

FUTURE EXPECTATIONS OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN ADOLESCENTS: TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the impact of societal change and related societal problems on the black youth of post-apartheid South Africa. It is argued that adolescents' perspectives on their future in this country could be negatively influenced by the extent of societal problems which are currently experienced in South Africa. Other findings indicate that the influence of traditional cultural norms and values on the black youth is slowly but surely diminishing. Middle class Black adolescents tend to share the general consumerism of South Africa's wealthy classes, and many are detached from the history of the struggle for political freedom. Amidst severe societal problems such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and violent crime, the findings of an empirical investigation into the views of 391 black adolescents from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds indicate that a general spirit of optimism and independence exists, paired with a strong desire to escape the trappings of poverty and to fulfil their career and social expectations.

Keywords: future expectations, black youth, societal problems

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescents' perspectives on their future in South Africa have significant potential as indicators of *inter alia* the "state of the nation" in South Africa, the expected "brain drain" from South Africa, the stance of adolescents' loyalty towards South Africa, the degree of adolescents' inclination towards materialism, and the measure of their internal versus external locus of control (with specific reference to religious faith) in contemplating their future. Evidently, adolescents' views of their future are of crucial importance for education. Disinterested and negative inclinations towards the future could manifest in low learner motivation, poor academic performance and asocial problems such as aggression, drug abuse and crime (Harris, Duncan & Bolsjoly 2002, 1007).

The nature and orientation of adolescents' future expectations are of particular relevance in South Africa due to the extent of social problems which are currently experienced. Media reports on crime, corruption, mismanagement, poverty and HIV/AIDS are ever-increasing to the extent that crime has seemingly spiralled beyond control. According to a national survey by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, focusing on the youth, 40 per cent of South African children between 12 and 22 years have already been victims of crime or violence (CJCP 2006, 1).

This situation begs the question: How do societal problems (like crime and violence) in South Africa impact on adolescents' perspectives and expectations regarding their future in their home country?

This study forms part of a research project on the future expectations of South African adolescents, which focuses on the impact of social change on the youth of various population groups, and the extent to which their future orientations and expectations are influenced by socio-political changes which have taken place over the past decade. In this article the spotlight is on the black youth of South Africa. One might expect that the future expectations of this group would be inherently positive in accordance with the excitement with which the Black population group entered the post-apartheid political dispensation. Yet we felt the need to determine the extent to which the Black youth has perhaps been disillusioned by the wide-spread incidence of crime, violence, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and the like, in South Africa. Furthermore, and from a different angle, we were intrigued by the degree to which the Black youth are becoming globalised in their thinking and perspectives: Are there discernable cultural shifts (e.g. from communalism to individualism) in the future perspectives of Black adolescents?

We firstly provide a brief orientation on the role that social context plays in the future expectations of adolescents. Next some major social problems in South Africa are highlighted. This orientation sets the theoretical and contextual backdrop against which we then present and discuss the design and findings of the empirical study.

2. THE ROLE OF SOCIETAL CONTEXT IN THE FUTURE EXPECTATIONS OF ADOLESCENTS

From a sociological point of view, there are two prominent models that could be applied when exploring the youth's future expectations, namely the *ecological model* and the *life history model* (Crockett & Silberstein 2003:3). The ecological model studies the immediate life world of the adolescent (family, school, peer group), while the life history model investigates the sociological obstacles which obstruct the optimal realisation of the adolescent's potential (ibid). It is the latter which is of particular relevance for any study on the effect of social problems on the future expectations of the youth. The life history theory maintains that young people acquire their perceptions of the adult life course through cumulative exposure to social institutions and by implication, the problems experienced by, and because of, social institutions. Elder and Shanahan (2006:667) clarify as follows: "Individuals do not develop according to their natures; but, rather, they are continually produced, sustained, and changed by their social context".

The impact of the social context (in terms of macro socio-economic, political and cultural factors) is extensively reported in the so-called Euronet study where the future expectations of adolescents in 11 European countries were explored (Alsaker & Flammer 1999). This project, supported by prominent international youth studies (Crockett & Silbereisen 2000; Larson, Bradford, Brown & Mortimer 2002), indicated a few common denominators in the modern youth's mind-set as far as their future expectations are concerned. Amongst others, the following findings are worth mentioning: adolescents generally have a feeling of control over their future (Grob & Flammer 1999:111) and their love for the own is stronger than the urge to settle elsewhere (although there is a relation between an unfavourable political order and an outward orientation) (Flannagan & Botcheva 1999:141). Despite the fact that religious convictions remain a significant influence (Larson 2002:13), materialistic values and aspirations appear to be prominent (ibid.). Future ideals and the motivation to reach them are much more noticeable in teenagers from deprived and underdeveloped societies (ibid., 222; Grob & Flammer 1999:111).

