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Regulating Cultural Expressions in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Case Study on Pretoria High School for Girls

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REGULATING CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA:
A CASE STUDY ON PRETORIA HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	Page 3
INTRODUCTION.....	Page 4-5
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	Page 6-15
METHODOLOGY.....	Page 16-17
LIMITATIONS OF STUDY.....	Page 18
FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	Page 19
HAIR EQUALS RACE/BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS.....	Page 21-23
HAIR EQUALS SOLIDARITY.....	Page 23-25
HAIR EQUALS EUROCENTRISM/WHITENESS/ASSIMILATION.....	Page 25-27
HAIR EQUALS POLITICS/DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENTS.....	Page 27-28
HAIR EQUALS WELLNESS/MENTAL HEALTH.....	Page 28-29
AFTERMATH.....	Page 29-31
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	Page 32-38
APPENDICES.....	Page 39-41

ABSTRACT

Within the social sciences, there is some debate about multiculturalism's compatibility with governing institutions in liberal democracies. Multiculturalism is a sociological concept that states cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those belonging to a minority group, deserve special acknowledgment of their differences within a dominant political culture. While promising in theory, the implementation of multiculturalism can lead to superficial recognition of differences and uphold institutionalized racism. I plan to use Pretoria High School for Girls as a single case study to examine the lingering heritage of apartheid and to better understand the tensions between multiculturalism and anti-racism in historically white South African schools through grooming policies that disproportionately impact Black women. This study will be qualitative in design and involve non-probability sampling of tweets under the hashtag #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh, press releases, video interviews, and news articles. Overall, the sample of texts reveals three prominent trends in the discourse of hair discrimination on media platforms with black consciousness accounting for 27.4%, solidarity accounting for 17.7%, and Eurocentric ideals accounting for 34.5% of the content.

INTRODUCTION

Pretoria High School for Girls (“Girls’ High”) was founded in 1902 with the goal of establishing an educational institution committed to diversity and inclusion. Despite its lofty goals to become a cultural melting pot, Pretoria High School for Girls served a predominantly white population during the apartheid era. In 1990, Girls’ High admitted its first group of Black learners after parents and pupils overwhelmingly voted to open the school to girls of other races. The expansion symbolized the school’s commitment to becoming more representative of the rainbow nation.

Often referred to as the “rainbow nation,” South Africa is well-known for its racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. However, scholars suggest that the lingering effects of apartheid and white supremacy on institutional structures impede South Africa’s efforts to consolidate their democracy as a multicultural state (Jarivs 2016; Gibson & Gouws 2000; Kittlinson & Schwindt-Bayer 2010). These effects are especially evident within South Africa’s education system, and in particular, formerly white schools that contain a demographic mix of learners. Formerly white schools often lack inclusive structures to accommodate their diverse student population and instead require that students assimilate through stringent codes of conduct and grooming policies that disproportionately impact black learners.

In 2016, Pretoria High School for Girls became the subject of intense media scrutiny for its racist grooming policies. Black students protested a clause in the school’s code of conduct that banned wide cornrows, braids, and dreadlocks. Photos from the student-led protest went viral and sparked a national debate on racism in education with the hashtag #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh being used more than 150,000 times on Twitter. The protest led to provincial education minister Panyaza Lesufi suspending Girls’ High’s hair clause and

launching an independent investigation into charges of racism at the school. Members of the African National Congress, Economic Freedom Fighters, and Democratic Alliance also weighed in on the situation. The pressures of the social media resistance campaign and government intervention led to Girls' High changing its code of conduct. Despite the success of the social media campaign, cases of hair discrimination in formerly white schools continue to arise annually because South Africa lacks a permanent solution to combat this issue. Therefore, the central research questions of this paper are as follows:

- (1) How do historically white schools in South Africa regulate cultural expressions through grooming policies?
- (2) How has hair been racialized through apartheid-era legislation and policy?
- (3) What are the challenges of multiculturalism in a liberal democracy such as South Africa?
- (4) What is the cultural significance of hair for people in the African Diaspora?
- (5) Does South Africa need federal legislation to ban hair discrimination?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review will discuss literature that has examined the role of whiteness in shaping apartheid education, resistances against apartheid, the conflict between multicultural initiatives and democratic institutions, and hair discrimination across the African Diaspora. Whiteness encroached upon the soils of South Africa in 1652 when Dutch settlers established a colony in the Western Cape. Europeans who traveled to the continent documented their interactions with natives in journals and perpetuated a narrative that “inferior, uncivilized peoples and areas ought to be occupied and controlled by those civilized and powerful” (Jarvis 2016, p. 26). Africa was largely portrayed as a vacant land with its history “reduced to tribal battles and internecine wars” (Biko 1978, p. 29). The justifications for colonialism were embedded in these 16th-century publications of natives and gave rise to white supremacy. Jarvis (2016) argues one function of whiteness is to establish social and cultural capital “with ‘cultural capital’ consisting of cultural facets as taste, attitudes, dispositions, language and accents, qualifications and skills, and ‘social capital’ referring to the degree which benefits accrue to individuals by virtue of them being connected to particular social groups...” (p. 31). In other words, whiteness determines the standards by which others are measured up against; it is the benchmark for civilization. Pieterse (1998), whose scholarly work centers on global political economy, development studies, and cultural studies, interrogates the binaries that were used to establish a social order of western dominance and white supremacy. Pieterse (1998) argues that “for the missions to justify themselves the heathen *had to be* perceived and labeled as degraded creatures sunk deep in darkness who needed to be brought to the light” (p. 71). Even though the Europeans were the aggressors in colonial projects, they blamed the natives for their own colonization. Victim-blaming served a dual purpose of absolving colonizers from the negative effects of colonization

