

Future Orientation of South African Youth

Nonhlanhla Cleopatra Masinga* and Thandazile Mathabela

Dept. of Psychology, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Email of corresponding author: masinncl@unisa.ac.za

Abstract: With young people constituting more than half of the South African population, they hold a pivotal role as custodians of its future. As the demographic majority, their opinions and worldview will have a significant impact on the trajectory of South African society. Understanding their perspectives on the future is essential for gaining insights into the collective aspirations, challenges and possible paths that the country may take as a whole. This study explored future perceptions of South African youth, seeking to understand the complexities that shape their perspective and contribute valuable insight to guide the formulation of strategies and policies for the nation's advancement. The study made use of both the traditional Danziger (1963) method of future ideologies, and the collective futures framework proposed by Bain *et al.* (2013). Findings showed that liberal and catastrophic future ideologies were salient and there were no significant race differences. However, socio-economic class rather than race was the primary divider among South African groups, emphasising the potential influence of economic status on perceptions. The results also showed that social context was a significant factor in shaping future outlook, particularly during adolescence.

Keywords: Adolescence; Collective Futures; Future Perceptions; Ideologies; South Africa.

The youth is the hope of our future

Jose Rizal

South Africa's population is made up of relatively young people, those who are below the age of 35 years constitute 66% of the total population (Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2022). To ensure the future well-being of South Africa, it is essential to understand the perspectives of these young people regarding their future society. Danziger initially collected essays written by youth and analysed them to identify themes related to future ideologies (Danziger, 1963). Research that follows the Danziger approach was replicated four times in South Africa covering the different phases of South African history. Bain and colleagues (2013) introduced the collective future framework to explore perceptions of the future. This framework reveals that the extent of social projections into the future is influenced by present-day circumstances. These projections include changes in both individual characteristics, such as values and traits, and broader living conditions, including the extent of societal dysfunction and societal development.

Danziger's studies were based on the premise that in times of social upheaval and instability, people would stimulate ideas that transcend their current lived reality. Surveys conducted from 1956 to 1962 revealed diverse future aspirations among

South African students of different ethnicities. Danziger categorized 439 essays into five dominant orientations: catastrophic, conservative, liberal, revolutionary, and technicist. Indians leaned toward liberal views, black Africans expressed revolutionary sentiments, white Afrikaans-speaking students favoured technicist perspectives, while white English-speaking students held catastrophic orientations (Danziger, 1963; Du Preez & Collins, 1985). Danziger's original study was replicated by Du Preez, Bhana, Broekman, Louw and Nel in 1981, followed by Finchilescu and Dawes in 1992 and 1996 and the most recent study was conducted by Leslie and Finchilescu in 2009. All these studies were conducted during periods of social instability. For instance, the first study was conducted during the Apartheid era when the government passed legislation such as the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act, which led to numerous anti-apartheid movements. These movements led to the 1976 Soweto youth uprisings. In 1981, Du Preez and colleagues conducted their research and found that Afrikaans and Black African students were liberal, Indian students were revolutionary and English students had catastrophic orientations. Government-led racial segregation made it easy for such studies to be conducted, in that, the differences in ideologies per race group could be compared based on how each group received or experienced the Apartheid system. The follow-up

studies conducted in 1992 and 1996, were conducted after the release of struggle icon Mandela and shortly after the first democratic elections. The research findings indicated that there was no overarching historical narrative capable of unifying all ethnic groups. However, it revealed a greater prevalence of optimism among black Africans compared to Whites, Whites displayed a higher prevalence of fear regarding the future. The most recent study was conducted just before the 2009 democratic elections: following events such as the ousting of a democratically elected president in 2007, and the 2009 breaking away of members from the ruling party and subsequent formation of opposition parties.