The extent of outward future orientation amongst adolescents who find themselves in deprived social conditions was extensively researched by Elder and Russell (2000). Their findings indicated that young people, especially the more ambitious ones, will look for greener pastures when their circumstances are unfavourable, regardless of family ties and love for their own. Although Elder and Russell (2000) focused on economic deprivation, their research findings on outward future orientation could be applied to other forms of social problems (ibid.:34). The important point is that the extent and intensity of young people's outward future orientation serve as pointers of the relative welfare (or lack thereof) in society.

Larson, Wilson and Mortimer (2002, 159) emphasise the social imperative to provide a secure future in the interest of the youth. They emphatically point out that societies should provide well marked, stable pathways whereby young people can develop and prepare themselves to be contributing adults to their communities. If these paths are hazardous, unpredictable or uninviting, the future for both adolescents and society is insecure (ibid.:159).

These authors (ibid.:159-166) provide an extensive profile of the modern adolescent based on studies in eight world regions. It highlights some social obstacles which adolescents may encounter on their way to adulthood in the 21st century, such as global poverty, inadequate and irrelevant provision of education, increasing unemployment rates, political apathy regarding the youth's welfare and future, and insufficient provision to equip people with interethnic communication skills in a globalised age. The necessity of comprehensive research concerning the social welfare and development of the youth is hence implied (ibid.:165).

It is clear that the social contexts in which the youth build their dreams and formulate their plans concerning the future are determined by politics and the domestic affairs of the state, such as political order and the efficiency and stability of the state. Larson (2002:16-17) cautions:

Governmental dysfunction and violent conflict have dire consequences for adolescents and for their preparation toward adulthood. Weak, destabilised, and distracted governments are less able to provide a beneficial developmental infrastructure to children and adolescents.—. Ultimately, governmental disorder, terrorism, and warfare deny adolescents a clear and predictable path to adulthood. It throws the future into uncertainty, leaving youth without a reliable vision or any confidence in whether they will get to adulthood and what skills will be needed. Promoting stable governments and minimizing domains of misrule are vital to the future of adolescents.

To what extent does a “beneficial developmental infrastructure” (see above) exist for South African youth, and, in particular, black youth?

3. THE IMPACT OF SOCIETAL PROBLEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA ON BLACK ADOLESCENTS

Social transitions are traumatic events which are characterised by distress and uncertainty (Sarakinsky 2001; Jung 1998). South Africa underwent political reform in 1994, from an apartheid government to a democratic state. This shift impacted on all population groups and filtered through to every facet of life. South African adolescents find themselves in a particularly precarious situation. On the one hand, they must negotiate the development of their own identities, while on the other, they must adapt to the social changes that are occurring around them (cf. Finshilescu & Dawes 2001:132).

As far as black adolescents are concerned, it is not possible to discuss their unique characteristics and future orientations without considering our specific heritage of racial segregation and the apartheid past as being at the heart of the black psyche. South African studies consistently point to the fact that the future expectations, behaviour patterns, perceptions and the life philosophy of the black youth, although embedded in tradition and cultural norms and values, cannot be studied or understood, nor can any assumptions be made about them without considering the black population's particular history within the South African context (Ferns & Thom 2001; Everatt 2002; Gaganakis 2003, 2004; Lambert, Rowan, Longhurst & Kim 2006).

According to the life history theory, moral development and life orientation are formed by the unique social, cultural and historical context in which they take place.

Human development is therefore not universal in nature, and human studies should always consider the role of socio-cultural-historical context of human behaviour and interaction (Elder & Shanahan 2006:667; Gielen & Markoulis 1994:73). In support of this theory, Gaganakis (2004:59) points out that culture and identity are phenomena which are continuously negotiated and reconstructed as a result of varying places, socio-historical periods and local contexts. This location-specific and context-boundedness of culture and identity are in contrast with earlier traditionalist views. The tendency was to think of culture, norms and values and behaviour patterns of groups as relatively static phenomena, implying that the norms and values of a particular group would remain more or less constant over time, fluctuating little or evolving very steadily from one generation to the next. Although this notion seemed to hold true for black people for a considerable length of time during the apartheid regime from the 1950s to the late 1980s, a major shift in life view of the current black youth in South Africa has been taking place.

