

DRAFT REPORT

**GENDER, SUCCESS AND
INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE**

**PREPARED FOR THE
CARNEGIE-SA SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME**

**Linda Chisholm Ursula Hoadley Thandi Lewin Relebohile Moletsane
Iriann Haupt Monica Mawoyo Pontso Moorosi**

23 AUGUST 2007

Education, Science and Skills Development research programme
Human Sciences Research Council
P Bag X41
Pretoria
0001

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INTRODUCTION

Linda Chisholm, Iriann Haupt, Ursula Hoadley, Thandi Lewin, Monica Mawoyo, Relebohile Moletsane, Pontso Moorosi

Introduction

Gender equity in South Africa is central to the achievement of rights guaranteed by the constitution. The South African government has accordingly undertaken a number of initiatives to assure greater gender equity at different levels of the system. In addition to a gender machinery that has been set in place throughout the administration, a number of initiatives have been undertaken to promote and facilitate gender equity at school and higher education level. One of these is the Carnegie – South Africa Scholarship Programme targeted at young women who wish to study at undergraduate level at a South African public university. The project was set up in August 2002, with the first cohort of scholarship recipients commencing their studies in February 2003. The project is currently funding 150 women students at eight South African universities over an eight-year period who started their studies in 2003, 2004 and 2005. Scholarship recipients are given a maximum of five years of support, depending on the length of their chosen course of study.

The Carnegie-South Africa Scholarship programme wished to encourage research related to the programme that went beyond being a programme evaluation. This project is a result of that initiative. It was conceptualized by the programme officer at the time, working with a team from the Human Sciences Research Council, as a study aiming to examine the quality of the experiences and subjectivities of a sample of scholarship recipients.

The scholarship programme consciously promotes women in higher education. It has also concentrated scholarships in fields where women are under-represented. In 2001, women students constituted 53% of all Higher Education enrolments in South Africa in 2001. (DST, 2004) But white women constituted the majority of female students – especially at the doctoral level. And while women students predominated at the undergraduate level, they were overrepresented in the Humanities, Health Sciences and Social Sciences, and underrepresented in Natural Sciences and Engineering. They were in the majority at the undergraduate and lower postgraduate (i.e. Honours) levels, but in a minority at the Masters and Doctoral levels. This was especially the case in the Natural Sciences and Engineering.

The project was originally conceptualized as training a gender lens on both men and women students' experiences of and integration into academic and social institutional cultures and the ways in which this experience is linked to gender identity and subjectivity. In this framework, the link between students' personal and family lives and their educational experiences was considered important and especially the roles of mothers, fathers, siblings and friends (Stromquist, 2004; Arnot, 2000). The focus

on institutional culture arose from the view that whereas access to educational institutions did not appear to be the problem for girls and women in South Africa, they emerged at the other end being deposited into, and often choosing gender-specific positions in a labour market that by and large still showed significant inequalities between men and women. The explanation for this seemed to lie in women's institutional experiences. Institutional culture, and students' experience of it, seemed to be the issue in need of investigation. This would include examining the social relationships between young men and women, curricular content, classroom dynamics, labelling practices, lecturer expectations, peer dynamics, organisational arrangements, sexual harassment, lecturer and student support and other academic experiences. These, in turn, were to be contextualised within wider institutional goals and objectives. Responses to institutional and academic cultures were to be framed in terms of 6 categories provided by Bernstein (1975): Commitment; Detachment; Deferment; Estrangement; Alienation; Indifference. Gender subjectivity was to be analysed through subject positioning in relation to the concept of 'success.' The links between subject positionings and academic and social integration were to provide the basis of the analysis of gender subjectivity and institutional culture.

The study ended up focusing on women students in the Carnegie scholarship programme. There were several reasons for this. For the study to make meaningful comparisons between and across the female scholarship students and male students, comparisons would need to be made between scholarship students, and male and female students outside the programme. There were no male students in a similar programme. The selection of students not on the programme posed significant challenges. How large should such a sample be? What type of study was being envisaged? Would this become a quantitative study if we increased numbers significantly? Was this the kind of study envisaged? Would such a methodology be appropriate for the kinds of issues we wanted to explore?

In addition, researchers in the team had qualms about the emergence of a 'boys' failing' and 'crisis of masculinity' discourse in South Africa that in public policy and discourse was drawing attention away from the continuing inequalities between boys and girls in schools and the wider society and positioned girls and women students as successful in relation to boys and men. Research was highlighting the achievements of girls at school as opposed to boys (Perry 2003). Provincial departments of education, such as the Gauteng Department of Education, were also producing internal research showing that boys were failing and dropping out rather than girls (Sujee, personal communication, 2004). Any discussion of the position of girls in any public or policy space was constantly countered by the statement: 'and what about the boys? The boys are the problem and require the intervention.' The impact of this South African discourse was such that even international agencies began to change their focus, as illustrated in a panel discussion of UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank at the Comparative and International Education Society Conference held in Stanford in March 2005. This was despite the fact that girls' academic 'success'

could only be measured at the very top of the system and that township and rural girls continued to fail as much as boys, and despite the continuing evidence of extreme sexual violence and abuse of girls in and outside of schools and obvious implication that this would have for their academic performance.

And so, it ended up focusing on them alone because of the Carnegie programme's interest in the scholarship recipients themselves, our interest in more fine-grained qualitative research with fewer students, our reaction to a binary oppositional approach emphasizing boys over girls that was being adopted, as well as the limited financial scope of the study. As will be shown, the implications of this decision were both theoretical and empirical.

Methodology

Although there were 150 Carnegie scholarship students spread across all universities, eight students were selected from three universities for in-depth study: the Universities of Pretoria, UKZN and UCT. These universities were selected on the basis of regional spread and historical institutional culture. Students were selected from each institution on the basis of class, race, subject choice and year of study. Research was qualitative, including short questionnaires, individual and focus group interviews, observations and self-construction of photo-albums by the students. Research was conducted over two years. The same strategies were employed by each team of researchers in each institution. Differences amongst researchers in terms of theoretical approach and understanding led to slightly different frameworks being employed and explanations provided in the writing up of research results. Nonetheless, similar themes were examined across all papers.

Key findings

The most significant result of all three institutional studies seems to be the finding that students across all institutions studied displayed a strong sense of agency and independence. Their academic and social integration did not conform to the Bernsteinian categories that were originally going to be used. Their experiences and sense of social and academic integration could not be described in terms of commitment or detachment, deferment, estrangement, alienation or indifference. Although students found the adjustment to university from school a severely challenging one, they all appeared to draw on personal and social networks variously consisting of family, friends and partners for support. The social class background of students seems to shape how well they integrate and perform. But across the board there also seems to be a resistance to analysing either their own or others' social experience in terms of social categories of gender, race and class. They espouse an individual, meritocratic ideology in which the individual is more important than the collective or group, and family and friends are central to their own and others' success. This race-and gender-denial and strong assertion of individual achievement

and merit nonetheless sits side by side with an awareness of race and gender belonging. They aspire to lead and live lives in which they are in control, shape their own destinies, and balance work and family life.

The students seem to turn a blind eye to inequalities even though they are aware of them. They seem not to want to name their experiences as sexist or racist, they shy away from it and do not want to relate it to themselves or accept it, as that would probably position them as less intelligent, and undeserving, as well as associating them with feminism which they would maintain is a thing of the past, a white woman's thing, too hard core and extreme. The linkage between the public and private spheres is also important - they complement each other; the students' relate their public success to their private lives; their private lives reinforce and support their public success and they are expecting this to continue into the future.

How does one explain or understand the seeming contradiction between the strong sense of agency and independence and resistance to understanding their experiences in terms of wider social and economic issues? The latter are present in their discourses and have shaped their own experiences and selection. The discourses of individualism abstract them from the realities and contexts of inequality. Research did reveal ongoing inequalities between men and women in institutions, as well as the class and race conditioning of those experiences, but the scholarship recipients themselves denied that these were important in their lives or had shaped them. Instead, they argued that they had arrived where they had through hard work and individual merit.

A feminist analysis is interested in inequalities between men and women, power relations, the agency of women, links between public and private lives, and institutional culture in relation to women's experiences of it. It aims to give voice to the women themselves. When this approach is applied to the subject positionings in relation to social contexts and institutional cultures, the following argument can be made.

Power appears to be operating in very subtle ways. Choice and agency is linked to power and responsibility. Students negotiate power relations through a denial and resistance to their categorisation but also by taking responsibility for themselves, owning agency and taking power away from the institution to themselves in a discourse that says I am responsible for my destiny; I choose (whereas they didn't choose). I choose to be included and not to be excluded: it is up to me. But that power comes from the fact that they have financial independence, itself the result of a conscious choice to select only women. The students are financially independent, but dependent. These issues are linked to their sense of agency and independence, but are invisible to them. This abstraction of the individual from the social and economic context is typical not only of neo-liberal but also liberal feminist discourses (Ringrose, 2007). The studies suggest that a powerful unconscious liberal feminism

exists amongst the students, selected and groomed for success by a programme whose *raison d'être* is a liberal feminist one in a society that has chosen a social democratic route within a liberal democratic constitutional framework. The discourse of the students is consistent with the programme that supports them, as well as the public discourse of gender rights and individual opportunity in post-apartheid South Africa.

To end here would however be to deny our own positioning as researchers and our complicity in the liberal feminist project. Recent work by Jessica Ringrose (2007) draws attention to new discourses of successful girls as a metaphor for the rise of a neo-liberalism that emphasises individual achievement and success while denying the raced, classed and ethnic foundations of such success. Our research is complicit in so far as it has focused on successful girls, thus feeding into creating the binary opposition between men and women.

Highlighting the individualist, meritocratic consciousness operative amongst the students may help to further the discourse of 'successful girls' when the evidence is patently clear that their lives are as diverse and full of struggle as their social and economic positioning, and that their achievement remains a class-related phenomenon both inside and outside the programme. The relative success of a small group of girls can occlude the relative failure of a much larger number, who were not fortunate enough to be selected for the scholarship and thus be freed from financial constraints to become the agents that these young women claim they are and wish to be. As Ringrose has argued, 'liberal feminism's gender-only analysis has culminated in measures of equity through gendered test results which violently obscures socio-economic difference. This brand of feminism... holds up "the girl" as proof that an individualizing ethos of hierarchical competition, performance and standards in education is working.' (Ringrose, 2007: 486)

The chapters below thus cast light not only on the discourses of success of these successful students, but also the unstable nature of this success, its constructedness in discourse and its links to class and racially-structured experiences. By examining these students, the lives of those not so-chosen are thrown into relief. They require much greater research and public policy attention. And finally by showing how these students navigate the possibilities open to them, the complex demands and contradictory requirements on them, the chapters question the 'success' of the discourse as it manifests in their lives and experiences. Despite financial support, these are full of ambiguity and struggle, hardship and pain, consciousness of constraints on freedom and boundedness of choice. The chapters included here 'trouble' the discourse of successful girl in different ways.

Chapter 1 contextualises and situates the study in terms of an account by the programme officer of the higher education context and aims of the Carnegie-South Africa Scholarship Programme. Written from the perspective of the programme manager, the chapter provides a personal account of the issues and challenges that

face the students and the programme. It provides a counterpoint to the chapters to follow, both providing insights from and reflections on personal experience, thus casting light on the research themes that would not have been available other than through personal knowledge. It addresses the difficulties that students face in the transition from school to university, messages of officialdom, career planning, health and identity issues. All are central to the experience of institutional culture and the students' sense of academic and social integration.

Chapter 2 describes the social and academic integration of young women being funded by the Carnegie Scholarship and studying towards science and engineering degrees at the University of Cape Town. Eight young women studying at UCT were selected for the study. It develops a model to explore how institutional culture, family and schooling background, and student individual commitment contribute to academic and social integration. The research explores the ways in which the young women construct their perceptions of success and failure as they negotiated their social and academic lives in the institution.

Two central issues emerge. One is the construction of UCT as a training ground for the elite. The second is the complex process of transition for the women from their homes, communities and high schools to the university context. The research probed issues of race, gender and social class in the formation of the women's 'new' identities entering this elite institution. Social class emerged as the dominant social category in mediating the ways in which the students experienced their new environment, both academically and socially. The pathways for students to the university, and their experiences once there, are very different for students from different social class backgrounds. Social class is, however, bound up with issues of race and language. The most that this small-scale investigation was able to do was to point to issues around class, race, language and gender that would better inform our understanding of students' experience of university, especially an elite institution where the silencing and denial of difference and disadvantage is often apparent.

Informed by the notion that gender shapes women's experiences in academic institutions, Chapter 3 examines the ways in which recipients of the Carnegie Foundation Scholarship for their first degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), experience their lives as university undergraduate students. The chapter is informed by frameworks that acknowledge the contextual realities of social and academic integration in the construction of success (Tinto's (1987; 1993) as well as feminist theories with their political commitment to changing the position of women in society by rejecting the possibility of value free research (Weiler, 1988). The research methods in the study included a photo-voice activity, which is "a participatory-action research methodology based on the understanding that people are experts on their own lives" (Wang et al, 2004:911), as well as focus groups interviews, individual interviews, and data from shadowing one of these students for a week.

Findings from the study indicate that a combination of the students' characteristics and effort, the social and academic experiences they have had in the institution, as well as their responses to these, determines their academic success. However, contrary to our expectations that gender would play a major role in the participants' experiences and their constructions of these, the participants' accounts seemed to reject notions of gender inequality in the institution and the programmes they were enrolled in. Thus, our conflict in this research lies in the 'genderless' constructions of success in these young women's experiences and our 'gendered' analysis and interpretation of these.

Chapter 4 takes up similar but slightly different themes for the University of Pretoria. It underscores the contradictions between perception and social context. The evidence for the University of Pretoria also suggests that young women are not estranged, alienated or indifferent to the institution; that indeed, they demonstrate a fair degree of social and academic integration and strong identification with the institution. Their self-conscious integration into current post-apartheid, dominant constructions to some extent belies the continuing deeply ambivalent position that women occupy in the social and public sphere and that marks their own occupation of physical space at the University of Pretoria. The young women express views of themselves as women who have rights in the public and private realm, able to balance multiple demands, and fulfil multiple objectives in both public and private life with little cost or detriment to themselves. And yet there are constraints on their freedom of movement related to broader security and physical safety concerns. They express weariness with public discourses about race and gender, and prefer to see racial and class differences primarily in terms of the more neutral construct of 'culture'. And yet, even if they are experienced as natural, campus and classroom interactions exhibit race and gender-defined modes of engagement. The students exhibit a strong sense of individual agency and independence, despite their own complex situations of financial dependence/independence.

Across all the institutions, students' perceived integration is facilitated through strong supports – from families, friends and schools. The strength of individual cases demonstrates that in some cases it is mothers, in others fathers that matter; sometimes it is female friends, in others it is male friends who support them; with some, it is a strongly supportive school and community environment. These social networks are highly significant in mediating institutional cultures that are not only very different from one another but also acknowledged in much of the literature to be harsh.

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CHAPTER ONE

Gender, Success and Institutional Culture: A reflection on the Carnegie-South Africa Undergraduate Women's Scholarship Programme

Thandi Lewin

Overview

The Carnegie-South Africa Undergraduate Women's Scholarship Programme was set up in 2002 as a national scholarship programme targeted at young women wishing to study primarily in the fields of science and engineering at undergraduate level. With funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a group of three cohorts of 50 scholarship recipients were selected over three intakes starting in 2003, 2004 and 2005. The author was the Programme Manager of this project from 2002 to 2006, from the start of the project until the year after the programme produced its first set of graduates. The article provides a background to the scholarship programme, moving to a discussion of some key reflections on student experiences, gathered from personal interaction with the scholarship recipients over the four year period. The piece is intended to provide an introductory context for the research reports that follow.

Introduction

Since 1994 significant progress has been made in addressing the representation of both black and women students in the higher education system. The proportion of female students in the higher education system grew from 43% in 1993 to 54% in 2004. While the participation of women in the higher education system overall has improved significantly, women are still particularly under-represented in certain areas, including science and technology (except the biological sciences where women make up 52% of overall undergraduate population), and all areas of engineering. Some figures from 2004 demonstrate this: mathematical sciences (42%), computer science (35%) and engineering (19%). (DOE, 2004?) In addition women, particularly black women, continue to be under-represented at postgraduate level in all fields, and senior academic posts remain dominated by men. In this regard the patterns of gender participation seen in South Africa are beginning to mirror international trends. In other words, although South Africa has its specific forms of inequity, the gender inequity figures are not that different from those of the developed world. Yet the inequalities at all levels are still stark, and hence are a major policy concern.

Much of the key international literature on women in higher education has focused on women in postgraduate studies and in academic positions, and the barriers that women face in climbing the academic ladder. This means that very little has been

written about the experience of undergraduate women. This literature also focuses significantly on the barriers that exist for women in progressing in academia, rather than on their own agency and choices and how these women interact with barriers that might exist. In particular there is a paucity of literature on how and why young women in the sciences make decisions not to continue with postgraduate degrees and become scientists. In South Africa, very little research has been conducted on student experiences beyond a few individual campus reports and there little published on the experiences of women students in male-dominated areas of study.

In places such as the United Kingdom, where the school curriculum has focused on encouraging girls to enter science careers for some time now, young women still do not choose to go into certain careers that are perceived to be male-dominated, such as engineering. (Hill, n.d.?) In South Africa the current policy context encourages gender equity in higher education at all levels, women participate in higher education overall in greater numbers than men, and all the universities involved in this study have missions and policies supporting gender equity. The universities also have policies and programmes in place to discourage sexual harassment and that specifically support women to succeed at all academic levels. At the policy level at least, then, there is a supportive framework for women to succeed in science and engineering subjects and in academia.

The policy context is, in general, a positive one. It is not clear yet though how much the recent changes in both national and institutional policy have contributed to greater equity. Not much research has focused on the choices that young women make in contexts where they are being encouraged to take up careers in science. Debates about student choice remain to be examined. It is not clear, for example, how many students on the scholarship programme chose to apply for the scholarship merely because it was available to them, and their only obvious source of funding for higher education study. There is some discussion below about student choices of study.

There is a broader policy concern in South Africa about the lack of sufficient high level skills in all areas, including the economic sciences (hence the inclusion of some students in these fields). The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) advocates for a shift in the ratios of students studying in different fields – moving towards a greater proportion of students in the sciences and economic sciences than the current proportions– and towards a lower proportion in the humanities and social sciences, as well as to address the ongoing equity concerns particular to the South African context, in particular the numbers of black students in these fields. (DOE, 2001)

An additional policy concern is the low throughput rate of students in the public higher education system. A Department of Education study of a cohort of students commencing in 2001 completing in 2004 showed high rates of drop out (30% after the first year, 50% by the fourth year). (DOE, 2005) Further research and analysis needs to be done into these issues, investigating in more detail what contributes to

drop out, accounting for the issues around completion time (i.e. the majority of students do not finish in the minimum time allowed for undergraduate degrees). The figures also need to take into account the students on degrees that are longer than the average length (e.g. certain degrees in health sciences). However, it is clear that poor throughput rates are a significant problem for the public higher education system.

Further research is required in particular on the factors that influence students to drop out or interrupt their studies. Certainly student funding is a factor and has been recognized by government as a key policy concern. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), to which government contributed over R1 billion in 2006, is a key vehicle for helping academically strong students in financial need access higher education. In 2005, over 120,000 students accessed the NSFAS funds to support their studies.

It is recognized, however, that due to the high student fees in public Higher Education Institutions, greater amounts are needed to contribute to financial aid for needy students. Private sector funds often target the professions such as law, engineering and accounting, and it is difficult to find private funding outside of these fields. Universities also contribute significant funds of their own towards student support. Information gleaned from the Department of Education, indicated that over R1.2 billion of student funding was expended in the system in 2005, excluding the NSFAS funding, but including external funding, government funds from other sources and universities' own funds, but excluding bank loans. Even students funded on the NSFAS however, have to contribute some of their own funds to their education, as it is very rare for a student to receive a bursary or scholarship which covers their study costs in full.

The difference between NSFAS-funded students and many other privately funded students and the Carnegie scholarship recipients is that they are all fully-funded students. The scholarship contributes the total amounts of their tuition fees, living expenses and book costs. Those students living in university residences are able to study without any family contribution to their studies and hence any financial worry is removed. Many of the students living at home have been able to contribute to family living costs through their living stipends. The students in the programme are all in financial need (though defined differently and more broadly to the NSFAS). This encompasses students whose parents and guardians are reliant on state pensions or social grants through to those who are informal traders, to those whose family members are teachers and nurses. All the families of Carnegie scholarship recipients would find university education a prohibitive cost.