Given the fact that adolescents' personal futures and their emerging identity are influenced by social, political and economic contexts (Finchilescu & Dawes, 1999), that is, the context in which these young people build their dreams and formulate their plans are based on ideologies of the times (Kamper & Badenhorst, 2010). In this context, ideologies are defined as a cohesive set of beliefs held by a person or social group, constituting a way of understanding the world over time (Nescolarde-Selva *et al.*, 2017). This definition underscores ideologies as an interrelated set of attitudes and beliefs used to justify or challenge a given socio-political order (Zald, 1996). These ideologies serve as an exploratory framework, shedding light on the motivation behind an individual's actions and assist in organising values and beliefs (Jost, 2006). Beliefs are so integral to a person's identity that they become seamlessly integrated into the self, feeling natural and unquestionably true. As indicated, previous studies conducted in South Africa have traditionally followed the Danziger approach to find out youth's predominant ideologies. However, as an alternative to find out people's projections about their society's future, the collective future framework is explored in the South African context (Bain *et al.*, 2013).

The collective futures framework relates beliefs people hold about the future of a society to their current attitudes and actions (Bain *et al.*, 2013). Images of the future whether on social prosperity or dysfunction have been shown to motivate people to act in the present either to promote the positive or to prevent the negative future from occurring (Bain *et al.*, 2013; Packard & Nguyen, 2003). This

framework indicates that people's future projections are intricately linked to the willingness of individuals to contribute to a society marked by improvement. As indicated the framework distinguishes between changes in people and broader social changes. Studies on beliefs people share about the future of society have been conducted about human extinction (Tonn, 2009; Leakey & Lewin, 1997), voter actions (Combs, 2016), ecologically sustainable futures (Hicks & Holden, 1995, 2007), climate change or global warming (Intergovernmental panel for climate change, 2001; Milfont *et al.*, 2014) and even videogame visions of the future (Abraham, 2015). Studies conducted within this framework show that people are motivated to support actions geared towards creating a society with better individuals thriving in a developed society.

This study was conducted in September 2013, one month before Born Frees (those born after 1990) became eligible to vote in the next national and provincial election, however, the relevance of our findings extend beyond the specific timing of the data collection. While political challenges persist, there haven't been eruptions as severe as the 1976 Soweto Uprisings. Notable changes include the renaming of South African cities to African names, streets named after anti-apartheid leaders, the Marikana protests, Amplats dismissals, and the suspension of the ANC youth league chair who later launched a party in late 2013. Despite the evolving political landscape, the fundamental socio-political issues addressed in our study continue to be relevant today. The dynamics of political challenges, unity efforts by the ruling party, and societal perceptions are ongoing themes that shape South Africa's trajectory. Moreover, while our study provides insights into the perspectives and attitudes prevalent at a particular point in time, it serves as a valuable baseline for understanding historical trends and potential shifts over time. Understanding the perceptions and attitudes of these young people offers valuable context for interpreting their views on the future of South Africa. Both the collective futures framework and future ideologies acknowledge that people's decisions are influenced by their present circumstances and the social context in which they live. Decisions are made based on a person's status within their social group. We hypothesised that individuals holding optimistic views of the future would perceive societal progress and

improvements as more common within future South Africa. Similarly, compared to those with optimistic future ideologies, individuals who imagined a failing society were predicted to describe more widespread societal dysfunctionality in South Africa in the future. Participants with positive ideologies were predicted to assign more positive features and values to future South Africans than those who saw a declining South Africa. A similar pattern was predicted for envisioned changes in future characteristics.

METHOD

Sample

Participants were recruited from South African four high schools in the Gauteng region. Six hundred and thirty-one ($n = 631$) Grade 10 pupils from four high schools participated. To gather comprehensive demographic information, participants were requested to self-identify their race, age and gender. Participants' age ranged from 15 to 21 years with a mean age of 16.77. Two schools were in townships, populated by black South Africans, within the Johannesburg school districts (i.e., township school environment; $n = 342$). The other two schools were historically white schools with learners from all races, located in middle-class Tshwane school districts (i.e., suburb school environment; $n = 289$). Three hundred and forty-one participants indicated that they were females, 274 participants indicated to be males and 16 participants did not indicate their gender. During apartheid, the Population Registration Act of 1950 classified all South Africans into four racial groups. This classification system is still in use today. Individuals were categorised into these four groups based on various criteria such as appearance, ancestry, socioeconomic status and cultural lifestyle: black, white, coloured and indian. Black South Africans comprise of nine traditional cultural groups distinguished by language: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu (Adams *et al.*, 2012). White South Africans are divided into two ethno-cultural groups: Afrikaans and English-speaking individuals, constituting the economic majority and are mainly of European descent (Jackson *et al.*, 2021). The coloured group includes people regarded as being of mixed descent, including Khoisan, European and Malay ancestry

(Mellet, 2011). Indian South Africans are of British Indian descent who migrated to South Africa as labourers.

