The 'place-attachment' practices of student residence leaders at their Stellenbosch University residences.

By

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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third-party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the immersion of 15 student leaders into their residences at Stellenbosch University. Concepts of place and agency form the theoretical underpinnings of this study. The investigation focussed on how they develop their place attachments in the residences and how their attachment practices, in turn, impacted their identities.

This thesis is presented via the thesis-by-articles mode. It consists of two wraparound chapters: the Introduction and Conclusion chapters (Chapter 1 and 4, respectively). The thesis also has two research-based chapters: an article (Chapter 2) and a book chapter (Chapter 3).

The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on a combination of Scannel and Gifford's (2010) multifaceted conceptualisation of place attachment and Archer's theory of morphogenesis (1982). The study used a qualitative and reflective research approach to produce qualitative data findings. The data collection methods assisted in gaining individual and shared meanings and experiences of place attachment in the residences.

The main analytical findings reveal that student leaders develop their place attachment practices at their SU residences through adaptive behavioural responses, which 'speak back' to an institutional culture that conditions and positions them based on their emergent identities. By drawing on their aspirations and assistance from others, the students developed the capacity to act differently, even when their belonging was at risk. Importantly, as they secured their attachment, they became concerned with the experiences of others. This led them, to contribute significantly to micro-transformations in the residence cultures of the university.
OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek die immersie van 15 studenteleiers in hul koshuise aan Universiteit Stellenbosch. Konsepte van plek en agentskap vorm die teoretiese onderbou van die studie. Die ondersoek fokus op hoe hierdie studente hul gehegtheid in die koshuise ontwikkel en hoe aanhegtingspraktyke hulle identiteit beïnvloed het.

Die tesis word aangebied deur die tesis-deur-artikels-modus. Dit bestaan uit twee omsluitingshoofstukke: die inleiding en slot hoofstukke (onderskeidelik Hoofstuk 1 en 4). Die tesis het ook twee navorsingsgebaseerde hoofstukke: 'n artikel (Hoofstuk 2) en 'n boekhoofstuk (Hoofstuk 3).

Die teoretiese raamwerk van die proefskrif is gebaseer op 'n kombinasie van Scannel en Gifford (2010) se veelvlakkige konseptualisering van plekaanhegting en Archer se morfogenese-teorie (1982). Die studie is gebaseer op 'n kwalitatiewe en reflektiewe navorsingsbenadering om kwalitatiewe data bevindings te lever. Die data insamelingsmetodes het gehelp om individuele se betekenisse en ervarings van plekaanhegting in die koshuise te verstaan.

Die belangrikste analitiese bevindings toon aan dat studenteleiers hul praktyke in hul koshuise ontwikkel deur middel van aanpasbare gedragspraktyke, wat 'terug praat' teen 'n institusionele kultuur wat hulle kondisioneer en posisioneer op grond van hul ontluikende identiteite. Deur gebruik te maak van hul aspirasies en hulp van ander, het die studente die vermoë ontwikkel om anders op te tree, selfs al was hul aanvaarding soms in gevaar gestel. Namate-hulle hul gehegtheid verseker het, het hulle besorg geraak oor die ervarings van ander. Dit het daartoe geleid dat hulle aansienlik bygedra het tot mikro-transformasies in die koshuiskultuur van die universiteit.
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To the students who so generously gave their time and shared their stories with me, thank you. Continue aspiring towards making a meaningful impact in society. Thank you for selflessly contributing to the learning of others through your example.

Finally, to our Heavenly Father, your grace knows no bounds! Thank you for the strength during this journey and for calling me to do your work. May I always be obedient to your will and purpose for my life.
DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my grandmother, Wilhelmina Johanna Lategan [02.12.1936 - 17.04.2011], and my grandfather Isaac John Lategan [11.09.1932 - 20.08.2014]. The home they built together was a significant part of my becoming. It is the place where Lauren, Amoré, and I made powerful memories and grew an unbreakable bond. I will never forget the singing in the kitchen as Oupa prepared the veggies for Sunday lunch, for which Ouma took the most credit. They built a home full of love and laughter, and I wish I could have shared this significant milestone with them. Knowing my Ouma, she would have paraded in the streets of Pella with this thesis, telling everyone who would listen about her grandchild's achievement.

I also wish to dedicate this thesis and journey to my twelve-year-old siblings, Chloe and Clyde, for whom the doors of meaningful learning are wide open. When I was twelve, the concept of a university was not part of my world, let alone the word 'thesis'. Thank you for always asking me how it was going and being one of my motivations for continuing on this challenging path. I pursued because you were watching, and I hope I have made you proud to call me your Tietie.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the immersion of student leaders at their residences in Stellenbosch University (SU). It arose out of my personal and professional experience and interest in student affairs and leaders' development within the co-curricular spaces of the university.

In this introduction, I give an account of how the research focus emerged and introduce the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, which provided me with the conceptual lenses necessary to answer my research questions. I outline the integral parts of the thesis, give an overview of the focus of the chapters, and outline their contribution to the overall argument of the thesis.

This thesis is presented in the thesis-by-article mode. In the case of this thesis, I present one article and a book chapter as the core research components of the thesis (I give more details about this below). The thesis locates itself broadly within the study of students in higher education in the field of the sociology of education. It consists of two research-based chapters and two wraparound chapters, namely the Introduction and the Conclusion. The article and book chapter were each researched, written and finalised after the acceptance of my Master's thesis proposal in July 2020.

The article and chapter each utilise a distinct theoretical framework. Both use a methodology that is informed by the interpretivist paradigm. The sample size, data-collection methods and data analysis differ in line with their different conceptual points of focus. The article and book chapter each provide an illuminating perspective and argument which responds to the overall research focus of the thesis. While each piece makes its unique contribution in this regard, there is some overlap in their focus.

The rest of the introductory chapter discusses my reflexive researcher positionality and the ethical considerations of the study. It concludes with a summary of the introduction as a segue into the heart of the thesis.

Overall, the thesis intends to highlight a small part of the student experience at a particular university with a distinctive history and thus does not aim to generalise the experiences of all student leaders.
The students who shared their experiences with me were purposefully selected to give both breadth and depth to understanding the multiple experiences on one university campus.

1.2. Background

This study is guided by an interest in the navigation and mediation of students’ behaviour and identity within the context of higher education residences. The sample for this study was student leaders within the residential spaces of the university, specifically those who occupy house committee (HC) positions. These roles are somewhat comparable to what is internationally known as Resident Assistants (RAs). A difference is that the HC members have a unique place in the residence because their peers elect them. Research on HC within the context of South African higher education is scant. Research on student leaders in South Africa has focused mainly on the experiences of Student Representative Council (SRC) members. These SRC members play a governance role, which differs from the functions of HC members in the residences. What distinguishes these two student leadership structures is that HC members live with their constituents in their residences.

Young people move and function within a variety of spaces that could influence their becoming (Fataar, 2007). During their time at university those who opt for residence accommodation at tertiary institutions spend much of their time in their residences. I believe that residences are crucial sites for investigating students’ educational experiences, as they live within these social spaces of the university while completing their degrees. Residences are social spaces where students of diverse backgrounds share intimate living spaces. Residences can be influential sites of transformation and social cohesion. They could also be sites of personal and social deprivation (de la Harpe and Conelly, 2011), misrecognition and alienation. At Stellenbosch University (SU), HC members are tasked with various responsibilities in the residences. They organise social programmes and leadership development training and contribute to maintaining safety and discipline. Understanding these students’ experiences and their role in the affairs of others is thus an important research focus. This thesis offers an account of the immersion and mediation of student leaders within the university’s residences. I now briefly discuss the motivation for, and rationale, of my study.

1.3. Motivation and Rationale for the study

In February 2020, the Stellenbosch University (SU) community was informed by its Director of
Student Affairs that student leaders had been temporarily relieved of their duties as a result of alleged dehumanising and unacceptable ‘welcoming’ practices at a men's residence on the Stellenbosch Campus. This came after a formal complaint was laid with the Rector by a parent who has since removed his son from the institution. Another incident was recorded in this same residence during the welcoming period of 2020. One of the newcomers shared a social media post which made derogatory remarks about the gender identity of a monitor (a senior student at SU). According to Dr Choice Maketha, the University's Senior Director of Student Affairs, these types of incidents go against "the way we think about the welcoming of newcomers, [which is closely aligned to] the values which currently inform our democracy, namely those contained in the South African Constitution" (2020).

In 2014 a university Task Team, called the Inquiry into Unacceptable Welcoming Practices, was appointed and most of the task team's recommendations have subsequently been implemented. These recommendations emphasise values and accompanying practices based on hospitality, friendliness, and dignity (Stellenbosch University, 2014). Yet six years later, degrading practices are still prevalent. The recent incidents described above are probably some of the most explicit cases, but more covert practices may also be prevalent.

The emphasis on a welcoming culture comes from a desire to help newcomers develop a sense of belonging, ultimately contributing to their academic success. Even though access to higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa has increased significantly in post-apartheid South Africa, attrition and dropout rates remain quite high. According to MacFarlane (2006), about 50% of South African university students of the 2000-2004 cohort dropped out before graduating. This is an alarming rate, and the reasons for attrition vary greatly, ranging from academic/cognitive difficulties, financial challenges and personal psycho-social issues (Bokana, 2010). Feelings of belonging, or more generally our feelings towards particular places, greatly influence our interaction with the place. The incident described above tells of one student who left the University because of his experience in a residence. But we do not know how many students have left residences because they feel alienated, misrecognised, or who feel the university does not seem like a place for them. Until we implement mechanisms such as campus-wide exit interviews and surveys which can help us to determine why students choose to transition to other universities, or ask to be shifted to a different residence, or move to private accommodation after their first year of staying on campus, we can only speculate about
their reasons for their sense of alienation.

We do know that a large number of students remain at the university and achieve academic success. At Stellenbosch University, approximately 22% of these students stay in university residences at some point during their undergraduate degree. Some students take up leadership roles in these residences and contribute actively to the residence and student life.

I was one such student. I completed my undergraduate degree at SU while living in a women’s residence on campus. Early on, I became involved in activities in my residence, and in my second year I availed myself of the opportunity to become a house committee member. My house members subsequently elected me as a house leader. The following year I was also elected the Primaria (head) of this women’s residence. I served my house for the term of 2014/2015 as the chairperson of the HC, thus taking up responsibility such as leadership development and discipline within the residence. This was no small feat, as I am a first-generation student who came from the Cape Flats, who attended an ex-Model C school and had never lived in a residence before. I also saw no one who looked like me on the house committee when I walked into this residence on my first day as a newcomer back in 2012.

While in the process of identifying an exact point of focus for my study, I reflected on my experience at SU through the theoretical lenses that I describe in the sections below. This has led to me re-examine my undergraduate studies, my terms in student leadership positions, and even the way I interact as a staff member at SU through a perspective that is more critical than nostalgic. As a newcomer in 2012, I did not have automatic feelings of belonging, as I questioned many of the practices and traditions I experienced as a newcomer. I questioned not only the practices but also the ‘tone’ of residence life. I felt this within my body, but did not have the vocabulary to put into words what I felt. I remember a vivid scene. It was the first day of welcoming. We had just said our goodbyes to our families and convened with our HC members in a communal space. I came into the residence congregating room almost at the last second, saw all the newcomers sitting on the floor and mostly segregated into racial groups by their own choice and association. The HC wore maroon blazers and sat on chairs, looking at everyone. My first dilemma was where to sit. I decided to sit in the middle, trying to simultaneously distance myself between those who looked like me and those who did not. This vignette is an example of how I had to choose to be within a space that was essentially beckoning
me to sit with those whom I identified with, at that time, based on skin colour. Instinctively and perhaps unconsciously, I chose to defy that messaging, but only because the year before I had worked in a professional setting with all types of people as equals, and being thrown back into a situation like this did not sit well with me. One can draw many other ideas from this memory, such as the various forms of power exerted by the HC. This encounter made me realise the importance of how one’s pre-university life impacts on one’s behaviour in a new setting such as the university residence.

My involvement in student leadership and interest in student development grew strong during these early years at SU. This led me to work as a student affairs professional for two years and three months at the university’s Centre for Student Communities (CSC) as a programme coordinator: co-curriculum (now renamed the Residential Education Curriculum Coordinator). I worked closely with student leaders and remained curious about how their experiences as newcomers informed the way that they would become custodians of a welcoming culture themselves. I sometimes listened to their stories and saw so much of my own development reflected in their words and experiences. At other times I struggled to comprehend how they could experience this University as such a different place than I had, as my involvement and experiences truly shaped who I have become (and am becoming still).

I attribute much of my development, learning and success to the lessons I learnt at SU, the people I met and worked with in leadership positions, and the kinds of conversations I was exposed to. However, the contrast with the stories of other students, both student leaders and others, have made me reconsider the reasons for my own relatively positive experience as a student and student leader. Why was it that I was elected into such a position when most student leaders at the time (even to this day) were mainly white, seemingly middle class, and came from private schools? How did I find belonging and acceptance in a space where many of my peers and students still face explicit racism or various forms of aggression (micro- and more explicit)? I began thinking of myself less as exceptional, as I began questioning a system or culture where some can flourish and others feel completely alienated. I wanted to find out whether my experience was an anomaly or whether one can replicate high levels of belonging and attachment.

In addition to this, I was serving as the Primaria (head student) of a residence at the time when the Task Team Report on the Inquiry into Unacceptable Welcoming Practices was completed and
published. I, therefore, was part of the first group of student residence leaders who were challenged to reconsider, with a sense of urgency, how we welcomed newcomers as a response to the recommendations of the Report. The Report recommended several incisive steps to be taken by the University to improve its welcoming institutional culture. My experience described above thus fuelled my personal interest as I wanted to uncover and understand what these stories and experiences mean for the student leaders, student communities and the institution at large.

This study thus stemmed from an interest in understanding the journey of elected student house committee members in their university residences. The case study explores these students' 'place attachment' practices at their residences. It focuses on aspects of their entry, immersion, and development in the residence context of the university.

1.4. Research Questions

The study is guided by the main research question and four related sub-questions.

1.4.1. Main Research Question

How do student house leaders develop their ‘place attachment’ practices at their residences at Stellenbosch University?

