022
Dr Annika Surmeier	Faculty Member	15 August 2022
Dr Caitlin Ferreira	Faculty Member	15 August 2022

Supervisor(s): _____ **Date:** _____

I hereby confirm that as Head of Department, I am of the view that the person(s) nominated as the Supervisor(s) is/are competent and has/have the time to supervise the this student.

Head of Department: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX 8

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN INCLUSIVE INNOVATION

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM:

Participant name: _____

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by **Nic Richter** as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MPhil Degree at the Graduate School of Business. I understand that the research is designed to gather information about HAIR CULTURE: WHERE AFROCENTRICITY AND EUROCENTRICITY MEET IN POST-APARTHEID PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN CAPE TOWN and that I will be one of approximately 15 of people being interviewed for this research.

Background and purpose of the research

My research aims to explore how notions of beauty are understood by parents of black students at elite private Cape Town schools, particularly natural Black hair practises and how they are governed by contested, pro-Eurocentric codes of conduct that are not representative of or inclusive of the general South African population. Its findings hope to lobby the Department of Education and guide private and public school policies to help South Africa progress towards adopting a law similar to that of the United States of America's suggested Crown Act (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural hair).

Ethics approval

Ethical consent for the study has been approved by the *UCT Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee*.

Participation and confidentiality

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, that I will not be compensated and that I may withdraw at any time. The interview will take approximately 45 - 60 minutes to complete and will be audio recorded. I understand that I will not be identified by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

Consent

I consent to participate in this interview, based on the terms outlined above and subject to the following additional condition of my own (if any).

Signed by interviewee

Date

Signed by Student

Date

APPENDIX 9

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: HAIR CULTURE: WHERE AFROCENTRICITY AND EUROCENTRICITY MEET IN POST-APARTHEID PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN CAPE TOWN

- ✓ Your MPhil Journey
- ✓ Proposal
- ✓ Ethical Approval
- ✓ My contract with you
- ✓ My contract with the University
- ✓ My data management plan
- ✓ Cultural inclusivity and inclusive education
- ✓ My research question

Photos

Cultural Inclusivity:

Cultural inclusivity in education refers to the creation of learning environments that recognise, respect, and value diverse cultural identities, practices and expressions of all learners. This includes accepting and accommodating diverse cultural elements such as language, dress, hair styles, customs, and ways of knowing as integral parts of learners' identities.

How are notions of Afrocentric hair, in terms of natural Black hair, managed by decision-makers in private schools in Cape Town?

- How long has your child been at (school)
- Was your child in any schools before?
- Why did you choose this school?
- What is the racial makeup of the school?
- And what is the racial makeup of the teachers and management body?
- As a parent, how do you believe beauty standards impact students' experiences?
- Photos
 - Which hairstyles have you seen? (photos)
 - Are there any predominant hairstyles that you notice among the students? (photos)
 - Which one of these hairstyles have you not seen at school? (photos)
 - What do you think might be the reasons why certain hairstyles are not seen at school? (photos)
 - Do you think any hair here is against the school code of conduct? (photos)
 - What specific elements of the hairstyles do you think might conflict with the code of conduct, if any? (photos)
 - These photos are all AI-generated, do you think the tool is giving an accurate representation of Afrocentric hair
- How much input do you have as a parent in formulating the code of conduct?

- Do you feel that parental input is adequately considered in the formulation of the code of conduct? Why?
- Are there areas of the code of conduct that could be more inclusive? Why?
- Who are the main stakeholders at the moment when hair policies are considered?
- What has worked to influence hair policy at the school?
- Do you feel the school has enough knowledge of Afrocentric beauty standards to make the rules inclusive?

How can policy changes be implemented in Cape Town private schools, where notions of beauty are formed within complex contexts?

- What, in your view, can influence policymakers to revise hair rules?
- Are you aware of any challenges or concerns related to the current grooming policies?
- What are the barriers to students adhering to the hair rules?
- How can potential resistance be addressed or mitigated to foster a positive atmosphere during policy implementation?
- How can various stakeholders be involved in the formulation and review of new policies?
- What steps can be taken to ensure the successful implementation of new policies related to hair rules and beauty standards?
- How can awareness and understanding of the different cultural beauty standards be effectively communicated to the school community?
- How important is it to have input from students, parents, and teachers in the policy-making process?
- How can policy changes be designed to respect individual rights and cultural sensitivities?
- Are there any potential unintended consequences of policy changes that need to be carefully considered?
- Do you think the school policy is inclusive and sensitive to cultural diversity?
- Are there any examples from other schools or regions where policy revisions have been successful?

How and why have some private schools in Cape Town created inclusive, representative environments for their learners, whereas others have struggled to do this with regard to hair?

- Are you familiar with any schools or institutions that have successfully implemented policy changes to promote inclusivity in beauty standards?

- In your opinion, what would be the ideal beauty policy that celebrates diversity and inclusivity?
- Have there been any recent initiatives or policies implemented to promote inclusivity and representation?
 - Follow Up to Yes. How have these policies been developed, and what stakeholders were involved in the process?
- Are there specific examples of students with Afrocentric hairstyles or natural Black hair being celebrated and represented positively in the school community?
- Can you share any success stories or instances where the school effectively embraced diverse beauty standards?
- To what extent are notions of beauty and hair influenced by the school's overall culture and values?
- How much influence and involvement do parents have in shaping the school's policies and attitudes toward Afrocentric beauty and natural Black hair?
- Have school staff members received training or education on cultural sensitivity, diversity, and representation?
 - Follow Up if Yes. How do these training initiatives impact the school's approach to Afrocentric beauty and natural Black hair?
- How does the school communicate its policies and values related to grooming and hair to students, parents, and staff?

Closing Question

If you were researching this topic - what questions would you ask?