In this study, 423 (67%) participants identified as black, 139 (22%) as white, 39 (6%) as coloured and 12 (2%) as indian. The distribution of our participants aligns with that of the nation, according to the 2022 SA mid-year population estimates by StatsSA, the demographic distribution is approximately 81% black, 7.6% white, 8.7% coloured, and 2.5% indian (StatsSA, 2022). Recognising that blacks, coloureds and Indians, all form part of the previously disadvantaged group, and have been considered 'non-white' throughout South African history, thus they were summarised under the category of Blacks for simplicity in the present study (Jackson *et al.*, 2010). For analysis, participants were further categorised based on race and school environment into white suburb ($n = 137$), Black suburb ($n = 147$) and Black township ($n = 330$).

Procedure

Ethical clearance and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the university, the provincial education department and the headmasters of the respective schools. Data was collected in September 2013, participants provided informed consent before participating in the study during their Life Orientation subject class. Paper pencil questionnaires were handed out.

Measures

Imagining the future of South Africa assessed as ideologies was adapted from Danziger's (1963) research on future ideologies. Participants were instructed to spend five minutes envisioning South Africa in 50 years (2063) and note spontaneous thoughts. Unlike prior studies, narratives were not categorised as a whole, avoiding assumptions of a prevailing ideology throughout the essay (Leslie & Finchilescu, 2013, p. 347). Instead, emphasis was placed on identifying the most prominent ideology, typically found in the first sentences. Following the approach of Leslie and Finchilescu (2013, pp. 342-344), content analysis was employed to classify the narratives using their proposed classification system, similar to previous studies.

Narratives were categorized as follows: Liberal future ideology, expressing belief in gradual social improvement through peaceful transformations (e.g. “Will be more developed, there will be less discrimination”). Catastrophic future ideology encompassed beliefs in the current political system leading to economic decline, crime, and disorder (e.g. “South Africa in years to come it will be a country of war and discrimination, and there will be a low percentage of skilled people”). Narratives classified as Technicist future ideology referenced societal changes due to technological and material development (e.g. “SA is going to function only via technology, like electronic ID and bank cards, through methods like barcodes”).

Narratives were classified as holding a Conservative future ideology if they indicated a belief that the social and political order will remain more or less the same (Example: “Things will be quite the same as now nothing much will be changed”); as Revolutionary future ideology if future social changes were due to the means of violence (Example: “A country in civil war, blacks against whites”); and as Socialist future ideology if a communist future was desired by making references to land and resource re-distribution (Example: “More industrialized the people of SA would mostly or entirely be black. Possibly communist”). Lastly, narratives were classified as unclassifiable if they did not depict any definable future ideology (Example: “There is a 50/50 chance of either crumbling cause of unfair treatment or it will be fixed”).

An inter-rater reliability analysis using Kappa statistics was performed to determine the consistency between the two raters. The interrater reliability was found to be Kappa = .67, ($p < .001$) suggesting an acceptable agreement between the two raters (Landis & Koch, 1977). Ambiguous classifications were discussed extensively until the raters reached an agreement.

Imagining the future of South Africa as collective futures was assessed using the collective futures framework as proposed by Bain *et al.* (2013). The two overarching dimensions of the collective futures framework are projected differences in people and society. The society dimension relates to projected changes in broad living conditions and consists of two sub-dimensions: societal development and societal dysfunctionality. The people dimension relates to projected changes in people's traits and values.

