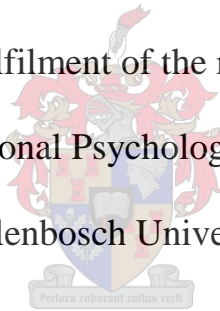


**NARRATIVES OF BELONGING AMONGST
STUDENTS AT A
HISTORICALLY WHITE UNIVERSITY**

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education in Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education at
Stellenbosch University



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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis is about diversity and inclusion at a historically white institution (HWI) in South Africa. It is a qualitative, exploratory study that attempts to garner rich and unique descriptions about the individual student's sense of belonging at an HWI. Researchers claim that racism and other issues related to inclusion continue to be barriers students must negotiate in the higher education (HE) context. However, universities have made and continue to make significant effort to ensure that previously disadvantaged students have access to learning. This discrepancy highlights the importance of critical study into what students are actually experiencing on campus because clearly, something is amiss. My aim for this research process was to give students a voice in order for them to share their experiences on the campus of an HWI, and to ascertain whether students are feeling, at ground level, the institutional and structural changes the university has made to promote inclusion. I chose a phenomenological approach to frame my research. I conducted three focus groups at three residences at an HWI as a means to gather data and analysed this data using Yuval-Davis' (2006) model of belonging. Significant findings revealed that residence traditions play an essential role in assisting marginalised students in forming a sense of belonging, and the use of Afrikaans continues to be a barrier for marginalised students and prevents them from feeling as if they belong in the residence community. The research is significant because it sheds light onto how students are negotiating issues related to diversity and inclusion in post-apartheid South Africa.

Key words: Higher education, community, belonging, race, historically white institutions, whiteness, narratives, phenomenology.

Opsoming

Hierdie tesis handel oor diversiteit en insluiting by 'n historiese-wit-instelling (HWI) in Suid-Afrika. Dit is 'n kwalitatiewe, verkennende studie wat poog om 'n ryk en unieke beskrywings van die gevoel van behoort van individuele studente weer te gee. Navorsers beweer dat rassisme en ander kwessies, wat verband hou met insluiting, blyk steeds hindernisse vir studente in die hoër onderwys (HO) konteks te wees. Tog wend universiteite pogings aan om 'n beduidende verskil te maak en seker te maak dat voorheen benadeelde studente toegang tot opvoeding het. Dit is belangrik om 'n kritiese ondersoek in te stel na wat studente in werklikheid op die kampus ervaar, want dit wil voorkom of iets steeds skort. My doel vir hierdie navorsing was om vir studente 'n stem te gee sodat hulle hul ervarings van 'n HWI kan deel en ook om vas te stel of die studente voel dat die universiteit op grondvlak genoegsame institusionele en strukturele veranderinge gemaak het om sodoende insluiting van alle studente te bevorder. 'n Fenomenologiese benadering tot navorsing is gebruik. Data is ingevorder deur drie fokusgroepe by drie verskillende koshuise by 'n HWI. Die data is geanaliseer deur Yuval-Davis (2006) se model van behoort te gebruik. Insiggewende bevindinge het getoon dat koshuistradisies 'n belangrike rol speel om gemarginaliseerde studente te ondersteun en ook dat die gebruik van Afrikaans steeds 'n hindernis vir gemarginaliseerde studente is wat hulle verhinder om 'n gevoel van behoort, in die koshuis-gemeenskap, te vorm. Hierdie navorsing is belangrik omdat dit lig werp op hoe studente oor kwessies onderhandel wat verband hou met diversiteit en insluiting in 'n post-apartheid Suid-Afrika.

Sleutel woorde: hoër onderwys, gemeenskap, behoort, ras, historiese wit instansies, witheid, narratiewe, fenomenologie.

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Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Opsomming	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Appendices	x
List of Tables	xi
List of Abbreviations	xii
 Chapter One	
1.1 Introduction and historical background	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	2
1.3 Brief literature review	2
1.4 Statement of objectives	3
1.5 Title	4
1.6 Definition of concepts	4
1.6.1 Belonging	4
1.6.2 Community	4
1.6.3 Whiteness	4
1.6.4 Historically white institutions	5
1.7 Research paradigm and methodology	5
1.7.1 Ontology and epistemology	5
1.7.2 Context of the study	6
1.7.3 Narrative as a form of data collection	6
1.7.4 Population	7
1.7.5 Procedure	7
1.7.6 Data analysis	8
1.8 Ethical considerations	8
1.9 Structure of the thesis	9
1.10 Conclusion	9

Chapter Two		
2.1	Introduction	10
2.2	Theories informing the study of race and belonging	10
	2.2.1 Contact theory	10
	2.2.2 Critical race theory	14
	2.2.3 Phenomenology	16
2.3	Whiteness	17
	2.3.1 Definition	17
	2.3.2 Significant research on whiteness	18
	2.3.3 A lens of whiteness	21
	2.3.4 Conclusion	23
2.4	Belonging	23
	2.4.1 Conceptualising belonging	23
	2.4.2 A framework for the study of belonging	24
	2.4.2.1 Social locations	24
	2.4.2.2 Identifications and emotional attachments	25
	2.4.2.3 Ethical and political values	26
	2.4.3 Relevant research on belonging	27
	2.4.3.1 An international perspective	27
	2.4.3.2 A South African perspective	29
2.5	Class and gender	30
2.6	Personal theoretical stance	31
2.7	Conclusion	32
Chapter Three		
3.1	Introduction	33
3.2	Phenomenology as a paradigm	33
3.3	Phenomenology as a research method	34
	3.3.1 Descriptive phenomenological research method	34
	3.3.1.1 The role of experience	35
	3.3.1.2 Phenomenological psychological reduction	35
	3.3.1.3 Free Imagination Variation	35
	3.3.2 Interpretive phenomenological analysis	35

3.4	The research procedure	36
3.4.1	Data collection	37
3.4.1.1	Research participant selection	37
3.4.1.2	Sampling	37
3.4.1.3	The use of narrative in data collection	39
3.4.1.4	Focus groups as a method of data collection	40
3.4.1.5	Data recording and transcribing	41
3.4.2	Data analysis	41
3.4.2.1	Read for a sense of the whole	41
3.4.2.2	Develop emergent themes	41
3.4.2.3	Transform natural meaning units	42
3.4.2.4	Determine structure and search for connections	42
3.5	Ethical considerations	42
3.6	Trustworthiness	43
3.7	Rigor of the study	44
3.8	Conclusion	44
Chapter Four		
4.1	Introduction	45
4.2	Interpretive phenomenological analysis	45
4.3	Data analysis	46
4.3.1	Residence A	46
4.3.1.1	Personal reflections on group dynamics	47
4.3.1.2	NMUs expressed as psychologically sensitive expressions	47
4.3.1.3	Discussion of NMUs	48
4.3.2	Residence B	54
4.3.2.1	Personal reflections on group dynamics	54
4.3.2.2	NMUs expressed as psychologically sensitive expressions	55
4.3.2.3	Discussion of NMUs	55
4.3.3	Residence C	63
4.3.3.1	Personal reflections on group dynamics	63
4.3.3.2	NMUs expressed as psychologically sensitive expressions	64
4.3.3.3	Discussion of NMUs	64

4.4	Conclusion	69
Chapter Five		
5.1	Introduction	70
5.2	Summary of findings	70
5.3	Analytical framework	71
5.3.1	Social locations	71
5.3.1.1	What can be learnt about belonging on the campus of an HWI?	72
5.3.1.2	What promotes and what hinders a sense of belonging?	73
5.3.2	Identifications and emotional attachments	76
5.3.2.1	What can be learnt about belonging on the campus of an HWI?	77
5.3.2.2	What promotes and what hinders a sense of belonging?	77
5.3.3	Ethical and political values	79
5.3.3.1	What can be learnt about belonging on the campus of an HWI?	79
5.3.3.2	What promotes and what hinders a sense of belonging?	81
5.4	Analysis of paradigm and methodology	83
5.5	Limitations	84
5.6	Recommendations for further research	85
5.7	Conclusion	85
5.8	Concluding thoughts on research process	86
References		87
Appendices		95

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Interview schedule and guide	95
Appendix B: Participant consent form	97
Appendix C: Ethics committee permission	103
Appendix D: Institutional permission	106
Appendix E: Analysis of transcript extract and identification of NMUs	108

List of Tables

Table 3.1	
Summary of research participants	39
Table 4.1:	
Example of transferring NMUs into psychologically sensitive expressions	46
Table 4.2:	
Demographics of Residence A participants	46
Table 4.3:	
Demographics of Residence B participants	54
Table 4.4:	
Demographics of Residence C participants	63

List of Abbreviations

CRT – Critical Race Theory

HC – House Committee

HE – Higher Education

HWI – Historically White Institution

IPA – Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

NMU – Natural Meaning Unit

NSAS – New South Africa Speak

RA – Residence Assistant

Res – Student residence

SACQ – Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire

UCT – University of Cape Town

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE OF STUDY

1.1 Introduction and historical background

In this chapter, I will first outline briefly the historical and present context of historically white institutions (HWIs) in South Africa. I will then go on to present the problem statement, and provide a brief discussion on some of the literature regarding my topic. This section will also include definitions of key terms. I will then discuss my research design and conclude with ethical considerations and an outline of the structure of the thesis.

Since 1994, along with the establishment of a new government in South Africa, this new government has embarked upon an endeavour to transform the higher education (HE) system. The HWIs have been unable to escape the turmoil of South Africa's past. The strong Afrikaans heritage and commitment to the Afrikaans language and culture have been the source of much discussion and conflict in a post-apartheid landscape at some HWIs. The reason for this is that universities have become more accommodating of a variety of cultural and racial groups post-1994. Consequently, the concept of public space is no longer as simple as it used to be when universities were divided along racial lines. A powerful illustration of the simplicity of the appropriation of public space (although unjust) is the segregation of races into specific areas under the Group Areas Act of 1950. Because racial boundaries were clearly defined, people were given access to some spaces, while access to other spaces was denied (Schrieff, Tredoux, Dixon & Finchilescu, 2005). Post-1994 however, these racial and spatial boundaries have changed and become blurred, existing more in the psyche of South African citizens rather than as demarcated areas of living.

HWIs have made an effort to assist non-traditional students with the negotiation of these changing boundaries. Transformation initiatives include affirmative action and employment equity policies, various strategies that aim to increase the percentage of black students on campus, extended degree programmes, and welcoming programmes to promote acceptance of all cultures on campus. However, researchers continue to maintain that racism is prominent on South African HWIs. For example, Jawitz (2012) refers to South African HE system in general as "a highly racialised space" (p. 547). Similarly, some researchers (Finchilescu, Tredoux, Mynhardt, Pillay & Muianga, 2007) maintain that "segregation is rife in many public spaces, including university campuses in South

Africa” (p. 720). Walker (2005a) concurs, arguing that the apartheid ideology has been subdued but not entirely defeated, and that “it lives on in aspects of the symbolic life of the [university] campus, not least in the halls of *residences* [italics added]” (p. 53).

As the above examples have shown, there is an emerging body of research which theorizes education and race in South Africa (see also Carrim & Soudien, 1999; Cooper & Subotsky, 2003; Jansen, 2004 and McGregor, 2003). I wish to contribute to this body of research by exploring the sense of belonging or “psychology of boundary construction” (Schrieff et al., 2005, p. 435) at a South African HWI.

1.2 Statement of the problem

My research will explore issues of diversity, inclusion and race on an HWI campus by looking at how students are experiencing belonging. This will include the narratives of white, black, coloured and Indian students. I will use the term marginalised to describe black, coloured and Indian students who attend an HWI

1.3 Brief literature review

Research reveals that issues of diversity in the HE context are not unique to South Africa. Ostrove and Long (2007) claim that American research “shows that the climate remains a stressful one for students of colour at predominantly white schools¹” (p. 383). A 2007 study examined the sense of belonging felt among a sample of 2,967 first year students across 34 universities in the United States. The study aimed to determine whether students felt comfortable on campus, whether they would choose the same university over again, whether they felt the university was supportive of them, and whether they felt they belonged to the campus community. This study found that students of colour (namely Asian Pacific, African American and Latino students) “perceive a less strong sense of belonging on their campuses than do white students” (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 534). I will continue to discuss international literature relevant to this topic in chapter two, showing that it is also on an international level that marginalised students in these contexts are experiencing exclusion.

From a South African perspective, Daniels and Damons (2011) engaged in a critical reflective research process in their study of undergraduate experiences of minorities (specifically coloured

¹ In the United States, the word ‘school’ refers also to universities and tertiary institutions.

women) at an HWI. They did so in order to create opportunities “to collaboratively seek ways of coping with the challenges that result from their minority status” (Daniels & Damons, 2011, p. 150). The narratives collected from five participants revealed that the greatest challenge for these women at an HWI is their race. Ironically, it is the process of transformation at this HWI that they felt was the cause of this, specifically the attention on them by white students at the university, and coloured people from their own communities. The participants were able to describe, through storytelling, their “experiences of being stereotyped as quotas and recipients of tokenism by the majority population on campus as well as people from their own communities” (Daniels & Damons, 2011, p. 165). Ultimately, it was found that these coloured women did not experience the institution as inclusive.

Referring specifically to South Africa, Jawitz (2012) argues that there “has been a lack of engagement with the concept of race in relation to higher education development” (p. 546) and he refers to the “discourse of silence” (p. 546) that surrounds issues relating to race and HE. As an example, he explains that between 2007 and 2009, the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa conference programme included only three presentations that focused explicitly on issues of race, two of them by Jawitz himself. Considering this, I concur with Walker (2005a) who argues that “how life unfolds within institutions of higher education is then an important focus for inquiry” (p. 131).

1.4 Statement of objectives

Harris (2009) argues that in order to make sense of a multicultural context, one needs to “engage more closely with lived experience and the changing cultural and material geographies of young lives” (p. 188). Therefore, in order to study the impact of the push for more diverse and accepting HWIs, I would like to link the ways in which students negotiate social spaces with the concept of *belonging*. I aim to explore the sense of belonging students feel on campus by asking the following research questions:

- How do students negotiate a sense of belonging in residence at an HWI?
- What promotes a sense of belonging in these residences?
- What hinders a sense of belonging in these residences?

1.5 Title

Narratives of belonging among students at a historically white university.

1.6 Definition of concepts

I will provide a succinct definition of the main concepts of my study, and expand upon them in chapter two.

1.6.1 Belonging

Carolissen (2012) defines the concept of belonging as one experiencing a sense of being at home in a certain place or community, and where the individual has the freedom of rights and duties. According to her, the notion of belonging can be both political and personal, and often reflects the interrelationship between these two contexts. Yuval-Davis (2006) outlines an analytical framework for the study of belonging, which consists of three facets. She defines one facet to belonging in a similar way to Carolissen (2012). According to her, one of the facets “is about emotional attachment, about feeling at home and ... about feeling safe” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197). The rest of her framework and its usefulness in determining aspects to my methodology will be discussed further on in this chapter.

1.6.2 Community

For the purposes of this study, I will use Harris's (2013) description of community. She defines community as “the reassuring site of belonging and togetherness that can hold steady in changing times” (p. 90). In terms of delimitations, the community that will be the focus in this study is the university residence. Using the residence as the context of my study will allow me to explore in more depth students' sense of belonging, of being “at home” (Carolissen, 2012, p. 197).

1.6.3 Whiteness

It has been suggested that “whiteness is perhaps the most compelling theoretical concept that has emerged in recent decades to deal with racism” (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007, p. 390). In light of this suggestion, defining and exploring this concept is imperative in a study exploring racial diversity, especially in South Africa. Whiteness is defined as ‘the production and reproduction of

dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage' (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 236). Because whiteness is linked to privilege and social dominance, it becomes desirable and thereby provides white people with advantages that are invisible to them.

1.6.4 Historically white institutions

In 1959 segregation on grounds of colour was legislatively enforced at South African universities, although it preceded the victory of the National Party in 1948 in practice (Walker, 2005b). Universities were established along cultural and ethnic lines for Indian, coloured and black students. In defiance to laws related to apartheid, two English-speaking institutions (The University of Cape Town and The University of the Witwatersrand) and a university traditionally designated for coloured students (The University of the Western Cape) led the way in admitting marginalized students, specifically black students (Walker, 2005b). HWIs are those universities that accepted *only* white students at that time, the language of teaching and learning being either English or Afrikaans. The context of my study is an HWI in the Western Cape.

1.7 Research paradigm and methodology

In this section I will briefly discuss the research paradigm framing the study, as well as methodology and analysis.

1.7.1 Ontology and epistemology

My ontology is post-modern in nature; I believe that for each individual meaning is constructed as the mind tries to understand its own particular and personal reality. Concerning epistemology, I advocate that there is not one approach to knowing but rather multiple ways of knowing and understanding experiences. Studies whose researchers have adopted a similar epistemology and ontology to mine have contributed significantly to understanding inclusion and diversity on HWIs. For example, a phenomenological study done in the United States, regarding race and racism in the experiences of black male resident assistants at one HWI was successful in “[getting] inside the common experience of a group of people and [describing] what the participants have experienced, how they have experienced it and the meanings they make of their shared experiences” (Harper, Davis, Jones, McGowan, Ingram, & Spencer-Platt, 2011, p. 186). The highly descriptive findings of

this study, as well as my personal beliefs, prompted me to choose phenomenology as the paradigm in which to position myself for this research process. Phenomenology is considered to be focused on discovery and interpretation, and is therefore in line with my desire to understand the “lived experience” (Orbe, 2000, p. 603) of diverse racial groups.

Yuval-Davis' (2006) model for the study of belonging framed my research process. The first facet or level to belonging is related to where one locates oneself and others socially in a certain context such as a school or community. The second is related to the individual, how one perceives and interprets one's belonging. The third includes a political level to belonging, a level on which Yuval-Davis believes people differentiate the world into ‘them’ and ‘us’. These three levels determined key elements to my research process, specifically the context of the study, form of data collection, and population.

1.7.2 Context of the study

The first facet Yuval-Davis's model of belonging is *social locations*. This level determined the context of my study. According to Yuval-Davis, individuals locate themselves and others socially through categories such as age, race, class, gender and profession. These social locations mean different things in different contexts, one of these contexts being the university residence. For example, a 21-year-old student might find himself being a leader in his residence, supporting and guiding first year students. In his postgraduate class, however, he might be one of the youngest students, perhaps finding himself as the one in need of support. Because context plays such a significant role in how people locate themselves socially, identifying a specific context for my study is necessary. Johnson et al. (2007) found the university residence social climate is “consistently related to a sense of belonging for students of all racial/ethnic backgrounds” (p. 534) and is a “compelling environment for shaping students’ sense of belonging” (p. 535). With this in mind, I chose the university residence and the sense of belonging to this community as the primary context for my study.

1.7.3 Narrative as a form of data collection

The next facet Yuval-Davis (2006) proposes is referred to as *identifications and emotional attachments*. This level informed my choice of data collection. Yuval-Davis (2006) defines identities

as “narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are and who they are not” (p. 202). She believes that such stories “relate directly or indirectly to self and other’s perceptions about what being a member in such a grouping might mean” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). Collecting narratives of belonging will ensure that the data will consist of personal experiences, and at the same time the identifications and emotional attachments participants ascribe to these experiences. Another advantage of using narratives as data is that researchers are able to explore narrative accounts for themes, patterns and images in what is referred to by McAdams (2012) as the “context of discovery” (p. 16). This is reiterated by Sonn, Stevens and Duncan (2013) who believe that narrative is a “powerful method [of data collection] that allows for deeper, nuanced understandings of phenomena” (p. 303). Furthermore, and in specific reference to racial issues, these researchers find that storytelling opens up “less-defensive, more honest dialogue about racism” (Sonn et al., 2013, p. 306) and also “reflect[s] and reproduce[s] existing social arrangements, including racism” (Sonn et al., 2013, p. 305).

1.7.4 Population

The third facet of Yuval-Davis's (2006) model of belonging relates to ethical and political values, and this level influenced my decisions regarding research participants. Emotional and value-based attachments to various ethical and political systems are often the means by which we judge others and others judge us. These attachments create attitudes regarding identity boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Since I am looking specifically at diversity in terms of race, and the impact that the policies and strategies that this university has created in order to accommodate a more diverse student body, it was important for me to consider the views of students of different races. Soudien (2008), in a study regarding the intersection of race and class in a South African university, postulates that when it comes to racial issues, what is required is an analysis to explore what students (black students in particular) are thinking about their experiences. Therefore, focus groups were divided by race, namely black, coloured and white South African students. Students who participated in the study must have been a part of a residence for a minimum of two years.

