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Experiencing education as misrecognised "Coloured" women in South Africa

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Abstract

Much has been written about the oppression suffered by marginalised groups in South Africa. From the literature, we can gain some sense of what it means to be relegated to racial boxes. We can also theorise about the harms of racism and their lasting effects on individuals and society. However, what does it mean for the individual to carry a label when they neither understand it nor want it? How do individuals internalise the prescribed assignments of racial identities? Through this article, we take you into the lives of six women labelled as "Coloured." We share stories of their determination to excel from when they were at school during apartheid to higher education post apartheid. While poignant and brave, their stories expose the rawness of being seen as a colour before being seen as a human. In making sense of their stories, we turn to conceptions of misrecognition to reshape identities without the baggage of racism.

Keywords: misrecognition, recognition, Coloured women, identities, identity formation

Introduction

Even as biological understandings of race have been renounced in recent years, social scientists have highlighted a new view of race as a social construction reliant on "moments" in history (Machery & Faucher, 2007). By moments, we mean eras like apartheid and democracy during which race depended on particularised contexts and relied on essentialist understandings of similarities and differences in races. Frequently, racialised similarities and differences are foregrounded as normalised and fixed. In other words, by marking the body with a racialised identity, phenotypes and accents became signifiers of a "type of person" to

project a particular inferiorised image—objectified, never a complex human being going about their daily lives (Al-wazedi, 2020).

When inferiority becomes internalised, as Taylor (1998) reminds us, it becomes almost impossible to change ideas of who we think we are and uplift our opinions of who we can become. The misrecognition or myth of who or, perhaps more specifically, what someone is thought to be and be capable of, interferes with the possibility of truly seeing that person. Stated differently, the inherent biases that are often stereotypical views of others prevent them from being seen in their full presence and humanity. In turn, approaching interactions with others through blinkered gazes and scepticism prevents people from authentically engaging with difference, not as othering, but as an added value in stepping into a broader world and perspective. The debilitating consequences of an essentialist reliance on race as a measure of who individuals are or what their capabilities are, are not limited to the individual. Instead, using race as an essentialist determinant of people and their worth extends into normative, hegemonic constructions of the world. In turn, these constructions are layered and complicated by intersectionalities of ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, and class.

Under South Africa's denigrating apartheid regime, crass racial relegations to "White," "Coloured," "Black," and "Indian" concretised segregation and divisions as systemic strategies for maintaining Afrikaner nationalism. The hierarchical pattern of these racial classifications (White, Indian, Coloured, Black) was meant to entrench deeper divisions among the oppressed groups. It was not enough that they were deemed inferior by the apartheid state. It was also important for Indians to be misled into thinking that they were better than Coloured and, in turn, that Coloureds were better than Blacks. By forcibly relocating Coloureds, Blacks, and Indians into separated and disparate residential areas, as well as schools, the apartheid government succeeded in ensuring a divisive wedge between these groups. While Blacks were easily banished to Bantustans, deprived of basic resources, facilities, and any means of improving their lives or livelihood, Coloureds presented a different kind of dilemma. Their ambiguous placing of being neither White nor Black resulted in them being viewed as impure and illegitimate.

While widely recognised as denoting a community, Coloured as an identity marker—even in a democracy—remains mired if not in stereotypical caricatures then in a misplaced racial/ethnic category of liminality. Coloureds were often depicted as lazy and drunk, incapable of taking care of themselves, and consumed by addiction and criminality (Jansen & Walters, 2020). Added to this, was the stigma and shame assigned to Coloured women as sexually promiscuous as part of a metalanguage of race that resulted in them being treated differently to other women (Sawyer-Kurian et al., 2009). The severity of misrecognised identities is evident when authorities do not take Coloured women (nor all women of Colour) seriously after they report real encounters of sexual abuse and rape (Wriggins, 1983). Subsequently, the sexualised metalanguage contributes to negative conceptions of Coloured women in South Africa, whose identities are interpreted by many as marked by "Colouredness."

