

“Real men”, “Proper ladies” and Mixing In-between

A qualitative study of social cohesion and discrimination in terms of
race and gender within residences at Stellenbosch University

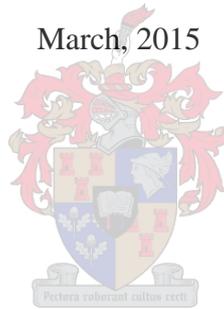
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the Stellenbosch University

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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 authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Date: 03/11/2014

Abstract

My research is motivated by concerns with promoting 'transformation' in Stellenbosch University, a formerly white Afrikaans University which is still predominantly white in terms of numbers and proportions of students attending the institution. While I argue about the importance of taking measures to promote more 'diverse' student populations, I am critical of discourses which equate transformation with 'improving' demographic profiles defined in terms of numbers of black, white, coloured and Indian students. I argue that understandings of transformation and diversity need to engage with the students' views and experiences of the university in order to make meaningful change with regard to social cohesion and integration, which goes beyond statistical change. My research does this by exploring how students from particular residences, in Stellenbosch University, construct and experience university and residence life and their own identifications. The students were interviewed in friendship groups, selected by the students themselves, and a key concern of mine was to facilitate conversations with them on broad themes relating to their reasons for coming to Stellenbosch and their interests, aspirations, motivations, identifications and dis-identifications as particular students in particular residences in Stellenbosch. I was particularly concerned to pick up on issues which the students raised in these 'focus group discussions' so that the students, themselves, played a key role in setting the agenda in the discussion and they and their reflections on their experiences and constructions of themselves and others became the topic of discussion. Rather than taking the group interview as an 'instrument' (as interviews, like questionnaires, are often described in methods texts in the social sciences), I write about it as ethnographic encounter involving them and myself as participants, and I explore insights about the nature of their friendships and relationships derived from first-hand experience, of how they engage with their selected friends and with me in the research group. Furthermore, by engaging with them as authorities about their lives and identifications as particular kinds of students at Stellenbosch, and posing questions which encouraged them to reflect on these. I argue that this kind of research can itself become a model of good pedagogic and 'transformative' practice.

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The role of Higher Education in South Africa.....	2
Diversity at Stellenbosch University	5
Understandings of transformation and diversity which inform my research.....	8
Why I want to engage with students in residences	13
The symbolic significance of residences at Stellenbosch	13
Becoming a member of a residence at Stellenbosch.....	15
The residences in my research	15
Research questions.....	17
Research questions and my approach	18
Chapter outline.....	18
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	20
Identity	20
Race.....	23
Sex and gender.....	24
Multiple and intersecting identifications	25
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology	27
Organising focus groups	27
Understanding the methodology as a research encounter.....	28
Participatory research through the interview approach	28
Understanding the focus group as an ethnographic encounter	29
Building on research methods used in previous research	31
Making use of friendship groups in focus group discussions	31
Data recording and analysis	33
Ethical considerations	35
Limitations	37

Chapter 4: Presentation and findings of focus group discussions.....	38
Introduction.....	38
Focus group discussion 1: Blouberg (all female residence)	40
General illustrative summary of the relational dynamics of the group.....	40
Presentation and analysis of key themes, as they emerge in the focus group discussion	43
Focus group discussion 2: Drakenstein (all male residence)	50
General illustrative summary of the relational dynamics of the group.....	50
Presentation and analysis of key themes, as they emerge in the focus group discussion	52
Focus group discussion 3: Outeniqua (mixed gender residence).....	61
General illustrative summary of the relational dynamics of the group.....	61
Presentation and analysis of key themes, as they emerge in the focus group discussion	62
Conclusion	67
Chapter 5: Comparing the focus groups in relation to the ways in which they engage with the practice of skakeling	69
Introduction.....	69
Blouberg focus group 1 (Lizhan, Nadia, Karli)	70
Drakenstein focus group (Elton, Wayne, Cole, Ian, Lee)	70
Outeniqua focus group 1 (Cameron, Stacey, Bianca, Anele, Erin, Maxine)	73
Blouberg focus group 2 (Kelsey, Asie, Sam,)	75
Outeniqua focus group 2 (Tasneem, Robyn, Lauren, Andre).....	78
Conclusion	81
Chapter 6: Implications and conclusion.....	83
Doing participatory research with students in the context of ‘transformation’	83
Tradition, diversity and social cohesion and how these were constructed and invoked by students in different focus group discussions	85
Tradition.....	85
Diversity.....	86
Social Cohesion	87

Skakeling.....	88
Thinking about the potential of participatory research with students as a transformative practice.....	89
Writing up research.....	93
Reference list	95

List of Tables

Table 1: Enrolment figures by language	8
Table 2: Outeniqua population figures by race and gender	17
Table 3: Focus group participants.....	33

List of Abbreviations

CHE	Council for Higher Education
CNE	Christian National Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HK	Huis Kommittee (translated into House Committee)
MoE	Minister of Education
NP	National Party
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PSO	Private Student Organisation
SU	Stellenbosch University
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFS	University of Free State
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

Chapter 1: Introduction

My research is based at Stellenbosch University (SU) and seeks to engage with students from different and diverse backgrounds living in the residences, and to explore their constructions and experiences of university and residence life. The research is motivated by concerns with promoting ‘transformation’ in SU, a formerly white Afrikaans university which is still predominantly white in terms of numbers and proportions of students attending the institution.

In this introductory chapter, I provide an account of how transformation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa has been conceptualised in various key policy documents relating to higher education in the post-apartheid era. I also examine how SU has engaged with and responded to concerns about ‘lack of transformation’, as articulated in documents in which the university indicates what measures it is taking to promote transformation.

Transformation, as conceptualised in these documents, is linked mainly with making the population of students and staff more reflective and representative of the South African population more generally, in terms of numbers and proportions of students and staff, defined according to the apartheid categories of race. I argue in this and later chapters about the importance of taking measures to promote more ‘diverse’ student populations (in terms of these categories) in order to encourage forms of interaction and ‘contact’ between students across lines of race. I voice concerns, however about transformation discourses which focus almost exclusively on ‘improving’ ‘demographic profiles’ of students and staff to the exclusion of the kinds of concerns raised in the Soudien report in 2008, about qualitative experiences of ‘social cohesion’, or inclusion and exclusion in relation to race, class, gender, sexuality and other variables.

In this chapter (and throughout the thesis) I develop and elaborate on understandings of transformation which inform my own research interests, focus and approach which raise questions about quality of relationships and types and levels of ‘contact’ or engagement between students from different and diverse backgrounds, and how ‘diversity’ is experienced, constructed and lived by students and staff in their everyday lives, in various university spaces. In my own research I explore these themes in focus group discussions with students in residences, which, as I discuss in this chapter, hold particular symbolic and material significance at Stellenbosch University.

The role of Higher Education in South Africa

Pre-1994 South Africa was in a state of economic turmoil which significantly influenced the country's change from an apartheid regime to a democratic form of government. The dire economic state was partly caused by the fact that the majority of South Africans were untrained, unskilled and uneducated, as they were disadvantaged on the basis of their skin colour. The pre-1994 years in South Africa were characterised by stark inequalities in the availability of options for different racially classified groups to attend university. Those classified as black, coloured and Indian received substandard primary and secondary education, making it difficult to enter into higher education. These inequalities are shown in the percentage of the 20-24 age group enrolled in higher education in South Africa between 1986 and 1993, with the figures indicating 70% for whites and 12% for black students (those classified using the apartheid categories of African, coloured and Indian) (NCHE, 1996). It therefore became vital for South Africa to restructure the higher education system in order for it to remain viable in a country which needed to find economic and political stability.

HEIs were compelled to help the country overcome the history of racialised development as the transformation of higher education formed part of the broader process of South Africa's political, social and economic transition. This included political democratization, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity (Republic of South Africa, 1997). After 1994, documents began to be formulated which would assist higher education institutions to adequately fulfil their role in the new South Africa. A programme for Higher Education Transformation took shape, and was the result of an extensive process of inquiry and consultation which began with the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in February 1995 by then President Mandela, the Green Paper on Higher Education in 1996, and the Draft White Paper on Higher Education in April 1997.

However, despite these many documents and plans, in 1997 the White Paper on "A programme for the transformation of Higher Education" indicated that access to higher education remained inequitable. Harsh discrepancies remained in the representation of black and female staff compared to that of white and male staff. Furthermore, in terms of resources and facilities, historically black institutions continued to lag behind the historically white institutions. The state of the education system in 1997 was seen as "limited in its ability to meet the moral, political, social and economic demands of the new South Africa" (Republic

of South Africa, 1997: section 1.4). South Africa suffered from a lack of “highly trained graduates in fields such as science, engineering, technology and commerce”, largely due to apartheid practices which diminished black and female students’ access to higher education (Republic of South Africa, 1997: section 1.4). There were duplication in programs offered, and inefficiencies in management structures and administration which hampered the ability of institutions to address the knowledge, human resource, social and economic needs of the country (Republic of South Africa, 1997). All of these have been detrimental to the social and economic development of the country.

Higher education in South Africa therefore, needed to address the inequalities and inefficiencies produced by apartheid which had distorted the development of higher education. Yet, it was tasked with this during a time of neo-liberal, macro-economic state policies, and the constraints of globalisation¹. This meant that higher education institutions had to juggle two roles. One was to produce graduates in a competitive global economy. The second was to produce students who could think critically, serve the public good and contribute to a newly-democratic society (Reddy, 2004:5). In order to do so, there was a recognition that the entire system had to transform dramatically. The White Paper strongly argued that in order to fulfil the requirements of higher education in a new South Africa, the system in its entirety needed to be planned, governed and funded as a single national coordinated system. This would be seen as promoting diversification of the access, curriculum and qualification structure with programmes developed and articulated within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), encouraging an open and flexible system based on credit accumulation and multiple entry and exit points. Effectively, institutional plans and missions would all need to be coordinated in order to achieve the collective goals of higher education in South Africa, which would deal with the problems being experienced in higher education at the time. This would require the help of the Council of Higher Education (CHE) to assess the different needs and weak points of each institution and what would need to be put in place to address these needs. Partly, this implied that the higher education system would broaden its social use in terms of race, class, gender and age. This would apply at all levels of the system, and in all programmes, to respond to the racial and gender composition of the South African population.

¹ Globalisation refers to broad and varied changes in global social, political and economic relations, the information and communications revolution, the growth of transnational scholarly and scientific networks, and the increase in competition in the global economy.

In April 2001, the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) was established in order to advise on the restructuring process of the higher education system in South Africa. The NPHE provides an outline for putting policy proposals laid out in the 1997, *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*, into practice (Asmal, 2002; Republic of South Africa, 1997). Through this plan, all institutions were urged to create a secure and safe campus environment, set standards of expected behaviour, promote a campus environment that is sensitive to racial and cultural diversity through extracurricular activities and scholarly activities and assign competent personnel to monitor progress in the above mentioned areas. It is therefore important that we continue to recognise HEIs as places which have a role and responsibility to facilitate transformation, not only for political and economic needs but to fulfil a social role in society.

In 2008, the then Minister of Education in South Africa, Naledi Pandor, established a ministerial committee which published a report on *Transformation and social cohesion and the elimination of discrimination in public higher education institutions* (Soudien, C., Michaels, W., Mthembu-Mahanyele, S., Nkomo, M., Nyanda, G., Nyoka, N., Seepe, S., Shisana, O. & Villa-Vicencio, C, 2008). This report, commonly referred to as the Soudien report (with reference to the chairperson of the committee Professor Crain Soudien), followed a highly publicised incident at the University of the Free State in which a few young, white, male students were accused of vilifying black workers of the university by making them participate in derogatory acts such as eating food which had been urinated in (Mail & Guardian, 2008; BBC News Africa, 2008). The resultant report emphasised the importance of social cohesion, non-discrimination and transformation, as aspects which should be placed at the forefront of HEIs' policy frameworks and social agendas in South Africa. It also emphasised the important role these institutions play in generating a critical, public understanding of these issues and their solutions.

Over and over again the reports post-1994, pointed to the need for institutions to change their structures and 'institutional cultures'. This push came, in part, from a need to politically and economically stabilise South Africa to compete in a globalised society. This could only happen if the racial injustices of the past were re-dressed in ways which made it possible for a much wider pool of young people to benefit from higher education and contribute to knowledge production of the country. The Soudien report points to the need for specifically white Afrikaans universities to change in terms of their 'institutional culture' understood as taken-for-granted norms, values and social practices which continue, in unacknowledged

ways, which continue to reflect, reinforce and privilege white, middle class students. Such values are made explicit in my own research, as I argue in Chapters 4 and 5 when presenting data, especially from group discussions involving black and coloured students who express concerns about being marginalised in particular residences, in relation to other residences, or in the university more generally. For historically black universities to change, the Soudien Report advocated developing resources through more funding and undergoing mergers with formerly white universities. These proposed changes were motivated not only by concerns with promoting equity in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa, but also with the economic viability more generally of South Africa.

In the twenty-first century, HEIs are obligated to make numerous changes in their recruitment, retention and study programmes. Since the fall of apartheid, they have become a main point of focus in terms of reflecting the demographics of a post-apartheid South Africa and in creating transformative practices in which no individual is marginalised on the basis of race, sex, religion, language and nationality (Soudien, 2010). But, despite this pressure on historically white universities to transform and become more inclusive in terms of the composition of students from different and diverse backgrounds mediated by race, class and gender, studies in formerly white universities have shown that informal segregation continues to inform interactions on university campuses and often forms and impacts on residential practices (Dixon *et al.* 1994; Dixon, Reicher and Foster 1997; Ballard 2004, cited in Steyn & Foster, 2008:26). This occurs even when the numerical demographics of the student populations in institutions are more representative and reflective of the breakdown of the population in South Africa in terms of race, class and religion, as for example in the University of KwaZulu-Natal (see Pattman, 2010).

I want now to focus on Stellenbosch University in the context of post-apartheid pressures to ‘transform’ and how the university has responded to these in official transformation documents.

Diversity at Stellenbosch University

At the time of Stellenbosch University’s establishment, South Africa was under British rule; later after independence, the regime of apartheid took over. Christian National Education (CNE) was the official education policy of the National Party (NP) during the apartheid regime. This policy was informed by the religious element of the NP, namely Christian principles. Article 15 of the CNE policy of 1948 explains the basis of apartheid education:

We believe that the calling and task of White South Africa with regard to the native is to Christianize him and help him on culturally, and that this calling and task has already found its nearer focusing in the principles of trusteeship, no equality and segregation. We believe besides that any system of teaching and education of natives must be based on the same principle. In accordance with these principles we believe that the teaching and education of the native must be grounded in the life and worldview of the Whites most especially those of the Boer nation as senior White trustee of the native...(cited in Msila, 2007: 149).

During apartheid, segregated universities were established and rationalised on the explicit basis of catering exclusively either for those classified as white, or black, coloured and Indian. Under apartheid SU played an important role in exemplifying and supporting a policy of racial discrimination and exclusivity. This was enforced by the *Extension of University Education Act* which made it illegal for “non-white” students to register at formerly open universities (those where black and white students attended the same classes) without written approval from the Minister of Internal Affairs (Union of South Africa, 1959). SU thus operated with minor resistance to the government’s Higher Education policy. These tendencies characterized the institution until the 1990s, during which time it enjoyed a substantial degree of autonomy (Siebritz, 2012:3).

In 2001, the NPHE’s assessment of higher education institutions in South Africa, the University of Cape Town (UCT) and SU (both historically white universities) were grouped together as sustainable institutions in terms of finances, enrolments over various degree programmes, masters and doctoral outputs and as top research institutions in the country. However, they did not meet the criteria for efficiently functioning institutions. The issue to which the NPHE draws our attention is that of transformation. With regards to SU, the report points to the fact that progress in terms of demographic numbers was slow, Afrikaans remained the primary language of instruction at SU and served as a barrier to many African students wanting to enter the university, and staff demographic profiles also remained unequitable (Asmal, 2002:52). The assessment also pointed to the need for both SU and UCT to ensure a change in their institutional cultures in order to provide a welcoming environment for all students to study in and identify with. Furthermore, as a form of reconfiguration, it was recommended that SU should pay particular attention to the enrolment and support of significant numbers of black or African students as well as ‘under-prepared’ and lower class, predominantly Afrikaans-speaking students. As a previous, predominantly white institution, SU needed to comply with laws and legislation to include more learners from previously disadvantaged groups in its student population.

Various strategies have been implemented since 1994 at SU, such as student recruitment initiatives, annual open days, Schimathus programmes (which aim to assist historically disadvantaged students in improving their science and maths marks in order to qualify for certain degree programmes at university level), as well as funding opportunities. Currently, SU has two documents which speak to the goals and direction of transformation and diversity in the university: *Strategic focus of the institutional plan of the university 2012 -2016* (Stellenbosch University, 2012) and *Hoop boekie²: Transforming Stellenbosch University into a national asset and African partner* (The Hope Project, s.a.). It is also currently in the process of constructing a Transformation Plan document which is expected to be realised in 2014/2015.

In the first document, diversity comes to be associated with representivity in terms of the extent to which ‘different’ or ‘diverse’ groups are represented in the university, as measured by the numbers of students and staff in the university from these groups: “the need to diversify both the staff and student corps (race and gender) is a self-evident strategic focus”, and when making reference to student success: “it is extremely important that the gap between the success levels of the respective racial groups should be bridged” (Stellenbosch University, 2012:7). The objectives laid out in this document aim firstly to increase the percentage of coloured, black, and Indian permanent members of staff from 38% to 53%. Secondly, the aim is to increase the percentage of coloured, black and Indian students from 24% to 33%”.

The university also aims to increase the attractiveness of the university as a preferred choice for studies as well as a preferred employer, via the impact of the HOPE Project, as articulated in the second document, the Hope Book which speaks to transformation in Stellenbosch. This explains the HOPE project as one which

...is about doing world-class research on local, regional and African challenges in state-of-the-art facilities with the best expertise available, while providing the best opportunities for learning and the growth of a new generation of thought leaders. Through the HOPE Project, the University supports the international development agenda by focusing some of its key academic and research programmes on, Eradicating poverty and related condition, Promoting human dignity and health, Promoting democracy and human rights, Promoting peace and security, Promoting a sustainable environment and a competitive industry (The Hope Project, s.a.).

² Translated to ‘Hope Book’ in English.

The HOPE project highlights and celebrates certain examples of what it regards as indicators of “achieved diversity” at Stellenbosch. For example, it specifies that in 1990 there were only 762 black students (meaning African, Coloured and Indian), compared to 9278 black students in 2011, which now accounts for 32.9% of student population. An objective was set that by 2015, 34% of students should be black (Hope Book, 2010:3). According to this document, “language [is] no longer a barrier” and “the perception that SU remains largely ‘an Afrikaans university where Afrikaners go’ is no longer accurate. The university has embraced multilingualism the document argues, and asserts that “Walking around campus you are as likely to hear isiXhosa and English as Afrikaans” (Hope Book, 2010:5). However, this is not supported by the statistics of the university, which indicate that the majority of students are still Afrikaans-speaking.

Table 1: Enrolment figures by language

Enrolment figures (1985 -2014) by language							
Year	Afr/Eng	Afrikaans	English	Other Official SA Lang	Unknown	Xhosa	Grand Total
2014	348 (1.3%)	12553 (47.6%)	10448 (39.6%)	1294 (4.9%)	920 (3.5%)	803 (3%)	26366

Most recently, as part of the pursuit of transformation, SU has formulated a residence placement policy, which takes effect in 2015. The focus of this policy is on changing the demographics in student residences in order to “ensure that diversity objectives with respect to Black, Coloured and Indian (BCI) students at undergraduate level can be achieved” (Stellenbosch University, 2013:2). The underlying expectation seems to be that if “diverse” numbers are achieved, “it will contribute positively to the formation of sound, diverse communities that will in turn contribute to optimal growth and development in the out-of-class context and to eventual success (academically and otherwise)” (Stellenbosch University, 2013:2).

Understandings of transformation and diversity which inform my research

Concerns about the racial demographics of the student population in Stellenbosch are important to address and should feature prominently, I suggest, in any transformation plan in a formerly white university like Stellenbosch which, still, twenty years into democracy, has a predominantly white student population (in 2014 65% of the student population was white).

However it is problematic, I argue, simply to render ‘diversity’ a measurable unit, as the Stellenbosch transformation documents tend to do, for the effect of this may be to deflect attention from how diversity is actually practiced and experienced by different and diverse students on campus, and also to project ‘diversity’ onto black and coloured students who become constructed as diverse and measurable Others. Ironically, by constructing ‘diversity’ in this sense this document may, I suggest, contribute to the symbolic construction of whiteness as the norm.

A number of educationalists and academics such as, Vincent (2008), Jansen (2009), and Pattman, (2010), have argued that, while making the university more demographically representative in terms of the race and social class of the student body and staff is a vital component of pursuing transformation, it is limited and problematic if used on its own. Demographic change does not mean that racial polarisation and segregation are not produced through informal processes of racialisation of places and spaces on campus, as I illustrate below by reflecting on my own experiences as a coloured student coming to Stellenbosch University.

Before coming to Stellenbosch as an undergraduate student, I went to a Model C school which was predominantly white in terms of the racial composition of students and staff. My friendship group was largely made up of white students, although I mixed with both the white and coloured learners at the school. My expectations of university was that it would be a more diverse place compared to my high school in terms of race, culture, religion, and language and that I would meet and become friends with people from a much wider range of backgrounds than I was used to in school. However, contrary to this I found when I came to Stellenbosch that my entire friendship group comprised of coloured students. This did not happen gradually over time, but almost instantly in my first few days on campus. I found that the people who approached me and sat close to me in class were coloured students, students whom I had never met before, and I sat in what were seen and known as coloured spaces on campus, in parts the Neelsie³, the student union or in certain social and entertainment spots in the town. I felt more coloured in Stellenbosch than I had in my previous school, not because my skin changed colour, but because something about the context I was in seemed to polarise me into a certain race category. I found that white students did not approach me in the same way coloured students did. There were clear spaces in the university which were symbolically

³ The student centre at SU.

constructed and taken-for-granted as coloured, black and white. It was and still is quite difficult to find many inter-racial groups of friends on campus. While the racial demographics of the student population at Stellenbosch have 'improved' from a 97% white student population in 1985, to 65% in 2014, my experience of university did not allow me to experience diversity.