and justifying the brutality of their actions. In a similar fashion as Pieterse, Gordon (2011) points out that “dominant organizations of knowledge [treated colonized people] as problems instead of people who face problems. Their problem status is a function of the presupposed legitimacy of the systems that generate them” (p. 97). The West’s need to construct justifications for colonialism suggests that the primary motivation for taking ownership of occupied land was not the purported inferiority of the colonized subjects. Rather, their true motivations lied in the resources the land possessed, and the subjects became “problems” because they stood in the way of those resources. The findings of Pieterse and Gordon are analogous to Jarvis’ (2016) argument that “in its most mobilised form whiteness is a bourgeois construct...” (p. 33). Capitalism and whiteness are two sides of the same coin. They gain their power through the exploitation of black bodies and the extraction of cheap labor. The apartheid state in South Africa weaponized whiteness through a series of legislative acts relegating natives to ‘homelands’ and legalizing segregation. According to Posel (2001), apartheid offered a system of order; “boundaries were to be reasserted and spaces reorganized, the movements of people systematised and contained” (p. 52). The most relevant organizational act for the purposes of this review is the Bantu Education Act which the literature covers extensively.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 was a South African segregation law that enforced racially separated education facilities. Jarvis (2016) argues that “Africans were needed primarily to provide cheap labour and were in no way prepared for positions from which they would be able to undermine the well-being of whites” (p. 107). The primary goals of apartheid education were to give black learners basic skills to perform manual labor and to condition them to accept the social order of white dominance. In the case of Black South Africans, the school functioned as a pipeline to the unskilled labor market. Education for Black South Africans existed for the

purpose of supporting the white economy. Hendrik Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs at the time, stated that “There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour...What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice?” However, South Africa has a tradition of student-led protests against the Bantu Education system with the Soweto Uprisings of 1976. The uprisings led to increased pressure from the international community to end apartheid in South Africa.

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND RESISTANCE AGAINST APARTHEID

The Black Consciousness Movement (“BCM”) in South Africa influenced young people to take pride in their heritage and advocate for a total restructuring of South African society around black culture. In his seminal book *I Write What I Like*, Steve Biko (1978) defines black consciousness as “the realization by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude” (p. 49). Biko (1978) attributes the need for black consciousness to the debilitating conditions apartheid created for Black South Africans. In describing the psychological tolls of apartheid, Biko (1978) contends that “the black man has become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity” (p. 29). Not only did the apartheid state oppress Black South Africans, but it also wanted them to be content with their own oppression. Biko (1978) rejects a bilateral approach involving blacks and whites to ending apartheid and instead advocates for self-determination. Self-determination is a core tenant espoused by the BCM and involves a radical restructuring of society around the dominant culture. For Biko (1978) it is only logical that “the culture by the

majority group in any given society must ultimately determine the broad direction taken by the joint culture of that society” (p. 24). Even though Steve Biko is recognized as the founder of the BCM in South Africa, his approach fails to acknowledge a critical constituency of the liberation movement: black women.

In her expansive ethnographic book *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness*, Ingrid Banks examines the role hair plays in cultivating black women's consciousness in North America. Banks (2000) argues that “the very act of self-definition renders power” (p. 70). Self-definition requires an active dismissal of hegemonic norms and a paradigm shift in conceptions of being. The anti-pass campaign is a prime example of a rallying cause in which many Black South African women rejected the notion of second-class citizenship being an inherent circumstance of their identity. hooks (1978) also acknowledges the power of self-definition and sheds light on the steps oppressors took to suppress black consciousness. The suppression of black consciousness occurred alongside the global expansion of capitalism during which “white corporations began to acknowledge black people and most especially black women as potential consumers of products they could provide, including hair-care products” (hooks 1978, p. 2). Capitalism led to the concentration of wealth shifting from black communities to big corporations and the perpetuation of white supremacy in beauty and politics. Although the literature on black women's consciousness and hair lacks an explicit focus on South Africa, it highlights the fact that struggles for black liberation are happening across the African diaspora and that “the black-white power struggle in South Africa is but a microcosm of the global confrontation between the Third World and the rich white nations of the world...” (Biko 1978, p. 72).

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND MULTICULTURALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

As a burgeoning democracy, South Africa's institutions play a vital role in ensuring the country's prosperity. Kittlinson & Schwindt-Bayer (2010) argue that "institutions act as symbols and send signals to citizens about the importance of inclusiveness to the democratic process" (p. 990). Institutions not only establish the foundations of democracy, but they also transmit and uphold the country's values. Schools are one space where democratic ideals have the potential to be contested or reinforced. Education is often administered by the government and therefore is an extension of the polity (Appiah 1994). Given their role as part of the political domain, schools can function as "power-sharing systems" which Kittlinson & Schwindt-Bayer (2010) say embody "democratic ideals such as inclusion and broad representation" with a focus on "generat[ing] governments that are representatives of a wide array of interests" (p. 991). Even though the literature lacks an explicit connection between schools and democratic institutions, Jarvis' (2016) analysis brings us closer to understanding the way schools perpetuate western liberal exceptionalism.