1.4.2. Research sub-questions

In addition to the main research question, the study offers a response to the following sub-questions:

i. How is ‘sense of place’ conditioned by the exigent institutional culture prevalent at the university’s residences?

ii. What are the different levels of ‘sense of place’ of residence house leaders at their university residences?

iii. How do these residence leaders establish their unfolding ‘place attachment’ strategies in their residences and the institutional context of the university?

iv. How do the student residence leaders contribute to the emerging ‘sense of place’ of fellow house members in their residences?
1.5. Research Design and Methodology

Durrheim (2006) defines research design as “a strategic framework, a plan that guides research activity to ensure that sound conclusions are reached.” This research design sets out the methodology used to determine the techniques and procedures I used during data collection and analyses.

I employed a qualitative methodology, which aligns itself with the interpretivist paradigm, where meaning is constructed in the light of the subjective experiences of individuals within the world (Scotland, 2012). In addition to this, the interpretivist paradigm takes into account that “different people may construct meaning in different ways” (Crotty, 1998, p.8 in Scotland, 2012), even as they experience the same phenomenon. Furthermore, in the interpretive paradigm, human actions are believed to have reasons; they are “preceded by intentions, and may be accompanied by reflection” (Connole, 1993). The use of this paradigm seemed to be a natural fit for the proposed inquiry, as 'place attachment’ processes are concerned with the actions of the participants as they encounter and deal with their university life. The investigation seeks to understand the actions and the intentions of those actions of the participants, through purposeful reflection on their experiences in their respective residences.

Another essential aspect of human action within the interpretivist paradigm is that it takes place within a “structure of social rules, within which they have meaning for both the actor and the observer” (Connole, 1993, p.12). These social rules and the society which emerges from the rules are thus made by all those human beings who participate in the society through every social encounter (Connole, 1993). Even though the ontological foundations of interpretivism lie in subjective experience, this experience occurs through the interaction between the individual and their social contexts and among the individuals who share a social context. Therefore, the understanding of truth and meaningful reality lies in the shared agreement amongst those who co-construct meaning (Pring, 2000). Consequently, in the interpretive paradigm knowledge emerges from culture-sharing individuals, and as such is historically and contextually situated and embodied (Scotland, 2012; Moore, 2012).

This interpretivist paradigm allowed me to explore and deeply understand the subjective experiences
of individual participants in relation to their ‘place attachment’ and their collective experiences and the interactions among the participants.

1.5.1. Positionality

My positionality as a researcher was based on the interpretivist assumption that research is socially constructed. Constructs and meanings are produced through the interaction between researcher and participants (Scotland, 2012) and require the active use and involvement of the researchers' social competencies to negotiate meaning (Connole, 1993). This means that the nature and quality of relationships between the inquirer and the participants are essential to the quality and trustworthiness of the research. The relationships between myself and the participants largely stemmed from my interactions with them in my previous role at the CSC. I coordinated and facilitated many leadership programmes and engagements in which the participants took part. The students thus all had varying degrees of interactions with me prior to the study.

Interpretivism requires an empathetic approach (Gough, 2000), is intimate (Scotland, 2012), and acknowledges and requires the researcher's intersubjectivity (Gough, 2000). The students saw me as an empathetic listener and shared their experiences of residence and university life in extensive detail during both the focus groups and the interviews. I experienced these engagements as intimate, which may also be due to the way that the participants engaged with one another and held space for each other when, for instance, sharing their experiences of mental health issues and of exclusion based on their various social positionings. I also acknowledge that my subjectivity, because of my previous experience as an HC member in a university residence, provided me with tacit knowledge, which assisted in framing the research questions and probing during the data collection. I acknowledge that my positionality may have affected the data collection, analysis and findings (Berger, 2015) and I therefore took care to probe for understanding. After the focus groups, I also conducted three in-depth interviews with six participants during which some of the questions were repeated to generate thick descriptions. In an attempt to privilege the participants’ voices, I use their own words extensively in the commentaries.

1.5.2. Reflexivity

To address the trustworthiness and quality of the research as it relates to challenges that emerge from
my researcher’s positionality, it has been suggested that researchers clarify their biases (Buzzanell, 2018) as well as “make their agenda and value-system explicit from the onset” (Scotland, 2012). In an earlier section of the introduction, I explained my positionality and experience relevant to the research questions. Throughout the research process, I practised critical self-observation through setting intentions to rely heavily on the data produced by the participants (Scotland, 2012). I constantly questioned whether I am imposing my ideas, beliefs and thoughts onto my interpretation and analysis of the data.

Throughout the research process, I jointly reflected with my supervisor and other critical friends about the emerging themes and how they were similar to and different from my own experiences as a result of my positionality. One question which was asked to me near the completion of my study was ‘What about the data has surprised you and challenged your own biases?’, and the response I shared influenced the final write-up of the third chapter of this thesis. To me, reflexivity in community has played a significant role in producing this thesis and my development as a novice researcher, for which I am truly grateful.

1.5.3. Sampling

I used purposive sampling in the study, as it allowed me to intentionally select the individuals and sites (in this case, residences) to understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Initially, 15 participants across seven residences who satisfied the following criteria were identified and selected:

- Current SU student in 4th or 5th year at SU,
- Students should have been enrolled in SU as a first year between of 2015-2017 and experienced welcoming in a university undergraduate residence,
- Has been a previous HC member of a university residence, who was elected during the 2017/2018 or 2018/2019 student leader election season.

To have a diverse range of students who could provide insight into the research questions and responses to them, the purposive sampling targeted participants:

- From a mixture of undergraduate women’s and men’s single sex residences as well as mixed residences, and
- who represent a wide array of diversity factors which include, but are not limited to race,
class, gender, rural / urban backgrounds and, language.

Purposefully selecting a diverse range of participants helped stretch my own framework and understanding related to the research questions.

The initial sample of 15 participants allowed me to understand the research themes in a broad sense. It assisted in producing the initial themes, which I may not have taken into account because of my researcher positionality, and which were also not evident in the literature. This initial larger sample helped steer the subsequent phase of research with the final 6 participants, which allowed me to prioritise the search for depth in the research process. These 6 participants were chosen for the rich narratives they could provide. Consistent with the requirement for ‘deep’ qualitative understanding, this smaller group of participants was selected to give the best and most diverse representation of the phenomenon. In addition to this, their availability and interest in continuing with the inquiry were also taken into account.

This sampling demarcation also became helpful in the way I structured the article and the book chapter. Data generated from the 15 participants were used in the article, while the chapter focuses on the data generated through the 6 participants in the later stages of the data collection.

1.5.4. Data-Collection Methods

In line with the qualitative nature of this study, I employed interpretive methods to describe beliefs, emotions, behaviours, and language from the participant’s perspective without dominating the participants (Scotland, 2012). I aimed to provide a reliable and credible thesis by providing rich evidence (Scotland, 2012) produced through the methods that I selected. I used various techniques to produce a description and understanding of the ‘place attachment’ practices of the research participants. I will briefly describe the logical flow of the data collection, and then provide a brief explanation of each method, why it was chosen, and how it contributed to answering the research questions.

The data collection began by gaining a broad understanding of the experiences and descriptions of the institutional culture amongst the bigger sample of 15 students and how they experienced belonging. I conducted four focus group discussions, using music and appreciative inquiry as
described below. The data generated from these focus groups inform the discussion in Chapter 2 (the article). After that, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a smaller sample of 6 participants. In these interviews I utilised photo-elicitation techniques as explained below. The data generated from these semi-structured interviews informed the discussion in Chapter 3 (the book chapter).

1.5.4.1. Elicitation techniques in social sciences

One of the challenges one might face in social science research is the inability or difficulty participants face to describe their feelings and attachments (Allet, 2020). This was a potential challenge for this study, and therefore I explored elicitation techniques. Descriptions of 'place attachment' processes rely on the participant to access feelings, emotions, and affective ways of being concerning particular places. This use of these elicitation techniques allowed me to probe in more detail the research participants' actions, intentions and beliefs than if I had only employed the spoken word and texts.

Music elicitation is an underutilised technique in the social research discipline (Dos Santos and Wagener, 2018; Allet, 2010). Music has significant cultural relevance within the socio-political landscape of South Africa. Particular genres and types of music (both from historically disadvantaged groups and those classified as white) that stood as counter-narratives to the apartheid ideology were labelled as 'protest music' and were heavily censored by the apartheid government. Silencing of any music that defied the day's 'accepted' culture was an important feature of marginalisation. Music can thus be both a unifying (Nussbaum, 2018) and a divisive force. This feature of music was drawn on during the focus group discussions with the initial 15 participants, described in detail below, as it can also elicit important memories and feelings. Specific residences often express their culture or tone through music, in the way they select which songs to play at residence gatherings and their formal house anthems. Music can thus be a contributing or detracting factor when describing one's 'place attachment' and could represent specific moments of belonging and feelings of oneness within a setting. Therefore, music as a theme and elicitation technique is an important mechanism to explore the development of the 'place attachment processes' of the participants in their residences at Stellenbosch University.

Visual elicitation techniques are more widely used and include any items such as photographs, artefacts and other things that can be visually observed (Johnson and Weller, 2011). Photo elicitation techniques have been used successfully by scholars wanting to understand place-making and affect
(Rinquest and Fataar, 2016; Brown, 2005; Grosvenor, 2004). Rinquest (2016) argues that visual aids deserve a more prominent place in social science and education research as they portray the social world of the participant.

In this study, I used a combination of photo and music elicitation techniques.

1.5.4.1.1. **Focus group discussion using music and appreciative inquiry**

Focus group discussion is the process of collecting data from a group of participants, where shared understandings can be elicited and the views of specific people can be expressed (Creswell, 2012:218). In the initial data-collection stage, I wanted to ascertain individual and shared thoughts, feelings and meanings related to the research questions. Each focus group consisted of 4-5 participants.

To preserve individual beliefs and emotions, I began the focus group by using music and appreciative inquiry, where each student brought to the session a piece of music they selected. The students were prompted to portray their journey in their residence at SU, using the chosen song (see Addendum 1 for the focus group brief and prompts). They also provided a written narrative to accompany the music which was they shared verbally with the group. The group listened to each song and then shared points of resonance or differences in relation to their own experiences. These pre-produced written narratives, observation notes and discussion transcriptions were the primary data sources for Chapter 2.

This focus group also discussed open-ended questions about their understandings and experiences of the operation of privilege, prestige and power within their residences and how that affected their ‘place attachment’ practices (see Addendum 2 for discussion guide). These discussions were helpful to guide further questioning in the subsequent stages of the data collection.

I made limited, yet targeted use of music as a data-generation tool to gain insights from the research participants during this phase of the research. I believe that the use of music as a methodology should be further explored in studies of a similar nature.

Further data-collection methods focused on the 6 final participants only, who were selected based on
the description provided in the section on research participants and sampling.

1.5.4.2. Semi-structured interviews

Interviews form a critical part of qualitative research as they allow the researcher to gain insights from everyone, one at a time (Creswell, 2012:218). The semi-structured interview explored specific questions related to the topic; they were audio-recorded and transcribed. Previous data collection from the participants, and analysis allowed me to explore emerging themes and points for further exploration with each participant. I also repeated some of the questions discussed in the focus group to generate thick descriptions. As the study was retrospective in nature, I used photo-elicitation techniques during one semi-structured interview (described below) to assist the participants in revisiting critical incidents, experiences and meanings.

1.5.4.2.1. Photo-elicitation interviews

I conducted one of these interviews per participant, using a set of photographs produced by the student as a stimulus for the interview. I selected pictures from their Facebook pages which were taken at specific intervals during their Stellenbosch University journey. Photographs situate the individual in a particular time and place, with specific people. Using these photographs as retrospective data meant that the student’s experience and what they chose to capture were not tainted by the knowledge that they would participate in this study. These photographs acted as visual stimuli to explore the participant’s feelings and emotions and allow them a reflective space to describe how they navigated their residence life and the institution as a place and how their emerging place attachment developed.

1.6. Ethical considerations

It is crucial to ensure the integrity of the research process, including data collection, analysis and presentation (Ramarathan, Le Grange & Higgs, 2016). Institutional permission was obtained from Stellenbosch University (see Addendum 4) before the commencement of this study. In addition to this, I applied for and was granted ethical clearance from the ethics committee at SU (see Addendum 5).

In line with SU’s ethics guidelines, research participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study and its intended outcomes. Participants were made aware that their participation was
voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage of the study. Each participant then electronically signed an “informed consent” form. The true identities of the research participants and any identifying information were withheld to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

Member checks and participant validation were done before the article and the book chapter were submitted for publication to ensure that the data were well represented, reducing the chances of misconduct during this process. I also wanted to ensure that the findings were empowering to those who participated in the study.

1.7. Theoretical frameworks and conceptual lenses used in the article and the book chapter

The article and the book chapter are responses to one or more of the sub-research questions. They each follow a logical structure to answer the main research question. I developed a theoretical framework for each one that assisted me to achieve the research objectives. While the overall focus is on students' place-attachment practices, it was important to account for the historical and structural conditions in which these students developed their place-attachment practices.

To this end, the first article, which has been accepted for publication by an accredited, peer-reviewed journal, situates students within the university's institutional culture and their residences. This first article (Davids, 2021) makes up Chapter 2 of this thesis. Archer's morphogenetic theory (1982) was used to understand the structural and cultural conditions in which students mediate their university journeys. I show how students experience and are positioned within the institutional culture. Their behaviours are conditioned by their interactions with environmental cues, which are shaped through the institutional culture of the university as well as the residences. I then focus on the students' morphogenesis to show how they counter-position themselves in response to the environmental cues. In doing so, I provide an account of how students' emerging agency develops and how, as student leaders, they contribute to micro-level transformations in their residences. The first article thus provides the contextual basis for understanding how the students develop their place-attachment practices. This article presents an analysis of the student leaders’ unfolding agency within their residences.

A research-based chapter makes up Chapter 3 of this thesis. This chapter has been approved and accepted for publication in a forthcoming book (Fataar, 2022). This book chapter is the second
research-based component of the thesis. The chapter focuses on the students' place-attachment practices. The multifaceted concept of place attachment (Scannel and Gifford, 2010) is the key concept used to develop the analysis. I describe the dimensions of place attachments to show how students’ attachments to their residences take place, specifically focusing on what they attach to in the residence and how they employ strategies to develop their place attachment. The chapter shows that their place attachment starts out in an individualistic manner. Only when their own attachment is secure enough do they become concerned with the place attachment of others. In their role as student leaders, they employ specific strategies to create a place for others to achieve greater inclusivity in their residences. The chapter provides an in-depth account of students' place-attachment development. It discusses how their place attachment remain in flux and unstable throughout their stay in the residence.