My experience of 'becoming coloured' at Stellenbosch resonates with published accounts of students' experiences of racial polarisation on coming to the University of KwaZulu-Natal, (UKZN), an institution which has been praised by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Blade Nzimande, as an exemplar of what a transformed institution looks like. In terms of the racial demographics of its student body, UKZN is much more 'representative' of South Africa in general than Stellenbosch University, with 64% of the UKZN student population being black African. Yet, Wesley Oakes' (2007) experience of coming to the university illustrates the limitations of conceptualising 'transformation in a way which equates diversity with representivity defined only in terms of numbers and proportions of students from particular races. Like me, he found when he came to UKZN that the students who approached him were almost exclusively coloured, and for Wesley who moved from Canada to attend UKZN, this was a particularly strange experience, for as a person with a black father and a white mother, he had always identified in Canada as black and African. On arriving as a new student in UKZN, he became constructed as different from black students and was pushed into associating almost exclusively with coloured students. This happened even though he did not identify as a coloured person himself, and in fact desired to be seen as black or African. People did not construct him as coloured in South Africa because his skin changed colour, but rather because the spaces and interactions in which he found himself, regardless of the 'representative' racial demography of students were highly racialised and contributed to the polarisation of students into races defined according to the apartheid categories white, coloured, black and Indian. His experience of becoming coloured at UKZN, despite his (initial) surprise at and opposition to this, demonstrates how salient these categories are in influencing forms of interaction at UKZN, and how problematic it is to reduce students to representatives of apartheid racial categories and 'diversity' to a measurable unit, in ways which ignores diverse students' constructions and experiences of diversity in the university.

Transformation concerns which focus exclusively on achieving 'diversity' by making the student population more 'racially' commensurate with society more generally rely heavily on

arguments posited by *contact theory*. This theory suggests that inter-racial contact promotes integration whereas lack of contact encourages prejudiced thinking and stereotyping. Many institutions striving to become more transformed often resort to this theory to direct their efforts to become more diverse. Stellenbosch University relies on this theory, for example, in the implementation of a residence placement policy to ‘improve’ demographics, and through processes which intentionally place students from different race groups as roommates. Contact theory however, neglects to consider that contact always takes place in a context in which the material reality of race is inscribed in students’ interactions (Vincent, 2008:1430). Therefore contact, such as happens between roommates, may not facilitate cohesion, integration, or friendship in meaningful ways. Critically speaking, integration implies something more than tolerance of those constructed as “Other”. In Pettigrew’s writings (cited in Vincent, 2008:1432), integration is understood as including “acceptance, friendship, equity and equality”.

The end goal of diversity should then not only aim to achieve proportionate numbers of students from different race categories. This understanding of diversity projects it onto only black and coloured students, and begins to construct them as ‘the Diverse Other’, or diversity candidates. As I have illustrated through Oakes’ and my own experiences, groups of students still become informally segregated on the basis of race and class through the practices and discourses of the institution. This is despite demographic changes in racially-mixed universities in South Africa, which have increased the proportions of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, diversity should not be equated with the co-existence of students from different social backgrounds. In fact, my experience (and that of Oakes) shows how co-existence might in fact serve to produce and reproduce racial polarisation. Therefore, in my research I want to engage with students experiences of the university, and with their interactions with each other in focus groups, in order to develop an inductive way in which to think about and conceptualise transformation. It is important to broaden the definition of transformation in ways which raises questions about the quality of relationships and levels of interaction between students from different and diverse backgrounds, rather than simplifying social cohesion to mean co-existence.

The focus on race, is understandable in transformation discourses, given South Africa’s history of racial segregation in higher education and more generally. However, it may also be problematic in deflecting attention from categories such as gender, social class and sexuality and how these may operate in universities and residences as sources of identification and dis-

identification and inclusion and exclusion. The Soudien reports found that sexism, as well as racism, were ‘pervasive’ in higher education institutions in South Africa. My own research on students’ constructions and experiences of residences at Stellenbosch is motivated by concerns with exploring gender as well as race, and how these intersect as possible dimensions of power and inequality in the context of transformation. I argue that it is important to raise concerns in transformation speak about gender inequalities and polarities, and how these are produced and reinforced through cultural practices and students’ everyday experiences at the university.

My research is influenced by theories of identity, upon which I elaborate in the next chapter, which argues that identities, relating to gender or race and/or other variables such as age or class, are not fixed and unitary, nor are they things we have or possess which make us behave in predetermined and homogenous ways, but are always constructed and produced in particular social contexts. People are defined by and construct themselves through multiple identities. Race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and language continually intersect in students’ experiences of inclusion and marginalisation at the university, and it is therefore important, in my view, to focus on how students attach meaning to these various identities, rather than focusing exclusively on one.

When understanding transformation based on students’ experience in my research, I want to pay attention to the ways in which students attach significance to their identities (race and gender), and how this informs their experiences of university and their interactions with each other. However, I want to investigate race in ways which deconstruct the idea that it is a fixed category which people are born with. Again, mine and Oakes’ experiences, shows precisely how race is in fact a fluid category which is something performed, rather than something we have. I do not see race as an essential category, as if it exists biologically outside of how individuals make meaning of it. One of my tasks stems from this understanding of race, as I explore if and how race influences students’ performances of their identity within the research encounter, and how these performances affect students’ narrative accounts of their experiences, and those of others. Furthermore, working on the assumption, that contact is not, on its own, a satisfactory means by which to achieve integration, I interview students in friendship groups. This provides a context in which to examine integration (acceptance, equality and equity) and cohesion, instead of just contact, as I elaborate in Chapter 3.

Why I want to engage with students in residences

The symbolic significance of residences at Stellenbosch

In 1918 the official residences which were established at SU were: Harmonie and Erfurthuis (for women), and Wilgenhof, Te Huis, and Macdonaldhuis (for men) (Thom, 2005:202). Year by year, more residences were added for females and males as student numbers grew, and in 2014 SU now has nine male residences, twelve female residences, and four mixed gender residences⁴ (one of which is reserved only for senior students). Residences were central to student life since its establishment, as is captured in an article written in 1918 by the editor in chief, P.A Weber, of the “*Stellenbosch Student*” (the student newspaper at the time),

The student that makes use of private lodging is only half a student: he does not enjoy the genuine Stellenbosch residence life and it is difficult for him to feel that he is an integral part of the university while he lacks the intimate fellowship with many of his fellow students (Stellenbosch, 2005:206).⁵

This residence centricity continues to operate in Stellenbosch University today. Even though SU residences only accommodate 5300 students out of a total student population of approximately 28156 according to SU census 2013 (Statistical profile, 2013). Residences continue to be perceived by many, as symbolic markers of student-hood at Stellenbosch, reinforced by their visibility among the affluent looking buildings which constitute the centre and hub of university life.

According to Jansen (2004:122), the final bridge to cross in order to achieve social integration at formerly-white higher education institutions in South Africa is to create an inclusive institutional culture, which he describes as, “the way we do things around here”, in which students from diverse backgrounds “feel at home”. It is important to note the impact residences have on student experiences at Stellenbosch University. In many formerly white, Afrikaans universities in South Africa, it is the residences which shapes, informs, and signifies this institutional culture. The fostering of institutional culture and maintenance of residential identity is prevalent in orientation practices and rituals performed by residences throughout the year. As expressed by Weber, students outside of residences (private students)

⁴ This excludes senior residences, residences on satellite campuses and private affiliated residences

⁵ Quote translated from Afrikaans

are only half a student. Many residence students themselves continue to believe that only once you are in residence do you experience the institutional culture in its entirety.

Residences throughout South Africa, including Stellenbosch, attempt to portray a certain institutional identity through symbols, practices and norms. In Afrikaans universities such as Stellenbosch, it is often the case that white, Afrikaans students have preconceived ideas of what residence and university life should be as they are often not the first generation in their family to attend the university. There is an entrenched idea of what the institutional culture is at a particular university as “they are surrounded with stories of pride and purpose, with inclusion and initiation, culture and community, lasting friendships and marriage within a mono-cultural environment” (Jansen, 2004:120). These sentiments and investments in residence life were conveyed in a convocation meeting at Stellenbosch University held in 2013, in response to the new residence placement policy which fought to establish race quotas in residences in order to promote a more diverse student body. Particular student leaders of certain residences opposed the placement policy on the basis of wanting to protect their institutional culture from the intrusion of “the Other”. “The Other” was clearly the, black and coloured students who would not be coming to residence in order to celebrate and continue the tradition and heritage of the residences, but rather who would be treating it as a place to stay. The hostile reaction created by a revised residence placement policy strongly demonstrates the resident centricity of Stellenbosch University and of students’ investments in “the Stellenbosch life”. Residences thus become important carriers of institutional culture. Residences serve as a prime, concentrated area in which symbols, practices, and values can create both inclusive and discriminatory institutional cultures.

As mentioned previously, SU has formulated a new residence placement policy which aims to increase the numbers of previously disadvantaged groups of students (namely, black, coloured and Indian students) into residences. However, this again does not address the already determined institutional culture of the university which excludes so many students coming in. The Soudien report argues briefly that the pressure to “fit-in” is common where the culture of a group is already determined which is why some students may find it harder to integrate in these groups, and why discrimination may occur. The institutional culture of SU is still largely unchanged culture reflected in the, language, symbols, sport, choir, festivals, activities and music based upon Afrikaner/European culture. Without being informed by student experiences of residence life and without paying particular attention to creating a

student, and therefore residence, culture which does not marginalize certain social groups, it will not lead to a notion of diversity which goes beyond demographics.

Becoming a member of a residence at Stellenbosch

Students need to apply for residence accommodation the year before they plan on staying in the residence. On this application, students are able to indicate their preferred residence, although their choices are never guaranteed. However, becoming a member of a residence in Stellenbosch is more than a formal procedure of filling out paperwork, but involves learning to place oneself in a hierarchy and learning to accept and enact the norms and values which come to be associated with the idea of a community to which the new men and women are expected to defer.

Every residence at Stellenbosch University operates according to a system of hierarchies. In each residence the students are placed under the supervision of a warden, more commonly referred to by students as the Huis Moeder (House Mother) or Huis Vader (House Father). These are usually lecturers, staff or alumni of the university who stay in the residence or next to the residence and who act as the protectors and enforcers of rules in the residence. Often they are the overseers of the residence life and sometimes act as confidants to the residents. Below them on the hierarchical ladder are the students leaders, commonly referred to as HK, which stands for “Huis Komitee” or House Committee. These are senior students who see to the overall functioning of the residence. They organise the welcoming week for students, are rule makers and enforcers, and are generally in control of all events and happenings taking place in the residence. Each member of the HK has a different portfolio/s of which they are in charge, examples of which are; first years, second years, social, diversity, culture, sports, media and communication, academics, and finances. These portfolios vary from residence to residence. The residence then has mentors, usually second or third year students, who operate as academic and general guides for the first year students. Second and first year committees also operate within various residences and see to the duties of these groups of students as well as their events and sports. Furthermore, various sub-committees work with those in leadership roles to ensure the success of social, academic, sport and community initiatives, and events in the residence.

The residences in my research

The three residences in which I conducted focus group discussions with students about their lives and identities, and views and experiences of the university and residences were

Blouberg (a single-sex female residence), Drakenstein (a single-sex male residence), and Outeniqua (a mixed gender residence).

Residences as I discovered in my research are constructed in very particular ways. Each residence is attributed with characteristics and personality traits, as though it were an individual person. This allowed students to speak about the “party-girl residence”, “the rugby jock residence”, “the poppie (or doll) residence”. These were very particular attributes attributed to other residences, which was used to lump all members of those institutions into the same category.

Drakenstein is one of the oldest residences on campus and a lot of emphasis is placed on unity in the residence. According to their website, even the architectural structure of the building was designed to increase unity, with a large central quad allocated for getting together, a centrally located recreational hall and a veranda for every section (or corridor) to be used for getting together. Drakenstein students pride themselves on their academic success, as well as their sporting abilities. There is a strong emphasis placed on succeeding in sports especially rugby and hockey. The residence houses in total 287 students, 81% of which are white, 14% coloured, and 5% black (Institutional Information, 2014). One interesting thing about this residence is that on its website it provides you with the room layout of the residence and the pictures and names of the student/s who occupy that room. By going through these pictures, I established that of the 144 rooms seen on the diagram only 9 of those rooms contains students sharing inter-racially. This gives some idea of the type of racial mixing which goes on in the residence.

Blouberg, houses 189 students in total, making it a much smaller institution than the other two residences. Of this total, 73% of students at Blouberg are white, 15% coloured, and 12% black (Institutional Information, 2014). According to the student leaders in the residence, a total of 31 of the rooms have roommates who share inter-racially. This is a lot more than seems to be happening at Drakenstein, and the placement of roommates seems to be quite an intentional way of bringing about some sort of ‘diversity’ by the residence. Blouberg is generally known as the ‘ladies’ of SU campus and it is an identity which is strongly advocated on their website and through their values.

Outeniqua was the newest residence out of the three, and was only opened in 2006. It is one of the larger residences on campus, housing a total of 508 residents. Built as a mixed-gender residence, it is unlike most other residences at Stellenbosch. Outeniqua is perceived largely as

a residence aiming to promote ‘diversity’. In their values they stress that they do not strive towards a standard, but rather acceptance and unity through the acceptance of differences. About 50 rooms are allocated to international students and are housed in Outeniqua because of its reputation and its aim to be a diverse student residence. This residence was the first built in Stellenbosch as part of a conscious effort to be more modern and liberal, as a residence without traditions which would accommodate and facilitate a more diverse student population. This is partly reflected in their demographic statistics as displayed in the table below (Institutional Information, 2014).

Table 2: Outeniqua population figures by race and gender

Gender (total number)	White (%)	Coloured (%)	Black (%)	Indian (%)
Female (283)	96 (34%)	111 (39%)	65 (23%)	11 (4%)
Male (225)	127 (56%)	65 (29%)	25 (11%)	8 (4%)
Total (508)	223 (44%)	176 (35%)	90 (18%)	19 (4%)

Through comparing Outeniqua’s statistics to Blouberg and Drakenstein, we can see that single sex residences are dominated by white students and are symbolic bastions of white privilege at SU. What is interesting in my research is how these statistics influence students’ ideas about what Stellenbosch and residence life currently means, and how diversity and transformation is experienced as the residence placement policy aims to change these statistics.

Research questions

The key research questions highlighted below stems from wanting to explore the significance which people themselves attach to their identifications and how these connect with their experiences of the university and residence. These questions are also largely aimed at exploring the ways in which participants perform their identities within the focus group discussions, and how these performances highlight the meanings student attach to various identities. Through these broad questions I aimed to do inductive research, in which understandings of transformation and diversity derived from conversational type discussions (see Chapter 3) I had with students about their views and experiences of university and residence life.

- How do different and diverse students (in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class and other social identifications) present themselves, perform and interact in focus group discussions in friendship groups in particular residences?
- In participants accounts of their lives in residences and in the university more generally, do they express feelings of belonging and/or marginalisation? If so what forms do these take, how do they emerge in the focus group discussion and is there any relationship between the social backgrounds of the students and their articulations of these?
- What institutional practices, if any, do students associate with being members of particular residences and how do they experience and construct these?
- What significance, if any, do these students attach to gender, race, sexuality, class and other social identifications, as intersecting sources of identification and dimensions of power?
 - How do any of these emerge in the process of the different focus group discussions with different participants (marked by race and gender) in different residences?

Research questions and my approach

In my research I am particularly interested in seeing focus group discussions as ethnographic encounters. This means that I am not only interested in finding out what people say, but also how they say it, and how they interact with each other and myself within the focus group discussion. I pay attention to how themes such as race and gender emerge, not out of specific questions aimed at race or gender, but rather in the process of conversation with the group. I am therefore interested in looking at how people present themselves and relate to each other, and me, in the focus group. My approach to my research and my research questions are therefore linked, as they are about tapping into people's investments and their meaning-making about their identities, and connecting this with their narrative accounts of the university and its residences.

Chapter outline

Chapter two provides a theoretical framework from which to view the concept of identity in this study. It provides a lens through which to view the problem of identity, and doing research on identity.

Chapter three sets out the research methodology and a rationale for using exploratory, ethnographic-type, focus group sessions. In this chapter I theorize around using a type of

reflexive, open-ended interview method which is treated as a social encounter in itself rather than just an instrument for eliciting information. I also speak about the importance of this type of methodology, specifically in friendship groups when investigating issues around diversity and transformation.

In chapter four I discuss three of the interviews in detail by presenting summaries of each and then discussing how and why certain topics arose in these three interviews. In chapter five, I go on to discuss a key theme, skakeling which emerged and was discussed in emotionally engaged ways in all five interviews I conducted, and how and why they emerged differently or similarly in different interviews.

Finally, in chapter six I draw attention to the implications my research has for the ways in which research on transformation is done, the implications of my research in terms of a critical appraisal of race, diversity and integration at Stellenbosch University, and finally the implications that presenting and encountering my research has had, and might have on students, staff, and researchers.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In order to do work on race, gender and sexuality it is important to engage with theories around the concepts of identity and identification. Below, I map out how I have drawn on theories of identity to conceptualise race and gender, based on Foucauldian understandings of these concepts, as used in the work of social constructionists and post-structuralist feminists such as Erving Goffman, Stuart Hall and Judith Butler. These theories deconstruct concepts which are often expressed as fundamental yet taken for granted such as the very concept of ‘identity’. Drawing on Hall and others, I argue for, and question the importance of thinking about identity not as something essential and fixed, but as fluid, performative, and contextual. I critique the common idea that individuals have one core identity, based on one social identification such as race, and argue that various identities intersect at different moments in time depending on the social context and power relations at play in that moment. These insights inform my own research, and are exemplified in the methodological approaches I take, and in my analytic focus on the research process in the focus group discussions I conduct with students in residences at Stellenbosch. I elaborate on this in the next chapter, which focuses on methodology.

Identity

Identity, Stuart Hall (2000) argues, must be recognised as a concept which operates “under erasure”. According to Hall, there is a general understanding (although not complete consensus) that identifications such as race, gender and sexuality can no longer be understood as essential. Identity needs to be considered, not as something which people *have* which make them behave in preordained ways but as a verb, and as something which people *do*, construct and perform. However, Hall also argues, that the concept of identity cannot be erased all-together or wished away as without it, key questions around how people experience and make sense of themselves in various contexts cannot be thought through (Hall, 2000).

Influenced by Hall, I try to engage with and explore the significance and meanings which my participants attach to gender and race and other variables as sources of identification and dimensions of power and inequality, rather than taking these as essential qualities which inhere in individuals. This means that I try not to start by asking particular questions of my participants about race and gender in the focus group discussions I conduct with them, but trace whether and if so how these categories are raised and invoked by my participants themselves, and if so how and in what context. Although I do operate with categories of

identities such as race and gender, I do not treat these categories (practically in my methodology and analysis) as fixed and essential but rather, by drawing on social constructionist ideas, I consider identities not as fixed essences but as constructed through discourse and performed by individuals.

Hall and du Gay (1996) argue for the use of the term ‘identification’, rather than ‘identity’, as the term better describes identity construction as an ongoing process produced through specific discourses and performances. Erving Goffman (1959), as well as Judith Butler (1990), argues that identifications are performative. Goffman (1959) uses the stage as a metaphor for the social world. Individuals are likened to actors on the stage that put on performances which will satisfy the audiences watching. The audience of a play is used as a metaphor for the people with whom we interact with. As the audience changes, individuals’ identity performances also change, depending on what is considered appropriate in a specific context. Identifications such as race and gender are not constructed out of nothing, but rather are constructed and performed within contextual constraints, and in conditions beyond the control of individuals, such as the material and symbolic resources which shape, sustain and unmake identities.

Butler (1990) argues that gender is something we do, and which we construct relationally, rather than something we are born with or which we inherently have. In addition, she argues that it is only because these performances are continually repeated that women and men are perceived to behave in biologically predetermined ways. Race and gender are “fictions” which are given substance through the repeated racialised and gendered performances of everyday activity and talk (Nayak, 2006:416). In this way, identity can be seen as a construction, something which is continually being made and remade, but which never results in one final, static identity (Hall, 2000:16).

Identities are also relational products. By this, it is meant that identities can only exist in relation to what they are not (Derrida, 1981; Laclau, 1990; Butler, 1993, cited in Hall, 2000: 18). Racial identities become constructed through the classification of “the Other”, as other racial groups become perceived as different to oneself (Pattman, 2010:956). Similarly, gender becomes defined in contradiction to a (real or imagined) version of the gender other to your own, i.e. femininity or masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Racial and gendered identities are produced in relation to “the Other”, which becomes the vessel that encompasses any anxieties and desires which can be projected onto “the Other” (Pattman & Bhana,

2009:23). Some researchers investigating how students construct and experience their lives and identities in mixed educational institutions in South Africa have suggested that processes of “Othering” in relation to race may become natural and habitual, with students automatically and unconsciously assigning themselves to one racial group, and differentiating themselves from those that they define as “Others” (Pattman, 2010:956). Identifications are therefore made and remade and given meaning through the language used to construct identity and to perform it (Hall, 1997). Language produces identities. However, it is only through interaction with others that these meanings come to be known and understood by the individual.

Language is also central to a social-constructionist understanding of identity as a non-essentialist concept. Language is not simply an instrument people use to describe a reality ‘out there’, but a social medium through which they construct social realities. At the same time, it is important to realise that, although identifications are products of language, agency still operates in the construction of identity, as individuals also have deep emotional investments in their identity performances. People are not merely products of language, but also take an active role in choosing which performances of their identity they will invest in, in the different contexts in which they find themselves. This means that identity, although limited to some degree by the constraints of the material and cultural contexts, and by the language available at the time, is still something people invest in, and can still be actively remade at different moments by the individual (Butler, 1993:2, cited in Hall, 2000). It is through performance that the individual demonstrates the material constraints which ascribe certain performances. At the same time, the individual shows agency through deciding which performance to invest in. In my research it was therefore important for me to pay special attention to the contexts within which people are constructing their identities.

Such understandings about agency and the limitations of agency influence the ways I conduct my research and my interactions with student participants in the residences in my research. I elaborate in the next chapter about how I try to engage with the agency of my research participants through the kinds of questions I pose which put the onus on them to set the agenda in focus group discussions and encourage them to reflect on the themes and issues they raise and invoke. My analytic focus is both on how participants produce themselves, or construct their identities through the ways they talk about themselves and others in the context of the focus group interview, as well as how they are produced through discourses

about, for example, gender, race, culture, tradition and transformation which are available to them.