Jarvis (2016) refers to schools as "socialising agents in society" (p. 49) due to the role they play in conditioning learners to have an "uncritical acceptance of the existing social order" (p. 49). The legacy of apartheid lingers in formerly white schools because learners enter these spaces under a social contract. While the prestigious formerly white schools agree to educate black learners, they must abandon their blackness in exchange for their education and assimilate into white culture. Jarvis (2016) illustrates the social contract between learners and institutions further by adding that at formerly white schools "Pupils have had no option but to 'fit in,' and many parents have felt disinclined to ask questions about how the school functions, for fear of compromising the quality of schooling they have been led to believe that their children will

receive” (p. 114). These formerly white schools have the means to perpetuate whiteness while going unchecked and the key to their success is multiculturalism (Jarvis 2016; Oyedemi 2016).

The relationship between multicultural institutions and school regulations of cultural expressions is also left unexplored by the literature. However, Jarvis (2016) and Appiah (1994) provide useful theoretical frameworks for assessing the potentiality of schools to be truly democratic in their discussion of multiculturalism. Appiah (1994) contends that multiculturalism errs by heightening differences among learners instead of trying to reduce them (p. 12). For example, educators will include topics in the curriculum in order to raise the self-esteem of marginalized learners but will not meaningfully engage with the structures that enable white supremacy. Jarvis (2016) attributes this trend in part to the fact that “liberal multi-culturalism masks the degree to which whites benefit from such exclusive group membership” (p. 44). White learners do not view themselves in racialized terms and have the privilege of receiving an education based on their customs and traditions. Going back to black consciousness, Biko (1978) dismisses the idea that integration is equal by defining it as “a breakthrough into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms and code of behavior set up and maintained by whites” (p. 24). Black learners enter these formerly white schools expecting to be treated with equal dignity but are singled out by their race and culture. Appiah (1994) builds upon that argument by stating “[i]t will not be enough to require that one be treated with equal dignity despite being black: for that will require a concession that being black counts naturally or to some degree against one’s dignity” (p. 25). Overall, the literature supports the finding that multicultural education should involve critical engagement with diverse cultures and the interrogation of identity attributes.

HAIR AS A SIGNIFIER FOR RACE AND CLASS

The body of research on hair discrimination is limited and outdated, especially within a South African context. However, scholars across disciplines argue that hair is an indicator of blackness and subsequently, a marker of culture. For hooks (1978), straightening one's hair in the black community "was connected solely with rites of initiation into womanhood" (p. 1). The appearance of a black woman's hair would reveal details about them such as their age, maturity level, and relationship with femininity. Taking care of one's hair in the comfort of one's home or at a beauty parlor was one way black women built community with each other. hooks (1978) states that "Hair pressing was a ritual of black women's culture of intimacy" (p. 2) and allowed them to create communal spaces where "we as women work to meet each other's needs, to make each other feel good inside..." (p. 2). Banks (2000) argues that "Hair matters because it is a part of our being, of our very existence that has meaning on the level of ideas and materiality" (p. 25). Black women construct their definitions of beauty in relation to their hair and skin color which are the primary signifiers of race. The good hair vs. bad hair debate positions blackness at the periphery and upholds whiteness as the golden standard for beauty. Banks (2000) contends that in this debate "the pride and elegance that once symbolized curly and kinky hair immediately bec[o]me[s] a badge of racial inferiority" (p. 7). Banks' (2000) argument about recognition of beauty is linked to hooks' (1978) point about Black women craving recognition through processed hairstyles. hooks (1978) cites Black women's fear of losing approval and recognition as their primary motivation for straightening their hair. Beauty has a close relationship with sexuality and the desire to become the subject of the male gaze which Black women identify as an influence for styling their hair (Banks 2000; Hooks 1978; Tate 2009). As

previously stated, hair is also seen as a profitable commodity that furthers the goal of capitalism of materializing everything.

While there are some black feminist scholars who advocate for Black women to wear their 'natural' hair, Tate (2009) represents a departure in the literature based on her definition of black aesthetics. Tate (2009) argues that Black women etch beauty unto their bodies by including artificial materials in their hair care process. She classifies "lenses, wigs, blonde hair dye not as approximations of whiteness but as 'versionings' of Black beauty" (p. 28). When Black women wear weave or braid extensions, they are participating in global commerce where cross-cultural exchanges happen and influence the ways Black women perform blackness (Tate 2009; Oyedemi 2016). The fluid relationship between hair and the black community is further outlined by Andre Powe (2009) who argues that "Hairstyles have memory and meaning. Each hairstyle choice tells an intimate story of the wearer, disclosing a personal narrative to spectators" (p. 2). Hair contains heritage and messages that are transmitted from older generations to younger generations. Powe's classification of hair as a language provides a new lens to analyze the activism of South African youth and to draw parallels to other black consciousness movements. Furthermore, Powe's focus on language builds upon the work of Stuart Hall (1977) and his theory of the floating signifier. Stuart Hall's theory of the floating signifier is useful in understanding how hair has been used as a measure of blackness from a socio-historical framework. Stuart Hall was a cultural theorist and a professor of Sociology at Open University in the United Kingdom. In his lecture "Race, The Floating Signifier," Hall states the following about signifiers: "Their meaning, because it is relational, and not essential, can never be finally fixed, but is subject to the constant process of redefinition and appropriation" (Hall 1997). In defining the floating signifier, Hall prefaces a constructionist approach in which one's production of meaning does not

rely on determinism or universal truths. Hall also undermines essentialist thinking through his contention that the signifier is always under construction because its meaning changes based on the experience of the person telling the story.

