



Agency and impasses to success amongst higher education students in South Africa



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Higher education

1. 55% failure rates among students
2. Low completion rates on time (only 1 in 4)
3. White completion rates 50% higher than Black students (CHE, 2013)
4. Inequity in enrolment rates (15% Black youth 18-24 enrolled versus 54% White in 2014)



Education and Emancipation

1. National research project
2. Investigate obstacles and opportunities within Higher Education
3. Started in April 2012/completed in 2018
4. Framing question: *Who are our students?*
5. In-depth quantitative and qualitative research

EE Components



1. *Cohesion and discrimination*: after the Soudien Report: review Soudien Report and media analysis of protest action 2008-2015
 2. *Graduating into Professions*: literature review on obstacles to access and throughput with reference to women and black students.
- ***Who are our students and what happens to them?***: quantitative (CS) and qualitative (HSRC)

Studying while black

Race, education and emancipation
in South African universities



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The study

1. The study followed 80 students in 8 universities over 5 years (2013 to 2017)
2. Used a variety of engaging methods
3. Produced two accessible outputs:
 - **Book:** *Studying while black*
 - **Documentary:** *Ready or Not!*
4. Recorded struggles and obstacles, along with strategies and resources for success

I went to the bursary offices

'Where's the father's

Affidavit?'

'I don't have a father'.

'Go to your mom and tell her

to write about the

whereabouts of your father'.

I go home.

Write out another Affidavit.

Go back to the police station

Using a taxi.

Then back to university.

Being a female at
university is an extreme
sport

Every morning I wake up

Walk down to campus

with weapons

Tasers and pepper spray

There's always crime on

campus

Females being raped on

campus

With cameras.

You sit there in the
lecture room and think:
'What am I going to say?
Are they going to laugh
at me?

Think I'm stupid?

Some students slept.
In the Student Building.
For two days.
Without food.

I wanted to study
They said it's full.
They just put me in another
programme so that I don't
stay at home.

If you are Black and poor,
you are in trouble.
This place is very brutal for
Black poor kids.

I don't feel I belong to the
campus

Findings

1. Race and Racism on campus
2. Gender dynamics on campus
3. Language and power
4. Obstacles to overcome
5. Student strategies for succeeding
6. Research strategies for intervention
7. Recommendations for all stakeholders
8. Proposals for further research and intervention

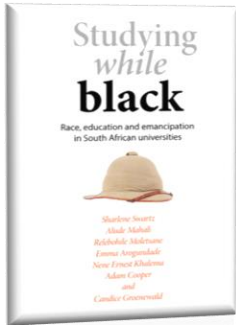


Sample Progression

<i>Category</i>	<i>Graduated</i>	<i>Still studying</i>	<i>Left university to work/seek employment</i>	<i>Untraceable</i>
Total (n=80)	27	35	7	11
School background				
<i>Township/Rural (n=38)</i>	11	17	5	5
<i>Suburban/Private (n=42)</i>	16	18	2	6
Parents' education				
<i>Higher ed (n=41)</i>	22	11	2	6
<i>No higher ed (n=39)</i>	5	24	5	5

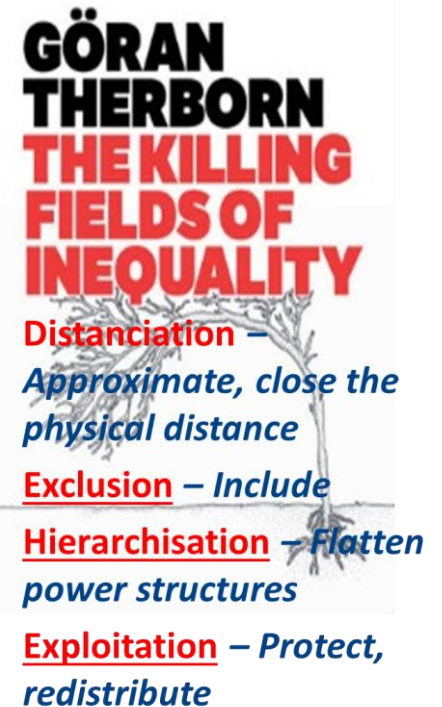
Participatory research

1. “**Recognises** the value of **engaging** in the research process those who are intended to be the beneficiaries, users and **stakeholders** of research” (Biggs)
2. **Key feature - location of power**, commitment to the democratisation & demystification of scientific research
3. **Community** members as knowledgeable **collaborators**
4. **Underlying values** - action-oriented, dialogue, relevant and iterative, justice (Lewin – ‘The Northern Tradition’)
5. **Core elements:** Mutual respect and trust, accountability and reflexivity, participative and interactive



METHODS

- Longitudinal cohort study
- Annual interviews
- **Social network interviews**
- **Social media blogs**
- Written Reflections
- **Ethnographic documentary**



Social network interviewing

Choose from among these people to interview e.g.