People's traits were conceptualised as three sub-dimensions: Warmth, Morality and Competence; whereas people's values are distinguished as Conservation, Self-transcendence, Openness to change and Self-enhancement. On an 11-point rating system (with 5 being significantly more prevalent than today, 0 representing no change from today, and 5 representing much less common than today), participants estimated the expected prevalence of society and individual traits in South Africa in 50 years. A scale from 1 (much less common than today) to 11 (far more prevalent than today) was used to recode the response format to analyse it.

Eight items were used to evaluate societal development: scientific education, community groups, volunteering, technological innovation, scientific advancement, key discoveries, educational standards, and social welfare ($\alpha = .78$). Gender inequality, corruption, murder, sickness, gangs, homelessness, burglary, assaults, rape, poverty, suicide, global warming, terrorism, prostitution, fear of crime, and forced immigration were among the 16 items used to measure societal dysfunctionality ($\alpha = .92$).

Six items were used to measure people's value of conservation: moderation, self-discipline, and moderation ($\alpha = .84$). Six items were used to measure self-transcendence: environmental preservation, social justice, equality, honesty, helpfulness, and finding meaning in life ($\alpha = .86$). Six measures were used to measure openness to change: creativity, enjoyment of life, independence, courage, and a varied existence ($\alpha = .85$). Finally, factors pertaining to achievement, wealth, social power, ambition, enjoyment, and recognition were used to quantify self-enhancement ($\alpha = .88$).

People's warmth trait was measured by the following six items: insensitive (reversed), unfriendly (reversed), unsympathetic (reversed), warm, caring, and considerate ($\alpha = .71$ after omitting insensitive). Morality was measured by the six items: immoral (reversed), deceitful (reversed), unfaithful (reversed), honest, trustworthy, and sincere ($\alpha = .84$ after omitting all reversed items). Competence was measured by the following seven items: disorganized (reversed), lazy (reversed), unskilled (reversed), capable, assertive and competent ($\alpha = .56$, which did not improve by the exclusion of any item).

RESULTS

Firstly, in order to determine whether school environment, gender and race were independent of each other, three Chi-Square tests were conducted, testing the independence between school environment and gender, $\chi^2(1) = 0.429$, $p = .513$; between gender and race, $\chi^2(1) = 1.50$, $p = .220$; and between school environment and race, $\chi^2(1) = 198.789$, $p < .001$ (note that only two participants reported to be white and attending a township school). These results suggest that gender and school environment as well as gender and race were independent categories, whereas race and school environment were dependent. The latter is not surprising since township schools are hardly attended by white pupils.

Secondly, we analysed the ideological beliefs. Of the 631 participants, 612 (97%) provided a narrative on the future of South Africa. The most frequent ideology emerging in the current study was Liberal at 46% ($n = 279$), followed by Catastrophic at 35% ($n = 217$), and Technicist at 14% ($n = 84$). The remaining 32 narratives were Unclassifiable. The top three ideologies (i.e., liberal, catastrophic and technicist) in the narratives were compared against race/school environment (Black township, white suburb and Black suburb). Significant differences in the proportions of these ideologies were observed among participants, $\chi^2(2) = 31.692$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc statistics revealed significant differences between Black township and Black and white suburb participants (Bonferroni statistic: $p < .01$).

Chi-square tests were conducted to establish the relationships between gender and the top three ideologies (Table 1). The Chi-square revealed a significant relationship for gender, $\chi^2(2) = 7.373$, $p = .025$, and race, $\chi^2(2) = 11.501$, $p = .003$. Female participants reported significantly more liberal ideologies than males, whereas male participants reported significantly more catastrophic ideologies than females.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants Reporting the Top Three Ideologies

	Liberal	Catastrophic	Technicist
Black	174	98	42
White	61	70	25
Male	130	77	42
Female	144	133	41
Suburb	96	128	45
Township	183	89	39