The apartheid state relied on fluid constructions of race in order to attach value and privileges to certain groups. Posel (2001) argues that “if anything and everything could be read as a sign of race, then race was *in* everything -- a ubiquitous dimension of everyday life...” (p. 65). The architects of apartheid believed racial differences were blatantly obvious and used arbitrary measures that considered an individual’s social standing within their community, skin color, heritage, educational background, etc to determine if they fit into the category of white or Black African. The pencil test was one arbitrary measure the apartheid state used to distinguish between whites and coloreds. Posel (2001) contends that “Some officials read racial differences into the texture of a person’s hair, the notorious pencil test being used to determine the boundary between ‘white’ and ‘non-white.’ Appeal boards adjudicating requests for reclassification sometimes called barbers to testify as to the texture of the person’s hair” (p. 59). These arbitrary classifications lead to disparate outcomes for some colored families whose children were forced to attend segregated facilities based on whether or not the pencil stayed in their hair. The legacy of the pencil test adds fuel to the global debate on the widespread representation of Eurocentric beauty standards in terms of professionalism and femininity.

Overall, the literature suggests that the principle of multiculturalism is discordant with South Africa’s democratic institutions. Differences among learners are superficially acknowledged in formerly white schools, and the complex systems of interlocking oppression are not thoroughly engaged. The legacies of apartheid appear in codes of conduct that disproportionately impact black learners. Black learners are coerced into the assimilation of

whiteness in exchange for a better education even if that means relinquishing their autonomy over their hair. The literature documents the significance of hair across the African Diaspora but lacks a distinct focus on how cultural expressions are regulated through codes of conduct and grooming policies. Furthermore, the literature has not interrogated the potentiality schools have to be democratic spaces where values are contested and reconfigured.

METHODOLOGY

The study primarily employs a qualitative research design for a single case study. Crowe et. al (2011) states that the purpose of implementing a case study approach to research is to explore complex, multi-faceted issues in their real-life settings. Case studies are useful for investigating an event or phenomenon in depth and within a particular context. I identified a concise timeline of events and key actors involved in the Girls' High protests. The MEC's investigation on claims of racism at Girls' High spanned between the end of August and the beginning of December in 2016. Subsequently, I selected a sample of 48 tweets from users who adopted the hashtag #StopRacisimAtPretoriaGirlsHigh between August 26, 2016, and December 7, 2016.

The sampling method I adopted when searching for tweets was non-probability sampling. Cornesse et. al (2020) provides the following justifications for employing non-probability sampling in a research study: "(i) that any sample examining a particular question will yield the same inferences, (ii) that the specific design of the sample, as related to the questions at hand, will produce conclusions that mirror the population of interests, (iii) that a series of analytical steps will account for any differences between the sample and the population, and (iv) that the particular combination of sample and/or analytic approaches will produce accurate population estimates" (p. 8). For the purpose of this case study, this method of sampling was favorable since the goal of my study is to measure public opinion on cases of hair discrimination in formerly white South African schools. The demographic of users is a particular one because I selected tweets based on the use of the hashtag #StopRacisimAtPretoriaGirlsHigh and the timeline of the Gauteng MEC's investigation. My data collection also included extensive media coverage in the form of news articles, press conferences, video interviews, and public statements which

documented the actions and viewpoints of protesters, school administrators, and elected officials during the specified timeframe.

For my data analysis, I created five codes to analyze the content of my sample texts. The advantages of content analysis for research include the following: 1) unobtrusive data collection, 2) transparent and replicable, and 3) highly flexible. The first code I created is notated as “Hair equals Race/Black Consciousness” and defined as words and phrases that address race, Black consciousness, and empowerment. The second code I created is notated as “Hair equals Solidarity” and defined as words and phrases that capture the support for Black learners and the collaborative nature of the student protests. The third code I created is notated as “Hair equals Eurocentrism/Whiteness/Assimilation” and defined as words and phrases that propagate assimilation into whiteness and Eurocentric ideals. The fourth code I created is notated as “Hair equals Politics/Democratic Engagement” and defined as words and phrases that address government intervention, the role of democratic institutions, and constitutional rights. The fifth code I created is notated as “Hair equals Wellness/Mental Health” and defined as words and phrases that qualify the effects of racism on mental health and self-esteem for Black learners. As a continuation of my data analysis, I quantified the prominence of particular codes that emerged during this case study. I achieved this by calculating the frequency in which the five codes appeared in the content of my sample texts. I employed statistical analysis to measure the significance of thematic trends in the Girls’ High protests.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Given the fact that this case study involves a viral social media campaign, one is bound to encounter bias in non-probability sampling. Berzofsky et. al (2018) argues that “while research has been conducted to correct for potential non-sampling error, it is not clear if the inherent bias of a non-probability sample can be corrected” (p. 1). My content sample of tweets includes a demographic mix of Twitter users who tweeted from all over the world to voice their public opinions on claims of racism at Pretoria High School for Girls. I did not control variables such as geographic location, race, gender, and age which means this study is limited to the respondent sample. However, I contend that the phenomena of racism in predominantly white-serving institutions is appropriately distributed in any broad population sample, and the specific composition of my sample is unlikely to influence my findings.