Although much has been written about Blackness and the oppression and suffering of Black women, the category of Blackness has not necessarily included that of Colouredness. Significantly, both apartheid and democracy have clearly delineated between Black and Coloured as separate racial categorisations. Accordingly, this article turns its attention to the perceptions and educational experiences of Coloured women. Specifically, we are interested in understanding the internalisation of a Coloured label and identity, the effect of this identity on personal and professional lives and ultimately, on notions of dignity and self-worth. Before turning to the stories of six Coloured women, we begin by looking at some theoretical debates on women of Colour (mainly encountered in literature outside of South Africa) and Coloured women in South Africa.

Negative imagery of women of Colour and Coloured women

"Women of Colour" is a widely used phrase outside South Africa to represent women who are not White. This descriptor is misleading because it infers a homogeneity, which does not take account of factors, such as nationality, religion, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and culture, on identity. As highlighted by Crenshaw's (1991) seminal work, ignoring and reducing the axes of intersectionality shaping the identities and experiences of women of Colour is to disregard the convergence between gender and race and its accompanying oppressive factors. Women of Colour are subjected to multiple marginalities and hence, intricate prejudices. Their presumed inferiority has placed them at the nexus of embodied domesticity and sexualisation—both of which have made them vulnerable to continuing practices of violence (Hicks, 2009; Turner 2002). Writing of the experiences of African-American women, Wing (2003, p. 1) maintained that it remains a challenge to move beyond the literature that depicts women of Colour as "incompetent, powerless, invisible, inferior, lazy, voiceless, sexually submissive, sexually brazen, irrelevant, welfare queens, [and] unfit mothers."

Although assigned a different label, the experiences of Coloured women in South Africa echo the marginalisation and discrimination of those women of Colour, particularly their portrayal as sexualised and violent beings (Geldenhuys & de Lange, 2007; Lesch & Adams, 2016). Erasmus (2000) made a crucial point that the experience of identity as a Coloured (woman) is congruent with White racism that uses (institutional) powers to subjugate and dehumanise Coloured women, while simultaneously detaching Coloured women from being human. Consider the comments by a columnist in a local newspaper: "You will always be assured of a large family as many of these girls breed as if Allan Boesak sent them on a mission to increase the coloured race" (Roberts, 2011, as quoted by Nicholson, 2011, para. 6). There, Coloured women were stereotyped as licentious and driven by an animalistic nature to procreate. Seemingly, "the look" of Coloured women predisposes them to sexualised imagery that portrays them as incapable of offering any value (Erasmus, 2017). Although literature about alternative narratives of Coloured women is on the rise (see Davids, 2012), much of those more nuanced depictions of them remain outside the academe (Jacobs, 2001; Russell, 1989; Wicomb 2008; Zinn, 2016).

Within the academy, Daniels and Damon (2011) found that young Coloured female students at a historically White university continued to feel the need to express themselves as "more than just a Coloured woman" as a response to justifying their studentship at the university. In so doing, they recognised that they were not being seen as students or as human beings capable of studying or achieving. The burden of the predetermined narrative of subjugated identities locates Coloured women as irreconcilable with competence and achievement. These students are often subjected to essentialist stereotypical conceptions of their identities, which view them as "less than," misrecognises what they are capable of, and more.

Misrecognition and identity formation

In spite of the plethora of theories about Coloured women, very little is known about how they have interpreted the label of Coloured, or how the identity marker has shaped how they conceive themselves in relation to others. The women whose stories we draw upon in this study are all professional mathematics educators in higher education. They participated in a more extensive study (Kenny, 2020) focused on their lived experiences as they established themselves as mathematics educators in higher education while South Africa transitioned into a democracy. Although the latter study yielded tremendous insights into the intricacies and barriers attached to Coloured women as mathematics educators, our interest in this paper is to give deeper attention to what we believe is a neglected field of research. We examine what it means to be seen as a Coloured (woman), a racialised categorisation that has been retained in South Africa's democracy despite the harm and misrecognition it has historically caused.