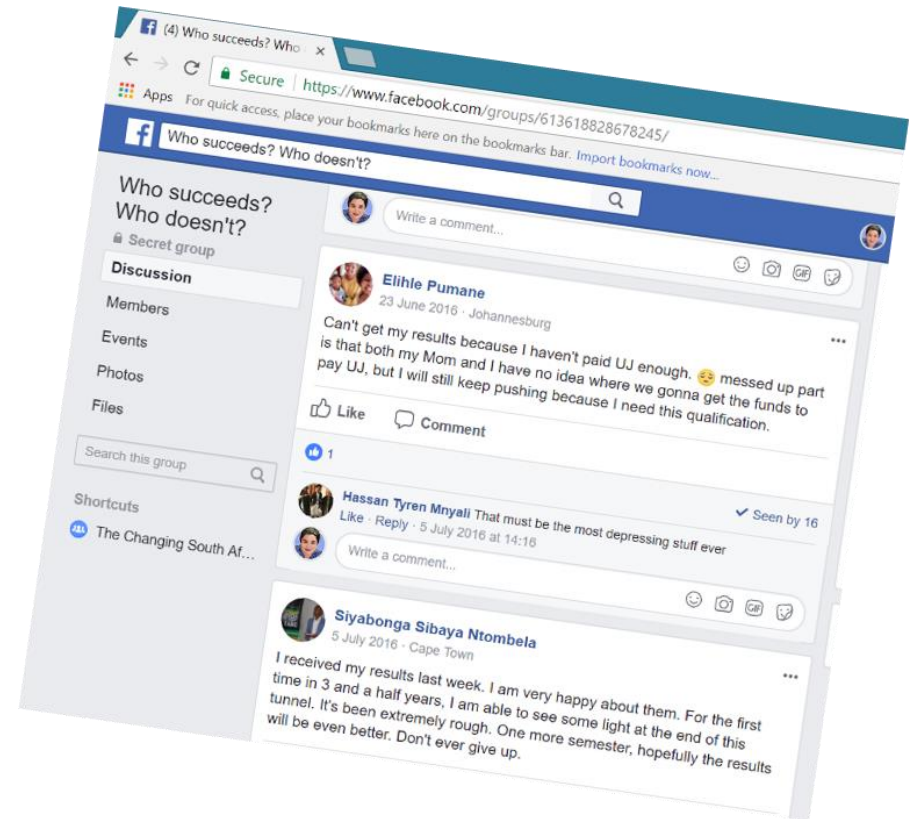
1. A person from your home town who never went to university
2. A student you consider more privileged than you
3. A student you consider less privileged than you
4. A staff contact from your previous school
5. A person in a university leadership position
6. A recent graduate that you know
7. A student like you
8. A person who works at student support services
9. A student who dropped out of university this past year
10. A person you consider to have helped you get to varsity
11. A person you consider to have helped you over this last year of university
12. A family member who has been to university

E.G. questions that interviewers asked students:

Question	Aims
1. ...	Evaluating social context and external agency – what can and cannot be changed.
2. ...	
3. In your opinion, what affects someone's success at university?	
4. Who is responsible for students succeeding at University?	
5. From what you know of me (or students in general), what do I do that stops (sabotages) me from succeeding at varsity? What should I be doing?	
6...	
7....	
8. In your opinion, who should be helping students succeed at university, and what should they be doing to help?	
9....	Developing strategies
10....	

Facebook: Who succeeds?

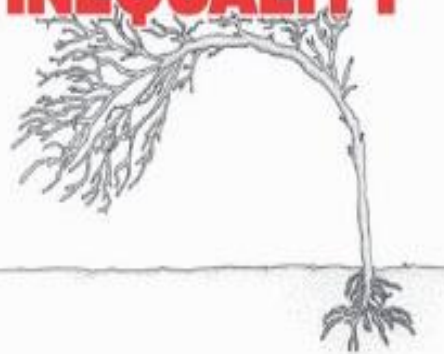
- Smartphone & airtime
- Status updates
- Images and Photo's
- Inspirational Quotes
- Memes
- Video clips
- Newspaper articles
- Blog posts
- Bursary/Funding Info