As a research methodology, content analysis usually requires some degree of subjective interpretation. Consequently, the researcher’s bias can affect the reliability and validity of the results and conclusions. I have attempted to mitigate the level of bias present in my research by having my advisor look over my data codes and finding more sources that address the corrective actions of the Gauteng MEC and the school governing body at Pretoria High School for Girls.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this ISP was to explore to what degree does the #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh social media campaign allow one to understand the multiculturalism and anti-racism debate in other formerly white South African schools. This case study aimed to investigate how democratic institutions, such as schools, handle conflict between multiculturalism and anti-racism. Examining a case study of hair discrimination in a formerly white South African school served as a window into broader regulations of cultural expressions in post-apartheid South Africa. This study aimed to answer the following questions: (1) How do historically white schools in South Africa regulate cultural expressions through grooming policies? (2) How has hair been racialized through apartheid-era legislation and policy? (3) What are the challenges of multiculturalism in a liberal democracy such as South Africa? (4) What is the cultural significance of hair for people in the African Diaspora? (5) Does South Africa need federal legislation to ban hair discrimination? In order to answer these research questions, this study will focus on data collected from media coverage in the form of tweets, news articles, press conferences, video interviews, and public documents.

Prior to the viral social media campaign, Pretoria High School for Girls' code of conduct contained language that singled out hairstyles worn by Black learners. Figure 1 shows the general appearance clause stated the following:

Cornrows, natural dreadlocks and singles/braids (with or without extensions) are allowed, provided they are a maximum of 10mm in diameter. Singles/braids must be the same length and be the natural colour of the girl's hair. Braids shorter than collar length must be kept off the face with a plain navy or tortoise shell alice band. Longer braids must be

tied back. No beads or decorations in the hair. Cornrows must run parallel from each other from the forehead to the nape of the neck. No patterned cornrows.

The language of the general appearance clause limited the cultural expression of Black learners in several ways. Firstly, the restriction in the width of 10mm does not take into consideration the hair thickness of Black learners. In a compilation YouTube video, an alumna of Girls' High recalls "one of [her] friends ha[ving] to shave off her beautiful long dreads because it wasn't allowed in school" (Multimedia LIVE 2016). Secondly, the clause also required hair to be the same length which posed challenges to Black learners who had braids or dreadlocks of varying lengths. The Daily Maverick reported that Leago Mamabolo, 18 and a pupil at Girls' High at the time of the protests, was instructed to fix her dreadlocks in order to satisfy the code's tidiness requirement. Mamabolo explained to her instructor that her dreadlocks were cut into different lengths and were too heavy to be tied back. For Mamabolo the code of conduct is "not just about hair. You're in fear when you go to school because you know you will be policed." (Nicolson 2016). Thirdly, the clause does not account for other hairstyles worn by Black learners such as Afros. Zulaikha Patel, 13 and a pupil at Girls' High at the time of the protests, tells CNN "The issue of my hair has been a thing that's followed me my entire life, even in Primary I was told my hair is not natural, it's exotic, my Afro was not wanted or anything like that and the issue followed me to High School" (Vilakazi 2016). Pictures of Patel and her Afro went viral on social media and led protestors to show their solidarity by chanting "One afro, one black woman" in a video as told by Twitter user @Mary_JaneSA (Mphahlele 2016). The exclusion of Afros from the code of conduct lead to arbitrary reinforcement of the rules from instructors which disproportionately impacted Black learners. Tiiseto Phetla, a former pupil at Girls' High at the time of the protests, observed the following in a video interview:

the system did not allow for black girls to have afros. It wasn't written in the code of conduct, but they tell you your hair is very untidy, and it's appropriate with the school uniform. You must flatten it somehow and you need to make yourself look presentable. It's understandable if your hair is really now in your face and everything, but if your hair is neatly tight and your afro is neatly tight, why must you be apologetic for being a Black African child in South Africa. Why must black girls receive the shortest end of the stick? (Child 2016).

HAIR EQUALS RACE/BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

The theme of race and black consciousness in relation to hair was one of the first to emerge from my sample of texts. The literature supports the notion that hair is a signifier for race which is why I was not surprised to find Twitter users adopting words and phrases that likened hair to cultural practices of Black people across the African Diaspora. One Twitter user reposted an image of a protestor carrying a sign that reads "My hair does not need fixing! Society's view of Blackness is what is broken! #BLACKNESSMUSTRISE" (Mphahlele 2016). South African Minister of Sports, Arts, and Culture, Nathi Mthethwa, weighed in on the situation and tweeted the following statements:

Schools should not be used as a platform to discourage students from embracing their African Identity. #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Mthethwa 2016).

To assert our language & hair, is to assert one's cultural belonging. Schools must embrace cultural diversity. #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Mthethwa 2016).

Let us continue to assert our Africanness in all spaces so that we can breathe & be truly, fully ourselves. #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Mthethwa 2016).

Overall, the sample shows that 27.4% of content written about #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh addressed issues of race and Black consciousness with respect to hair (See Figure 4). This statistic shows that the legacy of Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement deeply resonates with some Twitter users and elected officials and informs more than ¼ of the public opinion discussion on racism in South African schools. Other Twitter users published the following tweets about Blackness existing in predominantly white-serving institutions:

Master-servant mentality must fall #StopHighSchoolRacism

#StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh #CheckPoint (Manyoni 2016).

Always great to see africans reclaiming their hair and other aspects of the spectrum concerning the race. #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Mood 2016).

Leave our hair alone. Schools are for studying. My hair my choice.

#StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (LC 2016).

While Black South Africans may be a minority in formerly white schools, Black learners continue an apartheid-era tradition of youth-led resistance against oppressive white structures that seek to exclude them from the dominant culture. Furthermore, the discourse on Twitter recognizes that the struggle of #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh is connected with other student-led resistance campaigns in South Africa such as #FeesMustFall and the Soweto Uprisings of 1976.