For decades black people in South Africa have been exposed to discrimination upheld by laws and racism before the dismantling of the apartheid dispensation in 1994. Since black people found themselves in situations where they were regarded as inferior on account of their ethnic classification, with their individuality disregarded and their lives run by laws, they had to turn to their cultural group in order to experience a sense of belonging and security within the traditional values and norms of the group (Ferns & Thom 2001:46). This, according to Lambert *et al.* (2006:148) is typical of the minority group status that black South Africans had under apartheid, and it probably resulted in the general tendency of black people to be concerned about the maximising of circumstances for the good of the group. Their social and political group-based domination formed the building blocks for the communal spirit which has been prevalent for many years.

South African research conducted during the apartheid era claimed that black people were highly community-oriented. This spirit of caring was, and to a large extent still is, embodied in the African term 'Ubuntu'. According to research done by Gillespie and Allport as far back as the 1950s, it was claimed that white subjects valued private satisfaction highly, while blacks placed more value on community service and welfare (Gaganakis 2003:283). Almost thirty years later, in 1980, research by Geber on black adolescents in Soweto showed that adolescents' future plans were still formulated in terms of what they hoped to do for the community. (Gaganakis 2003:283). Studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s in various parts of South Africa repeatedly reported the same tendency, i.e that black families emphasised immense collectivism, interdependence and less autonomy, and having quality relationships with biological relatives and other nonblood relatives such as godparents, kin, peers and elders (Brown 2001:751).

This trend of collectivism and group cohesion was still highly characteristic of the black youth after the first democratic elections in 1994. According to Radebe (in personal conversation with Ferns and Thom in 1995), black adolescents' moral reasoning and world view were at the time to a large extent socialised according to traditional black African values and norms (Ferns & Thom 2001:39). Since the focus of these norms was aimed at the welfare of the group, conformation with group norms was emphasised. Thus, in the onset to the elections in 1994, black adolescents in South Africa grew up in a traditional culture wherein stable traditional values and norms were still forming the basis of their development within an increasingly globalised society. This is substantiated by the findings of a study conducted in 1997 by Moosa, Moonsamy and Fridjhon. They found that although black youth lived in the context of a 'western' or 'modern' environment, their traditional black cultural norms and values were still highly valued and could largely influence their perceptions. (Moosa *et al.* 1997:256-260). Mwamwenda expressed the same viewpoint in 1995 when he pointed out that although traditional African values and norms have changed on account of factors such as information technology, globalisation, improved education and the assimilation of Christian norms and values, the influence of the basic characteristics of African culture were still highly visible in the day-to-day functioning of black youth (Mwamwenda 1995).

In recent years, however, researchers such as Heaven, Stones, Simbayi and Le Roux (2000:67-72) have found that the social identity of black South Africans has become much wider than their ethnic group. In a study by Tyson and Stones (2002:5) it was found that being an individual member of a broad cultural group that has been identified as either individualistic or collectivist, is no longer a guarantee that the individual identifies with that culture and its traditional values. Their research shows how the legacy of ubuntu has been undermined in many communities by the erosion of the social fabric and family life. Möller (2005:258) offers a possible explanation for this seemingly deteriorating traditional order. She maintains that after 1994, black South Africans have been the main recipients of benefits and they are still the group which believes that they stand first in line for future benefits. According to her, the majority of the black population is youthful and may anticipate considerable improvements to their life situations during their life time. Equal opportunities policies have raised expectations of job opportunities, especially among black youth. In a study conducted by Everatt (2002:20) it was found that black youth in general share the consumerism of South Africa's wealthy classes, but many lack the history of participation in the struggle or the ability to argue that current consumption is an extension of a reward for earlier political sacrifices.

Although they may be politically aware and engaged, they are by far not politically active to the extent their predecessors were. Many of them were children or not yet born while the anti-apartheid struggle was being waged, they did not participate in the constitution-making process and they do not display the same sense of ownership that black adults have.

This shift in the value system and social orientation of the black youth over the past few years is confirmed by various researchers (Tyson & Stones 2002; Everatt 2002; Möller 2005; Ganagakis 2004). These authors consistently report that black youth feel 'enabled' and they express a sense of connectedness to themselves and their future. There seems to be a spirit of individualism, they strive for independence and they not only value academic qualifications as a means of exchange in the labour market, but also as an escape from traditional black working-class work. Many aspire to occupations in traditionally white dominated fields. Everatt (2002) argues that their expressed individualism suggests a break with a particular segment of the black community the urban poor. School education is perceived as a way of escaping the constraints deriving from a heritage of oppression. More significantly, they express a strong desire to pursue their own unique destinies and private satisfaction and to be independent and enabled rather than serving the community or being in a 'caring' role in the future (ibid.:2002:182). In several studies conducted over the past few years, it became clear that only a few perceive their future plans and any knowledge of education gained as something which should be shared or given back to the community in some way (Everatt 2002; Möller 2005; Ganagakis 2004.)