Race

In my research I use racial categories to make sense of my data. However, rather than using them as a descriptive tool in which to categorise people with different skin tones, I view them as relational social constructions that stem from colonialism and apartheid (Omi & Winant, 1994; Machery & Faucher, 2005). In South Africa, the colonial rule in the Cape was constructed on the notion that Europeans were biologically and socially superior in comparison to indigenous people. The notion of white supremacy became legalised and institutionalised in apartheid, supported by eugenics, religion and the ideologies of the time (Naicker, 2012). People in South Africa were put into racial categories and treated with more or fewer rights and privileges depending on which category a person was classified as, with those classified as white benefiting most from this system. Even though racial segregation and classification is no longer legalised in South Africa, the legacy of apartheid has resonated in the generally-accepted idea that society consists of four distinctly, separate racial categories, namely white, coloured, Indian and African or black (Posel, 2001:51). These categories continue to operate and influence how society is structured how people relate to each other and how people construct and identify themselves. There is nothing which naturally makes black, coloured, white, female or male individuals act in certain ways; rather there are certain performances of whiteness or male-ness which become accepted as the norm. These are partly made and performed through language, but only makes sense in relation to features which are seen as Other. Identities, as Pattman and Bhana (2009) argue, are not only constructed in relation to the Other, but at the same time produce the Other through the projections of anxieties and/or desires.

There is an element of racialization which happens in the historical context in which we find ourselves in South Africa. By this, I mean that through certain material realities such as the socio-economic differences which have become racialised, certain racial identities are ascribed to certain people through discourse, through practices, and through space (Fassin, 2011). However, as Fields (1990:11) argues, “it is incorrect to define any people as the product of state action and ideology”, as such thinking reduces individuals to passive victims of state domination. Therefore, it is not appropriate to say that the legacy of apartheid is solely responsible for how race operates in South Africa today. It is important to recognize

the deep emotional investments which people have attached to these categories and how they continue to invest in maintaining and remaking these racial categories in everyday interactions and experiences (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Erasmus, 2012). I therefore want to recognise race in my study as something which has not simply been passed down by a previous regime, but which is established through what is done and performed. Race remains a key form of identification, inequality and marginalisation and it is not something which can simply be wished away.

Sex and gender

In the same way that race can be theorised as a historically and culturally constructed concept, so can gender and sex. Certain versions of feminism which draw on forms social learning theories, have constructed sex as biological, partly because, men and women seem to have corresponding parts which “naturally” fit together (Butler, 1990; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998:191). It is therefore our tendency to think of sex as something which comes about in an instinctive way and therefore does not need to be mulled over. Butler (1990) argues, that the concept of sex which is a social construction, is erroneously taken for objective categories and descriptions. However, gender and sex cannot be understood as unrelated, concepts. Indeed sex, according to Butler (1990) is an important social medium through which gender identifications and performances are constantly made and expressed. We cannot investigate gender without investigating sexuality, and vice versa. I am interested in exploring constructions of relations between males and females in the focus group discussions I conduct, and whether these come to be sexualised, and if so, how this impacts on the ways males and females relate to and talk about the gendered Other. I explore people’s investments in being male and female by paying attention to the ways these categories are invoked by participants in my research as relational identities. I also focus on how these are created through discourse, and informed by everyday material and symbolic gendered experiences in a particular focus group discussion with a self-selected friendship group in a particular kind of residence in present-day Stellenbosch.

In thinking through and engaging with the gendered performances of my participants in the focus group discussions I am influenced by feminist writers for example, Holland *et al.* (1998:171) who draw attention to gender power dynamics and how gender power may be inscribed and asserted or undermined through the assertion of certain kinds of gendered and sexual norms, through particular kinds of gendered performances.

Some feminist writers, such as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), have argued, that certain versions of masculinity which construct men and women as opposites in relation to key social cultural themes and practices such as sport, work, hetero-sexuality and care have become ‘hegemonic’ in patriarchal institutions and societies. In these versions of masculinity men are constructed as emotionally and physically strong and as possessors of powerful sex drives, and women, in comparison, as emotionally and physically weak and as preoccupied with romance and ‘holding on’ to men.

In my research I use feminist and social constructionist theories of gender and sexuality as a base from which to investigate the ways that different groups of students, within single-sex and mixed-sex focus groups, relate to each other (and to me). I further want to understand how the gender dynamics within the various groups influence how the groups make sense of their experiences and identity performances, how they attach meaning to their masculinity and femininity in various contexts, and how their performances of gender give concrete evidence to understandings of social cohesion and diversity.

Multiple and intersecting identifications

Based on the understanding that identifications are fluid concepts, it must be acknowledged that these present differently when they intersect with other social identities such as race, class, ethnicity and sexuality (Butler, 1990). There has been a trend in feminist research and theory, in last 20 to 30 years to address intersectionality, on the basis that gender identities for instance, cannot be fully understood if analyzed in isolation from identities such as, ethnicity, sexuality and class (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000; Frosh *et al.*, 2002). Likewise, Hall & du Gay (1996) argue that current understandings of identities should account for the historically-specific context and the changes that take place in societies, as this subverts simplistic and unidirectional notions of identification.

In my research I recognise the multiplicity and intersectionality of peoples’ identities. Intersectionality is an integral feature of this research as gender or race cannot be considered in isolation as identifications. As Butler (1990:3) states,

if one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities”. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.

Multiracial and black feminist theories especially give focus to the matter of intersectionality in their research. Their central position for doing so is that all individuals have multiple social states, and there is no one true core identity which is always at play in one's experiences. Rather, multiple statuses work together to shape different experiences of oppression and opportunity in people's lives (Zinn & Dill, 1996, cited in Harnois & Ifatunji, 2011:1008). Therefore, by considering various identifications which intersect, we can consider the historically-specific context in which meaning is being made in everyday interactions and in research encounters.

I therefore want to consider the intersections of race, sex, class, gender and other forms of social identification in my understanding of people's constructions of their experiences and how they make sense of the world around them. I want to do this in a way which acknowledges how they interact within the world and how they use their agency to influence that world within the historically-contextual constraints of the society they find themselves in.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter I briefly map the practicalities of how I went about conducting my research. I then devote the rest of the chapter to discussing how the feminist and social constructionist theories of identity, as discussed in Chapter 2, influence how I thought about and designed my research, how I understood my interactions with my participants, and how it influenced the way in which I analysed and discuss my interviews with participants. Furthermore, I will address ethical concerns in some detail in this section, and the implications my methodology has on the way I think about ethics. Lastly, I will discuss the limitations of my research methods, and importantly how these limitations present a need to conduct more in-depth, exploratory research around issues of transformation. In my view, methodology cannot be divorced from theory, nor from the discussion of my findings. Indeed, methodological issues and notably my engagement with the dynamics of the research encounters feature strongly in the next chapters on the presentation and analysis of my findings.

Organising focus groups

In my research, I conducted five focus groups in three residences at Stellenbosch University. Two focus groups discussions were conducted at Outeniqua (a mixed-gender residence), two at Blouberg (an all-female residence), and one at Drakenstein (an all-male residence). I requested permission, via e-mail, from all the residences at SU (through their student leadership) to conduct focus groups with some of their first year residents. Only four residences responded. One male residence, which had previously been in the local news apologising for their residence's role in apartheid, verbally stated that they could not agree to take part in the study as they were concerned with what I would say concerning the residence's image. Via e-mail, they responded that they could not agree, due to the workload that their first year students were experiencing at the time, and due to a transition of leadership taking place in the residence. They informed me that it would be difficult for them to help me to meet with first years. Outeniqua and Drakenstein agreed to take part in my study through a response to my e-mail.

The three residence leaders and I then sent out e-mails requesting first year volunteers from the residence who would participate in the study. Residences went about this in different ways. Outeniqua and Blouberg contacted their first year leaders, who then recruited others and their friendship groups to participate. Drakenstein allowed me to visit the residence and

make a short announcement in their dining hall, and volunteers were then allowed to approach me.

Volunteers who participated in my study were asked to invite their friends (no more than six), who were also in first year and in the same residence as themselves, to participate in a focus group discussion with me. I met all focus groups at their particular residence, out of convenience and to meet them in an environment in which they were comfortable. I brought pizza and cold drinks to create a relaxed environment. I then sat down with each focus group and facilitated discussion about their experience of first year.

Understanding the methodology as a research encounter

Participatory research through the interview approach

For this study, I adopted an in-depth qualitative, participatory research strategy. The theoretical framework, as mapped in Chapter 2, particularly influenced the ways in which I thought about my research encounters and my participants. All focus group discussions began with brief introductions. This was followed by conversations I facilitated with participants on broad themes relating to: their reasons for coming to Stellenbosch, and their interests, aspirations, motivations, identifications, and dis-identifications as particular students in particular residences in Stellenbosch. The broad questions which framed my interviews were: How did you become friends? Why did you come to Stellenbosch? Why did you come to this residence? What kind of people come to this residence? What do you like or not like about your residence? How did you experience this interview?

I adopted a participatory, exploratory approach towards conducting my focus group discussions. I did this by picking up on issues and topics which the students themselves raised in the interview, in response to the broad questions outlined above. I followed up on what they were raising in non-judgemental ways and as an interested outsider. This facilitated relationships with the participants which brought about rich and interesting conversations about the students' thoughts and experiences which are often taken for granted. The participants were encouraged to talk about their experiences of Stellenbosch and their residences in terms of what they viewed as being significant to them. I did not ask participants questions which were directly framed around gender and race. As Erwin (2012) argues, participants are more likely to monitor their responses when they are directly questioned about race. Furthermore, by asking questions directly concerning race (or gender),

participants may be encouraged to think about and construct race (and gender) as an essential quality which explains how and why they think and behave in the ways they do. This may then reify (and reproduce) race leading to racialised and gendered thinking. Broader questions, Erwin argues, also allow for richer empirical data to emerge, as it opened up the possibility of exploring the interconnections between race and various social identifications such as gender, religion, sexuality and ethnicity.

Through framing my interviews using broad questions, I was able to avoid reifying essential identity categories, and was able to more richly research the complexity of fluid, multiple and intersecting identities (as theorised by Butler (1990), Hall (2000), and Pattman (2010)). Also, drawing on the idea that identity is a verb (something people do) I engaged with how people negotiate their identities in the focus group discussion by paying attention to which discourses students drew on to explain themselves and their experiences. Although I avoided asking direct questions about race, gender and other social identifications, it was equally important for me to pick up, as a researcher, on the significance which respondents attached to race and gender as a source of identification and as a dimension of power and inequality, and to pursue this with them. Through this method of interviewing and facilitating conversation, I treated participants as the experts and authorities about their own lives. This participatory form of research makes the students (and their lives, interests, identifications and relations and the ways they conceptualise these) the key research topic (Pattman, In press), which also allowed me to explore issues which emerged out of the group itself in ways which I had not anticipated. Furthermore, this interviewing style allowed me to take seriously the contextual constraints, as well as agency, which students used to make sense of their social worlds. By engaging with them as authorities about their lives and identifications as particular kinds of students at Stellenbosch, and posing questions which encouraged them to reflect on these, I argue, in Chapter 6, that the kind of research I am doing can itself become a model of good pedagogic practice. This research may encourage students to become co-constructors in developing ideas of diversity in very concrete ways, and in this way promote social change, facilitated by the students' agency.

Understanding the focus group as an ethnographic encounter

As already outlined, theories of social constructionism and ideas around the performativity of identities carry implications for thinking about how interviews can be seen as social encounters. In Chapter 2, I explained Goffman (1959), Butler (1990), and Hall (2000) argue that identities are constructed through performances, and these performances are dependent

on the context in which people find themselves. Furthermore, as Butler argues, these identities are not essential or natural, but rather are performances which become naturalised due to repetition.

In this chapter I draw on Pattman (in press) who makes the case for addressing participatory interviews and focus group discussions as social encounters and social contexts which frame how people present themselves, perform and relate to other participants. This way of conceptualising focus group discussions and interviews is very much at odds with popular and text book understandings of qualitative and quantitative interviews as instruments for eliciting information from interviewees about their social worlds outside the interview. Rather than being preoccupied only with this, I focused on: the relational dynamics of the focus group discussions and how concepts and themes emerged and were invoked in the process of the research, the topics which they seemed invested in talking about in relation to their experiences of university and residence life, disagreements and consensus within the group, and the similarities and differences between various groups. The focus groups discussions became, for me, ethnographic encounters in which I listened not only to what the participants said but, in a more holistic way, to how they said it, the emotions they expressed, identifications they made, and the relations they established in the focus group discussions.

In conceptualising my focus group discussions as social encounters and social contexts, I draw on feminist critiques, such as Ann Oakley's (1981) of popular understandings of 'objectivity' in research. In this, Oakley reflects on her experiences conducting interview research in England with women in a labour ward who were about to become first-time mothers. The women Oakley interviewed were initially anxious, and did not easily respond to her questioning. Oakley was older than those she interviewed, and as the women discovered, a mother herself. In the interviews, unanticipated by Oakley, the women began to ask Oakley about her own experience of motherhood. As a researcher, she was hesitant to engage with her own experience when talking to the women, as she originally just wanted to elicit information from them. However, she found that, as she began to share her own experience, she began to develop a relationship with these women, and they began to open up more about their anxieties and perceptions about becoming mothers. This information could never have been gained if Oakley had remained detached from the people she was interviewing in the quest to ensure 'objectivity'. Oakley's experience illustrates that interviews and group discussions cannot be thought of only as tools for eliciting information, and the importance of playing close attention to the interview context and the relational

dynamics. When presenting and analysing interview data. I try to put this into practice in Chapters 4 and 5.

These theories also serve to highlight the relevance of the researchers own social identifications (such as race, sexuality, class, age and gender) to the relations made with participants in research encounters, as well as to the way the data is interpreted (Roberts, 1981; Bowles & Klein, 1983; Stacey, 1988; Neilsen, 1990; Fine, 1992; Wolf, 1996, Arendell, 1997; Russel Rodriguez, 1998; DeVault, 1999; Long, 1999; cited in Best, 2003:896). Through drawing on these theories, it is important to acknowledge that myself as researcher, and the participants as researched, were constructing meanings, and together we constitutively attached meaning and made sense of symbols, practices and discourses (Best, 2003:896). The relationship I established with participants was therefore an important part of collecting data, and indeed constitutes data in itself. In the discussion of my findings in the chapter to follow, I reflect upon my experiences of the research encounter, as a source of data to understanding how students construct their identities.

Building on research methods used in previous research

There are strong parallels, in my view, between the methodological approach that I use, and the research which informed the Ministerial report of 2008 on “transformation and social cohesion and the elimination of discrimination in public higher education institutions” (Soudien *et. al.*, 2008). This research critically engaged with various higher education institutions around South Africa in order to explore the current state of discrimination, specifically focusing on issues surrounding race in order to promote social cohesion and fight discrimination in these institutions. The research was interview-based and was concerned with raising questions of marginalisation and cohesion in relation to race, as well as gender and other variables. I am interested in exploring similar issues through my research but with a particular focus not just on what diverse students say in the discussions, but also how students perform their identities within the focus group context, and how they draw on these identifications to make sense of their experiences of the residence and the university.

Making use of friendship groups in focus group discussions

Janet Smithson (2000), makes the argument that the focus group aims to create a sense of identity beyond the number of individuals who constitute the group. Focus groups need to be treated as a unit in itself. In order to do that, the role of researcher should be to facilitate discussions, while the people in the group act as catalysts and spark off conversation from

each other. In the previous section I demonstrated how I did this by asking broad questions and picking up on themes and issues students themselves raised in the group discussion. This then makes it a group discussion. This should happen in focus groups, regardless of whether there is friendship or not. The reason for choosing friendships groups to participate in my study was because I was interested in not only posing questions in these groups about how friendships and relations with other students came about and were sustained at the university, but also to observe how these relations were performed and played out in the process of the discussion. I was interested to find out if there was a group identity, what identifications the group made to create the sense of identity and how it presented itself within the process of the focus group discussion. I was particularly interested in whether a sense of belonging was facilitated across lines of race and gender, and if it did, how this happened. I was also interested in conflicts and disagreements between participants in the focus and how these emerged and the forms these took.

Another reason for choosing friendship groups to participate in my study was due to my concern not to reproduce the stagnant race categories which I seek to dismantle and understand. Previous research suggests that the use of mono-racial and mixed race groups stimulates different dynamics within groups which become useful to understand how multiple identities become constructed. This was illustrated by a study about HIV/AIDS education in schools in Southern Africa, conducted by Pattman and Chege (2003), in which they interviewed black females and males in single-sex groups. They found that in these single-sex groups, females felt more at ease to express their desires and concerns without being labelled in derogatory, sexualised ways. Although this picks up on the importance of how people present their identities in different contexts, it is also problematic, as it may reinforce the assumption that male and female are essentially different categories, which can explain people's behaviours and opinions. I therefore, asked volunteers in each residence to invite their friendship group in their residence to a focus group discussion. This was a new way of setting up focus groups which still allowed me to explore the dynamics of different groups, but in ways which did not rely on my presumptions about peoples' identities to categorise them into groups.

Below I give details of the participants in the various focus groups and the residences in which they lived.

Table 3: Focus group participants

Residence	Pseudonym	Gender	Race/Ethnicity/term they used to identify themselves	Place of residence before SU
Blouberg 1	Nadia	Female	White	Pretoria
	Lizhan	Female	White	Somerset West
	Karli	Female	White	Somerset West
Blouberg 2	Kelsey	Female	White	Johannesburg
	Asie	Female	Black	Limpopo
	Sam	Female	Coloured	Bellville
Drakenstein 1	Elton	Male	Coloured	Mitchells Plain
	Wayne	Male	Coloured	Oudtshoorn
	Cole	Male	White	Pretoria
	Ian	Male	White	Pretoria
	Lee	Male	White	Bonnievale
Outeniqua 1	Erin	Female	Korean	Cape Town
	Cameron	Male	Coloured	Cape Town
	Anele	Male	Black	Johannesburg
	Bianca	Female	Black	Namibia
	Stacey	Female	Black	East London
	Maxine	Female	Black	East London
Outeniqua 2	Tasneem	Female	Muslim ⁶	Zimbabwe
	Lauren	Female	Mixed race/Other	East London
	Andre	Male	Black	Zimbabwe
	Robyn	Female	White	Cape Town

As we can see by the multi-racial composition of some of the friendship groups, it is clear that some inter-racial mixing is going on in all residences. However, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, by observing the dynamics of the groups themselves and through drawing on the experiences of students as they construct them, I am able to expand understandings of social cohesion and diversity in very concrete ways. By doing research on friendship groups combined with my view of the interview as an ethnographic encounter, I was able to get a look at what kinds of relationships are possible in a context such as residences at Stellenbosch University, and also how these friendships are constructed by different students.

Data recording and analysis

All focus groups were audio recorded with the permission of participants. I also informed participants that I would be taking notes, as well as drawing a diagram of the focus group set-up. This made it easier to reflect on the dynamics of the group during analysis. I transcribed one focus group myself, and the other four were then transcribed by an external party, who

⁶ Although Muslim is used to refer to followers of the Islamic religion, Tasneem used Muslim to describe herself when explaining why it would be difficult for her to date across racial lines.

was paid a fee. Transcriptions included not only what was said, but pauses, laughter, mumbles, hesitations and the acknowledgement of inaudible moments of dialogue. I then conducted intensive line-by-line analysis of each interview. Some interviews I analysed by myself, while others were done along with my supervisor as well as other postgraduate students who form part of a research study group. Collective analysis was done through me reading out the transcripts, and with others stopping me to give comment on certain issues. Doing analysis as a collective assisted me in seeing the data from an outsider's perspective, it challenged me to not take things for granted, and it helped to engage with the transcripts in ways which I had not thought of before.

I then grouped the analysis into various broad categories. These categories are thematic, but I do not extract these themes from the context. When people talk about context in qualitative research, they usually mean the historical and material context which structures and helps to make sense of everyday forms of social interaction. For example, we cannot understand the significance of terms like black, white and coloured without also understanding the history of race in South Africa and the contemporary racialisation of spaces. But I want to argue that we need to add to this rich contextual mix by situating what people say in the context of the interview itself and addressing how certain themes emerge, what emotions these produce, and how participants were constructing their own identifications and choices.

I also draw from grounded theory in the way I analysed my data as grounded theorists advocate the development of theory from interaction with the research participants (Charmaz, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In my research I aim to understand the meanings participants attach to their constructions of their experiences at Stellenbosch University, through in-depth line by line, narrative analysis. I try to understand how they are symbolically constructing themselves through their identifications. In regarding the focus group discussion as a social encounter, language becomes understood not only as a descriptive tool, but something which works to produce realities (as Hall understands language, as I described in Chapter 2). In other words, experiences are always shaped and reconciled by people's narrative accounts of these (Riessman, 1993, cited in Pattman, In press). This means that narrative accounts (i.e. what participants tell you) are not simply reflections of the reality which exists outside the interview, but rather an important resource people use in which to construct themselves and others. My research was participatory, as myself and the participants, within the focus group discussion, participated together in making meaning of their experiences and the ways in which they were constructing themselves. I did not take for granted that what people said in

the interview was a reflection of how the world operates, but rather I situated what they said within the context of the interview and the particular kinds of identities they created in the research encounter.

Grounded theorists also advocate for simultaneous data collection and analysis. Therefore, although my analysis took place only after transcription, preliminary analysis took place immediately after I finished a focus group. After each research encounter, I sat with the picture of the diagram I had drawn of the participants and began to answer four questions: what stood out in this interview? What were the dynamics within the group? What were the similarities and differences between this interview and others I have conducted? How did I feel before, during and after the interview? These diagrams (which are included in Chapter 4) allowed me to reflect on the dynamics in the group. I then reflected on the power relationships and dynamics within the group, the similarities and differences between this focus group and others, as well as any significant or striking things which emerged from the interview, particularly those things which were unanticipated by myself. In my analysis, I explore insights about the nature of their friendships and relationships, derived from first-hand experience of how they engage with their selected friends and with me in the research group. This preliminary analysis helped to shape the way I asked questions and what I asked in my next interview, and it helped me to reflect on how participants were constructing me within the focus group process.