The project was set up to specifically address some of these inequities in the higher education system, as part of a wider set of strategies to increase equity in higher education, through support for marginalized groups, including considerable investment in student financial support.

It is a central question for the research that if you eliminate the element of financial concern for students, how are they affected? Surely they should all succeed? Surely they should all be able to finish in the minimum time? This is obviously not the case, as success at university depends on a combination of educational preparedness, schooling background, personal factors, personal motivation, and social and institutional factors. Financial support is a necessary but not sufficient factor for student success.

The scholarship project: the selection of students and support structure

The scholarship programme was open to South African female students entering higher education institutions as full-time students, having matriculated within a two-year period. Preference was given to students in financial need. All students were first-time entrants to higher education. Application forms were distributed via the provincial networks to schools. No more than two grade 12 applicants were permitted per school, and principals were asked to make the decisions about which two students to put forward for the scholarship.

Students were selected on the basis of academic merit, being within the top 5% of their grade 12 school year. They had to demonstrate high marks in maths and science, particularly if intending to study in the science or engineering fields. The final scholarship offer was conditional on their final matriculation results and their acceptance into a public South African university. The selection process was two-tiered, involving an initial screening and grading of applications and a provincial short-listing process, which included provincial department of education officials who had been involved in the project, or were in some way involved in gender-related school projects in their province and a final national selection process.

The scholarship programme office was primarily set up as a funding programme, to administer and manage the scholarship, but includes a core support programme with both formal and informal elements. A career development workshop was held for each new intake of students, prior to starting their university careers, focusing on preparing students for the university experience (including financial planning advice), and including a session encouraging the students to begin thinking about their career choices and decisions. This begins a process of self-reflection, which is intended to assist students in succeeding at their studies, but also often raises all kinds of questions about how they have decided to study what they are studying, and whether they have made the right decisions or not. The workshops were initially planned as a once off starter support, but after seeing the importance of continuing to support and engage with the students, as well as of building a cohort of students, the support workshops have been implemented as an annual activity, with regional-based workshops to keep the costs down.

The workshops draw on expertise from the higher education institutions where some of the students are located and relationships have been formed with support people at each of the institutions, primarily through their role of making payments to students and monitoring their performance, but often providing a broader support role. Additional support for students is provided through a project webpage, which includes an access-controlled zone for students only. The webpage is also used as a communication tool, although cellphones remain the principal vehicle for student communication.

Although a selection of students at three institutions have participated in this research project, the overall profile of the student group must be provided for in this introductory chapter. Of the 150 students, the majority are black, although they are broadly representative of the racial demographics of South Africa. The students are also broadly representative of the 9 South African provinces, although there is some dominance from the larger provinces (e.g. Limpopo) and those with a greater number of high-performing schools (Western Cape and Gauteng). Students in the total cohort are spread across 8 institutions in four regions of the country and are studying primarily in the health sciences, natural sciences and engineering programs. A small number of students are in the economics and commerce fields, with an even smaller number in the humanities and education. As indicated above, all students were determined to be in financial need, but even within the total student cohort there is great diversity of family income.

Methodology Questions

While this chapter is intended to give some background to the project itself, providing an introductory framework for the research chapters to follow, its primary role is to provide a reflection on aspects of the programme relevant to the research project. The chapter is mainly one of personal reflection, given the author's role as scholarship programme manager. The reflections contained here were developed over the 4 years I spent as a manager of the programme, where ongoing reflection was necessary for the program to adapt and respond to the needs of the students. The opportunity to reflect came from ongoing close communication with a large number of students on academic and personal matters.

My role as programme manager gave me privileged access to both personal and academic information about the students, with a perspective crossing students from a number of different academic and social backgrounds, studying in different institutions and in different programmes. While this provides an unusual overview of student experiences, writing about them in this way is a very different activity from feeding ideas into the management of the programme.

My role was one of a support person and a controller of funds. I was both the person that controlled their access to the scholarship and their continued funding from year

to year, as well as a facilitator (assisting the students to access services) and a supporter. I provided both pressure and positive encouragement and where necessary, sanction. This was a paradoxical relationship as I had some privileged information, but information could also be withheld from me as the controller. The knowledge gained from this position can be said to be only “partial knowledge”.

I also operated in both areas, providing support while keeping an eye on the interests of the scholarship investment. For example, I would have regular telephonic discussions with students who had produced worrying mid-year results. I would ask the student “ What is happening? Do you need any help? Is there anything I can do? Have you thought about getting additional support, study groups, academic counseling?” I would try to make sure that they were making full use of the support mechanisms available to them, that they were being realistic about their academic situation, and I also wanted them to know that someone cared.

However, there were always additional motivations behind those questions. Behind the supportive questions was always a strong concern about whether the student was making sensible decisions and choices about improving their academic results. Had they analyzed the situation effectively and did they know what needed to be done to improve marks? Further than that, did they realize that their scholarship would be in jeopardy if they did not improve their results? I would also be trying to assess whether there were more complex personal reasons for poor performance: Had something happened in their personal life to affect performance, a family problem, a relationship difficulty, or were they experiencing some form of depression where an intervention would be necessary? Perhaps they were just partying too much?! In many cases, this kind of information was very difficult to get out of the student from a distance and especially when not being in a professional counseling capacity, and so I often remained ignorant about the true reasons for a student’s problems.

This level of concern was motivated by a need for accountability to the programme funder. Can we be sure we had selected the right group of students, headed for success? Could we minimize any likelihood of student failure? The more successful the group of students, the more funding can be mobilized for further scholarships and the happier the funder will be.

At a deeper, more personal level, the issue at the back of my mind was that ‘I need to make sure that you succeed. My professional standing depends on it!’ I am claiming that we set this programme up successfully, but the success of the students is the clear marker of the success of the programme. There was always a dual goal – to encourage the student as much as possible and provide the necessary support, while ensuring that we remain accountable for the scholarship funds that we have disbursed and limit our exposure to student abuse. The reflection below is made with an acknowledgement of the methodological constraints.

Many of the ideas discussed below were gained on reflection from a series of student support workshops held between 2003 and 2006. Some of these were introductory workshops and others were part of the ongoing support programmes put in place through the scholarship programme.

In the absence of a formal evaluation of the programme, much of the perspective gained comes from anecdotal evidence and informal interaction with students, as well as their comments within the workshop settings. So, the information was gained not as researcher or an interviewer, but as a powerful insider.

The perspectives come from a combination of active programme reflection, student observation and reports of the student workshops, which include students' own reflections (usually anonymous within a group of 20 or more students) and informal student evaluations of workshops. It must be said that the primary role of the workshops was to provide student support, and not to provide research material for this project. However, it is through the engagement with students at all these levels, that the project was able to grow and develop and respond to the needs of the students, as well as to learn more about their experiences. This is therefore privileged information and can only be used to provide a general reflection on student experiences.

Student experiences of higher education institutions

The focus of the observations is on the kinds of issues that have come up in relation to this group of students relating to identity and experiences. I have divided my observations into five major themes which talk to the themes of the research project and which in part informed the development of the research project.

Coping with academic adjustment and pressure

The first theme is around academic coping. This is a substantial issue and possibly the one into which I had most insight given my role in relation to the students. Regardless of academic background the adjustment from school to university is a huge one. Very few students are prepared for the volume and level of work that they face when entering university. This is often quite a shock for students and some students adapt better and more quickly than others. This group of students had particular expectations of themselves as they were all top performers at their school and in many cases top matriculants in their province.

High-performing students enter university with the expectation that they can continue to score over 80% in tests and assignments and they find it difficult to adapt to lower marks. Families also sometimes find this difficult to understand. For many students the transition from school is so huge that they fail subjects in their degree. There can be many reasons for this: school background is key, but students also find academic

integration difficult, for all kinds of reasons. Managing study time without regular supervision is a challenge and takes self-discipline. Finding a balance between the new social life of university and the heavy academic workload is a challenge. Students almost universally claimed the transition was a huge shock, even if they managed to adapt quite effectively.

These issues are not new to the academic community in South Africa. University academic development and support programmes have been developed to respond to the fact that South African matriculants are generally under-prepared for higher education study and that the adjustment can be steep. What surprised us was the consistency of the shock response. Our assumption was that students would be affected differently depending on the quality of teaching and support at their school. The quality of schooling may influence student academic experiences differently (the assumption that students from high-performing schools tend to do cope better), but this should be further tested. It is not clear from the scholarship experience that quality of schooling has a direct correlation with success at university.

Living arrangements are key to being able to study effectively. Students traveling between home and the university spend significant time actually traveling and may have home chores to do. Students in residence have easier access to the libraries and computer facilities but can be distracted by activities around them in the residence, and unless they have a quiet place to study in their living space may find studying very difficult. At a number of universities, first year students are exposed to a lot of pressure to participate in residence/hostel activities, including RAG, house meetings, social events, etc. In some institutions hostels have their own uniforms, which first year students are expected to purchase and wear. There is a great deal of pressure to participate in cultural events determined by the residence. While some black students in particular felt uncomfortable about participating in these activities and felt that residence life increased their alienation from university culture, others felt that it was a way of making people feel at home. There did not seem to be a universal response to these pressures.

Some of the psychological challenges for students may be related to the expectations of family, scholarships and the university. Although students are expected to finish a BSc degree in three years, and an engineering degree in four years, the majority of students do not finish in the minimum time required. Most students in South African universities will take at least an extra year to complete their degrees. This may be a structural problem in the higher education system, but it is important to recognize that it is unusual for students to finish in the minimum time. What the student throughput study mentioned above may show us is that not only have students dropped out along the way, but they are still finishing their degrees in grossly extended time. It is therefore unreasonable to expect the scholarship students to do so too. It may be that a student is set up for failure if one expects her to struggle to finish in a prescribed minimum when in fact she would perform much better with an additional year.

Almost 50% of the scholarship students in this group will have completed in a minimum year plus one.

Messages of Officialdom

Through interactions with students it is clear that they take very seriously the messages that they receive from within the university. The messages they receive can be formal or informal; by formal I refer to the messages they receive from representatives of the university administration, residence supervisors or lecturing staff. Informal messages can be the messages they pick up from fellow students, and from the university environment.

Two strong messages predominate in the formal university cultures for a number of students. The one is a surprisingly common message from lecturing staff at universities to undergraduate students. That is one or other version of “you will fail”, “only 50% of you will make it through”, “look at the person next to you, one of you will not be here at the end of the year”. In one support session, with a group of over 50 students, students were asked how many of them had experienced these messages, and all but one or two hands went up.

The negative encouragement approach attempts to scare students into hard work but feeds into students’ own concerns about their ability to succeed at university. Already feeling overwhelmed in many cases, the negative approach can further undermine self-esteem. It is possible that some students respond well to the “fear” approach, but the students seem universally concerned by these experiences. The students on the programme found this approach very challenging as many of them seemed to take the messages to heart assuming that they will be the one person on the failing end. A combination of a negative lecturer and a few bad marks can seriously affect the self-esteem of a student, already struggling with the academic and social changes of university.

Within the scholarship programme a “we believe in you” approach was adopted, helping the students understand that they were supported, even if they did not do as well as we had hoped. While building in checks and balances for poor academic performance, it is still possible to send students encouraging messages. It is possible that the “sink or swim” message works for students comfortable and confident with their own ability and direction. In our experience, however, it is damaging to young people who are questioning their own abilities, facing tough challenges for the first time, and uncertain about where they are going. We spent a lot of time countering these messages.

The other message is that a university career should be a smooth journey from A to B, first year to final year, passing, having fun and graduating at the end of it. This particular message appears to exist most strongly in the informal culture of a

university. Somehow you are not good enough if you do not fit perfectly into the linear pattern. As mentioned above, very few students do in fact proceed smoothly through their university careers.

Perhaps one fifth of the scholarship recipients were formally placed in extended programmes by the university. These have been seen by some as a racist plot to undermine and ghettoize black students, while over time the success of certain extended academic support programmes has brought greater belief in them. Although the stigma continues, many students seem to appreciate the space, time and support allowed them by extended programmes. Given the reality of extended completion rates, students who are formally placed in a programme with the space to complete in a longer period are often in a much stronger position than students in the mainstream programmes. They get greater support, greater understanding and often special attention which the mainstream students do not get. While some students were initially upset about their placement in these programmes, most of them understood after a while that they were in a much stronger position. Students not on extended programmes would be held back for failing a key subject (such as one group of chemical engineering students) a much more frustrating and depressing experience. The additional strength of formal extended academic programmes is that students do not feel alone and isolated.

How do the students define success then in relation to these messages and their own standards of performance? They come to university and discover it is tougher than they thought, they discover they have to adapt to lower performance, in many cases they have to learn what it is like to fail something, and they are faced with the hard reality of the study choices they have made. What also influences a successful student is how they respond to the challenges. Are they willing to access the support that is available at the well-resourced universities? All the students on the programme were well informed about the kinds of services available to students – both academic and psychological. However, it was often only with significant encouragement from us, or in some circumstances after making it compulsory that many of the students accessed these services.

Career Planning

This is a theme that kept the programme engaged from the point of receiving applications through to the graduation of scholarship recipients. The challenges of recruiting high-performing young women for undergraduate study in the science fields were considerable. The poor levels of career guidance at schools as well as the support and subject advice offered at schools as well as the information and financial barriers to applying for higher education admission were highlighted through this process. Access to higher education and science courses in particular is influenced by a complex set of factors. These include the lack of information about higher education study and subject mix; misconceptions about the relationship between

finance provision and admission to higher education; the timing of application for higher education study; and the lack of clarity about what students actually want to study.

In 2003, out of an application group of around 2000 grade 12 students, only 86% of the applicants for science programs were actually studying maths at the Senior Certificate level. Of these students, only 29% were doing maths at Higher grade level, increasingly a pre-requisite for entrance to university science programs. In 2004 out of a group of 1800 applicants only 70% were taking maths. Out of the 2003 applicant cohort, only 42% of the applicants had applied for a university place by the time of application to the scholarship in October of their grade 12 year. This showed that although the students applying intended to study at university, very few had actually taken steps to make this a possibility. Discussions with teachers and principals revealed that many were under the misconception that students should obtain financial assistance before applying for a university place, whereas most funding is obtained once a student has obtained a place to study.

This affected a number of students on the scholarship short-list. In one case, a student had applied for a provincial scholarship to study medicine, under the misconception that by applying for the scholarship she was also applying for a university place to study medicine. Once she had received a provisional scholarship offer, we discovered that the university had no record of her application. At this stage, it was far too late for her to apply for admission to medicine, one of the most competitive university programs, but it was possible for us to assist her in getting a place to do a BSc degree. Another student applied to study chemical engineering, another competitive course. She was turned down flat by the university concerned despite having good results. She was not placed on a waiting list, or given an alternative programme. On investigation we discovered that she had not put down a second choice course of study, and the university had rejected her outright. Again, after some negotiation, we were able to obtain a place for her in the chemistry department by adding a second choice to her university application form. At registration, she did in fact gain a place in the chemical engineering programme, because she had then been placed on the short list. Both these cases are examples of students who may have not made it to university without our assistance, because they did not have adequate information about how to apply for university programmes.

A number of students on the programme began to question their choice of study early on. Within strict frameworks we were in most cases able to accommodate changes to the students' courses, where the changes were carefully considered and supported by advice from university career counselors. However, some changes could not be considered because they were ill-considered and badly planned. Even with our advice, a small number of students made radical changes to their courses which we could not support. These decisions were often influenced by family members and in a

small number of cases, students and their families were prepared to jeopardize their scholarship funding.

In several cases, however, we were able to accommodate slight changes to student courses, where they were able to carry over credits from previous courses, or where the change was well motivated. In one case a student changed from a microbiology degree to a degree in film and media studies. This case was well supported by careers advisors, and the student realized her desire to change early on in her degree programme. She was persistent in wanting to make the change, and clearly passionate about her new choice of programme.

The programme attempted to address these issues early on through a pre-university career development workshop, which started students thinking about the reasons for their choice of subject, their future plans, and reflecting on their own skills and strengths in relation to their course of study. Early discussions with students showed that their choices of study programme were often haphazard, influenced by the suggestion of teachers or families; chosen because the scholarship opportunity arose, and very often chosen because the degree course was perceived as the best route to a good job. Very few students had chosen their courses based on a passion for the area of study. A choice of course often provokes an identity crisis down the line, as students realize that it is too late to change their course of study. Student decision-making about their career choices is a complex area requiring deeper research, as it is questionable that students are in a position to make solid career decisions at the time of entering university.

Very few students were interesting in continuing to postgraduate studies. Many expressed the view that they wanted to go straight out and work, and that postgraduate studies would then overqualify them for a job. Very few students were encouraged to do postgraduate study and to consider academic careers. After a student support session where scholarship recipients were introduced to young women academics at the early stage of their academic career, one student commented that she would really like to become a researcher, but that she really had no idea that “someone like me” could be an academic. She was in her third year of a BSc degree, and it was the first time that she had been encouraged to consider postgraduate study.

Health

Students in higher education are often affected by stress-related problems. For some this is pure academic coping stress, but much relates to the complexity of social and academic adjustment to university. Financial independence, such as in the case of the Carnegie scholarship students, does not appear eliminate stress entirely. A number of students identified as being generally “stressed”. However, a few also identified as being depressed. With support from student counselors and in some cases external psychologists and psychiatrists, students were able to address some aspects of

depression. Some of the depression may well have been influenced by external factors such as family pressure, but it is impossible for us to tell this. What is certain is that depression, in whatever form it comes, has a clear effect on academic performance. A small number of the scholarship group developed depression in their second and third years. High performing students dropped their marks in some cases by 30 or 40%. The research may be able to investigate this in more depth. It was not clear from interactions with students, and limited psychological reports the real causes of depression. In one or two cases, it was possible that the students had some kind of substance abuse problem.

A clear preoccupation of the majority of Carnegie scholars was food, exercise and weight. Students find it difficult to balance their weight, particularly when they are not in control of cooking and preparing their own food, as those students in catering residences or hostels. This common theme amongst all students came up regularly at student support workshops. Students found it difficult to maintain control of their weight by finding time to exercise, controlling the amounts and type of food they ate. Having to eat at set times also leaves little flexibility for students wanting to control their eating. Student discussions often revealed strong views about weight. Women should be thin, and they should be able to control their weight. Fat is a sign of weakness and having the right looks and wearing the right clothes are a very important part of being at university. Peer pressure to look a certain way is a particular difficulty for students who do not come from wealthy backgrounds, but are in a university where there are large numbers of wealthy students.

In 6 cases, students suffered family tragedies, losing close relatives and breadwinners during their course of study. There were two cases of serious illness, and one student on the programme passed away.

Identity

One of the most interesting things about running a scholarship programme like this was watching students grow and develop into themselves, challenging and developing their own identities. The first year of university is hard. This group of students entered university with a strong sense of pride at their huge achievements – getting a place to study at a top university, and winning a scholarship on top of that. They truly believed that they could do anything, that they were young women in South Africa, and this was their time. This was a highly individualistic group, the TV generation repeating popular mantras and of “you can be anything you want.” The dynamic of expectation was fairly high. Unfortunately, the feeling of “I can do anything” turned quickly into the shock of false self-esteem for many students. The reality that they were not alone in their brilliance or achievement and that nobody at university thought they are brilliant leads to a forced re-evaluation of what they think of themselves. This is a tough process for students to go through. Toni and Olivier wrote about this in relation to black female first year students at the University of

Port Elizabeth (now Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University). They found that students entering university had very clear goals for successful careers and felt positive and proud, but that over time they became discouraged and confused, and this affected their academic identities. They related this to the university environment being unsupportive and alienating. (Toni and Olivier, 2004)

In the case of the Carnegie students, many students began a process of valuing the freedom and independence that comes with being a scholarship student at university with no financial worries. Students become aware of their independence over time and learnt to embrace and celebrate it. Students in their second years and beyond would start to focus on this as a really important part of their identity. Many of them mentioned this as the best thing about the scholarship programme and about their experience of university. They had freedom and independence: freedom to make their own choices and determine their own lives. The scholarship programme gave them that freedom because they had financial independence. For all students this was financial independence from their families (although several students were contributing to their family costs) and for a great number, the support that they would never have had because their families had no money. It appeared that financial independence gave many students the opportunity to regain some levels of confidence in themselves.