Despite this optimistic and individualistic trend in the minds of the black youth, researchers like Smith and Stones (2001:159) observe that South African adolescents face significantly greater challenges than their counterparts in countries where society is more stable. The extent of these challenges, as societal problems which are almost daily reported on in the media, becomes clear from the following brief summary of the incidence of **poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and violent crime** in South Africa. Although these societal problems are faced by adolescents across racial boundaries in South Africa, we shall indicate further on that this impact seems to be more severe on black communities. The level of acute **poverty** (i.e. the percentage of the population living below the so-called poverty line) in South Africa is distressing. If one sets the poverty line at a daily intake of 2000 calories, 40% of South Africa's population finds itself in absolute poverty (Kamper 2001:110). Unemployment is rife - less than 30% of the employable poor are actually working - compounded by the fact that 72% of the country's poor live in rural areas (ibid.). The most unfortunate aspect of the problem of poverty in South Africa is that it is ever-increasing, notwithstanding the political change in 1994 (Terreblanche 2004:213-214).

Kingdon and Knight (2004:199) believe that the **unemployment** rates in South Africa are extremely high by international standards. They base their statement on the general unemployment figure which has soared from an already elevated percentage of 31.5% in 1993 to 41.8% in 2002. They furthermore argue that unemployment figures vary significantly according to race. Africans face unemployment rates of 41% whilst the rate for whites is only 6%. Moreover, unemployment decreases progressively according to age, ranging from 51% for the youngest group to 17% for the eldest group (age 16-64). The incidence of unemployment also differs significantly in relation to variants such as region, gender and education (ibid.:200).

The **HIV/AIDS**-epidemic in South Africa is the most recent in Africa and one of the most severe worldwide (Whiteside & Sunter, cited in Prinsloo 2005:2). The life expectancy of South Africans has consequently decreased to about 50 years (Dorrington, Bradshaw, Johnson & Budlender 2004).

Prinsloo (2005:2) cautions that during the period 2000-2010 approximately eight million people will have died of the disease - most of them in the age group 17 to 45. Estimates of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS for 2004 indicate that the 15-24 year age group, and more particularly young women, has the highest infection rate (Dorrington *et al.* 2004:8).

In terms of proportional media attention, **violent crime** can be regarded as the most topical societal problem in South Africa. David Garland, British criminologist and social theorist, characterises South Africa as a "high crime society" (Berg & Scharf 2004:78). Whereas delinquency under the previous dispensation was more politically inclined, the face of crime has changed and violent crime is now the norm (cf. Keegan 2005:20). According to Berg and Scharf (2004), violent crime manifests as murder, attempted murder, culpable homicide, aggravated robbery, rape (and attempted rape), assault and common assault.

These authors furthermore emphasise that many incidents of crime are not reported and are therefore not reflected by the official statistics. Consequently a so-called 'dark figure' of unrecorded crime exists (ibid.:62). A study conducted by Powdthavee (2005:538) indicates that the sense of well-being as experienced by people who haven't fallen victim to crime correlates significantly with the regional crime rate. He observes that crime and the perception of personal safety are important factors in any assessment of social well-being and an individual's happiness level (ibid.:531).

From a sociological viewpoint, Smith and Stones (2001:159) argue aptly that racism, as the most apparent flaw of the apartheid era, has now been replaced by other manifestations of an ailing society, like fears of crime, and conclude by pointing out that a new nation cannot be built on fear and mistrust (ibid.:162). Crime has indeed become a significant emigration factor.

In a research study conducted in 2006 by Research Surveys, it was found that 55% of all South Africans who have settled in Australia and New Zealand based their decision to emigrate on reasons tied to violence and crime (Poverty 2006).