1.7.5 Procedure

I conducted focus groups in order to gather data. Focus groups are effective ways of gathering large amounts of information while at the same time allowing participants to reflect on what others are

saying and gain insight into their own experiences (Harper et al., 2011). This means that the group dynamic itself becomes a process for analysis, contributing to the triangulation of the research process. It is for this reason that Kitzinger (2006) believes that focus groups are a popular form of gathering research with those who wish to empower group participants. I conducted the focus groups using samples from three university residences. A snowball sample was used to gather participants. Each focus group consisted of two coloured students, two black students and two white students. One residence, which is mixed-gender, had a focus group of both male and female students. Many researchers recommend that the group be homogenous in terms of research participants in order to capitalise on shared experiences (Kitzinger, 2006). However, Kitzinger (2006) has found that there are advantages to bringing together a diverse group of participants, in order to explore different perspectives and points of interpretation. I asked each participant to share two stories – one story describing an experience of feeling a sense of belonging in the residence, and another describing an experience of feeling excluded. The group was then allowed the chance to discuss the narratives and reflect upon them. The groups therefore generated two sources of data: firstly, stories of belonging and not belonging, and secondly, a group discussion of the stories with interpretation.

1.7.6 Data analysis

The phenomenological paradigm and its assumptions influenced my analysis and interpretation of my findings. This paradigm has a set of useful techniques, such as bracketing, that assisted me in my analysis, and will be discussed further in chapter three.

1.8 Ethical considerations

This study involves human participants and therefore ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the ethics committee of the university which formed the context of the study before the research was conducted. Since the participants were adults, no consent was required from their parents or guardians. They themselves were required to give informed consent. Participants were not expected to identify themselves in the study, and were not labelled in a way that could be harmful or hurtful during the study. I maintained confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study by the use of pseudonyms. Participants were also made aware of the fact that they have full right to withdraw from the study at any time, as well as the right to receive counselling and further support proceeding the focus group, if necessary.

1.9 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters, which I explain briefly below.

Chapter One

This chapter introduces the reader to the study. The aim of the research is discussed and the objectives and problem statement put forward. In this chapter I will also discuss essential concepts and research methodology.

Chapter Two

This chapter provides an in-depth literature review of recent international and South African research pertaining to the study.

Chapter Three

This chapter discusses in further detail the research design and methodology.

Chapter Four

This chapter presents the findings of my research.

Chapter Five

This chapter contains an interpretation of my research, as well as a summary and conclusion. Limitations of the study and further recommendations are discussed in this final chapter.

1.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research study and my motivation for the study are introduced. I also present the aims of the study and the methods of data collection and analysis. A conceptual analysis for the purpose of the reader's understanding and orientation form part of this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AND SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction

Despite the fact that HWIs in South Africa are in the process of transformation, many young students' experiences of HE continue to be informed by race (see Dawes & Finchilescu, 2002; Duncan, 2005; Durrheim & Mtose, 2006; Kiguwa, 2014; Raditlahalo, 2007; Schrieff, Tredoux, Finchilescu & Dixon, 2010; Soudien, 2008; 2010 and Walker, 2005a; 2005b). Kiguwa (2014) notes that issues regarding redress and integration are often framed in quantitative and linear ways. For example, HWIs have focused expressly on increasing the number of students from marginalised groups through affirmative action policy. She states however, that what is equally important is for us to “take cognisance of the range of discourses around race that accompany these quantifiable practices and processes” (Kiguwa, 2014, p. 14). This is my aim for this literature review. Firstly, I explore research on diversity and inclusion at HWIs from an international and South African perspective. I then go on to discuss the literature on concepts significant to my own research process, namely whiteness and belonging. I end the review by briefly investigating the intersection of race, gender and class in current research.

2.2 Theories informing the study of race and belonging

Before I describe the theory I have used to frame my research, I will expound upon three theories that have been used in studies regarding racism in international and South African research, both in general and in the context of HE. After I have discussed these frameworks in detail, I will describe the paradigm that I have chosen to inform my research process.

2.2.1 Contact theory

Over 500 studies support contact theory, the basic premise of this theory being that intergroup contact, under specific conditions, reduces prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). There have been few tests, however, of contact theory post-apartheid in South Africa. The little research that has been done (see Dixon, Durheim & Tredoux, 2007, Gibson, 2004 and Holtman, Louw, Tredoux & Carney, 2005) confirms that there continues to be a significant correlation between intergroup contact and prejudice in South Africa. While Tredoux and Finchilescu (2010) acknowledge that contact theory

has value in understanding racial issues, Schrieff et al. (2005) disagree with the way in which traditional contact theorists construct situations of contact between groups, and refer to the findings of traditional contact theory studies as “questionable” (p. 434) to the relevance of everyday settings. They cite two reasons for this – firstly, that the studies themselves are contrived and unnatural, often having been manipulated in laboratories and formal settings, and secondly, that the studies elicit self-reports of contact and prejudice using standardised questionnaires, the results of which might not be accurate. For example, Gibson's (2004) self-report survey involving a sample of 3,700 South Africans, found a strong, positive correlation between multiracial contact and attitudes towards members of another racial group, but other researchers point out that individuals are often motivated to put a “positive spin on their own or their group's actions” (Finchilescu et al., 2007, p. 733) in order to reflect themselves in a more favourable light. Schrieff et al. (2005) argue that a more natural approach to researching racism needs to be adopted. One example of this is observation, which takes place in everyday settings.

A study by Durrheim and Dixon (2001) made use of observation as a method of data collection in their study of how space is used on South African beaches. These researchers observed that while contact was occurring between black and white beach-goers, segregation occurred, and that there was a tendency for white beach-goers to go the beaches only in the morning, vacating the area when black beach-goers arrived. Similarly, Tredoux and Dixon (2009) observed that although there was not much segregation in nightclubs in Cape Town, there was little direct inter-group contact on a micro-level. Both of these studies removed the need for self-reports which might have been manipulated by respondents. Schrieff et al. (2005) did a similar study specific to the HE context. These researchers investigated the pattern of racial segregation in university dining-halls in South Africa. They used a method of gathering data (through silent observation of patterns of racial segregation between black, white and coloured students in the dining-hall) that enabled them to do so in an everyday, natural setting, and not a laboratory or setting that had been manipulated. They found that the space within the dining-halls was “strongly racialised” (Schrieff et al., 2005, p. 442). They believe that the implications of this are that friendships are almost non-existent between black and white students. While this study was done over ten years ago, I endorse what Tredoux and Finchilescu (2010) believe, that a more “circumspect view” (p. 291) of contact and prejudice is needed.

My own view is that the studies cited above are somewhat limited in that they fail to explain *why* there is so little interracial mixing between South Africans. An understanding of the reasons behind the lack of inter-racial mixing might provide a more detailed explanation of the phenomenon. The findings of Finchilescu et al. (2007) corroborate my view. The researchers conducted a survey of 2,559 students, both black and white, at four universities in South Africa. They posed eight reasons for avoidance with contact of other races, and respondents were asked to agree or disagree with each reason. The most common reason students ascribed was the role of language; both black and white samples saw language as “a major obstacle to mixing” (Finchilescu et al., 2007, p. 728) because language is a “proxy for group membership” (Finchilescu et al., 2007, p. 734). Another reason, although not endorsed as strongly by the white students, was differences in socio-economic status. This appeared to be a major factor that influenced the amount of inter-racial mixing. These findings are useful; however, while this study generated more detailed data than other contact studies that focus only on the correlation between contact and prejudice, the researchers noted that the study was unable to “provide definitive evidence of actual obstacles to inter-racial mixing” (Finchilescu et al., 2007). What did become clear in this study is that black and white university students experience campus life very differently from each other, and that unique descriptions of exactly how students are negotiating 'race' on campus might contribute to even further understanding of this issue.

Erasmus (2010) extends the critique of contact theory and advocates for a more radical framework in which to locate issues of race and racism in South Africa. One of her main critiques of contact theory is that it simplifies issues surrounding race, assuming racism to be something that can be acknowledged because it is obvious, “homogenous and stable – one that favours the ocular over the auditory” (p. 388). Because of this, studies in contact research “reveal the use of race as a visible given” (p. 390). Erasmus goes on to explain that research questions then become “questions of objective measurement” (p. 389). In her criticism of research using contact theory, she coined the term “psychometric imaginary” (p. 389). She defines this as an approach to research that understands questions related to complex social issues as essentially being questions of measurement. Therefore, phenomena related to race and racism are imagined by these researchers as being “static and open to manipulation” (p. 389). Erasmus (2010) believes that studies that simplify race in this way – for example the aforementioned studies by Schrieff et al. (2005) and Durrheim and Dixon (2005) where researchers rely primarily on observation to collect data – are founded on a “raciological myth” (p.

390) that researchers know who is white, black, Indian and coloured merely by looking at bodies in a certain space. She argues that racism is “neither static nor monolithic” (p. 389) and that reducing racism in this way “obscures the multiple and related registers of racism as well as its systematic nature and political character” (p. 389). Soudien (2010) agrees that racism is not an “objective phenomenon which can be empirically assessed and measured” (p. 893). Instead, it is “malleable and fluid” (p. 893) and therefore difficult to locate.

A second critique of contact theory is that it has an impact on how white privilege is negotiated and maintained in society – it is left unaddressed and unquestioned (Erasmus, 2010). Erasmus (2010) argues that claims of contact are used by white people to claim 'no prejudice' in that they do not 'see' race. This positions white people as innocent, anti-discriminatory and “free of responsibility for any discomfort arising from contact, making anti-racist work the domain of black students” (p. 392). Her research among black and white medical students at an HWI in South Africa, which focuses on their experiences of race and racism in the health sciences faculty, shows that black students are responsible for the “race work” (Erasmus & de Wet, 2003, p. 2). She conducted in-depth interviews with 19 white students and 22 black students and found that the burden of cross-racial mixing “lies entirely with black students” (p. 2). Similarly, Soudien (2008), in his analysis of the major studies on racism and the individual's experience, found that white students appear to be ignorant regarding what black students go through on campus. Steyn (2012) believes that this ignorance is intentional, and refers to it as the ignorance contract, which is a “tacit agreement for white people to entertain ignorance” (p. 8). She defines this ignorance not as a lack of cognition, but rather “a social achievement with strategic value” (p. 8). Black people are left with the responsibility of engaging in strategies to negotiate racial issues because white people tend to deny their knowledge of apartheid, young people especially pointing out that it is not their generation that can be held responsible for apartheid.

Pattman (2007) uses a social constructionist perspective in his study on student identities and social inequalities in a racially merged university in South Africa. According to this theory, identities are not fixed by either culture or biology but rather constructed through language. Pattman (2007) found that there is a “fundamental contradiction” (p. 479) between, on the one hand, students' experiences of race on campus and the impact that race has on identity, and on the other hand, the idea of race not being a barrier between students on campus. While the university in question has made significant

effort to encompass a more diverse student body, clearly there are other forces at play. I continue to maintain that in order to understand and indeed expose these forces, rich and personal descriptions of students' unique experiences on HWIs are needed. One theory that has been used by researchers to do just this is critical race theory (CRT).

2.2.2 Critical race theory

Erasmus (2010) advocates the use of CRT over contact theory when it comes to research surrounding racial issues. The basic premise of CRT is that ideas of membership relating to race are socially constructed and rooted in political and economic phenomena, meaning that racial studies become much more than merely “reading peoples' politics off their skin” (Erasmus, 2010, p. 395). CRT theorists argue for the exposing and telling of stories from those who have been excluded because of racism. Harper et al. (2011) use CRT in their study on race and racism in the experiences of black male resident assistants (RA) which is a paid leadership position in American university residences, at predominantly white universities in the United States. Elements of CRT, namely counter-narratives and reflections on lived experiences, enabled the researchers to gather rich data and revealed previously unknown tasks that complicate the role of black RAs but are not given to their white counterparts. Because of the assumption that race is woven into the very fabric of society, CRT allowed these researchers to expose a variety of ways in which policies and practices that are seen as race-neutral actually serve to perpetuate further racial subordination (Harper et al., 2011). An example of this dimension to CRT in the South African context can be seen in Jawitz's (2012) study that attempted to understand the experiences of two black male academics at an HWI. In this study, he found that both participants believed that the potential for black students to succeed is undermined by the assessment practices of white lecturers. CRT was able to “draw out the counter-stories that challenge the dominant stories that reproduce white power while appearing to promote equality” (p. 548).

Kiguwa (2014) outlines four tenets of the CRT approach to race, two of which I have mentioned above briefly. Firstly, because race is assumed as being so endemic to society, CRT theorists are sceptical of “constructs of colour-blind understandings of race” (p. 37). Secondly, CRT theorists emphasise the lived experiences of individuals, seen in for example narratives and counter-narratives. Thirdly, CRT theorists focus on the many phenomena that impact on racism such as

gender and class. Finally, CRT is an activist-orientated approach that aims to transform oppression in society. Kiguwa (2014) notes that it is for this reason that CRT has been especially advocated by researchers whose agenda it is “to change the structures and racialisation processes embedded within the education institution and reflected in the lived realities and experiences of students and faculty” (p. 37). This final tenet to CRT is particularly evident in Sonn's study (2010) of the narratives of South African immigrants in Australia that were recorded as part of the Apartheid Archive Project, a South African project which he believes is the “key to legitimising silenced knowledge and unspoken memories (p. 432). He used CRT because CRT theorists argue for the telling and hearing of stories from those who have been excluded because of racism. In this research, he discusses his own story as a coloured South African man who immigrated to Australia during apartheid times, in 1985, at the age of nineteen. Sonn believes that his story and the stories of the others in the diaspora of South African narratives in the archive are “central to challenging oppression and learning about the ways in which people continue to resist oppression” (p. 440). In this way, he emphasises the usefulness of narratives in studies on race and racism.

I agree with these tenets of CRT. However, I feel that psychological studies on the impact of racism on belonging, that use CRT as a theoretical framework, might miss certain dimensions to these phenomena because the focus would be on exposing the stories of only marginalised students. In this way, it appears that critical race theory studies can sometimes perpetuate marginalisation of black people. My argument against involving exclusively marginalised students in a study on belonging is that this might serve to embed further the assumption that it is marginalised students only who have the potential to feel like they do not belong on the campus of an HWI. A study involving black, coloured and white students would prevent me from making this assumption.

Another advantage to including black, coloured and white students in my study is that doing so might reveal more in-depth information regarding the nuances and complexities of racial issues on HWIs. For example, Jawitz (2012) in his study of two black academics at an HWI, acknowledges that his findings are limited in that they do not “explain the silence that surrounds race within research into academic practice” (p. 579). The data collected from the two participants was based largely on the perceptions these participants had of the behaviour and intentions of their white peers. While their stories and interpretation of their stories are indeed valid, involving white participants in

this study might have contributed to revealing information that does explain the silence to which Jawitz (2012) refers.

Finally, the goal of CRT research is, as Kiguwa (2014) emphasises, activist-orientated. Considering the limited scope of my study, I feel it would be presumptuous to make this the goal of my research process, which is more exploratory in nature. I believe a great deal of research related to the phenomenon of belonging specifically is necessary before changes in practices or policies are made.

2.2.3 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is another theoretical framework concerned with understanding the experiences of individuals, from their own perspective, regarding various phenomena. However, phenomenological studies regarding race and racism differ from studies using CRT in a variety of ways, the most significant being the goal of phenomenological research. Researchers describe the essential goal of phenomenology as being an attempt “to enlarge and deepen understanding of the range of immediate experiences” (Goulding, 2005, p. 302). There are several basic assumptions to this paradigm, one of them being that humans are self-interpreting, and another being that their interpretations assume shared understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh & Marlow, 2011). Phenomenological research entails the researcher bracketing her assumptions regarding the phenomenon under study, and approaching the research participants as a neutral observer. The importance of personal perspective and interpretation is emphasised. The participants therefore are able to provide rich descriptions that reveal their own insights and motivations, perhaps at the same time challenging wisdom that is more conventional, along with assumptions and generalisations (Lester, 1999). Similarly to CRT, phenomenological research focuses on lived experiences. Durrheim and Dixon (2005) argue that researchers in psychology need to take seriously people's lived experiences of race relations. They argue against researchers defining phenomena in their own terms, stating that research participants' understandings and interpretations of phenomena “are not coterminous with the abstract definitions of researchers” (p. 450).

A phenomenological study conducted on African Americans' experiences of discrimination in the state of Kansas in the United States gathered research that was able to paint “a portrait of the everyday struggles that participants experience” owing to discrimination (Birzer & Smith-Mahdi, 2006, p. 22). Because of the phenomenological approach to this study, and more specifically the

phenomenological assumption that research participants themselves partake in a form of interpreting various phenomena, the researchers were able to “fully understand how African Americans contextualize meaning to and cope with experiences of discrimination” (p. 23). Similarly, Kiguwa (2014) was able to elicit nuanced descriptions of black postgraduate students' experiences and the meanings these students ascribed to these experiences on an HWI in South Africa, also using a phenomenological approach.

While I concede that the examples of phenomenological studies cited are still perhaps narrow in their focus, including only marginalised participants, I still maintain that the goal of a phenomenological approach to research makes this paradigm the most appropriate for a study of this scope.

2.3 Whiteness

Green et al. (2007) believe that the reinforcement of ideology linked to white privilege continues to shape social relations in the South African context. White privilege has been referred to by researchers as whiteness. I contend that locating whiteness rather than racism at the centre of my research is especially appropriate because studies on whiteness assume racism to be covert and hidden. Therefore, a conceptualisation of whiteness is particularly significant to this study. In this section, I will provide a brief definition of whiteness, followed by a summary of how whiteness is revealed in some of the studies done on racial issues both internationally and in South Africa. I will then discuss the meaning of approaching research through what Green et al. (2007) refer to as a lens of whiteness.

2.3.1 Definition

Whiteness was first introduced by Frankenberg (1993) and is defined as “the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage” (p. 236). Researchers have referred to whiteness as “complex”, “fluid” (Green et al., 2007, p. 390), “socially produced” (Sonn, Quayle, Mackenzie & Law, 2014, p. 535) and “taken for granted” (Pattman, 2007, p. 482). Put simply, whiteness is something that places white people in dominant positions, granting them unfair and unearned privileges, while remaining invisible to white people. Steyn (2012) notes that this is indeed the “trademark of whiteness” (p. 30) namely its “characteristic lack of insight into its own privilege” (p. 30). Researchers also note that

whiteness is an “empty category” (Green et al., 2007, p. 396) meaning that it is defined by what it is not. Green et al. (2007) explain that white people do not experience the world through an awareness of a racial category, but rather experience whiteness and cultural practices linked to being white as “normative, natural and universal, therefore invisible” (p. 396). This has resulted in white being the norm against which other races are understood.

2.3.2 Significant research on whiteness

Whiteness has been under-researched compared to other racial identities (Pattman, 2007). From an international perspective, Sonn, Quayle, Mackenzie and Law (2014) argue that whiteness in Australia is revealed in the fantasy of a whites-only nation. They go on to note that whiteness works to construct indigenous Australians in a particular way – firstly, as non-Australians and therefore foreigners in their own country, and secondly, as land-stealers and unable to be controlled by governance. These constructions, together with “myths of special privilege and forgetting of indigenous history” (p. 4) work further to “enshrine white privilege” (p. 4). In this study, the researchers used oral history theatre to engage in a process of de-centering whiteness. A diverse group of people shared stories about identity, culture, belonging and history, and through this study, dominant narratives about belonging or not belonging were ruptured. Together, they were able to conceptualise a new understanding of what it means to be Australian.