1.8. Conclusion

This introductory chapter provided the rationale and motivation for this study on student leaders' place attachment in their SU residences. The discussion on methodology highlighted the qualitative and interpretive nature of this study. I gave an account of my researcher positionality and reflexivity, and described the methods I used to identify participants and the techniques to generate data on the students' experiences. The thesis now presents the two research-based components of the thesis, namely an article and a book chapter, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 respectively. This is followed by Chapter 4, which is the concluding wraparound chapter of the thesis. The concluding chapter of the thesis draws on the insights from both the article and the book chapter to answer the study’s main research question.
CHAPTER 2: The Article

(This article was submitted for consideration of publication to an accredited peer-reviewed journal, the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, in July 2021. The article was accepted for publication in October 2021.)

Title of article: A morphogenesis analysis of student leaders’ development of their agency in their undergraduate residences at Stellenbosch University.

2.1. Abstract

This article offers an account of the development of student leaders' agency within the institutional culture of their residences at Stellenbosch University (SU). Residences at formerly white universities such as SU are struggling to align their welcoming practices and cultures to the requirements for immersion of diverse students who now live in them. This article focuses on students’ experiences of alienation in SU residences with a particular interest in how they develop adaptive responses to establish their place in them. It is based on focus group discussions with student leaders which provided insight into their perceptions of their residence cultures and how they established their agency in this environment. The analysis presented in the article is based on Archer's theoretical approach to morphogenesis. The first data section of the article discusses the interaction between the students' immersion in the institutional culture of their residences, on the one hand, and the acquisition of their initial identifications in response to the environmental cues of their residences, on the other. The second data section discusses the students' active acquisition of their social identities, which allowed them to establish their aspirant paths at the residence and the university. Overall, the article offers an account of morphogenesis at work at the institutional level of SU's residences with a specific focus on the adaptive behaviour of student leadership in this university context.

Keywords: Structural conditioning, student leadership, residences, morphogenetic approach, university transformation, acquisition of student identity

2.2. Introduction

This article presents a discussion of the development of the agency of student leaders in the context of their living experiences in SU’s undergraduate residences. It examines how these students develop
and employ their agency in pursuit of their educational goals. The focus is on a demographically diverse group of student leaders. They come to the university with their particular histories and identities, which position them in a particular way. Over time they establish their agency and identity with respect to their institutional behaviour.

Archer's morphogenesis theory (1982) is used in this article to describe the interactions between structure, culture and agency in informing and shaping the student leaders' behaviour. The contention is that the student leaders develop their agency by 'counter-positioning' themselves in their interactions with the institutional culture of residences. They speak back to the institutional culture by establishing their agency within the structural and cultural context of the residences. They do this by constantly evaluating the environmental cues in the residences; they reflect on their default positioning in relation to these cues and then adjust their behavioural responses in pursuit of their academic, social and leadership goals.

This article is based on a larger qualitative study investigating the student leaders' immersion and behavioural adaptation in their residences at Stellenbosch University (SU). The analysis presented in the article is based on research done with fifteen student leaders in seven selected residences at SU. The study employed qualitative methods to understand the experiences of these student leaders in the residences. Based on an inductive analysis of the data, the two key themes that emerged from the data to form the basis of this article were: 1) environmental cues at work in the residences, and 2) the emergence of the student leaders’ social identity. I use these themes to provide a narrative account of the students’ agency-based development practices within their residences.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

I proceed from the view that universities and their residences are social systems constituted at the intersection between structure and agency (Archer, 1982). Drawing on Archer (1982), this article uses morphogenesis as a theoretical approach to analyse how structural and cultural dimensions interact and shape social practices. Morphogenesis is a process that describes the changes in social systems due to the interaction between structure and agent (Archer, 1982). This approach is cyclical and consists of three overlapping phases: i) structural conditioning, ii) social interaction, and iii)
structural elaboration (Archer, 1982). *Structural conditioning* refers to the initial distribution of material goods and cultural qualities and provides the context in which action is conditioned. A particular space can thus constrain or enable the exercise of human agency. *Social interaction* refers to the actions taken by agents within a context not of their own making. If these actions are effective and transformative, *structural elaboration* occurs, yielding new social possibilities and signalling a new cycle, introducing new conditional influences for future action (and future agency) (Archer, 1982). This approach emphasises the bi-directional force that agents and structures exert on one another in producing change. Research on student learning in higher education is generally concerned with the morphogenesis of student agency (Case, 2015). Universities hope, for example, that students "leave higher education with different knowledge and capacity for action than that with which they entered" (Case, 2015, p.843). We consider the possibility of transformation and institutional change at the residence level.

Agential morphogenesis is dependent on the agent's experience of, and responses to, an institution's structural and cultural qualities, which are encountered as students experience the university’s lived institutional culture. Institutional culture has a subjective dimension, which comprises shared assumptions, meanings, understandings and values, as well as an objective dimension, including physical artefacts, organisational stories, and rituals and ceremonies (Jacobs, 2012). The prevailing institutional culture of a university cannot be seen as isolated from the outside world nor detached from its past (Agbedahin & Agbedahin, 2019). Even though South Africa is a democratic nation, the legacy of apartheid still lingers within educational institutions (see Hunter 2019). Similarly, our colonial heritage continues to influence the discourses and behaviour in these establishments (Fomunyam, 2015). Although these historical roots cannot account for the entirety of the present institutional culture of any university and residence, they do play a significant role because of their structural and emergent properties. Research done on institutional culture in South African universities refers to people's experiences, especially those of black South Africans, as having racial undercurrents (Higgins, 2007; Matthews, 2015; Vice, 2015). According to Vice (2015) and Higgins (2007), this has led to the cultural contexts of higher education institutions being characterised by 'whiteness' as normative. However, what these practices of 'whiteness' entail has been vague. In addition to critiquing this vagueness, Vice also rejects such race-only accounts and calls for exploring the influence of race by also taking into account the impact of the "gender, class, religion and able-bodiedness (and their intersections)" (2015, p.47) on institutional culture. It is in this light that the
article examines how students from various social positionings experience the institutional culture.

The theoretical framework presented above helps me analyse the dynamic relations and formative interactions between the cultural and structure of the university's residence and the student's developing agency. The institutional culture of SU, which is not of the students' own making, provides the background and basis for the development of differently positioned students’ agency. As they encounter the institution, their social interactions take place in specific settings and relationships. The nature of these social interactions determines the degree to which they can fulfil their educational aspirations. With this set of conceptual lenses, I set out to analyse student leaders' agential development at their SU residences.

2.4. Methodology

This article is part of a larger study that focuses on student leaders' behavioural identities and agency in university residences at SU. SU accommodates students from diverse backgrounds, with 43% of students being from Black, Coloured and Indian racial backgrounds in 2020, which represents an increase from 36.6% in 2014 (Stellenbosch University, 2021). Even though access to students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds has increased, the institution still struggles with institutional cultural transformation, characterised by students' negative experiences at the university (Fataar, 2018).

To understand some of these students' subjective experiences within their university residences, I employed a qualitative methodology that aligns with the interpretivist paradigm (Scotland, 2012). In the context of this study, it was important to select participants who had the opportunity to develop their agency in a concerted manner over a period of time in the residence. The participants selected were in the 4th or 5th year of their university studies and had previously served on their residence House Committees (HC), which positioned them uniquely at SU because of the nature of this elected leadership position. HC members fulfil essential duties within their residences, such as serving on disciplinary structures, involvement in safety measures, and educational and social programming. Their primary role focuses on building relations and a sense of community among the residence students, cultivating a feeling of belonging and growth. I employed purposeful sampling, as this allowed for the intentional selection of the individuals and sites, in this case, residences (Creswell,
15 participants who met the sampling criteria were identified and selected. I chose a diverse group of participants from a range of undergraduate residences. Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of the participants:

Table 1: Demographic distribution of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lower-Middle Class</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Home Language</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>isiXhosa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>University Residence Type</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Single-sex female</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Single-sex male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South African</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwean</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The social positioning of students as reflected in the demographic data presented above and their intersectional identities serve as a microcosm of the diversity present at SU. This article is based on focus group (FG) discussions with the participants, which allowed me to ascertain individual and shared thoughts, feelings and meanings related to the research questions. Each of the four FGs consisted of 4-5 participants. The FGs featured discussions of semi-structured, open-ended questions related to their understandings and experiences of belonging, attachment and agency, along with issues of power, privilege and prestige in their residences.

I used music-elicitation techniques to access participants' thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions (Allett, 2020) regarding their ways of being in their residences and the university. The intention was to understand these participants' actions, intentions and beliefs. Before the FGs, students were asked to select a piece of music that depicted their sense of their journey in their residence. They provided a written narrative before the discussion which they shared verbally with the group. The group listened to each song and shared points of resonance with their fellow participants' experience. These discussions provided rich and nuanced data on various environmental affordances and constraints experienced by the students in their respective residences. The participants' written narratives which they prepared before the FGs and the transcription of the discussions are the article's primary data.
sources.

When addressing issues of trustworthiness and authenticity as they relate to challenges that may arise because of the researcher’s positionality, it is suggested that researchers need to clarify their biases (Buzzanell, 2017). I acknowledge that the selection of questions, choosing whose voices to amplify, and deciding which data to report on would be informed by my own history and culture, as well as experiences as a former HC member at one of the SU residences. To manage and account for potential bias, I adopted a reflexive orientation which involved reflection during the data collection and analysis. Member checking was also done to ensure that participants had an opportunity to express any concerns about the results. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from Stellenbosch University.

I used an inductive approach to guide the data analysis. I first read through the data to obtain a general sense of the material. After that, each text segment was coded with reference to the research question and the emerging themes. Whilst coding, I identified topics related to setting and context, perspectives held by participants, their way of thinking about people and objects, processes, activities, strategies and relationships (Creswell, 2012). This process was iterative, as each additional set of collected data produced new themes that were useful for understanding the phenomenon. These codes were used to build up themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2012). The themes that emerged from this process and the data presented below are based on the environmental cues that act upon students and the emergence of their social identities whilst exercising their agency in response to these cues.

2.5. **Data Themes**

2.5.1. **Environmental cues at work in residences**

This section describes the institutional culture at SU's residences which manifests as environmental cues in two domains: i) structural and ii) cultural. Institutional culture refers to values, attitudes, practices and shared meanings which become embedded in an institution, even though they may not be explicitly articulated in policy or procedures (Matthews, 2015). The embedded nature of the institutional culture often makes it difficult to pinpoint, yet it sends strong messages to those who interact within the institution. From the data, I describe environmental cues that stem from the way that the participants engaged with questions around institutional culture, power and privilege.
Environmental cues are cues that are in place in the spaces around an individual and notify them about what is happening and how to respond. These cues send signals which are interpreted differently and result in different behavioural responses.

i) Structural Cues

The structural cues refer to physical characteristics that can be perceived through the senses. For participants the names of specific rooms, pictures and words which adorned walls in the residences generated specific meanings. The participating student leaders noted that the names of rooms, areas and sections in the residences were predominantly written and verbally referred to in Afrikaans. These names were often on plaques on the doors or at the entrances to these spaces. Similarly, some students reported that posters and notices put on walls by residents were also mainly in Afrikaans. For participants who do not speak Afrikaans, these sets of cues convey meanings of not belonging in the space. Such an experience was captured by Khumalo1, who said: "As soon as you walk into the space, you're like, [...], as a person of colour (POC), as a non-Afrikaans person you go in there and you're like, ah, the space is actually not for me."

When it came to photos, participants often described the meanings which they attached to these visual artefacts in term of the absences that they noticed. For example, when referring to portraits of earlier head students (known at SU as a Primarius or Primaria) as well as house photos (which included all residents of a specific year) which are often hung up in the archive rooms of residences, participants commented on the lack of racial representation in these photos. Referring to these photos, Andrea, for instance, said that "[when] you don't see people of colour, you're like, Oh, we only came later." For the participants, the images of head students that do not accurately depict the residents' current demographic diversity said something to them about what leadership looked like in the residences. Similarly, Andrea noted with disappointment that photos of earlier social gatherings included white males but no residents of colour, which sent a signal to her about "who has fun here."

The structural cues discussed above interact directly with the students’ primary agency upon their entry into the residences. Such interaction resulted in students questioning their belonging. This did not happen for all students. The students who questioned their belonging did not speak Afrikaans as

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1 Pseudonyms have been used for all participants to preserve their anonymity.
a first language, and they fell into the racial categories of black and coloured. Both male and female students experienced this questioning of their sense of belonging. The structural cues of the residences thus acted upon these students. The meanings they developed depended on their individual dispositions. These structural cues produced perceived meanings more or less immediately upon participants' entry into the residences. This contrasts with the cultural cues discussed below, which had a more protracted impact on students' cumulative meanings attached to their stay in the residences.

**ii) Cultural Cues**

Cultural cues refer to the 'atmosphere' of the residences and include embodied values, implicit understandings and expected behaviours. For the participants, these cues were more difficult to pinpoint and discussions about them were accompanied with some uncertainty, as they sometimes struggled to articulate what they were feeling or how these cues presented themselves. The cultural cues also affected student behaviour more directly.

When asking participants to describe the dominant culture of SU, Sharine responded with "White and Afrikaans." Sharine said that "I felt inferior in the space in the beginning, especially, you know, because of the way I speak Afrikaans, like [...] is it like proper or not". This statement refers to more than the language. On further probing, Sharine explained that she was referring to her perceptions about how her dialect, accent and even vocabulary positioned her in the residence. Mbali, a black female student, explained that,

> if you are a person of colour, or you do not speak Afrikaans, or you're not comfortable speaking Afrikaans, [...] you automatically feel like you're on the back foot within the community.

The experiences depicted above demonstrate that students experience discomfort based on prevailing language usage at the residences. Mbali's phrasing "being on the back foot" illustrates how language positions students within the university. Mbali notes that the HC attempts to conscientize students in their residence and uses English during activities to ensure that no one feels excluded. But when they had a *skakel* (the colloquial term for a social interaction with another residence) with a male residence, the language would revert to an "Afrikaans narrative" (Mbali). This leaves people feeling excluded
as 'dominant cliques' would form, which creates clear divisions among students based on language, which is often coterminous with race.