In view of the fact that adolescent views on their personal futures, as well as their emerging identities, are influenced by their societal, political and economic contexts (cf. Finchilescu & Dawes 2001:133), it appears that circumstances in South Africa could have a significant negative impact on adolescents' future expectations. To establish the extent to which this is indeed the case for black adolescents, an empirical study was done to gain insight on black adolescents' perspectives and expectations regarding their future in South Africa. As already mentioned, this focus is warranted by the above exposition of cultural shifts in the black population group, as well as the consideration that the black population group has had particularly high expectations of its future (also in terms of retributive and affirmative dimensions of the new political dispensation) in South Africa. Have these positive future expectations been diluted by societal problems in the past sixteen years, and how do black adolescents feel about the present circumstances and future prospects in their home country? More specifically, the following research questions guided the empirical research:

What are black adolescents' views on South Africa's biggest assets and problems?

Are black adolescents positively or negatively influenced about South Africa in their home and school environments?

Are black adolescents positive about their future in South Africa?

Do black adolescents' future expectations reflect a cultural shift from collectivism to individualism?

Are black adolescents' future perspectives globally or locally oriented?

4. EMPIRICAL SURVEY

4.1 Introductory remarks

The empirical study was conducted amongst Grade 11 learners from different social contexts and economic strata, based on the assumption that these different backgrounds could impact on their future expectations. Although Grade 12 learners would have been the ideal research population, principals have good reason to disallow any infringement on these learners' preparations for the matriculation examinations. Grade 11 learners were therefore selected.

There was no reason to believe that these learners would differ significantly from Grade 12 learners in contemplating their future.

4.2 Questionnaire content and design

In order to determine future expectations of high school learners, Grade 11 learners from a multicultural school in Pretoria were requested to write essays, not exceeding 300 words, on the topic: "My future in South Africa". The learners were informed about the research project, and their participation was voluntary. A text analysis was made of these essays to determine trends and themes in the future expectations of learners.

Useful data was obtained, and in order to verify the data, a focus group interview with eight of the learners was conducted. The participants in the discussion were selected on the basis of having a gender and race balance, as well as positive and negative viewpoints as expressed in the essays. The participants were again informed about the research project, and their voluntary participation in the focus group interview was ensured. Subsequently, themes from the essays and focus groups were identified in order to design a questionnaire for application on a larger scale. It was believed that a questionnaire could discriminate better between themes and would highlight ranking orders. A concise, user-friendly questionnaire (with completion time of about 10 minutes) was designed, of which only the last item was an open-ended one. The questionnaire focused on the respondent's self-image, home and school environment, future plans, views on South Africa's assets and problems, and own future plans.

4.3 Sampling

The selection of schools was made on the assumption that economic and geographic variables (socio-economic level, exposure to a multicultural setting, mining environment and an informal settlement) might influence the future expectations of the youth, and subsequently the following schools were purposively selected on the basis of their potential to provide rich data, and their proximity to the researchers' work bases: two multicultural secondary schools in affluent areas in Pretoria, a school in a mining environment (in the Free State), and one which is situated in the Diepsloot semi-informal settlement in urban Gauteng. The selection of the two multicultural schools was based purely on numerical considerations, i.e. to assure the participation of a sufficient number of middle class black learners in the project.

The principals of these schools were approached and informed about the aims and scope of the research project, and the importance of their schools' voluntary participation. The assurance of the confidentiality of data was given, as verbally stated in each questionnaire.

The principals then had the opportunity to scrutinise the questionnaire content, and to consent to its use. All principals were positive about the project and gave permission for the completion of the questionnaires by the Grade 11 learners from their schools.

4.4 Return rate

Language teachers distributed the questionnaires in their classes, which meant that all the Grade 11 learners got an opportunity to be involved in the research project. Thus the return rate was 100%.

4.5 Findings

In reporting and interpreting the findings, attention will first be paid to biographical data, followed by the exposition of data on respondents' home and school environment, their plans for the future and their views on South Africa.

4.5.1 Biographical data

The total number of respondents in the survey was 391, and their age distribution was as follows: 15 years (3.8%); 16 years (23.2%); 17 years (40.6%); 18 years (21.9%); and 19 years (10.5%). The phenomenon of over-age learners, a persistent problem in many black schools, was not significant in the participating schools. The research findings thus represent the views of a particular age cohort of respondents (16-18 years), as was the original research intention.

The respondents' gender representation was almost ideal, i.e. 182 boys (46.5%) and 209 girls (53.5%). Where some discrepancies in the views of boys vis-à-vis girls were found, these were noted for elucidation and interpretation.