Taylor (1998) clarified misrecognition as a distorted image reflecting an individual or group that creates a false and belittling representation of their identities. Our interactions and dialogues shape part of who we are with others. We take our cues from those around us—our family, teachers, and friends. At times, we believe how others perceive us and what is said about us, so that misrecognition leads to a diminished sense of self. To be misrecognised, asserted Taylor, can lead to distortion, harm, and a "reduced mode of being" (1998, p. 25). If Coloured people, for example, are led to believe that they are no more than a stereotypical phenotype, they live with a distorted sense of who they are and their capabilities. To be misrecognised with false imaging is harmful and inhumane, leading individuals to become "prisoners of their own bodies" (Mendieta, 1997, p. 499). Taylor (1998) continued that women in particular societies have been forced to adopt a depreciatory image of themselves. In other words, they have internalised their misrecognised inferiority to the extent that even when certain external barriers are removed, they are incapable of seeing and realising their worth. Therefore, misrecognition affects an individual's self-image, sense of capabilities, and how that individual interacts with others.

Every individual has a desire to be seen and recognised. Recognition, as Honneth (1995) observed, is an intersubjective process between two individuals (or groups) where both individuals recognise the value that each brings to shared space. In turn, he continued, the mutually recognised value brought to an encounter affects the individual's sense of self-worth. Unlike Taylor (1998), who posited that dialogical relations inform identity, Honneth

(1995) argued that identity is socially acquired through individuals' interactions with others. Firstly, self-confidence relies on relationships of affection with others; secondly, self-respect involves individual rights; and thirdly, self-esteem relies on feeling part of a community. Therefore, a key to identity formation is one's sense of mutually recognised value and, when obscured or absent, it can harm who we think we are. Both Taylor (1998) and Honneth (1995) maintained that recognition is an essential human need.

Stories of Coloured women

We considered an interpretivist research paradigm as apt to foreground the perspectives and understandings of each of the Coloured women involved in this study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). We did not want to repeat similar experiences from one participant to the next, so we collated their stories of misrecognition in various stages of their education—absorbing and listening to their accounts and experiences to draw on the particularities of their educational journeys. We employed a postcolonial feminist lens to make sense of these stories, focusing on the effects of their misrecognised identities.

From the outset, we knew that it would not be easy to secure the participation of Coloured women working in higher education in a study that explored identity and misrecognition. Conversations on race demand intense self-reflection and a willingness to be open about what can be intimate and sensitive lived experiences. We were aware that many people resist the label of Coloured, refusing to grant it legitimacy. The women in this study would have inherited a Coloured classification from their parents, legislatively imposed during apartheid (Breckenridge, 2014). Only once potential participants had confidence that we had no interest in perpetuating racial traits, and that our only research objective was to give voice to their experiences as a sidelined group, did we gain the involvement of six Coloured women. Given the sensitivity in establishing a research sample, we embarked on the study with immense care, guarding against exposing any vulnerabilities and with caution in allowing anyone to disengage at any time. We became re-attuned to the heaviness of racial othering, its invisible and continuing potential to inflict harms, and how easily even the wording of a question can compromise trust in researchers.

Our sample consisted of six professional women employed as higher education educators. We aimed to unearth aspects of their schooling, post-schooling, and employment journeys that might not have been explored in the academy—from apartheid into democracy. We ensured that the participant sample's age range was between 50 and 63 years old; this means that all of them went to school during the apartheid era. Each of the six participants attended politically charged secondary schools on the Cape Flats in Cape Town. They shared that, as potential teachers, they would have had to register with a Coloured classification to benefit from the apartheid state's bursary offer—and lured by a "secure" job offer and government pension (Breckenridge, 2014). Regardless of their college or university qualifications, the Coloured women participants were excluded from careers in higher education for the duration of their studies during apartheid.