Previous studies conducted on future ideologies revealed Catastrophic, Liberal and Revolutionary as the most salient ideologies (Danziger, 1963; Du Preez *et al.*, 1981; Finchilescu & Dawes, 1999). These studies made comparisons between race groups, with results further separated between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking whites, and the imagined differences about the future are influenced by group membership. Participants of the Danziger (1963), Du Preez *et al.* (1981) and Leslie and Finchilescu (2013) were older adolescents (19 and above) attending university, participants in the Finchilescu and Dawes studies (1999) were younger, aged 14 and 17 years. Participants from this study had a mean age of 16.77 and the results are in line with the Leslie and Finchilescu (2013) study. Similar to this study the most salient ideology was Liberal followed by Catastrophic/Deterioration and there were no significant race differences.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and F- and post-hoc Statistics of Future Ideologies on Projections about Society

Collective Futures	Ideologies			F- Statistics	Post-Hoc Statistics
Society	Liberal ^a	Technicist ^b	Catastrophic ^c		
Societal development	M = 8.24	M = 8.21	M = 6.96 ^{ab}	F(2, 570) = 32.678***	Bonferroni: ps < .001
	SD = 1.93	SD = 1.89	SD = 1.81		
Societal dysfunction	M = 6.19	M = 6.82 ^{ac}	M = 7.88 ^{ab}	F(2, 571) = 40.413***	Bonferroni: ps < .05
	SD = 2.19	SD = 2.09	SD = 2.01		
Collective Futures	Ideologies			F- Statistics	Post-Hoc Statistics
People's values	Liberal ^a	Technicist ^b	Catastrophic ^c		
Conservation	M = 6.74	M = 5.89 ^{ac}	M = 5.02 ^{ab}	F(2, 569) = 33.898***	Bonferroni: ps < .01
	SD = 2.43	SD = 2.09	SD = 2.22		
Self-transcendence	M = 7.53	M = 6.61 ^{ac}	M = 5.11 ^{ab}	F(2, 566) = 77.731***	Bonferroni: ps < .001
	SD = 2.06	SD = 2.13	SD = 2.22		
Openness to change	M = 8.51	M = 8.07	M = 6.63 ^{ab}	F(2, 224.181) = 40.904***	Games-Howell: ps < .001
	SD = 1.97	SD = 2.09	SD = 2.48		
Self-enhancement	M = 8.58	M = 7.84 ^{ac}	M = 6.77 ^{ab}	F(2, 219.293) = 41.151***	Games-Howell: ps < .05
	SD = 1.80	SD = 2.10	SD = 2.44		
Collective Futures	Ideologies			F- Statistics	Post-Hoc Statistics
People's values	Liberal ^a	Technicist ^b	Catastrophic ^c		
Warmth	M = 7.28	M = 6.74	M = 5.79 ^{ab}	F(2, 564) = 36.761***	Bonferroni: ps < .001
	SD = 1.89	SD = 1.67	SD = 1.95		
Moral	M = 7.12	M = 6.11 ^{ac}	M = 4.79 ^{ab}	F(2, 564) = 38.379***	Bonferroni: ps < .01
	SD = 2.41	SD = 2.49	SD = 2.50		
Competence	M = 7.35	M = 6.94	M = 5.97 ^{ab}	F(2, 562) = 44.352***	Bonferroni: ps < .001
	SD = 1.65	SD = 1.60	SD = 1.59		

Note: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations and F- and post-hoc Statistics race/school Environment on Collective Futures