Ethical considerations

Concerns regarding confidentiality and anonymity are addressed by assigning pseudonyms to participants involved in focus groups, thereby avoiding any connection between responses and participants. Furthermore, the names of the residences were replaced with pseudonyms in order to maintain the residences' confidentiality. The first male residence I approached declined to participate as they stated via an e-mail from the leaders, "we have done numerous similar projects during the year, which were both time consuming for the first years and the leadership"⁷. They also verbally communicated to me that they were concerned about the possibility of my research portraying the residence in a negative light. Informed consent of participants was obtained prior to conducting the focus groups and interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded, and these recordings will be erased on the completion of research, which is provisionally January 2015.

⁷ A reference is not provided here to maintain the anonymity of the leaders and the residence.

The above factors of confidentiality and the protection of my participants are important. However, I argue that ethics should not only be defined in terms of procedures such as maintaining confidentiality, or protecting participants or the institution, but it should also bring into question the ethical implications and responsibilities researchers have towards the institutions and people involved in the research. Recommendations from the Research Ethics Committee (REC), suggested maintaining the anonymity of the university, in order to “protect the university’s image”. However, the context and history of the university is vital in understanding what diversity and social cohesion has come to mean in this context. I therefore received permission to use the university’s name, with the condition of contextualising it, which is done in Chapter 2, and brought into consideration throughout this text. The male residence which turned me away was similarly concerned for the residence’s image. Due to their strong historical ties with apartheid, they seemed to be wary of being constructed as racist, even though I wanted to investigate what was happening in the here-and-now, and made it clear that the residence would remain anonymous.

Seeking historical and statistical information on the residences proved to be another ethical landmine which I encountered. In order to provide some context and background to each residence, I requested some demographic information, or any statistical information, from each residence. I did so firstly by contacting the student leaders of each residence. Drakenstein simply did not reply to my message. Outeniqua, although they did not themselves have the information, referred me to centres which they thought could further assist me. Blouberg however, forwarded the request to their house warden or house mother⁸. The house mother became quite upset with my request and with me contacting her. She then forwarded my email to the Centre for Student Structures and Communities, who again questioned me about my research and my permission to conduct research, and stated that they needed to be informed about research before I contacted a residence head directly. It seemed as though what I was requesting was illegal or confidential, and I could not understand the unwillingness and the difficulty in providing researchers with this statistical information.

Something which I was not asked by any institution, centre, or committee, was how my research would contribute to the institution or the participants. I want to expand the concept of ethics to include doing research and designing methodologies which add value to participants in the process of doing research, and which empower students even within the

⁸ I explain what a house mother is in Chapter 1.

interview context. In this thesis (and particularly in this chapter and Chapter 6), I argue that by using reflexive and participatory methodologies, the researcher can contribute positively, bring about change, and empower students in the process of research. In this way, the pursuit of transformation by institutions can also become less top-down, and be driven, not by management, but by diverse students in concrete ways.

Limitations

By focusing on the context of the interview, I want to recognise that there is partiality to the focus of my research. As I draw attention to particular social contexts, and work with Goffman's assumption that people present themselves and talk about themselves and others differently in different contexts, I recognise that my research is also situated in the particular contexts I was able to explore. Research has shown that people interviewed individually following focus group discussions may raise issues in ways which are different than in the focus groups (Frosh et al, 2002; Pattman and Chege, 2003). However, I did not have time or the resources to conduct individual interviews. Individual interviews would have allowed me to expand on students' individual experiences of Stellenbosch, to follow up on topics which died out somewhat unexplained in focus group discussions, and to compare students' constructions of their experiences in the focus groups versus individual interviews.

In my theoretical understanding, I also work on the assumption that people have multiple intersecting identities. I was only able to explore how these identities were enacted in a very specific context, with a very specific group of people at a very specific point in time. I also recognise that in many ways my own identity shaped the context of the interview. If I was a white male, rather than a coloured female, I perhaps would have not received the same responses I did from various groups. People are complex beings who present themselves differently in different contexts, and qualitative and quantitative forms of social research tend not to tap into all the nuances of this.

Chapter 4: Presentation and findings of focus group discussions

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I argue for ways of conceptualising ‘transformation’ which go beyond making the proportions of students, in terms of apartheid race categories, more commensurate with the racial demographics in South Africa more generally. Drawing on positions advanced by Vincent (2008), Jansen (2009), Pattman (2010) and others, I argued that any university transformation programme should engage with how students from different and diverse backgrounds, mediated by a range of identifications such as race, class, gender, age, and sexuality, actually experience and construct life at SU. Transformation should also look at the extent to which students feel at home or marginalised, and whether they mix and integrate with students across lines of race, class, gender, sexuality and other variables, and if so, what forms these take.

These are some of the questions which I explore in my participatory focus group study with students in self-selected friendship groups in specific residences on their constructs and experiences of university and residence life. In these focus group discussions, as I elaborated in Chapter 3, I engaged with students in conversations which sought to make them (and their lives, interests, identifications and relations, and the ways they conceptualise these) the key research topic.

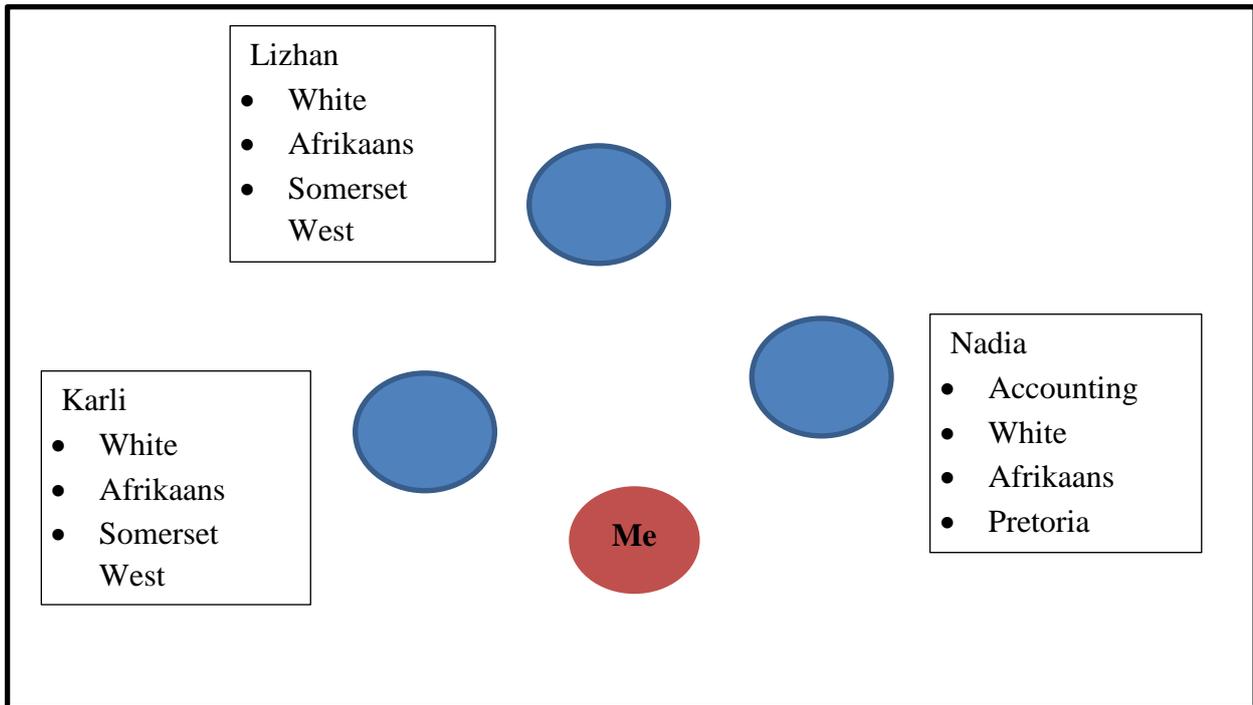
I examine in some depth, in this chapter, three focus group discussions which I conducted with students in three different residences, and in my presentation and analysis of these I begin by focusing on their relational dynamics. I do this because I understand these focus groups, as I argued in Chapter 3, not simply as instruments for eliciting information about the (university or residence) ‘world outside’ the interviews, but as ethnographic encounters. How the participants ‘perform’, make certain kinds of identifications, invoke certain discourses about gender, culture, tradition and race, position themselves in certain ways in relation to these, and form relationships with other participants and with me constitute key findings in my research which I draw attention to and critically reflect upon in my presentation and analysis in this chapter.

With each focus group discussion I begin by providing a balloon diagram which illustrates where each participant sat during the focus group. Next to each circle indicating a participant

is a box containing the pseudonym of the participant, and some introductory information on each participant, notably home location, gender, and race. I then provide a general illustrative summary of the relational dynamics of the group (based on my experiences and observations as I facilitated the discussions) which I wrote up immediately after each focus group. This form of presentation situates the emerging themes in the narrative accounts of the participants in the context of the focus group discussions, and in this chapter I try to present an account of the data which does justice to focus group discussions as particular social contexts which invite particular kinds of social analysis.

Finally I present and analyse key themes, as they emerge in the context of the focus group discussion, and draw comparisons between the groups. In this, I take full extracts from conversations and try to present an analysis which focuses on processes through which concepts such as culture, race and gender emerge and are invoked by participants, in ways which exemplify the significance such concepts hold for the participants and the meanings they attach to them.

Focus group discussion 1: Blouberg (all female residence)



General illustrative summary of the relational dynamics of the group

I arrived early for this interview with the Blouberg females and waited in my car for time to pass. In the back seat of my car sat two large pizzas and a bottle of coke, something which I brought along to every focus group. I wanted to make participants feel relaxed and create a casual atmosphere of a group of friends chatting over some food and drink. This was not the first focus group I was conducting for this research and as I sat in the car I replayed all the views other students had expressed to me about Blouberg females, the views that the residence itself put out through their values, and the views I had through my own experience of being a student at Stellenbosch. All these things had led me to understand that the Blouberg females were the ladies of SU campus. They were described and viewed by many as pretentious or stuck up and very feminine. I began to second guess my choice of offerings. Did ladies even eat pizza? Are they as stuck up and pretentious as other groups seem to have conveyed? I made my way to the entrance of the residence and like at the Outeniqua residence, I had to wait for those I was to meet to open the entrance doors for me. Unlike at the Drakenstein residence, where anyone let me in without questions, females of the residence would walk past me, going in and out of the sliding doors, while I waited. This I discovered was due to the rules of the various residences. Females in residences on campus generally, had to sign in their visitors. Even in the mixed-gender residence with females

present, a signing in had to take place. This hinted at the construction of females as soft and vulnerable, and their need for institutional protection. Males on the other hand, had no need for this protection.

Eventually the three females I was interviewing came to let me in, all of whom were extremely friendly, and I actually found myself enjoying their company immensely. Through my encounters with these females, I began to realise how much power the residence identity has over people's perceptions of others and themselves. There were very particular attributes given to the females in Blouberg and which they themselves attributed to each other as members of the residence. The residence identity itself had a significant influence on my feelings before (in this case, worried and nervous). The idea also seemed to affect how participants constructed themselves, and on how they interacted with students inside and outside the residence. Because they were the ladies of campus, the females said they were more respectable than other females, they would not dress in sexually suggestive clothing, and they prided themselves on this identity. I expand on these ideas as I discuss the theme of being a lady in the residence later on.

The three women in the interview had met in their first year of residence, simply through interacting with each other through activities arranged by the residence. The demographic makeup of this particular group was interesting. When arranging the focus groups, I asked one volunteer, in this case Nadia, to choose their closest friends in the same residence as themselves who were also first year. Nadia had chosen two friends in her residence who, like herself, were white and described themselves as Afrikaans. What was interesting about this was that all three females spoke in the interview about the fact that they had coloured or black roommates. When they spoke of their roommates, they spoke very affectionately about them, they all said they got along very well with their roommates and Lizhan at one point expressed that she loved her roommate. Yet none of the roommates were invited to join the group to talk to me. This in itself said something significant about the interactions taking place at residence. The females, based on their own observations, stated that most black and coloured females, because they were in a minority at the residence in terms of numbers, shared rooms with white females. The three females themselves were exposed to other races daily. However, they had not formed strong enough bonds to be considered a friendship group. The composition of the group is therefore a critique of contact theory. Although these females were in daily contact and shared living spaces with coloured and black students, it was not enough for them to be considered friends or to be part of a friendship group with

white students. There was something these three females shared which linked their friendship in a very specific way, and this seemed to be because of their investment in residence life and the Blouberg identity.

This leads me to highlight one of the key themes which stood out in this focus group which focused on their reasons for coming to Stellenbosch and their investment in the Blouberg identity, which was strongly grounded in all three being students who had followed in their parents' and grandparents' footsteps by coming to the university. The females spoke at length about how they had grown up wanting to come to Stellenbosch, and specifically to Blouberg residence, because their fathers, mothers and even grandmothers had attended the university and, in some cases, the residence. These three females generally seemed to share the same experiences and sentiments about Blouberg. All three females presented coming to Stellenbosch as an inevitable stage in their lives. The way they spoke about residence life was as though it was part of their heirloom or their destiny to come to Stellenbosch, and more specifically to be part of a residence in Stellenbosch. Through the tone of voice and the passion with which they spoke about life in a Stellenbosch residence, they demonstrated how deeply invested they were in these ideas of what it means to live in a SU residence. What is fascinating about this is how it led almost to their deification, of the residences, their construction of the residence as a community which has a life of its own in the Durkheimian sense, and as something which was more than the sum of the individuals who comprise it.

Another key theme which I discuss in more detail below was the way these three students constructed and experienced Stellenbosch as diverse compared to the high schools which they attended. They engaged with Stellenbosch as a place which provided them with opportunities to meet people from different backgrounds, which they defined mostly by terms such as race, culture, language and religion. Even though their experience of residence life is shaped by the sense of it being part of their lineage, and rooted in history and tradition, it is also seen as different in comparison to their schools. I imagine, too, that they associate this difference with changes in the university from their parents' day, compared to more recently. So they experience Stellenbosch, and the residence, not just as a traditional place they had known they were going to go to as kids, but also as a place where they now experience and celebrate cultural diversity through their interactions with people from other races.

Presentation and analysis of key themes, as they emerge in the focus group discussion

Following in their parents and grandparents footsteps

When asked why they had chosen to come to Stellenbosch, six of the seven students, who participated in the focus group discussions, who identified as Afrikaans and white, attributed this to their parents (and grandparents) having attended the university, and to the stories they told them about university and residence life.

When students elaborated on these, as happened in the focus group discussion with the three females at Blouberg, each of whom came from white Afrikaans families, whose parents (and grandparents) were Stellenbosch University alumni, they revealed deep emotional affiliations and attachments not only with the university but with students and residence lives and cultures. In response to my question about why they chose to come to Stellenbosch, the young women who participated in the Blouberg focus group discussion did not, as in most of the other focus group discussions I conducted, refer to the university's academic reputation or give instrumental reasons, for example proximity to their homes. Instead, they spoke on a much more emotional level about the appeal Stellenbosch and Blouberg had for them, and about symbolic identifications they made through lineage or past generations which generated a strong sense of attachment to, as well as awe of, these institutions:

Megan: So how did you guys decide to come here? Did you consider anything else?

Karli: I think my two options were uhm university of Pretoria and Stellies. And I choose to come to the closest university and because my parents came here. I think my dad was also studying here and my mom was in Blouberg as well. And in high school the other people from [Potchefstroom] came but there was never really like another option.

Megan: So both of you (*referring to two students in the group*) said that your families were here. So how did that play a role? Like what did they tell you?

Karli: Well my parents said I can decide where to go. But listening to their stores and the stuff they said when they were students here and how it was for them and every time we came here for holidays in Cape Town we would come to Stellenbosch and my mom wasn't that sentimental. But especially my dad because he was at Cederberg⁹ and he would show me like this was my room this year and this that year. So he would show me and he was very Cederberg. And the stories he told me about Stellenbosch made me want to come here. Ever since I was little I wanted to come here. Even in primary school I started collecting Stellenbosch merchandise. I even had Stellenbosch socks.

⁹ An all-male residence at SU.

[laughter]

Megan: And you?

Lizhan: My mom and dad met here and my dad was at Langkloof¹⁰. And every time we came to Stellenbosch... I mean Somerset West is just around here and then we drive past Langkloof and Blouberg and because I knew my gran was here. That's was also why I chose this res¹¹ where my mum was in. Tradition plays a big role and I'm also quite sentimental so I follow tradition.

Megan: What do you mean by tradition?

Lizhan: Like uhm... like my mum was here so I wanted to come here and my gran was here. I also wanted to stay at the same koshuis my mum and gran stayed at. And they studied BSc and they became like math teachers which is quite different from me.

These young women attached much significance to the sense of following in their parents' footsteps, and how through this longstanding familial connection, they became emotionally invested and attached to the university, the students, the residence and its culture, as remembered and narrated by their parents and grandparents.

Moments of mutual recognition in familiar stories they shared

These generational attachments to the university and the residence; were conveyed in the extract above in what seemed to be moments of mutual recognition in familiar stories they shared about parental recollections of their student days, being taken on family visits since childhood and being shown their parents' old hang-out places. It was noticeable how the participants built upon each other's contributions, for example Lizhan and Karli's mutual 'mapping' of Stellenbosch through family markers and associations: 'my mum and dad met here', 'my mum was here and my gran was here', 'my dad would show me this was my room this year, and this that year'. It was noticeable, too, how engaged and supportive they were of each other. For example, when Karli spoke about her 'Stellenbosch socks', the others laughed, not in a dismissive way (which would have rendered it absurd), but in a manner which showed empathy, as if this presented a witty illustration of her early identifications with Stellenbosch, which they themselves shared.

Indeed, it could be argued that the particular dynamics established in this focus group discussion made it possible for them to talk intimately about their families, and the emotional investments and identifications they made with (their versions) of Stellenbosch and residence life and cultures. In more 'diverse' focus groups (comprising, for example, of first and second

¹⁰ An all-male residence at SU.

¹¹ Res is a shortened form of the word residence.

generation students, or black, coloured and Indian students, or male and female students), the white Afrikaans students did not speak in the same intimate ways, as Karli and Lizhan did in the above extract, about how their identities became embedded generationally in the idea of becoming Stellenbosch students, long before this actually materialised.

This is not to imply that more ‘homogenous’ focus group discussions, in terms of the criteria mentioned above, allowed and enabled the participants to express themselves more *authentically*. Rather, than comparing the focus group discussions in terms of the authenticity of the participants, my analytic focus is on how participants ‘perform’ and ‘present’ themselves (as understood by Goffman, 1959) through their interactions with other participants. By analysing and comparing the focus group discussions as social encounters and contexts marked by participants from particular and different social backgrounds (Pattman, In press), we may obtain insights on the significance (if any) which variables such as race, gender, class, age, parental education and their intersections hold in influencing how people present themselves and relate to others.

Invoking tradition

In the focus group discussion with the Blouberg students, their parents’ story-telling and the family visits to Stellenbosch seemed to create not only a sense of familiarity with the university and the residence, but also a sense of awe, as if these institutions were marked by traditions and histories which shaped their parents’, grandparents’ and their own experiences as current students. Coming as students to Stellenbosch and the Blouberg residence was seen as natural and inevitable for these young women. Or as Lizhan, (who described herself as ‘following tradition’) put it, as *traditional*, as if institutionalising this as a longstanding familial habit.

The idea of ‘tradition’ was introduced and frequently invoked by these females in ways which drew upon and idealised the past, as a set of enduring cultural values and practices which connected them as contemporary students with their parents and grandparents in particular, and with past Stellenbosch students more generally. In these students’ imaginations, the university and residence represented longstanding communities, envisaged, in the Durkheimian sense, as much more than sum of the individual students who comprise these at one particular moment. In other words, it is not just made up of the building and its current residents. But how do the students reconcile their investments in a discourse which seems to idealise ‘the past’ and praise ‘homogeneity’ with high-profile public

pronouncements of the university about its commitments to ‘transformation’ and, in particular, to making residences more ‘diverse’?

Engaging with diversity

Interestingly, the Blouberg students who participated in the focus group discussion both idealised ‘tradition’ and the ‘past’ in their imaginative understandings of Stellenbosch as a homogenous community, and also constructed, experienced and praised Stellenbosch University as ‘diverse’. This was particularly apparent when they were comparing Stellenbosch University to their schools which they described as ‘white Afrikaans’, and how they welcomed opportunities for meeting ‘different’ people when they came to Stellenbosch, which were not available in their schools:

Karli: [My school] was all girls. All Afrikaans. Like the same beliefs, everything was very similar. Like same religion same everything. Like there was never really someone that stood out or who was different from the rest.

Megan: So how is it being here?

Karli: This is so much better. Like just having an open perspective and meeting different people. You learn so much...

In this extract Karli responds to my question on the kind of high schools they attended by describing and critiquing the homogeneity of her all-female, all-Afrikaans high school. Then, when I ask her about Stellenbosch, she uses her school as a point of reference, against which to construct (and celebrate) Stellenbosch as diverse.

Stellenbosch, and their residences, were constructed and experienced by the young women in this focus group discussion, not just, as a ‘traditional’ place that they had expected to attend since they were young children, but also as a place where they (now) experienced and celebrated cultural diversity through their interactions with people from other races. However, the idealised version which Karli presented of Stellenbosch as a community characterised by cultural diversity which offered opportunities for ‘meeting different people’ and developing an ‘open perspective’ (which presumably implied engaging with and learning from them) seemed to be undermined slightly by Lizhan who spoke, just after Karli’s contribution, about her black roommate’s concerns about being placed in the same room as her:

Lizhan: I actually think in the beginning they wanted to move me to another room because my roommate didn’t talk me for a while. We actually spoke about it later. She was scared about how I am going to react towards her and she was

scared because I didn't want to talk to her. So the HK came to me and told me that she wants to move in with another black girl so I was sad and disappointed and this person doesn't want to be with me in a room. But then everything worked out fine. Like we warmed up to each other and that we have an awesome... Like I couldn't have chosen a better roommate for myself.

Megan: Why do you think she was scared about how you would react towards her?

Lizhan: Because she came from Pietermaritzburg which is quite far. She came here and she was on this 8 hour bus trip. She was tired and she came in late already. She said that she only heard like 3 or 4 days ago that she got placed in this res and when you get here you have a lot of roommates and if you haven't lived with other people it could be quite frightening sharing room with a white girl. Like you already have to share with a girl you don't know and now it's even a different culture most probably. But luckily our cultures didn't differ at all. There was not something that she does funny or something I do funny. Which is like... that's a big thing for me because if your culture doesn't clash its fine and then you can get along. And that's what nice because you can be any colour but most of our cultures... it's like there is not something that will freak the other out.