The positionalities of the researchers are two women who have both lived through apartheid, classified as Coloured. Specifically, one of us could not secure full-time employment in the field of mathematics education at a university level. By participating in semi-structured interviews, the participants were invited to share their stories with researchers who could strongly relate to their experiences. The semi-structured nature of the interview process created the necessary space for the women to expand on and extend the unfolding dialogue in unique ways that we could not have imagined. Evident from the interviews were similar, yet vastly different perceptions and experiences. Although bound by a common identity marker of Coloured, the daily realities of the women were impacted by their families, home environments, religion, and finances. To date, very little is known about the lived experiences of Coloured women. Their stories are often conflated with generic stories of Black women. But, historically, and now in contemporary democratic South Africa, there are clear differences between the treatment of women classified as Black and Coloured. Consequently, the theorising on Coloured women is often written from perspectives that are, in fact, unfamiliar with the socio-political experiences of what it means to be labelled as Coloured. Hence, the stories shared in this article are directly from those who have and continue to live it. The women's stories are presented in chronological order—from their schooling years as young teenagers growing up under apartheid, to women working as mathematics educators in higher education in democratic South Africa.

Grappling with Colouredness as young women

When the women in this study were teenagers, schools were segregated along racial lines based on apartheid laws. As such, White privileges were established and entrenched, while other race groups were subjugated through unequal schooling. Consequently, the young women had no choice but to attend the schools designated for Coloured learners. Often, literature about Coloured learners represents them as either activists who resisted the apartheid regime through the influences of their politicised teachers (Chisholm, 1991), or as disinterested youth unable to cope with the effects of socioeconomic deprivation on their schooling (Spaull, 2015). Although these representations might be true, Danah[1] enacted a different role.

As a young woman classified as Coloured, Danah had a lived awareness of segregated residential areas and schooling, and recognised that her racial classification meant limited opportunities. Nevertheless, Danah's school was a politically charged space where learners were encouraged by activist teachers to "show the regime that they could excel at school." During her final year of secondary school, Danah and her peers persuaded the school principal to permit learners to teach each other during the government's shutting of schools in 1985. The learners studied together to ensure that they obtained good school grades and took responsibility to "take care of the younger ones" so they, too, could improve their school grades. She asserted:

1 All participants' names used here are pseudonyms.

> We worked *so* hard by ourselves (without teachers), and we passed, but not only that, we passed well.

Danah did not allow the apartheid regime's shutting of schools in 1985 to deter her from gaining an education. By seeing beyond a label of Coloured, she knew that she had the potential to perform well, and a moral compass to help others with similar challenges. She also understood the value of education under political circumstances when teachers were prohibited from teaching. Instead of internalising societal perceptions of Colouredness as less capable and inferior, Danah turned inward to tap into her potentiality. Whether or not political activism at school ruptured a predetermined script of Colouredness, Danah recognised and embraced a potential common to all—a feeling of worth that Taylor (1998, p. 41) referred to as "a universal human potential" that should be respected. Even though shutting schools was a means to control Coloured learners, Danah's school experiences also revealed that the apartheid government underestimated the capabilities of those learners. Acting outside the boundaries of a predetermined script of an inferiorised Coloured identity, Coloured female learners drew on their capabilities by believing in their potential.

Unlike Danah, not all Coloured teenagers had the knowledge and determination to resist the apartheid regime. Anoushka's experiences draw attention to the powerful effects of apartheid ideology in indoctrinating minds to accept or internalise racial identities as fact. Anoushka did not believe that a Coloured label had been imposed on her. In her view, Colouredness

> was an accepted fact because [I] lived in a Coloured area, went to a Coloured school, had Coloured friends and spent most of [my] time with [my] Coloured family.

As a family, they were not trying to change notions of a Coloured identity but merely making use of what was at their disposal in their day-to-day lives. There was no need to question or challenge what she described as her "reality." It was her family that she could turn to if she needed any advice regarding her future. Family mattered most to Anoushka. Therefore, the things she valued were always in relation to her family and in response to their advice.