		Ideologies			
Collective Futures Society	White suburb ^a	Black suburb ^b	Black township ^c	F- Statistics	Post-Hoc Statistics
Societal development	M = 7.5	M = 7.03	M = 7.99 ^a	F(2, 601) = 12.087***	Bonferroni: ps < .001
	SD = 1.75	SD = 1.81	SD = 2.09		
Societal dysfunction	M = 7.06	M = 7.42	M = 6.75 ^b	F(2, 295.019) = 5.695**	Games-Howell: <i>p</i> _s < .01
	SD = 2.42	SD = 1.92	SD = 2.16		
Collective Future		Ideologies		F- Statistics	Post-Hoc Statistics
Peoples' Values	White suburb ^a	Black suburb ^b	Black township ^c		
Conservation	M = 5.34	M = 5.79	M = 6.22 ^a	F(2, 314.272) = 4.743**	Games-Howell: <i>p</i> _s < .05
	SD = 2.12	SD = 2.31	SD = 2.53		
Self-transcendence	M = 5.45	M = 6.14 ^{ac}	M = 7.03 ^{ab}	F(2, 596) = 23.488***	Bonferroni: <i>p</i> _s < .05
	SD = 2.27	SD = 2.22	SD = 2.42		
Openness to change	M = 6.74	M = 7.57 ^{ac}	M = 8.16 ^{ab}	F(2, 596) = 18.564***	Bonferroni: ps < .05
	SD = 2.28	SD = 2.21	SD = 2.13		
Self-enhancement	M = 6.59 ^{bc}	M = 8.02	M = 8.06	F(2, 597) = 22.918***	Bonferroni: ps < .001
	SD = 2.26	SD = 2.09	SD = 2.25		
Collective Futures		Ideologies		F- Statistics	Post-Hoc Statistics
Peoples' Traits	White suburb ^a	Black suburb ^b	Black township ^c		
Warmth	M = 6.02	M = 6.42	M = 6.97 ^{ab}	F(2, 598) = 11.976***	Bonferroni: ps < .05
	SD = 1.79	SD = 1.88	SD = 2.09		
Moral	M = 5.32	M = 5.54	M = 6.61 ^{ab}	F(2, 594) = 14.985***	Bonferroni: <i>p</i> _s < .001
	SD = 2.48	SD = 2.50	SD = 2.76		
Competence	M = 6.18	M = 6.53	M = 7.06 ^{ab}	F(2, 595) = 14.264***	Bonferroni: ps < .01
	SD = 1.62	SD = 1.64	SD = 1.75		

Note: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Thirdly, we tested whether the ideologies correspond with the collective future framework, which relates to both society and people. We had hypothesised that participants who had optimistic views of the future, such as a liberal or a technicist future ideology, would perceive societal progress and improvements as more common in future South Africa. In contrast, individuals with a negative outlook, such as a catastrophic future ideology, would describe societal dysfunctionality or stagnation as more common within future South Africa. Moreover, we assumed a similar trend for the people dimension, in that, participants who are holding a liberal or a technicist future ideology were assumed to describe more positive traits and values to South Africans in the future than participants sharing a catastrophic future ideology.

The overall results supported our assumptions that future ideologies correspond with the collective future framework (Table 2). As assumed, participants who share a liberal or a technicist future ideology scored significantly higher on the measures of societal development, people's values and people's traits when compared to participants who share a catastrophic future ideology. As assumed, participants who share a catastrophic future ideology scored significantly higher on societal dysfunctionality than participants who share a liberal or technicist future ideology. The results also indicate that participants who share a technicist future ideology differed from participants who share a liberal future ideology, in that they scored significantly higher on societal dysfunctionality. Moreover, the results also showed that participants who share a liberal future ideology scored significantly higher on values: conservation, self-transcendence, self-enhancement and morality trait than participants who share a technicist or a catastrophic future ideology. These results suggest that participants who share a liberal future ideology are most optimistic about the future of South Africa. However, their optimism is not necessarily limited to the improvement of broad social living conditions or social systems through peaceful transformations, but it includes the development of people values and traits of those who will constitute the society of the future.

Lastly, we aimed to explore who these young people are, who either share a liberal or technicist future ideology with an optimistic outlook with regards to South Africa as society and South Africans as people or share a catastrophic future ideology with a pessimistic outlook with regards to South Africa as society and South Africans as people. The Chi-Square analysis revealed a statistically significant association between race/school environment (i.e., Black township, white suburb and Black suburb) and liberal and catastrophic future ideologies, $\chi^2(2) = 32.244$, $p < .001$. The odds ratio implies that Black township participants were 3.5 and 2.7 times more likely than white suburb and Black suburb participants, respectively, to imagine a liberal future for South Africa. On the other hand, white suburb participants were 3.2 times and Black suburb participants were 2.6 times more likely to hold a catastrophic future ideology than Black township participants.