READY OR NOT

Black Students' Experiences of South African Universities

**GÖRAN
THERBORN
THE KILLING
FIELDS OF
INEQUALITY**



What inequality does

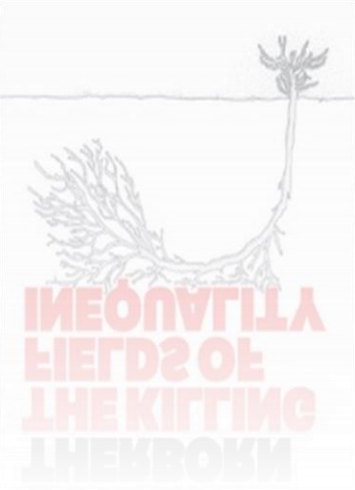
- **Short lives**
 - Lack of education (less than 12 yrs of schooling)
 - 3 and 12 yrs shorter life
 - Hierarchically low jobs in government service
 - Unemployed

- **Psychic/social stress**

5 to 15 more years of illness

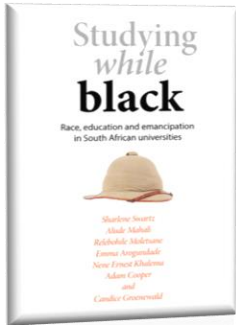


**INEQUALITY
FIELDS OF
THE KILLING
THERBORN**



4 Mechanisms of inequality

- **Distanciation** - a systemic process designed to discern 'winners and losers'
 - *Approximation – close the physical distance*
- **Exclusion** - the division of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'
 - *Inclusion*
- **Hierarchisation** - formal organisations of inequality
 - *Flattening power structures*
- **Exploitation** - unfairly capitalising on the physical labour of others
 - *Protection, redistribution and rehabilitation*



RECOMMENDATIONS

Three spaces for action

- Individual/personal
- Institutional
- National/structural

Actions for management and administrators, for lecturers and support staff, for students/student leaders, for government



University leadership

1. Symbols
2. Accommodation
3. Access to facilities
4. Race/gender ombud
5. Diverse lecturing experience
6. Diverse management
7. Spatial planning - safety of female students
8. Translanguaging
9. Writing centres
10. Compulsory African language
11. Use of dictionaries in exams
12. Transit time increased for consultation
13. Formal mechanism to complain about lecturer conduct
14. Administrators equipped for students' realities
15. Hardship funds
16. Funding information officers



University leadership (2)

18. Commissioners of oaths
available in funding offices

19. Administrative offices
accessible hours

20. Free or subsidised transport

21. Technology proficiency
capacity development

22. Improved mental health
facilities

23. Institutional justice
processes

24. Formal mentoring
programmes for all
undergraduate students.

25. Resources for student self-
management

26. Family events part of student
orientation

27. Multiple orientations -
compulsory

28. Course on other directed
and self-directed learning



Lecturers and support staff

1. Formal course on the social history of SA
2. Relevant Southern material
3. Formal reporting mechanism for GBV and harassment
4. Accents
5. Lecturers trained to communicate
6. Translanguaging
7. Lecturers as enablers of learning
8. Lecturers accessible
9. Course content to include academic know-how
10. Lectures compulsory for 1st yrs
11. Lecturers trained for referral e.g. mental health & crime
12. Faculty to act as mediators between students and management
13. Academic credit for reflections on transformation
14. Faculty to offer/administer mentorship programmes



Student leaders and students

1. Student activities must encourage diversity
2. Mechanisms to report staff who gender discriminate
3. Awareness of support services – academic and mental health
4. Compulsory courses to disrupt patriarchy.
5. Mobilise peer academic support (incl. social media)
6. Students helped to include family in study progress
7. Compulsory lectures
8. Frequent incentivised check-ups (study skills, career guidance, mental health, time use and writing).
9. Opportunities for funding
10. Watchdog over residence allocations, incl. racial mix
11. Technology courses required
12. Public service messages
13. Student protests as opportunities for reflection
14. Student orientation repeated



Government and policy makers

1. External structures for victimized students
2. Dedicate funding for Southern knowledge production
3. Multilingualism encouraged from school level
4. Change monitored
5. policy-makers should
6. Student funding reforms and accountability
7. No withholding of marks for non-payment of fees
8. Incentives for faith communities to assist students (eg. Accommodation, study spaces, com of oaths)
9. Private security firms to be held to strict codes of conduct
10. A standing forum for students to engage policy makers
11. Govt funded research on learning from students
12. Money for peer support and mentoring programmes

Urgent next steps

1. Discussion of recommendations with stakeholders
2. Full use to be made of the *Ready or Not! Documentary* in schools and for new students
3. Three follow up studies dealing with
 - Sexual violence and safety for women on campus
 - Translanguaging: Policies, practices, practicalities
 - Mentoring: For whom, by whom, how long, what medium?

Thank you