In their study on space on Durban beaches, Durrheim and Dixon (2001) found that white participants were irate about the behaviour of black people on what used to be whites-only beaches. For example, one white participant mentioned the inappropriateness of having a chicken tied to a bush and a mobile hair salon in the parking lot. The researchers go on to argue that a particular place definition has been “normatively imposed and a particular set of transgressive actions brought into view” (p. 445). In this way, the beaches were classified as a space for white people to belong and black people to corrupt, meaning that white 'behaviour' is the norm and anything different to that is abnormal. Bhana and Pattman (2010) had similar findings in their study on whiteness in schools. They interviewed white, female grade eleven students, and found that these students made sense of whiteness in opposition to being black. Black students became a reference group who were “narrow, racial and parochial” (p. 384) and white students described themselves as non-racial and open to diversity. The researchers argue that this description of the white students being non-racial ironically

serves to embed racism further into the school system as it masks white privilege and the fact that white students have indeed benefited from apartheid times. This masking of white privilege and removal of responsibility to South Africa's past was also found amongst white students in a study done by Leibowitz, Rohleder, Bozalek, Carolissen and Swartz (2007). In this study on strategies university students used to negotiate difference on campus, they found very few examples of white students examining their own roles within South Africa's past. One white participant wrote about how she would probably never know the impact apartheid had on different races. The researchers suggest that her comment implies that apartheid is “a history that belongs to other races and that the way to move forward is to focus on assimilation” (p. 713) into the dominant group. Again, this masks white privilege and leaves the responsibility of 'race work' (such as dealing with the psychological effects of apartheid or working against negative stereotypes) solely in the hands of black students. Another strategy students used to negotiate difference was denial. One of the white students remarked, “It doesn't matter who or what we are. We are still just people with the same problems and fears and feelings as the next person” (p. 710). While this student clearly accepts that there are differences between people, she implies that the differences do not matter. Leibowitz et al. (2007) note that this denial of the significance of differences also means that there is a denial that there might be differences in terms of power relations and privilege. The consequence of this is that again, whiteness is masked. Erasmus (2010) observed the same behaviour and discourse in the health sciences faculty of a university in the Western Cape. She noted that the majority of white students that she interviewed had far less to say about race and racism on campus than their black counterparts. She also noted that they showed much less of an awareness of race, particularly hidden or subtle forms of racism, and that this implied that white students might not recognise race or racism as issues impacting on their education. Again, this implies that white students are non-racial, and removed from any discourse related to race. Erasmus argues that this view is “problematic” (p. 35) because it “denies white students' implication in relations of power and inequality by virtue of their beneficiary status in this society” (p. 35). In short, Erasmus argues that white students and staff on HE campuses have a tendency not to see race and racism as “issues that profoundly affect their lives and everyday practices” (p. 36). Steyn (2012) refers to this tendency as the ignorance contract, and believes that it is this claim of ignorance that lies at the heart of a society dominated by hierarchy according to race. Her research into the narratives shared in the Apartheid Archives Project illustrates how whiteness manifests in white people's lack of awareness of racial issues, and their taking for

granted certain entitlements and privileges that have shaped the lives of white people in South Africa. She refers to the “blank spaces” (p. 16) in white people’s awareness of racial issues, and goes on to explain how it is this ignorance that “make[s] it possible to live comfortably in a world dislocated from those we [white people] oppress” (p. 16).

Language as discourse is another powerful way in which whiteness is revealed. The information Erasmus (2010) garnered during the study discussed above revealed evidence of how white staff at the specific university perpetuate a discourse of racism by referring to the black students as “emotional”, “loud” and “lazy” (p. 32). While not specifically racist comments, Erasmus (2010) believes that these words are rooted in the racist assumption that black people are emotional, loud and lazy because they are cognitively deficient in some way. Similarly, Jawitz (2012) describes how whiteness is expressed through language in his study in understanding black academic experience in an HE institution in South Africa. He notes that one participant in his study never used the phrase “white academic”, but when he spoke about black academics, he added the racial marker. Jawitz (2012) postulates that this might perhaps be because, as he is the only black academic in the department, he might feel it is unnecessary to add a descriptor to the term. However, Jawitz (2012) suggests that this also might reveal this participant's unwillingness to ascribe an identity related to race to his white colleagues, and this could perhaps “reinforce the normalization of whiteness in the notion of the academic” (p. 550).

The adjustment of black students at an HWI was the focus of a study by Sennet, Finchilescu, Gibson and Strauss (2003). While quantitative in nature, their results were interesting and initially appeared to be contradictory. They found that black students at a specific university were *not* found to have a lower level of belonging to the campus community than that of white students, as measured by the goal commitment-institutional subscale of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). However, black students were found to score significantly lower on the social adjustment subscale. The researchers believe that the sense of belonging that the black students felt may be due to the changes in diversity on campus as well as an increasing number of black students becoming part of campus governance. They note that this actually masks a sense of alienation felt by black students, and that this is seen in the lower scores on the social adjustment subscale. These researchers believe that the transformation the university is working so hard to achieve “makes it increasingly difficult for such students to locate the reasons for their discontent or perceived lack of support within the

institution” (Sennet et al., 2003, p. 113). Here it can be seen once again that whiteness is hidden in this institution by an agenda marked by a visible commitment to diversity. Similarly, Dolby (2002) conducted a case study of a private, previously white school that had been steadily increasing its number of black students post-1994. The school was evidently committed to diversity and transformation but at the same time held on to certain cultural and social practices such as rugby (a sport more popular with white Afrikaans students). Despite the lack of success and popularity of rugby amongst the students, Dolby (2002) suggests that the school held on so strongly to the sport in order to maintain its white identity.

I believe that these studies reveal what is central to my argument, namely the importance for researchers to engage in students' descriptions of their experiences, rather than solely measuring quantitatively issues related to diversity, inclusion and race.

2.3.3 A lens of whiteness

Green et al. (2007) refer to a “lens of whiteness” (p. 393) that can be used to look at race relationships. Through this lens, researchers are able to “analyse possible meanings and constructions of our society's values, practices and discourses” (p. 398). I argue that this is essential to studies on racism in South African HE institutions because issues relating to domination and subordination can be and so often are entrenched in a campus community visibly working to transform itself. In order to conceptualise this lens of whiteness, an understanding of how whiteness is produced and maintained is needed. Green et al. (2007) argue that whiteness is produced and maintained in three ways: construction of knowledge, anti-racism practice, and national belonging and identity. All of these ways can be seen in the studies discussed above. I will discuss these three ways briefly, linking them specifically to the studies cited above, the HE context and therefore the context of this study.

The first way in which whiteness is maintained is through knowledge construction. Ngobeni (2006) notes that 98% of all scientific research is produced by white academics, while white people constitute only 8% of the South African population. Indeed, it can be argued that the title of Ngobeni's (2006) study is most fitting, asking: *Where are all the black postgraduate students?* Whiteness therefore becomes linked to intelligence and to the production of scientific knowledge. This influences the way in which white academics treat black students. The narratives Erasmus

(2010) collected from black students on one of South Africa's medical campuses revealed that some of the academic staff behave according to the assumption that black students have nothing to contribute in an academic environment, and that they are merely there to listen, observe and learn from their white peers. This “reinforces the idea that whiteness carries intellectual authority in the learning environment” (p. 31).

Secondly, Green et al. (2007) argue that whiteness is produced and maintained through a discourse of anti-racism claims and practices. I have described numerous examples of this in the previous paragraphs. In another example, Bhana and Pattman's (2010) interviewed a group of grade eleven students, and found that the white students described themselves as non-racial and open to diversity. In this way, white students are able to hide behind the claim of being 'colour-blind'. In expressing the desire for non-racialism – in other words, a society that is not affected by racial disadvantage - and denying the impact of racialization, white people are participating in what Steyn and Foster (2008) refer to as “liberal power evasive colour-blindness” (p. 29). This colour-blindness means that white students are removed from any responsibilities linked to white supremacy (Green et al., 2007), thereby hiding whiteness behind anti-racism practices. This discourse is part of a collection of discourses that Steyn and Foster (2008) refer to as White Talk. They argue that it is this that enables white South Africans to present themselves as positive while resisting transformation. One of the discursive repertoires that forms a part of White Talk is New South Africa Speak (NSAS), which embraces values such as fairness, non-racialism and non-sexism (Steyn & Foster, 2008). In keeping with the argument of Green et al. (2007) Steyn and Foster (2008) believe that this maintains the status quo and serves to “conceal profound, ongoing inequalities that need to be acknowledged and redressed if one's intention is to bring about a fairer situation” (Steyn & Foster, 2008, p. 29).

Thirdly, and most significantly to this study, whiteness is maintained and produced through national identity and belonging. For example, Sonn et al. (2014) show how whiteness is maintained through indigenous Australians being constructed as non-Australians through the construction of their being land-stealers and ungovernable. Green et al. (2007) agree with this and argue that marginalised groups in both Australia and South Africa are made to feel “unconfident, uncomfortable and alienated” (p. 402). In South Africa, an attempt has been made to create shared symbols that unify diverse groups. However, research has shown that black South Africans are more attached than white South Africans to these symbols (Green et al., 2007) and this has resulted in white young people

specifically “dissociate[ing] themselves from the new South Africa and claim[ing] a whiteness that is part of a global whiteness” (p. 404). This is made possible because colour-blindness has become “ubiquitous in white discourses internationally” (Steyn & Foster, 2008, p. 29). The association of black people with these shared symbols ironically results in their having a sense of belonging on one hand to the new South Africa, but on the other hand becoming more alienated from the dominant society due to underlying whiteness. Thus, issues of belonging (especially on an HWI such as the university that is to be context of this study) become more and more complex.

2.3.4 Conclusion

Green et al. (2007) state that many researchers have expressed the hope that investigating the lived experience of whiteness “might contribute to de-centering and displacing its central position of dominance and privilege” (p. 408). This fits within a phenomenological perspective because of its emphasis on *lived experience*. Steyn and Foster (2008) maintain that White Talk “can help to secure the position of privilege for those who have not given up their faith in white superiority, but do not want their commitment to democracy ... to be called into question” (p. 34). Thus, there is a necessity for both white and black students on HWIs in South Africa to be able to engage with one other, and share stories and counter stories that begin to challenge the discourses of dominance, exposing how White Talk is maintaining the status quo in a post-apartheid context.

2.4 Belonging

The previous section showed how whiteness serves to produce and maintain racism in the HE context in South Africa. In this section I will discuss another important concept – belonging. I will build upon the brief definition of belonging I provided in chapter one, locate it within international and South African research, and explain how Yuval-Davis' (2006) framework informs this phenomenon.

2.4.1 Conceptualising belonging

The concept of belonging is complex, perhaps because it is informed by so many variables, such as childhood experiences, group dynamics, social class and race (Ostrove & Long, 2007). However, most definitions used by researchers converge on two themes – firstly, it is something that is felt on an emotional level and secondly, it is about feeling safe. Chavous (2005) links belonging to feelings

and emotional attachment. He studied the concept using the *Psychological Sense of Community Scale*, which includes items testing for emotional attachment, the sense that the community values the individual's contributions to it, and feeling a sense of community with others. Bozalek, Carolissen, Leibowitz, Nicholls, Rohleder & Swartz (2010) believe that feeling a sense of belonging is about having a social presence, reiterating Chavous' (2005) idea of the importance of feeling valued. Referring specifically to a project run at a university in South Africa, which involved students taking part in workshops and discussions on online forums, these researchers defined social presence as “the ability to make one’s presence felt as a real person” (p. 1030) and believe this is needed in order to feel one belongs.

In his study on students' needs for belonging in school, Osterman (2000) identifies three factors of belonging, namely “positive relationships with classmates, teacher support and a general sense of belonging” (p. 333). He emphasises the importance of a school culture that encourages interaction and support amongst students. He goes on to link a sense of belonging with the need for relatedness, which involves experiencing oneself “as worthy of love and respect” (p. 325). He also notes that while belonging is labelled as many things such as “support, acceptance [and] membership” (p. 326) all of these concepts have to do with the psychological experiences of students. Another definition, already mentioned in chapter one, is Carolissen's (2012) which lies closely in line with Osterman's (2000). She asserts that belonging includes a “sense of being at home” (p. 633). While the majority of the researchers cited above go into much further detail in their definitions of belonging, the complexity that I discovered in most research regarding this phenomenon resulted in my realising that I needed a framework in which to work, with an aspect of the framework specifically relating to belonging on a political level. Because of this, I decided upon Yuval-Davis' (2006) model of belonging.

2.4.2 A framework for the study of belonging

Yuval-Davis's (2006) suggests that belonging is constructed on three analytical levels – social locations, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values.

2.4.2.1 Social locations

Yuval-Davis (2006) links social locations specifically to “grids of power relations” (p. 199) in society. Social locations are constructed through categories such as age, race, class, gender and profession, and inform a sense of belonging in that these categories “have a certain positionality along an axis of power, higher or lower than other such categories” (p. 199). They are dynamic and multi-dimensional, meaning different things at different times in history. Carolissen (2012) highlights the complexity of social locations by citing the example of Americans treating Chinese Americans as foreigners, even though they were born in the United States. Therefore, what is required is my being cognisant of how participants of this study construct their social locations “along multiple axes of difference, such as gender, class, race and ethnicity” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 200).

My own experiences at a residence at the particular HWI that formed the context of my study are noteworthy here. In terms of social locations, I define myself as a white, English-speaking woman. Growing up in KwaZulu Natal, I had very little exposure to the Afrikaans language and culture. Initially, becoming a part of a very traditional women’s residence was extremely difficult for me. Apart from the language barrier, English culture appears to be more liberal than Afrikaans culture. I recall a specific occasion when I called my roommate's mother by her first name, normal in English culture but disrespectful in Afrikaans culture. This put me at the bottom end of the “axis of power” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199) in that I was not accustomed to how things were supposed to be done, and very rarely fully understood what was happening around me, at least initially. This impacted on everything from my speaking inappropriately to my roommate's parents to not being able to contribute in house meetings regarding important house matters that affected me as much as other residence members. Being a white woman at an HWI meant that this was surprising for me, as I had not expected to arrive and feel like an outsider.

2.4.2.2 Identifications and emotional attachments

Identifications and emotional attachments form the second part of the analytical model. Identifications are the stories that people tell not only themselves but also others about who they are and who they are not, and these “identity narratives always relate to belonging” (Carolissen, 2012, p. 635). These stories are not merely told and understood on a cognitive level. Yuval-Davis (2006) believes they “reflect emotional investments and desire for attachments” (p. 202). In a study on

negotiating belonging in Australia through storytelling, Sonn et al. (2014) use stories (specifically through the method of oral history theatre) to deconstruct dominant narratives about belonging and not belonging. Because of the emotional and therefore personal dimension to this analytical level, I believe garnering rich descriptions from personal narratives is especially appropriate to understanding the identifications and emotional attachments surrounding the concept of belonging.

In my own experience, I consciously felt the desire for attachments in the residence. However, this proved too difficult to negotiate. Although I was a part of the white majority, my inability to speak Afrikaans made me a minority student, and so, in order to negotiate this, I intentionally rebelled, becoming what is known as a *sluiper* – someone who is not involved in residence life and the many traditions. Directly translated from Afrikaans to English, to *sluip* means to prowl or sneak around. The irony is that ending up as the residence *sluiper* was a process that was born out of the desire to belong in the first place. My personal experience brings to mind Robertson's (2015) findings that residence traditions at an HWI appear at times to exclude marginalised students – this was certainly the reality in my case. In contrast to this, international research has shown that residence traditions can serve two purposes – firstly, residence traditions help students to negotiate social boundaries and norms, and secondly, they serve to anchor the students during a time of much transition (Moss & Richter, 2010). In the context of this research, it may be important to explore what purpose traditions serve in relation to belonging.

2.4.2.3 Ethical and political values

Ethical and political values have to do with how social locations, emotional attachments and identity construction are judged and valued. This moves us from the domain of belonging into what Yuval-Davis (2006) refers to as the “*politics of belonging*” (p. 204). She makes use of Crowley's (1999) definition of this concept, which is “the dirty work of boundary maintenance” (cited in Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 203). In a multi-cultural society, where inter-racial mixing is the norm, boundaries have become blurred. Since these boundaries are no longer easily visible, negotiating and maintaining boundaries, and dealing with 'them' (in other words, those who are not a part of 'us') becomes extremely complex. Carolissen (2012) argues that a significant feature of the lived experience of belonging is “the apparent permeability of geographical boundaries in the...movement of people” (p. 663). The politics of belonging, therefore, is concerned with the “boundaries that separate the world

into 'us' and 'them'" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 204). According to Crowley (1999), this is a "dirty business" (cited in Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 204) because it involves meeting people and deciding whether they stand inside or outside the boundary line of the community. This analytical level of belonging is important to the study at hand because the boundaries of HWIs in South Africa have become more and more permeable to people who previously were unable to access these spaces. This therefore has significant impact on how belonging is experienced by all members of these communities.

2.4.3 Relevant research on belonging

While racism in the context of HE in South Africa has been the focus of a great deal of research, few researchers have focused specifically on the sense of belonging felt by students on campus. This section will summarise briefly the international research on belonging in the HE milieu and then go on to look at how the little amount of research that has been done on students' sense of belonging in the South African context will inform this specific research process.

2.4.3.1 An international perspective

Read, Archer and Leathwood (2003) explored students' sense of belonging at a university in the United Kingdom, where the number of 'non-traditional' students had been steadily increasing. They found that even though the student body had become more and more diverse, non-traditional students faced obstacles to belonging related not to the treatment they received from traditional students, but instead to the culture of the institution itself. The researchers found that there exists a dominant discourse within the institutional culture of the white, middle-class, male student being the norm. Anyone deviating from this is seen as the 'other', to a more or lesser degree depending on race, class and gender. Efforts to increase diversity on campus have been accompanied by a discourse of 'dumbing down' and lowering standards, which serves to embed further dominant discourses within the institutional culture surrounding who belongs and who does not. This discourse implies that non-deserving students of colour or poorer students are admitted into the university, which means that the standards of the institution might drop. This appears to be the case at schools in South Africa as well. Osterman (2000) found that schools as social organisations adopt organisational practices that might actually undermine students' efforts to belong in a school community. In his review of research regarding students' sense of acceptance within the school community, he cites examples of these

institutional practices that include: method of instruction in the classroom, teacher support, authority relationships between teachers and students, and ability and inter-age grouping. While some of these practices might be unique to a school setting and therefore not applicable to the context of this study, it highlights how institutional culture has a significant impact on students' sense of belonging within the educational context. Ostrove and Long (2007) cite examples of HE institutions in the United States that have implemented counselling programmes to aid economically disadvantaged students. These researchers found that one of these programmes, for example, worked to help foster positive perceptions of the university environment, but ultimately students still experienced alienation and marginalisation on campus. What was successful in this context was a peer-support counselling programme, which was found to be useful in helping previously disadvantaged students to transition. One of the reasons that these kinds of programmes are so effective is that peer-counsellors “can answer questions about a school that the administration may be more hesitant to state explicitly, such as the institutional norms” (p. 383). Peer-counsellors are able to assist students in navigating the institutional culture in which they find themselves immersed. Perhaps this shows again how a sense of belonging is informed more by the institutional norms and practices, rather than overt inclusive and exclusive practices by the students and academics themselves.

Continuing within the context of the United States, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) identified something they refer to as “survivor’s guilt” (p. 477) felt by students of Mexican ancestry at a university in the United States. Specifically, these Chicana and Chicano graduate students experience a sense of guilt that they have 'survived' the university setting and accomplished their academic goals, whereas some of their friends of the same culture and heritage did not. They ask themselves questions such as, “how is it that I 'arrived' when so many others like me haven't? Will someone discover that a mistake was made and I don't really belong here? How long will it take for them to realize that I am an impostor, an other?” (p. 486). Other theoretical and conceptual issues such as self-doubt and invisibility were woven into the experiences of these students at the specific institution. What is clear in this study is that these non-traditional students have a very different university experience of belonging than the traditional student, and that this experience is largely centred on these students experiencing themselves as the 'other'. While the studies mentioned above are certainly not an exhaustive list of the international research done on belonging, what is clear is that these issues are not unique to South Africa.

2.4.3.2 A South African perspective

I have already shown that research has been done focusing specifically on race on South African campuses. Less research, however, has been done specifically focusing on students' lived experiences of belonging. Dolby (2002) examined how the administration in a previously white school in Durban navigated the school's pedagogical discourses and practices. While not specifically focusing on belonging itself, she found that whiteness is “a part of the fabric of the institutional, pedagogical (including discursive) arrangement of the school” (p. 24). She goes on to show that whiteness presents a challenge to black students because they are confronted with an environment in which they need to ‘act white’ in order to belong. A 2005 forum held at Wits University also found that it is “micro-relations” (Kiguwa, 2014, p. 33) that have a significant impact on the sense of belonging felt by both staff and students. These micro-relations are related specifically to the institutional culture of the university. Both these studies reiterate the international research that has found that a sense of belonging is informed more by the culture of the institution rather than overt practices of exclusion and inclusion experienced by students.