Megan: What do you mean by culture?

Lizhan: Like I know for example... the lady... that used to clean our house. She is coloured but she has a western culture and then she married a Xhosa and now she isn't allowed to wear pants anymore which is quite unfair because this is her... she has to take on this different culture. But here at res, nobody has such strong culture or something that is out of the ordinary so that you can see oh you are this culture. It's all quite the same.

Megan: So if do you think if someone were to come here who is quite different... will it be different?

Lizhan: Yes I think it will take time to adjust to the person. Because obviously it's things you notice. But it is possible to adjust to that.

What is particularly interesting about this extract is not only how it acknowledges and draws attention to conflict in the residence between 'diverse' students, but also how it presents, explains and rationalises this conflict in ways which hold on to the ideals of the residence, as articulated by the participants in this focus group discussion, as 'diverse' and 'open'.

The example she provides of conflict between 'diverse' students is between her black roommate and herself, a conflict which she attributes to the initial mistaken presumption of cultural incompatibilities on the part of her black roommate. When I ask why she thought her black roommate was initially 'scared about how she [Lizhan] would react towards her', she attributes this to very specific individual circumstances, her fatigue and late arrival, linked with her long journey and late notice about being offered a place in the residence. She does

introduce race as a possible factor: ‘it could be quite frightening sharing room with a white girl’. However, she attributes this to her roommate’s supposed inexperience of ‘living with other people’ (by which she presumably means white people) and concerns about cultural differences.

Race and its absence

What is conspicuous by its absence, in this account, is any acknowledgement of how inter-racial contact in residences, in a formerly-white Afrikaans University, may be circumscribed by the numerical dominance of white students (with the noticeable exception of Outeniqua). There is no mention of how discourses about residence life (including their own) which seem to idealise the past and praise homogeneity, may, in this context, contribute to the symbolic construction of residences as white institutions and as intimidating spaces, particularly for coloured or black students, like Lizhan’s roommate.

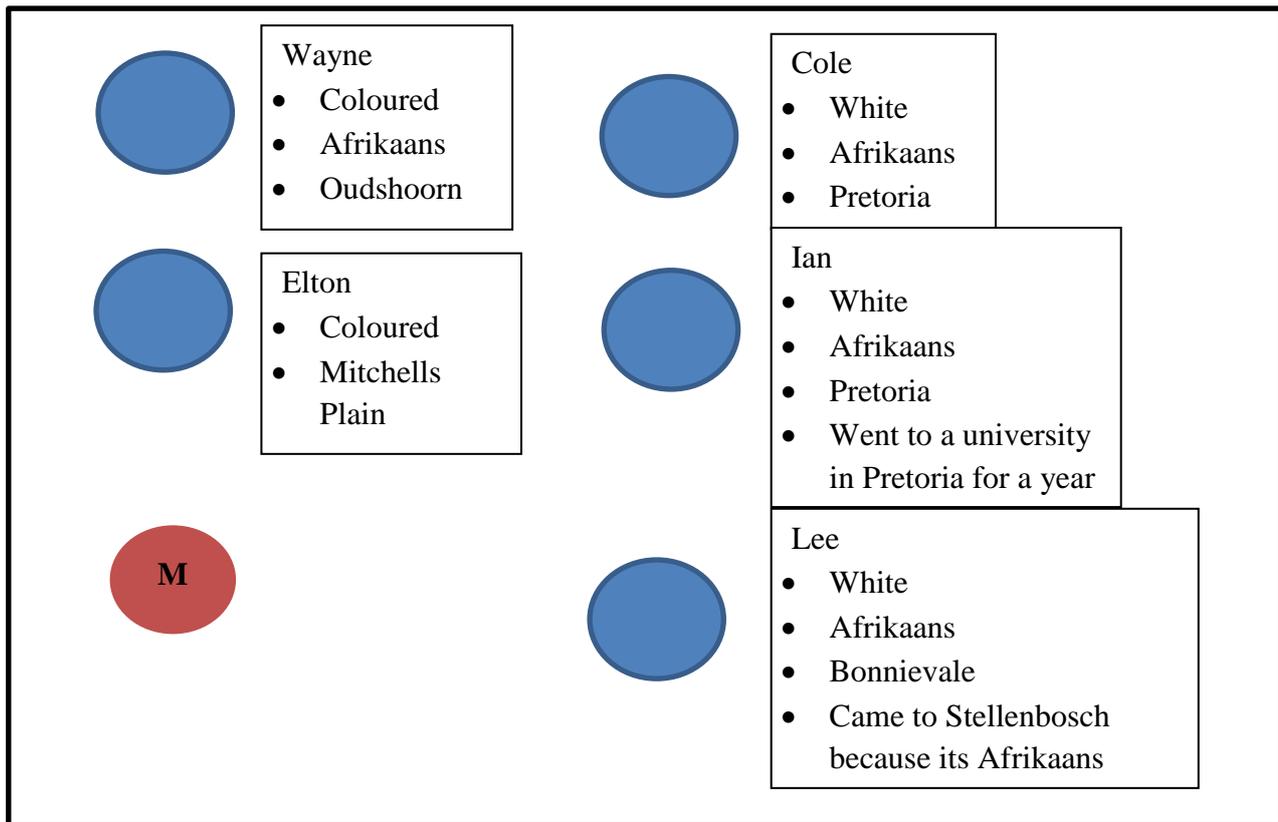
In this sort of context, inter-racial mixing occurs on white terms, a point made by Louise Vincent (2008) in her contemporary study of inter-racial contact at Rhodes, another formerly white South African university. Inter-racial contact, she argues, is not as Lizhan implies a simple and mutually beneficial interchange between individuals who happen to come from different social backgrounds. Rather, it occurs in a context of unequal power relations in which whiteness continues to be privileged over blackness. In this context black people are implicitly constructed as the Other, and the onus is on them to adapt and adjust to longstanding cultural practices, in which white students have engaged over generations and through which they have developed particular kinds of identifications.

The significance of race in framing relations of power in the residences is obscured in discourses which reduces race to ‘culture’, and power relations structured by race inequalities to cultural differences. And also in discourses, which imagine residences as communities which produce common identifications and allegiances among the residents (so long as the residents participate in what are presented as residential cultural activities) which are seen as transcending divisions in culture (which include race). These are exemplified in Lizhan’s accounts about race and culture in the extract above. Significantly when Lizhan talks about culture, it is in relation to race, and not class, age, gender etc. In fact she invokes culture in ways which make it almost synonymous with race.

Though race is very closely tied with culture, her deployment of 'culture' allows her to celebrate 'difference' and entertain possibilities of cross racial friendships, (as she does with her black roommate), but also in limited ways, as the black roommate was not included in the focus group. However, she also invokes culture in ways which locates cultural incompatibility in relationships as a problem stemming from black, not white people, from their presumed sexist cultures or from unfounded assumptions of incompatibility that black students in the residence may make in relation to white students.

She constructs the concept 'western culture' in opposition to 'Xhosa', as if by 'western culture' she means non-sexism and tolerance of others, clearly positioning herself and her coloured cleaner (who married a culturally incompatible 'Xhosa') as 'western', along with everyone at residence, including her black roommate. Therefore, the main cultural opposition she constructs does not seem to be racialised at all, Rather, it is between 'western' culture, as inclusive, cross-racial, and normal and Xhosa culture as 'strong' (in a problematic sense) exclusive and out of the ordinary.

Focus group discussion 2: Drakenstein (all male residence)



General illustrative summary of the relational dynamics of the group

I met the five males of Drakenstein in their residence pub. The coloured males were seated on one side of the table and the white males on the other side. It was unclear whether they chose to sit next to each other based on whom they were friendlier with, which could have affected the seating arrangement. Elton was the volunteer who organised the group, and he and Cole were the two more outspoken people in the focus group. Cole was clearly invested in preserving the ideas of residence. It was clear to me that he did not like the way I questioned why certain practices took place, why they were important, and why their residence operated in certain ways. He would also often clarify other participants' responses when they struggled to formulate and explain their ideas, especially if it was coming across in ways which put the residence in a negative light. Ian was the joker of the group, although also deeply invested in the ways of the residence. He would often say things very bluntly and either Wayne or Cole tried to present it in more diplomatic terms. Lee was the quietest one in the group, along with Wayne. The opinions seemed to be shared by all to protect the integrity of the residence.

Elton, Wayne and Cole claimed to have met because they all lived in the same section, or corridor, of the residence. Ian met them through their playing rugby together, and Lee was

not very specific about how he had become friends with the group. However, they all seemed to agree that it was through “doing stuff” together that they developed a relationship. The stuff which they referred to focused specifically on activities and events which took place in the residence. Skakeling was something which they were specifically invested in talking about. It was clear that they saw participating in residence life was a key part of forming friendships and social cohesion in the residence. However, as with the Blouberg females discussed above, these activities also played a significant role in policing the types of people who were thought of as part of the community of Drakenstein. Interestingly these males could clearly identify those who they constructed as not part of the community, and did this in more obvious ways than the females in Blouberg, by terming the outsiders, *sluipers*¹².

I found the overall conversation of this group to be less humorous than in focus groups done with the Outeniqua group and that they were less willing to critique each other or disagree with each other than the Outeniqua groups. I also felt like much more of an outsider in this group than I did with both the Blouberg and Outeniqua groups. This was because this group would often share jokes with each other, and would not explain them to me, often because the jokes were of a sexual nature and they felt they could not speak about this to me as a female. Humour was also used in ways which seemed to unite themselves as males, with similar interests and to separate me as a female from the group, whom they saw as not being able to laugh at the same things they were. On entering the residence with my usual pizza and bottle of Coke in hand, Ian joked that I had not brought beer or alcohol, a male would have. This showed the assumption Ian was drawing on to construct all males as being the same, and females as being fundamentally different to them. My usual interview technique, of acting like an alien in an interview situation also seemed to further separate me from the group. For example, when I asked them why the residence participated in rugby more than soccer, it seemed to affirm to them that I did not understand their humour or how things worked in their residence because I was a female.

This dynamic was confirmed when, towards the end of the interview, I asked whether they thought the interview would have been different if I was a male. The response by all of them, was a resounding yes. Wayne said he would swear more and tell different kinds of jokes. Elton then said they would speak more about skakels, I assume that, since they described skakels as a chance to get many girlfriends, they would have celebrated their sexual prowess

¹² When translated into English, *Sluiper* means ‘slacker’; someone who does not carry his/her weight to continue the work of the community or the residence.

more with a male interviewer. Ian responded that a male would have brought beer (again drawing on the same joke he had told before the interview began), causing a laughter throughout the group – again affirming their male cohesion. They were clearly using essentialised ideas of gender to relate to me and each other. In a way my identity as a female shaped their responses and the ways in which they interacted with myself and each other.

Their construction of females was that they needed to be treated in very particular ways, which the participants saw as respectful, and this would mean that the bond exclusively experienced as males of the residence, would be disturbed. This was evident when I asked how it would be if females stayed in residence with them. They said that they would have to be more sensitive and respectful, and that they could not conduct the same practices with females, such as sitting on the floor in first year.

Presentation and analysis of key themes, as they emerge in the focus group discussion

Coloured males' feelings of displeasure and incongruity arriving at Drakenstein residence

Second and third generation, white Afrikaans females who participated in the focus group discussion at Blouberg constructed their residence as a familiar cultural, material and symbolic space, and seemed to experience the process of transition from home to residence life as important but well-rehearsed and therefore seamless. This was in marked contrast to two of the six males who participated in the Drakenstein focus group discussion, who reported feelings of displeasure and incongruity in their initial days at Residence. Like Blouberg, Drakenstein was one of the oldest single-sex residences in Stellenbosch, with a reputation steeped in 'tradition'. Notably, the two males who expressed these concerns were first-generation students at the university. The Blouberg females had grown up with the assumption that they would follow their parents, and re-enact and relive their experiences of residence by participating in its collective cultural practices and rituals with which they were already familiar. However, the two males spoke about their surprise and shock they experienced in their initial days at Drakenstein, on finding that this was not, in the words of Elton, 'just a place....a roof over your head', but rather an institution which imposed certain kinds of collective social obligations and expectations.

Elton: I was like really fed up with the first week. Like I didn't enjoy it.

Megan: How come?

Elton: I guess I wasn't expecting it. I thought a res was just a place to live close to campus. And from the first day I was proven wrong. And I just wanted to go home.

Megan: How were you proven wrong?

Elton: Like it's not just a place... a roof over your head. Like its being part of a house or a family. It's something I wasn't prepared for. Uhm... But not just studying and living for the house. Like you do different things for the house. Like you play sports for the house. You do anything I guess. I wasn't prepared for it. But I am glad that I stuck it out...like I don't party at all. I don't drink. So it gets quite difficult at times. Because like the way I saw this place everyone was drinking. I didn't know people like that – no offence to you guys. But I just thought it's not a very good place. And everyone was drinking and partying and everyone made it seem like such a big social thing. It was like no one was really worried about their academics. Everyone was just concerned about being social and making friends. And no one was focused on academics. That was difficult

The above extract on Elton's initial encounter with residence life at Drakenstein provides a graphic illustrative account of how he experienced the residence, in the Durkheimian sense, as a social institution which was more than the sum of its individual parts, collectively produced by and shaping the practices of its individual members. This was a troubling experience for him because of the nature of these practices which contributed to and were, in turn, informed by the collective sentiments and ideals which came to be associated with the very character of the residence, namely drinking and partying.

His sense of marginalisation in this context is very acute, linked to the conflicting expectations he experiences, between his concern to succeed academically and to fit in with the drinking and partying culture of the residence in which *everyone*, he states twice, participates. He implies that drinking and partying, in this context, are not just activities in which some students happen to engage but become symbolic markers of students' commitments to the residence, which he came to understand and experience, 'not just as a place' to stay but as a 'house or a family' from which he did not want to be excluded.

When I ask the other members of the group for their reactions to Elton's recollections of his initial days at Drakenstein, there is some recognition from one of the others, Ian, about Drakenstein being 'big on partying' but this is not problematised, as it was in Elton's account. Furthermore, Ian puts a positive spin on the metaphor of the house as a 'family', constructing it as a place which produces familial- like relations of care and support between its (male) members, as implied by his use of 'brotherhood.' Significantly, he speaks about

this as if it provides the real picture (what ‘you will find’ if ‘you dig a bit deeper’) of Drakenstein and the kinds of fraternal relations which characterise it, as if this is not immediately obvious to newcomers or outsiders, like myself.

Megan: And you guys? Do you agree with him or him?

Ian: I also got the first impression that it was like... big on partying and so on. But if you dig a bit deeper than you will find its more about brother hood. It’s nice.

Megan: What do you mean by “Brotherhood”? Do you guys feel the same way?

Elton: I think there is something deeper. Like on the surface it may seem like someone doesn’t like you but in the end you are there for them, when push comes to shove.

While race was not raised as an issue by any of the participants, in this focus group discussion, it was noticeable that it was coloured students, like Elton, who, when reflecting upon their (initial) experiences and interpretations of life at Drakenstein, expressed concerns about not fitting in, or feeling out of place, or experiencing hostility. Even though Elton, above, picks up on and reinforces Ian’s assertion about the significance of a common sense of brotherhood at Drakenstein and how it is this which (really or ultimately or when ‘push comes to shove’) informs relations between the young men, he nevertheless mentions ‘it may seem like someone doesn’t like you.’

Elsewhere in this discussion Cole began to describe his first week at Stellenbosch as one characterised by compulsion or ‘force’, although he quickly qualified this by explaining that ‘you do a lot of things together’. When I asked him to elaborate on what he means by forced, he said ‘it’s not forced’ and Elton, as if concurring with Cole, said ‘it’s just one of those things you have to do’. Why Cole contradicts himself is not clear, but, it seems that they may, indeed, have experienced this as a socialising through compulsion, even if they rationalised it now, in their cross-racial friendship group, as ‘just one of those things you have to do’. This was not only for acceptance from the ‘seniors’, as Elton points out, but also, for acceptance and recognition in the residence more generally.

Cole: ... we basically uhm we met during Jool week. You are forced... well it’s not like forced but you do a lot of things together and eventually you learn everyone’s name.

Megan: And you said it’s forced... who forces you to do it.

Cole: It’s not forced.

Lee: Not forced like... but everyone just does it.

Elton: It’s just one of those things you have to do.

Megan: Why?

Wayne: Its part of initiation.

Cole: Yeah.

Ian: Yes.

Wayne: You have to go through that to be a first year.

Megan: So if you don't go through that you are not a first year?

Wayne: Okay you can be a first year in res.

Ian: Like you don't want to be outcast. You just want to be part of everything.

Elton: It's also about being accepted by the seniors.

Producing imagined brotherhoods and sluiipers

To begin with, Elton associated their participation in initiation activities with 'force', but then denied this, as did the others. However, the stakes, for not participating in the activities were high: 'you don't want to be an outcast', Ian comments. As I discovered later in the focus group, when they were speaking about the significance attached to rugby in the residence, and more specifically to watching and supporting the residence team, a specific, highly pejorative category was applied to people whose levels of participation in residence activities were deemed inadequate. They were called 'sluipers' which when translated into English, means 'slacker'; someone who does not carry his/her weight to continue the work of the community or the residence.

Megan: So does everybody have to take part? [in playing rugby]

Elton: Not really take part but rugby is the biggest sport here on res. So when they do play everybody goes to watch and afterwards just sing the house anthem.

Megan: So does everybody have to go?

Elton: No.

Ian: But everybody puts on their sports jerseys and go watch and it's nice because there is this unity.

Cole: You are not really forced to do anything. Like a lot of people did not partake in a lot of things for initiation. But you do not really want to be that person who does not partake because then you will be that person who not a lot of people know.

Megan: So who are the kind of people who don't take part?

Ian: Sluipers. [laughter from the group]

I did not expect to be given a category of person, in response to my last question above, as if the category 'explained' the 'kind of people who don't take part.' One of the effects of this, of course, is to blame specific individuals, who clearly are then given high profiles in the residence. When asked to explain a sluiiper they pointed out examples. At that point in the interview, one student, an Afrikaans white male, walked past the table where we were conducting the interview, and he was identified by the group as a sluiiper. The high profile

given to sluiipers presumably contributes to forms of self-policing in order to avoid being categorised in such a publically humiliating way. The focus on individual ‘sluiipers’ effectively detracts attention from how the category sluiiper is produced by and resonates with cultural discourses and practices which deify the residence and put a premium on symbolic displays of reverence for the residence in producing this category.

Interestingly, ‘sluiiper’ was commonly used to describe white students rather than black, coloured or any other race or nationality. Presumably the assumption is that white students have more in common with each other than black or coloured, and further, that the residence activities are oriented to white interests, so that a white person who is seen as not participating adequately in residence activities is deemed more culpable than a black or coloured person whose failure to participate could be attributed to cultural differences.

White and coloured students speaking about race and diversity in relation to black students

In this mixed race focus group, concerns were raised by the coloured students about the transition from home to Residence.’ This was rather different from the seamless, uncomplicated way in which transition from home to residence was presented by the white Afrikaans females in the focus group I conducted with them. These concerns were also ‘resolved’, it seems, in the Drakenstein group dialogue. This happened through their mutual constructions of the Residence as a community, as more than the sum of the young men who comprised it, and as an imagined ‘brotherhood’.

Significantly in the focus group discussion with the male students in the racially-mixed friendship group at Drakenstein residence, it was not in relation to themselves, as coloured and white students, but in relation to black students that they raised and spoke about *race* in particularly emotionally engaged ways. This was when they began discussing the future of their residence, linking this with concerns about the implications of the university’s new residence placement programme (which I discuss in chapter 1) to ‘diversify’ the residences.

Megan: So is that why it changed? To bring in more first years?

Elton: I don’t get the reasoning to it really...

Wayne: We don’t know what the reason is we just heard about it.

Megan: So you don’t know why the residence policy has changed?

Ian: To bring in more diversity I think.

Megan: What do you mean with more diversity?

Ian: So more cultures and so on.

- Megan: And you were saying it is to bring in different cultures, like why do we need-
- Ian: For diversity. More ethnic groups.
- Megan: Why?
- Ian: Because that's South Africa. I don't know.
- Wayne: We don't know the reason behind it. It's just...we were just told at a house meeting and that's the new ways things are going to work.
- Megan: So you don't know why we need diversity? Or do you think we need it?
- Lee: Diversity is important. Like you can't just have...
- Ian: Yeah but not at the expense of the res.
- Megan: How is it going to be at the expense of the res?
- Ian: You are going to put someone in res because of their skin colour and they are not going to contribute anything to the res and the res will suffer.
- Megan: Why?
- Ian: Because he is not constructing anything. He is not helping building the res for the future.
- Megan: And you said it's going to bring in more culture, how will that...
- Lee: That will definitely uhm be good because diversity is a good thing. Different people from different culture look at things differently and we will just be able to work together to solve problems in more unique ways and things like that. But obviously there will be struggles.
- Megan: Do you guys agree with that? What do you think?
- Wayne: I think diversity will be good. Looking at the sport. Soccer will improve.
- Megan: So how will soccer improve?
- Elton: There will be a second team which means people-
- Ian: A lot of people will play soccer more because now the only guys who come to soccer practice are the guys who play week in and week out. And other guys just don't come.
- Megan: So why would more people play soccer then?
- Elton: Because there are more people.
- Wayne: And the diversity is...
- Ian: There will, be more black people.
- [Laughter]
- Wayne: Yeah that's what I mean.
- Megan: So more black people will play soccer?
- Wayne: Yes because they tend to play soccer more.
- Elton: But like generally in a group of ten people there will be... like say 50% play soccer and in a group of 20 people that 50% would be a great number. Even though it's the same percentage there will be a greater number.
- Megan: Okay so it's a numbers thing and race thing.
- Elton: Ja.

What is very clear from this piece is the association which they draw between diversifying and encouraging an influx of black students, even though the University's policy document

on encouraging 'diversity' in the residences, links this with increasing numbers of black, coloured and junior students. Diversity is associated by the participants in this focus group discussion with 'more cultures', but whenever cultures or cultural activities are specified it is always black people and interests associated with black men such as football.

It may of course be that they envisaged that the most obvious effects of the new residence placement policy would be an increase in the numbers of black students, given the very low proportions of the residence population currently comprising black students. However, associations of 'race' and 'diversity' with black people, and not with coloured and white people, was framed by and contributed to the kinds of cross-racial identifications they were making in the course of the focus group discussion, through invocations of 'brotherhood' and common interests as young men. Thus, the specific racialisation of black people in the account above not only constructs black people as different but also as Other and reinforces a sense of homogeneity as young men which includes both white and coloured.