Mbali's vignette highlights an essential aspect of structural conditioning: the tension between the specificity of residential environments as they induce integrative and differentiating processes within the broader environment of the university. The interaction between the parts and the whole is an important feature of the morphogenetic cycle, as the nature of the tension that exists within the parts themselves, "produces the state of the whole" (Archer, 1982, p.476). The structural conditioning of language (and any other property) can thus have different effects on the positioning of students, depending on how such conditioning manifests in the different residences.

These tensions were also evident as students experienced gendered cultural cues, which stem from what both male and female participants labelled as a 'patriarchal culture' that exists at SU. In their experience, this manifested in the form of toxic masculinity, which refers to non-productive and even destructive behaviour of especially cis-gendered, heterosexual men. Commenting on the interactions during the anti-gender-based violence (GBV) protests in 2019 and around gender issues on campus, Lance, a male student at a single-sex men's residence, noted that men in his residence showed a general 'annoyance' when conversations of gender (and race) came up. Similarly, Carl, a black male student from a single-sex men's residence, remarked that:

the issue that people had [referring to the residents, especially white males] with the protest was how it [...], I don't want to, like call anyone out. But like, it wasn't valid, we sort of focused on how respectful the people who came to protest were to us, rather than focusing on the issue that was at hand. And I think that's been a problem in male communities and male spaces.

Carl's comment highlights a reluctance to "call people out," which could be due to his racial positioning in the residence. Even though he enjoys male privilege, being black positions him at a disadvantage compared to his white male counterparts. While Mbali's earlier vignette highlights group tensions between different residences because of language and race, Carl’s perspective helps us foreground intergroup tensions within one residence, which seem to be due to racial differences. However, the tensions play out with respect to the different beliefs around gender.
Participants who lived in mixed residences seemed to have greater fluidity in their attitudes to the way that gender is understood, expressed and accepted. Lionel, a white queer male student, reflects on an unexpected encounter with a fellow student who made him feel welcome in the residence even though Lionel, on occasion, wore heels and make-up. The acceptance by students in his residence of Lionel's expression of his gender identity came as a surprise to him, because even though many other students expressed their queer identity openly in the residence, there were also "very stereotypical white Afrikaans males who were judgmental and apprehensive towards the idea [of expressing a different gender identity than cis-gendered males]" (Lionel). Lionel's intersectional identity and privilege associated with being a 'white man' are contested due to his expression of his gender identity. Similarly, Anthony, who also identifies as queer, shared that he could authentically express his gender identity in the residence and felt accepted despite being different. As a black male himself, he also had experiences with other black males who expressed disdain for the way he portrayed himself.

The male participants’ engagement with gender cues was determined by their own race and gender identification. For the queer participants, gendered cues signalled something about how they go about expressing their personal identity, whether through the choice of clothing or sharing of beliefs. The cis-gendered, heterosexual men encountered resistance in conversation with similarly positioned men due to clashing beliefs about the treatment of women. For the female participants, the gendered cues manifested in a lack of representation of woman in positions of power and decision making more generally at the institution. Rufaro commented, for instance, on the lack of female lecturers in the Engineering Department, whilst Andrea mentioned the lack of female 'role models' at the institution. For them, the anti-GBV movement was a collective 'calling out' of men's toxic masculinity at SU in response to these gendered cues. Mbali goes as far as to say that participating in the anti-GBV protests "was the first time that I felt it [belonging]" in the larger SU community. Even though these cues were more prominent for the female participants in the university, it is still significant as such cues influence the potentiality of students' agency within the micro contexts of the residences. The institution's history informed the gendered cultural cues along with the behaviour of others. Participants responded to these cues by adopting specific behaviours.

Examples of these behavioural responses were most evident in the cultural cues which participants
derived from their class positioning. Class differences manifested in the way in which access to money positioned the students and impacted on their behaviour. Participants stated that the cost of an entertainment or recreational event would be a deciding factor in whether they or other residents would attend an event or not. Rufaro said that "I'm very aware that the price of an event affects the type of people that can attend, obviously, because there are some people that have more dispensable income." For example, one activity that came up frequently when discussing class differences was the annual house dances of residences. This formal event usually takes place on a wine farm or at the City Hall in Stellenbosch town. Students dress in formal wear and enjoy a three-course meal. These events cost upwards of R600 per person. Participants noted that these dances were not generally attended by students who could not afford to pay for the event, mainly students from previously disadvantaged groups.

Participants also said that students were expected to spend money during informal interactions. Examples where spending money was required included hosting social bonding gatherings that involve those who live on specific floors of their residences and contributing to floor funds that pay for decorations to make a space more 'homey'. Even when residences offered some money to attend house dances or offered free tickets for activities in the residences, many students who could not afford to contribute out of their own pocket opted to not take up these opportunities. Depending on how students interpreted these class-based cues, they would decide whether or not to attend these activities.

The cultural cues discussed in this section derive from language, race, gender and class and the intersections between them. Unlike the structural cues discussed in the previous section, which generated immediately perceived meanings, the meanings associated with the cultural cues developed more slowly over a longer period. The environmental cues do not have a homogenising effect on all residence students. Consequently, the cues and resultant behavioural responses signify intragroup and intergroup tensions in the micro contexts of the university. These cues condition but do not determine the potential for agency for the differently positioned students, which means that students are able to mediate between the cues, their behaviour and the outcome of their specific responses. Participants generally selected a course of action aligned with their aspirations and the perceived outcome of these actions. As Archer explains, these perceptions need not be accurate; however, students' perceptions of these outcomes condition their behaviour and agency (2003).
Understanding how environmental cues may condition student behaviour is essential. This allows us to understand the challenges students face as well as their opportunities as they develop their agency. The section below will show how students move through critical moments as they develop their emerging social identities in the residence.

### 2.5.2. The emergence of the social identities of the residence student leaders

This section describes the adaptation process which the students go through as they engage with the environmental cues. It discusses how the participating students' social identities emerged whilst they were living in the residence. According to Archer (2004), an individual gradually acquires a social identity through three developmental processes: primary agency, corporate agency, and becoming social actors. We will discuss each of these processes, starting with their entry into SU and ending with their experiences as HC members. Students' social demographics, life histories and motivations for study and pursuing leadership positions in the residences are central to this account.

#### i) The move from primary agency to corporate agency

All of the participants entered SU, in the words of Archer as *primary agents*, a concept she uses to refer to persons’ identity or agency as a result, for example, of being born into certain conditions such as being female or middle-class and having inherited certain cultural capitals from parents that allow these agents to occupy a place of privilege or disadvantage involuntarily (Archer, 2004). The participants in this study occupied a variety of positions that have been imposed upon them by society. Understanding how students reflect on the positions they were born into is important in accounting for morphogenesis (Archer, 2004). To illustrate how students reflected on their primary agency in the residences, we turn to Shaun, a coloured queer student who lived in a mixed-sex residence, who reflected on his initial sense of belonging. He said: "you know, for someone like me as a POC. I obviously didn't feel that [belonging] once I got there [into the residence] immediately." Similarly to Shaun, students used socio-demographic descriptors of race, language, gender and class as validation of their experiences. Participants thus showed consciousness of their primary identity and hyper-awareness that their experience may be different from those who are positioned another way.

Even though the environmental cues could constrain the development of their agency, all of the participants in this study moved from primary agency to *corporate agency*. The latter term refers to
how students were able to formulate goals and actively organise to achieve these goals. Archer explains aptly:

Only those who are aware of what they want can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organised in order to obtain it, can engage in concerted action to reshape or retain the structural and/or cultural features in question. These are termed corporate agents (2004, p.265).

Shaun’s and Anthony's accounts of their educational pursuits demonstrates such concerted action. They were born into families who could not afford to pay for tertiary education, yet they defied the odds and overcame great struggles to pursue tertiary studies. Shaun "always had this dream of coming to Stellenbosch University". He grew up in Kuilsriver and attended a no-fee high school in the area. In his final year of high school a teacher helped Shaun to apply to a different university in the province. After realising that this teacher did, in fact, not complete the application, Shaun and his mother went to this university, where an administrator shattered his dreams by telling him that he would "never be accepted to any university with those marks." Shaun opted to take an unplanned gap year, during which he applied to SU and got accepted. His father's boss gifted him his registration fee of R10 000,00 and he later secured a scholarship for his undergraduate studies. Shaun realised his dream through perseverance and support from family and community. Perseverance and resilience became key to his university journey.

Anthony is of the view that "I honestly think that Stellenbosch University chose me." Anthony grew up in a township in Strand and lived with his mother, a domestic worker. He comes from a large family of 12 siblings. Anthony attended a Muslim high school college in the area, which exposed him to cultural diversity. After matric, he worked at a supermarket to assist his mother with household expenses and support his sister's schooling. He decided to attend SU in pursuit of studies that would give him economic independence later in life. He manages to interact with his peers and lecturers, and the university's support infrastructure gave him confidence and a single-minded focus during his university studies.
These two short biographies illustrate how students transformed their primary agency into corporate agency in their decision to pursue tertiary education. Through the interaction with family, friends and mentors, they have become transformed. However, participants' corporate agency was not limited to their achieving academic goals but also towards their becoming in other spheres of university life. Helen, who grew up in Paarl and identifies as queer, shared that her Primaria inspired her approach to university. During orientation, the Primaria shared that "university is about getting more than a degree". Helen thus aspired to grow in many aspects of her life whilst at SU, yet always wanting to remain true to herself. Mbali entered SU with many fears, especially related to being away from home for long periods. After entering SU, she felt those fears diminish as a result of her residence community. Her welcoming experience translated into her motivation for pursuing student leadership, as she wanted other students of colour also to experience the same kind of acceptance and inclusion. Helen’s and Mbali’s experiences are examples of how the interaction with others helps with transforming primary agents into corporate agents.

Each participant had at least one story where they reflected on the influence of senior residence students, staff members, mentors or HC members who inspired them to become involved in residence activities or supported them in doing so. These parties are corporate agents who, in serving the House through their various positional and non-positional roles, became catalysts in the participants' moving from primary agency towards corporate agency. Thus, group elaboration was achieved, yielding increased corporate agency (Archer, 2004). The result was that participants opted to participate in residence sports teams, cultural activities such as SU choral a-capella group singing, and joined organising committees. Immersion in these activities was in direct contrast to the messaging that these cues conveyed. All the POC students became involved in managerial and leadership activities, even though they saw little racial representation in leadership. By merely representing people of colour, or queer bodies on student leadership structures, these participants redefine who could aspire to such positions.

Similarly, they went against the residence cues, which represented "who has fun here". They opted to attend events and participate in activities where they could contribute to the residence and have fun with others. Their ability to actively pursue their aspirations with assistance from others may be why they were able to resist and 'speak back' to these environmental cues. This then demonstrates
what is termed 'double morphogenesis', which refers to how these residence-based students become corporate agents who pursued self-directed goals, which in turn impacted on and transformed their residence culture.

The article now looks at these HC roles in order to describe how participants moved from corporate agency to become social actors.

**ii) Becoming Social Actors**

A social actor is someone who can personify a social role in which one's personal identity can be fully expressed (Case, 2015). This social role in question here is that of an HC member in a residence, who holds a position of responsibility and influence, with the power to constrain or enable. Becoming a social actor requires mediation between the personal and social identities of the individual (Archer 2004). The first move towards becoming a social actor takes place when the personal identity still holds sway over the social identity (Archer, 2004). Here students use their previous experiences from their life histories and experience as spectators in the residence to make their initial role choices. All of the students in this study chose to avail themselves of the social role of HC member, an elected leadership position in the residence, which shows that they made the first move towards becoming a social actor.

When they were elected, they had the choice to experiment in order to make the role their own, which is referred to as 'personification' (Archer, 2004). During this experimentation, the emerging social identity impacts on the emerging personal identity (Archer, 2004); students experiment and then reflexively evaluate this experience. For the participants in this study, this seemed to be the most challenging stage of becoming a social actor. This experimentation was met with resistance from peers in the residences. Anthony explains that:

I regard myself as a futurist, as an agent for change, as a voice to those who don't have a voice. Because I don't want anyone to experience necessarily experiences that I had in my first year. So, my role is to sort of be the torch there at the end of the tunnel. But that is sort of met with a lot of resistance.
Anthony's initially hesitant persona in his HC role translated into developing an emerging social identity as an 'agent of change'. His description of his role as a torch bearer shows a level of personification that comes up against resistance from those who want the status quo to remain in place in the residences. Similarly, Andrea recalls a painful incident during her leadership term as Primaria:

there was a lot of negative things about me as a Prim. How I'm not representing Moonlight residence, how dare I make this decision on behalf of Moonlight residence? The House wanted this, why did you decide this for the house? And just that animosity, as like I should have jumped in with this tradition. I shouldn't speak on behalf of Moonlight because I can't represent the voices when some of us don't agree. Yeah, I felt very alone in that moment. But I knew I did the right thing.

Andrea's experience highlights the nature of the resistance that students faced while occupying and experimenting with the HC roles, and the tension between her wanting to make the role her own and her house members' expectations about what she is allowed to do in the role. For Andrea knowing that "I did the right thing" was important. This shows that she would have had an internal dialogue, i.e. a conversation with herself, about her actions, how others perceived them, and what she ultimately took from this experience. Such a perspective aligns with Archer's view that experimentation in the making of the HC role impacts on participants’ identities as they learn more about themselves and their capabilities, and adapt in response to this learning (Archer, 2004). All of the students in this study embarked on transforming at least one practice, tradition or view in their residences as they occupied their HC role, and were met with resistance. This made the move onto the third stage of becoming a social actor more difficult for students, but they persevered regardless.

When students overcome the challenges that emerge during experimentation, they move to the third moment of synthesis between personal and social identity (Archer, 2004); students have to decide how much they will put into the role. Lionel describes his student leadership journey as a "bittersweet duality". He explains that:

student leadership, although it gave me a very good time in my life, it gave me a purpose. It gave me the kind of satisfaction and fulfilment and it gave me drive to work
with people, to resonate with people to be a representation for, you know, the first year coming in not knowing anyone, and being scared of being queer, being openly queer […] at the same time also having this situation be extremely taxing on myself, on my mental health.

Lionel's honesty and vulnerability prompted other students in his focus group also to share their struggles of finding a healthy balance of mind and body in meeting the demands of student leadership. In students' pursuit of realising the potential of the HC role and achieving a synthesis between personal and social identities, their experiences demonstrated sacrifice. Anthony explains that:

Well, I haven't graduated yet because of the many sacrifices but I don't regret any of that. I did doubt myself as to why I made certain decisions. But in hindsight, when I look back at where the community is, at what we managed to achieve for people of colour in this space […] I am proud that I was part of a narrative, of a vision, of a group that was steering for, for actual and tangible transformation.