From Taylor's (1998) perspective, dialogical interaction is necessary because it shapes identity in the same way that family shaped Anoushka's understanding of who she was. He pointed out that significant others matter because these relationships help individuals to feel fulfilled. Although Anoushka's relationship with family fulfilled her, her acceptance of the category, Coloured as fact meant that she had adopted a Coloured identity as her own. She was almost unwilling to imagine herself differently. Wherever she turned in her social circles, Anoushka was conditioned to internalise whom she ought to be. In turn, she could not imagine a life outside of it. She felt inhibited and unable to consider herself as an individual with potential. Reflecting on her journey, she stated:

> "If I *did* [give myself a chance], where would it have taken me?"

Esmerelda's account draws attention to living with a label of Coloured, and its intersection with expectations of young women. There were no secondary and post-schooling

opportunities in her rural hometown. Most of her female friends did not find employment. Instead, they married at a young age and thus became financially dependent on their husbands. However, Esmerelda wanted more than marriage—she sensed a potentiality in herself that lay beyond what was available to her in her small town. So she left for the city to further her secondary schooling, following which she attended a teacher training college reserved for young Coloured women who intended to become primary school teachers. The college was run by White European nuns who expected compliance with their authority through strict rules and regulations. It was the first time Esmerelda had interacted daily with White people, but "obedience towards the nuns" was a small price to pay for a teaching qualification. Accustomed to observing White authority in her rural town where Coloureds were reprimanded by both Afrikaners who "owned" the town and Europeans who worked for an international mining company, she never complained about the harshness of her college experience to anyone. Thus, whenever the nuns admonished Esmerelda for inappropriate behaviour, she never challenged them.

Esmerelda's experiences highlight a normalisation of subservience and subordination to White authority. Whether in her hometown, where she came to understand that, "I was classified as a Coloured and not a person," or in the city, she had been coached into compliance through fear and the consequences of defying and disobeying White authority. Moreover, the messaging to Coloured women was that White authority knew what was best, and abiding by their instructions meant access to bursary allowances and teaching certificates. However, there is an additional element to constructing her fear of Whites. She was led to believe that whatever she wished to achieve needed to be earned. "I always had to prove that I was worthy to be there," she remarked. Esmerelda was misrecognised at the college (and in her rural town) because the nuns ignored any value she could bring to the college space. For example, she was the only college student from a rural town and had experiences of primary school education in a rural setting, which she could share with her peers. Honneth (1995) maintained that when the value that an individual brings to a shared space is ignored, the misrecognition felt is one of disesteem—a denial of esteem recognition, affecting one's relation to oneself so that one's sense of worth is wiped out. While the college may have certified Esmerelda's hard work with a teaching qualification, they also harmed her into believing that worthiness was earned from, and judged and determined by, the authority.

Effects of authority on Coloured women teacher professionals

After Esmerelda qualified as a teacher, she found employment at a primary school designated for Coloureds, and under the leadership of a male principal. Initially, the principal transferred Esmerelda from one teaching subject to the next. As a newcomer to the school, she did not question his leadership decisions. Instead, she directed her attention to improving her teaching qualifications, hoping that, in time, she would be promoted. After a few years, the principal informed her that she was next in line as department head. However, in his view, a male teacher who had become a new father required increased remuneration as the head of his family. Esmeralda was furious, but she did not challenge the principal. Instead, she sought

promotion at a different school. Two months into her new position as department head, her new principal filled the post with another teacher. Esmerelda was ushered back to classroom teaching. She enrolled for yet another qualification—waiting for another opportunity for promotion at a school that discriminated against her as a (Coloured) woman, and which may have caused significant emotional, financial, and professional consequences and feelings of inferiority.

Although Esmerelda appreciated that upskilling herself was a route to promotion, she faced asymmetrical and gendered power relations at both schools where she was employed. However, she did not verbally respond to her demotions because she understood silence as a mark of respect towards authority. Taylor (1989) referred to this type of respect as "attitudinal," which, he affirmed, is always informed by biases and judgemental perspectives. Esmerelda's decision not to respond when she was demoted was influenced by a lens of subservience and compliance to authority. Therefore, it did not matter whether Esmerelda was good enough to be a department head or not. Instead, she was seen as a Coloured woman through a particular lens that projected images of her as being "less than." As Taylor (1998) noted, when negative (or derogatory) images are repeatedly drawn to a person's attention, as in Esmerelda's case, the effects of feeling inferior can be irreversible.