The respondents were asked to assess themselves according to various aspects of self image and self knowledge, and the results of this self assessment are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Self-knowledge

(Most often = Yes)

Reserved, not very social	203	51.8%
Goal-oriented	342	87.2%
Enthusiastic about new opportunities	332	84.7%
Successful in what I do	339	86.5%
Satisfied with my life thus far	216	55.1%
Frequently worried	117	29.8%
Like taking the lead	244	62.2%
A happy, easy-going person	336	85.7%
Lack of energy for life	77	19.6%
Participate in sports activities	276	70.4%
Religious	361	92.1%
Outspoken	243	62.0%
Looking forward to the future.	370	94.4%

The data in Table 1 clearly reflect a generally positive self image, with a particularly strong perception of personal success (86.5%), a happy, easy-going disposition (85.7%) and out-going, social life-orientation, as is evident from the scale of participation in sport (70.4%). A positive inclination to life is evident from strong goal orientation (87.2%), enthusiasm about new opportunities (84.7%), optimism about the future (94.4%), as well as from the relatively low incidence of worries (29.8%) and lack of energy for life (19.6%). The respondents expressed particularly strong identification with religion (92.1%).

An individualistic tendency can be deduced from the data on preference to take the lead (62.2%), the self description of being out-spoken (62.0%), and of being reserved, rather than very social (51.8%). This finding seems to support the already mentioned shift from communal to individualistic values in (some) black communities.

Particularly noteworthy is the extent of expressed satisfaction with life thus far (55.1%). This finding can be interpreted positively as an indicator that more than half of the respondents were apparently experiencing acceptable living conditions. On the other hand the finding indicates that almost half of the respondents were not satisfied, implying a need for improvement of personal and contextual improvement. This was particularly evident from the responses of the Diepsloot school (situated in an informal settlement) where a satisfaction rate of only 29.0% was expressed.

4.5.2 Home and school environment

To obtain an idea of how the respondents' home and school environments accommodated principal values and possibly influenced perceptions about South Africa positively or otherwise, the questionnaire included items on the attendance of religious gatherings; home conversations about South Africa; teachers' remarks about South Africa, and the frequency of newspaper reading. The data on these items are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Home and school environment

Attendance of religious gatherings		
At least once a week	197	50.3%
Approximately twice a month	68	17.3%
Irregular	68	17.3%
Seldom/Never	57	14.5%
TOTAL	390	99.5%
Home conversations about SA		
	0	0.0%
Usually positive	93	23.7%
Usually negative	39	9.9%
Alternating between positive and negative	207	52.8%
Don't really talk about SA affairs	49	12.5%
TOTAL	388	99.0%
Teachers' remarks about SA		
	0	0.0%
Generally positive	104	26.5%
Generally negative	45	11.5%
Alternating between positive and negative	199	50.8%
Don't really talk about SA affairs	40	10.2%
TOTAL	388	99.0%
Frequency of newspaper reading		
	0	0.0%
Daily	90	23.0%
Two to four times a week	142	36.2%
Only now and then	125	31.9%
Hardly ever	30	7.7%
TOTAL	387	98.7%

The data reflect first of all a rather strong religious living context, with 67.6% of the respondents expressing a frequency of church attendance of between once a week and twice a month. This finding verifies the previous one on the religious self image (see Table 1). For yet unknown reasons, boys reported a slightly higher incidence of infrequent or no church attendance (35.8 %), than

girls (24.6%) The strain of reported home conversations about South Africa is mostly critical (52.8%) rather than exclusively positive (23.7%) or the other way round (9.9%). The very same trend, with almost comparable percentages, is evident from the respondents' feedback on their teachers' remarks about South Africa. The data on the frequency of newspaper reading indicates that about 60% of the respondents do so daily, or two to four times per week.

From the contextual data on respondents' home and school environments, it would appear that they were mostly exposed to critical, rather than overly positive remarks about South Africa, that they were reasonably informed about socio-political circumstances in South Africa, and that their life and world views were significantly underpinned by religious values.

4.5.3 Future plans

In order to ascertain whether the wish to build a future elsewhere was significantly present amongst black adolescents, a number of items probed them on their future career and study plans, and their main motive for leaving South Africa, if they had any intention of doing so. There was also an open item in the questionnaire, on which the respondents could freely express their vision on where they would see themselves in terms of career and family in ten years time. The item responses are indicated in Table 3, with the exception of the responses to the open item, which will be given in narrative form.