For these students, the sacrifices of student leadership paid off, yet at some cost to other aspects of their lives. This is archetypal of social actors who have been able to make decisions about what concerns them and how they prioritise sometimes competing concerns, such as academic achievement versus leadership success. These students thus have emerged as social actors over the time spent in their residences. They achieved this by mediating between their aspirations, dispositions and goals, and the expectations of their HC role. Through experimentation and reflection, they succeeded in making the HC role their own. They did this despite experiencing some environmental cues as constraining and in the face of resistance from peers.

2.6. Conclusion

This article offers a situated account of morphogenesis at work at the institutional level of SU's residences. It offers a perspective that residences are important contexts of student's adaptive behaviour and leadership response sets. This article helps us understand how structure, culture and agency influence the students' being and becoming (Barnett, 2009) within university residences. The study employed the theoretical lenses of morphogenesis to offer an account of student leaders' experiences. The institutional culture of the residences condition students' perception of, and
behavioural responses towards, environmental cues, which are structural and cultural. The environmental cues at HEI's in South Africa have been characterised by 'whiteness' (Vice, 2015; Higgins, 2007). The accounts from the participants showed that these cues were constraining as they intersected with race, language, class and gender. Regardless, participants developed defiant behavioural responses and spoke back to the institution in the way they developed their agency-orientated practices. In terms of students' agency, they could transform from their primary agency at the start of their university journey into social actors. By the end of their leadership term, they had enacted practices that brought about change with respect to greater inclusiveness at their residence. The student leaders thus became change agents in their residences and the broader university.

Becoming change agents within the residences was not an easy task, as students faced both personal and environmental challenges along this journey. The environmental challenges came in the form of cues that sent messages which condition students' behaviour and sense of belonging. These cues interacted with students' identity and positioning, and students developed behavioural responses to these cues by counter-positioning themselves that is, intentionally going against the messaging of the environmental cues. They did this by becoming involved in residence activities. Through this initial involvement, they began becoming effective social actors through experimenting with various roles that aligned with their goals. The success of these endeavours propelled them into pursuing positional student leadership, which gave them the space for further exploration that in turn allowed them to integrate their emerging personal and social identities.

2.7. References


CHAPTER 3: The Book Chapter

(This chapter is forthcoming in an edited book titled, ‘The student experience at Stellenbosch University, edited by Aslam Fataar (Africa Sun Media, Stellenbosch), 2022)

Title of book chapter: The development of place attachment among student leaders at their university residences.

Delecia Davids

Keywords: Placemaking, belonging, student leaders, welcoming, first-year experience, ‘positional placemaking’

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a qualitative analysis of the experiences of student leaders who served as house committee (HC) members in undergraduate residences at Stellenbosch University (SU). SU has acknowledged its role in past injustices (Grundlingh, Oostuizen and Delport, 2018) and has stated its intention of pursuing transformation of its institutional culture to achieve greater inclusivity. Brink asserts that people retain “the image of Stellenbosch as an inaccessible circle of unfair advantage” (2007, p. 5), which privileges certain races, genders and cultures, and even one language, because of its colonial and apartheid past. The ambivalent experience of transformation sets the tone for students and staff at the institution.

One stated objective which frames the university’s quest for transformation is its pursuit of a ‘welcoming culture’. At SU, a ‘welcoming culture’ is defined as

one where staff and students feel at home, that everyone belongs, that everyone should feel proud to be associated with the institution, that one has a right to ask for help, that one’s contribution is noticed and valued, that everyone feels comfortable to study or teach or deliver service, [and] that one does not have to be in the majority to be included. (Stellenbosch University, 2013, p.5)
SU’s institutional goal for students to feel ‘at home’ is central to the discussion in this chapter. Given the University’s commitment to inclusivity, I discuss the experiences of six demographically diverse students as they navigated their residence spaces. The chapter explores their first-year experiences as they were inducted into their residences’ ‘welcoming culture’ and how, later in their capacity as student leaders, they co-created a ‘welcoming culture’ for other students. This chapter concentrates on how student leaders develop their place attachment in the residence and how they subsequently affect the place attachment of others. Place attachment refers to the bonds people develop with places (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Milligan, 1998). By examining the dimensions and functions of place attachment, the chapter argues that student leaders first engage in placemaking practices to establish their own place attachment. Once they are secure enough in their attachment, they become concerned with the place attachment of others. This progression manifests differently for everyone, but follows a generalised pattern across their journeys in the residences.

This article is part of a larger study that investigated student leaders’ immersion in university residences. I used in-depth reflective interviews and photo-elicitation techniques to understand the development of their place attachment from their pre-university days until the completion of their student leadership duties. The themes that emerged from the research suggested a recognisable developmental process of place attachment that followed a linear trajectory across their residence journey at the university. The data are presented in the following sections; 1) personal placemaking before and during their first year at university, and 2) how, as student leaders, they addressed the place attachment needs of other students.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

The transition from high school to university is a significant period in students’ lives. The challenges associated with the first-year university experience of transition, and adjustment have been studied extensively. Dazkir (2018), for example, emphasises the emotional distress that students experience during the initial period in the residence. He recommends greater attention be given to the way that residence halls can “act as home, influence student retention” (p. 255), and can be places of comfort and refuge.

SU provides a welcoming programme for all first-year students to ensure that they experience a
‘welcoming culture’ and to mitigate challenges experienced during these transitions. SU’s articulation of ‘at home’ in its definition of a ‘welcoming culture’ describes an “institutional culture [which] operates as a function of being or not being ‘at home’” (Thaver, 2006). Because we carry our associations of what ‘at home’ means from our familial homes, being ‘at home’ conveys a desire that is either fulfilled or denied and expressed through individual stories (Thaver, 2006). Since SU explicitly desires its students to feel ‘at home’, this chapter explores the institutional conditions and culture for achieving attachment to the university.

To understand students’ attachment to the university and its residences, it is important to conceptualise the university explicitly as a place. Shamai explains that “a place is never merely an object, but part of a larger whole that is being felt through ‘actual experience’ of meaningful events” (1991). A place is given meaning by people’s symbolic and material practices in it (Gieryn, 2000; Venter, 2016). In other words, meanings are socially constructed through embodied experiences (Milligan, 1998; Manzo, 2005) and emerge in a specific location that has a physical form (Gieryn, 2000; Venter, 2016). I understand the university residence as a ‘place’ constructed through the experiences of individuals and the meanings they attach to the residence through their social interactions with others.

We thus need to examine the interactions and processes that lead to students’ meaning-making. Place attachment is thus a concept that informs the analysis in this chapter. Broadly speaking, “place attachment is defined as an affective bond or link between people and specific places” (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001, p.274). More specifically, place attachment is a multifaceted concept which consists of three dimensions: place, process and people (Scannel & Gifford, 2010). First, the place dimension refers to the physical nature of the place, that which is built and/or naturally occurring around the place (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001) as well as the social arena. The place dimension refers to what it is about the place to which a person connects (Scannel & Gifford, 2010).

Secondly, the process dimension refers to the cognition, affect and behaviour that one demonstrates as a result of the attachment. Cognitive processes emphasise knowledge, meanings and memories associated with place, while affect refers to the emotions we have concerning the place, and behaviour refers to how place attachment is expressed through actions such as personalisation, reconstruction (Scannel & Gifford, 2010) and appropriation (Rioux, Scrima & Werner, 2017). The process
dimension addresses the *how* of place-making, i.e. the way that place-making is accomplished.

*Thirdly, the person dimension* refers to *who* attaches. It places the spotlight on the individual’s and group’s identifications with a particular place, their historical positioning and culture, and takes into account the experiences, milestones and realisations that occur in that place (Scannel & Gifford, 2010). In the context of this chapter, place attachment is understood as a deep emotional bond whereby individuals articulate affective, behavioural and cognitive processes of belonging and being ‘at home’ within the physical, symbolic and social arena of the place. Individual and group identifications play a key role in conditioning and facilitating the individual’s place attachment.

Understanding students’ place attachment in higher education institutions is important as positive place attachment has been correlated with increased academic motivation (Yu Li, 2011), positive psychological benefits and heightened wellbeing (Junot, Paquet & Fenouillet, 2018; Scannel & Gifford, 2017; Rolferro & De Picollo, 2010). Place attachment also develops because it fulfils essential needs such as belonging, safety and security, as well as enhancing identity (Scannel & Gifford, 2010). This theoretical framework enabled me to present an analysis of the nature of the place-attachment processes of selected students in residences at SU, which helps in illuminating experiences of transformation and inclusivity in these residences.

### 3.3. Methodology

This article is based on a broader study of student leaders’ place attachment practices at their SU residences. Student communities ensure that residences, clusters and private student organisations are places where students feel welcome and have a sense of belonging (Stellenbosch University, n.d.). Student leaders are essential in ensuring that these goals are achieved.

I employed a qualitative methodology to understand the subjective experiences of student leaders in their university residences. This approach aligns itself with the interpretivist paradigm (Scotland, 2012). Purposive sampling was done to select participants with rich narratives that are directly related to the focus of this chapter (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). These students communicated their experiences articulately and reflectively (Bernard, 2002). Six students who satisfied the sample selection criteria were approached to participate. Participants were in their 4th or 5th year of academic study and had served on their residence HC for at least one term. Participants were selected to give a
diverse account of their demographic positioning and residence type to compare and identify similarities in their experiences. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the different participants and their demographic information.

Table 1: Participants’ demographic and residence site information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Home Language</th>
<th>University Residence Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea²</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lower-Middle Class</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>Single-sex female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>Afrikaans Mixed-sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hendrik</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>Single-sex male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gretha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>Single-sex female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lance</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>Namibian</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Single-sex male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rufaro</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Upper-Middle class</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Zimbabwean</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Single-sex female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter draws on in-depth interviews with these six participants. Three 90-minute interviews were held with each participant. The first interview focused on aspects of their life before SU by concentrating on their high school experiences. The second interview focused on their journey at SU from the welcoming period until before their student leadership term. The third interview focused on their experiences as HC members and their role in the residences as it relates to the place attachment of other students. Through these semi-structured interviews I developed an account of the students’ individual positionings, how they attach and to what they attach while in their SU residences.

Photo-elicitation techniques are used by scholars wanting to understand place-making and affect

² Pseudonyms were used for all participants to preserve anonymity.
(Rinquest and Fataar, 2016). Photo-elicitation was used during the second in-depth interview to spark memories. I selected pictures from their Facebook pages which were taken at specific intervals during their SU journey. The selected photographs situated the individual in a particular time and place, with particular people. Using these photographs as retrospective prompts meant that the student’s experiences and what they chose to capture were not tainted by the knowledge that they would be participating in this study. These photographs acted as visual stimuli to explore the participant’s feelings and emotions, allowing them a reflective space in which to describe how they navigated their residences as a place and how their emerging place attachment developed.

Data were analysed inductively, using the theoretical framework to code the accounts with reference to the place attachment strategies of each student interviewee. These codes were then used to identify differences and similarities in the experiences of the participants. The data revealed a developmental process of place attachment for student leaders that loosely developed along the linear timeline of the students’ stay in the residences. For this reason, the data are presented as a chronological pattern that starts with their residence selection and ends with their leadership term in their third or fourth year of study.

3.4. Personal place-making before and during the first year in residence

Students’ place attachment starts as an individualistic response. They ‘make place’ for themselves to satisfy their own place-based needs. This section focuses on students’ residence selections and initial place attachment in their residences to describe the ‘personal placemaking’ phase.

3.4.1. Residence selection illuminates the influence of pre-university experiences on initial place attachment

Students’ pre-university histories are unique tapestries. Their reasons for choosing SU and their residences determine their subsequent unique place-making strategies. I show here that prior knowledge of SU as a place and consideration of its physical dimensions influenced their place attachment in different ways as they commenced their university journey.

Lance and Gretha described the ‘Stellenboschness’ of SU as a reason for applying. Gretha explains that
Stellenbosch has this, I think it's the perception that you have of it. It's gonna sound so cliché but like Victoria Street, and it sounds very idealistic, like just everything’s picture perfect.

Both students referred to the town as picturesque – with its distinctive oak trees and mountainous landscape. Lance’s attending a nearby feeder school and Gretha’s open-day visit to the University meant they were both familiar with the physical characteristics of the town. Hendrik’s familiarisation with SU and the residences was through secondary indirect contact. He learnt about SU through his peers and neighbours. Describing the uniqueness of SU through their own experiences and the stories of others shows that Lance, Gretha and Hendrik had begun to ‘cognitively’ identify with the place (Anton & Lawrence, 2017). According to Wang and Xu (2014), such identification is a predictor of initial place familiarising and subsequently place attachment.

Andrea, Anthony and Rufaro had little or no previous exposure to SU or its residences. Andrea felt she had no prior “attachment to any place in Stellenbosch” and for Anthony, getting into residence was a relief after his initial application was declined. For both students, no particular aspect of the place was central in their choice of residence.

Rufaro, an international student, did not mention any physical or social connections to SU either. Her choice of university residence was personal and strategic – based on her high-school experience that was competitive with toxic peer relationships. She applied to the three smallest residences. She explains, “the reason for a smaller res[idence] was that [there would be] fewer people to hate you.” In addition, Rufaro’s many relocations during her formative years had created a general sense of detachment. She pointed out that “In my mind, I feel like people can leave at any point, and getting super attached is problematic”. Rufaro’s orientation of general detachment is a consequence of how she experienced her home life (Thaver, 2006). Moving often during her life created a sense of impermanence. Rufaro was thus cautious about becoming attached to a residence and its people.

These stories show that students’ place perceptions of residences were influenced by their pre-university experiences. For them residence selection was already part of an act of making place, where some of them engaged in perception-generating processes related to the physical
characteristics of the town of Stellenbosch. The students who had high levels of familiarity with SU before entering their residences evinced immediate place attachment, while those with less exposure had lower levels of initial place attachment.