Discovering agency and choice was also a hard thing to learn because it comes with responsibility. Students had to learn that they had a responsibility to their sponsors as well. They had to take responsibility for their work and decisions and their own mental health. A dilemma for the scholarship programme was how to treat students as adults, allowing them the space to make their own decisions, while ensuring that they were monitored and held to a certain set of values and rules. Some students had difficulty taking on these responsibilities. One student planned to abandon her studies in the third year to take on a full-time job, another student took up an alternative scholarship after two years of funding, a third student changed to a different course without seeking the permission of the scholarship manager. These students struggled with decision-making in the context of their academic careers, and didn't seek advice. Where did our responsibility end and theirs begin?

Other challenges that affected students struggle for a balance between independence and responsibility were budgeting and managing funds; dealing with diversity (religious and racial and class diversity), maintaining their own values in the face of peer pressure, making friends and negotiating relationships and dealing with the challenges of language.

Family expectations influenced many aspects of student life, but were mostly hidden from us. In poorer families the scholarship money could create tension as students were expected to contribute to family costs rather than divert funds to their own needs as a student. Other family issues included a lack of understanding of the challenges of

academic achievement by some families, and in some cases strong interference in student decisions. Sometimes students would take the bad advice of parents over clear advice of the university or scholarship programme. In two cases students forfeited their scholarship because of bad parental decisions.

We discovered that cohort-building was an important way of assisting students in dealing with the challenges of university. Sometimes the simplest things that have the biggest impact. Through being part of a group of students, scholarship recipients knew that they were being supported, and learnt that they were not the only ones experiencing something difficult or overwhelming. Knowing that an experience is common to others boosts confidence and workshops gave students a space to share their problems and feel less alone.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide a broad context for the research chapters to follow. The issues raised above were discussed in the research planning and incorporated into the project methodologies. The methodology of this chapter meant that questions remained about what was missing. What are the issues that students could not raise through official channels? How can this research project tell us more about student identities and decision-making in the context of university experiences?

A key question that cannot be answered here, is what are the gender dimensions of these experiences? We cannot claim that the experiences and behaviour of students on the scholarship programme are unique to women students. In fact, it may be that social class is a more salient factor in the different ways of developing identities, making decisions and coping with academic challenges.

What is clear is that while financial support may offer students the freedom to find their independence and use their agency it is not a sufficient mechanism for ensuring success at university.

The dynamic of expectation and entitlement that young people have on entering university, with the surface self-confidence that comes with this is a huge challenge in designing student support programmes in South Africa. The challenge is that this generation believe they can do anything, but they often lack the knowledge and resources about how to do it. Despite the barriers, however, students also have agency and make choices. How they form identities, grow and change, and how they learn to define success for themselves are complex processes that need to be supported and given space.

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CHAPTER TWO

Social and academic integration of young women at the University of Cape Town

Monica Mawoyo & Ursula Hoadley

Introduction

Recent research on undergraduate attainment in South Africa shows that there is a 50% drop out rate of students in South Africa (Mercury, 2005). Both this research and the international literature suggests that the main obstacle confronting both female and male students in universities is financial. Students struggle to cover both the direct costs of university education, as well as the opportunity costs of being enrolled in full time study. A study of the Carnegie Fellowship students, on which this study is based, offers a unique opportunity to examine issues other than the financial that confront students in their academic and social integration into university life.

The Carnegie Foundation offered a group of 150 women generous scholarships covering tuition and subsistence for the duration it took for these women to complete their degrees. The 24 women selected for the broader study, on gender, success and institutional culture, were studying at one of three universities in South Africa. This chapter explores the academic and social experience of eight of these young women at one of the institutions, the University of Cape Town (UCT). The academic and social experience of these women is explored in relation to their family lives, communities, high school experiences and UCT's institutional culture.

Crucially what emerges from the research is the complex ways in which the students negotiate their academic and social identities in the university setting, which provides a vibrant and accommodating context for some of the students, and an alienating and indifferent context for others. The young women are at a particular point in their lives – what is key for them is the transition from their homes and communities to a university setting defined largely around a new independence and new responsibilities. This transition is about challenges and opportunities. The paper focuses on both of these, and the ways in which the students make sense of themselves in their new context. What emerges from the analysis is that in terms of gender, race and class, the standard points of reference for talking about identity, class-related factors emerge as a significant differentiator of social and academic integration for the women.

Women in Science and Engineering

Women's enrolments in higher education in South Africa have been relatively high. One of the most recent reports on women's participation in higher education (DST, 2004) finds that women students constituted 53% of all Higher Education enrolments in South Africa in 2001. Further, the study found that white women constituted the majority of female students – especially at the doctoral level. At the undergraduate level, which the present study is concerned with, there were also more female than male students. Women are, however, over represented in the Humanities, Health Sciences and Social Sciences, and are underrepresented in Natural Sciences and Engineering. Also, female students were in the majority at the undergraduate and lower postgraduate (i.e. Honours) levels, but in the minority at the Masters and Doctoral levels. This was especially the case, again, in the Natural Sciences and Engineering. The results of this study, at the level of undergraduate enrolment, are congruent with the undergraduate profile at the institution for our study, where in 2006, total undergraduate enrolments were 51% female and 49% male, but women were underrepresented in the Sciences. The table below shows the gender enrolment for certain faculties pertinent to the present study.

Table 1: UCT Faculty undergraduate enrolment

Faculty	% female	% male
Commerce	44	56
Engineering and the built environment	27	73
Health Sciences	71	29
Science	44	56
Humanities	68	32

There is some research into the reasons for lower numbers of women going into science and engineering (Jawitz & Case, 2002; Bebbington, 2002) as well as senior positions in academia (Brooks & MacKinnon, 2001). But these focus more broadly on the success stories of academic women, those who have already overcome the barriers and negotiated the difficult political terrain of becoming an academic. There is a gap in our knowledge on women at undergraduate level, their social and academic experiences of institutions and how they make decisions about whether to continue with academic or scientific careers, or how and why they decide not to stay in these areas of work.

Much of the literature discusses women's experiences in terms of economic, cultural and institutional constraints (Blickenstaff, 2005; Lynch & o'Riordan, 1998). Given the substantial numbers of girls in higher education in South Africa, it is worth posing the question as to whether young women experience their educational histories and institutional experiences in terms of constraints and/or possibilities. How do they respond to these constraints and possibilities? What does this mean for their social

and academic integration into university life and how does it shape their career choices and sense of what they will do once they leave university?

In answering these questions, it is important to bring to bear the extensive feminist literature on how educational trajectories and career choices are linked to the social construction of femininity and masculinity inscribed in the processes of education and family life (Stromquist, 2004; Arnot, 2000). As such, it is important to link students' personal and family lives to their educational experiences. The literature suggests that the roles of mothers, fathers and siblings need to be explored.

The three institutions from which the sample of students in the study was drawn are historically advantaged. The racial, and to some extent gender, profile of students in these institutions has however changed quite substantially, as can be illustrated by student enrolment demographics for the university where our study was based. The total number of undergraduate students at UCT in 2006 was 15 413. Of these, 40% were White, 20% African, 13% coloured and 7% were Indian. Table 2 gives a full breakdown of the student demographics by population group.

Table 2: UCT student enrolment, 2006

Population group	Number	Percentage
SA African	3063	20
SA coloured	2062	13
SA white	6136	40
SA Indian	1119	7
Other	286	2
International	2757	18
TOTAL	15413	100

While the racial institutional culture has been the subject of some research and discussion (Jansen, 2004), there has been very little other than internal institutional reports by transformation officers on the gender culture and gender regimes of these institutions and their relationship to the raced and classed nature of these institutions. There has been even less from the point of view and voices of the students themselves. This chapter will give voice to the students' experience of gender, race and class in their academic and social experiences at the institution where they were studying, but problematises their representations of their experience, fraught as they are with tensions and contradictions.

Theoretical framework

Through discourse, subjects are constituted and constitute fields of practice. But it is important to bear in mind that 'social institutions such as education bureaucracies and schools, cultural products such as policy documents and curriculum texts, and interpersonal processes such as pedagogy (teaching and learning) are made up of

many different and often contradictory discourses and discursive fields' (Kenway and Willis, 1998, xviii). Some of these are dominant, some subordinate, some peacefully coexisting, some struggling for ascendancy. In order to examine issues of gender, race and social class more closely, the study draws on identity theory to show how before entering university, the young women from a low socio economic status used agency to break away from the limiting possibilities presented by their communities, choosing to study science and engineering at non traditional universities. At the same time, we explore how these young women's social class position differentiates their university academic and social integration, compared to their middle class peers. In this regard, we regard class as Janus faced, opening possibilities as well as providing constraints. It offers possibilities where the students from low socio economic status created "alternative sources of self-hood" to those 'given' by society, community etcetera. But, it shaped university experience differently when past experience provided challenging academic and social experiences for the students. The classed differentiated experiences, at times, seemed to have been entrenched and polarised by the institutional culture at UCT.

Ismail (2002) defines institutional culture as

... the traditions and practices, often deep rooted, operating at both social and professional levels that have become the established norm in an institution. Ways in which institutional culture can be captured is reflected in the physical and administrative arrangements that enhance or detract from individual and collective progress... Institutional culture includes the ways in which various groups within the institution interact or avoid interacting with each other...(Ismail, 2002: 195).

This definition is useful in helping us understand the ways in which the students' reports of their experiences can be explained in relation to institutional culture. Other studies have explored institutional culture among students at UCT and South African institutes of higher education (Steyn and van Zyl, 2001; Mabokela, 2001), and among academic staff at these institutions (Ismail, 2001, 2002; Mabokela, 2001). Steyn and van Zyl's study concluded that the institutional culture at UCT was still largely characterised by whiteness and patriarchy, and that it reflected de facto segregationist tendencies. In Steyn and van Zyl's study, students' experience of UCT culture was that it was largely indifferent and that some of the problems in the university could be ascribed to the staff composition, which is largely white and male. Students also regarded the university's attitude towards knowledge, language, and other symbolic systems as largely ethnocentric. The assertion that UCT has a eurocentric attitude is not germane to UCT alone but other previously white universities, where, according to Mabokela, the quality of life for black students is impacted by the euro-centred organisational culture. It is suggested from these studies that the life experiences of some students in elite universities, especially black students, entail significant shifts from what they know and bring from their communities.

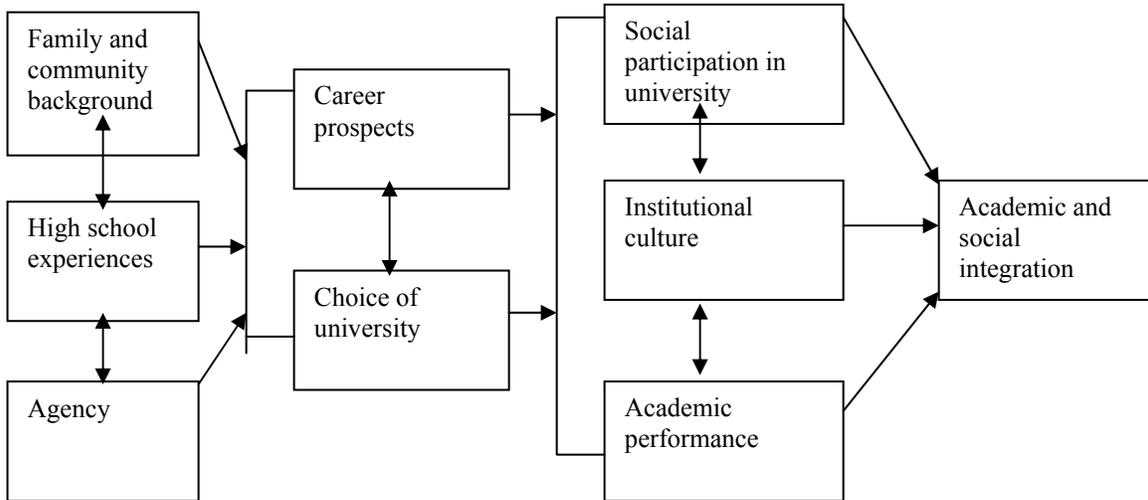
The shifts in support structures and what is known, was something emphasised by all the young women. They were experiencing a shift between two worlds: that of their community and school, and that of the university. For most this meant a significant geographical relocation. But it was also a shift in the values, freedom, demands and responsibilities of these two worlds. The attempt to reconcile the demands of what they knew and what they were coming to know was significant for some. The students also responded to this 'identity work' very differently. For all students, it meant a shift from one community to another. But what all the students were concerned with in the interviews was the projection of particular 'images of self' (Goffman, 1971). And these were often relational. Issues of race and gender emerged in subtle ways, which intersected with each other. The issue of class, however, was dominant in shaping the students' study motivations as well their university experiences. Social class positioning differentiated constructions of responsibility and success, in some cases causing anxiety and fear. Some of the accounts were also positive, with some of the students emphasising the opportunity and exigencies to 'create alternative sources of selfhood' (Sarup, 186:33). One of the students put it this way: "everyone at home had always known me as this really good student, but I wanted to try something else now. Cape town is a whole new set of people ... so it was almost like a blank page I could open" (Individual Interview: 2006).

Social class background as used in this study is determined on the basis of the conventional sociological scales of parental income and education. However, it is also considered in its effects, and in particular in what it means for the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) that students are able to access, often by virtue of their backgrounds. Cultural capital in this study is intimately bound up with language, academic and social experience, as we shall see. In terms of formal definitions, for Bourdieu cultural capital represents an individual's cultural status and knowledge and includes "verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the [education] system, and educational credentials" (Swartz, 1997:75). Social capital is about the "contacts and group memberships which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources" (Allard, 2005).

Thus the theoretical approach adopted in the paper draws on notions of social class, race, and gender in shaping social and academic integration. Race, gender and social class are constituted by family and community background. Following Tinto (1975), we consider social integration in relation to the young women's social relations in the university, for specifically, peer group interactions, involvement with residence activities, sporting, and cultural events. Academic integration is considered through the women's performance in their academic studies, and the degree to which the institutional culture supports them. We develop a model to explore how family background, individual commitment and schooling experiences and university institutional culture help shape the students career trajectories, and how these in turn

shape student's academic and social integration. The following diagram illustrates the model:

Figure 1: Relationship between social class, social and academic integration



The chapter is organised in the following way. We deal with academic and social integration separately, though of course they are related (or embedded). We then look at the women's career choices and their constructions of success. Following Kenway and Willis, these categories for analysis allow us to further probe the identity work that the women are engaged in, and the opportunities and constraints that they perceive and experience. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of integration, institutional culture and the negotiation of identities especially in terms of race, class and gender.

Research methodology

The broad problem informing the research design was the role of family, home and previous educational background on academic integration, social integration, and career decision-making and choice.

Information on the above categories was sourced through photograph based life history interviews, a focus group interview, classroom observations, shadowing of one of the students in lectures and at their residence and individual interviews with selected students. The focus group interview was conducted with all research participants and was used as a basis for selecting four students who were then individually interviewed. The individual interviews were guided by structured questions and eight existing and new photographs that the young women had selected, depicting their past, present and future experiences. The individual interviews were conducted twice, in 2006 and 2007. The second interview was aimed at probing further, issues that needed clarity after analysis of the first interviews. Of particular interest in the second round of interviews were the issues of academic integration as depicted by academic results/scores, and institutional culture. We were interested in getting the young women to evaluate their academic results across the years, so as to evaluate the extent to which institutional culture shaped the young women's academic trajectories.

Research participants

Eight students were selected for the study. The criteria for selection were race, social class, year of study and academic performance. The selection reflects a range of programmes in science and engineering. Proportional sampling was applied to the race criterion, depending on the total number of students in each racial group at each institution in the study population. Social class was important because we wanted to find out whether and how social class differences influenced academic and social integration when economic challenges were eliminated (by means of the scholarship). Academic performance was important because we wanted to have students who were doing well and others who were struggling in order to explore what factors in their academic and social integration were contributing to their performance. Race was important as a social category which is prominent in both public and private spheres of life in South Africa at this historical juncture.

The sample of students selected for the study at UCT consisted of five black students, two coloured students and one white student. Five of the students were from working class backgrounds. These students' parents were unemployed, apart from two students whose fathers worked as drivers. The other three students were from middle class backgrounds, and their parents were lecturers and teachers. Three of the students were studying medicine, three engineering, one business science, and one student was pursuing a BSc qualification.

Six of the students were staying in university residence and the other two were staying at home with their families. The description of the sample of students is summarised in the table below.

Table 3: The student sample

Student	Age	Race	Parental occupation*	Social class background	Residential status	Course of study	School
Tumelo	20	Black	M: Unemployed	Working class	Residence	Medicine	Former DET
Ayanda	20	Black	M: Teacher F: Teacher	Middle class	Residence	Medicine	Former DET
Lulama	19	Black	M: Lecturer	Middle class	Residence	Medicine	Former HOA
Angela	20	White	M: Tutor F: Lecturer	Middle class	Residence	Electrical engineering	Former HOA
Nazeema	21	Coloured	M: Hawker F: Driver	Working class	Home	Chemical engineering	Former HOR
Ntswaki	20	Black	M: Unemployed	Working class	Residence	Chemical engineering	Former DET
Kelebone	21	Black	M: Unemployed F: Unemployed	Working class	Residence	Business Science	Former DET
Camilla	20	Coloured	M: Unemployed F: Driver	Working class	Home	Bachelor of science: biology	Former HOR

* M= Mother; F= Father

Academic integration: intellectual life at university

Students' academic integration can partly be measured by the success with which they were progressing through their course, partly through the emotions evoked by their studies, and partly through the ways in which they spoke about the field of study that they were pursuing. In the table below we show the academic results for the eight students. Table 4 indicates the students' matric results and university results in each year of study to show how many subjects the students passed, failed or passed with distinction.

Table 4: Student academic performance

Student	SES	Matric Results	Year 1			Year 2			Year 3			Year 4		
			F	P	D	F	P	D	F	P	D	F	P	D
Tumelo	Working class	1A, 5Cs		4			2							
Ayanda	Middle class	5As, 1B		5		3	1	1						
Lulama	Middle class	6As		5	1		6							
Angela	Middle class	8As		3	3		7	1						
Nazeema	Working class	1A, 2Bs, 3Cs	2	7				5						
Ntswaki	Working class	1A, 4Bs, C, D	2	6	1	1	5		1	6		3	9	
Kelebhone	Working class	2As, 4Bs	4	3			6		2	5				
Camilla	Working class	4As, D, C	3	3										

F= Fail; P – Pass; D = Distinction

What is clear from the table is that far more of the working class women struggled in their first year of study, failing several courses. The picture by second year has changed, to produce a more evenly distributed spread of results. One (middle class) student failed one year of study, and three (working class) students partially completed a year (i.e. did not achieve sufficient results to pass the year). The sample is too small to draw any conclusions, and the results are too mixed to draw any relationships between class and achievement here.

However, if the matric and first year results are compared, it appears generally that the young women who attended advantaged schools had an advantage in their university studies over their counterparts from disadvantaged schools. In the first year of study, none of the students from middle class backgrounds failed any of their subjects and in the second year of study, only one student from a middle class background failed any of her subjects. From our sample of the four interviewed students, Angela and Lulama, the two students from the middle class background, consistently did well in their first and second years of study, achieving distinctions. Angela was on the Dean's merit list in her first year of study. However, Ntswaki and Kelebhone, the two students from the working class background experienced problems of failure across their academic trajectory. Ntswaki failed some subjects every year, and she indicated that it would take an extra year for her to graduate. Kelebhone failed subjects in her first and third years.

What is revealing from the 21 failed subjects among the sample is that not all students were making smooth progress through their degree, despite being selected for the scholarship based on academic performance at school. Five of the eight students had failed at least one subject, the majority of the students being from a working class background. On the other hand, one of the students from a working class background who had the most number of Cs for their matric, seemed to be making very smooth progress, with no fails recorded in the first and second years of study. What are some of the definitive class based reasons behind this uneven progress? We turn to the women's backgrounds and forms of support, as well as to aspects of institutional support available to them at the university in order to investigate this further.