However, how the prospect of an influx of black students in Drakenstein is viewed and envisaged carries different meanings for different members of the group. Promoting 'diversity' is presented in official university transformation documents and discourses as 'good for everyone' as creating 'cultural' diversity which enhances opportunities for learning from others, and this is echoed by Lee.

On a more prosaic level, some people mention the improvement it will mean for football, with football not only taken as a game mainly played by black men, but as a signifier of black masculinity. Hence it is only when I ask 'how will soccer improve' that the participants take time to spell out to me that 'more diversity' means 'more black people' who 'play soccer more' with 'black people' meaning, in this context, 'black men'.

It is not quite clear from the dialogue whether the participants welcomed or were concerned about this or did not really care. One of the participants, Ian, took issue with the 'diversity is good discourse' by arguing that the pursuit of diversity might be 'at the expense of the res' because people placed in the res, by virtue of skin colour, are 'not going to contribute anything to the res.' It is not clear what he means by this, but the effect of this is to reinforce the idea of black people as the diverse Other, who need special help in order to be admitted into residences and whose presence in residences is, therefore, problematic.

Othering Outeniqua

Black students were Othered in various ways by different students in this white and coloured mixed-race friendship group when raising and discussing particular topics, such as the new residence placement policy. Similarly, the residence Outeniqua, which, as I described earlier in chapter 1, is exceptional, by Stellenbosch standards, in having a student population which is not predominantly white, not single sex, and does not have a long history, was symbolically constructed as different or Othered:

Elton: I think the traditions and everything is about how things were and how you keep it that way. Sort of like my other friends who are at other universities. For them res is just like a place to live you know. Whereas... I try to explain residence life to my friends at home. I try to explain that each res has a different culture. There is not a major difference. But like from Drakenstein to Outeniqua, its going to be a completely different vibe.

Megan: Why?

Elton: Well they have a much more modern culture.

Ian: And Outeniqua is mixed.

Elton: It's more than just being mixed. It's not so much about serving the house and pride. There is pride but it's just different. More modern and its upscale. Whereas here it's more traditional and old school. Like in a good way.

Megan: You say in a good way as if it is supposed to be a bad thing.

Elton: Not old school as in boring.

Cole: Just the traditions. The brotherhood is a lot stronger here than for example a place where they focus more on socialising.

Megan: Okay you said Outeniqua, is that like an example?

Elton: Yes. I wanted to give an example of res with a different vibe compared to Drakenstein.

Megan: Do you guys agree?

Cole: Yes.

Ian: Yeah

As one of the very few gender mixed-gender residences, and the one residence with a majority of black and coloured students, Outeniqua was also constructed symbolically as the odd one out, or the Other, by these same students.

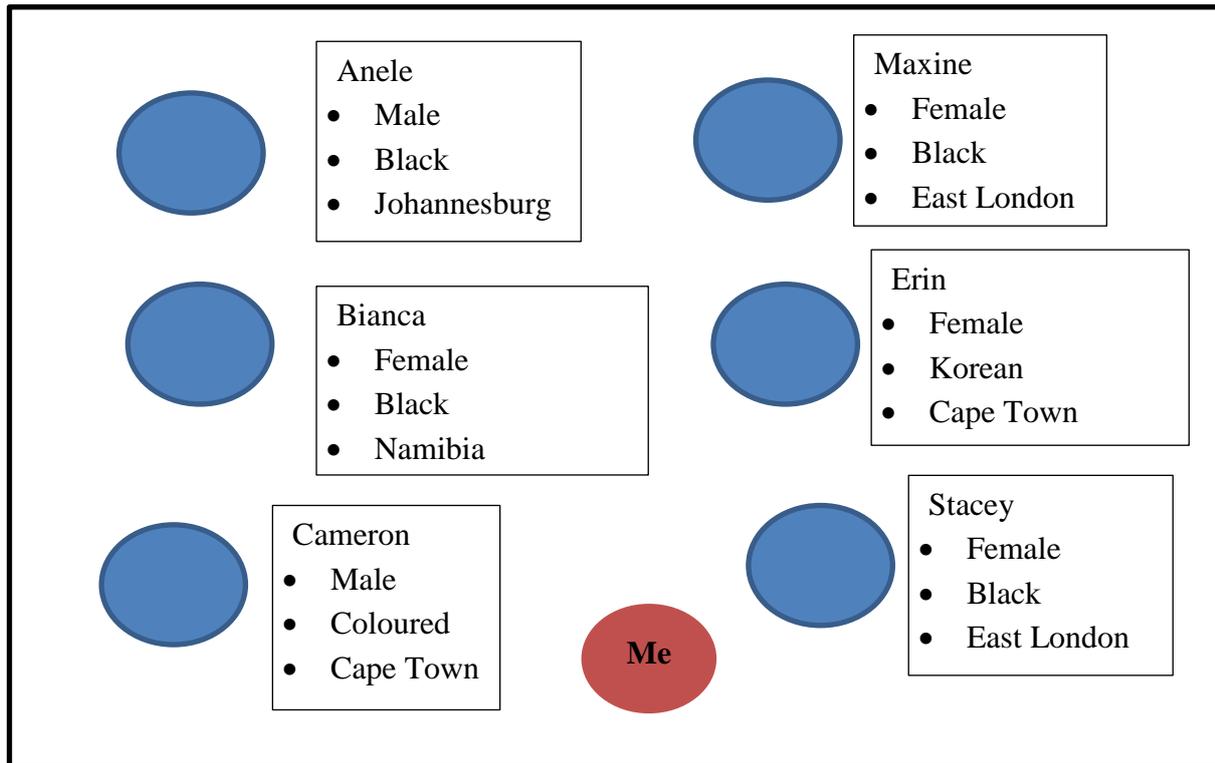
In using the concept of Othering, I draw on social constructionist understandings of identities “as positions we construct, negotiate, and perform in particular contexts, as opposed to essences we possess” (Pattman, 2007:123). In particular, I draw on writers, such as Richard Johnson (1997, cited in Pattman, 2007), who have used psychoanalysis to develop a radical critique of the reification of opposing identities, such as African and white, or male and

female, as fixed and independent opposites. He has also examined how racial and gendered identifications are derived through constructing the racial or gendered Other, which becomes a fantasy structure on to which difference is projected, a peg onto which fears or desires can be hung.

In this process of Othering, Drakenstein and Outeniqua were constructed as relational opposites by imputing symbolic and pejorative meanings to material differences. For example, a 'modern' culture is attributed to Outeniqua (a chronologically newer residence), and 'traditional' and 'old school' values to Drakenstein, a chronologically older residence. Ian's contribution that "Outeniqua is mixed" helps to provide insights into the meanings they attach to traditional and modern. He uses the category 'mixed' (and presumably he means gender-mixed) in a way which renders this and Outeniqua odd, and as Other. By implication, of course, it also renders Drakenstein and its homogeneity in relation to gender as the norm, not just numerically as compared to other residences but also as representing the pejorative norm, or what residences should be like.

By Othering Outeniqua, they were, I suggest, distancing themselves from what they perceived as 'diversity gone wild'. At the same time, they were, comforting themselves with the knowledge that this kind of diversity was contained in a single residence and had not become the norm in Stellenbosch. I argue this precisely because of their investments in brotherhood and their concerns about new residence placement policies and the implications of 'diversifying' the 'normal' residences. It is as if Outeniqua has become, for them, the diverse Other.

Focus group discussion 3: Outeniqua (mixed gender residence)



General illustrative summary of the relational dynamics of the group

This was the first focus group I conducted for this project, and as I waited outside the residence I had preconceived ideas as perpetuated by the university, other students and through the residence's values, of it being a liberal and modern residence. The group I met seemed to be conducting the interview by themselves as they spoke among themselves, asked each other questions, and disagreed and agreed openly with each other on a variety of issues. I did not have to probe for answers or opinions in this group as much as I did for the other groups. I often only stepped in to ask for elaboration on a topic or to steer the conversation back to a particular topic. There was a lot of humour throughout the interview, and hardly a moment of silence. This group interacted with each other to such an extent that I found myself feeling like an outsider. My supervisor, on reading the transcript, stated that he too felt like an outsider just by reading the transcript. This was clearly a cohesive group of people. However, this also showed that to a certain degree, unity amongst a group of people always serves to exclude those outside the group. The experience with this group also demonstrated both the pros and cons of choosing to conduct my research with friendship groups. Although it provided me with rich data and made it easy to facilitate conversation, it was sometimes difficult to understand what participants were saying. Jokes which only the group understood

happened quickly and often and it was difficult to pick up on everything which was spoken about. Occasionally it became difficult to facilitate and guide the conversation.

This was the most diverse friendship group in terms of race of the participants, and what was particularly striking was how these differences were turned into sources of identification as they constructed themselves as outsiders in SU. For example, they claimed, with much conviction that they only came to Stellenbosch because they had a bursary and that they had wanted to go to other institutions but only received financial aid from Stellenbosch and were left with no choice but to attend. Not only did they posit themselves as outsiders in this way, but they derived a sense of common identification through positioning themselves as outsiders. One of the ways in which they produced and demonstrated a sense of commonality as outsiders, was through their use of humour which took the form of poking fun of each other and also of other residences or students who were seen as embodying ‘traditional’ cultural values, as elaborated below.

What was particularly striking about this focus group discussion was how aware they were of being part of ‘the odd one out’ residence in Stellenbosch, how they drew on this, how significant this was as a source of identification and how they turned this into something positive and normal. This was done partly through ridicule of cultural practices they associated with Stellenbosch, appeals to versions of ‘modernity’ framed in opposition to ‘tradition’, as well as to university ‘transformation’ discourses. In their accounts of Stellenbosch and residence culture, they (and most notably the black and coloured men and women participants in the Outeniqua focus groups) raised critical questions not just about race, but gender and sexuality as well, and seemed to revel in being positioned as part of the ‘diverse Other’.

Presentation and analysis of key themes, as they emerge in the focus group discussion

The significance of humour as a form of resistance and source of identification

In this focus group, there was almost never a quiet moment or a minute without them making fun of each other and other residences, and as I mentioned above, the humour and laughter seemed to contribute to a strong sense of identity among the participants, which, in turn, encouraged them to engage in this. Their humour, as I suggested, seemed to allow and enable them to distance themselves as a group from constructions of Stellenbosch more generally. It

seemed to operate for them both as an important form of resistance and as powerful source of identification as we see in the following extract.

In this, Cameron starts talking about a friend who went to Drakenstein as if this was ‘death’, but who had to go because of the ‘family legacy’. In other words presumably he was expected to attend because his father or grandfather had been there. This construction of the ‘tradition’ of following in their parents’ footsteps as a kind of death sentence was in sharp contrast to its idealisation by the three white Afrikaans women from Blouberg. What was particularly striking was how everyone in the focus group started laughing, as if in recognition of Cameron’s debunking of this sanctification of ‘tradition’, and, too, as if this was a familiar theme in their conversational repertoires. When I picked up on their laughter and asked if they all knew then, what he was talking about, they went on to provide examples of cultural practices and traditions, notably initiation rituals which they associated with male residences, and made fun of these, with everyone joining in:

Cameron: ... He was in Drakenstein so it was like death if you don’t go to Drakenstein because it was like family legacy type of thing, but then I was like no (*deep sigh from Cameron*).

Megan:you’re all laughing so do you all know what he’s talking about?

Bianca: Well guys res’s have these rituals [laughing Everyone: Rituals?] Hai it is, where they do things with a guy, you know like they nasty, like they just do things

Maxine: Initiation

Bianca: So that you look like a sissy

Megan: Like what things?

Stacey: Running naked

Bianca: Exactly

Megan: Running naked?

Stacey: Kogelberg¹³ had to run naked.

Bianca: Walking to Kogelberg

Maxine: Ja the mountain

Bianca: 5 o’clock in the morning,

Megan: So do all residences do this?

Maxine: It’s traditionally the male res’s especially like the purest Afrikaans ones, with all these traditions that they bring down so like some boys had to cut their hair styles and dye their hair funny colours

Stacey: And ride horses, those stick horses

Maxine: And it’s all part of tradition so you know I would understand why a guy would not want to be in that type of res

¹³ Another male residence at SU.

Megan: So it's tradition?

Cameron: Ja it's not like tradition it's a thing they have to do because if I say no its no, that's no.

Significantly, when critiquing and ridiculing mainstream residence life and culture at Stellenbosch from their position as members of the Othered residence, they focus on male residences and initiation rituals. Maxine describes the male Afrikaans residences as 'the purest Afrikaans ones', as if these represent an 'ideal type' (in the Weberian sense) of Afrikaans identity to critique. What seemed to propel this critique, and the laughter it generated, was the sanctification as 'traditional' of rituals, such as running naked up mountains and riding on the backs of stick horses,¹⁴ in which new males in some of the men's residences were expected to engage. Adding to the humour, I suggest, was the gendering of these rituals, the very fact that it was men who engaged in these, whose power in Stellenbosch was buttressed by institutionalised cultural practices which reflected and contributed to the hegemony, not only of whiteness, but also of masculinities. For example, this occurs through the exaltation of rugby as the main Stellenbosch sport, and the 'Maties' as the main sporting representatives of the University. The humour they generated from talking about predominantly white young men running around a track on the back of stick horses or naked up and down mountains, derived in part from what they perceived as contradictory cultural practices at Stellenbosch which exalted and celebrated masculinity through processes of infantilisation.

Not ridiculing Stellenbosch but elitist versions of Stellenbosch which marginalised them

The Outeniqua students in this focus group discussion positioned themselves with pride and humour as the diverse Other in relation to mainstream residence life and culture which they characterised as predominantly white and they mocked and ridiculed its elitist pretensions as repositories of 'tradition', and as representing the real Stellenbosch. In their critique of mainstream residential cultural practices, they were not ridiculing Stellenbosch as such, but elitist versions of Stellenbosch which excluded and marginalised people like themselves, and produced them as the diverse Other. They developed strong identifications amongst

¹⁴ This occurs on the front lawn of one of the men's residences at the beginning of the academic year and involves new students riding pretend horses and racing each other round a track, as if they were jockeys. It features as a big social event on the Stellenbosch calendar attended by hundreds of people, (mainly white and some coloured students) from other residences, with the women dressing up for the occasion and particularly conspicuous standing next to the track and cheering on the jockeys. There is also a special enclosure for 'Old Boys' and their partners, some of whom sponsored the event who can watch the 'horse races' while sitting at tables eating and drinking and reminiscing.

themselves through articulations of common experiences, not least through forms and styles of opposition as exemplified in the humorous and critical dialogue in the focus group discussion. The identifications they made with each other were not in opposition to Stellenbosch. Indeed, they implicitly came to identify themselves as Stellenbosch students, as we see, in the following extract in which they tell stories which gently mock themselves and their parents' pre-conceptions about Stellenbosch.

Affirming their identifications with each other and Stellenbosch through self-mockery

This conversation was precipitated by a question I posed about whether, and if so how, they felt they had changed since coming here. Again everyone joined in the conversation, which was constantly punctuated by laughter and emotional exclamations. It was also noticeable in the dialogue that the stories which people started to tell elicited mutual recognition, as if these were common cultural stories with which they were all familiar, and which not only assumed but also, as evidenced in the emotional engagement of the participants, helped to produce a strong sense of identification with each other. This was evident, for example, in the ways participants 'finished' what others had started, for example Maxine 'finishing' Anele's contribution at the beginning of the extract.

Anele: Yes. Okay basically let me explain like, I came with my parents here because they were also worried [laughter]

Maxine: You were going to be killed by the Boeremag¹⁵ [laughing]

Anele: But at the same time they were also, because the plan was basically for me to just come by myself and sort myself, but then they were like, like no what did you do like where you going? So like they came with me but the minute we drove into Stellenbosch, because when you drive in you drive like by...

Maxine: N1 (*a national road in the Western Cape*)

Anele: So when we walked in we were like we were so amazed, we were like is this really Stellenbosch, ja because the buildings are just white and clean

Stacey: Ja

Anele: and wow

Stacey: Coming from Eastern Cape we were shocked, clean clean

Anele: it was like coming in a different country and we were like...

Megan: What's so different between this and...

Bianca: whooooo

Anele: Where I come from, after you eat an apple you're like whatever someone else will pick it up or, because you never seem to care because, basically in Joburg

¹⁵ In English, Afrikaner Force, a group which hold white supremacist ideologies and aimed to reinstate white, Afrikaans power to government in South Africa.

life is just too fast to be caring about these things so when I came here it's like my life started to become slower and slower and starting to care about recycling and you know, and when we got here and my parents were like really, I've never seen my mom so excited before, she was actually excited more than I was and like seeing like everyone is kind, everyone greets, like when you walk people are like hi, I don't even know who they are but they just greet you so it was also like friendliness also.

Megan: So your perception of it being racist wasn't, I mean when you said your mom was scared as well was she also scared about the same things as you were?

Anele: ja about the race issue, about it being too boere because she was like yoh, since you're going there and you're already going there like, everything is set you already got the bursary so when you, just stay by yourself and just study study study [Amanda laughing], it's only 3 years, only 3 years, you gone, that's what she was like, like the whole of January when we were preparing to come here that's all she told me she was like just be in the good books of those white people, go join the DA¹⁶, all this stuff

Maxine: Wow

Anele: Okay but honestly, okay I'm a bit exaggerating but she was like just don't be like, like don't allow them obviously to abuse you but at the same breathe don't be in there face...

Megan: okay

Anele: But when we got here she was like, she was actually worried about nothing. And I was also worried about nothing.

Though these stories are rooted in the past and focus on their and their parents' views and about Stellenbosch prior to and on their arrival, they are clearly ones which hold much significance for the participants, and this suggests that they resonate with concerns and interests that the participants currently share. In narrative analysis, attention has been drawn to the selectivity of memory, and how the kinds of stories people tell about the past may provide powerful insights regarding current motivations, identifications, and categories they use now to interpret the past (Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992:1).

The stories in the extract above were funny, but in hindsight, as they were telling them. Thus, the bunker mentality of his mother, which Anele gently mocks, now elicits much laughter and mutual recognition. There was no suggestion that this was a laughing matter at the time his mother gave him advice about how to cope at Stellenbosch. That is because both Anele and his mother presumed that he would be marginalised and treated like an outsider when he arrived at Stellenbosch. The humour, then, turns on the contrast between this presumption,

¹⁶ A political party associated with a large white and coloured constituency

and the reality as they experience it now as Stellenbosch students, and implicitly affirms their sense of identification and belonging as particular kinds of Stellenbosch students, with particular social networks and interests. Interestingly, Anele admits ‘a bit exaggerating’ the story about his mother’s advice, as if making the gap between this and their actual experiences wider and the story even funnier.

Conclusion

In my research, I want to take seriously the idea that identifications are not biological, fixed essences. I did not want to reduce students to racialized subjects, as popular discourses on transformation often do, or take a simplistic view of their multiple and intersecting identifications. Rather, I wanted to explore how students construct their identities in the focus group discussions, and whether and, if so how, in this very process, race, gender, sexuality and other variables interlink and intersect as sources of identification and dis-identification, and dimensions of power and inequality. In focus group sessions, I witnessed these constructions and performances first hand.

One of my concerns has been how to write about and present this in ways which do justice to the relational dynamics of the focus group discussions and processes of knowledge production which go on in these. I found that more conventional ways of presenting data in published qualitative research articles, which abstract lines from transcribed data which are taken as exemplars of key themes which emerge in the research, were not satisfactory in doing this. What happens in this manner of presenting is that the themes become too vague do not engage with the relational dynamics of the research encounter and how these themes emerged in the discussions and were spoken about. By providing summaries of the context of the interviews, and then engaging in detailed ways about how extracts emerged in various focus groups, I felt I did more justice to analysing the ways in which students were constructing their identifications and performing them in relation to each other, and myself.

I elaborate in more detail on the findings of my research as these relate on content and process in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Comparing the focus groups in relation to the ways in which they engage with the practice of skakeling

Introduction

In this chapter I want to examine and compare how the themes of ‘social cohesion’ and ‘diversity’ are invoked, addressed and defined in the different focus groups, including two others which I conducted with Blouberg and Outeniqua, (to which I did not refer in Chapter 4 due to lack of space) in relation to gender, sexuality, race and culture. I do this by focusing on and comparing how the practice of skakeling was raised and discussed in the five different focus groups. This was a topic participants raised in all the focus groups I conducted. It was introduced spontaneously (i.e. not in response to a question I posed about this) and generated emotionally engaged dialogue.

Skakeling is a practice which takes place amongst all residences in Stellenbosch as well as private students. Skakels are an organised practice in which female and male residences socialise. Generally the event begins by both residences lining up facing each other. They then greet each other with a communal pre-arranged greeting, and many times the male residence will serenade the females. The activity then begins, often with the males having to approach the females. Sometimes the males indicate the specific female they have chosen to interact with by giving her a gift of a rose, chocolate, or other items. A few of these skakels take place throughout the first week and continue (although less frequently) throughout the first year and sometimes second year of a student’s time in residence. Skakels take on different forms of socialising, from picnics, to dances, and to simply talking to each other. However, they are always formal and are almost always focused on males and females interacting with each other in heterosexual and often romantic ways.

Focusing on the topic of skakeling, and examining and comparing how this emerged and was discussed by different participants in the focus groups, provides insights on how students from different and diverse backgrounds construct and experience diversity, social cohesion and marginalisation. It also demonstrates the different discursive positions which participants take, and the identifications and dis-identifications they make within focus groups, and between focus groups.

Blouberg focus group 1 (Lizhan, Nadia, Karli)

These three females used essentialised ideas of gender and sexuality when communicating about their experiences of skakeling. Although skakeling generally happens between a male and female residence, these group of females spoke about one skakel they had with another female residence, which Lizhan described as “quite stupid”. When I asked them why, Nadia explained.

Nadia: So obviously we are girls and we want to meet guys. So at the skakel with girls’ res it was like we already have friends.

Megan: You said obviously, why obviously?

Nadia: Because... I don’t know... we have... we only have two weeks so I would rather want to skakel with guy’s reses than waste time skakeling with a girl res because we will just make new friends there. But I don’t want new friends because I already have my friends.