Gretha, Hendrik, and Lance demonstrated immediate and elaborate attachment upon entering their residences. Hendrik’s comment illustrates this well: “When I walked through the doors I felt welcome here on that move-in day and, yeah, I just grew to know Newmoon as my home”. Gretha’, Hendrik’s and Lance’s welcoming experiences from the first day resulted in positive attitudes towards their residences. Anthony’s, Andrea’s and Rufaro’s place attachment developed more slowly compared to the other three. For Andrea and Anthony, this was a result of the ‘whiteness’ they encountered. Andrea’s summary of her first year illuminates this point:

The beginning was a slow process for me warming up to people, warming up to the space. It felt very white. But it was also very foreign for me to see white people engage with people of colour. And I’ve just attributed that to because I never had that experience of being friends with white people.

Similarly, Anthony experienced immediate discord at his residence because “the leadership at the time was hundred percent white”. Andrea’s and Anthony’s slower attachment may have been a result of their racial positioning and misaligned expectations of residence life. Rufaro’s place attachment was diminished because of her detached nature and because she did not understand Afrikaans. She explained that she often had to remind her fellow newcomers to converse in English during gatherings in the welcoming week.

Students’ pre-university histories affected their initial place attachment in their residences. The intensity of their initial attachment depended on the individual’s prior knowledge of SU and their individual social positioning. The white students evinced an immediate attachment to their residences, which the black and coloured students (except for Lionel) did not experience. The proximity of the residence culture to the students’ previous school and home cultures determined how they attached to their residence during the first few months of their first year.
The next section describes how place attachment developed during their first year and demonstrates how students’ pre-university and initial attachments provided the bases of their varied place attachment practices in later years.

3.4.2. Students’ place attachment strategies to secure individual belonging during their first year

The selected students expressed particular needs for their residence life. During their first year they searched for ways to satisfy these needs. Belonging, support for their goals, self-regulation, enhanced confidence and self-esteem, and self-continuity are functions of place attachment which fulfil the basic needs of individuals (Scannel and Gifford, 2010). The participants attempted to satisfy these needs by drawing on the structural and social resources in their residences, resulting in initial place attachment. As the place began to satisfy these needs (albeit with various levels of effectiveness), their place attachment strengthened. Where these needs were pursued but not met, the consequence was negative associations with the place. This section describes the strategies these students’ employed to satisfy their needs.

Students developed friendships as a prominent method to satisfy their need for belonging. Gretha, Lance and Hendrik found making friends in their first year relatively easy. Lance’s advantage was his existing high school networks which presented him with the opportunity to connect with many acquaintances and friends upon his entry into the university. Gretha had made friends at a church camp the week before the welcoming period at the university; some people in her residence were thus familiar to her. Even though Hendrik knew only one senior at his residence, he quickly made friends with his neighbours on the floor.

People take concerted action by adopting different strategies to cater to their need for greater belonging (Kelly, 2018). These strategies of belonging were absent in the reflections of Gretha, Lance and Hendrik, and the ease with which they cultivated a sense of belonging and friendships seems somewhat taken for granted when compared to the experiences of Anthony, Andrea and Rufaro. The latter group explicitly shared their approaches to friendship during their interviews. For Anthony and Rufaro, attending social events was beneficial towards developing a sense of belonging. Rufaro explained:
So, for me, I, in my first year, the friend group I made, the seniors that I had in my section, they kind of made me feel like you can be home here, you can commit to this thing. And it's not going to be pulled out from under you unless you decide to leave.

Rufaro's cautious approach to relationships subsided the more she attended social events in the residence. The social interactions of the place dimension thus afforded Rufaro with the opportunity to develop positive emotions and shifted her understanding of ‘at home’. Anthony found a particular affinity in a “people of colour caucus”, which was founded to tackle matters of inclusivity in his residences. Anthony explained that:

[It was] just a space for people of colour to come together to speak about the experiences, grievances and to just be there, you know, as a network of support […] being in that sort of environment also was a safety net for me.

His assertion of a ‘safety net’ supports the notion that place attachment functions to fulfil the basic psychological need for safety and security (Scannel & Gifford, 2010). Anthony continued to participate in the conversations of the people of colour caucus, because he felt safe in this group and identified with its transformative agenda. His beliefs, self- and group identifications propelled him towards involvement behaviours (Shamai, 1991) in the residence early in his first year.

Andrea initially struggled the most with finding a sense of belonging, even though she pursued friendships immediately upon arriving at her residence. She had a deep desire to establish friendly connections with white students, for which she proffers the following explanation:

I also really wanted to connect with white people probably because I didn’t have them in my school. And because, my parents made me believe that, you know, white people is the people that have set kind of the success standard in life, so becoming friends with that person or talking to that that person meant that I’m entering into that world, I’ve been given access to it.

Beliefs that Andrea inherited from her parents influenced her meaning-making of the residence’s social arena. Her initial attempt at establishing belonging was unsuccessful because of her inability
to get along with her white roommate. She approached her friendship-building practices strategically. She imagined the role that university friends could play in advancing her future career through the social capital that such friends could provide her in future.

Kelly argues that “the opportunities people have to forge attachments are, however, shaped by power dynamics” (Kelly, 2018, p. 70), which may explain the absence of strategising in the reflections of Gretha, Hendrik and Lance. This group did not have problems establishing their belonging through making friends easily during the initial period of their university stay. Because of their social positioning, life histories and familiarity with SU before entering it, they were in a more favourable position to act on the opportunities to forge attachments to the residence more quickly and intensely compared to the other three students. Their strategies may have been unconscious, but it seems that they did not need to work as hard and be as strategic as Anthony, Andrea and Rufaro. For all the students, friendships and group identifications contributed to their sense of belonging, safety and security. The initial place attachment of the white students, who were in a social position to make friends, can be described as thick and elaborate. In contrast, for the black students, initial place attachment was hesitant, arduous and restrictive.

i) Bedrooms as a place of goal support and self-regulation

The bedrooms of the female participants played a significant role in their place attachment. Andrea and Rufaro indicated that their rooms were spaces where friendships were forged and strengthened. Andrea and her roommate eventually connected and she asserts that “we became the hub of our friends”. Their room became the meeting spot for dinners and where they congregated before going out to town. Similarly, Rufaro recalled countless coffee dates and conversations in her room, which facilitated a strong bond with her roommate, who was significant in her place attachment. Rufaro and Andrea became attached to their respective roommates and bedrooms, where they shared many social bonding experiences. Manzo (2005) explains it is not the structural quality of a particular place that creates attachment, but rather the quality of the experiences that peoples have in it. Both became attached to their rooms and the relationships that were nurtured there.

Rufaro and Andrea also explained that their rooms became places where they could practise self-regulation. Places that allow for self-regulation involve stress relief, problem-solving and self-
reflection, and they are regarded as sites of personal restoration (Scannel & Gifford, 2010; Korpela, Kytta & Hartig, 2001). The experiences Rufaro and Andrea had with friends and roommates allowed them to experience their rooms as restorative, something Gretha did not experience. Gretha and her roommate were both white, yet Gretha stated that class differences were a considerable barrier to a functional relationship between her and her roommate. Because of this, Gretha found opportunities for relaxing and restoration in the kitchenette of her residence section. She recounted with much delight the after-class snack eating and conversation rituals in the kitchenette that she grew to expect and appreciate.

Andrea’s constrained type of place attachment to her residence shifted because of her positive experiences of restoration in her room, which indicates that place attachment develops positive affective bonds resulting from successfully pursuing goals in place (Scannel & Gifford, 2010). Because Andrea persisted with her goal of “wanting to make connections that I could reap from, later in life”, she began to experience her residence positively.

None of the male participants mentioned their rooms or led me to believe that their rooms or roommates were significant in their place attachment. This might be because two of the three males had single rooms during their first year, so they did not have to negotiate the question of making friends with roommates. Another probable reason may be gender differences, as women were found to spend more time in their rooms than men did (Mandel, Baron and Fischer, 1980 cited in Dazkir, 2018). The male students did not express the same need for goal support and self-regulation.

**ii) Enhancing identity and bolstering self-esteem**

Anthony attributes a large part of his positive place attachment to the residence to his mentor who, like him, was a student of Xhosa descent. His mentor eased his anxieties and uncertainties and allowed him to focus on enhancing his personal identity. Similarly, Lance shared that his welcoming experience assisted in developing his self-esteem. He pointed out that

I think the other thing that it gave was just the sense of confidence, because I think I definitely needed to improve my confidence as I got there. […] And in a sense, also found a new identity.
Lance attributes his growing confidence to the relationships that he established in the residence. Lance noted that this confidence was bolstered by an HC member who gave him the responsibility to arrange a leadership development event. This was an important signal and motivator for Lance to become more active in the residence as he wanted “to do more for the place.” According to Shamai (1991), investing time and talent is a feature of commitment to a place, demonstrating a heightened degree of place attachment. Unlike Lance, Anthony, Andrea and Rufaro, who also identify as ‘students of colour’, did not show the same level of commitment to their residences immediately. Even though Anthony expressed the same need to enhance his identity and was also assisted by a student in a leadership position, the affordances in his residence did not have the same accelerated effect on his place attachment as they had for Lance.

Whilst Lance’s experience in his residence enhanced his identity, Gretha’s and Hendrik’s identity as Christians was challenged. They said that they felt excluded because of the alcohol-drinking culture in their residences. Hendrik did not completely reject activities where alcohol was consumed, but attended events and role modelled to others how to enjoy an activity and participate without consuming alcohol. His response is a behavioural expression of place attachment referred to as ‘reconstruction of place’ (Scannel & Gifford, 2010), which resembles the way communities often change the physical nature of meaningful places (see Geipel, 1982; Francaviglia, 1978). However, Hendrik’s reconstruction of place took place in the social arena of the residence.

Students constantly evaluated whether they ‘fit’ into the residence. By the end of the first year, all students had experienced a steady increase in place attachment, yet some questioned the intensity of their belonging and attachment when they perceived the residence culture to be out of alignment with their own values or expectations. The six selected students instead focused on finding a sense of belonging through managing relationships, navigating spaces in search of goal support and self-regulation. They looked for ways to enhance their personal identities and bolster their self-esteem. The students were concerned with their own safety and security rather than merely conforming to their residence culture. Their place attachment strategies were thus individualistic at first.

The students’ overall belonging and place attachment can be described as ambiguous. Finding a sense of belonging is an active process; some students needed to employ explicit strategies, while others
worked through favourable power dynamics in the residence. When their place attachment is secure enough, they begin to develop a more outward focus, interacting more comfortably with other students and beginning to take a more active role in the residence through involvement behaviours. From their reflections, it appears that Hendrik and Lance began to demonstrate this outward focus early on. Even so, all students went on to organise themselves around the need to reconstruct certain social aspects of their residences, thus beginning to influence the place attachment of others.

3.5. The students’ place-making strategies to address the needs of other students

This section discusses one specific place-making strategy that students employ which shifts certain residence practices towards greater inclusivity. The focus here is on their newly elected role as HC leaders and how they address the place attachment needs of other students.

Before their election, students began to envision new possibilities that could enhance residence life in positive ways. They drew from their own experiences and the experiences of others to guide their vision. Gretha exemplified the focus on newcomer students:

I wanted to kind of make people feel as comfortable as I did, or try to contribute towards that. And I must say I was quite first-year focused. And I think it's good, I don't think it's negative, because just reflecting back to my first year… It is very scary. And as I've said before, I come from a space where my parents were at universities, I can't begin to imagine what it feels like for people who have no point of reference in terms of university.

When these students take up office, they begin to take action. They plan meetings and think about how they can shift policies and practices in their residences. Andrea explained that they changed the name of a tradition in the residence as it evoked negative connotations. While they still valued the tradition, they name change was aimed at inspiring hope and belonging. She explains:

When you come back from the mountain on the last day, they call it [name of event], which we changed […]. There's a swing there and you're not allowed to sit on that swing during welcoming. But when you come down from the mountain, you sign this little thing

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3 The name of the event was omitted to protect the anonymity of the participants
that says you are now part of [the residence] on this day, and then you can take a photo sitting on the swing. And now that says you are a part of [the residence], so that the swing is very significant. They don't even allow boys to sit on there.

Lance and Hendrik made similar changes. They explained that they had changed the language of their house anthem from Afrikaans to include verses of other African languages, thereby attempting to increase inclusivity. These house anthems are sung at sports matches and after house meetings to illustrate and develop camaraderie and ‘brotherhood’ (sic). For both of them, this shift was essential so that more of their house members could feel included during these gatherings.

All of the students introduced significant changes in their residences with regards to traditions and activities. Their place-making strategy is an example of ‘place creation’, defined as the application of positive human effort which shifts policy, planning and design so that a place is enhanced positively (Seamon, 2013). These students draw on their commitment to and knowledge of the place (through their own experiences and experiences of their peers) to creatively craft new conditions to improve their residences (Seamon, 2013) as more welcoming places.

Students reflected on activities and practices which they implemented to foster belonging in the residences for newcomer students, which took place during the welcoming week. These activities included quilt making (in the female residences), where newcomers designed an individual patch of fabric and sewed it together; this quilt was later used at the first-year dance as a reminder of their connectedness as a group. Others spoke about big-sis-little-sis (sic) initiatives where seniors and newcomer pairs would engage in some social-bonding activities together. The students also mentioned mountain climbing and singing of the house anthems as the groups watched the sunrise. These activities were an attempt to make students “feel like they are a part of something bigger than themselves” (Hendrik).

The participating students also mentioned intentionally adopting dispositions which would not have been associated with being a HC member in an SU residence before, such as friendliness, approachability and vulnerability, to inspire new behaviours amongst their newcomer groups and their fellow HC members. Lance noted that his intentional display of his personal vulnerability became an important moment of connection for him and his section group:
I called everyone to the stoep [porch], and we just spoke. So I got very vulnerable, where I initially spoke about the things that I struggled with. And that like just had this like ripple effect, everybody started sharing, people started sharing really deep things about each other. And that's where we really built a connection. And it was really a lovely weekend.

Rufaro and Gretha also shared intimate moments with their newcomers early during welcoming. Gretha hosted a pyjama party, sat on the floor with her newcomers and shared how she struggled to adapt to a very English residence space. Rufaro described her own struggles as an international student. In a way these senior students gave newcomers permission to do the same, which created a sense of intimacy and belonging. These student leaders also modelled other ways of being an HC member. At SU, HC members usually wear distinct maroon blazers throughout the welcoming week and during official house meetings and activities. Whilst the blazers themselves are not problematic, associations with the blazer (and hence with the person wearing it) have caused difficulties. Rufaro explains: “I think the reason why blazers are so problematic is because of what they symbolise in high schools, where a specific blazer will show power and hierarchy”. In light of this, Gretha’s pyjama party is significant. She intentionally decided not to wear her blazer for this event as a way of distancing herself from the associated power and hierarchy attached to the HC blazer. By doing this, she succeeded in signalling to the newcomers that they could see her as an equal. Through embodying vulnerability, friendliness and approachability in their actions, the HC members demonstrated a caring and egalitarian attitude as a hallmark of their residence-based leadership.