Families and schooling

The students coming from working class homes reported that they were poorly prepared for university study. They had all come through the public schooling system in previously disadvantaged schools. These students expressed specific concerns about the dedication and commitment of their teachers, and the level of teaching at their schools. They felt that they had received very little or no guidance on their academic future plans. Tumelo, whose views were corroborated by the other students from similar backgrounds explicitly pointed out:

I am from a disadvantaged background and I grew up staying with my grandmother who was illiterate. But she did encourage me to go to school and kind of like wanted me to be what I am. But she didn't prepare me academically. She was just a support for me to pursue what I wanted to do. With the school, it was a government school where lots of things aren't there. You learn if you want to. If you don't, you don't. And even the teachers were not so behind kids you know. You come to school if you want to, if you don't want to - you don't. So in that sense I wasn't prepared enough to come to varsity. I think I must have prepared myself because I wanted to (Focus group interview: 14.08.06).

In comparison the students from middle class homes had attended well-resourced schools, previously advantaged 'Model C' schools. They reported having received structured advice and guidance on tertiary education and completing a university degree, with schools reportedly being very career-orientated and focused on student development. Students from these schools reported that they had been well supported by both their schools and their families, with some of the schools arranging community service projects to prepare students who were going to study medicine, and hosting official careers days to expose students to career choices. These students also came from more academically-oriented families (see parental occupations in Table 1), contributing to the students' understanding of university expectations. Angela stated:

I come from a very academic family where school and academics and careers have always been like the focus of the family. So in that sense there has always been that spirit – the spirit of learning at home. And I went to a really good school where they make sure that basically they sat us down and like what do you want to do? What can we do for you to make sure that you get there? So in that way I came here – I had the support network from home and I think I had the knowledge from school. So I was very prepared (Focus group interview: 14.08.06).

Ntswaki, another working class student emphasised the lack of preparation:

With me I was totally not prepared. Not by my family and not by my school. Because first of all with my family I was ok my sister went to varsity, my older sister but then it was a black university. One of those previously black universities....Then I was the first daughter to go to like an interracial varsity. Then people like around my family thought: “how can you even think of applying to UCT why don’t you just try something else”, you know? Go to the University of the North, go to Venda. You know all that (individual Interview: 8.9.06).

Choice here is bound up with considerations of class, which we’ll return to later. When the students from working class backgrounds were asked what helped them to succeed despite these obstacles, their accounts emphasised their own agency. They also reported seeking support and encouragement from people outside the immediate family: a teacher, an uncle, a cousin.

A further issue in terms of integration into the academic life of university raised by the working class students was that of language. The working class students had gone to school in their home provinces where the language of instruction at school, and the language in the home was largely an African language. Coming to an English medium university presented major challenges, especially in first year. Kelebone explained to the interviewer:

I: And your lecturers, are they all white?

R: Ya.

I: And how do you feel about that?

R: Now I’m used to being lectured by them but in first year it was just a mission to actually understand or maybe focus...keep up to speed with the lecturer.

I: In terms how quickly they went and the way they spoke...?

R: How quickly they went and ya I’ve never been taught by white people before...by a white person before.

I: So when you were in high school were you mainly taught in Sotho?

R: Ya but my ...two of my teachers were English and they were ok they were just not like my white lectures now.

I: How?

R: I think they speak fast, they were fast sometimes. Sometimes I don’t really hear what they say, ya (Individual Interview: 2006)

Again, language here is bound up with class, and this presented issues in relation to students' social integration as well, as we shall see later. The fact that the lecturers are reported to 'speak fast' could also be regarded as a sign of institutional indifference to student diversity.

Workload, stress, coping, academic support

Time management appeared to be the most challenging aspect of university life for the students, as well as striking a balance between their academic and social lives. Many of the students expressed feelings of being overwhelmed by the amount of work expected of them. While being on a scholarship relieved much of the financial pressure, according to the students, it did not affect the pressures of university life as a whole. In fact, having the scholarship for some students meant that they felt even more pressured to excel and succeed in order to show that they deserved the funding they had received. Two of the students indicated:

I think it takes away the financial difficulties to some extent. But the other difficulties of being a student are still there...The scholarship doesn't help you study and it doesn't wake you up in the morning for your eight o' clock lecture (Focus group interview: 14.08.06).

And it just feels so much worse because you think "gosh, I really need this scholarship; my parents will be like I was given this opportunity and you lost it". I feel the pressure a lot more being on a scholarship. (Focus group interview: 14.08.06).

While the students all prided themselves on being self-reliant and self-motivated, some of them simultaneously expressed anxiety at having lost the support of their families, who they perceived as regarding them as independent and responsible for their own success.

Support from university lecturers was also an adjustment for the students. They all acknowledged the difficulties of the expectation that they work independently and if they did require any further assistance, they were responsible for seeking out help themselves:

The work is a lot harder and I think the biggest challenge for me is to realize that I can't actually do it by myself...And it has been hard in a way to accept that I am only capable of doing so much and beyond that I need to ask for help...I don't find that I'll get the help immediately...there is a responsibility around yourself to apply yourself so that you understand when you get the help you do (Focus group interview: 14.08.06).

The lack of support from lecturers seemed to signal institutional indifference as students complained about this regardless of their social class background. Angela pointed out:

I think lecturers in general are just very much that you must take responsibility for yourself, that no-one is going to spoon feed you and make sure that you are ok and that you are coping, so, but I think that that is understandable in that there are so many people that they can't possibly look after you individually so in a way they are quite cold but at the same time there isn't another option ...(Interview: 06.09.06)

Ntswaki, who reported that students, once they fail, are encouraged by lecturers to change courses, reinforces this institutional indifference regarding student struggle with their studies: "Either that or apply to a technikon". This feeling of being cast adrift, having to take sole responsibility for one's success was a source of anxiety for all the students in the transition from the more pastoral form of instruction in school to the more remote style in university. However, Kelebone viewed this challenge in a positive light when she indicated that being forced to look for information and study on your own was one of the ways in which UCT was teaching students to be independent citizens. She explained, "I think UCT gives us a chance to excel because of standards. Most of the time I have to study on my own. It is teaching us to be independent in a way" (Interview: 8.05.07).

Based on classroom observations, it became clear that the tutorial class is a major source of institutional support for students with regard to academic work. Here they are provided with a space in which to ask tutors and lecturers questions and to clarify any issues that they may not understand in a smaller group. The format of students working together in groups, able to help one another, was also helpful. Ntswaki explained to the fieldworker that "during lectures, she simply focuses on taking down notes. Making sense of the course contents takes place at home in her own time" (Observation notes: 22.08.06).

Gender and academic experiences

All the young women subordinated gender in the ways in which they spoke about their university life. The students regarded gender issues as 'non-existent', a 'non-issue' in their academic and social integration into the university, and not in any way limiting the extent to which they were able to make social and academic decisions. But on closer analysis of the data, particularly that derived from observations, it would probably be more accurate to describe gender dynamics as embedded. The students spoke in a gender-blind way, yet their practices and some of their own observations were clearly linked to certain ascribed roles that were gender-based.

In one of the classroom observations the fieldwork notes record the following:

the male students appear to dominate in all of the groups. They are usually the ones handling and working with the machinery. The girls mainly record the results or work with the PC. In Ntswaki's group, Ntswaki sat the entire time on a chair in front of the PC. She hardly ever actually worked with the machinery. The two guys seemed to be in control of that part of the experiment; changing air pressure or valves etc. Ntswaki's task was to punch the correct figures into the PC that correspond with each pressure change and to make sure that the results of each one was saved in a file on the PC.

The observations also recorded that female students appeared reticent in the engineering lectures. They asked fewer questions than male students, and hardly ever approached the lecturer once the class was over. In turn, lecturers rarely addressed their questions toward female students, singling out males instead.

In a tutorial that was observed, mentioned above, what was particularly striking, was the gendered and hierarchical nature of the tutorial session. However, Ntswaki explained this by arguing that the hierarchies change depending on who has prepared well for the class. She indicated that sometimes women students also take the role of "explainers", if they have learned for the tutorial. She also explained that women were usually delegated writing tasks because of their neat handwriting or competent computer skills:

I don't know if it is a South African thing or what but you find that here girls are considered as the people with a good handwriting, so they are expected to do the writing, or they are faster on the computer so they do the typing. If you have a good handwriting or you can type fast you need to flash you know. So you do this in a group. It is not because you are a girl or anything but because you are good at it. So it would look like they are making the girl write because she is a girl but it does not happen that way (Interview: 25.04.07).

Another student picked up on the subtle suggestions of "a woman's place" in the academic world. Studying medicine, she wished to specialise in surgery once she had completed her medical degree. She expressed her concerns about doing so due to the fact that there were very few females who succeeded in becoming qualified surgeons or who remained in surgery once they had qualified. She noted that the sixth year surgery society was dominated by men, and comments from lecturers implied that surgery was a male domain, a "boy's club".

Likewise, another student referred to the unspoken expectation that women would not be successful in the engineering profession, and that studying engineering at university is hard work – perhaps particularly hard for women. Many of the students related this to the multiple roles of professional and mother. Their comments were, however, highly contradictory. On the one hand they professed the belief in being able to 'have it all' in terms of family, career and children, and on the other to the difficulties thereof. Despite the students feeling on one level that they are in no way

disadvantaged by being women, they also appeared implicated in discourses which subtly excluded, or channelled them in particular directions even within their chosen careers. This channelling into specific directions is entrenched by an institutional culture where in 2005, male academic staff constituted 66% of academic staff (UCT website). Kelebhone noted the male dominated academic workforce at UCT when she explained “Most of our lecturers are male and the message I am getting is that not most women can get to that point” (Interview: 8.05.07). However, Kelebhone indicated that instead of discouraging her, the fact that she seemed to be in a male dominated field was driving her to succeed in her studies.

Race and academic experiences

Ntswaki’s earlier comment about going to a ‘white university’ indicates how students’ academic integration is to an extent framed by considerations of race. Camilla had a similar experience:

But I got a flack for going to UCT and not UWC ... Because UCT is still seen as like the white university. And UWC is the coloured black university. It’s- I think jokingly called by most university students here as the Bush university ... To be - just because you are from a certain area you have to be blocked in by the stereotypes that is attached to the place. And I think a lot of people where I stay are resentful of the fact that I go to UCT because it is seen as a white institute. It is like betraying your race or something.

Another student pointed out the ways in which racial segregation operates within the instructional sphere:

I think that is true what she is saying. On the social point of view that at the university I have to say I have never seen any form of discrimination from them-but otherwise we as the students like we decide to separate ourselves because you go into a class – I don’t know if it is me. I used to do this thing but I’d go into a class and then not sit down but just check out what is happening before the lecture starts. You’d see this group of black people, this small group of Indians, this group of white people you know. Like we decide oh I want to associate with my type. You know (Focus group interview: 14.08.06).

In their negotiation of their academic world, schooling, family, language, gender and race all emerge as significant factors informing students’ integration. At times the students make these issues explicit, but sometimes they remain implicit. All the students expressed anxiety about the kind of responsibility they had to carry for their own success.

Social integration: Social relationships on campus

Students' social integration into university was strongly mediated by race and class. Both categories were invoked by students to describe the ways in which students grouped themselves, and what marked out people as different from one another.

Race

According to the students, social relationships on campus are racially defined. Race relations were not, however, portrayed as conflictual. One student described relations thus: "White people don't mind other people's business, but they are separate (Individual Interview, 2006). Kelebene said the following in response to a question from the interviewer:

I've never had a problem with race on campus. I think it's again, I see white people in [inaudible] they just go to...go together. But also I think they also don't really... I think this thing with white people looking down on other people I think it was over rated. Ya because I see white people here they really just don't care about what other people... they don't mind other people's businesses. Ya I've never experienced any race problems (Individual Interview: 2006).

Some of the residences are also racially-defined. The observation field notes record the following:

On our way to her flat [Ntswaki's], we pass a white male student and I ask whether it is really true that Liesbeeck is a majority black residence. She says yes, its true and that most of the white students that live there are foreigners and therefore don't know any better when they are allocated accommodation by UCT administration.¹

Racial stratification is also evident in social language codes. Ntswaki and her friend were discussing a shoe shop in the city which was too expensive and they described it as "shop iyamagho" – a shop for white people which is usually expensive and so you just pass by and never walk into it" (Observation notes: August 2006).

Kelebene indicated that she was shy to go out because she was not confident to speak English in public, and she chose friends who were Sotho-speaking like her. She indicated that 'Model C school students' went out more because they found it easier to mix because they are comfortable with the language (English):

Ya also I think so. People from Model C's they go out a lot...from Model C schools. Ya I think it's easy for them to just mix with everyone like on the language basis (Individual Interview: 2006).

¹ More is available from forthcoming masters thesis on race and residences at UCT

In contrast the middle class students, like Lulama, did not experience these kinds of constraints:

Sometimes we're feeling like something really big we go to Camps Bay for dinner, just in and around just getting to know Cape Town. I know the night life more, I don't really know Cape Town during the day it's quite a strange thing, I'm never out during the day (Individual Interview: 2006).

Some evidence of racial tension were observed by the fieldworker, however. She recorded the following in observing one of the lectures:

I did notice, however, some racial tensions in class. When a group of white male students went up to present, one of Ntswaki's team members poked fun at one of them telling me to listen to the way he speaks and that he will use the word "like" continuously throughout his speech. This kind of sentence structure, in which the word "like" is overused, is known to be associated with "white" speech patterns. Similarly, when a black student was presenting, he struggled with his speech and often said "Uuh" before starting a sentence. Two Indian male students poked fun at his accent and laughed out loud, and continued to laugh throughout his group's presentation. Neither the students seated around them nor the lecturer said anything to admonish them; either no one noticed this incident or the students were simply ignored. I also observed a group of four male students; 2 black and 2 white. They had to work together both in the poster and presentation tasks. I noticed that the black and white students hardly spoke to each other during these tasks. In fact, the white students worked on the poster alone, while the black students watched them. In the presenting task, they each worked on their own. The situation seemed extremely uncomfortable for all the students in that group (Observation fieldnotes: August 2006).

Despite the above, the idea that there is racial tension and hierarchies at the institution is negated by the students: "I'll honestly say that this is the one varsity that if there are race issues no one really knows about them – I haven't actually experienced anything like that". Lulama, questioned about all her lecturers being white, explicitly rejects racial categories as defining. She goes on to talk about the necessity for rejecting racial categories, and relates this to BEE:

... it's just by virtue of the fact that they need a black representation ... and you never know am I good enough for this or am I here just because I'm black. So I think that's one reason why a lot of us are going to shy away from and just try and establish our selves just to see. It casts a lot of ambiguity because you're not really sure.

We will see later, however, that while she rejects race as a category, social class is prominent in her account of social divisions in the university. The question arises as to whether at UCT race inequalities and tensions don't exist; whether they are invisible; whether we are presented with a new generation of South African young women determined not to define themselves or their life chances in terms of race; or

whether this is a form of ‘passing’ which we will pick up on later. It would appear, however, that for the women race is a static category, while social class (in terms of material wealth) is something that can be achieved.

Social class – ascribed and achieved

Several of the students were explicit about how social differentiation at UCT was marked by class. One of the students commented, “And you find rich people as she says going to their kind. And some going to their own kind as well”. Issues of class were particularly pronounced among the black students. The following account of class divisions is quoted at some length to indicate the perceived divisions along class lines:

There are two dominant groups among black people: there are the rich black students who are from certain areas ... class break ups are quite in your face. Even going out – you go to a party and there are certain types of people. It’s wealth. It’s school, it’s the different backgrounds – a lot of it starts from schooling – it’s also like the things that you integrate yourself with – you get girls who like a certain kind of crowd, the crowd that you are used to. You get the ghetto group then you get your model C type in a corner there. Me and my friends are called the Model C bunch. We listen to a certain type of music, we are upper and middle class and we speak in a certain way and we went to very good schools. The Ghetto crowd is kids from the township that all hang out together, speak a certain way and listen to kwaito and house music. In res I had a tough time last year. I was told I was so full of myself and people did not like me or speak to me. The problem is that once you are labelled, it sticks and people do not even try to get to know you better. It’s a signed deal. I got a lot of criticism because of my lifestyle. Now they have to talk to me because I am in house com and in house com you work for the people so I am now trying to get rid of the stereotypes labelled against me last year ... It’s also about lifestyle. It would be unfair to expect a person from the township to hang out with us because they wouldn’t afford our lifestyle. You need money to do the things that we do (Individual Interview: October 2006).

In the analysis of data from interviews with the four young women, there was a strong correlation between social class and social integration in the university. It appears that being middle class afforded students more choice to participate in university extra curricular activities without compromising their performance. Kelebone and Ntswaki were not involved in any residential committees or activities, and for Kelebone, striving for good results prevented her from exploring and seeing the beautiful side to Cape Town. However, Angela was involved in house activities like tutoring and she was involved in a committee to improve the library status of her residence. Lulama was also involved in a committee for a community focused rugby club. Yet despite these involvement, Angela and Lulama still did well in their academic programmes. The differences in academic and social integration at UCT by these students can be explained using Steyn and van Zyl’s notion of centred subject

positionalities. According to Steyn and van Zyl (2001) students at UCT who were in subject positionalities that are centred were able to move through the university a great deal more comfortably. Generally, examples of subject positionalities that are centred at the university include whiteness, Euro-American worldview, English-speaking as mother tongue, maleness, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, (upper) middle classness, South African nationality, urban background etc.

The middle class students in our study were at the centre of most of these axes but the working class students who struggled with academic and social integration were at the margins of these axes and this adversely affected their experiences of UCT.

It is interesting that issues of class and race did not feature at all in Angela's accounts. This could point to the possible difference between an ascribed social class status (of privileged white people in South Africa), and one that is achieved (by black middle class people). The desire for upward mobility, we shall see later, was prominent in the black students' accounts of success.

In relation to gender and social relations, there was interestingly a silence among the young women. It would appear, then, that for the students, race and gender are firmly subordinated to a concern with class.

Community and university – bridging the gap

What emerged as most significant for the young women in their social integration into the university was their move from their community to the university setting. Again, for the middle class students this was relatively unproblematic. Angela came from the University town of Rhodes, where in her words “everyone was in one way or another connected to the University. Its amazing how many people work for Rhodes”. She found the expectations of her community geared towards what she was doing, and having both parents as academics, found the culture of the university familiar.

For the working class students, however, the shift often entailed guilt over a rejection of community values and priorities. In some cases this left the students feeling disoriented – between two worlds. This was especially the case for two of the women interviewed who came from small, rural towns: Kelebone and Ntswaki.

Kelebone expressed feelings of guilt at having left her community:

R: Ya I think sometimes I even feel guilty like they are still in that situation and there's no progress and like my community I really feel like I don't belong there any more.

I: In what sense do you not feel you belong?

R: I don't know people like...they don't ..I don't want to say they don't like me... I don't know if they are scared ...afraid of me or maybe they give me too much respect but they don't treat me like as one of their own.

I: And when you talk about your community, who specifically are you thinking of?

R: Neighbours and other people on the street (Individual Interview: 2006).

Ntswaki felt that the community were “jealous” of her success. Even at school level, she experienced a culture within her community which was sceptical of success:

Ever since I was in standard 6 I would say...actually since from my high school, ya because people would go to school, not even finish high school and then drop out, have a child or maybe just decide to stay at home, so I didn't want that for myself, and you know people always discourage you, so I wanted to not really prove them wrong, but show people that this is do-able. Because when you were still in primary school you were acing everything and then they'll say 'oh my dear your time is going to come in high school where you'll be kicked by this and that', but then nothing of that nature happened (Individual Interview: 8.9.06).

Her initial response was to “show them”; part of her decision to choose to study Electrical Engineering was motivated by proving herself to the community that doubted her. This however shifted,

Because now, it's not about 'I want to prove people wrong' it's about 'I want to get what I want to get'. Ya because then it was 'these people are annoying me and I want to show them that it's do-able' but now it's more like, 'I want to be this, I want to be a Chemical Engineer', it's not about I'm doing Chemical Engineering to show these people (Individual Interview: 8.9.06).

Establishing her identity involved a rejection of community. Her response was to detach herself from the community she came from: “I wasn't gonna stay at home and be like the rest of the people around that place” (Individual Interview: 8.9.06).

For all of the students, success meant moving away from their homes and families and, to varying degrees, rejecting their communities' localized notions of success. As a result, some of the students expressed deep feelings of isolation, loneliness and in some cases, struggle. According to Thomson, this can create conflict between wanting to achieve success in a new context and defending one's social networks and support structures from the past. In other words, their loyalties to their localities are being tested.