Aisha's experience reveals constructions of Coloured women's professional roles as caretakers. Like Esmerelda, Aisha was ambitious and turned to promotional opportunities at schools. She was aware that senior leadership positions were reserved mainly for males and sensed that she needed alternate means to work her way up to a leadership position. In this regard, she earned an award for teaching excellence, acquired further qualifications to teach at senior-primary level, studied "any textbooks and reading material [she] could lay [her] eyes on," and worked alongside peers to improve the quality of teaching. Aisha intended to portray herself as an extraordinary teacher and well-regarded department head in order to be noticed as a deputy principal candidate.

Although Aisha succeeded in becoming a deputy principal, her primary responsibility was to oversee learners' pastoral care. It was not that Aisha was not a caring person—she was a caring daughter, mother, wife, teacher, and department head. It was the assumption that as a Coloured woman, she was best suited to take on the role of carer, confined to matters of the heart as if she were insufficiently fit for academic responsibilities. Aisha believed that she could add academic value to the school and, even though the principal recognised her value, he recognised her value differently. Extending Honneth's (1995) perspective of misrecognition to schools, when the value that a Coloured woman as a senior leader is not recognised by the principal, it affects her self-esteem as a possible senior leader. Aisha's misrecognition as a caretaker of children ultimately led to her resignation from the school because she believed she was worth more professionally. She accepted that she could not change the principal's fixed mindset and moved to a new school where she might be recognised for her academic value. Aisha's academic worth was diminished primarily because she did not want to continue in a role that the principal felt was best for her.

(In)Capabilities of Coloured women in higher education

At the dawn of democracy in South Africa, Carmen obtained employment at a higher education institution (HEI) historically dominated by White men. Here, she came face-to-face with the harsh reality of a White male line manager threatened by her professional capabilities, and Coloured men who challenged her managerial style. Although her line manager affirmed her diligence by acknowledging her commitment and value to the institution, Carmen faced resistance from her subordinates, who depicted her as difficult and demanding. Both responses pointed to a preconceived image of her unworthiness. However, she was headstrong and fought back, stating:

> I can be passively just as resistant as them. It takes a little time to win the battle, but it [remains] a battle.

Carmen's experiences highlight the assertiveness, decisiveness, and courage required to be understood as a capable and worthy woman.

Honneth (199, p. 122) described "social worth" as the degree to which a person is recognised to contribute towards societal objectives. Furthermore, determining social worth requires people to express what they consider valuable (or not) to society. Applying social worthiness to professional value in the context of apartheid, Coloured women, for example, were restricted to school-teaching careers. Danah enquired about employment at a university and recalled that she "wanted to make the progression [of teaching] from primary school to a tertiary institution; then [she] was told that [she] couldn't make that shift automatically—[she] had to have trained adults as well."

In her view, she had been given another hurdle, which excluded her from teaching in higher education. Although Coloured women have since entered employment in higher education institutions, Carmen's experiences depict that, once in employment, new ways were attempted to diminish her sense of self-worth. Given that Honneth (1995, 2007) has pointed out that interpretations and recognition of accomplishment usually inform worth, it appears that Carmen's value was not sufficiently recognised and appreciated by colleagues at her HEI. She felt insecure and doubted her own proficiency, and became distracted by what others thought of her, rather than focusing on her roles and responsibilities. Hence, although she was qualified and passionate about her profession, she could not shrug off the constant need to prove herself. However, Carmen found comfort in using her passion for mathematics to empower her colleagues, turning it into a powerful stand against a segregated education system.