While qualitative studies on belonging specifically are few, the research that has been done reveals that students experience belonging in very different ways based on race. Makobela's (2001) study of transformation at another HWI in the Western Cape revealed that black students have an intense desire to belong and to be accepted. Through interviews with students, she was able to generate rich descriptions of students' sense of social loss and confusion. Kiguwa (2014) engaged in a qualitative study exploring the perceptions and experiences of black students at a historically white institution of higher learning. What emerged regarding belonging is that while black students do experience feelings of alienation on campus, they also experience a sense of agency that came from their “not fully belonging yet having an awareness and familiarity with the other culture” (p. 258). One black participant referred to her having a “sense of the rules” (p. 258) of both the culture at the specific HWI as well as her own culture, and using this knowledge to negotiate these two different 'worlds'. These participants were not passive in their negotiation of difference and their own sense of belonging, but rather actively engaged in navigating through both racialised worlds. Similarly, Leibowitz et al. (2007) found that both black and white students employ a variety of strategies to negotiate difference on campus, such as denial, guilt and taking responsibility for the future.

Other strategies emerged in a study done by Daniels and Damons (2011). The researchers engaged in interviews with five coloured undergraduate students. In order to belong, one of these students used the strategy of embracing residence activities and accepting the nominations for a place on the house committee (HC)². This turned out to be a positive experience as she was able to make meaningful contributions to changes in the residence. All five of these students, however, described a deep sense of frustration at the implication that the only reason they had gained access to the university was through affirmative action policies, especially when a number of deficit discourses have been attached to affirmative action. Being seen as a token was a major source of anger and distress for these students, certainly playing a significant role in their experiences of belonging. The students' experiences on campus have been that of being stereotyped as a quota or recipient of tokenism not only from the majority population on campus but also from their own communities. The researchers found that this produced a sense of insecurity regarding their self-worth as students. Qualitative studies like these are valuable in that they are able to explore not only students' experiences on campus, but also how they are thinking about their experiences on campus.

2.5 Class and gender

Both international and South African studies have shown that race is not the only factor that influences belonging. In the South African context, a number of studies have revealed that the intersection of race and gender continues to inform the experiences of young people in South Africa (see Bhana & Pattman, 2010 and Botsis, 2010). Bhana (2014) argues for “consideration of the social forces and the social conditions which are intimately tied to exclusion and marginalisation” (p. 356). She found that there are many forces that reproduce inequality and marginalisation on HE campuses, such as language and class” (p. 362). Shefer (2010) refers to the “Reitz debacle” (p. 353), an incident at an HWI where white male students engaged in practices that humiliated a group of black women who worked in the residences. She believes this incident is a powerful example of “the intersection of racist practices with gender and class inequalities” (p. 383).

Concerning international research, Ostrove and Long (2007) found that social class background has important implications for students' sense of belonging in HE institutions in the United States. In

² The house committee or HC is the governing body of the residence. It consists only of students who have been living in the residence for at least two years.

their study of 324 students at a small liberal arts college, they found that firstly, social class informs who belongs and who does not belong, and secondly, that a sense of belonging determines the extent to which students participate in class and the extent to which students will go to seek help when needed. In Osterman's (2000) study on students' needs for belonging in the school community, he too links a sense of belonging to social class. However, he also reports that belonging is informed by many other factors. One of these factors is gender. Horvat and Antonio (1999) found in their study of six African American female students' experiences in a predominantly white secondary school, that the “overriding source of much of the pain felt by these young women centred around the sense of not belonging in this environment” (p. 332). In order to negotiate this, these women engaged in the work of 'fitting in' and consciously performed practices that resulted in their 'leaving themselves behind' as they entered the school grounds each day. They did this in a variety of ways, most ways being related to feminine practices regarding aesthetics, such as changing the way they dressed and changing their hairstyles, in order to conform to the norm of the white majority. These girls took it upon themselves to belong, “to make others feel comfortable, to conform to organisational standards based on colour and class, and to do so at some personal expense” (p. 339). Ostrove and Long (2007) cite the example of a study done in the early nineties that showed that students' needs for affiliation and acceptance differed by gender. The researchers found that boys with a high need for affiliation perceived themselves as feminine, while this need in girls was accepted and even encouraged. These few examples emphasise the need to engage with the multiple factors that influence belonging, and avoid the focus being only on race. Studies that neglect to acknowledge the impact of gender and class on social belonging might miss the many-layered complexities of this phenomenon.

2.6 Personal theoretical stance

In sum then, based on the aforementioned research, it seems fitting that I use phenomenology as both a paradigm and methodology. I will expand upon its usefulness as a research paradigm as well as a research method in chapter three.

The ontological assumptions that will frame my research are as follows:

- Racism is endemic to society and is often covert and subtle.
- Lived experiences of racism are significant.

- Race is not an isolated phenomenon but co-exists with other phenomena such as gender and class.
- The meaning research participants prescribe to phenomena is as important as their descriptions of the lived experiences of these phenomena.
- Whiteness entrenches a sense of white superiority in its various duplications.
- While the university is a place for one to be challenged and exposed to new ideas, research shows that for many students, there exists a significant desire to belong and to feel a sense of at-home-ness.

2.7 Conclusion

In the literature review provided in this chapter, I focused specifically on international and South African research on concepts related to belonging. I discussed three of the approaches that have been used in current research on racism and belonging, namely contact theory, critical race theory and phenomenology. In sum, my central argument, based on the literature discussed above, is that what is needed on HWI campuses is an in-depth view of how *both marginalised and majority* students are negotiating issues of belonging, while not neglecting the role of gender. Chapter three will continue to discuss the paradigm I have chosen to frame my research, namely phenomenology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH PARADIGM AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I map the practicalities of research methodology. I begin with discussing phenomenology as a paradigm or worldview, and then more specifically as a research methodology. I go on to discuss my methods of data gathering and analysis, and finally ethical concerns, trustworthiness and the rigor of the study.

The study's primary purpose was to explore how students experience and negotiate belonging in residences at an HWI. I thus aimed to explore a snapshot of the life-world or *lebenswelt* (Husserl, 2002/1913) of the participants with the intention of discovering rich descriptions in their personal narratives.

3.2 Phenomenology as a paradigm

Although this was discussed briefly in chapter two, in order to understand phenomenology as a research method, it is necessary first to define briefly phenomenology as a paradigm, both ontologically and epistemologically.

Phenomenology is a general term that encompasses a philosophical school of thought as well as a variety of approaches to research. Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938) was a major contributor to, and often considered the father of, phenomenology (see Ricoeur, 2004 and Sokolowski, 2000). Concerning the etymology of the word, it is a compound of the Greek words *phainomenon* and *logos*. It is the action of “giving an account, giving a *logos*, of various phenomena or *phainomenon*” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 25).

Husserl (2002/1913) argues that every individual is aware of being in a world, a world in which space is spread out endlessly. Ontologically, the world and a sense of being in the world, therefore, can be regarded consciously from the place where one is standing, and it is from here that this world unfolds (Husserl, 2002/1913). A central concept to Husserlian phenomenology is consciousness. Giorgi (1997) defines consciousness as the “medium of access to whatever is given to awareness” (p. 16). Husserl argues that consciousness is always intentional and it is what relates subject and object

(Giorgi, 1997). The individual, as the subject, is consequently much more than a passive observer of the world or object. The individual is a co-constructor of his experience in the world. Hence, epistemologically, knowledge is constructed through the individual's continuous experiencing of his world and the resulting making sense of it.

3.3 Phenomenology as a research method

Phenomenology as a research method can be defined as is “the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2). The phenomenological approach to research is a descriptive one, and “seeks to illuminate issues in a radical, unprejudiced manner, paying close attention to what presents itself to our cognitive grasp” (Ricour, 2004, p. 3). Giorgi is seen as one of the founders of phenomenological research (Wertz, 2005). Basing his method on principles laid out by Husserl, he developed the descriptive phenomenological research method in the 1970s. In the 1990s, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) evolved from Husserl's initial method, and is a more modern approach to phenomenological research. Both approaches are useful for research that is focused on gathering and interpreting narratives, and I will expand upon these two approaches in the following paragraphs.

3.3.1 Descriptive phenomenological research method

Giorgi (1985) contends that the goal of descriptive phenomenological research is to ascertain how an individual who has had a specific experience understands this experience, and then analyse the comprehensive and detailed description given by the individual.

The descriptive phenomenological approach is particularly useful in psychological research because it assists researchers in gaining an understanding of how a phenomenon is experienced as a unique, everyday occurrence (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) while at the same time eliciting rich descriptions of the phenomenon. Although some researchers have objected that this form of research is “mushy, soft and unscientific” (Marecek, 2003, p. 51) it can be argued that Husserlian phenomenologists assume that an individual's mental processes are genuine data (Cairns, 2004, p. 31) and therefore as relevant as quantitative data. In addition to this, the descriptive phenomenological method includes fixed steps in analysing data, and this contributes to ensuring that the research process is rigorous. I will continue to discuss the rigor of my research process further in this chapter.

Variations of this research method have developed in recent years, yet certain core characteristics described by Giorgi (1989) hold true for all variants and these are identified as: the role of experience, phenomenological psychological reduction and free imagination variation. I made use of all three of these characteristics in the analysis of my data.

3.3.1.1 The role of experience

Phenomenological researchers believe that participants experience phenomena differently based on the meaning they ascribe to the experience itself. Reality is what the perceiver intends it to be, rather than being something objective (Giorgi, 1997). Personal experience, therefore, is an essential and core concept of the descriptive phenomenological approach.

3.3.1.2 Phenomenological psychological reduction

Phenomenological psychological reduction is also known as phenomenological *epoch* or *bracketing*, and refers to the abstaining from influences that could result in bias descriptions (Wertz, 2005). Simply put, this required me as the researcher to “abstain from incorporating natural scientific theories, explanations, hypotheses, and conceptualisations of the subject matter” (Wertz, 2005, p. 168). I therefore ‘bracketed’ prior assumptions and biases regarding the phenomena in order to gain access to what Husserl referred to as *sachen selbst* or the *things themselves* (Wertz, 2005).

3.3.1.3 Free imagination variation

In order for me to grasp exactly *what* belonging is, in other words the essence of a phenomenon, I engaged in free imagination variation. Wertz (2005) proposes that for a phenomenological study to be rigorously scientific, the researcher must engage in this process in order to elicit the essential qualities of the subject matter. An individual's description of a situation or phenomenon can shed light on multiple realities (Giorgi, 1985). In order to “elucidate the psychological aspects in a depth appropriate for the understanding of the events” (Giorgi, 1985, p. 17) I needed to engage in a contemplative process asking: ‘*What can I change or leave out without losing the phenomenon?*’

3.3.2 Interpretive phenomenological analysis

Giorgi (1997) emphasises that his approach is a descriptive one, and the limitation in this is in its analysis – this approach does not allow for interpretation. Instead, the goal of this method is to gather

personal accounts of a phenomenon so that an integrated, general structure of this phenomenon can be built (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA is a recently developed approach to research that builds upon the phenomenological psychology of Giorgi and Husserl. IPA is described as being “avowedly interpretive” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 200) and therefore more appropriate for a study that aims to explore personal narratives, where interpretation will capture the “texture and richness” (p. 200) of the research participants’ experiences. IPA reveals the nuances and subtleties embedded within these narratives.

IPA was established as a research method in the 1990s (Smith et al., 2009). IPA research is concerned with lived experience, which is a phenomenological perspective. However, there are distinctive elements to this research method that make it more suitable to a study that aims to explore experiences of individuals. One of these most appropriate to my study is the influence of idiography. Idiography is concerned with detail. The descriptive phenomenological approach is nomothetic in the sense that it uses research participants’ accounts of a phenomenon to describe the general qualities of a phenomenon. By contrast, IPA is dedicated to understanding how experiences “have been understood from the perspective of a particular people, in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). Smith et al. (2009) contend that the idiographic analyses which IPA offers can contribute significantly to existing research, particularly in the field of psychology.

On HWIs, where it would be risky to generalise research findings of social phenomena, such as a sense of belonging felt by students, I felt IPA would be particularly appropriate. In contrast to Giorgi’s approach, which aims to generate a general structure of certain phenomena, Smith et al. (2009) explain that “IPA is concerned with the micro analysis of individual experience, with the texture and nuance arising from the detailed exploration and presentation of actual slices of human life” (p. 202).

3.4 The research procedure

The research procedure involved data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation. The research procedure also included paying particular attention to issues of trustworthiness and validity of data.

3.4.1 Data collection

Data collection included determining the criteria for research participant selection, choosing a suitable strategy for sampling, deciding in which form to collect data, and then recruiting the participants. I will discuss each below briefly.

3.4.1.1 Research participant selection

Since the context of the study was an HWI in post-apartheid South Africa, it was important for the research participants to vary in terms race (black, white and coloured) and gender. This would ensure that opinions and interpretations of both majority and marginalised students would be collected as data. Participants were required to have spent at least two years in a residence. This ensured that the participants had sufficient time in which to experience a sense of belonging or not belonging.

Three residences were chosen based on gender – one female residence, one male residence and a mixed gender residence provided the context of the study. As mentioned in chapter two, the reason that I decided on the residence to be the context of the study is that the residence is likely to be something to which the participant might ascribe feelings of belonging or not belonging. For most students, the residence is (or is at least supposed to be) a ‘home away from home’ during the university term. Thus, a sense of belonging is more likely to be a factor under consideration for students who occupy a certain living space together.

3.4.1.2 Sampling

Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique, and considering the debate and controversy surrounding racial issues – particularly in institutes of higher learning in South Africa – I felt that this technique would be an appropriate one for such a sensitive research topic. Before I can justify this decision, it is necessary to define the term sensitive research topic. Farquhar (1999) defines a sensitive research topic as one that has the potential to elicit strong emotions and opinions in those involved, or in some way pose a threat to participants. As the study was a medium risk one and occurred within a context marked by much controversy regarding issues of race and belonging, I felt it was necessary to define the research topic as *sensitive*.

There were a number of reasons that prompted my decision to use snowball sampling as a sampling technique. The first was that I felt that this method had the potential to communicate a level of respect and professionalism in approaching students' communal but also personal space by going through the appropriate channels. I identified one member of each of the three chosen residences. This person was a member of the HC, which is the official channel of communication with the residence. I then asked this initial student to identify five other students who would be willing to partake in the research process. The second reason I used this sampling technique is that it was important that the focus group consist of a diverse mix of students and consequently involved intentional choosing of participants based on race. Because of the idiographic influence on IPA, this approach makes use of small samples that have been “purposively-selected and carefully-situated” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). Farquhar (1999) notes, particularly in the case of white researchers approaching black participants, that how the participants are approached is as important as who the researcher is, and describes her own success in recruiting black homosexual participants through personal, social networks and her subsequent failure in using emails, flyers or advertisements in approaching the same population. Her experience resulted in my being cognisant of the way in which students were approached, ensuring it was done in a thoughtful and respectful manner. The third reason this form of sampling is useful is that many social science researchers prefer to work with groups of people who are pre-existing, already acquainted through working or living together, because they are “the networks in which people might discuss or evade the sorts of issues likely to be raised in the research session” (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999, p. 9). By making use of pre-existing groups, I was able to “observe fragments of interactions which approximate to naturally occurring data (Kitzinger, 2006, p. 25). I felt snowball sampling would ensure that the research participants have already been acquainted, which would be especially useful in the larger residences where some students might not know one another.

Table 3.1 shows the participants with their pseudonyms. Residences have not been named to protect the identity of the participants, as per requirements from the ethics committee.

Table 3.1
Summary of the research participants

Residence	Participant	Race	Gender
A (female)	Anneke	White	Female
	Lali	Black	Female
	Melody	Coloured	Female
	Monique	White	Female
	Pamela	Black	Female
B (male)	Cedric	Black	Male
	Johan	White	Male
	Keletso	Black	Male
	Roger	Coloured	Male
	Ruan	Coloured	Male
	Wiecus	White	Male
C (mixed gender)	Lee	Coloured	Male
	Nick	White	Male
	Rozanne	White	Female
	Sam	Black	Male
	Shelly	Coloured	Female
	Thabisa	Black	Female

3.4.1.3 The use of narrative in the collection of data

Giorgio (1985) recommends requesting that participants provide a description of the specific phenomenon and then add comments. Because of my decision to use IPA as a methodology, I felt it would be more appropriate for these descriptions to be in the form of narratives. Steeves (1994) succinctly differentiates between a simple description and a narrative, stating that “narrative represents a world in motion as mediated by some voice relating a story of the world to an audience, [whereas] description . . . represents a world at rest” (p. 3). Holstein and Gubrium (2012) outline a variety of different forms of narrative, one of them being “short, topical stories about a particular event or specific character” (p. 1). Reiterating Steeves (1994) in his definition of a description, which he believes represents a world at rest, they go on to emphasise that narratives do more than merely supply information regarding what happened. Narratives also express the narrator’s “emotions, attitudes, beliefs and interpretations” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 6) and are informed as much by “extra-individual forces as they are by personal experience” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 6). Using narratives allowed me to uncover the

nuances embedded in the data. The phenomenological assumption, that the meaning individuals ascribe to their experiences is as significant as the experience itself, supported my decision to use narrative as a method of data collection. In the context of my study, all six participants were asked to share two stories: one which described when they felt they belonged in the residence, and one which described when they felt that they did not belong. These stories were then discussed within the group.

3.4.1.4 Focus groups as a method of data collection

This topic was discussed briefly above but warrants further discussion owing to the nature of the phenomenon under study. Research about sensitive phenomena or social issues has generally relied on the use of one-on-one interviews or anonymous self-completion questionnaires (Farquhar, 1999). I acknowledge that issues of confidentiality are easier to negotiate since no other participants are present. However, Farquhar (1999) argues that since focus group methods have grown in popularity, these methods can no longer be assumed to be ill-suited to sensitive research. One reason for this is what he refers to as “a certain thrill in the open discussion of taboo topics” (p. 47). Findings indicate that participants may feel supported and even somewhat empowered in a group setting, surrounded by friends and peers (Farquhar, 1999). Focus groups also have the potential to create a safe context in which taboo topics might be discussed, and might also help with the “identification and illumination of group norms” (Farquhar, 1999). Kitzinger (2006) reports that some researchers have found that focus group discussions appear to generate more critical comments than interviews. Although some might object to my usage of focus groups, especially taking into account issues of confidentiality, I would reply that revealing group norms in residences might result in important findings, since norms often dictate how groups interact. Based on this and the other reasons cited above, this method of data collection therefore seemed particularly appropriate to me.

Focus groups also give a voice to marginalised groups that might otherwise remain unheard (Farquhar, 1999), and this is significant when one is considering the norms and everyday practices of a group. Chiu and Knight (1999) believe that “cultural heterogeneity and diversity exist within all marginalised groups” (p. 104) and that it is for this reason that “views expressed in focus groups will be a subset of those that exist in the community at large” (p. 104). Despite the opinions of these

researchers, I felt that such personal opinions and experiences should not be generated to the wider population. The phenomenological assumption that reality is *subjectively experienced* helped me to remain aware of this. Waterton and Wynne (1999) claim that focus groups can offer “a telling snapshot of attitudes in the making, of the way issues and identities interweave” (p. 142). While the focus group might not produce data that can be generalised, as attitudes and identities are more often than not unique to the individual, it is still a useful method in collecting this ‘snap-shot’ of individual experiences.

3.4.1.5 Data recording and transcribing

With the participants' permission, all three focus groups were audio recorded. The transcriptions were done by an external party who was paid a fee. Transcriptions included what was said, pauses, mumbles, inaudible moments of dialogue and laughter.

3.4.2 Data analysis

Smith et al. (2009) note that current literature has not defined a single method for analysing data, but emphasise that what is more important is the essence of IPA, which is its analytical focus. Simply put, this focus “directs our analytic attention towards our participants’ attempts to make sense of their experiences” (p. 80). These researchers offer one approach to analysis, which I will use.

3.4.2.1 Read for a sense of the whole

The first step in the process of data analysis was to read the entire transcription more than once. This ensured that I gathered a comprehensive understanding of all descriptions and opinions of descriptions. This involved using an open mind to note anything of interest and relevance in the transcriptions. It afforded me the opportunity to become even more familiar with the content.