HAIR EQUALS SOLIDARITY

The theme of solidarity in relation to hair was another trend to emerge from my sample of texts. The literature supports the notion that solidarity among Black women is a tenet of Black

feminist theory and one of the ways minority groups can tackle issues of racism. The #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh Twitter campaign captures the solidarity and support users had for young Black girls who resisted their school's racist code of conduct. The Daily Vox reposted a video on Twitter that documented the protestors' confrontation with police and the young women respond to the threat of arrest by chanting "take us all!" (The Daily Vox 2016). Elected officials also articulated their support for Black pupils protesting against Girls' High on Twitter and in media press releases:

Firstly, we support the stance of Pretoria Girls High students to protect their right to have natural hair #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Mthethwa 2016).

The young ones have shown the way #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh, stop being a coward & speak against injustice at your workplace & everywhere (Malema 2016).

The ANCWL supports the young fearless black girls at Pretoria Girls High school for standing firm in dealing with the racism they are experiencing at their school. South Africans should not tolerate any form of racism and must work together to deal with structural racism in our formerly white schools (City Press 2016).

Overall, the sample shows that 17.7% of content written about #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh expressed solidarity with the struggles of Black pupils (See Figure 4). This statistic highlights the importance of exhibiting solidarity and unity when confronting racist structures and the collective power rooted in the Black radical tradition of agitating white supremacy. Other Twitter users posted the following tweets expressing sentiments of collective action on social media:

Parktown Girls' protest today, in solidarity w #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (The Daily Vox 2016)

Schools from Atteridgeville and Mamelodi showing their support to

#StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Ngobese 2016)

Former pupil out here to support #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Child 2016)

SA hair protest: 'Natural beauty. Leave our sisters alone' (BBC Africa 2016)

So Zulaikha Patel's the face of the #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh? Why do we always insist on celebrification in collective movements? Wha? (Guuuuuuurl 2016)

Overall, the protests at Pretoria High School for Girls seemed to cause a chain reaction at other South African schools that wrestled with this same issue. Instead of waiting for government intervention, The Washington Post reported that Parktown Girls High School amended its code of conduct in order to create a more inclusive environment for its students. Anthea Cereseto, the school's headmistress, provided the following justification via email to the Post: "We do not have a problem with hairstyles. We believe the hair issue is the superficial manifestation of something deeper in the country which needs to be dealt with" (Mahr 2016). The literature supports the notion that the legacy of white supremacy in South African schools persists despite the end of apartheid rule in 1994. Furthermore, the literature also recognizes the capacity of schools to be socializing agents and transform democratic ideals. The chain reaction of school-reforms is consistent with the theoretical framework of a successful model of multicultural education in liberal democracies.

HAIR EQUALS EUROCENTRISM/WHITENESS/ASSIMILATION

The themes of Eurocentrism, whiteness, and assimilation were the most prominent trends to emerge from my sample of texts. The literature supports the notion that the legacy of apartheid lingers in South Africa's democratic institutions which is why I was not surprised to find that the

discourse on whiteness dominated the conversation. One alumna of Pretoria High School for Girls shared the following about her experience at the school on Twitter at the time of the protests:

When I was in Girls High I was always stopped in the corridor and instructed to
FLATTEN MY AFRO #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Atlili 2016).

I was told I look BARBARIC for having an AFRO!!! #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh
(Atlili 2016).

The school's explicit discontent with black hairstyles is observed by other alumnae of Girls High who witnessed and experienced discrimination at the hands of faculty and staff. In a compilation YouTube video, an alumna shares "Very often girls' afros were called bird's nests, a bush." (Multimedia LIVE 2016). Another alumna confesses she witnessed pupils being "stopped at corridors because their hair was apparently untamed, and they had to pat their hair until it goes down." (Multimedia LIVE 2016) The leader of the opposition for the Democratic Alliance tweeted the following in response to the protests at Girls' High: "My daughter has an Afro. It's the only way she wears her hair. Would she not be allowed PTA girls?" (Maimane 2016).

Overall, the sample shows that 34.5% of the content written about #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh focused on the discourse of Eurocentric ideals in a majority Black country (See Figure 4). This statistic suggests that South Africa continues to struggle with how to move the country forward given the lasting impression apartheid made on its institutions and more than 1/3 of public opinion discussion on racism in South African schools is informed by apartheid's legacy. Other Twitter users posted the following tweets about white-serving institutions expecting Black South Africans to assimilate into whiteness:

#StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh just realized how my own high school underhandedly discouraged blackness (Obonyo 2016).

The shaming of Black Women's bodies cannot continue to be a casual matter

#StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Moshenberg 2016).

Keep your straight hair! Keep your standards of fairness and beauty...#blackpride

#StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Tsokotsa 2016).

Been told that to be successful = relax hair & drop African name #ProudToBeAfrican

#StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (kiwanuka 2016).

At school we learn our names r complicated, nose-ugly, hair-untidy, skin-dirty! We learn 2be at war with our bodies. #StopRacismInSchools (Mpungose 2016).

Overall the protests at Pretoria High School for Girls seemed to rekindle the debate on anti-racism initiatives in South Africa. The literature suggests that the multicultural narrative of the rainbow nation tends to mask the issues of modern-day racism in South Africa. The findings of this section are consistent with the theory that diverse liberal democracies experience tension with multiculturalism.