The shifts in support structures and what they are familiar with was emphasised by all the students. Essentially, the students have a foot in two seemingly different worlds – that of their community and school, and that of UCT. For some, the gap between the two is very wide, and the attempt to reconcile the demands of being in these different

worlds is tremendous. For others, the distance travelled from one to the other is not so far. In addition, different students respond to what is essentially 'identity work', very differently. In a perpetual process of negotiating their identities, UCT has provided them with "alternative sources of self-hood" (other than those passed down by their families and communities) from which they are able to draw upon.

Choosing UCT

For the middle class young women, the decision to come to university and complete a tertiary degree was in fact not a decision as such rather than a natural progression from school to university. Hird (1998) suggests that having known persons in higher professions helps students see possibilities for themselves, and these students all had family members who were professionals. For the working class students, however, choosing UCT in particular meant to some extent detachment from the community and in some cases entailed a struggle as we saw earlier, where the coloured student's choice of university was construed as a sell-out. All the students commented on UCT as a superior higher education institution, and a privileged choice.

UCT (as opposed to higher education in a broad sense) is perceived by the students as a means or mechanism for upward social mobility, even though the price of such mobility is sometimes high. Facing rejection from their communities or moving away from their communities was often presented as an alienating experience. The young women's sense of alienation was clear when we considered their social relationships on campus and the detached relationships some of them have with their families now that they are at university.

The students mark themselves out as UCT students, but they also do this as 'science' students. They emphasise the privileged position and opportunities that their course of study gives them. One student emphasises the difference between science students and humanities students through a humorous stereotyping of humanities students:

They start at like 2o'clock and they leave at 3. And they have a nice tan and they don't carry anything besides these teeny tiny little bags that can't keep anything but a cell phone and make-up (Focus group interview: 14.08.06).

UCT, and pursuing a scientific career, are seen as a means to upward mobility. The elite status of UCT, and how it potentially positions them, is something that the women are acutely aware of. But this emphasis may also stem from a particular institutional culture that has become normalised. Steyn & van Zyl (2001) argue that UCT sustains a particular discourse around 'educational standards', in this way obscuring a cultural milieu characterised by 'whiteness'. On some instances, UCT's superior 'educational standards' conflicts with the realities of practice, as Lulama laments when she indicates that her lecturers preach to her that she has to be a patient centred caring doctor, while the doctors in the hospitals they do their practice tell

them that they should just concentrate on executing their duties under the material and financial constraints faced by doctors in the country:

... there are clashes between what the lecturers tell us and what the doctors in the practice tell us. A lot of the messages we get from the lecturers are that we have to be caring doctors who care about their patients, comforting doctors, patient centred doctors. When we move into the hospital the doctors give us the realistic approach. They tell you there is no time to be caring and talk to people, you have to do your job. So we end up not knowing what we have to do (Interview: 8.05.07).

Whatever the realities of the working world are, UCT students indicated that they are made to feel special, with students from disciplines like Chemical Engineering being head hunted and offered employment by companies in their final year of study, and the other students feeling quite confident that they have been made to feel they are the top of the cream. However, as Angela explained, the perception that UCT produced top students was demotivating for students who did not succeed. She explained:

I think everyone at UCT is made to feel you are the top of the cream. However, students who do not do well here may feel they are not good enough for the institution and this may kill their confidence (Interview: 24.04.07).

Kelebone, who was not sure that her academic results made her stand out in a job hunt, displayed this lack of confidence:

I will find a job but maybe based on my results people may not take me because my results are not so great. So maybe they will take someone with better results over me. But I think I will find a job (Interview: 8.05.07).

In the above assertions, typically, social class positioning differentiated the perceptions of institutional culture by Angela and Kelebone. UCT seems to have entrenched Angela's confidence by embracing her academically and socially through academic accolades and participation in residence activities, while it undermined Kelebone's confidence and kept her at the fringes of the institution academically through failing subjects along the way, and socially through exclusion imposed by a workload that the student was struggling to cope with.

Success

The students had different constructions of success, and the realistic nature of those constructions. These constructions appeared to be linked to class and the extent to which the students would have been exposed to role models. For students from middle class backgrounds, ideas of success were framed around abstract notions of happiness and satisfaction. In their minds, being successful was not so much about completing a degree and having a job, but about doing something that you truly

enjoyed. The students' families often reinforce the notion of success as the value of happiness. For example, one student talks about her mother, who despite having a Masters degree in Accounting, is not a Chartered Accountant and is not trapped in an office all day. She teaches at university and still has time to do the things she loves such as drama and theatre. In this regard, the student aspires to be like her mother. Moreover, when her family calls her to find out how she is coping, they do not ask her what kind of grades she is obtaining, but rather enquire as to her happiness with her results and with what she is doing. Thus, success is constantly being framed around achieving satisfaction and happiness.

In contrast, students from working class backgrounds aspire to materialistic notions of success such as becoming the CEO or president of a company, or owning a house in the suburbs. The path towards achieving these goals is typically not well-deliberated, which makes their ideas of success seem unrealistic to a certain degree. For these students, there appears to be a considerable mismatch between their optimism for the future and the realities of their present situation, which is characterised by social and economic constraints.

Consider the above student from a working-class background who envisions herself as a CEO in the future. When asked which qualities she had that would enable her to achieve her goals, she espoused a discourse of individualisation framed around notions of internal resources such as ambition and academic ability. This "can-do" approach is typical of persons aiming to move beyond the constraints of lower socio-economic status.

Now consider another student from a middle-class background who ultimately wishes to own a horse farm. Her initial idea was that she would get a degree that would allow her the opportunity to make lots of money so that she could eventually leave her job and buy a horse farm instead. She has subsequently realised that to purchase and maintain a horse farm requires a substantial amount of money, and that she will not be able to afford her dream unless she continues to work in order to sustain the costs of owning a farm. She has also recognised the inherent value of her studies and wants to put her degree to good use.

Thomson et al (2003) refer to the working-class student's approach to success as the illusion of attaining social mobility through education. According to Thomson, individual resources of ambition and ability do not always translate into success for young people of economically deprived backgrounds. While a "can do" attitude is necessary for achieving success, it is insufficient in the face of structural constraints.

Conclusion

The financial possibilities of the Carnegie scholarship gave the young women from different backgrounds, the opportunity to study towards a science or engineering

degree. In this study we were afforded the opportunity to explore issues, other than finances, facing these young women in the transition from home to university. What the analysis presented here shows is that some of the students had a far greater distance to travel in acquiring social and academic integration into the university. In observing the students, and listening to them talk, it was clear that class, race and gender differences and divides mediated the ways in which the students negotiated their identities. Taking students' voices as the object of our study reveals contradictions, fragmentations in how students present their experience. Although their new independence was often embraced, the students expressed a great deal of anxiety in terms of their academic work, and the complexity in navigating the social and academic terrain of the university. In general, those students from middle class homes found the transition easier, where the values and priorities of the home aligned with those of the university. Those students from working class backgrounds found the gap between their home and communities and the university more of a challenge. Although financial constraint had been removed, students still had to confront a very particular academic and social milieu which by and large left them to 'sink or swim'.

The study points to the importance of focusing on the institutional cultures of universities, in particular the ways in which students separate themselves out in where they live, where they socialise and how they organise themselves to work. The kinds of support that are offered, which tend to be academic, only go part of the way to making students feel comfortable and confident in a new environment. And this environment may present a significant challenge for some students in terms of what they know, value, understand and accept what is required of them to graduate. What we see is that social and academic integration into university is about the complex negotiation of identities that students undertake in making the transition from home to the context of the university. This entails the interwoven issues of class, gender and race. Whereas gender does not emerge explicitly in the ways in which the young women talk about their experiences, in academic practice we see how it is embedded in their everyday lives. The young women take on traditional roles and functions, and experience subtle forms of exclusion and allocation. Race and class are intimately bound up – class is explicit for some of the women, as a fundamental divisor and boundary to be negotiated. Although there are divisions along racial lines, those most salient are the ones that intersect with class. Personal experience is mediated by the social and cultural capital that the students bring to their new environment, and this positions them differently to achieve commitment to the different orders of meaning of the university.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Lameez Alexander for her participation in the research in 2006.

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CHAPTER THREE

Constructions of Success by Female Undergraduate Students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Pontso Moorosi and Relebohile Moletsane

Introduction

Available literature suggests that gender is a powerful dynamic in shaping the experiences of women – young or old (See Collins, 1999), including their experiences of success in academic institutions as well as in the workplace. Smulyan (2000) studied women principals who claimed that gender did not have any influence in their lives yet her findings suggested that gender influenced both their personal and professional lives. In her study of female students and their success in Mathematics and Science, Mthiyane (2007) revealed that these young women believed issues of gender did not have any impact in their lives but their stories also suggested otherwise. In this study, while the women students did not associate their academic experiences with issues of gender, our analysis of interview data revealed that gender has been and continues to be a big influence in these young women's lives.

This study is part of a larger inquiry which focused on young women who are recipients of a Carnegie Foundation Scholarship for their first university degree at three universities in South Africa: The Universities of Cape Town (UCT), KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and Pretoria (UP). While most of the scholarship recipients who participated in the study were enrolled in Mathematics, Science, Medicine or Engineering, the UKZN sample, which is the focus of this chapter, had one student studying in the Humanities. This study was undertaken to examine the ways in which these young women experienced their lives as university undergraduate students in their respective institutions. In particular, their construction of success in general and their own success at university was examined. Utilising frameworks that acknowledge the contextual realities of social and academic integration in the construction of success, we highlight the diverse nature of these young women's experiences.

Further, we use some feminist frameworks in our analysis and problematise the notion of doing a feminist research on young university female students who do not necessarily use gender as a frame of reference in explaining their own experiences. While we did not want to impose our own framework of analysis on these participants' understanding of their own experiences, we want to highlight the lack of feminist consciousness among young women in South African institutions and its

implications for interventions attempting to change the gender regimes of university classrooms.

Women, science and success

Much literature on gender and science focuses either on women scientists who have negotiated the obstacles to performing in science or on factors preventing girls at school from participating in science subjects (See Hannan et al 1995, Baker and Leary, 2003). Longino and Hollands (1995) explore the tensions and conflicts in the feminist study of gender and science. While our focus is not necessarily on the tensions in the feminist study of women in science, we found their study relevant to us because we experienced some conflicts in our analysis of young women and their constructions of success.

The most recent study done in South Africa to this effect is that by Mthiyane (2007) where she studied the environments that formed these 'successful' girls' background in order to understand factors that impact on their participation and success in maths and science. Mthiyane found that the home and school had a big influence in these young women's achievement in science and maths and that their gender had some influence on their experiences. Many studies done to establish the reasons for low participation of women in science have been criticised of their lack of attention on these contextual factors that impact on these women's success or lack of it. We identify a gap in studies focusing on young women, particularly African women at university in terms of how they negotiate the challenges of being a woman and studying science - a traditionally male dominated area of study. Thus, this paper discusses the students' own constructions of their success and the social and academic experiences that have impacted on it. The paper also examines the students' accounts of their experiences at the university in relation to their gender (and race) identity.

Theoretical frameworks

This study is mainly informed by those frameworks that suggest that to understand students' success, it is necessary to examine their perceptions of the educational experiences in the institutions they attend. In particular, Tinto's (1987; 1993) model of student attrition from university, which suggests that factors within the institutional environment interact with students' characteristics to enhance or reduce students' success, was utilised. Even though the model focuses on attrition and dropout, the principles it entails and their criticisms can also be used to explain the experiences of students who succeed at university.

Developed from Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, and Van Gennep's (1960) study of the rites of passage in traditional societies, the model suggest that students' persistence and success in universities, which represents a rite of passage in modern

societies, requires integration into both the academic and the social systems of the institution. As such, the individual is incorporated “as a component member in the social and intellectual communities of the [university] (cited in Tinto, 1987: 126). Lack of integration, therefore, increases the chances of failure and dropout.

Lovitts (1997; 2000) identifies the factors that produce each type of integration. According to her, on the one hand, academic integration develops when there are formal interactions between and among students and staff in the academic endeavour. On the other, social integration develops from informal interactions between and among students and staff outside the classroom. In addition, a number of factors including the academic programme, as well as the social and physical structures available to students might facilitate or hinder academic and social integration.

A second framework relates to debates on what it means to do feminist research. While feminist researchers do not necessarily agree on what exactly constitutes feminist research, Lather (1995) argues that to do feminist research simply means “putting the social construction of gender at the centre of one’s inquiry” (1995:294). Of particular relevance to our argument in this paper is the notion that feminist research is politically committed to changing the position of women in society by rejecting the possibility of value free research (Weiler, 1988). This political commitment is not only supportive of women’s rights, it also reflects women’s own personal experience of subjugation within a male dominated society, in this case, the male-dominated natural sciences faculties in universities. This commitment in feminist research also allows women to speak out and discuss their experiences in their own words in order to address the invisibility and distortion of their experiences in ways that are relevant to ending women’s social position of inequality (Lather, 1995). Through the feminist lens, our intention was to put specific questions into focus which centred on how these young women constructed their own academic and social experiences, as well as their own world of success in the institution.

The integration of feminist theory into science education suggests that scientific knowledge is cultural and reflects the gender and racial ideologies of societies (Brickhouse, 2000). The argument by feminist researchers is that the study of science benefits the dominant group who in this case is male students at universities whose realities (it is argued in feminist theory) differ from those of female realities (see Weedon, 1987 and Walshaw, 2001). In the post structural view of feminist theory, women’s experiences in science are not divorced from their material social practices and power relations within the structure of society (Weedon, 1987). Thus, we do not see the social and academic integration of these young women isolated from their family background and their own personal and political importance as female individuals within an environment that is historically male dominated.

It is within this framework of feminist research that we experienced some tensions and possible contradictions both on our part as researchers as well as on the part of

the participants' accounts: Are we seeing the young women's worlds from their own perspective as young individuals making sense of their social realities, or are we imposing our own framework of analysis on their otherwise 'ungendered' experiences? If the feminist researchers' political commitment is to contribute towards women's social change, to what extent are we not imposing our own gendered interpretation on the young women's experiences and to what extent are we not distorting these women's experiences by imposing our own frame of analysis? Feminist research acknowledges subjectivities and value laden nature of feminist researchers, but what we are problematising in this chapter is whether in our own subjectivities we did not go overboard, particularly considering the non-feminist dispositions of the participants.

Methodology

The intention of the study was to investigate the academic and social integration or non-integration of the Carnegie Foundation-supported women into university life, and their understandings of success in relation to home, school and university life. At UKZN, eight young women receiving a Carnegie Foundation Scholarship were selected and were requested to participate in the study. The study involved a self-completion questionnaire asking for biographic details, a focus group interview on the students' shared experiences of university life, both academic and social, individual life history interviews with four of the participants, and shadowing of one of these participants for a week.

Participants were also required to participate in a photo-voice activity, "a participatory-action research methodology based on the understanding that people are experts on their own lives" (Wang et al, 2004:911). Following on the Caroline Wang's work with Chinese village women, photo-voice arms participants, who seldom have a voice in decision-making in communities and organisations (e.g., women, and in our case, young women in three universities) with cameras to record and reflect on their lives and the social factors which have impacted them (Wang, et al, 1996). In this study, participants were each given small cameras to capture memorable moments in their lives and asked to arrange these with captions in photo albums. These photos were then used as probes during the life history interviews and observations that followed. Together with focus group and individual interviews, as well as data from shadowing one of these students, the photos stories also form part of the data analysis in this paper.

The various strategies used in the study to collect data complimented each other and helped us to capture the perceptions of these women students regarding their educational experiences in the institutions they attend. Feminist research advocates the use of multiple methods in search for pattern and meaning (Lather, 2005). While it served well for triangulation purposes, a wide range of methods further helped us immerse ourselves in a variety of subject matters that helped in understanding the

young women's academic and social worlds within the university environment. A reflection on these methods show how the strategies employed complimented each other and elicited different kinds of data.

The bio-questionnaire provided biographic details and some basic details about the participants which were further probed in the life history interviews. The focus group interview allowed for a group interaction that sparked some connections and similarities from other participants. As Krueger (1994) puts it, "answers provide mental cues that unlock perceptions of other participants – cues that are necessary in order to explore a range of perceptions" (1994:54). Photo-voice as a research method is meant to excavate some of the silences that cannot be addressed by the other strategies and it helped illuminate some of the experiences and memorable events of the participants that were not necessarily mentioned in the focus group or individual interviews.

Who were these young women?

The young women who participated in this study were all studying towards an undergraduate degree, most of these, with the exception of one, in the natural sciences. The selection for participation in the study was based on their racial and economic background. We wanted to include at least one student from each racial group, but also wanted to capture the diversity of educational and social experiences the students have had throughout their lives.

Using apartheid-time nomenclature, we selected four African, one coloured, two Indian and one white student. The one White student also happened to be blind and had attended a special school for the blind. Given her disability, we were interested in finding out how she experiences all these issues that young women had to negotiate. The remaining participants (seven) all came from low income earning backgrounds which made it a necessity to get a scholarship for university study after having gone through ordinary public education. All of them were between the ages of 20 and 22. The table below summarises the demographics:

Table 1: UKZN students' biographic details²

Name	Age	Pop. group	Course of Study	Main source of income	Home area	Residential status
Sarah	21	White (Blind)	Psychology	Small business	Farm	Home
Visanthi	21	Indian	Biomolecular Tech	Small business	Township	Residence
Karen	22	Coloured	MBCHB)	Small business	Township	Home
Khethiwe	22	African	MBCHB)	Pension grant	Rural homestead	Residence
Khanyisa	22	African	Physiotherapy	Pension grant	Rural homestead	Residence
Nonhle	21	African	Bio med	Disability grant	Township	Residence
Ntombi	20	African	Biological Sciences	Small business	Rural homestead	Residence
Suchitra	20	Indian	Engineering	Small business	Township	Home

Women, Science and Educational Success at University

From the participants' accounts of their experiences and their constructions of success and the role of gender therein, several themes emerged. Based on these, we argue that a combination of factors seem to play a role in the educational success of these women students. These include their personal identities (race, gender, social class and family background), their hard work, and the programmes they were enrolled in. Most importantly, their own constructions of success and the factors they attributed their success to, also played a significant role in how successful they considered themselves to be. In this section, we focus on the latter.

Constructions of success

That all eight participants considered themselves successful became evident in the first focus group interview we had with them as well as in subsequent encounters. While they acknowledged being sometimes overwhelmed by their studies as well as other demands, they tended to "look at the bigger picture" and generally felt

² We have tried to ensure some degree of anonymity by not using participants' real names. However, the small sample size and the identities of these women as Carnegie Foundation scholarship recipient might make it impossible to disguise their identity.

successful. Their measures of success included a change in their financial status (from depending totally on a social grant, to having enough money to actually see a better future). Khanyisa's³ comment illustrates:

...considering my family background...from Standard Six to Grade 12 my school fees were R80.00 and I didn't know where exactly I was going. Fortunately Carnegie was there. Here actually I am on my third year (sic), so I am definitely going to be successful, I know it! ...nothing can actually stop me, absolutely nothing! So, I'm successful.

For others, not having to worry about financial constraints because of the scholarship, made success attainable and motivated participants to work hard. Being able to supplement the family income out of the scholarship money was also an indicator of success for a number of the participants. To illustrate, for Nonhle, whose parents are both unemployed, her success involved the ability to help her parents as well as her brother:

...I sometimes have to look after him (brother) to have pocket money...so that just gives me everything, just tells me I'm really successful...

Khanyisa agreed:

I feel that I am really successful being able to take from your own pocket money and give to home. At home, I, my father is late and my mother, she's not working and she's disabled cos she's had a stroke after my father passed away...I also like to give money home and its like, it makes you feel wow! I'm strong, you know!

In terms of their definitions of success, while their understandings of success was highly linked to good academic performance, the young women often discarded the criteria frequently used by educators and researchers to measure academic achievement and defined their success in terms of multiple indicators. To illustrate, during the focus group interview, for most of the participants, a great deal of emphasis was put on their ability to see and "know where I am going" and being a university student at third year level (as most of them were) almost guaranteed success. To this effect, one participant asserted:

I think for me success is probably being able to see where I am going in life, to be able to see where, the place I am now will be able to secure me a future that I would like, that is going to support me through life...

Another considered success as the ability to balance life's competing demands:

³ All the names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity

I think success is as a person when you are completing all three years of your life and balance in whatever you do, whether its academic, your emotional life, your social life, there must be a balance...