Bernita was not reliant on a state bursary to fund her higher education. However, her first career choice of veterinary science was reserved only for Whites. Therefore, her career depended on the apartheid regime's racialised quota system at historically White universities. Despite completing an honours qualification at a different university, she could not secure a tutoring position there, and turned to a university reserved for Coloured students. Here, she became a tutor, completed a master's qualification and was employed as a junior lecturer.

When the tide turned to democracy, she transferred to a university of technology (for Coloureds during apartheid) to teach her pure science subject at a higher level. However, the fragmentation of the pure sciences meant that her subject department was dissolved and staff members deployed to new departments. With a loss of purpose in a new department, she sought employment at an alternate HEI.

Bernita was an ambitious woman whose family could afford to pay her university fees but, as a Coloured woman, she had very limited prospects. She recognised that the rejections she received from universities might not have had anything to do with her academic results but rather her classification as a Coloured woman. Whatever aspirations she had, had to adjust to meet the limited opportunities available to her. With the introduction of universities of technology in South Africa, she considered a field of study that had mainly been offered to White men. Once again, she experienced rejection at her university because she did not fit the academic mould of her institution's newly developed science field. Her academic aspirations were frustrated when she was appointed as a support staff. The change from apartheid to democracy was followed by changes in the higher education landscape, including the restructuring of HEIs. The institutional restructuring took place at the expense of a capable Coloured woman who had to adapt to the changing expectations of an HEI's changing expectations. As Bernita shared:

> And that was one of the reasons why I resigned . . . I just had enough of . . . me not going anywhere [with my passion to teach harder concepts in mathematics].

Therefore, the effects of misrecognition of Coloured women in mathematics, although felt differently in democracy, has had the same effect of exclusion as during apartheid.

This study recognises that the experiences shared in this article might resonate with many others across racial, cultural, and ethnic categorisations. Certainly, many women—whether White, Black, or Indian—may be able to relate to the experiences of Bernita, for example, if one considers that issues of gender justice remain elusive in HEIs. The point, however, is that even though there are broad understandings of racial and gender injustices both during apartheid and in the current democracy, there is insufficient research on the experiences of Coloured women. Their specific experiences are as distinctive as the experiences of Black, White, and Indian women. Unpacking their stories is critical to delve not only into the immense harm caused by apartheid but also into how the legacy of those harms has remained in a democratic society.

Conclusion

This paper foregrounded the voices of Coloured women as they experienced their education as learners and teachers during apartheid, and followed by their employment in higher education, post apartheid. Despite their courageous and ambitious efforts to fulfil their drive to educate themselves and others, their stories reveal that their capabilities were questioned and challenged at every turn in their journeys. During apartheid, whether they identified with a Coloured classification or not meant proving their worth beyond the state's limited and

essentialist expectations of Coloured women. The apartheid state used its authority to enforce the subservience and compliance of Coloured women to those in charge. In this way, a message was communicated of Coloured women being unworthy and incapable of contributing to education in a manner deemed fit by the state. Post apartheid, Coloured women who demonstrated capabilities in higher education spaces were labelled unwelcome, and misconstrued as problematic and demanding towards their colleagues and the HEIs. Misrecognised as incapable of participating as full members of all educational endeavours in apartheid and democracy, Coloured women's worthiness had to be earned under conditions determined by those in power. Ultimately, they were misrecognised as inferior.

Although all the Coloured women in this study opposed their inferiorised images, it cannot be denied that the persistent negative imagery affected their sense of self-worth. We are not proposing identities of Coloured women per se be reconsidered in a redemptive light in our democracy. We do however, call on those given decision-making powers to be cognisant of not seeing a person as a colour before seeing them as human; and to rather consider the value that a person can bring to a shared space—whether in a school, professional, or academic space. We argue that the ability to articulate self-worth and imagine new ways of feeling worthy in educational spaces poses new challenges to all individuals who are historically marginalised. Until diminished self-worth is known and understood, we cannot diffuse misrecognised racial identities and recognise an individual's experiences in, and value to, educational spaces in South Africa.

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