HAIR EQUALS POLITICS/DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

The theme of politics and democratic engagement in relation to hair emerged as a minor trend from my sample of texts. The literature supports the notion that Black hair is politicized for people of African descent and can be a method of resistance. However, I was surprised by the limited focus on the democratic engagements of protestors within my content sample. The African National Congress issued the following statement at a press conference on the Girls' High protests: "The ANC commends the steps that have been taken by the democratic

government...Let the child have the braids...Encourage more students to come forward” (Eyewitness News 2016). In a video interview, the mayor of Pretoria had the following to say about the Girls’ High protests: “They find themselves having to protest things that could have been prevented...Let us be more proactive. Let us find a more permanent solution” (SABC News 2016). The statements of these elected officials seem to suggest that the onus is on the South African government to address these issues and the success of resolving claims of racism is partially determined by whether citizens feel the need to protest. The perspective of these elected officials could be partially influenced by the history of student-led protests that resulted in property destruction and school cancellations. One popular slogan of the Soweto Uprisings of 1976 was “Liberation before education!”

Overall, the sample shows that 12.4% of content written about #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh focused on politics and democratic engagements (See Figure 4). This low statistic suggests that the discourse focused less on the political nature over the Girls’ High protests and more on the political response of the South African government. These two Twitter users published the following tweets about the protests:

Students telling Solly(new mayor) to go, “it’s not a political matter”

#StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Atha 2016).

social media shows how anybody has the power to create movements

#StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Kandawire 2016).

HAIR EQUALS WELLNESS/MENTAL HEALTH

The theme of wellness and mental health in relation to hair also emerged as a minor trend from my sample of texts. The literature supports the notion that the perpetuation of Eurocentric

standards of beauty can have a negative impact on the mental health of young Black girls. One twitter user posted the following about the Girls' High protests: "why do black girls have to do the most in order to be heard?" (babygirl 2016). In a compilation YouTube video, an alumna of Girls' High stated that the code of conduct made her feel "ugly," "unworthy," and apologetic "for having this type of hair" (Multimedia LIVE 2016). A current student at the time of the protests called the code of conduct "degrading" and stated in an interview with The Washington Post that "If we don't stick up for ourselves, no one's going to" (Mahr 2016). The spokesperson for the MEC also acknowledged that "the girls are very traumatized" and Girls' High had "no tolerance" for Black learners in his final report.

Overall, the sample shows that 8% of the content written about #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh focused on the mental health effects of the school's code of conduct on Black pupils (See Figure 4). In a media briefing at Pretoria High School for Girls, Lesufi apologized to Black learners on behalf of the department "for going through such a traumatic and humiliating experience of racial abuse and victimisation." (Maromo 2016) Before the investigation commenced, Lesufi announced that the department would provide psychological and related social services to counsel learners against the trauma they appeared to have suffered. I was surprised to see a lack of widespread attention to mental health and its effects on student activism in South African schools. However, I suspect that this is partially because conversations around mental health are still considered taboo in Black households across the African Diaspora. Future research could involve follow-up stories with the young women who participated in the protests and how their experiences impacted their mental health.

AFTERMATH

Since the #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh protests took social media by storm, Girls' High revised its code of conduct to use more inclusive language. The school promised to study Lesufi's report and implemented the following changes to its grooming policies as shown by Figures 2 and 3:

14.3.9 Afros as a form of natural hair are permitted, provided that it is neat, well maintained and subject to sub-section. 14.3.2 to 14.3.7. Natural hair should not impede or restrict the view of any other learners from seeing the teacher, the board or any other educational aid or device. Teasing of hair is not acceptable.

14.3.10 Cornrows, dreadlocks, and singles/braids (with or without extensions) are allowed. Dreadlocks arranged on the head should not impede or restrict the view of any other learners from seeing the teacher, the board or any other educational aid or device.

14.3.11 Singles/braids must be the natural colour of the girl's hair. Thick braids are allowed. Braids shorter than collar length must be kept off the face with a plain navy alic band. Longer braids must be tied back.

14.3.12 Patterned cornrows are allowed, if there is only one pattern.

14.3.16 Shaving of hair is however allowed for medical conditions, cultural and or religious reasons, subject to the learners obtaining the necessary exemption referred to in paragraph 10 above.

While the school moved to include Afros and relaxed restrictions on braids, cornrows, and dreadlocks, the language still retains some ambiguity that can lead to biased reinforcement of the code. For example, the code of conduct correlates the size of a learner's Afro to the potential level of distraction other learners might experience from their presence in the

classroom. Therefore, an instructor who is biased against the cultural practices of Black people in relation to their hair growth can arbitrarily police Black learners who do not wish to cut their hair. To mitigate the likelihood of future cases of hair discrimination, Pretoria High School for Girls can require its faculty and staff to attend racial bias and cultural diversity training throughout the academic year. Future research could examine the frequency of protests at Girls' High since the school changed its code of conduct and whether or not government intervention was successful in the long term.

The case study of Pretoria High School for Girls revealed that hair discrimination is an issue that affects the majority of formerly white schools in South Africa. While some schools were inspired by the protests at Girls' High to amend their code of conduct policies on hair, South Africa lacks a permanent solution to combat this issue at the national level. The Secretary-General of the ANCWL suggested that the matter be overlooked by the Human Rights Commission. Oversight from the Human Rights Commission would allow the government to closely monitor regulations against cultural expressions in South African schools in order to ensure that the country's founding values of human dignity and equality are being upheld across all democratic institutions. Future research could examine the correlation between employment discrimination in South Africa and strict grooming policies in the workplace to determine how widespread hair discrimination is across the country.

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APPENDICES

Figure 1

6.4 General appearance

All hair must be brushed. If hair is long enough to be tied back, it must be tied back neatly in a ponytail, no lower than the nape of the neck, with a navy blue elastic. Ponytails may not be visible from the front. No crocodile, banana or other fancy clips are allowed. All hair must be off the face and not be in the eyes. Hair buns must be tight with no loose hair and have to be worn in the neck, and not on top of the head. The hair may not cover the elastic.