3.4.2.2 Develop emergent themes

This step entailed going through the data again, using phenomenological reduction and bracketing. It is during this stage that bracketing was particularly useful, because meaning is “correlated with the perspective of the researcher” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 252). Smith et al. (2009) note that it is at this point that the phenomenological researcher needs to become particularly cognizant of the I and P in IPA, which would ensure that the focus remains the lived experience of the research participant,

although I, as the researcher, would ultimately be closely involved in the interpretation as well (Smith et al., 2009). I borrowed a term from descriptive phenomenological analysis to describe the emergent themes – namely, Natural Meaning Units or NMUs (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). I felt it would emphasise the essential characteristics of these themes: that they are the collection of raw, organic, natural data, and also that they contain a great deal of meaning for participants.

3.4.2.3 Transform natural meaning units

This step entailed transforming participants' everyday expressions into expressions that emphasised the psychological meanings experienced by the participants. In other words, natural meaning units were changed into phrases containing the psychological essence of what was said by the participants. This step used free imagination variation and also required me to focus on rendering implicit factors explicit.

3.4.2.4 Determine structure and search for connections

Based on the transformed meaning units, it was then necessary to use these themes as a basis for describing, comparing and contrasting the psychological structure of the experience.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was received from the ethics committee at the university that formed the context of the study (ethical clearance number HS1184/2015). The ethical guidelines laid down by the committee were strictly adhered to. Attempts to ensure confidentiality were duly made; firstly, through the use of pseudonyms which prevented there being any connection between responses and participants. Secondly, the names of the residences were also replaced with pseudonyms. Only my supervisor and I had access to the transcribed research, and the transcriptions and audio records were kept on a password-protected computer. Concerning confidentiality and anonymity, with focus groups there can be no absolute guarantee that opinions and responses shared by participants will be respected. This was dealt with by ensuring ground rules regarding confidentiality were discussed at the start of each focus group.

One issue that has been mentioned briefly above is the researcher's role in the constitution of the meaning units during data analysis. Giorgi (1985) notes that these meaning constituents exist “only

in relation to the attitude and set of the researcher” (p. 15). While I made consistent use of the technique of bracketing, it was inevitable that my perspective had some influence in interpreting the data. I therefore reduced the chances of this happening by ensuring that there were a number of participants from which data was gathered. The greater the number of participants, the more variations of information (Giorgi, 1985). This better assisted me in identifying what was essential about the phenomenon. Focus groups of six people, 18 participants in total, meant that the focus groups were small enough to encourage maximum participation, but also ensured that a variety of information was gathered.

With regards to consent, participants were required to sign a consent form that described in detail the research procedure, aims and purpose of the study, intended use of findings, what their participation would require and risks to the participants themselves. Participants were made fully aware of the fact that they were free, at any time, to refuse to participate, or withdraw from the focus group.

Attempts were made to ensure that any risk of harm to participants was minimised. Participants were offered the option of a free debriefing session, which would be organized by either me or my supervisor, at the student counselling centre at the HWI in question, in case that they felt this was needed. This was owing to the sensitive nature of the research topic, which had the potential to illicit strong emotion in participants.

3.6 Trustworthiness

While some researchers have criticised the use of triangulation in qualitative research for being too positivist (Rothbauer, 2008) it can be a useful technique for qualitative researchers “to identify, explore, and understand different dimensions of the units of study, thereby strengthening their findings and enriching their interpretations” (Rothbauer, 2008, p. 893). In this study, I will use a triangulation of methods of data collection to ensure validity and credibility. The focus group discussion, the sharing of personal narratives describing incidents related to belonging, participant observation during focus groups, and my own process notes and reflections were used to triangulate data.

3.7 Rigor of the study

Related to the trustworthiness of results is the question of whether the methodology used can be considered rigorous. As aforementioned, while the results of phenomenological research cannot be generalised, Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) argue that this method can be seen as scientific because it is methodical and critical. It is methodical because it follows a series of steps that can be replicated by others, so that the knowledge claims can be tested. It is critical because the results of the research will be read by experts within the field who will be free to challenge the knowledge and conclusions generated from the data.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has continued to frame the study of belonging. In this chapter, I presented the ontological, epistemological and methodological approach of phenomenology as an appropriate framework to engage the various themes that emerged. Through the explanation of methods related to IPA, I have argued that these methods ensured that I was able to gather nuanced and various rich descriptions of a sense of belonging in the exploration of “actual slices of human life” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 202).

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the raw data garnered from the three focus groups. An interpretation and discussion of these findings will be presented in chapter five.

4.2 Interpretive phenomenological analysis

The first step of IPA involved reading through each transcription twice. Doing this enabled me to gain a sense of familiarity with the raw data, themes and core ideas embedded within the transcriptions.

I approached each transcription with the research questions in mind. In other words, I read the transcribed data paying specific attention to those extracts that appeared to articulate something about belonging, either overtly or covertly. I then performed step two and three: from each text, I divided data into a number of preliminary themes or NMUs. These NMUs were kept in the participant's original words and reveal similar themes. The identification of NMUs was coded manually and involved highlighting and writing notes to indicate various patterns. From these I located the essential meaning structure of the experience of belonging, and transformed them into psychologically sensitive expressions (Smith et al., 2009) this being step three of the process. This approach meant that data was coded with the aim of looking only at particular aspects related to my research questions, and therefore findings not related to the research questions were not included in the final interpretation and discussion.

In my reporting and interpretation of the data, I have specifically included the race and, in the case of the mixed-gender residence, the gender of the participant when reporting what was said. I believe that this information is crucial in understanding contributions made by each individual.

An example of step two and three of the method is illustrated in Table 4.1. Please see Appendix E for a more comprehensive example of the analysis of data and identification of NMUs.

Table 4.1***Example of transferring NMUs into psychologically sensitive expressions***

NMU Residence A	NMU Residence B	Psychologically Sensitive Expression
<i>Pamela (Residence A, black participant)</i>	<i>Keletso (Residence B, black participant)</i>	A sense of belonging can be linked to language usage.
<i>“Because then you go home and you can speak Zulu and you can be yourself again. But if it’s in the place that you live...”</i>	<i>“...it was just the fact that I couldn’t understand people and that made it difficult for me to connect to people.”</i>	

4.3 Data analysis

Each focus group from the three different residences, along with the NMUs expressed as psychologically sensitive expressions, is discussed below.

4.3.1 Residence A

Residence A is a female residence that was founded in 1968. It has a high academic standard and places a strong emphasis on the student becoming a perfect ‘[residence name] lady’, who finds meaning in her life through serving others. This is specifically expressed in the residence's mission statement.

Table 4.2***Demographics of Residence A participants***

Name	Race	Gender
Anneke	White	Female
Lali	Black	Female
Melody	Coloured	Female
Monique	White	Female
Pamela	Black	Female

4.3.1.1 Personal reflections on group dynamics.

Residence A struck me as a very traditional residence; the building is an old yet beautifully maintained house with photographs of generations of students decorating the lounges and dining hall. It was interesting to note that the majority of students in the photographs were white students. While waiting outside I was greeted by most residence members entering the house, always in Afrikaans by white and coloured students, and in English by black students. I was joined by five focus group participants (one student was unable to attend) in one of the common rooms. This was by far the most emotional focus group of all three I conducted. Two of the participants (one white and one coloured) became very emotional when discussing issues specifically related to race and belonging. I ended the interview after an hour but remained behind with three of the participants who had expressed the most emotion in the group, ensuring that they felt sufficiently contained before I left.

I attempted to bracket my own assumptions throughout the process. Since some of what the participants spoke about, particularly the white students, resonated with me, doing this was difficult. I remained conscious of bracketing throughout the interview, ensuring that I commented only when it was necessary to clarify what had been said. I feel I did my best to approach the focus group as an inquisitive observer of the phenomenon under discussion.

4.3.1.2 NMUs Expressed as psychologically sensitive expressions

The NMUs³, along with corresponding numbers, that emerged in this data are as follows:

- 1. An individual's attitude towards the residence impacts on feeling a sense of belonging.*
- 2. A sense of belonging can be linked to language usage.*
- 3. Residence traditions can result in students feeling either included or excluded.*
- 4. An individual's race might prevent her from feeling as if she belongs.*
- 5. Sharing of cultural practices promotes a sense of belonging among marginalised students.*

³ These NMUs and corresponding numbers will be used for the other two focus groups, should similar themes emerge.

4.3.1.3 Discussion of NMUs

NMU 1: An individual's attitude towards the residence impacts on feeling a sense of belonging.

Monique reports that she did not initially feel a sense of belonging in the residence because she was accepted into the residence only in her second year of study. In this case, she links her lack of feeling a sense of belonging with her own mind-set:

“I had a mind-set that I don't belong because I didn't get accepted in the first place. It wasn't people that did it to me, but it did feel in a way that I was not good enough to be here.” Monique (white participant)

Melody also believes that mind-set has an impact on belonging. She expounds on what Monique says but links the impact that an individual's mind-set has on a sense of belonging to race:

“You make it [your mind-set] affect how you interact with people, then you will see racism and stuff like that.” Melody (coloured participant)

Pamela notes that when she stopped caring about what people thought of her, she started to feel more included. Her own shifting mind-set resulted in her participating more in residence activities, and this resulted in an increased sense of belonging:

“I didn't care about being accepted. And that definitely made me feel more included. You do a little more, you know, personally, I participated a little more.”
Pamela (black participant)

NMU 2: A sense of belonging can be linked to language usage.

Certain Afrikaans terms used by the residence members do not have an English definition, despite these words being part of the residence vocabulary.

“Also in terms of skakeling⁴, I don't know what it means.” Pamela (black participant)

⁴ This is an Afrikaans term which, roughly translated, means *to socialize*.

Pamela explains that a significant contribution to her feeling excluded comes from the speaking of Afrikaans during house meetings⁵. She notes how coming into an Afrikaans space, where people are speaking Afrikaans, makes her feel as if she wants to “retreat” and that she is not supposed to be there in the first place. She also goes on to note that this is particularly difficult because the space is where she resides:

“Because then you go home and you can speak Zulu and you can be yourself again. But if it’s in the place that you live [shakes head].” Pamela (black participant)

Lali feels the same. She goes on to say that even though she understands Afrikaans, she believes that speaking the language around someone who does not understand it immediately excludes this person and that this is when language can be connected to racism. Pamela also interprets this happening as an act of racism:

“So when I am in the kitchen and somebody greets me in Afrikaans, they can see that I am black, immediately what that means to me is that you think your language is better; that’s why you can come into my space and say to me ‘Gooiê more’⁶. So that’s the immediate connotation that it carries.” Pamela (black participant)

Lali explains this further saying that being greeted in Afrikaans once is not in itself something that results in her feeling excluded in the residence. She says it is more a “spectrum of things” or racist acts that result in her feeling excluded:

“It’s a spectrum of things. The person would greet you [in Afrikaans] and they always do that to me [laughs]. Why do they always do that?” Lali (black participant)

She reports also that being in a residence that is predominately Afrikaans puts her in the position where she has to greet people in Afrikaans, and yet other residence members make no effort to

⁵ During house meetings, important issues related to the residence are discussed.

⁶ *Good morning* in Afrikaans.

greet her in her mother tongue. This results in her feeling that she must be accommodating to others in her own space in order to feel like she belongs, but no one attempts to accommodate her:

“...we are not going to walk up to someone and we are like sawubona⁷ if I know that she speaks a different language. We have been put in a position where we [are] accommodating to everybody else. And I just think that maybe to some extent we have to be.” Lali (black participant)

Monique notes, however, that speaking Afrikaans to fellow residence members is “instinct”. She says it is her “default” language, and that she does not mean to exclude anyone when she speaks her home language in a public space. It is not something that occurs to her. In contrast to this, Lali, being in a similar situation with friends in residence who speak a variety of African languages, notes the conscious decision the group makes to speak English:

“Like among my friends we have a lot of black girls but some speak Vendi and some speak Xhosa and yet among us we have to speak English all the time even though it is not our home language.” Lali (black participant)

NMU 3: Residence traditions can result in students feeling excluded.

Traditions play a significant role in university residences. However, it seems that they can result in students feeling excluded. *Skakels*⁸ are normally arranged at the beginning of the year to encourage mixing amongst students. Pamela explains how *skakels* make her feel excluded, mainly because of the link they have to the Afrikaans culture that she feels is imposed upon her when she attends them:

“I don't know how far back it goes, but it seems to me it's a set Afrikaans tradition and now I must now comply with this Afrikaans tradition. I have no choice, I have to do it, and it's somebody else's culture that is imposed on me.” Pamela (black participant)

⁷ Hello in Zulu.

⁸ This word is also used as a noun to refer to socials between residences.

Lali feels the same and notes that this is a part of residence life to which she will never belong. She links this to her identity as a residence member:

“So that takes part of me, like a [names residence] lady - that definition is like I am not part of that.” Lali (black participant)

Another tradition that was mentioned is *sêr*. This is when residence members form an acapella group and compete against other residences. Anneke states that it is a very Afrikaans tradition, but it is something that has been extremely positive despite that:

“We sing sêr because it's sêr. We don't look into the background of sêr and what sêr is and where it came from. That is not an issue.” Anneke (white participant)

In this comment, Anneke separates the tradition itself from its link to the past. Pamela agrees that *sêr* is a positive tradition, but says that it is because it has been adapted and changed, and therefore its link to the past is not as strong:

“But I think also because sêr has adapted so much. You are not forced to sing in Afrikaans. It's probably not the same now as it was ten years ago. It's changed.”
Pamela (black participant)

NMU 4: An individual's race might prevent her from feeling as if she belongs.

Four of the five participants in this focus group commented on the role that race has played in their sense of belonging in the residence. Pamela explains how, during *skakels*, residence members from male residences would 'choose' with whom they would want to *skakel* and that the choice was generally made along racial lines:

“...so even if [there are] two black people...in the other residence, say six black girls are still going to have to be chosen.” Pamela (black participant)

Lali goes on to explain how this made her feel excluded, as there were often not enough black male students with whom to *skakel* and she was often ignored by the white male students:

“And I had never spoken to people about why I am being excluded. Why don't people speak to me? Maybe I look ugly [laughs].” Lali (black participant)

Because of this, she now avoids situations in which she might be forced to socialise with white Afrikaans men especially. She states specifically that none of her black, Indian or coloured friends attend *skakels* or frequent any of the popular nightclubs or restaurants in Stellenbosch. Melody reports that she feels the same as Lali, especially when students return from home after the holidays, and that because of this she feels she belongs more off campus than she does on campus:

“Everyone is back in their clicky vibe, and then as the semester progresses again, and everyone is more integrated.” Melody (coloured participant)

Anneke says that for her, race became an issue only when she moved into the residence. She speaks with emotion about incidents where she was accused of being a racist:

“People are so negative towards other people of a different skin colour and sometimes behind their backs even. I have had personal experiences where I have heard people of colour in res⁹ speak of me as a white racist behind my back. And that's not nice.” Anneke (white participant)

Both white participants expressed a frustration at the fact that race has been and remains to be an issue in the residence. While Melody notes that she has experienced a sense of not being completely welcome in the residence by white students, and that she sees this in these students not greeting her, Anneke reduces the role race plays in this scenario, highlighting rather the idea that this has more to do with personality:

“But then I realised that people not greeting me back is not because they are black or Indian or coloured or white, it's because of their personality.” Anneke (white participant)

She goes on to express her desire to move forward and forget our apartheid history:

“Because I really understand our history and I understand it was terrible, but then again when will we start moving forward? When will we start loving each

⁹ Short for *residence*.

other? Truly accepting each other for who we are and not judging me because my skin is so extremely white that I can't go into the sun." Anneke (white participant)

This is a very different opinion to Pamela's, who reminds the group that moving forward is very difficult when remnants of apartheid still exist. The very past that Anneke advocates forgetting is something that Pamela describes as a part of the stories she was told as a child:

"But then someone will find something that reminds you of all the stories your Mom told you about how tough it was." Pamela (black participant)

NMU 5: Sharing of cultures promotes a sense of belonging in marginalised students.

Both black participants said that opportunities to speak about their cultures and bring these cultures into the residence space helped to promote in them a sense of belonging. Pamela cites the example of a residence Masterchef¹⁰ competition:

"...where everybody cooks something for their specific section [of the house] but where I have an opportunity to express my culture in especially an Afrikaans university, I definitely felt more included." Pamela (black participant)

She goes on to explain why this helps her to feel she belongs:

"It helps to feel more included, ok, now you want to learn from me as well and it's not like now I am in your space and I have to do what you want to do." (Pamela, black participant)

Lali explains that when she shares her culture, she is able to celebrate who she is, and for her this is a significant part of belonging:

"Belonging is not just ridding yourself of everything that you are and complying with one thing that you have to be. You have to be proud of who you are naturally and accept yourself naturally. You can't wipe out everyone's culture to get to that place [where people feel they belong]." Lali (black participant)

10 A televised cooking competition in which participants compete for the title of the best chef or *MasterChef*.

4.3.2 Residence B

Residence B is one of the oldest residences of the university. It is a large, male-only residence, and regarded as one of the leading residences on campus owing to its competitiveness on a sporting and cultural level. The residence also prides itself on having a high academic standard. It maintains its identity as a brotherhood, emphasising that when one is a part of the residence, one is part of a community for life. Tradition forms a significant part of residence life.

Table 4.3
Demographics of Residence B participants

Name	Race	Gender
Cedric	Black	Male
Johan	White	Male
Keletso	Black	Male
Roger	Coloured	Male
Ruan	Coloured	Male
Wiecus	White	Male

4.3.2.1 Personal reflections on group dynamics

This was by far the most enjoyable focus group I conducted, mainly because of the camaraderie that exists between the students. I arrived a little early and was able to spend some time outside the residence observing the students coming and going. What stood out for me was the large majority of English-speaking students leaving the residence in groups to go jogging or play some sort of sport.

The focus group was attended by five South African students (one black South African student, two white students and two coloured students) and one black student from an African country¹¹. The group was in high spirits and appeared very eager to share stories about the residence and one another. While the students were diverse in age, race and degree choice, they appeared to be good friends. A strong sense of identity as being a man from Residence B was evident and this

¹¹ I have not mentioned the specific country for the purpose of confidentiality.

appeared to be a source of pride for all the participants in the group. This was the only group that checked before the focus group started that the information they shared would in no way damage the reputation of the residence, and that strict confidentiality would be maintained. It seemed that protecting the name of residence was very important to all of these participants.

At some stages in the discussion, the black and coloured students would start saying something about not experiencing a sense of belonging because of their race. However, every time this happened, I noticed that these students would either make a joke about what they had just mentioned, or change the story slightly, often blaming themselves for their own 'inadequacies' (for example, not being able to *sokkie*¹²). I felt frustrated during these times because I felt that these students were holding back from sharing valuable experiences that could add to my collection of rich and meaningful data. However, if this is in fact what these students were doing, then that itself is significant. I will expand more upon this and the potential meaning behind this in my interpretation in the next chapter.

4.3.2.2 NMUs expressed as psychologically sensitive expressions

The NMUs (with corresponding numbers) that emerged in this data are as follows:

2. *A sense of belonging can be linked to language usage.*
3. *Residence traditions can result in students feeling either included or excluded.*
6. *Belonging is promoted by competitive activities/sport.*
7. *Different socio-economic backgrounds can either promote or prevent a sense of belonging.*
8. *Forming a sense of belonging takes time,*
9. *Marginalised students must assimilate in order to feel a sense of belonging.*

4.3.2.3 Discussion of NMUs

I will discuss each of these in detail below.

¹² This is a traditional and very popular form of Afrikaans dancing.

NMU 2: A sense of belonging can be linked to language usage.