For Sarah, success meant overcoming the challenges brought about by physical disability. She asserted:

For me, to be where I am, 3rd year varsity, it's a success for me because I am, I have a disability and unfortunately that makes varsity life a bit more hectic for me. But I am at the top of...I am in the upper academic region and kind of defying the odds almost...people don't really have high expectations of you if you have a disability. So, to be where I am now is kind of that would be success and if I can graduate and do what I want to do and that is to be a psychologist...that will be the ultimate success.

Other definitions of success included personal growth through the years, from a timid girl who did not know anything about university to somebody who is not afraid to stand in front of a professor. "Being happy within" with what you have, and "fulfilling your purpose on earth" which was also linked to the power of the Almighty were also other definitions of success. Thus, while these young women attributed their success to their own power to act – agency within themselves to have the ability to do the right things, some of them also acknowledged the presence of the supreme power in their lives.

Factors that Impact on Participants' success

So, what makes a successful female student in the natural sciences and other disciplines in a university today? To capture the factors to which they attributed their success, the participants were asked to comment on what they enjoy most about studying at university. Different reasons were cited for this achievement.

Social and Academic Integration

The participants' accounts of their lives in the institution suggest that they are well integrated and believed that universities were not hostile places, both socially and academically. The factors that contributed to this feeling of integration were many and varied. To illustrate, some of the participants, particularly those from larger programmes in the sciences, referred to the independence and autonomy that university life brings as an important factor in their enjoyment of being a university student. One commented:

The best thing I enjoy, that really used to stress me out in high school, you know that when you are one of the top students the teachers are always on you like "you gonna get As', you gonna do this!" You know...it gets to you sometimes...now its like your lecturers don't care about you...

Referring to the independence that studying at university brings, another observed:

When I left home actually I was very eager to go to varsity too, because I believed that I need time to be by myself, to be able to sort of make my own decisions and learn how the world works. My parents were very protective people... so when I got there I found that I could actually stand on my own and make decisions that I could be proud of at the end of the day. I have made some that I am not proud of, but I've learnt from those.

A third participant referred to this in terms of the relative anonymity of individual students in lecture halls and elsewhere as freeing students to enjoy studying and succeed.

On the other hand, other participants, particularly those studying in smaller programmes (e.g., medicine and other health sciences) talked fondly about the sense of "family" they experience with their fellow students, forming communities of practice and learning that facilitate their success. One of the medical students had this to say:

...well the nice thing about it...at medical school, it's really like a family, close community, very close really. You literally know everybody from your 1st year class to the final year class, you know everybody.

However, this has not always been the case for some of the participants who reported experiencing difficulties in adjusting to both the social and the academic environment at university. To illustrate, they often referred to individuals and groups "doing their own thing". Referring to the negative impact of social class and racial alienation, one explained:

...Ya, I heard about other campuses that there are like cool hang out spots because even if you are like allocated in groups, then they say: Are you sure you are in this group? ...They judge you the way they see you. They don't even give you a chance to explain yourself or anything...they will talk about cars: My mother is going to buy me this car once I've finished my degree.

Another found sharing a room with a stranger in the first year stressful and alienating. She elaborated:

...Ok she came in with her uncle, ok she woke me up and she started like talking, talking. I didn't get a chance to say a word. I just remember I went out, I went to the bathroom, I cried because I felt like, oh my God! I'm nothing! She was all over the place, criticising the place when I didn't see a problem with the place.

A significant finding related to social integration at university was the consensus among the participants that there was no support from lecturers, who “do not care about you”, with some reporting acts of racism by demonstrators and lecturers in classes. One participant explained:

So the sense of families are amongst the students (sic), not between students and staff. There’s a big gap between students and staff, major gap!

Another asserted:

...if you can complain about the pracs...somehow it seems as if they will look at the colour of your skin or check who you are before they really, really listen to you. That’s the problem of our department and hopefully they will try and sort it out, because even if you write a supp its like they will look at the student and ...then all these people fail. That’s how we fail most of us.

However, the one student from the humanities, perhaps because of her disability, felt supported by both students and her lecturers. She declared:

...lecturers know you and who you are. But the lecturers are very understanding...we have their office numbers and they give us consultation times and we are free to email them. Also ‘psychers’ have the, what is called staff liason committee...every module has two or three class reps who take your problems up to them...ja, they are generally understanding and they will help you as long as are prepared to work and you go to them with a problem...

The participants all recognised the negative impact of a lack of social integration on academic integration, and possibly on academic success. The medical students were the most vocal in this respect:

It’s the same by us where there is this constant communication with other years...[in the res] there always like evenings, weekends, people are there supporting and giving you assistance if you need it for whatever reason.

The participants also talked about what they found most difficult in studying at university. To this effect, one cited the difficulty of learning to relate to different people, fellow students and lecturers:

...its like very difficult having to socialise with all sorts of people, I really had a difficult [initially]. I’m still having a difficult time now, some people call me anti-social and whatever, but I’m managing.

Another agreed, citing the academic demands of her programme as hindering social interaction with fellow students:

...I battled to make friends in my first year...for me work takes me a lot longer than it would for anybody else because of getting access to it and all that. So, I don't really have much time for a social life and I've got all these scary friends who I don't know how they do it, but they go out, they get hammered and they come home and they sit down and do assignments at two in the morning and hand them in the next morning...

Others referred to the difficulty of having to effectively balance the personal, social and academic aspects of their lives. For example, living at home while studying at university presented particular challenges for one of the students:

...living at home you still maintain that same life at home. Like you have responsibilities in the house...and then it's your school work, [which] is so much more as compared to high school and then trying to adapt...but really it's not just about you because there's other people involved and having to incorporate all these people and still maintain and perform academically...

Referring directly to academic integration, a few of the students cited the challenges of new technologies they had to learn upon arriving at university. These ranged from computers to photocopying machines to advanced technology in the engineering and other departments. To this effect, one participant remembered:

...my first day going alone to a computer lab. I never touched a computer [before that]. I didn't know where to start...

Others cited language as a barrier to their integration into university learning. To illustrate, coming from a rural school, Khanyisa experienced alienation in her first year on the bases of her English language proficiency, and not being familiar with some terms that were used. She recalled:

...In my first year, English was not my thing. It was really difficult even like in lecture theatres it was. Like in my school, it was just Zulu. Ja, now in the lecture theatre English all the way. If you don't understand 'come to me in my office'. I go there and its still English. Ja but now I'm coping.

This was sometimes further exacerbated by the lecturers' language background, for example, where the lecturer is foreign and speaks with a non-English accent. It became difficult for those experiencing English as a barrier to their learning:

...sometimes the lecturers have accents...they come with accents that are from Russia. We spend time guessing what accent we are listening to, but ja, its hard to understand. Not only do you have to understand new concepts, but also what the lecturer is telling you...

With regards to curricular and pedagogical issues, the participants referred to a variety of factors that facilitate or hinder their learning success. One factor

participants identified as hindering learning was related to the negative impact of large classes and the lecturers' attitudes. One participant lamented the lack of one on one consultations with lecturers, particularly during practicals because of large classes:

...Not one to one...mostly done in groups because there's a large number of us now. Before it used to be one to one with lecturers where we like discussed the pracs and get like interviewed on it to check our understanding.

The same student also referred to the tendency for lecturers to normalise failure by telling students first thing in their introductory lectures that the failure rate in the module is high, perhaps triggering self-fulfilling prophecies among many (Rosenthal & Jacobson (1968):

...so if 20 people pass in a class of 250, you know its normal and 20 pass with supps, and they tell us things like that and its like, oh! Where will fit in...when I was in school I was ...with top students. I knew where I fitted, but now I'm not clever anymore.

What factors might facilitate or hinder academic and social integration of students into university life?

The social and academic impact of gender relations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the academic and social integration of a group of Carnegie Foundation-sponsored women into university life, and their understandings of success in relation to home, school and university life. To this effect, we were interested in understanding the role and impact of gender on the success and/or failure of these students at university. Informed by feminist frameworks that argue that feminist research simply means "putting the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry" (Lather, 1995:294) and that female realities differ from male realities (Weedon, 1987), this study examined the participants' perceptions of the role of gender in their educational experiences. A specific question put to them in the focus group interview was: Do you find the university a hostile place for a woman? To this, there was an overwhelming consensus that it was not, and that students "don't think of ourselves as boys and girls, we are just one big class together". Elaborating, one participant commented:

...I don't think so, I don't and for me its not like we're treated differently from the guys by either the lecturers or our fellow students, males and females. The guys respect us in our family, they are there to help us if we need it...

Another agreed:

...it's normal, just like how it is for guys, its for girls. In class, at res, we don't feel any less than guys. I don't ever! Sometimes you feel better than them. Ja, even with the tests and everything, we can do as much as they can.

However, while the students agreed that there was gender equality between the sexes, some of their comments belied this sense of equality. A few cited incidents of unequal and gendered treatment, especially from male students:

Some of the guys are childish. Do you think they understand that, do you think they know that you can do as well? Ja, for us they respect us for keeping up with them, ok, giving them competition...

Putting the burden of responsibility for addressing this unequal treatment, another contended:

I think I experienced this mainly because I'm in the SRC... there's only two women on the SRC...and guys have this thing you know: we can't be represented by this little girl you know. I've had exposure to such stereotypes and such comments, but like I said, it's how you respond to them and you know, take the challenge.

The young women studying Medicine also indicated their male counterparts downplayed and did not expect them as females to study some specialisations:

... There are some specialties where there is male predominance so they look at you if you coming into that and want to be a surgeon you get down played because you are female but its never in your face.

The belied equality also manifested in how the young women interpreted their social interaction with their male counterparts. While they agreed unanimously that universities are not hostile for women, others did experience some hostile behaviours from senior male students:

Ja I say like senior guys will come tell you like when the 1st years come, they'll tell you I got this text book, I'll help you with this and that then they've got other intentions, they're devils!

Interestingly this is not seen as hostile behaviour because they could deal with it. For Fundisiwe, it is essential for every young woman who comes to university to have their own agenda in order to avoid being abused and taken advantage of by male students. She remarked about the exploitation of young female university students by older senior male students. Putting it strongly, she asserts that:

... there is that thing that as a female first year student you are there to make somebody's bed warmer, cosier, ... but the basic thing is that the guys agenda overrides the female agenda.

So while these women claim they did not experience any sexism from the lecturers and in tutorials, they certainly did experience it from other male students both in and outside lecture rooms. And we found it interesting that they do not find the university hostile because they are able to deal with the situations and male attitudes with which they are confronted.

However, when they were asked directly about what they thought about the scholarship as a 'woman only initiative', they acknowledged gender consciousness and the fact that women have to be empowered because men "had their time". While most of them would love to get married and have children some of them did not think having a boyfriend was important yet. They place value on having female friends. To illustrate, Nonhle did not have a boyfriend at the time of the interview and her reasons for this included how boys are a constant headache that affects one's freedom. She puts it strongly that

... you have to worry about how you look, how you behave. Not that I am not behaving or anything. But how you behave, how you act around other boys and other girls and you have to give first priority and you have to phone him and if he doesn't phone you get worried and he goes for a party you get worried. There is so much freedom when you don't have a boyfriend.

For others having a boyfriend was a valuable source of support. For Suchitra having a boyfriend was a source of support:

My boyfriend is my constant support and inspiration. Since we are both studying engineering, we are able to relate and understand each other's dreams, aspirations, challenges, pit-falls and achievements. He can make me laugh when I am depressed or stressed, and gets me to take a break when I am about to crack. He loves for me and makes me feel secure about who I am and where I'm headed.

Fundisiwe also regards the support she gets from her boyfriend very highly.

He is very supportive. We are studying medicine together. ... he has been a very great friend to me as well, he is the friend I can call when I have major issues. And I think our relationship – we used to be friends before we started going out. So we are very much friends and we talk about anything and everything problems whether they are family or related to my friends. He is just a support that I really need and I value him a lot.

Although these young women would all like to get married and have children one day, it was interesting that they believed they have to be 'successful' and established first. For most of them success meant independence and power career wise and marriage was not part of the equation. Marriage was not seen as part of the success,

but as something one can do when one has already achieved success. In this regard, Fundisiwe again remarks:

... It [marriage] is not the sort of thing that would crush my world if I don't do it. It's not a very important thing to me and I think also it's a bit overrated and people just go through marriage as a stamp to something sometimes. It doesn't really make that difference in the person's life or where it does make a difference it's not a really desired difference.

For Fundisiwe her career comes first and she knows that marriage is one of the things she will have to sacrifice in order to pursue her career. She is aware that society expects a woman to be married and have children to be successful but she does not subscribe to that. On the contrary, Suchitra sees marriage as part of success and was already prepared that her career will take second place once she starts her family. For her, it is important to live up to the norms of society.

So what does this tell us about young women and their construction of success within the gendered frame?

There was a clear lack of association of gender to their experiences or gender as a category of analysis to their experiences. Their experiences were not generalised as a framework for understanding women's experiences broadly, but were regarded as individual experiences. This we interpreted as young women trying to make sense of their own experiences in a culture that has been traditionally male dominated particularly in terms of their area of study. Perhaps the lack of gender consciousness to some extent helps them define their individual experiences and constructions of success in the academic environment that is so achievement oriented. And perhaps it was inappropriate for us to impose the gender framework and challenge their lack of feminist consciousness.

Factors outside the university

While the participants in this study regarded institutional factors as having played a major role in their success at university, they also attributed their success partly to factors outside the university. These included family and background and schooling experiences.

Family Background

Table 1 (p. 59) highlights the family background of the participants in this study. Most come from very humble low income backgrounds. As such, issues of finances were always critical for most of them. For most, it is the family's socio-economic status that fuels their determination to succeed in their studies. To illustrate, Khanyisa, one of the participants whose life history we collected explained:

... There are three pairs of twins in my family and there is nine of us all in all... My father was the only one working... So me and my twin brother were like the first ones to go to varsity....And then when I was in Grade 11 my father lost his job because the company had gone overseas. But he was trying hard to help us finish our studies and seeing us doing well motivated him to support us. My father knew that we were at school and he would rather let the family sleep without food rather than us not going to school or having problems at school because they have not paid.

For others, it is the role modelling that their parents and/or siblings has given that motivates them to do well. Nonhle's story illustrates:

But they [parents] were such an influence 'cause they were like top at their school. They were at the same school in the same class competing for position one. They were very intelligent. Even when we were at school they always told us about their time when they did so well and how they fought for first position and sometimes both of them would come out first. So that alone was an influence and even we got interested in going beyond matric.

Other role models were outside the immediate family but within the extended family set up. Suchitra's mother was not educated but her aunt went to university and was always encouraging and motivating them and sharing her experiences with them. Fundisiwe's uncle also played a big role in inspiring, motivating and encouraging her to "*dream big and do big things*".

Besides influence to study, participants drew a lot of social support from their extended family members. Most recounted their close relationship with their siblings. Khanyisa and her twin brother have always been very close:

.. I always talk about him [my twin brother] he has been there for me ever since. Even when I got discouraged that none of our elder brothers passed matric but not went anywhere and we were like losing hope in a way. But my twin brother was there to say we are going to go somewhere and do something.

Suchitra adds:

My sisters are my best friends, we share secrets, clothes, the good and bad times, they force me to relax and remind me there is more to life than studying; ...they provide constructive criticism ...

Nonhle's family support is also very strong and, according to her, has been strengthened more by their trust in God. Describing her relationship with her family, she states:

My family is amazing, ... I am telling you. It's not all the time that one is placed in such a beautiful family you know. And it's like when people complain about their

parents and how they are pressuring them you are thinking God thank you for giving me the family that you have given me. Because I am telling you there is never a time that they will turn their backs on you, never ever. I don't know maybe it's because I don't get up to too much of bad things or whatever, but they are always supportive in everything I do.

It was remarkable that all participants had very supportive families, from parents and siblings. Even those who did support the family with their stipend, enjoyed doing it because it gave them a sense of responsibility that they were able to give something to the family. It was also a symbol of their own success.

The influence of schooling experiences

On the one hand, in the focus groups as well as in the life history interviews, with a few exceptions, the participants mostly regarded their schools as not having played a significant role in their preparation for university. They mostly cited lack of career guidance as a major hindrance in their development. Again, Khanyisa's experience illustrates:

I didn't know anything, I don't want to lie. So my high school like the deputy principal gave me this career guidance thing and then I read it but even though I read it I didn't understand anything because he gave me when I was like applying already. So I just saw this Physiotherapy and I didn't know anything about it. But I just applied for it.

Nonhle experienced racism at a previously Indian school where there was no expectation that she would perform well. She remembers that to have been one experience that pushed her to work hard and prove to her teachers that she could make.

... you know when you are doing well and you the African student people become suspicious they think you are probably copying or you have your ways or whatever. And it was on two occasions that I was blamed for copying during the test and I cried in front of the class when the teacher told me that because I had never copied in my life and someone just gives you a zero and says you have copied. So I really had to prove myself because the marks that I had they could not believe that a Black student is doing so well...

On the other hand, while the teachers and schools do not seem to have provided direct career guidance, some of the participants recalled the major role their schools and individual teachers played in preparing and motivating them to succeed and go to university. Karen recalls:

Ja there was a teacher that really pushed me, I know my English teacher, my Bio teacher, they set these standards that you know, you need to achieve, you can do it if you like really put your mind to it you can achieve and by they say like, they knew

that you know circumstances could be better, but they not, accept that and get on with it and do what you have to do that was their whole...

In a similar vein, Sarah's school also seems to have played a major role in getting her to be where she is:

I went to ... a school for the blind. They teach normal academic subjects from Grade 0 to matric and you write the same matric exams as everyone else in this province...I was also under a lot of pressure from my teachers because they expected 80s from me and so Lord help me if I didn't get them... I really looked up to and admired my Maths teacher poor woman, she was so patient... always encouraged me, you can do it you just got to assure the rest of the world that you can be normal and you can do your work and just do your best.

So, what does this tell us about what makes a successful Carnegie Foundation-sponsored female university student?

Discussion

One of the frameworks we have used to analyse the participants' experiences of their university study (Tinto, 1987; 1993) suggests that to understand students' success it is necessary to examine their perceptions of their educational experiences in the institution they attend. For us, the participants' accounts of their educational experiences demarcate some lessons, if not to teach, to begin to develop, as well as implications for the successful education of female students, particularly those sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation and similar scholarship programmes.

The participants in this study considered themselves successful in the various academic programmes they were enrolled in, mostly in the natural and health sciences, and only one in the humanities. Similar to the findings of Moletsane's (1995) study on the success of scholarship-sponsored black South African students studying in United States universities, the participants in this study often discarded the commonly used criteria for measuring success by educators and educational institutions and defined success in general and their own success in particular, in a variety of ways. To them, success meant more than high marks and good progress towards completing their studies. For some, success meant feelings of self-worth and pride in the programmes they were enrolled in. For others, it was also defined by their ability to supplement their families' incomes from the Carnegie Foundation scholarship money.

The participants identified several factors as impacting positively on their success. Firstly, an analysis of their personal characteristics as distinct individuals presents their success as inevitable. To illustrate, their personal biographies, characterised by histories of high academic performance from high school to university, high levels of

motivation, propensities for hard work, and educationally and socially supportive families, suggest a high likelihood for success.

Secondly, the participants' experiences, both social and academic, in the institution, influenced their success. While for some individual hard work seemed to dominate as a contributing factor in their success, for others, their social experiences for example, positive and supportive relationships with fellow students had a major influence on educational success. In addition, utilising feminist frameworks (e.g., Lather, 1995), we expected gender to play a major role in the participants' experiences in the institution. However, their accounts seemed to reject notions of gender inequality in the institution and the programmes they were enrolled in, with all of them vehemently denying that gender was a (negative) factor in their lives. While we were careful not to impose our own feminist framework on these students' accounts of their experiences, further analysis of their accounts presents a different picture. A few grudgingly admitted to experiencing low expectations of their performance by lecturers as well as by their fellow students at best, and sexual harassment and targeting, especially of younger (new) students by older male students on campus at worst.

Thus, linked to Tinto's framework of social interaction, our feminist analysis additionally offers a useful understanding to how the young women at university construct their success. On the one hand, these young women's construction of success is not separated from their social conditions. Rather, success is viewed in terms of where they come from in relation to where they are. On the other hand, their success is due to their individual effort, with schools and community not viewed as having played any big role. Further, although sexism hardly forms part of their vocabulary, these women students are aware of the upsurge of feminism and acknowledge the usefulness and necessity of interventions such as the Carnegie scholarship which are informed by liberal feminism with its emphasis on the increase of numbers of women in science. Longino and Hammonds (1995) argue that there is always a conflict in the interpretation of gender, science and feminism and this conflict lies centrally in the questions that are asked. Our conflict in this research lies in the 'genderless' constructions of success in these young women's experiences and our 'gendered' analysis and interpretation of these.