No dyeing, bleaching, highlighting, colouring, colour washing, colour rinsing, relaxing of hair causing a change in colour or shaving of hair **in any way** is allowed.

Cornrows, natural dreadlocks and singles/braids (with or without extensions) are allowed, provided they are a maximum of 10mm in diameter. Singles/braids must be the same length and be the natural colour of the girl's hair. Braids shorter than collar length must be kept off the face with a plain navy or tortoise shell alic band. Longer braids must be tied back. No beads or decorations in the hair. Cornrows must run parallel from each other from the forehead to the nape of the neck. No patterned cornrows.

All styles should be conservative, neat and in keeping with a school uniform. No eccentric/fashion styles will be allowed.

All hair elastics and ribbons must be navy blue. Alic bands or slides may be tortoiseshell or navy blue. No hair ornaments of any kind are permitted. No fashion items may be worn. No crocheted hairbands are allowed. Hair bands, which may have a maximum width of 5cm, may not be worn to cover any part of the ears.

Screenshot of Pretoria High School for Girls' code of conduct during 2016 protests. Reprinted from <https://www.phsg.org.za/>

Figure 2

- 14.3.7 When the wearing of an elastic band is not possible, braiding and knotting of hair must be done in such a manner that hair does not fall in the face.
- 14.3.8 Ponytails are not allowed to be worn at the side of the head. High ponytails and high buns are allowed, but may not be on the top or front of the head. Hair buns must be tight with no loose hair. The hair may cover the elastic.
- 14.3.9 Afros as a form of natural hair are permitted, provided that it is neat, well maintained and subject to sub-section 14.3.2 to 14.3.7. Natural hair should not impede or restrict the view of any other learners from seeing the teacher, the board or any other educational aid or device. Teasing of hair is not acceptable.
- 14.3.10 Cornrows, dreadlocks, and singles/braids (with or without extensions) are allowed. Dreadlocks arranged on the head should also not impede or restrict the view of any other learners from seeing the teacher, the board or any other educational aid or device.

Screenshot of Pretoria High School for Girls' code of conduct as of 2018. Reprinted from <https://www.phsg.org.za/>

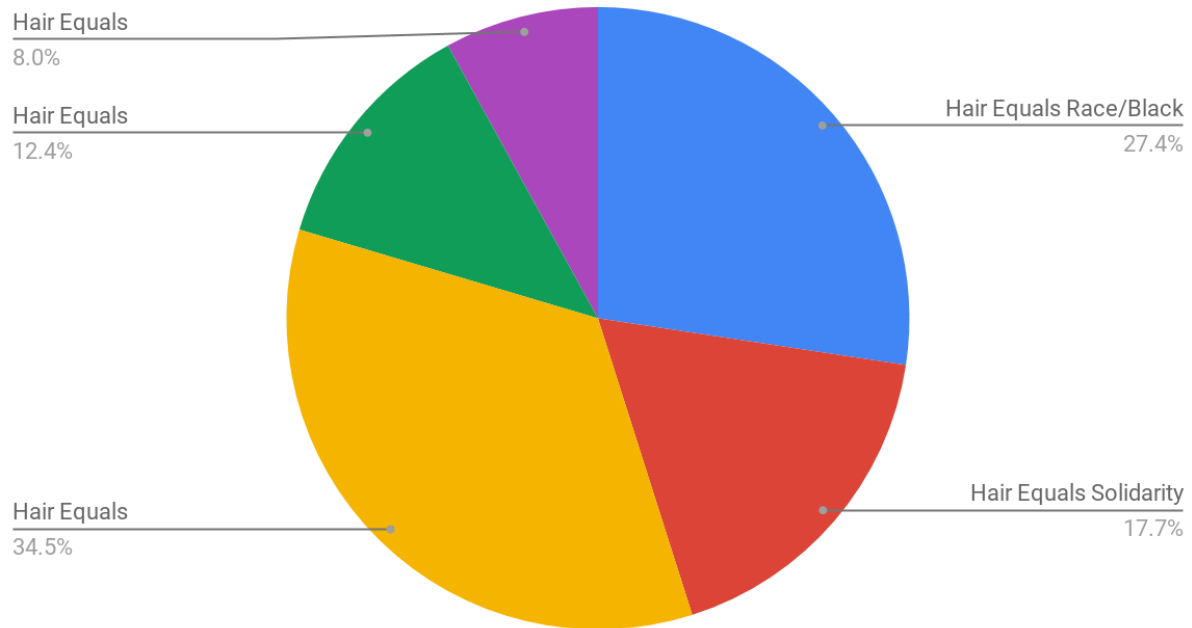
Figure 3

- 14.3.12 Patterned cornrows are allowed, if there is only one pattern.
- 14.3.13 The overall appearance of hair must be natural. No dyeing, bleaching, highlighting, colouring, colour washing, colour rinsing, or shaving of hair is allowed.
- 14.3.14 Shaving of hair is however allowed for medical conditions, cultural and or religious reasons, subject to the learners obtaining the necessary exemption referred to in paragraph 10 above.
- 14.3.15 All styles should be conservative, neat and in keeping with a school uniform. No fashion styles will be allowed.
- 14.3.16 All hair ribbons, alic bands must be navy blue.

Screenshot of Pretoria High School for Girls' code of conduct as of 2018. Reprinted from <https://www.phsg.org.za/>

Figure 4

Points scored



This figure represents the percentage breakdown of content from my data sample that was distributed to each of the five hair codes.