Table 3: Future plans

Future plans after completing school		
Working overseas before taking up studies	40	10.2%
Working in SA before taking up studies	55	14.0%
Immediately taking up studies in SA	201	51.3%
Studying overseas immediately	46	11.7%
No further studies, rather own business or other work in SA	9	2.3%
No further studies, rather own business or other work overseas	7	1.8%
Not sure yet	30	7.7%
TOTAL	388	99.0%
Future plans regarding career		
Working overseas permanently	45	11.5%
Working overseas but returning to SA at later stage	156	39.8%
Working in SA before taking up studies	145	37.0%
Not sure yet	43	11.0%
TOTAL	389	99.2%
Main reason, if to leave SA		
To earn money	95	24.2%
Career success	256	65.3%
Living in a safe environment	13	3.3%
Not applicable - no intention of leaving	23	5.9%
TOTAL	387	98.7%

The data in Table 3 firstly reveal that only about 11% of the respondents have any wish to settle permanently overseas - see item on working overseas permanently, for which boys expressed relatively stronger support (20.1%), compared to girls (9.6%). The same overall margin of interest is expressed in working overseas before taking up studies (10.2%). Compared to these percentages, the percentage for the wish to work overseas and then return to South Africa was unexpectedly high (39.8%). These findings seem to indicate a significant measure of global thinking amongst black adolescents, i.e. to go for best opportunities, but only for a small minority would this imply uprooting from South Africa. The data also spell out clearly that further studies weighed rather heavily with the respondents, with 63% indicating that they would prefer to continue immediately with after school studies, be it locally (51.3%) or overseas (11.7%).

If they were to leave South Africa, the majority of respondents (65.35) gave career considerations as the main reason for doing so, whereas the materialistic/money motive was expressed by a significantly smaller percentage of respondents (24.2%).

Fear for own safety as a reason for leaving rendered a negligible percentage (3.3%), which is truly surprising in view of the violent crime situation in South Africa, as already alluded to.

The responses on the open item, which requested respondents to envision their position in life in 10 years' time, revealed that most respondents had the desire to be successful in a career, and to be well off financially. The ideal to be settled and happy in marriage and family life was mentioned to a lesser extent, as was the wish to contribute in whatever way to make South Africa a better place. The pertinently expressed wish to live abroad, or safely, was almost non-existent.

It seems, therefore, that the respondents were mostly locally oriented regarding their long term future plans, but certainly open to the prospects of leaving the country for shorter or longer spells to pursue attractive (mainly career-related) opportunities. The tendency to view future opportunities in global terms is clearly discernable, but certainly not motivated by a fear factor.

4.5.4 Views on South Africa

The gist of the questionnaire had to do with respondents' views on South Africa, and their future prospects for having a good, meaningful life here. Respondents were probed on what they regarded as the country's biggest advantage, its biggest problem, and their positive, neutral or negative view on their personal future in South Africa. The responses are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Views on SA

South Africa's biggest advantage		
Economic prospects	30	7.7%
Beautiful scenery	39	9.9%
Work opportunities	58	14.8%
Human relations	28	7.1%
Opportunities to be of service to others	16	4.1%
Freedom of speech	69	17.6%
Importance of human rights	91	23.2%
Sport achievements	54	13.8%
TOTAL	385	98.2%
South Africa's biggest problem		
Poverty	53	13.5%
HIV/AIDS	158	40.3%
Mismanagement	7	1.8%
Racial tension	8	2.0%
Unemployment	65	16.6%
Affirmative action	0	0.0%
Violent crime	76	19.4%
Corruption	16	4.1%
Land claims	2	0.5%
TOTAL	385	98.2%
View on future in SA		
	0	0.0%
Future in SA good. Depends on hard work and positive attitude	211	53.8%
Positive about future due to God's care and disposal	109	27.8%
Wait and see. Will leave if circumstances deteriorate	19	4.8%
Circumstances are worrying. Will leave at first opportunity	22	5.6%
No future here. Prefer to leave permanently	15	3.8%
None of the above views.	12	3.1%
TOTAL	387	98.7%

As for South Africa's strengths, the majority of respondents (47.9%) opted for social aspects (see the items on human relations, freedom of speech and human rights). Economic aspects came in second position (22.5%) (see items on work opportunities and economic prospects). Ecological and sport features of the country gained more or less 10% support.

Notably, the response rate from the affluent, multicultural schools sometimes differed to some extent from the general trend. Compared to the percentage given in Table 4, these respondents allocated a higher 12.5% to human relations, a positive finding in view of the fact that these responses came from a multicultural schooling context. The percentage for "beautiful scenery" was also notably higher (22.5%), which can be attributed to the better opportunities which these respondents probably have to travel. On the other hand, local work opportunities were regarded with less enthusiasm (5.8%), as were sporting achievements (4.2%). It could well be that these more affluent respondents were more knowledgeable about severe competition in the upper echelons of the job market, as in the sport domain.