Similar results were found when we compared the three groups regarding the collective future framework (Table 3). The overall results revealed that the broad societal changes (i.e., societal development and societal dysfunctionality); and peoples' values (i.e., Conservation, Self-transcendence, Openness to change, and Self-enhancement) and traits (i.e., Warmth, Moral, and Competence) in the future were perceived differently by Black suburb, white suburb and Black Township participants. Black township participants scored significantly higher on societal development than white suburb participants. Black suburb participants scored significantly higher on societal dysfunctionality than Black township participants. Black township and Black suburb participants scored significantly higher on people's values in the future when compared with white suburb participants. However, Black township participants scored significantly higher on values of self-transcendence and openness to change than Black suburb and white suburb participants. Black township participants scored significantly higher on the conservation value than white suburb participants, who scored significantly lower on self-enhancement as a value when compared with Black suburb and Black township participants. Black township participants scored significantly higher on people's traits (i.e., Warmth, Moral, and Competence) than Black and white suburb participants. As outlined in the sample section, the

race/school environment groups (suburb vs. township) consisted mostly of Black participants because township schools are composed of only Black learners, the observed differences about people's traits in the future (between township and suburb participants) can be attributed to the differences in school context. It is noteworthy that white suburb participants were rather pessimistic regarding people in the future. In sum, the results suggest that Black township participants are the ones who are more optimistic about the future of South Africa as a society and South Africans as people.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study explored South African youth's perspectives on the future, using the Danziger method and the collective futures framework. Findings aligned with prior research, indicating prevalent liberal and catastrophic future ideologies. No significant race differences were observed, highlighting socio-economic class as a more influential factor in dividing South African groups. Despite racial distinctions, a shared perception of future ideologies exists among different races. However, the study further indicates that socio-economic class plays a more significant role than race in dividing South African racial groups. Suggesting that economic status might influence perceptions more than racial identity.

On testing the association between group membership and perceptions about the future, optimism and pessimism across groups was found to be eminent. Black township participants appeared to be more optimistic about South Africa's future, while those in Black suburbs envision societal dysfunction. This contrast might stem from different socio-economic circumstances and experiences within these groups (Kamper & Badenhurst, 2010). This suggests that social context might have an influence on future outlook. Previous studies have established that adolescence is a crucial time for thinking about the future (i.e., personal or social) and is influenced by social context (Elmore & Oyserman, 2012). For instance, when adolescents were asked to imagine their personal futures, Black suburb participants described that their motivation is informed by their feared possible identities, indicating the impact of

social factors on individual aspirations (Masinga & Dumont, 2018). The study notes the difficulty in explaining the pessimistic perceptions of the White suburb participants of the future. These results imply complexities in understanding how different groups perceive the future, possibly influenced by varied experiences, values, or fears.

The study suggests a potential shift in priorities when envisioning the collective future, indicating that values may be less important compared to personal futures (Bain *et al.*, 2013). The call for more research underscores the need for a deeper exploration of these complexities.

While the present study offers valuable insights into future outlooks among young individuals in South Africa, it acknowledges several limitations. The present study is not without limitations, first, convenient sampling was used for the present study and therefore the results cannot be generalised beyond the present sample. Second, imagining the future of South Africa was assessed using a cross-sectional research design might have limited the study's ability to capture the dynamic nature of societal changes. South Africa is still going through many challenges and changes as a society and thus, such changes can be appropriately addressed through a longitudinal approach. Third, the present sample is made up of relatively young people, hence they might have found the 50-year time frame as rather far into the future to correctly project. Hence their perspectives might be influenced by their immediate concerns and might not fully encompass the broader societal changes that might unfold over the long term. Lastly, ideologies are difficult to rate because of South Africa's context, in as much as young people of South Africa are free post-apartheid, they have other issues to contend with including an uncertain future in terms of quality of education, unemployment, health issues and threats to their living conditions (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2015). These significant challenges may overshadow and influence the perceptions and future projections of young individuals, making it challenging to separate their ideological views from immediate concerns. Addressing these limitations in future research endeavours could lead to a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of how perceptions of the future are shaped in South Africa's diverse and evolving societal landscape.

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