As with Residence A, language appears to play a significant role with regards to the phenomenon under study. Keletso expresses how he initially felt when he heard he was assigned to Residence B:

“...like I got a bursary here I was really unhappy about being in [names residence] and I really wanted to change because I just had this perception of this big Afrikaans university residence” Keletso (black participant)

His fear was specifically related to his race, but he quickly discovered that it was the language barrier (in other words his lack of understanding Afrikaans) that had more of an impact:

“I thought that I would be disadvantaged because of my race; it wasn't really a race problem. It was just the fact that I couldn't understand people and that made it difficult for me to connect to people.” Keletso (black participant)

It was this lack of understanding that actually resulted in Keletso not wanting to be a part of the residence activities, which further influenced his sense of belonging:

“My only mistake was that because of the whole language thing I didn't want to sort of include [myself] in any of the activities. But then when I felt really like I belonged [was when] I became a mentor¹³.” Keletso (black participant)

Cedric found it even more difficult to fit in initially, since he is originally from an African country, and had no exposure to Afrikaans at all until he came to South Africa and started at the university. This proved to be a significant obstacle to belonging for this student:

“You don't just get there and then become friends with everyone because you don't really relate to what's happening in that res.” Cedric (black participant)

Apart from having an impact on his mixing socially, Cedric explains how it was also difficult for him to keep up with exactly what was happening in the residence.

¹³ This is a leadership role in the residence. Mentors are students who have been living in the residence for more than two years, and they provide guidance and support to first year students.

“Like everything was in Afrikaans, like you get emails in Afrikaans everything then, they’ll say one or two English words. And obviously it doesn’t really help if someone says, blah blah blah, and then you should do this blah blah blah. It doesn’t really help you [laughs] only have like two words in English so, doesn’t really help you” Cedric (black participant)

Cedric explains that after approaching his HC member¹⁴ to ask him to send English emails, he was told to ask someone in his section to translate for him. He did not experience this as being helpful. This resulted in his feeling even more frustrated and excluded:

“I’m supposed to look up to you and you like – not chasing me away blatantly but then you are actually telling me to go away.” Cedric (black participant)

NMU 3: Residence traditions can result in students feeling either included or excluded.

Tradition forms a significant part of life in Residence B. Johan notes that traditions connect him to a greater community of alumni students:

“I mean like guys that I meet that are ten years out of [names residence] ask, ‘Are you guys still doing this?’ You are connected with them immediately.” Johan (white participant)

Roger agrees, and it appears in what he says below, that traditions also help the students to build memories together:

“The thing that when I felt most involved - it’s those small traditions that we did that afterwards we could laugh about...um, ja¹⁵, I’m not going into details [laughs]. Things got a bit messy at times.” Roger (coloured participant)

Johan notes that the traditions give the students the chance to get to know each other and become close friends:

¹⁴ HC members are senior students who are part of the governing body of the residence and are responsible for groups of students in the residence, communicating important house information to them.

¹⁵ Afrikaans word which means *yes*.

“I feel part of something. Especially within the welcoming meeting¹⁶; that's where we feel like brothers.” Johan (white participant)

NMU 6: Belonging is promoted by competitive activities and sport.

Something else that contributed to a sense of belonging is when the students did some form of competition or team sport. Keletso speaks about rugby on Fridays, and the unifying effect this has on the students:

“...everyone is united...you wanna win this trophy.” Keletso (black participant)

Rugby was cited as a unifying factor for the students, not only playing the game but also joining the rest of the residence in supporting the players:

“...cheering to your brothers and to your roommate and to the guy in your section that's playing on the field at this moment...it also helps to create a sense of belonging.” Ruan (coloured participant)

Ruan explains how running up a mountain as a first year group during Welcoming Week¹⁷ helped to bond the students:

“...you would literally take your maatjie's¹⁸ arm two on each side and you would literally go up the hill the three of you; it's just amazing the relationship you build in that time.” Ruan (coloured participant)

It appears that working together towards a common goal, such as running to the top of a mountain, powerfully generates a sense of community amongst the students. This is reiterated again in what Keletso says:

“When we had to work together for Vensters¹⁹. Like I'm a big believer that Vensters can like bring people together; you have to basically sweat and all those

16 The welcoming meeting is the first meeting of the year in which first year students are welcomed into the residence.

17 The first week of the university year, in which students from various residences socialise and partake in fun and competitive activities.

18 This is an Afrikaans colloquial term for *friend*.

sort of stuff...ja all these weird things that have to do with Vensters and try to get yourself towards a goal.” Keletso (black participant)

NMU 7: Different socio-economic backgrounds of students can either promote or prevent a sense of belonging.

A student's socio-economic background appeared to be a significant factor in either promoting or preventing a sense of belonging. Wieceus explains that background in terms of where one was raised plays a role. He describes a situation in which a white, Afrikaans-speaking residence member felt left out when he was with Wieceus and the rest of the friendship group because he is the only one from the city, who did not grow up on a farm:

“And even though he is white and Afrikaans, still he’ll be excluded and a lot of times he’ll say, ‘But I don’t know what’s going on.’ I feel sometimes there is arguments almost.” Wieceus (white participant)

Four of the students cited socio-economic background as having a greater impact on a sense of belonging than race has:

“...if it’s a black guy from a sort of an equal school than mine it was much easier for me to get over the school barrier and to connect with the guy, than a guy from some or other township, because just from the start we don’t have that much in common. It was easier for me to connect with people from the same socio-economic class” Wieceus (white participant)

There appeared to be a desire in some of the students to move away from blaming exclusivity on race. Wieceus noted that inclusion and exclusion become an issue when people label a certain race to a certain economic class, but it is not race *per se* that is the issue. He talks about black people from “the uneducated class” and how it is this class difference that impacts on a sense of belonging:

19 Vensters or ‘*Windows*’ is a production organized by the first years of each residence and performed during Welcoming Week for the public. Residences compete against each other for the title of best production.

“And I think that’s what I realised here is that the class difference it’s much more difficult to overcome than the racial barriers...like for me it wasn’t that much of a racial barrier but more of a class barrier.” Wicus (white participant)

Ruan agrees and specifically states that the socio-economic status and not the race of black, coloured and Indian students is what hinders their feeling a sense of belonging:

“...there are blacker, coloured and Indian students coming into this space, and the social economic – that bridge is so, so wide that they do not buy – they don’t buy into this.” Ruan (coloured participant)

He goes on to explain that the students coming from previously disadvantaged communities find the gap between what they are used to and what they experience in residence as too “big”. Despite the fact that he is coloured himself, Ruan says that he was able to fit into the residence because he came from a very privileged home and would not define himself as previously disadvantaged.

Keletso agrees with this, and reports that he, a black man, fits into the predominately white Afrikaans residence because of his background, which is similar to that of his white peers. He attended a high school very similar in demographics and cultural practices to the residence, which has made it easier for him to fit in. One of the examples he uses is his knowledge of rugby, and how this enabled him to connect with the other students:

“I found myself easy to connect to the guys from different big boys’ high schools because then I can sort of talk about a common thing like rugby.” Keletso (black participant)

However, he did initially experience some difficulties, which he relates specifically to his race and language:

“...but obviously having the disadvantage of not speaking the correct language and sometimes feeling you’re not the right race sometimes. It’s a bit difficult as well.” Keletso (black participant)

NMU 8: Forming a sense of belonging takes time.

Johan, a white student, also notes the impact of socio-economic background, specifically how difficult he thinks it might be for a student from a previously disadvantaged background to have the time to fit in:

“But if I come from a previously disadvantaged house and I’m studying, I need to pass...like otherwise I lose my bursary. Like we try to have a culture of inclusivity and stuff...I feel some people don't feel they have time to do that [be involved] because they need to pass.” Johan (white participant)

Roger experienced this first hand. While he does not specifically mention that he has a bursary to keep, he does say how hard it was for him initially as his demanding academic load prevented him from being a part of residence activities:

“When I came here my main priority and focus for the first six months was to establish myself academically and make sure I get the grip on what’s going on...and it lead to the fact that I felt that I didn’t have time for section activities and playing in the quad and being betrokke²⁰ because I’m here to study and I’m here to work. So in a sense um...the fact that I didn’t partake and up until today I don’t partake because it’s not, it’s because of my own inability.” Roger (coloured)

NMU 9: Marginalised students must assimilate in order to feel a sense of belonging.

In order to belong, it appears that marginalised students take on the responsibility of assimilating. Keletso experienced this:

“There’s a lot of picking up you have to do like other people’s cultures in order to like feel like you belong.” Keletso (black participant)

As already mentioned, he reports initially being unhappy that he was accepted into the particular residence, and goes on to explain what helped him to negotiate these feelings.

²⁰ Afrikaans word which means *to be involved*.

“I decided look if I want to thrive in the space I must contribute somehow - that’s when I started feeling like this is my house as well because I’m making a contribution, then that’s when I started feeling ownership.” Keletso (black participant)

He expounds on this, explaining that as a marginalised student he feels it is his responsibility to make some sort of effort to understand the cultural practices of the majority:

“...there must be some sort of like effort from your side to try and at least understand why people do this, why people like this music, why people like this, why people are talking about this or whatever. And once we do that the people are more accepting obviously they naturally more accepting of you because you are doing the things that they like as well.” Keletso (black participant)

Roger explains that when he is at a residence dance, and the rest of the students start to sokkie, he feels excluded. He blames this feeling however, on his own inability to dance like this:

I feel excluded when people start, not because they sokkie, it’s because I can’t sokkie, if it make sense and I have to but it’s my own...I also have two, four left feet. I just don’t so that’s the thing.” Roger (coloured participant)

Keletso also refers to sokkie dancing and Afrikaans music being played at social settings. This resulted in his feeling excluded and left out. However, like Roger he too explains how he had to accept that things were not going to change:

“I just realised the music’s not gonna change. Like obviously the music isn’t gonna change any time soon unless I organise the dance and get the DJ. It’s probably advisable for me to learn at least one sokkie move.” Keletso (black participant)

Once Keletso had learnt how to sokkie he was able to feel more a part of the residence:

“And now I like – I love it, like guys wanna take me to Opskop²¹? Let’s go [laughs].” Keletso (black participant)

21 A local dance club where sokkie music is played.

4.3.3 Residence C

Residence C is one of the newer residences. It is one of the largest residences at the HWI and one of the few mixed gender residences. The focus specifically is on providing a welcoming environment to each and every student who walks through the residence doors. It prides itself on being one of the most diverse, yet unified residences on campus and emphasizes that there is no 'standard' residence member for the residence but that everyone is welcomed and accepted. One of their core values is the African value of *ubuntu*.²²

Table 4.4

Demographics of Residence C Participants

Name	Race	Gender
Denovan	Coloured	Male
Heskin	Black	Male
Nick	White	Male
Rozanne	White	Female
Shelly	Coloured	Female
Thabisa	Black	Female

4.3.3.1 Personal reflections on group dynamics

Waiting outside for the HC member, I was struck by the atmosphere in the courtyard outside the residence. A diverse mix of students in terms of race and gender sat casually on the benches, chatting and laughing, some of them smoking. Apart from the diversity in terms of race, what struck me the most was the fact that everyone was talking in English. Perhaps it was the newness of the building, as Residence C has only recently been built, but it did feel as if I were in a space very different to the "klein dorpie"²³ in which the university is located. I was aware of the pre-conceived ideas I had about Residence C as being a liberal and modern residence, and had to

²² An African value, best translated into English as: *I am a person only because of other people*.

²³ Translated as 'small town' in English. I intentionally used this term because it encapsulates the identity of the town in which the university is situated – which is a small Afrikaans town with a strong Afrikaans heritage.

work hard to bracket my assumptions that belonging would be something that was felt easily by all members of Residence C, more so than the Residence A and Residence B.

Like the other two focus groups, the participants appeared to be friends and were relaxed and comfortable within the group setting. The students arrived individually and joined me in a common room. I couldn't help but notice that the six students ended up sitting divided by race – two students on each of three couches – although the decision of where to sit appeared to be completely random. The students appeared to have a strong sense of family, at times referring to other members of the residence as brothers and sisters. There were many occasions in the focus group where participants compared the residence to other more traditional residences at the university, and being a part of something that was not the status quo appeared to be a significant source of identity and pride for the participants. They were aware of the fact that “other residences” said that they as a group were “going nowhere” and it appeared important to the participants that I know how much they enjoyed being a part of the residence, and how much they would dislike being anywhere else. The irony for me is that it was this residence that appeared to be the most progressive out of the three in terms of diversity and inclusivity, and certainly *not* a residence I would describe as “going nowhere”. Five of the participants were South African and one of the black students was from another African country. All six students appeared to be extrovert in nature, outspoken with strong opinions regarding the residence and the topic at hand.

4.3.3.2 NMUs expressed as psychological sensitive expressions

The NMUs (with corresponding numbers) that emerged in this data are as follows:

- 2. A sense of belonging can be linked to language usage.*
- 10. Cultural and racial diversity promotes a sense of belonging*
- 11. A lack of hierarchy amongst residence members promotes belonging.*
- 12. Belonging means being accepted for who you are.*
- 13. Being different to other residences unifies students.*

4.3.3.3 Discussion of NMUs

Each NMU will be discussed below in further detail.

NMU 2: A sense of belonging can be linked to language usage.

Something that promotes a sense of belonging in Residence C is language use. Heskin was initially very nervous to attend the university, owing to its strong Afrikaans heritage. However, he notes that Afrikaans-speaking students in Residence C make great effort to speak English to him. Thabisa tells the story of a HC member whose home language is Afrikaans, yet chose to present his HC election speech²⁴ in English. This helped her to feel like she belonged:

“...but he was like, 'You know what there [are] 502 people here and I need to cater for everyone'. It makes me feel like really welcome and it makes me feel like I count, you're here because you belong.” Thabisa (black participant)

Thabisa goes on to note that she would not be able to stay in other more traditional residences owing to the lack of effort she perceives these residences making in terms of inclusive language usage. She bases her opinion on the fact that she has spent a large amount of time in more traditional residences visiting friends:

“I couldn't survive, because it is very Afrikaans and I got the feeling that the HC don't make the effort to make it more English.” Thabisa (black participant)

The residence has not completely excluded the use of Afrikaans. The residence song is in Afrikaans, yet all of the students praised the implementation of this new tradition.

“...literally the whole residence goes outside, we form a circle and sing the song and it's amazing.” Rozanne (white participant)

“...and then the HC just like formed a circle around us screaming [name of residence song].” Denovan (coloured participant)

²⁴ Elections are held at the end of every year, in which students of the residence run for positions on the HC.

NMU 10: Cultural and racial diversity promotes a sense of belonging.

Two students commented on how the diverse mix of cultures in the residence promotes a sense of belonging. Thabisa feels that the high number of international students living at the residence means that people tend to be more open-minded, and this makes it easier for a person to fit in. Similarly, Rozanne ascribes the welcoming atmosphere I experienced when I walked into the residence to the diversity that exists in the student body.

NMU 11: A lack of hierarchy amongst residence members promotes belonging.

One of the primary ways in which Residence C differs from more traditional residences is evident in the relationship that the members of the HC have with the rest of the students in the residence. Thabisa describes how friendly the HC members are and that in other residences, the HC members and other students (particularly first years) do not mix. It is this that she believes promotes a sense of belonging:

“And I think that also brings a really good sense of belonging especially for the first years, because they feel like they can talk to the HCs²⁵ which are meant to be like parents of the house you know.” Thabisa (black participant)

Rozanne too, focuses on how Residence C is different to other residences in this regard:

“...but I think [names residence] is one of the few residences that's actually... like your HC will literally come and knock on your door and come and fall on your bed and come and speak to you.” Rozanne (white participant)

Apart from assisting students in forging relationships in the residence, the lack of hierarchy existing between HC members and other students in Residence C appears to communicate a powerful message to the students that assists in promoting a sense of belonging:

“Because you are still a first year but you feel like, ja, you not like worthless or something. You're a person before title.” Thabisa (black participant)

²⁵ Members of the HC are often referred to as HCs.

An icebreaker during Welcoming Week also contributed to the lack of hierarchy amongst students in Residence C. Called *Cross the Line*, students were asked to cross over a visible line drawn onto the floor if they have experienced certain things that range from being a prefect at school to feeling judged or discriminated against for various reasons. This appeared to promote a sense of belonging, as through this experience, students found themselves on common ground:

“...even though you didn't explicitly go out and say, 'This has happened to me'. But you've stepped forward with people who have been there with you.” Nick
(white participant)

NMU 12: Belonging means being accepted for who you are.

Not being judged and being free to be oneself appeared to be a consistently occurring theme in this focus group. Students frequently mentioned how they felt free to be themselves and that they felt accepted by the majority of the student body in Residence C. Nick speaks about Residence C being a place of “zero judgment”. Shelly describes how she felt when she arrived at the residence:

“When I came here I was like okay maybe I should just keep to myself...and then I started meeting people; the people were as crazy as me [laughs].” Shelly
(coloured participant)

This feeling of being completely accepted also gives students the space to learn how to interact in a more diverse space. Heskin refers to the students in the residence as tolerant when one is ignorant of certain things. He describes how, when he said something socially inappropriate at a house-meeting, one of the HC members pulled him aside and warned him that it might be offensive to some people. The gentle yet firm way in which she did this was something that influenced him:

“So like ja I mean I appreciate that. And although people like to make fun of me, I like to think that nobody has anything against me for that.” Heskin (black participant)

Nick explains how nervous he was to come from a small town in South Africa where he was not accustomed to much diversity, and how he was helped by the other students:

“So I was a bit nervous as to how like I’m gonna fit in. Am I gonna be too white, am I gonna be racist without knowing and when I arrived I met some people that really helped teach me what to say and what not to say.” Nick (white participant)

NMU 13: Being different to other residences unifies students.

A significant source of pride and what promoted a sense of identity and belonging amongst the students was the feeling that Residence C is not like other, more traditional residences. This was mentioned by most of the participants:

So people are very open-minded I would say compared to other people that I have met in let's say [names two other ladies' residences].” Thabisa (black participant)

Thabisa feels so strongly about this that she says that she would not be able to survive in other, more traditional residences:

“...because it’s very Afrikaans and I got the feeling that the HC don’t like...they don’t make the effort to make it more English, you know.” Thabisa (black participant)

Heskin says something similar:

“...you don’t associate [names residence] with racism.” Heskin (black participant)

This is particularly significant coming from Heskin, because he reports his friends and family being surprised at his choice of university:

“And at that school when I said I’m going to [names university] everyone was like, ‘Oh my gosh what, you’re so brave’ [inaudible] nerve wrecking...because I’m black... I can’t speak Afrikaans. There was those two things.” Heskin (black participant)

Rozanne explains that even though she applied to get into the more well-known ladies' residences, she is glad that she ultimately ended up in Residence C:

“...and here’s us [names residence] and nobody knows about it because it’s so new and like everyone’s a bit scared and then actually it’s the perfect res.”

Rozanne (white participant)

Both Thabisa and Heskin go on to mention how accepted they feel at Residence C, and how open-minded they find it in comparison to other residences on campus.

Two of the group members speak about how the controversy on campus regarding diversity and language has not affected them, and appear to be issues from which they take pride in distancing themselves:

“I know this whole thing’s going on [but] when you walk into [names residence] it’s just like it just doesn’t reach here, you know.” Denovan (coloured participant)

“...it’s like we are living in a bubble...it doesn’t bother us...it seriously doesn’t play a role here.” Rozanne (white participant)

Nick continues with the idea of Residence C being a place of acceptance, despite the fact that other residences see it as “going nowhere”:

“Some will say [names residence] is nowhere, but everyone knows at [names residence] you are accepted.” Nick (white participant).

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described my method of data analysis. I then went on to discuss each focus group, the NMUs participants expressed in their own words, and the psychologically sensitive expressions I formulated from these NMUs. The following chapter will provide an interpretation of these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter elucidates the connections between the results of the research and the literature discussed in chapter two, interprets the key findings, revisits the theory of phenomenology and its usefulness in studying the concept of belonging, addresses limitations of the study and proposes recommendations for further study.

5.2 Summary of findings

The purpose of this study was to explore a sense of belonging at an HWI. The research questions were as follows:

- What can be learnt about a sense of belonging and how students negotiate belonging?
- What promotes a sense of belonging amongst students on an HWI?
- What hinders a sense of belonging amongst students on an HWI?

The findings revealed interesting information about how students experience and negotiate belonging on an HWI. I formulated 13 psychologically sensitive expressions about the phenomenon from the raw data:

1. An individual's attitude towards the residence impacts on feeling a sense of belonging.
2. Language can either positively or negatively impact on a sense of belonging.
3. Residence traditions can result in students feeling either included or excluded.
4. Racial issues play a noteworthy role in both white and black students' sense of belonging.
5. Sharing of cultures promotes a sense of belonging in marginalised students.
6. Belonging is promoted by competitive activities and sport.
7. Different socio-economic backgrounds can either promote or prevent a sense of belonging.