The six students on whom this chapter is based showed a commitment to changing practices in the social design of their residences to foster belonging among newcomer students. They used their knowledge and experiences of their residences to increase the chances that others would feel greater belonging than they or their peers had experienced when they first arrived at the residence. The student leaders engaged in purposeful social and cultural redesigning of the residence through place creation (Seamon, 2013). I have shown how the student leaders enact their leadership roles to ensure that newcomers develop place attachment in the residence. Through their own relatively successful place attachment processes in their earlier phases, and their positions as HC members, they used their beliefs, motivations, feelings and behaviours to influence the social and cultural design of the place.
In terms of place attachment, HC members are essential in the social design of the residence structure and culture, and in affecting the place attachment of others in the residences.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the place attachment practices of selected residence student leaders at Stellenbosch University. Place attachment is the emotional bond that people develop with specific places. The main argument of the chapter is that students’ place attachment developed on the basis of their personal place-making strategies based on individualistic strategies. Moreover, while their initial place-making is ambiguous, once it is accomplished they begin to focus on the needs of other students. In the early period of their residence life the students concentrate on finding their foothold in the residence. Students occasionally experienced a momentary sense of loss of belonging because of a variety of negative experiences. Black and coloured students in this study were most at risk of not feeling a sense of belonging and attaching to their university residences. In the ‘personal placemaking’ phase the students strategically searched for belonging through relationships and attending events that enhance their identity and support their goals. It is in the later phases of their residence life and in their capacity as student leaders that they intentionally begin to implement activities that enhance the place attachment of newcomers to the residence. The student leaders then went on to play an essential role in developing the place attachment of others in the residence, ensuring that there is a welcoming culture in the residence through the purposeful creation of the social design of the residences. These students are able to move to heightened place attachment, even when they are constantly at risk of ‘not belonging’.

3.7. References


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CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

4.1. Rationale

This study investigated students’ immersion into and mediation of their behaviour and identities within university residence spaces. The study foregrounds the link between place and agency as the conceptual basis to investigate how students attach to their residence environments. The investigation focused on how students develop these attachments, how the attachment processes impacted on their emergent identities, and how these practices influenced the transformation of the emergent institutional culture of the residences. I view the residences as places where the students' encounters with diverse others are amplified because they share intimate spaces throughout their academic years at university. This study was thus interested in understanding how students develop their place-attachment practices while navigating the complex terrain of their residence spaces.

Residences at formerly white institutions are struggling to transform their practices to include their increasingly diverse student body. This study thus considered SU's historical and cultural context and its impact on the lived institutional culture in its residences. The legacy of apartheid and a colonial heritage linger in educational institutions and continues to influence behaviour in these spaces (see Hunter, 2019; Fomunyam, 2015). Fataar describes post-apartheid South Africa as a reconfiguring terrain that provides the experiential text within which identity practices emerge (Fataar, 2010). Understanding how students experienced the institutional culture and its impact on their emergent identities was thus a focal point of this study.

The study focused particularly on the experiences of student leaders known as House Committee members. HCs are uniquely positioned because they are elected by their peers and live within their residences during their leadership term. At SU, HCs have institutional and positional responsibilities to co-create a welcoming culture within their residences as they complete their duties, which include the implementation of social programmes, the management of safety and discipline, and leadership development initiatives. By focusing my inquiry on 15 HC members across 7 residences, this study investigated their induction into the residence life in their first year of study and how they later co-constituted their residences as inclusive places as HC members. To do this, I conducted an analysis
of how the institutional culture positions and conditions the members’ behaviour and how, through the development of their own place attachment and emergent identities, they co-create the residence as a welcoming place for themselves and others.

The study was guided by a central research question: How do student leaders develop their place attachment practices at their SU residences? This thesis addressed this research question through empirical research, with the findings presented as an article (Chapter 2) and a book chapter (Chapter 3).

4.2. The theoretical underpinnings of the thesis

This study's theoretical orientation was based on the view that university residences are social systems where a diverse range of students spend much of their time interacting with each other. The theoretical framework is founded upon Scannel and Gifford's (2010) interpretation of place attachment. Their tripartite model formed the basis of this study's understanding of and inquiry into the place attachment of student leaders in their residences by illuminating the relationship between place, people and the process dimensions of place attachment. This model, along with the work of other researchers such as Thaver (2006) and Kelly (2018), has contributed to my conceptualisation of place attachment in SU residences. Place attachment in this thesis refers to a deep emotional bond whereby individuals articulate affective, behavioural and cognitive processes of belonging and feeling ‘at home’ within the physical, symbolic and social arena of their residences.

My data-collection phase and initial findings led me to investigate additional theories that could provide me with the language and lenses to understand my data and provide further theoretical depth. Archer's theory of morphogenesis (1982) helped me understand the structural and cultural influences on the social processes in the residences and their impact on the place attachment practices of the participants.

In Chapter 2 of this study, Archer's explanation of morphogenesis (1982) offered me a lens to understand the interaction of structure and agency related to the conditions that position students living in the residences in particular ways. Drawing on Archer's theory, I understood the institutional culture of SU's residences to be constituted at the intersection of their physical, social and cultural dimensions. As the students interacted with these dimensions, they developed particular and
divergent meanings based on who they are at the particular point in time. Therefore, in Chapter 3 I was able to conceptualise SU and its residences explicitly as a place. The residence became a particular place for these students through their embodied experiences in the residences to which they attached specific meanings (Milligan, 1998; Manzo, 2005). I argue that the experiences of individuals in place are varied and depend on the individuals' positioning in relation to the physical, social and symbolic dimensions of the place.

4.3. The methodological underpinnings of the thesis

My thesis is based on a qualitative methodology approach, grounded in the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm acknowledges that an individual’s sense of truth and meaning is subjective (Scotland, 2012) and can be co-constructed among those who interact in the same social structures (Connole, 1993). This paradigm enabled me to uncover and give voice to the experiences and practices of my research participants, both through their individual and collective meanings.

I embarked on a reflective study to understand the actions and experiences of my research participants. In the interpretive paradigm, human actions are believed to have reasons which are preceded by intentions and may be accompanied by reflection (Connole, 1993). I chose the data-collection methods to provide the participants with opportunities to reflect on their experiences during their university journeys. I used the following data-collection methods in this study: 1) four focus group discussions with 15 participants using 2) music elicitation and appreciative inquiry to develop a broad understanding of the different place attachment processes; 3) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six participants to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences related to the research questions, with one interview using 4) photo-elicitation techniques which were used as a stimulus to reflect on past experiences and to elicit memories that were important in the development of their place attachment.

I restate my researcher positionality as a former HC member at an SU residence and as a former co-curriculum coordinator at SU's Centre for Student Communities before I commenced this study in 2020. I ensured that the research and findings are valid and reliable by adopting a reflexive approach throughout the data-collection phase, during the data analysis, and during the verification and finalisation of the findings.
The reflective, qualitative study enabled me to analyse student leaders' place attachment in their university residences from the time of their first arrival until the completion of their leadership duties.

4.4. The analytical summary of my research

This thesis has been presented in the thesis-by-article mode, consisting of an article (Chapter 2), a book chapter (Chapter 3), and two wraparound chapters. I will now briefly summarise the article and book chapter. After that, I will respond to each sub-question by providing an analytical summary of the thesis.

Chapter 2 (the article) presents a discussion of morphogenesis at work within the residence environments of SU. Using Archer's (1982) theory of morphogenesis, I showed how the institutional culture positions and conditions students and their behaviour in the residences. The institutional culture manifests as environmental cues in the structural and cultural dimensions of the residences. These cues provide signals to the students on how to behave, and students interpret these cues based on who they are. The cues have a heterogenic effect on students' meaning-making and behaviours. The students, however, develop adaptive behavioural responses as a way of speaking back to these cues. They can do so because of their emerging agency and identities, driven by their educational and leadership aspirations in their residences. With some support from other student leaders, and despite resistance from some of their peers, they emerge as change agents who influence micro-transformations in their residence. This chapter lays the basis for understanding the university's physical, social and symbolic dimensions, and the way they impact on students' behaviour and emergent identities.

Chapter 3 (the book chapter) then deepens the inquiry by analysing students' behaviours and processes as they develop place attachment. SU is explicitly conceptualised as a historically situated place, and the multifaceted concept of place attachment (Scannel and Gifford, 2010) is employed to understand whether students experience their residences as welcoming and inclusive (or not), and as places where they can develop emotional bonds. This chapter describes what students attach to, the cognitive, behavioural and affective processes that result in place attachment, and how students' individual positionings facilitate or constrain their place attachment. While students' place attachment varied in intensity, the study found that the participants went through two distinct place attachment phases. These phases loosely followed a linear trajectory across the years of living in the residences.
First, they make place for themselves through involvement behaviours such as making friends, joining interest groups that provide safety and security, and pursuing interests that bolster their self-esteem. While the data showed that at first their belonging and place attachment was ambiguous, but when they were secure enough in their own place attachment, they became concerned with the experiences of others. In their role as HC members, they create place by changing the social design of their residences. During this process, they transform their residences into more welcoming and inclusive environments than they had experienced in their first years.

4.4.1. Research sub-question 1

How is ‘sense of place’ conditioned by the exigent institutional culture prevalent at the university’s residences?

i) The unfolding institutional culture manifests as cues in the residences

Chapter 2 (the article) presented SU’s institutional culture as the fundamental backdrop against which to understand students’ immersion and mediation of their residences. The institutional culture manifests as environmental cues in the residences. These cues in this instance are strongly influenced by whiteness, specifically in terms of race and language. There are also gendered and social-class dynamics at play in the place dimension of the residences. As students engage with these cues, they reflect on the conditions within which they are born (Archer, 2004), such as their racial and gender identities. From this reflection, they develop particular and divergent meanings ingrained from their pre-university upbringing and imagine outcomes for their planned behaviour. As Archer states, these perceived outcomes need not be accurate (Archer, 2004). I argue that the institutional culture conditions students' behaviour, placemaking and subsequent place attachment development during this meaning-making process.

Chapter 3 shows that black and coloured students engaged in explicit and strategic practices to 'make place'. Power dynamics favoured white students and students whose school culture closely mirrored that of their SU residences. These students experienced immediate place attachment, which they developed relatively quickly. I argue that the environmental cues, and thus the institutional culture in the residences, are more affirming of white, heterosexual men and women. It favours those who speak Afrikaans with a particular accent and with the financial means to participate in paid residence activities. In this way, the institutional culture creates favourable dynamics for students from specific
social positionings, but constraining conditions for others. Black and coloured students in this study experienced a slower and restricted type of place attachment because of the way that the institutional culture initially positioned them.

**ii) The students’ agency interacts with the residence culture**

Chapter 2 develops a perspective that aligns with Archer’s (2003) view, which stresses that while institutional culture conditioned students’ agency and attachments, it was not deterministic. This means that while the institutional culture had the potential to affect students’ emerging identities and place attachments negatively, they were able to overcome its constraining nature. I show how students counter-position themselves in response to their residence culture. They speak back to the environmental cues by defying its messaging. The students mediate their environments by drawing on their educational aspirations and developing behavioural responses in alignment with these aspirations. They become involved in residence activities where they practise their skills and live out their interests. Their student leaders support the participants' aspirations until they too develop corporate agency, which is the ability to articulate their goals and actively organise to reach them (Archer, 2004). Because of these shifts in their agency, they emerge as social actors who contribute to micro-transformations in their residences.

Students' emerging agency develops in tandem with their place attachment. Chapter 3 shows how students begin with personal place-making strategies to secure their own sense of belonging, security and support for their goals, and to enhance their identities. Similar to their agency development, they are assisted by other HCs and mentors to grow their confidence. I argue then that their emerging agency provides the energy and will to secure these attachments. Simultaneously, their emerging place attachment gives greater purchase to their agency in the residences. The result is that they develop a greater capacity to act (differently) in response to the residence culture and practices which do not align with their values, identities and aspirations for their educational journeys. Their emergent agency and place attachment provides the individual capacities to speak back to the residence culture to enhance their emergent identities in place. Through this process, they contribute to the transformation of their respective residence cultures.
4.4.2. Research sub-question 2

What are the different levels of ‘sense of place’ of residence house leaders at their university residences?

i) **The intensity of place attachment differs across the residence journey**

The discussion in Chapter 3 shows that all students managed to develop place attachment, but that their attachment was fluid and ambiguous. Students experienced momentary losses of belonging, even when they had already experienced feelings of being ‘at home’. Chapter 3 also emphasised the differing experiences of immediate place attachment along racial and cultural lines. Students' social positionings and exposure to SU before they arrived in the residences were significant factors that impacted on their initial place-perception processes. When accounting for the reasons for students' lower attachment levels, language, race and religion were shown to be prominent detractors in place-attachment development. While Chapter 2 did not account for religion, other environmental cues such as language and race were discussed. The argument then is that the environmental cues in the residences condition students’ place attachment both immediately and over a more extended period, which conditioned students' behavioural responses. The meanings students attached to these cues influenced whether they would attend events or develop friendships with particular people. Chapter 3 showed that these involvement behaviours were essential for developing a sense of belonging and place attachment. I argue that the environmental cues have an immediate and long-term effect on students' place attachment development, because they conditioned students' involvement in the residences. I concur with the literature that the meanings of and attachments to place develop over time. But my research has also shown that immediate perceptions of place are important in place attachment development, an aspect which has been overlooked in the literature (Raymond, Kyttä and Stedman, 2017).

4.4.3. Research sub-question 3

*How do these residence leaders establish their unfolding place attachment in their residences and the institutional context of the university?*

i) **Personal placemaking and emergent agency support the development of place attachment**
Students' place attachment starts as individualistic. In Chapter 3 I describe how students organise themselves around their need to find belonging and to feel safe within their residences. They develop relationships with peers through their interactions with them. Roommates were significant for some students, and consequently bedrooms were important places where these relationships were strengthened. I also showed how other student leaders supported the participants' place attachments during their first year, which was identical to the way that students were shown to develop their agency in Chapter 2. When their attachments and agency are secure enough, they develop an outward responsibility to others and their residence later in their first year because of increased place attachment. They then avail themselves of the opportunity for election of the house committee, a social role they see as pertinent to their own growth, belonging and potential to influence their residences to become more inclusive places.