For Lizhan, Nadia and Karli, skakeling is an activity clearly demarcated for heterosexual contact. The interaction with other females in skakeling is described as just making new friends. The assumption here is that when the same sexes mix, it is for friendship, but when mixing with the opposite sex it is for romantic or sexualised relationships (something uniquely different from their friendships with females). The importance of the type of research I am doing was also brought out in this conversation. The open style of interviewing I conduct allows people to reflect on other peoples experiences, even though they do not engage directly with the Other. When I asked, “why obviously?” in the above example, Nadia spoke in heteronormative ways. However, directly after Nadia spoke, Karli responded, “Now that I am thinking about it, what if you are not a straight female and then you have to skakel with a guy’s residence”. What is notably absent from this white group of females, and present in groups with black and coloured females, is experiences of discrimination or marginalization in the process of skakeling.

Drakenstein focus group (Elton, Wayne, Cole, Ian, Lee)

In the Drakenstein interview, the first thing that emerges when asked about how they met was that they ‘do stuff’ together. When I asked what stuff they do, they say skakels. They say this even though skakeling is something male students do with female students in other residences, the Drakenstein students say very little about the female students they meet when skakeling, as if the significance they attach to skakeling as ‘stuff they do together’ is tied up with the bond they produce with other male students through this common heterosexual ritual. Skakeling was therefore not just an opportunity for males to mix with females, but is

constructed along the lines of males getting together through their sexuality, and through the construction of themselves as people who desire females.

- Megan: And you? How did you become friends with them?
Lee: It just happened basically. You meet everyone at res. I can't really remember how I met these people.
Ian: Because the first years do stuff together. So you meet everyone.
Megan: Like what stuff do you guys do? Like give me examples.
Ian: Skakels.
Megan: Skakels, which are?
Ian: We get together.

Heterosexuality is normalized and naturalized through the heteronormative practice, and this influences how students themselves think of sexuality and gender. This is epitomized through a statement made by one of the Drakenstein males, when I ask, why did they have to skakel with females, he responds with, "that's how nature works". Homophobic meanings are not invoked simply by the presence of feminine characteristics but rather an inability to be sufficiently male. Being able to skakel with those of the opposite gender rather than the same gender proves masculinity. To not do so is seen as a betrayal of male solidarity (Plummer, 2001:6).

Similar to the Blouberg focus group 1 females, the Drakenstein group, when speaking about skakels, distinguished very clearly between skakeling with those of the same gender, which would only allow these males to make friends (which they framed as a pointless endeavour), and skakeling with females, which was clearly a sexualised activity. At one point in the focus group, the males explain that the aim of skakeling is to be 'as romantic as possible'. When I asked, "So is it to meet a girlfriend?", Wayne corrects me and says "Girlfriends" which resulted in uproarious laughter from the group. Through this laughter they shared their commonality as heterosexual men who would pursue women as sexual objects. I too joined in this laughter as I wanted to show the group that I also had a sense of humour, and I was trying to create a relationship in which they allowed me into their jokes. However, my laughter, as a female laughing about males sexually pursuing females, seemed to make them uncomfortable as they quickly moved on to talk about other traditions in their residence.

The exclusivity of their sexuality became especially evident through how the male group related to me as a researcher, which was very different to any other focus group I conducted. For example, the discomfort they showed when I laughed at jokes of a sexual nature, and

their unwillingness to share or explain jokes of sexual nature to me throughout the interview. Towards the end of the interview I asked them if they felt that the interview would have been different if I was a male researcher.

- Megan: If I was guy would you speak to me differently or speak about different things?
Ian: We would have spoken about the same things but in a different way.
Elton: Not very much different I guess.
Lee: A guy would have asked different questions
Megan: Like what?
Lee: I have no idea.
Wayne: I think we would have stuck to the ‘kuiers’¹⁷, a lot of it was a guy. We would be talking more about that.
Elton: And skakels.
Megan: What would you have talked about?
Wayne: More skakeling with girls.
[laughter]

Ian immediately said yes, and Elton responded that they would have spoken more about skakeling. So much emphasis was put on skakels in the interview, in fact the word is brought up 32 times in the interview by the males themselves. Yet they still claim they would have spoken about it more and in different ways if I was a male. This extract highlights the difficulties the males are experiencing in talking to a female about what has been up until now constructed as a sexual activity. Through this they were pushing me as a female to the margins of their group, by placing assumptions on me as a female based on very traditional gender stereotypes of females being shy and non-sexual. By doing this they are again affirming their group identity as males on the basis of a shared sexuality.

Interestingly, race was absent in the males discussion about skakeling. This is partly because, as all the groups explained, that when skakeling the males almost always approached the females. Black and coloured females were therefore the ones waiting to be approached, and who were excluded when they were not approached or were publicly rejected, as Asie experienced. Wayne and Elton, as coloured males, seemed to have no experience of exclusion in skakeling perhaps because much of the power in choosing who to interact with lies in the hands of the males.

¹⁷ Translated to English: “Socialising”

Outeniqua focus group 1 (Cameron, Stacey, Bianca, Anele, Erin, Maxine)

In this group, a key theme which emerged in relation to skakeling was the racialisation thereof. Stacey, Bianca and Erin were especially aware of skakeling becoming racialised as white males approached white females, black males approached black females, and coloured males approached coloured females. Interestingly, the entire group then focused on Erin, as she said that everyone, of all races approached her because they viewed her as an exotic, Asian female. As Cameron said, “The thing is, who doesn’t want to speak to the Korean girl”. They said this even though Erin had already communicated to the group that she too felt that, when interacting with majority-white male residences, she was hardly ever approached.

This group, specifically through Anele and Cameron’s accounts, communicated, albeit in a humorous way, the kinds of pressures they felt to communicate with females in skakeling. There are clear ways in which skakels can function to disempower males (instead of celebrating their sexual prowess such as in Drakenstein’s account), as they are forced to prove their sexuality through talking to females. This was evident in the Outeniqua 1 students’ responses to my question of why males do not skakel with other males.

Megan: So what is the point of skakeling?

Cameron: It’s like you’re meant to make, its networking basically like you...

Megan: So why can’t guys network with other guys?

Cameron: But it’s more so like a girls meet guys kind of thing

Stacey: I think it was more for the boys res’s to get to know the girls because they all boys res’s, so I think it was more for them than for us because we already had boys.

Anele: Because I also think it’s like the guy res’s compete against one another, whose the best guy res. Getting a girl, they compete who’s the best girl

Maxine: Also I think cos a lot of, you think of first years, majority of them are straight from high school. So if you think of your high school friendship groups they were mainly boy, girl groups and separate you know people had boyfriends and all of that stuff but it was a boy friendship group, girl friendship group, so I think now that you at university, you free now have boys and girls mixed type of thing, for you know and to meet new people and I think it’s also weird like you know almost, like it’s weird for guys to meet each other, like when guys make friends like, hi friend can I borrow your pen and like they make friends like that whereas with girls it must be a meeting like hi I’m so and so and that’s how they meet.

Megan: You mean when two girls are meeting?

Maxine: Two girls are meeting each other, a girl and a guy are meeting each other, like guys can’t like, I think it’s weird for guys to meet in a formal setting

Stacey: Like when they’re forced to meet.

Megan: So it's normal for a girl and a guy to meet formally but not for guys and guys to meet formally

Maxine & Anele: Ja.

Megan: And why do you think that

Cameron: Because if you would force, if it was a guy guy skakel, you were forced it would be like, you knooow. Whereas the girls would be "Hi Hi, I like your shoes" type of thing uh but guys would be like

Bianca: Like moffies or sissies

[laughter]

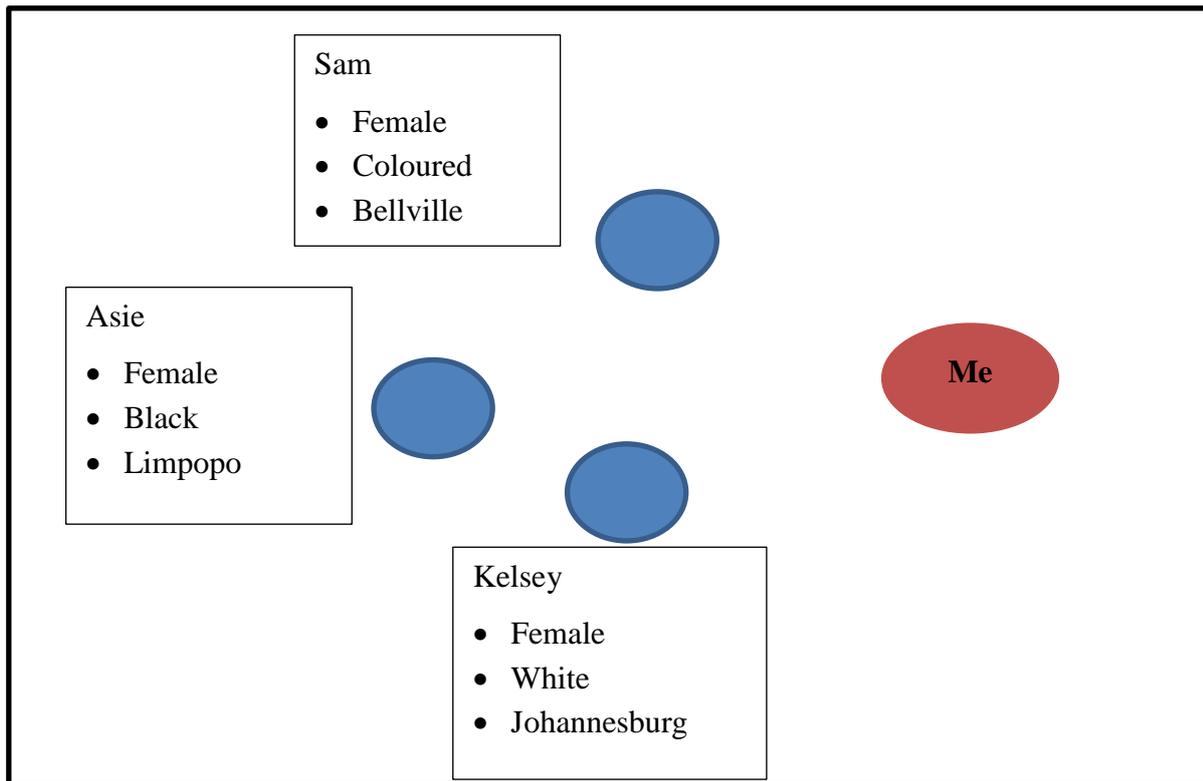
Megan: Why would that be?

Cameron: It's just a thing, like a, it's a thing.

Bianca: It's society

When I asked why they, as males, would not skakel with another male residence, Anele said, "It's like, don't disturb my manhood type of thing". Moffies and sissies are terms used here to describe males with feminine characteristics or those who don't perform their sexuality the way they are supposed to in the context of a skakel. By placing these terms on males who could not prove their "manhood" through skakeling, the practice becomes something which polices sexuality and reproduces heteronormative thinking. No one explicitly told this group that heterosexuality is considered the norm in Stellenbosch, but it is certainly implied through a practice such as skakeling. Practices such as skakeling are exemplars of how heteronormative assumptions materially, socially and culturally shape our world, and how these assumptions are maintained and reproduced through the rejection and shaming of behaviour which goes against this, such as the use of terms like 'moffie' and 'sissie' (Renold, 2005).

Blouberg focus group 2 (Kelsey, Asie, Sam,)



Although a mixed group in terms of race and geographic background (as can be seen in the diagram above), the ideas of residence life clearly separated this group. Two females in particular seemed to come from completely different backgrounds. Kelsey was a white, Afrikaans female from Johannesburg who was a generation student and who celebrated residence life. Asie was a black female from Limpopo who came to Stellenbosch only because she received a bursary, and said she did not understand the point of residence traditions. She clearly stated that she would probably be leaving the residence, and possibly the university, the next year because she felt that she did not fit in. Asie spoke about an incident where they were skakeling with a male residence. All the first year females in the residence had to throw their shoes in the centre of the room. A male then had to choose a shoe, and dance with whomever the shoe belonged to. Asie did this, and she described how a white Afrikaans male threw the shoe back at her and walked away laughing. When I asked why he did that she said, “Probably because I’m black”.

Asie: I have gone through a bad experience at a sokkie dance. And what happened is we had girls and guys. So all the girls had to throw their shoe on the dance floor. And a guy had to pick up just one shoe and then raise it up. And if it was your shoe then he had to dance with you. So I did that and one picked my shoe. And then they just looked at me

and threw it at me and laughed with their friends. So that was something that was really... it hurt me a lot... that's why I hate skakels. I hate them. And ja... that's basically it.

Megan: Why do you think he did that?

Asie: I think he did that because he was Afrikaans and obviously he didn't want to dance with a black girl. So ja.

Megan: So that experience made you not want to participate?

Asie: Ja because I was like maybe... I'm not saying every guy in Stellenbosch is like that... but it's something I am still dealing with and ja.

Kelsey: I think a lot of people... the more you stand back the more harder it is to come back. So I think that a lot of people that do not attend skakels, that aren't part of committee in res. If you don't do it once your less likely to do it the second time. If you don't do it the second time then you won't do it the third time. So people stand more and more back. Whereas when you are continually involved, you know its fun even if you have bad experience. You have good experiences too so you will come back even if you had a bad experience.

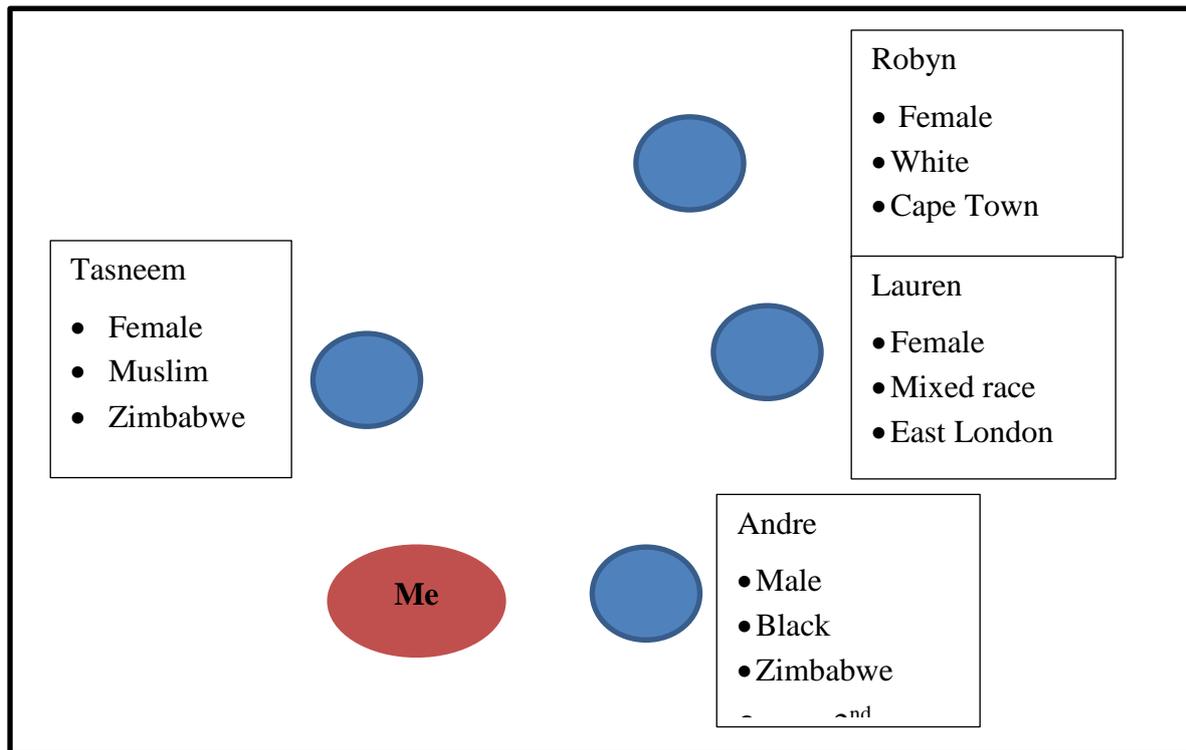
Megan: Have you ever had a bad experience like her?

Kelsey: We went to Stones with [another male residence]. And for a certain period of time I was not there. And I put in all this effort and I got there late. So yeah that was not a good experience for me. Because I got there and then nobody was there. So there have been bad experiences but in general I enjoyed it.

At this stage the atmosphere is very tense, as there was silence from the entire group for a moment after Kelsey spoke. Asie herself was very quiet, and I felt tense as I waited for Asie, or someone to respond. Kelsey, who like Lizhan, Nadia and Karli, wanted to follow in her parents' footsteps of coming to Blouberg, almost immediately jumped into the conversation and compared it to an incident where males did not show up to a skakel. Kelsey's reaction dismisses her friend's very real experience of racial discrimination, as just another bad experience. She moves the story of discrimination from being one of marginalisation and exclusion of various people by a particular residence, to a story of personal willingness to be part of the system. This happens even though blackness is constructed by the student herself as something which marginalises her. This extract exemplifies the ways that students construct racial discrimination in ways which exempt the residence life or community from the responsibility of those who are pushed to the margins or seen as having other priorities or who are simply not interested in residence life. But it is precisely because of the traditions that there is space for people who do not or cannot assimilate to this.

The extract also serves as an example of how only black students seem to be carriers of race in institutional contexts and practices where whiteness comes to be taken for granted. Skakeling produces black people and others through processes of marginalisation and one of the victims of this is Asie whose claims that she was discriminated against as a black person are not taken seriously by Nadia. Sam, a coloured student (similarly to Elton and Wayne) did not experience incidences of discrimination in skakeling at all. Race only seemed to appear as problematic in Asie's experience.

Outeniqua focus group 2 (Tasneem, Robyn, Lauren, Andre)



According to Outeniqua group 2, skakeling not only polices students in relation to sexuality, but also constrains possibilities of cross-racial mixing. In the focus group I conducted, Lauren develops a powerful critique of racial assumptions which become evident in the practice of skakeling. This extract arises after the group has pointed out that they observed that during skakeling only students of the same racial groups talk to each other.

- Tasneem: I think it's just comfort zone.
- Andre: Yeah your comfort zone. One of your own. You feel that it is easier.
- Megan: Why are they more used to people who are like the same?
- Tasneem: You automatically have something in common and something to talk about.
- Megan: How come?
- Lauren: Like I am half black so I have had a lot of black people around me and I generally feel more comfortable with black people. And I just like their vibe and they are loud and talk and also because they speak Xhosa or Zulu and then I'm like Ha that's something familiar to me. But like... but ja... Being with coloured people can be awkward because they are expecting something from you. Like you can tell they are expecting something. And it's just awkward
- Megan: So they expect you to be the same?
- Lauren: Yeah in a way. And I really am not coloured in whatsoever way. And it's so hard to like yeah.

Lauren speaks here about being mixed-race, (or half black as she terms it), and being familiar with Xhosa and Zulu people and their “vibe”. However, others identified her as coloured (assuming as she is mixed race she looks lighter skinned, I myself would have assumed her to be coloured), even though her background seems to be in contrast with the expectations people have of her. She says it is like people expect something from her, that they expect certain performances of her colouredness which she cannot comply with as she does not identify herself as coloured, and she cannot relate to what she perceives as the ‘coloured culture’. For Lauren, these expectations were highlighted in the activity of skakeling. It was in this practice that she noticed that the kinds of people came up to her were those who thought they looked the same as her. This shows the limits of a practice such as skakeling. It does not allow for reflection, or for students to engage with students across race lines, who they would not otherwise interact with. It also reinforces people’s assumptions about race and gender, rather than challenging people to think about their assumptions.

One of the main reasons that skakeling doesn’t allow for this is because of the sexual or romantic nature which students attach to skakeling. In the following extract how race becomes more significant when the interaction is perceived as being romantic.

- Andre: Like there are some people who perceive it as an opportunity to meet your soul mate. So people have these ideal partners in their mind so like literally they will like... if we continue with the theory and say that black people stick to black people and white people stick to white people, and we continue with that theory and then we introduce this thing about relationships and people have this mentality that they are going to meet their soul mate then they are naturally going to go for a person who is in the same category as their soul mate.
- Megan: Why naturally though?
- Andre: Because if their main aim is to find a soul mate then they are not going to go for anyone from a different category.
- Robyn: Yeah you have the idea of somebody you want to be with and how you want them to be one day. And then you would go for that type of person.
- Megan: But how would you know by just looking at them though?
- Andre: It’s like if you have an ideal partner in your mind. Like okay fine I like white girls. She has to be slim she has to be this and that and then you go to skakel and then you are going to try that because you never know what’s going to lead you to her... So you have this opportunity and you

just try it out. So most people go for... I think they would go for similar paths.

Robyn: I agree with you if you are going to look for that. But if you there just to make friends and the usual, but if you have the idea of somebody then you take that type you have in your mind and you apply it to the people who are there. So it's not just based on that because you go and speak to them. And if you don't like them then you go okay cool and go speak to the next person. So I think at first it's a mentality of okay this is my type and I'm going to try and find somebody like that. You got the look okay cool. Nay don't really like you so I am going to go and speak to somebody else.

Megan: So if I understand what you guys are saying. If it's meeting for friendships then it doesn't matter?

Robyn: Yeah

Andre: Yes.

Megan: But if it's for relationships then-

Andre: Then you get picky.

When same sex interaction happens, they are seen as having something in common based on gender, however when mixed gender interaction takes place people seem to put a lot of emphasis on having nothing in common with those of the opposite gender, therefore gender commonalities falls away and people cling to racial or "cultural" commonalities. Very traditional ways of thinking about race, gender and sexuality are communicated through this practice. It is through traditional practices such as skakeling, which contributes to shaping relationships on campus. And therefore it is important to look at practices such as these if we want to include social cohesion into our concept of diversity.

It is interesting when comparing all the focus groups, that it was mostly black and Asian female students who felt marginalised on the basis of racial discrimination within the activity of skakeling. However, it is important to recognise that skakeling can also exclude students on other bases. Robyn, a white female, who was in this group, spoke about her experience with white males from other residences.

Robyn...I was like really excited to make guy friends. Because I just wanted to make genuine guy friends and I was talking to this one guy and we were talking about cool stuff like where he is from and what he does and all that normal stuff. And then I was like "Okay so why did you come to Stellenbosch" and he told me and then asked "Do you know anybody at res" and I told him that my boyfriend is at Outeniqua. And he was like "Oh my gosh. Like I just wasted 20 minutes of my life."...I was so upset about it and was like does every guy think like that. So thereafter at skakels I just talked to my friends. Didn't really

...speak to anyone. And it's just a horrible experience for me and it left such a bad taste in my mouth like right at the beginning you know.