8. Time constraints impact on forming a sense of belonging.
9. Marginalised students must assimilate in order to feel a sense of belonging.
10. Cultural and racial diversity promotes a sense of belonging.
11. A lack of hierarchy amongst residence members promotes belonging.
12. Belonging means being accepted for who you are.
13. Being different from other residences unifies students.

I will provide an interpretation of these using Yuval-Davis' (2006) framework below, providing an answer for each research question in the process.

5.3 Analytical framework

Yuval-Davis (2006) constructs belonging on three analytical levels – social locations, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values. It is on these three levels that I will interpret the key findings of my research in relation to each specific research question. A detailed description of the rationale behind this decision was given in chapter two.

5.3.1 Social locations

Here, Yuval-Davis (2006) refers specifically to an individual's place in the intersection of age, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. I included only the following psychologically sensitive expressions to be analysed on this level because they have to do with how students appear to experience and negotiate the various social locations in which they find themselves:

- 4. Racial issues play a noteworthy role in both white and black students' sense of belonging.*
- 7. Different socio-economic backgrounds influence students' sense of belonging.*
- 8. Time constraints impact on forming a sense of belonging.*
- 9. Marginalised students must assimilate in order to feel a sense of belonging.*

I will now interpret each psychologically sensitive expression in relation to my research questions, commenting on how belonging on this level (social locations) is experienced.

5.3.1.1 What can be learnt about belonging on the campus of an HWI?

As Durrheim and Dixon (2001) found in their study on South African beaches, white culture and practices are seen as the norm. The same was evident in the residences, and led to the identification of NMU 4, which is that both black and white students' experiences of belonging are impacted by racial issues. One coloured male participant remarked that the gap between 'them' (specifically referring to coloured, black and Indian students) and 'us' (members of Residence B) was too great for these students to know the appropriate way to behave in the residence. This is a powerful example of whiteness - there is an appropriate way to behave, and because some students do not know this appropriate behaviour, they are unwelcome. Some of the students noted how they felt more welcome in the residence when they adopted norms that the majority of the residence members enjoyed, such as rugby and *sokkie*. In other words, these students assimilated in order to negotiate a sense of belonging, which was identified in NMU 9. I will discuss this further below.

In my own experience in a residence when I was an undergraduate student, I noticed this particularly with practices related to grooming and hygiene in the ladies' residence which I called home. For example, some of the black and coloured students would wear a head wrap made of a pair of pantyhose to protect their hair while sleeping, otherwise known as a *swirlkous*. This is a practice that was foreign to white students and more often than not a practice of which they were not even aware before they came into the residence. Initially, it was the source of some ridicule and hilarity among the white students, who thought the practice of sleeping with an old stocking on one's head was 'weird' and at times even 'dirty'. This is another example of whiteness playing out in the residences - a simple practice linked to feminine grooming for some coloured and black women was seen as silly, laughable, odd and dirty in white students' eyes, certainly not a practice deemed as 'normal' by white students. In addition, this practice of swirling (which is intended to keep hair straight) is an example of black and coloured students aspiring to white norms. However, white people ridicule these women for this aspiration to whiteness. Perhaps this can also be seen as an example of what Shefer (2010) refers to as "the intersection of racist practices with gender and class inequalities" (p. 353). As Sennet et al. (2003) note, and evident in the above examples, black and coloured students have access to a space to which they were

previously denied, yet whiteness in terms of what is normal behaviour and what is deviant is still hidden in this institution by an agenda marked by a visible commitment to diversity.

5.3.1.2 What promotes and what hinders a sense of belonging?

Whiteness also has significant implications for how students negotiate belonging and attempt to feel included. As Erasmus and de Wet (2003) found in their study of medical students on an HWI campus, it appears from the data I collected that black and coloured students continue to bear the responsibility of the “race work” (p. 2) and that many white students continue to ascribe to the ignorance contract mentioned by Steyn (2012). This continues to have an impact on belonging for marginalised students. Assimilating into the majority culture is a strategy used by some black students to negotiate a sense of belonging - as long as these students dedicate the time necessary to partake in residence activities, learn the 'correct' dance moves and cheer at the 'right' sports, a sense of belonging is something that is accessible to them. Not adopting the 'right' mind-set by not learning the behavioural practices of the majority was reported to impede on marginalised students' sense of belonging. The majority of black students in my study spoke about a decisive moment, in which they consciously changed their mind-sets and chose rather to seek actively a sense of belonging by participating in residence activities, and learning the behavioural practices of the majority. This confirms Kiguwa's (2014) research, which found that black students were not passive in their negotiation of difference and their own sense of belonging, but rather actively engaged in navigating through both racialised worlds of whiteness and blackness. Some of the focus group participants noted that marginalised students simply do not have the time to partake in activities in order to assist them in forming a sense of belonging. This adds further to Kiguwa's argument that assimilation is an intentional and conscious decision on behalf of marginalised students to negotiate a space in which they experience themselves as not a part of 'us'.

In keeping with the role whiteness plays on the promotion or hindrance of belonging on HWI campuses, there appeared to exist amongst some of the white students in the focus groups a desire for 'everyone to love everyone regardless of race' and for students to move towards not 'seeing' colour. Consistent with the study done by Leibowitz et al. (2007) it appears from the data that white students wish to focus on assimilation into a colourless whole, rather than

affirming differences related to race. In fact, white students from two of the focus groups appeared eager to blame issues of inclusion and exclusion within the residences on things like personality and socio-economic status, rather than race, thereby underplaying the role that race plays. In the view of many of the white focus group participants, society should move towards becoming a colour-blind community where everybody 'loves' everybody. In this way, the white participants presented themselves as open to diversity and non-racial. It was the black students who stressed the desire to avoid being 'colour-blind' and instead develop a sense of belonging by sharing one another's cultures, affirming racial differences, and taking an interest in different backgrounds and heritages. These findings reiterate the findings of Bhana and Pattman (2010) who report that in their study of grade eleven students in a South African school, the white students engaged in a discourse of White Talk (Steyn & Foster, 2008) by describing themselves as non-racial in their desire to become a colourless whole. In contrast, black students became seen as a group that was "narrow, racial and parochial" (p. 384). These researchers believe that this masks white privilege and removes the responsibility white students have to South Africa's past.

What was not mentioned in the focus groups were the reasons that explain why white students feel the desire to become 'colour-blind'. One of the reasons could be what Steyn (2012) notes as being a strategy used by white people to protect themselves emotionally "in a context that, if responded to honestly and accurately, would produce a great deal of personal anguish, guilt and shame" (p. 16). In my observations of all three focus groups, I noted often that when a white student mentioned the word 'black' or 'coloured', this student would glance at the black or coloured students in the room, suggesting that he or she was feeling great discomfort at the usage of words that denote race. These white students would appear apologetic, and at times even guilty, when mentioning anything that had to do with race, preferring rather to describe themselves as blind to colour, and therefore, by connotation, as free from any racist attitudes. The white participants blamed exclusionary practices in the residence on things like personality or socio-economic status, while the black students interpreted these same practices as racist. Attempting to become 'colour-blind' or at least describing oneself in this way, is perhaps a strategy used by white students to negotiate a sense of being uncomfortable around racial issues, corroborating Steyn's (2012) argument regarding the desire white people have to protect their

emotional well-being. Furthermore, these findings are corroborated in the research of Leibowitz et al. (2007) who report that students at an HWI that formed the context of their study engaged in a variety of strategies in order to negotiate difference, and this included ways of managing the conversations about difference.

As a white woman in South Africa, I can relate to these feelings. In the focus group with Residence A in particular, I identified strongly with the white Afrikaans student who exclaimed with great frustration that she just does not know what to say anymore because everything she says is seen as being racist. I have become very conscious of my own feelings of guilt and frustration, firstly because I am white and secondly, because I have benefited greatly from South Africa's apartheid past. At times, I even regretted my choosing of this topic for my thesis, and went through a couple of months feeling quite depressed about the fact that I am white. I noticed in myself and also the white students in two of the focus groups, a need to prove somehow that I am innocent of racist attitudes. These feelings of guilt, being uncomfortable and being unsure of what to say or do are examples of how white students may be affected by racial issues. This also might explain the frustration evident in the white participants' responses and the desire for everyone simply to 'move on'.

Steyn (2008) notes that whiteness is maintained by emphasizing the universal experience of dominance and oppression. The impact of this is that racist practices are downplayed and attention is diverted away from the impact of colonization. Furthermore, she notes that this “cuts white people off from an empathic engagement with the experience of Africans” (Steyn, 2008, p. 32). Rather than being met with this empathic engagement, black people are met with frustration when confronting racial issues, as I noted in my focus groups. I maintain that research into issues of diversity and inclusion in HWIs, which focus on the views of only marginalised students, might miss gathering valuable data regarding the negotiation of social locations by all students. The frustration white students appear to be feeling might result in these students isolating and excluding black, coloured and Indian students even further, and at the same time facing positive interracial relationships with trepidation. In choosing to identify as a citizen who is ‘colour blind’ and ‘ready to move on’, white students appear to view black students as ‘stuck in the past’ and the reason racial issues continue to be a problem. This contributes to the maintenance of white dominance.

While the above might shed some light on the motivation behind white students' desiring to become 'colour-blind', the problem with their desire to do this is that, as Leibowitz et al. (2007) note, this denial of the significance of differences also means that there is a denial that there might be differences in terms of power relations and privilege. It is this denial that maintains whiteness. The data I have gathered is significant because it reveals descriptively some of the ways in which students are negotiating this lived experience of whiteness on an HWI campus. As mentioned in chapter two, many researchers have expressed the hope that investigating the lived experience of whiteness “might contribute to *de-centring and displacing* [italics own] its central position of dominance and privilege” (Green et al., 2007, p. 408). Whiteness can also be linked closely to identifications and emotional attachments, the second level to Yuval-Davis' framework, because, as mentioned above, it has powerful indications for how students construct their identities. I have, however, included the discussion on whiteness on the social locations analytical level. Whiteness was originally defined in part as “the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination,” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 236). This definition relates to power and therefore, also to Yuval-Davis' (2006) understanding of social locations which have to do with “grids of *power relations* [italics own]” (p. 199) in society.

5.3.2 Identifications and emotional attachments

As discussed in depth in chapter two, identifications are the stories that people tell not only themselves but also others about who they are and who they are not, and these “identity narratives always relate to belonging” (Carolissen, 2012, p. 635). Emotional attachments have to do with where one finds one's sense of emotional support – in this case, where does one feel at home. There were a number of findings that linked closely to this level of the framework. I specifically included the following psychologically sensitive expressions on this level because they have to do with what appears to bond students emotionally, or encourage the formulation of a common identity.

The psychologically sensitive expressions that have to do with this level are as follows:

1. *An individual's attitude towards the residence impacts on feeling a sense of belonging.*
3. *Residence traditions can result in students feeling either included or excluded.*
6. *A sense of belonging is enhanced by competitive activities and sport.*

11. *A lack of hierarchy amongst residence members promotes a sense of belonging.*
12. *Belonging means being accepted for whom one is.*
13. *Being different from other residences unifies students.*

5.3.2.1 What can be learnt about belonging on the campus of an HWI?

Although this was something specific to only one of the residences, worth mentioning is the way in which most participants in the focus group at the newest residence, Residence C, identified as a group that was different from other, more traditional residences. While both black participants cited one of the reasons for this being the fact that very little Afrikaans is spoken at the residence, all six participants (four of whom are home language Afrikaans) felt this way. As mentioned in chapter two, there exists a dominant discourse within the HWI institutional culture of the white, middle-class, male student being the norm (Read et al., 2003). The only white, middle class, male student in the focus group stated expressly how he would never have been accepted in one of the more prominent male residences owing to his sexuality. It appears that this is perhaps one of the ways students are negotiating being seen as the ‘other’. As Leibowitz et al. (2007) discovered, both black and white students employ a variety of strategies to negotiate difference on campus. These researchers found that strategies such as denial, guilt and taking responsibility for the future are often used. Perhaps identifying as a group that is not influenced by race and language issues on a campus that has, in the past year, been marked by controversy directly relating to these issues (as in the #FeesMustFall movement) is another way in which students are negotiating belonging on a campus environment in which they find themselves being different.

5.3.2.2 What promotes and what hinders a sense of belonging?

Residence traditions in South Africa have been marked by much controversy and often viewed as exclusionary and outdated (for example, see newspaper articles by Allen, 2011; Buys, 2014; and Venter, 2010). Therefore, an unexpected finding was the positive role that traditions appear to have on a sense of belonging for students across all racial groups. The positive effects of residence rituals can be seen in the reports of most of the participants across all three focus groups, who mentioned the impact that residence traditions have had on their social integration and sense of belonging at the university. Traditions appear to promote a feeling of ‘us’ and ‘them’ – one male coloured student refused to share with me what some of the traditions include,

laughing with the rest of the group about how things get a “bit messy at times”. When he said this, it resulted in making me feel like an outsider, not part of the close-knit group. As mentioned in chapter two, international research has shown that rituals or residence traditions serve two purposes – firstly, these rituals help students to negotiate social boundaries and norms and secondly, they serve to anchor the students during a time of much transition (Moss & Richter, 2010). Both of these purposes can be seen in the raw data. Firstly, the traditions mentioned by black, coloured and white students, such as *sêr*, running up a mountain together and house songs appear to bond the students, resulting in their feeling a part of something that is bigger than they are, a collective whole. Perhaps the sense of not being alone, of belonging to something bigger than oneself, is what is so anchoring for students. This explains the reason that the students in Residence B in particular cited sport and competitive activities as being useful in unifying the students – competing against another residence might mean that all of the students are united, and a group outside the residence becomes the ‘other’. Secondly, while not expressly mentioned, the function that traditions serve in the passing on of norms was also seen in the examples cited by students. Students mentioned what is the norm in terms of what is valued in the residences – things such as a certain sport like rugby, or a form of dancing. One black participant mentioned that it was his knowledge of rugby that helped him to connect with the other residence members. Perhaps the passing on of these norms is what encourages a sense of belonging as students then have a clear understanding of what *should* be important to them. In my own experience, embracing what was important to the residence in which I stayed might have led to a greater sense of belonging. This might have been something as simple as attending residence netball matches, a sport very important in female residences at the university, or something even more complex such as embracing the identity of a *trou-vrou*²⁶. Since very little research has been done in South Africa regarding residence traditions and the intersection of race and class issues on belonging in residences, these results are noteworthy. It seems that these traditions are having a positive impact on a sense of belonging for students, particularly marginalised students. This could have great significance for stakeholders at this HWI; these stakeholders might be in danger

26 A *trou-vrou*, directly translated into English as *married wife*, is a female student who male students identify as the ideal future wife. She is normally a woman who attends church, does well in academics and sport, is physically attractive, and does not behave in any way deemed inappropriate, such as engaging in drinking or smoking.

of ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater’ in their desire to create more inclusive campus cultures by changing or eradicating traditions that actually serve to promote belonging.

However, it could also be argued that some of the marginalised students in the focus groups could have made an active decision to mention these things in the context of the group dynamic. Furthermore, acceptance and engagement with residence traditions could be another example of marginalised students assimilating into whiteness. Some of the residence traditions continue to be steeped in white, heterosexual patriarchy, and if marginalised students agree with these traditions, they may have made the decision to assimilate. If this is the case, these students appear to take on the responsibility of creating a sense of belonging themselves. Two of the NMUs that emerged from the data involved firstly, the idea that belonging means being accepted for who one is, and secondly, that students feel a sense of belonging if there is equality in the residence between first year students and members of the HC. Taking this into consideration, it seems that belonging is synonymous with equality and acceptance. If marginalised students are having to assimilate in order to belong, then they are certainly not being accepted for who they are. If a sense of belonging is based on provisions and stipulations, it brings into question the quality of the sense of belonging that these students are feeling. This is an ideal example of the complexity of belonging – while these students might belong in terms of social locations, because they have made the decision to assimilate into the majority, the emotional aspect to belonging, in other words, feeling a sense of being “at home” (Carolissen, 2012) might be something that these students are lacking.

5.3.3 Ethical and political values

The third analytical level of belonging involves ethical and political values, which have to do with how social locations, emotional attachments and identity construction are judged and valued. The psychologically sensitive expressions that have to do with this level of the framework are as follows:

- 2. The usage of Afrikaans in the residence impacts on belonging both negatively and positively.*
- 5. Sharing of cultures promotes a sense of belonging in marginalised students.*
- 10. Cultural and racial diversity amongst the students promotes a sense of belonging*

5.3.3.1 What can be learnt about belonging on the campus of an HWI?

Research shows that, as mentioned in chapter two, the intersection of race and gender continues to inform the experiences of young people in South Africa (Bhana & Pattman, 2010). In my own experience, it appeared from the focus groups that the participants from Residence A (all female) were much more emotionally affected by the controversy on campus in 2015 to the extent that two of the participants cried when sharing their stories. The atmosphere during the focus group with Residence B (all males) was light-hearted and jovial, with much banter going back and forth between the participants. The male students did not appear as impacted by the controversy on campus. However, this might have been defensive behaviour, the reason perhaps being what Ostrove and Long (2007) discovered in their research regarding belonging and gender; boys with a high need for affiliation perceive themselves as feminine. While it might be premature to assume that these differences in the focus groups are owing to gender, perhaps what these findings do confirm is that gender does play some role in how students negotiate a sense of belonging.

Another interesting finding was that marginalised students appear to judge themselves quite harshly when it comes to being excluded. One of the black participants spoke about how he was unable to mix at dances, because he has “two left feet” and cannot learn how to *sokkie*. One coloured female participant wondered if her not being chosen by white men with whom to *skakel* was because she is ugly. Yet another participant spoke about how he is not the “right” race. In all of these examples, the participants blamed themselves for being excluded. This is possibly due to these students individualising the discourses and accompanying treatment surrounding race, rather than perceiving these as structural issues. In addition to this self-blame, white students tend to make use of what Steyn (2011) refers to as the ignorance contract, explained in more detail in chapter two. She believes that this results in “communal denial” (p. 12) amongst white students of exclusionary behaviour on campus related to race, further serving to embed this individualised discourse of self-blame. This discourse of self-blame could be what is causing marginalised students to take on the task of assimilating in order to experience a sense of belonging.

5.3.3.2 What promotes and what hinders a sense of belonging?

Finchilescu et al. (2007) state that language is a “proxy for group membership” (p. 734) and numerous examples were cited by students that confirmed this argument. In fact, the NMU related to the usage of Afrikaans (NMU 2) was the only one that was consistent across all three focus groups. This reiterates the research of Finchilescu et al. (2007) who found that both black and white participant samples on another HWI in South Africa saw language as “a major obstacle to mixing” (p. 728). In terms of ethical and political values, it appears that the usage of Afrikaans impacts on forming a sense of belonging both positively and negatively.

It seems that the reputation of the university (being Afrikaans and therefore exclusive) instils in marginalised students (particularly black students) a feeling of anxiety regarding whether or not they will experience a sense of belonging. In this way, these students are very aware of how they might be judged according to their social locations. Two black students spoke about how friends and family were surprised at and concerned about their attending the university, specifically because of its reputation of being Afrikaans and therefore exclusive. Perhaps this is why diversity in terms of culture and race appears to promote a sense of belonging. Apart from the expected feelings of anxiety in attending university for the first time, these students had the added emotional stress of attending a university with a reputation for excluding students just like them. Before arriving on campus, these students already had to negotiate seeing themselves as the 'other'. Read et al. (2003) touched on this briefly when they found that the institutional culture impacts on belonging as it serves to embed further dominant discourses. While institutional culture and the reputation of the institution are not synonymous, it is interesting to note that this might confirm international research that has found that a sense of belonging is informed more by the culture of the institution rather than overt practices of exclusion and inclusion experienced by students (Kiguwa, 2014). This is applicable particularly in residences where students like Pamela indicated that they do not have the option of going home – the residence is their home. When the institutional culture is exclusive, it can be unbearable for these students, who are not afforded a ‘break’ from this.

The usage of Afrikaans in residences *per se* is not what bothered some of the students who were unable to understand the language. Instead, it is the link that the language has to South Africa's

apartheid past that they feel is exclusionary. Some of the black students reported feeling that being greeted daily in Afrikaans is outright racism, as it makes them feel as if they have to adopt the dominant group's status quo. However, the white students claim to greet the black students in Afrikaans simply because it is their default language, something about which they do not even think. Again, whiteness is evident because the assumption amongst the Afrikaans students appears to be 'my language is the obvious and natural choice', perhaps confirming the suggestion that whiteness is often “normative . . . [and] natural” (Green et al., p. 396).