4.4.4. Research sub-question 4

*How do these student residence leaders contribute to the emerging ‘sense of place’ of fellow house members in their residences?*

i) **Place creation through representation**

Chapter 3 describes place creation as the application of positive human effort which shifts policy, planning and design so that their residence is positively enhanced (Seamon, 2013). The participants creatively crafted new conditions to improve their residences (Seamon, 2013) as more welcoming places. Chapter 2 described physical environmental cues which highlighted the absence of diverse student leaders. In speaking back to these cues, the participants availed themselves of leadership positions, even though the environmental cues did not signal this behavioural response. For them, ensuring the representation of queer bodies in leadership, those who did not fit the middle-class or white demographic, and those who spoke various dialects of Afrikaans and English was a meaningful way to achieve transformation. The students who were now elected into the HC positions in their residences created place firstly through representation on the house committee. Their election into these leadership positions elaborated the role of HC members, thus creating new cues regarding the type of person who can be a leader in their residences. I argue that through more diverse representation on the HCs, they influenced the social design of the residences. Students who may have believed that they could never aspire to such positions could interpret the presence of the diverse
HC members as empowering cues. By creating place in this way, the participants crafted new conditions for agency and the place-attachment development of newcomers and fellow house members. These newcomers and house members can more explicitly perceive themselves as individuals who can achieve the similar high levels of place attachment that these student leaders have accomplished.

ii) **Place creation through purposeful social design of events**

While representation on house structures as residence leaders was the beginning of creating place for others, merely being elected onto the HC was not enough to enhance the residences as more welcoming places than the participants experienced before. Chapter 3 described the various activities and changes of traditions that the student leaders purposefully planned and implemented. These changes were aimed at increasing the sense of belonging and safety of especially newcomer students. The student leaders influenced the social design of the residences through their actions during their leadership term. They used their positional power and influence to achieve this.

I argue that the student leaders could not have achieved these changes without their emergence as social actors, which I described in Chapter 2. Because these students were able to personify the HC role, they overcame resistance from peers, who were not always supportive of these changes in traditions. The student leaders, who now saw themselves as change agents, defied the messaging of the environmental cues and overcame the barriers created by their peers to create a more welcoming and inclusive residence.

iii) **Place creation through shedding of power via embodied dispositions**

The HC role in residences carries associated influence, power and a place in a hierarchy. I argue that while this associated power gave initial credibility to the student leaders in this study (especially for those who did not fit the traditional mould of an HC member), the participants distanced themselves from this power and hierarchy once they were elected. They did this by intentionally embodying dispositions of friendliness, vulnerability and approachability to inspire new behaviours and ways of being among the newcomers and fellow HC members, as described in Chapter 3.

These embodied dispositions are not traditionally associated with enforcing power in the residences. Thus, as student leaders embody these dispositions, they show how they enact their social role of
being an HC member. As explained in Chapter 2, the students emerged as social actors through experimentation with these roles as they mediate and integrate their own beliefs, values and aspirations with the expectations of the HC role. The student leaders' experimentation with these dispositions yields a change in the social and cultural design of the residence. Their newcomers can see them as equals, who support their emergent place attachment from the moment they arrive at the residences.

4.5. The main argument

In response to the main research question guiding the study: "How do student leaders develop their place attachment practices at their SU residences?" I now summarise the main argument.

Student leaders develop their place attachment practices at their SU residences through adaptive behavioural responses, which ‘speak back’ to an institutional culture that conditions and positions them based on who they are. The students recognise that the institutional culture generally affirms the identities of white, Afrikaans-speaking students, those who come from middle-class backgrounds and who express heteronormative gender identities. By drawing on their aspirations and living in alignment with their own values, and with the help of others, they develop the capacity to act differently, even when their sense of belonging is at risk. Their emergent identities and agency develop in tandem with their place attachment, which follows a developmental process. As they secure their own attachment, they become concerned with the experiences of others, and in their social roles as HC members they transform the emergent culture of the residences to enable greater place attachment for themselves and fellow house members.

The main contributions of this thesis are that: 1) it provided a situated account of morphogenesis at work; 2) it explained how institutional culture conditions both agency and place-attachment development in SU residences; 3) it described the morphogenetic nature of place-attachment development for students; and 4) it showed that student leaders contribute significantly to micro-transformations in the residence cultures of the university, through enhancing their residences as places which are welcoming and inclusive.

4.6. Considerations for future research
Current debates on transformation in HEIs in South Africa highlight the ambivalent experiences of transformation, especially of previously white institutions. The prevailing 'whiteness', which has been used to describe the institutional cultures of such institutions normatively, has been a significant reason for untransformed universities. My inquiry into students' experiences at SU was intended to understand how this 'whiteness' manifests and continues to affect an institution with a desire to become more inclusive. I believe place attachment research in HEIs which have a majority black population should be prioritised. The cues which emerged from the data were not based on race alone, but the research illuminated aspects that could be considered as 'white tone' (see Hunter, 2019). ‘White tone’ can be understood as a metaphor for an institutional culture which advances cultural ‘whiteness’ and prestige (in schools) (Hunter, 2019). The concept of white tone reconstitutes race as a covert dimension of an institutional culture, and examines the intersections between gender and language, for instance, as a way to develop a nuanced understanding of institutional cultures (Hunter, 2019). Investigating the influence of institutional culture on the place attachment of students in such institutions may provide illuminating perspectives on how people of all races are complicit in preserving constraining conditions by living and constructing the institutional cultures of our universities.

While the residences of SU took centre stage in this study, I believe that understanding the place-attachment processes in relation to the formal classroom spaces is essential, as place attachment has been correlated with increased wellbeing and academic achievement. The students in my study had an immediate advantage in developing belonging to at least one place in the university due to the physical and social resources, which are available and bounded in space and time in a residence. Even though there are private student organisations at SU, many private and commuter students may be at risk of not developing any attachments to the university if they do not plug into these communities. The formal classroom, then, may be the only place where they can develop any bond with the institution. Exploring the nature of these attachments and what constrains and enables them in the classroom will be a valuable research direction.

This study was concerned with the morphogenesis of the student. While I have shown that their transformations and actions have shifted aspects of their residence cultures, the question remains whether these micro-transformations found their way into the overall change of the institutional culture. I believe that investigating the morphogenesis of the institution as such would hold valuable
insights for understanding transformation within higher education and the attachment and experiences of belonging of staff and students at the macro level.

Place attachment has a long research history, but "studies of place-attachment in South Africa are relatively in their infancy" (Dlamini & Tesfamichael, 2020, p. 1). By embarking on studies related to place attachment within the context of South Africa, one would be contributing to the contextual and situated understanding of place attachment in the global South.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis by reviewing the rationale, theoretical frameworks and methodology used to address the research question. It outlined the logic and structure of the thesis. It summarised the article and book chapters, which constitute Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. It offered an analytical summary of the main research findings by responding to the research sub-questions. The chapter then provided an overview of the main argument and considerations for future research to advance the scholarship on place attachment at HEIs in South Africa.
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ADDENDA

Addendum 1: Focus group brief and preparation

FOCUS GROUP BRIEF AND PREPARATION

Dear Participant,

Once again, thank you for agreeing to participate in the study as a focus group participant in my M.Ed study entitled “The ‘place-attachment’ practices of student leaders at their Stellenbosch University residences”.

A REMINDER OF THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to determine how student leaders develop their ‘sense of place’, which include belonging and attachment to their residences and the university at large, during their time as a student. The study will also look at how their prior social conditioning affects these ‘place-attachment’ practices. The study will assist in providing a lens into how the institutional culture shapes these practices and how the student leaders then go on to be active role players in the development of these practices for other students. I will also be making use of institutional and residential documents/materials that are in the public domain to supplement the data.

FOCUS GROUP PURPOSE

You will be in a focus group with 3 or 4 other participants, where you will provide an oral history account of how you have experienced residence culture as well as the institutional culture, particularly as you established your sense of belonging and attachment in both of these domains. You will also be required to share what you think contributes to and detracts from a welcoming culture at the institution. You will also be asked to share your roles, responsibilities and experiences as a house committee member in facilitating belonging for newcomer students. This will be done through object- and music-elicitation and discussions.

NB: HOW TO PREPARE

Reflect on your time at your residence and SU. Select a piece of music that portrays your experience
up until this very moment. Please write down a narrative which you will share with the group before
playing the song. Think back to key moments in your SU journey to guide you. Examples of these moments could be:

- Your first day at your residence or the welcoming period as a whole
- Your first year experience
- Your transition into second year or senior undergraduate years
- Your student leadership journey
- Your undergrad graduation (if applicable)

Please have the song ready to play during the session. You will also have about 3-5 minutes to share your narrative before we all listen to the song together. Please also keep a copy of your written narrative (typed or written down) and send this to me after completion of the focus group for me to be able to refer back to it.

PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY, AND IDENTITY

Any information you share during the focus group that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected as participants’ anonymity will be prioritised. This will be done by omitting any reference to personal details, however, the name of the residence you were in and the year may be recorded.

If you have any questions or concerns about this focus group, please feel free to contact Delecia Davids at deleciad@sun.ac.za.
Addendum 2: Focus group discussion guide

Welcome participants and remind about confidentiality and informed consent.

Section 1: Music-elicitation to portray SU journey in residence
Each of you will have 3-5 minutes to share your prepared narrative about your experience in your residence. I will then play your song and ask the other participants to comment and give feedback on what resonated with them or what stood out for them about your experience.

Section 2: Discussion Questions

‘AT HOME’
• What does it mean to feel ‘at home’? What words would you use to describe the feelings of being ‘at home’ at the university and residence?
  o Was there a specific moment in which you felt “now I belong here” or how would you describe that process?
  o Were there any moments when you did not feel ‘at home’ at your residence or SU at large? Who were you with, in which location were you, what symbols surrounded you, what were you feeling?

‘WHITE TONE’ AT RESIDENCES AND SU
• How would you describe SU’s institutional culture as well as your specific residence culture?
  o Show integral quadrant on screen to guide participants to think of descriptive words related to people, places, policies, traditions, values, etc
• How has the institutional and residence culture affected your sense of belonging at SU?
• Which of these elements made you feel “at home” and which did not?
• How does the institutional and residence culture at SU compare to that of the high school you attended?

BELONGING, ATTACHMENT AND AGENCY
• As a HK member, what were your responsibilities in terms of facilitating a welcoming culture in your residence for newcomers?
  o Which specific activities in your residence is designed to facilitate belonging of
newcomers especially? And seniors?
  o How did you know whether the newcomers felt welcome and felt like they belonged?

- Thinking back on your own personal skills or way of being, what made your transition/journey at SU successful and what made it challenging?

*Thank participants for participation and remind them about the member checking invitation when report is finalised.*
**Addendum 3: Interview schedule**

**Interview 1: Life History and High School**

1. Please tell me about your family and where you grew up
2. Which high school did you attend and how did you decide on this high school?
3. Please describe your high school your high school in as much detail as you can
4. Do you have a story of when you felt ‘at home’ at your high school?
5. Were there any moments when you did not feel ‘at home’ at your high school? Who were you with, in which location were you, what symbols surrounded you, what were you feeling?
6. What influenced your decision to study at Stellenbosch University?
7. How did you decide on which residences to apply for at SU?

**Interview 2: Reflection on SU experience**

*Prep: The researcher selects pictures from the participant’s social media during their time at SU for picture/object-elicitation.*

1. Please tell me about your first-year experience at your residence and at SU?
2. Was there a specific moment in which you felt “now I belong here” or how would you describe that process?
3. Were there any moments when you did not feel ‘at home’ at your residence or SU at large? Who were you with, in which location were you, what symbols surrounded you, what were you feeling?
4. Tell me about these specific moments (showing them images from their social media/residences social media)
5. How would you describe your residence culture and SU’s institutional culture and how are they similar/different to that of your high school?
6. Why did you decide to become a House committee member of your residence?
7. Which specific activities in your residence is designed to facilitate belonging of newcomers especially and what was your role in this as a HC member? And seniors?
8. How would you describe your experience as a House committee member? Were there any moments where you felt more or less attached to the residence/University during your leadership term?
Interview 3: Attachment, ‘White Tone’ and Agency

1. How has the institutional and residence culture affected your sense of belonging at SU, especially after your leadership term?

2. During your time at SU, have you ever been confronted with symbols/practices/conversation of whiteness, privilege, and power? Please describe these and share your experiences around them.

3. Do you think that SU succeeds in being a welcoming place for everyone who is a part of the institution? Why/why not?

4. How have you managed to navigate your residence’s and SU’s culture? What about your own orientation/identity/skills/life experience allowed you to do so successfully?

5. Were there any key roleplayers who made you feel more ‘at home’ than others, both in your residence and at SU?
6. How would you describe your current involvement at SU, after your undergraduate residence experience?

7. Are you proud to be associated with your residence and SU as a whole? Why/why not?
Addendum 4: Institutional permission letter from Stellenbosch University

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION:

AGREEMENT ON USE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION IN RESEARCH

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<th>Name of Researcher</th>
<th>Delita Davids</th>
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The researcher has received institutional permission to proceed with this project as stipulated in the institutional permission application and within the conditions set out in this agreement.

1 WHAT THIS AGREEMENT IS ABOUT

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<td>1.2</td>
<td>POPI regulates the entire information life cycle from collection, through use and storage and even the destruction of personal information.</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>The privacy of our students and employees is important to us. We want to ensure that no research project poses any risks to their privacy.</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>However, you are required to familiarise yourself with, and comply with POPI in its entirety.</td>
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<td>Information relating to the race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, national, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental health, well-being, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth of the person;</td>
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Addendum 5: Ethical clearance letter from Stellenbosch University

NOTICE OF APPROVAL
REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

11 December 2020
Project number: 17162
Project Title: The 'place-attachment' practices of student residence leaders at their Stellenbosch University residences.

Dear Miss Delecia Davids

Your response to stipulations submitted on 1 December 2020 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

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<td>16 November 2021</td>
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GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT: INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

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

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (17162) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

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.
CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

Included Documents:

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If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioral and Education Research

*National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032. The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.*