In terms of their academic experiences, Tinto's (1987; 1993) model utilised in this study suggests that universities that are committed to students' success usually adopt and implement policies and practices that enhance their educational experiences. Contrary to this, with a few exceptions, participants in this study reported poor interactions with, and support from staff, particularly their lecturers. They attributed this to the large classes that often characterise the undergraduate teaching environment in universities in South Africa. While they sometimes regretted this, they nevertheless welcomed the anonymity and the autonomy that it brings to them, freeing them to do their 'own thing' and perform well in their studies.

The above suggests that both academic and social factors have played a reciprocal role in the participants' success in the programmes they are enrolled in.

So, what can we learn from this?

Conclusion

First, the participants in this study considered themselves successful. In the first instance, they attributed their success to their personal attributes, as well as to both social and academic factors in the institution and elsewhere. They succeeded because of their own intellectual abilities, motivation and propensity for hard work. In the second, they succeeded because of the social and academic relationships they had in the institution, the home and elsewhere. To illustrate, while they reported poor support from lecturers, and while they experienced acts of racism and gender discrimination in the institution, the communities of practice they formed with fellow students, as well as their supportive relationships with friends and family, provided enough motivation and support to guarantee them success. From this vantage point, we argue that it is a combination of the students' characteristics and effort, the social and academic experiences they have had in the institution, as well as their responses to these that determines their success. While personal attributes are an important element in the success of these students, as Tinto (1987; 1993) and many others have concluded in other contexts, the extent to which they feel socially and academically integrated into the life of the institution plays a significant role in how successful they become.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Negotiating Social and Gender Identity: The Worldview of Women Students at the University of Pretoria

Iriann Haupt and Linda Chisholm

Introduction

Since 1994, South Africa's Constitution, legal context, official apparatuses and programmes in government and across different types of institutions have made the achievement of gender equity a major priority. Recent research assessing these efforts have pointed on the one hand to achievements in young women's enrolment and performance but on the other also shown that race and class continue to determine which young women achieve in what, and that gender violence and abuse both inside and outside institutions continue to play a role. A major question is why these differences persist and what role gender violence plays in their persistence. A less frequently asked question is how young women who have successfully negotiated their way through school and into conventionally male terrains experience and negotiate often contradictory gender expectations of them.

Analyses of gender and education at the end of apartheid showed that whereas young women were coming through school in equal numbers to boys, and were studying similar subjects with similar results, the bifurcation in their lives began in higher education and showed a major difference in the labour market. In post-school and post-higher education contexts, women's role in the public sphere is not only marginal, but also sharply raced and gendered: (white) men typically occupy leadership positions in the public and private sector, women predominate in feminised occupations, and black women are concentrated amongst the unskilled and unemployed.

How young women in post-apartheid South Africa from different class and race backgrounds, who have successfully negotiated their way through the school system into the sciences and subjects not traditionally defined as women's work, are experiencing their university contexts and constructing their identities and futures might provide important insights into a number of deeper questions about the society: to what extent has the ethos and practice of institutions changed to support women's full participation in both the public and private sphere and how is this perceived and understood? In addition, the study is important not so much for what it tells us about the young women themselves as what it suggests may be missing or absent for young women who have not 'succeeded' - where success is defined as entry to university in

the traditionally male field of the sciences, medicine, engineering or architecture and furthermore as following this trajectory into relatively high-status jobs in the future.

This study draws on those frameworks in cultural studies that are concerned with the material, social and cultural conditions of subjectivity formation in the policy trajectory (Kenway and Willis, 1998). These include analysis of macro and micro-level policy. At the macro level, gender regimes of institutions are written through their policy and curriculum-making processes. At the micro level, the domain of policy in practice, such framings are received, understood and enacted in different ways. Through discourse, subjects are constituted and constitute fields of practice. But it is important to bear in mind that 'social institutions such as education bureaucracies and schools, cultural products such as policy documents and curriculum texts, and interpersonal processes such as pedagogy (teaching and learning) are made up of many different and often contradictory discourses and discursive fields' (Kenway and Willis, 1998, xviii). Some of these are dominant, some subordinate, some peacefully coexisting, some struggling for ascendancy. For Kenway and Willis, gendered meanings emerged as unstable and constantly struggled over. It is this aspect, of struggle, negotiation, contingency and instability that this study explores more closely. Is social and academic integration in institutions linked to struggles over gender, gender identity, and gender boundaries? How are these identities linked to family and educational history, career decision making and choice? In order to examine these issues more closely, the study draws on Kenway and Willis's framework of investigation for analysing subject positionings around the concept of 'success.'

The paper argues that the students see themselves as free and socially, academically and institutionally integrated, but that there are nonetheless constraints on this freedom. Their discourses display an unstable mix of a present and future-oriented race-and gender-weariness and awareness, a strong sense of individual merit and achievement as opposed to racial or class belonging, a construction of racial difference as cultural difference rooted in the past, an apolitical orientation to the social world around them as desirable, and a reality of interactions in classrooms and on the campus strongly marked by race and gender inequality.

Methodology

The selection of students at the University of Pretoria was not systematic, although it set out to be. Three African, one Indian, one Coloured and three white students formed part of the study. As Table 1 below shows, race and class were not neatly reducible to one another amongst the girls. One white student came from a large family that could not be described as wealthy, the family of one African student could be linked to the new African middle class and the Indian student's family, while teachers, had a history as immigrants that located them for a good part of their lives as firmly part of the rural poor. The families of the majority of girls, with one

exception, could be described as relatively well-off. Many demonstrated middle class aspirations for their daughters. All the students had performed exceptionally well at school; their performance at university was variable (see Table 2). This was not reducible to race and class. Both black and white students were gaining distinctions.

Table 1: The student sample

Student Name ⁴	Age	Population Group	Parental occupation	Social class background	Residential status	Course of study
Keshani		Indian	F: Teacher M: Teacher		Residence	MbchB
Susan		White	F: self-employed M: unemployed			B.Is Multimedia
Nolwazi		African	F: not known M: not known		Residence	(Bcom) Informatics
Thandeka		African	M: Deputy Chief Education Specialist Aunt: Unemployed		Residence	Engineering (Chemical)
Marise		White	F: Minister of Religion M: pension grant		Residence	(BSc) Biochemistry
Lerato		African	F: Correctional officer M: unemployed		Residence	(Bcom) Economics
Lizette		Coloured	M: Financial Assistant		Residence	BSc Financial Maths
Marijke		White	F: Draughtsman M: unknown		Residence	Architecture (B)

Table 2: Academic performance

Student Name ⁵	SES	Population Group	Matric Results	Course of study	Year 1			Year 2			Year 3		
					F*	P*	D*	F	P	D	F	P	D
Keshani		Indian	6A, 1B	MbchB	1	9	3						
Susan		White	8A	B.Is Multimedia		33	24						
Nolwazi		African	2A, 3B, 1D, 1C	(Bcom) Informatics	1	23	4		14				
Thandeka		African	2A, 4B	Engineering (Chemical)	1	11		5	8				
Marise		White	7A	(BSc) Biochemistry		16	10		13	1			
Lerato		African	5A, 1B	(Bcom) Economics		19	7		11	5			
Lizette		Coloured	5A, 1C	BSc Financial Maths	1	12	6	2	9			12	2
Marijke		White	4A, B	Architecture (B)		17			14	4		13	6

⁴ To secure the respondents' anonymity, pseudonyms were used

* F= Fail; P= Pass; D= Distinction

During the first round of research in 2006, we intended to assess the students' social and academic integration into higher education institutions through questionnaires, focus group and life history interviews. Seven of the eight young women we interviewed were in two focus groups (three and four participants each). One student, Marijke, did not participate in the focus group interviews. However a life history interview was conducted with her and she also filled in the bio-questionnaire. All participants filled in short bio- questionnaires before the focus group discussions were held. They were also given disposable cameras and a photo album to take photos of their past and current encounters. These photo albums were then used as prompts in the life history interviews, which constituted the last step of data collection. Life history interviews were held with five of the young women and each took between 50 and 90 minutes. Both focus group interviews and all life history interviews were held at the University of Pretoria. The aim of the second round of research, conducted in 2007, was to gain a better understanding of the class room interactions between students, lecturers and amongst students as well as of the ways female students think about cultural, racial and class differences and the way they interrelate these notions. A focus group interview and observations of lectures provided the data source for this. The focus group interview was conducted at the main campus of the university, while the observations were conducted at the respective campuses of the students.

Interviews and observations provide direct information about the young women's lives, but they also provide insights into their social constructions of their experiences. As such, this paper is a narrative (re)construction of the discourses in which the selected young women express their experiences. Indeed, the paper problematises the notion of 'voice' as unmediated manifestation of 'reality'; the voices we hear in these narratives are as much constructed as they are constructing, revealing as they are hiding, confident as they are silent. The voices of the young women represented here are the ones of a generation of transition: a generation that is at the same time characterized by a strong emphasis on individuality, independence and cultural pluralism as well as by the heavy weight of the historical 'baggage' of South Africa's past.

The young women's experiences of integration were initially going to be analysed in terms of six categories provided by Bernstein (1975): Commitment, Detachment, Deferment, Estrangement, Alienation and Indifference. But the evidence for the University of Pretoria suggests that young women are not estranged, alienated or indifferent to the institution; that indeed, they demonstrate a fair degree of social and academic integration and strong identification with the institution. More interestingly, the discursive evidence also suggests a degree of integration into current post-

⁵ To guarantee the respondents' anonymity pseudonyms are used here.

apartheid, dominant constructions which to some extent belie the continuing deeply ambivalent position that women occupy in the social and public sphere. The young women express views of themselves as women who have rights in the public and private realm, able to balance multiple demands, and fulfil multiple objectives in both public and private life with little cost or detriment to themselves. They express weariness with public discourses about race and gender, and prefer to see racial and class differences primarily in terms of the more neutral construct of 'culture'. They exhibit a strong sense of individual agency and independence.

In most instances, this paper will also argue, their perceived integration is facilitated through strong supports – from families, friends and schools. The strength of individual cases demonstrates that in some cases it is mothers, in others fathers that matter; in some cases, it is female friends, in others it is male friends; with some, it is a strongly supportive school and community environment. The boundaries of expectation are tested in limited cases; in most cases, the young women live out expectations of themselves at this age and stage of their lives in the protected educational environment of the university.

The paper examines their experiences from these two perspectives, attempting to convey at the same time their sense of confidence and security as their vulnerability and insecurity, the strength of their convictions and their social contexts. The paper examines first the way in which students position themselves and others in terms of race, class and gender, then their constructions of their experiences of academic and social integration at the university, the influence and support of families, friends and communities and finally provides evidence of how they see themselves and success in relation to their own raced and gendered identities. Before drawing on this evidence however, it is necessary to examine institutional context and culture a little more closely.

The ethics of examining institutional culture

A major methodological ethical issue in this project is how to maintain confidentiality of respondents while at the same time being able to demonstrate the significance of the results. Two issues deserve highlighting: the one is the question of institutional identification, the other the question of the use of visual methodologies. Both issues were important for the HSRC Ethics Committee and deserve some discussion. The HSRC Ethics Committee was concerned about observation of lectures as well as the use of photo albums. The general issue raises the broader question of when research starts to hide what it is intended to research, and when it begins and is able to reveal relations.

In the case of institutional identification, much of the significance of the results relates, for example, to the historically constructed, specific character of institutions around race and privilege. To speak about social constructions of success outside of

the context of who is speaking and in what context would render the results meaningless. It matters in South Africa whether an institution is historically advantaged or disadvantaged since institutional culture is strongly linked to the raced and gendered character of universities. For this reason, it was decided that while it was important to maintain the confidentiality of identity of the students, it was equally important to identify the institution, much as Jansen does in his *Harvard Education Review* article (2005). In this article, Jonathan Jansen describes his experiences as a Black dean at the University of Pretoria. He is explicit about it being the University of Pretoria. The article shows how race, gender, history, and institutional culture constitute emotional terrain in which decanal leadership plays itself out in the volatile post-apartheid era. It provides no less of an emotional terrain for students.

Another, more recent article, deals with the process of merger at an unidentified institution that is clearly, however, also the University of Pretoria. The aim here in identifying the institution is not to shame or to praise; rather, it is to relate the emotional work of gender boundary maintenance and construction to the institutional context which is also 'emotional terrain.' To present the experiences and constructions of the young women outside of a real understanding of the institutional context is likely to lead to a partial understanding of the issues. In the interests of a whole, complex understanding, then, the institutional confidentiality is not maintained. However, the identity of the young women is protected, and the names used in this paper are not the real names of the students.

The University of Pretoria is historically an all-white institution that was established in the nineteenth century, and linked closely, since its inception, with Afrikaner nationalism. Situated in Pretoria, it was close to power and the apartheid state until 1994. Since then it has, like all other formerly white universities, changed the character of its student enrolment. Like other universities, its staff has however remained largely white. It is one of the largest universities in South Africa, following closely after the largest, UNISA, and the recently-merged institutions of the Tshwane University of Technology, University of KwaZulu-Natal and North West University. In 2004, black students comprised 41 per cent of all contact students and 99 per cent of its distance education students. Female students comprised 53 percent of its contact, and 72 percent of its distance students. (DoE 2005: 29) Thirty six percent of its students were in the fields of science and technology, 15 percent in business and 48 percent in the humanities. Compared with these enrolments, only thirteen percent of instruction and research staff were black, and forty four percent were female. (DoE 2005: 40)

Whereas Jansen's article (2005) draws attention to how the deeply conservative history, politics and traditions of the university play out in the contemporary era, his student, Venitha Pillay, highlights the continuing 'masculinist' culture of the institution (Pillay 2006). Such a culture is not necessarily bound up with the

biological sex of the incumbents; it is rather a style that can also categorise the social behaviour of women. She argues that, 'the institutions involved in the incorporation process (the subject of her article: LC) have been historically masculine in their outlook and image but, more importantly, the remain masculine.' (Pillay 2005: 599) The institutional terrain in which the young women find themselves and in which they make sense of their lives is thus one which has changed its enrolment patterns in the post-1994 era, but in which dominant history, race and gender remain powerfully inscribed.

The second issue concerned the use of visual methodologies in the research. This was initially inspired by a visual methodology project at the University of KwaZulu-Natal whose express purpose is to make visible hidden aspects of social life and to enable greater focus on the voices and lives of research participants. The intention in this study was to use photo albums prepared by the students as prompts in life history interviews. For the Ethics Committee this methodology, like visual methodologies in disability studies, disclosed the respondents' identities and the team was strongly discouraged from using this methodology. We did use the photo albums, and they were extremely useful. But the debate raises a host of questions about the newly-invented Ethics Committee-imposed constraints imposed on the freedom of researchers to conduct research in modes that probe hidden realities.

Academic and social integration: race, class and gender

Interviews and observations show that the students feel themselves to be academically and institutionally integrated. These University of Pretoria students are tired of the public discourse of race while being positioned in and by it. They want to see themselves as 'normal' when they interact amongst same-race or same-sex groups rather than as aberrations from an abstract ideal. They emphasise the importance of the individual, individual merit and achievement even though they themselves have been selected on the basis of their gender. They deny that race has any salience on campus and in their own lives, and they see racial difference as rooted in culture, an orientation consistent with how race positioned individuals in apartheid discourse. They prefer a disengaged, apolitical approach to student life, where dominant student politics is right wing. They are comfortable but variably confident and shy in lectures. They are strong feminists while denying that they are such, and they draw strong support from families, same-sex friends and peers.

Institutional integration : free but constrained

According to their own testimony, the young women are well integrated both socially and academically and do not experience any discrimination. On the whole, they say that they experience the university as a safe place, where they are treated equally, they are recognized and can develop themselves. The safe space of the university is counterposed to the unsafe outside space – the inner space is one where they are protected and secure; the outside world one of danger and violence. Their security is a fragile one, however: after a mugging spree, in the men's residences, the university had introduced security guards who were available to escort women at night. The security guard was an ambivalent figure, at one and the same time expressing the violence in the outside world and the protection from it – as one young woman expressed it, they were so many, they constituted 'an invasion of privacy.' Whether the university was in reality a safe or hostile space, the young women were constructing their social environment in terms of 'safe' and 'unsafe' spaces, in so doing assimilating the surrounding violence in the society to their understanding of how and where they could move in it. Academically, they experience the university as challenging, and requiring hard work, but not as constraining.

Young women are aware of gender stereotypes, but claim that it does not play a role and does not affect them. Thus Nolwazi argues that 'it's been proven men are better programmers because they grow up playing play stations while we play with dolls, but I've never felt pressure or anything. I can program just as good as that man.' And Thandeka likewise felt that 'There are really no gender issues here. I mean, I haven't heard any of my friends complain about it in different faculties, that 'there's this lecturer, he does this with the guys and the guys do this. No.' In fact, if there is any gender discrimination it is brought on by 'the young women themselves.' Far from the university being a restrictive environment for women, it is seen and experienced as a place of opportunity and free expression. Again, they express a form of 'gender blindness' on the part of the institution, as well as from their own perspective. From writings on race, this approach to race and gender often hides the subtle realities of taken-for-granted gendered behaviour and assumptions. There is a division of the world into a space in which 'gender happens' and a space in which 'gender does not happen.' In creating this division, much as the 'safe' and 'unsafe' space is created, young women differentiate themselves from a world in which there is inequality and discrimination. The world they occupy is a different one. In their view, it is a free world.

Race and gender-weariness

The importance of the individual as opposed to their membership of a racial group on the basis of skin colour features prominently in the students' accounts. They consistently do not want to make, or be exposed to, any distinctions based on skin colour. They express a weariness of 'the whole black and white thing'. Considering

themselves as a new generation, they ‘almost have a need to just accept each other by who you are, who you are as a person’. They all assert that ‘people in general want to be evaluated for who they are and what they have accomplished’. They do not want race quotas in residences, ‘make it people could go wherever they want, it there is a whole floor of white people, or a whole floor of black people, so what?’ The same emphasis applies in the discussion of class and status. Individual merit and accomplishment is the basis on which people should be judged; money ‘doesn’t (and shouldn’t) make a difference’.

Their emphasis on the individual and refusal to make distinctions based on race translates into a pronounced apolitical attitude: Politics is ‘not our thing’. Interestingly, Susan speculates that it is ‘may be the way the courses are structured (...) that makes us feel more independent’. They do not want to be involved in political organisations on campus such as PASMA⁶ or VF and TAS⁷. Those organisations are regarded as ‘too extreme’ especially as they ‘are associated with a lot of violence’. They want to judge and be judged as individuals who speak, think and act for themselves.

Despite this race-weariness, all students report a correlation of race and class. Black students see white students as having greater financial resources and coming from wealthier families. Thandeka explains: ‘Most of our (*the black students*) moms and dads don’t drive land rovers, and we still have to take taxis to go home and can’t get fetched and stuff’. Awareness of race and class as an interrelated source of exclusion becomes obvious in Thandeka’s account: ‘I think it’s quite intimidating, walking into a place that is full of a certain kind of people, I mean, if you walk into a restaurant, that is just so up there, with full of rich white people, and they think ‘Okay, she’s a rich black person’, you kind of feel, okay, this is not quite my territory’.

Making jokes is a light hearted way of dealing with ‘the whole black and white thing’. On the one hand, these jokes give expression to their ‘weariness’ of race (as well as gender) politics. Susan tells about an incident in her class, where she countered one joke about race with another one about gender: ‘I was looking for a stapler, and he asked me if I didn’t ask him for a stapler because he was black, and it’s a bit weird but then you can see that he is joking, and then it’s fine and then you joke back (...) and eventually my comment to him was ‘because I’m a woman’. On the other hand, these jokes are tools to de-politicize race relations and make race and skin colour a much less sensitive topic that can be spoken about jokingly without offending people: ‘I have black friends that go and say to our other black friends and say ‘You’re blushing, you’re going darker’ (laughs) so they diss each other as well (everyone laughs)’, says Keshani. Susan adds that making jokes about such

⁶ Organisation of predominantly black students, affiliated to the ANC

⁷ Organisation of white Afrikaans speaking students

differences are ‘almost like you’re celebrating your difference, and accept it, you can understand it and see it and it provides a lot of fun’.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that racial stereotypes have become completely reduced to an unproblematic topic and source of humor and jokes. The students tell us about a cake sale by VF and TAS at main campus, where cakes were priced 5 ZAR for white people and only 2 ZAR for black students. Students, who could prove being members of the ANC did not have to pay anything, provided they paid money into a ‘corruption box’. Whereas all interviewees expressed a weariness of race quotas and policies, the way VF and TAs interpreted this topic in their cake sale was perceived as too offensive, in particular due to the negative, right-wing image they have of this Afrikaans student organisation. It becomes clear that making jokes about stereotypes is something that belongs to circles of close friends where students can be sure not to offend anyone. Susan explains: ‘I’m sure you find people where you can’t even go there, if you make any distinction they would be immediately offended’.