It also appears that two of the residences continue to hold house meetings, make announcements and send general e-mails exclusively in Afrikaans. While the expectation is for English-speaking students to ask an HC member for translation, one black student described how tedious and time-consuming this becomes. This highlights that the social location of this particular student allows him access to the university; however, the way in which his language needs are judged by other students prevents him from experiencing fully a sense of belonging. The newer residence (Residence C) had only positive things to say about the role of language. It is interesting to note that the residence song is in Afrikaans. However, it seems that there is always an accompanying translation. What this communicates to students is the message that 'I am respected' and 'I count' because effort is made to ensure that these students are accommodated. In this way, the use of Afrikaans becomes something that results in students feeling accepted. Perhaps it is for this reason that marginalised students also cited that being given a space in which to share their cultures with the dominant group helped them to feel as if they belonged. In this way, these students were able to feel as if they were significant in their living space. This brings to mind Osterman's (2000) definition of belonging, which includes “the need to feel securely connected with others in the environment and to experience oneself as worthy of love and respect” (p. 325). In terms of ethical and political values, what this appears to communicate to students is that, not only do they have access to a space to which they were previously denied, they are significant in that space too, significant enough for the effort to be made to ensure they too understand. In terms of language, this is an encouraging finding as it indicates that there are strategies to negotiate the use of Afrikaans that might result in marginalised students feeling welcome, without abolishing the language from HWIs completely. The importance of a mutual co-existence of languages cannot be emphasised enough.

Furthermore, these findings are noteworthy because they show two very different reactions to the usage of Afrikaans in the residences. It is the assumption that one should speak Afrikaans because it is the norm, and the link this language has to apartheid ideology that hampers a sense of belonging for students, not merely the use of the language. The ontological assumption, that the meaning research participants ascribe to phenomena is as important as their descriptions of the lived experiences of these phenomena, made phenomenology as a methodology particularly useful here.

5.4 Analysis of paradigm and methodology

Since the research question is based on lived experiences of students' perceptions, I feel that phenomenology was an appropriate paradigm and methodology. The essential structure of belonging was able to show for itself in the voices of participants. The research therefore remained true to the 'being-in-the-situation' of human experience. Through the phenomenological process of bracketing, I was able to focus on isolating my own presumptions and opinions regarding the topic, which was useful since I have personally experienced residence life at the specific institution that formed the context of the study. In this sense, phenomenology benefited the study as it resulted in my continually reflecting on my perceptions and presumptions. In my opinion, phenomenology provided a paradigm and methodology that was sound in order to best analyse and interpret the data. In terms of operations, phenomenology provided a useful set of techniques (described in chapter three) that enabled me to analyse the data adequately. Following a set of predetermined steps also meant my study was rigorous.

In terms of data collection, while the scope of this study was too small to make use of both methods it might have been more effective to use a combination of both focus groups and individual interviews. While the advantages of focus groups as a research method have been discussed in detail in chapter three, it is important to note some shortcomings in using only focus groups as a method of data collection. Individual interviews might have been more effective in teasing out stories of not belonging from marginalised students. In the focus group with the male-only residence in particular, the stories the black students shared touched on themes of discrimination and racism, but it appeared to me as though they held back from sharing more detailed information that they might have offered more freely in individual interviews. This may

have affected slightly the validity of my findings as it is unclear how freely participants were able to be authentic. Individual interviews might also have allowed me to explore more fully things mentioned in the focus groups that remain unexplained.

Finally, collecting narratives of belonging instead of approaching the focus group with a specific interview guide was useful in light of research done by Finchilescu et al. (2007). They note that their study on inter-racial mixing on HWI campuses was limited in that it could not provide descriptions of actual obstacles to inter-racial mixing. The significance of my study is that it does exactly this – using phenomenology and narratives of belonging, I was able to gather numerous examples of descriptions of obstacles to inter-racial mixing, as well as participants' reflections and opinions on these descriptions.

5.5 Limitations

This study was not without a few limitations. Firstly, as with all qualitative studies, and especially one from a phenomenological perspective, it is not possible to generalise the findings. Added to this, the sample (17 participants in total) was relatively small, and a larger sample might have rendered different results.

Secondly, the role that the house committee members played in selecting the participants may have influenced the study. Depending on the house committee for participant selection was a conscious decision, as explained in chapter three, in order to ensure that participants were approached with the utmost sensitivity and respect. In hindsight, while I still maintain that this sampling method was especially useful considering the sensitive nature of the topic to be discussed, it may have negatively influenced the results generated. While the choosing of participants was according to set criteria which I stipulated, house committee members would naturally have been influenced by a number of other variables that I was unable to control. For example, participants may have been chosen based on who might best represent the residence, or who the house committee member associates with daily.

The context in which the study took place may have affected the research process.

#FeesMustFall is a student-led movement that started in 2015, in response to an increase in tuition fees across universities in South Africa. The protests included marches, lockdowns and

student arrests. Exam dates were either changed - on many campuses more than once - or cancelled completely. Based on my own feelings and the reports from friends and peers on campus, this resulted in increasing stress and anxiety levels for many students. One of the women in Residence A referred specifically to 2015 and her experience of the protests on campus as “hell”. This might have inadvertently influenced what was shared in the focus groups, as well as my own perceptions and ability to bracket prior notions.

At the same time, and as with all qualitative research, I have to consider my own role in the research process. Despite my attempts to bracket all existing perceptions and assumptions concerning the research phenomenon, I realise that a stance of absolute objectivity is not possible. However, transcribing the interviews verbatim, supporting all findings with direct quotations, keeping a diary of my own feelings and thoughts regarding each focus group, and finally, analysing the data in light of previous research findings and current literature, show that I was rigorous in my attempt to ensure that I did not influence the research process.

5.6 Recommendations for further research

A unique theme that emerged was the role of traditions on campus, which might be promoting a sense of belonging amongst marginalised students. Further research could explore in more depth how students are experiencing traditions on HWI campuses.

There were examples cited by the students where the Afrikaans language was used, but they did not experience feelings of exclusion owing to how the situation was managed. In light of the controversy regarding the role of Afrikaans on the particular campus under study, further research could explore further exactly how and when this is happening on HWI campuses.

Whiteness appears to pervade HWI residences. Green et al. (2007) state that many researchers have expressed the hope that investigating the lived experience of whiteness “might contribute to de-centering and displacing its central position of dominance and privilege” (p. 408) and therefore how whiteness plays itself out in residences might be a worthwhile topic to explore.

Another key finding was how marginalised students desire to be given more space to celebrate their cultures in the residences. The data suggests that when students feel that they are significant and respected, the use of Afrikaans is not an issue. Further research could explore how this is

enacted in residences, how students of all races experience this, and the impact it has on their sense of belonging.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided a critical evaluation of the study, focusing on the significance of the research findings, and how these findings may lead to future research. It also explored possible limitations to the study.

5.8 Concluding thoughts on research process

In this study as a whole, I attempted to explore narratives that would highlight experiences of belonging in residence at an HWI campus. Phenomenology was my chosen paradigm, informing my research methodology, and I was able to garner rich descriptions of the phenomenon using this approach. A variety of themes emerged. I integrated these themes with previous research to offer a portrayal of how belonging is being negotiated in residences.

It is hoped that this study has captured the experiences of students faithfully. HWIs in South Africa are visibly committed to transformation. While there are still many barriers to marginalised students, what I found most encouraging in my research was how marginalised students are gradually starting to experience a sense of not only being included, but also seen as significant. While the road ahead may be paved with obstacles, it appears that in some ways, albeit slowly, we are moving forward.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND GUIDE**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

PHASE	APPROXIMATE TIME ALLOCATED
Introduction	5 minutes
Sharing stories	35 minutes (approximately 7 minutes each)
Core discussion	20 minutes
Summarising and thank you	5 minutes
Total	60 minutes

INTERVIEW GUIDE

MAIN FOCUS QUESTION	CAUTION FOR	DURING DISCUSSION PROBE FOR
Please share about an incident either that occurred in the residence itself with other residence members or during a residence-related activity with other residence members in which you felt like you belonged to the student community in your residence.	Ensure that participants are aware of the fact that this incident/experience must be one in which the resident members involved do not consist only of the participant's close friends. Caution also for confusion regarding the term “group”. Although the concept of belonging is being explored	Participant’s role in the incident Specifics of who else was involved (House Committee members, first years etc.).

	<p>and therefore has been loosely defined, students must be aware that the group to which they are being asked if they experience a sense of belonging is the actual student community at the residence.</p>	
<p>Please share about an incident either that occurred in the residence itself with other residence members or during a residence-related activity with other residence members in which you felt like you DID NOT belong to the student community in your residence.</p>	<p>Ensure that participants are aware of the fact that this incident/experience must be one in which the resident members involved do not consist only of the participants close friends.</p>	<p>Participant's role in the incident</p> <p>Specifics of who else was involved (House Committee members, first years etc.).</p>

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: NARRATIVES OF BELONGING AMONG STUDENTS AT AN HISTORICALLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

My name is Lauren Brown and I am a master's student in Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. My supervisor is Professor R. Carolissen. I would like to ask if you would agree to take part in a research study conducted by me.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because the data needed will be best given by students who have spent at least two years in a residence at a historically white university.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study is designed to explore if and how students at Stellenbosch University experience belonging to a group (namely a residence) at a historically white university in a post-apartheid landscape.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you agree that you will volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- * **Take part in one focus group with five other students from the residence to which you belong.**
- * **At this focus group session, share one incident in which you felt you belonged in the residence and one incident in which you felt you did not belong.**
- * **Participate in a discussion about your and the other five participants' experiences.**
- * **This focus group will last no longer than one hour.**

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There is some risk involved in that you might share an experience or opinion that might evoke some strong emotions in you – talking about belonging can sometimes be difficult. You also might hear an experience or opinion from someone else that might do the same. If you feel that you do not want to answer certain questions, you are free to do that. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable or feel that you cannot continue with the study, you are free to withdraw from the study (and the focus group) anytime you wish. If you feel during any stage of the research process that you would like a debriefing session after the focus group, I will ensure that you receive the appropriate support that you may need. My supervisor or I will liaise with the Student Counselling Service in order to do this. Alternatively, you may contact the Student Counselling Service at Stellenbosch University yourself on 021808 4994 or 082 557 0880. You will be directed to a counsellor as the institutional policy does not allow allocation of specific counsellors. My supervisor and I will support you as far as we can and ensure that you receive appropriate support and assistance should you need it.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

You might not benefit from the research as you might be leaving the residence at the end of the year – most students stay for a maximum of three to four years at a residence. However, if changes are made after the study has been done, they will benefit the students who will still be at the residence and the other students who will still come to the residence. This means that your participation will help a lot of other people.

- **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

There will be no payment involved for taking part in the research but you will be offered tea/coffee at the start of the focus group.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Only I and my supervisor, Professor Carolissen, will have access to the information that you share during the focus group. I will not share your name with my supervisor.

Other members of the group will also be aware of the confidential nature of the information and experiences you might share and will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement that will stipulate that no information heard from any other group member will be shared with others not involved in the focus group.

You will be requested to sign this confidentiality agreement too, and will be required to maintain strict confidentiality regarding other information or experiences or opinions that group members share.

Any biographical information will be shredded after completion of the study.

Honesty and transparency will be upheld in that preliminary findings will be made available to all research participants involved.

The transcribed interviews will be stored in a secure place for 5 years in accordance with the ethical regulations of the HPCSA. Data that is gathered will be kept on my password-protected laptop. Any other data related to this study, along with a backup on a flash drive, will be kept in a locked safe to which only I will have access.

The focus group will be audiotaped. This will then be transcribed verbatim; the transcription will include any non-verbal behaviour.

You have the right to review/edit the tapes.

No real names will be used in the thesis, thus you will remain anonymous.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me, Lauren Brown or my Supervisor, Professor Carolissen. You can contact me at this email address – laurennataliebrown@gmail.com – and my supervisor at 021 808 2306/8 or rlc2@sun.ac.za.

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development at Stellenbosch University.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

The information above was described to me by Lauren Brown in English and I am in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I _____ hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Signature of Subject

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I, Lauren Brown, declare that I explained the information given in this document to

_____. *He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions.*

*This conversation was conducted in [Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*other] and no translator was used.*

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C: ETHICS COMMITTEE PERMISSION



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Approved with Stipulations Response to Modifications (New Application)

20-Jul-2015

Brown, Lauren LN

Proposal #: HS1184/2015

Title: Narratives of belonging among students in a historically white university

Dear Miss Lauren Brown,

Your **Response to Modifications - (New Application)** received on **18-Jun-2015**, was reviewed by members of the **Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)** via Expedited review procedures on **07-Jul-2015**.

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: **07-Jul-2015 -06-Jul-2016**

The following stipulations are relevant to the approval of your project and must be adhered to:

The name of the residences and the university should preferably be kept anonymous and should only be disclosed with explicit permission from the university and participating residences.

Please provide a letter of response to all the points raised IN ADDITION to HIGHLIGHTING or using the TRACK CHANGES function to indicate ALL the corrections/amendments of ALL DOCUMENTS clearly in order to allow rapid scrutiny and appraisal.

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number (HS1184/2015)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 218089183.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator

APPENDIX D: INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION



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12 March 2015

Ms Lauren Brown
Department of Educational Psychology
Stellenbosch University

Dear Ms Brown

Concerning research project: *Students' Experiences of Belonging in a University Residence at a Historically White University*

The researcher has institutional permission to proceed with this project as stipulated in the institutional permission application. This permission is granted on the following conditions:

- The researcher must obtain ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee, Stellenbosch University, before commencing with this study.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Persons may not be coerced into participation.
- Persons who choose to participate must be informed of the purpose of the research, all the aspects of their participation, their role in the research and their rights as participants.

- Participants must consent to participation. The researcher may not proceed until she is confident that all the before mentioned has been established and recorded.
- Persons who choose not to participate may not be penalized as a result of non-participation.
- Participants may withdraw their participation at any time, and without consequence.
- Data must be processed in a way that ensures the anonymity of all participants.
- Data must be treated as strictly confidential.
- The use of the data collected may not be extended beyond the purpose of this study.
- All the data related to this study must be responsibly and suitably protected.
- Individuals may not be identified in the report(s) or publication(s) of the results of the study.
- The privacy of individuals must be respected and protected.
- The researcher must conduct her research within the provisions of the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013.

Best wishes,



Prof Ian Cloete

Senior Director: Institutional Research and Planning



APPENDIX E: ANALYSIS OF TRANSCRIPT EXTRACT AND IDENTIFICATION OF NMUS

JOHAN Okay so just some background I come from a quite traditional high school. Um...so I always liked traditions and stuff like that. So I think the first time I came to [Residence B] the first time I must say we – we were always mocking like in the beginning, me and um...it's never gonna be our school like this is like – you just step out of the environments, like you've got 5 very good years. And then you step in here and then it seems like they have these tradition [inaudible] not but I think when, for me when I felt the most when I belonged here was when I started buying into traditions that were 10/15 years old. Like stuff I mean stuff like guys that I meet that are ten years out of (Residence name) ask are you guys still doing this.

INTERVIEWER Okay.

JOHAN You're connected with them immediately and ag it's just simple thing it's not like discriminating tradition like simple stuff that we do. so ja so I think that was probably one of the times I felt mostly I belonged here.

INTERVIEWER Could you give me an example of a tradition?

JOHAN Um... [Laughter] ...watch yourself. Um...I would say for instance...

WIECUS: Some of the songs we sing..

JOHAN Ja that's my – the songs we sing is traditions that we do like in certain way like – I remember at school we were never allowed on the grass and it was like the matric grass.

INTERVIEWER Ja we also had that.

RESPONDENT And here it's also like that, I mean reminds me of school but it doesn't bother me at all because I mean this is where generations before me had done this and it's only later

NMU 3
Residence traditions can result in students feeling either included or excluded.

when I came on the HK I realised that it's actually major purpose in the tradition.. like the whole goal of the tradition is that the first get to know the seniors because they uh...need to walk around the quad in a clockwise manner...

INTERVIEWER

Ja.

RESPONDENT

And that's the only way that they can do the senior house.

INTERVIEWER

Okay.

JOHAN

So then only when I was in the HK I realised that – our - this – there's actually like value in a tradition but so anyway just my example, but ja I mean smallest – just stuff that you do in a section like when you get 'maatjje van die week' like if you did something and you nominate this maatjje van die week and you need to do something else. I mean it's mostly like it's – I think sometimes people that doesn't have such a good self beeld you know can feel very offended by stuff like that. Uh...but if you have a good self beeld...

WIECUS

Self-image.

JOHAN

Self-image... then you just laugh it off and you do it for gees.

WIECUS

So what he spoke about is...you get nominated by other person you may be like wear an embarrassing hat or something funny.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, okay.

WIECUS

Ja or like in the dining hall you must say everything that you are doing like "pouring the coke".

INTERVIEWER

Okay. [Laughter]

RUAN

Ja something like that. Uh when you you say out loud it's actually hilarious.

INTERVIEWER

Ja but I can imagine it must be hilarious.

ROGER

Just to add to that as well now. The thing that when I felt most involved like inclusive or whatever is when we had, when we did certain things we all did together irrespective of race, colour, creed etcetera, etcetera. It's those small traditions that

NMU 3

Residence traditions can result in students feeling either included or excluded.

NMU 2

A sense of belonging can be linked to language usage.

we did that we did that afterwards we could laugh about. Um...ja again I'm not going into details. Things got a bit messy at times but...and especially the sections as well in [Residence B], I remember with the nice things we don't have like walls um...'gange' so we have section corridors. Which means 4 guys or 8 people on each floor get to know each other very, very well and it's like a communal...

INTERVIEWER

Okay.

RUAN

It's a communal lifestyle and you bond and you feel like this is – I feel part of something. Especially within the welcoming meeting that's where feel like brothers.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, is it.

JOHAN

And then just to carry on...that are part of that section and then we have like every Friday sections competing with each other or something, do like a competition. Like a hotdog eat competition or a spread competition something fun.

RUAN

And you have your whole section cheering your representative – you on.

INTERVIEWER

Oh okay.

JOHAN

So and I mean that's also if you – that's um...enhances the feeling of camaraderie.

INTERVIEWER

What about when you – if you feel you didn't belong?

RUAN

I also wanted to add onto belong. Um...in the beginning of the year there comes a group of first years here from different spheres of life, different cultures, different languages, different – it's like the most diverse group of people that you can imagine and in my first...and you know the members of the HK design welcoming programming that um...ja that is designed to make the first years feel welcome, to make them feel and I mean I think

NMU 3

Residence traditions can result in students feeling either included or excluded.

NMU 6

Belonging is promoted by competitive activities/sport.

John C. Maxwell said everything rises and falls on leadership but I feel like it's rather a case of everything rise and falls on the sense of belonging, I mean you wanna feel like you belong somewhere, to a family to a group of friends, to a faculty to like you just, human race is not designed to be alone. Everybody wants to be wanted. Um...everybody wants to be wanted um...and that is what created here... I will never forget in my entire life um...and this is being – there's been lots of criticism on this um...but we would jog for about in my first year we would jog for two weeks in my first year. [Laughter] we would jog up the mountain in the mornings.

NMU 6
Belonging is promoted by competitive activities/sport.

INTERVIEWER

All the first years?

RUAN

For the first years yes, that wanted to, and we would run up a hill and I had this first year in my section that was struggling up that mountain, and you would literally take your maatjie's arm two on each side and you would literally go up the hill the three of you.

WIECUS

Um...but just what I experienced to connect with people it's not necessarily a racial difference but more of a social economic difference which I think is more difficult to overcome. So in terms of like for example uh...it's a black guy from a sort of an equal school than mine it was much easier for me to get over the school barrier and to connect with the guy, than a guy from some or other township because just from the start we don't have that much in common, it's just much more difficult to connect. I think if I can make that that generalisation. It was easier for me to connect with people from the same socio economic class. Um...and I think what a lot of people maybe do wrong is they label a race to a certain economic class.

NMU 7
Different socio-economic backgrounds can either promote or prevent a sense of belonging.