Robyn, as a white female also felt discriminated against, it was not that no males approached her but it was the romantic and sexualised ideas they had about what they would gain from interacting with her that made her feel negative about the experience. It is also important to note Robyn's experience in relation to what Anele and Cameron were saying. There is pressure implicit in skakeling, which forces males to in some ways prove their masculinities in order to fit in. Interacting with females who already have boyfriends does not allow males to prove their masculinity.

Conclusion

One thing which was consistent in all groups was the way skakeling is constructed as a sexualised, and in some ways romantic activity, which provides a formal opportunity for males and females to interact in order to establish heterosexual relationships. However, the experiences of these differed between groups. For Drakenstein, skakeling served as an activity which formed unity amongst them as heterosexual males who pursue females. Anele and Cameron, in Outeniqua 1, however explain how skakeling can also function to dis-unify males who cannot prove their masculinity through performances of heterosexuality. The practice of skakeling functions to reify racial assumptions and marginalises especially black female students (in my focus groups). The intersectionality of gender and race identifications show how Asie's experience of marginalization cannot be explained without including race and gender into understandings of discrimination. However, it also impacts white females who are unavailable for a heterosexual relationship, such as Robyn who has a boyfriend, or indeed, homosexual females.

Symbolic practices such as skakeling, which reproduces essentialised ways of thinking about race, gender and sexuality, contributes to shaping relations and interactions on campus. The practice of skakeling connected with assumptions that males and females do not naturally mix unless it is for sex. The idea is that in order to make this happen, something formal has to happen in order to facilitate this process. This speaks to Butler's argument (1990) that gender differences are expressed and emphasised through heterosexual practices. Skakeling reinforces essentialist and heteronormative thinking. This idea is communicated through the formal way in which students are expected through the institution of skakeling to find a prospective heterosexual mate. The taken for granted ways in which race, sexuality and

gender are spoken about, is evident in most of the focus group discussions about skakeling. These normative taken for granted practices were nevertheless challenged by students who complained about feeling marginalized through their participation in skakeling.

Chapter 6: Implications and conclusion

Doing participatory research with students in the context of 'transformation'

As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, one of the unintended and problematic effects of transformation plans in universities, such as Stellenbosch, which focus primarily on 'improving diversity' through increasing the numbers of students from racially-defined groups, is the reduction of race to a measurable entity. This puts a premium on 'co-existence' and 'contact', rather than 'cohesion' and 'integration'. Thus, the idealisation of diversity becomes achieved in a way which reifies or naturalises race, as well as the construction of black and coloured students as the diverse Others, in a way which reinforces whiteness as the norm. Indeed, in Stellenbosch, black and coloured students have been categorised as 'diversity candidates' in official documents, and, this was echoed when the Drakenstein students were discussing the impact of the new residence placement policy, and when they were talking about Outeniqua.

I see the Ministerial report on universities and social cohesion published in 2008 as offering a challenge, which I try to take up, to engage in more in-depth research in universities on how diversity is lived, experienced, and constructed by different students in different universities. In my research, I build on the Ministerial report (2008) which emphasised the importance of 'social cohesion', 'inclusion' and 'diversity', as aspects which should be placed at the forefront of HEIs' policy frameworks and social agendas in South Africa.

My research investigates transformation by engaging with the complex and nuanced ways in which students participating in focus group discussions in particular residences about their views and experiences of university and residence life constructed their identities and articulated concerns and pleasures. These focus group discussions were conducted in friendship groups in single sex male and female residences, which constitute the norm in Stellenbosch, as well as in a residence which was constructed as exceptional, by virtue of being gender mixed as well as comprising a majority of black and coloured students. Themes such as tradition, diversity, and social cohesion and the social practice of skakeling emerged spontaneously in these focus group discussions. That is, it did not emerge in response to specific questions which I posed about these, but raised by the students as they discussed aspects of life in Stellenbosch and in their residences. What was particularly interesting were

the very different ways these themes were invoked and constructed by students participating in different focus group discussions, the different meanings ascribed to them, and how these drew on the experiences of students and the different ways they constructed their identities.

One of the factors which makes my research particularly significant is how I addressed and engaged with focus group discussions, not so much as instruments for eliciting information from young people, but as social and ethnographic encounters which offered insights, at first hand, on how participants position themselves and construct their identities, and the significance, if any, which they attach to categories such as race, gender, sexuality and other social identifications in this process. In order to make the interviews ethnographic encounters, I worked hard, acting like a friendly alien and posing questions, all the time, which encouraged participants in the focus group discussions to reflect upon the kinds of things they usually took for granted and which might become second nature. The focus group discussions then became participatory in the sense that they were about the participants and were steered and directed by the issues and concerns which they raised and brought to the proceedings. They also became participatory in the sense that the participants' lives, identifications, and relations, as they articulated, constructed and exemplified these in the very research process, become key sources of data.

By using friendship groups in my research, I was able not only to listen to what students told me about how they formed friendships, but to observe how they performed their identities within these friendship groups and how they were producing group identification and cohesion within the interview itself. By comparing the friendship groups I was also able to discover commonalities and differences between the stories of different groups, especially in relation to skakeling.

The kind of stories different students told and the possibilities of telling them, was significantly affected by cultural and material backgrounds, mediated by race, class and gender and other variables, of the participants. For example, I found that only in groups which had black or coloured female students were stories told of racial discrimination and feelings of marginalisation in relation to the common topic of skakeling. Working within this framework which focuses the research gaze on the research encounter, my research generates findings about how different and diverse students at Stellenbosch construct and engage with others marked by race, gender, sexuality and other social identifications, as well, I suggest, as offering a model of good pedagogic practice in the context of transformation.

I begin by reflecting briefly on different interpretations and takes on tradition, diversity and social cohesion as they emerged and were spoken about in the different focus group discussions. I then go on to argue the kind of participatory research approaches I adopted might provide models of good pedagogic practice in the context of concerns about transformation at Stellenbosch.

Tradition, diversity and social cohesion and how these were constructed and invoked by students in different focus group discussions

Tradition

The concept of ‘tradition’ and being a ‘traditional residence’ are not simply abstract concepts used to describe the chronological age of a residence. But it emerged in the focus group discussions as a pejorative category which was ascribed positively and negatively to residences such as Blouberg and which operated as a source of identification and dis-identification for participants in different focus group discussions.

Notably the concept of ‘tradition’, which emerged very early and prominently in the focus group discussion conducted with 2nd and 3rd generation students in Blouberg group 1, was a concept which was invoked in ways which idealised the past. Tradition was used to construct SU and its residences as a longstanding community, which was more than the buildings and more than the current students. Coming to SU and to Blouberg seemed, for these females, to be a natural part of their life trajectory. It was a place which they identified with, and celebrated before arriving, because of their parents’ and grandparents’ stories of life at SU, and the attachments these females had formed with these stories. Fitting in to Stellenbosch life becomes something which is seen and experienced by these students as natural and easy; the idea of tradition was associated by these young women very positively with feelings of awe, inclusivity and belonging.

However, for other students who participated in the focus group discussions, and notably 1st generation black and coloured students in Outeniqua group 1, ‘tradition’ had negative connotations and was associated with the privileging of whiteness at Stellenbosch and as something manufactured rather than natural. This reflects and buttresses white privilege. In the focus group discussion with Outeniqua 1, Stellenbosch ‘traditions’ became objects of ridicule for the participants who created a sense of commonality with their fellow participants

partly through making fun of Stellenbosch traditions as appropriated and practiced by residences like Blouberg and Drakenstein which were constructed as ‘traditional’.

It was noticeable how in the focus group discussions with Blouberg students, ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ were invoked in ways which seemed to deny race when concerns about being marginalised were raised by black students. An example of this was when a black woman in Blouberg group 2 spoke about how her shoe was thrown at her by a white man at a skakel event because he was white and she was black, and how this was attributed not to race but cultural incompatibilities by a white student participating in the same discussion.

Diversity

Promoting ‘diversity’ is presented in official university transformation documents and discourses as ‘good for everyone’ and as enhancing opportunities for learning from others. This was echoed by some students such as Lee, a coloured young man participating in the focus group discussion in Drakenstein, who said “different people from different cultures look at things differently and we will just be able to work together to solve problems in more unique ways and things like that”. Stellenbosch, and their residence, was also constructed and experienced by the young women in the Blouberg focus group 1 discussion, not just, as a ‘traditional’ place but also as a place where they now experienced and celebrated cultural diversity through their interactions with people from other races, more so than what they had experienced in high school. The Blouberg group reconciles tradition with transformation by seeing it as good to meet people from other cultures, but in ways which is setting the terms of the friendship, where whiteness is taken as the norm. For Lee and the Blouberg 1 females, diversity is celebrated, in ways which allow the students to conform to the idealism of transformation, in the context of a university which is flooded with ‘diversity speak’. However, they do so in ways which do not force them to part with their traditional ties to SU, partly by using the term ‘culture’ as the thing which causes conflict between people who are different, rather than race.

Diversity was constructed by some of the participants in the Drakenstein focus group, in direct opposition to ‘tradition’ as Ian claimed that black students will not invest in the community and build upon it for future generations. As Pattman and Bhana argue (2009:23), racial and gendered identities are produced in relation to the Other which becomes the vessel which encompasses any anxieties and desires which can be related to the Other. For the Drakenstein group, the Other (namely an influx of black students), holds anxieties about not

understanding tradition and the way residences operate, and are figures which are seen to break down the residence. The community of residence life therefore excludes black students. In this way, diversity is constructed as much more than simply an uncomfortable situation but it is in fact seen as threat to the future of residences (and the way they currently operate) at SU. Furthermore, by Drakenstein Othering Outeniqua, they were, I suggest, distancing themselves from what they perceived as 'diversity gone wild'. At the same time, they were, comforting themselves with the knowledge that this kind of diversity was contained in a single residence and had not become the norm in Stellenbosch.

The accounts of students like Asie, Lauren black students who participated in the Blouberg focus group 2 discussion, and Elton, a coloured student who participated in the Drakenstein focus group discussion show how, for some, the experiences of residence life stand in stark contrast to the way SU presents itself as a university committed to embracing 'diversity'.

My research suggests that divisions and identifications along the lines of gender and race were an important feature of life at SU, and coloured and especially black students experienced varied and complex forms of marginalisation with which some of the white students participating in the same focus group discussions could not relate. It was also clear that these forms of discrimination were not seen by white students, such as Lizhan, Karli, Nadia and Kelsey as part of the institutional culture or practices which marginalised students racially, but was almost always attributed to individual attributes of individuals or attributes outside of race categories. In many ways race seemed to be 'wished away' by white students.

Social Cohesion

The comparison of the different groups, and individuals, ideas about social cohesion demonstrates that there are different catalysts for social cohesion. However, the catalysts attributed and performed by the students as bringing them together are limited in some ways by stereotypical and essentialised ideas of race, gender and sexuality. For example, females in Blouberg identified as a group on the basis of 'tradition' and generational sentiments. The white, Afrikaans, female, generation students in Blouberg, carried a similar idea of institutional culture of the residences as part of their heritage.

The males in Drakenstein joined together on the basis of taking part in activities, of which the coloured males, specifically Elton participated, because of a pressure to fit in and not be termed a sluisper. The other key source of identification these young men identified in the focus group discussion was their heterosexuality which was performed through skakeling and

through their shared sexual humour as exemplified in the interview with me. This form of social cohesion is limited in the sense that its focus is on producing a rather narrow all (heterosexual) male, (mainly white and coloured) residential culture. This constructs a community, defined through the exclusion of a wide range of people, including women and black men, who, in this focus group discussion, were constructed as the diverse Other.

It is precisely this idea of a homogenous institutional culture, and what is understood as creating cohesion, which is contested by Outeniqua group 1. People in Outeniqua appropriated and invoked transformation discourses, and in particular the rhetoric of ‘celebrating diversity’ in ways which constructed and empowered them as ‘modern’ and ‘liberal’ students. Diversity, for the Outeniqua 1 group, operated as a form of resistance to marginalisation. In telling stories about how they were different from students in the other residences in Stellenbosch, and by making fun of the other residences, they were not only expressing their views, but also dealing with forms of marginalization.

At the same time, the identifications they made with each other were not in opposition to Stellenbosch. In fact, they implicitly came to identify themselves as Stellenbosch students through the ways in which they tell stories which gently mock themselves and their parents’ pre-conceptions about Stellenbosch. Their stories of their perceptions of Stellenbosch, and their resistances to single-sex male residences, were collectively constructed, and telling their stories in the group, invited lots of humour and reinforced a sense of group identity. Identifying as diverse students created a sense of social cohesion within this group.

Skakeling

My research also demonstrates contradictions between constructions of skakeling as a social and cultural practice which aims to promote relations between males and females, and how this was experienced by some of the black women who participated in the focus group discussions as highly marginalising and alienating. Not only did Asie a black woman student who participated in the Blouberg 2 group experience being rejected by a white man who threw her shoe at her, but some students in Outeniqua were also critical of the ways skakeling reinforced polarised ideas about gender, and presumptions of heteronormativity.

Thinking about the potential of participatory research with students as a transformative practice

Erwin (2012) suggest that research which engages with race (and I argue gender as well) should not reduce participants to essentialised subjects, as popular discourses on transformation often do, or take a simplistic view of their multiple and intersecting identifications. Yet at the same time, Erwin argues, research also needs to identify, compare and present participants in terms of racial groups which were evident in the lived experiences of students. Concern for issues of transformation in terms of students' experiences needs to address agency, as well as pay attention to the material and cultural constraints which influence students' identifications and performances. This, I argue, means developing innovative research methods which engage with the complex ways in which participants engage with and perform their identifications (race, gender, and sexuality), and the meanings they attach to these in relation to discussions around their experiences of residence life at SU.

In terms of methodology, by putting the onus on participants and by engaging in conversations in research encounters through broad, open-ended questions with a non-judgemental attitude, I was able to facilitate focus group discussions in ways in which the experiences of participants became the focus of interviews. Through understanding the interviews as particular social encounters and contexts, I paid close attention to processes of identity construction going on in these and the kinds of dynamics which were played out between the participants (including myself as the interviewer). Issues of gender, race and sexuality were raised in the discussions, and I was able to see first-hand how participants drew on these identifications and presented themselves in particular ways in relation to the people with whom they interacted in the focus group. I also saw how the participants negotiated with each other, constructed stories together, forged group identities and took up certain positions at different moments in the interview. I wanted to do this because most interviews (qualitative and quantitative) tend to be preoccupied with what interviewees tell the interviewer about their social worlds outside the interview. This simplifies the social world, and fails to take into consideration the context of the interview and participants' agency. This is unlike my research, which draws on versions of feminist and social constructionist theories in order to pay attention to the peoples agency and complexities of participants multiple intersecting identities as they are performed in the interview.

I trace whether and how certain versions of masculinity and femininity become (implicitly) constructed as normal in the focus group discussions in the focus group discussions with students in these different residences. I am interested too in reflecting on whether this entails the denigration of people for ‘failing’ to live up to these perceived gendered norms (Davies, 2003:312) or whether the focus group provides opportunities for students to challenge and resist popular discourses about what it means to be male and female in Stellenbosch.

I examine how certain conversations are made possible through certain kinds of mutual experiences and identifications which may be taken for granted, or made explicit, sometimes, through the position I try to take as a ‘friendly outsider’ and the kinds of probing questions I ask, which arise from this. Even though the students were participating in friendship groups and knew each other well, issues were also raised in which they seemed to take opposing views which generated some surprise, as if the focus group discussion itself had opened up spaces for discussion in which they did not normally engage in their friendship groups. I tried to open up possibilities for people to express views and experiences of the university and the residences even (and especially) if these did not necessarily resonate with other participants contributions in the same focus group discussion. For example in Drakenstein, a coloured student, Elton, strikes a unusual and discordant note in the context of discussion about the residence when he mentioned not liking the first week and I ask him to elaborate on this. In response Elton speaks about his concerns about forms of socialising, fuelled by drinking in which new students were expected to engage. Although this conversation quickly was closed down by other white males, who associated this with the formation of a common sense of brotherhood in Drakenstein, Elton, nevertheless, was able to talk about his concerns in this group in a way which, I suggest, might have been difficult in everyday conversations with the same students in this friendship group.

A great deal of learning went on in the focus group discussion in my research. This involved not only me learning about the lives of the participants, but also them learning from others in the group in ways which they might not have done in ordinary conversation. One of the ways in which my methodology made it possible for students to reflect on their experiences and identifications, and that of others, was through the ways in which I asked questions about the very concepts they were using to describe their realities. For example, when Lizhan said that tradition played a big role in why she came to Stellenbosch, I asked “What do you mean by tradition?” She then goes on to explain that tradition, for her, means the ties previous

generations in her family has with Stellenbosch¹⁸. By asking this question, the term “tradition” is deconstructed, and this method of asking questions takes the idea of agency seriously. By making use of this kind of questioning, and by pretending to be an alien to most concepts the participants were using,

The interviews were also empowering and validating experiences for the participants as they learnt from each other. This was partly because the participatory approach I used yielded rich data and tried to engage with people as authorities about themselves and posed critical questions which encouraged them to think about things which they took for granted. One example of this is in the Blouberg 1 focus group, out of a response to why they said “Obviously we are girls and we want to meet guys” when I asked “Why obviously?” they began to reflect on this and Karli responded, “Now that I am thinking about it. What if you are not a straight female and then you have to skakel with guys’ residences”. This shows the taken for granted ways in which practices are engaged in, and how the participatory research which I conduct functions as a pedagogic tool which challenges essentialist thinking as Karli exemplifies through her surprise about finding out things they did not think about before. With the kinds of questions I posed and the conversations which were being generated, point to the use of my methodology as dialogue tool which seemed to challenge, for example, essentialist ideas of gender or race in which participants were invested or encouraged forms of critical empathy with others

My research also builds on the ideas of feminists such as Oakley (1981) who suggests that the relationships which researchers form with participants are important to consider, not only in terms of gathering rich data, but also in terms of the implications your interaction with participants has for them. My encounter with Asie and Kelsey made me think quickly and critically about my position as a researcher. Instead of taking the position of an objective outsider, I sympathised with Asie’s experience of discrimination, but at the same time I tried to encourage Kelsey to reflect empathetically with her friends experience by asking her to think of what Asie had said about the male rejecting her because of her blackness. By not doing this, and by remaining an objective outsider, I would have reinforced the idea that it is in the hands of the individual, rather than the institution, to change in order to minimise incidences of marginalisation. At the same time, it is important for researchers not to become censors, by only paying attention to the voices of those they sympathise with. Rather,

¹⁸ An analysis of this example is explained in more depth in Chapter 5.

participants should see the researcher as someone they can talk to about how they see themselves and others. For example, it was interesting that only the group of Blouberg 1 females (all-white) were the ones who avoided speaking about race, but spoke about ‘culture’ instead, even though it was in ways which attributed culture to race. Outeniqua 1 however spoke freely and openly about race without showing any discomfort. An example of this is when Maxine responds to me asking, “how was the interview?”, she answers:

“it wasn’t uncomfortable like normal, like when we have to confront race, racial issues, it’s normally uncomfortable, it’s almost like accusing, someone’s always on the defensive and then someone’s always accusing and then it always feels like you’re either defending yourself or accusing, whereas this was very like, it was free, we were free to say what you needed to say”.

It is essential that opportunities are created for students to talk about issues in spaces which encourage students to reflect and learn through each other’s experiences.

Participatory interviews are both research and pedagogic activities and, I suggest, may offer examples of good pedagogic practice in transformative practices and policies in higher education. A key aim of research should be to encourage students to critically think about the taken-for-granted ways and the investments they have in thinking stereotypically about gender polarised identities, and race categories. Why? My research has shown that focus groups discussions with facilitators that follow up on terms to deconstruct taken for granted meaning and reflexive thought could encourage students to challenge the norms of residence life. Other studies have shown (Pattman & Chege, 2003; Pattman, 2007; Pattman & Bhana, 2009) that doing research in this way allows participants to play a role in contributing to understandings of how change can be facilitated. If change is imposed in top-down ways, such as the residence placement policy in SU has been, without any critical engagement from students from different backgrounds, students will not necessarily take ownership of ideas especially if they fail to speak to their ideas or experiences about diversity or transformation. For example, the Drakenstein males see an increase in black students in their residence as improving their soccer team and as a threat to residence life, as they will not attach any symbolic sentiment to the residence, and therefore will not “work to build it up”. Students construct ideas around diversity differently to what the placement policy argues, in terms of numbers and this is not a sustainable solution to promoting transformation.

In the presentation and analysis of my findings I reflect upon my own position as a facilitator, questioning them about concepts and ideas they may take for granted, as a way of exploring

how they construct these as well as how the participants relate to me through the kinds of questions I ask. As a young coloured woman I seemed to impact much more on the participants in some focus group discussions than others, and I draw upon the attention which some participants drew to my gender as a way of exploring their own investments in particular kinds of gender identifications.

I recognise the importance of the interplay between context and identities and in that way my research is able to raise further questions about the way we engage in research about identities and transformation. For example, it would be interesting to explore whether the two coloured males (Elton and Wayne), who participated in the Drakenstein group, present themselves differently outside the residence. If they do, do they hang out more with coloured people or white people outside of the residence? Is there conflict which they encounter outside the residence, for example, do other coloured people judge them for hanging out with other white people, or if they have coloured friends outside of the residence, do white residence members judge them? My research thus shows the need for developing interesting and innovative approaches of doing research which explores the context of the interview itself and the implications that research practices has for those participating in the research. My research urges researchers and policy makers to devote time to thinking of how they construct their participants, how they develop a repertoire and build relationships in the research encounter.

Writing up research

Given my interest in not thinking about the focus group as an instrument for eliciting information from participants, but as an ethnographic encounter, my research also raises questions about what counts as data and disrupts the rigid boundaries between writing sections which encompass methodology which usually precede the findings section in research. So while I do have a methodology section where I discussed my methodological approach prior to the findings section, I draw on the dynamics of the focus group and the discussion and how themes emerge in these as key findings which exemplify the significance of the processes of identity construction and relationship formations which happen in the interview research (which I interpret as an ethnographic encounter) itself. It is important for research on identities to not take for granted prescribed fixed and rigid sections in a thesis, which separates theory, methodology, and findings, but rather to consider how all these aspects continually inform research in order to not only do justice to research on

transformation, but also so that researchers deal with these identifications without reproducing race and gender categories as stagnant ones.

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