Racial difference as cultural difference: ‘What else is there? Other than cultural difference?’

Students saw differences between people as the result of different cultural backgrounds and upbringing rather than of being a member of a specific race. As they consistently speak about ‘white’ and ‘African/Black culture,’ it becomes clear that their understanding of culture is highly essentialised. Culture is seen as a static determinant of standards, values and morals and of ‘how you behave when you’re amongst other people’. Knowing about the particularities of other cultures provides guidance to understanding the behaviour of people: ‘When we try to sit and analyse why that person did that you can always say, might be a racial thing, oh, not really a racial thing, cultural, ja’. Asked about what cultural differences she has observed amongst her fellow students, Keshani, convinced that ‘there must be’ a difference, expressed surprised that she could not spontaneously think of an example.

Nonetheless, race as a (visual) marker of difference is recognized as having an impact on the interactions of people. Susan tells that when she once walked into a restaurant where ‘There were only black people sitting, and I mean not light skinned, dark skinned and I’m not a racist, I accept people and I don’t have issues with it, and for me I was so surprised at my reaction, I was almost frightened, I felt out of my place, I felt almost threatened, like this is their space, I’m leaving, and I think that is something at a very low, almost survival level, you do realise differences and you do see groups together’. Thandeka speculates that ‘maybe it’s because we relate better to our own kind’ and further that ‘it’s a subconscious thing, it’s something like that, it is just a normal thing to do, go with your own kind’. She also reports that she felt virtually ‘invisible’ to white students when they met her outside of the campus, or when an Afrikaans group did not hand out a free newspaper to her.

In lectures, white and black students hardly sit in mixed groups and one rarely sees a racially mixed group during a stroll over the campus of the University of Pretoria. Groups of black or white students often talk amongst each other in their respective mother tongue. While language or the separated way of being seated in the classrooms create social fields that tend to be mutually exclusive, the occasional entering of a student into a group of people of a different race highlights the fluidity and permeability of boundaries for those who wish to cross them. However, in general, class rooms seem to be predominantly characterized by a mode of comfortably living and studying next to, but not really *with* each other.

Students acknowledge however that people from the same race ‘tend to cluster’ and ‘it’s not often that you get multiracial groups’. However, since this is regarded as natural or instinctive behaviour it is not problematized. Generally, there is a strong avoidance of seeing race as a problematic issue or source of exclusion. Keshani even considers that ‘maybe it’s because I don’t want to see it like that...one can feel excluded if you want to see yourself as being excluded’. Thus, inclusion is regarded as an active process of engagement rather than a passive process that is directed by others, be it groups of students or institutions such as the University. Whereas differences are recognized, the common experience of similar ‘student problems’ such as high workloads, difficult topics and long nights of studying, creates a shared identity that, according to them, transcends the boundaries of culture, race and class.

However, the students do engage in processes of negative othering. Nolwazi highlights that ‘in black culture’ the respect for people in general, and especially for elders is highly valued whereas ‘the whole swearing thing, I picked it up in most of the white people...it’s wrong, you know, you’re degrading the other person, it’s wrong, why do you have to use such language, yet I find with the white people they speak like that with each other’. Nolwazi generally feels that ‘most white people are very disrespectful, very, very disrespectful’ in their interaction with lecturers. Susan states: ‘I find often that black students, they would talk on their cell phones, they would walk out of class on their cell phones, they would chat in class, they would come in late’. However, she quickly adds : ‘I can’t say from my experience if this is really a specific culture or specific race’ and stresses that complaining about workload to the lecturer, swearing or coming in late is a type of behaviour that can be found among black and white students alike and thus emphasizes the internal heterogeneity of racial groups. Black and white students are thus constructing one another as culturally different using exactly the same examples in doing so.

Gender and Race in Lectures

Observations of lectures were conducted over a week. The atmosphere in lectures can be described as relaxed. Students seem to be comfortable and confident enough to ask questions. In most classes, the majority of students are white and male, and the male students are also the ones that attract the most attention from the lecturers. All

lecturers were white and Afrikaans speaking, and with one exception, male. Both female and male students seem to feel comfortable with both male and female lecturers. However, a female student rarely, regardless of race, commented or posed a question. Whereas white students of both sexes sit together and white female students interact very confidently amongst their male fellow students, black female students tend to sit amongst each other, often right in front of the lecturer.

All students see differences with regard to academic performance and motivation amongst black and white students. Susan distinguishes 'people that want to really go on with a project and achieve, or people that are just cruising through' and finds that this is often related to race. This is supported by Nolwazi, who explains that most black people have a 'laid back' mentality and think that 'in the end we all have the same degree'. According to her, white students 'want to perform, they want to get distinctions', whereas black students just want to 'get through this course'. Nolwazi does not have an explanation for what that 'x-factor' might be that makes white students more willing to perform well than black students. Certainly, more research is needed on whether this is true or not or yet another example of the racialised perceptions of students, given that it was not an issue at any of the other universities studied.

The male students, all in their very early twenties, are confident enough to attempt a 'flirt' with the female researcher and one of their comments reveals that they believe 'if pretty students join the group we'll get better marks'. A by standing female Indian student and Nolwazi report that, despite lower numbers of male students in one class, one of their lecturers prefers to call them to the board. Nolwazi and this girl report, that even when they are confident in the topic, a call to the board and public solving of a problem in front of everyone else makes them 'go blank'. According to them, the male students are much more confident, and even if they do not know the answer they are 'cocky' with the lecturers and 'sloppily write something on the board'. All this points to a continuing presence of gender stereotypes and, possibly, resulting gender inequalities. Whereas the female students are aware of the existence of such stereotypes, they still assert to not be affected by them when directly asked about them. This confirms the results of the first round of research which revealed a high degree of 'gender blindness' amongst the female students.

Socially integrated, quintessential feminists: 'I'm not a strong feminist, but...'

As with awareness of gender stereotypes, the young women are fully aware of the social pressures to get married and have children. Some are more skeptical than others about marriage. But they all express the confidence and need to find and balance families and careers: to have careers of their own, defer the gratification of having a family, but combine a family and a career nonetheless. Everything is possible: a fulfilling job and children in a happy marriage or as a single parent. For one young woman, herself brought up by a single parent, marriage is not necessarily

the answer. By free choice, God's will or parental arrangement – having a partner is however still part of their sense of themselves and their futures. At one level, these are well-adjusted young women, fulfilling the social expectations of themselves as much as they create them for themselves as well. At this point, there is little constraint on their dreams, which they see no reason to be frustrated.

Caution and restraint is evident, however, when they reflect on the lives of friends, family and peers whose lives do not conform to this women's magazine idyll: a cousin who leaves school to have a child at the age of 22; parents who lived happily with three children born out of wedlock until the pressure from granny forced them to tie the knot against their will; 'mom's friends who are all getting divorced, all of them and they've got horror stories about their marriages and I'm thinking, yo, I rally don't wanna go there;' women bringing up children alone; husbands who abandon their wives; fathers who have many wives and are not present to their children.

Through all this shines a fierce and stubborn independence, an insistence that 'there's no rush to get married,' as marriage may be 'overrated'; a recognition that cheating on a woman can happen with or without a ring on a finger, and that 'stunning' and 'proper' children can emerge from a single parent. There is also a deep commitment to equality in gender relations. Domestic duties have to be equally shared – 'I'm not your cook and I won't be ever in my life. If I feel like cooking of course I will and chances are that I will do it more often than I won't but I don't want people to expect that. He shouldn't think now it's my duty and I must make him supper. Ha! Never!' And children must be jointly reared to enable women to work: 'What makes him more superior to me? Why can't he be at home and I'll be at work? That I totally, eish, I feel so strongly about that. I don't believe that women should now sit and take care of the babies and then the man goes to work.' Dependence is anathema.

And even for the young Indian woman, Keshani, in the most dependent context, with the most transcendent view of the beauty of marriage, there is ultimately a recognition that 'it's not gonna be easy to balance a career and a family.' If she had to choose, however, she would decide *for* marriage/family, and *against* her career. Her dreams are balanced by seeing the reality around her; in her case, an aunt, a doctor, who was widowed and left with two small children on her hands. They both 'need full attention' and 'so she left them with her parents while she continued to study for her degree. Also the head of a hospital where she works, her life was transparently 'not easy'. 'So I don't think it's gonna be easy.' When she indicates in the focus group discussions that she is not sure what is more important and does not know what she would do if her husband would want her to stop working, all the other young women strongly oppose her. She thinks that 'sometimes, maybe, if you have enough money, then maybe I can understand'.

Social supports: families and friends

Most of the young women talk about the big difference between the expectations of school and university academic life. For most, school did not prepare them for university life. 'The learning only starts now,' said Nolwazi, referring to the spoon-feeding and rote-learning that characterizes high school contrasted with the pressure, study methods and expectations at university. For some it is the newness and difficulty of the concepts, 'the fundamentals' to be mastered, for others the size of the task that results in 'sleeplessness nights.' But it also depends on the subject, as Keshani feels that memorization at school prepared her for the memorizing work required in an MBCHB. Nonetheless, being at university, 'is like learning to swim in a deep sea.'

All the young women acknowledge the support of family, friends and boyfriends in their lives and in assisting their integration into the unfamiliar world of the university. The families from which they came and to which they referred varied tremendously. Relationships in families are also complex. For one of the young African women, Nolwazi, who came from a well-educated family, her mother was the role model, the father the decision-maker; for Thandeka, mother, sister, uncle and granny play important roles while the impact of her once-absent father now trying to recreate ties creates emotional confusion and distress.

For the young Afrikaans woman, Marise, coming from a small, conservative town once the capital of a homeland, sisters and boyfriend along with the family expectations was the key. The boyfriend, with whom she had been at school for six years, had come from Europe and a family that debated issues. He encouraged her to develop her own opinions. He was an important influence, but so were the assumptions in her family that university was the 'end-point' of education, and not a privilege. Coming from a large family where resources were always stretched, financial independence was a strong motivation for higher education – as it was for several of the other students too. Her rebellion against her Christian upbringing, the encouragement of her boyfriend and her parents' expectations of higher education for their daughters, all created a strong sense of independence and easy integration into university life.

Whereas religion was something to rebel against in her case, God was the reason for achievement and support in another. Christianity was and remained the constant companion of the young Indian woman, Keshani, who came from a deeply conservative, recently-immigrated Indian family where 'Like I would be the horse and they would control me and I wouldn't want them.' In her case, her brother was the key support.

Family cohesion is strong in all cases, and a major source of support. Familiar relationships are overwhelmingly positive and supportive. However, relationships with a negative character can have the opposite and very detrimental effect on personal and academic life : 'When I've had a fall out with my dad it's horrible, I just

get this...ah, you see, its like...a bummer! And you're bumped for the whole week', says Thandeka.

All the young women have broken up with long term boyfriends during the first one or two years at varsity; they feel they have "outgrown" these high school relationships and have 'moved on' in comparison to their former boyfriends. However, they have maintained good friendships with them and still assign a certain degree of significance in their current life to them.

Family is important to the young women, and so too are their friends. Whether it is the group of friends, or the special, best friend, fellow female friendships matter. For one of the African women, Nolwazi, her friends are 'always there' for her, each very different, and each playing a special role. It is as if they provide a substitute family. She recounts how she once had to stay on campus for three days in a row, and how her friend had brought her breakfast, lunch and supper, a change of clothes, 'and mints cause I couldn't brush my teeth on campus.' A friend who is a loving mother, carer, companion: 'she has always been there, when I am laughing, when I am crying, when I am sad, when I am happy, she has always been, and she is not judgmental, that's what I love.' A better partner none could wish for!

A key issue in close female friendships is that 'they are always there for you,' through thick and thin, supporting, assisting, unquestioning, casting no judgment. Another of the young African women, Thandeka, had a Christian 'Discipleship group,' a major source of support: 'So if I'm struggling with school, I'm struggling with guys, I'm struggling with my family, they know about it and they are there for me and we meet like every week ... they just help me to grow spiritually and ... socially (and) as a leader as well.' She talks about how the group was formed: 'you know how it is, all the black students just flock together,' providing some insight into how race is a source of support and solidarity in friendship networks in an unfamiliar environment. For the young Indian medical student, Keshani, God's hand was discernible in her meeting of her best friend: 'It was just weird how we clicked.' Meeting her friends are a mystical expression of 'just special moments in my life.'

There was one exception, for whom same-sex friendship were more difficult. For the young Afrikaans woman, Marise, who rebelled against her father's religion, whose sisters provided a source of strength and whose boyfriend was an important influence, relationships with other women were more difficult than relationships with young men. She acknowledges differences between herself and young men – 'I know I'm still much more emotional than guys' – and that 'there's a basic part of me that correlates with women,' but 'it's just that I feel that it's easier to connect with guys.'

Social Support of Communities

A source of pride to the family, a source of admiration to the community: so one of the young African women, Nolwazi, described how she was viewed by her community. She described the community in which she grew up as one where a university degree was uncommon, students dropped out of school early to have children, and many went onto drugs, and so, 'Hey, I'm a queen. People just think the world of me... People don't dream big in my neighbourhood... I'm already the cream of the crop.' Another, Thandeka, who came from a white suburban neighbourhood, commented on the distance and lack of connection between the community and her success: '... you know how white people are it's just well, they're there, we're here, we're cool, as long as they don't bother us and we don't bother them that's it, so that's that, but other than that, no, there isn't much really. She expresses distance, but so, too, does the young Afrikaans woman, Marise, who went to 'an Afrikaans church and an Afrikaans school: '... the people are very judgmental out there. The aura is very much different to Pretoria.... Emm I don't feel as if I, I felt as if I belonged in the community but not as if I stood out or as if I was noticed that much. I mean I know I achieved very well but I wasn't one of the popular people, (but) not like a cheerleader or something.' For both the black and white woman, in different ways, there was a sense of alienation from the community and indifference towards it.

This contrasted strongly not only with ? who came from the African township, but also the young Indian woman, Keshani, whose family struggled to survive on arrival in South Africa from India. She says: 'They're actually very supportive, especially the friends that our family has. They are supportive. I've mentioned how Indians look to studies. They always ask, how is it going. It actually keeps me up to standard, it gives me, looking back on when I feel that I can't go on, but I feel that I owe it to all the people who might be thinking about me and how I'm going through.' She describes her self-doubt when she first arrived at the university, and how the thought of the community support strengthened her. She remembers how they said: 'wow, you being a doctor, I want to see that' and how 'Something in me just said... you know... things like that just stick to me. Even now it encourages me. Ja, they are very nice and loving people.'

Constructions of Success

The discourse of success amongst the young women is centered on the idea that a university degree is a guarantee for a good job and a stepping stone to a successful life and career measured in material things: 'you must get your degree, get a job, buy a house, get a car'. Once positioned on this trajectory of success – by themselves as well as externally by significant actors like parents and communities – 'you are on the right track'. They display a strong sense of confidence in themselves as powerful young women who are in full control and who 'won't allow anyone to step on' them, as Marijke says. The learning experiences of overcoming difficulties at university for the first time on their own strengthen their sense of self confidence and ability. As a result there is difficulty dealing with or admitting failure, 'I don't like failure, it just

gets me down', said one when the Carnegie Program Manager checked up on why she failed an exam, says Thandeka.

Levels of expectations and ambition are uniformly high. All of the young women assume that they will not have any significant difficulties in finding employment after they have finished their studies. Two plan to start their own businesses once they have gained a degree of experience in the field. In the case of one of the young African women, Nolwazi, it's the strong academic background of the family that positions her on a trajectory of academic success, having a degree and job: 'It's like everyone in my family studied. My dad is educated, he's got a masters. Everyone is like doctor, doctor. So for me getting a degree is just like getting a matriculation certificate. Nobody congratulates you. It's like well done you've passed and that was it you know.' Admitting to not having fulfilled expectations makes her assume a defensive attitude towards the respective person or institution leveling criticism. Their perception of themselves as being independent, successful women could also contribute to the already-mentioned relative 'race' and 'gender-blindness', namely that none of them perceives any significant gender or racial inequities at university.

The degree of integration into the dominant discourses of success varies among the young women. However, even when departing from the norm, their ideas are still oriented towards it. Limitations and boundaries are overcome but at the same time acknowledged as divergent from the perceived 'norm' and hence re-confirmed. One of the young women, Nolwazi, describes her mother as an admirable example of an independent woman but at the same time judges that very behaviour by stating that her 'mom is a weirdo', or another time praising how opinionated a friend of hers is but also saying about that young woman that 'she is not normal.'. This seems to show the deep internalisation of gender stereotypes and perceptions of 'normality' and 'womanhood' and provides insight into the complexity of the dynamic of boundary breaking, making and (re)confirming.

Interesting are the different perceptions the young women have of "studying" itself. Sometimes it is perceived as fun, but equally often referred to as hard work, pressure, stress and struggle – it is seen as a means to achieve a goal. Only Marijke speaks about her subject with passion, bursting out that she 'just loves studying'. The other students seem to be driven rather more by doing something that will ultimately help them achieve their individually set goals in life: financial independence, self-realization but also status and upward social mobility. They present themselves as hard-working students who make sacrifices; this is also part of their constitution of themselves as successful.

Their constructions of success in relation to their gender are also complex. Negotiating their female identity and their ideas of womanhood (and what is 'normal' for a woman) within the crosscurrents of other significant identities – being a student, being a student in traditionally male fields and being a recipient of a high profile

scholarship - seems to be a process that is not always as smooth as they make it seem. A significant part of their identity is determined by positioning themselves in opposition to social norms, conventions, etc. while on the other hand linking themselves in individually selective ways to the *very same* normalizing discourses. What they show is not a general rejection of gender boundaries; they confirm those they are not (yet) ready to leave behind. Thus they see themselves as outside conventional gender stereotypes, neither conforming to them not holding them, as having overcome them, but at the same time aspire to the conventional markers of feminine gendered identity.

A strong theme that arises from the data is centered on the notions of independence, guidance and control. All young women express a strong dislike of 'being controlled' – for example, by Carnegie with regard to their academic progress - and of being determined in their personal life by 'social pressure', especially with regard to gender roles. They emphasise their current and future status of independence – in thought, opinion, financial status and emotion. Influences and encouragement to independence have arisen from different sources, be it the father who 'helps me doing things my way', the ex-boyfriend who was 'allowing me to become opinionated, to make up my own mind about things,' or be it the difficulty of growing up with a single mum 'I'm just an independent type of a person (...), I just had to be responsible quickly, and I had to be responsible for a lot of things', says Thandeka.

High school does not seem to have played a significant role in channeling these young women into the fields and careers they are in now. This is, rather, presented as having resulted from individual choice and self-initiative, especially with regard to the acquisition of information. Apart from one young woman who felt 'technically' prepared for university, all felt that high school has not informed them well enough about future career options and that they have had to acquire all relevant information by themselves. Knowledge as a resource has been acquired predominantly on their own initiative. The fact that they have no particular role models underlines their sense of independence and strong will to use their own ability and resources to succeed.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to present a portrait of some of the Carnegie-supported students at the University of Pretoria that does not judge them, but places them in the context of an institution with a history and a society in the process of change. Selected for success from family and school contexts that have positioned them in different ways for success in a historically white institution that has been described as 'masculinist' in its culture - entry to which is another marker of success - it is perhaps not surprising that they prefer to see the individual recognized on merit, express a distinct distaste for racial and gender-based judgements and categorizations even as they articulate perceived racial differences as cultural differences and are strongly feminist in their orientation to the control they wish to exercise over their lives even as they wish for balance and seamless integration of their working and private lives. It is clear that they will exercise leadership in the society in one way or another. They are being groomed for it and they espouse values that will, in one way or another, enable them to do so in particular ways.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Sibongile Vilakazi for her participation in the research and analysis in 2006.

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