Opportunities to serve were not really regarded as a strength of any significance (4.1%). This latter finding is intriguing in view of the very high need for social work and development in South Africa, and once again indicative of the cultural shift taking place in black communities, as already referred to.

HIV/AIDS was singled out as South Africa's biggest problem (40.3%). The percentage for the Diepsloot school on this item was 53.4%, clearly indicating that the severity of the HIV/AIDS problem is most acutely experienced in high poverty contexts. Boys seemed to be marginally more inclined to view HIV/AIDS as most important problem (48.1%), compared to girls (37.8%). Poverty and unemployment (30.1%) were in second position as serious societal problems in South Africa. Conspicuously, the percentage from the high poverty Diepsloot school on the poverty item was a mere 5.7%. A probable explanation is that nobody wants to be regarded as poor, and that impoverished people are therefore inclined to safeguard their dignity by shying away from contemplating the poverty issue.

In contrast with high incidence of corruption reports in the media, respondents apparently did not view mismanagement and corruption as that serious (5.9%). The same applies to violent crime (19.4%). Affirmative action and land claims were not regarded as problems at all (0.0% and 0.5% respectively), implying strong support for these measures.

Most respondents (81.6%) identified with the first two statements regarding future prospects in South Africa, revealing a strongly positive stance, particularly, and perhaps unexpectedly, amongst the presently not so well off the corresponding percentage for the Diepsloot school was 87.5%. The positive outlook on the future in South Africa was not shared by about 10% of respondents. The latter percentage corresponds closely with related items in Table 1.

It is clearly evident that respondents' views on South Africa and their future here were primarily driven by social considerations regarding the strengths and weaknesses of South Africa.

The latter were not regarded by the majority of respondents as casting a shadow on their local future prospects. Within these socially driven perspectives, there are clear signs of some cultural shifts, i.e. from local communal interests to individual global ones.

4.5.5 Summary

The empirical survey proceeded without any hitch and rendered usable data. Careful data comparisons per school and gender revealed only a marginal extent of variations. When noteworthy, these were highlighted for mentioning, as was done in the afore-going data exposition. The findings were sometimes unexpected and surprising. The surprise element arose particularly due to the respondents' low rating of the effect of the widely reported crime and other societal problems in South Africa on their future prospects. The latter were strongly positive, and mostly locally oriented, expressing the rather general belief that life in future South Africa will be good. This view is apparently not based on naïve assumptions about the future, because the data revealed a significant extent of respondents' exposure to critical comments about South Africa at home and at school, as well as to newspapers.

The survey findings were also particularly informative regarding the respondents' religious and social dispositions. The former reflects the existence of an apparently firm religious frame of mind, whilst the latter is indicative of social and communal thinking, also about the future, but with clear signs of individualism and global perspectives. Only follow-up research will tell whether the latter is indeed a growing tendency.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

With reference to the previous theoretical exposition and the empirical research questions, the survey revealed an emergent profile of the modern black South African adolescent's future perspectives. There can indeed be little doubt that the black youth of South Africa feel excited about the future in their home country. Many of them still live in dismal social circumstances, but there exists the firm belief that these circumstances will change for the better. The future perspectives are mostly locally oriented, but global future perspectives are discernable, albeit mostly for temporary opportunities. It also became clear that black youth is by no means naïve or overly idealistic about South Africa. Home and school discussions about the country appear to be mostly critical rather than exclusively positive, with the youth also being informed to varying degrees about newspaper contents. A large degree of agreement on South Africa's greatest assets (the constitutional emphasis on freedom of speech and human rights), and its most serious problems (the scale of HIV/AIDS, poverty, unemployment) was found among the respondents.

The research findings also indicate that the black adolescents' future expectations show signs of cultural shifts from collectivism to individualism, and from caring/societal values to consumerist/materialist ones. Yet there were signs of the upkeep of societal dispositions which are not uncommon to Africa - unfortunately not always in the positive sense, as with our finding about the apparent measure of complacency with mismanagement and corruption.

In conclusion: It is clear from our findings that there exists a general spirit of optimism and independence amongst black adolescents, notwithstanding a problematic societal context in South Africa, mainly caused by the socio-economic hurdles of poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and violent crime. A strong desire to escape the trappings of poverty and the social inferiority of the past is evident. It appears that a new generation of black youth is emerging, with non-traditional elements in its view of life and future expectations. Keeping in mind that black adolescents are part of the country's largest population group, the positive findings of our study are indeed encouraging for South Africa - its citizens-to-be strongly believe in its future.

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